

# **Globalisation and the Rurality of Everyday Life: Cases Study of Guangdong, China**

Submitted by **Xinhui Wu** to the University of Exeter

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## Abstract

This thesis explores the changing rurality and everyday life of rural China in the global era. It is built upon eight months of fieldwork in three villages in Guangdong, China. These three villages each represent a different development pattern, and therefore a different form of interaction and engagement with globalisation. Details are presented in the form of ethnographic work studying the everyday lives of villagers in these case villages, including, but not limited to, the changing commodities, production, consumption, regulations, community, family life, and lifestyles.

The overall aim of this research is to record and examine the differentiated experiences of rural everyday life and the reconstruction of Chinese rurality under globalisation. It further aims to contribute to the development of 'grassroots globalisation', arguing that the practices of everyday lives are deeply embodied in the global processes even in villages. Furthermore, it seeks not only to present and analyse the first-hand empirical evidence of diversified Chinese rural life, adding to scholarly place-based knowledge, but also to offer some new perspectives on the use of ethnography in Chinese rural studies.

Drawing on eight months of fieldwork, the research suggests that the dynamic processes of globalisation are continuously shaping and enriching village life in rural China, provoking the diversity and divergence between villages rather than eliminating them. Through the differing reconstruction of production and patterns of consumption in rural areas, villagers' consciousness of urbanisation and globalisation varies from village to village. Meanwhile, globalisation has triggered individualisation and brought more opportunities to villagers, further leading to the uncertainty of village development. While globalisation has caused the 'hollowed-out' phenomenon in some villages, at the same time it has elevated the competitiveness of others. New meanings have been brought to modern Chinese rurality.

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## Abbreviations and Glossary

### Abbreviations

English term	Chinese	Definition
SOEs	国有企业	State-Owned Enterprises, which means that the only/main shareholder is the state
TNCs	跨国企业	Trans-national Companies
P.R.C.	中华人民共和国	The People's Republic of China
CCP/CPC	中国共产党	the Chinese Communist Party/Communist Party of China
TVE	乡镇企业	Township and Village Enterprise
SEZs	经济特区	Special Economic Zones, which has been selected by the central government as the first few cities to allow the foreign capitals and investments to come in

### Glossary

English term	Chinese	Definition
Guangdong/ Canton	广东	Guangdong Province, also name Canton, where the case villages located, Guangdong locates in the Southern China, with a long coastal line. It is one of the most developed area of China.
Hukou system/ Household registration system	户口制度	Hukou refers to one's household registration status, which attaches to the permanent address of a person. Hukou system used to restrict the mobility of people between different places (especially from rural to urban).
Zen-Lineage of Buddhism	禅宗	A school of Mahayana Buddhism that originated in China during the Tang dynasty. Zen emphasizes rigorous self-control, meditation-practice, insight into

		the nature of things and the personal expression of this insight in daily life, especially for the benefit of others.
The Sixth patriarch Huineng	六祖慧能	A semi-legendary but central figure in the early history of Chinese Zen Buddhism, the founder of the 'Sudden Enlightenment' and Southern Zen school of Buddhism, which focuses on an immediate and direct attainment of Buddhist enlightenment
Mu	亩	A unit of area equals to 0.0667 hectares
Village	村	The most basic unit of rural China
Natural Village	自然村	A community/settlement that is naturally formed by blood ties or regional ties, before its border has been officially established.
Administrative Village	行政村	A village sphere that divided by the government, in order to achieve better governance, often consists of a few natural villages in Guangdong.
Single-surname Village	单姓村	A village where nearly all the male residents have the same surname, therefore most of the villagers are each other's relatives. In such village, the influence of clan is often more vital.
Varied-surname Village	多姓村	Compared with the single surname village, the varied-surname village is composed of two or more surnames member, and its composition is often more complex. While in such kind of village where the influence of clan is weaker, it may produce disputes between different surnames member within the village.
Village Committee	村委会	The self-govern institution of an administrative village,
Hollowed-out Village	空心村	A type of village that has been 'hollowed-out', which means that majority of working age labours have gone outside for work, while only elderly and children stay; or in general very few people stay.
Tourism Village	旅游村	A type of village whose major income is from the tourist industry

Taobao Village	淘宝村	A type of village which more than 10% of the whole village population run online businesses at Taobao.com; or the annual turnover of the e-commerce on Taobao.com in the village exceeds ten million yuan.
Urban Village	城中村	A type of village often less developed, but with dense buildings and sits in the middle of the city and surrounded by the urban architectures and facilities.
Agritainment	农家乐	An entertainment site with agricultural them, often including farm, accommodation and restaurant, offering agricultural or ruralism experiences to customers (often from cities).

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# Chapter 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Chapter summary

This chapter, like all opening chapters, serves to tell the reader what this research is about. As set out in the title and abstract, this thesis discusses the interrelationship between globalisation and rural China. Having conducted eight months ethnographic fieldwork within three different villages, I aim to present here the diversified everyday life and the qualitative changes in these three villages in Guangdong, China, changes which suggest that rurality in such areas of China interacts with and has been reconstructed by multiple global processes. It also shows that conversely, the hybrid rurality of Chinese rural areas enriches and remakes the understanding of globalisation at the grassroots level.

The chapter is divided into six sections:

In Section 1.2, I briefly introduce 'my research journey', which describes how this research has developed, starting from the initial research ideas to the final thesis.

Following my research journey, in Section 1.3, a necessary research context is provided to situate rural China from the perspective of globalisation. In this section, by offering the information on contemporary China and China's rural areas, I aim to make clear two questions: Why has rural development remained an insurmountable problem in China in the global era? and why is it important to study globalisation in Chinese rural areas?

In Section 1.4, I briefly explain how I approach dynamic rurality by adopting a multi-sited ethnography methodology and the comparative study, which provides the framework of this thesis. By employing this method, I attempt to bridge rural everyday life and the so-called 'grand' concept: globalisation. I also argue that multi-sited ethnography and the derivative comparative study is a valuable approach for accessing changing rurality in China.

I finish this chapter by setting out my research aims in Section 1.5 and giving an overview of each chapter in Section 1.6.

## 1.2 My research journey

“My daughter was married and went abroad with her husband.”

“Which country?”

“I don’t know.”

An elderly resident of Peanut Village

“We should employ the wind of the tourist development to promote our ‘global first’ Buddhist Lychee Festival.”

A middle-age villager in Tower Village

“We are not copying directly [from those fast-fashion brands such as H&M and Uniqlo], we make changes. Those brands [H&M and Uniqlo] refer to luxury brands too. We learn from them and make them more suitable for the domestic customer.”

A young, ‘new’ villager in Alibaba Village

During my eight months’ fieldwork in three different villages, I heard a lot of stories from different people, people of different genders, different age groups and different occupations. The three excerpts presented above have left a deep impression on me. Jointly, these fragments serve to give a preliminary sense of how different these three villages can be, in terms of how ‘globalised’ they are, while being in the same region and of the same era. However, the differences between these three villages actually go far beyond a simple linear order, such as from the most closed village to the most open one. Instead, there are wide ranges and mixtures of phenomena that embody the encounters of ‘global and local’, ‘traditional and modern’ *within* the village and also *between* the three villages studied. The elderly resident of Peanut Village who did not know which country her daughter currently lives in, was also surrounded by elements of globalisation. While the ‘new’ villager in Alibaba Village – the reason for the designation ‘new’ is explained later in the empirical chapters – is familiar with foreign brands, yet still works with her family members and relatives as in the agricultural period of time. They all embody the complexity of different cultures.

The details of these villagers will be presented in depth in the three empirical chapters of this thesis.

Briefly, this thesis is an attempt to understand the underlying roots of the differential village life in a globalising rural China. By ethnographically focusing on rural villagers' everyday life, I aim to share, describe and interpret the experiences, attitudes and cultural interpretations of the local people regarding global elements and transformation in their lives in three case villages in Guangdong, China. In doing so, I intend to provide a microcosm of the "seemingly-grand" globalisation in rural China.

The recognition that rural China presented such a diversified and complex picture was not evident from the outset, instead, it has gradually formed during my research. Before we enter the substance of the research, I would like to share my research journey, a journey during which my own understanding of rural China has greatly changed.

I began my project with the intention of producing a structuralist sociological analysis, based on sophisticated theoretical assumptions, then use thorough investigations from fieldwork to test them, which would enable me to present a set of clear, simple, precise arguments to bridge globalisation and rural China. Before my fieldwork started, and during the writing of my first draft of the literature review for this thesis, I had a basic hypothesis that 'China (as a political economic entity) presents an alternative form of classic globalisation', and that 'the Chinese government (and the ruling party behind it) plays an essential role in the shaping of this form'. Therefore, I reviewed a large volume of literature on 'Globalisation' and 'Globalisation with Chinese Characteristics' before my fieldwork started.

However, when I entered the field, I found it very difficult to connect my findings with my prior assumptions. I not only found that the empirical facts are much richer and more complicated than my previous hypotheses, I also realised that there are often discrepancies between the specific observations and the overall understanding. For example, local government did play an important role in maneuvering the economic development in village sphere overall, yet the village committee and villagers themselves have their own 'power of agency' to construct their own everyday life if one observes at the individual scale.

Similarly, I viewed Peanut Village (one of my case villages) as the most passive and poorest village among three villages, and indeed it is, but it was not completely silent. Peanut Village has its own 'indigenous vitality' (a term that I used, which will be discussed in detail too in the empirical chapters) rather than just being 'backward'. The oversimplified label 'backward' often leads to a disconnection between policy intentions and actual practices.

During my fieldwork, I gradually realised that the original way I had considered presenting my findings might not be suitable. Eventually, the decision was made to present this research as an ethnographic work, addressing the variations from the typical expectations and presumptions of what globalisation is like and what Chinese rural areas are like in a global era. This is not only because I found it more appropriate to do so, but because I also considered that a multi-sited ethnography would be a valuable approach for more clearly delivering the complex pictures of the changing countryside in China instead of oversimplifying it. There are always variations, as no place will develop purely following its original planning or model. In this sense, my case study sites are not unique, yet, they are special and meaningful because each one represents a set of growing, changing processes that have not been clearly revealed before in the broader literature.

Conclusions about globalisation in rural China are still there to be drawn, but in this thesis they are generated from a grounded theory perspective. The nature of this research has shifted from testing how the form of globalisation in China is different from the classic western one, to revealing the new forms of connections. Here I give up the rhetoric 'alternative form', because I found it implied that there is an 'authentic form', a form that served as reference. I do not deny that such a more widely-accepted, standard form of globalisation exists. In my research, I am going to adopt the definition of globalisation from the 'Global-Rural' project that was initiated by Aberystwyth University. In their words: "Globalization describes different processes and changes in how the world works. It is often seen as the integration of businesses, markets, economies, culture, people and politics across the world"<sup>1</sup>. However, definitions often perplexed me during the research process as I was continuously asking

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<sup>1</sup> Definition excerpted from [https://www.global-rural.org/story\\_map/being-global/](https://www.global-rural.org/story_map/being-global/). I take up the discussion as to what globalisation refers to in Chapter 2

how relevant these phenomena were to globalisation and into which account of globalisation these data should be categorised. Therefore, I decided to change the way that I conceptualised my empirical findings: starting from the phenomena that I observed and describing them. In this way I gradually made sense of them, finding the interconnections to globalisation between them, and in the end made my argument, further trying to make contributions to the existing literature on globalisation and ‘join the conversation’.

I would like to quote below a note that I wrote at the initial stage of my research to be used as a reference point, to show how my mindset and conceptions of rural China have altered during the course of this thesis.

*There is a saying in China, “whose family was not peasant if you count three generations forward” (谁家往上数三代不是农民). This saying often appears in the debates regarding the urban/rural split or as a fightback to some disdain regarding peasants and their behaviours. Indeed, in China, it is hard to find a person who does not have any connection with rural areas or can completely count themselves exempt from rural experiences.*

*I was born in a large city. My father used to be a peasant when he was young. Both my grandparents used to be peasants and only stopped working on their land when they were in their 60s. My father belongs to a famous generation in China, who changed their fates by education. Most of them were from rural areas and studied hard to get the very limited offers from the very limited universities, and who were then assigned to work<sup>2</sup> in the city after they graduated. They are now the mainstay of the current society, and most of them have rural backgrounds, and even if not, they have been through the movement “Up to the Mountains and Down to the Countryside”.<sup>3</sup>*

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<sup>2</sup> In 1978, China resumed admissions to university and college after the Cultural Revolution, during which the normal order of society had been destroyed. As undergraduates were very rare and in high demand, most of them would be selected by the government, various public institutions and medias before they graduated. If they had not been chosen, they could still be assigned for jobs instead of looking for one.

<sup>3</sup> A nation-wide movement in the PRC took place from the late 1960s to 1978. Because of Mao’s perception that pro-bourgeois thinking was prevalent during the Cultural Revolution, he declared that certain privileged urban youth should be sent to mountainous areas or farming villages to learn from the workers and farmers there, to ‘be transformed’. In total, approximately 17 million

*But these traces are vanishing.*

*For Millennials, perhaps the third generation to enter the city, the history of people like my grandparents is fading away. What they know about the countryside may no longer be from their own family, and if they grow up in the city, they may not have any close friends from the rural areas, as it is hard for rural children to study in the city due to their household registration status.<sup>4</sup> With the consolidation of the social strata, the number of rural schoolmates and colleagues that an urban child can encounter will be less and less.*

*And then, what will the images and perceptions of the countryside of urban children be like? Where will these impressions be from? Increasingly the image of rurality available to urban children will be from TV shows, social media, the depictions of classic novels and prose, a scene in a movie, or a glimpse during a holiday tour. But all of these seem distant from their everyday life.*

*What will China's rural areas look like then? What about the child in the countryside? Maybe they (the urban child and the rural child) are the same in many aspects: they all drink coke; they all use shampoo produced by transnational companies; they also read some of the same Japanese comics; both of them are the fans of some Korean pop stars.*

*But there are some differences, for sure. By the time they go to college, an urban student in Beijing may go to study in the US, while he or she can speak fluent English after the 15 years of education that they have received; the rural student may drop his/her study after senior high school, and go to work at the factory in town. The*

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youth were sent to rural areas as the result of the movement (Ebrey, Patricia Buckley (2005). *China: A Cultural, Social, and Political History* (1st ed.). Place of publication: Wadsworth, p. 29).

<sup>4</sup> Although the split of rural and urban hukou in the household registration system (see glossary at the beginning of this thesis) was officially abolished in September 2016, many cities still hold strict restrictions on the registered permanent residence of students, namely where the student is originally from. If a student does not hold a permanent address in a particular city, for example, Guangzhou, it will be extremely hard for them to get into good schools in Guangzhou. Make sure font here is the same as above.

*products he/she make are sold to the US and the urban student may purchase them in their supermarket.*

*The tentacles of globalisation are everywhere, and not many people can be exempted, but their experiences can be very different.*

*China is changing, the Chinese countryside, of course, cannot stay unchanged. But in the wave of globalisation and modernisation, some village have declined and disappeared in this time, while others have regained their vitality. But why? Who plays a decisive role in this? After the abolition of the urban-rural segmentation system, it is claimed that there is no longer a legitimate system that restricts peasants. But the huge disparity between urban and rural areas cannot be dismissed easily. So, what draws this distinct division? The initial doubt began during my internship when I was an undergraduate. I visited villages and gathered data for questionnaires. By then I was curious as to how the different villages in the same area can be so different. Why do some places look like this and some look like that? Why is the living room still dim even when it is a newly-built house?*

When, at the end of my research, I look back at this note, I feel that my previous thoughts were very naive and full of parochial assumptions. I myself seem to become the one who reinforces the urban/rural dichotomy and the classic modernisation theory which had been dismissed by most of the social science disciplines many years ago (Kipnis, 2016). Moreover, I realise that I unintentionally viewed myself as a privileged person who wanted to help, by writing emotive words to show my genuine concerns. I was certainly concerned with rural living and the words were the initial motivation for me to start this research; I really meant it when I was writing these sentences. Yet, they appeared to show a sense of arrogance and superiority.

However, some parts of these assumptions above are the facts. During my fieldwork I have either talked to or heard about many villagers who dropped out of school to work in factories. Yet, this 'fact' does not mean that this is the only way or only route for these rural people. Rural youth are much more capable of taking control of their own lives than I, and many other people, have assumed. A

factory job can indeed be a good job for many. They are proud of themselves and live a happy life. Comparing a factory job with studying abroad and assuming that one is more privileged than the other is an omnipotent kind of view, lacking practicability in rural lives.

By saying so, I am not implying that there are not actual problems, difficulties, social inequalities and injustices in their lives. Instead, by carefully observing the everyday experiences of villagers and others participating in the three case villages and their surroundings, my research suggests a more diversified, if not contrary, picture of contemporary rural China. There are weak, helpless or wise elderly, hard-working or lazy middle-aged people, immature, mature or intelligent youth, wealthy men with ideas, vulnerable groups, village political elites, young internet entrepreneurs, employees, and freelance landlords. They are the real rural people and they are making different choices and are heading in different directions. All together they suggest a very complicated and divided society both along urban and rural lines and divided more generally in China. Rural people cannot be simply described as “dead-brain” as Liu Xin (2000) suggests in his observation of a village in Hebei; nor can they be simply labelled as ‘suzhi cha’<sup>5</sup> (Han Dong, 2010)<sup>6</sup>. I try to avoid simply fitting them into particular/specific categories as I would have done in the past.

In the village sphere, my own research fieldwork suggests that the rural experience in Guangdong China is neither as backward as many media or scholars have assumed in the existing literature, nor as advanced as some of the propaganda that has been released by the state would suggest. Also, the degree of exposure to and interaction with globalisation is neither as close as some people have perceived it to be in northern China, nor as open as imagined in the villages in the coastal area. This research seeks to expose the problems of these general assumptions.

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<sup>5</sup> Suzhi: “suzhi is an inclusive and elusive term that can refer to one's morality, intelligence, education and many other elements in relation to character and ability” (Han, 2010: 605); Cha: bad at/poor at something. “Suzhi cha” often means impolite or poor quality (of person).

<sup>6</sup> In order to better distinguish the names of Chinese scholar, all Chinese scholars that have been cited in this thesis are referred in their full name instead of abbreviation.

### **1.3 Setting the scene: Globalising rural areas in China**

This section will provide an essential context for readers to understand the research settings. However, I do not intend to condense all the background information here, as the sense of how things have happened and developed in rural China will be gradually built up through the following chapters as well. Before we enter ‘the scene’, I want to make clear the main aim of this section, which is to illustrate how the globalising processes that took place in China were different from those of other countries and why globalisation matters to Chinese rural areas. Indeed, just as no two leaves are the same, there are no two countries in the world with exactly the same path of development. From this perspective, every process of development is unique. My intention here is to make the argument as to why the development of globalisation in China is special, where my research meaning lies in such context, and how this context affects or facilitates my research settings. Therefore, this section will briefly situate globalisation within China and rural China within globalisation.

#### **1.3.1 Situating Globalisation within China**

In Western literature, globalisation and globalisation studies have often been marked as ‘truisms’, saying little that is new or beyond what is obvious. To counter such criticism, many globalisation studies begin with an acknowledgement that the researcher has already noted the tendency towards cliché, and that their study will indeed be different and somewhat new. In China, ‘globalisation’ has not been exempted from excessive usage in almost all subjects. Nearly all journal articles published in the social science sphere related to the development of China, whether in Chinese or in English, refer to globalisation as an important background to the times. But very often, they stop there leaving globalisation as a background to the times, and then turn to talk of urbanisation and industrialisation, which they consider to be the more dominant domestic driving forces for significant emerging phenomena in China. Also, in Chinese studies of Sociology or Human Geography, regardless of whether they are in the urban or rural sphere, we can often see a beginning like this: “Since the economic reforms and opening-up policy were initiated in 1978, China [or, China’s rural area] has undergone tremendous changes, including [or, particularly in] ...”

My intention is not to criticise these beginnings for being similar, rather I very much agree that this is the truth: basically every change that we have witnessed in contemporary Chinese society can be linked to the 'reform and opening-up' policy, which, 'installs' 'globalisation' like installing a 'program' into China. I use the word program, as it has a particular launch date. The reform and opening-up policy, which was initiated in 1978, was a signal that symbolised China's willingness to embrace the world — the mainstream of the world by then — in the form of capitalism and the market mechanism. Such a position, however, did not mean that China accepted these trends entirely, but selectively – an issue which I discuss further in Chapter 2.

As I mentioned in my research journey above, taking globalisation as an observational lens was a difficult decision. As anthropologist Andrew Kipnis (2016) noted, most of the social transformations that have happened after 1978 in China are the amalgam of globalisation, industrialisation, urbanisation, and development in every aspect of life. And these processes often come together as a whole, together laying the modernising path of China. That is the common case for most of the Chinese rural areas, across counties and villages, which has made it difficult to distinguish and categorise what event was the consequence of which set of processes.

Take an ordinary county, A, in Southeast China as an example. After the launch of the 'reform and opening-up' policy which signalled the opening up of the market, a few Chinese from overseas have invested back in their hometown, county A. For instance, a clothing factory has been set up, producing clothes that are sold to Southeast Asia or America. Such processes are part of globalisation, as the investors were from overseas and the products sold overseas; are part of urbanisation, as many workers were from the surrounding villages, and the county expanded; are part of industrialisation as factories have been set up and residents have changed their occupation from farmers to workers. In the meantime, the whole city experienced modernisation in every aspect, developing its economic status, and the local government distributed money to the urban infrastructure projects: roads were widened, urban policies were applied, a supermarket was opened, mobile phone and cars became commonplace. All of these flowed into China simultaneously. Research can be carried out in any sphere here as the materials and data are tremendously rich.

At the meantime, western scholars have tended to focus on the geography of the Global North, and most of the globalisation studies, or capitalist studies have concerned 'the West' (Rigg, 2007). Here I line up with Rigg and his novel book *Everyday geography of the Global South*, in terms of attempting to fill a gap in the English literature, that calls for "a real and substantive re-engagement with the world beyond Europe, North America and Australia" (Rigg, 2007: 5), a similar contribution of my thesis too. Yet, it would not be entirely fair to blame western scholars for having "forgotten the importance of taking a truly global perspective" (Rigg, 2007:2). The same thing is happening elsewhere as well. For example, in China, while Chinese scholars highly praise and value theories and models that originate from the west, regarding the matter of globalisation, they tend to consider the changes that have and are happening in rural China to be due more to urbanisation and industrialisation (relatively domestic forces) rather than globalisation (mainly refers to the influences from outside).

The interwoven, messy, wild-growing development of China causes me to wonder what might happen in China *without* globalisation? If we take globalisation out of the picture, would China be in the same, or at least similar, situation in the world? If there were only industrialisation and the consequential urbanisation, would China become another Soviet Union? However, these hypotheses cannot be tested, or answered in the manner of a scientific model. My starting place therefore is to look into the details of globalisation, to see what rural China is like when it is *with* globalisation.

I argue that the first specific of globalisation in the Chinese context, lies in the timeframe. As mentioned above, is that like a program or product, a 'launch date' can be attributed to it. Such a program, has had the direct influence of exploding development in some areas (mostly the coastal area in China) and many indirect but still huge influences in other areas (mostly inland China), it triggered the processes of rapid industrialisation and urbanisation, and accelerated the modernising progress of the whole of China. However, I also argue that as time went on, globalisation collapsed into every aspect of people's life, becoming an indivisible part of the context.

China has a long history of being an autocratic monarchy, and experienced over forty years of chaos with internal regime struggles after the last feudal dynasty,

Qing, collapsed. Although in Chapter 3 I address the notion of a 'traditional rural society' formed in the long history of China, due to the constraints of this study, the historical context is limited to the period beginning in 1949, when the People's Republic of China (the P.R.C.) was founded.

After the P.R.C. was founded, China did not build diplomatic relations with most of the developed countries of the West until the 1970s, due in part to the 'cold-war seal off' and to the China's socialist ideology. In addition, the socialist economic policy — a planned economy — also became a barrier which blocked most of the capitalist countries from participating in China's economy.

1966–1976 saw a decade of chaos named the Great Cultural Revolution<sup>7</sup> sweep across the country and destroy most of the normal activities of production and marketing organisation as well as the whole education system. This 'disaster' did not end until Deng Xiaoping became the leader of China in 1978, from which time onwards the political and economic order was re-established (Howell, 1993; Zhang Honglin, 2006).

For many years China seemed to cut itself off from the mainstream of the world. Then it came to the moment that we noted above — December 1978 — when Deng and his leadership announced the reform and opening-up policy, which broke the system of planned economy and turned China into a market-orientated economy. China's globalising process therefore came much later than in many other countries. Additionally, its government still retains rigid control with regard to important political, economic and social areas, and thus in relation to what globalisation means in most other contexts — liberalising, deregulating, levelling, and unstoppable — China has a relatively unique path.

The second specific is the caution of Chinese government towards globalisation. In comparison to the planned economy era, China has loosened its control over many areas, including the market, by allowing foreign direct investment to come in and by encouraging the establishment of small domestic enterprises. However, it is difficult to label Chinese economic policy as 'liberal'

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<sup>7</sup> A socio-political movement with a stated goal which was to preserve 'true' Communist ideology in the country by purging remnants of capitalist and traditional elements from Chinese society. During the movement, educated urban youth were forced to the countryside in order to be re-educated by peasants and important intellectuals, large numbers of intellectuals were persecuted or insulted by the 'Red Guard'. For more details, see P. Clark, (2008) *The Chinese Cultural Revolution: A history*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

or 'pro-market'. Instead of de-regulation, a well-known neoliberal policy norm (Sparke, 2013), China has used strongly centralised state power to turn itself into the second biggest economy in the world. China has controlled its footsteps towards globalisation in contrast to the conclusion of many hyperglobalists that globalisation is inevitable and uncontrolled. In order to achieve this, the first step the Chinese government took was to intentionally select the places where foreign investment would be allowed (Howell, 1993).

These initially selected cities, like Shenzhen, were given the opportunity to become some of the wealthiest and most advanced cities in China (Kwok, 1986). This kind of opportunity also opened up for individuals. Over a long period of time from 1978 until the present day, people who have ambitions have regularly moved to those eastern-southern coastal cities to pursue their dreams, leaving their inland hometowns behind.

### **1.3.2 Situating rural China within Globalisation**

Undoubtedly, the uneven development has caused extreme inequality between the coastal area and inland, as well as between the urban and rural. Along with rapid urbanisation, following Deng's guidance to 'let some of people get rich first',<sup>8</sup> investments were channelled to cities and the allocation of public resources was concentrated in cities as well. Most importantly, most of the labour that underpinned the economic bloom of China were the workers from the countryside, who were forced to leave their land since there was hardly any profit to be earned from cultivation. Small cities/towns and rural areas were sacrificed to satisfy the developmental needs of big cities. This sacrifice is both cruel and involuntary for rural residents, which also meant the separation of family due to the household registration system (see glossary). A large number of rural labourers converged on the cities, leaving home villages 'dying' and creating very large 'left-behind' populations of the elderly and children. According to the *China rural towns and villages' statistics in 2000* and *China*

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<sup>8</sup> Deng's words when meeting representatives of Times Group, U.S. on 23 October 1985. Resource: <http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/34136/2569304.html> (Accessed 16 Sept,2016).

*rural statistics yearbook in 2010*,<sup>9</sup> more than 900,000 villages disappeared<sup>10</sup> in ten years.

Does that mean all villages in China are coming to their end? Not necessarily, because intra-rural differences can be enormous and rural-urban similarities can be sharp (Hoggart, 1990). In fact, inequality within rural areas in China can be the more extreme. Rural areas tend to retain a single or simpler economic structure, which leaves their economies both vulnerable to collapse or open to taking off. Therefore, globalisation and urbanisation have exposed and exacerbated this inherent polarity.

For example, Huaxi village, a village famous for its wealth and called 'The No.1 village in China'. Huaxi village located in Jiangsu Province, founded a co-operative company to manage the collective properties and investments of villagers. The group now earns more than 50 billion yuan (approximately £ 5.5 billion) per year, and every villager owns at least a 6 million RMB savings (Zhou Yi, 2006). In contrast, according to a nation-wide labour force database<sup>11</sup>, in Bayi village in Yashao Town, Guangdong Province, every household earns less than 3,000 yuan (approximately £350) per year and struggles to live.

However, in China, villages like Huaxi are the minority while villages such as Bayi are more common. The development of Huaxi village is not without its problems either. The research of the sociologist Zhou showed that more than ninety percent of Huaxi Village's fortune is controlled by the sons of the former village leader, and that villagers were forced to participate in the community with very restricted freedoms. Zhou Yi argues that Huaxi village belongs to a certain kind of village that he calls a 'post-collective village', which exists in contemporary industrialised China and whose success cannot be copied (Zhou Yi, 2006).

How can an ordinary village survive in the wave of globalisation? In 2005, three years after President Hu Jintao came to power, the Chinese state launched a

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<sup>9</sup> Published by China National Bureau of Statistic (NBS). Data can be obtained at <http://data.stats.gov.cn/easyquery.htm?cn=C01>.

<sup>10</sup> Nobody lives there anymore, or the administration of this village has been cancelled.

<sup>11</sup> CLDS: Chinese Labour Dynamic Survey, conducted by Sun Yat-Sen University once every two years. The data I cite here is based on the survey of 2014 (<http://css.sysu.edu.cn/Data> [accessed 16Sept, 2016]).

campaign called 'Building a New Socialist Countryside.' The significance of this campaign, according to Hu Jintao, was to ensure the smooth implementation of modernisation and maintain a steady development of the national economy. With strong support from President Hu, state agencies in the central government and subnational governments designed various policies to reconstruct China's countryside. In assessing this campaign, Long Hualou et al. (2010) point out that regional discrepancies, rural poverty, rural land-use issues and the present international environment are four major influential agendas in this campaign. They also note that more attention should be paid to caring for the future livelihoods of farmers in the process of implementing the strategy. Long et al. have carried out more researches on Chinese rural areas ranging from the processes and driving forces of rural hollowing-out (2010), land use policy in China (2014), to the differentiation of rural development driven by industrialisation and urbanisation in eastern coastal China (2009). Although these studies help us understand the background to rural transition and its driving forces, they are nevertheless limited to macro-level rural restructuring and lack explanation at the individual scale. As we can see, Chinese rural studies often focus on the economic aspects of these areas but leave a big lacuna between livelihood (how people earn money) and lives (how people live their life) – any embodiments other than material elements that the rural inhabitants might express and perform are hard to discern. The social-cultural construction of rurality is missing.

However, reading data, indices, and policy alone will not lead to a more complete understanding of the Chinese rural situation. We know already that rapid industrialisation and urbanisation have greatly changed the rural areas in terms of the loss of cultivated land for factory workshops, and the transformation of rural labourers into urbanised workers. More importantly, globalised industrialisation has changed the people who live in rural areas, or were born there but have now left. According to the sixth population census of China in 2010, more than half of the population still live in rural areas. But in contrast to the implications of this data, nearly 70% of the whole population is registered as peasants under the household registration system. It not only implies that the household registration system is no longer sufficient for the contemporary situation of 'floating populations', but also suggests that new

methods and theories need to be employed to understand the dynamic changes that have happened and are happening in rural areas. In line with China's traditions, some of the floating population who went to the cities returned to rural areas when they had earned enough money. With this money, modern houses have been built for their elderly parents and young children, but the lifestyles of rural people do not necessarily change immediately from traditional to contemporary by moving into a modern house with a television and other modern technologies.

As globalisation permeates into the local scale, 'glocalisation' is inevitable. Thus, the embodiment of globalisation, in forms such as the internet and 'western fashion', may sharply vary in different spaces and in different people's perceptions. For example, I found that for many rural people, 'foreign things' were considered the best and appealing. The metamorphoses of these global elements into rural forms were the key factors in initially sparking my research interest; it is not uncommon to see in the countryside 'white-house' like buildings, or European style furniture in rural homes. At the same time, the internet industry has become one of the most popular and rapidly expanding industries in China. While the Chinese elites consider it as a powerful tool, a 'money tree' or an essential bridge to a bigger world, some parents living inland towns rather believe it is a 'drug' for their child: those teenagers who spend too much time on the internet should be sent into a rehabilitation centre to recover.<sup>12</sup> Compared to cities, where information circulates freely, these hinterlands — little towns and villages where information is transformed and metamorphosed — have their own understanding of globalisation.

One thing this thesis needs to pay special attention to is that it is neither globalisation nor Chinese rural culture should be seen as a given abstract entity. This means that globalisation cannot be simply regarded as a contemporaneous backdrop of China's rural vicissitude; nor can we take Chinese traditional rural culture as a given cultural background into which

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<sup>12</sup> *Internet Addiction Clinic Uses Electroshock to Cure Patients*, <http://www.sixthtone.com/news/internet-addiction-clinic-uses-electroshock-cure-patients> (accessed at 16 September, 2018).

globalisation enters rural China. On the contrary, the two are shaped dynamically by each other and by the people who live within.

It is clear that, rural areas can be understood as ‘hybrid places’, where rurality is performed by rural inhabitants and immigrants, farmers, landowners, workers, tourists and tourist attractions, recreational visitors, policymakers, the media, and academic researchers (Woods, 2007; 2010). Undoubtedly the material daily lives of rural people are affected by economic activities, but profound conceptual changes are also happening: in the way they think, the experiences they have, or their attitudes towards family and work. To understand rural China, we need to consider it in a more qualitative way — more descriptively and more culturally. The everyday nature of politics, the social and cultural changes of places need to be taken into consideration in order to understand how particular villages are differently affected by contemporary globalisation in China.

#### **1.4 A multi-sited, comparative, ethnography of everyday life**

The previous section describes how the two big themes — globalisation and rural — link together in this study. This section will introduce another aspect of the research, that is the methodological perspective. Detailed discussion of methodology is undertaken, and the corresponding methodological concerns addressed, in Chapter 4.

This research is a multi-sited ethnographic research that built upon three case-study villages. Comparisons are drawn between different sites in different locales (on the same scale), and also on different scales (case villages, regions and nations). During the process of seeking for the answer of some ‘why’ and ‘how’ questions, everyday life became a natural choice as the main focus of my research, providing a detailed understanding of how the rural people in China experienced globalisation.

After decades of ethnography based on single sites, there has been a call for more multi-sited ethnographies to take place (Marcus, 1995). In a world where the distinction between the world system and the lived world has collapsed, “there is clearly scope for this kind of multi-sited study” (Miller, 1997:12). Multi-sited ethnography is particularly timely in China for a number of reasons. Firstly, there are already many great masterpieces of single-sited ethnography in

traditional Chinese rural studies (Fei Xiaotong, first published in 1939, my reading version published in 1992; Lin Yaohua, first published in 1944, my reading version published in 2013; Xiang Bao, 2004<sup>13</sup>), giving a multi-sited ethnography firm ground from which to contribute to complement existing work. Secondly, just as there is not a single discipline within social science that can capture the multi-faceted processes of globalisation, a single-sited ethnography is not enough to present the diversity and variability of changes that have happened and are happening in rural China. A limitation of this multi-site approach is the length of time spent on each individual village. As in traditional anthropology or ethnographic writing, two months per site is definitely not enough to grasp the tremendous amount of detail in a small community. However, when all these materials were put together, the beauty of multi-sited ethnography started to emerge, in that it brings to light in the same time and in the same frame of study very different things that are sometimes masked by the generality, and reveals similarities that I might never have supposed before my actual fieldwork.

Marcus (1995) questions the demand of multi-sited ethnography at a time when globalisation means that traditional 'local, close-up' perspective of anthropology no longer can be held. Indeed, more than twenty years later, such a demand and the relational background still reads as familiar and applicable to my research in rural China. Marcus took the global as an emergent dimension in multi-sited ethnography, suggesting that multi-sited research can be designed around "chains, paths, threads, conjunctions, or juxtapositions of locations" (Marcus, 1995:105). In my research, the primary idea of multi-sited emerged in the form of the juxtaposition of locations, that is the three villages. However, it is also naturally designed around the global dimension and different paths, threads and conjunctions as it is a study about globalisation. By describing the everyday life in these three villages, different threads have cut across the three different sites.

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<sup>13</sup> Fei Xiaotong: *Peasant Life in China: A Field Study of Country Life in the Yangtze Valley*, first published in 1939 in English by Routledge & K. Paul; Lin Yaohua: *The Golden Wing: a family chronicle*, first published in 1944 in English by International secretariat, Institute of Pacific relations; Xiang Bao: *Transcending Boundaries: Zhejiangcun: The Story of A Migrant Village In Beijing*, published in 2004 in English by Brill.

In addition, different sites in a multi-sited ethnography will often have different sets of investigating processes and with different intensities (Marcus, 1995). This applies to my research as well. As the three case villages are in their origins different in many ways (though they do have similarities as well), it is impossible to make this a controlled comparative study. I have paid attention to various aspects in each case village. For example, I focused more on daily consumption and commodity circulation in Peanut Village, while I paid more attention to the dissemination of global knowledge in Tower Village. The difference of concerns is related to the characteristics of the village itself, but also due to the selective presentation of the researcher myself, as I want to present stories from different narratives, and to the degree of globalisation, as the main concern in one village may no longer be the distinct part of another village. These differences will be further discussed in the methodological and empirical chapters.

Alongside the *multi-site* aspect of the study, another key point to address is the *ethnographic* nature of the research. Globalisation in rural areas seems to be such grand topic above anything that ethnography can reveal. Yet, I was inspired by Daniel Miller's *Capitalism: An Ethnography Approach*, which uses ethnography as a powerful tool to explore the 'Capitalism' in Trinidad. Miller (1997) states that, by being in the presence of the people that are being studied, ethnography captures the day-to-day commerce which describes the organic capitalism that can be seen as different from the 'pure capitalism'. This makes the incorporation of plural definitions of capitalism possible.

Therefore, out of the same narrative, that ethnography can be a powerful tool to reveal the day-to-day practise of globalisation – a more grassroots perspective in rural China can be obtained. In China, it is not unusual to see comparative studies among villages, cities, and regions. However, these genres of research are heavily focused on the macro-level. They involve mainly quantitative and policy-orientated perspectives, employing surveys and demographic data. This often results in a lack of detail and explanation. For example, cross-nationally, Zhou Yunqing & Wang Peigang (2005) have drawn comparisons between the rural governance in Yanglinqiao town in Hebei, China, and that of Local Service Districts in New Brunswick Province, Canada. Similarly, Long & Woods (2011) initiated a comparative study regarding rural restructuring under globalisation

between the rural eastern coastal area of China and Wales. Domestically, Wang Yanfei et al. (2016) provide a comprehensive assessment of the spatio-temporal patterns of urban–rural development and transformation in China since 1990, which covers 337 study units (cities). Li Rongbin & Zhang Liyan (2012) research the status and influencing factors on the identity of floating populations, which is based on the survey data of 106 cities in China. Xiang Yanping(2014) compares ‘the one village one product (OVOP)’ model in Japan to that of China, displaying the geographic distribution and regional characteristics of 322 OVOP towns and villages in China.

Certainly, there is research that adopts a multi-sited ethnographic approach (for example, see Zhou Xiaohong, 1998), but compared to the ‘bigger’ picture, the in-depth comparative research that focuses on the individual and village community level with a more ethnographic approach appears weak and less influential.

Such an absence of this qualitative approach is partially due to the Chinese academic tradition which values quantitative methods. It is also influenced by the very high population that seems to require more macro-level, general explanations, and the residual collectivist mode of thinking. My thesis therefore will be an attempt to fill this gap in the literature of rural studies in China, proving a detailed, in-depth, multi-sited ethnography of rural China.

Comparisons are integral to multi-sited ethnography as the object of study is mobile and multiply situated (Marcus, 1995). In my thesis, comparisons exist and are drawn in many dimensions. Not only is the ‘globalisation with Chinese characteristics’ as a whole compared with other patterns/forms of globalisation, rural areas of China are compared with those of the west, and the generality of the three villages is compared with other features in other regions in China: ‘Chinese’ as an entity holds a great deal of diversity within it. In other words, using the word ‘Chinese’ to draw conclusions and represent the different regional or ethnic groups in China insufficient and lack the necessary levels of nuance. In the context of China's domestic context, regional culture occupies a very important position, even within a province, the people of each city/town/village are often considered to have their own unique regional culture. Therefore, this comparison also takes account of different regional characteristics. And most centrally, the three parallel cases make intra-group

comparisons in multiple dimensions: the different degrees of globalisation; the different aspects of globalisation; the different open-borders of villages; the economic developments; the chief industries; the landscape; the demographic structure and the values of each village and so on.

In such a multi-sited ethnography, comparisons emerge from “putting questions to an emergent object of study [rural everyday life in my research] whose contours, sites, and relationships are not known beforehand, but are themselves a contribution of making an account that has different complexly connected real-world sites of investigation” (Marcus, 1995:102).

*Everyday life* is the core concept of this thesis and explains the focus of the research. It is the answer to the following questions: by research what I research globalisation and rural; what I care about the most in different villages; and on which I employ the ethnographic methods.

Everyday life has inspired much theory in social science, not only in geography but also in sociology (Kalekin-Fishman, 2013), anthropology (Jenkins, 1994), and cultural studies (Seigworth, 2000). It is made up of procedural, mundane, trivial things, which happen in normal places and in the daily life. Everyday life as a study sphere then concerns with ordinary people, everyday actions and commonplace events. It focuses on normal living rather than abnormal events (Rigg, 2007).

We experience the world that we live in through everyday life. Compared to some big, ceremonial stages or events, everyday life appears to be similar, boring, and dull (Eyles, 1989). However, it is in these familiarities that we see the impact and permeation of ‘structure’ on ‘human agency’, as well as the reshaping of ‘structure’ by ‘human agencies’, by turning individual thinking into collective consciousness and common practices (Blumer, 1979; De Certeau, 1984; Eyles, 1989). From Simmel’s perspective, everyday life should be seen as the embodiment of the totality of society that shows from within, expressing the most common social cultural context (Simmel, 1950).

Therefore, everyday life becomes a field that connects structure and agency, the macro-processes and the micro-practice (Zhang Min & Xiong Guo, 2013). Eyles (1989) pointed out, cross-cultural comparisons suggest that the detail of

everyday life varies significantly between places. This has been established and verified by many place-based, anthropologic studies.

In this research, even within the seemingly similar social and cultural backgrounds, the case villages have shown great diversity in terms of everyday life. Of course there are similar, continuous, everyday activities, yet the everyday life of different villages has become a mirror which reflects different small-scale context and process of the site.

Most importantly, after all, from ancient to modern times, most of the happiness and suffering of the countryside are inscribed in everyday life.

## 1.5 My Research Aims

In this study, my research aims became clearer after the fieldwork, as they emerged amidst the discursive, diverse observations discussed above. For example, during the fieldwork, the tension of the question as to whether a phenomenon was related to globalisation or not, generated the need for me to clarify 'what is globalisation', and further led to the enrichment of 'grassroots globalisation'. Thus, there are three research aims for this study, targeting the different spheres.

The **first research aim** is to enrich the knowledge of 'grassroots globalisation' and 'globalisation from below', presenting the everyday practices of globalisation in three case villages. By so doing, I aim to dilute, if not dissolve, the grandness of globalisation as an academic sphere. This research gives a sense of how global forces have permeated village lives via different routes, and touched a particular aspect.

The **second research aim** is to challenge the stereotypes and general impression of Chinese rurality. Modern Chinese rurality has been enriched and diversified under globalisation. The traditional close rural community is transforming to a more globalised countryside. In line with this aim, I also seek to initiate a dialogue with the 'global countryside' model that Woods has proposed, by providing a Chinese village case study and suggesting that an individual-scale factor should be added to it.

The **third research aim** is to use ethnography as a research method to incorporate these two sets of seemingly parallel processes, to describe the everyday practice of globalisation in rural China. In three empirical chapters, multi-sited ethnography has been applied to reduce globalisation and rural China to those aspects manifested within the ethnographic encounter.

## 1.6 An Overview of Chapters

From these three aims the structure of the thesis as a whole emerges. This thesis is divided into eight chapters.

Chapters 2 and 3 are designed to function together. They comprise an analysis of two bodies of literature concerning globalisation and rural areas. However, they are not treated as distinct areas of 'globalisation' and 'rural', but examined as 'globalisation and rural' in the West and 'globalisation and rural' in China.

**Chapter 2** mainly focuses on the broad picture of the globalisation and rural studies in the present-day Western/English academia, and the research gaps in the existing literature on global–rural relations. It serves to provide an overview of 'classic globalisation' and the 'western countryside'. Following that a few key concepts within the modernisation process that has happened in western rural areas are revisited.

**Chapter 3** offers a reading of the contemporary Chinese version of things outlined in Chapter 2, starting with 'globalisation with Chinese characteristics', and 'Chinese rurality', including the traditional rurality and modern rurality. I briefly introduce the study of the 'termination of a village' in Chinese literature, involving the gradual opening of village boundaries model.

These two chapters together lay the foundation that this thesis then builds on and develops. They also set out how this thesis can contribute to the literature and allow a better understanding of my own research context and background.

**Chapter 4** introduces the methodology and corresponding ethical concerns. This chapter explains my positionality, the research methods used, the case

selection process, how the eight-month fieldwork was conducted, the data was collected and processed, and the research ethics involved.

The core of this thesis lies in the three empirical chapters, focusing on the three case study villages. Each chapter presents the story of case villages: **Peanut Village (Chapter 5)**, **Tower Village (Chapter 6)** and **Alibaba Village (Chapter 7)**.

The story of **Peanut Village** starts with a description of the village, an ordinary, purely agriculturally-based village. The chapter then moves to its main focus on the everyday consumption in village life, illustrating the connection between globalisation and the villagers' everyday consumption as the simplest visible aspect of the influences of globalisation on people's lives. Another theme of this chapter is the negotiation with modernities, represented by the villagers' negotiation with modern equipment and modern facilities and also addresses the lack of consciousness of globalisation in such forms of encounter. I named the form of globalisation in Peanut Village as '**superficial globalisation**', which implies the permeation of global elements into the daily life of villagers. Yet, such a form of globalisation has not evoked an awareness of globalisation, therefore the spiritual core of the villagers has remained untouched to some extent.

Similarly, the story of **Tower Village** begins with the description and introduction of Tower Village – a village in transition from an agriculturally-based village to a tourism-orientated village. I discuss the dissemination and making use of global knowledge. Different perspectives and expectations from different actors involved in these processes are shown in this chapter. The latter part of the chapter sets out the different performances of villagers in different stages, further suggesting that the more globalised/developed a place is, the more stages and identities there are for an individual. A villager's life in a week has been used as an example to show the multiple stages for that person and their multiple identities. I named the form of globalisation in Tower village as '**in the name of globalisation**', which suggests that the people there have learnt how to use the discourse of globalisation to achieve their own pursuits.

**Alibaba Village** is a 'village in the city' and an 'urban village', with a special kind of production mode: the Taobao online business and surrounding by the urban

landscape. This chapter also starts with a description of and introduction to the village. I then begin to explore the everyday life of villagers from the perspectives of globalising production, the varying lifestyles, the changing values of family and the grassroots self-organising practices from individuals to the organisational level. Compared to the previous two villages, Alibaba Village is the one that I consider to already **'be the part of globalisation'**, which means that the residents here, no matter whether they are the 'old villagers' or the 'new villagers', have become highly globally aware and live a globalised life in the village.

In the final chapter, **Chapter 8**, I summarise the key findings of this thesis from three angles: the dynamics of participation of each village and villager in globalisation in the form of grassroots practises; the preservation and re-creation of traditional values in rural China; and the gradual opening of borders of villages. The subsequent discussion examines how the findings of this research shed light on the different bodies of literature the thesis speaks to: globalisation, and globalisation in China, geographies of rural China, and the application of ethnographic methods in China.

## Chapter 2 Globalisation and Rural Studies

### 2.1 Chapter Summary

I began writing this chapter on the train from London to Exeter. On that train, I was reading Michael Woods's *Rural Geography*, within which a classic rural imagination is discussed: "picturesque, spacious rural housing, set in a pleasant healthy and pollution-free environment with an absence of crime" (Woods, 2005:231). This imagination definitely chimes with the scene that I saw outside, where the sheep and cattle were scattered in the long uninterrupted meadows, the whole scene providing a great aesthetic experience for its audience.

At that moment, the sight of such a picturesque rural view, made me think of the countryside of a very different country, with its own very different view. Such an interconnected thought, generated by an international student from China, that happened randomly amidst daily life, is a common, ordinary embodiment of globalisation.

As set out in the introduction, the overall aim of this research is to understand the different ways in which life in specific local/rural settings has interacted and continues to interact with the wider context of globalisation. Before unfolding these particular ways in which globalisation is being experienced, this chapter sets out the broad picture of globalisation and rural studies in the present-day, mainly western/English academia, and identifies research gaps in the existing literature on global-rural studies.

This chapter is structured around three main bodies of literature.

Specifically, Section 2.2 provides an overview of 'classic globalisation', including the basic clarification of the term globalisation, major genres and a few key concepts within the debates: markets, states and the global culture. Then Section 2.3 turns to 'western countryside', with special attention paid to the changing ways of conceptualising rurality and the approaches to accessing rurality.

Section 2.4 revisits the literature on rural restructuring, including the review of global-rural relations in Western literature and the idea of global countryside; here I also

briefly touch on the changing nature of community and family. While Section 2.5 draws some conclusions from the material of this whole chapter.

## **2.2 A ‘Classic’ Globalisation?**

*Globalization is in danger of becoming, if it has not already become, the cliché of our times: the big idea which encompasses everything from global financial markets to the Internet but which delivers little substantive insight into the contemporary human condition. (Held et al, 2011:1)*

As Held points out, globalisation is a term that has been used in so many different contexts and by so many different people, both in sophisticated academic ways and in other much looser ways (Massey, 2001). There is a wealth of literature that has talked about nearly every aspect of globalisation, ranging from the definition, its history and periodisation; its core elements; the mechanisms by which it functions and, of course, its influences and impacts and people’s attitudes towards it (Woods, 2000; Held et al, 2011; Lechner & Boli, 2012). Here I am not going to simply reiterate the things that we all know, which would also be impossible to do within the limitations of a brief overview. For the sake of simplicity, the two particular areas of focus here are as follows: one is the meanings and ways that globalisation is described in literature; and the second is a discussion of a more ‘classic’ version of globalisation more than just providing definitions. Both aspects together prepare a framework for the successive chapters examining the rather different experience of China’s globalisation and the empirical studies in the later part of this thesis that consider the question of how globalisation is experienced by different individuals, and, on a more specifically personal scale, how Chinese rural inhabitants experience globalisation.

### **2.2.1 What is globalisation?**

Globalisation is often considered as an all-inclusive phenomenon, describing the conditions of an intensifying worldwide interconnectedness and consciousness of the world as a whole (Robertson, 1992). There is a relatively dominant view that has tended to describe globalisation as a phenomenon, process(es), or contemporary

condition. For example, Giddens (1998: 33) defines globalisation as “a complex range of processes driven by a mixture of political and economic influence”, while Sparke (2013) defines it as a collection of processes of economic, political, and social integration which have created ties that impact the way we live all around the world.

The definition previously discussed in Chapter 1, proposed by the 'Global-Rural' project, concludes that

“Globalization describes different processes and changes in how the world works. It is often seen as the integration of businesses, markets, economies, culture, people and politics across the world.”

This kind of definition, which more or less belonged to the descriptive school, often is the first step for defining a phenomenon — describes some social facts that exist.

Based on these descriptive definitions of globalisation, many scholars dig into and explore the power relations behind such descriptions, which is to consider globalisation as an artificial ideology or a project. Both Fukuyama (1992) and Huntington (1996) in their well-known seminal works considered globalisation to be a one-sided process of westernisation (Georghiou, 2013; Zhou, 2013). Working alongside neoliberalism with its claims of free trade, deregulation, privatisation and the withdrawal of the state (Harvey, 2005), globalisation thus becomes “the inevitable and desirable fate of all humankind” (United Nations 2002:18, cited in Choudhary, 2007).

In this genre of definition, globalisation refers to a one and only dominant global system, namely capitalist globalisation. In contrast to the optimistic view above, Massey (2001) is more sceptical. She made the criticism that globalisation has been used as a rhetoric, working to re-tell the story of modernity as a time of violent, racist, and oppressive tendencies, and has also been used to persuade people that unequal spatial development — which some scholars believe to be an aspect that globalisation has reinforced — is only due to temporal differences connected to developmental stages.

Following the track of the more sceptical school of thought raises the question as to whether there are alternative forms of globalisation. The capitalist viewpoint is

criticised for its failure in explaining other experiences of modernisation in countries like China: the state cannot be defined as capitalist, yet it displays strong globalising traits evident in the political, economic, social and cultural reforms and in its levels of progress. Sklair (2002) therefore proposes 'socialist globalisation' as a dialectical subject, an alternative form of globalisation in comparison to 'capitalist globalisation', which he considers as the historically contingent dominant form of globalisation. China's mode will be discussed further in Chapter 3.

Three schools of thought have been formed amidst these debates, each representing a different perspective regarding globalisation: the hyperglobalist, the sceptical, and the transformationalist (Held et al, 2011). According to Held et al. (2011), hyperglobalists hold an optimistic view which believes that globalisation marks a completely new era of human history and will eventually lead to a single, borderless world and to denationalisation. They are the faithful advocates of neoliberalism and the contemporary capitalist world system. The sceptics' thesis, as the counter perspective to the hyperglobalist, argues that the interconnectedness of the world has not changed much since the nineteenth century and the extent of globalisation has been overstated by hyperglobalists. The sceptical school of thought also points out that the power of the traditional nation-state has been underestimated. Since globalisation has boosted inequality between different nations, there will not be a single united world but it will split into various regions and cultural enclaves. Transformationalists stand in between, acknowledging that globalisation is the core impetus of the rapid transformations upon the economies and politics of modern societies. Therefore, the power, functions and working forms of the nation-state are being continuously reshaped, reorganised and reconstructed in response to complex modern conditions. Moreover, the future of the world is full of uncertainty (Held et al, 2011).

Halsall and Cook (2013) assert that China is taking a transformationalist approach, considering globalisation as the driving force behind the social, political and economic changes in modern China since 1978. In line with Halsall and Cook, this research is based on the transformationalist thesis. It could be argued that the rapid development of China neither fits in the hyperglobalist thesis nor the sceptical thesis, as we can clearly see the deep impacts of globalisation in China but, in comparison to many western countries, with a distinctive form where the state does not step

back. Therefore, this research will not focus on questioning whether globalisation exists, or whether it will lead to a global convergence, instead it seeks to show the processes of changing and shaping Chinese society. Within these processes, the power and function of the nation-state in China have been re-energised (Held et al, 2011).

Sklair (2002) comments that many of these studies of globalisation seem too abstract, they are 'up there' rather than rooted in the ground. For example, Sparke (2013) posits that when readers buy a book, they do not think about the global economy, politics, and different networks involved in the producing and consuming of this book. For most people, the influence of globalisation is embodied in everyday life without self-conscious awareness, but continuously shapes the world we live in. This is also the starting point for my research.

### **2.2.2 Common Experiences: The overarching forces**

Scholars have noted that the influences of globalisation — or how these influences function — can be looked at both in objective and subjective ways (Sklair, 2002). The objective side considers the 'forces of globalisation themselves' or 'impersonal global forces' (Sklair, 2002:2), such as mass media corporations, global economic forces, institutions that structure politics, global marketing, and how they create and underpin the conditions and opportunities for different groups of people to make their choices. This narrative tells the story of globalisation from a top-down perspective, for example how the global impacts the local. The subjective side, on the other hand, focuses on the individual scale, that is how one's life is affected by globalisation. This includes areas in which we make individual decisions such as media use, job situation, voting behaviour, consumption choices, and consideration of how people and groups think about and identify themselves. These together shape the overall structures of globalisation. This might be characterised as a bottom-up narrative, or a micro-level narrative.

The objective view and subjective view are in essence just two versions of the same thing. As Sklair argues, it would be silly to ignore or just look at one side since the objective side can provide a wider context for understanding the subjective side, how these choices in our daily lives become available and possible. Conversely, the subjective side offers insight into qualitative changes, which, Woods (2000) argues,

creates the distinctive newness of contemporary globalisation in comparison to the ways in which it was manifest in previous decades (see also Dicken, 2004). These qualitative changes, namely the nuanced impacts on everyday lives, reflect the complexity and permeation of objective powers into practices at the grassroots level.

