

JOURNEY INTO CHINA



Guo Huancheng, Ren Guozhu & Lü Mingwei

Countryside of China

translation by Tong Xiaohua



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Contents



Foreword 5

Traditional Homes with Picturesque Beauty 9

- Shuhe, an Ancient Naxi Town in Lijiang 11
- Houses on Stilts and the Wind-Rain Bridge: Dong Villages in Liping 15
- Hakka Civilian Dwellings: Yongding Earthen Houses 19
- Residence of a Shanxi Businessman: The Grand Courtyard of Qiao Family 24
- Xidi and Hongcun: Ancient Villages in Huizhou 28
- Cuandixia Village: Ancient Village in Western Beijing 33
- Zhouzhuang: A Town of Rivers and Lakes in Southern China 38
- The Immigrant Town of Nianbadu 43
- Kaiping, Guangdong: East Meets West in the Diaolou 46
- Jiaju Tibetan Village, the Most Beautiful Village in China 51

Rustic Scenes All over China 57

- Wuyuan: Possibly the Most Beautiful Countryside 59
- Shuangfeng Forestry Center: Snow Village in the Northeast 63
- Tuva Village Beside Kanasi Lake 68
- The Terraced Fields of the Hani People in Yuanyang 74
- Puli Town, Nantou County 78
- Fishing Tourism on Changdao Island 83
- Turpan Grape Valley 88
- Tengtou Village of Fenghua, Zhejiang 94
- Guangxi Buluotuo Scenic Mango Orchard 99





The Rich Traditions of Folk Culture 103

- Lugu Lake: Exotic Oriental Land of Women 105
- Forced Marriage of the Yi Ethnic Group 111
- Northern Shaanxi: Simple Yet Precise Village Marriage Ceremony 116
- Southern China: Dragon Boat Races on Duanwu 121
- Shehuo of the Central Plains 125
- Traditional Wooden Chinese New Year Pictures of Yangjiabu, Weifang 130
- Farmer Art Village in Jinshan District, Shanghai 135
- Home of Plaster Statues—Liuying (Camp Six) Village in Fengxiang, Shaanxi 139

The New Appearance of the New Countryside 143

- Rural Tourism in Nongke Village in Pixian, Sichuan 145
- Hancunhe, the Richest Village in Beijing's Suburbs 149
- Home to Longjing Tea—Longjing Village 153
- Model of Common Prosperity—Huaxi Village 157
- Eco-Friendly Village: Liuminying 161
- Xibaipo Red Tourism 165
- Tahur Hala New Village 170



Foreword

The countryside usually refers to the large areas outside of the cities. It developed from the first humans living together and is the place where we have been living for generation after generation. In the early living and working activities of our ancestors, people lived together to pool their resources to better defend themselves, thrive and gather resources. This concentration of people living together represents the earliest stage in the formation of the countryside in China. The formation of the countryside followed a slow process that took a million years from the first concentration of dwellings to living in caves and living near vegetation and water to scattered settlements in the countryside (semi-permanent settlements) to fixed villages in the countryside to fixed settlements of permanent residents. During the process of moving from living in caves and outside to living in buildings, after the beginning of division of labor, society entered the stage of scattered village settlements. As the level of agricultural production went up, the scattered settlements went from scattered and semi-permanent to become more stable as the size and scope of settlements grew. The development of the countryside in China was a slow process of change that began with a primitive form of villages that developed into ancient style of villages and finally the modern form of villages. As of the 1990s there were approximately 3.207 million incorporated villages in China containing 205 million households inhabited by 790 million people. During the long process of change and development in the Chinese countryside, the hardworking, simple people of ancient China developed a brilliant farming culture and ethnic traditions, writing chapter

after chapter in the history of the peoples in the world.

