Grassroots Actions for Rural Revitalization: Documenting a Miao Family's Efforts Toward Autonomous and Sustainable Futures through Biocultural Design

by

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A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of

The University of Manitoba

in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of

MASTER OF NATURAL RESOURCES MANAGEMENT

Natural Resources Institute

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ABSTRACT

This study documented the efforts of a Miao (Hmong) family in Guizhou, China, to create autonomous and sustainable rural futures by developing diverse economic pathways rooted in local biocultural resources. Amidst the rapid sociocultural and economic changes in rural China over recent decades, this family from Queniao — a remote Miao village in the core of Leigong Mountain Nature Reserve — has undertaken a series of agritourism and conservation projects under the business entity Manyou Farm (慢友农场) since 2019, focusing on local agricultural and food practices, rural experiential activities, ecological tea, Miao heritage crafts, education, and advocacy.

Using a case study approach complemented by ethnographic methods, this study explored the emergence, organization, and impact of these agritourism and conservation projects and the embedded meanings, values, knowledge, and skills. It also identified the drivers and constraints of these projects. The concepts of autonomy, biocultural design, and sustainability transitions were engaged to interpret the family's motivations, encapsulate Manyou Farm's projects, and contextualize the success and significance of these efforts.

The findings and implications fall into three dimensions. First, Manyou Farm's projects offer the family significant security and well-being from local ways of life while maintaining integration with mainstream economic systems and cultural life. This highlights the inadequacy of hierarchical developmental discourses and the agency and strategism of communities in pursuing their own paths to desired futures. Second, Manyou Farm is identified as a sustainability-driven, autonomy-centered, and dynamically organized enterprise, whose distinctiveness has contributed to its positive, multidimensional impact, underscoring the benefits for rural developmental projects to support multi-actor, innovative processes. Third, Manyou

Farm's case highlights the role of state and regional developmental schemes in enabling grassroots tourism initiatives and the yearnings among urban residents for environmental and food quality, community connections, and cultural authenticity. Three emerging values, processes, and relations of sustainability — slow, urban-rural integration, and multifunctionality — are derived from this case study.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, I would like to thank my supervisor Dr. Iain Davidson-Hunt. Your academic guidance, professional assistance, patience, and trust have been essential for the entire conceptualization and development of this project, especially in helping me overcome the challenges of developing the proposal. Your prompt responses to my questions and concerns throughout the program have been invaluable, and I sincerely appreciate them.

I would also like to thank my thesis committee members, Ms. Lanying Zhang, Dr. Filiberto Penados, and Dr. Julián Idrobo, for their continuous support during key stages of this thesis's development. Your advice, encouragement, and feedback gave me the confidence to pursue this topic and helped me understand how my draft can be refined for clarity and conciseness. I would like to specially thank Ms. Lanying Zhang for her supportiveness and mentorship in helping me locate a field site in China and inviting me to engage with a network of rural design scholars and practitioners in the country.

I am deeply grateful to the people of Queniao for making my fieldwork a memorable and rewarding experience. These include, Xiaoniu, Liping, and their family, whose participation in this research, hospitality, and work ethic greatly inspired me. I would also like to thank other community members and the family's supporters who shared their insights and contributed to this project.

Additionally, I would like to express my appreciation to the teaching and administrative staff at the Natural Resources Institute of the University of Manitoba for their academic mentorship and essential support throughout my studies. I would like to specially thank Dr. John Sinclair for his encouragement and feedback on my project.

I would like to thank the organizations and people who funded this project, particularly the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, the University of Manitoba Graduate Student Entrance Scholarship, and the Berkes Graduate Scholarship in Community-Based Research.

Finally, I extend my heartfelt gratitude to my partner Yueming for her unwavering trust, support, and love throughout my graduate program, as well as to my family and friends for their encouragement and support.

DEDICATION

To the lands, people, ideas, and practices that help us expand our perspectives and build bridges of understanding.

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

QMDAP: Qiandongnan Miao and Dong Autonomous Prefecture（黔东南苗族侗族自治州）

Manyou Farm (or the "Farm"): Queniao Manyou Ecological Family Farm (雀鸟慢友生态家庭农场)

GLOSSARY OF PERTINENT CHINESE TERMS

Tushicai (土食材): Literally "earthy food ingredients," typically referring to food ingredients that are produced naturally in a specific region, without industrial processing, and often associated with traditional or rural farming practices.

Chawenhua (茶文化): Literally "tea culture." A term encompassing a wide range of customs, etiquettes, and practices related to the preparation, consumption, and appreciation of tea important in Chinese and other East Asian societies.

Minsu (民宿): The Chinese term for homestay, bed and breakfast, or guesthouse. Literally "people's dwelling."

Gongyi (公益): Literally "public welfare," often used interchangeably with *gongyi huodong* (公益活动, "public welfare activities"). A term covering various humanitarian and poverty relief activities, often organized by charities and non-profit organizations.

Renqingwei (人情味): Literally "the feeling of human emotion," referring to the feeling of genuine care, hospitality, and kindness in interpersonal interactions or environments, similar to human warmth or human kindness.

Daka (打卡): To check in or punch in. In the context of travel, it refers to visiting popular destinations and posting about them online to show one has "checked in" at the spot.

Yanxi (研习): Literally “research and study.” The term is used to encompass a variety of educational programs, workshops, or initiatives in specific fields.

Nongjiale (农家乐): Literally “farmhouse joy.” A popular form of rural tourism or agri-tainment in China, typically involving peasant households offering urban visitors experiences such as rustic meals, accomodation, locally-made products, and activites to experience local customs and leisure.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Worldwide, many rural and remote regions are in decline due to globalization and environmental changes (Liu & Li, 2017). Legacies of colonialism, industrialization, and capital-favoring development schemes have created precarious living conditions for rural communities, driving many to migrate to urban areas in search of better futures. In response, there has been a search for ways for the "rural" to persist, emerge, and transition within globalized changes to foster greater autonomy (Escobar, 2018). One approach has been to create diverse economic pathways by drawing on local biocultural resources. These practices — often described as artisanal, alternative, indigenous, rural, peasant, or traditional — are rooted in place and tradition. They may offer additional social and ecological benefits while enabling communities to respond to external changes from within their local environments (Davidson-Hunt et al., 2016). By integrating these practices into contemporary contexts and building alliances, communities are garnering increased recognition and support for these practices and associated ways of living, and, in doing so, creating their aspired rural futures. These efforts are also believed to contribute to rural revitalization and sustainability transitions through collective action (Davidson-Hunt et al., 2012; Scoones et al., 2020). Documenting these initiatives will highlight their importance, support community members, and advance our understanding of biocultural design and sustainability transitions.

Despite a shared desire for greater autonomy through revitalizing traditions, grassroots initiatives are often highly diverse in their causes, forms and levels of organization due to each location's unique biocultural and socioeconomic contexts and the varied aspirations and capabilities of the actors involved. Additionally, being "alternative" means that these initiatives may not easily align with existing organizational structures, instead relying on non-formal and incipient relationships driven by shared values. These characteristics call for a case-by-case approach to documentation. Specifically, documenting the meanings, organization, and value regimes associated with these initiatives can enhance our understanding of 1) the persistence of cultural traditions amid globalizing forces and their multi-faceted interactions; 2) how diverse biocultural resources are utilized to create alternative pathways for rural economic development; and 3) how emerging values, processes, and relations of sustainability are embodied through these pathways. Additionally, when considering strategies to foster collective action toward

sustainability, it is crucial to examine the factors that enable or constrain these efforts, such as individual capabilities, social capital, local resources, government initiatives, and other situational dynamics.

1.2 Context of Research

Lanying Zhang, a prominent figure in China's rural reconstruction network, introduced me to a family working to establish diverse economic pathways based on local biocultural heritage in Guizhou Province, China. This family is based in Queniao village, a Miao ethnicity village located in Leishan County of Qiandongnan Miao and Dong Autonomous Prefecture, home to one of the largest Miao populations in the country (Mao, 2015). The Miao people of this region have a long history of settlement, as evidenced by the distinctive terraced systems they have developed across the mountainous landscape. Until a few decades ago, most people in Queniao did not seek work outside the local area. However, beginning in the mid-1990s, the growing importance of cash, the low profitability of agriculture, and the demand for workers in China's emerging coastal regions drove tens of millions of rural inhabitants to migrate to towns and cities (Sit & Wong, 2013). This migration wave also reached Queniao, with working-age adults leaving for coastal areas in search of employment. While migrant workers have increased local family incomes, this shift has also led to significant changes in the continuity of cultural practices (Huang & Fan, 2014). Additionally, the influx of industrial products and technologies and the influence of the national education system have led to changing perceptions about the value of traditions.

Within this general context, the family initiated their projects. The family comprises a married couple, Xiaoniu and Liping, their son, Liping's parents, and Liping's grandfather. Xiaoniu, from the Yi ethnic group in Yunnan province, has worked in sustainable rural development and rural culture conservation for over ten years. Liping is Miao and from the village. Since 2015, Liping's family has initiated several projects, including revitalizing local crop varieties and traditional agroecological practices, organizing agritourism activities for urban visitors, developing ecological tea and Miao heritage crafts, and engaging in education and advocacy. While most of these efforts have been carried out within the extended family, they have also encouraged other community members to participate. These projects have become significant sources of income for Liping's family and have helped showcase Queniao's

biocultural heritage on both domestic and international platforms. In 2019, the family formalized these projects as a business entity named Queniao Manyou Ecological Family Farm, (雀鸟慢友生态家庭农场, abbreviated as Manyou Farm, hereafter also referred to as "the Farm").

During an initial visit to the community, Liping's family expressed interest in participating in my research project. Given their busy involvement in the Farm's various projects, they perceived a benefit in having a researcher document the development of Manyou Farm over time. My research could help produce useful materials to communicate their messages to current and potential supporters and share their experiences with others in the region interested in launching similar projects.

Considering the research framework and context, this study addressed the following questions: First, how have the projects at Manyou Farm developed, how are they organized, what knowledge and skills do they involve, and what impact have they created? A detailed description of these tangible aspects would highlight the creative processes by which Liping's family draw upon Queniao's diverse biocultural heritage for product and service development. This effort would also deepen our understanding of the descriptive relevance of biocultural design, a core concept used in this study to encapsulate the distinctiveness of Manyou Farm's projects. Second, what is the significance of the Farm's projects and associated way of life for Liping's family? In light of regional trends of migrant work and urban relocation, exploring the family's commitment to developing their livelihood in the village could demonstrate the significance of place-based practices for local communities. The concept of autonomy (Starr & Adams, 2010) was applied to make sense of the choices and aspirations of local communities as they face accelerated exposure to trans-local forces. Third, what are the value regimes that draw the Farm's supporters to participate in its projects? By incorporating the perspectives of the projects' participants, such as consumers, visitors, and collaborators, the study sought to provide a more complete picture of the subjective meanings and experiences driving the Farm's activities. Insights from these three areas, which explore both tangible and subjective dimensions of a grassroots innovation, could reveal emerging values, relations, and processes of sustainability.

Lastly, what are the enabling and hindering factors of Manyou Farm's projects? Identifying the drivers and constraints of the family's efforts at various levels could shed light on the conditions that may foster more collective actions toward sustainability. Given the strong role of centralized planning in China, it is particularly important to examine how state policies and

initiatives are shaping regional trends, which, in turn, influence Liping's family's endeavors. Additionally, since China has made significant investments in addressing rural sector issues since the turn of the century (Sit & Wong, 2013), identifying these factors could reveal the synergies and tensions between top-down and bottom-up approaches to rural development.

1.3 Research Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this research was to document the efforts of a Miao family in Guizhou, China to build sustainable and autonomous rural futures by developing diverse economic pathways based on local biocultural resources.

The objectives of the research were to:

1. Document the development of biocultural pathways at Manyou Farm, including their emergence, organization, impact, and the knowledge and skills involved.
2. Understand the meaning and significance of these projects for Liping's family.
3. Identify the value regimes upheld by Manyou Farm's supporters through their consumption and other forms of support.
4. Identify the factors that enable and hinder Manyou Farm's projects.

1.4 General Methodology

A combination of constructivist and pragmatic worldviews guided this research. Constructivism focuses on understanding the meanings people construct about the world based on their lived experiences. At the same time, pragmatism emphasizes understanding a problem or situation using all available approaches to achieve an intended consequence (Creswell, 2018). These perspectives aligned with my research objectives, which focused on understanding the meaning, organization, and values associated with Manyou Farm's projects within the larger goal of identifying the factors that enable or hinder these efforts toward fostering more collective actions for sustainability. Given the exploratory and descriptive nature of the research objectives, a qualitative research approach was chosen. Case study was employed as the primary research design given the overall goal of gaining a holistic, in-depth understanding of Manyou Farm's projects, which involve multiple participants. However, my research design also drew heavily from ethnography, as one of the research objectives involved understanding the meanings a cultural group ascribes to place-based practices (Creswell & Poth, 2017).

Document review, participant observation, and semi-structured interviews were the primary data collection methods used in this study. Firstly, Xiaoniu and Liping had accumulated a body of project-related textual and audiovisual materials over the years through their promotional, educational and documentational efforts. These documents provided a general overview of Manyou Farm's diverse projects and deepened understanding of the emergence, organization, motives, and values regimes associated with these initiatives.

Secondly, I conducted fieldwork research for approximately 37 days between May and August 2022, during which I engaged in participant observation. During this time, I joined Liping's family in their daily activities to gain understanding of the knowledge, skills, and values involved in their efforts. These activities included sourcing and processing foods and crafts, managing their fields, organizing experiential activities for visitors, and exchanging with their customers. I recorded conversations, discoveries, interpretations, and reflections related to the research objectives while observing these activities and conversing with people. I also conducted audio, photo and video documentation of these processes.

Thirdly, I conducted semi-structured interviews with Liping's family and Manyou Farm's supporters — individuals familiar with the Farm who had purchased its products, participated in its agritourism activities, or provided other forms of support. These interviews provided an opportunity to gain deeper insights into how the family's lived experiences shaped their aspirations and allowed them to reflect on the drivers and constraints of the Farm's projects. Interviews with the Farm's supporters focused on identifying value regimes they share with Liping's family through their consumption, participation, and other forms of support.

Following data collection, all data were coded and analyzed to produce case themes and descriptions pertinent to the research objectives, which were then discussed in relation to the concepts and conceptual frameworks guiding this study — namely autonomy, biocultural design, and sustainability transitions. Additional literature was reviewed to corroborate the implications of the research findings.

Lastly, in keeping with the principles of community-based research, the researcher fulfilled several community outcomes using materials produced during the research process following discussions with Liping's family to support their educational and promotional efforts.

This research was approved by the Research Ethics Board at the University of Manitoba (see Appendix 1 for the protocol approval, amendment, and renewal certificates).

1.5 Study Area

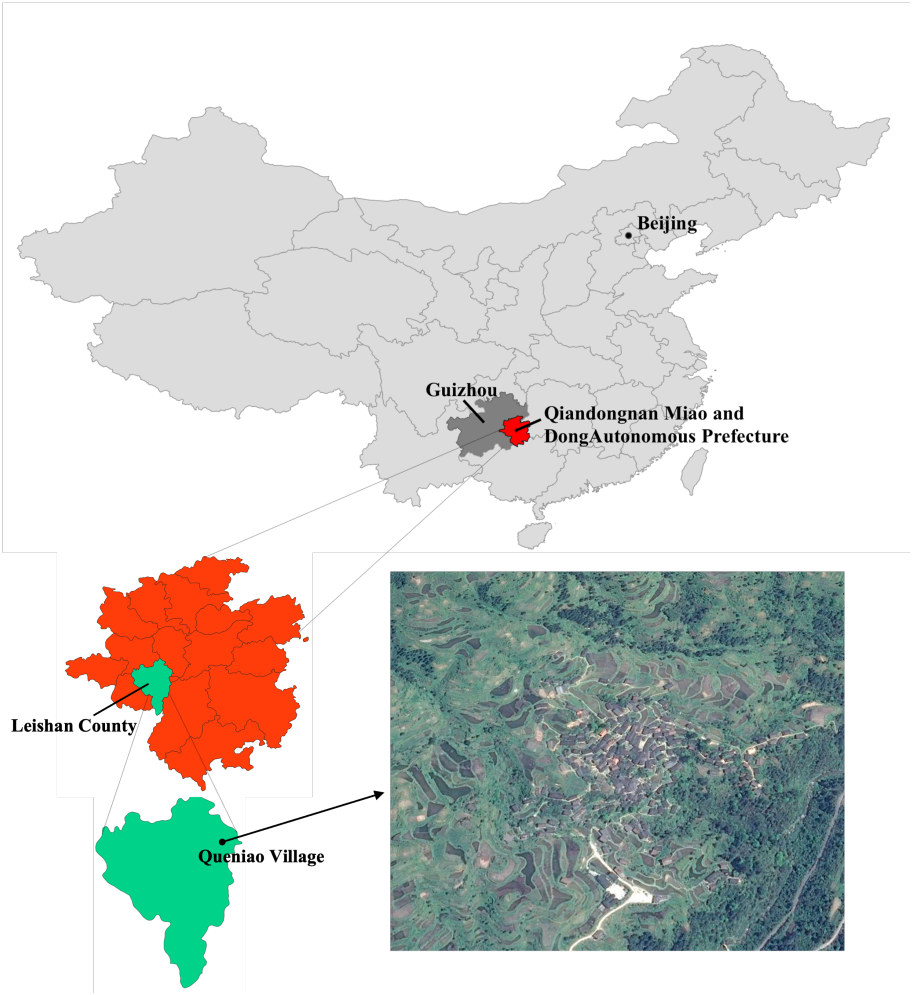


Figure 1. Location of Queniao Village. Image Source: Google Earth

Qiandongnan Miao and Dong Autonomous Prefecture (QMDAP) is located in the southeastern part of Guizhou province. Geographically, it lies in the middle zone of China's three-step staircase topography, between the western Plateau and the eastern lowlands. The region has a subtropical wet monsoon climate characterized by mild weather, ample rainfall, and distinct seasons. Culturally, QMDAP is one of China's minority ethnicity regions, with 81% of the population belonging to ethnic minorities. Among them, 43% are of Miao ethnicity and 30.4% are Dong, followed by Buyi, Shui, Yao, Zhuang, Tujia, and other groups (Qiandongnan Prefecture Department of Statistics, 2020). Within this region, the Miao population is most concentrated in the Leigong Mountain area, located in Leishan County. The Miao people have over a thousand years of settlement history in this area (Mao, 2015) and have developed a rich

biocultural heritage through living off the local landscape. These aspects are explored in more detail in Section 2.3.

Queniao village (雀鸟村, 26°25'N; 108°13'E) is located in Fangxiang Township (方祥乡) of Leishan County (雷山县), within the core zone of Leigong Mountain nature reserve, south of the main peak of Leigong Mountain. Queniao covers approximately 21 square kilometers and has an average elevation of 1,558 meters. The village is about 8 kilometers from the Fangxiang town government, 40 kilometers from the Leishan county government, and 70 kilometers from the prefectural capital city of Kaili. In 2013, the village received the accreditation of "Traditional Village of China" by the central government (Ministry of Housing and Rural-Urban Construction of the People's Republic of China, 2013). In recent years, the economy of Queniao's residents has been based on a combination of commodity crop and livestock production, subsistence farming, and migrant work. Nearly one third of the village population seeks work outside in towns and cities, with the majority returning only for important holidays (Huang, 2014). More on the historical factors and development initiatives shaping people's livelihoods in the region is explored in Chapter 2.

Table 1. Queniao Community Profile

Description	Queniao	Source
Total population	918	(Huang, 2014)
Number of households	238	
Miao ethnicity percentage	99.35%	
Working age population	442	
Population engaged in migrant work • Education – Primary School • Education – Middle School • Education – High school and above	280 33.21% 46.79% 13.93%	(Huang, 2014)
Average yearly household income (2015) • Income from agriculture and husbandry • Non-agricultural income • Other income	9063.50 RMB 63.24% 11.27% 25.49%	(Feng et al., 2019)

1.6 Thesis Organization

This thesis is organized into eight chapters. The first chapter introduces the background of the study, the research purpose and objectives, the general methodology, and the study area. Chapter 2 reviews literature relevant to the study, exploring the main concepts — autonomy, biocultural design, and sustainability transitions — followed by an overview of rural transformations and developmental initiatives in contemporary China, and the history and biocultural heritage of the Miao people in the Leigong Mountain Region. Chapter 3 presents the detailed research methodology, including the research design, case study selection, participant recruitment, research methods, data analysis, and dissemination.

Chapters 4–7 present the study's findings. Chapter 4 details the emergence of Manyou Farm and its current projects, which include agroecological revitalization, agritourism, ecological tea production, Miao heritage crafts, and educational and promotional activities. Chapter 5 explores the motivations behind Liping's family's efforts. Chapter 6 examines the value regimes that draw Manyou Farm's supporters to participate in the Farm's projects. Chapter 7 analyzes the enabling and hindering factors affecting the Farm's projects. Finally, Chapter 8 discusses the study's implications and recommendations based on the research findings and concludes the study.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter is comprised of three sections. The first section explores the key concepts and frameworks framing this research: autonomy, biocultural design, and sustainability transitions. The second section reviews the major transformations and development initiatives impacting rural communities in contemporary China. The final section provides an overview of the history, sociocultural trends, and biocultural heritage of the Miao people in the Leigong Mountain region.

2.1 Rural Autonomy, Biocultural Design, and Sustainability Transitions

This case study of Manyou Farm engaged three key concepts and frameworks, each addressing a different dimension of rural transformation. First, it drew on the concept of autonomy to interpret the diverse aspirations and responses of rural communities amid globalized changes. Next, it proposed the concept of biocultural design as one pathway for these communities to strengthen autonomy while contributing to sustainable development. Lastly, it adopted the framework from the sustainability transitions literature to contextualize local, grassroots innovations within broader systemic and structural perspectives and forces. These three concepts were used to interpret the motivations and aspirations of Liping's family, encapsulate Manyou Farm's projects, and contextualize the success and significance of the Farm, respectively. By integrating multiple concepts, this study sought to explore the linkages among sustainability-related concepts and frameworks that concentrate on different levels of actions. The following subsections present the main narratives and ideas of each concept.

2.1.1 Globalized Change and Rural Autonomy

In the past decades, globalization has emerged as a prominent phenomenon, driving major political, economic, and cultural changes across the world. While advances in transportation, communication, and production technologies have fostered global-scale movements of humans, capital, and commodities since at least the time of the spice trade, this most recent wave of globalization is marked by the widespread implementation of neoliberal policies by national governments, the rise of transnational organizations and globalized supply chains, economic financialization, new information technologies, and the growing dominance of Western political, economic, and cultural norms (Scheuermen, 2018). The deregulation of domestic markets and

increased cross-border flow of products, technologies, capital, labor, and information have created interconnectedness and interdependencies across political and geographic boundaries.

However, these interdependencies are often built on unequal terms and conditions. Much has been written on the growing inequalities, precarious living conditions, environmental degradation, and sociocultural changes brought about by the current globalized system, which primarily favors the interests of transnational corporations and a few "core" nations. Through monetary geopolitics backed up by military power, global financial capital appropriates the gains from resource economies of developing countries through speculative investment schemes, while the financial risks and social and environmental costs are transferred to these countries (Sit & Wong, 2013). In response to the crisis wrought by neoliberal globalization, people at different levels of organization have formed new alliances and movements in search for greater sustainability, social justice, autonomy, and resilience from the prevailing system.

For rural, resource-dependent regions, the hallmarks of globalization often manifest through integration into global supply chains, commodification of natural resources, labor migrations, and the formation of amenity landscapes (Woods, 2007). Under the influence of state or corporate interventions, the rising importance of cash, and various development narratives, the diverse peasant economies that once sustained rural regions have been converted into export-driven production systems that rely heavily on external inputs and capital (Woods, 2007). These systems are often ecologically degrading and expose rural populations to market fluctuations as well as shifting political and corporate decisions.

In addition to navigating the precarity of a globalized economy, many rural regions are forced to contend with legacies of colonialism, land concentration, loss of sovereignty over commons, resource and labor drain for urban-industrial development, and, more recently, the impacts of climate change. These challenges have driven many young people to migrate to cities in search for better futures, diminishing the ability for left-behind populations to maintain basic rural functions, thereby creating a spiral of decline (Liu & Li, 2017).

Some rural regions with aesthetic or natural appeal, or close to metropolitan centers, have been transformed into amenity landscapes, characterized by tourism development and the influx of visitors and migrant workers. However, these developments do not necessarily benefit local residents, as they can lead to exclusion and out-migration. Concurrently with these social and economic changes are cultural and political shifts as communities confront globalization. These

include the erosion of traditional cultural practices, the weakening of social capital, the growing dominance of global narratives over local discourses, and shifting sites of political authority — all of which contribute to feelings of alienation, loss of identity, and political disempowerment for rural communities.

While the impact of globalization on rural communities is multi-faceted, this process is neither uniform nor linear. As Woods (2007) notes, many rural regions do not exhibit all the characteristics of a "globalized countryside" in reality. Instead, through acts of negotiation, contestation, and resistance by local communities, as well as mediation by nation-states and other place-specific factors, these regions are shielded from the full brunt of globalization. At the same time, globalization is not entirely a dualistic system of domination and subordination, as communities also actively choose to engage with its desirable dimensions, forming new relationships, practices, and identities as they have always done throughout historical interactions with trans-local forces. For these reasons, it is more accurate to understand globalization as a multifaceted and heterogeneous process which, through intermingling with local actors and processes, results in diverse and hybridized rural landscapes. Adopting this relational lens, which pays attention to the agencies of local actors and the specificities of place, allows us to re-examine globalization in ways that present alternative pathways to the forces of global capital.

Under a relational framing of globalization, "autonomy" has emerged as a concept used by scholars, activists, and some rural communities to interpret the motivations behind diverse actions in response to globalized changes. Autonomy is generally defined as a condition in which people can live according to their own preferences, free from external imposition (Starr & Adams, 2010). However, unlike terms such as freedom, independence, or sovereignty, autonomy does not adhere to a universal set of standards, imply complete isolation from external forces, or limit its focus solely on political and economic dimensions. Kilman (2017, p. 109) uses the term *relational autonomy* and defines it as a condition where "individuals have the capacity to make their own decisions, be guided by their own morals and values and yet do this from within contextual boundaries (spatial, temporal, structural, cultural)."

Escobar (2018) argues that at the heart of autonomy is the recognition that biological or cultural units are defined by a basic level of organization, or way of living, which they aim to conserve and which needs to be conserved to remain who they are. This basic organization, encompassing both material and non-material dimensions, emerges from historic, recurrent

interactions with other units and the environment. It empowers these units with the agency to shape their futures by engaging with and responding to external forces through endogenous processes. However, when units operate under heteronomy — where processes and norms are externally determined — they become disintegrated and lose the ability to be and maintain their identity and organization. In practice, since units or systems overlap, there are no clear boundaries between internal and external forces, and thus, no absolute autonomy or heteronomy (Fox & Gordillo, 1990). Nevertheless, people continuously strive for greater self-organization and localization along the autonomy-heteronomy axis, unless there are perceived necessities or benefits to engage with a larger, more distant system.

For rural, particularly rural indigenous communities, their basis for autonomy is particularly strong because they have often established ways of living deeply rooted in their local communities and biological landscapes, enabling them to derive both material and non-material well-being locally over extended periods of time. These ways of living encompass multiple dimensions, including political organizations, production and exchange systems, languages, technologies, arts, crafts, medicine, customs, beliefs, values, and social relations. By learning, participating in, embodying, and passing down these culture-specific ways of being, knowing and doing, individuals are shaped by and empowered through their culture (Fei, 1947). This does not mean these cultures are static or independent of external forces, but rather that they possess degrees of capability and flexibility to adapt to changes through endogenous processes (Escobar, 2018) and maintain parts of their organization even when other aspects of living are governed by external forces (Starr & Adams, 2010).

Neoliberal globalization, however, has intensified these heteronomous pressures by transforming diverse, place-based rural cultures into another way of being, knowing, and doing — a globalizing, Eurocentric, and technocratic system with its own set of values, discourses, systems of exchange, and power relations, in which many rural communities find themselves marginalized. This has led to struggles as rural peoples strive to regain control over dimensions of their lives that have been governed, managed, suppressed, or undermined by the state, transnational corporations, and the global financial sector.

From this perspective, many initiatives can be understood as efforts to strengthen rural autonomy, even if they are not framed in these terms (Woods, 2007). Politically, these efforts may include securing local control of land, defending rights to resources, and establishing

localized political institutions (Van der Ploeg, 2010). Culturally and socially, they may involve revitalizing traditional knowledge systems, organizing communal activities to build social capital, reincorporating young people into rural areas (Sit et al., 2017), and restoring other sociocultural functions at the communal level. Economically, they may involve revitalizing local markets and other exchange systems, de-commodifying and internalizing production to serve local needs and reduce reliance on external inputs (Schneider & Niederle, 2010), diversifying livelihoods, and increasing monetary income to expand financial capabilities. Given that much of the contemporary world has been shaped by modernization, industrialization, and global trade, these pursuits for autonomy are unlikely to involve a complete rejection of trans-local forces. Rather, they are more likely to advance through strategic engagement with diverse actors, institutions, infrastructure, technologies, and forms of capital to enhance local capacities for self-determination.

2.1.2 Biocultural Heritage and Design

Among the diverse rural actions to build greater autonomy, one approach is to develop economic pathways based on local resources. As monetization and marketization increase globally, monetary income has become increasingly important for many rural communities. However, overreliance on single industries and external capital for local economic development often proves vulnerable to external shocks, ecologically unsustainable, and culturally detrimental, ultimately undermining local autonomy. In response, in addition to producing for supply chains and seeking employment opportunities in towns and cities, some communities are drawing upon the diversified, place-based ways of living that once sustained rural regions for their potential to generate new economic opportunities.

Unlike formalized economies, however, these pathways often exhibit greater diversity, plurality, and informality in their forms, functions, and organizations. First, the diversity of interrelationships between rural peoples and their landscapes provides a rich reservoir of resources —from food, medicine, energy, shelter to cultural norms and practices — that can be transformed into products and services of value. As a result, potential pathways may include not only the offering of physical products but also the offering of skills, knowledge, educational and recreational experiences, as well as access to resources in exchange for capital. To avoid

dependence on single industries and to more fully utilize local resources, people may offer multiple types of products and services tailored to diverse user-group interests.

Secondly, economic pathways rooted in place and tradition often provide additional social, cultural, and ecological benefits (Davidson-Hunt et al., 2016). Many local enterprises are not driven by capital growth alone but recognize capital as a necessary means to support a wide range of social, economic, cultural, and political goals valued by their communities (Berkes & Davidson-Hunt, 2007). These goals may be pursued by the reinvestment of profits, the creation of flexible working conditions to allow time for other meaningful activities, or the explicit or implicit design for different stages of production to be socially inclusive, ecologically sustainable, and cultural meaningful (Zhan et al., 2017; Shen et al., 2010). Lastly, because of their tendency to be diversified and multifunctional, many of these pathways do not fit neatly into existing occupational and organizational boundaries (Gibson-Graham, 2008). Instead, they are often organized informally, based on shared values upheld by producers and supporters through their participation in these pathways. This informality is compounded by the multiple iterations these pathways often undergo as people learn to design, produce, and market in ways that can communicate value to their supporters and differentiate themselves from mainstream products and services.

In attempts to capture these characteristics, various terms have been used to describe these pathways: rural, peasant, alternative, artisanal, craft, traditional, indigenous, as well as concepts like the peasant economy and community enterprise. However, these terms may fall short in emphasizing the diversity, plurality, adaptive nature, and the underlying motivation for greater autonomy that these efforts embody. Instead, the concept of *biocultural design* — coined by Davidson-Hunt et al. (2012) — provides a suitable framework for understanding and implementing these pathways for endogenous economic development in rural indigenous and local communities.

Biocultural design is comprised of two parts: biocultural heritage and design. *Biocultural heritage*, or collective biocultural heritage*,* is defined as "knowledge, innovations and practices of Indigenous and local communities which are collectively held and inextricably linked to traditional resources and territories, local economies, and the diversity of genes, varieties, species and ecosystems, cultural and spiritual values, and customary laws shaped within the socio-ecological context of communities" (Swiderska, 2006). The term originates from the field of

conservation and has evolved from the concept of biocultural diversity, which acknowledges the linkages between biological and cultural diversity (Maffi, 2012). Biocultural heritage is thus conceptually open, able to include various types of resources, while recognizing the contribution of indigenous and local knowledge to sustainability, and supporting the rights, practices, and aspirations of rural communities.

Design, on the other hand, refers to the intentional process of giving form, structure, and function to an idea. Traditionally, design has been associated with the development of physical objects, spaces, and systems by professionally trained expert designer. Along with production and marketing, traditional design is often aimed at meeting consumers needs and desires in exchange for profits or other benefits (Manzini, 2012). In recent decades, however, new design paradigms have emerged, partly due to increasing awareness of the interconnectedness of social, economic, political, and ecological problems — issues that traditional design has failed to adequately address (Irwin, 2015). These news paradigms reconceptualize design to be broader in its scope, more collaborative and civil in its implementation, and more socially and environmentally conscious in its goals.

Thus, biocultural design is a conceptual framework that considers the creative potential of biocultural heritage as a source of innovation for sustainable development in rural areas. It moves away from a top-down approach to development by emphasizing and promoting endogenous innovation, thereby supporting rural people's adaptive capacity and self-determination. Biocultural design leads to "compositions of co-existence", where varying proportions of biocultural heritage and exogenous elements — such as people, ideas, and technologies — are brought together, resulting in iterative, complex, and mutually beneficial linkages that provide solutions for rural people's livelihood challenges (Davidson-Hunt et al., 2012). This framework has been applied both conceptually to identify and study existing cases of small-scale, heritage-based, and sustainability-driven rural enterprises (Davidson-Hunt et al., 2019; Janzen et al., 2017) and practically to implement the development of innovative products and services rooted in place and tradition (Rodríguez, 2020). Ultimately, biocultural design recognizes the importance of development to be rooted in and strengthen people's rights, knowledge, languages, values, identities, and resources.

2.1.3 Sustainability Transitions

While biocultural design highlights the agency of rural communities in developing endogenous economic pathways for greater autonomy and how these pathways contribute to sustainability, it is also essential to recognize the role of trans-local structures, systems, and movements in shaping local actions — and how local actions, in turn, can influence changes beyond the local level. In their analysis of how transformations have been conceptualized to address the complex, interlinked challenges of environmental sustainability, poverty elimination, and social justice as outlined in the UN Sustainable Development Goals, Scoones et al. (2020) identify three different approaches to transformation: structural, systemic, and enabling (Table 2). These approaches, rooted in different worldviews, positions, and knowledges, differ in their conceptualizations of what should be transformed, by and for whom, and through what processes. Rather than being mutually exclusive, the authors argue that these approaches can complement and reinforce each other to drive effective societal transitions toward sustainability.