Before we get to the grassroots level – which is the main body of my work – it is important/necessary to summarise some common experiences of globalisation at the national scale. Specifically, in relation to countries in the Global North, within the various sectors including economy, politics, and social culture.

Represented by the US and many countries of the Global North, the dominant form of capitalist globalisation is characterised by the free market, the withdrawal of the state, and the assimilation of global cultures. These assumptions are being continually challenged and each will be discussed in turn in this section.

### **Markets**

As the transformation of global economic activities is a vital aspect of globalisation, a wide variety of academic and political policy thinkers have contributed to the discussion about the nature of economic integration and the trajectory of the global economy. As Marx and Engels (1848; re-published at 2008) asserted, it is the inherent capitalist drive to expand to every place in the world where there is a possible market that that has been responsible for creating what we call globalisation today. Similarly, Sparke (2013) claims that global trade has been transformed and defined by the profit-making nature of capitalism. In other words, globalisation is dominated by a capitalist economy. Moreover, in popular debates in the media or politics, globalisation often tends to be equated with economic globalisation: the power of transnational corporations (TNCs), global production and global trade, and the nature of globalised finance (Jones, 2014).

The typical capitalist commodity chain comprises three main parts: production, distribution, and consumption (Sparke, 2013). These three parts have been largely re-organised under past economic restructuring and current processes of technological change, which represent a new form of production (Mishra, 2006). With regard to production, Massey (1984) made observations about the spatial division of labour in the early 1980s, suggesting that rather than drawing from the original geographic concept of spatial divisions — regions specialising in a particular industry

(for example, the development of mining industry in a certain province) — the new kind of international spatial division of labour seeks to divide a production process into different procedures and locate them in different regions globally to maximise profit. This new form of production is led by TNCs, which actually carry out most of the transits and exchanges of goods and services across the globe, and are the direct drivers of technological upgrades and the geographical spread of participants (Woods, 2000).

One of the most significant patterns is the restructuring of international labour divisions, which manifests in three waves of international industrial transfer, and has led to the spatial specialisation of production (Dicken, 2015). Since these waves are highly relevant to the region Guangdong in China, as it became one of the recipients of the third wave, I will therefore describe them in detail here. The first wave was in the 1950s when the United States transferred its textile and steel industries to Japan and Germany. The second wave was from the 1960s to 1970s, when many labour-intensive industries were transferred from developed countries to Eastern Asia and Latin America, followed by the transferring of some capital-intensive industries to the Asian 'four tigers' (Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea and Taiwan). During this time, the developed countries kept those industries that were technology-intense. The third wave began in the 1980s and continues to the present day. The recent four decades have seen, as a result of the modularisation of production, most of the manufacturing, labour-intensive industries and part of the technology-based industries transferring to Asia and Latin America.

The influence of the international spatial labour division and industrial transfers is clearly reflected in the explosive growth of imports in developed countries. This indicates that the centre of production and export for many manufacturing processes has shifted to an ever-expanding array of those newly industrialising economies in the developing countries (Gereffi, 1999; Dickens, 2015). In the meantime, with the blooming of new technologies in information and communications and the lifting of regulations, money or capital in the form of investments, has become the biggest 'export' of the advanced industrialised First World to the new markets (Jones, 2014). However, as Massey (1999) argued, there is an ironic fact of inequality within globalisation between capital and labour. While barriers have been torn down under the name of free trade to serve the movement of capital around the globe more

freely in the search for the best opportunity to invest, other barriers have been set up to prevent people from immigrating and to hold people in place, especially the poor and unskilled.

Sparke (2013) suggests that every basic part of the commodity chain has to be understood from the start as embedded within the special processes that produce or affect the availability of labour, money and nature, including the political systems of nation-states and all the inter-governmental agreements that shape international relations. This leads to another vital debate within the realms of both political and economic globalisation: the role of the nation-state.

### ***Nation-States***

As mentioned above, the dominant form of globalisation, namely capitalist globalisation, chimes with neoliberalism, a theory of political economic practice. Neoliberalism proposes that the most advanced status of human wellbeing can be achieved by “liberating entrepreneurial freedoms and skills of individuals within an institutional framework characterised by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade” (Harvey, 2006: 2). Such an ideology naturally demands the withdrawal of the nation-state from the market as well as from other areas of social provision (Harvey, 2006).

According to the theory, apart from withdrawal, the neoliberal state should also provide the institutional arrangements that protect free markets and free trade alongside ensuring the freedom of action, expression and choice of individuals (Harvey, 2006). These arrangements include the privatisation of assets, meaning that sectors (including land, water, rail and so on) previously run by the state should be deregulated and turned over to the private sphere. Moreover, the most crucial task for the state is to nurture and protect the free mobility of capital between sectors, regions, and countries by collectively negotiating the reduction of barriers and opening up of markets. Examples of this would be the establishment of the G7 group, formed by seven advanced capitalist nations (the US, Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Canada and Japan), as well as many other collaborative trade agreements designed to reduce the barriers of exchange. On a global scale, promoting the neoliberal mode can be understood as a hegemonic process, which forces every possible market to open its access (Harvey, 2006).

In line with the idea of convergence around a notion of a single “global human condition” (Held and McGrew, 1993: 262), we have also witnessed the foundation of the United Nations, together with many other international organisations such as the World Bank and the World Trade Organisation (WTO). The growth of non-governmental organisations and inter-governmental institutions (the UN, WTO, and IMF for example) has changed the nature of governance by removing certain powers from nation-states and has led many to argue that national sovereignty has been eroded (De Jonge Oudraat & Haufler, 2012).

A much-used phrase in response to the contemporary situation has been management guru Kenichi Ohmae’s famous obituary ‘the end of the nation-state’ (Ohmae, 1995, cited in Sparke 2013). Sparke, however, believes that this is overstated, a view supported by Harvey (2006) and Dodds (1988). Although we can observe that world politics has been largely altered by the economic and political forms of globalisation and neoliberalisation, the practice of nation-states has extensively departed from the template that neoliberalism provides (Harvey, 2006). In other words, the nation-state has not yet exited world stage but remains active under modern neoliberalism (Dodds, 1998; Sparke, 2013). Some elements of globalisation even reinforce the role of national government (Woods, 2000). Moreover, there are tensions and contradictions within the theory of neoliberalism itself where it seems that the reverse is happening in practice (Harvey, 2006). For instance, there are certain sectors, such as agriculture or the car industry, that are protected by the European Union, where the EU sets up tariffs regarding imports or imposes eco-friendly regulations that can only be met by domestic producers and manufacturers, while at the same time advocating free trade and anti-trade-protectionism in all other areas for economic, social, and political interests (Harvey, 2006). The more recent trade war between President Trump’s US administration and China also reflects the revival of the trend toward trade protectionism and statism.<sup>14</sup>

In addition, correlation can be made between the variations in the impact of globalisation and the relative strength of the state (Woods, 2000). Henderson et al.

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<sup>14</sup> In the discussion of world trade, both sides have been criticised for returning to Statism and becoming statist. See, China Statism, US China Trade War, retrieved August 3, 2019 from <https://uschinatradewar.com/tag/china-statism/>; And Armstrong, A (2016, July), ‘The statist convergence of Trump and Clinton’, retrieved from <https://ariarmstrong.com/2016/07/the-statist-convergence-of-trump-and-clinton/>

(2013) argue that globalisation can be considered as the externalisation of certain national forms of capitalism. However, such externalisation only applies to 'strong states' who either have the capability to influence the rule of the international economy, and/or can control the speed and extent of their integration into the global economy (Woods, 2000). The US and other Global North countries would fall into the former category, while the latter characteristics apply to strong developing countries such as Brazil, China, Iraq and Iran (Woods, 2000). These countries have managed to slow down the globalising processes and gain more control over them. A 'weak state' is one that has suffered from lack of choice in global economic relations and therefore has been further weakened, resulting in the ineffectiveness of domestic government.

Overall, neither 'a borderless world' as the hyperglobalists suggest, nor 'a changeless conventional form of nation-state system' as the sceptics argue actually exists. Instead, "the world finds itself in a transitional phase between the modern nation-state system and postmodern forms of global governance" (Steger, 2013:68).

### ***Global Cultures***

Globalisation constantly produces new global cultural linkages and commonalities (Wilson & Dissanayake, 1996). Barnard and Spencer claim (1998: 136) that "any particular person is a product of the particular culture in which he or she has lived, and differences between human beings are to be explained (but not judged) by differences in the cultures (rather than their race)". In this sense, since global culture has permeated daily life, every person is a product of globalised culture. And for the same reason, compared to economic trends or supra-national policy, social cultural transformations could be considered as being the most day-to-day of encounters with globalisation that an individual has.

Similar to the ideological hegemony of globalisation, the globalisation of culture has always been criticised as western 'cultural imperialism' or 'westernisation' (Tomlinson, 2001; Allen & Skelton, 2005). From a Marxist perspective, Sklair (2002) describes cultural imperialism as the powerful societies — normally deemed as the capitalist societies of the Global North — imposing their values and beliefs on weak societies, normally seen to be the poor societies of the Global South. For example, Tomlinson (1999) lists a range of things from western culture that have now become

all too familiar in the lives of everybody on a global scale: McDonald's (see also Ritzer, 2015); Coca-Cola; English as a world language; styles of dress; architecture; music; and a range of cultural values and attitudes including personal liberty, human rights and so on.

Modern media on the one hand is the carrier of global culture, and on the other hand is the recorder of social cultural transformations (Lechner & Boli, 2012). One of the significant features of modern globalisation is that we can be "sitting at home and knowing things that happen at the other end of the world" (A Chinese proverb: *zuozhitianxiashi*). This has been achieved by technological advances and through various media — newspaper, movies, radio, broadcast television, and the Internet of course — that combine to tie distant people far more closely together than ever before (Lechner & Boli, 2012).

Sklair (2002) argues that cultural imperialism is reproduced through media imperialism and capitalist consumerism. For example, a viewer of a Hollywood movie may be aware of or attracted by the lifestyles and values that are embodied in the movie and may therefore eventually purchase the products displayed, which are normally sold by TNCs. Homogenous products have been developed to expand markets and make a profit, targeting the audiences of global cultures that are produced by global capitalists. In the above circumstances, the cultural influences and capitalist economic activities have been tightly linked together and therefore reinforce each other within a capitalist global system. These processes are nevertheless considered as particular threats to the fragile and vulnerable cultures of the global periphery (McQuail, 1994; Friedman, 1994). A most frequent worry concerning the influences of cultural globalisation is the thesis of global homogenisation. It argues that with the dominance of advanced capitalist (American) culture, everywhere is becoming the same (Ohmae, 1995).

The global homogenisation thesis has however faced criticism too for ignoring the way that globalisation is simultaneously producing distinctly different reactions and cultures and therefore preserving cultural diversity (Woods, 2000). For example, though fast food chains such as McDonald's have spread into many nations, many adapt their menus for local customers, such as the teriyaki chicken burgers in Japan (Turner, 2010; Pieterse, 2015). At the same time that global culture is acting to

reshape the local, global culture is being localised in the texture and composition of local everyday life (Wilson & Dissanayake, 1996), a process that is given the term '*glocalisation*' (Swyngedouw, 2004). Kirmse's (2013:16) research on youth and globalisation in Central Asia suggests that globalisation can indeed be partially accepted and localised: "They consume Hollywood and Bollywood movies, listen to Russian rap music, follow ideas of 'true Islam', interact with Christian missionaries and engage with global capitalism and international organisations." As a result of this research, Kirmse also calls for studies on the multiple effects of cultural globalisation on local lives and the distinctiveness of cultural globalisation in particular places.

By drawing on all these old and new linkages to depict the character of modern globalisation, we can see that globalisation is multidimensional and is experienced in many different forms. There is a dominant form that gives rise to a number of commonalities in the global experience of globalisation (Lechner & Boli, 2012), but as various ideas and concepts engage with each other and then reproduce new global relations and cultures, critical voices have emerged to highlight the ways in which others may encounter globalisation completely differently. Anti-globalisation discourses and movements largely focus on the adverse effects of globalisation on the environment (Shapiro, 2012); other voices note the destruction of local traditions through the homogenisation of culture and life (Tomlinson, 2001); and the dominance of richer nations over poorer nations (Sparke, 2005; Harvey, 2006). Whatever stance we take in the debate, any discussion around the practices of globalisation must not ignore the foundational understanding that these practices are contextually embedded. This research reflects that, with a focus on examining everyday life under globalisation for the individual, household, village and local governance instead of exploring experiences at the large scale, such as central government policy, corporations and international organisations.

### **2.3 'The Western Countryside'?**

The debates above also show that these commonalities of global experience largely focus on urban places, and more specifically refer to a sort of transnational urban elite (Castells, 2000; Sassen, 2001; Sklair, 2001, cited in Aguayo, 2008). Meanwhile,

rural places, as well as small towns, have been considered marginal to the globalisation process and are often seen as places which are firmly linked to traditional and 'tribal' identities (Cid Aguayo, 2008). Aguayo (2008:542) points out that "rural places are not outside of the cycles of production and circulation of capital, culture, and ideology, but rather are fully integrated therein". In line with Cid Aguayo, this thesis proposes that there is not a single village that is exempted from the wave of globalisation but that all participate in many different ways. Before discussing this, I will briefly introduce a familiar form, or perhaps more traditional view, of the countryside.

As noted above, the British countryside has left a deep impression on me. A British opinion poll conducted by the Cabinet Office in 2000 shows that 71 percent of respondents believed that rural areas offer a better quality of life (Cabinet Office, 2000, cited in Woods, 2005). This understanding of rurality is often shared in many Western countries, stating certain kinds of expectations and imaginations of the Western countryside. For example, in Canada, more than 50% of city residents would like to live in somewhere more rural, while 85% of those already living in rural areas were satisfied with where they lived (Bollman and Briggs, 1992, cited in Woods, 2005). While in some other contexts, the opposite may be true. In many developing countries, for example, when people think of their rural areas, the image is nothing like a peaceful desirable place but the shabby, dirty and poor undeveloped countryside, where rural habitants dream of the city with all the fortune and wealth that they want. Although, as a rural researcher, I have learnt that the rural Britain indeed faces its own problems just like many other rural areas: poverty, rural decline, social exclusion and marginalisation (Cloke, 2003).

Woods explores various processes of rural restructuring, presenting the responses of communities and government, as well as people who live in, work in and consume in the countryside. Yet he largely focuses on rural restructuring in Western countries, and, as he himself reflects in the preface of his book, it has been taken for granted that rural geography is the geography of the Western rural. Alternative views of rurality are barely presented in the English literature, as one rarely sees descriptions or discussions of rural development in Cambodia or China in the 'textbooks'. Yeung and Lim (2003, cited in Rigg, 2007) also observe this tendency to focus only on the theoretical and empirical issues of very limited advanced economies. The

geographers of the Global North who work in the Global North seldom notice the particularities of their own geographies, which may be inadequate to explain the non-Western world (Rigg, 2007). The inadequacy forms one of the challenges of this thesis: to present the diversified and detailed rurality in South-eastern China, and to examine the extent to which it can or cannot be understood and explained in “the theoretical approaches and frameworks that have their roots in the North” (Rigg, 2007:4).

This section begins with a basic theoretical framework of rural and rurality in Section 2.3.1. I then proceed to the different approaches to accessing rurality, such as the social representation of rurality, the performance of rurality, in Section 2.3.2. Lastly in Section 2.3.3, I summarise the studies on rural restructuring and global-rural relations, which lead to the notion of the global countryside.

### **2.3.1 Conceptualising the rural and rurality**

Ever since “rural geography has been content to establish itself and its concerns as a legitimate category of enquiry” (Cloke, 2005: xi), the discussion and contestation over how to define ‘rural’ is ongoing and seemingly unable to reach a conclusion. Once again, there is much valuable literature on this topic that has formed our basic understanding of rural. Therefore, instead of repeating this literature at length, I will highlight the key concepts that have helped to shape my own research.

Over the past few decades, the construction of theoretical frameworks of rural geography has been influenced by three significant approaches: in the 1970s, the functional concepts of rurality were dominant, identifying rural space by its specific functions (Cloke, 1977; Cloke and Park, 1984, republished in 2013); in the 1980s, the political-economic approach attempted to define rural as the product of broader social, economic and political processes (Cloke, 1989); from the 1990s, responding to the ‘cultural turn’ in human geography, rurality became a socially constructed concept, increasingly detached from the actual geographical space and thereby more related to the representations and imaginations of the rural (Cloke, 2006; Wood, 2009).

Through these various attempts to conceptualise rurality, two perceptions for understanding the rural and rurality have been formulated — rural as a material

space and rural as an imaginative space. Cloke (2006:18) observes that the rural stands both 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 practise alternatives to the city” — and as an imaginative space compromised of “various kinds of cultural meanings ranging from the idyllic to the oppressive”. These two different ways of defining rural underpin the two conventional approaches of describing rurality in current rural geography.

Similarly, Halfacree (1993, 2006) uses ‘locality’ and ‘social representation’ to characterise these two different spaces of the rural. Defining rural as location is likely to draw upon the distinctiveness of functional settings: agriculture and other primary productive activities, low population density and physical inaccessibility, and consumption behaviour. Social representation of space on the other hand, refers to an imagined rural, which includes a landscape aesthetics and the ‘community’, in contrast with that of other spaces, for example, the city and the suburbs.

However, these two divergent approaches present a dualism forcing us to choose one or the other as the ‘right’ perspective and split up the totality of rural space (Halfacree, 2006:48-49). Harvey (1996:322, cited in Halfacree, 2006) suggests, “materiality, representation, and imagination are not separate worlds”. Halfacree (2006) drawing on Lefebvre’s (1991) three-fold model of space, proposes a three-facet architecture of rural space which seeks to accommodate both approaches:

- a) *Rural localities*, reflecting the material approach, inscribed through relatively distinctive spatial practices, which are linked to either production or consumption activities;
- b) *Formal representations of the rural*, reflecting the social representation approach, dominated by capitalist interests, bureaucrats or politicians, and referring to the way that rural is framed within the broader production process.
- c) *Everyday lives of the rural*, which incorporate individual and social elements (‘culture’) in their cognitive interpretation and negotiation. (Halfacree 2006:51)

The three-fold model of rural space provides a way to understand the rural as a whole, yet with adequate attention to different strands. Halfacree (2006) points out that in different contexts, one or more facets may be dominant, and the extent to

which they are unified or disjointed is uneven. Cloke (2006) also stresses that these three aspects can be viewed as intrinsically and dynamically intertwined, and any application of this model should be situated in real-life context and culture.

In my research design, rural space has been conceptualised according to Halfacree's three-fold model. Each village has been considered as the integration of these three facets, looking at different aspects which constitute the village as a whole. Moreover, each case-study in this research has the particular village's dominant facet as the main analytical entry within the wider interaction of globalisation. For example, I mainly focus on the locality of Peanut Village, paying attention to how the material life is changing under globalisation in the village; on the formal representation facet of Tower Village, telling how the image of the village is constructed and how global knowledge is circulated; and likewise on the everyday lives of Alibaba Village. However, this does not mean that in looking at the villages, the other two facets of the model have been ignored, instead, they are explored within the dynamic relations among these three facets and interwoven as a whole.

There are various ways to examine and access different ruralities across the range of rural research. In my study, ethnographic work has been taken as a vehicle to merge these different facets, recording and examining the experience and performance in the everyday lives in the villages, which as Liu (2000: xii) believes, "are the fruits of larger forces of society". The next section reviews a number of other classic approaches to examining rurality.

### **2.3.2 Approaching rurality: index, social representations and performance**

Scholarly approaches to examining rurality vary, due to the different ways that people define rural or conceptualise rurality. There is a historical path of academic discourses of rural and rurality which is tied into the developments in human and culture geography. For example, the index of rurality (Cloke, 1977) as an approach was developed based on various statistical indicators, reflecting a time when rural was defined by some socio-spatial characteristics such as population, land use, and commuting patterns. With the cultural turn in human geography, the social representations of the rural gained much more attention. Correspondingly, the way to assess rurality has changed from identifying features of the rural to questioning how people construct themselves as being rural (Woods, 2005).

As this thesis adopts the three-fold model of rural space, multiple approaches have been employed to access the hybrid rurality in the three case study villages. The village is considered as a locality first, which is inscribed through relatively distinctive spatial practices, including production and consumption activities. The formal representations of villages are emphasised through the social representation approach; while the everyday lives of the rural are understood by the approach of performing rurality, which can help to bridge the gap between discourses and material settings (Woods, 2010). These two approaches will be briefly summarised in the following discussion.

### ***The social representation approach***

In the social representation approach, rurality is socially constructed (Woods, 2005), where the cognitive representation as outweighing the social and physical landscape becomes the focus of rural scholars (Halfacree, 2006). Therefore, 'the rural' manifests in "words and concepts understood and used by people in everyday talk" (Halfacree, 1993:29). This approach emphasises the discourses through which ideas about rurality are produced and reproduced, and the text, signs and images through which they are represented (Woods, 2005).

Within this strand, there has been a significant interest in the rural idyll, which focuses on how idyllic meanings of rurality are constructed, negotiated and experienced (Bunce, 1994). Little and Austin (1996:102) describe the way in which "rural life is associated with an uncomplicated, innocent, more genuine society in which traditional values persist and lives are more real". Bell & Barnett's (1995) study of a village in Hampshire, Childerley, found that many rural immigrants tended to describe the rural nature of village in comparison to the towns or cities where they had previously lived. 'Peaceful', 'slow', 'community' and 'time for living' were the words they kept repeating. This kind of discourse reflects the imagination of the rural idyll. Bell also points out that those who spoke highly of countryside life-styles were more likely to fulfil their descriptions of rural. In other words, the common discourses of rurality help people to build up an imagination and presupposition of rural and fit themselves in, which may shape the discourse in return.

The idyllic discourse and representations of the rural are largely created by the government, capitalist interests, as well as the ordinary people who desire the rural or who live in the rural for different reasons (DuPuis, 2016; Short, 2006; Woods, 2005). When the idyllic rurality represents a classic social representation of western rural, what emerges within the Chinese countryside and other developing countrysides may not conform to that pattern. Also, the dominant producer of these representations varies from context to context. For example, the image and expectation of 'a peaceful village' are instructed and constructed largely by the local government in Tower Village (a case study village which is currently transforming into tourist village, details in Chapter 6). This comparison of different representation of western rural and Chinese rural will be further demonstrated in Chapter 3.

### ***The performance of rurality***

The social construction approach has been criticised for neglecting the material dimensions of the rural conditions that deeply impact people's experience of living, working and playing in rural space (Cloke, 2006). Woods (2009, 2010) acknowledges Halfacree's model as an attempt to rematerialise the rural, and goes on to suggest the study of the performance of rurality as another approach, which serves to reveal "how discourses of rurality are enacted and routinised with material effects, and conversely, how the practices and performances of rural actors in material settings contribute to the production and reproduction of discourses of rurality" (Woods, 2010: 836).

The study of social performance has its roots in Erving Goffman's classic performance theory of 1959, in which social interactions are seen in terms of a 'stage'. All actors involved are both 'players' and 'audiences', adapting their self-presentations according to the expectations of differing audiences (Goffman, 1959). In terms of the performance of rurality, Edensor picks up on Goffman's analogy while sounding a note of caution, arguing that his theory neglects a host of unreflexive, habitual enactions. Thus Edensor (2006) suggests that different rural performances are enacted on different stages by different actors, and these performances range from reflexive, strategic self-presentation of a 'staged event' to unreflexively iterative everyday practices.

The staged performance of rurality means that the actions are scripted and choreographed, including the portrayal of rural life in films and television programmes, in museums, farm parks, heritage sites and so on (Edensor, 2006; Woods, 2010). These resonate in different contexts: tourist villages in China, for example, use the 'rural lifestyle' as a selling point, providing folk shows and traditional rural cuisine on site. On the other hand, a less-staged manner of performing rurality is seen in the everyday enactions of people who live and/or work in the countryside, and in the self-conscious rural performances of tourists and visitors (Edensor, 2006; Woods, 2010).

Particular rural environments greatly influence the kinds of habitual performance that persist. For example, when rural inhabitants are in private spaces where they feel comfortable or at ease, for example, their home, performances will be more unreflexive; in local public spaces, such as the local shop, pub, village hall, or in the Chinese context, village ancestral hall, performances will be guided by 'local common sense' and communally coordinated. Many meanings and tacit understandings of rural or a certain village have been produced through the shared forms of practical enactions, everyday knowledge and embodied approaches.

Sociologist Michael Carolan (2008: 408) argues that conceptualising the rural as a mental construct, or a sociocultural phenomenon, is untenable because, "we cannot divorce mind from body when talking about knowledge(s), understanding(s) and perception(s) of the world". Drawing from his work in the Iowa countryside, Carolan (2008: 412-414) foregrounds notions such as "mind is body" and "thinking-as-bodies", emphasising the importance of body — how residents do "being-in-the-world" by physically engaging with their material surroundings. He argues that both farming and non-farming residents know and understand the land through feeling. Therefore, the understanding of performance is inherently 'more-than-representational' because there are various forms of embodied being in rural space that are involved in everyday practices, which cannot be represented adequately in text or language (Woods, 2010).

Waterton (2013) links performances with landscape: performances should be contextualised in the fluid and animating landscapes within which they take place. Waterton (2013) also claims that notions of landscape can be significantly enhanced

by viewing it through the lens of a more-than-representational approach. In this sense, people are interacting with the landscape in their everyday lives, routinely and creatively (Lorimer, 2005; Wylie, 2007). Thus, numerous sensory experiences can be assessed within the landscape: “not only visual, but textured to the touch and resonating with smells, sounds, and tastes, and often mundane in nature” (Waterton, 2013: 69).

Woods (2010: 843) concludes that “rurality is performed by rural residents and in-migrants, farmers, landowners, workers, tourists and tourist attractions, recreational visitors, policy-makers, the media, and academic researchers”. These diverse actors are the key to understanding the performance and enactment of rurality. The performance approach has been particularly useful to answer the question “how is rurality performed by the villagers through their daily practices?” in this research.

## **2.4 The ‘Modernising’ Processes?**

Modernisation theory is one of the most influential theories to have been developed since the nineteenth century. It has been understood from many aspects, suggesting a progressive transition from a ‘pre-modern’ or ‘traditional’ society to a ‘modern’ society. It shares many similar processes with globalisation that I have stated above, but mostly describes the internal social variables and development within a society/country, while globalisation can be considered as the international externalisation of modernisation.

Narrowing down to how such theory has been linked with people’s lived experiences, Kipnis (2013:5) points out that the modernisation theory emphasises the discontinuities of lived experience in the processes of capitalist urbanisation. For example, “the abrupt shifts in kinship practice, orientation towards community, way of life that urbanisation is said to bring about”, alongside the rise of individualism, cosmopolitanism, and sometimes social alienation (Smith, 1979, cited in Kipnis, 2013).

The everyday life then becomes a useful observational sphere for these changes. To be more specific, everyday life has been widely used to explore how change occurs and how people respond to it. For example, Paiva (2016) studies how urban change

has affected the elders' daily rhythms, which are further stabilised by the resources of urban space. Kothari and Arnall (2019) examine how daily changes in the physical environment interconnect with people's everyday lives, routines and practices in the Maldives. 'Modernisation' breaks into everyday life in the form of these changes.

These significant trends are often considered as threats to traditional rurality (Woods, 2005). In particular one of the key concerns of modernisation theory, that of urbanisation, resulted in the typical differentiation between the premodern 'rural' and the modern 'urban' (Kipnis, 2016). Industrialisation has led to the agricultural and economic changes in the countryside; while urbanisation has brought great demographic dynamics and cultural changes in rural residents' lifestyles, self-identities, and the attitudes and perceptions of rural space and rural life.

In this section, I will revisit a few key concepts within the classic modernisation theory, mainly relating to the rural changes under globalisation. These include, for instance, the rural restructuring processes, the changing values of community and family, and rural governance in the global era.

#### **2.4.1 Rural restructuring: Global-Rural and the Global Countryside**

Rural everyday life is not fixed, instead, it is constantly changing along with the ever-continuing rural restructuring. Rural restructuring is another essential school within rural studies. It is also a field where in the globalisation and rural encounter since the late twentieth century, the restructuring processes of the rural have been tightly linked with multiple global tendencies, such as "the increasing mobility of capital, the adoption of more flexible production methods, the complex relations between technology and environment, the influence of more clearly articulated consumer interests, and the widespread deregulation and reregulation of economic and political structures" (Marsden et al., 1993:1). These processes have continuously reshaped the social and economic structures, causing "changes including the declining economic significance of agriculture, the rise of the service sector, urban to rural migration, and so on" (Woods, 2009:429).

More than twenty years ago, Marsden et al. (1993) recognised that rural places in advanced economies had become more differentiated under the conditions of multiple restructuring processes that swept across time and space. In line with

Marsden et al., Woods (2005) argues that while the differentiation of the countryside has been enlarged by the economic and social restructuring processes, the distinction between rural and urban space is declining. Again, this is a common experience within advanced economies but may not be applicable to the case of China or any other developing countries.

In this section, I will briefly introduce a 'typical western' kind of restructuring history of the British countryside, then further explore the notion of global countryside — a way of connecting globalisation and the rural.

### ***A brief history of the path of development of a Western countryside***

By the late eighteenth century, British countryside had struggled through the period of enclosure, and experienced a series of changes ranging from a series of changes encompassing issues to do with landholding and the readjustments of social relations. It gradually completed its transformation from the traditional peasant economy and society to a more open countryside, one with fully-commercialised agriculture, capitalist markets, and a technically efficient farming industry which was dominated by the elite landowners. These elements formed the basis of the British Agricultural Revolution, that further led to the Industrial Revolution, as the increasing productivity accelerated the decline of the workforce needed for agriculture, who then turned to cities for work (Marsden et al., 1993).

As Britain initiated the Industrial Revolution, the consequential restructuring of the British rural continued in advance of most of the European rural changes. During the post-war period, various restructuring processes occurred across the countryside. With the improvements in transportation, including arterial roads, the railway system and the motor car, that enabled urban workers to live in places that were relatively far from their urban workplace, from the 1960s onwards Western rural areas experienced a trend of re-population (Rogers, 1989). This population turnaround was termed 'counter-urbanisation', and has had profound impacts on the reconstruction of western countrysides. The rural population has been greatly diversified, therefore various urban attitudes and behaviours have permeated rural areas by both the 'invasion' of urban people and the advance of new information technologies (Rogers, 1989). Nowadays, rural areas in most of the advanced economies have transformed into modern countrysides, characterised by commercial agricultural production;

commercial exploitation of rural resources in a capitalist free market; are fully-supplied with basic infrastructure including electricity and water; and most importantly, with a population that is sufficiently affluent and is capable of affording the commodification of rural landscapes, lifestyles, artefacts and experiences (Woods, 2005). In June 2016, 17% of the population of England, around 9,370,200 people, lived in rural areas, out of which only 7.7 per cent were employed in the agricultural, forestry and fishing industries<sup>15</sup>. In other words, agricultural is no more the main occupation for rural people, instead, the rural population has become further detached from agricultural production. The rural economy has transited from one based on production to one based on consumption, providing various recreational resources (Rogers, 1989; Woods, 2005).

As has been noted, the story above does not seem to be repeated in the developing world (Woods, 2005), and as has been mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, there are completely different sets of expectations surrounding rurality in China. Differences between Western rurality and Chinese rurality exist in terms of material lives as well as the social cultural construction of rural, which will be further discussed in the next chapter.

### ***Global-Rural Studies***

As globalisation became one of the most significant forms of restructuring to affect rural areas in last two decades, more and more global issues such as climate change, food security, energy security and biodiversity have gained attention in rural geography. As a result of the current global social and economic processes which cut across both rural and urban areas, rural areas are much more interconnected (Woods, 2005, 2012).

Woods (2007) has usefully summarised current studies on globalisation in the rural context into five general categories: 1) globalisation of commodity chains and the development of the global agri-food system; 2) the linkages of regulation theory to the global economy and local rural economic restructuring; 3) rural development and

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<sup>15</sup> Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs UK, (2108), *Statistical Digest of Rural England January 2018 Edition*, retrieved from [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/676594/Statistical\\_Digest\\_of\\_Rural\\_England\\_2018\\_January\\_edition\\_v2.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/676594/Statistical_Digest_of_Rural_England_2018_January_edition_v2.pdf)

new opportunities/challenges brought about by globalisation (Epp and Whitson, 2001; Wu et al., 2015); 4) the de-peasantisation which is associated with globalisation (Araghi, 1995); and 5) the various processes and trends in rural societies evoked by globalisation as a context, including domestic policy reforms (Epp and Whitson, 2001), outward migration (Alston, 2004), and changing gender roles (Bee, 2000). As Woods notes, all of these studies are extensively focused on economic globalisation. Such a tendency is also reflected in the rural studies in China. In a more recent special issue on “Rural Restructuring in China” in the *Journal of Rural Studies* published in 2016, the twenty-four journal articles were categorised into three genres: spatial restructuring, economic restructuring and social restructuring. Most of these articles noted that rural China is intensively integrated into global social and economic networks (Long Hualou and Woods, 2011; Woods, 2012) and at the same time are continuously being strongly shaped by the national macroeconomic development strategies.

Together with Massey (2005), who calls for more place-based studies of globalisation, Woods (2007) claims that there is still a lack of place-based research which can draw together the discursive elements into a highly contextual, comprehensive analysis of the remaking of rural places under globalisation. Today, place-based qualitative rural research still lacks a voice in China, and most studies are from anthropology. Therefore, this study, adopting Woods’s assumption of global countryside and in answer to the call of place-specific research of globalisation, aims to explore the diverse changes of rurality in contemporary rural China under globalisation, placing emphasis on the local scale and showing how such changes are embodied in everyday practices.

### ***The notion of global countryside***

The notion of global countryside, first raised by Michael Woods in 2007, aims to capture some of the complex, messy and geographically variegated countryside under globalisation (Woods, 2014).<sup>16</sup> This concept constructs a framework, or perhaps an ideal type of global countryside, to understand the multiple forms in

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<sup>16</sup> Michael Woods (2014, Aug 21), *What is global countryside*, retrieved from <https://globalruralproject.wordpress.com/2014/08/21/what-is-the-global-countryside/>

which countryside connects to globalisation. It can also be employed to evaluate how 'globalised' a village is, or can be.

Adopting Steger's (2003) definition that globalisation is a dynamic and multifaceted process of integration and interaction that enrolls localities into networks of interconnectivity organised at the global scale, Woods (2007: 491) proposes a hypothetical space, positing that there are some rural localities "with greater intensities of globalisation processes and of global interconnections", and thus "with a differential distribution of power, opportunity and wealth". Inspired by and drawing on Woods's notion, my research will examine how these globalisation processes create and differentiate the power, opportunities and wealth of specific rural localities, and more expressly, how these processes alter the local culture and individual perceptions of rurality.

Since the concept of 'global countryside' is one of the core concepts that my own research works with, the ten characteristics of the global countryside that Woods proposes are listed here:

1)	Primary sector and secondary sector economic activity in the global countryside feeds, and is dependent on, elongated yet contingent commodity networks, with consumption distanced from production.
2)	The global countryside is the site of increasing corporate concentration and integration, with corporate networks organised on a transnational scale.
3)	The global countryside is both the supplier and the employer of migrant labour.
4)	The globalisation of mobility is also marked by the flow of tourists through the global countryside, attracted to sites of global rural amenity.
5)	The global countryside attracts high levels of non-national property investment, for both commercial and residential purposes.
6)	It is not only social and economic relations that are transformed in the global countryside, but also the discursive construction of nature and its management.
7)	The landscape of the global countryside is inscribed with the marks of globalisation.
8)	The global countryside is characterised by increasing social polarization.
9)	The global countryside is associated with new sites of political authority.

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10) | The global countryside is always a contested space.

*Table 1 “10 characteristics of ‘global countryside’”, (Woods, 2007:492-494).*

Woods acknowledges that at the time of his writing “such a space does not currently exist and there are no rural localities that can be labelled at present as global countryside” (Woods, 2007: 492), yet these characteristics provide an insight into global rural integration and possibilities. Woods (2007) also reminds us that some rural localities can hold one or more of these features. Since the concept was proposed, more studies have now been undertaken on the global countryside, including on global villages and rural cosmopolitanism (Cid Aguayo, 2008), the local politics of the global countryside (Woods, 2011), and family farming in the global countryside (Woods, 2014).

The extent to which a certain characteristic is significant in any particular rural locality is heavily impacted by the way in which this locality interacts with global processes, including how these processes are mediated, and how other local processes are incorporated (Woods, 2007; Long & Woods, 2011). In other words, the practice of global countryside is highly contextualised. For example, in terms of place-based studies, Argent and Tonts (2013) examine the out-migration of the countryside in heartland Australia as a main aspect of engagement with the global within the context of global countryside. Wu Xinhui et al.’s (2015) research on a Chinese suburban village demonstrates that more than one of the characteristics are exhibited there, including migrant labour and globalised landscapes, yet, the hybridity within it can only be understood within the Chinese, and more specifically, within local settings. It is hard for a village to claim itself has fulfilled all the descriptions of the global countryside, yet many studies show that there are places holding particular characteristics of it and have been influenced by the global processes.

However, these characteristics of global countryside cannot avoid being largely focused on the material side, while social and political aspects have been only slightly touched upon. Moreover, exploration often stops at the scale of the village, where human agency, for example the villagers themselves, do not have any sense of presence.

This research aims to go further, raising the question that as these villages have been marked by global cultures, how do the individuals who inhabit global countryside in China think and position themselves, and how have their mindsets and narratives of understanding been shaped by globalisation. Hence, like ‘the urbanisation of the mind’, more attention should be paid to the ‘the globalisation of the mind’. The extent to which a village is globalised should go beyond the material changes that the village has, to look at how individuals in this village perceive and connect with globalisation. This thesis suggests that only when the villagers have certain global consciousness has the globalising process of this village reached a stage where it can claim to be a global countryside. Further discussion on this will be taken up in the successive chapters and the conclusion.

#### **2.4.2 The Changing Community and Family**

In both Western and Chinese literatures, community is a very important concept that associated with rurality (Woods, 2005). I will save the discussion concerning traditional Chinese rural communities for the next chapter, and briefly outline the changing ideas of community and family as discussed in the broader literature in the following paragraphs.

Rothman et al. (1995) view community as “the territorial organization of people, goods and services, and commitments that are important subsystems of society where locally relevant functions occur” (Telfer and Sharpley, 2016:178). While Urry (1995) interprets community in terms of three main concepts: a topographical sense; a sense of community, formed by the interconnection of local people and organisations; and a sense of communion, implying personal ties and the sense of belonging. Hall (2000) argues that the community is made up of individuals and organisations which have different values, aims, and objectives. Inevitably, conflicts and power struggles are generated within the community (Telfer and Sharpley, 2016).

In the studies of rural and/or globalisation, community is a very important theme as it is the site where interactions happen locally and where traditional values are (thought to be) preserved. The German sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies drew the classic contrast between *gemeinschaft* (community) and *gesellschaft* (society), arguing that the ‘community’ in rural area is based on “close human relationships

developed through kinship . . . common habitat and . . . co-operation and co-ordinated action for social good”, while the ‘society’ refers to a more advanced form of social interaction (Harper, 1989:162, cited in Woods, 2005). Although such dualism has been criticised for its oversimplification, community remains a critical theme both in lay discourse and academia.

Family is a basic cell of human society. The theory of modernisation holds that it is the general trend for the traditional extended family to be replaced by the modern nuclear family (Goode, 1963). Under the major changes within society, the structure, model, function and value of family have been reshaped and reconstructed dynamically. Yet, the theory was gradually challenged by the many empirical studies on the mode of the family in Asian countries, as they argued that family patterns can take a variety of forms, even in the same phase of the industrialising process. (Emiko Otiai, 2010, cited by Ma et al., 2011; Yang & He, 2014)

Similar to community, the concept and value of the family are often used as indicators for illustrating changes in rural society. It is commonly believed that the modernising process has destroyed traditional family values in a traditional society. Industrialisation has broken the family-based production system of traditional agricultural production. In modern industrial society, the family-based production mode is rare, which is manifested in the fact that family members often have different occupations and jobs.

Associated with the transforming understanding of community and family, a classic topic of sociology — the atomisation of society — discusses the changing relations among society members. The atomisation of society in China was once a significant concern after the dismissal of socialist collectives, where individuals used to be governed and connected within (Tian & Lu, 2014). However, this study pays attention to another sphere of atomisation, that is the atomisation of rural society, which will be further discussed in the next chapter in the section on Chinese rurality. Moreover, this study, particular the case study of Alibaba Village (Chapter 7), challenges these classic assumptions of community and family.

## **2.5 Conclusion**

This chapter presents three bodies of literature on globalisation, rural studies, and the restructuring processes that have happened in rural areas. Notably, they are what can be described as the classic ones: most of them are written by Western scholars, describing the Western versions of these processes. In the next chapter, I will shift attention to another version, that is how Chinese people think of and look at these concepts. Taking these two frames of literature together, we can gradually see how these “grand concepts” are being contextualised, mediated and transformed.

## Chapter 3 A Chinese Version

### 3.1 Chapter Summary

If writing a chapter on the English countryside reminds me of the British South-Western Railway train going through the carpet-like green grass of the countryside in the spring, then writing a chapter on the Chinese rural reminds me of an extremely hot summer in Guangdong, China. It is not pleasant. It is steaming. Mosquitoes will not give up any opportunity to bite you. People are sweating even when doing nothing but just sitting under the big trees. However, there are often showers, heavy rainfall coming in the afternoon, washing all the dirt off, then everything is new again. It is very different rain from the continuous overcast rain in the UK. Different geographical locations create different climates, while different environments give birth to very different cultures.

This chapter primarily discusses and reviews a different body of literature from the previous chapter, namely literature that describes how Chinese scholars interpret and connect globalisation and rural studies. It is also structured in three main parts.

Responding to 'A Classic Globalisation', Section 3.2 presents a different version of globalisation: 'Globalisation with Chinese Characteristics'. This section serves to answer two questions: what path has China taken in facing globalisation? What are the Chinese Characteristics? The regional background to the three case villages — Guangdong Province — is then introduced in order to further understand the research context.

Section 3.3 turns to 'Chinese Rurality', which distinguishes the Chinese rural (including rural areas and rural people) from that of other countries. This section is structured according to the different phases of the changing ruralities in China starting from the imperial, traditional phase to modern times, while Section 3.3.2 introduces the ongoing structuring of the Chinese rural under globalisation.

In Section 3.4, I review the theories that relate to village boundaries, including the vanishing boundaries of a village, a theory put forward to illustrate the opening of different boundaries of an imaginary village in Guangdong; and discuss the differing imaginations between rural and urban. The chapter concludes in Section 3.5.

## **3.2 ‘A Chinese Globalisation’?**

Compared to the common experiences that globalisation brings to the world, there are some unique experiences that China and its people have. These unique experiences are the results of negotiation between global processes and local practices that are marked by special Chinese characteristics.

This section begins with the path that China has walked and the debates surrounding it. However, I argue that what is important is not so much the template, but the actual logics of China’s performance, namely the Chinese characteristics. At the heart of these Chinese characteristics is the role of the CCP and Government control, and the logic lying behind them is the maxim ‘take everything for my own use’, whether that comes from Marxism, or capitalism, or any other sources. And this narrative plays a crucial role in mediating the modern development of China.

The influence of globalisation on Chinese rural areas is profound, and often manifests in three major ways: first, a relatively direct effect on rural areas caused by globalisation; second, a relatively indirect effect, that comes from the urbanisation, industrialisation and modernisation brought by globalisation — consequentially domesticating globalisation — in urban areas, which then act on the rural population through the attraction or repulsive power of urban areas; lastly, the local cultural environment of the countryside also plays an important role, which I name as indigenous vitality. Based on this three-fold framework, a closer look is taken as to how globalisation is manifested in the context of Guangdong, and through such an example I aim to articulate how globalisation localises itself to the village scale.

### **3.2.1 The Path of Chinese Globalisation**

China has been regarded as one of the biggest winners in the globalisation process, enabling it in the past decades to transform from “one of the globe’s poorest countries” to “become a booming economy – second biggest in the world” (Perry, 2014:5, cited in Wang, 2015). Similarly, Halshall & Cook (2013) suggest that

globalisation has been the key factor in changing China from *Maoist*<sup>17</sup> production cities to *Dengist* cities of consumption.

Historically, China's interaction with globalisation is not a new phenomenon. If one takes the overseas trade of the early dynasties as an expression of globalisation, then China has a long history of globalisation marked by trade with European and south-eastern Asian states. Even in the pre-modern period, Zhejiang (a coastal province of China) lifted overseas trade restrictions in A.D.840 (Shengenn et al, 2014). As in many other European countries, the shoots of capitalism emerged during the fourteenth century (Ming Dynasty) in China (Shengenn et al., 2014; Nolan, 2004). However, it did not successfully form a capitalist class as happened in the West. After the foundation of the People's Republic of China, the socialist ideology isolated China from the main stream of the world during the mid-twentieth century. This is why the 'Reform and Opening-up Policy' was so significant and has been recognised as the signal of China's modern globalisation process (Perkins, 1991; Howell, 1993) (See also Chapter 1: Introduction).

Since then, in view of the rapid, or perhaps unparalleled, growth that China has achieved in the past few decades, China's interactions with globalisation have been well documented and studied by both Western scholars and domestic researchers. Questions are raised not only as to the impacts of globalisation on China, but also concerning the impact of China on other parts of the world such as the USAA, Russia and Latin-America, and the consequences and implications of the rise of China for the wider global totality (Henderson et al., 2013).

A large portion of these studies focuses on the economic linkages between China and the global economy. Zhou (2013) points out that the interrelationship between China and globalisation is two-fold: China's rise has had a profound and consistent impact on the international community; whilst its own development and rise are impacted by globalisation. Zhou further posits that China's economic development relies on science, technology, trade and foreign investment and in fact, without international support, China's economic development would be thwarted (see also

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<sup>17</sup> Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping, two famous leaders of China, represent two very different governing styles. While Maoist refers to a very collective communist governance, Dengist refers to a relatively Capitalism-friendly, free-market orientation governance.

Chen & Yao, 2006; and the book series '*Routledge Studies on the Chinese Economy*'). Political, social and cultural linkages are also observed and studied, but receive significantly less attention than the economy (Perry & Selden, 2000; Hu, 2007). In addition, most of the studies focus on globalisation in cities (for example: Shanghai and Hong Kong, Huang, 2008; Beijing, Cook, 2006; Wu, 2006; Halsall & Cook, 2013), while there is relative silence on rural areas under globalisation. Specifically, there remains a lacuna in understanding the cultural and mundane changes in rural areas under globalisation.

As discussed in the previous chapter, current globalisation is dominated by the capitalist economy, which tends to incorporate global societies into a capitalist modernity (Dirlik, 2007). To answer what distinguishes China from other developing countries in the era of globalisation, Wang (2015) argues that is the strong glocalising or Sinicising-orientation. Such a strong local culture enables China to relocate itself in the broader context of globalisation, and translate, import and localise globalisation in its own context.

There is an impression among both Western and indigenous scholars that the Chinese context is very difficult to unravel. It becomes more mysterious when it comes to politics, as the power struggles within the party before any decision is made and the attempts to maintain the Party's singular and unique hold on power are always masked (Harvey, 2006; Halsall & Cook, 2013). Huang (2008:2) also observes, "the Chinese economy is so complicated that what appears to be straightforward and obvious on the surface is not at all so once we dig into details". To explain this, he offers a detailed study of Lenovo, a 'Chinese' computer company famous for taking over the manufacturing division of IBM in 2004. This acquisition has been regarded as the game-changing moment when the rising China had enough power to subsume an iconic American brand (McGregor, 2004, cited in Huang, 2008; Shenkar, 2006). Huang comments however, that although the founders of Lenovo all came from the Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS), in 1984 there was no legal channel for an independent, private-sector firm the size of Lenovo to register and operate in the computer manufacturing industry. To get an entry ticket into the industry Lenovo had to give itself the legal status of foreign-owned, therefore Lenovo is actually not a Chinese company. It is 100 percent owned by Hong Kong Lenovo, a legal foreign entity, and the real corporate control and equity holdings of

the production and technological development of Lenovo reside in Hong Kong. Based on this example, Huang (2008) argues that Lenovo is technically a success story of the market-based finance of Hong Kong, rather than of the state-controlled financial system of China. By illustrating that “the story of Lenovo mirrors the story of China” (Huang, 2008:2), Huang claims that the success of China should be less attributed to the creation of an efficient institutional environment but more to the permitting of access to efficient institutions outside China.

As such, Huang (2008) puts forward his proposition that the path China walks should be regarded as ‘Capitalist with Chinese characteristics’, rather than ‘Socialist with Chinese characteristics’. Huang suggests that China was moving directionally toward the classic and virtuous kinds of capitalism in the 1980s, when most of the best-known achievements took place; while in the 1990s, the country adjusted its direction to the state-led brand of capitalism, which, Huang asserts, is the root of many of the deep-seated problems of today.

An alternative perspective is provided by Dirlik (1989, 2014), who argues that China provides an alternative modernity — a post-socialist alternative to the capitalism under globalisation. Dirlik notes:

“Chinese society today is postsocialist because its claims to a socialist future no longer derive their force from socialism as an immanent idea. On the other hand, it is also postsocialist because socialism, as its structural context, remains as a possible option to which it can return if circumstances so demand.” (Dirlik, 1989: 244, emphasis in origin)

In this manner, Dirlik proposes that the postsocialism that China is conducting should be considered as a response to the experience of capitalism and an effort to overcome the inadequacy of capitalist development. In Dirlik’s argument, what distinguishes China from capitalist societies is the possibility of options such as social collectivisation, and ideological socialist culture. He goes on to comment that the Chinese Communist Party refuses to let go either of its socialist commitments or its ideological legacy.

It is a tradition that the leadership of China claims loyalty to socialism. The successor to Deng, the core leader of the third generation of the PRC leadership President

Jiang Zemin, as well as his colleagues, are considered to have been influenced in the modernising steps they took in the 1990s by Anthony Giddens's Book, *The Third Way*, as well as by the practise of the UK Labour Party under Tony Blair (Halsall & Cook, 2013). However, in conversation with representatives of the Japanese Communist Party in 1998, Jiang refuted this, declaring:

“Internationally, there are people who think that we are conducting Capitalism, or we are walking ‘the third way’. All of these are incorrect. We are steadfastly walking on the road of socialism, and we are conducting socialism with Chinese characteristics.” (Translation mine, original in Chinese in the Selections of Jiang Zemin, 2006)<sup>18</sup>

Jiang also stated that there can be various ways to achieve socialism, therefore we should not focus too much on the unnecessary debates of ideologies. Every practice, including that of Marxism or socialism, should be understood or operated contextually, he added.

Harvey (2006) asserts that the details of the transformation of contemporary China are hard to make sense of unless a rough map of its general path has been drawn. However, the aim of this chapter is not to clarify how capitalist or how socialist China is, but to explore how these Chinese characteristics work as filters to embrace, resist, or transform and accommodate the influences of globalisation. If we borrow Deng's famous metaphor for the capitalist and socialist debate in China — “it doesn't matter whether a cat is black or white, as long as it catches mice” (translation mine, original in Chinese in the Selections of Deng Xiaoping, 2006<sup>19</sup>) — we could say that no matter whether it is capitalism with Chinese characteristics or socialism with Chinese characteristics, the essential part is the Chinese characteristics. Scholars acknowledge that the economic growth of China can be attributed to the “adept tailoring of economic policies and institutions to their local contexts, rather than from an application of universal economic principles” (Huang, 2008:2). The question therefore arises, what precisely are these ‘Chinese characteristics’?

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<sup>18</sup> The Selections of Jiang Zemin (2006), CPC People, retrieved April 29, 2018 from <http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/64184/64185/180138/10818618.html> .

<sup>19</sup> Retrieved from <http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/69112/69113/69684/69694/4949601.html>, at 18:08 24/06/2018.

### 3.2.2 The Chinese Characteristics of Globalisation?

A notable trait is the large number of studies that have commonly adopted the concept of 'with Chinese characteristics'. For instance, David Harvey (2006) uses 'Neo-liberalism with Chinese Characteristics' as a chapter title; Yasheng Huang (2008) entitles his book 'Capitalism with Chinese Characteristics'; Henderson et al. (2013) introduce a special issue on 'Globalisation with Chinese characteristics'; and numerous scholars mention it in their articles. The reason why scholars favour this rhetoric is perhaps twofold: first, 'socialism with Chinese characteristics' is the official rhetoric used by the Chinese Communist Party as proposed by Deng in 1981,<sup>20</sup> when the party claimed that they would construct an unprecedented socialist market economy; second, China's experiences of neoliberalism, capitalism, and globalisation cannot be fitted into the normal framework that these ideas hold, therefore a term has been created.

Some scholars have defined the characteristics in terms of 'difference', namely how China differs from other countries or from the templates of globalisation, socialism, capitalism, or neoliberalism. With regard to capitalism, Huang (2008) argues that the main difference has to do with the role and the size of the private sector, which is heavily guided and regulated by the Chinese government. Henderson et al. (2013) compare Chinese capitalism to that of the USA, which they take as the classic account of contemporary globalisation, suggesting that the Chinese form is more unusual, hybridised and highly complex. Wang (2015) claims that another difference is the degree to which the state is a helping or 'grabbing' hand. Harvey (2006) argues that the peculiar path China takes is a form of stated-manipulated market economy, and the distinctly Chinese characteristics behind this are the "the authoritarianism, the appeal to nationalism and the revival of certain strains of imperialism" (Harvey, 2006:151).

Based on the above views, we can see that the central feature of 'Chinese characteristics' relates to the role of the Chinese government, making this the key element and most substantial component of any definition of globalisation 'with Chinese characteristics'. (Huang 2008; Lim,2013). In distinction from most countries in the world, China is dominated by a single party, namely the Chinese Communist

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<sup>20</sup> Retrieved from <http://theory.people.com.cn/GB/49150/49152/7542100.html>, at 20:00 21/09/2016

Party (CCP). In this manner, the behaviours of the Chinese Government, especially the central government, represent the Party's will, as Mackeras and Yorke (1991:59) observe: "The Chinese Communist Party is the leading organ in society. It sees itself as the vanguard of the proletariat and its role is to lay down policy, which the state [the government and Chinese bureaucracy] then implements."

Wang (2015: 2066) takes up the notion of 'grabbing', describing 'Chinese characteristics' as the result of the pragmatic attitude of '*nalaizhuyi*' (grabbism), as formulated by Lu Xun (novelist and revolutionist in early 20<sup>th</sup> century China), which means grabbing everything useful to China, including Marxism.

In agreement with Wang, I argue that 'grabbism' better explains the origin of Chinese characteristics. It operates as the underlying narrative of governance in China. The grabbism here is not referring to plunder from others but refers to taking everything 'for my own use' (为我所用). From the adaptation of Marxism in Mao's era, which, combined with the actual practice among Chinese peasants, created the well-known strategy 'countryside surrounding cities'.<sup>21</sup> To the adaptation of capitalism in Deng's era, when egalitarianism as a long-term goal gave way to the urgent need for economic growth and commercial opportunities, and capitalist practices were therefore tolerated as long as it helped the development of China. The grabbist narrative also works within the state. For example, the worker and peasants have been regarded as the dominant revolutionary forces in Mao's era, standing alongside the party to fight against capitalist exploitation. Whereas nowadays, in recognising the profits and growth that capitalist elements could bring, the party "is fighting shoulder to shoulder with the cold-blooded capitalists in their struggle against the worker" (Harvey, 2006:150).

A similar grabbist tendency runs through the domestic social and cultural sphere. Women's rights in Mao's era were justified as a demand of socialism in order to release a large volume of productivity to build up modern Chinese society. However, in the face of a population crisis, President Xi and the party he leads are now calling on women to return to their family: "Being *a good wife, a good mom*, is the best

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<sup>21</sup> This strategy, utilising the power of the bottom of the social ladder, mainly the peasants, corresponding to the proletariat in Marxism, has been proved one of the key tactics attributed to Mao's victory over the Chinese National Party in the Chinese Civil War.