China has a vast territory and long history with great differences in natural conditions among different areas of the country. The natural resources and cultural content of the villages are very rich. The beautiful natural scenery of the Chinese countryside, the ancient village buildings, the authentic folk customs, the longstanding farming culture, the simple and unsophisticated village workshops and the primitive form of labor create a unique vista in the countryside. It is like a scene in a painting of the countryside reflecting perfect harmony between people and nature. For example, the row on row of the terraced fields in Yuanyang, Yunnan, forestry farms in the snowed-capped Changbai Mountains, a sea of flowers in Wuyuan in spring, Zhouzhuang, a town of rivers and lakes in southern China and the melons in Turpan, Xinjiang. There are also country villages and dwellings that combine the thousands of years of traditional Chinese culture with religious ideals and folk customs. Examples of such historical buildings include the dwellings of the Naxi people on the Shuhe in Lijiang, Yunnan, the stockaded villages of the Dong people of Liping, Guizhou, the earthen buildings of the Hakka people of Yongding, Fujian, The grand courtyard of Qiao Family in Shanxi, the Huizhou dwellings of Hongcun and Xidi villages in Anhui and the watchtowers of Kaiping, Guangdong that combine Chinese and Western influences. There are also rural festivals, farming techniques, lifestyles and interesting tales that are rich in cultural content such as the *Sheshuo* of the Central Plains and the dragon boat races of southern China. Moreover, China has 56 officially recognized ethnic groups including the Dai people of Yunnan, the Miao people of Guizhou, the Zhuang people of Guangxi, the Yao people of Hunan, the Li people of Hainan, the Uygur people of Xinjiang and the Tibetan people of Tibet, all of whom attract people to enjoy their local customs. These ethnic minority groups are good at singing and dancing. They are ebullient and unrestrained and have maintained their unique lifestyles and customs for generation after generation in the areas they inhabit,

providing ample resources for tourists.

The Chinese countryside has been undergoing great changes since the government began instituting the reform and opening up policy. The rural economy has been developing rapidly. The lives of rural residents have greatly improved. The appearance of the countryside has changed considerably. The Chinese government has recently introduced the goals and requirements for building a new socialist countryside. Rural dwellers across the country are developing modern agriculture, improving the rural living environment, and building a new socialist countryside. During this process, a great many model villages and model plots for modern agriculture such as Huaxi Village in Jiangsu, Hancunhe Town, and Liumingying eco-friendly farms in Beijing and Longjing Village in Hangzhou, Zhejiang. These model villages and agricultural plots are prime examples of the new image and appearance of the new socialist countryside.

Countryside of China shows the natural and social phenomena of these villages in the Chinese countryside through a combination of tradition and modernity. The book provides a detailed description of 30-plus selected villages in China using both text and illustrations. The book covers traditional dwellings, folk customs and marriage customs, farm life, country scenes, farming culture, ethnic culture and the building of a new socialist countryside, reflecting the unique traditions of various types of villages in different regions of the country. It could be said that *Countryside of China* is a tour to see the natural and human sights in the Chinese countryside, as well as a tour to see the folk customs and culture in the countryside and a tour to see ethnic minority culture. The abundant natural resources, agricultural resources, human resources, and folk culture resources are the outstanding features of the Chinese countryside. The countryside attracts large numbers of Chinese city dwellers, resulting in a great exchange of concepts, culture, news, and knowledge between urban and rural areas of the country. Moreover, the Chinese countryside is attractive to

overseas tourists who come to appreciate the folk customs of Chinese rural residents, thereby increasing understanding among different peoples of the world and promoting mutual development of all countries of the world.

Anything to do with national culture belongs to the world. The countryside of this rapidly developing country of China, with its unique mix of ethnic groups, is now coming into view for our friends at home and abroad and becoming a focal point for increasing friendship among the peoples of the world. The countryside of China is welcoming friends from all over the world with their new image and enthusiasm.

Guo Huancheng

March 6, 2007

Traditional Homes with Picturesque Beauty

During the many thousand years when people lived in an agricultural society, the level of productive forces was quite low. People took a simple ecological outlook and created the best possible living environment for themselves by conforming to nature and building a suitable living environment using simple techniques. Traditional Chinese homes were adapted to local natural conditions and climate and drew of the rich sensitivity and aesthetic sensibility of their builders. Because the natural conditions and cultural situation differed from place to place, a great diversity of house styles appeared that was rarely matched in the history of architecture.

Many traditional houses still exist in rural areas all around the country, and people still think of them as the ideal type of residence.