Table 2. Complementary Lenses for Sustainability Transitions. Used with permission from Scoones et al. (2020)

Approach	Definition/emphasis	Pros	Cons	Example
Structural	Fundamental changes in the way production and consumption is governed, organized and practiced by societies	Highlights the prevalent economic and political processes and associated interests that serve to perpetuate current conditions	Lack of emphasis on environmental triggers and processes, individual agency and the possibilities of incremental change; historical studies may downplay the role of complexity and serendipity	Emergent discourses on decarbonization or zero- or degrowth economic structures Mass social mobilization around climate change and economic inequity
Systemic	Intentional change targeted at the interdependencies of specific institutions, technologies and constellations of actors in order to steer complex systems towards normative goals	Highlights interdependencies, connectivity across scale and geography, and the potential for non-linear shifts in system dynamics across scales. Emphasizes the role of ecological dynamics in social change and vice versa.	Critiqued for de-emphasis of individual agency, power and politics and/or overly managerial approach, glossing over differences in capacities, governance structure and politics	Low carbon energy transitions, focusing on technology-centred developments, modulated by incentives and disincentives enacted in policy mixes
Enabling	Fostering the human agency, values and capacities necessary to manage uncertainty, act collectively, identify and enact pathways to desired futures	Recognizes potential of human agents for collective action; explicitly addresses asymmetries in power and circumstances of social injustice	May neglect significant structural, political obstacles to social transformation; burdens those with greatest vulnerability with task of transformation	Community led environmental action; hacker/maker spaces for grassroots innovation; commoning approaches to sustainable local economies

Given their grassroots origin, cases of biocultural design can be considered as enabling pathways toward sustainability. Recognizing the agency and uncertainties inherent in choosing the aims and directions of transformations (Preiser et al., 2017), enabling pathways focus less on moving toward predetermined outcomes or configurations and more on fostering the capacities

of marginalized and vulnerable individuals and communities to take actions on their own behalf. Transformations are perceived as occurring through diverse bottom-up actions that cascade upward over time, leading to broader structural and systemic shifts that reflect the values and visions of mobilized agents.

In fact, the emergence of the contemporary sustainability movement itself has been traced to a similar process, where numerous smaller social movements characterized by "messy, plural, unruly collective action" (Stirling, 2015) eventually coalesced into the formalization of sustainability discourse on the international stage (Stirling, 2019). This underscores the importance of paying attention to, and making visible, the meanings, values, agency, and relations in smaller initiatives — often through everyday practice — for understanding the emerging values, relations, and processes distinct from dominant systems (Gibson-Graham, 2008).

In the case of biocultural design, the cultural beliefs and practices of many indigenous and local communities often already embody principles of sustainability (Garnett et al., 2018; Shen et al., 2010). However, their complex and holistic characteristics often makes them difficult to quantify as statistical data, leading them to be overlooked and undervalued in sustainable development initiatives (Daskon & Binns, 2009). Developing biocultural products and services provides a way for these beliefs, practices, and associated ways of living to persist and transition into contemporary contexts. This calls for researchers to remain open-minded in understanding how diverse definitions of sustainability are articulated and embodied through these pathways, while also critically assessing whether they achieve effective outcomes in environmental sustainability, social justice, and poverty elimination. Indeed, despite the assumption that rural communities are homogenous and act collectively, in reality communities are complex and heterogeneous, with power disparities and conflicting interests likely to exist among different actors and groups. Without effective collaboration and equitable negotiations, the development of biocultural economic pathways can be susceptible to issues such as lack of participation, elite capture of capital and resources (Lund & Saito-Jensen, 2013), reinforcement of existing relations of subordination or marginalization, and degradation of common-pool resources (Klooster, 1999).

To foster more collective action and avoid placing the burden of transformation onto the most vulnerable groups, it is essential to that grassroots initiatives are shaped by the complex

interactions of multi-level factors. In the case of biocultural product and service innovations, studies have highlighted the importance of social capital (Li et al., 2016), key individuals with entrepreneurial capabilities (Raos-Mejía & Balanzo, 2018), access to resources and markets (Rodríguez, 2020) and knowledge sharing (Janzen et al., 2017) in facilitating local successes. However, favorable structural and systemic factors — such as national and regional policy support, infrastructure, and conducive situational conditions — are also likely necessary for creating transformations at a larger scale (Seyfang & Smith, 2007). Exploring how these initiatives are enabled and hindered by various factors through in-depth, case-based investigations can provide a holistic view of the interactions — including both synergies and tensions — between bottom-up and top-down approaches to sustainable rural development (Bai et al., 2009). Such a holistic can also deepen our understanding of the complex power relations involved in transformations. For instance, Avelino and Wittmayer (2016) suggest that the prevalent power framework of state, market, and community can be refined by considering boundary-crossing actors, different level of organizations within each group, their internal power dynamics, and how different types of power may be exercised by various actors.

2.2 Rural Transformations and Developmental Initiatives in Contemporary China

This section reviews the roles that rural communities have played and the transformations they have undergone during China's modernization, industrialization, and economic development. Since the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, centralized planning has been a dominant force in the country's governance, politically and economically integrating rural communities into the state's regime. The state has also acted as an important mediator between these communities and global forces. Exploring dynamics at this level will help build a contextualized understanding for Manyou Farm's case of grassroot innovation by recognizing the broader structural and systemic factors it is situated within.

The emergence of contemporary China can be traced to the mid-18th century, when increasing exposure to Western — and later Japanese — imperialistic powers contributed to the demise of the Qing empire and the semi-colonial, politically turbulent period of the Republic of China (1912-1949). Following the Chinese Civil War, the People's Republic of China (PRC), led by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), was officially established in 1949. One of the foremost reforms implemented was a national-scale land reform, which redistributed land from landlords

and wealthier peasants to poorer peasants, establishing smallholder economies across rural regions. This reform not only laid the foundation for subsequent systems of rural land ownership but has also been credited with insulating the country from cyclic economic crisis and maintaining low labor costs during the country's modernization and industrialization through the social security provided by small landholdings (Gurley 1975; Sit & Wong, 2013).

In the mid-1950s, China launched its first wave of industrialization, facilitated by industry transfers from the Soviet Union. However, to maintain the production and administrative superstructure and to clear foreign debt associated with the introduction of external capital, the state needed to develop a system for extracting surplus internally (Wen, 2013, pp. 31-59). For rural areas, this led to the formation of the people's commune system, a form of collectivization that persisted until the late 1970s. Under this system, most property rights and means of production were transferred to the communes, each consisting of 4000–5000 households, which were further divided into production brigades and production teams. Many aspects of lives — including production, purchases, distribution, sales, education, and social services — were collectivized under state governance (Ye, 2015). This system enabled the state to extract surplus from rural communities more efficiently, put industrial products and machineries to use, and mobilize large amounts of labor to substitute for capital inputs under conditions of capital scarcity (Wen, 2013). During the people's commune period, rural areas witnessed significant increases in irrigation works, infrastructure development, and the adoption of modern agricultural implements such as power machinery, agrichemicals, and modern crop varieties (Wilkes & Zhang, 2016). Also, during this period, rural collectives absorbed around 20 million unemployed urban residents, in several consecutive waves, through ideological mobilization campaigns (Wu & Fan 2017).

Despite the achievements of rural collectivization in advancing the state's industrialization projects and in establishing nationalized institutions across rural societies, the top-down planning system resulted in inefficient resource allocation, discouraged farmers from production, and imposed heavy human, social, and environmental costs for rural areas (Huang et al., 2008; Lin, 1990). Beginning in the late 1970s, in response to these problems, the decreasing contribution of agriculture to national GDP, and fiscal pressures from new waves of industrial transfer from the U.S., the state gradually abolished the people's commune and replaced it with the Household Responsibility System, which remains in place today. Under this system, land is owned by

village collectives, but individual households are granted contract and use rights to specific plots (Ye, 2015). The state's control over production quotas, product pricing, distribution, and profits was gradually loosened, allowing farmers more autonomy in managing their production.

This shift, combined with price incentives and improvements in agricultural infrastructure, significantly increased production output. Additionally, farmers were permitted to engage in industrial and commercial development, sectors previously monopolized by the state. Rural communities capitalized on these opportunities, leveraging land, labor, and capital resources internally, which led to the emergence of township and village enterprises (TVEs) focused on producing diverse consumer goods. These enterprises, partially enabled by the resource-pooling and profit-sharing practices inherited from the collectivization era (He et al., 2014), significantly increased peasant income for several years and contributed to the country's economic recovery (Wang, 2018).

By the late 1980s, however, the income growth experienced by peasants had diminished. With the disintegration of rural communes, the state could no longer transfer the costs of economic crises directly to the rural sector. This led to a series of structural reforms, including fiscal contraction, decentralization, selective opening of the domestic economy to foreign loans and investments, marketization, privatization, and the transition toward export-led development (Wen, 2013, pp. 84-113). The TVEs were required to procure from and sell to international markets, leaving domestic markets for urban enterprises. Additionally, as the state reduced expenditure on local governments and public services, the costs for maintaining local institutions were increasingly endured by peasants through increased fees and taxes, inequitable land expropriations, and other mechanisms. These pressures, combined with decreasing income, led to escalating social conflicts in rural areas.

During the same period, the state lifted restrictions on rural laborers entering cities, coinciding with a growing need for cheap labor to develop labor-intensive, export-oriented industries. As a result, the migrant work phenomenon began in the early 1990s, with tens of millions of rural workers traveling to towns and cities — especially in the emerging coastal provinces — in search of work opportunities (Li & Tang, 2013). Many worked in low-end manufacturing jobs, receiving irregular wages and little or no social benefits.

Despite the increased income from migrant work, rural regions continued to be drained of land, labor, and capital in general throughout the 1990s from new waves of marketization,

financialization, urbanization, and urban sprawl (Yang & Wen, 2010). The East Asia financial crisis in 1997 prompted the beginning of China's utilization of expansionary fiscal measures, which included issuing national debt to stimulate economic growth (Sit et al., 2019). While these measures successfully revived the economy and partially helped rectify regional imbalances, they primarily focused on urban infrastructural development, which further diverted resources from rural regions. This period witnessed a peak in rural social conflicts and peasant petitions (Wen, 2013, pp. 138-162).

In addition, years of urban and industrial development, land reclamation, and conversion to growth-oriented production modes reliant on high external inputs contributed to severe rural environmental degradation across the country. Notable issues include land loss and degradation, groundwater over-extraction, unsustainable nutrient management, and soil and water pollution (Wilkes & Zhang, 2016; Xue et al., 2021). Alongside these environmental changes, a series of sociocultural changes emerged, including shifts in the agricultural population structure, the rise of rural "left-behind children", weakened social capital, and the spread of consumeristic values (He, 2006).

The severity of the economic difficulties and socio-environmental crises alarmed the state, leading to the recognition of the "three rural issues" —peasants, rural society, and agriculture — at the national level in the early 2000s. Since then, significant steps have been taken to address these challenges. These measures included the elimination of agricultural taxes, increased agricultural subsidies, and increased state investment in rural public services such as healthcare, pensions, welfare, and education under various programs (Xue et al., 2021). The central government introduced major strategic adjustment initiatives such as the New Rural Development in 2005, "Constructing a New Socialist Countryside" in 2006, and "Ecological Civilization" in 2007, making these rural development priorities for the nation.

By the early 2010s, significant infrastructural projects had been completed in rural regions, which provided the vast majority of administrative villages in China with access to water, electricity, roads, gas, and the internet (Wen, 2018). To address land fragmentation and idleness, the state incentivized the formation of farmer cooperatives and refined policies for land-use right transfers, aiming to increase smallholders' bargaining power and improve land-use efficiency. Environmental issues were addressed through various measures, including promoting resource-efficient production and consumption systems, establishing regulations on arable land

conversion, implementing payment-for-ecosystem service schemes to combat land degradation, and strengthening pollution control through regulations, monitoring, and enforcement (Wilkes & Zhang, 2016).

While these top-down, material-focused measures had mixed efficacies and may not have accurately addressed the diverse local conditions, they did channel considerable resources back into the rural sector. This helped reduced rural social conflicts and mitigated the impact of reduced foreign demand following the 2008 financial crisis.

However, by the second decade of the 21st century, these pro-rural measures encountered new challenges. State-led investments, driven by debt expansion, yielded increasingly marginal returns, and China's resource-intensive, export-oriented development model was severely impacted by global market fluctuations and imported monetary expansion following the 2008 financial crisis. This led to industrial recession and accelerated financialization of the domestic economy, which affected both urban and rural sectors (Wong et al., 2020; Zhang & Jia, 2021; Wang, 2018). Rural communities faced reduced employment opportunities in urban centers, coupled with rising expenditures (Gregory & Mong, 2018). At the same time, excess financial capital encouraged urban enterprises and investors to capitalize on rural land and resources, while local governments increasingly relied on land financing to maintain fiscal budgets.

To address these challenges, the central government began instituting structural transitions in the country's developmental pathway by adjusting international trade arrangements and fostering more sustainable and equitable domestic economies (Garnaut, 2018).

Among the various measures undertaken, the implementation of the Targeted Poverty Alleviation (TPA) initiative in 2014 and the announcement of Rural Revitalization in 2017 as a national strategy were directly relevant to rural communities. TPA is a comprehensive set of state-led initiatives that included continued investment in infrastructure, enhanced social security and public services, and the promotion of industry development. Since previous poverty alleviation measures had already met basic needs in most rural areas (Wang & Zeng, 2018), the new measures targeted remaining pockets of extreme poverty, particularly in remote and ethnic minority regions. At the same time, the focus shifted toward strengthening development capacity, addressing regional imbalances, and developing the eco-economy.

Specific programs were tailored to different causes of poverty. These included promoting internal east-west industry transfers; supporting entrepreneurship; facilitating new industries

such as e-commerce, photovoltaic power generation, and rural tourism; relocating people from inhospitable areas; providing compensation for reducing ecological damage; enhancing educational support; and offering social welfare payments. In addition to these targeted programs, the initiative aimed to be "targeted" in terms of more accurately identifying those in poverty, more efficiently utilizing capital, ensuring benefits reached individual households, ensuring the assignment of poverty alleviation cadres to every poverty-stricken village, and improving systems of monitoring and evaluation (Wang & Liu, 2016).

According to official statistics, in 2012, there were 98.99 million rural residents living below the updated poverty threshold across China. By the end of 2020, all of them had been lifted out of poverty through the TPA programs (The State Council Information Office of the Republic of China, 2021).

Meanwhile, rural revitalization was put forward not only to consolidate the efforts of TPA initiatives, but also to give directions to broader, longer-term development goals. As outlined in the 2018-2022 *Rural Revitalization Strategic Plan* (The State Council of the People's Republic of China [SCPRC], 2018), the "rural" is recognized as a complex geographic entity that encompasses natural, social, and economic characteristics and sustains multiple functions. Its revitalization is seen as critical, particularly in the context of unstable international markets, increasing urbanization and informatization, and China's transition from production-oriented to quality-oriented economic growth. Beyond signifying the state's overall prioritization of rural development in the coming years, rural revitalization specifically emphasizes green growth, holistic rural development, stimulating industry innovation, strengthening county-level economies, and promoting urban-rural integration (Xinhua News Agency, 2021; Liu & Yang 2020).

In summary, since the founding of the PRC, China's diverse rural regions have been fundamentally integrated into a highly planned national economic and political system led by the CCP. Throughout the country's industrialization and subsequent incorporation into the neoliberal globalized economy, rural areas have continued to contribute land, labor, and capital while shouldering the majority of the institutional costs associated with cyclical economic crises. After recognizing the severity of socioeconomic decline and environmental degradation, the state has taken significant steps to address rural issues since the turn of the century. Initially focused on monetary and material solutions, recent measures have shifted towards more targeted and holistic

approaches to rural development, coinciding with the state's strategic transition from developmentalism to ecological civilization. The grassroots case of biocultural design being explored in this study is inevitably shaped by this national context. Thus, an in-depth exploration of this case could reveal the efficacy of state-led measures at the local level and highlight the synergies and tensions between bottom-up and top-down actions towards sustainability.

Table 3. Rural Revitalization's Five Principal Objectives and Focuses. Adapted from SCPRC (2018)

Principal Objectives	**Focuses**
Industrial Prosperity	• Strengthen agricultural technologies, production support, and basic farmland protection; • Improve produce quality and safety and encourage specialty branding; • Encourage new types of business organizations, support production chain extension for added value, and facilitate diversified rural industries integrating primary, secondary, and tertiary sectors; • Consolidate current systems of rural property rights and develop new collective economies; • Nurture talent, provide incentives, and improve supporting services for rural innovation and entrepreneurship; • Strengthen peasants' roles as principal participants and beneficiaries in new rural industries.
Ecological Livability	• Advance environmentally friendly modes of production and consumption; • Strengthen pollution control and management; • Improve the rural living environments and encourage the use of traditional and green building materials; • Strengthen the conservation and reclamation of critical ecological landscapes; • Value and make use of the diverse potential functions of natural resources.
Civil Rural Culture	• Improve rural public cultural services and facilities, and encourage the organization of cultural activities; • Strengthen the advocation of socialist core values and fair moral standards; • Protect traditional culture and landscapes, promote valuable cultural heritage, and develop cultural industries.

Principal Objectives	Focuses
Effective Governance	• Strengthen the overall leadership role of local party organization in implementing rural revitalization; • Promote governance by local autonomy, rule of virtue, rule of law, and their organic integration; • Enhance township-level authority, personnel recruitment and training, and management and servicing abilities.
Prosperous Life	• Strengthen basic rural infrastructure such as transportation, logistics, irrigation, water supply, modern energy, and information technologies; • Improve provision of rural public services, including education, healthcare, welfare, pensions, and disaster prevention; • Increase overall state investments to rural areas, enhance rural financial services, and steer the flow of market capital into rural areas; • Encourage urban professionals and wider civil society to participate in rural revitalization; • Refine rural land-use policies for fair land acquisition, reinvigorate idle lands and properties, and support new collective economies; • Facilitate the voluntary urbanization of peasants, ensure their rights to urban public services and conditional retainment of peasant rights.

2.3 History and Biocultural Heritage of Miao (Hmong) People from the Leigong Mountain Region

According to oral history and archeological research, the earliest ancestors of the Miao settled around the Yangtze and lower Yellow River plains, developing complex societies based on paddy rice agriculture (Li & Yang, 2001). However, from around 2500–3000 BCE, ongoing military conflicts and persecution by Han groups and later the Han empire forced the Miao to migrate south and west into remote, mountainous areas of modern-day Hunan, Guizhou, Yunnan, Sichuan, and Guangxi provinces. Guizhou eventually became the province with the largest Miao population (A Concise History of the Miao [ACHM], 1985, pp. 6–13). Within Guizhou, the highest concentration of Miao is found in the Qiandongnan Miao and Dong Autonomous Prefecture (QMDAP), particularly in the Leigong Mountain region, which has a settlement history spanning over two thousand years.

The mountainous terrain and need for mobility historically led to the dominance of shifting agriculture over paddy rice farming, which was limited to the flatter valleys. However, from the Yuan Dynasty onward, the central empire's expansion into the southwest pushed many Miao further into the Leigong Mountain region. As they lost access to valley floors, they began constructing terraced fields on mountain slopes, a practice that has persisted, creating the distinctive terraced landscapes still visible today (Mao, 2015).

According to Yuan and Liu (1992), Miao culture emerged as an adaptive, instructive, and self-sustaining system that helped the Miao people navigate their environment, regulate rhythms of living, maintain social cohesion, construct identities, and engage with external forces. They identified five interacting dimensions — kinship and locality-based systems of organizations, spiritual beliefs, oral literature and symbols, and living customs — that constitute this system, which will serve as starting points for exploration in the following paragraphs. It is important to note that due to frequent migrations and relative isolation from other groups, Miao culture has become both diversified and relatively autonomous. Additionally, cultural practices and identities are continually evolving and being reconstructed. Therefore, the following descriptions are meant to be illustrative rather than definitive.

First, a kinship-based organization known as *Gushe* (鼓社, or "drum clan") is prevalent in Miao societies, particularly in historically common single-clan villages (ACHM, 1985, pp. 21–22). The emergence of *Gushe* is associated with the livelihood transition from hunting and gathering to agriculture and husbandry (Wu, 1989; Wu et al., 2012). Each *Gushe* is united by a common male ancestor and consists of family members from his lineage across one or several villages. Traditionally, a clan was responsible for organizing many aspects of life, including organizing production activities, performing rituals and ceremonies, establishing rules of marriage, managing clan forests and other communal resources, providing economic relief and labor assistance, engaging with external groups, and community defense (He & Shi, 1999, pp. 58–79).

Second, as villages with multiple clan lineages became more common over time, locality-based institutions became more influential (ACHM, 1985, pp. 33–36). These include *Yilang* (议榔) and *Zhailao* (寨老). *Yilang* is a village or inter-village council system for formulating and enforcing customary law (Zhou, 2009). Led by both officially elected and informally recognized leaders, these councils convene periodically or as needed to address land disputes, crimes,

defenses, marriage and family issues, and to organize against external threats (He & Shi, 1999, pp. 80–96; Zhou, 2004). *Zhailao*, on the other hand, are respected leaders recognized by the village community for their fairness, persuasive skills, and knowledgeable of customary law. They are relied upon to settle disputes and organize collective activities (He & Shi, 1999, pp. 97–101).

Third, the Miao people are united and guided by a set of spiritual beliefs that permeate many aspects of their culture. Spirits and souls with different powers, including those of deceased relatives and ancestors, are believed to exist and are communicated with ceremonies held during events such as marriages, funerals, healing and exorcisms, house construction, and various festivals (He & Shi, 1999, pp. 108–129; Li & Yang, 2001). One notable figure venerated in Miao culture is Chiyou (蚩尤), a heroic figure from historical texts and legends, recognized across many Miao groups as their earliest ancestor (Jin, 2020; Yang, 2010).

Fourth, with limited written language, the Miao people developed a rich oral tradition and symbolic system for passing down history, ethics, knowledge, and ways of living. This includes songs about human origins, migration history, customary laws, ceremonies, and rituals; songs on making alcohols, dyeing fabrics, and crafting paper; songs providing instructions on agriculture and seasonal tasks; songs sung on occasions of socializing; and numerous folk legends and stories (Yuan & Liu, 1992; He & Shi, 1999, pp. 220–233). The Miao also use intricate patterns and symbols on clothing, batik, embroidery, silverwork, and other crafts to convey similar information (Yang, 1998, pp. 244–260). For example, the Miao of the QMDAP region are known for using animal and plant motifs, especially the butterfly, which is linked to their origin story (Yang, 1998, p169, pp. 182–184).

Finally, Miao people have developed distinct customs — both material and non-material — through daily activities such as eating, dwelling, working, celebrating, dressing, singing, dancing, and exchanging. Rice is the staple crop for the Miao of Leigong Mountain, with glutinous varieties carrying particular cultural importance, often used in ceremonies, festivals, and social exchanges (Ma, 2016). Among the notable regional foods are glutinous rice dumplings, fermented sour dishes, cured meats, and rice-based alcohols (ACHM, 1985, pp. 317–320; He & Shi, 1999, pp. 24–32). Miao food customs also reflect key moral values such as inter-familial connections, hospitality, and ancestor veneration.

The Miao of Leigong Mountain typically live in half-stilted, two or three-story Chinese fir houses clustered along hillsides. Traditionally, the lower story is used for keeping livestock, while the middle and upper stories serve as living and storage spaces (He & Shi, 1999, pp. 19–24). Terrace fields are interspersed among the housing clusters and extend further into the hills. These fields are divided into paddies, used for rice cultivation and fish raising, and dry fields for growing vegetables, root crops, and other plants (Wu & Huang, 2011; Meng & Wu, 2014). A complex system of knowledge, practices, and tools has been developed for managing these fields, encompassing aspects such as seed and field selection, tillage, irrigation, sowing, transplanting, fertilization, breeding, harvest, and storage (Ma, 2016).

Several major festivals in this region, including the Miao's New Year Festival "Nongx Yangx" (苗年), are tied to key stages of the agricultural cycle, while others are linked to ancestor commemoration, spirit worship, and youth socialization (Sun & Dan, 2016). These festivals are also occasions to showcase artistic traditions, including the famous *lusheng* (芦笙) music and dances, as well as Miao batik, embroidery, and silverwork. While these customs and other cultural dimensions could be explored in greater detail, this section aims to provide an overview of the complex and holistic characteristics of Miao culture.

Despite increasing political and economic pressures from the central empire during the Ming and Qing Dynasties, and later from the Republic of China, the Miao of Leigong Mountain largely maintained their traditional land tenure, customary law, and associated social organization and cultural practices at the local level (Ma & Huang, 2011; Yang, 2004; Zhou, 2009). However, significant changes occurred following their formal incorporation into the socialistic government of the People's Republic of China in 1949. These changes can be divided into two phases.

The first phase, from 1949 to the mid-1980s, was marked by top-down political, economic, and cultural reforms initiated by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Fan's (2009) study of rural changes in QMDAP from 1949 to 1956 highlights the comprehensiveness and complexity of these early reforms. They included the suppression of rebel forces, land redistribution, the formation of mutual-aid teams and producers' cooperatives, comprehensive agricultural reforms, the establishment of ethnic autonomous polities and village-level administrative apparatus, and the implementation of cultural, public health, educational, and relief programs. Despite local-level complications, these reforms generally improved material conditions for most people and

reduced long-standing inter-ethnic tensions compared to pre-1949. However, the acceptance of new political, economic, and technical authority weakened traditional clan and locality-based organizations and laws. Local production systems were also transformed as the state commanded and incentivized the adoption of new farming tools and techniques, farmland reclamation, compost collection, the planting of high-yielding crop varieties, and the construction of irrigation projects.

Since the late 1950s, however, the state's push for "progress" in productive capacity and production relations combined with subsequent ultra-radical ideological campaigns brought severe economic, sociocultural, and environmental plight to local communities. These included the mandatory expropriation of most household and communal property for collectivized management, leading to a lack of production incentives; large-scale deforestation of Chinese fir forests for industrial development (Jiang, 2009); the denouncement of minority ethnicity officials and Miao artisans (Li, 2012); the banning of local ceremonies, festivals, marketplaces, and other cultural activities; and the confiscation of musical instruments, silverwork, and other cultural artifacts.

The second phase, from the 1980s to the present, has been shaped by more complex factors. After the end of the Cultural Revolution and the abolishment of the people's communes, Miao communities were granted more autonomy in production, and ethnic-based persecution was overturned. However, due to the mountainous terrain and geographical isolation of Leigong Mountain, most local communities reverted to small-scale subsistence production as their main livelihood strategy. Meanwhile, a series of new challenges have emerged, including an increase in under-employment labor force; restrictions on timber harvesting due to the establishment of the Leigong Mountain Nature Reserve in 1982, and growing cash needs in a marketizing economy (Chen et al., 2011).

As a result, with the state's removal of barriers to rural-urban migration, young people began leaving for coastal provinces in search for work opportunities. This migrant-working trend started in the mid-1990s and accelerated in the mid-2000s. Today, migrant work remains a major livelihood strategy for many families, providing higher income than agriculture, enabling them to afford educational expenses and purchase material goods. An increase in women's family status has also been noted as they earn more income through migrant work (Huang & Fan, 2014). Despite these benefits, migrant workers often face marginalization in urban areas in terms of

income distribution, living conditions, and access to information and public services. Additionally, the departure of working-age adults has diminished care for children and the elderly while increasing their responsibilities for agricultural production.

Besides migrant work, local communities experienced changes through accelerated exposure to foreign media, foods, products, technologies, and ideas, made possible by improved transportation, communication networks, and greater access to the national education system. On one hand, the potential markets for many kinds of exchanges were broadened substantially, and young generations became better equipped with the knowledge and skills needed to compete in the labor market. On the other hand, studies have documented the loss of place-based knowledge, skills, customs, and landscapes due to a lack of time for learning and practice, the perception of tradition as "backward", the strong appeal of urban culture, and a general social context that prioritizes economic gains (Li, 2012; Yao et al., 2014; Zhao et al., 2014; Zhao & Liu, 2020; Gao, 2015; Zhang, 2021; Pan, 2017).

Starting in the late 2000s, with the implementation of the New Socialist Countryside initiatives, the rise of China's middle class, and the state's economic restructuring efforts, QMDAP's rich biological and cultural resources became increasingly valued for heritage conservation and their potential to support the development of ecological and tourism industries. Numerous programs and policies were put forward by provincial, prefectural, and county governments to identify and conserve cultural heritage, establish tourism infrastructure and programs, and develop industries in specialty crops and livestock production and non-timber forest products (Luo et al., 2021). These efforts have been paired with poverty alleviation and rural revitalization initiatives to improve living conditions, provide job training, strengthen social security, and enhance public services.

In Leishan county, for example, Xijiang Qianhu Miao Village (西江千户苗寨) has become an iconic tourism destination, receiving over 11 million tourists in 2018 (Wu, 2019). This has spurred the growth of Miao handicrafts, folk-custom performances, and agritourism ventures in the surrounding areas. Other key industries in the county include tea, vegetable and medicinal crops, konjac, *Wu Gan Tian Ma* (乌杆天麻, a local variety of *Gastrodia elata*), paddy-grown fish, pig and poultry farming, fruit trees, and beekeeping (Gu, 2017; Xie et al., 2019). These industries often operate through partnerships among diverse actors, including central and local government departments, public institutions, state-owned and private enterprises, supermarkets,

food corporations, e-commerce companies, civil society groups, peasant cooperatives, and peasant households. In combination with other income-generating programs, Leishan county was officially lifted out of state-defined poverty in 2019 (Luo et al., 2021, p. 72).

In light of the complex changes experienced by the Miao communities of Leigong Mountain in recent years, it is crucial to understand how local communities perceive and respond to these changes. The increased societal recognition of Miao biocultural heritage and the inflow of resources to rural areas have created a favorable environment for the revitalization of local economies and culture. However, studies have identified several issues and barriers that may impede the long-term adaptive capacity of local communities. These include, but are not limited to, the dominance of external actors in development decision-making and discourse on Miao culture (Gao & Wu, 2014); the over-commercialization of cultural heritage, which replaces its original functions (Li, 2012); insufficient scale of organization, production chain extension, and industry diversification (Luo et al., 2021, pp.126–132); and the lack of knowledge, skills, and motivation to take actions (Luo et al., 2021, pp.144–50).

In this context, the concept of autonomy becomes pertinent as it focuses on more than one dimension to consider whether local Miao communities — shaped by their cultural traditions — experience a strengthened sense of agency and expanded capabilities through these changes. Manyou Farm offers an opportunity to explore these dynamics in depth.

This section has provided a general overview of the history and biocultural heritage of Miao communities in the Leigong Mountain region. More contextual research on the specific trends and practices related to Manyou Farm's projects are presented in the results chapters (Chapters 4–8).

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

This chapter discusses the study's philosophical worldview, research design, research strategy, and methods in detail. It also covers data analysis, research validity, and the dissemination of results.

3.1 Philosophical Worldview and Research Approach

This research was guided by both constructivist and pragmatist worldviews. Constructivism is concerned with understanding the meanings people construct about the world based on their lived experiences (Creswell, 2014). Recognizing the influence of social interactions, historical, and cultural norms on people's beliefs, constructivism seeks to bring out the complexity of the context through relatively open-ended processes of questioning, participation, and interpretation. This worldview aligned with my second and third research objectives of understanding the meanings and values associated with Manyou Farm's projects. Specifically, I sought to explore the significance of revitalizing cultural practices for Liping's family within the local historical and cultural context, how these meanings varied among family members based on their experiences, and how new meanings and values were constructed in the development of biocultural products and services.

Conversely, pragmatism focuses on understanding a problem or situation using all approaches available to achieve an intended consequence (Creswell, 2014). Its problem-centered approach aligned with my first and fourth research objectives: understanding the organization, knowledge, and skills involved in Manyou Farm's projects and the factors that enabled or hindered these projects to foster collective actions toward sustainability. I believed it was necessary to draw from both worldviews to understand how grassroots efforts are contributing to sustainability transitions through their diverse articulations of what should be transformed, by and for whom, and through what processes.

Informed by these worldviews, this study employed a qualitative research approach. Qualitative research focuses on "exploring and understanding the meanings individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem" (Creswell, 2014), which was congruent with my constructivist inquiries. For my pragmatist objectives, a qualitative approach was also more suitable than quantitative or mixed-method approaches. While certain numerical data, such as family income, quantities of goods and services sold, and their prices, could help provide

insights into the family's financial situation and livelihood strategy, most of the information I sought — such as how the family coordinated their efforts, Manyou Farm's connectivity with other initiatives, and its enabling and hindering factors — was descriptive and exploratory in nature. This necessitated open-ended and participatory methods, which are key components of a qualitative research approach.

3.2 Research Design

This study employed case study as the main research design while also drawing from ethnography. A case study involves developing an in-depth analysis of a process — often bounded by space and time — through a variety of data collection procedures (Creswell & Poth 2017). For this research, the efforts by Liping's family to create diverse economic pathways based on local biocultural heritage through Manyou Farm were treated as a case of biocultural design for exploration and analysis. The temporal boundary of the case spanned from 2017, when Liping's family began actively developing place-based products and services, to the present. The spatial boundary centered around the family's house, workshop, and fields, where they produced and offered their products and services. It also included other sites of exchange, training, promotion, and family and communal activities related to these pathways.

Within the three types of case studies outlined by Creswell and Poth (2017), this research used an instrumental case study approach. An instrumental case study focuses on a single case to gain a holistic understanding of a complex issue or phenomenon and to provide insights into generalizable themes. Specifically, an in-depth analysis of Manyou Farm's projects would illustrate how the emergence, organization, and motivations of biocultural economic pathways are shaped by the complex interactions among political, economic, historical, geographical, cultural, and human factors. This approach could also explore how a grassroots initiative may embody emerging values, relations, and processes of sustainability, while offering insights into the enabling and hindering factors for more collective actions towards sustainability.

On the other hand, since biocultural design is deeply rooted in cultural-specific ways of being, knowing, and doing, ethnography became an important strategy within this case study to understand the cultural context of these economic pathways. Ethnography aims to describe the shared patterns of behavior, beliefs, and language of a culture-bearing group and interpret the meanings behind these patterns (Creswell & Poth, 2017). The particular issues of interest for this

research were to understand the meanings of these place-based practices for the family and why they were actively revitalizing them in the broader regional context of rural decline.

It should be noted that, since ethnography was crucial for addressing part of my research objectives and typically involves extended fieldwork, only one case could be studied in-depth for within the time and resource constraint of a master's program.

3.3 Case Study Selection

As outlined in Chapter 1, the efforts of a Miao family in Queniao village, Leishan County, Guizhou province to develop diverse economic pathways rooted in local biocultural heritage were selected as the case study. This family was introduced to me by Lanying Zhang after I expressed my research interest in biocultural innovation, diverse rural economies, and sustainable rural development. During my initial visit to the community, the family also expressed interest in participating in my research.