*achievement of a woman*” (translated from a poster at the Marriage Registration Institution in Beijing, emphasis in origin).

Therefore, the complexity and hybridity of the Chinese political economy to some extent derives from this grabbist attitude — there is not any universal value that China obeys, neither any coherent policy that they insist on, they are all changeable and manoeuvrable when needed. If there is an overarching rule, it will be to maintain the supremacy and stable governance of the Chinese Communist Party. If we bear this rule in mind, it can provide a lens through which we might understand the details of many local practices in Chinese rural areas.

The same attitude has been applied to the penetration of globalisation. Aiming at harnessing the best of foreign technology methods (Sklair, 2002), the state controls the speed and extent of opening up to the outside world. Thus, the trajectory of globalisation in China can be traced through the government policies and plans undertaken over the last few decades (Valli & Saccone, 2015). Valli and Saccone propose that the main moves towards globalisation in China since 1978 can be presented as five steps: a) The responsibility system in agriculture, 1978; b) the institution of Special Economic Zones (SEZs), 1978-1980; c) the institution and expansion of Township and Village Enterprises (TVEs) in the 1980s; d) the gradual recognition of private ownership and expansion of private enterprises and joint ventures with foreign corporations in the 1990s; and e) the entry into the WTO in 2001. By acting in this way, the extent and sphere of opening up to globalisation is under control.

Nowadays, empirically, the Chinese government’s steady control regarding globalisation can be observed in three different aspects. First, the Chinese government remains in control of the domestic economy by macroscopic readjustment and control, and by holding key sectors, including transportation, communication, energy and agriculture, where foreign capital is not permitted or is given very limited access. The decisive role of party-state is also embodied in many State-Owned Companies (SOEs), where the state is the major shareholder (Henderson et al., 2013); and the party branches within many large companies (including SOEs and private companies),

Second, in China the government also plays a role in legislation. Chinese executive legislation is in stark contrast to western countries, where legislation is primarily a judicial function, though the executive may have certain delegated legislative powers. Most of the legislation that relates to foreign investment, company law or security law is executive in nature in China (Simon et al., 2016), therefore many regulations are all manoeuvrable by government (both central and local government).

Third, the Chinese government carries out strict censorship, commonly seen across political, social and cultural life. A critical article in *The Times* notes that “the tech totems of our era” — Google, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and Wikipedia — are all forbidden in China; they are casualties of the ruling Communist Party’s opposition to free expression (Beech, 2015). By controlling public views and comments, the Chinese government provides a ‘limited globalisation’ to Chinese people. MacKinnon (2008) comments that the Chinese government has succeeded through censorship and regulation in blocking activists from using the Internet as an effective political tool. Furthermore, Lorentzen (2014) contends that only some of the domestic information gathered by the news media is ever published, and any information that could harm the Party is compiled into secret ‘internal’ reports. For example, any demonstration by peasants and the poor (as mentioned above), is unlikely to show up in public media. Lorentzen then employs a model in his research to demonstrate how an authoritarian regime can benefit from a more sophisticated media control strategy, permitting journalists to report aggressively on low-level malfeasance in order to improve governance, but constantly adjusting the amount of reporting in order to avoid giving discontented citizens enough information to be certain about whether a revolt would receive sufficient support to be worthwhile (Lorentzen, 2014).

The Chinese government underpins the macro-economic structure of the society and this has brought huge success to China’s economy in the past two decades, but many would argue that there are some other aspects where the picture is not so bright. Nye (2012) points out that while China (the government) has made significant attempts to increase its ‘soft power’, it has had a limited return on its investment. Soft power is a concept put forward by Nye (1990) referring to the ability to get what one wants by attraction and persuasion rather than coercion or payment. More

specifically, culture, political values, and foreign policy are considered in this light. Nye (2012, a commentary in the *Wall Street Journal*) then further criticises China for its activities, commenting that “[great powers] try to use culture and narrative to create soft power that promotes their national interests, but it's not an easy sell when the message is inconsistent with their domestic realities”. In this respect, “the best propaganda is not propaganda”. Thus ‘true’ soft power should not be designated by the government, rather it should be the reflection of real social cultural atmosphere. Gill and Huang (2006) assert that in the current analysis and debate concerning China's rise, the subject of ‘soft power’ is either missing or misapplied. There are however a growing number of Chinese researchers now paying attention to this concept.

Though the government attempts to control domestic opinions, there is in fact more than one voice in contemporary Chinese society. Popular culture growing from the grassroots, where material lives are heavily affected by globalisation, is increasingly flourishing and contested nowadays. Zhou (2013) argues that Chinese society is traditionally Confucian, whereas globalisation forces a diverse culture on it. Moreover, modern Chinese culture has to be historically linked with revolution — ideological and political struggle in China has always been explicit and dominant in the symbolic sphere or the domains of culture (Liu, 2004). Thus, a mixture of different cultures and values are produced and are continuously reproducing in an encounter between traditional Chinese values, western ‘universal values’ and ‘socialist values’ (See Paltiel, 2007; Liu, 2004). Therefore, new kinds of Chinese characteristics is underway, which are more varied and multiple. These new connections and cultures are waiting to be explored and discovered, which is also the main course of this research.

What emerges from this review is that in both Anglo-American and Chinese academia, research into cultural changes in the rural sphere based on the globalisation narrative are very limited. Most of those that are undertaken describe cultural and value changes based on a macro level, are policy-oriented (Shen, 2013; Bai & Chen, 2010), missing detail and lacking in case-studies based on individuals. This research, therefore aims to fill the gap.

### 3.2.3 Guangdong: the most globalised city and the poorest countryside

As discussed in the section above, the initial globalising processes of China were under the control of the government in terms of selecting locations, which was then followed by the establishment of Special Economic Zones (SEZs), and the channelling of foreign investments into these zones. These initially selected cities, like Shenzhen (a city of Guangdong Province), were given the fortunate opportunity to become the wealthiest and most advanced cities in China (Kwok, 1986).

There is a common phrase 'the Shenzhen Miracle', which describes what has happened in Shenzhen since 1978: Before 1978, Shenzhen was a small fishing village whose economy mainly depended on agriculture, and whose only advantage was that it shared the border with Hong Kong. Taking 1979 as a marking point, the total industrial production of Shenzhen was about 60 million RMB (which by 1990 standards was judged to be about 4 million GBP), produced by 224 enterprises. As a pioneer during those initial liberalising times, Shenzhen caught the wave of the rapid remapping of the world economy in the early 1980s, namely the transfer of industry. Thirstily absorbing investments, technologies and modern concepts, mainly from Hong Kong, as well as from other Chinese communities in Southern and South-Eastern Asia, it turned out that by the end of 1983, more than 379 million US dollars from abroad had been invested in Shenzhen (Kwok, 1986). In addition, the total industrial production of Shenzhen increased to 720 million RMB in 1983, twelve times what it had been in 1979. Since then, Shenzhen has a high-speed train link and become one of the biggest and most globalised cities in China. Due to its symbolic significance in representing China embracing the capitalist world, the experience of Shenzhen has been studied by many scholars, especially economists (for detailed analysis of Shenzhen, also see Sklair, 1985, 1991).

What happened to Shenzhen is a microcosm of Chinese eastern coastal areas in the 1990s. Also called Canton, Guangdong Province is one of the most developed areas in China, whose GDP has ranked in first place among all the 31 provinces in China for the past 29 years, from 1988 to 2017.<sup>22</sup> It has two out of the four metropolises in the whole of China (Shenzhen and Guangzhou, the others being Beijing and Shanghai) Therefore, we could see Guangdong as a place that has been influenced

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<sup>22</sup> Retrieved from <http://data.stats.gov.cn/easyquery.htm?cn=E0103>, at 19:15 10/05/2018

over the longest period of time by the processes of globalisation and liberalisation in China, and as such it has been well studied by many scholars.

As the leader of economic growth, however, Guangdong faces the greatest intraregional inequality (Gu et al. 2001; Lu & Wei, 2007; Liao & Wei, 2012, Zhang et al, 2018). Guangdong is traditionally comprised of two areas: The Pearl River Delta (PRD) at its heart, and the rest of province (North, East and West Guangdong) as the periphery (see Figure 1, original in Lu & Wei, 2007:229). In 2003, whilst only covering 26.7% of the area of the province, the PRD accounted for 80% of Guangdong's GDP. Historically, The PRD has long been the economic core of Guangdong. With the capital city Guangzhou as the centre, the growth rate of PRD is always higher than the periphery. However, the gap between them has been intensified since the reform and open period, which has led to further regional polarisation (Lu & Wei, 2007). According to the Guangdong Statistical Bureau (GSB, data cited in Lu & Wei, 2007), the GDP per capita of the PRD and the periphery in 1978 were 570 yuan and 317 yuan respectively, with a 253-yuan gap in between. However, in 2003, the gap increased to 32178 yuan, which means that while the GDP per capita of the PRD reached 39782 yuan, the periphery only achieved 7604-yuan GDP per capita. As Lu and Wei's study reveals, the polarisation of Guangdong during 1980s was driven by foreign investment and the consequential development of labour-intensive industries in the PRD.

However, after the 1990s, a new form of regional polarisation arose in the development of the PRD, characterised by the knowledge economy and internal forces, which Lu and Wei termed as *domesticating globalisation* (Lu & Wei, 2007). The idea that Lu and Wei propose, describing a series of domestic effects stimulated by globalisation, reveals that globalisation is no longer a purely external force, but finds its echo within the country. For example, the PRD received many domestic investments besides the FDI in the 1980s, as many branches of the central and other provincial governments wanted to set up 'windows' in the SEZs to attract foreign investment. The other example is the knowledge economy that emerges during the 1990s. Facing intensive competition between Guangdong and other provinces for foreign investment, and the serious pollution that labour-intensive industries brought, the government of Guangdong sought new forms of development (Lu & Wei, 2007; Liao & Wei, 2012). The Guangdong government therefore

proposed a path that combined external and internal forces (Huang, 2005) in favour of high-technology and information industries.

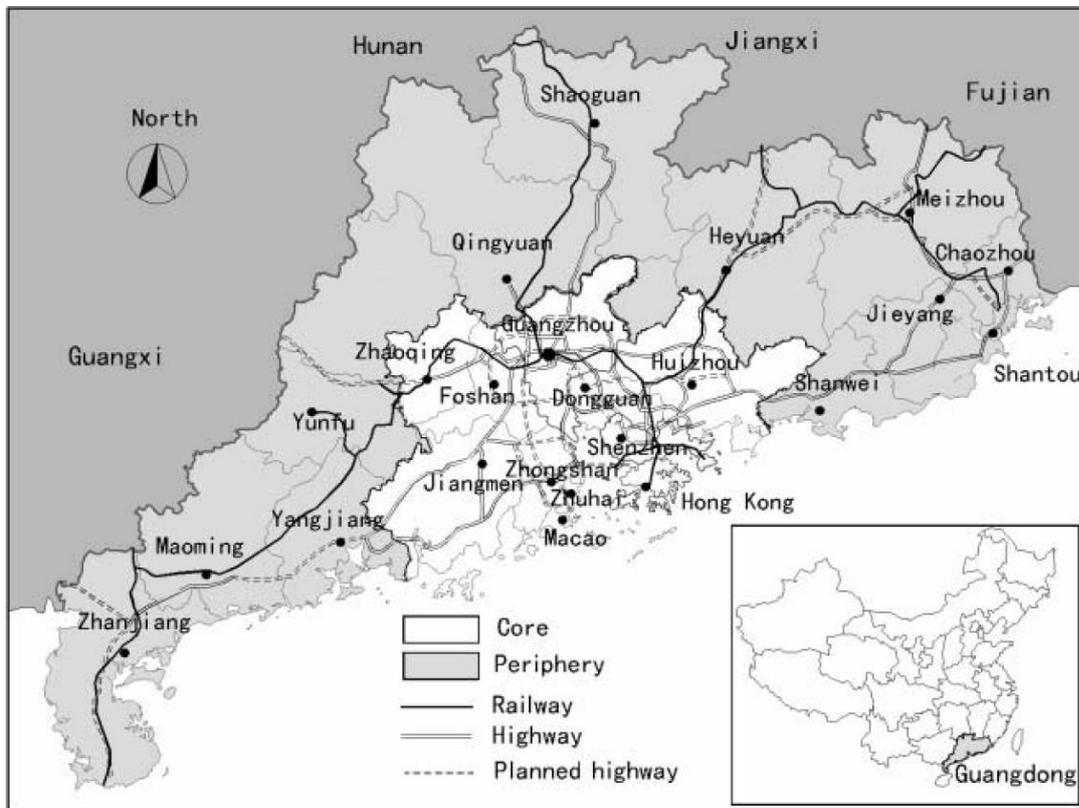


Figure 1 Location of the Pearl River Delta and Guangdong Province (Lu & Wei, 2007:229)

As is well-attested, a more developed area often provides more opportunities for individuals. Over a long period of time from 1978 until the present day, people who have ambitions have regularly moved to those south-eastern coastal cities to pursue their dreams, leaving their inland hometowns behind. The same story happens within Guangdong as well: rural inhabitants leave their land to earn more in the city. The PRD has experienced rapid urbanisation and restructuring since the 1980s, with a declining primary sector and growing secondary and tertiary sectors (Lu & Wei, 2007). Moreover, education and medical resources have been more concentrated in the metropolitan areas. All these factors have caused population agglomeration in the PRD. In 2017, more than 14 million people were living in Guangzhou, leaving many hollowed-out villages in the periphery of Guangdong.

Besides the abundant literature on economic inequalities, Yuan and Wu (2013) have studied the social deprivation inequality within Guangdong province. Using 13

variables, their research calculates the social deprivation index for Guangdong Province, which also shows a significant gap in terms of social deprivation in the development between the PRD and the peripheral areas. Based on that, Yuan and Wu argue that the unequal spatial pattern of social deprivation is the outcome of both market and institutional forces such as urban-biased policies, public investment and city planning. Like Yuan and Wu's study, most of the studies regarding the regional inequality of Guangdong are quantitatively-based. They provide a useful macroscopic understanding of the current situation, but cannot offer the insight of local personal life — how do people respond and live their lives behind these data and indexes?

The unequal development of urban Guangdong and rural Guangdong is similarly divided. A government report<sup>23</sup> published by Guangdong Statistics Centre in 2004 emphasises the different rural developments of Guangdong and Jiangzhe (due to their geographical closeness and similarity, Jiang Su Province and Zhejiang Province have been always mentioned and studied together). While Jiangzhe is famous for its well-developed towns and villages, as leader in terms of total GDP, Guangdong has fallen short in its rural development. One of the reasons is the high urbanisation rate in Guangdong, attracting most of the labour surplus surrounding the metropolis thus leaving the rural area little space to develop. Moreover, the personal choices made by rural inhabitants are in line with the traditional regional characteristics of Guangdong: going outside to seek for opportunity instead of staying at home and waiting. Local villages can also have particular situations which influence the choices of villagers, for example, a role model for success in the village.

Therefore, as I stated at the beginning of this chapter, the current development of the rural is often influenced by three different sets of processes. The first two sets are globalisation and the consequential domesticating globalisation, as the direct and indirect forces, and both play important roles in the processes that have led to the differentiation and diversification of the three case-study villages. The last set of processes take place within localities and individuals, who have their indigenous

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<sup>23</sup> Assessed at [http://www.gdstats.gov.cn/tjzl/tjfx/200404/t20040406\\_10113.html](http://www.gdstats.gov.cn/tjzl/tjfx/200404/t20040406_10113.html), at 17:52 7<sup>th</sup> May 2018 .

vitality, the power of 'agencies' in relation to the social 'structure', creating their own living logics and understandings of these global processes.

Guangdong has the most globalised city in China, as well as a very distinctively different periphery area in terms of economic development, resource allocation and social deprivation. Within the periphery area there are hubs that link with both the metropolitan, and the relatively isolated countryside. Of the three case studies of this thesis, one is located in the central region of PRD, as the suburban area of Guangzhou, and the other two are both located outside the PRD. Based on my observations, they perform very differently in terms of economy and social culture.

As Rigg (2007) states in his book *Everyday Geography of the Global South*, his aim in focusing on the local and on everyday life is not to overlook the importance of national and international actors, structure and process, but to avoid the tendency of viewing local outcomes as the result of overarching meta-processes only.

This section provides a basic contextual understanding of globalisation in contemporary China and tries to frame a macroscopic interpretation of the circumstances of rural Guangdong. The empirical study of three case-study villages brings a local approach, offering rich details as to the local and everyday life of the ordinary people who live in rural Guangdong. By taking a closer look at human agency, this thesis seeks to give a different answer to the 'why' and 'how' question: Why are these villages different, and in what ways? How do they live their lives in this era of globalisation? Therefore, an intentional contribution can be made to the wider literature concerning the diversity in the grassroots-level practice of globalisation.

### **3.3 'Chinese Rurality'?**

Following the discussion of 'Globalisation with Chinese Characteristics', which implies a different form from 'classic globalisation', this section first will answer the question "is there a different type of rurality of China, that is distinctive from that of other places?". The answer seems obvious, as the most fundamental difference has

been determined long ago by the geographic environment and consequential different modes of production. Moreover, the historical processes and the corresponding political systems have also made the countryside of different places take on a very different look. Thus, this section does not seek to prove that Chinese rurality is different, but to explore “Is there a united Chinese rurality” and “How has Chinese rurality been changed and transformed”.

This section is structured by time sequence. Section 3.3.1 reviews the changing ruralities of China starting from the imperial, traditional phase to the modern times, while Section 3.3.2 introduces the ongoing structuring of the Chinese rural under globalisation.

### **3.3.1 Changing ruralities: from peasantry to modern society**

Although in China, rural areas are often described as ‘a pool of stagnant water’ that has not changed for a long time, yet in history, rural areas have never been quiet. Even before the collapse of last dynasty Qing, rural China was not a promised land, and most peasants were always poor and struggling. Nevertheless, amidst various chaotic events, including natural calamities and man-made misfortunes, Chinese society has still formed its unique culture and characteristics, which Fei Xiaotong (1937:37) concluded are “fundamentally rural”. These kinds of rural characteristics are considered relatively stable, embodied in the traditional values of Chinese peasants (the majority of population) and the ways in which they saw the world (Wang Xingzhou, 2018).

Fei’s (1937) *From the Soil* is one of the most classic and significant studies regarding Chinese traditional society, especially traditional rural society. He asserted, “Chinese society is fundamentally rural, I say that it is fundamentally rural because its foundation is rural. Several variations have arisen from this foundation, but even so, these variations retain their rural character (1937: 37)”. The ‘rural’ used here, in the Chinese version of his book, rather than to rural space, referred to a character or various characteristics that Chinese rural areas hold. Scholars use ‘ruralism’ or ‘rurality’ to describe these characteristics.

In order to distinguish the two different uses of "rural"— 1) the normal, common use, in contrast to urban, mainly describes the location and some common characteristics of rural areas; and 2) a "special character that concludes the Chinese rural society

until the first half of the 20th century"— I use the word 'soil-ed'<sup>24</sup> to denote the second version of 'rural', which concentrates on traditional Chinese rurality.

The idea of 'soil-ed' also appeared in Fei's book, originating from the notion that Chinese "country people cannot do without the soil because their very livelihood is based upon it" (Fei, 1992:37). Fei summarised a few features which have developed based on this essential ground, for example, the inability to move, the solitude and isolation between villages, and the parochialism of villagers and the rural society. Together these factors further led to a society constructed upon acquaintances and kinships, which is the famous 'acquaintance society' theory.

Since Fei raised this concept — the 'soil-ed' rural society of China — many scholars have placed their research regarding some phenomena of Chinese rural society into such a framework for further analysis and understanding.

### ***Rural areas in turmoil***

As a traditional agricultural country, which it still is, the Chinese rural did not begin its modernising process until the early 1980s. Before then, although some industrial infrastructure work had been carried out during 1970s, the rural areas were in turmoil for years, reflecting the turmoil across the whole of China during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Unlike the British rural, which has been depicted as the symbolic Arcadian landscape that needed to be protected during the World War II (Short, 2006), Chinese rural areas were the main battlefields from the nineteenth century onwards and did not rest until 1978. Throughout Chinese history, peasants were the main revolutionary force, as they were always those who suffered from land consolidation, the corruption of local cadres, and uncontrollable severe ecological crises (Little, 1989). During World War II, since the Chinese Army gained few advantages in the encounters with the Japanese Army in major cities, rural areas again became the scattered battlefields where small battles occurred. Even after the CCP ultimately gained control of the whole country in 1949, when Mao claimed that the People's Republic of China was a regime based on the union of workers and farmers, rural

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<sup>24</sup> As 'soiled' may have primarily negative meaning of being dirty or disgraceful, here I have hyphenated it to preserve the meaning that 'connection with earth and soil' and avoid confusion with any other meaning of the word.

people were not at ease. Between 1959 and 1961, the Great Chinese Famine occurred, when more than 20 million people<sup>25</sup> (Fairbank & Goldman, 2006) died of starvation (or perhaps from what could be termed as unnatural deaths) and most of them were from rural areas. Most of the rebellions before the Great Chinese Famine had been attributed to natural disasters such as drought and poor weather conditions. However, in most of the researches conducted by overseas scholars and some domestic researches published after 1980s, the policies and political movements led by Mao have been recognised as the key factor that caused this uncontrollable disaster. The Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) was another disaster that destroyed the economic, political and social orders in rural society as well as in the whole Chinese society. It was then Mao's command that all the intellectuals need to 'go to the countryside' for 're-education given by peasants'. Rural areas became a nightmare for most of the intellectuals for a long time due to the suffering of their material lives and forbidden cultural lives.

All of these left scars and trauma on rural China. By the end of the 1970s, rural areas not only fell behind in terms of economy but also showed high levels of chaos in terms of social orders and relations. Recognising the essential role of rural areas in China — in 1982, 80 per cent of the population in China still lived in rural areas and were registered as rural residents<sup>26</sup>— the very first attempt to liberalise the Chinese economy that the reformists made was to liberalise the rural sector (Harvey, 2006) by contracting out the cultivated lands from collectives to each single household. This action has effectively revived the rural economy, and thus has been marked as one of the most successful policies of the post-Mao reforms (Day, 2013). However, this success did not last long and did not save the countryside. Day (2013) remarks that while there was much endogenous economic growth in the rural economy heading into the mid-1990s, the late 1990s were a time of economic and social stagnation in the rural sphere as the Party shifted their concentration to urban areas.

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<sup>25</sup> The number of deaths is highly disputed. 30 million is a widespread version but the number in different researches varies from 15 million to 43 million. For a brief introduction of the Chinese Great Famine, see D. G. Johnson (1998), 'China's Great Famine: Introductory Remarks', *China Economic Review* (1043951X), 9(2): 103-109.

<sup>26</sup> 'The Third National Population Census' (1982), *Chinese National Bureau of Statistics*, retrieved September, 7, 2018 [or July 9,] from [http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/tjgb/rkpcgb/ggrkpcgb/200204/t20020404\\_30318.html](http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/tjgb/rkpcgb/ggrkpcgb/200204/t20020404_30318.html)

### ***Rurality under transformation***

In more recent times, the traditional, the traditional rurality has changed, challenged by and mixed up with various external processes, ranging from the socialist revolutionary movement, the reform and open policy, global investment, and most recently, the development of information technology. In general, after 1978, we have witnessed a transition of the rural economy and rural society: from planning-oriented to market-oriented, from closed to open (Wei & Liu, 2019).

Rural people are no longer 'soil-ed'. Due to the very limited income from cultivation, they gradually leave the land and become much more mobile. After the launch of the 'reform and opening-up' policy, rural people have gone to cities for work, becoming the largest floating population ever in history — the peasant workers — which reached 247 million in 2015 (Goodkind & West; 2002; Shi & Liu, 2019).

Why it is not 'worker' but 'peasant worker'? There are a few reasons. First, they are technically 'peasant' as this is their register status in the household register system.<sup>27</sup> Secondly, most of them still hold the traditional values, lifestyles and habits of rural life, and 'peasant characteristics'. They are also called a 'floating population' as they are denied the local household registration at destination, preventing them from accessing the full benefits of citizenship, tagging them with the status of second-class citizens (Chan, 2010, cited in Shi & Liu, 2019; Wang Xingzhou, 2018).

Wang Xingzhou (2018) defines such groups of people who struggle to fit themselves into the urban life, as 'urban villagers'. They have lived in the city, doing non-agriculture jobs, and enjoying the public service of city, yet have not completed the transformation of lifestyle and mindset. Wang Xingzhou (2018) points out that this phenomenon is the direct result of the psychological urbanisation of rural people falling behind the urbanisation process of rural areas.

For those who stay in the villages, atomisation becomes a common description for the remaining rural community. This usually contains two layers of meaning: first, after the transformation of the mode of production, with the establishment of the

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<sup>27</sup> The household registration system officially divides people into two groups, giving them either agricultural or non-agricultural residency status, creates institutional discrimination between urban and rural areas as well as barriers for rural people to settle in cities (for more details of the hukou system, see Tang & Hao, 2018).

household-contract responsibility system based on family instead of village,<sup>28</sup> the common interests of the village community and the village has been gradually weakened and has disappeared, and the villagers have become isolated individuals. Second, with the departure of a large number of peasants, the village is hollowed-out, the local relationship network between the villagers has been greatly weakened, or has even disappeared (Tian & Lv, 2014).

Facing such transformation, many scholars propose concepts to explain the changes that have happened in the rural society that are based on or comparable with the 'acquaintance society' theory that Fei posited regarding the traditional Chinese rural society. For example, He Xuefeng (2000) proposes the notion of the 'semi-acquaintance society'. Similarly, Wu Chongqing (2002, 2011) puts forward the idea of the 'subject-less acquaintance society'. Both concepts express a state of social relations that contain features such as the following: the weakened relationship between individuals and difficulty of forming an effective association with each other; the failing of supervision mechanisms over public opinion in the village, which also results in declining moral standards. He Donghong & Zhang Xianhong (2012:43) conclude, such a state "began with the rural household contract system in the 1980s, and the subsequent process of marketization and urbanization".

However, these researches have been criticised for their 'top-down', 'national-governance' narrative (Zhou Daming & Liao Yue, 2018). Zhou & Liao also assert that the slackness of grassroots organisations, the weakening of human relations and the decline of villagers' moral standards are indeed enough to become the unfavourable factors of national rule. However, from the villagers' point of view, these do not constitute the normality of their daily life; they are more concerned about their livelihoods in terms of food, clothing, housing and transportation, or as related to their family or parents. For the villagers, 'atomisation' is only one aspect of their daily life and the inevitable consequence of increasing mobility. As Zhao Xudong (2009:54) questions: "Why does rural society have to be non-atomic in the first

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<sup>28</sup> The household contract responsibility system is a form of agricultural production responsibility in which farmers, as a relatively independent economic entity, contract to manage collective land. In addition to handing over a small portion of income to the collective and paying state taxes in accordance with the provisions of the contract, all of its operating income will be attributed to farmers. At the beginning, this system greatly stimulated the peasants' enthusiasm for production and liberated them from the shackles of collective production. It is an important change for China's transformation from a planned economy to a market economy.

place?” Only when the ‘acquaintance society’ has been considered as an ideal mode of society, the weakening of which then becomes a social problem that needs to be solved (Zhao, 2009). Furthermore, Zhao (2009) criticises the thinking paradigm of ‘problem-solving’ in Chinese rural studies, arguing that such awareness of problems exists in the observers’ ideas and imaginations, which are heavily affected by the urbanised and westernised mindset. Perhaps the reason why the countryside has become a problem is not the problem of the countryside itself, but a reflection of the problem embodied by an oriental civilisation facing the modernity of the West.

The criticism of Zhou & Liao (2018), and Zhao (2009), coincides with my fieldwork observation, namely that the villagers do not have too much nostalgia for the pastoral life of the past. In the context of globalisation, the relative disorder and social atomisation of rural governance seem to have only affected them mildly, and do not cause particularly adverse experiences in their daily lives. On the contrary, the conveniences of modernisation, especially of information technology, are often mentioned in our conversations.

My fieldwork observation has also led to a shifting of expected research findings. Frankly, I was one of the ‘problem-solving’ mindset holders before I conducted my fieldwork. However, such a narrative has been changed during fieldwork. I have encountered the same uncertainties. Inevitably, from my point of view, under the city-oriented evaluation system, the development of rural areas lags far behind that of the city. However, most villagers do not complain much about this state of life, on the contrary, they generally feel better about life compared to the past. Moreover, people who have stayed in rural areas even have a higher sense of happiness than most of the ‘urban villagers’. However, for these urban villagers, though leaving home is not easy, the corresponding income is much higher, therefore it has not been a difficult choice for them to make to leave. Based on these (sometime contradictory) observations, the narrative of this research has also changed from ‘revealing and solving rural problems’ to ‘understanding the diverse experiences of rural areas’.

### ***Family change under Social change***

Family is a basic cell of the human society. Under the great changes of society, the structure, model, function and value of family have been reshaped and reconstructed dynamically.

The concept and value of family are often used as an indicator for illustrating changes in the rural society. It is tended to believe that the modernising process has deconstruct the traditional family values in a traditional society. Industrialisation has broken the family-based production system of traditional agricultural production. In modern industrial society, the family-based production mode is rare, which is manifested in the fact that family members often have different occupations and jobs. Yet, this section tries to demonstrate in another way, that is how the advanced of economy and the globalised vision has reinforced the preservation of family life.

The theory of modernization holds that it is the general trend for the traditional extended family to be replaced by the modern nuclear family (Goode, 1963). Yet, the theory was gradually challenged by many empirical studies of the mode of family in Asian countries, as they proved that the family patterns can take a variety of forms, even in the same phrase of the industrialising process (Emiko Otiai, 2010, cited by Ma et al., 2011; Yang & He, 2014). Some demographic studies have shown that, the majority transformation from extended family to nuclear family in Chinese rural area has been achieved since the mid-1960s (Wang Yuesheng, 2007). Many farmers' children have left their parents, went to city and get employed as migrant worker, some may have established a family in the city, forming a nuclear family, while their parents stay in the countryside to form couples or single-person families, which further enhance the trend of downsizing of families. Wang also mentioned, the desire to live on their own of the elderly who can take care of themselves has increase. However, my own observations in my case villages does not support such argument.

An empirical research conducted by the research group of Hebei Academy of Social Sciences during 2015 to 2017<sup>29</sup>, on rural villages in Hengshui, Cangzhou, Zhangjiakou, Baoding and other places shows that, the proportion of all types of nuclear families fell from 58 per cent three years ago to 46 per cent today, while the proportion of joint family<sup>30</sup> households rose from 30 per cent to 42 per cent, of which the proportion of intergenerational joint family rose from 23 per cent to 36 per cent.

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<sup>29</sup> Data achieved from [http://jtjy.china.com.cn/2017-11/07/content\\_40059778.htm](http://jtjy.china.com.cn/2017-11/07/content_40059778.htm), at 18:12 13/03/19

<sup>30</sup> The term Joint-family that I used here refer to a family formed by more than two generations. The most common type of joint-family is a family of three generations: grandparents, parents and children.

The study offers another possible result on family structural changing that brought by the floating population. It argues, as the younger generation went to work in the city, the underage children are left behind and taken care by their grandparents. With the popularisation of agricultural mechanisation and the improvement of elderly's health conditions in recent years, more and more elderly take over the responsibility of agricultural production and raising underage children. Thus, the proportion of standard nuclear families in rural areas is likely to continue to decline, while the proportion of joint families, particularly intergenerational joint families, is likely to continue to rise.

My observation of rural family structure has the same conclusion with the study above. This research did not conduct in a quantitative demographic way, yet, the family structural changing that brought by the floating population is an important background for the qualitative observation in rural family life.

### **3.3.2 Ongoing restructuring: Globalisation and the Chinese rural**

Although the city-oriented evaluation system has been criticised from the perspective of understanding villagers' feelings, it does not mean that in reality there is no actual problem or urban/rural split.

China's impressive growth since the 1980s has been accompanied by high inequality and a wide rural–urban division (Wang et al., 2013). The contrasting regions have been commonly labelled as 'the poor and backward areas' and 'the areas that get rich first', which are mainly the coastal cities as the result of Deng's policy: 'let some areas get rich first'. However, most of the studies undertaken around this issue tend to focus on inequality mainly in terms of income and consumption, while only a few studies draw attention to other dimensions of this sharp division such as education, employment, health care, pensions, access to public services, and the environment, even though they might be more severe (Wang et al., 2013).

To some extent, the rapid urbanisation and industrialisation in China was largely pushed forward by the peasants, as those who had the strength, technique and aptitude tended to go to work in the city for the large-scale infrastructure construction and the growing services sector. The massive out-sourcing of labour from the rural has delivered some benefits to rural districts through remittances and through the

physical and human capital brought back by returning migrants (Ma, 1999). However, these positive effects have been more than outweighed by the problems generated by the depopulation of the countryside. Long & Woods (2011) make the particular observation that out-migration has been led by younger and better-educated rural residents, producing a 'brain drain' that has seen rural communities lose their most active population segment. In many cases, adult migrants have left children with family members, creating social issues as families are divided and children are raised without parental care and support (Ye et al., 2005). Long et al. (2009) argue this point, commenting that given the scale of the contribution made by agriculture to the development of cities and industries in China, sacrifice is to some degree an appropriate term.

However, in the face of such high mobility of the rural workforce, institutional improvement is not keeping up. As mentioned before, due to the household registration system, a large group of rural workforces who have devoted their energy to urban construction cannot receive proper education for their children or welfare that is designated only for city residents (Zhou & Cheung, 2017). As a consequence, most peasant workers, who cannot compete with urban residents in terms of educational background and skills, can only become cheap labour in the market, and their occupations and life are extremely marginalised, vulnerable, and volatile (Chen, 2005; He Congzhi & Ye Jingzhou, 2014). Regarding this, Sanders et al. (2016) argue that China shows increasing social polarity between the new millionaires and strong middle class in the cities and poor people in the rural areas.

Based on his ethnographic work in Zhaojiahe, a village in rural Northern China, Xin Liu (2000) concludes that there are three identifiable macro sources that historically influence the everyday actions and experiences in rural China: the traditional, the revolutionary, and the modern. And he also notes that the actual social and cultural practices cannot be traced back to a single source but complexly combined. In my fieldwork and in the process of organising and categorising research findings, the same challenge exists, that is, apart from those distinct events that can be clearly counted into 'global forces' or 'traditions', most of the everyday practices have multiple origins. An individual's behaviour can be either improvisational or strategic, and every source has been filtered and situated by a specific set of personal experiences and social contexts before they are presented and performed (Bourdieu,

1990). For example, the choice of a villager to leave the village to work in the city can be interpreted as one influenced by globalisation, as it brings jobs that require cheap labour forces to coastal cities; it can be seen too as resulting from a historical influence of traditional farming patterns where a small-scale peasant economy cannot suffice the needs of a village household; apart from these 'push and pull' factors, this villager can also be persuaded by their relative who has connection or experience of urban life or is fascinated by television programmes that depict urban life.

Furthermore, just as there are places that 'get rich first' and places that remain 'in the shadow' (Liu, 2000), the existing researches are not only place-bias but also perspective-bias. In globalisation studies, there is an implicit presumption that "globalisation is overwhelmingly if not exclusively urban process" (McCarthy, 2008:130). As stated in the previous section, in the Chinese context, the globalisation-related studies have extensively focused on how globalisation impacts the city (urbanisation) and the industrialisation of China (Hu Biliang & Chen Chunlai, 2015), and especially on economic performance under globalisation (Chen Xiangming, 2018). Rural areas are relatively neglected as they are often considered as the preserve of traditional Chinese values.

Woods (2005) notes that there are three forms of globalisation that are particularly relevant to current rural societies, namely economic globalisation, the globalisation of mobility and the globalisation of values. How these processes influence China and its rural areas will be presented in detail in the empirical chapters; here I want to introduce another form of globalisation that has an effect on the rural structuring of China.

Since the 'Building a New Socialist Countryside' campaign was launched in 2005 in order to envision what a new socialist countryside could be like, numerous official delegates have visited South Korea, Singapore, and European countries and then brought international elements into villages back home. As the practice of the people's commune based on the Soviet Union model has failed, the development of Chinese rural areas has fallen far behind many developed countries.

In other words, a new socialist countryside should learn from advanced capitalist countries and become globalised so that rural villagers can live a new life which is

embedded in Chinese soil and tradition, but encompasses modern styles. Various group of people including scholars, column writers and government officers have been involved in the heated debate over which agricultural mode China should learn from. The increasing worldwide interconnectedness makes such discussion more possible and popular.

For example, as the biggest agriculturally developed country, the USAA's agricultural mode has been denoted as the most modern and efficient one. Early in 2013, the central CCP proposed developing so-called 'family farms'. A great deal of discussion ensued, in which the dominant view was to call for developing scale economies in 'family farming' through greatly increased transfers of land, in the belief that large-scale farms would help raise both labour and land productivity. Such a view has undoubtedly been influenced by the American mode of agriculture and rural development. Regarding this, Philip Huang Zongzhi (2014) argues that the idea of the family farm is borrowed from American rhetoric and reflects the way American agriculture is mistakenly imagined by many people. Huang also contends that the American 'big and coarse' model is utterly inappropriate for Chinese agriculture as the context of America is 'lots of land and few people' and the reality in China is 'lots of people and little land'.

The above example is not unique to the discussion. Yang (2009) examines the rural planning and restructuring processes of the UK (West Harwood Lothian), the USAA (rural Massachusetts), and the experiences of the 'new countryside campaign' in Korea and the 'one village one product' campaign from Japan. Yang further suggests that China should learn from the experiences of the rural USA and rural UK in terms of sustainability and ecology, instead of agricultural modes. Long et al (2011) compare the different trajectories of rural development and different policies and strategies for rural development in eastern coastal China and in Wales in order to consider the possible lessons that China might take from the experience of rural development in Wales.

How much this learning and referencing of knowledge has been successfully applied to the Chinese rural restructuring is a question that is waiting for more empirical studies to answer. For example, Xiang Yanpin's (2014) study has shown that there were 322 towns/villages which have been officially recognised as a model

town/village of the 'one village one product' idea. Here we can see that the development of the Chinese rural can be influenced by globalisation in this way.

Zou Qiong (2012)'s work on Nan Village in Dongguan, Guangdong explores rural changes under globalisation from an anthropological perspective. By observing the occupations, economy, family memories, rituals, clans and tourism development in Nan Village, Zhou concludes that in the process of globalisation and localisation, the local society has enough vitality to protect its own existence in its unique cultural context, and this vitality has enabled communities and residents to adapt to the times and changes in any historical period.

Another empirical study has been conducted in a nearby village Yantian in Dongguan, which indicates that the influences of globalisation in Yantian Village including the vanishing of agriculture industry, the development of foreign companies, the increasing number of immigrant worker, the transformation of household economic structure and the development of financial service sector. Yantian Village has deeply involved in the global producing and consuming chain (Hu Biliang et al., 2016).

There are more macro-level policy-orientated works concerning globalisation and rurality conducted by Chinese scholars. For example, Hu Biliang et al. (2016) state that the example of Yantian Village can shed light on the policy concerning the reconstruction of Chinese countryside. Similarly, Zhang Xiaoshan (2011) summaries the relationship between globalisation and China's rural development from different angles at the macroscale, exploring, for example, the trade of agricultural products and China's agriculture, the impact of globalisation on Chinese farmers as an entirety, and to restrain the negative effects of globalisation on rural areas by deepen the reform of administrative system.

In the face of the stagnation of rural incomes and increasing rural protests, Wen Tiejun (2000) asserts that peasants and surplus rural labour, rather than agricultural production, are the key to understanding the long-term strategy of China. In agreement with Wen, this study will present the understanding and knowledge that emerges from the everyday life of rural residents in order to gain insight into contemporary Chinese rural lands from the perspectives of those who actually live on them. Are there some villages with greater intensities of globalisation processes

and of global interconnections, thus performing a differential distribution of power, opportunity and wealth? Why is this and will it last? How are the impacts of globalisation being performed differently or similarly in suburban areas and hinterlands in China? Are the 'rural characteristics' going to disappear, be integrated into a new Chinese capitalism, or form an excluded class that is marginalised and continually disruptive? All these notions and questions require a deep understanding of contemporary rural individuals, and that will be what this research tries to present.

### **3.4 The Changing Boundaries of Village**

Boundary has long been one of the significant objects of research in political and cultural geography (Newman & Passi, 2001). In recent years, researchers have not only challenged the conventional idea of fixed boundaries — territory, de-territorisation and re-territorisation — which are stable empirical entities dividing the global space into bounded units, but also the symbolic dimensions of boundaries, such as identities, truths and power. The notion of blurring boundaries has been discussed between urban–rural, global–local and many other spheres. Emphasis has shifted onto the fragmentary and impermanent nature of boundaries, which are increasingly mixing, blending and blurring (Bhabha, 1994; Thrift, 1996; Passi, 1996, 2003). In terms of boundary-blurring in globalisation, Liu Sida (2008) concludes that it is a process of hybridisation in which local actors become structurally global-looking while global actors get localised.

The notion of de/re-territorisation is a heated topic of debate in global studies, however, this will not be the focus of this thesis. Instead, this research focuses on two ways of understanding boundaries: the changing, multiple boundaries of an imagined village; and the imagined boundary between urban and rural. Both perspectives involve the blurring of an imagined boundary, or even the disappearance of the visible boundary.

#### **3.4.1 The vanishing boundaries: Yangcheng Village**

##### ***Village as a research unit***

In rural studies, 'village' has for a long time been a traditional research unit due to its clear boundary. Arthur Smith's (1899) *Village life in China: a Study in Sociology*

established an example for modern Chinese rural studies. Fei Xiaotong's *Peasant Life in China* (1939), which was an ethnographic work on Kaixiangong Village, discussed sixteen aspects of this village. It carried forward a school of research that uses the village as a research unit, believing that by studying a single village we understand the Chinese countryside, within which the interrelationships among the residents of the village, such as the vocabulary of relatives, the distribution of power, economic organisation, religious conversion, and other social connections, are examined.

Taking the village as a research unit has been criticised for various reasons: firstly, it fails as a generalisation of the whole of rural China, as a small unit may not be an epitome of a whole rural society (Deng Dacai, 2010); and secondly, scholars such as G. William Skinner (1971, 1985) criticise the constraint of the geographic boundary of a village, arguing that taking a village as a study unit obstructs the understanding of the bigger, rural economic social network. This critique subsequently led to another significant school of thought in rural studies that uses the local market, where rural people exchange, buy and sell their products and livestock, as an entry point to understanding the social structure of the Chinese countryside. The third critique of village-based research is that it assumes that a village is a closed community which is relatively static and thus preserves most of the traditional life experiences and historical social structures.

Correspondingly, the market-based school thus developed their theory based on a fluid framework that tended to put small villages into a larger/wider market network to understand it (Skinner, 1971). Moreover, it also recognised that rather than staying static, the village changed with and was changed by the macro-level of economy, social structure and market (see also Li Peilin's discussion, 2004). These market-based rural studies were also in line with the rise of a political economic approach in Western rural geography in the 1980s (Cloke, 1989, 2006). Skinner's research evoked a long-lasting discussion concerning the research unit of Chinese rural studies – namely how to go beyond the village. Following this, clans, marriage circles and many other social organisations that extend beyond the simple geographic sphere of the village have been explored as research units.

However, in the face of these critiques, the village-based study did not vanish. Fei (1945) developed the single village study into a rural-villages typology. He suggests

accessing the entirety by recognising, comparing and categorising different types of villages, through which generalisation can be sought. Both homogeneous and heterogeneous villages have been chosen to reach more general conclusions about rural China. This also opens up the multiple comparative village-based study method, represented by Xu Yong's (1997) *Chinese Villagers' Self-governing*, where eleven villages were selected in order to analyse the self-governing of villagers in different villages, building up a cross-unit comparison among them. This has been applied in the research of the politics of everyday life, which tries to discover the logistics behind the large-scale operation of power through the micro-level of everyday life.

Returning to this study, the village has been chosen as the unit for the case study here. However, the aim is not to just capture a static scene of village life as in the traditional village-based study. Instead, the village should be understood against a broader, constantly changing context. Here the village is not seen as a closed sphere/community, but as an open subject that keeps producing, receiving, and exchanging various capitals, culture and information with the larger world. The village as a whole has been studied as an individual case, while both qualitative observations and quantitative data have been utilised for analysing the impact of globalisation on each case. Moreover, the different actors that form part of the sub-unit of analysis, including organisations and individuals, have been investigated through ethnographic methods to reveal the influences of globalisation in a nuanced, detailed, personal manner. These different layers of study are examined within three main cases, then a set of cross-case conclusions as to how different rural areas and rural habitants have adapted and responded to globalisation are drawn.

The administrative boundary of the three cases should be addressed here as well. When the village is spoken of in China — *Cun* in Chinese — it can either refer to the administrative village, which is apportioned by the government, or to the natural village, which is historically formed by blood relations, clans, or geographical relations. Normally in Guangdong, an administrative village consists of a few natural villages. In this study, the administrative village is adopted as the case study unit. This choice serves the purposes of accessing statistical data and reaching diverse interviewees. However, though an administrative boundary of the village has been used to simply define the boundary of these cases, the studied subjects go beyond

the people who live or work in it. For example, each village is administratively governed by the town, county, or city. To learn the logic of village governance, town or city officers have been included in the research.

Acknowledging the unclosed boundary of a village/community in the modern era, the fieldwork also recognises that a completely closed village may not even exist. In fact, how the different boundaries of village have been crossed, how the community boundary is separated from geographic boundaries are also topics of the research. In the following section I will further this discussion.

### ***The end of village and the vanishing boundaries: the story of Yangcheng Village***

'Yangcheng Village' is the name of an 'ideal type' village. This village is 'constructed' by Li Peilin (2004), an abstraction based on many 'urban villages' in Guangzhou. Li Peilin (2004) states this Yangcheng Village has a main referenced village, but also many prototypes. He abstracts the most representative characteristics and stories of these prototypes, uses these original materials from life and condenses them into 'the Story of Yangcheng Village'.

"Yangcheng Village, located in the center of the city, looks like a stone forest surrounded by the peaks of tall buildings. The houses are dense, and people feel stuffy and depressed in this haze and humid southern weather." (Li Peilin, 2004: 5). In Li's description, as with many villages in the southeast coastal areas, Yangcheng Village is densely populated and its land resources are scarce. As early as the early 1950s, the population of Yangcheng Village reached nearly 5000 people, while the land was only just 4000 mu (See Glossary, mu, a unit of area equals to 0.0667 hectares), with a per capita of less than one mu of land. Along with the rapid urbanisation in Guangzhou, the farmland of Yangcheng Village was soon expropriated. The agricultural farming history of Yangcheng village has been brought to an end yet the story of the village still continues.

Moreover, the main theme of the story does not seem change. From the repeated farmland disputes, the homestead disputes, the contradictions in the land circulation to the land expropriation of the state and the current distribution of land rental income, the theme of the village story has always been around the issue of land rights. The story of Yangcheng Village can be said to be the story of land.

The expansion of the city caused the price of land in Yangcheng Village to soar. Money 'naturally' grew out of people's land. The peasants' way of production and life have consequently been completely changed. One by one, they have gone from self-sufficient small farmers to 'individual entrepreneurs' with rich industrial and commercial strategies, but without any factories, machines and employees. They become landlords who rent out their houses build on their own homesteads. Traditional constraints such as government regulations, traditional geomancy are no longer powerful against rural residents' desire for profit.

In recent years, with the rapid development of industrialisation and urbanisation in China, the natural and social boundaries of villages have undergone great changes. The boundary of the village has been diversified. Zhe Xiaoye & Chen Yingying (1997) concludes that, both the original community boundary, geographic boundary and administrative boundaries of a village cannot function anymore. Similarly, He Xuefeng (2002) asserts that, the village is abstractly composed of three kinds of boundaries: the natural boundary, the social boundary, and the cultural boundary. It is when the three boundaries coincide, that we say that the village is a community, otherwise it becomes 'incomplete'. The natural boundary underpins the space and foundation of people's communication. At present, the natural boundary at the level of the village committee is generally very clear. The social boundary is the social confirmation or legal confirmation of the identity of the villagers. As officially-registered villagers, they can contract the land from the village collective and enjoy the public services and benefits of redistribution from the collective income of the village. He Xuefeng (2002) deems that the cultural boundary is whether the villagers can recognise their own villager identity psychologically, and whether they appreciate the value of village life. He believes that the social boundary is the most important among these three kinds of boundaries, because it determines the villagers' legal status in the village.

Developing Zhe Xiaoye (1997) and He Xuefeng's (2002) works, and his own observation of various 'urban villages', Li (2004) further suggests that a complete village community should have five kinds of identifiable boundaries: 1) social boundary, 2) cultural boundary, 3) administrative boundary, 4) natural boundary and 5) economic boundary.

The cultural boundary is based on the psychological and social identity of the common value system; the social boundary is the social circle based on consanguinity and geographical relations; the administrative boundary is based on the autonomy of the village committee or the permeation of state power into the countryside; natural boundaries are based on the geographical scope of land ownership; economic boundaries are networks and scopes that are based on economic activities and property rights.

For a traditional, relatively closed village, these five boundaries are basically coincident. The area within such boundaries is the scope of life for a peasant, in other words, most of peasant's activities within their whole life can be handled within this sphere. However, with the opening of villages, de-agriculturalisation, industrialisation, de-industrialisation and urbanisation, the boundaries of villages are also differentiated, and these five boundaries no longer completely overlap.

Normally, this differentiation process of the boundary has an order of precedence, from the edge to the core, from the opening of the economic boundary to the opening of the social boundary. There will be particular cases that have a particular order, yet at the level of general experience and rational thinking, this should be a 'basic' and 'natural' order.

Yangcheng village has been utilised as an example to illustrate the opening of different village boundaries. As it is in the heart of the city, Yangcheng Village inevitably engaged in the economic transactions and activities with the outside world, thus breaking the economic boundary. After the expansion of the economic boundary, the natural boundary also changed very quickly. For 'urban villages' such as Yangcheng Village, their territory has shrunk. The administrative boundary has to be adjusted to adapt the change of the natural boundary and economic boundary, as the administrative power becomes attached to or merged with various village joint stock cooperation organisations, such as Village Economic Groups, economic associations, companies and so on. At the same time, the cultural boundary and local identity have also been shaken. The village value system is also diversified, the village people tend to shift to the urban lifestyles, ideas and values. Finally, the social boundary collapses, as the blood relationships, clan relationships and geographical relationships are gradually desalinated and dispelled. Li asserts that the complete disintegration of the social boundary means *the end of the village*.

Some new technologies and systems may break the basic order of this process of village boundary change. For example, with the development of information technology, the popularity of television, and the rapid spread of the Internet, some closed communities are able to understand what is happening all over the world in real time. A variety of adverts, soap operas, commercial blockbusters, and pop songs are also constantly propounding a culture which is different from the values of the village. Therefore, for some villages, the cultural boundary may become the first village boundary to be shaken, yet the social boundary is always the last bastion of village boundary differentiation.

Among the various indicators of human modernity in the past, there is an interesting indicator called the 'radius of life'. The radius of life refers to the distance from home or work within which a person performs most of their day-to-day activities, or the distance within which a person lives all or most of their life,<sup>31</sup> In general, a bigger life radius represents a higher degree of modernity of a person. In the past, in a closed village, the life radius of an old peasant may be only dozens of kilometres, and the edge of their life radius is usually a bazaar shared by several villages. Going to the market was the extension of the living radius of the peasant. While the five boundaries of the village are highly coincident, and although the life radius of 'rural people' is also different, the overall degree of differentiation is very low, so it is easier to maintain common cultural and social identity. Once the boundary of the village is violently divided, the villagers in the same village will have a greater variety of different activities, leading to a less overlapping life radius. Li (2004) suggests that the process of opening the village boundary is the process of expanding the radius of peasants' lives, that is, the process of modernisation. In terms of the 'urban village' that Li discusses, when all the five boundaries are open or no longer exist, this village has met its end. It has become a part of the city.

Returning to this thesis, during my fieldwork in three case villages, I often met rural elites who had profound insight, the ability to analyse and speak articulately on the current situation of the world. Although none of my case villages are close to the 'end of village' situation, the differentiation of boundaries has nevertheless been happening for a long time. For example, villagers going out for work can be viewed

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<sup>31</sup> The definition of life radius is drawn from <https://wordspy.com/index.php?word=life-radius>, retrieved July 26, 2019. .

as the expanding and opening of the economic boundary; and the changing status of household registration — from a farming household to a non-farming household — can be viewed as the opening of administrative boundary; the changing self-identity and lifestyles result in the opening of the cultural boundary. In the empirical chapters, these various processes relating to the changing and opening of boundaries will be examined and analysed.

### **3.4.2 The boundary between reality and imagination – urban and rural**

The contrasting ‘countryside’ and ‘city’ story is all too familiar in Western thought (DuPuis, 2006). Moreover, how they actually vary in terms of economic structure and landscape, imaginations and expectations have been placed on them where comparisons have been drawn between them. In such a dichotomy, the countryside often represents nature, young and innocent, while the city represents worldliness, old and corrupt. Although scholars have tried to erase the false boundary (Cronon, 1991, cited in Dupuis, 2006), the rural idyll remains a powerful narrative in the Western countryside. Although rural areas have been driven from their traditional character which was built upon agriculture, there is still the distinctive rural lifestyle that attracts different groups of people to visit the rural and live there. For example, in Chapter 2, I reviewed Bell’s (1994) research, which showed that rural Hampshire has the capability to meet the expectations of both villagers and immigrants of idyllic countryside, and that their rural life can be built based on such expectations.

The dualism between city and countryside is also very influential in China. As discussed above, the dual-track development of the Chinese urban and rural has drawn a clear boundary between them on the material dimension. Such a structural division on the one hand causes and deepens the insubstantial differences between the city and the countryside, on the other hand, stimulates the pursuit of rural people towards the urban way of life, blurs the seeming boundary between the two. This is a cyclic two-way process in which the boundary is constantly blurred and reproduced.

For most of the Chinese rural people, the city is a dream place full of opportunities and wealth, while the rural symbolises what is dying and backward, as Liu Xin(2000: xi) describes rural Shaanxi (Province): “the poor and backward areas . . . [were] in the shadow of the modernizing process”. This dualistic imagination is reinforced by

modern media, for example, more than 314 teleplays were produced and gained a licence in 2017, and only 14 of them, accounting for less than 5 per cent of the total, focused on rural lives.<sup>32</sup> Most of them were based on city lives, displaying modern, fashionable, urban lifestyles. The teleplays that were based on rural lives largely highlighted the 'peasant characteristics' of the rural characters and how they do not fit into the modern society, in order to create a comedic scene, or they displayed the misery of rural life, to arouse sympathy for the elderly.

Liu Xin (2000) notes that Chinese rural inhabitants have often been considered incapable of making any changes *for* and *by* themselves and are waiting to be modernised (emphasis in origin). Although this passivity may not be the case when we look into individuals' everyday lives, it still shows that rural inhabitants — most of whom are still farmers — are depicted in contrast to urban inhabitants, who are often brave, active, aggressive and young.

Unlike the many elderly people in the West who choose to live in the countryside after they retire, most of the elderly people who live in Chinese rural areas are left-behind (He, Congzhi, & Ye, Jingzhou, 2014; Connelly & Maurer-Fazio, 2016). Although the separation between parents and grown-up children is common worldwide, the situation in China is exacerbated by a set of laws and regulations that both make family migration difficult and provide incentives to keep families involved in agriculture (Connelly et al, 2015; Ye Jingzhong et al, 2017). It is very common in China for a rural household to separate by generations. While the young generations have gone to the city for work, the older generation has stayed in the village for cultivation of the household land, and often, to take care of the children of the younger generation. Therefore, a semi-worker, semi-farmer structure has been formed within the rural household. In such cases, it is not the choice of elderly to become those who stay in the rural but they have to, owing to the expensive living costs in the city that are unaffordable as the push factor, and the land needed to be taken care of as the pull factor.