Jiaju Tibetan Village



Cuandixia Village



The Grand Courtyard of Qiao Family



Shuhe Town



Dong Villages in Liping



The Diaolou of Kaiping



Yongding Earthen Houses



Nianbadu Town



Xidi and Hongcun

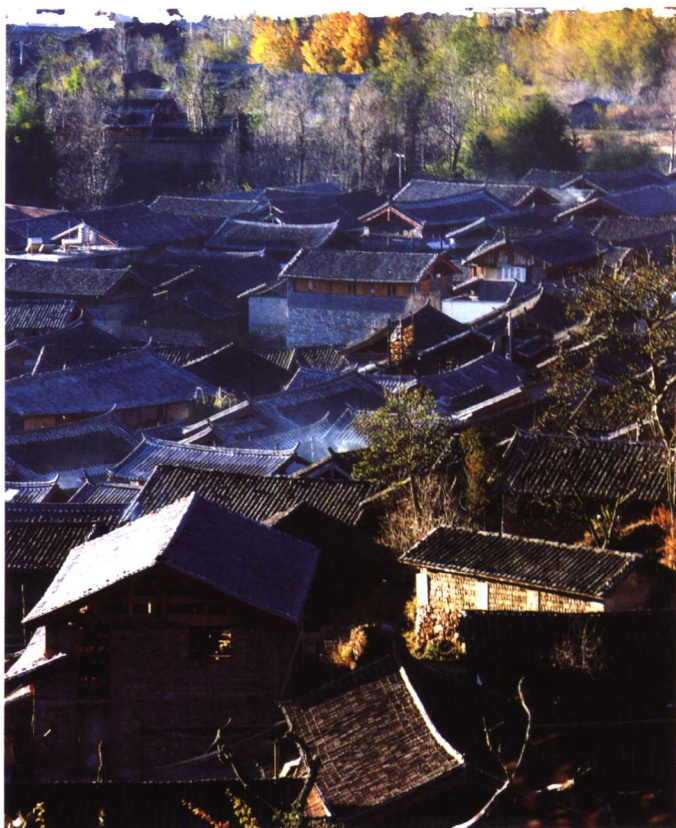


Zhouzhuang

Shuhe, an Ancient Naxi Town in Lijiang

The ancient town of Shuhe is located in Lijiang in the northwest part of Yunnan and was once an important town on the "ancient tea delivery road." Driving to Shuhe from Lijiang only requires following the pavement 7 kilometers towards Snow Mountain before the ancient village comes into view. This is Shuhe, the "land of clear springs," also known as Longquan (Dragon Springs) Village.

Shuhe is the location of one of the earliest settlements



Bird's-eye view of the ancient town in the first light of day



of Naxi people. Entering the ancient village you can directly arrive at the central square in the style of Sifang Street in the ancient city of Lijiang. The square has a total area of 200 square meters and has become known as "Shuhe's Sifang Street." The four sides of the square are lined with shops and stores with ancient-style wooden fronts painted with bright red lacquer. Added to the shiny black stones in front of the stores and the spotted stone walkways, the square has a simple and natural feel.

Elderly Naxi woman in a lane

West of Sifang Street at the foot of the mountains is a large concentration of ancient dwellings. Most of the Naxi dwellings in Shuhe are made of earth and wood, with earth, stone, and brick complementing the basic wooden framework. They are often built in a courtyard formation with dwellings on three sides and a decorated screen wall on the entrance side, front courtyard and back courtyard, and one entrance leading to two courtyards. The first type is most basic and most often seen. The rural court-

Sign in Chinese, English
and the local Dongba
language on rural inn



yard formation with dwellings on three sides and a decorated screen wall on the entrance side is a little different from those found in cities in terms of function. The three buildings have two stories, and the lower floors of the main building facing east and the building facing south are used for living areas with the upper stories used for storage while the lower floor of the building facing north is used for sheltering animals with the upper floor used for storing feed.

The most outstanding characteristic of Naxi dwellings in Shuhe is that they all have a wide porch in the front, which they often use as a dining area and for entertaining guests. The courtyards themselves also have their own character. Most are covered with paving stones and are often well landscaped, and many use brick, tile or cobbles to form large depictions of auspicious Chinese symbols and characters to make them even more elegant. In addition to daily activities, the courtyards are also used as a work space and for folk activities.



Leisure in the central room

As the Naxi communities prospered in recent years, villagers have been building new houses. The new houses follow regulations concerning main framework, design and, style to maintain the traditional appearance, but on the inside more and more people are going for modern decoration and modern wall treatment. The houses truly reflect an organic and harmonious blend of ancient and modern.