Besides being accessible, there were intrinsic reasons for selecting this case. First, Queniao village is located in a region rich in biocultural heritage, which had experienced rural decline in recent decades but now benefits from favorable resources and conditions for economic and cultural revitalization. These factors likely provided the region with a conducive environment for cases of biocultural design to emerge, making the case relevant for validating whether such contextual factors facilitate endogenous economic development.

Second, other than receiving the "Traditional Village of China" accreditation (Ministry of Housing and Rural-Urban Construction of the People's Republic of China, 2013), Queniao did not appear to be associated with any other major village-level identities that could exert a strong influence on its development trajectory. While every village is unique, this gave Queniao a quality of commonness which could make the research findings more generalizable.

Third, Manyou Farm's projects were particularly representative of the concepts and frameworks used in this study — rural autonomy, biocultural design, and sustainability transitions. While I had learnt of other economic and cultural initiatives in the region, Manyou Farm's projects were particularly diversified, plural, and dynamic in their range, functions, and organization. Thus, studying this case could be revelatory in terms of informing rural developmental goals, advancing understanding on alternative pathways for endogenous economic development, and revealing emerging values, relations, and processes of sustainability.

Finally, Manyou Farm's status as primarily a family initiative made it an unusual and revelatory case. While studies on sustainable rural development often emphasize and uphold community-scale actions and impacts, bottom-up initiatives can also emerge from below the community level for complex reasons. Examining smaller-scale efforts could provide valuable insights into the heterogeneity within a community, why such initiatives arise at the family level, and how to support their expansion. Moreover, as the basic unit of social organization in rural societies, the family is an indispensable mediating structure between individuals and the larger society through the varying familial roles and duties each family member assumes. In this sense, documenting a family-based initiative could shed light on the values, roles, and everyday practices involved at this important level of organization, which should be considered in fostering more collective action. For instance, the motivations for participating in these initiatives may differ among family members based on their familial roles, project-specific duties, and life experiences.

3.4 Participant Recruitment

The project participants recruited for data collection belonged to two main groups. First, I worked most extensively with members of Liping's family, including Xiaoniu, Liping, and Liping's parents, as they were the main organizers of the Farm's projects. The second group consisted of the supporters of Manyou Farm, which included consumers, visitors, program organizers, and those who provided support to the Farm in other ways. Participant selection for this group was based on individuals' familiarity with the Farm's projects, their accessibility, and the willingness of Liping's family to include them as participants for my study. Familiarity was specifically defined by 1) past participation in at least one of the family's projects or activities; 2) past purchases of the Farm's products; or 3) the provision of knowledge, labor, capital, promotional assistance, or other forms of support to Manyou Farm.

The identification of individuals who fit these inclusion criteria was accomplished through discussions with and recommendations from Xiaoniu and Liping. The specific research methods and consent processes employed for these two groups are detailed below in Section 3.5.

In addition to these two groups, I also engaged with individuals both within and outside the community who were not directly involved in Manyou Farm's projects. These included members of the extended family, the village community, and people from other organizations who offered

partial assistance to the Farm, such as production, service provision, marketing, or advising Liping's family. While these interactions helped build contextual understanding for the research objectives, these individuals were not directly recruited for data collection.

3.5 Qualitative Methods

Document review, participant observation, and semi-structured interviews were the main methods used for this study. Liping's family were recruited as participants for all three methods, while Manyou Farm's supporters were recruited for semi-structured interviews only.

3.5.1 Document Review

Document review is a research method in which researchers collect and analyze various types of documents (Creswell 2014). For this study, I reviewed public and private documents related to the family's projects. Over the years, Xiaoniu and Liping had accumulated a collection of project-related textual and audiovisual materials through their promotional, educational, and documentation efforts. These included, but were not limited to, social media posts, product descriptions, program applications, presentation slides, and photo and video archives. For simplicity, I considered both audiovisual and textual materials as documents.

Documents produced by the family were crucial in understanding the significance of these projects for Liping's family and how their projects evolved over time. Analyzing documents targeted at the Farm's supporters also revealed the value regimes and organizational connections formed through these projects. Additionally, given the time constraint for fieldwork, documents provided insights into the family's projects that occurred outside the fieldwork period.

All documents were obtained by requesting from Xiaoniu and Liping. Photos materials taken by Liping's family or accessed on Manyou Farm's public promotional platforms were reused by this study to present the Farm's projects, complementing photos taken by the researcher. Among them, all photos that contained faces of individuals other than Liping's family came from public documents published on Manyou Farm's social media.

3.5.2 Participant Observation

Participant observation involves immersing oneself in a group and record information about their lives (Bernard, 2006). Through experiencing the subjects' daily activities firsthand and

collecting data in their natural setting, this method provides researchers with experiential knowledge and helps uncover unanticipated, contextual, or otherwise difficult-to-obtain information (Bernard, 2006). During my fieldwork, participant observation was the primary method used for Liping's family. Specifically, I joined the family in their daily activities to gain an embedded understanding of how they organized their efforts, the network of people and organizations they interacted with, and the knowledge, skills, meanings, and values involved in their projects.

These activities included sourcing and processing foods and crafts, managing their fields, hosting experiential and educational activities, engaging with their supporters, and undertaking activities for their own learning and training. Living in the village also allowed me to gain a sense of the sociocultural context of the community and the non-project-related tasks and responsibilities the family engaged in.

I spent a total of 37 days with Liping's family between May and August of 2022, divided into several two-week visits. The dates for each visit were determined based on the family's availability, whether they were actively working on particular projects, and COVID-19 travel regulations implemented by the Chinese government. As their diverse projects and activities took place at different times throughout the year, I could not participate in all of them in person due to time and resource constraints. Therefore, I relied on textual and audiovisual materials, as well as conversations and interviews, to gain insights into the other projects and activities I could not observe firsthand.

As my fieldwork took place during the COVID-19 pandemic, a series of precautions were taken to mitigate the risks of the researcher and research participants. These include applying to undertake in-person research from the University of Manitoba COVID-19 Recovery Steering Committee, abiding the Chinese government's COVID travel regulations, maintaining COVID-related communications with Liping's family, adopting sanitization and safety measures, and ensuring the researcher is fully vaccinated.

Upon meeting the family, I presented Xiaoniu and Liping with a formal consent form that included my institutional affiliation, funding source, estimated fieldwork duration, and an outline of my proposed research (see Appendix 2A for the English version of the consent form; the Mandarin Chinese version, translated by the researcher, was used in the field. This also applies to other forms, schedules, and posters in the appendices section). The consent form also included a

COVID-19 appendix that outlined the COVID-related precautions taken by the researcher. I reviewed the letter with them and obtained their written consent for me to collect data through document review, participant observation, and interviews. Each family member was offered the option to remain confidential or use a pseudonym; all of them permitted the use of their names and photographs containing their faces for this study. Consent for Liping's parents and grandfather were obtained verbally, which involved the researcher verbally introducing the content of the consent form to them and obtaining their verbal consent. Liping was present during the verbal consent process for Liping's mother and grandfather to assist with translation.

When observing and participating in activities, I recorded conversations, discoveries, interpretations, and thoughts related to the research objectives, primarily by typing notes on my cellphone and using audio and video recordings with my cellphone and camera. The timing and method of recording depended on the nature of the content and the discretion to minimize distraction and discomfort for the participants.

When documenting group activities, any faces of individuals other than Liping's family that appeared in photographs and videos were blurred after the footage was taken. An exception was made for adult individuals who consented to revealing their faces. For these individuals, a photo/video release form was provided to them to obtain their written consent (Appendix 3).

Language posed a significant barrier to data collection given the limited Mandarin fluency of Liping's mother, grandfather, and many residents of Queniao. This impacted the quantity and validity of the data, particularly for the second research objective. Since I could not learn the Miao language within the short fieldwork period, I requested Liping's assistance with translation during conversations with these individuals. To respect the privacy and confidentiality of participants, Liping signed an oath of confidentiality form (Appendix 4) before assisting with translation.

3.5.3 Semi-structured Interviews

Interviews are a powerful method for eliciting deeper thoughts and opinions, obtaining historical information, and understanding individuals' lived experiences through direct conversations (Creswell, 2014). In this study, interviews complemented the other two methods by allowing me to directly ask participants questions related to most of the research objectives. Specifically, I conducted interviews with five members of Liping's family — Xiaoniu, Liping,

Liping's parents, and Liping's grandfather — as well as four supporters of Manyou Farm. Semi-structured interviews were chosen for this study as the emphasis of these interviews was more on the content of the discussions rather than the informants or the interview questions themselves (Dunn, 2005). The lists of questions developed for the two participant groups are presented in Appendix 5.

Interviews were conducted in person when possible. In-person interviews were conducted in various contexts according to participants' preferences, including during drives, agritourism activities, and meals. They took place in the family's guesthouse, their vehicle, or outdoors. Due to time constraints and scheduling conflicts, however, interviews with Xiaoniu and two supporters were conducted remotely via Tencent Meeting. Interviews averaged an hour with Liping's family and half an hour for the supporters. All interviews were conducted one-on-one except for the group interview with Liping's mother and grandfather, which was requested by the family for convenience. Liping was present to during this interview to assist with translation.

The approach to organizing interviews varied depending on the participant group. For Liping's family, I requested interviews with individual members after spending some time with them, allowing for familiarity with their projects and rapport to develop. This approach enabled me to formulate more informed interview questions based on my observations during participant observation. The date, time, and location of interviews were determined by each family member's availability and preferences.

For the Farm's supporters, I reached out to potential informants — either in person or remotely via WeChat, using contact information provided by Xiaoniu and Liping — by distributing a recruitment poster (Appendix 6) that briefly described the research, compensation for participation, on ways of contacting me if they were willing to participate. Once I received responses from interested informants, an interview date and time were scheduled for each informant.

For remote interviews, an electronic consent form (Appendix 2B) was sent to the informants to obtain their written consent before the interview. For in-person interviews, I reviewed the consent form with the informants on the day of the interview and obtained their written consent before proceeding. An additional COVID-19 appendix was included in the form for in-person interview participants. Each supporter who participated in the interview was given

the option to receive a compensation of 150 RMB (~30 CAD) for their participation. The identities of all supporters were anonymized, and a pseudonym was used for each informant.

All interviews were audio-recorded using either my mobile phone or the default recording function on Tencent Meeting. Hand-written notes were also taken during the interviews to record supplementary data.

3.6 Data Analysis

The three research methods used in this study produced multiple types of data, including documents, audiovisual materials, field notes, and interview recordings. These raw data were organized, reviewed, and coded to identify case themes and develop case descriptions, which were then interpreted for their meaning and implications (Creswell, 2014).

For data organization, all written notes from interviews were typed electronically. Interview recordings and audio-recordings from participant observation were transcribed using the online software Trint. These data were then organized based on content and date, alongside textual notes, photos, and videos from participant observation, as well as documents and audiovisual materials from Liping's family.

Next, I reviewed all the data to gain a general sense of their meaning, depth, and validity. This was followed by coding, where I labeled sections of text and images with codes that represented them. Example categories included specific activities and processes of Manyou Farm's individual projects; names of key actors and locations; meanings, motivations, and values related to the projects; specific enabling and hindering factors; and other concepts related to this study's conceptual framework. The coding process was conducted using the computer software Nvivo.

Once the data were coded and analyzed, key case themes emerged, forming the foundation for writing the case description. The case description focused on the emergence, organization, and impact of the Farm's projects (Chapter 4); the meanings and aspirations associated with the Farm's projects for Liping's family (Chapter 5); the value regimes upheld by the Farm's supporters (Chapter 6); and the enabling and hindering factors of these projects (Chapter 7). After presenting the case description and themes, I discussed these findings in relation to the conceptual frameworks guiding this study — namely autonomy, biocultural design, and

sustainability transitions — in the final chapter. Additional literature related to the case findings was reviewed for these discussions on implications and suggestions.

3.7 Validity of Study

Two strategies were employed to enhance the validity of the study's findings. First, the use of document review, participant observation, and interviews provided multiple sources of evidence. In addition, a member-checking procedure was implemented, where I shared the case themes and descriptions with Xiaoniu and Liping for them to confirm and comment on the accuracy of the findings. This was achieved through conducting follow-up interviews with them remotely. Both strategies contributed to enhancing the study's construct validity, which involves identifying the correct operational measures for the concepts being studied (Yin, 2017).

Second, qualitative studies are inevitably biased by the researcher's background. Reflecting on and clarifying how the researcher's gender, culture, and life experiences may shape the findings helps provide a more transparent narrative for readers. In this study, being an unmarried male meant that I likely presented biased and incomplete information and perspectives, particularly regarding women and children, due to limited access to certain perspectives and my own potential insensitivity (Bernard, 2006). Additionally, my upbringing in an urban Han Chinese environment undoubtedly limited my depth of understanding regarding rural livelihoods and Miao culture. However, this background offered an advantage in understanding the perspectives of the Farm's supporters. Spending sufficient time in the field with the community likely mitigated some of these biases.

3.8 Dissemination of Results

For academic research conducted in community settings, there is growing recognition of the need to mitigate unbalanced relationships between researchers and community members (Halseth et al., 2016). Since my study involved participation from rural community members, it was important to consider their goals and interests when designing both the research process and its outcomes. During my initial visit to the community, the family expressed several interests, including: 1) having a researcher document their efforts to assist in their educational and promotional activities, 2) being informed about the research objectives and design, and 3) potentially becoming co-authors in journal publications on their projects in the future.

To address the first interest, this research produced several community-based outcomes and a University of Manitoba master's thesis. These outcomes were confirmed upon discussions with Xiaoniu and Liping and later fulfilled by the researcher. They included sharing the textual and audiovisual materials produced during the research process with the family; drafting an article for Manyou Farm's social media; and assisting the family in applying for an award related to food system transitions for Manyou Farm. The second interest was met by distributing a translated version of the reviewed thesis proposal to the family and addressing any questions they had about the research during fieldwork. The third interest reflected the family's desire to strengthen their ownership, engagement, and potential to create meaningful change for the knowledge they have co-produced (Castleden et al., 2010). To support this, I have maintained contact with Liping's family after fieldwork to share the updates of this research. If there is a plan for journal publication in the future, I will work with them to discuss the details and co-authorship.

Additionally, the four supporters of Manyou Farm who were interviewed during this study were offered the opportunity to receive a translated full copy of the thesis and a synopsis of the main research findings. Once the study is completed and the thesis manuscript is translated, interested individuals will receive these materials digitally through their preferred method of distribution.

The next four chapters (4–7) present the findings of this research. Chapter 4 begins with a comprehensive overview of the Farm's emergence and ongoing projects, forming the foundation for the subjective and analytical discussions that follow in subsequent chapters.

CHAPTER 4: EMERGENCE AND CURRENT PROJECTS OF MANYOU FARM

This chapter presents the emergence of Manyou Farm and explores the diverse economic and non-economic activities that Liping's family engages in through the Farm. The first section introduces the background and life experiences of individual family members and major events leading up to the formal establishment of Manyou Farm in 2019. The second section provides an in-depth breakdown of Manyou Farm's projects — agroecological revitalization, agritourism, ecological tea, Miao heritage crafts, and education and promotion.

4.1 Background and Emergence

Before the official establishment of Manyou Farm in 2019, its projects and activities had been developing for years. In 2005, Liping, a middle school graduate then, encountered the opportunity to work in Beijing as a *lusheng* dancer at a Leishan cuisine restaurant. As a native of Queniao village who had never left her hometown, she embraced the opportunity. After two years, she returned to Leishan in 2007 and planned to start a business growing and selling tea and pepper with friends. However, the 2008 Chinese winter storms severely damaged their crops, derailing their plans. Over the following years, Liping stayed in Leishan, basing herself in the county seat. She worked for a local tea shop for one year before commencing training in sewing and embroidery through local opportunities. She later partnered with several of her fellow sisters to run a Miao clothing storefront at the county seat. During this time, she met Xiaoniu and married him. Following the birth of their child in 2013, Liping relinquished her role in the partnership to prioritize caring for the newborn.

Xiaoniu, a native of Yuxi County in Yunnan, first visited Leishan in 2006 to conduct preliminary site investigations for an organization committed to human-centered sustainable development in rural China. Recently graduated from university, he was enrolled in the first "Sustainable Rural Development Talent Training Program," a year-long program organized by Liang Shuming Rural Reconstruction Center (or "Liang Center"), a partner to the organization. After completing the program, Xiaoniu was formally employed by the organization, where he worked for 14 years until 2020. During this period, he was based in the organization's office in Leishan's county seat, but his work also included frequent visits to rural villages in QMDAP and

other rural regions and major cities in China. His work primarily involved overseeing volunteer and youth training programs, designing and promoting school curricula in rural culture conservation, and supporting cultural activities and heritage conservation in rural villages.

Liping's parents, both Miao, are from Fangxiang township of Leishan county, where Queniao is located. Her father, Yang Zhou, is a native of Queniao while her mother, Luo Buding, is from the adjacent Getou village and moved to Queniao after marrying. In 1994, Liping's father went to Guangzhou, the capital of Guangdong province, in search of job opportunities. Since then, he has worked as a migrant laborer across various provinces, typically leaving the village in late May or early June to help with rice planting and returning before the Spring Festival the following year. In contrast, Liping's mother only took on migrant work briefly between 2007 and 2008, and on a few other short-term occasions, spending most of her time in Queniao.

In 2015, an incident catalyzed what would become Manyou Farm. While Liping was hosting some friends in Queniao, their guests inadvertently ate boiled sweet potatoes meant to feed a pig. This incident, along with similar occasions where guests expressed preferences for local, everyday foods over store-bought foods, spurred Liping's awareness of the appeal of local foods to outsiders. In the same year, Liping joined a project funded by Xiaoniu's network aimed at community development for Guizhou's ethnic minorities, focusing on leveraging local food resources. After participating in workshops and sessions, she returned to Queniao to undertake various exploratory and mobilization initiatives. By 2016, Liping had mobilized a group of local youths to establish the Queniao Youth Entrepreneurial Cooperative. Operating voluntarily in their spare time, the cooperative sought to drive sustainable community development by creating specialty products, offering authentic Miao village experiences, and reinvesting profits into community development and cultural preservation.

In September of 2016, Liping travelled to Turin, Italy, upon recommendation of the Liang Center, to present five of Queniao's local foods — black glutinous millet, red bean, soma (a type of perilla), pod pepper, and lilium — at the Terra Madre Salone del Gusto, a global gathering of food producers and activists organized by the Slow Food Foundation (SlowFood, 2016). Following the event, the cooperative members were suddenly confronted with increased demand for these foods. However, searching the village, they discovered that many crops had limited production quantities. Recognizing the importance and potential opportunities in revitalizing traditional crop varieties, the cooperative members renamed their group Laopinhui (老品

汇, meaning “heirloom selections”) and intensified efforts to identify, cultivate, and market traditional foods. Additionally, through Xiaoniu’s connections, Liping participated in events hosted by China’s Farmers’ Seed Network, which enhanced her understanding of the connection between peasants’ everyday practices and broader movements on food security and seed conservation.

Alongside the development of Laopinhui, Xiaoniu had initiated a series of experiments in tea field management since 2015. Despite tea becoming a significant economic crop in Leishan County since the 2010s, it was primarily sold as unprocessed or lightly processed goods at low prices (Xiaoniu, personal communication, June 17, 2022). Consequently, Xiaoniu sought to enhance local ecological conditions while augmenting the income of local families by developing an ecological tea brand that could fetch premium prices. Using his spare time, he collaborated with his family and Liping’s uncle-in-law, the owner and operator of a tea processing plant in the neighboring village of Jiaoyao, to reduce the application of urea, a chemical fertilizer, in his tea fields. By 2017, they had fully eliminated the application of urea and begun other experiments to replenish soil nutrients, such as intercropping with soybean and medicinal plants, producing and applying fermented enzyme solutions made from food waste, and employing traditional methods like hand weeding and mulching. The fresh tea leaves were processed into green tea by Liping’s uncle-in-law and branded and sold through Xiaoniu’s network and the Laopinhui team.

In 2017, the Laopinhui team welcomed 230 visitors from 11 groups (Liping, personal communication, May 29th, 2022). Many were friends and acquaintances, while others discovered the village through travel platforms. Visitors stayed at the homes of various team members, where they were treated to local, seasonal foods. The team also introduced visitors to activities such as Miao embroidery, medicinal plant identification, plant-based dyeing, tea harvesting, and stilt house construction. Despite initial success, the team disbanded in 2018 due to insufficient financial incentives and differing views on implementing specific amenities, such as installing flush toilets and replacing bedding materials.

Determined to continue their projects, Xiaoniu and Liping decided to renovate their family house in Queniao and continue the projects as a family enterprise. They removed the pigsty on the ground floor and cleared out underused storage spaces to make room for guest rooms, public areas, showers, and flush toilets. Additionally, they reinforced part of the traditional wooden

structure with a brick-and-concrete overlay to enhance the durability and weather resistance for the kitchen, balcony, and ground floor spaces. With the assistance of relatives proficient in construction, the initial phase of the renovation was completed within a month in mid-2018.

In the same year, Liping participated in a batik training program organized by China's Ministry of Culture and Tourism to promote the protection and inheritance of intangible cultural heritage. Through the program, she discovered her talent and passion for batik and thus continued to develop her skills in the craft. Initially, she used a multi-functional workspace on the ground floor of her house in Queniao to create batik pieces. As her local reputation grew through participation in exhibitions and training programs, in 2019 Liping rented a larger workspace in the county seat to handle larger orders. This new workspace was named the Manyou Intangible Cultural Heritage Workshop (慢友非遗工坊).



Figure 2. Emergence of Manyou Farm. From top-left to bottom-right: 1) Liping serves Queniao's local, everyday foods to guests. 2-3) The family experiments with reducing chemical use and breeding indigenous microorganisms (IMOs) to enhance soil quality in their tea fields. 4) Liping at the Terre Madres Salone del Gusto event in Turin, Italy in 2016. 5-6) The Laopinhui team's efforts to revitalize local crops and develop them into marketable products. 7) The Laopinhui team hosting a group of over 30 people in 2017. 8) Renovation of the family's house in Queniao, 2018. 9) Liping and her graduation work from the batik training program she attended in 2018.

As the family's various projects matured and stabilized, Manyou Farm (慢友农场, literally translated as "Slow Friends Farm") was formally established as a business entity in 2019, with Liping serving as the legal representative. In 2020, the Farm launched a public social media account and an online storefront on the digital platform WeChat (Manyou Farm, 2020). Later that year, Xiaoniu resigned from his employment position to dedicate himself fully to the family enterprise. Since then, the primary projects and activities of the family have remained largely unchanged. These will be explored in detail in the following sections.

4.2 Biocultural Pathways

This section details the various projects currently managed by Liping's family. It explores the knowledge, skills, organization, and networks that facilitate these projects and their impact. Additionally, it presents other non-project-related activities that the family participates in, providing a broader insight into their way of life.

4.2.1 Agroheritage Revitalization

Farming has historically constituted a central aspect of the livelihood of the Miao people at Queniao. With a settlement history exceeding four centuries, the local Miao people have developed a complex, distinctive, and dynamic system of knowledge, customs, and practices, along with their tangible expressions in the form of tools, crops, livestock, structures, and landscapes. This system enabled the Miao to live off the local environment over extended periods. In recent decades, however, many young people and families have relocated to the county seat or other urban areas for educational and employment opportunities. Consequently, the village population has become increasingly comprised of middle-aged, elderly, and young children. Despite the persistence of many traditional farming elements, they face varying levels of decline, discontinuation, and adaptation. By returning to village life, engaging visitors in farming experiences, and promoting local agroecological practices, Liping and Xiaoniu are striving to revitalize this way of life in a contemporary context.

As with many villages in QMDAP, the agricultural cycle in Queniao revolves around rice, the most important staple crop. The cycle commences with the sprouting and sowing of rice seeds in March, followed by the transplantation of seedlings in May and June, and culminates with the harvesting and processing of mature rice ears in September and October (Figure 3).

Following the legacy of land allocation policies in the 1980s, the paddy fields and dry fields allocated to each family are typically dispersed throughout the village to ensure fairness. Local families cultivate both glutinous and non-glutinous rice varieties; glutinous rice is typically reserved for special occasions, while non-glutinous rice is consumed daily. Additionally, various fish species are raised in the rice paddies to help with weed and pest control, soil fertilization, and as a source of food. All families in Queniao adhere to a similar rice-growing schedule, with key stages of the growth cycle coinciding with major communal social events. Consequently, during these key periods, individuals are often busy tending to their own paddies or helping others, occupying them for days and weeks at a time.



Figure 3. Rice Agricultural Cycle in Queniao. From top-left to bottom-right: 1) Rice seeds. 2) Rice sprouts. 3) Sowing rice sprouts. 4) View of seedling stage. 5) Pulling out seedlings for transplantation. 6) Emergence of the rice ears. 7) Mature stage of rice ready to be harvested. 8) Harvesting by hand. 9) Storage of harvested rice.

Most families in Queniao follow a set of similar, but complex, rice cultivation procedures. I had the opportunity to observe, participate in, and document some of them during the transplanting season, as shown in Figure 4. As the examples illustrate, the local people possess and utilize a tremendous amount of place-based knowledge and know-how to maintain this relatively contained and symbiotic ecosystem centered on rice — one that not only produces

food for humans but also supports the coexistence of other organisms. This local expertise includes, but is not limited to, understanding the life cycle and behavior of plants and animals; managing environmental factors like water levels, nutrients, temperature, moisture, spacing, and species interactions that impact crop health; recognizing and responding to phenological changes and anomalies; selecting desirable traits throughout the growth cycle for seed improvement and conservation; and, employing polyculture, composting, and mulching to enhance soil fertility and nutrient recycling. In addition, local people possess the ingenuity, skills, and physical abilities to locate materials, transform them into tools and structures, assemble people, and perform various maneuvers efficiently and effectively to accomplish the above.



Figure 4. Local Rice Transplanting Practices. From top-left to bottom-right: 1) Catching and removing grass carp in the rice paddies by lowering the water level in advance and digging ditches in the mud. Grass carp, introduced earlier for weed and pest control, are removed before transplanting to prevent damage to rice roots. Common carp, which do not harm the roots, remain in the paddies year-round. 2-3) Fertilizing the paddies before transplanting involves spreading composted weeds and a small amount of chemical fertilizer evenly across the paddies, then treading them down and flattening the mud with feet. 4) Overview of a paddy before transplanting, showing different varieties of rice separated by unplanted strips and a mud dyke that isolates the rice seedlings from the rest of the paddy. 5) Liping's mother sets up fish shelters and scarecrows using poles, branches, feathers, and recycled materials. 6) Once the paddy is prepared, the seedlings are pulled out, swashed clean, and bundled together with precise techniques before being transplanted.

Apart from rice, local people cultivate a variety of other crops and harvest numerous local plants throughout the year for subsistence, fodder, sale, or a combination of these uses (Figure 5). As with rice cultivation, people have developed specific knowledge and skills for growing and harvesting each of these crops and plants. However, the decisions about whether, when, and how to plant, manage and harvest them are more flexible than with rice. Families often experiment with new crops and farming techniques and pool their labor for tasks such as harvesting fish mint to increase efficiency. Taken together, the work of planting, weeding, composting, fertilizing, and harvesting occupies a substantial portion of the growing season. A typical day of farm work involves leaving the house early in the morning and returning just before sunset. Additionally, locals manage and harvest Chinese fir and other plants for use as firewood, building materials, medicine, and food coloring. However, the fruits of these labors are also substantial, as shown by the diversity of foods obtained from these harvests (Figure 6).



Figure 5. Various Farm Work Scenes. From top-left to bottom-right: 1) Digging potatoes. 2) Picking tea. 3) Harvesting daily vegetables. 4) Bundling weeds for composting after a weeding session. 5-7) Digging, washing, and transporting fish mint (*Houttuynia cordata*) roots, an important economic crop in Queniao. 8) Planting watermelon seedlings purchased at the local market; 9) Harvesting chives, a fast-growing staple vegetable. The leaves are consumed fresh and the roots are fermented before eating.



Figure 6. Commonly Cultivated Crops in Queniao. From top-left to bottom-right: 1) Rice (glutinous variety shown). 2) Sweet potato. 3) Potato. 4) Maize. 5) Pod pepper. 6) Green Pepper. 7) Chive. 8) Tomato. 9) Fish mint. 10) Bamboo shoot. 11) Cucumber. 12) Various melons. 13) Soybean. 14) Red bean. 15) Green bean. 16) Black glutinous millet.

In addition to working outside, local families dedicate time at home to feed their animals (Figure 7). Rather than purchasing commercial feed, they primarily use food scraps, rice bran, and crops such as sweet potatoes, potatoes, and corn to feed their poultry, fish, and pigs. Producing pig feed requires the most effort, as the ingredients need to be boiled daily or every other day and fed to the pigs once or multiple times daily. Both passively and actively collected, the manure from these animals, along with human waste, wood ash, and composted weeds, is recycled back into the fields as fertilizer.

While the above descriptions of farmwork highlight the knowledge and practices associated to material production, farming is also deeply woven into the social, cultural, and spiritual lives of the locals. As a shared practice that is often undertaken collectively, the process of farming often fosters extended conversations and interactions among people. The elderly and children are often engaged as well, as they would participate in lighter tasks or find leisure for themselves around the fields and houses. The fruits of people's labor — including food and other materials and structures transformed by human effort — are also valorized through their consumption,

exchange, and use in everyday life and communal events. These activities, along with elements of agriculture represented in local language, stories, songs, and histories, imbue the processes and products of farm work with deep cultural meaning. Additionally, through farming, people develop intimate, vital connections with the local environment. They need to constantly respond to seasonal and weather change, navigate diverse terrains, and interact with diverse biotic and abiotic resources within the landscape. Thus, Queniao's farming culture is more than just an economic activity; it is an integral part of a broader way of life that nurtures multiple aspects of well-being — material, social, physical, mental, and spiritual. In this dynamic relationship, the community not only derives sustenance from the landscape but also in turn contributes to its preservation.



Figure 7. Fish and Livestock Feeding Practices. From top-left to bottom-right: 1) Carrying daily food scraps. 2) Feeding leftovers to poultry. 3) Pig swill made from boiling food scraps, vegetables, and root crops. 4) Mixing pig swill with rice husks before feeding. 5) The pig pen is lined with dried grass, which becomes high-quality fertilizer after mixing with pig manure. 6) Fish feed created from rice bran.

By returning to their village to engage in farming, Liping and Xiaoniu are among the few young adults who continue to practice and inherit this knowledge with associated skills, lifestyles, and to pass them on to the younger generation. Moreover, through Manyou Farm, they undertake addition efforts to make visible the contemporary relevance and value of these practices (Figure 8). Firstly, they enhance the economic value of local foods and farming

practices by inviting visitors to experience farming firsthand, preparing meals with local ingredients, purchasing produce from local families to sell to visitors and local restaurants, and by promoting the taste and health benefits of these foods. More details on these experiential activities are presented in Section 4.2. Secondly, Xiaoniu and Liping advocate for and seek support for Queniao's farming culture from the perspectives of environmental sustainability, cultural valorization, seed conservation, and nature education. They engage in these efforts through social media, direct communication, community projects, and participation in workshops, conferences, and projects that focus on these themes.

Manyou Farm is connected to two important domestic networks that provide opportunities and support: China's CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) Coalition and the Farmers' Seed Network. The CSA Coalition is a broad network that includes academics, environmentally conscious "new" farmers, educational and farm tourism entrepreneurs, consumers, agri-food tech companies, architects, government staff, and international partners, all united by interests in food safety, sustainable agriculture, and strengthening farmer-consumer ties (Si et al., 2020). This network is also connected to China's rural reconstruction movement (Day, 2008). The Farmers' Seed Network is a nonprofit organization with academic roots that manages community-based projects to support community seed conservation, enhance farmers' livelihoods, and promote national seed security (Farmers' Seed Network (China), n.d.).

The efforts to revitalize Queniao's agroecological traditions by the Laopinhui Team and Manyou Farm have produced a variety of impact. Locally, Queniao's produce, particularly pod pepper and fish mint, have gained recognition and demand in local restaurants for their taste and quality, leading to price increases until COVID-19 caused a downtown in demand (Xiaoniu, personal communication, October 15th, 2022). Another noticeable impact is the growing interest and recognition of Queniao's agricultural and food traditions and associated ways of life by external entities such as media, academics, and nonprofit organizations (Foodthink, 2022; Media Center for Community, 2021; Qiu, 2022; CCTV-17, 2022). Manyou Farm, often the facilitator of these engagements, has received considerable attention, but the effects have certainly permeated throughout the community. For example, Xiaoniu has noticed an increased sense of pride and confidence among community members in their traditional crop varieties after recognizing their economic potential. Moreover, by organizing farm stays and educational initiatives, the Farm has not only raised awareness of the value and wisdom within Queniao's farming culture but has also

successfully facilitated ecological farming and seed conservation projects in other local areas. More details on these activities are discussed in Sections 4.2.2 and 4.2.5.



Figure 8. Activities Related to Agroheritage Revitalization. From top left to bottom right: 1) Liping at the weekly market at Leishan's county seat, where locals gather to offer and exchange crops, crafts, tools, and services. 2) Promotional materials created by Manyou Farm to highlight Queniao's unique foods. 3) A photo exhibition organized by Manyou Farm in Queniao on International Women's Day, showcasing local crop varieties. 4) An episode of CCTV's (China Central Television) "Beautiful Countryside" column featuring Queniao's food, heritage and peasant life, partly facilitated by the Farm. 5) Manyou Farm, invited by China's CSA Coalition as one of 35 "ecological farms," hosting an "open day" event to promote biodiversity and conservation for the annual Mois franco-chinois de l'environnement (MFCE), organized by the French Embassy in China (CSA Coalition, 2021). 6) Manyou Farm is one of the community partners of Farmers' Seed Network on in-situ seed conservation initiatives (Farmers' Seed Network, 2020).

4.2.2 Agritourism

Building on the local farming culture, agrotourism, also known as "farm stay" or "rural experience", has been an integral part of Manyou Farm since its inception. Liping's family guides visitors in the day-to-day life of Queniao and surrounding villages, offering authentic experiences that include living, eating, playing, and working in a rural setting. Not only is agritourism one of the family's major income-generating projects, but it is also the most

prominent and visible part of the Farm's operations. It incorporates elements of all other projects of the Farm, making these endeavors accessible and appreciable to visitors and supporters alike.

The family typically receives visitors from April, after the rice seedlings have been planted, through to the end of the rice harvest in October, which also marks the start of the “slack” season. Peak periods for tourism coincide with major holidays such as the Labour Day holiday in May, the National Day holiday in October, and the summer break. Instead of listing themselves on public booking platforms, the family has so far chosen to promote their agritourism activities solely through social media and indirectly through their involvement in various projects and events. Consequently, many of their visitors are either friends and acquaintances or have learnt about the Farm through word of mouth. Another major source of visitors includes students, families, villagers, and members of organizations who come to attend educational camps or training workshops. These events, often co-organized with various academic or non-profit institutions, focus on themes such as rural culture education, family and youth camps, ecological farming, and rural development. As a result, the demographic of the Farm’s visitors is diverse, encompassing individuals and families, larger groups of over 20, young children to the elderly, and guests from different parts of the country and occasionally from overseas.