The role of rural lands is essential here, and in many scholars' eyes, land ownership has been recognised as a vital institutional factor that restricts the development of

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<sup>32</sup> Lili Ding (2018, May 3), 'Call for producing more rural teleplays', *People's Daily*, retrieved from [http://paper.people.com.cn/rmrb/html/2018-05/03/nw.D110000renmrb\\_20180503\\_2-24.htm](http://paper.people.com.cn/rmrb/html/2018-05/03/nw.D110000renmrb_20180503_2-24.htm)

the Chinese rural (Long Hualou, 2014). Marsden et al. (1993) note that the conjuncture between external, mobile capital and the distribution property rights is crucial for British rural economic restructuring. I argue that the land ownership system is the main factor that differentiates the current developing path of the Chinese rural from the Western rural as it limits the privatisation and the commodification of rural space.

There is a growing concern in China regarding future food security, due to the rampant urbanisation and decline of cultivated lands (Long Hualou, 2014). In order to maintain the total farmland area above 1.8 billion mu until 2020, a strict farmland protection has been established. As the agricultural land area had already fallen to only 1.826 billion mu in 2007, there is little room for further loss of farmland (Long Hualou et al., 2012; Long Hualou, 2014). The existing land ownership in China stipulates that all rural lands (including cultivated lands and homesteads) are collectively owned by the villagers, and only the members of collectives have the right of use. Although the restriction has been loosened since the 1980s (Li Yuheng et al., 2018), there is not a mature trading market for the privatisation of land owning. The capital flowing from city to countryside, especially the takeover of household land, was strictly forbidden for a long time. Hence, the proletarianisation process in China was unlike that of some of the old capitalist countries that Marx studied, instead it was 'semi-proletarianisation'; a term coined by some scholars (Shen, 2006; Pun et al., 2009; Liu, 2012) due to the fact that the separation of peasant from their land is incomplete (He, Congzhi, & Ye, Jingzhou, 2014). On one hand, the state protects the land tenure rights of peasants, although the land cannot guarantee them a decent life. Here the rural land acts as the 'safety net' for peasant workers, preventing them from being urban homeless and offering a route of retreat to those who cannot survive in the city (He Xuefeng, 2017). On the other hand, the existing land ownership limits the circulation of land resources and the concentration of land holdings, further limiting the large-scale operation which to some extent symbolises the modernisation of agricultural industry. Rural inhabitants are not willing to give up the land even though it is not profitable. China has not yet been through the counter-urbanisation, and it may never happen for the very reason that rural land cannot be privatised. In such a situation, the government, instead of private capital, has to take the extensive and unlimited responsibility for rural development and restructuring.

For many years, extensive areas of rural land have only served as scattered space for inefficient production, a long way from any transformation into consumption-orientated space as Western countryside has.

It seems that there is not much room for the type of consumer-orientated village in China, so are there any idyllic imaginations that exist in the Chinese rural? The answer is yes. And similar to many Western countries, the idyllic imaginations largely come from the gradually forming middle-class in China, who are beginning to be tired of the polluted, noisy and competitive city that they live in. However, unlike the Western countryside, which provides opportunities to live in an attractive house with land attached (Rogers, 1989) to fulfil expectations, the Chinese countryside does not possess such environments and infrastructure for the middle-class to enjoy.

Therefore, their imagination of an idyllic rural tends to be channelled along two veins: it either stops at the nostalgia for a tale of the peaceful village of long ago (which is not even the actual case due to the general poverty in rural China in history), or it becomes something akin to building a castle in the air and enclave amidst the wild. The popular 'nongjiale' (agritainment) is one form of the latter. Normally the host of nongjiale tries to present a rural scene to middle-class tourists that is better and more decent than actual rural lives, and it is often provided in the form of a one-day trip and only to some manicured 'natural' locations.

Idyllic imaginations also exist in the formal representations of the rural which are dominated by the government. In 2005, the Chinese government launched a campaign called 'Building a New Socialist Countryside'. This was an integrated approach to rural development focusing on objectives such as advancing production, improving livelihoods, promoting a civilised social atmosphere, developing clean and tidy villages, and enhancing efficient management (Long Hualou et al., 2010; Long Hualou & Woods, 2011). Long and Woods (2011) assert that this policy marked both the latest articulation of a trajectory of economic liberalisation in rural China pursued since 1978, and a new recognition of the centrality of rural restructuring to the development of the national economy. However, Xu (1999) argues that China's economic policy relies too much on a top-down approach in monitoring, control and supervision, a style which Long Hualou and Woods (2011) point out has been continued in the implementation of the 'Building a New Countryside' policy. A lack of

local embeddedness and naturalisation in the development of policies has created difficulties in the implementation of strategies such as houses reallocations, which have encountered reluctance and resistance on the part of the peasants (Long Hualou & Woods, 2011).

For example, in Yangjiang (city), where Peanut Village is located, every village needs to complete a set of small programs, such as building a village yard for public space, building a village library, or creating a pleasant landscape, in order to apply for the title of 'the beautiful countryside' and gain more funding for village construction. A tourist-oriented village, for example, Tower Village, is shaped by government expectation and has been designed to turn into a 'peaceful, quiet and clean village' that has been influenced by the Zen culture of Buddhism. Raising pigs is forbidden there since it does not meet the expectation of such a place. The negotiation between local government and villagers regarding rural imagination and expectation will be explored more fully in Chapter 6.

Conflicts arise as the government is the main body for the planning and restructuring process instead of actual rural inhabitants. As described before, the main population of rural China is still the peasant (or peasant worker) and their family members, and there are not many rural-bound immigrants. Chinese villagers are often absent in the processes of village restructuring which are led by government. However, in the reconstruction processes which can be controlled by villagers themselves, for example, the rebuilding of their own family house, a strong urban orientation has been shown. In the eyes of villagers, the urban appearance and city lifestyle represent modern and affluent, therefore when they have the capability (which mostly means earning enough money from city work) to rebuild their rural house, they choose to design it with an industrialised appearance (boxy, cemented building with 3 to 4 floors or even more) and the urban interior decorations (big TV, European-style leather sofa and so on). Apparently, this kind of house does not meet the aesthetic taste of the urban middle class, who dream of the traditional Chinese wooden architecture located in a peaceful harmonic village.

Therefore, the Chinese rural faces a dilemma: to whom does the countryside belong? Does it belong to every citizen, thus the urban middle-class has the right to use them for their own purposes, or does it belong to peasants therefore their needs

should be satisfied first? My empirical works try to answer this question from the perspective of rural residents: how they conceptualise the rural and rural lands, who do they think needs to be in charge of the reconstruction of the village, and how do they image the city and the surrounding countryside.

### **3.5 Conclusion**

Following on from the previous chapter, this chapter reviews another body of literature that focuses on related research themes, namely how Chinese academia views 'globalisation', 'rural' and the interrelations between them. Compared to the previous chapter, which largely focuses on theories, this chapter, although it too is a literature review, focuses more on the actual context. Such differentiated preferences also show the different academic orientations of Western academia and Chinese academia.

In detail, this chapter examines 'globalisation with Chinese characteristics' and 'Chinese rurality'. In addition, it introduces the notion of the opening and changing of village boundaries. Chapters 2 and 3 therefore together present the necessary ground for the empirical studies set out in the following chapters of this study.

## **Chapter 4 Methodology**

### **4.1 Chapter Summary**

If one thinks of the chapters on literature as sitting at home reading the theory textbooks describing the countryside, the chapter on methodology is more like presenting a documentary about walking in the countryside. This chapter focuses on the methodology used in this research, sets out the processes of the research, and the practices of approaching the rural.

As stated in the introductory chapter, this research is a multi-sited ethnography. Therefore, Section 4.2, discusses the details concerning/regarding the selection of the particular case studies, explaining why I chose them and identifying the differences between them. Following on from this, the theoretical approach and research design that has been constructed around these three case study villages is examined.

Section 4.3 then provides the details of the research methods — mainly qualitative research methods — that have been used for data collection, and discusses how the data has been processed and analysed for further interpretation.

In Section 4.4, particular attention is given to the positionality of the researcher and how the positionality and ethical concerns have affected the research process. Section 4.5 provides a short conclusion to this chapter.

Methodology is an essential part of the research as it heavily influences the formation of research findings and its explanatory power. My methodology has also determined the way that I present changes to and details of everyday life in the rural in the era of globalisation.

### **4.2 Research design and Approaches: Qualitative Cases Study**

This section begins with the case selections, in which I introduce the principles that I used to choose case study villages and a brief introduction to these villages. Following that, the theoretical approach and design of this research is explained.

#### 4.2.1 Case Selections: the case study as a research method

This study focuses on three specific villages, located in different cities within Guangdong Province. Also called Canton, Guangdong Province is one of the most developed areas in China. A number of harbours within the province were opened during the 1990s as windows for developing China's economy in accordance with the Chinese government's 'reform and open' policy. This means that Canton is a place that has been influenced over a long period of time by the process of globalisation. It can be suggested that Canton is a key example of a place where globalisation has had the clearest impact on the changing landscapes and socio-economic structures of rural areas. General details of each village and why they have been chosen as case studies will be explained below, while the further details of each villages will be shown in the empirical chapters 5, 6, and 7. For reasons of confidentiality, the real name of the village is not given and has been replaced by its significant feature to protect the participants from any possible political risk.<sup>33</sup>

The selection of cases was based on two basic principles: (1) the data of the case, including general statistics, local documents, people who could be interviewed and any other field events that could be adequately accessed; (2) the cases that could most likely illuminate the research question (Yin, 2014). In accordance with these two principles, three case studies were selected with the aim of representing three different modes of restructuring and transformation within rural villages in China. They are all located within Guangdong Province, which is also my hometown, therefore language (dialects) has not caused any significant problem. Moreover, the general fieldwork conditions including transportation, accommodation and dietary considerations are in relatively good order.

More than three villages were considered in the initial stages of this study. However, after revisits, the validity and accessibility of the final three case villages were re-confirmed, which resulted in their selection. The relative geographical locations of the three case villages are shown in Figure 2.

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<sup>33</sup> This is out of the concern to not expose any member of the village committee or any official who consented to be interviewed. All real names of participants will not appear in this final dissertation: a nickname is used instead. Also, the views of any individual participant will remain confidential and will not be disclosed to any other participant or organization.

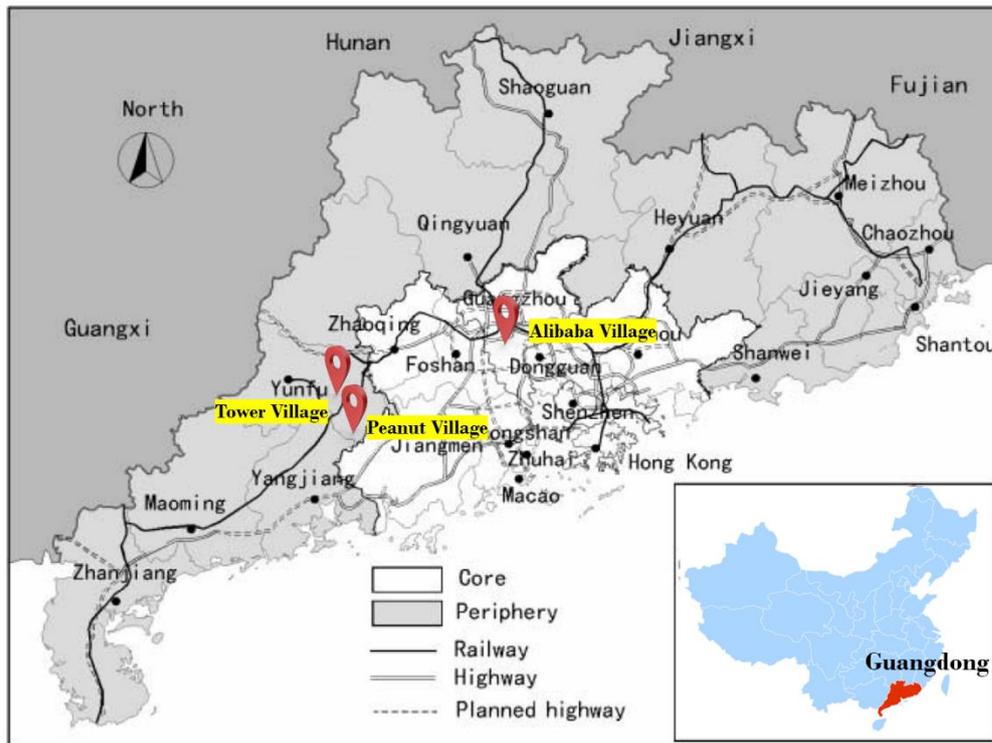


Figure 2 The geographical locations of three case study villages

### **Peanut Village**

*Peanut Village* is located at and governed by the coastal city Yangjiang. The name Peanut Village comes from the fact that most of the households there grow some peanuts alongside rice. Peanut Village is a typical agriculturally-based village without any special industry, resulting in the very limited income of households there. Therefore, like many other ordinary villages in China, it has suffered from the emigration of its residents, which has made it a typically ‘hollowed-out’ village. Peanut Village consists of 10 natural villages, with a population of around 2000 and 500 households registered in the household registration system. However, there are only fewer than 200 people who actually live in the village. This discrepancy is due to the outflow of work-age residents, which will be explained detailedly in Chapter 5. Moreover, more than half of these are either elderly or children, the very few of working age who live there either commute from the village to the nearby town daily or stay for childcare (mostly women). The per capita cultivated farmland there is approximately 1.2 mu (a unit of area equals to 0.0667 hectares).

The first time I visited this village was in 2014 when I spent two weeks there to conduct a social survey on the dynamics of the Chinese labour force (CLDS). I therefore had previous research contacts with the village. Before beginning this study, I contacted the town government to state my research purpose and ask for assistance. During the two months I stayed there, the third national agriculture census was undertaken. Thus, I have obtained some official data directly from the town government statistics department. In addition, an officer of the town's women's union was assigned to accompany me in visiting the village in the beginning, introducing me into the village committee and helping me communicate with some of the elderly who can only speak the local dialect. With all this assistance, access to Peanut village was smooth and efficient.

### ***Tower Village***

*Tower Village's* name comes from the Buddhist Tower that sits within the village, which belongs to a famous historic Buddhist temple. This historic temple was built by the sixth patriarch of the Zen lineage of Buddhism, Hui Neng, as the village was his birthplace. Tower Village is now a half-agriculture, half-tourism-based village. Besides the Buddhist temple, it has abundant hot springs as a resource for tourism. Therefore, half of the land of this village has been rented out or requisitioned by the government, who then re-rents them to private enterprises for several hot spring resorts. The theme of Zen and other activities symbolic of Zen have been broadly employed in these resorts. The most impressive resort is a newly-constructed, 5-star luxury hotel covering a large area, which was built based upon an investment worth more than 2 billion yuan.

Tower Village has a registered population of around 2600, but around 1000 people actually live there. Similar to Peanut Village, this discrepancy is mostly due to the outflow of the workforce during most of the year. Owing to the tourist industry nearby the village, which employs part of the workforce of the village, there are more who stay. However, the tourist and related industries cannot satisfy all the employment needs in the village. Some villagers work at the factory of a nearby town and commute on a daily basis.

Besides the rented land, the per capita cultivated farmland is approximately 0.42 mu. In general, with the more lively and vibrant economy, more people of working age are willing to stay with their families in the village.

Before Tower Village was considered as a research case, I had visited there as a tourist on many occasions. After my primary research project formed, contacts were made with local government, hotel owners, the village committee and ordinary villagers to confirm the viability of the research. Most of the contact details have come as a result of family contacts, since one family member has worked there, and therefore access has been facilitated.

### ***Alibaba Village***

*Alibaba Village* derives its name from its famous online business. Alibaba Ltd. is the biggest internet enterprise in China (in 2018) and built its powerful business empire based on B2B, B2C, and C2C online trading platforms, among which the most popular one is Taobao.com, with more than 2 billion users. Alibaba Village, located in the suburban area of Guangzhou, is one of the first 20 'Taobao Villages'<sup>34</sup> that was acknowledged by Alibaba Ltd. in 2013, and at that time the annual turnover of e-commerce within the village exceeded 0.68 billion yuan. According to the latest report (2018) released by the Ali Research Academy,<sup>35</sup> the number of 'Taobao Villages' has now risen to 2118. In these villages, many online business operators gather together and trade via Taobao.com. In Alibaba Village, a group of residents is famous for running small-to-medium scale businesses online within family units. With the employment of the e-commerce industry, this village sells products all over the country, even all over the world.

Alibaba Village at the same time is an 'urban village', which means that a less-developed village sits in the middle of the city and is surrounded by the urban architectures and facilities. Along with the process of city development, all the farmland of Alibaba Village has been requisitioned and converted into main roads, compact residential estates and living quarters. However, inside the village itself, it is

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<sup>34</sup> Taobao Village: a type of village where more than 10% of the whole village population run online businesses at Taobao.com; **or** the annual turnover of the e-commerce on Taobao.com in the village exceeds ten million yuan.

<sup>35</sup> Ali Research Academy: the research institution of Alibaba Ltd, which mainly focuses on Internet industry, Internet economics, e-commerce, and rural economics.

more like a chaotic big market, where buildings are relatively low-rise, and goods are randomly placed along the streets. Thus, Alibaba Village is like a sunken land surrounded by lots of high buildings and large mansions. Nowadays, the registered village population of Alibaba Village is around 6000, while according to local villagers, more than 60,000 people actually live there. In contrast to Peanut Village and Tower Village, the actual number of residents is far greater than the registered residents. This discrepancy indicates the vitality of the village, symbolising the willingness of residents to stay here.

Unlike the previous two, Alibaba is quite a famous village that has been reported as a 'successful example of village reconstruction and transformation' in the press. This village came to my attention in 2014 due to its uniqueness in terms of its relationship to the process of globalisation. During August to September 2014, for a separate study, I interviewed 42 participants including local landlords, local villagers, Taobao shop keepers, Taobao shop workers, and couriers and dispatchers, town officers and restaurant owners. The research findings of that have been drawn on in a published paper in a Chinese academic journal (Wu et al, 2015). Since then, I have kept a few of the important contacts gained from an online-shop owner, who was one of the first few pioneers of online business in Alibaba Village and the co-founder of an e-commerce union. He, as a gatekeeper, introduced me to his friends and family, which was very helpful in bringing me into contact with a potential interview group.

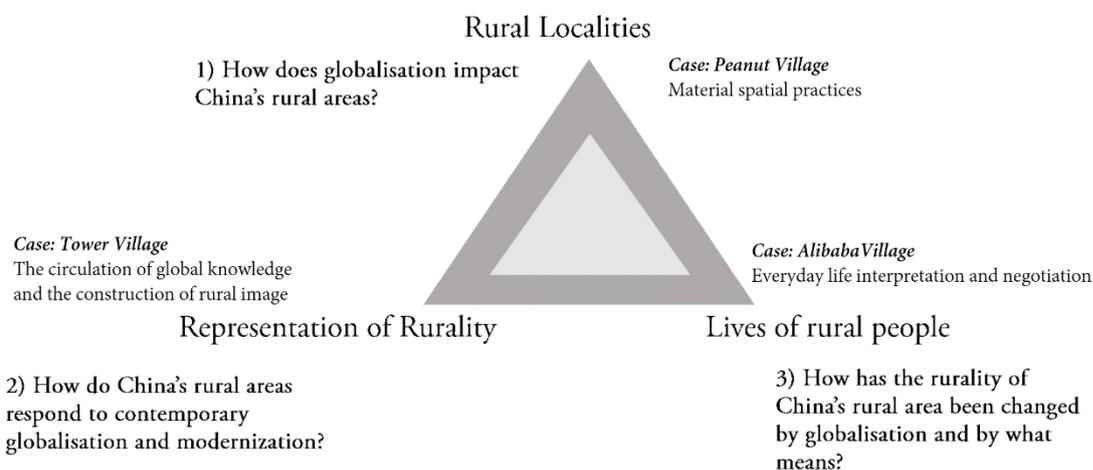
Together, the three selected villages represent three different forms of restructuring and modes of transformation of villages in rural China. First, with regard to productive activity, Alibaba Village has gone through a fairly substantial industrial upgrade, in which the productive mode has undergone a transition from agricultural to industrial and then to services-oriented; Tower Village is transforming from an agricultural village into a tourism-orientated village; Peanut Village remains dominated by traditional agricultural production. Second, in terms of subjectivity, Tower Village and Alibaba Village in comparison with Peanut Village, are relatively *active* in the restructuring process, while the Peanut Village can be considered *passive*, which means that there has been no significant action taken in the restructuring process. Third, most residents of Tower Village and Peanut Village are local peasants. In contrast, Alibaba Village is close to one of the biggest cities in China, where residents comprise local people, immigrants who commute to the city

centre daily, and immigrants who work and live in Alibaba permanently. To summarise, these three case studies represent different kinds of rural villages, where the everyday life and ‘the degree of rurality’ differs as well.

#### 4.2.2 Theoretical approach and research design

In this section I introduce my theoretical approach and the research design of this thesis. Following the discussion in Chapter 2, where I reviewed Halfacree’s work (2006), in which he suggests using the three-facets structure to understand rural space — rural localities, formal representations of the rural, and everyday lives of rural inhabitants — I have developed my research design based on this pertinent framework.

Employing Halfacree’s ideas, the research content is structured along three enquiries. Based on these three enquiries, I seek to present not only how the economy affects culture, but principally how village residents live their everyday lives. The Figure 3 shows how my three research enquiries and case villages correlate with the triangular-facet model of rural space.



*Figure 3 Structure of the study*

In this model, each case village has been considered as the integration of these three facets, looking at different aspects which constitute the village as a whole. As Halfacree (2006) remarks, each of these three facets cannot be understood in isolation from the other two, instead, they are always in a relationship with the other

two (Halfacree, 2006 citing Shields, 1999). However, each case village in this research has its dominant facet as the main analytical entry within the wider interaction of globalisation.

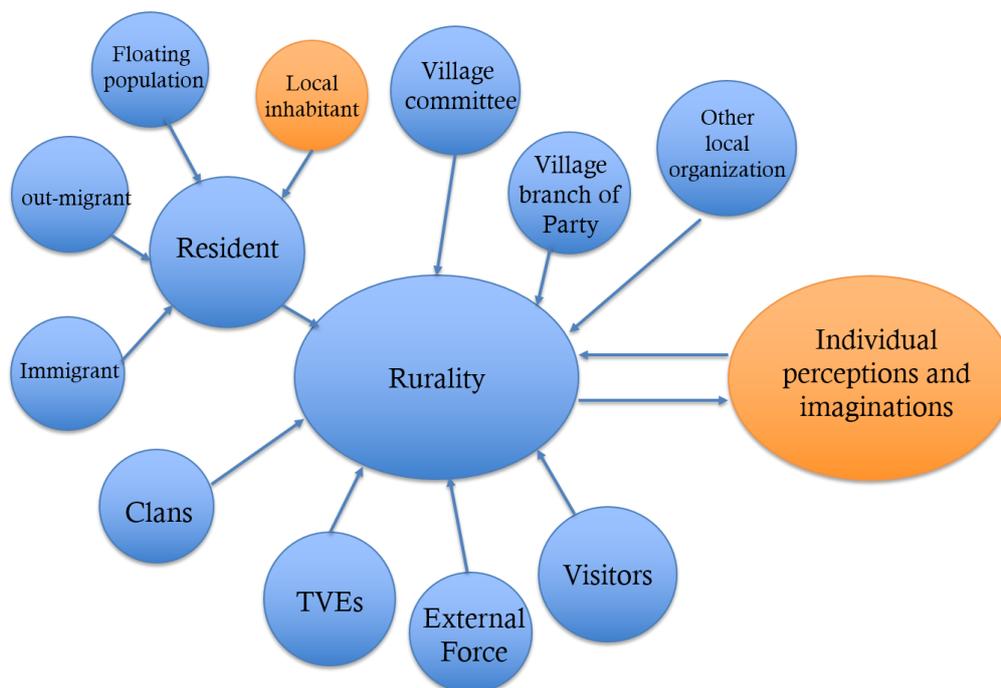
The first enquiry, corresponding to the *rural localities* facet, concerns the question *how does globalisation impact Chinese rural areas?* To answer this question, the approach of the study here is to examine how the influences of globalisation permeate Chinese rural areas through the lens of central power and regulations, and has as its main focus material spatial practices. Although in all the case villages this strand has been looked into and touched upon alongside the other strands, I have selected Peanut Village as the main case study for this particular strand, focusing on how the material lives and spatial practices are changing under globalisation in the village.

The second enquiry deals with the question *how do Chinese rural areas respond to contemporary globalisation and modernisation?* This involves focusing on the space of *formal representations of rurality*. For example, the 'building the beautiful countryside' and 'building the new socialist countryside' campaigns launched by the Chinese government in 2005 clearly indicate the expectations and imaginations that the state had for and wanted to impose upon Chinese rural areas. In order to envision what a new socialist countryside was like, numerous official delegates visited South Korea, Singapore, and European countries and then brought international elements back into villages at home. In other words, the expectation of the state is that a new socialist countryside should learn from advanced capitalist countries and become globalised so that rural villagers can live a new life which is embedded in Chinese soil and tradition but entails modern styles. In terms of this study, the second enquiry aims to explore the representational space of the rural to identify how these new conceptions and identities of the rural have been constructed by various actors: the state, local government, capital investors, the press, and the villagers. Tower Village has been selected as the main case village to analyse this strand.

The third enquiry meanwhile, is at a more individual and mundane level, asking *how have the changes brought by globalisation affected the lives of rural residents?* This is the most important facet in my research considered in every case village. In this

strand, the space of the everyday life experience of rural people is examined in a manner that considers both the viewpoints and subjective imaginations of rural actors, especially those of individual residents.

As Merrifield argues (2000: 175), the spatial triad must always “be embodied with actual flesh and blood and culture, with real life relationships and events”. The Chinese rural is a contested space, within which the power relations are continuously affecting and shaping people’s everyday economic, political and social lives. Thus, the power relationships within rural China are analysed from two different directions: the top-down narrative and the grassroots narrative. The former looks at how the effects of globalisation permeate down to rural villages through multiple lenses: central government and central policies; then regions and provinces; to the city/town, finally to the villages. While the latter considers the different actors (Figure 4) who perform and function within the rural areas.



*Figure 4 Actors of performing rurality*

As a result of these enquiries, six sub-research questions are raised:

1. How does globalisation affect diverse Chinese rural places differently?
2. In what ways do global/national/local power relations shape the impacts of

globalisation differently?

3. What changes have been made by different bodies in rural areas to accommodate the process of globalisation or modernisation?
4. How is globalisation embodied and metamorphosed in rural areas?
5. How is globalisation and its influences performed in the daily lives of villagers?
6. How do individuals in rural areas identify themselves in contemporary China, and how do they understand rurality in the globalisation era?

To answer the research questions, I employed a mixed methods approach, which comprises qualitatively-based case studies, although quantitative evidence such as demographics and economic data, has also been used to support and explain the phenomenon within a bigger picture. Also, multiple interpretive strategies, including representational and non-representational ways, have been applied to examine different aspects of the research questions.

### **4.3 Research Methods, Data Collections, Analysis and Interpretation**

In general, this research is conducted using a qualitative approach, through which the hybridity of human behaviours is examined in order to acknowledge people's multiple subjectivities (Clifford et al., 2010). Some quantitative evidence, such as censuses and other national databases have provided a wider contextual setting for this study. The methods that I have adopted are discussed in turn below, namely the adoption of archive and secondary data, ethnography and participant observation, and the in-depth semi-structured interview.

#### **4.3.1 Archive and Secondary Data**

Archives in this research refer to various documents including central government policies, censuses of population and agriculture, official or institutional research reports on rural/urban changes, local planning strategies, regulations, and news reports. Secondary data also enables wider comparison to be made, including

testing the same ideas in different circumstances or tracking the changes in an original location some years later.

Reading these documents as archives, connections between local practices and central policies can be traced, thus furthering the understanding of rural areas in a bigger context. Documents that relate to a few important movements in the countryside in recent years – ‘Building the new socialist countryside (建设社会主义新农村)’, ‘The beautiful countryside campaign (美丽乡村运动)’, ‘Bringing finance to rural (金融下乡)’ – have been taken into account. Moreover, the database of the sixth population census of China, the Chinese dynamic labour force (CLDS) census, and the 2016 agricultural census have also been used.

Local institutions are the important resources for information of local development planning where this exists. For example, town governments hold the planning for villages that are under their governance. Through the development plans, the rural image projected by the government and the ways and methods that they use to regulate villages can be read. These plans were obtained during fieldwork. Though it was not possible to gain completely open access, key reports and planning documents for the case-study villages were acquired where they existed. Local history annals, maps and photographs from different time periods provided by officers or villagers are also valued as important materials.

The statistical data and central policies can be found on the website of the Chinese central government ([www.gov.cn](http://www.gov.cn)), the Chinese National Bureau of Statistics (<http://www.stats.gov.cn>), the ministry of commerce ([www.mofcom.gov.cn](http://www.mofcom.gov.cn)), as well as a few open databases for scholars.

Another important archive category for this research is news report. News reports are a contemporary and useful reflection of the current social phenomena, activities and events. Although reports of city life are much more abundant than those concerning rural areas, they can still reveal some facts and trends happening in rural areas that can be considered as ‘news’. Also, news reports provide information given out by local authorities as well as some of the perspectives of rural people when interviewed by the journalists.

The archives and secondary data used in this study help to explain the profound influences of globalisation on the Chinese economy and the dynamic changes of Chinese rural areas in terms of factors such as the economy, work, development and urbanisation. However, these reports are inevitably general and cannot be a substitute for detailed on the ground research.

#### **4.3.2 Ethnography and Participant Observation**

Ethnography is the essential core of this study as stated in the introductory chapter. In social science, ethnography is a widely utilised research strategy that is used to understand how the world is created and experienced by people through various processes such as place making, inhabiting social spaces, forging local and transnational networks, and representing and decolonising spatial imaginaries (Watson and Till, 2010). It attempts to study social life by unfolding the practices of everyday life (Donge, 2006).

There are things that I want to address before I introduce how ethnography is conducted in this research - particularly why I choose ethnography as research method and how it can contribute to the understanding of the seemingly structural forces, such as globalisation and modernisation. As I mentioned at the beginning of this thesis, there is a strong tension between the 'structural nature' of the force that I wanted to examine and the 'ethnographic and observational nature' of this research throughout the whole research process. Such tension has continuously caused struggles before, during and after fieldwork, which also affected the choice of research methods.

A more structural approach in geography often requires classification, focuses on the distribution of material resources and the organisations and institutions that govern such distribution (Smith & Fetner, 2009). However, in a highly complex context, using traditional parallel classification methods to divide the large volume of actual practices into different categories, may lead to the exclusion of materials that cannot be included in the classification criteria. For example, an individual in village may have overlapping identities, causing controversial behaviours which could not be explained as the outcome of single impetus. The using of ethnography can better capture such complexity, leaving more space for individual interpretation and diversity.

Therefore, back to the question, how can the use of ethnography help to understand global and other structural forces? By being more practical, that is to position individuals' performance in the broader social structure and historical background for analysis.

It is also the nature of ethnography to seek to go beyond simply describing phenomena, to explain the meaning behind them and reveal the general laws, which then produces grounded theory. Compared to 'above-ground knowledge' (Terry McGee, 2007), grounded knowledge refers to knowledge that is deeply embedded in the real world. This knowledge often varies from place to place and sensitive to changes in geographical conditions, which also highly dependent on the social, political, and cultural environment in which the research object is located, the values of the relevant researchers, and the perspectives and technical levels taken. Ground theory then generated based on this knowledge.

In such sense, ethnography becomes a bridge between institutions and individuals, structure and human agency. Local practices have become a mirror which reflecting the outcome and feedback of current political, economic, governmental policies.

Ethnographers explore topics that are difficult to research and represent using quantitative techniques. Thus, a range of qualitative methods, time-intensive techniques and sources of materials are employed. These include participant action research, writing field notes, sketching maps, gathering visual, physical and documentary materials, engaging in informal conversation, asking people to document and describe their everyday worlds, conducting in-depth interviews, focus group interviews and recording performances. Participant observation is only one of many methods that an ethnographer may use in their research, yet it is the defining method that distinguishes ethnography from other qualitative research designs (Laurier, 2010; Watson and Till, 2010). Moreover, participant observation should produce effective commentary on the culture, society and geography of various spaces and places (Laurier, 2010). However, a non-judgemental stance should foreground the whole observation process which means that the records should be a just account and kept as original. In this study, participant observation has involved spending time being, living or working with people or communities in order to understand them, and finding opportunities for immersion in the everyday life and

atmosphere of the villages. Field-notes, photographs and video recordings are used as methods of data collection. Laurier (2010) states that there is no template for doing participant observation. Thus, in my fieldwork situation, observation methods and actions are diversified in different villages. By living in selected villages, the examination of everyday communication and behaviours of local people, and sociological observations of the villages have been conducted and recorded.

To gain the fullest possible experience of local life, I also participated in different local economic and cultural activities. For clarity, Table 2 shows the detail and scales of the time that I spent in each village.

Village	Time scale	Host/Accommodation	Additional Activity/work
Peanut Village	9 weeks	2 weeks in village; 7 weeks commuting from town nearby.	5 days at a farm as casual worker; 3 days within town government as intern officer; 6 x 1-day officer/villager-following participant activities <sup>36</sup> .
Tower Village	8 weeks	4 weeks at villager's house; 4 weeks at a resort hotel within the village.	1 week at an 'agritainment' farm including restaurant as casual worker; 2 days at a tourist resort as casual worker.
Alibaba Village	8 weeks	2 weeks in village; 6 weeks commuting from nearby city.	1 week as a customer service staff member in an online shop.

*Table 2 Schedule of participant observation*

<sup>36</sup> Following villagers or officers to experience their daily lives in the village, including going to the farm (rice field or vegetable pot)/work, chatting with friends, shopping and etc.

During the eight-month fieldtrip, most of the time was spent in these villages. Besides interviews, purposeful or random walking, observing and informal conversations were also undertaken, alongside participation in various types of work and activities to gain a sense of normal working life there.

Based on these long periods of participant observation and local life experiences, the complex scene of different rural lives has emerged, where a variety of interests, senses of the richness of life, and clear dissimilarities arose from everyday life. Attention has been paid to the material life in the village, including the commodities villagers consumed at home, the things sold in village shops, the furniture in villagers' houses, the clothes they dressed in, the restaurants on the roadside, as well as to the cultural and social life: the way the inhabitants talk, the themes they discuss, the books in the village library, the television programs they watch and so on. As observations may come as a mixed, ambiguous totality, there were many instances where I was unable to distinguish what they symbolised, and whether they had values for analysing. Therefore, I considered every single piece of the sketch as an important element in forming the big picture and they have been marked down as fieldnotes or captured in pictures for further analysis. By conducting participant observation, a sense of localness and immersion has been produced.

However, immersion was not always possible. Some 'awkwardness' has been expressed by participants surrounding the observation of their community by an 'outsider', namely me, the researcher. During the time that I stayed in these villages, some villagers often displayed a sense of alienation from me and anxiety towards me — although at the same time they were very polite. For example, some villagers neither wanted to talk to me nor answer any questions, they stared at me with a cold face. Although as time passed, awkwardness did gradually decrease but was never entirely absent.

In order to be more reflective, I also tried to capture the reactions and attitudes of the participants towards my appearance in the community and to my questions within fieldnotes and interview notes. For example, if I asked a villager if I could go into their house to look around, some might have welcomed me in, proud to show me the house, while others might have felt ashamed to let me in. Their attitudes should be linked with the observations carried out at their houses.

### 4.3.3 In-depth semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews are a verbal interchange where the interviewer attempts to elicit information from another person by asking questions (Longhurst, 2010). They provide a space for enquiry that goes beyond simply observing, drawing on individual perceptions, imaginations and more personal life-experiences. For this research, one-to-one interviews, as the main data collecting method, have been conducted to collect ‘thick descriptions’ of village life.

#### ***The scale of formal interviews***

For eight months, at three different villages, I sought to access as many respondents as possible to conduct interviews. I also sought to reach a diverse group of interviewees, covering different genders, ages, occupations, places of origin, economic status and other elements that might be of value (for example, those with different family structures). I designed the scale of the interviews before I entered the field, however the final number of formal interviews was affected by the actual context and conditions of the site.

The numbers of formal interviews conducted are listed in *Table 3*. The scale of the samples proposed before the actual fieldwork are listed as well. More interviews were expected in Tower Village and Alibaba Village while fewer were expected in Peanut Village. Interestingly, the proposed volume of interviews and the actual one is inverse.

Village	The proposed samples of 1-1 in-depth interviews	The actual sample of 1-1 in-depth interviews
<b>Peanut Village</b>	In total: 27 Local villagers: 20 Village Committee members: 5 Town government representatives/officials: 2	In total:35 Local villagers: 27 Village Committee members: 3 Town government representatives/officials: 5

<b>Tower Village</b>	In total: 40 Local villagers: 20 Temple Buddhists: 5 Visitors: 5 Village committee members: 3 Town government officers: 2 Resort/Hotel owners: 3 Village tourism management officers: 2	In total: 27 Local villagers: 14 Temple Buddhists: 2 Visitors: 2 Village committee members: 3 Town government officers: 2 Resort/Hotel owners: 2 Village tourism management officers: 2
<b>Alibaba Village</b>	In total: 36 Immigrants: 15 Local villagers: 15 Village immigrant management committee officers: 2 Town Government officers: 2 Village committee members: 2	In total: 24 Immigrants: 17 Local villagers: 3 Village immigrant management committee officers: 2 Town Government officers: 1 Village committee members: 1

*Table 3 The scales of interviews*

There are various reasons why the volume of cases varied in the different villages. Fewer interviews were expected in Peanut Village because the population there was originally less than that of the other two villages, and those remaining mainly comprised the elderly and very young. However, for the same reason, residents there were relatively unoccupied for most of the day, which gave an opportunity for me to visit the research participants' homes and talk to them. Also, people there were comparatively less defensive, which increased their willingness to talk. With the assistance of a local officer, Peanut Village had the best acceptance level of the three villages. Nevertheless, the inhabitants were not familiar with expressing themselves: in other words, they were quite shy and slow in speech. Most of them

had not received much education, which led to a common phenomenon that they did not have many things to talk about other than their family and daily life, and their points of view regarding the outside world were often unclear and limited.

The situation in Alibaba Village was the other way around. Alibaba Village is near a city surrounding by all kinds of city facilities and urban people. Residents there are familiar with urban lifestyles and have knowledge of contemporary social media and issues of personal privacy. All of these factors increased their awareness of strangers the stranger, and the suspicion that I would expose them to public attention. Moreover, most of them were at work during the daytime and felt tired by the evening. Fewer residents were willing to be interviewed, which made Alibaba Village the most difficult one with regard to this aspect of my fieldwork. Even when they accepted to be interviewed, they were very sensitive about/to questions that involved personal information. However, they were noticeably voluble and expressive — about their work, the village life they used to have, their views of recent news, and their opinions of urbanisation or globalisation. Once engaged in a conversation, they were not passive interviewees waiting for the researcher to throw questions to them, but active participants who exchanged information with me.

Interviews in Tower Village fell somewhere between those of Peanut Village and Alibaba Village. There were villagers who were more like those of Peanut Village but clearly had more exposure to modern society. There were also people who had been deeply influenced by the modern tourist economy nearby, thus having a distinct commercial awareness. Some of them were even familiar with the various purposes of the interviews. Clear differences and distinctions between these three villages can therefore be tracked through their attitudes towards interviews.

One thing needs to be clarified, that some positions of individually cited interviewees are held or shared by many other people that I encountered during the fieldwork. For example, an elderly woman's daily life is presented in the empirical chapter, represented many other elderly women that interviewed or casually talked to in the course of this research. The same goes for village committee members or government officers.

### ***The strategy of choosing interviewees***

Another strategy involved in interviews is the selective sampling of subjects, referring to the use of a small number of people to represent the larger population.

Specifically, convenience samples, purposive samples, snowball samples and quota samples (Berg, 2009) have been employed in the sampling process.

Convenience samples, according to Berg (2009), refer to available subjects who are easily accessible or close at hand. In my case, convenience samples constituted nearly half of all respondents. They are the villagers that I met in the village while I was walking around (which happened quite often); my neighbours when I lived in the village; or the colleagues that I worked with during participant observation. These respondents constructed the most basic conception of the village for me since most often they were just ordinary people who actually lived in the village. The advantage of this, as its name suggests, is its convenience. However, it sometimes fails to provide sufficient explanation for certain topics that I am interested in. For example, if my neighbours do not have information regarding the large-scale farming within the village or any city life experiences that I am keen to know about, then that is the time to turn to purposive samples.

A purposive sample is developed when the researcher wants to gain some special knowledge or expertise about some groups, and a few subjects are particularly selected to represent this group of people (Berg, 2009). For instance, the large farm householder of each village was approached to gain information about a different agricultural mode of production in addition to the single-household, small-scale peasant economy that is fairly common in Peanut Village and Tower Village. Another example would be the women's representative on every village committee who can provide knowledge of living conditions of women in the village.

Snowball sampling is another useful tool to gain more samples when subjects that are willing to be interviewed are hard to reach. It can also fulfil the need for locating subjects with certain attributes or characteristics necessary for the study (Berg, 2009). This method was particularly useful in Alibaba Village. The first person that I interviewed was able to introduce me to his co-workers and relatives who worked in the same industry, and the interviewees that he introduced were willing to refer me to some other friends nearby which created many useful subjects for me. Snowball

sampling was significantly more effective in Alibaba Village than convenience samples since the residents I approached in the village often refused to be interviewed. Snowballing meanwhile, can provide a sense of trust as the referring comes through friends and families, and thus it works smoothly in a kinship/geographically-based community.

In addition, quota samples were used in all three villages. A table of the supposed proportion of different occupations in each village was designed before the actual fieldwork to make sure as many perspectives from different occupations were gained as possible. Such design came from my intention to know more about the potential different lifestyles that attribute to different occupations, or to see if there indeed was such a connection. However, in applying such a strategy, the proportion of each group was not fixed but flexible reflecting the actual circumstances that arose in the fieldwork.

A mix of the four sampling strategies above was applied across my case study villages enabling me to access a wide variety of research subjects. This undoubtedly enriched my understanding of different groups of people in the villages.

### ***Location***

The location of the interview is another important issue to address. Different spaces may construct distinct behaviours in the interviewees. Therefore, most of the interviews were conducted in villagers' houses, or in the public spaces that rural people often gathered at and felt comfortable in, such as under the biggest banyan tree in the village. This was for their convenience and to create an ease of atmosphere. Few were conducted in the office of the village committee, and likewise interviews with government officers were mainly carried out at their offices. These choices of locations were made based on the constructing of a 'natural' environment ('natural' here refers to psychological perspective rather than physical perspective) which can better reveal the normal status of the interviewees. From looking at the most common interview locations, observation can be made about the shifting focus of life in the different villages: in Peanut Village, most of the interviews were conducted at home, while at Alibaba Village the work place become the common location for interviews. Also, the participants' behaviour during the interviews, following the theory of performance, has been marked down in the interview notes.

### ***Assistance and cooperation***

In my previous experience of conducting fieldwork in these three villages, it proved hard to gain trust and be allowed into the 'private' spaces in the communities. Therefore, when I started the in-depth interviews for this study, I needed to rely on a local government officer, who assisted in three ways: First, when I entered a village, they introduced me to the members of the village committee, which also was the stepping stone for entering the community; second, they accompanied me during the first few days to reassure the villagers that what I was doing was not for profit or on behalf of the government; third, when some of the interviewees only spoke the local dialect, they helped me to translate some specific points that I was unable to catch or understand. I have noted that such ways of entering the village influences the researcher's positionality and identity, that I may be considered as a representative of the government, creating new power relations between the researcher and the interviewees. Actions were taken to minimise this effect, including asking the government officer to clarify my identity as a researcher and student; interviewing without the presence of the officers most of the time and staying in villagers' houses later on. Based on my observation, there was surprisingly no obvious impact of working with government officers. Besides the efforts made by the officers and myself stated above, this might also be attributed to the 'peaceful' relationship between villagers and government (in Peanut Village specifically).

It is worth noticing that the degree of co-operation with the government officer varied between the different villages. The highest level of co-operation happened in Peanut Village, since its clusters of dwellings are distant from each other (and therefore required more guidance) and villagers were more taciturn towards strangers. In Alibaba Village, the gatekeeper was not from the government side, and villagers were more conversable and used to communicating with visitors, thus less support was needed. In the case of Tower Village, the gatekeeper has overlapping identities, both a villager himself and a member of village committee, therefore it did not cause extra impact regarding power relations. It also needs to bear in mind that any gatekeeper chosen in field work has the potential to exert a level of influence that the researcher themselves is completely unaware of.

### ***The design of interview***

The design of the interviews in this study is semi-structured, but the content varies between different villages and different occupations. For example, in Tower Village the questions were more related to tourism, while the questions asked in Peanut Village were mainly focused on agriculture. Likewise, in Alibaba Village, questions were more related to internet usage and online businesses.

Most of the time, a personalised interview-outline with specific questions designed for the particular interviewee was prepared before the scheduled interview. For example, before undertaking the interview with the town government officer, questions that related to town governing, local policy, and relations between the town government and the village committee were prepared. In addition, a general template was prepared for any unscheduled interviews — for instance, I came across a villager who was interested in my research and was willing to have a longer conversation with me, but he only had time on that day.

The interview was normally structured into five sections: 1) background information (including personal and family information); 2) work and livelihood; 3) everyday life (family life, consumption, life style, leisure time and entertainment); 4) social life; 5) personal imagination, perception and conception of urbanisation, rural life, globalisation and so on. Moreover, detailed and derivative questions were raised based on the answers of the interviewee and conversations between us. The length of each interview varied from 20 minutes to 100 minutes, but was normally no less than 40 minutes.

### ***Other forms of interviews***

Besides one-to-one semi-structured interviews, there were a few group interviews. For example, interviews were conducted with a group of village women who were keen on gathering together to chat in the afternoon. A whole family joining in the conversation was also a normal situation. In these circumstances, the interviews did not follow a clear linear narrative but were fragmented and disorganised. I have followed the principle that when participants were willing to talk, I would listen patiently rather than interrupt them, although some direction was necessary. In this particular form of interview, there were numerous informal conversations between myself and participants, between participant and participant. Only some of these

were marked down in the field notes with formal interviews. However, these fragmented chats constructed the atmosphere of the interview and during which I got to know a lot of background information about the interviewee leading to a deeper understanding of each isolated or related interview.

Similarly, during participant observation, beside formal interviews, a lot of informal conversations took place between me and villagers. These conversations happened throughout everyday life. Although they may not appear as formal interviews they constructed the most basic elements of the thesis, an overall understanding of these villages and villager's life. While the formal interviews turned into the quote, the evidence and reference in this thesis, the looser information and materials from daily life had formed my own perceptions and reading of the countryside that studied in this research.

#### **4.3.4 Data Analysis and Interpretation**

Other than data collection, the interpretation of data forms the main body of a study, which is especially significant in qualitative research. The interpretation of qualitative data can be understood as an attempt to tell a story about the interviews, observations, or other data that have been collected (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005). It not only makes sense of vague numbers and discourses, but also allows theories to develop around the data collected.

The various kinds of data gathered from this research range from archives, current news, to fieldwork findings, which include fieldnotes, interview notes, interview recordings and transcription, photographs, local documents and materials. However, the process of data analysis and writing them into research findings is hard and complex work. Crang & Cook (2011:132-133) describe the situation thus:

“the ‘analysis’ of this informally constructed ‘data’ is likely to be via an informal process of piecing things together, figuring things out, gaining focus and direction as the research unfolds... All being well, you will be faced with a mass of what you think is pretty good stuff”.

And indeed it was like that. The interpreting of data runs through the whole research process, beginning as soon as the data is collected — for example, after an interview has been done, or a walk has been carried out in the village. Interpreting is always

on going and these initial interpretations have influence in shaping the following research by realising new possibilities, phenomena, and new questions. For example, after one interview with a teacher from a rural school, children's education became one of my foci, opening up something that I had not thought about thoroughly before, namely the relationship between children's education and globalisation.

Once the fieldwork had ended, recordings were transcribed. Most of the interviews were recorded although some of them were spontaneous so were not suitable to record, or the interviewee refused to be recorded. In those circumstances, every interview had a written record of both the conversation and the observations that went with the conversations. This is an intensive data analysis process, using the procedures listed below:

- 1) The first time, all the data was read through and listened to in Chinese without attempting to interpret or analyse them, only marking down things that were especially interesting or significant and listing them on paper.
- 2) The second time, notes were made while reading, and different data relating to different topics were categorised. Key sentences and passages and photos were underlined and sorted into a separate document, coded with a number and interviewee's name in preparation for the third review.
- 3) At this stage, a start was made to organise writing themes using bullet points and making references to the original data.

All the data collected for analysis is in Chinese. Recordings have been transcribed into Chinese text, and important information selected and translated into English. The same method has been applied to fieldnotes, where the majority have been left in Chinese and selected quotes translated into English. Moreover, photographs have occasionally been taken to mark things that I considered to be meaningful, and these have been selected to present specific viewpoints.

As other researchers conducting qualitative research in Chinese and interpreting them in English have noted, "language conveys culture, ways of thinking, beliefs, and outlook of the world and education level of a particular person" (Wei, 2011). The materials in Chinese carry not only the meaning of certain sentences, but also the context beyond conversations. Thus, as an interpreter, the task of researcher should

not be simply converting words from Chinese to English, but also revealing the cultural context behind the words, presenting the authentic meanings of conversations.

To that end, recorded conversations in this thesis have been transcribed under the principle of not modifying the interviewee's words so as to keep their authenticity. However, in translation, words and sentences are sometimes edited reasonably to make the expression in English closer to the original meaning of the interviewee in Chinese. Moreover, I have worked to stay 'value-free' and non-judgmental.

At the point of review in the research, discourse analysis was employed as one of the strategies of interpretation. According to Phillips et al (2002: 1), discourse is a "particular way of talking and understanding the world (or an aspect of the world)". The way in which the discourse (the text, conversation, dialogue) is analysed can vary. The social sciences, however, focus on how discourses are formed and shaped; what power structures lie within and beyond the discourses that give rise to the meaning they produce (Hewitt, 2009). Critical discourse analysis in particular primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context (Van Dijk, 2001).

For this study, discourse analysis has been used to examine three agendas. First is the discourse of the official rhetoric of rural governance, including the central and local levels. From analysing the representation of globalisation in the official rhetoric, the social power relations and intentions behind the reconstruction of rurality may be revealed. The second discourse is the representation of the rural and of globalisation in popular culture, which includes but is not limited to articles, images, comments and discussions in newspapers, magazines and on social media or any other possible formats. The aim is to identify the assigned position of Chinese rurality in the nation's conception of its globalising process. The final area of focus is on rural actors' discourse from everyday life. Discourse analysis can provide a snapshot of contemporary rural China, and through the lens of public discourse we can catch a glimpse of the perceptions and imaginations of Chinese rurality as constructed from different perspectives, including that of rural people themselves.

However, as stated in Section 4.2 dealing with the research approach, both representation theory and more-than-representation theory have been employed in this study. So instead of analysing the discourse alone, attempt has been made to access, understand and communicate the ways in which people perform and embody the landscapes that surround them. In regard to data interpretation, fieldnotes and all other visual data have been seriously taken into account, enabling a full picture of rural life to be constructed.

Finally, it is worth noting that the discourse that I chose through which to analyse and interpret data, and the way I have interpreted it, were inevitably affected by my own perspective and positionality, which I discuss in more depth in the following section.

#### **4.4 Positionality and Ethics**

In this section, I discuss my positionality and the ethical concerns from a few perspectives. I begin by briefly reviewing the classic literature that discusses positionality and situated knowledge; then I will turn to the start of my research interest: how my biography shaped my research interest and this thesis. In Section 4.4.2, the different identities I hold are considered in turn, and the relevant ethical concerns are addressed as well. In Section 4.4.3, the focus is shifted to another key debate concerning the positionality of the ethnographic researcher — as an outsider to or insider of the community we study.

Research represents a shared space, shaped by both researcher and participants (England, 1994). As such, the identities of both researcher and participants have the potential to impact the research process (Bourke, 2014). In this process, positionality comes into play, where personal values, views and location in time and space influence how one understands the world. More specifically, research as the production of knowledge, is always and inevitably shaped by the actions and values of the researcher. Therefore, it is essential to consider one's own positions before engaging in research, especially qualitative research (Sanchez, 2010). Positionality is often formed, constructed, and influenced by various identities, including gender, race, class and other aspects. "Identities come into play via our perceptions, not only of others, but of the ways in which we expect others will perceive us." (Bourke, 2014:

1) In terms of this study, recognising that the researcher, as well as the participants, have multiple overlapping identities and reflecting on these, has significantly shaped the research processes (See Kezar, 2002: 96, cited in Bourke, 2014). Haraway (1988) points out that all forms of knowledge reflect the particular conditions in which they are produced, and at some level reflect the social identities and social locations of knowledge producers, what she terms as 'situated knowledge'. Such critiques of knowledge production have influenced feminist geographic research in particular, but also are evident in debates about research methods and power relations in many other social science disciplines.

#### **4.4.1 Where my research interest started: a short biography**

Since my research is mainly conducted in and heavily linked with Chinese rural areas, it has been essential to start with rethinking the construction of my own understanding and knowledge about the rural. As a young researcher, most of my life has been spent in Guangzhou — one of the largest and most open cities in China — where I grew up and received my education. As I briefly mentioned in the Introduction, my grandparents, however, are from a rural area on the coast where they have lived and cultivated the land for more than fifty years. Each year, throughout my childhood, for one month during the summer holidays, I stayed with them in 'our' village. Thus, I have some, albeit limited, experience of rural areas and rural communities from two main sources: these childhood vacations and as a researcher who has conducted sociological research there.

As a child who spent vacations there with my grandparents, I have over the years experienced the changes— which I would like to describe as a feeling of dying away — in my own village. This can be illustrated in two ways. I made friends in the village when I was a child; we played together during each summer, running across the whole village, playing 'hide and seek' behind the old houses and climbing trees. At that time all of those friends lived in the village with their parents and/or grandparents. With the passing of time when I arrived for every vacation as I grew older, I found fewer of my friends staying there. Some of them had moved out to nearby towns and cities for education or dropped school for work. One of the most shocking moments came when I was 14, had just finished middle school and was about to enter high school, and one of my best friends in the village, a girl who was

just two years older than me, got married and moved to her husband's hometown. It was at that time I clearly felt the divergence between our lives. At this young stage of life, as a non-official village member, I could feel that the village was losing its energy with all the young people leaving and no new blood coming in. Similarly, at the time when I was playing with my friends as a child, my grandparents also had friends of their own generation. Sadly, they were also now leaving — for those who were 'lucky', their children picked them up and moved to town to live together; for those 'unlucky' ones, they stayed in their dark and shabby houses watching their life pass by, and died alone. This was not as significant to me as to my grandparents, but the pain of losing their friends has been shared in our family too.

Beside losing friends, the whole environment of the village evoked a sense of loss in me. When more people used to live in it, this little village was chaotic but lively. You would see chickens running all around, children running everywhere, hear grandparents yelling at the children to be careful and not go to certain dangerous places. But all these scenes are vanishing. The village becomes quieter and quieter. One year when I was at high school, a house burnt down and right up to last year when I visited, it has remained black and burnt-out because nobody has cared enough to rebuild or remove it.

My village is just a small and normal village in Guangdong. It is nothing special, in common with many other ordinary villages along the south east coast. As a normal girl rather than a researcher, I already sensed the dying of my village. The sadness I felt at this led me to think about why this had happened.

When I was doing my undergraduate degree, with a minor in sociology, I had a chance to participate in a large-scale social survey, collecting information about the Chinese labour force to build a database of it. From this opportunity, I got to know and understand rural areas from a different angle, that of a researcher. I started to notice the economic activities and livelihoods of villagers, the layout of villages, the family structure and social relations, the farming situation and many other aspects of life in different villages. By then the interest in these topics had grown, partly because they were the 'data' that I needed to collect to fill in the forms, and partly because it started to make sense of and chime with what I was both reading in books about and actually experiencing in the rural. Rather than just leave this as a feeling, I

started to think about it and analyse it. It was at this point that my general research interest formed — why did these villages look so different, why were some of them livelier than others, and what had caused these differences.