In order to avoid commercialization of the ancient village, just to the south of the village a beautiful new section has been developed in the ancient style to match the lay of the river and ancient trees. This area is especially designed for locating bars, inns and shops so that the growing crowds of tourists do not disturb the routine lives of the villagers. The local Naxi residents, who are simple, kind, enthusiastic, and hospitable people, are very approachable. Life here is much tranquil and relaxed like olden times than in Lijiang. As you enjoy this return to a more natural lifestyle with the local residents, you too will want this lifestyle to continue this way.

Naxi handicrafts hanging on a wall

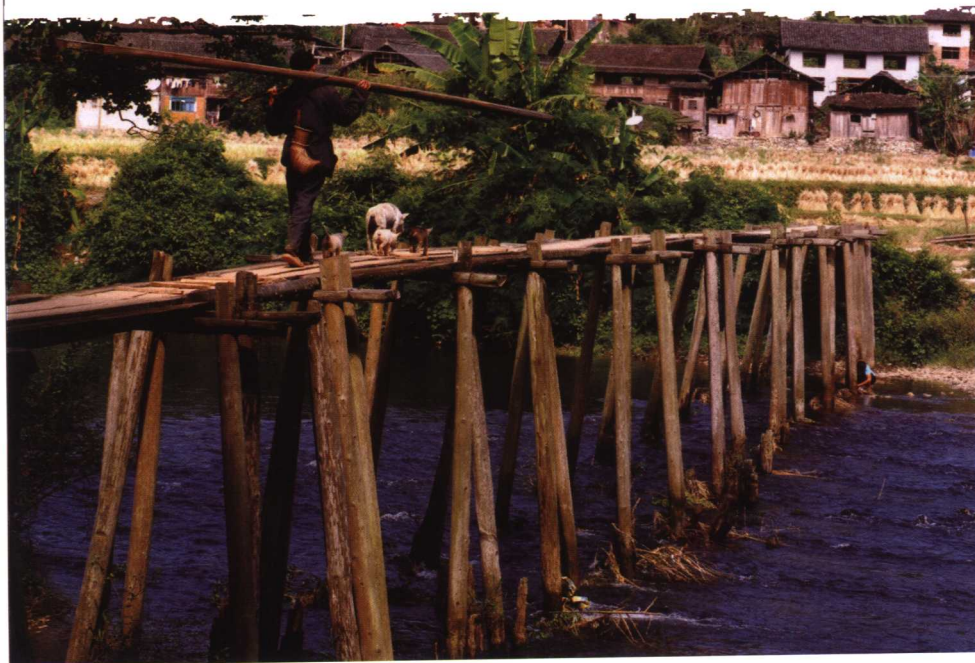


Houses on Stilts and the Wind-Rain Bridge: Dong Villages in Liping County, Guizhou Province

The total area of Liping County in the province of Guizhou is 4,441 square kilometers, and the population is 50,000, 70% of whom belong to the Dong ethnic group. This is the largest concentration of this ethnic minority in the country.

The Dong Area of Scenic and Famous Sites in Liping is located where the provinces of Hunan and Guizhou and the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region meet. The area is chock a block in ethnic culture, natural scenery, historic and cultural sites and sites related to the early history of the CPC (known as "red tour sites"), making tourists reluctant to leave. One of these sites, the Diping Wind-Rain Bridge is a key cultural relic under national protec-

Villager crosses Red Army Bridge.



tion. The Tang'an Dong Village is the only ecological museum of the Dong ethnic minority set up by China and the Kingdom of Norway. Zhaoxing, one of the "six most beautiful ancient rural towns in China," is one of the first group of ten ethnic minority folk culture trial protection sites. The Liping Tiansheng Bridge is the world's largest natural stone arch bridge. When the Dong ethnic minority songs were performed in Paris, people called them "the



music of a sparkling fountain" and a "hidden civilization." The Liping National Forest Park is a major oxygen generator and an ideal place to look for signs of the ecology of the distant past. Qiaojie Street in the ancient town of Defeng has been compared to a famous painting of the Qing Dynasty depicting scenes along the Grand Canal and the ancient courtyard houses. Walls and eaves in the tourist area of the town all give it an ancient atmosphere. The original site of the "Liping Meeting," a key cultural

Farmland of Tang'an in fall colors

The Dong Village of Zhaoxing

Song and dance of the Dong People