Figure 9. Exterior View of the Family’s Guesthouse. The guesthouse is named *Daiyixiu*, or “to stay overnight.”

Since Queniao has not undergone commercialized tourism development at the time of this writing, the accommodations available are primarily rooms renovated within villagers’ own

homes, as is the case with Liping's family home. Instead of hiring professional designers and architects, the family had mostly recruited local builders in the community, co-designing and implementing the renovation plans. As a result, the completed guesthouse is rustic and practical. It features many improvised structures built using local techniques and materials and maintains a high level of functionality for the family's own living needs (Figure 10). The family named the guesthouse *Daiyixiu* (呆一宿), which means "to stay overnight."

Daiyixiu has a total of eight guest rooms, which generally suffices to accommodate the Farm's overnight visitors. Guests typically stay for one to four nights, although some choose to stay longer. The family purchases white cotton bed linens for the rooms and changes and washes them for each group of guests. Modern amenities like Wi-Fi and electrical outlets are available in each room, and both phone and data signals are strong throughout the village's settlement area. All guests, including married couples, are asked to follow with the local Miao tradition of male and female guests sleeping in separate rooms.



Figure 10. Guesthouse Interior. From top left to bottom right: 1-2) Renovated attic (fourth floor) which includes a common area and two large rooms with space for multiple beds. 3) Third floor – one of the six guest rooms. 4) Third floor – balcony and toilet. 5) Second floor – common area used for dining and other activities. 6) Second floor – kitchen. 7) First floor – craft and teaching space. 8) First floor – storage space. 9) First floor – toilets and shower areas.

After settling into the guesthouse, visitors are quickly immersed in the local food culture, a central component of the agritourism experience. The family sources mostly local, seasonal ingredients from their own fields, as well as from local communities and markets. They skillfully transform these ingredients into a variety of dishes using both traditional and contemporary processing and cooking techniques. Meals are shared with visitors according to local customs, and unless specified otherwise, the family prepares three meals per day for their guests.



Figure 11. Food Preparation Scenes. From top left to bottom right: 1-4) Various food preparation scenes around the kitchen. 5) Making yeast balls for brewing rice alcohol. 6) Drying fish over a wood stove. 7) Washing dishes. 8) Hosting an outdoor barbecue. 9) Visitors participating in food preparation by making dumplings.

In Queniao, both everyday and special foods often require pre-processing of ingredients. Some notable examples include fermenting leafy vegetables, chive roots, and bamboo shoots; maintaining the fermented soup stock known as “An Tang”(庵汤); smoking and curing pork; drying of fish; drying and roasting pod peppers; and brewing rice wine, which involves a detailed process starting with the preparation of yeast balls. These specialized tasks are typically handled by Liping’s mother, who possesses the necessary knowledge and experience. While Liping’s mother manages these specific preparations, both Xiaoniu and Liping participate in the preparation of a variety of ingredients in and around the kitchen. When hosting larger groups, the

family would recruit other community members to assist with food preparation and other tasks. Occasionally, enthusiastic visitors also participate in food preparation and cooking for the experience; some even bring their own food and ingredients to share.

In Queniao and most other Miao communities in Guizhou province, dining traditions center around communal eating. People typically sit around tables with soups or hot pots at the center, surrounded by various side dishes (Figure 12). A spicy dipping sauce made from ground pod pepper and other spices is a staple condiment, prepared for almost every meal. Rice and alcohol are served individually in bowls. Rather than choosing from a menu, visitors are served whatever the family has prepared. Meals at the Farm are shared with different groups of visitors, the family, and occasionally visiting relatives or community members, all eating together in the same space and sometimes at the same table. Guests are often able to adapt quickly to these novel dining arrangements involving new people, spontaneous conversations, occasional toasts, and a generally relaxed and convivial atmosphere. If a full day's activities are planned, such as hiking to the tea fields and picking tea, the family typically prepares food to be enjoyed outdoors, often opting for a barbeque.



Figure 12. Food Consumption Scenes. From top left to bottom right: 1) Visitors dining in the guesthouse's dining area. 2) Liping's family and their relatives enjoying a meal together. 3) Visitors at a barbecue picnic next to the family's tea fields. 4) Breakfast serving sweet potatoes and minced meat rice noodles. 5-6) Typical food arrangements featuring hot pot or soup, surrounded by side dishes, with servings of rice and rice wine.

In addition to providing lodging and meals, the family leads visitors in a variety of experiential activities in Queniao and nearby villages (Figure 13). These activities offer a hands-on, leisurely introduction to the family's projects and the local way of life. Some of the more distinctive activities include: engaging in the diverse farm chores outlined in Section 4.2.1; picking and processing tea; creating Miao batik and embroidery; participating in guided village walks; catching fish by hand or with bamboo poles in the rice fields; and involvement in food processing and preparation. Visitors also engage in more general activities of relaxation and entertainment on their own — such as enjoying the local scenery, chatting and drinking tea, playing outside or inside the guesthouse, and taking photos and videos. The specific activities available are influenced by factors such as the season, weather conditions, visitor interests, and the family's availability. As such, the range of activities can vary throughout the year and are often subject to change.



Figure 13. Experiential Activities during a Family-Child Summer Camp. From top left to bottom right: 1) Participants experiencing Miao embroidery in Maomaohe village. 2) Children playing by the river in Getou village. 3) A guided village walk in Queniao. 4) Fishing in the rice fields. 5) Washing chive roots. 6) Picking tea leaves. 7) Learning about the local brewing culture and tasting rice wine brewed by Liping's mother. 8) Drawing and making batiks. 9) Learning to wrap traditional glutinous rice dumplings.

To effectively manage their agrotourism activities, Liping's family makes use of their extensive local knowledge and community rights to identify, access, and utilize various local sites and materials. However, communicating with visitors is equally important for Xiaoniu and Liping. Various forms of communication occur throughout a visitor's stay, including coordinating plans, teaching and explaining, answering questions, addressing concerns, and engaging in conversations on various topics. These interactions require not only sufficient understanding of the diverse interests, habits, and perspectives of urban visitors but also the ability to articulate the details and significance of local knowledge and practices in a way that resonates with visitors and sparks their interest. Additionally, depending on the visitors' needs, the family might also handle logistical tasks such as arranging transportation or working with co-organizers to develop itineraries. These logical aspects are often managed by Xiaoniu.

Alongside managing their agrotourism independently, Liping's family also collaborates with other community members who are knowledgeable about their projects and can provide additional support. Such assistance might include leading tours, sharing specialized knowledge, or offering additional accommodation and food services. For large group activities that take place in other villages, the family extends their collaboration to include relatives and acquaintances from those villages to make special arrangements.

In terms of pricing, the family typically combines lodging, food, and activities and charges on a per person, per day basis. Price adjustments are made based on several factors, including the size of the visiting group, the duration of the stay, the specific activities undertaken, and other relevant considerations. Additionally, visitors have the opportunity to purchase Manyou Farm's products, such as tea, batik, pod pepper, and other produce, directly during their stay or through online orders.

From 2019 to 2022, Manyou Farm welcomed over a thousand visitors, making agritourism a significant source of income and one of their primary economic activities. This success has allowed Xiaoniu and Liping to forge an economic pathway that not only aligns with but also enhances their efforts in agroecological revitalization and sustainable rural development. Hosting visitors has also broadened interest in Queniao's agroecological traditions and lifeway. Initially, the Farm's visitor profile was mostly comprised of friends and acquaintances from the rural construction network. Over time, however, it has diversified to include individuals from varied backgrounds, including those with limited knowledge of sustainability and rural culture.

(Xiaoniu, personal communication, June 17th, 2022). Furthermore, Manyou Farm has also received accolades for its social and environmental commitments. In 2021, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs of Qiandongnan Prefecture (2021) nominated Manyou Farm as one of the "Prefectural Level Exemplary Family Farms of 2021." In 2022, the Beijing-based Good Food Fund nominated the Farm as one of twelve "Best Practice Case Studies of Sustainable Food System Transition" in China (Good Food China, 2022).

4.2.3 Ecological Tea Farming and Branding

In 2015, Xiaoniu began using his spare time to conduct a series of experiments on tea. He collaborated with his family, particularly Liping's uncle-in-law, to explore the potential of employing environmentally friendly management methods and processing and branding their tea to enhance its value. Black tea and green tea represent two of Manyou Farm's primary products, significantly contributing to the family's income alongside agrotourism. Picking and processing tea have also become highly popular among the Farm's visitors. This section presents more detail on the background and management practices of the family's tea fields, the production process for their tea products, and the organization of experiential activities around tea.

While old, feral tea bushes, possibly introduced over a century ago, can still be found along the edges of fields and roadsides in Queniao, large-scale tea cultivation was not a traditional practice among the Miao communities in the Leigongshan region. In the 2000s, a county government initiative encouraged local communities to plant pear trees on a large scale as a development project. Unfortunately, when the pear trees matured, there were no buyers for the fruit, leading to innumerable pears rotting on the ground. Subsequently, tea was proposed as an alternative crop (Liping's father, personal communication, July 6th, 2022). Tea cultivation has proven to be a far more successful venture, as tea plants provide multiple harvests per year, and the processed leaves have a longer shelf life. This has allowed it to persist and expand in local communities for over a decade until the present. Queniao has approximately 2,500 *mu* (or 410 acres) of actively managed tea fields, and tea has become a major economic crop in Leishan County (Eyes News, 2021; CCTV-17, 2022). Unlike the approach taken by Manyou Farm, most villagers in Queniao typically harvest raw tea leaves and bring them directly to the village center. There, they sell the leaves to a local buyer who pays based on weight. The bulk leaves are then transported to various processing facilities in Leishan County to be transformed into green tea.



Figure 14. Queniao's Tea Fields. Left: Overhead view of several tea fields in Queniao. Right: Close-up view.

Manyou Farm manages three tea fields, each in a different location in Queniao. Collectively, these fields cover an area of over 20 *mu* (3.3 acres). Liping's family has named their tea fields "ecological tea garden," reflecting the variety of traditional and innovative management practices they employ. These practices include weeding and composting, fertilizing, and pruning (Figure 15).



Figure 15. Management Practices at Manyou Farm's Ecological Tea Garden. From top left to bottom right: 1-2) Applying composted weed and wood chips to enrich the soil. 3) Barrels containing the family's home-made enzyme solutions. 4) Spraying the enzyme solutions onto the tea bushes. 5) An increased presence of spider webs on the family's tea bushes, indicating a healthier ecosystem compared to other tea bushes in the village. 6) A view of the dark-colored soil under the family's tea bushes.

Weeding is done manually through the traditional method of using scythes and hand-pulling to remove weeds around the tea bushes. This labor-intensive process occurs several times a year and can take from one to several weeks depending on the workforce available. The removed weeds are piled together and composted to be applied as mulch in the following year. In addition to using composted weeds, the family applies wood chips, animal manure, trace amounts of chemical fertilizer, and agricultural enzymes to enrich the soil. The agricultural enzymes are produced by fermenting brown sugar, vegetable scraps, and water. This technique, learnt from other practitioners in the rural reconstruction network, is believed to help fertilize the soil and break down any chemical residues. Finally, the tea bushes are periodically pruned to prevent vertical growth and encourage the growth of new buds.

Tea picking begins in early spring and extends into the fall. It is timed to coincide with the emergence of new leaf buds, which occurs intermittently throughout the growing season. As Manyou Farm processes its own tea, the family often recruits community members to assist with harvesting for several days, allowing for a greater yield of raw leaves for bulk processing. Tea picking is a full-day activity: people leave home early in the morning, carrying pre-packed lunches to the fields, and harvest until just before sunset. During early spring, when the leaves are more tender, one or two leaves are picked along with the bud for green tea production. Later, when the leaves are firmer, two or three leaves with the bud are harvested for black tea. At the end of each day, community members are compensated for the weight of their harvest at a higher rate than the local purchase price. The harvested leaves are either spread out and stored in a shaded area overnight or directly transported to a processing facility.

Before 2021, the bulk of the tea harvested by Liping's family was sent to Jiaoyao village for processing by Liping's uncle-in-law in his facility. Only small quantities were processed in Queniao, mainly for experimentation and tourism purposes. However, after receiving formal training in tea processing and securing a facility in the nearby Xijiang township in 2021, Xiaoniu began independently processing the bulk of the tea leaves harvested at the Farm.

Upon arrival at the processing facility, the raw tea leaves undergo a meticulous series of procedures to be transformed into black tea. These steps include withering, rolling, de-clumping, fermenting, and drying (as detailed in Figure 16). For green tea production, the process diverges. The leaves are first subjected to high heat in a process known as fixation and then are subsequently rolled and dried. Xiaoniu operates different machines for these processes and

monitors their progress by observing, feeling, and periodically sampling the leaves. The entire processing period generally lasts until the second night or third morning from the time of picking. Once the tea is processed, the dried leaves are sorted, packed, and transported back to the family's warehouse in Leishan's county seat. There, the tea is stored, repackaged, and prepared for shipping along with the Farm's other products.



Figure 16. Tea Picking, Processing (Black Tea) and Sale. From top left to bottom right: 1-2) Picking tea begins early in the morning and continues until just before sunset. 3) Weighing tea and calculating payment for community members at the end of the day. 4) Transporting freshly picked tea leaves to the processing facility. 5) Spreading out the leaves onto withering machines that provide constant air flow and mild heat. 6) Checking the thoroughness of withering the next morning. 7-8) Using a rolling machine to break apart the cell structure of the leaves and then de-clumping the rolled leaves. 9-10) Fermenting the leaves for several hours using a fermentation machine. 11) Heat drying the fermented leaves for several more hours. 12-13) Sifting and sorting the dried leaves before they are packed and transported to the family's warehouse in Leishan's county seat; 14) Repackaging for individual customer orders at the warehouse before shipping. 15) The family's WeChat storefront where their tea, produce, batiks, and other products can be ordered online. 16) Various packaging options for the family's tea products.

Xiaoniu and Liping utilize various methods to promote their tea, including social media advertising and presentations at events. However, the most important avenue through which new customers are obtained is through agritourism, particularly the experiential tea-picking and

processing offered at the Farm. During their visits, Xiaoniu would introduce the Farm's tea management practices to the guests and encourage them to observe and feel the soil. Visitors then participate in picking tea for one to two hours. Upon returning to the guesthouse, Xiaoniu guides the guests in processing their freshly picked tea leaves. This involves using a wok-like implement for the fixation and drying of green tea, using bare hands for rolling the leaves, and using room temperature and moisture for black tea fermentation. After processing, visitors are invited to sample the tea they have produced, using spring water sourced from the surrounding hillsides. Given the popularity of tea consumption across China and the lack of hands-on experiences for many urban visitors, the entire process often sparks numerous conversations around the subject of tea.



Figure 17. Tea Processing Experiences for Visitors. Top left: Xiaoniu hosting a tea tasting event where he introduces various types of teas and offers them for sampling. Top right and middle right: A wok-like roasting machine in use for the fixation, rolling, and drying stages of green tea production. Bottom left and right: Visitors participating in the process of rolling tea leaves by hand and then fermenting them under room temperature conditions to produce black tea.

The family produces between 150 and 200 kg of dried tea annually. While this quantity is modest in scale compared to most tea producers, their tea is in strong demand as most of it is sold before the next growing season. As with agrotourism, the Farm's tea is well-known within

the rural reconstruction network. From 2017 to 2019, it was designated and served at China's CSA Annual Conference as the official tea beverage. A local film crew dedicated to documenting Guizhou's agri-food heritage produced a mini-documentary about the Farm's tea project, which was later incorporated into an official digital learning platform by the state (Guizhou Learning Platform, 2021). Xiaoniu has long sought to facilitate collective actions around tea in Queniao, which he believes will have a positive impact on the local community. On the one hand, he is aware of the high demand for his tea and hopes to mobilize more community members to apply ecological management methods so that he can purchase the raw leaves from them at a higher price than what they would normally receive. On the other hand, he hopes to engage more adults and youths in the community in comprehensive training around the cultural, ecological, and economic dimensions of tea. Nevertheless, this objective has yet to materialize for a variety of reasons, which will be discussed in Chapter 7.

4.2.4 Miao Heritage Crafts

While Xiaoniu is the primary figure overseeing the tea project, Liping leads the Farm's other initiative, Miao heritage crafts. Centered around Miao batik and embroidery, this project involves offering visitors hands-on crafting experiences and fulfilling customized orders for local and non-local customers. The former takes place as part of the family's agrotourism activities while the latter is undertaken at different times of the year as orders are received.

Batik and embroidery are two traditional handicrafts widely practiced by women in Miao communities across QMDAP and beyond. They feature a rich array of symbols and patterns and involve complex tools and procedures, playing a crucial role in expressing and preserving cultural aesthetics, values, stories, and collective identities. Despite numerous revitalization efforts from both grassroots and government levels in recent decades, which have spurred the regional development of the Miao crafts industry, batik practitioners are currently scarce in Queniao, possibly due to the lack of its continuations in recent history (Liping, personal communication, June 21st, 2022). In this context, Liping continues to practice and revive the skills she honed over the years in Leishan's county seat.

Batik, a simpler and quicker craft compared to embroidery, is the primary activity offered to visitors at the Farm, along with variations like tie-dyeing. This wax-resist dyeing technique involves applying heated wax to cloth using tools such as brushes and wax spatulas. Once the

cloths are waxed, they are soaked in a dyeing solution, typically indigo for Miao communities. This process produces distinctive indigo-colored batik with unique patterns preserved in the cloth that does not take up the dye due to the wax. Liping sources materials such as cloth, drawing tools, beeswax, and indigo pastes from both local and external suppliers. She also maintains "live" dyeing solutions in large vats, which can be reused for many years with periodic additions of alkali, alcohol, and indigo pastes.



Figure 18. Essential Tools for Miao Batik. Left: New and re-used beeswax on a heating device. Center: Wax spatulas (pen-like tools) on a piece of cloth. Right: Indigo dye solutions in one of Liping's dyeing vats.

To start, Liping prepares the batik tools and semi-finished items like cloths and clothing based on visitors' desired end products. She introduces the batik and tie-dyeing process, guiding visitors through their creative processes of sketching, wax application, and cloth tying. This activity ranges from a few minutes to several hours. Some visitors create traditional Miao batik patterns using online sources or reference books available at the guesthouse, while others opt for non-traditional characters and designs. Once the designs are completed, Liping immerses the pieces in dyeing solutions. The pieces are then lifted out and re-immersed for several turns to enhance the fixation of dye pigments. Liping adjusts the dyeing time for different pieces based on cloth's thickness and the desired color saturation.

Once dyed, the pieces need to undergo dewaxing, which includes boiling, washing, pounding, and rinsing. The initial hot water treatments remove most of the wax, which Liping collects for future reuse. The subsequent pounding and rinsing, performed with a hammer and running water, eliminate any residual wax and surface pigments. Visitors are invited to participate in these two steps, either at the guesthouse or by the river. After drying and ironing, some batik pieces are complete, while others require additional finishing by Liping, such as

sewing in linings, adding pockets, zippers, and handles. The entire batik-making process typically spans more than one day, with breaks and other activities interspersed during steps that do not require constant attention.



Figure 19. Batik-making with Visitors. From top left to bottom right: 1) Liping explains the batik process to a group of visitors. 2) Visitors apply wax to their pre-sketched patterns. 3) Liping partially soaks a cloth to achieve a color contrast effect. 4) Pieces are lifted and hung to enhance pigment fixation. 5) Wax is removed by stirring and washing the cloths in hot water. 6) Liping demonstrates how to pound the cloths and wash out remaining pigments. 7) Cutting and sewing pieces into their final forms. 8-9) Visitors and their completed pieces.

Throughout these processes, Liping utilizes a vast array of tools, kits, equipment, materials, accessories, and crafting techniques to meet the specific design expectations of each visitor for their batik pieces. She maintains this personalized approach even when hosting larger groups. The task requires not only extensive procedural knowledge and dexterity for various crafts but also familiarity with contemporary designs and aesthetics. Additionally, visitors frequently pose questions regarding batik techniques, procedures, and symbolism, to which Liping provides explanations throughout the process.

In addition to guiding visitors, Manyou Farm also fulfils customized orders, serving a client base that extends beyond farm visitors to Liping's local social network and participants in events and exhibitions related to intangible cultural heritage. Local Miao customers typically request

traditional ethnic clothing for daily wear or festive occasions. Meanwhile, the Farm also produces creative cultural products such as bags, runners, clothing, covers, and cases for various businesses, organizations, foundations, and tourism vendors. These items are often used as gifts, resale items, or exhibition pieces. Liping incorporates a mix of traditional Miao symbols — like the snail, sun, butterfly, dragon, and geometric patterns — with contemporary design elements also in her creations.

For larger orders, Liping typically works at her workspace in Leishan's county seat, known as the "Manyou Intangible Cultural Heritage Workshop" (hereafter referred to as the "Manyou Heritage Workshop" or "the Workshop"), which operates as a business entity separate from the Farm. She often enlists relatives and women from Queniao and surrounding communities to help with these substantial orders, which require many days of collective effort to complete. Besides fulfilling customer orders, a variety of batik items are also crafted for use as decorations at the guesthouse and for sale in the Farm's online store.



Figure 20. Bulk Order Production and Impact. From top left to bottom right: 1-2) Liping and her team of relatives and community members working for bulk orders in the Workshop. 3) Finished products from a bulk order. 4) Liping's workshop invited by Leishan's Ministry of Tourism to exhibit at the 2022 "Cultural and Natural Heritage Day" at the county seat square. 5) Batik products from Liping's workshop featured at the United Nations' 75th Anniversary Day Exhibition in Beijing. 6) Liping's new storefront at a county seat marketplace, showcasing products and offering garment processing services to customers.

Since its launch, the heritage craft project has continued to make impact. In 2019, Liping was invited to Longtang village in Leishan County to provide training on batik and heritage crafts as part of a corporate-based poverty alleviation initiative. In 2020, the Workshop was designated by Leishan's Poverty Alleviation and Development Office as a "Consumption Type Poverty Alleviation Enterprise" (Xiaoniu, 2021a), recognizing its role in facilitating the purchase of products and services in poverty-stricken regions to help increase local income. Additionally, products from the Workshop have been showcased at local and national events celebrating cultural heritage and diversity, endorsed by Leishan's Intangible Heritage Protection Centre and the rural construction network. Participation in the Workshop's activities has empowered Liping's relatives and fellow sisters in several ways, providing them with financial benefits and opportunities to learn, practice and connect with traditional crafts. In 2022, the family rented and renovated a storefront near Leishan's town centre to increase the visibility of the Workshop's products and services. The storefront is currently managed by one of Liping's fellow sisters from Queniao. Overall, the widespread distribution of products through the Workshop's orders and the Farm's agrotourism activities have helped make visible Miao craftsmanship, assigning new meanings and functions to these crafts in contemporary society.

4.2.5 Education and Promotion

A key focus of Manyou Farm, alongside its various projects, is its commitment to incorporate an educational dimensions to its activities. This includes actively disseminating its knowledge and experiences and promoting the values it upholds. These educational and promotional efforts are carried out across diverse settings and target a wide range of audiences, including tourists, local and non-local villagers, media and government personnel, conference and event attendees, as well as the general public.

At the Farm, the family integrates various educational elements into their experiential activities, employing both structured and informal approaches. In structured settings, like summer camps and villager training, Liping and Xiaoniu would organize formal sessions to share and demonstrate topics such as local rice farming, tea field management, batik making, village tour guiding, as well as introducing the Farm's emergence and goals. Conversely, for visitors new to the Farm or those with less specified interests, Xiaoniu and Liping would take time to get to know them over their first few meals together. These interactions often stimulate questions,

leading to deeper discussion and participation in activities. During experiential activities, visitors are also encouraged to engage in deeper inquiries on the things they are seeing and experiencing. Furthermore, this learning experience is not merely one-way: visitors also contribute their own expertise to the family to and other visitors, either spontaneously or through planned contributions.

Outside the Farm, Liping and Xiaoniu engage in various online and in-person platforms, such as projects, conferences, and events, where they share their knowledge, experiences, and voice. These opportunities often come through invitations from networks and organizations such as the rural reconstruction network and Farmers' Seed Network. During these events, they connect their work at Manyou Farm with broader topics, presenting on subjects such as "Seed Conservation and the Development of Local Food Products," "Tea Management, Seed Conservation and Biodiversity," and "The Inheritance, Re-understanding and Development of Rural Natural Knowledge and Living Wisdom," and "COVID-19 Changes: Anxiety and Everyday Life in Rural Communities." In addition to their role as presenters, Xiaoniu and Liping also contribute as advisors, facilitators and volunteers in projects aimed at conserving and valorizing rural culture in QMDAP and Guizhou. These projects focus on documenting Guizhou's agrarian heritage, activating rural resources for sustainable development, fostering cultural confidence, and enhancing connectivity among practitioners.

On social media, Liping and Xiaoniu manage personal WeChat accounts and a public WeChat Official Account for Manyou Farm. Their personal accounts are used for daily communications, updates about the Farm, sharing articles, news, and events, and promoting products available on their WeChat-based online store. The public account focuses on the dissemination of articles and videos that highlight the Farm's activities, achievements, and goals. Additionally, Xiaoniu has formed partnerships with other sustainability-focused enterprises, enabling the Farm's products to be listed on external platforms, and similarly, their partners' products are featured on the Farm's channels.

The educational and promotional activities of Manyou Farm have generated impact in several areas. Firstly, they have increased awareness of the aspirations behind the Farm's diverse initiatives. After visiting the Farm, many visitors share their experiences on social media or in articles, often praising the beauty of Queniao and their enjoyable visit. More importantly, they also recognize and appreciate the value of local agricultural and food traditions, affirming the

efforts of the family and community in maintaining these practices. Such recognition serves as validations that encourage the family to continue their work. Secondly, through their training and advisory roles, the family has successfully initiated several projects in QMDAP related to ecological farming, seed conservation, and rural culture documentation (Xiaoniu, personal communication, July 27th, 2022). Finally, by promoting their work, the family maintains visibility within and beyond their social network, enabling them to access opportunities to learn, share, and promote themselves. The increasing interest from various groups over the years, including local government departments, underscores the effectiveness of these efforts.



Figure 21. Educational and Promotional Activities. From top left to bottom right: 1) Liping introduces the origins of Manyou Farm to teenagers during a summer camp. 2) Liping's father demonstrates local farming techniques to a visitor group from Cangyuan county, Yunnan. 3) Xiaoniu discusses family farm management and ecological farming with government and village committee leaders from Hubei and Xinjiang. 4) Liping conducts batik training for local women in Longtang village, Leishan county. 5) Xiaoniu presents his ecological tea experiments at an online subforum organized by China's CSA Coalition. 6) Xiaoniu leads a workshop on identifying cultural strengths for villagers from various parts of QMDAP as part of a non-profit initiative to foster community development in the prefecture.

4.2.6 Other Activities

This final section outlines the additional activities undertaken by the family beyond the primary projects of Manyou Farm. While some of these activities might appear unrelated to the

thesis focus — the utilization of local biocultural heritage for sustainable rural development — they are integral to the family's broader lifestyle, which both supports and is supported by the Farm's initiatives. Therefore, they are included here to offer a more contextualized view of biocultural innovation within the local sociocultural and economic realities.

First, the entire family regularly participates in the numerous communal social events characteristic of the Miao and other ethnic minority groups in QMDAP. A local saying captures the region's vibrant festival culture: "large festivals on every third, sixth, and ninth days and small festivals every day." These events vary in scale and location, with smaller gatherings typically held in Queniao and nearby villages, while larger festivals occur in Leishan and neighboring county seats, especially during the late fall and winter when many families return from migrant work. Activities at these festivals are diverse, ranging from drop-in visits with relatives and neighbors, feasting and toasting, and preparing special foods, to exchanging gifts, traditional dancing, drumming, *lusheng* performances, bull or bird fights, and rituals of prayer, commemoration, and veneration. Participation in these events depends on each family member's identity, skills, availability, and interests, and they also embrace customs from Han festivals like the Chinese New Year.

Second, aside from their commitments in Queniao, Liping and Xiaoniu spend a considerable amount of time in Leishan county seat to support their child's elementary school education. Like many other parents, they have rented an apartment in town where at least one of them stays with their child during school weekdays. Consequently, both are available at the Farm on Fridays and weekends to host visitors. However, they often alternate roles during the week, making day trips between Queniao and Leishan, a journey that takes approximately an hour each way. While in town, Liping or Xiaoniu would handle packaging and shipping products, and purchasing groceries, tools, and other supplies.

Third, Xiaoniu and Liping actively participate in learning opportunities arising through their social networks, often involving other community members. They have engaged in various educational events such as tea processing and tasting workshops, hotel and B&B manager training, heritage crafts training, and site visits related to rural reconstruction, village tour guiding, cultural documentation, seed conservation, and the development and marketing of agricultural products. For events at distant locations, they sometimes bring the entire family, transforming these occasions into opportunities for travel and socializing.

Fourth, Xiaoniu and Liping continuously experiment with new ideas that appear interesting or potentially viable. Some of their current projects include cultivating new tea varieties, transforming an old house in Queniao into an exhibition space for local seeds and crops, growing indigo plants for dye production, and co-designing a curriculum for summer camps. Additionally, they regularly test new food recipes, batik techniques and patterns, crop management practices, and guesthouse furnishings to enhance their offerings.

Finally, although revenue from the Farm has become a significant source of income for the family, migrant work remains a primary livelihood for Liping's father. Despite the economic challenges brought by the COVID-19 pandemic, he secured several construction jobs in Guangzhou and Shenzhen through long-established social connections. However, when he is in Queniao, he actively participates in local social events and supports the family with various tasks, such as farm work, gathering and processing firewood, making repairs, weeding, and picking tea.

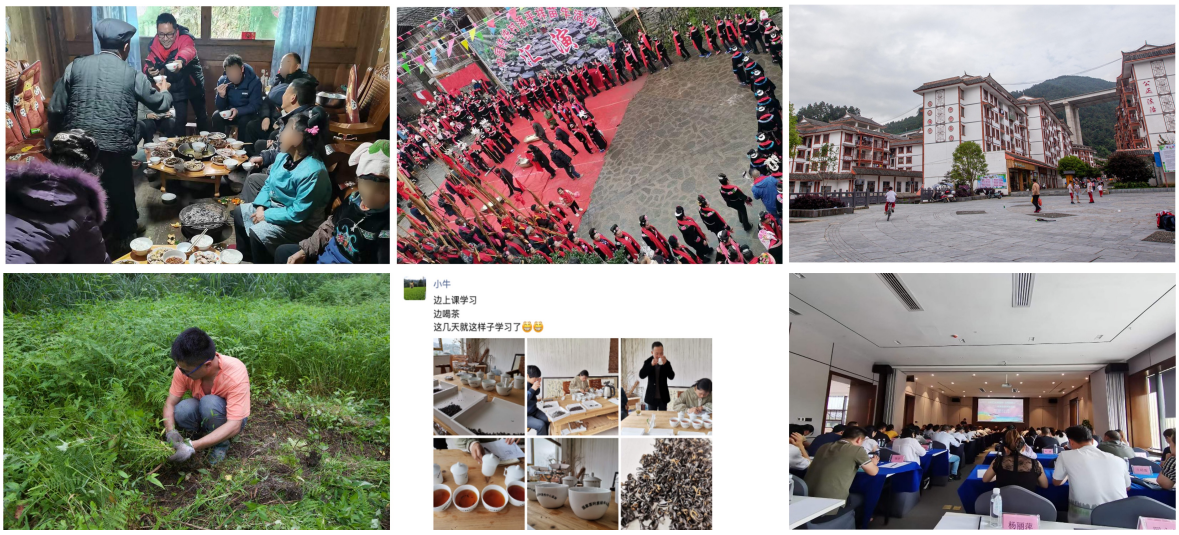


Figure 22. Other Activities and Duties. From top left to bottom right: 1-2) Community visits, celebrations, and performances during Nongx Yangx, the Miao New Year. 3) Elementary school students at a public square in Leishan county seat. 4) Xiaoniu weeding a field where new tea saplings have been planted. 5) Xiaoniu sharing his experiences from a tea processing training workshop on social media. 6) Liping at a training workshop for boutique hotel and B&B hosts.

4.3 Chapter Summary

Chapter 4 details the emergence and ongoing projects of Manyou Farm. The chapter begins by outlining the background of Xiaoniu and Liping, the main figures behind the family-run

initiative. Liping's journey from being a lusheng dancer in Beijing to starting various entrepreneurial endeavors in her hometown, along with Xiaoniu's involvement in sustainable rural development, sets the stage for forming the Farm's projects. Since 2015, Liping's involvement in community development projects and participation in international events such as the Terra Madre Salone del Gusto led her to recognize the potential of local food resources. This awareness prompted the formation of the Queniao Youth Entrepreneurial Cooperative, a collective initiative organized by local youths, which disbanded and ultimately evolved into Manyou Farm.

The second section of the chapter elaborates on the Farm's various projects — agroecological revitalization, agritourism, ecological tea farming and branding, Miao heritage crafts, and education and promotion. These projects are rooted in revitalizing the diversified production system of the Queniao community, a system centered on rice farming that requires complex place-based knowledge, involves many material reuse and recycling practices, and is deeply woven into local people's sociocultural and spiritual lives. Agritourism is the Farm's most prominent project, enabling urban visitors to experience rural life through farm work, local food preparation and consumption, tea picking, batik making, and relaxation and play. Xiaoniu and Liping manage and guide each visit, accommodating guests in their renovated family guesthouse, *daiyixiu*, and implementing communal living and dining arrangements.

Besides agritourism, Manyou Farm derives income through the branding and sale of tea, a major regional economic crop. This project is led by Xiaoniu, who employs a variety of traditional and innovative management practices to improve tea and soil quality, processes them into different types of tea, and sell them at the Farm's online store. In addition, Liping leads efforts in reviving traditional Miao crafts, including batik and embroidery, offering both workshops and custom orders to local and non-local customers. These crafts make use of a diverse array of tools and materials, extensive procedural skills, and Liping's knowledge in both traditional Miao symbols and contemporary designs and aesthetics.

Throughout and alongside these projects, Liping and Xiaoniu actively incorporate, facilitate, and seek out occasions and opportunities for learning and sharing. Through in-depth conversations with visitors, an active presence on social media, and participation in programs and events related to rural development and culture conservation, Xiaoniu and Liping have disseminated sustainable practices to diverse audiences, established alliances with sustainability-

driven networks and organizations, and received recognition and accolades from various governmental institutions and non-profit organizations. Lastly, this chapter also outlines the non-project-related activities that Liping's family create time for, including communal social events, childcare, travel and leisure, and migrant work.