These two very different factors, my childhood holidays and my previous research experiences, have constructed my own perceptions and knowledge of Guangdong rural areas before I went into the field to start this project. England (1994) concludes that the biography of the researcher directly affects fieldwork in two ways: firstly, different personal characteristics allow for certain insights, and secondly, it affects it in terms of the potential problems raised by the nature of the power relations within the research encounter. My situation is that I am a young woman from a big city, who has received sociological training at one of the best universities in China and has gone on to post-graduate studies in human geography at a world-leading Western university. The following discussion will unpack these different identities and suggest how they might influence this research.

#### **4.4.2 Different identities of the researcher**

##### ***Researcher as a woman***

For most of the eight-month fieldwork period, I conducted research independently in the villages. Stacey (1988:21) argues that ethnography is particularly appropriate to feminist research, to feminist research, which is often contextual and interpersonal, as it is attentive to everyday reality and human agency. Although I do not claim this research as a feminist research, nor have I linked it with feminist theory, it has naturally situated itself in the concrete realm of women's everyday lives, caring about the "actual experience and language of women".

As a woman, I certainly benefited from appearing 'harmless', which made it much easier to be invited into the villagers' houses and for them to let their defences down. Moreover, it made it easier and more natural to approach and talk to women in the villages, who were more relaxed when there were only women present. Most of the daytime casual talks in the villages happened between myself and the women who stayed at home to care for children or to carry out household duties. Some of these conversations developed into an interview while some just stayed as chats.

Therefore, inevitably, I experienced the village more from the women's perspective.

On the other hand, as a woman I might not have picked up on some of the tacit understandings between the men, and it also limited me from staying late in villages, or being involved in some all-male activities, such as the gambling group beside the village shop. Thus, during my fieldwork, the daily scenes that involved women were more likely to be those observed, while men were less likely to be present in daily life and casual talks (especially in Peanut Village and Tower Village). Men were mainly seen within one-to-one interviews and they were also less relaxed than the women in these interview situations. Naturally and consequently, the observations and presentations of rural everyday life were slanted towards the everyday life of women.

From a very different angle, being a woman in a rural area can bring a sense of insecurity. For example, it was not recommended (by a family member, government officer and also some villagers) for a young woman to walk alone at night in between natural villages, as there was not any lighting alongside the small roads. This was especially so in Peanut Village, which did not have any streetlight within but only weak light from the homes. In this situation, seeing a person on the road is as alarming as not seeing anyone. In contrast, Tower Village made me feel safer since it is close to the tourist resort, where a bright leisure square has been built and there was effective street lighting. In this scenario, holding the identity of young girl who lacks strength to protect herself physically did not even cross my mind. These factors combined to construct part of my own research experience of how the rural is experienced in different ways.

### ***Researcher as a young student***

Age can bring difference to the encounter with an interviewee, and it often stands alongside the identity of researcher or student. The identity as a researcher was more blurred in Peanut Village, as most people there did not have a clear understanding of what research is about, or who a researcher is.<sup>37</sup> In these cases, I often replaced 'researcher' with 'university student', which they were more familiar with, and made it relatively easy to accept me as one of the village residents.

Ethics of consent was involved in these situations. In general, following the ASA ethical guide (2011), before conducting one-to-one interviews, I provided adequate

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<sup>37</sup> This research has been approved by the ethics committee of the Geography Department, University of Exeter, and the ethics application has been included as Appendix 1 in the thesis.

information to the participants in a Consent Statement. This statement included my identity, the research purposes and methods, the use of data, the potential benefits of the study, the possible harm or discomfort that might affect the participants' confidentiality and the degree of anonymity. The time involved and potential anticipated consequences were fully explained. However, in the actual fieldwork, especially in Peanut Village, some older villagers were unable to read the text version of the consent statement. In that circumstance, the consent statement was explained orally using plain language, after which oral consent was obtained. The consent for recording the conversation was also asked for and the interviewee had the right to refuse the use of recording devices.

Because this fieldwork sometimes required assistance from local officials in providing information about the village or introducing the researcher to the villagers, there was some reluctance around giving consent in the presence of any official. Consent was not negotiated in such circumstances so as not to jeopardise the person's willingness to participate in the research. However, reassurance and clarification of consent was given after the conversation.

There was difference in terms of participants' attitude to the identity of researcher as opposed to student. For example, the advantages in being a 'student' worked mainly in two ways: many elderly people in the village considered me to be the same generation as their grandchildren, which brought them a sense of intimacy so that they were willing to share experiences with me; being young and a student also reduced their vigilance, since they were more relaxed regarding chatting and sharing information.

The consequence was that ordinary villagers might have tended not to treat my work very seriously, which, to some extent, perfectly satisfied my needs because I wanted to observe and ask about their everyday lives within a relaxed environment.

However, the student and young woman identity might have held them back from telling me 'adult-life struggles'. This problem is noted with respect to some of the questions such as "is there an unpleasant experience of city that you want to share?" or those that concerned family relationship issues. The first time I realised this problem was after I interviewed a woman who had returned to the village by herself while her husband stayed in the city. I asked her if she missed her husband and had

she ever thought about moving to the city to be with him again; she simply said no. After that, a member of the village committee, who worked at the village women's union, told me that the husband of the woman I interviewed had cheated on her in the city, she had found out but had not got enough courage to divorce. In addition, she thought that the modern city was a lure that had seduced her husband and destroyed their relationship. Since then I have been careful to pay attention to the unsaid words behind the conversation. Though the age difference was not the only reason that prevented interviewees from sharing, some of them clearly did not feel comfortable sharing complex life situations with someone whom they considered 'young and inexperienced'.

By contrast in Alibaba Village, people were more alert to the identity of 'researcher'. As most of them have known about 'doing research', 'writing reports/news', the concern of exposing personal information was more common. In these more economically developed villages, nearly everybody is used to and familiar with the use of social media, and so interviewees were more likely to seek confirmation from me that their information would not be in any reports or on news media. Therefore, Alibaba Villagers were keener to share only their working life with me, as their sense of boundary was stronger. And once the identity of researcher had been established before them, it was hard to erase such a sense of boundary between us.

### ***Researcher as an urban, middle class resident***

The urban background, educational background, economic status, as well as the language of a researcher also created potential problems regarding the power relations between the interviewer and interviewees. For instance, I had a different style of dress and ways of speaking which were clearly distinct from the rural residents that I encountered. It was hard to become a village member: in a villager's words, "even [though] you dress like us, you do not look like one of us, you do not look like a peasant".

Similarly, in seeking to establish mutual trust, I practised speaking local dialects and tried hard to understand local traditions, but local people can easily tell that "you are not a local here". Within the three villages where I worked, most of the participants were rural people who have relatively different life experiences and conceptions of modernity. They have a limited educational background, limited prosperity, and were

more conservative. Some of them have experienced urban areas as immigrants and therefore hold a different perspective on the urban. Taken together, these formed a cultural distance between myself and the villagers (though the disparity within the village population was distinct as well). Most of the participants in this research maintained a very modest attitude towards me as they thought “as a resident of city you know more than us”.

In the eyes of many rural people, they are inferior to ‘urbanites’ due to the extremely unbalanced development between the Chinese urban and rural, from economic status to social capital. They felt ashamed because “I didn’t receive much education”, “I don’t know about this” or “we are poor”. Similar to my experience, Steinmuller (2011) suggests that rural populations are well aware of the representations of them and the stereotypical meanings that have been attached to their identity as rural dwellers. Moreover, in daily life they are actively adapting these stereotypes to construct their own understandings about themselves. The power relations between myself and most of the participants were uneven from the outset due to such opinions, although age, gender, and a friendly and open attitude of equality can help in levelling these power relations to some extent. Inevitably, personal perspectives will exist, and along with the self-interpretation data collection methods, they are factors that might lead to a limited investigation and findings.

### ***Relationship with state and local government***

As mentioned earlier, this study has received some assistance from local government, mostly when entering the field. More help was received in Peanut Village, mainly in the form of county-level government staff informing the village committee about the visit; providing a period of accommodation and catering; allowing me to work at the government poverty alleviation office and to follow government officers as they carried out their tasks for a few days; providing resident population and agricultural statistics, and government personnel to be interviewed, and so on. The government assistance that I received in Tower Village and Alibaba Village was mainly in the form of relevant information provided by government officials and the acceptance of interview requests. On my part, I informed the town government of my presence and leaving at the beginning and end of the investigation into the village.

However, in this process, I did not receive any restriction from the state, nor the government higher than town government level. My personal independent research activity was not restricted, including interviewing people freely, participation in village life, watching village committee elections, taking pictures and recording all the above. I am aware that there were certain occasions that related to rural land disputes that the government officers refused to let me know about or be present at. Conversely, if this had not been revealed by one of the government officers, I would not have known about the situation at all. During my fieldwork period in Peanut Village, one of the town government officers expressed his concern about me writing 'sensitive' words about the town government. However, this research is not politically orientated, and my writing has not been affected nor altered by any government instruction or restriction.

#### **4.4.3 Insider or Outsider? Both or Neither?**

To return to the issue of positionality, taking all the disparities and similarities together, the researcher, especially the qualitative researcher, always needs to consider their position in the research or within their research domain. 'Insider' and 'outsider' is a common dichotomy that many researchers have used to clarify their role in the research (Bonner & Tolhurst, 2002). Breen (2007) points out that generally 'insider-researcher' refers to those who chose to study a group to which they belong, while 'outsider-researchers' do not belong to the group under study. Bonner and Tolhurst (2002) indicate that it is increasingly common for the researcher to become an insider of the social group that they study, which brings three key advantages: having a greater understanding of the group culture; having natural social interactions with group members without altering it; and having an established intimacy between the researcher and participants. In light of this, every researcher wants to, or at least constantly attempts to be an insider; to make the effort to minimise the power differential between themselves and participants in their research (Bonner and Tolhurst, 2002; Delyser, 2001). Yet it has also been argued that an insider role faces disadvantages and ethical dilemmas. For example, the loss of objectivity/awareness because of familiarity, and the difficulties of balancing an insider role with the role of researcher (Delyser, 2001; Gerrish, 1997).

However, being a natural 'insider' or native to the research subjects may not always be possible. Coming as an outsider, although inevitably losing some advantages that an insider would have, has its own advantages as well. Compared to the insider, an outsider could find everything new and interesting in an unfamiliar environment, bringing a careful sensitivity to noticing everyday routine/details. Open objectiveness can be held as another advantage of the outsider as well (Bonner and Tolhurst, 2002). Bonner and Tolhurst also mention that as an outsider, the researcher is able to stay as an impartial observer, which means that they could benefit from the fact that they are not involved in the daily life of the participants' community. In this circumstance, possible impacts and disputes of interest can be prevented, thus participants are willing to share experiences with them.

Breen (2007) argues that the insider/outsider dichotomy is too simplistic and does not adequately capture her role in her research. To seek a balance, she considers herself to be neither an insider nor outsider. Moreover, insider and outsider positions describe the position of researcher in relation to their participants. However, position also exists in the comparison with a bigger sphere. For example, a researcher who was born and grew up in town, who then tries to research a village nearby. Certainly, they are not a native villager of the community that they are studying, but compared to many other scholars from other cities, or other countries, they are an insider in terms of their research, familiar with and sharing the same culture as their research domain. Furthermore, for much participatory and immersive research, the role of outsider can be gradually transferred to that of an insider by the length of time of time that the researcher spends on the field.

Regarding my research and the research field, and adopting Breen's (2007) idea, I am not completely an insider nor completely an outsider. I am somewhere in between. For example, to the villagers whom I met and talked to, I am an outsider to their village, but to the international geographical research community, I am an insider, a Chinese, a Cantonese, who speaks the same languages and who has relatively local rural life experiences, and who is trying to deliver first-hand observations of Chinese rural areas to those who are definitely outsiders. Moreover, when I participated in some activities in the villages — for example working at a village leisure farm in Tower Village growing and preparing food, showing tourists around and working as a receptionist — I felt that I had become an

insider, who shared the same identity and code of behaviour. Similarly, by the time of the seventh week of my stay in Peanut Village, some of the villagers who were on familiar terms with me became very proud of my local dialect: they commented that now I sounded like a true YangJiang person. In certain circumstances, the reasons why the villagers acted in particular ways became much more logical and understandable when I considered myself as one of them, even though I had not thought so before as a researcher from the outside world.

To be honest, such reflection of my researcher's role as an insider or outsider came much later when I had finished my fieldwork. I did not carry this mindset while I was in the field but just "went with the flow" (Umans & Arce, 2014: 338). However, if I look back, I can see how some strategies were employed to minimise the effect of being an insider or an outsider. For example, as mentioned above, practising speaking the local dialect, working in the village, or having a gatekeeper to introduce me can be seen as the attempts that I made to reduce the identity of stranger.

During my fieldwork period, I also tried to avoid some personal involvements as an insider. This happened after some interviews with a few households that had low economic status. Once a trusted relationship had been built during the interview, and they knew I would stay in the village for a few weeks more, they tried to seek 'help' from me, and they believed that if I wanted to, I could help them in many ways: to talk to the town government officers, or bring attention to them by reporting their story in the press. Although my role as a researcher was made very clear at the beginning of an interview, some of the participants expected me to change my mind after knowing more about them. There was not any specific strategy to deal with such situation other than carefully reaffirming my role as a researcher, as I could not get involved in the conflicts between two parties in the villages and I did not have any ability to intervene in the livelihood of a household. In other aspects of life, if they asked, I did help them as much as I could, such as recommending or buying books for children, buying medicines for elderly folk and answering what they wanted to know, like ordinary friends.

Finally, we turn to the issue of the responsibility and self-recognition of the researcher. This also relates to a common issue in Chinese social science: many concepts, paradigms and knowledge originally produced by Western scholars for

explaining and addressing Western phenomena, have been applied to explain what has happened in China. The prevailing theories of globalisation and neoliberalisation (see also Power, 2003; Harvey, 2006), as well as the idea of 'development' (Rigg, 2007), have been taken for granted within studies of urbanisation in China. However, the situated knowledge of Westerners inevitably affects these assumptions and discourses and they may not be suitable for describing or analysing the reality in China. Concerning this, the Chinese sociologist, He Xuefeng (2003) calls for more Chinese contextually-based empirical research that might inform theoretical discussions and debates.

As for myself and this research, I have received a sociological education based on Western sociology theories; I am studying human geography in a Western higher education setting; and am experiencing the 'real Western countryside' in Britain. As the urbanisation processes in China came much later than in the Western world, the study of these processes has lagged behind as well. When a Chinese rural researcher tries to understand rural changes under the sweep of globalisation, the literature they are going to seek will probably have been published in the 1990s in the United Kingdom. They (me in this case) will instantly feel that the descriptions of Western countryside in late 90s are appropriate to the China of today. Thus, when it comes to my research, it is inevitably influenced or informed by Western rural restructuring studies.

For instance, during the 1990s, Marsden et al. (1993) proposed three broad questions that rural researchers at that time needed to be concerned with and these, I think, are still very relevant and worth considering in terms of the current Chinese context (Marsden et al. 1993:4): 1) How are international processes of economic and social restructuring being expressed and mediated within one nation state? 2) How is the state 'regulating' rural change and to what extent does the late twentieth century represent a break with the past? 3) How can conceptual advances in mainstream social theory be applied to the rural arena and, conversely, how can locally-based social action be effectively incorporated into our understanding of uneven development? These three ideas have pointed out some directions for my study of rural restructuring in China. Yet, the international processes that the UK was facing in the late twentieth century are clearly unlike what was happening in the global south. Moreover, the 'state' Marsden et al. referred to is very different from the 'state' that

we are talking about in China. The negotiation of concepts, implications, context and situated experiences not only forms the structuring process of this case-based study, but also reflects back to the researcher's positionality. How, then, to bridge the gap between theories and practical experience, is one of the central aims of this study.

## **4.5 Conclusion**

This chapter explains in detail the methodology that I used and other related concerns that were raised during the research process. Through the discussion of methodology, we can consider not only how the previously reviewed literature and theoretical framework are embodied in the actual context, but such discussion also makes a strong case for the validity and authenticity of the following empirical chapters.

## Chapter 5 Peanut Village: Superficial globalised

### 5.1 Chapter Summary

This chapter tells the story of Peanut Village, the first village that I started my fieldwork in 2017. Peanut Village is an ordinary traditional agricultural-based village, that has been heavily influenced by the globalisation and urbanisation that occurred in the coastal area, as most of the villagers have gone out for work. The village is hollowed-out, leaving fewer than 200 people that living in a village out of a registered population of around 2000.

In this chapter, Section 5.2 provides a sketch of Peanut Village as a starting point, so my readers know what it 'looks like'. This includes my first impressions of the village, how I began my fieldwork here, how I got to know people, and then a more formal introduction to Peanut Village.

In Section 5.3, I illustrate the everyday consumption in Peanut Village through two sub-case, both from individual perspective: Erpo's story – a personal ethnography of an old woman; and Fangjie's family life.

Following the descriptions in the section above, Section 5.4 discusses the shopping, commodities and brands in village and town. The observation angle has been shifted from individuals to a bigger level: village and town, which is the extended scope of villagers' consuming behaviours.

Section 5.5 deliberates the negotiation with modernity of Peanut Villagers, represented by the adaption, rejection and the indifference to some modern facilities. Negotiation also exists in the bargain of interest between villagers and the restructuring forces, represented by the local government, regarding the construction of high-speed train.

I draw a conclusion at the end of this chapter that if there is a form of globalisation that Peanut Village can fit itself in, that will be 'superficial globalisation'. I suggest that Peanut Village owns a lot of global elements throughout the village life – as what we can see on the surface – yet the core of village life, the lifestyles and values of villager remain untouched. The economic boundary of village has been opened with the emigration of villagers, while most of the other boundaries stayed unchanged.

As this is the first empirical chapter of three case study villages, it focuses more on the descriptive facts and ethnography of the village and villagers; while more comparison and analysis will be drawn in the story of the third village – Alibaba Village, and of course, the Conclusion Chapter.

## 5.2 Setting the scene

This was not the first time that I had visited Peanut Village.

In 2014, I was there to collect data for a national-scale survey. On one occasion, as I left a villager's house where I had just finished an interview, the old lady of the family came out to chase me. She handed me a bag of peanuts and asked me to take it. "We grew this ourselves", she said. I was surprised and rejected it at first (this is what Chinese people always do when they receive a gift, no matter whether you want it or not). The old lady insisted, "take it, it's not worth much money". In Peanut Village, every household likes to plant some peanuts beside their house or in their vegetable plot, not to sell but just for personal consumption and as gifts. I eventually took the peanuts and gave them to my grandma. She was glad and said that was the taste that she remembered from the old days.

This is a scene that stayed with me for a long time. It is nothing special, and it used to be a quite common scene when rural people were still renowned for their hospitality and simplicity. However, fewer and fewer villagers are doing this — I have not received any peanuts this year. It may just because that is not the season for peanuts; or they are not growing peanuts anymore, or, maybe, a type of tradition is fading.

The idea of choosing Peanut Village as one of my fieldwork sites also arose from the impression that I had before: this is a small, typical, ordinary village. It has the good characteristics that a village may have alongside some backward customs. It is located in Guangdong Province, which means that it has had some qualified exposure to globalisation. Yet it is distant from the Pearl River Delta, which means that relatively it is not a beneficiary from the economically advanced region. These features allow me to explore globalisation in a context that is very different from the cities and rural areas in developed countries, but also in a typical context, as it is

similar to many villages in Chinese rural areas: an agriculturally-based village without any special industry, and becoming hollowed-out.

To get to Peanut Village from Guangzhou, the capital city of Guangdong Province, one first needs to take a three-hour coach journey to the nearby town. There was no taxi operating in the town, so when I got off the coach, several modis (motorcycle-taxi) were waiting for business. They yelled at me, asking me where I wanted to go. I randomly picked one and told him that I was going to the town government – I soon know that it takes about five minutes. The modi driver asked me for 10 yuan. I only learnt later that the normal price is 5 yuan.

From the town centre to Peanut Village is either a ten-minute drive, a twenty-minute moped ride or a forty-minute walk. The newly-built asphalt domestic highway passes beside the town. The journey to Peanut Village travels a short part of this domestic highway, then turns onto a narrow cement road, which further leads to some small dirt roads between houses. There used to be a bus line operating twice a day. However due to the low usage of this line, it has been cancelled and now villagers need to find their own way. The most common form for villagers is a motorcycle or moped.

Driving to a village and riding a moped to village can be two very dissimilar experiences. When I was sitting in a car, the trip was short and I felt confined. I seemed distant from the surroundings. There were several times that I sat in the car, travelling with town government officers, heading to different villages from town to *xiang*<sup>38</sup>. Little difference can be sensed between the ways to every village. It was more like I was going to complete a task there, rather than going to a place. Riding a moped is something different. I was exposed to the wild lands. It was impossible to avoid dust that rises from the road. One can smell the difference when entering the countryside — it may be the smell of mud and soil, or the smell of poultry. You can view the landscape more closely, whether that is the neatly rice fields or the abandoned lands covered with weeds. Sometimes I saw cows and farmers, and I could just stop and say hello. If I waved my hand at them, sometimes they would

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<sup>38</sup> *Xiayang*: going to the countryside. A general phrase for city/town officers to go to villages to carry out multiple tasks and work, for example, to monitor the reconstruction of a 'high-standard field' or to check the progress of certain goals

smile at me. Therefore, apart from a few times at the beginning, I mostly travelled by means of a moped that I rented from a town government officer.

The research at Peanut Village actually started from the town. In China, if you want to do something in a local sphere, you need to inform their upper governing institution first. In this case, villages are administratively governed by town government. Before I went into Peanut Village, I first informed and visited the town government, which was located in the centre of the town. The government complex consists of two areas: a five-floor office building, and a living area, comprising a three-floor building of dormitories and the canteen. A young woman called *Cici* came out to meet me, brought me to a small dorm, and told me that I could live there during my research. The small dorm became the first spot that I settled in that area. Cici was my first gatekeeper in the research in Peanut Village and the town. She is young and fashion-conscious, smart, and seems to be very tactful, a familiar characteristic of township cadres. I asked her if I had disturbed her normal work, she laughed: "No, of course not, I would rather accompany you everywhere. I don't have much work to do normally". From our conversation later that I discovered that she was one of the members of the town women's union (*fulian*), and also the town director of Peanut Village (In Yangjia, each village is assigned a director, who is town government officer, to reinforce the communication between village and town). I was surprised when she told me that she had a 10-year-old son as she only looks in her late 20s.

On my first day there, Cici drove me to Peanut Village, planning to introduce me to the members of the village committee. Cici parked her car outside the village committee office. The office was locked and it seemed that nobody was there. She made a call. Soon a middle-aged woman came, riding her moped, asking us if we wanted to come in. Cici told me that she is *Fangjie* (Fang is her name; jie: sister. Chinese people often call women older than themselves jie, to show respect and a kind of intimacy). Fangjie is the women's director (*funvzhuren*) in this village. Compared to Cici, Fangjie is a typical rural woman, shy (at least in front of me) and rustic. Her skin tone is relatively dark, showing the trace of long-time exposure to the sun. She smiled at me and let me into the village committee office.

I was surprised by the office of the village committee. It is quite big and bright. In the middle of the office was a long, black working table, which was made of polished stone, equipped with five computers and a printer. A self-service machine stands by the door. The instructions beside it says that it can be used to pay various kind of fees (electricity, water, social security funds and so on). A notice board of village committee members was hung on the wall, where I saw Fangjie's photograph. The office was clean and empty, and did not look like anybody actually worked there. It was a strange sensation standing at the door of the office: looking inside I see a modern office with modern furniture and equipment which makes me feel that I am living in the 2010s; if I look outside, however, right opposite the office is an abandoned old house surrounded by enormous weeds, which make me feel as if I was in the last century.

The office tour was short. After that, Cici suggested that we go to Fangjie's house to *zuozuo* (local dialect for sit for a while; For most of the time in Peanut Village, going to somebody's house to *zuozuo* is the most convenient and acceptable social way to start the conversation and get to know villagers' lives). There I talked to Fangjie and her daughter-in-law. This turned into my first interview. Latter Fangjie became my host (though only for two weeks).

Peanut Village is an administrative village with a population of around 2000 and 500 households registered in the household registration system. However, based on the testimony of one of the village committee members, there are fewer than 200 people who actually live in the village. The village committee member added "those who have connections are all gone". The whole village consists of 10 natural villages, which means 10 dwelling clusters. There is only one small retail store, one small clinic and one elementary school beside the office of the village committee.

Most natural villages are dominated by one or two surnames. The oldest natural village was formed in late Ming Dynasty (around 1600 AD) and the newest one only formed in 1970s, whose residents immigrated from an area that was taken over by the government for use as a reservoir. It is widely considered that in South-eastern China, the influences of clans are more vital and far-reaching (Freedman, 1966). However, in general, Peanut Village is a varied-surname village (compare to a

single-surname village)<sup>39</sup> and there is not any significant clan force existing within the village. There are some major surnames which have more members than others, yet they are only connected as family member or relatives. And this kind of connection is weakening. The residents here are all villagers of Peanut Village on their ID, but this does not mean that they all have a deep sense of identity of here. For example, the residents of a newly forming cluster barely talk to villagers in other clusters. “Impolite and rude!” was a comment that one villager made about the groups of villagers who live in the newly forming cluster.

The clusters often have a similar layout. In the front of the cluster is a small pond, then there is usually a square, which villagers use for drying the grain during harvest and other collective activities. Behind the square are the main dwellings, often in rows. Between every cluster are fields and trees. Vegetable plots are usually set nearby the dwellings and they are the main dietary source for the villagers.

Peanut Village is beautiful and most of the time quiet. There were not many people, especially in the summer afternoons. If one walks from one natural village to another, one can feel the hot air steaming from the ground. Its beauty lies in the exuberant and vibrant trees and grass, which were wildly grown without any cutting or



*Figure 5 A corner in Peanut Village*

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<sup>39</sup> See also the Glossary. In a single-surname village all the male members of the village have the same surname, therefore most of the villagers are each other's relatives. In such a village, the influence of the clan is often more significant.

gardening, in the small ponds hiding in fields and houses (Figure 5). The cicadas and other insects sing. Dogs are everywhere, looking for strangers and barking at them. None of them has a dog leash. The village is their home territory and I am the visitor. During the first few weeks I was very scared of these dogs and they were very alert to me, often following me until villagers yelled at them and made them go away. A few weeks later, actually I did not realise when, I was able to pass through them without being extremely cautious, and they seemed to have lost interest in me. However, this beauty was full of contradictions when it came to the impact of humans. The village did not smell nice. As nobody cares about the trees, rubbish was thrown anywhere without caution. In some compact living areas, rubbish was just piled up into a small mountain (Figure 6). In a 40-degree summer heat, which is not abnormal at all in Guangdong, the mixed smell of steaming rubbish and poultry excrement is an unpleasant experience for the visitor not yet used to it. Local residents do not seem to care; only very few of them will choose to place the garbage in the designated place, where the city contractor will come and collect it once every two weeks.

It is common that a natural village divides into two parts: the new one and the old one. The old area is mainly occupied by old traditional houses, mostly vacant. Villagers might only visit them during the Spring Festival or Qingming Festival to carry out ancestor worship as these were the *zuwu*, where their ancestors used to live. Therefore, the alleys between these houses were often covered by flourishing weeds, which made it hard for people to get through. The new part of the village, in contrast, is formed by newly-built houses. Since the old houses often occupied the centre of a natural village, the newly-built houses are often built on the outskirts of the village. In other cases, the new part can be completely separate from the old site, usually besides it. However, the construction of new houses is not synchronous. It depends on when one household has earned enough money to build their new home. Building a new house here, as in many other rural areas, symbolises bringing glory on one's family and ancestors. Therefore, one may choose to live in the town or city after earning enough money, but once there is extra money, building a new house in



*Figure 6 The rubbish mountain in the residential area*

the village becomes a common choice. However, this kind of view is often more valid in the older generations and is less influential in younger generations.

To some outsiders, the old village in Peanut Village has a desolate beauty. The houses here are often crumbled and rotting, some even in ruins (Figure 7), but the way they are built is 'traditional', with the appearance that chimes with the imagination of the ancient village: houses built with antique appearance of brick and tile. However, as they have been built for decades, and decades ago China was still an undeveloped country, not least in the rural areas, the interior design of these houses lacks the impacts of modernity. For example, they are often dark inside and rely heavily on natural sunlight (see for example the house behind the elderly woman in Figure 9); even though they might have installed an electric system and lights, most of those who remain choose not to use them. Firewood stoves are commonly used in these old houses and the toilet is very crude. "Young people are not willing to live here, I don't", a young villager told me, when he saw me walking through this area. "We all moved out, only those elderly who do not have children may stay." I said, "but here is beautiful". "No no no", he laughed, "everybody wants to live in the new houses".



*Figure 7 Old area of village*

In the area where new houses had been built, the appearance of houses is more

similar and unified (Figure 8). Most of them are two or three floors, tile-faced and in a similar square shape. There are various reasons for this, but two factors stand out. Firstly, villagers need to get a homestead licence from the village committee before the construction of a new house. These homesteads are mostly of the same size and in a specified area. The square shape of the house is considered a most efficient way to utilise the space of the homestead. Secondly, such a style is widely accepted and considered by villagers to be good and modern. And these new houses are indeed usually equipped with contemporary furniture and facilities such as a washing machine, television, fridge and water heater. Compared to the old houses, undoubtedly these new houses are more comfortable and convenient for daily life.



*Figure 8 New area of village*

In light of this, new houses in the village become the most frequent choice for those who still live in the village. Villagers over 50 years old and children below 10 years old are the major residents of Peanut Village. As stated in the previous chapters, Peanut Village has become 'hollowed-out' because of the large outflow of workers. Similar to many hollowed-out villages, the agricultural work is carried out by the older generation. Some of these are those who can no longer stand the heavy physical work in the city (the type of labour peasant workers always have in the city) and come back to take care of the family fields. Some have never left for work but have

been a peasant all their lifetime. A common dual-income structure has been formed in the village, that is the 'half-agriculture half-work' structure, usually divided by generation or gender. In Peanut Village, the wage from outside work becomes the main income of a household. The agricultural income is very limited, sometimes barely enough to make ends meet beyond *zijiachi* (eat by their own family). Some have given up one cropping (in Guangdong Province, the normal pattern of farming is two crops per year) to reduce the investment and effort, but hardly any villager completely gives up their field — it would be considered as too wasteful.

Not all those who stay in the village (mostly the elderly and children) are left-behinds, sometimes there are those who have actively chosen to stay and prefer village life. As one old lady said to me “Even if you invite me to live in the city, I won’t go. I have lived here for my whole life. Everything is so expensive outside, and I know nobody there.” Compared to young people who desire the outside world, older people are more afraid of change. The high living expenses of the city are also a major concern for the elderly, who do not want to increase the pressure on their children who work there.

Unlike in some northern Chinese villages, where the Maoist era has come to be viewed as a ‘ideal world’ and become an important source of nostalgia (Liu, 2000), villagers in Peanut Village do not miss the collective life. “Now is much better than the past”, “thanks to Xiaoping (Deng)”, “now we have more freedom” are the common opinions among villagers. Though most of the villagers’ lives in Peanut Village are still far from rich or abundant, they still get on with this way of living.

As discussed in the methodology in Chapter 4, the main enquiry of this thesis is to explore how globalisation is embodied and metamorphosed in the daily lives of villagers. Therefore, this chapter now turns its focus to the villagers’ consumption, one of the most basic parts of everyday life, then extends to the commodities in the village and town.

### **5.3 Everyday Consumption**

How does the everyday life in such an ordinary village get caught up in the wave of wider modernisation and globalisation? If one starts to trace the track of globalisation

in the life of the village, one can see connections everywhere. For example, in the photo of 'rubbish mountain' above, the cans of Red Bull (a brand established in Thailand, and popular across Europe and America), and the bottles of Coke Cola were clearly visible. Conversely, many beverages produced in China, that can be bought from the village retail store, can also be found in the Asian supermarket in the UK. At this point, villagers in Peanut Village, and myself who studies in the UK, were consuming the same thing.

It is fascinating how these small fragments of everyday life show the connections between different corners of the world in various ways. Daily consumption is often a simple and visible aspect of the influences of globalisation on people's lives. During my fieldwork, I paid attention to things that seemed influenced by global elements – however small. In Peanut Village, these global elements were inevitably concentrated in daily consumption.

In this section I examine the everyday consumption of a number of people typical of Peanut Village's population. First, Erpo, an elderly woman who has lived in the old town for her entire life; second, Fangjie, a middle-aged woman and her family.

### ***Erpo's life***

The material products that villagers consumed were largely decided by their family structure. For example, households comprising only of left-behind elderly are the most frugal group, barely buying things from shops but living upon very limited daily necessities.

*Erpo* ('The second grandma', an old woman whose husband was the second of five children in his family) was a classic example of this group: she was 84 years old and her husband had passed away ten years before. Since then, she has lived alone.

As an old woman living on her own, Erpo's life is fairly simple. She gets up around six in the morning every day, not relying on any alarm clock but a bio-clock that formed many years ago. After simply freshening up, she visits her vegetable plots to care for her vegetables. After that, the day is often long with nothing to do but sit around. Therefore, going to the open space in front of the residential area in the village, or to the houses of other elderly folk to chat, has become Erpo's major method of spending her time. Erpo still owns a small piece of field, yet at her age,

she cannot undertake the physical work there. As with many other households whose working-age population have gone to cities and towns for work, Erpo (or more likely her daughter) hires small machines to help her sow and harvest. Even so, in recent years, they have only cultivated one season of crops.

Since Erpo cooks just for herself, her lunch and dinner are often very simple meals of plain porridge, with a few salted vegetables or a small plate of salted fish. She seldom buys fresh meat, especially since the *zhurouzai* (the pork seller who used to visit different villages with a tricycle to sell fresh meat) reduced his visits to Peanut Village. She seldom buys clothes either, instead, she waits for her daughter to buy her some, mostly before the Spring Festival (Chinese people like to wear new clothes during the Chinese New Year, symbolising the new beginning of the year).

Our conversation started at the doorway of her house; a very old house located in the old part of the village. Erpo was sitting on a traditional small bamboo chair in front of her house, and curious about the strange passer-by, which was me. I explained my research and said that I would like to know more about her life, then she invited me into her house. The old house was quite dark even in the early afternoon, and she obviously did not have any intention of turning on the light. I had to take a few seconds to get used to the dimness.



*Figure 9 An elderly stands in front of her house, in the old area of Peanut Village*

*Even during the daytime, the space insider is often dark as I describe above. The plastered banner on the left to the door is the traditional Spring Festival Couplet. People put them on before the Spring Festival, on which lucky words and sentence are written, representing the best wishes of the new year. The hanging over the doorway is also a traditional sticker, symbolising wishes to protect the house from evils.*

At the beginning, as with many other conversations with ordinary Peanut Villagers, Erpo stated that she had nothing special to tell. A frequently used word was *chamoduo* (local dialect meaning about the same); they believe that nearly every villager's life is similar. Those who are different do not belong to this 'chamoduo' group anymore and are thus not the object of their discussion anymore. Therefore, when I talked to old people in the village, their children often became the starting point to discovering their life, allowing them to come out of their shell. I asked about Erpo's children, and she told me about her daughters. She has two daughters, one married a *waishengren* (man from the other provinces; this form of address often implies the denial and disparagement towards people who are from the unknown world of the villagers), and never came back. The other daughter worked in the town, has her own family and lived with her parents-in-law. "She visits me once a month", Erpo said, "It is enough, she has her own family", "she brings me something every time".

Erpo pointed out a few things that her daughter had bought her: a carton of yogurt, some snacks such as cookies and candy, and an induction cooker, which still

remained in the box, seemingly unused. “My daughter asked me to stop using the traditional firewood stove, but I have no idea how this thing (the induction cooker) works”, Erpo explained, with a kind of pride at her daughter’s filial piety.



*Figure 10 A traditional firewood stove*

The brand of the yogurt is currently quite popular due to advertising. The selling point of this yogurt is ‘the Greek flavour’, and of course, it has a ‘Greek style’ name — Ambrosial. It is a sub-brand of a giant company in the Chinese dairy industry. To promote this new product, some teenage idols were employed as celebrity spokespersons, and this clearly gained some advertising effects, turning Ambrosial into a popular choice in the local supermarket. Erpo clearly was not the target group of this yogurt brand, yet she passively became the consumer of it, became one of those who enjoy a Greek-style yogurt in a remote Chinese village. The same is true of the cookies and snacks: most of them were produced domestically, yet often have a western-style brand name and fashionably designed packaging.

I used the bathroom of Erpo’s house in the middle of our interview. Similar to her house, the bathroom was dark and damp. It was a squat toilet and a shower head was hung on the wall, together forming a rather crude bathroom without any

furnishing. A few bottles of shampoo and shower gel were on the floor. The shampoo was a famous multinational brand — Rejoice from Proctor & Gamble, a company that was established in the USA in 1837, and now owns 65 sub-brands and 70 production bases all over the world. The brand Erpo used, unsurprisingly, was produced in China, even within Guangdong Province in Dongguan, where various contract factories and manufacturing bases are located.

The connection between Erpo's life and globalisation is minimal and mundane. Hardly anybody would connect these two 'irrelevant' things together. However, the transnational enterprise(s) and the strong capital behind them have won the domestic market of China, at least in some fields, sweeping out many small local brands as has happened elsewhere. Erpo's life was marked by globalisation without she herself knowing anything about it, as the products of globalisation profoundly permeate into people's everyday lives through their everyday consumption.

I saw Erpo a few times after our interview, every time I would happily say hello to her, "Hey, Erpo"! She then would answer me, and grab my hands to show her closeness. She was just an ordinary old woman in Peanut Village, a small footnote of a big era, yet her life offers us a glance into the globalised consumption in the everyday life of an elderly woman living alone. Other groups, such as families with kids and teenagers, were embed into the global network more deeply.

### ***Fangjie's family life***

Fangjie was the first person that I knew properly in Peanut Village. As mentioned earlier this chapter, Cici introduced me to her as a member of the village committee. Fangjie lived with her son, her son's wife and their little baby girl. Her daughter occasionally came back home and stayed for a while. Fangjie's husband was working at Zhongshan, another city in Guangdong, as a construction worker. Her son worked in a factory in Yangjiang. The relatively short distant allowed him to commute everyday by motorcycle. His wife gave birth to the baby last year and has not yet restarted working. Fangjie took care of the whole family, did most of the housework and cooked for them.

Fangjie is a very humble and friendly lady. The second time we met, hearing that I was looking for a place to stay in the village, she invited me to stay in her daughter's room in her house. Fangjie told me that her daughter had rented an apartment in the

town and therefore was not currently living at home and only came back once a month or less. I was curious about their family life, so her offer was really appealing to me. After she reassured me that her daughter said it would be fine, I moved into her house the second week after arriving at Yangjiang.

Fangjie's house was quite new, compared to Erpo's house and the other old houses in the village which were over 50-years old. Her house was built in 2005, and is a two-storey building with a courtyard. The ground floor comprised two bedrooms, a living room, a kitchen and a toilet. Fangjie's son and his wife and the baby lived in the biggest room, Fangjie's daughter lived in a smaller room, while Fangjie and her husband lived upstairs.

Her daughter's room was small, and a bit messy, showing the living traces of a young girl. There were a few posters of idols on the wall, but they were not new and some had started to fade away. Fangjie had packed her daughter's clothes into the wardrobe to give me some space. With my suitcase and notebook, I moved in and started my life in Peanut Village in March 2017.

Walking through the courtyard, where Fangjie parked her moped, we entered Fangjie's house. The living room was big but crowded, showing a common life situation of a Chinese family — a life that centres on the children. Most of the furniture had been pushed back against the wall, leaving an open space in the middle. A big soft mat was laid on it, providing a play area for the baby. Toys were scattered on the mat. Many parcels — some have been opened, some remained packed — were in the corner of the living room. Fangjie explained: "My daughter-in-law bought them online", "most of them are for the baby". I then turned to ask Lingling — the wife of Fangjie's son — "Do the carriers deliver them to the door?". "No, they send it to a station in the town, we drive to town to pick them up," Lingling answered. Then she asked me, "Do you know any daigou (people that buy and ship things for their clients who are not in that region) in Hongkong? I heard that the Hongkong milk powder is better." At first, I was actually going to answer because I did know someone. However, as I was searching my memory, she was staring at her phone, chatting with her friends via WeChat (a Chinese social media app) and did not seem as if she was expecting an answer. Then I realised that she was not really asking, but trying to say something to close the distance between us.

Clearly, more global elements can be found in this house, from the toys on the ground — I saw a toy of Doraemon, a model of Captain America, and a teddy bear — to the products of daily consumption: Abbott's formula milk powder was on the desk and a pack of diapers with an English name 'MamyPoko' on its package (I did not know this brand before, until I checked it online. It is a sub-brand produced by the Chinese branch of a Japanese Company); to the tee shirt that Lingling wore with its English slogan, 'born to die' on the chest; to the poster on the wall in Fangjie's daughter's room of the Korean idol group TVXQ. All these things that I saw from the beginning made me excited and curious to know how they had entered Fangjie's family life.

During the time I stayed in Fangjie's house, I had dinner with them every day. I mainly talked to Fangjie and Lingling during dinner time, while Fangjie's son, who had just finished work and come home for dinner, kept quiet most of the time. Sometimes after dinner, everybody sat in the living room to watch TV — most of the time they watched soap operas, sometimes variety shows. Lingling often watched programmes on her phone. They did not use a computer in the house: Lingling said, "we don't need it, we can do everything on our cell phone now".

Fangjie was a member of the village committee, but it was not a 'full-time' job. As far as I know, every member of the village committee in Peanut Village had their own means of livelihood. For example, Fangjie told me that the head of the village committee, the village secretary, owned a flower and tree nursery. Fangjie used to work at Zhongshan with her husband. A few years ago, due to Fangjie's backache, which was getting more and more serious, she moved back to the village to rest and take care of the family-contracted land. Soon her son got married and her daughter-in-law was pregnant. Fangjie was elected as the women's representative in the Peanut Village three years ago, due to her kindness to villagers and her knowledge about the outside world.

Now in China, every village committee needs to have a representative for women, to show respect for women's rights. However, when it becomes a fixed form, a formalism in grassroots practice, the practitioners stop reflecting on what having this representative should mean. "There is not much to do, if there are conflicts between husband and wife, sometimes they called me to intercede", Fangjie said. "Not much

salary — used to be none — now we have a few hundred per month.” She also told me that nobody wants to compete for the position of a village committee member in Peanut Village. Unlike some other rich villages, which have collective property or lands that are rented out and therefore dividends that can be gained, “Here has nothing (value resources); who wants to do this (work for village committee), hard work and no gain”. Another part of the responsibility of the village committee is to cooperate with the town or even higher-level government. “Sometimes we need to work with the town government, they require some data, we gather them; or they tell us there will be leaders coming to the village to assess the poverty alleviation work, we then will prepare and show them (the work that has been done).”

After we became more familiar with one another, chatting became more relaxed and open. Unlike some rural women that I have met before, who often complain about everything, such as their situation of poverty, the terrible neighbour, the government or fate, Fangjie did not do that. She seemed to be absorbing things in silence. When I asked how she feels about her life, she answered: “It is not bad”. When I asked whether she ever thinks of going back to city to live there, Fangjie kept silent for a few seconds. Then she said no. When I asked why, she replied: “We will never be proper city residents, we can’t have a house in the city. It’s better to be in the village.” But soon she added, “but the children should go to the city, to receive better education. They should go, I’d better stay.”

Fangjie’s daughter-in-law Lingling was the other family member I spent most time with, as at that time she did not have a job but stayed home as a housewife — most of the time she took care of her baby girl while Fangjie took responsibility for the housework. Lingling was from another province nearby Guangdong, and met her husband, Fangjie’s son, in the factory. They fell in love and soon got married. Lingling seemed to be very at ease with her life. She was still young (24 years old). She likes shopping online, watching videos online, playing online cell phone games. In this respect, she is no different from other modern urban young women. She was then a fan of a Chinese variety show called “Run! Brothers!”, which was reproduced from a very successful Korean variety show “Running Man”. I asked her if she knew that the show originated from Korea, she said she had heard about that, but had never watched the original version.

However, Lingling has had a totally different type of experience from most of the urban young girl: “I came out of my hometown after middle school, it was so poor, I could not see any hope.” She also talked about how remote her hometown was: “The town was 50 km away from our village. I had never been out of my village until I was 15. I don’t miss there at all. My family has 5 daughters and I was always wearing my older sisters’ clothes.” Lingling was satisfied with her life now, “I can’t say now my life is the best, but I can’t do better”. She said, “When my daughter grows up a bit, I will go back to work, definitely. If we (Lingling and her husband) both work, we can save some money and maybe move to town.”

The third woman family member that I met in Fangjie’s family, was completely different. Fangjie’s daughter Xiaojing came back home a few days after I moved in. In my imagination, she was an unadorned and modest girl. Therefore, when I met her for the first time, I was surprised. It was an afternoon, and she came back driving a car — a pretty car with a very ‘good’ license plate number with some number sixes and some number eights. In China, number six and number eight represent luck, therefore they are highly demanded, often you need to pay more to get them. Xiaojing wore a pretty dress, swinging into the living room. She was attractive and cool, displaying a kind of confidence that I hardly see in rural girls. She came back with a friend whom she said was “not yet my boyfriend”. Fangjie asked her not to speak stupidly nor to boast. Xiaojing laughed out loud, “It doesn’t matter, who cares!”. Since Fangjie had told her about me beforehand, she was not surprised that I was there, and also did not show any special interest in me. When I asked her if she worked in town at the moment and what was she had been doing recently, she answered half-heartedly, saying that she worked at a trading company. After she left, Fangjie told me that Xiaojing used to work at Dongguan as a real estate saleswoman, where she earned enough money to buy her car. After 2014, in the wake of a declining economy, Xiaojing lost her job. Fangjie asked her to come back home — she missed her so much and did not want her to float around anymore. Xiaojing then came back home and found a job in Yangjiang. She was only 25, but already had nine years of working experience. Xiaojing has been to Dongguan, Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Hongkong and other major cities, but eventually she chose to come back, “to be with my family”. I asked about the poster of TVXQ (a Korean Idol Group) in her room, Xiaojing laughed, “Oh I got that when I was at school”, “they

were very popular then, but I haven't been updating about their news for ages". Xiaojing was enjoying her single life. Unlike most of the rural girls, who marry early and have children early, she wanted to live a life constructed around herself rather than others. "That's why I lived in town", she told me 'secretly', "I need to escape from my mom's persuasion [of marriage], she thinks that I should get married as soon as possible." Lingling and Xiaojing, were two girls with abundant work and life experiences, who were now heading towards two very different lifestyles.

In the two weeks that I stayed in Fangjie's house, the only male member, Fangjie's son, remained silent and distant. He went to work at 7:30 every morning, and came home around 6.30 in the evening. Apart from dinner times, he stayed in his room, or played on his cell phone in the living room. Sometimes he talked to Lingling, but most of the time that was about the baby. He hardly talked about his work, his hobbies (if there were any), himself or anything else. I tried to initiate a conversation with him several times, but he was shy and only answered my questions. Compared to him, Fangjie and Lingling were chattier and more willing to share their opinions with me. Of course, the gender difference may have played a part in his closure to me, though Lingling said, "he is always like that (a silent man)". Or, as another famous statement puts it, it might be that "home is not the main stage for man".

Fangjie's family life is apparently more widely and deeply connected into global networks. The main reason is that the age and generation structure of the family is relatively young. Even the oldest generation — Fangjie — was just entering her 50s. Compared to Erpo and the elderly villagers, they are more energetic and curious to learn new things, which largely are the products of such a globalised era. In such a three-generation family, resources tend to be inclined towards the youngest generation. Within their financial ability, the parents always want to choose the best for their children — the best in many circumstances, is the foreign product or the imported product. These items of consumption range from milk powder to baby diapers, and further on might include an international school when the baby grows older (another story from another interviewee). In such an era, global cultures have entered people's lives without them noticing. Sometimes they glimmer behind the derivative products made domestically, as I will further describe in the following section. In Peanut Village, villagers, especially the younger generation, are consuming global products and their ramifications without knowing, realising or

tracing their origins. However, this is nothing really surprising, as we all live like that, no matter whether we live in cities or in the countryside.

#### **5.4 Shopping, Commodities and Brands in Village and Town**

As stated in Section 5.3, in their daily lives the villagers consumed a variety of 'global products' just as city residents would. Fangjie once asked me if I wanted to store some Coke at home, so that I could drink it easily. She assumed that I would like it; 'young people like to drink Coke' has become a kind of common impression. I was surprised by the successful promoting strategy of Coca Cola Enterprises, which has made drinking Coke a representation of youth and fashion, something that is even well perceived by villagers in rural China.

In this section, I discuss the two most typical contexts for the consumption behaviour of the villagers, that is two places where villagers buy and sell from village to town. Branding as a theme runs throughout these consumption scenarios.

##### ***Village***

Most of the villages have a small retail store, some have two. Peanut Village also has one. It is located beside the village committee building and the primary school of the village. The goods the store sells range from daily necessities, drinks, snacks, small toys, alcohol, and cigarettes to poker, dice and many small things that are hard to classify, serving the diverse needs of the different age groups in the village. The goods include both foreign brands and domestic brands, yet nearly all of them are produced within China. There are some 'fake' foreign products as well, but not all the victims of fakery are foreign brands — some famous domestic brands also have their imitators, with a slightly lower price and a very similar outlook. Men get their alcohol and cigarettes here, while children got their toys and snacks after school. The busiest period of the day for the small store is after school, normally around 4:30 in the afternoon. Parents gather at the front gate of the school, waiting to pick up their children (Figure 11). While waiting, the small store becomes a spot for parents to chat, buy snacks and cigarettes. When school is over, children also gather around the store, to discuss the new toys that the store stocks, or to spend (or rather beg their parents to spend) a few yuan to get some snacks. However, based on what the



*Figure 11 A grandpa picking up his grandchildren with motorcycle and an 'additional' chair*



*Figure 12 The village store after school and A Mah-jong Table*

store owner said, business was inevitably declining due to the more convenient transportation to town supermarkets and the gradual moving-out of residents.

The village store often serves for multiple purposes. Similar to the small church or the community centre in western countryside, the village store in Chinese rural often serves as a community gathering place. In general, the village store is a popular

choice for villagers to exchange information, or for some villagers to kill their long boring daytime. In the old days, when villagers hardly have telephone at home, not to mention cell phone, the village store has installed a public telephone. At then, people called the number of village store, then the owner or his family members would run to the house of called person to ask them to pick up the call at the store. Also, villagers came to the store to make calls to their relatives and friends outside. Of course, with the technology advance, this service is no longer needed. Yet, the village store remains a pioneer to adapt the new trends. For example, to response to the call of the central government to initiate the 'finance service goes to the countryside' campaign, a POS machine has been set up at the village store, which will be discussed in detail later on.

In this aspect, the village store is a great observational entry of how globalisation entered the everyday life in the Village. The daily consumption in Peanut Village is thick with the elements of globalisation, yet, the village store shows the unchanged spiritual core of village life. For example, to attract more people to come, a Mah-Jong table and a few chairs have been set up there by the store owner (Figure 12). Therefore, various kinds of (small amount) gambling are taken place there (Figure 13). Notably, most of the participants are male villagers, and they are often very active and talk loudly when they start to play. Moreover, these activities were often exclusive to stranger – every time when I passed by or want to have a closer look,



*Figure 13 Villagers playing Mah-Jong*

the participants would show alerted and unwelcomed attitude to me, which I would not normally come across in the village. Cici told me that this may be because gambling is illegal in China, and they were afraid that I, who do not seem like a part of them, would report them. Also, it was a strong male dominance activity, which was uncommon in nowadays Peanut Village, as most of men were out for work during daytime.

### *Town*

Since the transportation becomes more convenient (not for elderly though) and the extensively abundant choices of products in town, many villagers are more tended to get things from town now. 'Xu' is the outdoor market in the town, which opens on a regular basis. It used to provide a site for exchange, buy and sell between villages and town residents around. 'ChenXu' (Go to the Xu) used to be a very important activity in rural households: they sold their agricultural products here and bought those things that they did not produce. In the old days, one may sell the eggs that lay by the home-feed hen, or exchange them for clothes or tools. Villages used to get those 'big items' from the town Xu as well, for example, their cattle, carts, or the big wok. With time goes by, the function of exchange gradually disappears, but the buy and sell functions remain. The frequency of the opening of Xu stays at once 5 days – the days end with 3<sup>rd</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup>: the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, 13<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup>, 23<sup>rd</sup>, 28<sup>th</sup> every month are the Xu days in this town.

Xu, the rural market, used to be an important analysis unit in Chinese rural studies, as it connected the different villages and linked the producing activities with consuming activities. Similar to the village store, the Xu is the combination of modern trends and traditions. It is weakening, as nowadays, villagers no longer need to purchase things from Xu on these specific days, instead, they can get groceries from the supermarkets and the shops in Town, or even from the internet. Yet, Xu remains a symbol of rural life in many people's eyes, especially for older generations. Among the elderly in Peanut Village that I interviewed, a few of them said that they would visit the town on the Xu days, not to buy anything but to "hanghang" (walking or shopping without specific aims or targets).

As the Xu is opened regularly, most of the participants on the Xu day are mobile vendors from different villages, each occupying a small space and displaying their

goods on a fabric that lying on the ground (Figure 14). Of course, the Xu has



*Figure 14 A booth that sells stainless steel tableware at the Xu*

changed, the town has changed, the only thing that unchanged is changing. The Xu in the town governs Peanut Village remains open once 5 days, but in those days Xu is not opening, the site of Xu still serves as the business area of the town. The street surrounding the Xu has been built into permanent shops, where a series of small retail shops opened, ranging from drugstore, clothing shop, stationery store to restaurants. Again, we can see the trace of globalisation: for example, there is a fast-food restaurant named MFC, the local combination of McDonalds' and KFC (Figure 15), selling burgers as well as fried chicken. There were not any 'real ones' – maybe this town is not developed enough – in a long time, whether a place owns a KFC or McDonald's became a reference standard of whether this place is developed. Some clothing shops also have an English name, 'honey too', 'T.A style' or 'Angel'. During the time I visited, which not far from the Chinese New Year, the traditional Spring Festival Couplets beside the front gate was kept, together formed a very local appearance of these shop (Figure 16). Many clothes have English word or design on it, such as 'Star Wars' or 'lovely'. Similar, many canton or comic images that originated from western or Japan have been employed on the clothes, school bags,

or stationary, though all of these were produced domestically, and I assume that they have not obtained the copyright of using these images.



Figure 15 The MFC in town



Figure 16 A clothes shop with English Name and Spring Festival Couplets on two sides of the door, the text on the couplets says “Good business and Earn A lot of Money”

The commodities and branding that I described above, falls into two categories regarding how local consumption in China linked with globalisation. The first one, for example, global brand products have become a large constituent part of the groceries that villagers consumed. Yet, most of these products are produced within China, even within Guangdong Province, as massive producing bases of TNCs have established in Guangdong. Secondly, many pure domestic products have 'borrowed' or just say 'plagiarise' some global elements, and 'taken for their own use' (what I concluded as the 'Chinese Characteristic' in Chapter 3) without thinking much of copyright.

Since China has developed into a massive economy in such a short time, the establishment of proper market order has fallen behind, which led to a disorder market and the supervising difficulty. A huge volume of copy or plagiarism are happening, and no effective punishment is taken. Most of the villagers have encountered with the global culture via these 'variants', for example, before they have tried the real McDonalds', they know MFC first. Before they know the 'Maltesers' chocolate, they know the 'Mylikes' first, which is a Chinese brand, using an extremely similar packaging to Maltesers (Figure 17).





*Figure 17 The imitation version of Maltesers and the real one*

Compared to the village store, undoubtedly there are more global elements and global products in town, for example, the diapers that Lingling brought for her daughter. However, the difference between village store and town supermarket mainly exists in the quantity instead of quality. The goods in town are not much 'authentic-global' than what sells in the village store. What we can see from these brandings are just a 'globalised' surface with a Chinese core.