In summary, this chapter delineates how the Liping's family integrates Queniao's traditional practices into a contemporary context through Manyou Farm. The Farm's projects provide economic benefits to Liping's family and help connect local traditions with broader sustainability movements and elevate their values within contemporary society, contributing to cultural and environmental conservation and sustainable rural development.

Building on the comprehensive overview provided by this chapter, the next chapter delves into the aspirations and motivations of Liping's family to advance understanding of why they commit to the Farm's projects and manage them in their distinct forms.

CHAPTER 5: MOTIVATIONS AND ASPIRATIONS

As Chapter 4 describes the more factual, tangible elements of Manyou Farm's projects, Chapter 5 builds upon this foundation to present the subjective meanings and aspirations underlying these projects for Liping's family. It focuses on the family members' individual and collective motivations and aspirations that drive them to commit to Manyou Farm's projects and pursue this way of living. Given the relative rarity of local young people returning to the countryside and considering the Farm's unconventionality in being much more than a typical rural farm stay, this chapter focuses not only on understanding why Xiaoniu and Liping are pursuing this way of life but also why they are conducting and managing these projects in their distinct forms. It also attempts to understand the perspectives of Liping's parents, who play instrumental roles in some of the Farm's tasks. However, their direct input, especially that of Liping's mother, is relatively limited, mainly due to a barrier in communication. Thus, the interpretations are primarily based on Liping's words and the researcher's observations. Most of the information in this chapter is obtained from conversations and interviews with the core family members. However, the chapter also draws upon available documents, social media articles, and observations to inform and support the interpretations.

Based on data collection and analysis, this chapter categorizes the family's aspirations into three general themes: autonomy, sustainable rural development, and education. These themes roughly correspond to the family's aspirations for themselves, the local community, and their visitors, respectively. Each theme is divided further into three constitutive dimensions.

5.1 Autonomy

When discussing their projects and overall way of living, Xiaoniu and Liping often highlight an important yet seemingly ambiguous motivation for themselves. As Liping puts it, "In fact, we are just doing what we have been doing day to day… we are not really doing these intentionally for [something or someone] (interview, June 20th, 2022). Similarly, Xiaoniu shares, "A lot of people see my posts [on social media] and tell me how much they admire us [chuckles]. For us, this is our work, but we are also living our lives at the same time" (conversation, June 16th, 2022). Instead of relating to more specific rationales or abstract concepts, which they do articulate in other scenarios, both Xiaoniu and Liping express satisfaction in being able to "live a life for themselves." But what does this mean? Based on my findings, I interpret this as the

ability to live a relatively autonomous life rooted in rural communal traditions of self-sufficiency and care while also maintaining sufficient integration with mainstream material, social, and economic life. Next, I present more information for each dimension — namely self-sufficiency, care, and integration with mainstream society — to support this interpretation.

5.1.1 Preserving Local Self-sufficiency

By 'self-sufficiency', I refer to the ability to use one's knowledge, skills, and identity to support oneself and obtain support on various fronts. As locals, Liping and her parents possess a deep, practical understanding of how to sustain a living using local resources and their labor. Each of them, in their way, has emphasized the necessity of preserving this capability. For instance, Liping and her mother refer to this as "looking after the home" during our interview (June 20th, 2022):

> Lam: Why did your mother go to Shenzhen from 2007-2008?
> Liping: Hmm… at the time, it was to make a living.
> Lam: Do you mean working to earn income?
> Liping: Yes. Also, I was back at the time to look after the home.
> Lam: What do you mean by 'looking after the home'?
> Liping: Well, for example, I can manage the paddies and fields, feed the pigs, and look after the vegetables and peppers…
> Lam: So at least one person needs to be home to look after the fields?
> Liping: Yes, that's right.
> (…)
> Lam: Why did she (Liping's mother) choose to come back home after staying in Shenzhen from 2007-2008?
> Liping [after asking her mother]: To supervise us, hahaha…[laughs]
> Lam: Was it because she missed home?
> Liping: Yes, sort of…and…we can't be away all the time. If we are away all the time, someone still needs to take care of the paddies and fields.

For Liping's father, possessing the land and skills to derive material sustenance without heavily relying on monetary means provides him with a sense of security:

> Lam: But I think the real estate price [in Shenzhen] is way too high.
> Liping's Father (hereafter referred to as LF in quotes): Yes, it is too high, yes.
> Lam: What about around here?
> LF: Well…here in the mountains and streams it's not always good either. [But] we have a house, more or less, that can house people; the water doesn't cost money; burning wood doesn't cost money [laughs]; and electricity costs only 0.45 yuan per kilowatt hour…if you use electricity, then 40 or 50 yuan should be enough per month (…) We have rice to eat,

> water to drink, and fuelwood doesn't cost money; if you want to eat fish, [you can] raise it in the paddy. (Liping's father, conversation, July 30th, 2022).

This belief is mentioned in another conversation between us (July 26th, 2022), where he alludes to the precarious situation of other migrant workers:

> I have some friends who are from the Chaozhou and Shantou area like you. He told me, "Brother, don't say how poor you are…you are not as poor as my family. Now we don't have any paddies or fields left. We can only rely on migrant work to buy rice and vegetables (…) We [have to] do things every day; if we don't, then we don't have rice or vegetables or anything…

The ability to "live off the land" holds particular significance for the older generation, such as Liping's parents, whose limited education places them at a disadvantage in the urban job market. They often take on precarious jobs that lacks stability. For them, farming serves as a reliable fallback to meet basic subsistence needs. During an online event focused on COVID-19's impact on various professions, Xiaoniu (field note, July 31st, 2022) described this mindset as a form of local wisdom, cultivated over generations through enduring and adapting to uncertainty:

> The overall impact of the pandemic on us is relatively small, because we believe that in rural areas, we farmers still have land, and we cultivate a variety of crops. In our village, people possess a variety of skills for basic life necessities…everyone can contribute. If this family can't do something, another family can. There is collaboration among people. This enables us to achieve relative self-sufficiency. (…) Besides, this is also a characteristic of our rural places that are…where agriculture is not as scaled-up and industrialized. I also view this as a wisdom passed down from our father's generation, the older generation.

Additionally, many local customs, such as sourcing materials locally and reusing and recycling them, can be attributed to this practical consideration for self-suffiency. For instance, Liping's father notes that the reason local people limit their use of chemical herbicides and fertilizers — opting instead for traditional methods like applying animal manure and weeding by hand — is partly because they have observed the negative effects of overuse on soil and crop quality in the past (conversation, July 30th, 2022). Another example is that, despite installing flush toilets and septic tanks in many homes, locals often continue using dry toilets because they allow human feces to be recycled into fertilizers (Liping, interview, June 20th, 2022). By taking their child back to Queniao during weekends and holidays to participate in farm work and local food culture, Xiaoniu and Liping are also seeking to pass these skills on to the next generation (Guizhou Learning Platform, 2021).

Regarding work in the village, Liping additionally points out that, despite its demanding nature, working for themselves offers greater flexibility. This, she notes, can be less stressful compared to working for others in the city:

> Liping: Every day is so packed [here]. At dawn, we get up and do this, this and that. When we are back at night, if there are [tasks to do], like right now my mum is going back to feed the chickens and ducks, things like this. Some families also have pigs and sheep. [We] need to do a full day's work, and at night still need to take care of these [animals], then we go to sleep, and the next day we get up…there is no time for us to feel depressed…
> Lam: But…would they find this too demanding? Or perhaps they are just used to it?
> Liping: I think…
> Lam: Or do you think they enjoy the process?
> Liping: Hmm…I don't think it's that they enjoy the process. I think it's because there are all these things that need to be done.
> Lam: So because there are all these tasks, they [feel the] need to do it?
> Liping: Yes, right. And it's not like working in the city…like… for example, [these people] picking tea, if [they] don't feel like going today, then just let [the leaves] get tough, some would do that. But for others, [they feel] they can't [stay idle for several days] and let the leaves get tough, [they would think of] how much they can earn if they go pick for one day. There are different perspectives. Each person has their own thoughts.
> Lam: So [here] a person can rest if he or she decides to, unlike in the city where you are more obligated to go to work?
> Liping: Yes, right. (…) Like perhaps you decide not to feed the chicken today, they will get hungry, [but] then you can go feed them [later]. For things like these, if you don't do them today, you can do them tomorrow — they are things you can take control of for yourself, nobody is forcing you. (…) In fact, I think everyone is really busy [here], but in a way that is not stressful. (…) I can choose not to do this thing; or I can choose to do it.
> Lam: So there is this choice?
> Liping: Yes, there is a choice. (Liping, interview, June 20th, 2022).

In migrant work or office jobs in the city, people often face pressure to adhere to a strict routine or accomplish a certain number of tasks. However, in the village, there is greater flexibility to make various adjustments based on personal circumstances, resulting in less stress. Furthermore, the demanding tasks in village life are made less stressful because their processes and outcome more readily contribute to personal and familial well-being — a concept I encapsulate with the term "care."

5.1.2 Personal and Familial Care

When discussing his decision to return to the countryside, Xiaoniu cites personal well-being as a key factor:

> Actually, I have an innate longing for country life, deeply ingrained within me. Initially, my parents wanted us to leave the countryside and secure [urban] jobs, unlike the older generation. However, after attending junior high school in the city, I realized I wasn't quite adapted to city life. I found that if you don't do a little labor work, your whole body feels sick; once you get out to do labor, break some sweat, your body has more appetite, you can eat more food, your energy is there. So I had wanted to drop out of school from junior high all the way until high school. Unlike others, I always have a deep-seated desire to be a farmer. Overtime, I became more educated in this area, and for work, I stayed in several metropolises like Beijing, Shanghai, Nanjing, Xi'an, Chengdu, and Chongqing, each for at least half a month. Yet, I realized that I still wasn't quite ... adapted to it (urban life). Seeing the skyscrapers towering above, I often felt rather depressed. It's this kind of situation. (Xiaoniu, interview, September 8th, 2022).

While Xiaoniu's concern for his health may be personal, the motive to care for other family members is a common theme among all family members. For Xiaoniu and Liping, basing their work and lives in Queniao enables them to better care for their child and Liping's grandfather, who is over 85 years old and has spent most of his life in the village. They find that not only can they look after the young and the elderly while hosting guests or engaging in farm work, but they also view the village as a healthier and more nourishing environment. This is due to its availability of locally grown food, the presence of family, guests, and community members, and diverse options for exercise and leisure (field note, August 6th, 2022). Liping's father also demonstrates his concern for the family by helping with family affairs, including lending a hand in farm work, participating in important social occasions, and assisting with various difficulties, seing this as part of his responsibility as a family member (Liping's father, conversation, July 28th, 2022). Furthermore, Liping also believes the reason her mother and other mothers in Queniao put extra effort into growing a diversity of crops can be attributed to a form of "motherly love":

> Lam: Your mother is so hardworking…[working until late at night] and getting up early the next morning.
> Liping: Actually, in many aspects, it's because we really want to eat [certain foods], so she (Liping's mother) would [make them]. And it's because we enjoy eating [certain crops] that she would grow them. She doesn't eat many of these things herself. (…) For example, she doesn't eat cucumber raw or that [root crop] which you can peel and eat directly…and things like pepper. She only grew these because we wanted to eat them. She also doesn't drink alcohol, even though she brews it every day. (…) She seldom eats pepper too. But she did all this for us, not necessarily for guests like you guys, but for me, my dad, and my brother, for the family.
> Lam: So she is growing them for the family?

> Liping: Yes. Before [the planting season], we are like "plant less, plant less", but even before the crops are mature, we [become eager and] ask, "Is this ready to harvest? Is that ready to harvest?" [laughter] (…) So actually, a lot of things came from us asking for them. (…) And in Queniao, [regarding] everyone growing vegetables, melons, and fruits…I think it's also a kind of…motherly love. Like, when we were little, or for the kids nowadays, their mothers would say, "we need to grow this [crop] because the other family has grown it; otherwise, when theirs is mature, we won't have any." It's like this. There is this aspect to it. And then every family ends up growing everything. (…) If everybody grows it, I will have what you have as well. (Liping, interview, June 20th, 2022)

As illustrated above, despite taking various forms and expressions, caring for family members is another significant motive for the family, guiding their choices and actions. These practices are also mirrored in the local customs of other community members, emphasizing the shared values of familial care.

5.1.3 Integrating with Mainstream Society

While farm work in the village can help secure basic sustenance against a precarious market economy, offer better flexibility, and provide more opportunities for personal and familial well-being, the family also aspires towards and recognizes the importance of integrating with mainstream socio-cultural and economic life. Liping and her parents have noted significant improvements in the village's living standards compared to the past when there was insufficient rice to eat and little sources of cash income (Liping's mother, interview, June 20th, 2022; Liping's father, interview, July 28th, 2022). Since the 1990s, the opportunity for migrant work substantially increased local people's purchasing power. This has enabled them to procure essential goods from outside, such as rice and oil for basic food security, as well as to renovate their houses and purchase household appliances. Additionally, fees associated with medical care and education are major expenses for local families, further exacerbated by the centralization of schools to the county seat. Both Xiaoniu and Liping view the pursuit of cash income —which drives many locals to seek work away from home — as rooted in the practical need to make a living, rather than a quest for greater wealth. Xiaoniu summarizes the aspirations of most locals as follows:

> They seek to have enough food to eat and clothes to wear, have a place to stay, [support their children to] go to school without issues, afford medical care when sick, and maintain good health. (…) In fact, if people can earn a stable cash income of 30,000–50,000 yuan (6000–1000CAD) per year, they would feel at ease and may not want to leave their hometown." (Xiaoniu, interview, September 8th, 2022).

For Queniao's villagers, the opportunities to sell fish mint, pod pepper, tea, and bamboo shoots to external markets in recent years at relatively high prices have given them economic advantages. For Xiaoniu and Liping, the opportunity to earn additional income through agrotourism, branded tea products, and batik orders via Manyou Farm is undeniably a crucial factor in their decision to stay in the locality. However, economic incentives alone are not enough; many locals also harbor a strong desire to integrate with and experience urban sociocultural life, which makes them eager to leave for the city, at least temporarily. This aspect became apparent to me during a conversation with Liping (June 21st, 2022), where she commented on the curiosity some locals expressed about my extended stay:

> Liping: …And the two people who went tea-picking [with us] and came on a motorbike, they were like, "We saw him last time, and we saw him again this time, is he here every day?" I said, "yes, for almost a month now." And she responded, "What is he doing here everyday?" [laughs] (…) And someone people would say, "we are all tired of staying in this place, why is he staying here for so long?"
> Lam: So they would say this? Is it the younger generations [who are saying this]?
> Liping: No, even people like my mother, if they see [you], they would ask. I say, "He's been here for a while now." [And they would respond] "For this long? We are all tired of staying here, doesn't he feel bored?"
> Lam: [Laughs] [It seems like] a city person would desire the countryside while a rural person would long for the city. For you, as you have been in Beijing for 2 years, even though it was a long time ago…but what do you feel about life in the city versus the countryside? Which do you prefer?
> Liping: Hmm…I think I can get used to either one if I stay long enough.
> Lam: That makes sense.
> Liping: And maybe it's because the first place I went to was Beijing, a metropolis, which broadened my experience. Perhaps because of this, I am not like others who would have various hopeful imaginations [about the city]. So, I've been to Beijing, stayed there for over two years and experienced city life, so when I came back I wasn't that anxious. (…) And in terms of entrepreneurship, when I came back to start these ventures, I got to go to different places to learn (…) including going abroad, so I have been enriched by all these experiences.

Through their previous work experiences in the city, both Xiaoniu and Liping acquired a deeper, informed awareness of their identities, capabilities and needs in relation to the dominant culture. This awareness makes their decisions to return to the countryside more a matter of choice than necessity. Furthermore, they have maintained this integration through Manyou Farm's projects, which enable them to interact with urban visitors, participate in trans-local events, and travel

occasionally. The recognition they receive on these occasions also instills in them a sense of pride about the broader significance of their efforts. As I will explore next, Xiaoniu and Liping also view their ability to stay connected and competent within the dominant culture as a critical element in their aspiration to promote sustainable development for the broader community.

5.2 Sustainable Rural Development

Apart from the shared desire of all core family members to live and inherit an autonomous way of life, another key motive — actively embraced and vocalized by Xiaoniu and Liping — is to propel sustainable rural development for the broader community. This goal is clearly articulated in the Farm's bio, which states, "…a comprehensive-style family farm engaged in the cultivation, branding, and sale of mountain ecological tea; the traditional cultivation, pre-processing and sale of potato, sweet potato, rice and other old crop varieties (…) aiming to promote sustainable rural development and seed conservation through the organization of ecological farming cultural experiences and education." (Manyou Ecology, 2020a) However, given the conceptual ambiguity of the term "sustainable," it is necessary to elucidate its specific meanings for the family. Results from data collection have identified three key dimensions constituting their understanding of sustainability: strengthening cultural awareness and confidence, basing development on local resources, ethics, and ways of living, and developing competence in mainstream economy and culture.

5.2.1 Strengthening Cultural Confidence

Xiaoniu believes that the foundation for fostering more collective actions toward sustainability in rural communities must start with cultivating a sense of confidence in their own culture. Influenced by a common interpretation of "culture" in Chinese, which is often hierarchical and linked with literacy, many rural villagers tend to view themselves as "inferior" and "having no culture" due to their limited formal education or literacy [REF]. Moreover, mainstream society often values and promotes ethnic minority culture primarily for its commodifiable aspects, such as music, dances, festivals, and foods. This trend has led many, including renowned practitioners of various crafts, to feel unconfident in front of educated people and to have a superficial understanding of their own cultural heritage (Xiaoniu, conversation, June 15th, 2022).

Instead, Xiaoniu strives to promote a deeper and more egalitarian understanding of culture. In workshops and sharing events involving rural communities, he often employs the metaphor of the "cultural iceberg" to emphasize the significance of everyday knowledge and wisdom, as well as the attitudes, values and ethics underpinning observable behaviors and practices that define rural culture. Whenever possible, he encourages participants to reflect on and share their own upbringing, aiming to help them recognize and appreciate these elements and their often-understated importance in contemporary society.

For example, Xiaoniu emphasizes the vital connection between traditional agroecological practices and the sustainable cultivation of high-quality tea. He explains:

> "To produce good tea, it's not enough just to apply enzyme solutions. but [it also requires our traditional] farming methods, like wood chip mulching, which you've seen us do earlier, as well as hand weeding and mulching practiced by every family locally. These [practices] are all rooted in local wisdom and everyday life, passed down because they have proven sustainable. I don't know if you have been to many major tea-producing regions, but it (the conditions) can be quite dangerous there with the hardening of their soil and tea fields; many tea crops have died of drought this year. Ours remain in good condition, all thanks to our weed mulches, rather than film mulches (…) So this is another example of our local wisdom, our cultural "genes" at work. Once a habit is formed and adopted by a community in their work and life, it elevates to the cultural level; this is how culture functions in these areas. (Xiaoniu, interview, September 8th, 2022)

Xiaoniu also underscores the profound impact of local farming practices on the taste and nutritional value of food. He says,

> Xiaoniu: "The reason we insist on serving local, seasonal ingredients is to help people (communities) realize their role in ensuring food safety and health. A few years ago, I noticed that people, including the elderly in northern China, began purchasing a lot of unfamiliar drinks once they have some money. And as there are many knock-off products in China, these often led to health issues like diabetes, caused by excessive sugar and additives. (…) This [phenomenon] does exist; people are exchanging healthy foods for little money, only to buy junk food. So, first it's important to show that it's okay to serve guests our healthful, everyday foods. Another aspect is — going back to building confidence — what we are doing [with Queniao's foods] has received a lot of positive feedback, even from locals in Leishan county. Our pod pepper and fish mint are good examples. We initially struggled to sell them, but after years [of promotion], they have become quite famous locally.
> Lam: Do you think this is due to the Farm's work or also the promotion by other villagers?
> Xiaoniu: Local promotion certainly played a role, but [our work] focuses more on strengthening their confidence, or confidence in one's culture. Why are our peppers and fish mint so delicious? Just look at how they are grown. [For example,] after we plant the fish mint, we cover it with rice straws. For pepper, you can't use too many chemical

> fertilizers or herbicides; otherwise, it's no good. You also need [to apply] wood ash. (…) And if you visit the ground floor of people's houses, you'll see how they make compost…these things (practices) are all interconnected. So, it is about making people more confident in their production and crop management methods, which in turn boosts confidence in their own culture. (Xiaoniu, interview, September 8th, 2022)

Through verbal advocacy, leading by example, and prompting reflection, Xiaoniu aims to spark curiosity and a sense of urgency among villagers to rediscover, value, and conserve their own culture. Perhaps more fundamentally, these efforts empower local communities by involving them in events and occasions where they witness recognition and support for rural culture. This support comes not only from their fellow villagers but also from scholars, non-profit organizations, and consumers.

Xiaoniu also utilizes collective activities centred around cultural heritage to boost community confidence. For instance, by organizing a photo exhibition of local crops in Queniao, he aims to "increase the community's recognition of these [crops] and evoke memories associated with them." (conversation, May 29th, 2022) Additionally, one significant reason he encourages Liping to engage in Miao heritage crafts, aside from supporting her personal interests, is his belief in their potential to enhance collectivity and "self-worth" among local women, particularly those from the generation of Liping's mother. Many of these women have experiences in sewing and embroidery from their youth. Recognizing the economic value of these skills and the cultural heritage they represent can bolster their confidence. Furthermore, the collectivity formed through the gathering of these women for such activities facilitates easier mobilization for other community initiatives (interview, September 8th, 2022).

5.2.2 Basing Development on Local Resources, Values, and Ways of Life

Apart from rekindling local people's curiosity and confidence in their culture, Manyou Farm's projects also embody the family's core principle: development should be based on local resources, ethics, and ways of living. This commitment is underpinned by complex rationales, including cultural heritage conservation, reproducibility, quality, ecological sustainability, and the desire to preserve autonomy. For example, during the guesthouse's initial and subsequent renovations, the family prioritized collaborating with skilled community members over external professionals and work crews for design and construction. This approach not only generates local employment opportunities but also supports the revitalization of local cultural heritage through

the use of traditional craftsmanship. This is particularly evident in the creation of traditional and improvised wooden structures using traditional carpentry skills.

Moreover, the family is mindful of being economical in their capital investment. Xiaoniu explains, “While we have implemented major renovations in several areas of our guesthouse, [we are conscious that] if others see them and think ‘oh you need to invest that much’, they might be deterred. […] So, it’s about limiting investment, including labor, to enhance the project’s reproducibility and scalability. I always believe our [project] is replicable; many can model themselves after it.” (interview, September 8th, 2022) Xiaoniu notes that the renovation process has attracted considerable attention and inquiries from community members, inspiring other house renovations projects in Queniao.

Furthermore, the room layout of the guesthouse reflects the family’s emphasis on prioritizing their own needs above the preferences of their visitors. Xiaoniu explains,

> The reason I did not rebuild the second-floor bedrooms next to the public area is because that’s where our family lives. Many people have suggested to Liping to convert them into guest rooms or exhibition rooms, but I firmly opposed it. Why have we positioned grandpa’s bedroom at the edge? To ensure he gets the first sunlight and abundant exposure throughout the day. An open window allows for full ventilation. The health of the elderly is vital to the family’s well-being; any news of illness would be concerning. (…) For most visitors, adapting to unfamiliar norms is feasible; and (besides,) local people do have the resources [to accommodate guests]. That’s the reasoning behind our decisions. (conversation, June 16th, 2022)

The challenge to maintain a balance between upholding local customs, values, and autonomy on the one hand, and catering to the desires of visitors and other external actors on the other, is a recurrent theme in many situations. Liping provides several examples of how they navigate these scenarios, particularly in their agrotourism activities. She explains,

> Liping: “In some places, people would specifically create opportunities for visitors to catch fish in the paddies [after transplantation], even though we no longer do so at this time of the year. This results in people trampling over [and damaging] the rice stalks. We don’t like to do this [in this way] either.
> Lam: Right, in that case, the activity becomes entirely commercialized; it no longer aligns with your actual living needs.
> Liping: Exactly. And for paddies that don’t have fish, [some people] would hurry to buy fish from the county seat and release them into the paddy just before the visitors arrive. These newly released fish are easy to catch, so visitors, especially kids, can catch a big one immediately and feel very happy.' (interview, June 20th, 2022)

Xiaoniu underscored a deeper ethical concern in such situation, reflecting on the cultural values embedded within local traditions. He explained, "For local elders, wasting food is believed to bring about severe consequences, like being struck by thunder. This belief embodies a form of respect or reverence; it's also an integral part of [local] culture. When this sense of respect or reverence is lost, it leads to disorder [and disregard for our traditions]." (interview, September 8th, 2022).

Liping shared another instance demonstrating the challenge of balancing ecological sustainability, quality, and market demand in the family management of local crops and harvested edibles for sale:

> Liping: "When we started promoting these [local crops], many people showed interest and wanted large quantities, but we don't have enough. In our village, we don't really grow [crops] on a large scale; the amount we grow is only based on our household needs, so we usually don't have excess quantities. People suggested we should grow more, but we don't do that either, because doing so compromises the quality. [Additionally,] In Queniao, people don't grow large scale because we are in a nature reserve and are not permitted to clear land for cultivation. (…)
>
> At one point, some buyers were interested in lilium powder in large quantities, but we had to decline the order. We could supply them over several years, but they wanted a large amount immediately. Lilium are foraged plants and you cannot harvest them all just for one single order. (conversation, May 29th, 2022)

Furthermore, the family's dedication to preserving autonomy is evident in their approach to hosting guests and interacting with the local government. Xiaoniu and Liping opt for guests to communicate in advance rather than relying on immediate bookings via public platforms. This strategy allows them more control over guest reception, accommodating their limited staffing and engagement in other projects. Liping explains,

> We are not fixated on hosting a specific number of guests (…) If we have the time, we can welcome guests; but if we are busy, we can decline, recommend you (alternatives), or suggest a more suitable time for their visit. (…) Sometimes, people arrive at our house [unannounced], which can be inconvenient for us." (interview, June 20th, 2022)

Similarly, despite having the necessary credentials, Xiaoniu and Liping have not actively sought financial or other forms of support from the local government, such as by participating in its programs. They believe that accepting such support could lead to obligations, like accommodating frequent visits from officials and other requests that may disrupt their routines or pose inconveniences (Liping, interview, June 20th, 2022).

Apart from their own autonomy, the family is also cautious about Queniao's development trajectory being overly dominated by external actors. Liping cites the adjacent village of Getou as an example. Chosen as a key site for poverty-alleviation efforts, Getou has undergone substantial infrastructural investment and developmental planning by the state to boost rural tourism. Many homes have been leased to external investors and tourism operators, who transformed them into inns, B&Bs, and restaurants. Meanwhile, villagers have relocated to the county seat or elsewhere for most of the year. The government has also developed various amenities and attractions in Getou, including a prefecture-level center for intangible cultural heritage, a library, and an exhibition space for local fauna and medical plants.

Despite these transformations, Liping questions the variety of experiences available to visitors, especially given that external operators do not own the local paddies and fields necessary for more immersive activities. Moreover, visitor numbers are limited outside the summer holiday, leaving Getou's streets and attractions often empty and lacking liveliness. Liping is also concerned about the impact of a growing number of visitors on local community's privacy and autonomy: in Queniao, there has been a noticeable increase in tourists arriving without notice, taking photos or videos of villagers without consent, and demanding food or accommodation abruptly and disrespectfully (field note, June 11st, 2022). Such behaviors not only intrude upon the daily lives of the community but also challenge the traditional norms of respect and hospitality that are integral to their culture. To address this, the family takes an active role in personally guiding visitors and educating them about local customs. Through these efforts, they aim to cultivate greater respect and consideration among urban visitors towards rural communities and their traditions. This endeavor to balance tourism with cultural integrity and community respect is further explored in Section 5.3.

5.2.3 Developing Competence in Mainstream Economy and Culture

The examples above illustrate the family's multifaceted motives for aspiring to an economic development model rooted in local resources, ethics, and ways of living. However, Xiaoniu and Liping also recognize the need for such development to integrate effectively with mainstream socio-cultural and economic systems to ensure economic viability and broader impact. This understanding is particularly profound for Xiaoniu, whose experience with numerous non-profit projects focused on rural culture conservation has highlighted the

limitations of relying solely on charity donations, corporate sponsorships, and government grants. He observes that these funding sources can be unstable and their objectives sometimes idealistic, failing to meet the practical economic needs of local communities (interview, September 8th, 2022). This realization inspired him to develop Manyou Farm's projects, through which he seeks to demonstrate how cultural and ecological conservation can be advanced through business practices. Xiaoniu recounts,

> As I got in touch with these things (projects) through work, I realized that first they are too idealistic, and I have been idealistic myself…but [I realized they] need to be more realistic and practical. (…) So it is a matter of how to turn theory and ideals to practice…in reality, the first neccesity is that I need to be able to sustain myself, including my family, and to demonstrate that what you are doing is economically viable — it doesn't have to be highly profitable, but there should be some economic benefits (…) If you are doing and promoting these things but you can't even live a decent life for yourself, who will believe in you or follow your lead? This has always been a practical consideration throughout history." (interview, September 8th, 2022)

Not only should economic viability be given greater consideration, but many practices that provide less visible social benefits should also be considered as contributing to "sustainability", as Xiaoniu suggests an expanded understanding of this term,

> "During my first three years working in the non-profit, charitable sector, while I had been critical of things like commercial capital, I also grappled with the idea of sustainability (…) There are some things (aspects) that can be integrated. I've been observing many vendors and entrepreneurs conducting their businesses — while they aim to maximize profits, through this process many of them also pay attention to sustainability. (…) [For instance,] I've observed several rice noodle shops in Leishan that are doing well in these aspects. (…) Even though they are doing business, from the perspective of social welfare, they will also sometimes set up sort of like a platform through which many people come to communicate, exchange information, and things like this. Isn't this a kind of charity? They are not donating money directly, but they are doing this (charity). If you do not have the right "vibe", so to speak, why would anyone choose to eat here? (…) Even if you (they) don't have the amenities of high-end restaurants, people are still drawn to you. Why? So, it is because they have merged [business and with a charitable ethos] well. Of course, they are talented in that area which I am not; I enjoy farming instead, so I focus on [projects] in this domain. (interview, September 8th, 2022)

Along with economic viability, Xiaoniu and Liping believe that to foster more collective action, local communities also need to build familiarity and competence within mainstream cultural and intellectual spheres. This involves acquiring necessary knowledge, skills, credentials, and qualifications. In the workshops he leads, and his mentoring work with rural youths, Xiaoniu

frequently advises against hastily abandoning mainstream education and employment in favor of alternative paths. He explains, "You need to have a foot in the door first; then you can pursue whatever you like. Otherwise, if you lack this foundation, why would people want to listen to you?" (conversation, August 8th, 2022). In essence, people are more inclined to respect and support unconventional values and causes when one demonstrates proficiency in widely accepted domains of knowledge or meet certain prevailing standards. This philosophy is evident in Xiaoniu and Liping's own actions, as they actively pursue various learning and training opportunities, apply for awards, and communicate their achievements at the Farm and through social media. They believe these efforts will help gain recognition and support for the Farm's projects from a broader spectrum of society.

Finally, due to the significant challenges involved in pursuing a form of rural development that attends to cultural inheritance, autonomy, and ecological sustainability, Xiaoniu believes it is crucial to harbor ambition while exercising patience in one's endeavors. During a workshop, he advised a group of villagers that while it is important to be ambitious and confident, and to act on even the smallest opportunities, they should not rush to expand too quickly; doing so can lead to a swift and painful fall, making it hard to recover." (field note, June 24th, 2022). By advocating this approach, he aims to minimize the risk of failure and ensure that grassroots efforts remain true to their original intentions as they progress. Discussing the challenges of facilitating collective action in Queniao, Xiaoniu reflects,

> "The process is undoubtly [going to be challenging] unless you are backed by strong capital or have a substantial market. Based on our current, individual efforts…it's difficult. This is our reality. But it is essential to have a vision, ambition, or plan; otherwise, you will fall into another extreme. That's my personal understanding. I think [you] would fall into a profit-first mentality where you only care about your own success — to maximize your profit and have no concern for your surroundings. (interview, September 8th, 2022)

To tackle these challenges, Xiaoniu and Liping adopt and advocate for a key strategy: seeking collaboration and assistance from like-minded individuals who share similar values. Especially for burgeoning grassroots initiatives, they believe the first step is to foster connections among community practitioners themselves and between these practitioners and other actor-groups who are already committed to sustainability values and principles. These connections enable local efforts to gain the necessary support without overextending their often-limited time and resources. Since establishing Manyou Farm, Xiaoniu and Liping have continuously relied on and

benefited from such diverse networks. This includes exchanging information, resources, and experiences with other community practitioners, accessing learning and marketing opportunities provided by various organizations, receiving guidance and recognition from scholars and professionals, and forming partnerships with these actors (field note, Jun 17th, 2022). By leading and participating in workshops and experience-sharing events, they also aim to help support local initiatives in QMDAP and beyond in a similar manner. In their view, collective actions toward sustainable rural development need not solely originate within individual communities, even though shared communal traditions are a strong foundation for mobilization. Instead, they believe such efforts can also flourish from, or perhaps even benefit more from, collaborations and exchanges across geographical and occupational boundaries among people who hold shared values.

5.3 Education

In addition to empowering local communities, Xiaoniu and Liping recognize the importance of fostering learning and reflection among their visitors, consumers and the broader society. This approach is vital to effectively drive the kind of autonomous and sustainable development they envision. Through educational initiatives, the family aims to gather support and encourage active participation from the broader society in the conservation of rural culture and the adoption of sustainable practices. Simulutaneously, they seek to cultivate a more respectful and reciprocal relationship between urban and rural communities. To achieve these goals, their efforts are channeled into three interconnected areas: first, they work to make visible the contribution of rural cultural practices to prominent social values, alongside highlighting the challenges these practices current face; second, they offer immersive and entertaining rural experiences to urban visitors, aiming to spark interests in rural culture and related issues; and third, they design their hosting arrangements in ways that challenge the conventional conceptualizations of tourism and charity.

5.3.1 Making Visible the Broader Significance of Rural Cultural Practices

First and foremost, in the same way that they strive to increase local communities' confidence, Xiaoniu and Liping are dedicated to elevating awareness among external actors about the importance of Queniao's biocultural heritage. They actively challenge the notion of

"rural backwardness" and draw connections between local practices and prominent, influential contemporary values, such as biodiversity conservation, sustainability, and health. These values are encapsulated in a social media post by Xiaoniu (Manyou Ecology, 2020d) for National Biodiversity Day that is titled "Biodiversity: We Have Always Been Safeguarding It." The post, particularly emphasizing agricultural practices, reads,

> On this special day,
> Xiaoniu feels moved to share his thoughts while working in the field alongside the elderly and the child.
> It might seem surprising,
> Even though our work today is so "down-to-earth", we are thinking a bit ambitiously —
> To the level of the United Nations, to the Earth.
> But this is, in fact, what we at Manyou Farm,
> Have been contemplating, persisting in, and striving for.
>
> This year marks the fifth year of Xiaoniu's endeavor to revitalize local crops.
> Among ordinary people who are voluntarily undertaking actions to honor the Convention on Biological Diversity,
> Certainly we belong in them;
> But many elders in Queniao are also still continuing their traditional, non-harmful, sustainable, and circular form of agricultre.
>
> We learn traditional cultivation methods from the grandparents:
> Cutting down weeds rather than eradicating them with herbicides;
> Avoiding pesticides that [indiscriminately] kill all insects, both good and bad;
> And steering clear of pesticides harmful to our bodies.
> We hope our fields would grow not only the foods humans need,
> But also to keep alive the sound of frogs;
> Paddies, fields, birds, creatures, flowers, and trees — they all form part of our world!
>
> And for these things,
> We owe our respect to the "old-fashioned" grandmas and grandpas!
> They continue to use those "old-fashioned", "traditional", "unscientific", and "backwards" methods to do farmwork and production,
> Those that don't fit the principles of so-called "modern agriculture"
> And these methods are now only known to the older generation, the grandpas and grandmas.
> Now in his 80s, grandpa is still doing farmwork and is able to do it;
> They continue to keep their safety and health in their own hands.

Here, Xiaoniu uses examples to highlight how Queniao's traditional weeding and fertilization practices differ from industrial farming. Unlike the latter, these methods support co-existence with local flora and fauna, while minimizing contaminants to crops and soil. Another linkage he

often emphasizes is the role of local seed-saving practices in conserving agrobiodiversity (personal communication, July 26th, 2022). While Xiaoniu is more proficient at articulating grand narratives, Liping' strength lies in detailing these concepts through conversation. An exchange with Liping (July 29th, 2022) about pig feed production exemplifies this:

> Lam: It is beneficial to have a pig, isn't it? You can feed it with food scraps, right?
> Liping: Yes, you can feed these to the pig. You put them all in the large pot and boil them. When they are boiling, you cut up [and add in] more vegetables.
> Lam: So you don't throw out the food scraps; they get transformed into pig feed.
> Liping: In fact, in the past, we fed excess crops that we couldn't eat to the pigs. Many crops are grown specifically for them.
> Lam: Grown just for the pigs?
> Liping: Yes, everything is recycled and reused (…) Our leftover food can be fed to the pig, and the pig's waste becomes fertilizers for our fields. (…) And it's the same with human. If you use flush toilets, you can't reuse human waste. And if you don't have [the facilities] to process [sewage] from the flush toilet, it causes pollution. That's why every family here still uses traditional toilets. They keep their waste to fertilize the fields.

Beyond agriculure and farm work, this local knowledge — termed as "rural natural knowledge and living wisdom" by Xiaoniu — extends to other dimensions as well. These include, but are not limited to harvesting and using medicinal plants for healing, producing wine yeast and rice wine, and making colored rice with medicinal dye plants to aid digestion. (Xiaoniu, personal communication, August 7th, 2022). In terms of local food culture, the family primarily emphasizes health benefits. Given the widespread perception among urban Chinese populations that *tushicai* (土食材, literally "earthy food ingredients", referring to food ingredients that are either harvested from natural environments or produced using non-industrial, traditional methods) are more nutritious and flavourful, establishing this connection is relatively straightforward. By comparison, Xiaoniu dedicates more effort to prioritize and highlight health and quality over other values in his tea production and marketing. This approach diverges from dominant narratives in China's tea industry, which focus on *chawenhua* (茶文化, or "tea culture"), often valorizing aspects such as production region, brand, leaf appearance, cultivar, age, processing techniques, taste, and various aesthetic and ceremonial practices surrounding tea consumption. Instead of adhering to these "upmarket" values, Xiaoniu aims to reestablish tea as an everyday health beverage accessible to the general public. This intent aligns with the Chinese folk saying "firewood, rice, oil, salt, sauce, vinegar, and tea", referring to the seven daily neccesities of ordinary people. (Xiaoniu, interview, September 8th, 2022). As he explains,

> "I don't want to overemphasize aspects like tea culture or tea-ism, and there's a reason for that. Instead of making tea a scarce commodity, I want it to be accessible so that everyone can enjoy good quality [tea]. Also, I feel [certain practices have] distanced [tea] from its role in everyday life. Taking my grandpa, for example, he drinks a lot of tea, sometimes just with cooked rice [as a meal], yet he enjoys good health. But your tea has to be good: it should be free from excessive pesticide residue. We should focus on quality rather than labelling something as "high-end'. The food we consume should be of good quality, or at the very least, clean." (conversation, June 11st, 2022)

Apart from cultivating his tea ecologically, Xiaoniu also prioritizes nipping off more leaves to maximize nutrition in place of leaf apperance; using plain packaging materials and tea-drinking implements; pricing his tea reasonably; and shifting the focus from *chawenhua* to nutritional value and ecological benefits in conversations, demonstrations, and social media promotion (conversation, June 15th, 2022). Similarly, in their batik project, the family also emphasizes the use of natural fibers, dyes, and wax, adhering to traditional practices. Xiaoniu explains,

> The materials we use are not only environmentally friendly but also beneficial for human health. (…) Our dyes work best with natural fabrics like cotton, linen, or silk, which are gentle on the skin. The dye itself comes from indigo plants, which are medicinal. [We] also use beeswax, which is collected and reused." (interview, September 8th, 2022)

According to Liping, some batik producers and tourism operators opt for inorganic, chemical-based wax and dyes to improve efficiency and reduce costs. However, these methods do not offer the same health and ecological advantages (conversation, July 30th, 2022).

In his more structured presentations, Xiaoniu focuses on the threats to the continuation of these valuable customs. He discusses the impact of working-age adults leaving for migrant work, the influx of industrial goods and products, the relocation of schools to towns and county seats, and the influences of a profit-centered market economy. For audiences more informed and interested in rural culture and issues, Xiaoniu and Liping delve deeper, elaborating on the meanings and functions of local cultural practices; the challenges faced by local people communities, and various aspects of rural culture and development.

5.3.2 Sparking Interests and Reflection Through Authentic and Enjoyable Experiences

While the family strives to connect local practices with broader values, narratives, and concepts, they also recognize the importance of complementing conceptual education with authentic, immersive, and enjoyable rural experiences for their visitors. These experiential

activities serve two critical purposes: firstly, by directly engaging people with Queniao's landscape and local lifeways — including observing its natural and built structures, tasting local foods, smelling the soil, participating in tea picking and processing, and immersing in the everyday lives of the community — the family can concretely demonstrate the discussed values, concepts and narratives. For example, Xiaoniu notes that some of the Farm's tea customers, longtime tea enthusiasts who are knowledgeable yet unfamiliar with the cultivation and processing of tea, have gained a new appreciation for its health and environmental aspects after experiencing the vibrant ecological environment of Queniao and feeling the soil from the Farm's tea fields (conversation, June 15th, 2022).

Another instance of the family's commitment is their adherence to local food traditions rather than conforming to typical tourist dining preferences. Rather than offering a menu, visitors are served with whatever foods are available and in season — the same foods found in the homes of other community members. By controlling the selection, preparation and portioning of food, Xiaoniu aims to encourage visitors to reflect on reducing the environmental impact and wastage in food consumption (Xiaoniu, conversation, July 30th, 2022). Xiaoniu explains:

> Eating locally and with the seasons are not supposed to be dogmas; rather, they are concepts that make people aware of how to align with nature's rhythms and minimize the environmental impact of their food consumption. (…) We don't have professional chefs here; all our food processing and cooking are done by locals using local ingredients. This approach not only aids in the inheritance of living wisdom but also allows us to sell a certain amount of local ecological crops like pepper, potato and sweet potato for our community each year. We believe this is a sustainable practice and serves as an important form of sustainable food education. (Xiaoniu, personal communication, August 7th, 2022)

Despite the lack of textbooks, classroom-style lectures, and often prior expectations from the visitors themselves, Xiaoniu and Liping believe the learning and reflection that take place for their visitors as they guide them to make sense of and engage with Queniao's novel, rural biocultural landscape should also be considered as a form of education. Xiaoniu, in particular, views their agrotourism experiences as a vital component of nature education. He critiques the current nature education pedagogy for often presenting a disconnected understanding of natural and human systems. In contrast, he believes that not only does local farming require an intricate understanding of "water, soil, sunlight, temperature and multiple other elements", but these practices also play an important role in safeguarding biodiversity (Xiaoniu, personal communication, August 8th, 2022). He articulates, "agriculture itself is [a form of] nature

education, and [local] biodiversity is deeply intertwined with our local culture. That's how I see it." (conversation, July 26th, 2022)

Furthermore, through creating enjoyable and relaxing experiences for visitors, the family can engage a broader audience while deriving the economic support necessary to preserve valuable traditions. Although they emphasize learning, their agrotourism activities are primarily marketed as opportunities for fun, relaxation, enjoying countryside foods, and experiencing a change of scenery from city life (Manyou Ecology, 2020a). Catering to these common desires that most urban tourists are readily willing to pay for allows Xiaoniu and Liping to making a living in the countryside while pursuing other projects with less direct monetary returns, such as revitalizing local crops. (Xiaoniu, conversation, July 26th, 2022). Xiaoniu also believes that the quality of local ingredients, Queniao's amicable atmosphere, and their guidance can inspire interest in people with no relevant background, leading them to learn about, participate in, and support the Farm's activities and values. He shared an example during our interview (September 8th, 2022),

> By this year, we are welcoming [people] not just from our own little circle, but also from other spheres including pure business sectors. We've reached those unfamiliar with our background. But their transformations after arriving is noticeable. (…) For instance, a couple who were introduced to the Farm stayed for over five days. (…) [While they were still on the way here, I] had a sense that they might want to cancel the trip. [However,] after they arrived and asked to have meal — which we prepared and they ate — from there they began to start chatting [with us] and did not want to leave, for real. [They even] went to the tea fields. (…) We realized people will have no problem accepting these things if you treat them in such a manner. (…) They will know these things are good, not based on my word; they tasted the foods themselves. (…) After they posted [their experiences] on social media, many people from their circle asked where they were and expressed interest in visiting as well. (…) But their circle is business people who are unfamiliar with sustainability and charitable work. Since then, I've realized that the general public can [recognize the value in] these aspects from our everyday life. There is just a lack of environment, or a lack of platforms for such exchanges. (…) This is why it is my plan to expand [our audience] beyond my usual circle (…) If societal change is to occur, it must involve the majority, not [just] the minority. The minority's role is to lead. So [while] I am making an effort in these aspects, this [effort] is also inseparable from my family, from our [local environment and culture]. The atmosphere of the village is [also] friendly overall.

In this passage, Xiaoniu reveals both his ambition and confidence in the Farm's ability to engage broader sectors of society. This ambition is a testament to what he believes makes the Farm distinctive and valuable. The family does not just implement sustainability concepts and rural

culture conservation in practice; they have also created a conducive environment that attracts people who may not be as familiar with these ideas. By providing an experience that allows visitors to relax, learn, and engage in conversations while immersing themselves in local food culture, they facilitate a spontaneous and convivial context for establishing or strengthening these connections. This method of integrating visitors into local food culture and everyday life is the family's primary approach to integrate Queniao's cultural heritage into contemporary society. It also represents how they envision the re-discovery and appreciation of rural culture's value. (Manyou Ecology, 2021).

5.3.3 Challenging Conventional Conceptualizations of Tourism and Charitable Work

Finally, Xiaoniu believes that the Farm's approach of intertwining education with tourism is valuable, not only for spreading sustainability and rural culture conservation ideas, but also for fostering a shift in mainstream understanding of tourism and charitable work. For tourism, in particular, he envisions promoting a more "responsible" form, encouraging travelers to cultivate deeper, mutually beneficial relationships with host communities and destinations. Xiaoniu explains,

> We've become used to these things (forms of tourism) that center around consumption and enjoyment based on others' services, which is a western [concept]. (…) However, my understanding of tourism — to use this widely accepted term — is that it's a form of learning. (…) [And] It's a two-way process. (…) If you can slow down — not rush but become calm — and then feel the tranquility of nature and other aspects [of your surroundings] …this atmosphere can be deeply rewarding. (…) In fact, my attitude [towards hosting is that] if there are things I don't understand or know, I will listen attentively and respond to people, (…) regardless of their age (…) People sense this [attentiveness] and are more inclined to engage in conversations with you, and this positive interaction is a form of learning for them. (…) Also, they would feel these are memorable experiences and, if they are planning for future travels, would likely visit you again or recommend you to friends. It's a two-way thing (relationship). So, on another level, we have been saying that we are doing responsible tourism." (interview, September 8th, 2022)

Apart from engaging in sincere conversations with visitors, the family's adherence to local food and accommodation customs is integral to their practices of responsible tourism as operators. This is reflected in their belief that their approach to hosting truly embodies the spirit of *minsu* (民宿, the Chinese term for B&B or guesthouse, literally meaning "people's dwelling"). Introduced to China in recent decades, the term *minsu* is now commonly used to describe various

types of accommodations, ranging from family-run homestays to large, hotel-like facilities staffed by professionals. Xiaoniu, however, has a distinctive perspective on what *minsu* truly means,

> "About doing *minsu*, specifically why we are doing it in this way... because Liping and my understanding is that there needs to be a host in a *minsu*. Simply providing a place to stay is not a *minsu* in my view. Guests are supposed to stay with the host, participate in eating and working alongside them to some extent, even though you (the host) will be working more [than usual] when the guests are here. Under this arrangement, you (the guests) are here to learn and to relax at the same time, and [you] pay for it. This is what we mean." (Xiaoniu, interview, September 8th, 2022)

The quotes above reveal the family's perspective that mainstream practices in the domestic travel industry are overly focused on catering to travelers' preferences and lacking in-depth interaction between travelers and host communities. They believe that such arrangements not only prevent tourists from gaining truly memorable experiences but also fail to showcase local communities' narratives, strengths, and contributions. This prevailing view, rooted in the hierarchical perception of rural areas as impoverished and backward, necessitates external development and assistance. This mindset is prevalent not only in tourism but also in the charitable work sector, or *gongyi* (公益, literally "public welfare"). In China, a common *gongyi* activity involves taking people to remote rural regions to learn about the lives of impoverished communities and provide various forms of aid. While Xiaoniu recognizes the good intentions and importance of these aids, he is critical about their overly simplistic, one-dimensional approach. He explains,

> People often think that *gongyi* means visiting schools and witnessing the conditions in harsh places. I say we won't do it like that. I say if you really want to do this, here we focus on biodiversity and local seeds. (…) The same goes for trips to Xijiang (a famous tourism destination in QMDAP): people go there with me to learn about travel and sustainable development, not just to *daka* ("打卡", or "photo-checking", here referring to travel mainly for photo opportunities). (…) Many places can't offer [what we do] because all my team members have backgrounds in *gongyi* and rural development, and they have developed their own critical view [of these sectors]. It's not just about donating goods and educational funds." (Xiaoniu, conversation, June 12nd, 2022)

Xiaoniu views the prevalent form of charity as reinforcing urban communities' patronizing attitudes towards rural areas, which undermines rural communities' confidence in their own culture. In contrast, the educational camps that Xiaoniu and Liping co-organize in Queniao and other villages embody a more balanced approach to *gongyi*. They focus on experiencing, recognizing, and learning from the wisdom, merits, and strengths of rural culture. In this way,

they aim to establish a more equal and reciprocal relationship between urban and rural communities, where both sides acknowledge and benefit from each other's unique strengths. Ultimately, this approach aligns with the family's aspiration to encourage collaborations among people with diverse backgrounds and expertise. They aim to create better living environments for future generations by integrating contemporary knowledge with traditional rural wisdom. This vision is encapsulated in the rest of the social media post (Manyou Ecology, 2020d) quoted at the beginning of this section:

> As a small family, a window,
> Manyou Farm comes together with our Slow Friends from different places,
> To collect heirloom seeds and plant them;
> To make eco-friendly enzymes to fertilize crops; to cultivate and spread indigenous microorganisms to enhace the soil's trasformative capacity;
> To continue using traditional agricultural methods;
> To revitalize the production of ecological tea, millet, and other products;
> To get close to nature with children and the elderly;
> To care about food and vegetables.
> (…)
>
> And for the "adorable" Slow Friends,
> Who have "culture" and knowledge, are educated and have seen the world;
> A bit fair-skinned;
> Who wear sun hats when working; are expressive; and like to talk "science",
> But are willing and able to go to the fields;
> To pick up the fruit scraps and trash;
> To be modest enough to learn the "old ways";
> And dare to cook up meals with plain ingredients to cater to friends;
> To learn from older generation and ask them to share the old ways to their kids, in local dialects,
> And are willing to let their fair-skinned and chubby kids play in the dirt despite nagging from the elders.
>
> To be honest,
> We are all hoping that our children and grandchildren, while becoming educated in modern scientific knowledge,
> Could inherit and pass down valuable traditional rural wisdom,
> To create a better enironment for them to grow up and live.
> Thus, from this perspective,
> While we are certainly doing these for biodiversity, for the Earth,
> We are also doing these for ourselves,
> As we continue our work,
> Hope there will be more of you to connect and participate.

5.4 Chapter Summary

Chapter 5 delves into the deeper, personal motivations and aspirations of Liping's family that inspire their commitment to Manyou Farm's initiatives. It explores Xiaoniu and Liping's decision to return to the countryside, a rare choice among local youth, and examines why they pursue their way of life and manage these projects in their distinctive forms. The family's aspirations are categorized into three key themes: autonomy, sustainable rural development, and education.

The section on autonomy illuminates the family's desire to live an autonomous life that combines traditional rural self-sufficiency with selective integration into contemporary material, economic, and social life. For Liping's parents, preserving the skills and relations to derive material sustenance directly from the local landscape and community offers them a sense of security against the uncertainties of the market economy. For Xiaoniu and Liping, farmwork and rural life not only offer greater flexibility compared to urban employment, but also provide a more conducive and nourishing environment for achieving personal well-being as well as performing and receiving family care. However, the family also values monetary income and integration with mainstream culture to improve material living standards and expand their life choices and perspectives, which Manyou Farm's projects enable them to achieve.

The second section focuses on how the family envisions and works to promote sustainable development among rural communities. For Xiaoniu, a foremost issue is the need to establish a deeper and more egalitarian understanding of culture, where locals can recognize the underappreciated aspects of their customs and everyday practices. Through organizing workshops and cultural events, he aims to spark people's curiosity, sense of urgency, and confidence to rediscover, conserve, and celebrate their culture. Meanwhile, Manyou Farm's design and practices, such as employing local craftsmen, limiting the scale of investment and production, and prioritizing local needs and values, reflect the family's principle of basing development on local resources, ethics, and ways of living. Additionally, recognizing the limits of donations and grants, the importance of mainstream skills and credentials, and the challenges of maintaining conservation projects, Xiaoniu also advocates integrating business practices into conservation projects and adopting a patient yet ambitious approach to ensure economic viability and broader impact.

The final section discusses Manyou Farm's educational goals to engage visitors and the wider society in rural culture conservation and the adoption of sustainable practices. Through social media, presentations, and informal discussions, Xiaoniu and Liping advocate for traditional farming, highlighting its ecological benefits and contributions to health and food quality in contrast to industrial, high-input methods that are overly focused on efficiency. The family also prioritizes health and accessibility over exclusive, "upmarket" values, which they demonstrate in their production, advertising, and pricing practices. By combining conceptual education with immersive agritourism activities, the family seeks to demonstrate sustainability concepts and practices in practice and promote reflection from individuals across diverse backgrounds while generating income to support their other initiatives. Additionally, through Manyou Farm's approach, Xiaoniu aims to foster shifts in mainstream perspectives of tourism and *gongyi* (charitable work) from one-sided consumption and patronization towards mutual learning and collaboration.

While this chapter identified the individual and collective motivations of Liping's family, the next chapter shifts focus to the perspectives of the Farm's supporters to gain a fuller understanding of the value regime underlying the Farm's projects.

CHAPTER 6: VALUE REGIMES

This chapter shifts focus from the core family's aspirations to explore the perspectives of Manyou Farm's supporters, including visitors, consumers, and collaborators. It delves into the value regimes that attract these supporters to the Farm's various projects and includes their suggestions for enhancing these initiatives. The insights are gathered primarily from interviews with four of the Farm's supporters and supplemented by participant observation and document review. The material has been analyzed and categorized into six themes: leisure, human warmth, sustainability, authenticity, naturalness, and accessibility.

6.1 Leisure

One of the most significant attractions for guests at Manyou Farm is the relaxing atmosphere of Queniao's rural landscape. Many guests, accustomed to the hustle and bustle of city life, have shared on social media or in personal accounts their feelings of peace and satisfaction in Queniao's secluded and picturesque environment and its leisurely pace of living (field note, August 5th, 2022; Yitongxing Social Work Center, 2021). Guests often appreciate the village's expansive views of the surrounding hills, its abundant streams and lush greenery, the refreshing air and cool, misty climate, and the vibrant sights, smells, and sounds typical of rural villages. These features provide a welcome change of scenery for urban office workers, offering opportunities to de-stress and recharge through activities such as walking, scenery appreciation, tea drinking, or simply *fadai* (发呆, meaning "zoning out") at the guesthouse (Manyou Ecology, 2020c). Xiaoniu describes this experience as *manshenghuo* (慢生活, or "slow life"), defining as a lifestyle that transcends the typical "nine-to-five" routine" and "mobile phones, supermarkets, offices, and traffic." It is a life where "the heart and body can slow down and be restored to a healthier state." (Manyou Ecology, 2020a)

In addition to providing relaxation for urban visitors, Queniao's environment fosters a sense of play and exploration, particularly in children. The village's rich natural diversity and accessibility spark children's innate curiosity, leading them to indulge in unstructured play and exploration, from which they derive immense pleasure (field note, August 5th, 2022). Wu, a professor and co-director of a Beijing-based non-profit organization that runs camps focused on experiential learning, parent-child education, and charity, has collaborated with Xiaoniu and Liping since 2017. They have jointly organized five summer camps in Queniao and nearby

villages as of August 2022. Wu shared several examples to illustrate why children's enjoyable experiences are a crucial factor behind her and other parents' decisions to return each year:

> When we first visited, my son was 5. (…) He eagerly asks every year, "Can we go to Guizhou again this summer, mom? When does this year's camp start?" And he would say to his friends, [saying] "Guizhou is so fun; I want to go to Guizhou, to uncle Xiaoniu's home. I want to go to Queniao and stay there." (…) The first year we brought three kids, and the nine-year-old [child] was particularly interested. (…) His favorite thing to do was to wake up each morning and feed the pigs, because he had not seen [a pig before] nor fed one before. His mom was a bit against this, because she thought "we should instead be taking photos of the Miao village, so you'll have things to say when your teacher asks you to share about your holiday." It's (Her mindset was) still task-oriented, but children are not like this. They are [curious] about novel things and are interest oriented. (…) Like today, one child said "I want to catch locusts", meaning he's interested in catching locusts — then good, you should go for it, right? It's a natural [instinct]. You have a place so intimately connected to nature that children can all find things they are interested in. For instance, the girl yesterday, Betty, it's her second time here. Her mother originally planned to take her to the ocean this year; she even bought the swimsuits and were all excited to visit the beach. [But then] she (Betty) said she wanted to come to Guizhou (…) [In fact,] last year she was still rather quiet — consider that she was only 5 years old. She was also moaning and groaning and clung to her mother most of the time. However, look how independent she's become this year. (…) When we were fishing yesterday, she stayed until the end, all by herself; she even slipped and fell on the slopes but got up on her own. When her mom called her and asked, 'would you like to leave? Was it too sunny at the fishing spot?' [she responded,] "No, fishing is fun! I want to stay and fish!'" (interview, Wu, August 3rd, 2022)

Wu also notes how children's spontaneous interactions with nature contribute to their development of courage and independence. She elaborates on the importance of these experiences in improving parent-child relations, especially when parents are present:

> Letting them [children] get in touch with nature is vital, but changing their perceptions on many things is necessary to provide a better growth environment. However, what's more important behind children's perceptions are their parents' perceptions. (…) Last night, the parents were sharing how, on the first day (of the camp), this place (Leishan county seat) looked pretty dangerous, right? The kids were running around everywhere and, as people are used to being in the city, your kids cannot be out of sight -- you are worried about their safety, right? [People were] looking for their kids everywhere […] But when the group reached Queniao, perhaps because we are tired and more relaxed, the kids were running around themselves, and the parents seemed…not as worried. They were gradually stepping back, and the children could have more space: rather than doing as their parents expected or demanded, the kids had greater freedom and more opportunities to interact with nature. So, as you've seen, when parents asked their kids to pose for photos, the children won't cooperate, [they think that] "I'm going elsewhere to play, this is more important to me." Right? There is a natural 'field' [here] that allows a different parent-child relationship to

> emerge (…) And for instance, during today's hike, parents realized that even young children could manage the climb on their own. If this was at home (in the city), would you even let 5- or 6-year-old children go on such a hike?" (interview, Wu, August 3rd, 2022)

In urban settings, parents often exert more control over their children, motivated by a desire to protect them from various potential dangers. However, Queniao's comparatively sheltered environment allows parents to relax and let their children roam freely. Many parents have come to appreciate the value of providing such space after witnessing the joy and developmental strides their children make through self-directed play and exploration. These behavioral and perceptual changes, resulting in improved parent-child relationships, are key outcomes Wu aims to foster through the camps. As Wu and other parents have noted, Queniao's leisurely atmosphere and enchanting rural environment are instrumental in facilitating these transformations, as well as providing a profound sense of relaxation and enjoyment for visitors. These conditions, which encourage a slower pace of life and closer connection to nature, are difficult to replicate in urban areas, where environments tend to be more hazardous, fast-paced, and devoid of natural landscapes. These contrasting settings highlight the unique benefits offered by the rural experience in Queniao.

6.2 Renqingwei (Human Warmth)

Beyond the appeal of its scenery and tranquil atmosphere, Manyou Farm's guests often express enjoyment and gratification from the abundant and sincere personal interactions they experience there (field note, July 30th, 2022). Visitors frequently contrast their time at the Farm with mainstream, commercialized destinations where dining and activities are provided as standardized services and transactions characterized by formal boundaries. In these conventional settings, interactions between tourists and hosts or staff are formal and impersonal, often limited to superficial exchanges. In contrast, many guests appreciate the hosting arrangement at Manyou Farm for its more intimate, personalized, and communal experience.

For example, more than a few visitors have been deeply moved by the host family's comprehensive involvement in their stay, from cooking meals and arranging accommodations to guiding all experiential activities. The unique, personalized experience provided by Xiaoniu, Liping, or both is frequently praised. They consistently remain present from start to finish, attentively responding to individual questions and needs. The couple often goes the extra mile to

fulfill guests' requests, whether it involves adding activities, engaging in extended conversations, or staying up late to complete complex batik projects. Many guests have revised their initial skepticism about the worth of their trip, swayed by the feeling of being genuinely cared for. Wu, echoing this sentiment, highlights the richness of *renqingwei* (人情味, literally "the feeling of human emotion") at the Farm as another major draw for her. She remarks,

> This is the most special part about them (the family): they are nice people, and they are willing to go out of their way. (…) It's not like "after I've done my job, that's it. I am making the boundaries very clear." They really hope to see communications and interactions among people. I think this is rare." (Wu, interview, August 3rd, 2022)

Furthermore, most visitors seem to thoroughly enjoy the communal experience of living, dining, and participating in activities alongside the host family and other visitor groups. The guesthouse's home-like setting, with its shared facilities, multi-purpose spaces, along with the Farm's array of activities and Queniao's relaxed pace, create ample opportunities for spontaneous conversations and collaborative interactions. Common areas frequently resonate with spontaneous chats, laughter, and moments of genuine connection as people share the same space, tasks, and meals. The atmosphere becomes particularly lively during dinner, further enlivened by rice wine, toasts, and the hospitality of the host family and sometimes other community members. Wu recounts a memorable instance that illustrate the natural bonding among children in such an environment:

> We came here last year while the Tokyo Olympics was happening. (…) I still have a vivid memory of it — it was at their (the family's) kitchen. And [you know] the stove and TV were all in the kitchen. So, the kids from the village — Guiqian and their relative's child — and the 6 children from last year (…) were watching the finals there together at night. I forgot which sport it was, and (but) the Chinese team won the championship. The kids were in high spirits: they were cheering for the Chinese team and singing the national anthem together, you know? You would feel that the kids have bonded together — that there are interactions among them. In this home-like environment, they could quickly become one group. The atmosphere was completely different from just a few days ago at the hotel in Leishan county seat. (Wu, interview, August 3rd, 2022)

Wu believes that while urban areas might provide superior material living conditions, there are things in rural villages that people can never fully experience in the city, including such sincere and intimate human interactions. However, not all rural areas have managed to retain their *renqingwei* amidst the influx of mainstream cultural norms. Consequently, many rural destinations fail to offer such genuine experiences to visitors. Several visitors, including Wu, feel

that Queniao's geographical isolation has helped preserve the authenticity and warmth of its people. They immensely appreciate these qualities, which they find lacking in many other rural villages, especially those near urban areas, where they observe an increasing trend towards commercialization and the homogenization of rural culture and landscapes.

Wu (interview, August 3rd, 2022) cites an example of a high-end hotel in another Miao village in Danzhai county, built to provide stunning views rather than to facilitate meaningful connections between visitors and the local community. The hotel focuses on offering luxurious services and scenic spots for *daka* which, in Wu's view, is superfluous considering similar amenities are available closer to cities. In contrast, even though Manyou Farm may fall short of expectations in terms of facilities and services, it excels in providing uniquely memorable, intimate, and convivial experiences. It attracts urban visitors seeking to immerse in *renqingwei* and genuinely connect with a Miao village and its people.

Although the Farm's strong sense of *renqingwei* is an asset, the family's hosting style also brings its own challenges. For instance, the relatively rustic furnishings and cluttered appearance of the guesthouse can be off-putting to some, particularly first-time visitors accustomed to the neatness of hotels. Liu, a local from Guizhou working in environmental conservation who spent two weeks at Queniao in 2021, could tolerate the guesthouse's worn facilities. However, she suggests making the public areas tidier, possibly by removing miscellaneous household items from view (Liu, interview, August 24th, 2022). Wu acknowledges a dilemma between maintaining *renqingwei* and standardization, based on her experiences with pre-scheduled activities being delayed. While she personally appreciates the unpredictability and is comfortable with a flexible schedule, she also recognizes the need to manage the expectations of others, particularly parents who might be upset by delays. As a camp leader, she understands the importance of punctuality, yet she is also aware that enforcing strict schedules might compromise the Farm's unique, personalized experience.

Zhao, a young artist who has frequented the Farm to study and document local seed conservation efforts, highlight additional challenges. She notes that the absence of a clear, uniform pricing policy and common services like room cleaning could cause confusion and dissatisfaction among some guests, particularly those accustomed to standard services and staying for extended periods (interview, June 10th, 2022). While she understands the difficulties in pricing the Farm's flexible operations and the family's time constraints in providing additional

services, she suggests Xiaoniu and Liping develop more systematic procedures for handling requests and communicating the rationale behind their arrangements.

Moreover, Zhao expressed concern about the family's ability to maintain the quality and consistency of their products and activities, recalling an instance where Xiaoniu momentarily fell asleep during tea processing due to fatigue. Despite her concerns, Zhao also reflects on the need for a full-time steward from the guests' perspective and its feasibility for the family. She acknowledges her own "urbanite" mindset and recognizes that the Farm's current setup may align more closely with the traditional definition of *minsu*. As she puts it,

> …it's our own home, and we are [merely] sharing our extra rooms for guests, rather than being a…a very commercialized *minsu*, where I acquire an old house in the village, renovate it to make it really comfortable — offering services like star-rated hotels — and price it high. From my understanding, Xiaoniu's principles of running a *minsu* is the same as how he does other things: in agriculture, every one of his products is integrated into the local ecological system and agroecological traditions; as for running a *minsu*, he has incorporated it into the lives of local community and their traditional customs. (Zhao, interview, June 10th, 2022)

6.3 Sustainability

Just as Xiaoniu and Liping endeavor to make visible the value of Queniao's biocultural heritage and promote broader social and environmental goals through their projects, some of their supporters are also drawn to the traditional living wisdom of the Miao village and the Farm's principles regarding development and tourism. Many of the Farm's visitors are connected to the rural reconstruction network and have pre-existing awareness and interest in sustainability issues. Consequently, they often arrive eager to learn about and explore the knowledge and wisdom embedded in the village's traditions. Guided by Xiaoniu and Liping, these visitors frequently find their experiences at the village rewarding. Many have expressed awe, inspiration, and reflection induced by witnessing the village's harmonious human-environmental relationship (Manyou Ecology, 2020b). Elements that particularly stand out to them include the local community's resource-conserving and nutrient-recycling practices, their ability to derive multiple forms of well-being from the local landscape, as well as their reverent attitude towards the natural world in both farming and daily life (Media Centre for Community, 2021; Bobobox, 2021).

Liu, who visited Queniao for a work-related project focused on "the research and study of sustainable lifeways", has been particularly observant in this regard. For instance, she vividly

recalls her participation in rice transplantation preparations with Liping's family, where she was struck by the wisdom contained in local practices, including fertilizing the paddies with previous year's rice stalks and building fish shelters out of local materials. She comments,

> A lot of consideration goes into these [practices]. (…) Growing up in the city, these things were quite distant from my life, so I find that within these processes of traditional farming, (…) even though the locals might not have a high level of education, they possess a lot of wisdom. (…) You will find that their knowledge of farming passed down over generations are truly sustainable — including how they grow fish mint, and numerous other examples. (Liu, interview, August 24th, 2022)

Furthermore, Liu expresses her admiration of Queniao's soft, fertile soil, and the notable absence of unpleasant odors in the pigsties and dry toilets. She attributes this to a combination of the village's favorable environmental conditions and local people's practical wisdom, such as lining pigsty floors with dried vegetation stalks. Additionally, her observation of local rituals, such as prayer and ancestor veneration during festivals and everyday life — exemplified by offering bits of quality food and drinks to ancestors before meals — helped her understand how deeply the villagers' respect for nature is woven into their customs. Witnessing and participating in these customs and traditions, which Liu feels are increasingly forgotten by urban dwellers like herself, left her in awe. This sense of inspiration, combined with the relaxation and enjoyment derived from Queniao's picturesque setting and the hospitality of its people, has motivated her not only to return for a second visit in her leisure time but also to contemplate spending part of each year there in the future (Liu, interview, August 24th, 2022)

Apart from the opportunity to explore valuable rural traditions, people also support the Farm because they resonate with Xiaoniu and Liping's perspective on rural development and tourism. Particularly, they appreciate the family's environmentally cautious approach to expanding their operations. Wu discusses the family's restraint from engaging in collaborations and scaling up their accommodation indiscriminately, despite the potential for economic gains:

> Numerous people want to collaborate with them (Xiaoniu and Liping), [but] many are merely seeking to 'take a look from the outside' instead of really immersing themselves in Miao life or forging deeper bonds with them. They (the couple) would then think that this isn't what they seek. (…) They are also concerned about what would happen "if my accomodation capacity cannot meet…if I generate too much garbage, packaged foods and consumption? Would that lead to development or degradation of my village?" They are very sensible and cautious in this regard, so they are only keeping it to a small scale. Even now, they've only led one other family to host, and that too on a limited scale (…) And there are a lot of people that wish to book rooms from them — they are well-booked.