## **5.5 The negotiation with Modernities**

There are connections and encounters with globalisation in village life that go beyond commodities. In this section, I introduce another form of encounter in village life, namely the negotiation between villagers and modernities, from the use of modern electric appliances at home to the construction of a high-speed train station nearby. Unlike many 'anti-globalisation' or 'preserve local culture' campaigns that happen elsewhere, the villagers of Peanut Village have no idea of what modernity or globalisation is, therefore they do not have the concept of 'resistance' or 'preservation'. They take in some of the modern things, and reject others of them. However, as I mentioned above, the same group of frugal elderly folk may reject using a washing machine or fridge, but have no problem with wearing a T-shirt with an English slogan that their children have bought them. Most of these selections

would not be well-thought through, but out of pure preference. They are not resisting anything but simply making decisions based on their needs.

The most accepted modern equipment in Peanut Village is a variety of agricultural machinery. Yet, this does not mean that Peanut Village has achieved agriculture mechanisation or large-scale operation. The current land ownership system in China determines that large-scale farming is difficult to achieve at present. Instead, a few small rental companies or self-employed businessmen own some agricultural machines, and rent them to villagers during the sowing season and the harvest season. Most of the households chose to hire them to make up for the loss of labour within agriculture. All the rest of the regular work of farming is often carried out by the 'left-behind' people, mainly the elderly. Due to the use of machinery, the cost of human input in farming has greatly reduced, and basically every villager, even the normally frugal elderly, considers it a worthwhile input. Some households still keep their farm cattle, but compared with machine use, this is much rarer. However, there is some equipment that seems to be of little use here.

### **5.5.1 The useless advanced?**

On a normal day during my stay in Peanut Village, Cici told me that she would come to visit the village and asked if I would like to join her. I said of course, she picked me up and we went to the village store. It was nearly the end of the month and that was the first time that I noticed that the village store owned a POS machine.

Cici came here as part of her responsibility as the 'assigned director' of the Peanut Village. Now every village has a designated officer in the town government who needs to supervise the village's poverty alleviation and development. Cici and the village store owner seemed to have known each other for a long time. At the village store, after some casual chats, the store owner took out a POS machine from the draw at the back of the store. Cici then took out three different bank cards from her purse, started to swipe them in turn on the POS machine, then the store owner gave her cash.

"What are you doing and why are you doing this?" I asked in puzzlement. Cici then explained: "You know that now the central government is promoting a rural policy called 'developing finance service in rural areas'. To carry forward such a call from

the central government, the town government asked the bank to set up a POS machine in every village, normally in the village store, for residents to use bank cards there to buy things or withdraw money. Don't tell others that I tell you this,"<sup>40</sup> she added, "Nobody will actually use this service, most of the elderly villagers do not even have a bank card and don't bother to use it." Cici also told me that the county government has set up a certain goal for every village to achieve: one village has to achieve 10000 yuan turnover every month (approximately 1250 pounds, in a village with a population of 2000-3000 people). It seemed not too hard to meet — in a village of 2000 people' everybody only needs to spend 5 yuan using a bank card in the village store to meet this goal — yet, actual villagers barely use this service. Those who have bank cards and actually use them in daily life, do not need to withdraw money in the village store — they can withdraw money in town and buy things there, or in a further advancement, just use mobile phone payment with Alipay and WeChat Pay.<sup>41</sup> Conversely, those who actually spend their time in the village store, have no need to use this service. Therefore, the goal eventually has become the personal task for the assigned director of this village, that is, it is now Cici's routine to complete at Peanut Village every month.

This seemed a rather ridiculous situation to me. Certainly, promoting modern financial services within villages is a good thing. However, the mismatch between the vision of a 'beautiful and advanced countryside' and the actual need of villagers rendered these advanced services 'useless'.

The same thing has happened in other spheres of village life. The unused induction cooker in Erpo's house was a typical case. In Peanut Village, it is not at all rare for all the young adult villagers to go out for work. They earn money outside the village and bring it back, and the purchase of modern household appliances, such as the cooker, often symbolise the improving of family economic status. Nowadays, nearly every household in Peanut Village owns a refrigerator, television and washing machine.

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<sup>40</sup> This is a common scenario, namely that the practice and implementation of rural work runs counter to the expectations of the central government. In some contexts, the adjustment and adaptation of this strategy seems necessary, because the goal cannot be achieved without doing so. In this contradiction, government officials often have tacit agreement with one another, but have a contradictory attitude towards outsiders. On the one hand, they think I can understand their behaviour therefore they are willing to tell me, and on the other hand, they are afraid that I will make it public and make a fuss that will get them into trouble. Before I wrote this paragraph, I asked Cici if I could include this in my thesis, she said yes but asked me to anonymise all the information.

<sup>41</sup> Two very popular online banking and payment platforms, similar to PayPal and Apple Pay.

However, not every household uses it in daily life. Perhaps even more commonly, when the younger generation leaves home again, those who remain in the village often consider it unnecessary to use these appliances. For instance, in two-person families (mostly old couples), as they eat simply and are not eating meat every day, they often switch off the refrigerator as there is no need to use it, and most importantly, they think that it is wasting electricity. Similarly, using the washing machine is considered wasting water as well as electricity. Old women are so used to washing their clothes by hand, even when they are in their 80s. Compared to refrigerator and washing machine, television is the more widely-accepted household appliance in a family. In the long, tedious daytime in the village, television becomes the most common way to spend time; other ways are going to other villagers' houses or to the public space to 'zuozuo' (sit around), or to chat with others. Hardly anybody reads: I rarely see books other than textbooks in any family homes.

It surprised me when I knew that Peanut Village had a village library. The small library used to occupy a room on the second floor of the village committee building. However, in order to apply for the title of 'the beautiful countryside',<sup>42</sup> the village library was moved into a detached building within the backyard of the village committee. I did not know that it was a library because it was usually locked, and nobody went in or out. I found it by accident when I was wandering around the village committee one day waiting for Fangjie to finish her work. I asked Fangjie if I could go in to have a look, she said of course, and took the key out from the draw, and opened the door for me. Similar to the office of the village committee, the small library was newly-built, tidy, and covered with a thin layer of dust, showing its desertedness. One can also tell its newness from the smell of printing ink. The book selections in the library were very 'classic', from famous works of Western literature such as 'Pride and Prejudice', and 'La Dame aux camélias', to those from Chinese literature as well. Most of them were completely new, while only very few of them

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<sup>42</sup> The normal procedure of applying for 'the beautiful countryside' title consists of several steps. For example, a village needs to own a neat village courtyard (for drying paddy), a village library, and a public activity space, which can be a basketball court, the ancestral hall if the village owns one, and another proper project. The village committee needs to write a proposal, invite town government officers to come and inspect in order to apply for funding to construct such facilities. A certified or scheduled 'beautiful countryside' village can obtain a certain amount of subsidy to support further construction and maintenance within the village.

were old books that could be dated back to the last century, and had the obvious traces of the Communist, Mao, and red culture.

I wondered if there was anyone who actually read them, and Fangjie said no. I was not surprised, as the answer could be found in the well-preserved new keyboards and the dust. Fangjie said that they (the members of the village committee) were very willing to open the door for those who asked, but nobody showed any interest. The reason can be easily explained, as those who have the need or urge to read — mostly students and young people — can always access other reading resources, such as from the internet or from school. The old people who stayed in the village did not have such accesses. However, many of them were not capable of reading, or were not eager to read, leaving the village library for the inspection of the ‘upper leader’ only.

Moreover, there were computers in the village library (Figure 18), which were left unused. Some even with their plastic covering still on. The monitors were produced by Dell, a famous international brand that has been chosen as the monitor supplier to the government and public institutions.



*Figure 18 some unused computers in a village library. The monitors (Brand Dell) even still have their plastic encapsulation on.*

The impression of ‘useless advancements’ can also be found in the village primary school. To respond to the demand of central government to promote rural primary education, every village primary school was required to upgrade their education equipment, most commonly referring to the installation of a computer and projector in every classroom. The primary school in Peanut Village also finished its upgrade in 2016. However, when I visited there in early 2017, this equipment was basically left unused. A primary school teacher, a man in his 50s, commented that “I don’t know how to use them, I’ve never seen anyone use them since they were installed.” There was no training provided for using computers in education, and most of the village teachers are more than 40 years old and not so sensitive to these facilities. They are familiar with writing on the blackboard. Since there were only 37 students studying at the school, “there is no need to use a computer or projector, the blackboard is good enough,” commented a relatively young English teacher. When I interviewed her, she was using the computer in the teacher’s office, not for preparing coursework, but for shopping online.

The scene I witnessed here chimed with the description in an article published by the *Department of Education of Guangdong Province and The Southern Daily*:

*This rural teacher who has more than 10 years teaching experience hardly believed that, within a year, this typical rural school has turned into a modernised campus that covers more than 30,000 square metres of land, owns three computer rooms that have 150 LCD personal computers, a 600 square metres’ library, a laboratory full of experimental apparatus, a scientific activity room, a psychological counselling room, a music room and an art room . . . and the whole campus is covered by CCTV.<sup>43</sup>*

Such a scene not only surprises the rural teacher, but also surprises me as a reader. The article depicts a central<sup>44</sup> primary school in another town in Yangjiang, which is one of many that have benefited from the education resources reallocation policy. These descriptions seem more likely to belong to schools in the first-tier cities rather

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<sup>43</sup> The article focuses on the educational development in Yangjiang City, and belongs to a series of reports concerning the education revolution and rural development. Mayor of Yangjiang: why do rural kindergarten degrees become popular? (4<sup>th</sup> January, 2016), retrieved from <http://gd.people.com.cn/n2/2016/0104/c123932-27458817.html>

<sup>44</sup> The biggest primary school in town is often named Central Primary School, compared to village schools which are more peripheral.

than to a school in a rural area. I have not visited the school that the article refers to, yet the changes I have seen in Peanut Village school persuade me that it could be true. It also raises a question in my mind: if the teaching equipment is left unused in Peanut Village, what would be the situation of those fancy facilities in that school? Will there be enough competent teachers to deliver these resources to the students, and, how 'useful' are they?

### **5.5.2 The bargaining of interest**

In village life, the bargaining of interest is the most everlasting form of negotiation. It is never a new phenomenon but nowadays the content of the bargain has changed along with the economic development — villagers now have more fields and contents to bargain with. The shifting focus also reflects the changes underway within the community and society. However, there is particular and unchanged theme of bargain, or rather conflict, which is land dispute, as discussed previously in Chapter 3, Section 3.3.

Although, since 1980, most of the land disputes have taken place in cities, or the villages surrounding the cities. It does not mean that the villages in the hinterlands have escaped land disputes. In Peanut Village, such disputes bubbled up through the construction of what is termed 'a high-standard field', and a High-Speed Train link and its station.

During the time that I stayed in the town government dormitory, I was introduced to the agricultural director, Van, in the town government. Van was in charge of the agriculture supervision department of the town government, which covered the agriculture-related administrative affairs of twelve villages. Van was relatively young, in his mid-30s, but dark and thin — the typical image of a Chinese farmer. He said he had worked as a farmer until he went to the university, had studied agriculture in the university, so he still considered himself a farmer. He seemed to be the busiest man in the town government; I could hardly reach him during working time as he was always working in the countryside or on his way to the countryside. When I asked him again for an interview, he suggested that I accompanied him to work.

The next day we met at his office in the morning. He shared an office room with others. Van hardly sat there, but his desk was very distinct, piled up with batches of

paper documents. I had a glance at them, on top was an inspection report of a small water conservancy project. Van explained that recently the whole department was working on the high standard farmland program, which is about renovating and re-planning the existing farmlands to convert them into farmlands with sizeable, concentrated plots, perfect facilities, a strong ability to resist disasters, and high productivity. Practically, there were some small construction projects required. In Peanut Village, there was a small canal that needed to be built.

We got into Van's car, heading to Peanut Village. In the car, I asked him a few general agriculture-related questions. Van told me that many rural households have given up cultivation of the first crop in a year (normally from April to July), but most of them will cultivate the second crop (from late July to October). "That's why here looks so wasted now." "Of course we want them to farm, but it indeed cannot earn much money, therefore I understand why they don't want to farm." From the conversation in the car and the impression that I had before, Van is a very gentle man. He answered my questions in detail and always made sure that I understood, since I was using notebook to write down his words. Sometimes he was even shy and avoided eye contact with me when we were having conversations. But very soon, I saw a different side of him.

When we arrived, Uncle Yang, a member of the village committee, who was the village director of agriculture, was waiting for us. He was a bit anxious, quickly updating Van on the current situation. Van seemed a bit angry hearing that. They walked ahead along the canal that was under construction, and then they stopped at the point where the construction ended. Van looked serious, and Uncle Yang was kept explaining. They talked really fast in the local dialect that I could not follow. Van then explained the situation to me. The planning route of the canal goes through fields. Trying to avoid any possible conflicts, the route has been designed to go between field plots that belonged to different households, in other words, often on the boundaries. However, a villager has brought a lot of rubbish and sundries here to stop the construction. "He said we cut his tree, oh it's not even a tree, just a small bush! And he wants us to give him compensation for this, otherwise he will not let us go through! How ridiculous!" Van complained about the villager and the slow progress of the project here. He became determined, "we are not going to do this — if we do that then every household will come to ask for money." "But isn't it a good

thing for them to have this canal? To water their fields?" I asked. "Yes, it is, definitely, but they still want to get some money out of this."

At the time that we talked, Uncle Yang was making calls. Soon the villager arrived, with his hoe. Van took a tough stance, saying "you must move these today!" Then the villager became furious, yelling "you removed my tree, the tree was planted there years ago, you have to pay for this!" Then they erupted into a furious argument and raised their voices. The villager was talking and kept waving his hands, Van was similar, both of them were red in the face and fuming. Uncle Yang stood aside and time to time tried to intervene, but apparently without effect.

The argument lasted for at least 15 minutes then Van tried to walk away. He seemed to realise that this was not going anywhere. He talked to Uncle Yang, and asked me to go with him to another spot for further checking.

As we walked, I asked him what was said during that 15 minutes. Van was still in the aftermath of anger, replying, "you don't need to know about this, this is not anything good to know." "That's how we work every day, this is something good for them and we won't get anything from it! Not a single fen (penny in Chinese)! He acted like he's the victim!" I then asked him what normally would eventually happen. Van said, "I don't know, I really rather not say it."

The rest of the day was normal. Van took me to another village where the construction project was going well and was nearly finished. However, when a town government leader knew that Van had taken me to the field and that I had seen the conflict between the government officer and the villager, he was not happy about it and blamed Van for this. From my perspective, neither Van nor the town government had done anything wrong, thus there was no reason to hide this incident.

Nevertheless, I gradually learned the logic behind the leader's unwillingness regarding the exposure of such an event. They are afraid of revealing anything that can be possibly seen as 'undermining social stability'. The leader was worried that I would report this to the media, which could do harm to the reputation of town government. As mentioned in Chapter 3, the maintenance of stability is one of the most basic rules in the governance of Chinese society.

The incident that I came across can be seen as a small-scale land dispute, and in its most common form: a compensation dispute. And this is not the only example in Peanut Village.

### ***The dispute regarding the construction of high-speed railway***

Yangjiang is located in the western part of Guangdong. For a long time, there has been a large gap in economic development between the east, north and west of Guangdong and the Pearl River Delta. The deficiency of transportation facilities has become a key factor restricting the economic development in western Guangdong. During my visit, a high-speed railway was under construction to make up for this deficiency. One of the stops has been placed nearby Peanut Village, and the railway would go through part of it — not the residential area but the field. There is a saying that has been drawn from a lot of rural construction experiences in China in the past: "want to get rich, the first thing is to build the road". The general opinion is that the improvement of traffic conditions will have an obvious effect on driving the local economy. When I heard the news, I was happy for the villagers, and looked forward to the opportunities that this station would offer the village. For example, there might be shops, hotels or restaurants starting their businesses to accommodate the needs of passengers, which would further create jobs in the local area.

However, the next time I heard about the high-speed railway in Peanut Village, it was news of a dispute rather than the news of completion. One day an acquaintance working in the town government told me that they were going to Peanut Village for 'comprehensive enforcement' the next day. At the time, I still had no idea about comprehensive enforcement, but I asked her if I could go with them. She refused and told me that it would be dangerous. She explained to me that such comprehensive enforcement was planned, since some informers say that there would be a small demonstration of peasants on the constructing site, demanding more compensation for their lands which was going to be used for the construction of high-speed train station. Unsurprisingly, no matter how hard I tried to participate in such an event, all of my acquaintances refused me. The best result I was able to get was a promise from one of my friends that she would try to take some photographs for me.

She did take some photographs and sent them to me the next day. In the photographs, all the officers were wearing camouflage, some straw hats, and they were standing beside a construction site. She told me that the peculiar dress was because of the intense sun exposure and, moreover, it had the convenient function/effect of not revealing personal identities to the villagers. With regard to the actual encounter, she said it was not a big deal, and refused to say more. There was no photograph that had any villagers in it. However, later I saw a few 'selfies' in the friend circle (a function of Chinese social media WeChat, where people normally post photos to share their life with friends and family and only mutual friends can see the posts) of an officer who was present. It made me realise that though they refused to let an outsider participate in such event, they did not take it very seriously. Instead, they were used to it, and took conflict with peasants as a normal thing, which could be shared within their social circle.

I interviewed and talked to more than forty people in Peanut Village. I did not ask all of them questions regarding the building of the high-speed railway here. Oddly, among the interviewees, nobody showed special attention to or care concerning such a station which was just less than two miles from where they lived. Some of them said that they had heard about this, that it should be a good thing, but that they did not think that it could possibly make their life any different. Some of the old people did not even know about it at all.

Only one family, who normally lived in Shenzhen and came back home at the Qingming Festival for ancestor worship, expressed their appreciation regarding the high-speed railway. "It could save us so much time driving. Although most of the time we drive so that we can bring as many things as we want. But the option of a high-speed train makes coming to our hometown in two hours (by car it is more than four hours) possible!" The family, who stayed in their newly-built four-storey house in Peanut Village, was the one of the very few who clearly expressed that they were fond of the village life here. Here has the fresher air, the self-grown vegetable and less people, compared to big cities. The biggest thing that they complained about here were the insects, mosquitoes and flies. They hope that the environment could be better, and then they could spend more time here with their old parents, who lived with them in Shenzhen but always wanted to come back to their hometown.

## 5.6 Postscript

I visited Peanut Village again at the end of 2018 when I was about to finish this chapter. I spent some time wandering around the village, talked to random people, took some photographs and had dinner with a few acquaintances in a village restaurant nearby Peanut Village. At the end of the day, I left by the high-speed railway that departed from the newly-built station. Cici drove me to the station. The station and Peanut Village shared an entrance from the domestic highway. The beginning of the road was dark, as, Cici told me, the lights were not ready yet. Then the road divided into two, the right path led to Peanut Village, while the railway station was on the left. Going through the darkness for about 500 metres, we finally entered the brand-new station avenue, with the bright shining lights showing its newness and modernity. The station was like a reinforced-concrete giant lurking in the dark. I could not see the farmland and the old village surrounding it as they remained in the shadow.

As on the outside, the interior of the station is spacious and bright. I said goodbye to Cici and waited for the last train of the day. I suddenly felt detached — the station and the direction the train was headed did not seem in any way relevant to this small village. This is the same impression that I got from the fieldwork in Peanut Village: it is superficially globalised, owning a lot of global elements but the core of village life has not been touched.

## Chapter 6 The story of Tower Village: In the Name of Globalisation

### 6.1 Chapter summary

Parallel to Chapter 5, in which I depict a relatively untouched village experiencing globalisation in superficial ways, this chapter looks at another old village whose experience of globalisation has been shaped by the development of tourism.

This chapter presents the story of Tower Village through a different perspective on globalisation. As I mentioned in the Methodology Chapter (Chapter 4), the analysis of Tower Village is mainly constructed upon the 'formal representation of rurality' facet in the three-facet architecture of rural space. Therefore, this chapter presents the fieldwork results more from the angle of the construction and re-construction of the rural image, and how 'formal representation' is shaped.

Similar to the story of Peanut Village, Section 6.2 gives the general background and description of village life in Tower Village.

In Section 6.3, I pay attention to the spread and adaptation of global knowledge in Tower Village, by presenting the diverse reactions and participations of different agencies in the community during the construction of the Zen-Culture Tourism Area. These different subjects work together to shape the image of the new countryside.

I term the form of globalisation that Tower Village belongs to as 'in the name of globalisation'. By proposing this notion, I argue that compared to Peanut Village, people in Tower Village, especially those who work there as government officers or the rural elites, have more than a basic understanding of globalisation, knowing that under the wind of globalisation, or in the name of globalisation, rural areas can be better developed. However, in such a transitional period of time, the villagers' awareness of globalisation is uneven, and globalisation is more of a tool to help them, rather than a lifestyle or philosophy in itself. The boundaries of the village have been further opened. While the core boundaries of the village — the social and cultural boundaries — are being shaken, the indigenous vitality of the traditional side of village still work to stabilise the value system of village life.

## 6.2 Setting the Scene

I had never been to the residential part of Tower Village until I started my research fieldwork there. However, I have passed through it many times. It is one of my family traditions to spend holiday there during winter for the hot spring resorts, when we also visit the temple time to time. Therefore, I have partially witnessed the changes and transformation that the area has undergone since 2008.

When I started to reflect on the different paths of development of villages in a globalised era, Tower Village came to my mind. I knew that the historic temple there was going through changes, aiming to upgrade itself into a more advanced tourist spot. The temple is on the top of a small hill called Dragon Hill. As a long-time visitor to the temple, the changes are obvious to me. There used to be small, narrow, bluestone steps heading to the main hall of the temple, which now have been rebuilt into magnificent white brick steps. An imposing gate, as well as a spacious plaza, has been built at the bottom of the hill (Figure 19). Together with the Buddhist music playing in the plaza, all this serves to make one feel that the temple is more like the 'pure land' of Buddhism than ever before. The booming tourist industry has brought in more visitors from all over the world, while at the same time increasing the demand for more recreational space. What impact does this have on the living space and lifestyle of local villagers? How would the lives of the villagers living around it have changed, or in what ways remained unchanged?



*Figure 19 The imposing hill gate at the entrance of Temple*

With these questions in mind, I walked into Tower Village.

Tower Village located in the Xinxing County of Yunfu City. The Village acquired its name from the old Buddhist tower which used to be within the village. Since the village was built here, it has had strong links with the Buddhist Temple nearby.

The historic temple was first built in the late seventh century (Tang Dynasty), by the Sixth Patriarch of the Zen lineage of Buddhism, Huineng, whose birthplace was nearby. Huineng built the temple here to show his gratitude to his parents and to the land that nourished him. Not long after the temple was built, Huineng passed away here. Tower Village was first formed following the construction of the temple. Along with people who came to worship or worked for the temple, a small village gradually formed. While the villagers' population grew and multiplied, the village increased in size and some of their descendants moved out. Now the main residents of Tower Village are under two surnames.

Tower Village has a registered population of around 2600, but around 1000 people actually live there. Like Peanut Village, this discrepancy is mostly due to the outflow

of the workforce during most of the year. However, compared to Peanut Village, where mainly elderly and children stay, Tower Village has a relatively normal population structure, as the tourist industries here have provided some job opportunities for work-aged villagers.

Another significant difference between the two villages that I noticed from the beginning, is that while Peanut Villagers always say “there is nothing special here”, Tower Villagers have a lot to say about their village. Nearly everyone can tell you something about the village: the *fengshui* (geomancy) here, the ancestral hall, a bit of village history, or the story of the Sixth Patriarch, Huineng. Tower Village is situated between two hills and a river runs in front of the village, which is considered as “*fengshuibaodi*” (good geomancy) in fengshui theory. Villagers are proud of it: “the fengshui is good here, that’s why the Sixth Patriarch was born here”, an old villager told me.

Benefiting from the tourist industry here, the road from the central area of county to the village is well constructed. It is a four-lane asphalt road, with trees and flowers planted in the middle of it, and it does not look like a countryside road at all. Various hoardings and advertising boards stand beside the road, announcing that a large-scale real-landscape performance would be launched there next year, with the theme “how Huineng became the Sixth Patriarch”. The tagline on these hoardings claims “It is the *global first* live performance in which the audiences can participate and where indoor-outdoor is integrated”. This asphalt road extends right up to the scenic area, where the new plaza, a rebuilt tower, the renovated temple, an exhibition hall, various hot spring resorts and a five-star luxury hotel are located and neatly organised. The scenic area is quiet and clean during the summer — the low-season for hot springs. It does not seem rural at all. Right before entering the scenic area, there is a little bridge diverging off, heading to Tower Village (Figure 20).

Tower Village and the town that governs the village (and a few other villages) are separated by the main asphalt avenue; while the town centre is on the west of the main road, the village and the scenic area are on the right of it. Such a layout not only shows that Tower Village is closer to the temple — the main tourist attraction in this area — but was also the factor that determined that Tower Village was

geographically more suitable to be converted into a tourist recreation area than the other nearby villages.



Figure 20 The map of the Scenic Area, Tower Village and its surrounding

However, the peaceful scene that I describe above was not the case some years ago. I still remember that the road from Guangzhou to the hot springs resort used to be full of bumps and jolts. At that time the temple was quite secular, just as many other temples in Guangdong, serving to bless the people surrounding it and coexisting with the mundane life of ordinary villagers. At that time the temple area was lively and noisy. When a tourist walked closer to the temple, they could hear small dealers (often villagers) touting for incense sales. The sound of firecrackers was loud and incessant, as in Guangdong the burning of a firecracker is a custom when people finish their worship. Villagers in Tower Village prayed to the Sixth Patriarch for the peaceful life and the health of family members. They visited the temple from time to time since the temple did not charge an entry fee for villagers. They also relied on the temple, as some villagers made a living by selling incense and other oblations to tourists while some villagers worked for the temple as handymen or gardeners.

After 2008, a year when the tourist industry was booming in China due to hosting the Olympic Games, Chinese people became more aware of how profitable the tourist industry could be. Culture-led tourism and creative economies were becoming more and more popular, with the trend toward revaluing local culture and turning it into a consumable product or experience (Qian, 2017). Culture was packaged and commodified then sold to the tourists (Telfer and Sharpley, 2016). In order to promote local economy, the leadership of Xinxing county at the time decided to develop the temple and spring resorts into an inclusive tourist area. It was around that time that the local government leader realised the importance of the accessibility of a tourist attraction. Roads were rebuilt and broadened. The temple area was re-regulated step by step in an attempt to repackage the theme of 'Zen' and turn it into a marketable resource, a lifestyle that can be experienced and lived by urban visitors and consumers. Since then, in line with the developments in the tourist industry, Tower village itself has been through a series of restructurings.

Following the bridge that leads to the Tower Village, a sign overhead announces "Tower Villagers welcome you". Passing that, a small shop and the village committee office are beside the road. When I entered the housing/residential area of the village, a huge notice board, similar to those that I saw on the way, stood under the trees (Figure 21). However, unlike those brand-new hoardings, the notice board was quite old and the printing on it had started to fade away and peel off. This notice board, entitled 'The preview image of the plan for the New Tower Village', picturing a few modern and attractive designs of apartments, villas, and a shopping centre. When I asked a villager when it had been set up, he said, "I am not sure, a few years ago? Nobody cares, we don't want to move at all."



Figure 21 A noticeboard which pictures the image preview of the 'New Tower Village'

This notice board was set up to promote a village relocation project. To meet the needs of an expanding tourist industry, the local states (led by the county government) wanted to reconstruct Tower Village into a leisure resort, which could provide alternative rural-style accommodation for urban visitors other than a conventional hotel. To accomplish this, the whole village needed to be relocated to another site. The government promised that new villas would be built for villagers in the new site and that the villagers would become the actual operators of the tourist resort when it was finished. However, that did not seem attractive to many villagers. The project has been turned down by many of them because would not agree to move out from the original village site, which they considered has a good *fengshui*. The county officer and the leader of village committee all failed to persuade them. Since then the project has been shelved, leaving the notice board standing there as an imagination of another kind of life.

The stagnation of reconstructing Tower Village did not delay the pace of development in the scenic area. A five-star luxury hotel has been built along the theme of 'Zen' right next to the village, or more accurately in the village, as the land

where it is located used to belong to Tower Village. However, after the hotel opened for business, a long high wall has been set up to separate the hotel and the village, to “detach the hotel from the rural surroundings”, as a villager commented. “They [the hotel operators] do not want to see the village, it’s not elegant enough for their customers” (Figure 22 & Figure 23).

When I asked villagers if this wall was affecting their lives, an old man replied, “half the village has been enclosed by this wall; if one day there is a fire, we can’t even run out”. “When they wanted to requisition the land, they said they would build a plaza here, not a hotel”, he added, “but what can we do”?



*Figure 22*

*The high wall that separates the hotel and village; the hotel is on the left of the wall, hiding behind the tall trees, while the village is on the right*



*Figure 23*

*The front facade of the luxury hotel. Behind the hotel is the high wall and the village.*

Tower Village was, though, developing at its own pace. Similarly to Peanut Village, Tower Villagers were gradually moving out from their old houses and moving into new ones. However, as the area became more valuable in terms of business, space for the village to expand became limited. Houses have to be built compactly, leaving very little space between them, which has further led to conflicts between neighbours.

Huahuang was my host in Tower Village and later became my gatekeeper in the village. He was in his 40s. He called himself *Huahuang* (the king of flowers), as he owns a farm and provides flowers for the temple. One of my family acquaintances introduced me to him, as he is a member of the Tower Village Committee and is familiar with the whole village.

On the first day I arrived, Huahuang took me for a walk to introduce me to the overall situation of Tower Village. We started from the main entrance of the village, where the village committee office is located then walked along the border of the whole village. We walked along the north main road which divides the farm fields and the residential area (Figure 20). We passed by some cement buildings first, which were the new houses of villagers, then a transitional zone, with new houses mingled amongst the lower old houses (Figure 24). The core of the village is occupied by one-story red brick or mud houses, and that is normally named as the old village. At the other end of the village is the temple area. There used to be a small business area that sold incense and worship oblations; now it is a main road and a part of the plaza. We then walked along the southern border, where the high wall stands, separating the village and the hotel (Figure 22).

Afterwards, we went back to Huahuang's house, which was one of the highest in the village – four floors with a roof top. In looking at the panoramic view of Tower Village (Figure 25), he commented, "Isn't it pretty? It will be great that if we can turn that [the old village in the middle] into a tourist resort." "It would be a waste if we just leave them abandoned."



*Figure 24 Old brick houses among new cement buildings*

“It’s a nice view”, I agreed. I felt that if one often looked at the village from such a position as this, it was not surprising that he felt responsible for its development.



*Figure 25 The overlook of Tower Village from the roof of Huanghua's house*

The development of a village, or an industry, is never an isolated process and it is always associated with the wider political and economic environment. Undoubtedly Tower Village's development is affected by the growing tourist industry. According to the World Travel & Tourism Council, in 2017, China was the largest domestic travel market in the world. In the same year, Chinese tourists made 5.001 billion trips within the country compared to 139.48 million outbound trips.<sup>45</sup> Moreover, the tourist industry has provided 28.25 million employment positions and indirect employment for 80 million people. Amidst such a huge market, rural tourism is one of the new trends encouraged by the state as a means of promoting the rural economy. According to statistics, trips to China's rural areas reached 2.5 billion in 2017, and tourism consumption exceeded CNY 1.4 trillion.

Compared with many famous Buddhist temples in Southeast Asia, the temple here is still a long way from a global tourist destination. The temple and the hot spring resorts around Tower Village are only relatively famous within the province, mainly providing short-term leisure tours for provincial tourists. Tower Village is an even smaller part of the whole scenic spot. According to the tourism management office, there was not yet any trans-national enterprise operating the tourist resources, nor has any foreign branded hotel been launched in the scenic area. At least until 2018, the tourist industry was locally-driven.

Tourists mostly come from mainland China, while a lesser proportion are from Hongkong, Macau and Taiwan. Among these, Hong Kong has the largest number of tourists. According to a county government official, there are more than 70,000 former Xinxing inhabitants who now live and work in Hong Kong. These people who left the countryside, some of whom were from Tower Village, cared about the construction of their hometown, and brought many tourists back to their hometowns when they themselves returned to visit their relatives. Apart from that, foreign tourists are relatively rare. In general, it is not a typical tourist spot that relates to globalisation in terms of business operators, service providers and tourists. However, this does not mean that the people here have no ambition to go further, nor that they are not already aboard the globalisation train. Globalisation has worked itself into the village via some other channels.

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<sup>45</sup> <https://www.travelchinaguide.com/tourism/2017statistics/>

Similar to what was observed in Peanut Village, the daily consumption in Tower Village also largely relates to globalisation. They have wider ranges of foreign brand products, and more places to buy them. To adapt to the needs of tourists, there is a supermarket located just outside the village, within the scenic area. Another big supermarket is in the town centre, which is only less than 1km from the village.

In the meantime, technological innovation has permeated most of the aspects of people's daily lives as one of the most significant features of globalisation, ranging from the ways of consumption, transportation to mobile devices and payment methods. What I describe in the story of Peanut Village, for example, shopping online or chatting online, are no longer anything special or worth particular mention in Tower Village. Moreover, in Tower Village, the extent and the depth of the application of technological innovation are both much greater. For example, as a tourist area, all hotels can be booked via the internet and information about them can be found online. The experiences of tourists are posted and shared on various platforms, thus other people can read and know what they can expect before coming here. The temple has its own website, which not only posts events that are being held in the temple but also Buddhist-related news from all over the world. Moreover, the website has an online prayer page for believers to post their requests — the website states that the monks in the temple will deliver these prayers to the different Buddhas by chanting every day. As of 28 January, 2019, there are 9262 people who have posted their requests on the page (Figure 26).

勅賜國恩寺  
本寺僧衆每日在六祖殿  
爲許願信衆誦經祈福  
許願祈福道場

祈愿者: 第 位 搜索查找 祈福道场首页 | 国恩寺首页 | 发布许愿 | 随缘乐助 我要祈愿

编号	祈愿人	所在地
[9260]	许愿人吴先生	广西来宾
[9259]	吴先生	广西来宾
[9258]	许愿人	国恩寺
[9257]	许愿人	国恩寺
[9256]	许愿人	国恩寺
[9255]	许愿人	国恩寺
[9254]	许愿人	国恩寺
[9253]	许愿人	国恩寺
[9252]	许愿人	国恩寺
[9251]	许愿人	国恩寺
[9250]	许愿人谢小姐	GZ
[9249]	谢小姐	GZ
[9248]	许愿人谢小姐	GZ
[9247]	许愿人谢小姐	GZ
[9246]	许愿人谢小姐	GZ
[9245]	许愿人	国恩寺
[9244]	新外滩	开平市
[9243]	魏小姐	开平市

第1页 首页 上页 下页 尾页 共9244条愿望 共47页 每页200条 转到: 页 直接

祈愿高萨护持我的女儿  
今日面视顺利过关,得  
遂所愿!

吴先生  
广西来宾 2019/1/23

友身体健康!

诚心许愿人  
国恩寺 2019/1/18

南无阿弥陀佛! 祈  
求  
药师如来保佑我健康平安!  
驱除病魔! 南无阿弥陀佛!

诚心许愿人谢小姐  
GZ 2019/1/14

南无阿弥陀佛! 祈  
萨保佑我健康平安!  
如意吉祥! 南无阿弥  
!

诚心许愿人谢小姐  
GZ 2019/1/1

保佑  
身体  
财源!

祝福 愿顺利健康如意!

诚心许愿人

Figure 26 The official website of the temple, where people can post their wishes (every yellow box represents a request), as accessed on 28 January 2019. In September, 2019 the website was no longer available.

Moreover, unlike the limited usage of home electrical appliances in Peanut Village, households in Tower Village take such things for granted. My visit was during summer, and at that time every household turned on their air conditioner, as least during the night. “Nobody can stand the heat”, one villager told me. The climate of Peanut Village and Tower Village are much the same, however, hardly anybody had installed air conditioning in Peanut Village. Such a difference was due to the better economic performance and the younger family structure in Tower Village — villagers here are generally richer and young people often do not have the thrift and endurance of the elderly. The overall better economic performance comes from the industries within the county. Besides the tourist industry, a few big companies are also present within Xinxing County: a Steel Group, including a stainless steel kitchenware enterprise, which sells 90% of its products overseas; one of the biggest domestic livestock breeding companies; and quite a few mineral materials processing companies. These industries have made it possible for Tower villagers to work near home, and more importantly for many villagers to earn money at the same time. With a better economic situation and a less agriculturally-based occupation structure, Tower Village is more globalised and urbanised in terms of its adaption to consumerism and an urban lifestyle.

In the next section, which is also the main section of the chapter, the connections and interactions between globalisation and the village will be explored in another sphere, that is, how the community members in Tower Village absorb various global knowledges and transfer them into their own use. Compared to the community in Peanut Village, people here are more globally aware. These processes are illustrated through detailing the construction of 'the Zen-Culture Scenic Area'.

### **6.3 The construction of Zen-Culture Scenic Area**

Compared to Peanut Village, the composition of the community in Tower Village is obviously more complex. Not only the original villagers, but also the staff who work at the hotels/resorts, the officers working on the tourism area management committee, and the monks in the temple are all involved in the development of Tower Village, and sometimes, researchers and planners. As a community that is made up of individuals and organisations which have different values, aims, and objectives (Hall, 2000), conflicts and power struggles are inevitably generated within (Telfer and Sharpley, 2016).

Moreover, the governance structure of Tower Village is complicated. As key areas for development, scenic spots have received more attention from upper institutions of government apart from the common vertical governance structure, 'City-County-Town-Village'. The city, the county or the tourist management department in the province may be directly involved in the planning of this area as well. In addition, there are a number of cross-level regulatory bodies such as the Scenic Area Management Office and the Bureau of Religious Affairs involved. Therefore, in contrast to the close supervision and management role played by the town towards Peanut Village, the town government of Tower Village occupies a relatively light weight position in terms of the governance of the scenic area and Tower Village. In such circumstances, various actors have contested and negotiated the reconstruction of Tower Village, resulting in changes in the landscape of the village and its surroundings, and of course, in the everyday life of villagers.

During these processes, different agencies have their own visions and expectations for the same place. Therefore, their aims and actions are far from being unified. In

this section, I categorise my interviewees into several groups – the local state represented by government officers, the ordinary villagers, the village elites, and the business operators – to illustrate their different expectations of and for the village and their understandings of globalisation. By telling these small stories, I hope that a vivid scene of village life can be presented.

### **6.3.1 The expectation from state: An organised village**

The state that I discuss in this chapter mainly refers to the county government and the tourism management office with responsibility for Tower Village. In my observation, local governments are the most active agencies in the construction of the Zen-Culture Scenic Area. They initiated the development strategy, invited the Planning & Design Institute to plan the development of the whole scenic area, attracted investment and expropriated the land from villages when it was needed for construction. Sometimes they act as the mediator between enterprises and villagers, negotiating land disputes or even intervening in the decisions of enterprises.

In the Chinese context, since the 'open and reform' policy in 1978 and the gradual decentralisation that followed, local government has gained more initiative with respect to regional development. The new tax distribution has brought the right to tax the economic development of the local area within the remit of the local government, thus encouraging their motivation to promote economic development as well. Local government has transformed from a passive policy executive into an active actor in persuading maximum economic benefits. In theory, the goal of the local state is to promote the development of the area they cover, which includes enhancing the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of the local. Yet in practice in most of the Chinese contexts, economic achievement outweighs others, as the growth of GDP can be clearly measured via numbers while other progresses in environment or culture are hard to evaluate. Moreover, researchers have noted that there is a positive correlation between the promotion of government officials and the GDP of the jurisdiction (Zhou LA, 2003). It is not surprising that the local government attaches greater importance to economic efficiency.

At the beginning of my fieldwork in Tower Village, the first voice from the state side that I heard, was from an officer of the Tourism Management Office. The Tourism Management Office occupies a two-storey building, standing beside the exhibition

hall (Figure 27) and the plaza. The outside of the building has been renovated, with the original plain square building as the main body, and the added archaistic outer walls and rooftop (Similar to Figure 28).



*Figure 27 The exhibition hall*



*Figure 28 One of the shops in the Scenic Area, an original building with a newly added archaistic outer walls and rooftop*

I walked into the building as I had an appointment with a member of the management committee. The decoration style within the building was also antique, and there were some Zen-related calligraphies and paintings hanging on the wall. I met the officer in his office, the interior decoration of which was also traditional Chinese style – not the appearance of a typical village/town office, they are often more simple, with little, if any decoration. But similar to many interviews with government officers in Peanut Village, my interviewee, who asked me to call him Uncle Lin, also offered me tea once I sat down.

Yet, I immediately felt the difference between Mr. Lin and the officers that I interviewed even before we started our conversation. Mr. Lin was in his early 40s, wearing a white shirt, black trousers and a pair of gold-rimmed glasses, a typical image of an intellectual. I asked him if he could introduce me to the work plan of this year of the Tourism Management Office. Without looking at any notes or slides, he gave me a ‘speech’ which lasted for about ten minutes, listing all the accomplishments and future tasks in a methodical, comprehensive way.

“We are working on establishing the National 5A tourist attraction.<sup>46</sup> We were ranked first in Guangdong Province at the 4A review in 2015...We oversee the development of all the Zen-Culture related products within the whole 425 km<sup>2</sup> tourist area...We currently focus on the Zen-Culture real-landscape live performance, which can accommodate 5,000 tourists per show every night . . .”

Mr. Lin was excited about the landscape live performance: “You have seen those famous live performances, right? The Impression Series.”<sup>47</sup> Without waiting for my answer, he kept on talking about how he (and he often used the word ‘we’, representing the office) valued the show. He thought that such a show could bring more population and increase the land value, referring to a similar show in a county of Hebei Province, which tells the story of Kangxi, an emperor of the Qing Dynasty. Since that show was launched there, their resident population and the local house

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<sup>46</sup> The evaluation standard of tourist attractions. There are five grades according to the quality of scenic spots in China. The order from high to low is AAAAA, AAAA, AAA, AA and A. 5A level is the highest level for China's scenic spots, representing the level of China's world-class, fashionable tourist attractions.

<sup>47</sup> A famous series of live performances produced by the famous Chinese Director Zhang Yimou, including various performances based on different local cultures and lore.

prices have increased several times. “It's all because of that show”, he said it confidently. I had not heard of that show before, however, when I googled it later, I found a similar rhetoric: “The global first royal-cultural theme, large-scale outdoor live performance, depicting the legendary experience of Emperor Kangxi” — maybe it was the origin of the ‘global first’ slogan that I saw on my way here.

The conversation with Mr. Lin was one of the smoothest interviews of my fieldwork. He was very effusive, showing his familiarity with all the data and information, and appeared skilful in giving an introduction or speech. He constantly referred to a few tourist spots that he or his colleagues had visited, among which he highlighted the ‘Fo Guang Mountain’<sup>48</sup> in Taiwan:

“We recently visited Foguang Mountain in Taiwan, from which we realised that the prestige of the Sixth Patriarch was really strong overseas. Fo Guang Mountain is now a world-class tourist destination, consisting of 136 properties and Buddhist Academies around the world. But in fact, Fo Guang Mountain’s master Hsing Yun and all the monks there are the disciples of the Sixth Patriarch Huineng. Hsing Yun Master is the 48th generation of Línji School, one of the five schools that was generated from the Sixth Patriarch of the Zen lineage. As the people from the hometown of the Sixth Patriarch, we were warmly welcomed by them. They also said that the reputation of the Sixth Patriarch in the world Buddhist community is very high.”

“That’s our model”, Mr. Lin added, with his confident tone. “To develop our scenic area into a world-class tourist destination. Therefore, of course we need to learn from others and the successful experiences from all over the world, but innovation is more important.”

Moreover, Mr. Lin mentioned that when all the supporting facilities along the avenue are completed, they want to run a Marathon Festival here. To me, his plan seems both comprehensive and forward-looking. In these plans and visions, globalisation appears more than a few times. Rather, it became a common, frequent phrase that Mr. Lin would use, ranging from absorbing the foreign experience of a developing

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<sup>48</sup> Fo Guang Mountain is an international Chinese Buddhist monastic order based in Taiwan that practices humanistic Buddhism, founded in 1967 by Hsing Yun.

tourist industry, to constructing their own 'global-first' show. As Mr. Lin was one of the first few interviewees that I met in Tower Village, I cannot help but compare him to the government officers that I met during the fieldwork in Peanut Village. They were very different: while the government officer in Peanut Village paid lots of attention to the daily matters and hardly talked about future plans, Mr. Lin seemed the other way around.

When I tried to change the topic to the development plan of Tower Village, Lin also has his opinion. He told me that "the image of Tower Village did not fit with the appearance of the surrounding scenic spots", and that is the initial motivation to renovate Tower Village.

He used a metaphor to proceed,

"We are heading to a world-class tourist spot which includes historic culture sightseeing, worship and leisure relaxation. We [the government] have built the stage for enterprise as well as villages, they can go onto the stage to find their own position."

"Then what position do you think is suitable for villagers?" I asked.

He said,

"There's a lot of things that they can do. Like the suggestions that we raised before, they can run farmhouses, providing bed and breakfast, or selling agricultural products." "What is important is that they do the proper thing in a proper place — you can't sell incense anywhere; it will bring chaos and it is hard to manage."

At the end, Mr. Lin suggested that I go to talk to another officer who is more familiar with the development of Tower Village. Finally we shake hands to finish our conversation, which was more like the experience that I had in cities, where I was treated as an 'official interviewer' instead of a young student.

When I reviewed our conversation, I realised that Lin has talked about the central policy, talked about the trends of domestic economy, talked about the development of the domestic tourism industry and even foreign tourism, which all seemed very grand. In such a picture, Tower village is just a very small and currently *mismatching*

piece. Lin's opinion is typical, representing a kind of perspective which see things from the overall situation. From this angle, the main expectation for a village is that it can fit into the bigger scene — can play its part in the big show.

Later on, I realised that Mr. Lin's 'global knowledge' was not unusual here. Another government officer mentioned Lulang Town in Tibet in an interview, which is a famous show case of an imitation of a Swiss-style town. The officer said, "We don't have such conditions [the similar natural scenery] to copy their developing mode. Maybe we should learn from Japan, have you been to Japan's countryside?"

Undoubtedly, the vision and expectation of the local state in Xinxing County is more globally-orientated when compared to the local state of Peanut Village. The requirement of developing better tourism urges them to observe and learn from others. The benefits of development allow them to actually go out and see, which further leads to a virtuous circle of absorbing global knowledge and producing local knowledge.

For the local government, Tower Village is nothing really special, or rather its speciality lies only in its location. Even the function that the local government wanted the village to provide and which they failed to do — providing alternative accommodation and leisure space — can be offered by other surrounding villages. Therefore, Tower Village is not indispensable in the development plan, at least not at this moment, when other land resources are still accessible. It may be the luck of Tower Village that villagers did not have to be forced to integrate into the grander tourist development picture; or perhaps conversely in the eyes of some other villagers it may be that Tower Village failed to capture the opportunity of development brought by tourism. In the next section, I will explore the expectations of the village from the villagers' point of view.

### **6.3.2 Villagers: the diversified attitudes**

As discussed before, community is heterogenous. Also, villagers are not united as one voice: some are more ambitious, while some just want to keep a peaceful life; some want to achieve something more than money, while some value money more. In the globalisation era, where various commodities, information and cultures are being exchanged more quickly, people with broad horizons and quick access to

information get more opportunities. These people tend to stand out from the crowd and become elites. Global knowledge has its own transmission path within the group of villagers, which clearly is not evenly perceived.

When ordinary villagers were questioned regarding “What’s your expectation for Tower Village”, most of them felt puzzled at first. Not every villager pays the same attention to village affairs; more people may stop at ‘cleaning the space in front of their own door’ (a traditional proverb that means people who only care about their own things). However, if the question was narrowed down to do they have any expectation of the village environment or do they want Tower Village to be transformed into a tourist-based Village, then they would have a lot to say.

Unlike Peanut Village, where it is mainly the elderly and children who stay, Tower Village has a relatively normal population structure. More middle-aged people live here, and they were more willing to express their opinions. And these people who stayed have formed a much stronger sense of community, a thing that needs to be built and maintained.

Compared to the scenic area next to it, Tower Village was livelier and more chaotic. In the afternoon, those who did not have much work to do, often women beyond 50 years old, were fond of gathering around to chat about various things. When the evening arrived, they would scatter, heading back to their own houses: it was time to cook for their children or grandchildren, who worked in the scenic area or at nearby factories/farms. In this section, I sketch out four snapshots of different villagers in their everyday lives. They were as diversified as urban people, and such a diversity suggests that villagers have found different ways of living their lives, in other words, they have more choices.

### ***An ordinary family***

During the first few days after I arrived, I asked Huahuang to show me around the village. During an early evening, Huahuang and I wandered across the village. He stopped from time to time to talk to people who were sitting outside their houses or who had just left work and were passing through the alley, asking them how life was recently and introducing me when people asked. Huahuang was stopped by a middle-aged man in front of his house, asking Huahuang to judge a conflict between him and his neighbour. Huahuang then asked me to go into the villager’s house,

where the villager's wife and their child of primary school age sat. He talked to the woman, introduced me, and said that I could ask them questions if I wanted. Then he walked aside to discuss the matter with the man outside the house.

The house was not new, and it is as dark inside as many other old houses. A bulb was on for the child as he was doing his homework, but it was not very bright. The living room was messy, just as most of the houses that are occupied by several family members. It did not seem to have a unified furnishing style. It had modern elements, for example a leather sofa, though it was quite worn, a television, and a computer on a desk in the corner. It also holds an old wooden bench which looked like it was made up of a few planks. An electric bike leaned against the wall, with a hoe beside it.

After a few seconds silence, I started the conversation by asking about their family members. The woman villager, Jade, told me that they lived with her husband's parents, and her husband's young sister. Her mother-in-law was not at home then, probably was at another villager's house, while her father-in-law was at the farming field. The younger sister worked at a factory nearby. Her husband worked as a handyman in a nearby hotel and he had just finished work and come back home. Jade worked at a resort in the scenic area as well, as hotel staff, but that day she was on the night shift — from 6pm to the 6am tomorrow. Her child was 8 years old and went to the village primary school.

I asked her if she knew about the project to build a new village. She said yes without further commenting. Then I asked, "What do you think of it? The notice board outside seems attractive?" Then Jade became suspicious: "Are you from the government?" "No, no, no, I was just curious and want to know what the villagers actually think." She said, "We don't want to move out, the government said if we want that kind of..." she paused, "Villa? we will need to move the whole village further inside from the main road".

"Don't you want a new house?" I asked. She then answered, "of course I want one, but we want to build our new house by ourselves, instead of this villa — it looks good, but nobody has actually seen it and how can we just give up all we have now and just hope for a villa in a picture?"

During our conversation, her father-in-law and her sister-in-law came home one after the other and joined the conversation. The old man tried to clarify: “No, they said that the villa is not for free, they only cover 100 meter<sup>2</sup> per household. You need to pay some extra money to get the area over there.” What surprised me was that the daughter was the most emotional one when she heard about this topic. “No, definitely no! We are good here and we don’t want to move at all!”

The conversation ended up in chaos as everybody was talking about random things. I tried to raise my voice to ask them if they had certain expectations for the village as the surrounding to their life. Only the young girl gave me an answer: “We want to be in charge of our own village. If we want to build a new house, we can build one. That’s my expectation.”

Later Huahuang ended his conversation with the man and we left together. He told me that the conflict between the villager and his neighbour was linked with the house-building issue. As the scenic area is now developing, the local state wanted to preserve more land for the future. Thus, the approval of homesteads in surrounding villages was tightening. In Tower Village, the construction of a new house often needed to be accompanied by the demolition of an old house. Jade’s family wanted to rebuild a new house in the same location as their old house. A lot of conflicts and negotiations happened between neighbours, as nobody wanted their house to become the ‘lowest’ in the neighbourhood<sup>49</sup> or for the space between the two houses to be occupied by one of them.

This is a normal state of expectation among villagers, that is, hoping that the rules can develop in their own interest. In the meantime, they pay less attention to the renovation of community, which will possibly bring long-term, positive impacts on the members within. In this respect, Tower Villagers were not much different from Peanut Villagers.

### ***Sanshu’s life***

While government officers were convinced that the development of the local tourist industry would benefit the villagers, local villagers did not necessarily think so.

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<sup>49</sup> It is common for rural people to care about the height of the house’s foundation or of the whole house, because they believe the height symbolises the social status in the neighbourhood.

Another villager *Sanshu* (the third uncle, the third child of the family of his generation) who was a little grumpy, expressed his dissatisfaction: “No, not at all, how can we benefit from that high wall? It blocks our whole village! Relocate the village? Then the traffic will be even worse [as the relocation site would be further from the main road]! Nothing is good or better, but even worse. It’s all about collusion between officials and businessmen!”

Sanshu represented another group of villagers, who conceptualised government as an opponent who was always grabbing and harming their interests, and the development of tourism, which was led by the government, would also worsen their life situation. “No chickens, no pigs, have you ever seen a village like this?” Sanshu asked me, and he continued without waiting for my answer, “raising livestock is forbidden here, as they smell. It’s all about the tourism area. Now farmers have nothing to do!”

When I heard this ‘news’ — that raising pigs and chickens was forbidden here — it did surprise me. Sanshu told me that since the ‘new leader’ of the county government had come to his position, he had made a lot of “bad and unsympathetic regulations”. Sanshu used to raise a flock of chickens, but not pigs. He admitted that raising pigs was a really tiring job, yet, he insisted, “livestock, rural people used to count on them. And I don’t think it’s a good thing to erase them from countryside life. It’s not real.”

However, my interview with Sanshu took place in his three-storey, big and bright house. With his living room with its modern sofa, television and refrigerator, he did not seem stubborn, or one of those who only wanted to stay in the past.

Sanshu was in his 50s, but retired at home, taking care of the family field, while his son worked for a stainless-steel factory nearby. He also denied that the tourism industry had brought more job opportunities, instead, he claimed that most of the villagers have gone out for work, for example to the stainless-steel factory. The stainless-steel factory belonged to a Steel Group Company in the county, whose products are mainly exported overseas. Sanshu’s son was embedded in the global network in one of the simplest and most direct ways — he made globalised products. I did not have a chance to interview his son, as he had a busy job and most of the time slept at the dormitory of the factory.

“This is a good job, right?” I asked Sanshu. “Yes, but not too good, still earn little money, cannot compare with those who worked in the government or those businessman”. However, in his complaint, I sensed his pride in his son — a typical Chinese parent’s attitude of hiding their pride behind modesty.

### ***Village Elites: Grandpa Ding’s story***

Grandpa Ding is 90 years old and lives in Tower Village. His house is distinctive, as the outer wall is painted white, and he has an organised small garden in front of his house. I met him at the very beginning of my fieldwork in Tower Village, as Huahuang introduced me to him when I asked him if there was any “story-teller” in the village. Grandpa Ding was good at telling stories, about history, and about war, as he used to be a soldier in the Korean War (which in China is called the War to Resist US Aggression and Aid Korea). In his leisure time, he does some gardening, plays erhu (a kind of Chinese musical instrument), and makes his own erhu. He was talkative, but also controlled with a polite manner. He talked gently, just like a grandfather. Indeed, his oldest grandson is married already, while his youngest granddaughter just started kindergarten. Although he is 90, while at home, he still wears decent shirt and trousers, which was not very usual in Chinese village life. He uses a cell phone, but he said, “not WeChat, I may be too old for this.”

Grandpa Ding has witnessed changes not only over recent years, but also from the time before the P.R.C was founded. He has been to a lot of places, either during the war, or travelling after he retired. One of his sons worked and lived in the city, yet Grandpa Ding and his wife Grandma Ding eventually chose to settle down in their hometown village. I asked him the reason for that, and he replied, “the air here is fresher, everybody knows everybody, and I can go for walks every day. When Chinese people get old, they always want to go back to the place that they were born and grew up, me too.” Grandpa Ding’s answer was a classic template to the question “why do you choose to live in the village”, as these are the most appreciated characteristics of village life.