> Could they renovate their old house [to create more rooms]? Absolutely, right? While there are certainly going to be practical [limitations], if your value is such, you will surely be more strongly motivated in that regard (expansion), right? (…) There are definitely better methods to make money, but no (they have not proceeded this way) — so this is where I find them to be exceptional. (Wu, interview, August 3rd, 2022)

Liu makes a very similar comment, commending the Farm for not pursing blind expansion and contrasts their current approach with a more conventional *minsu* model:

> It's commendable that they're not blindly expanding their scale (…) I've told them that (…) the fastest way to make money for them is not doing it this [way], but to rent out their house to those who specialize in building and managing *minsu* (…) [and] make several hundred thousand a year, right? Two houses are enough [to do this]. (…) So, I encourage Xiaoniu to stay on the current path — never rent out your house and let people who don't understand your culture step into your position. They are merely using your land and your environment to make money. What can you and the locals get? You don't know, maybe not much. But would your environment be damaged? That's open to question. As you know, in terms of water use and food preparation at a large scale — and [you see how] the family don't waste their food scraps. (…) If you turn it into a modern *minsu*, (…) they would definitely need to throw these things away. But where to? Into the river, or to their garbage dump? That's why I think his current approach — where he is gradually leading other relatives to follow his cultivation method — is a good thing. (…) He has his own pace of development. He tells me that there are actually people who wanted to invest [in the Farm], but they (the family) were not willing [to accept], because investment from others might interrupt the pace they wish to proceed for themselves. Such investment would certainly [prioritize] the maximization of profit, right? Turning a certain profit within a set timeframe. (Liu, interview, August 24th, 2022)

Supporters of the Farm not only acknowledge the family's approach to accommodation but also their principled management of agricultural products. For instance, instead of overharvesting Lilium roots to meet consumer demands, the family limits their harvest and informs buyers about the product's unavailability, ensuring sustainability for future years. Similarly, they prioritize saving a portion of their produce for personal consumption and propagation, even at the cost of reduced earnings and potential customer disappointment. Both Wu and Liu express their admiration and support for this "restrained approach towards development", which emphasizes conservation and long-term sustainability over immediate yield and profit.

Zhao, a tea enthusiast and researcher in the tea industry, also recognizes the Farm's environmental considerations in tea cultivation:

> For the local community and the Leigong Mountain nature reserve, such an ecological method of [tea] management is nurturing to the land. It is distinct from industrialized production methods found in the current tea industry, where I am trying to produce as

> much tea and as quickly as possible. So, I think that Xiaoniu is striving to maintain a balance between the tea fields and the land, ensuring that it's non-polluting to the local environment and offers reciprocation to the land. (Zhao, interview, June 10th, 2022)

For Liu, the solidarity she feels with the family's dedication to ecological tea management, despite its challenges, is more significant than the tea's taste:

> He (Xiaoniu) has his own principles…it's not that he cannot expand the scale of his tea — in fact, he could do so. He could purchase tea from other families, right? But why doesn't he? Because others don't follow his cultivation (management) method. This is his commitment, right? So, his commitment leads to mine. What's my commitment? First, it (the tea) is from Guizhou, and I am from Guizhou myself. I approve of Guizhou's tea because I know its climate and environment, right? Also, it's based on their persistence to do this [converting to ecological management methods] which I find hard to do — you know, to make a living while also having their bottom line and principles which they uphold. Even if I find the taste of his tea to be not as good as other tea from Leishan — those that are produced in mechanized fashion — however, based on such dedication, I think you should give people the support, in my opinion." (Liu, interview, August 24th, 2022)

Liu's concept of support extends beyond mere financial contributions. As an office worker who drinks tea infrequently, her ability to purchase tea or visit the Farm is limited. However, she believes that providing psychological support and recognition is more crucial for individuals who share the family's values, like herself. This can take various forms, such as validating their philosophy, connecting them with relevant opportunities, and expressing interest in their stories. Liu views the Farm's approach as pioneering, acknowledging that their values are not yet widely recognized and that they belong to a small group courageously taking challenging steps. In her perspective, showing support in these non-material ways can bolster the family's resolve to continue on this challenging yet promising path. Specifically, it may help them resist temptations to abandon their principles in favor of approaches where "they could potentially make money faster and easier."

Furthermore, Liu, who is familiar with Guizhou's tourism industry, also emphasizes the importance of meaningful learning experiences in rural tourism, distinguishing the approach of Manyou Farm from more conventional practices. She uses the example of rice transplantation to illustrate her point:

> Liu: "Normally he (Xiaoniu) doesn't take children to transplant rice. I don't know about other places, but you know in Guizhou, (…) there are countless *yanxi* (研习, literally "research and study") programs for students, where you go to a place to experience rural

> life — catching fish, doing batik…there are so many of these in QMDAP. But, I think the objectives of these experiences — and a lot of organizations do not get this — you are here to experience local lifeways, and what is at the core of them? It is that you need to have a kind of cherishing attitude towards plants and food. But most of these activities are just "going through the motions": the children [are being guided to] experience 'okay this is transplantation and that is catching fish', everyone takes photos like crazy, and then they go back [home]. I think there isn't much value to that. I've discussed with Xiaoniu about this once, and he said, "I just need to use one paddy for children to experience transplantation [once], and that can make me 500 yuan, at the very least," right? (…) "If I sell the rice produced from the same paddy [which takes the entire year], that would also make me merely about 500 yuan." However, he did not want to do this. He said he would do this only under the condition that those children do not [damage and] waste the seedlings. (…) It takes hard work to cultivate the seedlings, and you transplant them because you want to make them alive, instead of transplanting them, pulling them out, and use the paddy again for you (people) to transplant. This is another form of wasting.
> Lam: Right, but would people really do that? To transplant and pull out the seedlings repeatedly for people?
> Liu: Many would (…). Of course, I am not saying the activity itself is bad, but we…we cannot do this blindly and in a perfunctory manner. How much of a mark could you leave deep down in everyone's minds? After they go back [home], would they [learn] not to be wasteful with food while eating? I don't know if it's possible to have such impact or foster a kind of reflection within people. (…) After you experience transplantation, you should feel that it is not easy, and ponder how long it takes to grow this food from start to finish. I think this is the education that should be given to children and makes for a more meaningful experience. (…) It is difficult but certainly worth exploring (…) how to — within a short period — have an immersive experience and let children experience our farming methods in the past; (…) to see there are people living a different way of life; and to reflect on which one is more suited to yourself. It is not necessarily that the urban lifestyle is [all] good and worth pursuing by everyone, right? Are there also merits in a rural way of life? So, I think [these activities] should incorporate some reflections like these. (Liu, interview, August 24th, 2022)

Here, Liu expresses her admiration for Xiaoniu's decision to prioritize sustainable practices over profit in their tourism activities, particularly in avoiding food wastage and countering a careless attitude towards food that often prevails in tourism settings. She envisions that rural experiential activities should extend beyond merely entertainment, such as "parents leading their children on a playing spree." Instead, she believes they should also increase people's awareness of the varied practices that underpin rural lifeways and, through offering a glimpse into the knowledge, skills and wisdom involved in them, promote reflection on the validity and dominance of urban norms, values and behaviors. She suggests Xiaoniu make these experiences even more comprehensive and systematic by designing more activities that utilize local biocultural resources and providing more in-depth explanations during these activities. Her proposed activities and topics include

exploring the process of local rice alcohol making, highlighting the use of medicinal plants and their health benefits; examining the different biological materials used in batik-making and their environmentally friendly and health-promoting properties; and delving into the history, rationale, and cultural significance behind the local Miao people's settlement patterns, architectural style, livelihood practices, and social customs.

Like Liu, Wu considers education and reflection to be fundamental elements of the children's camps she designs. During a scouting visit to Guizhou in 2017, she and her co-director discovered their like-mindedness with Xiaoniu on rural development. Over the years, they have progressively incorporated more elements into their camp programs:

> We wanted to fit in some *gongyi* education, (…) for example, what is environmental conservation? How to interpret sustainable development? (…) How to understand the relationships between our so-called 'poverty' and 'affluence', right? How should children participate in *gongyi*? Is it simply to donate some things to [rural] children? Probably not. (Wu, interview, August 3rd, 2022)

Wu believes that especially for young children, these concepts are most effectively instilled through experience rather than reasoning, particularly for younger children:

> I really hope to let children — especially for younger kids in parent-kid camps where it's not yet the time to reason with them, to tell them such and such about rural villages, how to develop sustainably, what is ethnic minority culture, and so on. But, (…) I hope to establish an impression in them at a young age — that rural villages do not equal *zangluancha* (脏乱差, dirty, messy, and inferior), that they do not represent "backwardness", and not to [perpetuate] the old saying of "I am going to the countryside to experience hardships" [or] "I am going to the rural, remote Guizhou to do such and such." I hope these children could think 'look at how pretty the countryside is'. [While] it has its inconvenience, its different bugs, and while it is convenient to be able to shower at home and to live in convenience; however, could you see a sky full of stars? Could you have such [spectacular] view outside your home? Could you have such physical stamina? Could you run around the hills like Guiqian (Xiaoniu and Liping's child)? Things are simply different here, and each place has its advantage. I hope this is the countryside that children take in. This [impression] cannot be established through lecturing, but only through experience by children themselves. Take our kid for example, it's actually his fifth year here, (…) he would come here every year. (…) So I know the kid's sincere response: I won't lecture him about it, but you'll feel that when he mentions Queniao, it is a really happy, beautiful place that he looks forward to. Then, I know I have achieved my goal — it's enough to establish this impression in him about the countryside. (Wu, interview, August 3rd, 2022)

Despite their different focuses, both Wu and Liu champion a holistic, non-hierarchical view of urban-rural relationships. They advocate moving beyond the one-sided glorification of urban culture to recognize both rural and urban lifestyles for their unique wisdom, contributions, and respective advantages and limitations. To achieve this, they integrate both direct and nuanced forms of education into rural experiential activities. Through these experiences, they aim to open urban visitors' minds to the virtues and insights of rural cultures, especially regarding sustainable living practices. Queniao, with its rich and largely intact biocultural heritage, provides an ideal setting for this kind of learning and reflection. Xiaoniu and Liping's deep understanding of the contemporary relevance of their heritage, coupled with their eagerness to share it, makes Queniao an exceptionally conducive environment for fostering appreciation and understanding of rural wisdom.

6.4 Authenticity

People are attracted to Manyou Farm not only for its embodiment of traditional wisdom and sustainable practices but also for its authentic, immersive experiences, which satisfy their curiosity about Miao ethnic traditions and provide opportunities for hands-on engagement with biological materials. The distinctiveness of rural, place-based cultures, with their diverse and longstanding customs and deep connection to the natural environment, holds a special appeal for urban dwellers accustomed to a more standardized, modernized lifestyle, often removed from physical labor and nature. The richness of QMDAP's ethnic diversity and ecological resources draws many visitors to the region, eager to immerse themselves in the unique customs of the Miao, Dong, and other ethnic groups. They are interested in experiencing local food culture, architecture, music, dance, costumes, handicrafts, and understanding their historical and cultural significance. While each region's destination offers unique attractions, and visitors often explore multiple locations, some find their time in Queniao particularly memorable and fulfilling, owing to the genuine and in-depth nature of the experiences available there.

Queniao stands out for its preservation of place-based traditions, which are increasingly rare in urban communities and more urbanized rural villages. These include material heritage such as traditional carpentry, herbal medicine, rice alcohol production, farming practices, less tangible customs such as frequent reciprocal exchanges, collective activities, veneration of nature and ancestors, and conventions around hospitality. The novelty of the materials, skills, mindsets,

and worldviews in these traditions is pivotal for drawing people to experience them and subsequently sparking their curiosity and fascination.

Wang is a woman from Guiyang who has been living in Queniao since 2020 renting an old house from a community member and renovating it into her residence. She has participated in the Farm's activities multiple times and maintains regular contact with Xiaoniu and Liping as she recommends her own friends and guests to the Farm as well as occasionally co-organizing activities with the family. As someone who is passionate about handwork and has previous experiences leading rural experiential activities, she highlights the importance of novelty by recounting a disappointing experience she experienced elsewhere:

> Wang: "I think from the standpoint of a participant, the processes of [the Farm's] experiences are alluring and captivating (…) To give an example, (…) When I was in Guangdong, I once visited a famous, beautiful village in Shaoguan. We wanted to experience local…crafts and whatnot, and we decided to [experience] making tofu and taste its by-products like bean curd jelly. But when we went there, we became disappointed (…) Why? Because it (the tofu) was made with a soya milk maker. (…) So, you (they) boiled the beans, grinded it, strained it, and added whatever ingredient to solidify it (the liquid), and that's it. It's like we've watched the whole process of making tofu with a machine.
> Lam: Did you get to do any hands-on work?
> Wang: How? [laughs] There is no place for you to use your hands.
> Lam: So, you [just] watched others make the tofu?
> Wang: Yes, and it's made with a machine. And even if you want to ask them some questions, you don't know where to begin. For instance, if they were making it (tofu) with a stone mill, you could still ask about when this began or why make it with a stone mill. With a machine, I can't even find any questions to ask. (Wang, interview, May 25th, 2022)

As this example highlights, when rural traditions are assimilated into contemporary mainstream technologies and processes, their attractiveness to tourists often diminishes, as they become "no different from home." However, even in destinations that retains more authentic, place-based traditions, the experience can still fall short if local guides or tourism operators fail to offer relevant products and experiences. For instance, Wang believes truly "place-based" products and experiences need to integrate both biological and cultural elements of the locality rather than focusing on just one. She compares the activities offered at Manyou Farm with those found in typical rural camps and tours:

> For me, if I were a tourist, I would really enjoy its (the Farm's) traditional stuff, because now there are lots of so called "ecological tourism" [experiences] that I find to be overly "packaged"…they're not necessarily place-based. For example, [some] people come here (Queniao) to do *xiesheng* (写生, sketching in the outdoors) […] or some handicrafts or

> artistic, creative activities — I think these are not exclusive to this village as they can also be done in other villages. There's nothing special about them — they are not activities built upon local natural resources or cultural heritage. But here at Manyou Farm, one of the things I find great about it is picking tea — because tea is an important industry locally, and this is actually what local people would do in their everyday life. Also, there are some food tasting and processing experiences such as konjac or making rice wine yeast — they are manifestations of local wisdom and culture because people live like this here. (…) So, these are products and activities that are deeply tied to this place-based culture. (Wang, interview, May 25th, 2022)

Conversely, Wang finds that activities related to cultural heritage become even more captivating when they allow for direct engagement with nature. She particularly enjoys experiences such as people washing vegetables or batik cloths together by Queniao's streams and riverbeds; for her, this outdoor arrangement adds a "rustic charm" to these traditional crafts, which are often presented in more conventional indoor workshops for tourists. Further, many tourism operators tend to expedite and simplify traditional processes, such as using chemical reagents in batik dyeing. In contrast, Manyou Farm's approach is slower but more thorough, offering Wang a fuller experience of traditional crafts and a deeper understanding of "how things are made from scratch."

People's appreciation for comprehensive, "made-from-scratch" experiences is especially evident in tea-related activities. The lively conversations during tea picking and processing, and the surprise expressed by many visitors about their unfamiliarity with tea-making process despite being daily consumers, underscore the allure of these authentic experiences (Bobobox, 2021; field note, July 30th, 2022). Participants are often amazed to discover the intricate process behind something as commonplace as tea, gaining new appreciation and understanding.

Moreover, Wang praises Xiaoniu and Liping's ability to respond to people's inquiries about their activities, which she believes must be acquired from regular practices:

> They (Xiaoniu and Liping) are adept at what they do in terms of those traditional processes because they have always been doing them in such ways — they have done them many times (…) And because they have always been practicing, he is able lead with proficiency, and he has in fact accmulated a lot of knowledge in this process. For instance, if I were to go tea-picking with Xiaoniu, I would have lots of questions for him. For instance, why do you lay dried grass on the ground? How do you normally fertilize the soil? What makes your management method "ecological", and why is it effective? Why pick tea in this way? What is the purpose of fixation? He can withstand these inquiries rather than being unable to answer people's questions. And it's the same with batik. (Wang, interview, May 25th, 2022)

In contrast, some of the guides that Wang has worked with in other places are either not conversant with the activities they lead or, if they do possess sufficient knowledge, unable to engage visitors effectively due to language barrier or lack of experience in designing and leading activities for tourists. This is where Manyou Farm stands out. Not only does it offer in-depth, truly place-based experiences, but Xiaoniu and Liping also possess the necessary craft-specific knowledge, language skills, and hosting expertise to effectively engage visitors.

However, despite the Farm's above strengths, the preferences for novelty and authenticity vary among tourists. While individuals like Wang are open and curious about novel customs, others prefer more commercialized, *daka*-type rural experiences. Such experiences often involve hotel-like accommodation services, restaurant-style dining, and activities specially designed or "performed" for tourists. In contrast, Manyou Farm treats visitors more like guests participating in local life, rather than customers needing service and entertainment. Wu recognizes this as a matter of market segmentation and differing visitor preferences:

> I think this is a matter of balance… it depends on what you want. Some people may think, "I want to go to a [popular] tourism spot, this is what I want, I need to be able to have a cup of coffee at a place with an open view. (…) This is the vibe I want. I don't want to experience laboring and participating [in local people's lives], right? I am not here to sweat." So, people want different things; this is a kind of market segmentation. I (They) don't need to cater to everyone; [even] if you (they) do, they don't have the capacity, to be honest. (…) So, I am sure there are people who will not visit the Farm for a second time, because it's not what they expected. (…) Yet, there will also certainly be people that keep thinking about coming back, because this [kind of experience] is so hard to find, right? You just can't have this experience in other places. (Wu, interview, August 3rd, 2022)

Wang values the Farm's effort to balance authenticity and entertainment, which enables her to gain a more thorough and contextualized understanding of novel cultural practices. She discusses *daciba* (打糍粑, literally "pounding glutinous rice cakes"), a popular tourism activity in the region, to illustrate her point:

> Wang: For instance, with *daciba*, actually [Queniao's locals] are already using machines instead of the traditional method to pound it because it (the former) is more convenient. But when you visit them (Manyou Farm), (…) they wouldn't — say if this is not the season for *daciba* — arrange a *daciba* experience specially for you. (…) They would [still] let people experience the traditional method of *daciba* when it's the season, even though the village doesn't do it this way anymore.
> Lam: So they would try to [let people] experience traditional methods so visitors can have better experiences.
> Wang: [More] authentic experiences. And you will get to understand the culture here. For instance, why do (pound) it this way? That's a logical question. (…) Why are you only

> able to eat *ciba* (糍粑, glutinous rice cakes) at this time of the year? You will naturally develop these…pleasures from exploration, in my view. (Wang, interview, May 25th, 2022)

The daciba example demonstrates that even though the family would cater to people's desire to experience traditions that are no longer practiced by locals, they would aim to do so in a way that connects visitors more deeply to local seasonality, ecology, and sociocultural life. Such "realness" is also echoed by other visitors with regards to the Farm's provision of in-season, everyday foods; their unhurried approach towards the sale of farm products; as well as the frequent involvement of other community members in the Farm's activities. People appear to experience a more profound sense of learning, connection and reward when local culture is presented not as static, readily available "goods and services", but as a dynamic and autonomous way of life, or a "living culture", that continually adapts and interacts with various human and environmental factors.

6.5 Naturalness

As briefly noted in Section 5.3.1, there is a prevalent belief among urban Chinese citizens in the superior quality of "natural" food ingredients — those harvested from relatively untouched environments or produced through traditional, non-industrial methods. The belief, fueled by the perception of these foods as more flavorful and healthier, often motivates urban dwellers to travel to rural regions. The terms *tuchicai* and *nongjiacai* (农家菜, literally "dishes from peasant households"), emphasizing fresh, in-season ingredients and simple cooking methods, are commonly used in food advertising to appeal to this desire.

While food may not be the primary motive for visiting Manyou Farm, it frequently becomes a significant highlight for visitors. The Farm is especially recognized for its local foods and tea products. Xiaoniu notes that nearly all guests enjoy the meals, with many remarking after their first meal that it was "worth the trip" (field note, July 29th, 2022) The superior flavor of the Farm's dishes, often rated higher than high-end restaurants and star-rated hotels, is consistently attributed to their "naturalness." This includes the sweet-tasting, untreated water from local streams, the rich flavor of local fruits and harvested edibles due to freshness and Queniao's pristine environment, and the tastiness of meals resulting from traditional farming methods and simple cooking techniques (Liping's father, interview, July 28th, 2022; field note, July 30th,

2022) . These methods are believed to preserve the "original" flavor of the ingredients (Manyou Ecology, 2020e).

The Farm's tea is also lauded for its pure aroma, rich mouthfeel, and slightly sweet aftertaste, attributed to ecological management practices (Gengshi Agriculture, 2020). While there are occasional mentions of inconsistencies in quality, possibly due to Xiaoniu's inexperience in tea processing, guests generally feel these minor imperfections are overshadowed by the overall outstanding quality of the tea leaves (Liu, interview, August 24th, 2022; Zhao, interview, June 10th, 2022; Xiaoniu, 2021b)

In addition to flavor, the Farm's supporters also value the above "natural" qualities and practices for their contribution to healthfulness. Given the already strong association of *tuchicai* and *nongjiacai* with healthfulness, people are more impressed by and vocal about the health benefits of the Farm's tea. They believe that Queniao's relatively pristine environment, coupled with the family's ecological management practices, not only enhances the nutritional content of the tea leaves but also minimizes harmful chemical pesticide residues. This belief instills confidence in the quality and safety of the tea (field note, July 30th, 2022). The emphasis on health benefits often takes precedence over taste. Liu articulates this perspective:

> Even though he (Xiaoniu) did not apply for an organic certification, I believe he is cultivating it (tea) according to organic principles because he is using enzymes…and (…) the soil underneath the tea bushes…the overall conditions I find to be good. I believe that, for people with such principles, the tea that they produce would surely be…healthy, to begin with. And the environment in which the tea grows is also excellent. (…) Regardless of the [level] of the processing skills, which is part of the product, I find the quality of his tea to be guaranteed, above all else. (…) And I believe this is not just advertising, but rather what they are doing for real. Therefore, I believe in his cultivation method and trust that he follows through with it. This is why I buy his tea — and not just his tea but also potatoes, red beans, and other stuff. (Liu, interview, August 24th, 2022)

Liu's consideration is also echoed by Zhao, who indicates that the combination of the Farm's ecological management practices and the unspoiled ecological environment of Leigong Mountain, or both the micro and macro environment, give her ample reassurance of the tea's "cleanliness" (Zhao, interview, June 10th, 2022). In addition, she also points out the price advantage of the Farm's tea compared with others with similar standards of "cleanliness" within the country's tea market:

> In fact, I have already developed my own taste and preference for tea. The reason that I would buy Xiaoniu's tea is because, first of all, this (the Farm) is a place that I have stayed

> in, and its story and values made me willing to buy his tea. I would likely purchase them mostly as gifts for my friends. Another aspect is that his tea is actually pretty cheap [laughs] (…), and it is also managed ecologically, so the tea is clean -- I feel very assured whether to use them as gifts or for my own consumption. (…) In fact, this is one of their advantages, because personally I would more often drink feral or wild tea, which are limited in quantity and expensive, understandably; however, through ecological management and sensible ways to keep costs under control, it (their tea) will have degrees of price advantages compared with other tea products on the market where…the distinction of tea grade and quality can be quite complex. (Zhang, interview, June 10th, 2022)

6.6 Accessibility

As Chapter 4 details, while agritourism is the primary undertaking of Manyou Farm for economic benefits, Xiaoniu and Liping also actively participate in various documentary, educational and promotional endeavors related to seed conservation, community development, rural revitalization, poverty alleviation, and cultural heritage inheritance. These endeavors extend beyond agritourism and involve engagement with diverse groups driven by motives distinct from those of the Farm's tourists. I encapsulate these motives with the term "accessibility", referring to Xiaoniu and Liping's capability to act as a "bridge" that enables these actor-groups to effectively engage with local communities to fulfil their sustainability and social justice-related goals.

Xiaoniu and Liping are recognized by non-profit organizations, academic institutions and various media platforms for their dual roles as advocates and active practitioners of sustainable rural development. Xiaoniu, in particular, can translate abstract concepts and narratives into relatable, plain terms, making him an effective facilitator in programs to empower rural communities. His engaging way of elucidating the contemporary relevance of everyday rural practices and his attunement to practical concerns inspires creativity and enthusiasm among community participants (Xiaoniu, interview, September 8th, 2022; field note, June 24th, 2022).

Meanwhile, conference and event organizers value Xiaoniu and Liping's insights for the real-world perspective they provide on implementing sustainability principles. Their experiences in driving community-led, economically sustainable practices at Manyou Farm are seen as coherent, firsthand accounts valuable for understanding sustainability at the grassroots level (Xiaoniu, interview, September 8th, 2022). Furthermore, their ethnic minority background and the Farm's location in Guizhou, a region not traditionally recognized as a core tea-producing

area, add to their unique appeal. This aspect was particularly notable to Zhao, who invited Xiaoniu to speak at a book club event focused on the tea industry:

> At the time, he attracted my attention for two reasons — the first being that he was applying ecological management methods for his tea fields, which is of practical value within the current tea industry. Another reason was that he was growing tea in Guizhou and in an ethnic minority region. Guizhou is not a core tea-producing region in the country; it does not have as much of a [marketing] advantage [in terms of production origin]. Therefore, as a tea-producer and seller from a peripheral region, [I was] interested in hearing him share how he developed his own [marketing] advantages and values. (…) To be more precise, the more important reason was that they were an ethnic minority tea producer in a non-core tea producing region. (…) Whether in terms of advantages in tea origin or tea resources, Xiaoniu's case is, comparatively, of representative significance within a non-representative context in many aspects. (…) And tea also appears to have been an economic crop once promoted by Queniao, or the adjacent township; therefore, it is able to reflect the local economy and culture. (Zhao, interview, June 10th, 2022)

Zhao's interest in Manyou Farm reflects a broader curiosity about the Farm's unique position as a tea enterprise and the role of tea in the economy and culture of Queniao and the surrounding area. This curiosity extends beyond Zhao to others like Wu, Liu and various individuals connected to media or academia. Their visits to the Farm are driven more by the opportunity to conduct research, documentary work, or educational projects in an ethnic minority village with a rich biocultural heritage, rather than for tourism or leisure. However, engaging with remote and culturally distinct villages like Queniao poses challenges, such as finding suitable locations, overcoming language and cultural barriers, and gaining locals' consent and support. The Farm's established presence, accommodation facilities, conceptual understanding, and local identity significantly mitigate these challenges, making it easier for these actor-groups to achieve their objectives. This accessibility is subtly acknowledged through the diverse range of documentary, research, and educational projects in which Manyou Farm has been involved.

Moreover, as a social enterprise, Manyou Farm is valued for providing a channel through which individuals and organizations can support sustainability-related goals through their consumption. This is particularly evident in the bulk orders, exhibition opportunities, and partnerships extended to Manyou Heritage Workshop by corporations, charitable foundations, and local government departments. Facilitated by government initiatives to develop ethnic handicrafts into cultural industries, these collaborations are often framed explicitly as supporting poverty alleviation, women's income generation, sustainable livelihood development, and cultural heritage preservation (Manyou Ecology, 2020f). Through its creative, contemporary

designs that integrates traditional crafts into mainstream items, the Workshop has helped drive such socially and environmentally conscious form of consumption.

Similarly, the Farm's integration of sustainability principles into its agritourism offerings also creates accessibility for visitors initially drawn solely for leisure. Both my observations and Xiaoniu's comments indicate that even tourists with little prior engagement with sustainability are interested in learning about and supporting responsible travel and consumption practices. By primarily presenting itself as a leisure tourism operator, Manyou Farm offers a platform for conventional tourists to explore and engage with these interests, often leading to an unexpected sense of reward and fulfillment from their stay. The growing curiosity and positive feedback from visitors reflect their appreciation for this unique form of accessibility.

6.7 Chapter Summary

Chapter 6 presents the perspectives of Manyou Farm's supporters, which include visitors, consumers, and collaborators. It explores why these individuals are attracted to the Farm's projects and the value regimes that drive their participation and support. Drawing from interviews with four supporters —Wang, Zhang, Li, and Liu — along with participant observation and document review, this chapter identifies six key themes: leisure, renqingwei (human warmth), sustainability, authenticity, naturalness, and accessibility.

The first theme, leisure, highlights how urban visitors are drawn to Queniao's picturesque, animated landscapes and leisurely pace of living, which, in contrast with the hustle and bustle of urban life, foster profound physical and mental relaxation. Additionally, families are motivated by the excitement and joy children experience from exploring the village's safe, diverse, and accessible natural spaces. The second theme, renqingwei, captures the sincere personal connections visitors feel with Liping's family. Their diligence and willingness to engage deeply with visitors create a sense of being "cared for." Such human warmth is further enhanced by the community's sincerity and the Farm's communal dining and living arrangements, which facilitate bonding and spontaneous interactions, often missing in cities and commercialized destinations, creating memorable experiences for visitors.

The third theme, sustainability, illustrates how visitors and consumers, particularly those interested in sustainability issues, are drawn to the village's harmonious human-environmental relationships and the family's principled approach to development. Many are inspired by the

"traditional living wisdom" embodied in everyday local practices that are absent in urban environments and which promote resource conservation, human well-being, and reverence for nature. The family's prudent approach to their operations — giving attention to waste, soil and ecological health and facilitating learning and reflection — further garners appreciation and support for their products and offerings.

Authenticity, the fourth theme, underscores the Farm's appeal for offering genuine, immersive experiences of Miao ethnic traditions, which many visitors find enriching and unique. The Farm is appreciated not only for its provision of "place-based" experiences that encompass both cultural and biological elements, but also for the family's capacity to respond to inquiries and strike a balance between authenticity with catering to guests' desires. These merits, enhanced by Queniao's diverse and novel material and non-material heritage, engender more profound experiences of learning and fascination in curious visitors compared to destinations with less intact heritage, less "complete" experiences, and less conversant guides.

The fifth theme, naturalness, focuses on the quality of Manyou Farm's food and tea products. Guests and consumers frequently praise the freshness, superior flavor, and health benefits of the Farm's locally sourced ingredients and ecological farming practices, which drive people's purchases and repeat visits. Lastly , the theme of accessibility highlights Manyou Farm's capacities to serve as a bridge for organizations and individuals invested in sustainability and social justice objectives to effectively engage local communities. These include Xiaoniu's ability to communicate sustainability in accessible language, the Farm's success in conserving and disseminating sustainable practices as a grassroots initiative, the family's dual role as community members and sustainability advocates, and the contribution of Manyou Heritage Workshop towards linking consumption with poverty alleviation and heritage preservation.

Having explored the factual and subjective aspects of Manyou Farm in Chapters 4–6, the next chapter examines the enabling and hindering factors of the Farm's projects to advance a contextualized view of their success and significance.

CHAPTER 7: ENABLING AND HINDERING FACTORS

Chapter 7 further explores the documentative and interpretative perspectives discussed in earlier chapters by analyzing the enabling and hindering factors of Manyou Farm. The analysis examines how factors at different levels have both facilitated the emergence and continuation of the Farm's projects, as well as impeded the family from realizing their envisioned future on the other. The information in this chapter has been gathered from a variety of sources, including conversations and interviews with Liping's family, my fieldwork observations, and analysis of research findings from previous chapters. These enabling and hindering factors have been identified at three levels —individual, communal, and societal — and will be presented in this order.

7.1 Individual Factors

At the micro-level, Manyou Farm's success can be largely attributed to its core family members' distinctive capabilities, life experiences, and identities, along with their synergistic collaboration. Xiaoniu's previous work in rural culture conservation is a critical factor in this success. His experiences in this field have equipped him with a deep understanding of the narratives and discourses surrounding sustainability, rural development, and cultural heritage. This understanding has been instrumental in identifying the valuable elements of Queniao's rural culture and tailoring the Farm's agritourism and other projects to meet the diverse interests of various actor-groups engaged in rural culture. Xiaoniu describes this skill as the ability to "quickly grasp people's needs, or reach their hearts" (conversation, Xiaoniu, August 5th, 2022). This aptitude, combined with his extensive social network built through years of professional experience, has been pivotal in establishing a stable economic model for the Farm. It has opened up numerous avenues for visitors, sales channels, and opportunities for learning and teaching that are vital for the Farm's sustenance and growth. Without Xiaoniu's field-specific knowledge, experiences, and network, the family would likely face significant challenges in establishing a viable economic pathway based on agritourism and the direct sale of farm products to urban consumers.

Liping's personal background and experiences have likewise played a significant role in contributing to Manyou Farm's success, complementing Xiaoniu's contributions. Her early work experience in Beijing and subsequent opportunities for learning and travel have broadened her

horizons. This exposure has given her a unique perspective, making her less inclined to seek opportunities outside her village compared to other local youths. Also, Liping perceives this widened worldview as a key factor in the Farm's ability to not only retain customers but also effectively promote their cultural offerings to a broader audience. This was highlighted in a compliment from a local government representative, who noted the Farm's comparative success in customer retention and cultural promotion compared to other family farms in the QMDAP region (Liping, interview, June 20th, 2022). Liping acknowledges that while her family engages in similar activities to other local families, their unique experiences and perspectives enable them to identify, communicate, and organize these activities in ways that resonate with the interests and value systems of urban tourists. Her reflection underscores the significance of personal experiences in enhancing one's ability to bridge the rural-urban divide and successfully market traditional rural activities to a wider audience.

The success of Manyou Farm not only relies on Xiaoniu and Liping's exposure to urban culture and their background in rural culture conservation but also heavily depends on the active participation of Liping's parents. As detailed in Section 4.2, Liping's mother is integral to the Farm's day-to-day functioning. She undertakes most of the farm work and food pre-processing tasks, which are labor-intensive and time-consuming. Her extensive experience and deep knowledge of local practices, honed over many years of living and working in the area, make her an indispensable "backbone" of the Farm. Additionally, Liping's father contributes significantly to the farm work during his periods away from migrant work. His involvement includes rice transplantation, weeding, repair tasks, and other essential farm duties. His input is particularly valuable given his understanding of the local environment and farming techniques. Moreover, as members of the local Miao community, Liping and her parents bring vital language skills, rights, and social relations that facilitate assistance from community members, collaboration, and access to local resources. Their deep-rooted connection to the locality provides them with a wealth of place-based knowledge and stories, which intrigue many tourists and visitors. Liping's fluency in both Miao and Han languages is especially crucial, as it allows visitors to directly access and understand these local insights and perspectives.