They built this house more than a decade ago, and have lived here ever since. When I praised his small garden and the house, he laughed, “At the time I built them, they were really nice, like one of the best around, but not anymore. Now everyone’s house is getting prettier and prettier. Just like the temple and the scenic area.”

“Villagers have earned more money, building more and more houses. That area,” he pointed to a direction, “used to be the fields, now they are all residential areas.”

“What’s my expectation for the village? Everybody here can live peacefully and work happily [An Ju Le Ye: a conventional Chinese phrase]. Our village is such a good place, where we are blessed by the Sixth Patriarch, therefore even the typhoon won’t come. And I hope the village can be more and more beautiful and developed, then everybody is happy and willing to stay.”

“So, are you willing to rent out your old house for developing a tourist village?”

“Yes, why not? If they can reconstruct the old village, that will be good. But it does not necessitate relocating the whole village. It will be great if we don’t need to move out, but the inner village can be renovated.”

Grandpa Ding’s opinion also represented a part of villagers. Besides the staunch minority who rejected development as ‘the will of the government’, most villagers would not mind earning more, or developing tourism, as long as it did not risk or change their current life. Similar views were observed in other villages that have developed tourism based on the old village and its architectures. A research in Nancun (A village in Dongguan, Guangdong) also shows that it was difficult for villagers to cut off the connection between new village and old village in their daily life (Zhou Qiong, 2012). Even for the local elites, who are considered as owning more resources and as being more aggressive in pursuing economic effect, it is not an easy decision.

Compared to ordinary villagers, local elites tend to be friendlier to the local state. Actually, local elites often play an important role in the village-level governance. In China, the village is the only level that practises *direct election*, which means that the members of the village committee are elected directly by villagers. However, to prevent ‘disputes’, recommendations or rather ‘instructions’ are often given by the local states to ensure that the elected are ‘communicable’ and co-operative. And such people are often local elites, who have better economic performance and charisma in the community, or who have working experience at town or county level, are now retired or willing to work in the village. For example, the youngest village secretary (the highest position in the village level) that I have ever met, was a 28-year-old man, who used to work in the town government but wanted to live a more

countryside-style life, therefore he applied to work at the village-level as a village secretary. Most of the village committee members are men beyond middle-age, and many of them have other occupations to make their living. In this way, village elites are often formed of people who are either economically or politically in an advanced position in the village. Most of the time such identities (economic elite and political elite) overlap, reinforcing one another. On the one hand, local cadres who can receive more information from the government side, which can bring them more opportunities to make money; on the other hand, village economic elites are more likely to be voted as a political elite, and further gain a louder voice in community decisions. My gatekeeper, Huahuang, is also part of this group. In the next section, using Huahuang's a day as example, how the everyday life of Tower Village is intertwined globalisation will be further explored.

### **6.3.3 The Business Operator**

As a tourist area, there are many business operators present. For example, hotels, resorts, restaurants, and shops. Many of these business operators are not villagers, the managers and investors especially are mostly from and live in the city or the county, but run their businesses here. Therefore, they do not count themselves as village people. Yet, many villagers work here, as staff in the resorts or shops. Under these circumstances, villagers are also involved in the commercial operation chains, which are heavily influenced by global knowledge. For example, as mentioned above, the hotels and resorts here are all connected to various online booking platforms. Also, they all participated in the hotel star rating standards issued by the National Tourism Administration, which was originally set in the 1990s for hotels that were involved in foreign business.

The luxury five-star hotel here is on the other side of the high wall that separates the Tower Village from the hotel. This hotel has been open since 2016, employing the idea of Zen; it is the first Zen-themed, hot spring hotel in Southern China. It is largely built in a wood structure, presenting traditional Chinese architectural art that uses the tenon and mortise structure. The hotel comprises 290 rooms and 25 independent villas, equipped with private hot spring pools, aiming to offer the best luxury experience to customers who want to experience the Zen-lifestyle. Moreover, they offer a variety of meditation programs, ranging from Zen Yoga, Tai Ji, zazen, Zen-

spa, copying scriptures, chanting scriptures, to practising abstinence. If we name Zen as the core soul of this hotel, then its framework and supporting bone are actually the globalised management.

The wood that the hotel used in the main hall, teak, was all imported from Southeast Asia, mostly Indonesia, as they were no longer available in China. The wooden furniture was from Laos. The whole hotel management system is run along Western lines, as are most of the commercial luxury hotels in the world. The manager whom I interviewed has a master's degree in hotel management from one of the best universities of Australia. The hotel owns a café, a cigar/wine bar, a western-style dining hall which also serves a buffet.

Such a luxury hotel, of course, requires an expensive charge be paid by its customers. During peak season, winter, the price of each room per night can go over 2000 yuan (around 220 pounds). However, during the summer, it looks bleak, as not many people like to enjoy hot springs in temperatures over 30 degrees centigrade. Though I cannot really know their business status, when I walked in the hotel to sightsee, I hardly meet any people besides hotel staff. As I mentioned above, the government officer Lin thought that the village is a mismatch piece of the whole Scenic Area, as it was not 'peaceful and sacred' enough. Here I have a reverse sense of mismatch: Does such a high-standard, luxury hotel really match the secular but lively surroundings here? The hotel and the village, which is the mismatched one, or are they both?

However, not all the global elements presented here are high class or completely unattainable. In some other hotels within the Scenic Area, buffet as a form of serving food and originating from Europe, has been employed widely. For example, to overcome the low-season for the hot springs, hotels here have started to offer a buffet of local Chinese dishes at a cheap price to attract local people to come. In the same way, there are discounted swimming tickets and sauna tickets for sale to local people other than tourists. During my fieldwork, I sometimes went to these buffet restaurants for lunch, as they were cheap but tasty.

A Tower Villager told me that on his daughter's birthday, they went to one of the buffet restaurants, since as a staff member, he could have discount. "My daughter was excited and happy", and when he said this, he seemed very happy as well.

## 6.4 A day of Huahuang

According to classic globalisation theory, globalisation is famous for the way it stretches and deepens social relations and institutions across space (Held, 1995; Amin, 2002). Global connectivity increases, for example, the rapid transportation and communications technologies to significantly enhance the flows and circulation of people, goods, ideas and information (Amin, 2002). Also, the advance of technologies allows people to have more than one identity. For example, people who work from home could possibly have multiple jobs, which was hard to achieve in the past while people were tied to certain workplace.

However, how do these flows embody in much small scale places such as villages? Critically, how has the circulation of people, goods, ideas and information permeated into villagers' lives?

The story of Tower Village began with the tour on which my gatekeeper Huahuang took me, and I also want to close it with his story. Huahuang in many senses is also a local elite: he is a member of the village committee and he owns a family farm. I lived in Huahuang's house for a month, together with him and his wife, Auntie Hong. Their son works in Shenzhen, for Huawei, a Chinese multinational firm, the largest telecommunications equipment manufacturer in the world.<sup>50</sup>

As mentioned previously, Huahuang's house is one of the tallest in the village, and stands alongside a main road of the village. He owns a truck and often parks it in the farm, which is only 5 minutes' walk from his house. The truck is for delivering flowers and transporting tools, but most of time he travels by moped. Huahuang is always busy and the moped makes it easier for him to travel between town and village, villages and villages, work places and home, while in different places he switches his different identities.

Since Huahuang was my host, we talked a lot. He was then 45 years old. When I asked about his educational background, he was shy: "I only finished middle school,

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<sup>50</sup> In 2019, Huawei Group became more famous/well known due to the China-US Trade War. The USA blacklisting Huawei in May, 2019 was considered as taking the China-US trade war to a dangerous new level.

then I went to a technical school where I learnt garden planting there.” “I’ve done a lot of different jobs, constructor, driver, gardener, and small businessman in Guangzhou, Shunde and Yunfu... and then I decided to come back home.”

Huahuang came home in his late 30s, when he decided to turn his rice farmland into a farm garden. At the beginning he started with planting flowers, then he co-operated with some business partners to plant some black rice. Gradually, it developed into an inclusive farm, with various fruit and vegetable crops and later a fishpond within. By then he thought, “What about a restaurant? I can do agritainment<sup>51</sup> as now more and more tourists come to visit”. Now, four people, Huahuang, Auntie Hong, a chef and the chef’s wife were all working for the farm.

Besides this, he also worked as the village committee member, the gardener of the temple, and sometimes, as my research assistant.

In this section I will use ‘a day in the life of Huahuang’ to illustrate how he compromises these different identities in his everyday life. One thing I need to acknowledge first is that I have concentrated his activities into a one-day long journey – he does not normally do all the activities in a day – but these are indeed his routines.

While Huahuang and his wife get up in the morning – as most of the farmers who get up early – they get up at 6.30am. Then they will have simple breakfast, for example, steam sweet potatoes, boiled eggs, or plain porridge. In this sense, they are living as many other Chinese rural elderly, who do not consume foods like milk and bread but stick to traditional food habits. At that time, I was still asleep so they would save some for me, putting the food on the table in the living room.

### ***Farmer/Gardener***

Then Huahuang and Auntie Hong go to the farm, where Huahuang takes care of his flowers. He often does piling, weeding, spraying, pruning and watering works in the morning, before the sun gets too hot. While I was there, it was summer. Huahuang planted a pool of lotus flowers in the pond, to offer a very traditional but elegant view (in the Chinese taste) for his customer, also creating a nice spot for taking photos.

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<sup>51</sup> An inclusive form of farm, which provides multiple rustic experiences including rural style’s restaurant, bed & breakfast, cultivating experience, fishing, cooking in old big stove, etc.

Besides, he is in charges of the construction and maintenance of the whole farm. Different tasks come up from time to time, which keep him busy until 11.00am. Auntie Hong takes care of their vegetables, including the supply of their family and the restaurant – though most of the time they eat at the restaurant.

Huahuang also looks after the flowers that he provides for the temple's garden. On one occasion I followed him to the temple. He walked inside, demonstrating his familiarity with the place, saying hello to the monks and staff. When he was working, he just asked me to wander around and then, when his work was done, he took me to lunch at the staff canteen of the temple.

In this regard, Huahuang is a competent farmer and gardener, not only because he takes care of the fields and flowers by himself, but also due to the beautiful views of flowers and garden that we can see.

### ***Restaurant Owner/Businessman***



*Figure 29 The view of the pond in the farm garden during summer*

After a busy morning, before noon, Huahuang begins to perform his duties as the owner of the restaurant. Though the size of restaurant is large (in terms of space and the tables that they have within), the management and operating structure of it is

very simple – technically it is still a traditional rural family-run business. In addition to the Chef, Huahuang occasionally serves as a second chef. Auntie Hong and the Chef's wife are responsible for ordering, serving and washing dishes. When there are many people, they can be really busy. Therefore, Huahuang often asked me to work part-time there. He told me that some customers praised me, saying that I was very polite and 'don't look like a rural girl', therefore he was willing to have me there as waitress and casual worker. I worked there from time to time for more than two weeks. Besides, Auntie Red 's nephew occasionally came to help.

Working as a member of staff there gave me opportunities to observe how Huahuang worked for his farm. In addition to cooking for his customers, he is responsible for marketing. He is also well acquainted with the use of social media. Since we added each other as friends in WeChat, I observed that he updates his 'friend circle' (similar to the Facebook personal homepage and information stream but only mutual friends can see it) frequently. He kept posting nature views and the various activities on his farm, in an attempt to attract customers. He also made friends with photographers too, and invited them to come over to take photographs, which he will then post online.

Besides posting daily views and advertisements about the farm on his social media, Huahuang spares no effort to develop new customer sources. He has designed a wide range of activities that different groups of customers can enjoy here. For example, he installed a barbecue stone stove, and then invited the person who was in charge of schools and companies to come and experience these activities, to attract them to bring their students or employees to the farm for team-building events. Moreover, he uploaded pictures and introductions of the farm to travel information websites, and joined different competitions to promote his farm. I asked him how he knew these sources, and he told me that he joined many organisations, including Areal Farm-Union, Small/Medium-Scale Rural-Business Union and so on, to gather as much as information and opportunities as possible. Moreover, he always seeks chances to talk with his customers, asking them how do they know and feel about his farm, to learn more about recent trends and news.

One noon, after several customers finished their lunch at the farm, they asked me call the boss out. Huahuang then came out from the kitchen and asked them what

they required. One of the guests said that they worked for a food app and asked Huahuang if he was interested in registering as a merchant on their platform and co-promoting it. Huahuang of course seemed interested. He showed them around the farm and told them where to take the best picture. However, what surprised me was that Huahuang did not immediately agree to cooperate and join their platform, but asked them to leave business card for reconsideration.

Later, Huahuang told me that there are many such platforms, and other platforms have been here before. These platforms were in competition with one another. So if one joined a platform, they can no longer join others. In addition, the conditions given by each platform and the commission drawn are not the same, and he has to make a comprehensive comparison before it can be settled, otherwise the 'opportunity' can become a 'limitation'.

It was Huahuang's understanding of modern business that made me recognize his identity as a businessman rather than a farmer. He not only knows the rules of modern marketing, but also has a clear willingness to absorb the knowledge that he not yet has.

'Airbnb' was another thing that Huahuang learned from his customers. When we first met, he knew that I was from the capital city Guangzhou, and he asked me "Do you know any rich boss? We are looking for people to invest on our village," he emphasized, "to re-build it in the way that the villagers want". Huahuang said, "I heard that there is a popular thing called Airbnb, maybe we should start with a few households first."

I was curious, "how do you know about Airbnb?"

Huahuang then told me, "A tourist told me when he came to my restaurant for dinner, he suggested that we could make use of our old village."

It was not surprising that a passing guest had mentioned Airbnb to him, but it was surprising that he paid attention to all the ideas, that he thought they were interesting and worth learning. He was eagerly absorbing various information and methods that he could use to apply to his own business, or the development of the village.

### ***Village Leader and A Learner***

When lunchtime is over, Huahuang and staffs take their rest – the afternoon is too hot here that everybody will rather stay home until around 3 pm.

In the afternoon, Huahuang sometimes goes to the Village Committee Office to see if there is anything that needs to be dealt with. But it is not how villagers normally deal with things. Normally, villagers make calls to a member of Village Committee who they trust, and who will then come to the house to discuss the matter. The scene that I mentioned earlier in this chapter, where I presented the attitude of villagers regarding the re-construction of the village happened in such a way.

Therefore, before dinner time, Huahuang often performs his duty as a member of Village Committee, a leader of the village. He walks around the village, goes to different families and solves various disputes. He took me along as I requested. Most of the time these are everyday, ordinary issues. There are small quarrels between villages, sometimes they don't even need to be resolved. Instead, they just need a "person in charge" to listen to them and Huahuang is just the right person. Also, Huahuang goes to the difficult 'low-income households' in the village to hand out their minimum-security money to them once a month.

However, as one of the elites in the village, and in his golden age, Huahuang was more ambitious, compared to Grandpa Ding. Apparently, he was one of the supporters of the 'new tourist village project'. Not only so, he was deeply involved in the persuasion of villagers when the project was initiated. He expressed his regret on the failure of it, commenting, "villagers have misunderstandings about the project, it is good for everybody". After the project was shelved, he changed his strategy.

Besides his plan to turn a few old houses into Airbnb accommodation, Huahuang also knows that only when the economy of the village develops, will the villagers stay voluntarily, and the village will be developed.

He once asked me to edit his proposal of a "General Plan of developing a Lychee Planting-Base in Tower Village". The proposal was taking shape, which suggested that the villagers of Tower Village should unify their growth plans to cultivate Lychee on the contacted fields on the mountain. The lychee he wanted to promote, was the

same variety that the Sixth Patriarch planted thousands of years ago. The old Lychee tree was still alive, and produced around 100 lychees per year, which made it very valuable and rare. Huahuang, who used to be a gardener, wanted to develop this variety into a famous brand, as the special local product of the temple and the village, further promoting the village economy.

In his proposal, he also mentioned the notion of a 'global first' — "to create the global first Buddhist Lychee Festival", "accommodating tourists from all over the world". Regardless of whether this goal can actually be achieved at this level, at least it proves that he has global awareness, in other words, of how big the stage can be.

Apparently, Huahuang is more globally-aware. From the rhetoric 'global-first' which he learnt from the state, to knowledge of Airbnb gained from his customer. Although he lived in village and grew up against the village background, there were traces of many modern business modes that could be seen in the ways he used to promote his own business and the village's business. Some of them may be still rough, or not comprehensive enough. But a very important thing that I observed about Huahuang is that he never stops learning.

In the evening, Huahuang goes back to his restaurant business. At this time the restaurant can be really busy (although sometimes it is very quiet). It is not yet a very mature business. The farm restaurant now shows its advantage – nearly all the food consumed is produced on the farm so there is always fresh food – no need to worry about wasting prepared materials if there are not many customers. But in the quiet days, Huahuang does not complain. He is still happy, often inviting friends or his business partners to come, to come and have dinner for free. After dinner, on the less busy days, he makes video calls to his two sons. Like all parents, he and Auntie Hong ask about their lives and their work. Huahuang also introduced me in these video calls, telling them he was then 'being my research assistant'. I once asked him, does he want his sons to come back home to work or inherit his farm when he retires?

Huahuang laughed, and said, "Of course not, they have their own career. I have mine."

## 6.5 Postscript

I have referred to Tower Village as ‘in the name of globalisation’, which means that the people here, such as Mr. Lin, Huahuang, or Sanshu, all have deeper connections with globalisation. They are no longer indifferent to globalisation. Instead, they have utilised its features to make a difference to their lives, and they are well aware of that. Moreover, they know how to play this game, using the name ‘globalisation’, as the rhetoric that shows up many times in this chapter in the phrase ‘the global first’. I am not sure about this, as I can hardly imagine that there is anything that has not already been thought about by somebody in the world. But I really appreciated the efforts that the inhabitants of Tower Village have made to get closer to globalisation and benefit from it.

At the end of 2018, Huahuang sent me a link, asking me to vote for his farm in an internet competition for the 10 best agritainments in Guangdong Province. I voted for him and greeted him, asking how the business has been recently. He said all is fine, and invited me to come next year.

“Come and eat lychee this summer!”

## Chapter 7 The story of Alibaba Village – Be the part of globalisation

### 7.1 Chapter Summary

This chapter, similar to the previous two chapters, tells the story of Alibaba Village and how it is embedded into network of globalisation. Among the three case study villages, Alibaba Village is the most 'globalised' one, not only heavily influenced by globalisation, but also able to actively produce global constituents. Unlike Peanut Village and Tower Village, where villagers are *relatively* local and homogeneous, Alibaba Villagers clearly consist of two groups of people, *original villagers* and *new villagers* who come from other parts of the country. However, both groups are mostly globally aware. They think globally and live globally, at the same time preserving their own traditional values. The example of Alibaba Village shows that e-commerce has elevated the competitiveness of the village, which makes this village the one that conforms most clearly to the notion of the 'global countryside', as discussed in the literature. Moreover, the advancement of economic status has had positive effects on the preservation of family values, reinforcing a sense of community of Alibaba Village.

Similar to the structure of the previous two chapters, this chapter starts with a brief introduction of the village, illustrating its background, history, followed by the current situation, including the changing landscape and division within the village.

Then I will proceed to analyse its connection with globalisation in terms of production, demonstrating the transformation of modes of production within the village in the section 7.3. Section 7.4 focuses on the lifestyles of villagers. In this section I characterise lifestyle as five different aspects, which are routine, entertainment, daily consumption, networking and the daily speech.

Finally, in Section 7.5, I discuss how globalisation affects and works its way on Alibaba Village from another perspective, that is the community. This section discussing the family, individuals and the social organisation within this community.

## 7.2 Setting the scene

The way to Alibaba Village is completely different from the other two villages. If the other two can still be clearly identified as countryside, the identity of Alibaba Village is relatively blurred. It is located in the suburbs of Guangzhou, the third biggest city in China. Along with the rapid expansion of the city and its population, the suburban area, Panyu District, is no longer wild. The area was changed rapidly from farm fields into a residential and business area. One of the busiest metro lines connects this area with the Central Business District (CBD) of Guangzhou, which makes it possible to travel between the two in just thirty minutes. Outside the metro station is the bus station, which provides various bus lines that connect to the villages. The bus drives along the six-lane main road, which is extremely busy during the commuting period, transfusing ‘the fresh blood’— the labour force who work in the city centre and live in the suburbs — from the peri-urban to the very heart of the city in the morning and admitting them back from a full-day’s work in the evening. From the bus, one can see a lot of high buildings, shopping malls and restaurants on both sides of the road. The entrance to the village is marked by a barrier arm that raises to admit cars, and it was not until I had actually crossed into the village itself that I really felt like I was walking into a village.

How does Alibaba Village still qualify as a village then? The simplest and direct answer is that it is registered in the administrative system as a village, its land is still collectively owned by the village and it has a village committee. However, apart from these ‘fixed boundaries’, the administrative boundary and the natural boundary, there are other features that make this place a village, which will gradually be presented in this chapter.

### ***A brief history of Alibaba Village***

Alibaba Village itself has a long history. As with most of the administrative villages, it consists of a few natural villages, which now turns into a few clusters. The oldest natural village was formed around the Tang Dynasty (618-907AD). However, the boundaries between the original natural villages are now blurred and hard to find, as the houses were built compactly (Figure 29 & Figure 30). Traces of former agricultural production have also vanished. Alibaba Village used to grow rice, peanuts, vegetables, beans and fruit, the same as most of the Guangdong rural

villages. However, by 2015, there was not a single villager in Alibaba Village who was still reliant on an income from agriculture.

After the famous 'open and reform' policy launched in 1978, the village was heavily influenced by overseas investment in Guangzhou and its nearby towns. Industries, especially labour-intensive industries, started their businesses in this area, which led to a large influx of people from all over the country. In the 1980s, some clothing and shoe factories were set up around Alibaba Village. The village gradually rented out its agricultural land and turned its main industry into manufacture and clothing. Meanwhile, due to its location, which is within an acceptable commuting distance from the major city of Guangzhou, Alibaba Village soon became one of the preferred places to accommodate factory workers and immigrants. As a result, the main occupation of local villagers has become that of property landlord, renting their houses to immigrants who cannot afford the rental prices in the city. According to the staff of the rental property management office in the village, around 70% of local households have their (extra) rental properties within the village. By 2014, there were over 3,000 buildings (over 20,000 apartments or single rooms) registered as 'rental'. Since then, two distinct groups of residents have emerged in Alibaba Village: there are the original villagers who registered as formal residents here, and a floating population that we called new villagers.

Alibaba Village also represents a particular village type – *Taobao Village*. This name comes from Taobao.com, the biggest online B2C platform in China, which owns more than 5 hundred million active users<sup>52</sup>. The Alibaba Group, the owner and operator of Taobao.com, is also the biggest online business company in China, owning Taobao.com, Tmall.com, Alipay and various sub-companies. According to AliResearch, the research institute of the group, if more than 10% of the population of a whole village run online business at Taobao.com, or the annual turnover of the e-commerce on Taobao.com in the village exceeds ten million yuan, such a village can be identified as a Taobao Village. According to the Village E-commerce Association, in 2013, Alibaba Village had more than 600 vendors and merchants that were running online business on Taobao.com, with more than 6 hundred-million-

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<sup>52</sup> According to the report of 2018 fiscal year of Alibaba Group. Achieved from <https://www.alibabagroup.com/cn/news/article?news=p180504>

yuan turnover in that year. It was the same year that Alibaba Village has been identified as one of the 20 Taobao Villages. Since then, 'Taobao Village' as an economic geographic agglomeration phenomenon has experienced rapid growth. Just a year later, by the end of 2014, the number of Taobao Villages in China increased to 212. In 2018, there are more than 3000 Taobao Villages nationwide.<sup>53</sup> Even within Panyu District, there are more than 38 Taobao Villages. Alibaba Village is special, as it was one of the pioneer villages in this fast-growing industry. At the same time, it is an ordinary one amidst these three thousand, considering that similar processes are happening in many other villages.

Interestingly, by 2015, according to the Boss Luo, there were more than 60,000 people living in the village, while only around 5,000 were original villagers. Those new villagers, mostly involved in Taobao industry, were from the countryside of Chaoshan area (the joint name of Chaozhou and Shantou, an area of eastern Guangdong),<sup>54</sup> including but not limited to people who run Taobao online shops, people who provide logistics services for the Taobao business, and people who open restaurants to serve Chaoshan food. The village has been divided into two separate worlds, but which nevertheless have countless ties with each other.

After 2000, along with the process of city development, all the farmland of Alibaba Village was requisitioned and converted into main roads, compact residential estates and living quarters, which has made the rest of village a depression (Figure 30 - Figure 32). However, a strong sense of rural, which distinguishes Alibaba Village from the surrounding urban area, can be clearly recognised once you walk into the village. The sense of rural is hard to describe — it is nothing to do with nature. The trees within the village are even fewer than in the residential estates nearby. There are no animals, much less any lake or river. It seems everything runs counter to the traditional village. The sense of rural here is reflected in the atmosphere, the way the villagers live, and of course, in the fact that the administrative status of this village stays as village. Compared to the city, it is noisy, full of bustle, and relatively

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<sup>53</sup> Data from the report "China Taobao Village Development Report (2014-2018)", released by AliResearch and the Space Planning Research Centre of Nanjing University. Retrieved from <http://www.aliresearch.com/Blog/Article/detail/id/21709.html>

<sup>54</sup> Chaoshan area is located in the east of Guangdong Province. Chaoshan people are famous for their "talent for doing business", and the local culture there encourages young people to look outward/travel outside the area for every opportunity to start their own business.

disordered (Figure 33). Buildings are relatively low-rise and congested; goods are randomly placed along the streets. It is like a big market, which seems chaotic but obviously has its own operating logic.



Figure 30 The aerial view of Alibaba Village (from <https://gz.house.qq.com/a/20170824/009280.htm#p=3>)



Figure 31 The aerial view of Alibaba Village (from <https://gz.house.qq.com/a/20170824/009280.htm#p=10>)

This kind of village is called '*chengzhongcun* (village in the city or urban village)'. It is like the city is swallowing the countryside, but some places are harder than other to digest – they remain in situ, with a strong sense of vitality.



*Figure 32 The aerial view of Alibaba Village (from <https://gz.house.qq.com/a/20170824/009280.htm#p=11>), a wide main road divides the village on the left and the middle-class residential quarters on the right*



*Figure 33 A small traffic jam due to misplaced building materials in Alibaba Village*

### ***The changing landscape***

I still remember the first time that I entered Alibaba Village in 2014. It was also a summer, and I travelled from the metro station to the village by modi. Compared to 2017, Alibaba Village was then even more cluttered. There were more stalls set up by the side of the road, and the roads were not so clean. A government officer from the town introduced me to Boss Luo, as he was a famous figure here, one of the first few pioneers who started a Taobao business here in 2009. By 2014, Boss Luo was the owner of two big Taobao online shops, but was seeking a transition from a pure trader to the supplier of traders. In the meantime, he took advantage of his wide connections, established the union of logistics service providers. He considered that as the best way to gain and synthesise the latest information and consuming habits of customers from different areas, and to provide the best logistics services for the Chaoshan community here. In various aspects, he is a successful entrepreneur.

The first time I met Boss Luo was at his old office — a three storey building within the village. The ground floor was for customer services; the second floor was storage, and the third floor was his office. The space within the building was not big and was quite messy (Figure 34). But Boss Luo kept his own office tidy, and as most of the Chaoshan businessmen, he put a large tea table in the middle of the room. He said: drink some tea, then we can talk — a very Chaoshan way to be social and start the conversation.

Boss Luo told me then, that instead of being only a normal participant of the Taobao industry and playing by the rules made by Taobao.com, he wanted to be in the upper levels of industry and become the one who shaped the industry ecosystem. He then started to build up his own online platform to supply other online sellers. “We only ranked fifth in the peer companies”, he said seriously, “after the initial competition, often only the top three, or even top two, can survive; we have a long way to go”.



*Figure 34 A corner of the old office building of Boss Luo, the door on the right side of the photo is heading to the second floor*

Boss Luo stayed as my contact after my previous research finished. Since we were friends on Wechat,<sup>55</sup> we can see each other's postings of daily life. He knew that I was studying for my PhD and I was able to follow his latest activities. Therefore, when I told him that I was going to start new research in Alibaba Village, he was very happy to help.

Three years after that initial meeting, Boss Luo again became my first interviewee in Alibaba Village as I conducted my fieldwork during 2017. Boss Luo has moved his company into an industrial park that has been built within the village to accommodate Taobao shop owners. Now his company rents a floor in the new building. This time his office is bright and big. Everything is open, and everybody can see the boss in his office through the glass (Figure 35). Here has the appearance of a classic modern internet enterprise, no goods, no parcels, and no relatives and families. However, the tea table in his office has not changed (Figure 36). The establishment of the industrial park was the attempt made by the local government to regulate the

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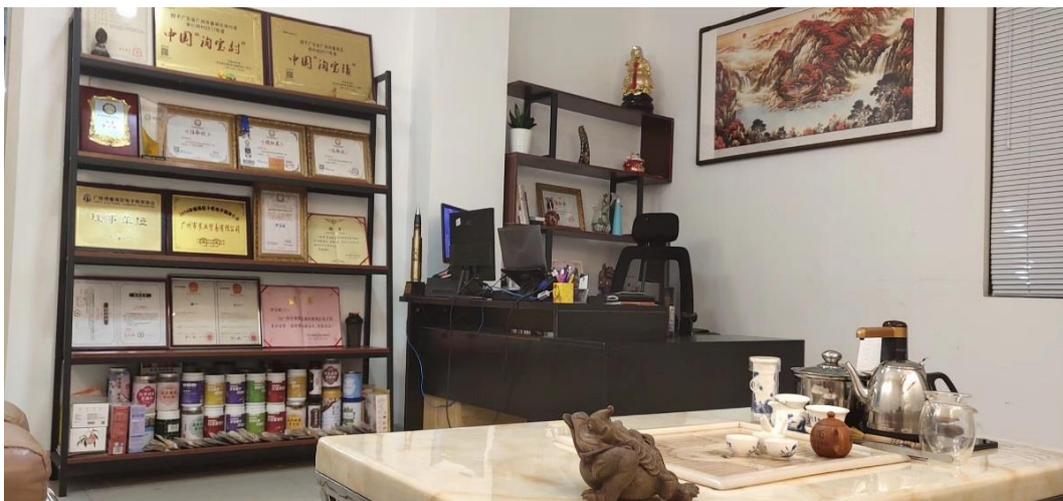
<sup>55</sup> A very popular Chinese social media app: its function is like a combination of Instagram and WhatsApp.

rapidly growing Taobao industry — “but most people here don’t like to be regulated, that’s why they choose to do Taobao, you are your own boss.” Boss Luo commented.

.Boss Luo’s change is an epitome of the changes that happened in Alibaba Village during recent years – the informal, grassroots practises of Taobao business have been normalised. Compared to Peanut Village and Tower Village, Alibaba Village



*Figure 35 Boss Luo's new office in the industrial park, his office is on the right of the photo*



*Figure 36 Boss Luo's new office and his tea table, where we sit around to conduct our interview, the plates on the shelves are various certificates of Taobao Village and his company*

changes much quicker and more frequently. If one visits once a year, he or she will find out that there is always something new comes up.

Villagers of Alibaba village rarely talk about its history. For them, the more important thing is that the village is alive, updating itself every day, just like the city, but in a less disciplined way. The changing appearance of architectures and landscape illustrates a village's development and status. Today, we can see the ways in which the impacts of globalisation and industrialisation leave obvious marks on the landscape of Alibaba Village. For example, there are two conspicuous signboards hanging on the buildings just near the entrance of the village, which belong to an international children's education centre and an English educational institution, and they seem to have been there for a while already (Figure 37). At least we can assume that the children living in the area have the need to or are willing to improve their English, as these two institutions have survived here.



*Figure 37 One of the entrances of Alibaba Village with a rising arm barrier, the two conspicuous signboards are belonged to an international children education centre and an English education institution*

As in most of the naturally formed localities, the layout of the buildings in Alibaba Village is hodgepodge. In the agricultural age, or certainly before the early 1980s, Alibaba Village was an agriculturally-based village. Most of the houses then only served as homes for local villagers. Therefore, as with most of the Guangdong

villages, the houses were majorly built from wood and bricks (Figure 39). Although these houses were generally in the same style, they were varied in terms of size, height, and outlook. The distance between buildings was small, the roadway was narrow. Thus, the appearance of the village at that time would have been of a crowded and disordered place. Many of these buildings still remain in the southern part of the village.

Entering the mid-80s, with the process of industrialisation, although the alleys and roads within the village were still narrow, the main road nearby Alibaba Village was completed and opened to traffic. This main road connected Panyu District and the major city of Guangzhou (Zhang et al, 2016). Factories set up in the area, attracting thousands of migrant workers to work in or nearby the village. These migrant workers wanted to spend as little money as possible on accommodation. New buildings, which were often divided into high-density, dormitory-like single rooms, emerged as the situation required. Or, some villagers divided a portion of their own houses to rent out. From then on, the traditional countryside scene gradually vanished from sight

In 2000, with the expanding need for land resources, the village collectives planned to develop the northern part of the village. Although the homesteads there had been allocated to individual households, construction of buildings there had to follow the collective plan. Under their planning, these new houses were relatively uniform and spacious. They were also designed to satisfy the needs of the small-scale clothing industry. Therefore, the road between the houses can accommodate two trucks at the same time, which is convenient for manufacturers for loading and unloading goods.

After 2009, with the development of information technology and the need for industrial transformation, a group of Taobao online shop owners moved in. This group of Taobao sellers found it easy to transport their goods here, based on the previous good foundation of the clothing industry. The convenient location allowed them to send the goods out quickly but with a much lower price for storage and rent compared with the city. Since then, Alibaba village has developed a special path apart from many other villages, with its development heavily dependent on the internet industry.

To adapt to the change in the occupations of the labour force, local villagers have rebuilt their houses from small single rooms — suitable for a single factory worker — to apartments which are suitable for online shopkeepers and their families. Overall in the village, there is thus an area where new buildings are concentrated, as well as area where relatively old buildings stand. As discussed above, the changing landscape is in line with the change of production mode. The living environment of human beings has always been adapted to the manner of human labour. The agricultural landscape corresponds to agricultural production, and the industrialised production mode brings about the landscape of industrialisation. The main industry in the village currently is the internet economy, correspondingly relating to the 'global' landscape. However, such a global landscape, is widely divergent from what we know or have seen from 'global cities'. Here does not have the modern gleaming towers or glittering nightscape, yet inside it hides one of the most energetic internet industries with a high volume of trading every day. It is grassroots globalisation.

In Alibaba Village, at the northern part of the village, new four- to six-storey buildings have been built alongside the straight and parallel alleys. These buildings may have slightly different outlooks, ranging from three storeys to six storeys, but most of them have been divided into several apartments (often one per floor) with a similar layout inside. They have been designed to accommodate four to five people. This kind of apartment often has a big living room as the main working area and packing area, compensated for by a small storage room for their goods, one or two simple bedrooms and a small kitchen and bathroom. The ground floor of the building is sometimes used as storage, for its convenience of delivery (Figure 38), and sometimes occupied by peripheral industries, for example, garment processing or courier services. Most of the day this area is quiet, as people often work in their 'office/home'. Only when they are out for shipments, often in the evening, does the area get livelier. Another peak is around midnight when many young people who work for customer-services finish their work. They head out in groups to get some *night snack* or even a *night supper* at 2am. As most of those who run online businesses are from the Chaoshan area, to meet their needs, a lot of Chaoshan-style restaurants have opened beside the main road in the village. Some of them are open from the afternoon to even 3 or 4 in the morning, as their customers — the young Chaoshan people — have a habit of eating late at night after they have

worked all day. A small enclave of Chaoshan community has been formed and is attracting more and more Chaoshan people to come. Therefore, there are three main languages that a visitor might hear within this area: Cantonese as the local dialect, Chaoshanhua as the dialect that most of the tenants speak, and Mandarin as the language that allows communication between two groups of people.



*Figure 38 A classic workplace of small Taobao shop, a young woman sits there, operating computer to do customer service, while the parcels are piled everywhere*

The southern part of the village is a different case. Here the inhabitants are mostly the local villagers and individual tenants (compare to the tenants in the northern part who come in groups and from the same place). New houses are interspersed with the old ones. The alleys in this area are narrower, as they do not need to serve for transporting goods and parcels. The history of Alibaba Village is preserved here (Figure 40). There are a few ancestral halls and a small Buddhist temple within (Figure 41), hiding themselves in the sprawling village. Similarly, the evening is the most buoyant moment of the day, as the children have finished school and working people have finished work and are coming home. Around then we can see villagers — whether they are the original ones or newcomers — carrying their groceries and hurrying back for dinner. The smell of home food wafts into the air. Yet, the southern

part of village is not completely separate from the 'new world'. The trace of Taobao is everywhere, for example, in the simple job posting on the wall: "Internet customer service recruitment: communicating with customer on WeChat, good expression, age 18-28, female preferred." These kinds of job postings are common, including in the southern part of village (Figure 42), along with posters advertising spare rooms to rent.



*Figure 39 The overview of Alibaba Village, where we can see the buildings in northern part are more organised and the buildings in the southern part are more compact and disorder*



*Figure 40 A traditional dwelling in southern part of the Village, the alley is too narrow which makes it hard to capture the whole picture of the house<sup>3</sup>*



*Figure 41 a small ancestral hall hiding in the sprawling village, in the middle of newly-built buildings'*



Figure 42 The random postings on the wall of southern part village: hiring and renting

### 7.3 Globalised production

After the exploration of the landscape of the village, in this section, the focus shifts to the modes of production, namely, how this ‘Taobao’ industry operates here, and how it affects the everyday lives of the villagers.

To take one of the major jobs in Alibaba Village, running an online shop in Taobao.com, as an example.

“What you need is a computer only.”

“With a network cable and a computer, you can do global business.”

These are the familiar sayings in the practice of Taobao business, especially during the initial stages of development of this industry. A computer and a network cable are often used as the symbols to demonstrate how easy it is to enter the industry. The ‘useless advanced equipment’ in Peanut Village become the essential living tool of Alibaba Village.

Unlike the traditional agricultural work, which entails heavy physical labour, or the industrial assembly line that requires repetitive mechanical labour, running an online shop asks for more mental work. However, its entry threshold is much lower than other high-tech industries. Simply speaking, to become a Taobao shop owner, one just needs to register on Taobao.com, find the supply, take photographs of the goods and post them online. Once the customer places an order, the money is paid to the guarantee institution that Taobao.com provides, then the owner ships the goods. After the goods have been received, the customer clicks confirm, and the money is paid into the owner's account. This is a common process of online trading. However, the existence of Taobao Village greatly reduces the complexities within these processes. The mature and stable suppliers in a Taobao Village allow shop owners to order goods from them after the owners receive orders from customers. Some suppliers even provide shipping services, which means that the only thing that owners need to do is to receive orders, and pass them to the suppliers with a cheaper price, then the owner earns the price difference between the customer and supplier.

In the following section, I will analyse how a more globalised mode of production works in this village from the perspective of different professional roles.

### ***Shop Owner***

The job of shop owner does not require a higher education background or special intelligence or qualifications, but enthusiasm and hard-work. An online shop owner, *Wei*, told me:

If you say it's hard, it's not hard. When a *laoxiang* (someone/a fellow who comes from the same place) comes and decides to do this (Taobao involvement), we normally provide all the information he needs, and we will tell them what to do and how to do. You only need some computer skills. But how well you can do it, it's up to you.

Wei belonged to the middle level of the shop owners here. He has a team of more than a dozen people, and has been here for four years. He owned around ten online

shops, each averaging a million profit per year. In the 2016 Double 11 Festival,<sup>56</sup> his shops earned more than three million a day. He said, “that’s not a big deal, many people here earn more than ten million on that day.”

Although the basic procedure looks simple, it can develop into a very complicated subject. It is down to these details that differences and variations between owners arise. For example, the quality of goods, the way the owner presents and advertises their goods, the price and discount that a shop can offer, the activities to increase the page views, the after-sales service that they are able to provide, and so on. As Wei said, the rules are simple, but how well one can do this depends on how devoted one is, to gather information, to catch the possible trend, just as in any other industry. The biggest difference between Taobao trading and other business is that most of the operations happen online:

You need to look at many data every day. Which item of goods (this owner sells women’s clothes) going fast, why it is going fast, where the traffic comes from, and is the data of each piece of clothes sound? One owner may have various shops, then he needs to check with each piece of clothes and every shop. After checking your own business, you need to check with other owners’ businesses, after that you need to figure out a way to break through and gain more business traffic, “If you do not look at Taobao for three days, your information will fall behind others.”

The importance of information and data is highly valued here, so is business acumen. According to some villagers, the first few years, around 2009 to 2012, were the golden period for the start-up of Taobao operations. After then, the competition became more and more intense, as homogeneity became serious and market supervision was tightened. A shop owner commented that there used to be more than 1,000 merchants here, but by 2015, only around 600 had survived. Lin Geng et al.’s (2016) research on Junpu Village in Jiayang, another Taobao Village, also shows that low-price competition and merchandise mimicking are common in the developing period. Such contexts and the fast-changing dynamic of online business

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<sup>56</sup> 11 November, the biggest online shopping festival promoted by Taobao.com. According to the data released by the Ministry of Commerce, national online retail transaction volume of the day in 2018 exceeded 300 billion yuan. Data retrieved from <http://www.ebrun.com/20181116/308036.shtml>

urge shop owners to upgrade or make a switch in their business. Some switch their types of goods; some change their platform from Taobao.com to other e-commerce platforms. Some expand their business further into the whole industry chain, transiting from trade-only to including design, production, hiring models, and quality control. Some establish their own brands, creating their own styles. At this stage, these small businesses become mature enterprises. Some of the mature businesses in Alibaba Village have moved out of their old sites and are renting a floor in the nearby commercial real estate. Another shop owner *Brother Ming* told me,

“One of my friends is dealing with IPO, another one has done so last year. They all started their business here, and sometimes they come back, to have a drink with us. We are *laoxiang*, we still exchange information and experiences.

Another friend, who used to be in the same building with us three years ago. He has gained the sole agency of Playboy in China. He paid more than one hundred million yuan to get this. Now he owns hundreds of shops across the country, including those on Tmall.com.<sup>57</sup> Last year’s double 11 Festival, one of his shops earned thirty million!”

When he said this, he expressed a kind of admiration, but not much and he did not seem to regard his friend’s experience as something that was particularly remote from his own. I asked Brother Ming if he wanted to achieve this, he replied, “Of course I want to earn more, but I am doing fine now. That will be too tiring [to run such a big business], I guess.”

I talked to six Taobao shop owners or former owners in Alibaba Village, five men and a woman. All of them are young, keen and very sensitive to new information. However, they did not have typical smart ‘office look’ of young city elites. They all dressed casually, and sat in a very relaxed manner both at work and when we talked. But the content of the conversations always naturally revolved around the

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<sup>57</sup> A platform that separated from Taobao.com. Most of shops on Tmall are direct-sale or authorised stores of well-known brands, while Taobao.com focuses on small businesses.

internet industry, innovation, fashion trends, new opportunities and anything new, because they are truly interested in and care about these.

Besides their ideas and concepts, back to the 'actual practice', some of them sell their goods to Japan, Korea, and Taiwan, achieving truly globalised networks in economic activities. "It needs to be really good to let them accept our goods", an owner said. Apparently, he was not referring to the traditional 'made in China' products.

### ***Designer***

One designer, Tracy, who works in a company here commented that:

"the competition is getting more and more intense, because we are not only competing with each other, but also competing with those international fast fashion retailers. For example, H&M, Zara, Uniqlo, they all set up their online shops on Taobao.com. What shall we do? We learn from them of course!"

She does not mind openly saying that they will refer to other brands' styles:

"Everybody does that. And we are not copying directly, we make changes. Those fast fashion brands refer to luxury brands, we learn from them and make them more suitable for the domestic customer."

The nature of the industry makes them become globalised individuals with global vision. Villager is one of their identities, but not the only identity. They are also online shop owners, entrepreneurs, fashion designers and IT professionals.

### ***Customer Service***

Of course, not everyone in the village stands at the forefront of the industry. The jobs offered by some employers, are much more basic. Many young people work in customer services here. Their job is mainly to communicate with customers, answer their questions, assist in ordering and provide after-sales service. A person can be qualified for the job after a day of training and continue learning while working. Yet, it provides opportunities for rural young people to experience 'city life'.

Xiumin is a young girl, who looks about 18 or 20 years old, and works on the ground floor of a small Taobao studio. She was the third girl that I tried to talk to that

morning; the first two girls in other shops turned me down, claiming that they did not want to talk to a stranger, nor did they want to be interviewed. Xiumin was shy, and maybe that was why she did not reject me directly. During our conversation, she kept an eye on her computer screen and time to time typed something. Sometimes she talked to the customers, sometimes she talked to her friends, skilfully switching between different software. I asked her if I was interrupting her work and whether I could interview her after she had finished. She said, "No, now is fine, I don't want to be interviewed seriously, but we can talk now."

She told me that she came here after she finished secondary school two years ago. She worked for her relative, her uncle's nephew, who runs a Taobao studio here. "Some of my friends came first, they told me that the life here is good, and I have relatives here, so I came, too." Xiumin was also from Chaoshan, in her hometown, many people have relatives or friends who work here and then bring their family members here. The news and opportunities spread rapidly from mouth to mouth.

"I am happy here, why not? I don't know any special skill, and the job here is quite easy and relaxed. Working time maybe long, but it is not like you need to work all day."

Besides her work, Xiumin just like any other young girl in the city, shops online, watches soap-opera dramas online, and hangs out with friends, mostly also laoxiang who work here, when they have time off. She hardly goes to Guangzhou: "Not necessary. Panyu has everything," she said.

Xiumin is representative of the life situation and values of a group of young people in the village. Yet most of them make friends with laoxiang here, and people in their working environments are mostly from the same place. Such a lack of diversity is very rare in any global city or economically advanced city. This phenomenon will be further discussed in the next section: the lifestyle of villagers in Alibaba Village.

### ***Local landlord***

There are inhabitants who do not participate in Taobao enterprises or other e-commerce in the village. Most of the local, original households have property to rent out, thus their main occupation has become that of property landlord. Although during interviews, instead of calling themselves landlords, some young and middle-

aged villagers proudly claimed themselves to be a “free-lancer”. Yet, rent has become the main income resource for original villagers, including the collective rent (the village as a collective, rents out their land to factories) which is distributed by the ‘village company’,<sup>58</sup> and individual rent from their own properties. Some original villagers have moved out to nearby modern residential districts, some have moved to central Guangzhou. However, more than half the villagers have chosen to stay in the village. Some stay on the top floor of the new buildings in the northern part of village and rent the rest of the floors to tenants. Some remain living in the southern part. In addition to the stable rents that they receive, young people also tend to work in the city as commuting has now become much easier.

I was curious as to whether there were any local villagers engaged in Taobao business. A new villager, a Taobao shop owner who came to Alibaba Village in the early stages stated:

“Barely, basically none. They think that it’s easy to earn money when they see us. But from the point that you actually start, to the point that you master it, it may take more than a year. From the beginning, you may need to wake up at 7, work until midnight. Only when you become a boss and hire somebody, can you sleep late and let others share your work. Before then, you maybe can hang on for a month, or two months, or even half a year. But compared to building a house here, renting it out, and getting paid every month [without working], why would they choose to do this? For them, it’s not worth it.”

As we were in a less serious group interview, or say more like a group chat, a local villager argued back against this:

“Many local villagers are landlords indeed, but it doesn’t mean that they don’t want to be a boss. They just do not want to work so hard. Some landlords even go to work as a cleaner, and at the same time are receiving rent. They are willing to work, but they just don’t want

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<sup>58</sup> Alibaba Village has established a company to manage the collective property including land resources and other assets.

to do business. Something is suitable for you, and something is suitable for us. We are not lazy.”

Eventually, the new villager concluded that they (the immigrants) needed to work harder because they did not have anything to retreat to, while the original villager can drop running online business anytime. “We don’t want to go back to ploughing. We have to work harder.” Then the original villager agreed.

The original villagers here, completely unlike the category of ‘peasant’ that has been traditionally despised or sympathised with, are the objects of envy. People envy them for their eligibility for a homestead, which means that they can have much cheaper house in the suburbs. Most of them have property to rent out, therefore they have assured income without working hard. Moreover, as an urban village, its residents are expecting that one day the government will carry out land acquisition here, as the space is very limited in the city. And based on the cases of land acquisition in other urban villages, they will receive generous amount of compensation or a guarantee to move back after reconstruction. Taking these factors together, the villagers are in a relatively commanding position. Work has become an option for them rather than a necessity.

The globalised mode of production has not only heavily impacted the village landscape, but also significantly influenced the lifestyles of the villagers. In Marxist thought, the way of production determines the style of life. In the next section, attention shifts to examining how the lifestyle in Alibaba Village has been changed by globalisation.

#### **7.4 The varying lifestyles**

The concept and definition of lifestyle is continually changing. Featherstone (1987:55) proposes that “one’s body, clothes, speech, leisure pastimes, eating and drinking preferences, home, car, choice of holiday etc.” can be viewed as indicators for recognising the individuality and lifestyles of certain groups of people within contemporary consumer culture. In this thesis, the lifestyle is used as an observational angle to illustrate the changing nature of rurality. Through the lens of

lifestyle, the transformations of villagers' individuality and subjectivity can be further explored.

Compared to Peanut Village, where the population is mainly comprised of the elderly and children, or to Tower Village, where the population structure is relatively balanced, Alibaba Village attracts more young people. Besides being a place of residence, Alibaba Village is also the workplace for those engaged in Taobao businesses and its supporting industries. As an emerging industry, e-commerce naturally attracts young people who are more familiar with and used to the internet era. In general, as the age structure here is relatively young, the mainstream lifestyle here is also younger in nature. In addition, the location of Alibaba Village on the periphery of a metropolis, has determined that most of its consumption and living habits have been highly urbanised. It is important to note that, although there is a unique rhythm and atmosphere of life that makes Alibaba Village clearly different from the surrounding urban area, it is still closer to the city end rather than the countryside end in a continuum from extreme countryside to extreme city in terms of lifestyles.

In this research, I take five different aspects as characterising lifestyle, which are *routine* (work–life balance), *entertainment*, *daily consumption*, *networking*, and *daily speech in everyday life*. At first, I tried to describe each of these in turn, but realised that these behaviours permeate mutually, intertwine with each other and that it is hard to clearly categorise them, which further suggests that the boundaries between work and life are blurring in Alibaba Village. The high dependence upon the internet in the different aspects of life has become a significant characteristic of the village.

### ***Routine***

Scholars have noted the particular time rhythm in a Taobao Village (Wu et al., 2015; Lin Geng et al., 2016). Using Junpu Village as an example, Lin et al. (2016) pointed out that the time perceptions and the routine of villagers have been changed by Taobao trading, which was largely affected by the logistics industry and online business requirements. In Alibaba Village, a similar situation exists. For example, a Taobao shop owner often gets up at noon, and rest after 2am. The timetable of employees is also organised based on Taobao work practices (Table 4). Also, in the small- or medium-scale online shops, the division of labour may be blurred or

overlapping. When the day ends often depends on the volume of business during that day.

Occupation	Time	Arrangement
Taobao Shop owner	11:30-12:30	Get up and work, checking yesterday's data and news
	12:30-13:30	Lunch
	13:30-18:00	Work, stock, customer-service
	18:00-19:00	Dinner
	19:00-02:00	Work, customer-service, inventory
Customer-service conductor (Two shifts)	09:00-19:00	Day shift
	13:00-23:00	Night Shift
Art designer	09:00-18:00	Work
Storage Management	12:00-23:00	Work

*Table 4 Everyday life of the small-medium scale of online shop in 'Taobao' industry*

Generally, at the beginning of the start-up of a Taobao shop, a person might do all the work themselves, including stocking, updating the goods on their shop webpage, packing and shipping their goods, meanwhile keeping an eye on the cell phone or computer to conduct customer service. Out of these duties, customer service is the most time consuming one, as there may be orders and inquiries, or complaints from customers twenty-four hours a day. Similarly, Lin et al.'s (2016) research, quoting the 2014 Report of China's Online Shopping Market Survey released by China Internet Network Information Centre in 2015, explained that the most frequent time that an ordinary online shopper browses the website is during leisure time at home, which often means, after work, during night time. Therefore, after the business is on track, shop owners tend to hire people to take charge of customer services, to release more time for them during the day. Although, some shop owners will take over customer services when their employees are off work, because they do not want to miss any potential order.

Due to the peculiarity of customer service, in which working time is decided by the customer, the working time of a customer-service operator is unfixed and periodic. Although the time of dealing with each session can be short and intermittent, the overall working time is long (see Table 3). In addition, the working environment within the village, unlike in the formal customer-service providers, is much more relaxed and without strict supervision. These two features jointly make it possible for a customer-service operator to carry out other personal activities while a consulting session is not ongoing.

Noticeable, the boundary between work and life in Alibaba Village is blurred. This can be shown in the example of Xiumin above, who switched smoothly between working and talking to her friend while I spoke to her. Xiumin's behaviour was common. Moreover, the heavy reliance on a computer at work coincides with the entertainment tendency in the global era, much of which can also be delivered via a computer. Some young people chose to play computer/cell phone mini games, while others chose to watch television series or to shop online. If a customer requests something, they can pause what they are doing, and continue after they finish the session.

The evening often means the end of the day's work, and often is the liveliest time in a village. The southern part of the village is no exception to this, as people finish work and begin to return home. Evening is also the active phase of the northern part of the village, but for a different reason. As stated in Section 7.3, there are two active phases in the northern part of the village: one is the evening, as it is the time goods are shipped and couriers will travel through streets to different shops to pick up the parcel of the day; the other one is midnight, while the other part of the village and the city begin to sleep. This is the rest time for those engaged in the Taobao industry, which means peak business time for surrounding Chaoshan food stalls and restaurants. This unique work and rest ecology constitute a rhythm in the village.

A shop owner made the following comment regarding the midnight gathering:

“The night snack time actually is the time for friends and *laoxiang* to exchange information. During daytime, everybody is busy at their own business. Night time is more relaxing. Sometimes we don't actually work until that late, but we get used to staying up late.

Friends will call, and you couldn't sleep anyway. Sometimes you pay for the night snack for your employees after a whole day's work, to encourage them to work happily."

An older shop owner said,

"I used to do that all the time when I was younger, at that time my family was still staying in my hometown. But since my wife and children came here, we rent a separate apartment, then I go home earlier than before, like around 10. Besides, I am old now (in his late 30s), I could not stay up late as before."

The unique schedule in Alibaba Village is a combined result of Taobao trading, the social needs of young people, and the habits of Chaoshan people. The night food culture in the Chaoshan area is famous for its abundant, delicious choices and its popularity. Chaoshan immigrants have brought their custom here and perfectly connected it with the timetable of Taobao work practices, generating the new local culture.

### ***Entertainment***

Regarding the ways and location of leisure time entertainment, most of the new villagers said they spent all their time within the village. People who lived with their children tended to have a bigger range of activity, while young people tended to spend more time on their computer or cell phone. A Taobao shop employee told me that since most of her friends here work in the Taobao industry, it was hard for them to arrange a day-off together. Thus, the main collective activity for them was going for a night snack together. Apart from that, they would rather stay in their dormitory or at home to watch television to relax by themselves. "Go out for movie? We can watch that online anytime. But maybe once every two months?"

### ***Consumption***

Ways of consumption share many similarities with modes of entertainment. Benefitting from the convenient logistics within the village and the familiarity with online shopping, most of villagers choose to buy their groceries and other daily needs online. A shop owner observed that:

“it is not necessarily because of the fact that we work in this industry. I would rather say it’s the technology that changes our life. Some of our colleagues, they do not go out to supermarket. It’s so hot outside [above 30 degrees centigrade], and they don’t want to carry it by themselves. They buy all the things from No.1 shop [an online grocery platform]. Oil, soy sauce, rice, toilet rolls, spring water, drinks, shampoo... basically everything. We have a few pharmacies just downstairs on the main road, they still choose to buy that online, me too.”

After more than ten years development, the area outside Alibaba Village has grown into a mature business district, led by three shopping centres surrounding Alibaba Village. Walking out from one of the entrances of Alibaba Village, crossing the sky bridge over the main road, there is a famous suburban outlet. The outlet sells international luxury brands such as Gucci, Coach, Michael Kors, MaxMara, and has restaurants that provide food from all over the world ranging from Western food to Japanese and South-east Asian Food. Moreover, to be more accurate, the land on which the outlet is located, belongs to Alibaba Village, and the owner of the outlet still pays rent to the village collective every year. Next to the shopping centre is Sam’s Club, the American chain of membership-only retail warehouse clubs, owned and operated by Walmart Inc. However, this store has no impact upon the daily lives of the villagers. They know that they can buy things there, but they hardly do. A villager said, “It’s not for us. It’s so expensive. Normal people won’t buy luxury. If I want to get groceries and fresh food, I would rather go to the market.”

Nevertheless, there are people in favour of high-end consumption. When interviewed in August, shop owner Wei told me that one of the shop owners whom he knew had already purchased three sport cars that year, while each one exceeding one and a half million yuan. Wei did not seem jealous. When I asked him how he got to work each day, he said by walking or by bicycle. “Why would I drive a car just within the village for a such short distance?”

In general, the consumption of Alibaba Villagers displays a high degree of integration with globalisation, not only in the content of that consumption, but also in the ways in which they consume.

### **Networks**

As mentioned earlier, a small enclave inhabited by Chaoshan people has developed within Alibaba Village. In this enclave, Chaoshan people not only can use their own dialect to communicate, eat the traditional food of their hometown, but also associate with people from their hometown most of the time. Moreover, the experience of leaving home to start a business and work together has brought people in this enclave closer together, and even more supportive of one another.

Traditionally, Chaoshan people attach great importance to kinship, regional contacts, and have a tradition of unity and mutual assistance. This is also mentioned previously in this chapter, where the pioneers of the village are willing to selflessly assist the latecomers.

In Alibaba Village, the social circle formed by occupation and the social circle formed by regional connections widely overlap. Such a social network model is distinctly different from the conventional perceptions of social circles in both urban and rural areas. Due to the replicability and high profit of the online shop model, the first batch of online merchants employ regional ties as the linkage, absorbing many relatives and friends into the professional circle. Although competition is inevitable, it does not break this inextricable social circle.

Amidst this tightly-connected social circle, community elites occupy an important role. In the case of the Chaoshan community elites, not solely because of the size of their assets, but because of the trust others have in them and their popularity among the community members. As a result, several businessmen who took the lead in entering Alibaba Village not only played the role of imparting experience to the latecomers, but also mediated disputes among community members from time to time. These community elites are also the most informative in the community, with a wider circle of contacts.

Boss Luo, my first interviewee in Alibaba Village, is the first Chaoshan Taobao online shop owner to have entered Alibaba Village. Boss Luo is the boss of an online platform that provides goods for Taobao sellers who do not have their own supply of goods, and the founder of the logistics union in the village. He has many connections within the Chaoshan community in the village and thus became my gate keeper here. Besides his great relationships with the people in Chaoshan community, he also maintains good connections with some original villagers in the village, as well as

with the associate officer of the town government. He built up his connections with local villagers based on his first landlord, then further expanded his social circle by spending time or drinking tea with the landlord's local friends and other local villagers.

However, Boss Luo's case is quite unusual. Most employees and the owners of small- to medium-sized businesses limit their social circle to the Chaoshan community. In addition, Chaoshan people highly value the concept of family, therefore they are more willing to spend their limited spare time with family.

The research of Li et al. (2011) on a hometown-based community in a village in Guangzhou proposes that Hubei Village (where villagers come from Hubei Province) plays an important role in accumulating and retaining all kinds of sub-ethnic elements of Hubei people, including capital, labour force and identity.

In line with Li et al., I also suggest that the close-knit social circle in Alibaba Village provides not only the material supports such as job opportunities, start-up experience, familiar food, but also the emotional support, such as sense of familiarity and identity, for Chaoshan immigrants. Such a hometown-based community has created a buffer zone for Chaoshan immigrants, enabling the better integration into city life and into the host city.

### ***Daily speech***

By talking about daily speech, I am referring to the ordinary speech generated in a villager's daily life, including what they talk about to family and friends, or what is mentioned during conversations.

Since Taobao trading is so closely linked to the internet, the topics that mostly catch the attention of those who are involved will inevitably be the trends and what is happening in the industry. However, besides that, the daily speech of these practitioners also has certain dimensions of global vision. During interviews, all shop owners said that when chatting with friends in the same industry, the focus of conversation would be the overall development and prospects of the e-commerce industry. Whereas, employees were mostly concerned about fashion trends around the world.

In Peanut Village, conversations with interviewees often needed to be introduced with the theme of family, and the topic of conversation often revolved around the family members. Conversely, in Alibaba Village, although they highly regard family, they barely talked about them unless I asked specifically.

An interviewee in Alibaba Village stated:

“I used to take the coach back home (Chaoshan), and those old people in their fifties and sixties were talking about the circumstances at home or what had changed in the villages. But now when I take the coach that departs directly from Alibaba Village to home, those 50 or 60 year-olds, they are talking about Taobao! They are very professional, sometimes even better than those who just started. Like how much is the average cost of advertising, what is the most effective way to promote. And then it's about which way his son used is the most effective.”

In addition, in Alibaba Village they show growing interest in my identity as a student study abroad, and hope to know more in this regard. One interviewee asked about higher education in the UK, as he was considering sending his child there for undergraduate education, although at the time his son was just 9 years old. Most of the Taobao shop owners care about the foreign business mode, the development of online business in Europe and so on.

Such global awareness runs through most of the conversations between myself and the Alibaba Villagers, irrespective of whether they are the original villagers or the newcomers. When I asked one of the original villagers who worked at the immigrant management office about the population of immigrants living here, he said:

“It is still dominated by Chaoshan people. There may have been a small number of people from other provinces in the past few years. This situation is similar to the population of Singapore, which is basically dominated by Chinese. In the past, Chinese may have accounted for 80% to 90% of the population in Singapore. Now it's down to 76%, and the situation is similar here.”

Overall, while the mainstream lifestyle in Alibaba Village has been affected by globalisation, not all of that has converted into an urban lifestyle. The ideas brought about by globalisation collide, integrate with the local ones, and the local culture itself is under dynamic change. Such collisions create new cultures at the local level. The presence of e-commerce has brought not only a new type of population, their way of production and life to Alibaba Village, but also a global consciousness that appears and takes root in the countryside. This new culture does not belong to the traditional countryside, nor does it belong to the modern metropolis, but it serves as a notable embodiment of the global countryside

## **7.5 Family, Individual, and Organisation**

In this section, I will discuss how globalisation affects and works its way on Alibaba Village from another perspective, that is the community. This section discussing the family, individuals and the social organisation within this community.

### **7.5.1 Family Life**

In the previous two chapters, I have presented the family relations by depicting the family life of a rural family.

In Alibaba Village, parents and children are more willing to communicate. Young adults are more proactive in living with their parents, instead of out of the obligations that they must undertake. As described before, if a Chaoshan immigrant comes here, successfully gains a foothold and wants to expand production, they often think of bringing their family over. And most of the Taobao businesses here are based on the family as the basic unit of production. In such a mode of production, parents in their 40s or 50s become reliable labourers, helping their children to expand production without additional employment costs. Parents are happy to make contributions to their children's careers, and at the same time satisfy the need for emotional companionship from both sides.

A Taobao shop owner in his 30s explained,

“I started working here at the end of 2009, my wife came in 2010, and I brought my parents over in 2011. There are a lot of families

working together here. Parents can help a lot. When you hire a person, you may need to worry about whether he can be trusted. You don't need to worry about this at all when your parents work for you. Moreover, since they're here, I can be a lot less concerned about them. "

When I was interviewing him, I was able to have a short conversation with his father. His father was busily directing an employee to place goods on different shelves. I asked him if he enjoyed the life here, he answered happily:

"Of course! Me and his mother used to farm fields at home, sometimes made some money by doing small processing work. We're no longer young, of course we want to spend more time with our son and grandchild. Here we can still help his business and I feel that we are useful. The farmland in our hometown was left to relatives who stay to help farm it. A family staying together is the most important thing."

There is also an intergenerational division of labour in the family here. It is often dominated by the younger generation, who is responsible for the purchase of goods, online store operation and other core links. Correspondingly, the older generation is often in charge of the warehouse, food supply for the family and employees, and other logistics work. This division of labour completes the transfer of power of discourse from the older generation to the younger generation within the family. The parents can play their own roles in the production activities, while ensuring that family members can live together.

### ***Family values***

Villagers care about family. In this thesis, all participants show this concern for family. However, they have different views and values with regard to the family, which is affected by the living context, life status and many other personal reasons.

In Peanut Village, although villagers still attach great importance to the family, they often have to face the reality of family members' separation, due to the backward economic situation of the village. As a result, in the eyes of Peanut Villagers, home has become an option that has to be sacrificed in order to make a living:

“There's nothing we can do. Someone has to go out and make money. Nor can the whole family go out, the field will be left unattended, and the cost of living outside is high.

It's lucky that my son can come back two or three times a year. Some villagers' children come back only once every few years. Don't they [the elderly villagers] miss their children? But they have no choice. When my son earns enough money, maybe we can live in the town altogether. I hope so.”

Nelson's (2001, cited by Lin et al.) research shows that improved economic conditions contribute to the creation of more jobs, which in turn helps family reunification and harmony. Lin et al.'s (2016) research shows that the development of the network economy in Junpu Village has given young people more opportunities to stay in their hometown to start a business and be together with their families.

In the discussion on urbanisation in Chinese domestic literature, the path of the urbanisation of villagers is often divided into two: one path is local urbanisation, which refers to the direct change of the administrative status of a village from a Rural Village Committee to an Urban Residential Committee. Such a path is mainly dominated by the local state and achieved by developing the village economy and improving the village infrastructure. When the living standard in such a village is close to the surrounding cities and towns, the original registered status will be changed by the local government, then the village becomes a part of the city or town, so as the registered identity of rural people. However, this kind of local urbanisation is often only applicable to urban village or villages at the edge of cities and towns. The examples of Junpu Village and some other Taobao Villages have provided alternative ways of local urbanisation (Li Wenhe, 2017, master's thesis) as these villages are not located on the fringe of big cities but rather in the middle of the countryside.

The other path is immigrant urbanisation, which refers to the rural immigrants entering city to work and gradually undergoing the transformation from rural people to urban residents. The phenomenon of large quantities of immigrant workers flowing into the city in the past a few decades belongs to this category. However, entering the city to work, does not mean that villagers have successfully taken on an urban

identity. Under the dual system of urban–rural division in China, such a path is very difficult for most of the villagers due to their lack of economic strength and social capital. A large volume of research has drawn attention to the integrating processes of migrant workers into the city and the institutional burden within these processes.

Many of the tensions between the immigrant workers and urban life are generated by the dissimilar cultural background and the ‘backward characteristics’ that urban residents perceive rural people to have. Against such a context, Alibaba Village offers another possibility of immigrant urbanisation for immigrant villagers (along with local urbanisation for original villagers), that is, to enjoy the urban lifestyle together with traditional ethics. These ethics, include the collective community formed on the basis of blood and regional ties as described earlier in this chapter, and the traditional values of family, such as living with parents and showing filial piety, as well as family members pulling together and working together.

While local urbanisation attaches new meaning to a rural village, the immigrant urbanisation in the context of Alibaba Village enabling the immigrant community to be retained as a community and has less barriers to negotiate, is less restrictive. It also largely shortens the time an immigrant needs to integrate into the city, and resolves the contradiction between making money and family reunification. For these immigrant villagers, they no longer feel that family is a burden or an option that has to be sacrificed. In Alibaba Village, villagers feel grateful that that they are reunited with their families:

“Before I came here, I was doing clothing wholesale. At that time, it was very hard, I needed to run around the city all day. I rented a small room as my accommodation, but most of the time I was out for work, it was just a place to sleep. By then I only went home once or twice a year. Now is much better, I can make more money. Although at the beginning it was always hard, but since I can bring my family over and live together, everything is worthwhile.”

Moreover, as it is the immigrant kind of urbanisation, the whole family is separated from the hometown environment in Chaoshan area, which is considered quite conservative. By working with their children, parents get to know more about what their children are doing, which strengthen the parents' understanding of their

children. Therefore, the younger generation is able to break away from the staid cultural norms in their hometown, and obtain relative freedom of the individual without conflicts with parents. As a result, a form of individualisation becomes possible, that is, to maximise the development of an individual's will and talent while retaining traditional family values.

In the same time, the separation of hometown and 'home' reduces the sense of nostalgia on the part of the immigrants. Many new villagers here said that they do not want to return to their hometown to live. While being questioned about their opinions on returning to their hometown, or about conducting Taobao trading back there, one of owners stated:

"Our hometown is also developing. Some people started to do Taobao there indeed, but the conditions cannot compare with here. If you want to develop, eventually you need to head out. Anyway, I don't want to go back, maybe when I am older, but definitely not now. I enjoy my life here. My family is here now."

Another villager in his 40s, who was from the same village said,

"We went back during last Spring Festival. Both here and my hometown are villages, at least they say so, but they are so different. Although the hometown village is also developing, somehow, I want it to stay in the old days, a village with green mountains, rivers, chickens and cows, so that we can relax and escape from our work for a few days. But it's impossible. And I missed here on the third day when we were back."

Although they are getting used to the 'urban lifestyle', they still label themselves as villagers, both new immigrant villagers and original villagers. Undoubtedly, Alibaba Village is urbanising through the two groups of villagers. Yet, both of them do not want to drop the village label, instead, they enjoy the village life here, as the midpoint between the city and the countryside.

### 7.5.2 From individuals to organisations

In the beginning period, most of the Taobao businesses here were informal economy, as many of people did not register their 'workshop' as a formal shop or company in the industrial and commercial administration. Online business was new then, thus the corresponding regulations had not been established.

Most of these forms of Taobao businesses hid themselves in residential buildings therefore it was hard for industrial and commercial officers to track them down. Without registration, they can escape taxation and other administrative fees that would likely be generated.

An officer from the Migrant Population Management Centre in Alibaba Village told me:

“We didn't really know the exact number of 'Taobao workshop' in the village for a long period of time. We have stipulated that immigrants should register with us first when they come to our village. But they don't. Besides, it is impossible for us to know that there are a few more people joined the immigrant family here. A few times we have carried out street sweeping, that is, we checked on every apartment and every building one after another by knocking on their door. But some people did not even open the door, you cannot break in. Also, sometimes even the landlord doesn't necessarily know when his tenants are coming and going.”

That's the reason that while there were only around 30,000 people are registered as immigrants who lived in Alibaba Village in 2014, according to the Migrant Population Management Centre. However by then, Boss Luo told me that there were more than 60,000. Also, he knew how many Taobao merchants were in the village, how many parcels were sent out a day, and the approximate volume of transactions a year. He obtained this information from the Union of Taobao Merchants and the Union of Logistics Providers in the village. Taobao shop owners were willing to join these unions as they can benefit from them, enjoying the sharing of information and the lower price of delivery.

The emergence of these organisations reflected the ability of self-organisation from the bottom-up and the ability to innovate within the community here. These unions were founded by a few pioneer Taobao shop owners and they were all from Chaoshan.

A similar ability of grassroots self-organising was observed by anthropologist Xiang Bao in his ethnography work on Zhejiang Village, a migrant village in Beijing formed by people from Zhejiang Province (Xiang, 2004). Xiang spent twenty years from the 1990s onwards following the village, during which time he documented the transition of this village from the informal economy to regularisation, accompanied by the loss of social autonomy of villagers. In the past, the village's self-organising vitality had pushed the government to launch specific policies for them. But now the local government has more power in terms of administrative intervention and resources-drawing.

This grassroots self-organising ability is not only embodied in immigrant villagers, but also in original villagers. In order to better manage the immigrants, the village committee and the town government have jointly established the Migrant Population Management Centre, which is rarely seen in other normal villages. Also, to manage the collective property, including land resources and other assets that belong to Alibaba Village, villagers established a Village Economic Development Management Company. In the office building of the village committee, there are three institutions: the branch of the Party, the village committee and the village company. Most officers in these organisations are local villagers. One of my interviewees, a girl who worked in the Village Committee, told me:

“It’s kind of self-governed. [Laughed when I asked her where is she from] I am purely local. I was born here, grew up here, and after I graduated from university, I came back here to work as an officer and I still live here. Yes, our village has changed a lot. It’s hard to say if it’s good or not, it’s not that simple. But generally, villagers earn more now.”

The village committee here is busy and the composition of its members is much more complex than that of the previous two villages. Compared to the village committee in Peanut Village and Tower Village, which open irregularly according to

the demands of the villagers, during my interview with one of the officers, villagers kept coming over to make various inquiries. These inquiries included the issuing of residence certificates or birth certificates, the stamping of applications for business licenses, and so on. The vitality of Alibaba Village is sensed through these trivial, ongoing affairs.

## **7.6 Postscripts**

During the two months fieldwork in Alibaba Village, I often felt that Alibaba Village has already become 'a part of globalisation', ranging from the global landscape, global production, global consumption, to the global-vision of villagers. The situation of Alibaba Village also illustrates that globalisation has not led to homogenisation here, instead, it inspires more cultural diversity and generates new cultural connotation. The villagers have transformed into individuals with clear global awareness but yet hold traditional values. However, it is different from the superficial globalisation in the Peanut Village, as the 'traditional value' here becomes a choice instead of a rule that one needs to follow. Whether in the face of globalisation or traditional values, they have gain the confidence to decide their own future.

The story of Alibaba Village has not stopped. By the end of 2018, I read a future planning proposal for Alibaba Village and its surrounding. This proposal aims to construct 'a two-wheels drive (meaning that there will be two main positions for future development) of Alibaba Village: the intelligent technology base and fashion highland'. I don't know which way the village will head to, but I will not worry much about it, as the villagers here are always open to changes and adapting them quickly, and they are able to hold the initiative in their hands.

## **Chapter 8 Conclusion and Discussion: Towards A Dynamic Rural Future**

This thesis explores the changing rurality and everyday life of rural China in the global era. It is built upon eight months of fieldwork in three villages, each representing a different development pattern, and therefore a different form of interaction and engagement with globalisation. The core and the main contribution of this research lie in the study of the everyday lives of villagers in the three empirical chapters above. The stories of Peanut Village, Tower Village and Alibaba Village, are formed of fragments and various different threads, including, but not limited to, the changing commodities, production, consumption, regulations, community, family life, and lifestyles.

This concluding chapter aims to respond to the three research aims that I outlined in the introductory chapter: To enrich the knowledge of 'grassroots globalisation' and 'globalisation from below' by presenting the everyday practices of globalisation in three case villages; to challenge the stereotypes and general impression of Chinese rurality by demonstrating how modern Chinese rurality has been enriched and diversified under globalisation; and to use ethnography as a research method to incorporate these two sets of seemingly parallel processes, to describe the everyday practice of globalisation in rural China.

In the first section, I summarise the key findings of the thesis from three angles: the dynamics of participation of each village and villager in globalisation in the form of grassroots practises, which is responding to the first research aim; the preservation and re-creation of traditional values in rural China, which deals with the second research aim; while the application of ethnographic methods in China answers the third aims.

This section also examines how the findings of this research shed light on the different literatures that the thesis speaks to: globalisation, and globalisation in China, geographies of rural China, and the application of ethnographic methods in China. Some further research and questions that could be pursued in the future will also be discussed here.

At the end of chapter, some final thoughts will be shared to close the thesis.

## 8.1 Summaries of Empirical Investigations

In this section, I will return to my empirical research findings to respond to the first two research aims raised at the beginning of this thesis. In the process of responding to the research aims, I will compare the three case study villages, in terms of the different aspects of globalisation, the different degrees of globalisation, the different open-borders of villages and other related themes.

### 8.1.1 The enrichments of village life: Grassroots Globalisation

As already stated, the **first research aim** of this study is to add to the knowledge of 'grassroots globalisation' and 'globalisation from below', presenting the everyday practices of globalisation in three case villages. This research gives a sense of how global forces have permeated village lives via different routes, and touched particular aspects.

This research has shown that globalisation certainly enriches some aspects of village life, in terms of both material and cultural lives, through different embodiments and metamorphosed forms. Moreover, globalisation also provokes diversity and divergence between villages through the restructuring of production and consumption.

In terms of the enrichment of village life, villagers have a wider range of consumable products in their daily lives and have more ways to access these 'global products'. In the consumption sphere, globalisation has permeated rural people's everyday lives, often without them noticing, and global products have become a large constituent part of the groceries that villagers consume. Generally, these commercial processes are driven by market forces rather than government planning. However, the globalising process is managed in other ways – while materials and entertainment culture are not restricted, the political and ideological aspects are seriously forbidden.

#### ***Material lives***

In the chapter concerning Peanut Village, I identify two common forms of 'global consumer products' that we can see in Chinese village life. In the first form, most of the globally-branded consumer products are produced within China, even within

Guangdong Province, as massive production bases for TNCs have been established in Guangdong. In the second form, many purely domestic consumers products have 'borrowed' or 'copied' some global elements, 'taken them for their own use', in the production of a 'fake' global product.

The first form of global products can be found across Chinese people's daily lives, including both cities and rural areas. However, the latter form exists more in Peanut Village than the other two case studies, suggesting the more rural an area is, the more such a kind of metamorphosis exists.

The attitude of 'borrowed' then 'take for my own use' has also been adopted by various actors in Tower Village and Alibaba Village too, but instead of copying packages outright, it is done in a less-obvious way. In Tower Village, villagers learn from globalisation, and try to reproduce the successful experiences of the tourism industry from other parts of the world. While in Alibaba Village, villagers have mastered the online business mode, and even contribute back to the internet industry globally. Here, globalisation has acted as a trigger for the divergent paths of different villages.

The commodities and the awareness of global commodities are diversified, too. For example, Peanut Villagers do not know that they are consuming global products, as most of these global products are 'metamorphosed' and presented in the same way as domestic products. While for Alibaba Villagers, there is little concern over whether they are consuming global products, since they can get them as easily as domestic products.

These types of commercial behaviours are not under strict controls.

### ***Cultural lives***

Global culture has permeated into everyday village life as well.

In Peanut Village, similarly to the commodities, global culture often appears in a metamorphosed and localised manner and has been consumed unquestionably by rural people. For example, the television variety show that has bought the copyright from a Korean variety show, and Chinese soap operas that copy the ideas and plots from American television series. These 'semi-global' cultures show up in villagers' lives intertwined with some urban, modern fashions, making villagers unable and

uninterested in distinguishing them but just accepting them in as they are. In such circumstances, almost all of the rural participants in this research have been exposed to some kinds of global culture at least to some extent. For example, Erpo's story tells of a woman who has had Greek Flavour Yogurt without knowing anything about it passively becoming a global consumer. However, such a degree of exposure does not bring about the *global consciousness*, and villagers' lifestyles have not been changed much by the modern facilities and global cultural products. The core values of villagers in Peanut Village remain untouched.

While in Tower Village, global culture becomes something that rural elites are keen to refer to, as a useful discourse to support their vision and aspiration of development. Although most of the villagers' lives seem unrelated to globalisation, the penetration of globalisation into their livelihood has caused gradual changes to their mindsets. For example, the employment of tourist destinations, hotel value standards, and the business mode of tourism, have brought a certain awareness and understanding of global culture to them.

Moreover, in Alibaba Village, villagers, especially new villagers who run online businesses on the platform Taobao.com, are much more sensitive to global culture. They are completely aware of the global (especially fashion) trends, as it has become important to their livelihoods and they consume global culture as a part of being urban living.

Therefore, a conclusion can be drawn by these findings, that only when globalisation has changed, or at least touched, villagers' ways of making money — their livelihoods, or the modes of production — does it become possible for the local culture to take in and fuse with the global culture, creating new global and new local cultures.

Taking these empirical findings together, I argue that the form in which globalisation shapes different villages in the Guangdong Area, China, can be concluded as 'grassroots globalisation'. In such a form of globalisation, people hardly mention or discuss those big, grand concepts of 'classic globalisation' — economic global integration, the demise of the nation-state, the cultural homogenisation or cultural hegemony — instead, they focus on everyday life. When globalisation or its embodiments turn up in their lives, they then decide to accept those elements or not,

and always under the same principle: only taking in things that (they consider to be) good for them.

The material lives and cultural lives together construct the most basic practices of everyday life. The empirical evidence that I outlined above demonstrates that the village life has quite clearly been diversified by globalisation in a grassroots manner – instead of being homogenised. This diversification occurs not only in comparison with the village itself, but also between different villages. In other words, the diversification effect of globalisation has expanded the differences between villages.

### **8.1.2 Differentiated Individuals, Families and Community**

The **second research aim** of this thesis is to challenge the stereotypes and general impression of Chinese rurality. As discussed in previous section, modern Chinese rurality has been developed and diversified under globalisation. The traditional close rural community is transforming to a more globalised countryside. In line with this aim, I sought to initiate a dialogue with the ‘global countryside’ model that Woods has proposed, by providing a Chinese village case study and advancing the model by adding the individual-scale factor to it.

My research suggests that globalisation has not only worked at the village level, it has also affected the individual’s everyday life, from their choices, to family structure and the way villagers see family, and furthermore, impacted the forming and vitality of community. Moreover, globalisation has enhanced the economic performance of some villages, Alibaba Village, in the particular case of my research. However, while the improvement of economic status breaks and dissolves some tradition customs, it also assists the preservation and re-creation of traditional values.

As mentioned earlier, the demographics of the three case villages are different. A village’s population structure is a major reflection of the family structures within the village.

Peanut Village is a hollowed-out village which means the elderly and children make up the majority of the population, with the loss of a large quantity of young labour force who go out for work outside the village, due to the lack of job opportunities locally. Such a hollowed-out village is made up of couples (mainly old couples), single-person families (elderly living alone), or intergenerational families, where

grandparents are taking care of grandchildren. In some other cases, the women family member stays in the village to take care of the family while the men leave for work.

In Peanut Village, family relations are relatively detached. Many elderly people living alone do not even have a family life to speak of, while some of them only see their children once a year during the Spring Festival. Contrary to some scholars who propose that the elderly who have the ability to take care of themselves have an increasing willingness to live independently (Wang Yuesheng, 2007, 2011), the elderly living alone in Peanut Village in fact often desire to live with their children. Nevertheless, many of them considered themselves as a burden to their children who work or live away from home. Sometimes they claim that they cannot get used to living in the city and would rather live in the countryside. However, this is not contradictory to their desire to live with their children, but rather a way for them to express their understanding that their children have not been able to live with them. This is often reflected in the envy that those elderly people who live alone show towards the elderly who have been brought to live with their children in cities and towns. "They have good luck" is a common expression. On the other hand, the intergenerational families in Peanut Village usually have an age gap between grandparents and grandchildren, and that leads to poor communication. In intergenerational families, grandparents often can only take care of their grandchildren at the material level, yet it is difficult for them to communicate at the emotional level. In this case, individualisation, even the atomisation of villagers becomes an evitable trend.

Taking up the point made in the story of Peanut Village, namely 'superficial globalisation', the core value system of villagers in Peanut Village can be identified as '*modern traditions*'. It implies that though villagers may wear a tee-shirt with an English slogan on it, or live in a modern big house, their core value system remains traditional.

The case of Tower Village is different. There are more active economic activities around the village, so that the village residents can make a living around the village. In such a case, the reconciliation of work and family life becomes possible. In Tower Village, the age structure is more balanced, the joint-family is the most common

form. In addition, a large number of nuclear families living independently also maintain fairly close ties with the older generation. In such circumstances, though the separation of generations inevitably exists, its negative effects are much weaker than in Peanut Village. The lack of spatial distance between generations means that parents are less eager to live with their children as they can meet each other quite often. Hence children have space to develop their own careers which ultimately gives them confidence. Moreover, some villagers in their 40s expressed the hope that if the village develops, their children who currently work at the cities can come back to work in the village – they have heard about enough stories of ‘young villager entrepreneurship’.

In Alibaba Village, the forms of family are more diverse. Because it is also a gathering place for newly emerging industries, there are many young employees or entrepreneurs who have not yet formed a family. Other slightly older villagers, especially those Chaoshan people who have set up a relatively stable business, are very willing to bring their parents here. In general, Chaoshan people tend to get married at an early age and attach great importance to childbearing. As a result, there are many immigrant joint families composed of three generations in the village, which is rare among general urban immigrants.

For original villagers, their living area is relatively spacious and they are relatively well off. Most of them own more than one property, and for that reason, the separation of generations has become common. Some young villagers choose to move out to the nearby modern estate, while their parents stay in the village. The close location is convenient for them to take care of their parents and to manage the rental property. Because of their high degree of urbanisation, the proportion of nuclear families is also relatively high.

Correspondingly, parents and children in Alibaba Village are more willing to communicate. Young adults are more proactive in living with their parents, instead of out of the obligations that they must undertake. At the same time, parents are happy to make contributions to their children's careers. By working with their children, parents get to know more about what their children are doing, which strengthens the parents' understanding of their children. The younger generations in Alibaba Village are able to break away from the more staid cultural norms in their hometown, and

obtain freedom to some extent of the individual without conflicts with parents, meanwhile the needs for emotional companionship from both sides are satisfied.

Taking three villages as case studies together, Alibaba Village is clearly the one where villagers are more individualised but at the same time have a healthy relationship with family members. The urban/Western style of 'pursuing individual freedom' has been perfectly fused with the 'preservation of traditional family values' in Alibaba Village creating a special form of '*traditional modernity*', compared to the '*modern tradition*' in Peanut Village. In general, the traditional close rural community is transforming into a more globalised countryside.

### 8.1.3 Globalised Village and Chinese Village

The previous two sections have summarised two different dimensions of the influence of globalisation on villages based on my empirical studies. This next section, will dig further, to provide a conclusion to the question 'to what extent does globalisation as a process explain these differences', and 'how do these empirical works reflect on the speciality of the Chinese mode'.

Just like the intuitive feeling of a researcher while entering different villages, the three villages are originally very different, including their locations, distance from the city, history, development stage of village economy, main industry, demographic structure and so on. And these differences are continuously being shaped by various processes. However, after reviewing the whole research process, it seems that the most basic decisive factor which determines the status and differences between villages, is the village's *geographical location and conditions*. Being situated in a suburban area or in the mountains will fundamentally determine or limit the development path of such village. The villagers of a village in the middle of nowhere can hardly become landlords, while the villagers of 'urban village' do not have the foundation or tourism resources for becoming a tourist site.

Yet it is important to acknowledge that the development and divergence of any one village is affected by the socio-economic structure including globalisation, modernisation, urbanisation and other processes.

At the scale of village, in this sense, globalisation can never be a direct force that decides the 'fate of village.' Rather it can act as an *opportunity* for a village and

villagers. Such opportunity allows villagers to have more choice in their lives, ranging from consumable products (material or cultural), to personal careers. For Peanut Village, globalisation offers no more than types of daily necessities. For Tower Village, globalisation provides a kind of imagination, a vision of possibility that the village may achieve, and knowledge that one can learn. For Alibaba Village, globalisation, other than the rapid urbanisation, gives them the chance to 'take off', to become a unique 'online' village.

Globalisation also brings *uncertainty*. Again using the example of Alibaba Village, globalisation can be both a force of integration – a village becomes a link in the global production and consumption chain and facilitates family reunion; it can also be a fragmental force – like the families in Peanut Village who are separated by the widening gap between urban and rural areas. There is not a linear development process anymore, instead, the development path of villages is 'bouncing', which may achieve great-leap-forward development, or decline or even disappearance. One cannot simply predict.

However, an important argument that I have confirmed in my research is that, at the individual level, the intra-group difference is often greater than the inter-group difference. That is, for example, in every village, there are very globalised individuals and there are individuals who are almost isolated from the idea of globalisation (not materially). Nevertheless, recognising these individual differences, we can see that the villagers' global consciousness differs significantly in three villages, due to the different developmental paths and mode of villages. In turn, villagers' global consciousness, under the leading of rural elites, will also make an impact on villages' paths of development, gradually forming a virtuous circle. The story of Tower Village and Alibaba Village are similar.

On the basis of the above analysis, I argue that, as a fundamental part of judging the degree of globalisation of a village, it is clear that we need to focus more on the local individual and personal factors. All the three case study villages have been marked by global cultures, but their degrees of 'actual globalisation' significantly vary. Hence, like 'the urbanisation of the mind', more attention should be paid to 'the globalisation of the mind' in the examination of globalisation. The extent to which a village is seen as globalised should go beyond the material changes that the village has undergone

and recognise how individuals who inhabit the global countryside in China think and position themselves, and how their mindset and narratives of understanding have been shaped by globalisation.

This thesis suggests that only when villagers have a certain global consciousness, has the globalising process of a village reached a stage where it can claim to have created a global countryside.

Then we come to the second question that needed to be answered, that is 'how do these empirical works reflect on the speciality of the Chinese mode'?

My answer is that, fundamentally speaking, their development and status quo as Chinese villages have been surely affected by Chinese characteristics. Such as Alibaba Village, a village in the city – the urban village – is a unique phenomenon in the process of urbanisation in China – only because of the existence of urban characteristics including the high value of land ownership does it become possible for all original villagers to become landlords.

In Chapter 2, I suggest that compared with globalisation of other capitalist countries, globalisation with Chinese characteristics lies in its controlled path, aspects, and developing processes by the nation-state (or say the party). These are seen and confirmed from macro-level, ranging from the well-known censorship to the Sino-US trade war today. At the same time, the Chinese government promotes rural modernisation and informatisation, initiating waves of rural construction movements in recent years such as 'beautiful countryside', 'village revitalisation', 'building socialist new countryside' and so on. Therefore, China's rural development to some extent retains many traces of the 'planned economy'.

Yet, I still suggest that the hypothesis that I proposed at the beginning of this thesis - the notion of the 'globalisation of Chinese characteristics' - is not entirely supported, but rather is challenged. Based on my observations, the role that nation/government leadership forces played in three case study villages is much less important and less vital than I thought.

In Peanut Village, local government has promoted finance services and library facilities. However, these did not seem useful to villagers' everyday lives. The traces of globalisation exist in villagers' lives by their own choices in consumption. In Tower

Village, villagers rejected the moving and reconstruction plan provided by the government. Instead, they learned global knowledge by themselves and wanted to build a better life in their own ways. In Alibaba Village, where villagers had created spontaneous, flourishing informal economies, the local government *then* reacted to establish new regulations and organisations to regulate these informal economies.

In these micro-level practices, I saw the indigenous vitality of Chinese villages. It is in these practices that Chinese villages are no longer the passive objects waiting to be changed by government, or by any other external forces, but are the active subjects negotiating with globalisation, modernisation, urbanisation, and enormous small mundane things in their lives.

Therefore, I conclude that one dominant characteristic of the villagers that I met in the fieldwork is the '*for my own use*' logic. Similar to pragmatism, villagers' interpretation of reality often depends on the effect of reality on their interests. However, they do not always make economically rational choices based on their long-term interests but, rather, on recent, visible expectations.

Hence, these are globalised villages to some extent but, in another sense, they also retain a lot of Chinese characteristics. But for the Chinese, if the culture from the western world is 'globalisation', then why cannot Chinese rural culture become the 'globalisation' in other parts of the world? What is the nature of globalisation?

## **8.2 Discussion**

This section goes beyond the empirical investigations summarised in the previous section, and serves to further the discussion. Unlike the empirical findings, these strands may not have enough evidence to be classed as a strong argument, Nevertheless, they offer some deeper thoughts that may lead to further research.

### **8.2.1 The nature of globalisation: an ethnographic way of seeing**

We have read enough about the definition of globalisation, that we do not need to repeat it in the conclusion chapter. However, the line between globalisation and locality is further blurred. Today, few people can tell whether the emergence of a phenomenon is the product of globalisation or modernisation, or a mixture of the two.

Therefore, does rural change like that that I witnessed in these three villages still count as globalisation?

My argument is that it does. In today's international situation, what we have known in the past, the great consensus on globalisation established by history and various world organisations, is gradually disappearing, yet the traces of globalisation in rural China are vivid and alive. Therefore, I think this is the essence of globalisation: unwittingly, we all experience parts of global culture, and we also constitute that global culture.

How did I approach the nature of globalisation in this research? Here I can respond to my third research aim: to use ethnography as a research method to incorporate these two sets of seemingly parallel processes, to describe the day-to-day practices of globalisation in rural China.

This whole thesis adopts an ethnographic approach. Using ethnography as a 'tool of enquiry', I explore the interactions between globalisation, urbanisation, the policy implementers and, most important, the villagers. As the performance of villagers' everyday lives is multi-dimensional, mundane, rich, and vast, it is hard to capture. Ethnography becomes a useful way of exploring and presenting these mundane and discontinuous details, allows an important perspective on globalisation that I do not think is visible in other research methods.

In exploring these two massive themes – globalisation and rural change - Chinese scholars tend to employ 'big-data' to tell the grand contemporary story. For example, the 'One-belt One-Road' related research has become a topic of hot debate among Sinologists and pundits in recent years, which represents an orientation of official discourse, to focus on the bigger picture (Aoyama, 2017; Winter, 2016).

Under such an orientation, the observation of villagers and the village seem 'old fashioned'. However, I argue that such an observational angle is especially valuable in the era of globalisation, as there are too many details that are buried in obscurity. Exploring how globalisation is experienced in rural areas, brings back the research scale to individuals and their villages, and furthers to pay attention to 'personal feelings' and 'villager-based village governance'.

To summarize, the ethnographic approach of this thesis adds value to the existing literature on Chinese rurality. I hope that this thesis has successfully met this aim.

### **8.2.2 The transformation of peasantry and the formation of rural middle class**

During my fieldwork, I witnessed many rural elites. Unlike the passive 'left-behind' population (elderly people, housewives and children), they were often in their middle age, with considerable wealth and were enjoying the life here, and had chosen to stay in the rural area.

The restriction of land ownership in China has determined that only 'original villagers', who were born in rural areas and with the household registered as rural residents, have the right to own their homesteads, and build their own houses on it with relatively unrestricted constraints. Unlike many Western countries, urban residents in China cannot buy into the rural. As a result, this group of people, which I term as 'rural middle class' has become some of the few people who can enjoy the real countryside.

The rural middle class often comprised two kinds of people. The first group of people who were often born in a rural area, then went to the city for work. After they earned enough money, they came back, built their big house, and stayed for the rest of their lives. The other group of people never actually leave the countryside, but may seize the chance of earning money, either by running some small business, or managing a big farm. Compared with the urban middle class, both groups were born in the countryside, therefore had no unrealistic illusions about it, but just built their lives around things that they like – for example, some houses have a big courtyard, and some decorate their house with a 1980s Hong Kong film's style.

These rural middle classes often exhibit a combination of wealth and power. This has often been achieved in such order: when they earn enough money, they become the economic elites of the village and seek to become the political elites as well. Due to better economic performance, they have more energy and time to participate in village politics than other rural people who are struggling to make a living.

There is no doubt that the growing path of this type of rural middle class is very different from that of the rural youth entering the city, but both are very difficult. However, the ways in which these people become rural middle class receives much

less attention than how rural people integrate into the city. Compared with 'urban villagers', the rural middle class tend to have a higher standard of living and live a happier life. Therefore, I hope to have a chance to get to know more about this group of people and their stories in the future.

### **8.2.3 How to define a village — does boundary still matter?**

The final topic of discussion, returns to a very old, but long-standing question, namely, how do we define a village? In times of globalisation, we often say that villages are coming to an end, that hundreds of villages disappear every day. So, in the end, in what form will our villages be preserved? Taking Peanut Village and Alibaba Village as examples, the former may disappear in the sense that it is no longer inhabited by any residents; the latter one may also disappear, in the sense of becoming a part of the city. Perhaps Tower Village could be an exemption by being preserved as a tourist destination, but by then are the people and economic activities in the village still 'rural'?

Here I borrowed Li Peilin's (2004) model of village boundaries that I introduced in Chapter 3. Li (2004) suggests that a complete village community should have five kinds of identifiable boundaries: 1) social boundary, 2) cultural boundary, 3) administrative boundary, 4) natural boundary and 5) economic boundary.

The cultural boundary is based on the psychological and social identity of the common value system; the social boundary is the social circle based on consanguinity and geographical relations; the administrative boundary is based on the autonomy of the village committee or the permeation of state power into the countryside; the natural boundary is based on the geographical scope of land ownership; and the economic boundary is a set of networks and scopes that are based on economic activities and property rights.

For a traditional, relatively closed village, these five boundaries are basically coincident. However, with the opening of villages, de-agriculturalisation, industrialisation, de-industrialisation and urbanisation, the boundaries of villages are differentiated, and these five boundaries no longer completely overlap. Normally, this differentiation process has an order of precedence, from the edge to the core, from the opening of the economic boundary to the opening of the social boundary.

Among the three villages, Peanut Village is the most traditional. In many people's eyes, the less-developed area and the less-open village should preserve more rural social attributes, as do many villages in Northern China (Liu, 2000).

Peanut Village's economic boundary was broken a long time ago, as people went out for work, and this collapsed its social and cultural boundaries. Since the community of Peanut Village barely exists, traditional Chinese values, including living with a big family with parents, and the 'acquaintance society' (See chapter 3, Section 3.3.1) can hardly survive. In such case, of the five borders of the village, only the natural and administrative boundaries remain intact. This is different from Li Peilin's analysis based on the urban village, because Peanut Village does not conform to the development logic of the villages around the city or in it. Therefore, the symbol of the end of the village here is not the disappearance of cultural and social boundaries, which have long disappeared because of the poor economic situation and the loss of population in the past decades. Rather, there is no doubt that such a village has lost the ability to preserve its traditional village culture. Although it retains the establishment of villages and is the epitome of many rural areas in China, its vitality and continuity is not as good as that of the other two villages. Tower Village is somewhere between traditional and modern. Because of its relatively strong economic performance and its relatively vigorous rural elites, it has practised self-organisation and learnt upward management in the negotiation with the government. The community mechanism has a certain vitality. Compared to Peanut Village, its natural boundary has changed over the years due to the expropriation of land. However, the vitality of its community and the common religion belief of Zen Buddhism have helped it to maintain its relatively stable social and cultural boundaries.

Alibaba Village is the most open village among the three and has the strongest economic performance. However, though it is the closest one to the city, it does not show alienation between the neighbours and within the community. It has the strongest social self-organising ability, which leads to the most stable social and cultural boundaries, while at the same time preserving the most traditional social attributes among the three villages. However, it also has the most urban outlook and urban lifestyles, which can soon become a part of the city in the predictable future,

changing their administrative status from rural to urban. By then, can Alibaba Village still call itself a village? I am not able to answer this question right now.

In sum, the relationship between globalisation, modernisation and traditional values of rural society cannot be explained by simple linearity because the collision of different cultures in different places will bring different consequences. I cannot simply answer the question 'how to define a village', as if you look close enough, every village has its vitality in some ways, so a model cannot be applied.

I am hoping to continue my studies, or at least continue to pay attention to the development of these three villages. As a researcher who observed them, a participant who once lived in them, and a listener who once listened to their stories.

### **8.3 Limitations of The Thesis**

There were two moments when I was most clearly aware of the limitations of this study. The first came when I reviewed all my fieldwork data and tried to identify my research findings. I felt that the fieldwork time was too short, that I did not obtain enough data to cover all aspects that I wanted to analyse. Two months is way too short and very limited to do an ethnography of a village. For example, I have not experienced the autumn harvest in any of the three villages, a season that used to be very important in rural life. However, methodology books tell me that it was a very normal situation and you will never feel you have done enough. The second moment came when I got to the end of the thesis writing, which means now, when I realised that research cannot be perfect and, if it can, it will not be achieved overnight or even over a few years.

I recognise there are three main limitations of this research. Firstly, as I mentioned in the introductory chapter, because I choose globalisation as a starting point and an explanatory perspective for village change, I have to give up a lot of more interesting stories that seem to have nothing to do with globalisation in the choice of materials. Also, I have to shelve some research topics that I am personally interested in, such as rural education, rural grassroots politics and so on. However, at the same time, though I have made some selections, because I still want to show many different perspectives, I feel that the writing of this thesis is not concise and concentrated enough.

Secondly, as I described in the methodology chapter, I was unable to participate in many male-oriented activities in village life. I considered these as important events, since in rural China, many tacit understanding and occasions where public affairs are decided are male-only. Such a customary gender-bias made my presence in these occasions impossible to be neutral and unnoticeable, which further limits the thesis.

Lastly, there is a strong tension between the 'structural nature' of the force that I wanted to examine, which was mainly reflected in the Chapter 2-4, and the 'ethnographic and observational nature' of this research, which was shown in Chapter 5-7. This tension and the incompatibility of these two forces has caused to some extent a discontinuous sense or even a breakage of the thesis as a whole. In this sense, I have not been able to give this thesis a more structural and powerful conclusion. Nevertheless, these limitations of this thesis give me more motivation to further my study in different aspects of Chinese rural life in the future.

## 8.4 Final Thoughts

I started this research at the Autumn of 2015, and now is the Autumn of 2019. During these four years, the world has changed a lot. I witnessed the discussion of Brexit in Britain, the China-US trade war and many other single or consequential events which, all together, have greatly changed the way that we used to think of globalisation.

Elliott writes an editorial in the Guardian newspaper, commenting on the China-US trade war:

“As was the case in the 1930s, the seemingly inexorable drift towards protectionism is part of a deeper crisis of the international status quo... Globalisation as we have known it is coming to an end and that's by no means unwelcome” (Elliott, 2019)<sup>59</sup> .

At the end of this thesis, I cannot help thinking that had I started this year, this Autumn, would I still propose the same topic of research? Would I have spent so

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<sup>59</sup> *Globalisation as we know it will not survive Trump. And that's a good thing.* Larry Elliott, Thu 8 Aug 2019. On Guardian. Retrieved at <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/aug/08/globalisation-not-survive-trump-markets-new-world-order>

much more time describing and analysing the changing nature of globalisation? I have no answers yet.

Now, as this thesis finally comes to its final edits at the early 2020, a pandemic has swept all over the world. It could be the 'best' illustration of globalisation that no one in the world can escape from something that sounds far away from you and happened in another country. It also can be an 'improper' signal to 'the end of globalisation', as for so many years since the plane has been invented, it is the first time that every country is locking down not because of war.

However, I am not as pessimistic as many people, as I have seen how the small seeds of globalisation have grown into big trees in the Chinese countryside. China's embracing of globalisation and the outside world is an established fact and cannot go back, as we, the Chinese people have seen the world. Exchanging, communicating and learning from each other are the only ways for a country to make progress. I am very grateful to these times and globalisation, which offer me an opportunity to study the Chinese countryside in a UK University, marking down the details and imprints of the times by writing this thesis.

## Appendix 1

### The ethics form of this research

#### Summary

##### Lay Summary (Max 400 words)

Recognising that globalisation has had different impacts at various scales in rural China, this project, concerns how rural villages and rurality in China are influenced by globalisation forces. The multiple processes of globalisation, industrialisation and modernisation, are producing similarity as well as uniqueness in local areas of China. However, compared to what has happened in the countryside of western economies, the globalisation that Chinese rural areas have experienced has been selective and mediated by central and local government. By examining everyday life of rural inhabitants in China, this project, aims to make three important contributions to knowledge and understanding. First, it will examine the material changes in villagers' everyday lives; Second, it will analyse both official and local representations of globalisation; Third, it will investigate how globalisation alters rural people's perceptions, conceptions, and imaginations of rural, urban, modern and traditional daily lives.

The planned fieldwork mainly focus on the third aim of this research and will be conducted over a period of 6 months in three different villages. These villages are all effected by globalisation but present different performances in the global arena? During 6 months (Feb 2017- Aug 2017), I will spend 2 months in each village. I plan to stay in a local resident's house in each village, and to participate in their daily life including working if it is possible. The interviews will follow the initial period of participant observation. The main interviewees will be village residents ranged in age from 20 to 75 years old, as well as selected officers from key positions where relevant. Regarding the sample of interviewees, following my previous pre-research experiences, possible interviewees will be divided into different types of villagers: for example, in village A, a few key people from township entrepreneurs, ordinary villagers, and member of village committee will be interviewed first. After that, snowballing will be conducted to find more participants in different sectors. The interviews will be in the form of one to one and semi-structured, and will be based on

in-house visits. A field-note diary will be kept to record observations during the whole period of the fieldwork.

The interview will seek to explore how various globalisation practices and influences affect the rural areas in different aspects of everyday life, such as family structures, and beliefs, community lives, life styles, entertainment as well as the reflected mutual relationship between modernity and rurality of the area, in order to understand the values, and self-identification, social interactions and pace of life of villagers.

I consider that this project has no significant ethical implications to be brought before the Departmental Ethics Committee. **YES.**

What ethical issues are raised by your research and how will you minimise their impact? If you answered yes to the above, please explain what ethical issues are raised by your research.

There are three main ethical concerns regarding my research.

- 1) The first concern will be the authority of researcher when I encounter villagers. Based on my previous experience of conducting interviews in Chinese rural areas, the researcher would often be considered as a representative of authority or university by villagers, and become seen as a person or official who can deliver villagers' requests or inquiries to the government or the press. I will therefore make it very clear in the information sheet as well as the beginning of interviews that I neither work for nor represent any authoritative organisations, and the only intention of this research is academic inquiry. I am will also provide information to participants after the interview if necessary.
- 2) The second concern will be how to gain consent from villagers since some may not be able to read through the information sheet and consent form by themselves. In this case, the information sheet and consent form will be explained by myself using easy-understanding everyday language, and

respondents will be asked for oral consent. The oral consent will be recorded as proof of ethics consent.

- 3) The third concern of this research will be potential political risks faced by the interviewees who provide information or opinions regarding to the local or central government. I will ensure that my research questions do not lead to discussion of significant political issues or ideological concerns. But the potential risks still need to be handled properly and so all villagers and interviewees will be anonymised. The location of two of the cases study is hard to anonymise, since the characters of them are obvious. For example, one village is close to a well-known historic temple and another is famous for its online business in the press and internet. However, the identities of villagers and key officers who work for government or village committee will be completely anonymised. Interviewees will be ensured that they have every right to refuse to answer certain questions if they are uncomfortable and that they can stop the interview at any point. The researcher will be sensitive to the need to selective with the data on occasion in order to prevent harm to vulnerable groups from the exposure of certain information about them. However, conversations will be recorded and translated without modifying the interviewee's words to keep its authenticity.

After the interview, the transcript will be sent to respondents if requested. At that point they can withdraw the data of interview if they want to. A report will also be sent after the whole research finished if required (will be an option in the consent form).

In addition to the potential jeopardy faced by the people that I will talk to, I am clearly aware of working in China may involve political/cultural potential risks for researcher. However, balance will be seek and every writings after fieldworks will be discussed and consulted with my supervisors to prevent potential and uncontrollable conflicts.

In addition to the major ethical concerns that I outlined above, two principles will be applied to whole research process.

- 1) Confidential and '*zero-harm*'

All data collected in the fieldwork will remain confidential. The personal preferences of interviewees regarding anonymity or any other requirements will be fully respected. In line with the third concern mentioned above, to prevent any political risks and harm, all individual participant's view will be confidential and will not be disclosed to any other participant or organization. The primary data or recording will be secured by appropriate measures of storage and not available to anyone but myself. The interviewees will be ensured that their personal information in records and the field-notes will not be disclosed.

## 2) Positionality, reflexivity and cultural awareness

How a researcher situates themselves in the research context in relation to their multiple positions including gender, age, experience, ability is integral to the research process, especially the fieldwork (England, 1994; Bourke, 2014). As for this research, in most of the case, I will be the only one in the field. Therefore, my positionality and identity will be important in the encountering with different groups of people. For example, as a young woman, I may benefit from this identity, gaining trust from villagers due to the low-threat image; on the other hand, I am also an intellectual who has received education from both domestic big city and the UK, which may produce a barrier between myself and the villagers.

In relation to my positionality, cultural gaps will inevitably exist between researcher and participants. My educational background and economic status, as well as mode of dress and language, are distinct from the rural residents I will be encountering. Most of the participants of this research are rural people who will probably have totally different life experiences and conceptions of modernity. They may have a limited educational background, limited prosperity, and be more conservative. Some of them will have experienced urban areas as immigrants and may therefore hold a different perspective on the urban. The cultural gap between these identities can be very sharp, which will possibly be reflected in the interviews and participant observation. Regarding these cultural gaps, attempts will be made to avoid the presuppositions such as "city life style is the 'more civilised' one" or "rural

people lack of understanding of the society". Although personal perspectives will exist unavoidably, I will be open-minded and listening to interviewees, who will be treated as co-producers in this research, and be reflexive in the interviews as well as writing research findings. To cope with this challenge, I will seek to establish mutual trust with participants and understanding of local traditions and local dialect.

## Information sheet for potential participants

This research is about globalisation and the reconstruction of the rurality in Chinese rural areas, specifically, it will base on three villages in Guangdong, China. This research aims to examine the multiple influences of globalisation at different scales and in different villages, through a focus on the individual scale whereby rural inhabitants will be the main participants in the research.

### Invitation

Therefore, I would like to invite you to participate in this research, which is concerned with how your daily life is influenced by or related to foreign factors, for example, the means of livelihood, the way of living, the ways of getting information and the ways of entertaining. I am also interested in how do you think of city and countryside, as well as modern and traditional.

### Why am I doing this research?

This will contribute to my PhD dissertation at the University of Exeter, UK. Also through this research, I hope that more understandings and insights of rural changes in China can be gained. This research is conducting out of independent academic interest, and it is not associated with any government or university's project. The research data and findings will not be handed to any authority.

### What will happen if you agree to take part?

- An interview will be arranged, which will base on your convenient time and location. It could be in your own home if that is appropriate.
- There will be one, single interview this myself, during which I will ask you questions regarding three different aspects (the material changes of your life; the culture life of you and your community; and your own viewpoints regarding city and countryside).
- The interview is expected to last for approximately 1 hour and no longer than 1.5 hours, and is a one-off event.
- When the research is completed, a summary of findings will be sent to all participants if they are interested.

**Confidential and Anonymous participation**

If you agree to take part in this research, your name will be anonymised and recoded as number, unless you require to stay non-anonymous. All information including conversations between us will be confidential and disclosed to other parties, and will be used for the purpose of this research only.

**What are the advantages and disadvantages of taking part?**

You may find the research interesting and I will be more than happy to share the rural development policy or information of other villages or rural areas in another part of the country or the world. Once the research is finished, a report about local rural changes will be sent to every participant, if you are interested.

This research will be conducted under the 'zero-harm' principle. All information will be anonymised and you can be assured that you can withdraw or stop the interview any time you want, and can skip the part if there is any question that you feel uncomfortable or unsecure to answer.

**Do you have to take part in the study?**

No, the participation in this research is completely voluntary, if you do not wish to take part you do not have to give a reason and you will not be contacted again. Similarly, you are at liberty to withdraw at any time without prejudice or negative consequences.

**Who am I and Contact Information**

**Xinhui Wu**, graduated from Sun Yat-Sen University at 2015, now study for PhD degree of human geography at University of Exeter, UK. (Supervisor: Paul Cloke)

Mobile No.: 18578777520. Email: [xw293@exeter.ac.uk](mailto:xw293@exeter.ac.uk)

## Informed Consent

**Full title of Project:**

***Globalisation and the Reconstruction of the Rurality: Cases Study of Canton, China***

**Researcher: Xinhui Wu**, PhD Candidate, Geography, University of Exeter.

**Contact:** 18588747520; [xw293@exeter.ac.uk](mailto:xw293@exeter.ac.uk).

**Please initial box**

- |   |                          |
|---|--------------------------|
| 1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving reason.                 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. I agree to take part in the above study.   | <input type="checkbox"/> |

**Please initial box**

- |  | <b>Yes</b>               | <b>No</b>                |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 4. I agree to the interview being audio recorded.  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6. I agree to the use of anonymised quotes in publications.  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 7. I agree that my data gathered in this study may be stored (after it has been anonymised) in a specialist data centre and may be used for future research. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 8. I am willing to receive a final conclusive report and further information of this research.   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Name of Participant	Date	Signature
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Name of Researcher	Date	Signature
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<sup>60</sup> In order to better distinguish the names of Chinese scholar, all Chinese scholars that have been cited in this thesis are referred in their full name instead of abbreviation.

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