The integration of individual capabilities within the family is not merely coincidental but a result of their deliberate choice to run Manyou Farm as a diverse, family-centered enterprise. This approach has several key advantages. Firstly, by primarily utilizing their own land, labor,

and capital, the family minimizes financial overheads, granting them greater resilience against market uncertainties. For instance, Xiaoniu notes that in the face of challenges like the COVID-19 pandemic, they have the flexibility to revert to basic farming, ensuring their food security (interview, September 8th, 2022). Additionally, the family's focus on a diversified production system underpins the resilience of their agritourism model. The variety in their activities and produce not only stabilizes their income stream but also enriches the experiential value for visitors, intertwining cultural heritage with sustainable practices. Crucially, this family-owned and operated model aligns with their broader objectives that transcend mere profit maximization. It allows them to simultaneously focus on family care, cultural preservation, and sustainable development. This multifaceted approach might be compromised if they chose to significantly expand or specialize, as it could potentially shift the focus away from these core values and disrupt the balance they have achieved in harmonizing their lifestyle with their business model.

While the family's diversified, family-centric operation model of Manyou Farm brings notable advantages, it is not without its challenges. A primary concern, as highlighted by several supporters, is the impact of this approach on the quality and consistency of the Farm's offerings. The diverse range of projects, coupled with limited labor and resources, sometimes leads to a mismatch between the quality or availability of "products and services" and visitor expectations. This is particularly evident in the execution of planned activities, the consistency of tea products, and the provision of guesthouse services.

Furthermore, diversification poses internal challenges for the family. For instance, Liping perceives a lack of time for Xiaoniu and herself to engage in retrospection and planning as they are often occupied in multiple tasks:

> We do not make plans for many things ahead of time —we just think of them and then do it. (…) Sometimes it feels like I am chasing my tail every day and there is no major outcome… [we are] busying ourselves every season, including winter, and don't even know what we are busying ourselves for. (…) And then, after giving it a thought, because we've been doing these daily, like you have just mentioned, tea, fish-mint, this and that, there's quite a lot of things [that we have done]. (…) We are doing marketing, sales, processing, and…a lot of things, and [even though] we don't know what we are busying ourselves for every day — looking back, it seems that we have been doing all these ourselves. (Liping, interview, June 20th, 2022)

The sense of busyness experienced by Liping is further intensified by limited labor resources and the family's commitment to accommodating spontaneous requests from visitors. Xiaoniu

acknowledges this busyness but views it as manageable, suggesting that the family can always create time for themselves despite the demanding nature of their work. However, he points out that in the absence of significant financial support, he needs to confront the constraint of having to progress slowly towards his aspiration of implementing more cultural conservation projects, as he is faced with the immediate necessity of making a living and caring for family members through the Farm (Xiaoniu, conversation, May 29th, 2022).

Finally, Xiaoniu also identifies challenges stemming from his identity as a non-local within the community. His different background and skillsets, coupled with the absence of blood ties to the local community, have led to various conflicts and obstacles. Nonetheless, he recognizes that this divergence can have both positive and negative impacts. He reflects,

> If everyone's thinking aligned with mine, we might be better off than we are now in terms of overall performance. Yet, there's also the possibility that we could end up worse off. There are two possible scenarios: one is where everyone's actions are consistent, and the service level is uniform, leading to better reputation and more growth. The other scenario is where we are idealistic but the practical implementation falls short. In that case, it would be the same — the performance wouldn't be as good. (Xiaoniu, interview, September 8th, 2022)

7.2 Communal Factors

At the community level, Manyou Farm benefits from several key advantages that contribute to its success. These include Queniao picturesque natural landscape, its abundant and fertile land, and the friendliness and sincerity of the local community. Since Chapter 6 already details the Farm supporters' affirmation of these factors, the main additions here are views from family members. Firstly, Liping's father points out that the relatively open topography of Queniao village offers superior views, ideal for sightseeing. This contrasts with the nearby Getou village, where the view is restricted due to being flanked by mountains. Secondly, he notes that Queniao, situated in the mountains, has more land per capita and richer natural resources compared to flatter, more densely populated areas. Queniao's land also contains more fertile "black" soil, unlike many other villages in the region where the soil is thinner and rockier (conversation, Liping's father, July 25th, 2022). These natural conditions have led Queniao's villagers to rely more on subsistence agriculture as their main livelihood, growing a wide variety of crops. In addition, enhanced transportation conditions in the last decade have made Queniao's crops, particularly fish mint and pod pepper, increasingly popular locally, fetching higher prices than

other villages. For Manyou Farm, these factors mean not only higher economic returns from selling produce but also access to more natural resources, a variety of heirloom crops, and quality ingredients, particularly beneficial for hosting visitors. Furthermore, Xiaoniu points out that because of Queniao's agricultural advantages, more villagers are willing to stay and farm, making the village more vibrant than many neighboring villages, which are relatively empty and stagnant outside of holidays and festivals.

In addition to Queniao's advantages in natural resources and conditions, the relatively friendly atmosphere of its people is also crucial for the Farm's success. Because mutual aid among community members is still prevalent in the village, the family can access labor, resources, and skills to help with various tasks at a relatively low cost. These include, but are not limited to buying crops, procuring materials, making repairs and renovations, and finding help during busy farming seasons or when hosting large groups of tourists. Meanwhile, as Wu and Liu reveal, the sincere feelings and hospitable customs of local Miao people are highly appealing to visitors from large cities. Such friendliness and hospitality allow visitors to let down their guard and enjoy more pleasant and genuine human connections.

While the above factors have contributed to the Farm's current success, the family's vision for expanding their scale and impact is also constrained by several community-level factors. Firstly, Queniao's rich variety of crops is managed on a relatively small scale, primarily for self-sufficiency. This is exemplified by pod pepper, a high-value crop, yet the surplus each family can sell is limited to about 15-20 kilograms due to the specific requirements of harvest and processing methods like sun drying or charcoal roasting (Liping, conversation, June 21st, 2022). This limitation in scale is a common challenge for many local crops and edibles, constraining their potential for generating significant economic value through large-scale cultivation and sale. Fish mint and tea are notable exceptions in Queniao, as they are easier to manage and are cultivated on a larger scale, making them the village's primary economic crops. However, the local reputation of Queniao's fish mint and the lack of distinction for its tea in the market, where it is collectively wholesaled for processing without differentiation from teas from other villages, highlight a missed opportunity in value addition. The potential to create more economic value from Queniao's diverse ecological and cultural resources is evident, yet it remains underexploited due to these scale constraints and the lack of distinct branding and promotion. While these challenges could potentially be overcame through developing tourism, branding, or other value-

adding channels, these paths give rise to another significant hurdle — the prevalent lack of cultural awareness and confidence within the community.

To attract more urban visitors or establish a brand, the local community needs to be familiar with city dwellers' unique needs and the value regimes they uphold. Many locals lack this understanding of external cultures. For instance, the failure of the Laopinhui team partly resulted from villagers' inability to grasp and satisfy the basic accommodation needs of city residents (Liping, conversation, May 29th, 2022). Meanwhile, Liping points out that many villagers, herself included initially, do not recognize what aspects of their village are valuable or appealing to urban tourists (Liping, interview, June 20th, 2022). This limited awareness could lead to actions such as purchasing external ingredients to entertain guests, based on a belief that external elements are superior and more presentable. To shift this perspective, villagers need to have confidence in their own culture, rooted in a thorough understanding of mainstream discourses and values, not just blind faith. They should be able to use the language and concepts of mainstream culture to add value to their products or experiences. While external collaboration can assist in promotion and advocacy, the community requires key leaders who can bridge communication with external groups and also train and educate community members.

At the same time, whether in developing local brands or tourism, cooperation and participation from more community members are essential. Xiaoniu points out that in rural areas where blood ties and clan relationships still play a significant role in maintaining social cohesion, the relatively shallow blood ties among Queniao's villagers create challenges for mobilization. The Queniao community consists of not only multiple clans by surname but also smaller family groups within each surname, who migrated to the village at different time periods. Therefore, mobilization often requires communication with various individual families. By contrast, in villages where residents all belong to one large family with a common ancestry, there are usually a few influential figures. Once these key individuals are convinced, they can effectively persuade the rest of the villagers. As a result, mobilization in these villages tends to be easier and more efficient (Xiaoniu, conversation, July 28th, 2022).

However, even if the aforementioned community-level barriers are overcome, so that local resources are in position to generate more economic value, the family must still confront more fundamental obstacles at the societal level. These obstacles are discussed in the following section.

7.3 Societal Factors

In addition to factors at the individual and community level, the emergence and success of Manyou Farm has relied on or benefited from a number of fundamental, societal-level enabling factors. These factors affect not only the family, but also Queniao village and many other local communities. The most important of these is undoubtedly the improvement in material living conditions. Liping and her parents point out that life in the village as a whole is getting better today compared to the past, when everyone was still striving for subsistence (Liping's mother, interview, June 20th, 2022). In the early days, the introduction of hybrid rice and the opportunity to work outside allowed locals not only to meet food security, but also to have money left over to subsidize their families, purchase supplies, and renovate their houses. At the same time, the construction of local infrastructure such as roads, electricity, and internet infrastructure increased the mobility of people, information, and commodities: for example, villagers were able to bring in a variety of industrial products to their villages to improve the convenience of their lives, and access to information and services from the outside world. If these basic living conditions had not improved, no matter how rich the village's ecological and cultural resources are, local people would lack sufficient material surplus, infrastructure, and awareness of both internal and external environments to understand the potential value of local resources, let alone utilizing them for local economic development.

Since 2010, the Guizhou provincial government has made significant efforts to develop tourism and specialized farming industries in the province by building and optimizing its road and rail networks, creating tourist attractions, and improving supporting resources. Xiaoniu points out that these measures are the basic prerequisites for his family and other locals to be able to market their agricultural products and develop tourism. Taking tourism as an example, Xiaoniu describes how these initiatives have played a key role in improving accessibility, attracting tourists, building capacity, and processing documentations for the Farm:

> For instance, in terms of access to roads, water, and electricity… Nowadays (…) only very few places (destinations) are [accessible only] by foot. (…) Everybody is particular about accessibility; otherwise, without access to roads, it's not feasible for children and the elderly. And, if the road surfaces aren't good — for instance, if they're not cement roads, how could the elderly bear it? Those bumpy roads are very dangerous, so these things are very critical. Also, in terms of the broader environment, take [the adjacent] Xijiang Miao Village for example: because it attracts a lot of visitors every year, after visiting, some might think, "Are there more 'primitive' destinations [nearby]? I want to check it out."

> (…) Additionally, the local government has been promoting this aspect (tourism), including [organizing] numerous training workshops for guesthouse operation. Liping has attended many of them. Without these regional initiatives, such opportunities would be scarce. So these are all crucial, including applying for [agritainment or other tourism operator] licenses. In some places, they (local officials) don't even know how to handle it, or they might make it difficult. But here, the process is very straightforward because they [already] process so many licenses from Xijiang every year. (…) Local officials clearly know what documents people need, so they can process their requests quickly. All these factorsare very important." (Xiaoniu, interview, September 8th, 2022)

Additionally, from a consumption perspective, the success of the Farm is closely related to the transformation of China's overall social structure, material conditions and lifestyle. China's rapid economic development and urbanization over the past few decades have led to emergence of a large urban middle class. This group not only has greater disposable income compared to previous generations but they exhibit a strong curiosity towards different life experiences owning to their exposure to increasingly global information in the city. As such, individuals have both the ability and willingness to engage in various forms of travel, including experiencing rural areas and the customs of other ethnic groups.

Furthermore, many urban dwellers have become aware of the social issues arising from China's industrialization and urbanization, such as food safety concerns, environmental degradation, loss of traditional culture, and disconnection from nature. As a result, they are taking action to reduce the impact of these issues on themselves, their families, and society. This includes consuming sustainably produced food, supporting the preservation of cultural heritage, and reconnecting with nature. In this regard, the development of domestic transportation, logistics, and digital systems brought about by China's industrialization and informatization has made it more convenient and affordable for citizens to travel to remote villages like Queniao. Additionally, it has enabled them to discover small businesses like Manyou Farm through social media and other online channels and purchase products directly from them.

The operation and development of the Farm, while benefiting from the above factors, are equally constrained by various impediments at the societal level. Among them, the COVID-19 pandemic has the most direct affect on the family's current projects. Xiaoniu notes that in the summer of 2021, due to epidemic prevention and control policies, five planned summer camps were successively cancelled, resulting in a loss of about half a year's economic revenue for the Farm (Xiaoniu, conversation, June 12nd, 2022). Also cancelled as a result of the epidemic were

different villager visits and training events. Not only did this further reduce the family's income and deprive the Farm of opportunities to publicize its reputation, but it also prevented more villagers interested in rural culture conservation from acquiring inspiration and assistance through these activities (Xiaoniu, conversation, July 31st, 2022). Furthermore, the shutdown of tourism and the drop in consumer demand due to the epidemic also led to a significant drop in demand for Queniao's tea, fish mint, and pod pepper, resulting in villagers being unable to sell or having to sell these economic crops at low prices for over two years (Xiaoniu, conversation, July 31st, 2022). Fortunately, despite these impact, the family's diversified livelihoods and relatively low-cost business model have prevented them from falling into a more severe economic crisis.

Excluding the direct impact of the COVID epidemic, the family faces challenges and concerns related to expanding the scale and influence of their projects. First, developing local brands or tourism requires not only mobilizing more community members and increasing their cultural awareness, but also obtaining external support such as capital and market access. One of the major reasons for the disbandment of the Laopinhui team was precisely the lack of sustained and stable customers and funding, which resulted in the team not having sufficient income and capital to sustain its internal operations. Thus, in order to expand their scale, locals will most likely need assistance from the government, corporations, or other external entities.

However, Xiaoniu and Liping's concern is not the lack of external support, but rather that such support is not provided based on a balance of power and philosophical alignment with the local community. As mentioned in Section 5.2.2, Xiaoniu and Liping have not actively sought government support and do not wish to see the government overly dominate Queniao’s development. On one hand, Liping's concerns about the inconveniences that may arise from government funding reflect the government's dominant position in decision-making and relationships with villagers in rural affairs. Many village matters, such as land planning and allocation, use of forestry and agricultural resources, and reception of external visitors, are under direct control of the government. Community members are usually unable to participate in decision-making and can only passively adapt to the implementation of top-down policies. Against this background, although accepting government support could increase villagers' economic income, they are likely to be in a more passive position in other ways. For instance, villagers may need to spend more time and effort maintaining their relationship with the government in order to continue to receive support, and if these activities become too time-

consuming and difficult to refuse, they could turn into a burden and in turn limit villagers' autonomy.

Similarly, Xiaoniu points out that the government, in leading development, tends to focus too narrowly on economic indicators, which he believes is more harmful than beneficial to the long-term development of the village. He cites the nearby Xijiang and Longtang Miao villages — two villages where the government has been highly involved in their development and which have now relied upon cultural tourism as their primary industry — as examples:

> On the surface, they see, “I'm getting dividends, I'm getting all these things,” but actually in terms of everyday life, (...) there are many (issues) existing. (...) (According to) our (Manyou Farm) way of doing things, (...) suppose this (tourism) can’t be done, then we can still live (on our own). (...) At least we will not become…using economic [outcome] to measure everything…then there would be a big change in the family, big problems." (Xiaoniu, interview, September 8th, 2022)

In Xijiang and Longtang, villagers' main livelihoods have shifted from the traditional "peasant economy" to a market economy. Under this new system, the village's land, resources, and labor are managed and operated by the government or external enterprises, and local communities rely on dividends and employment for income, which they then use for consumption. This shift has resulted in a significant change in the way these communities derive self-sufficiency. However, although these villages have received many investments in facilities and villagers' incomes have increased, the government’s focus on short-term achievements and economic indicators often leads to deficiencies in promoting autonomous development and risk awareness among villagers. This not only causes communities to become accustomed to receiving immediate, relief-type support but also leads to the commercialization of local customs, social relationships, and environmental resources, as well as the increasing reliance by villagers on consumption to meet their needs. Under such an arrangement, local communities will face even more severe livelihood challenges if their incomes are reduced as a result of instability in the external market or the end of external support, and they are unable to easily return to a state of self-sufficiency. Although the local government has begun to emphasize sustainable development and capacity building in recent years, Xiaoniu believes the operational model and development philosophy of Manyou Farm are still ahead of their time; therefore, the lack of recognition and support for such practices by the government and mainstream society can also be considered a barrier (Xiaoniu, interview, September 8th, 2022).

Finally, the development of the Farm and the preservation of rural culture and knowledge are ultimately constrained by phenomena that have arisen in the context of China's urbanization, industrialization, and marketization. These include an education system that prioritizes urbanization, a society that values efficiency and productivity, and an economic system that prioritizes commercial gain above other concerns. For instance, the concentration of schools into towns and county seats has caused many children and parents to leave their hometowns. Meanwhile, the exam-oriented education offered by these schools often lacks the teaching of rural culture and recognition of its value. As a result, many local children no longer speak the Miao language or engage in farming. Another example is that in rural development, cultural elements such as food, music, and dances, those that are most easily commercialized for tourism, are often prioritized. However, other valuable knowledge and wisdom, which are under the "cultural iceberg", are neglected due to lack of recognition. Moreover, as many working-age adults leave their villages for work or to accompany their children to school, the villages become increasingly empty, exacerbating the "hollowing out" of the countryside.

What the family and many villagers seek is not to oppose urbanization, industrialization and marketization — in fact, they largely embrace and aspire to these changes, as they have significantly improved local living standards, raised awareness of mainstream culture, and expanded life choices and possibilities. Furthermore, integration into the mainstream economy and culture is also a fundamental prerequisite for villagers to be able to recognize the value of local resources in contemporary society and use them for economic development. The problem is that while villagers receive mainstream education and are exposed to urban lifestyles, they are often not informed of the value of rural culture, and lack the opportunity to pass them on; while society relentlessly pursues efficiency and output, it often fails to accommodate other values such as health, sustainability and diversity; and when external entities cooperate with villagers to develop the rural economy, they often seek to maximize commercial value at the expense of the community's relatively self-sufficient and harmonious way of life. If these societal trends do not undergo structural and systemic changes to achieve more balance, Manyou Farm's efforts may struggle to expand beyond its local scale, and it may also be difficult for Xiaoniu and Liping's vision for autonomous and sustainable rural development to be fully realized.

7.4 Chapter Summary

Chapter 7 examines the factors that have enabled and hindered the development and operation of Manyou Farm. The chapter explores these dynamics across three levels: individual, community, and societal.

At the individual level, Xiaoniu's work experience in rural culture conservation and Liping's experiences in urban settings have been instrumental to the Farm's development. These perspective-broadening experiences fulfilled the couple's curiosity towards the outside world as rural youths, reducing their anxieties about rural-urban migration. More importantly, they enabled the couple to develop an informed understanding of the contemporary value of rural traditions and the social network necessary to develop offerings that resonate with the values and interests of urban citizens. Meanwhile, Liping's parents contribute the vital labor, local knowledge, and social relations that sustain the Farm's offerings and the family's place-based way of life. The family's deliberate effort to adopt a family-based, diversified economic model facilitates the resilience and autonomy they seek; however, this model limits their capacities to bring consistent offerings, engage in long-term planning, and commit to other conservation projects.

At the community level, Queniao's scenic landscape, natural resources, and friendly community provide advantages to Manyou Farm. The village's abundant fertile land has facilitated the community's prioritization of agriculture, leading to high crop diversity, greater economic returns from agriculture, and a more vibrant community. In conjunction with the prevalence of reciprocal exchanges, these factors enhance Queniao's appeal for agritourism and facilitate the family's projects and daily life. However, the Farm's potential to drive greater impact and community involvement is constrained by the community's small production scale, lack of branding, limited cross-cultural awareness and skills, and the village's fragmented clanship structure.

At the societal level, improvements in purchasing power, education opportunities, and connectivity, made possible by migrant labor and state development initiatives, have been essential preconditions for local development. They have enabled local communities to meet basic food security and access trans-local information, goods, and services. On this basis, Manyou Farm's projects are made possible by QMDAP's regional developmental programs and China's overall economic and sociocultural transitions. The former have brought substantial

tourism-related infrastructure and visitor volumes to the region, while the latter gave rise to large urban middle-class populations with interests in traveling and socio-environmental issues associated with urbanization. However, the state's dominance in local decision-making processes and its prioritization of material and economic metrics present challenges for Liping's family in seeking external partnerships that attend to autonomy and capacity building. More fundamentally, the family's vision for rural culture conservation requires systemic changes in education, societal values, and developmental philosophy — from urban-centered, efficiency-oriented, and profit-driven paradigms to more holistic, balanced approaches — to be fully realized.

Through combining factual, interpretative, and analytical approaches, Chapters 4–7 provide an in-depth, holistic understanding of Manyou Farm's case of grassroots innovation. Based on these findings, the final chapter explores the implications and recommendations of this research project.

CHAPTER 8: DISCUSSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings from Chapters 4–7, the concluding chapter interprets the research findings in relation to the main concepts used in this study — autonomy, biocultural design, and sustainability transitions — and discusses their implications. It explores how the findings deepen our understanding of these concepts and how they might inform and advance existing discourses and practices supporting sustainable development and rural revitalization. Each concept is examined separately and is guided by two central questions: one focused on interpretations and the other on implications. Table 4 outlines these questions and the main discussions points, which are further expanded in Sections 8.1–8.3. The chapter concludes with a summary of the research, its limitations, and suggestions for future studies.

Table 4. Summary of Interpretations and Implications of Study Findings

Main Concepts	Key Questions	Interpretations and Implications
Autonomy	1) Is autonomy an appropriate concept to interpret the family's motivations?	Autonomy aptly reflects the family's culturally mediated aspirations, pragmatic adaptation to external forces, and focus beyond mere economic empowerment.
	2) How can this understanding contribute to current discussions on development?	Autonomy underscores the limitations of hierarchical and unilinear discourses, the agency of local actors in creating desired futures, and the nuanced positions, roles, and relations within developmental processes.
Biocultural Design	1) Is biocultural design a suitable concept to capture the form, function, and organization of Manyou Farm's projects?	Biocultural design aptly encapsulates Manyou Farm's distinctive approach, including its preservation of non-market relations and functions, promotion of sustainable practices, and co-creative and adaptive processes.
	2) How may this advance understanding on alternative pathways for rural economic development?	Rural development projects can benefit from supporting multi-actor, innovative processes that consider and engage diverse perspectives, knowledge systems, and needs to ensure viable and sustainable outcomes.

Main Concepts	Key Questions	Interpretations and Implications
Sustainability Transitions	1) What are the emerging sustainability values, relations and processes embodied in Manyou Farm's projects?	1) Slow: a departure from "fast" paradigms in daily activities, developmental practices, and travel. 2) Urban-Rural Integration: urban-rural relationships based on respectful, in-depth, and synergistic exchanges. 3) Multifunctionality: the design and utilization of spaces, practices, and resources to serve multiple purposes, which enhances efficiency, sustainability, and community integration.
	2) How can broader systemic and structural changes create conditions to foster more collective actions towards sustainability?	A shift away from growth-oriented development paradigms and a reduction in unequal exchanges between core and peripheral regions are necessary to foster more collective action toward slow, urban-rural integration, and multifunctionality.

8.1 Autonomy and Rural Development

This section examines the concept of autonomy in relation to the aspirations of the core family members. It analyzes the reasoning behind Xiaoniu and Liping's decision to return to the countryside and revitalize local cultural practices, despite the availability of employment opportunities in urban areas. It also considers the implications of this analysis on the meanings and objectives of development for rural communities and beyond. The primary questions addressed are: 1) Is autonomy an appropriate concept to interpret the family's motivations? 2) How can this understanding contribute to current discussions on development?

To review this concept, Section 2.1 defines autonomy as the ability of individuals to live according to their own choices, proposing it as a framework to conceptualize the diverse actions of rural people in response to globalized changes. This concept is distinctive in three key aspects: it is based on contextual rather than absolute standards; it does not entail complete isolation from external forces; and is multi-dimensional. Based on these definitions and the findings in Chapter 5, I argue that autonomy accurately and appropriately captures the motivations behind Liping's family's efforts, as their actions and reasoning align with each of these aspects.

My findings indicate that the family prioritizes the ability to "live their lives" over pursuing specific, normative goals. Xiaoniu and Liping, in particular, perceive and take pride in their

diverse activities at the Farm as a direct extension of their way of life, not as separate "projects" or "work" undertaken merely to support their livelihood. This perspective, focused on self-containment and continuity rather than striving for change, suggests that their sense of agency is deeply rooted in and exercised through a unique culture they embrace and seek to preserve amidst external disruptions. For the family, this way of life, anchored in the diversified agricultural systems and ethnic traditions of the local Miao people, is far more than a mere means of securing material sustenance in a volatile market economy. Rather, the processes and products of farmwork are also integral parts of their social, intellectual, creative, emotional, and spiritual lives. They are mediums through which the family can connect with the distinct language, social relations, landscapes, materials, knowledge, skills, values, beliefs, and everyday customs ingrained in them from their upbringing. These elements imbue the family with profound sense of meaning and purpose.

Despite the self-containment and significance of this way of life, the local Miao people are deeply intertwined with broader systems, notably China's socialist governance and market economy. Such integration is both strategic and involuntary, driven by the potential benefits they offer on the one hand and the need to respond to their powerful and intrusive forces on the other. Many locals pursue migrant work and settle in towns and cities out of such complex and pragmatic considerations. As opportunities for migrant work opportunities and local infrastructural development have increased, so too has their exposure to urban-industrial materials, lifestyles, and discourses. This exposure introduces them to a wide range of novel commodities, technologies, services, experiences, and knowledge. The novelties of these external influences, along with the perception of abundance, cosmopolitanism, and progressiveness, strongly motivate local people to engage with them to improve living conditions, broaden perspectives, and expand life choices for themselves and future generations. Not only is Liping's family interested in exploring the possibilities and experiences of the outside world, but they have also benefited from greater convenience and material security through local infrastructural development and the utilization of external commodities, tools, and technologies purchased with their earned income.

However, unlike many others, Xiaoniu and Liping have had deeper exposure to both mainstream culture and the rural culture conservation sphere. This has given them a more informed understanding of the long-term disadvantages of migrant work, a critical perspective on

mainstream culture, and the knowledge and resources to develop a more sustainable form of livelihood. They recognize that urban employment, despite its rewards, can create a sense of rigidity and alienation by limiting engagement with multiple dimensions of life and disconnecting individuals from their cultural roots. This disconnection is particularly acute for rural, ethnic minority communities, who often occupy economically disadvantaged and socially marginalized positions. Lacking the resources and skills to fully integrate into urban life, rural families are frequently separated, with adults becoming isolated from children and the elderly. This not only leads to increased work burdens and a lack of emotional care at home, but also the erosion of community liveliness and social fabric, which in turn lead to an increasing reliance on external means to meet people's diverse needs. Additionally, educational institutions and urban workplaces tend to valorize urban lifestyles, scientific knowledge, and transferable skills over place-based knowledge and traditions. Under shifting market conditions and state policies, this mode of integration with mainstream culture can potentially make individuals more vulnerable, alienated, and disempowered than they were previously. Meanwhile, Xiaoniu and Liping are also aware of the comparative strengths of local biocultural heritage, such as a relaxing environment, a sense of community and warmth, healthful and flavorful foods, and the embodiment of ecological sustainability principles — elements that are pursued by many urban dwellers.

Consequently, through Manyou Farm, Xiaoniu and Liping aim to facilitate a form of integration that builds upon, rather than undermines, the strengths of the local way of life in the long term. By developing economic pathways rooted in the diverse and multifaceted activities of local people, they can generate monetary income while caring for their family and enjoying greater time flexibility. Additionally, they have more opportunities to connect with and preserve the place-based knowledge, skills, customs, and relationships to which they are deeply attached. This approach enhances the community's material resilience and sense of control and belonging, countering the unpredictability and cultural alienation often associated with the urban-industrial market economy. Moreover, through their educational and promotional activities, the family seeks to elevate the status of rural communities within the broader cultural landscape. This enhances the family's and other locals' confidence in their cultural identity while facilitating the development of stronger external alliances as they engage with the wider world.

In light of the above analysis, the relevancy of the concept of autonomy becomes clear. First, Xiaoniu and Liping's decision to return to the countryside demonstrates that their sense of

empowerment is not solely realized through making advancements along pre-determined pathways, particularly the ability to live an "urban" lifestyle or the wealth and leisure time they possess. Autonomy considers the cultural boundaries that shape their perception of what is meaningful, valuable, and empowering. Secondly, autonomy aptly captures the complexities and pragmatism in the family's perspectives and actions amidst accelerated exposure to heteronomous pressures. Their approach is neither indiscriminate nor polarized; instead, they actively embrace and incorporate beneficial aspects while avoiding undesirable ones. Moreover, their perspectives continue to evolve as they gain deeper comprehension of the workings and changes of the broader system. Lastly, autonomy encapsulates the family's concern beyond economic empowerment. Their efforts to strengthen local people's confidence in their culture, build collectivity, uphold local traditions and values, and raise awareness among the broader society reflect their recognition of the importance of maintaining and strengthening the social and cultural aspects of their lives within mainstream society.

How can the above analysis of autonomy contribute to current discussions on development? To begin with, the self-containment and contentment of Liping's family and the Queniao community challenge the often hierarchical and patronizing perspectives within current developmental discourses. These discourses tend to view rural culture as backward and impoverished, and thus requiring external interventions to improve quality of life. However, the family and many locals continue to derive significant security, freedom, and pride from the diverse, place-based activities and relations rooted in local lands, resources, and traditions. The benefits of this way of life may not be immediately apparent through mainstream conceptualizations of freedom and well-being, which often employ material-based and individualized indicators such as economic and educational opportunities; health and longevity; access to services, information, and technologies; mobility and connectivity; and personal freedom (Mahali et al., 2018; Ikuenobe, 2015; Knight & Gunatilaka, 2010). While rural life may be limiting by these standards, many rural and indigenous communities experience empowerment and freedom through other pathways. These include a slow pace of life and tranquil living environment; close-knit community and social ties; a deep connection to land and nature; the capacity to meet material, recreational, and other needs directly using their skills, labor, and creativity; cultural and traditional practices that offer a strong sense of identity and continuity; and the ability to directly participate in decisions that affect their lives (McCubbin et

al., 2013; Fleming et al., 2017;). As such, autonomy underscores the complex and contextual nature of individuals' experiences of freedom and well-being. It highlights a skewed understanding of developmental goals that tends to prioritize material and economic measures over the more relational and community-oriented aspects of well-being.

Second, autonomy underscores rural development as a multifaceted and dynamic process, characterized by shifting relationships of collaborations, affiliations, and tensions among diverse actor-groups with distinct positions and interests. On one hand, certain state-led economic development projects have been criticized as "traps" that lead to rural precarity, indebtedness, and environmental degradation, leading to acts of resistance (Stahler-Sholk, 2014; Shepherd, 2019). On the other hand, incorporation into developmental projects can also bring enhanced convenience, material security, mediation from larger intrusive forces, and an overall improved quality of life and expanded life choices for communities. The pragmatic and strategic engagement by Liping's family with external systems — embracing certain desirable elements and forming alliances with certain actors while rejecting others — demonstrates the diversity of actors and practices involved in developmental processes. It also reflects the nuanced, rather than clear-cut positions, roles, and relations within these processes.

These insights have significant implications for developmental goals and trajectories, especially in the context of environmental and social crisis accelerated by neoliberal globalization. First, the shortcomings of urban-centric developmental approaches in recognizing the internal significance and societal values of rural, place-based traditions highlight the need to re-evaluate common presumptions and objectives within developmental discourse. Rather than concentrating exclusively on material and monetary indicators, providing solely relief-type assistance, and viewing urbanization as the only path to improved living standards, developmental initiatives should also consider the risk-mitigating and sociocultural functions of local practices, acknowledge communities' deep connection to place and tradition, and enhance individuals' adaptive capacities. Adopting more multi-dimensional, culturally sensitive, and participatory approaches can prevent communities from falling into more alienated and vulnerable conditions in the long term, which could increase pressure on governance and social stability. Furthermore, given the growing recognition of the unsustainability and limitations of prevailing capitalistic, Euro-centric, and urban-centric paradigms, it is crucial to adopt a more reflective and open-minded stance towards non-mainstream values, practices, and ways of life.

This calls for a fundamental shift in rural developmental discourse and practices, moving away from a one-sided approach of patronization toward a more reciprocal approach grounded in mutual respect and learning.

Additionally, the intricate and evolving nature of development processes highlights the importance of adopting a discerning yet non-deterministic perspective on developmental trajectories and outcomes. Understanding the relational basis of autonomy allows for greater consideration towards place specific-factors, agency within structure, divergences and contradictions within systems, boundary-crossing interactions, and adaptive iterations. In the context of this study, this perspective acknowledges the significant achievements of state-led developmental initiatives in improving the material well-being and prospects of local Miao communities, while also recognizing the associated challenges, such as family separation, the erosion of valuable communal traditions, feelings of inferiority, sociocultural marginalization, and limited community participation in developmental decisions. In addition, it makes visible the agency and capacity of local communities to draw upon their heritage and leverage their expanded knowledge, capabilities, and networks to forge more sustainable developmental pathways.

Furthermore, adopting a relational lens sheds light on the dynamic, heterogeneous, and multi-level realities of community development: as Manyou Farm's case shows, family, kinship, and clan relations can serve as signifianct forms of collectivity guiding individual actions and decision-making. In many rural contexts, specific production and exchange activities are organized at the sub-community level — such as through family-based enteprises — even though raw materials and inputs are held and regulated communally (Lira et al., 2022). In this sense, by grounding their projects in collectively held resources, values, and traditions, Manyou Farm exemplifies community-based development even though its scale and impact align with a family enterprise.

8.2 Biocultural Design

This section explores the concept of biocultural design in relation to the form, function, and organization of Manyou Farm. It aims to encapsulate the diverse projects, multi-faceted objectives, and dynamic operations that set the Farm apart from existing business categorizations. Additionally, it considers how principles of biocultural design could inform

more sustainable rural development pathways. The primary questions addressed in this section are: 1) Is biocultural design a suitable concept to capture the form, function, and organization of Manyou Farm's projects? 2) How may this advance understanding on alternative pathways for rural economic development?

For review, biocultural design is proposed as a framework to conceptualize and facilitate endogenous and sustainable development in rural indigenous and local communities. By introducing design thinking to the field of biocultural heritage conservation, the concept offers a collaborative process for these communities to pursue self-determination through product and service innovation. It also emphasizes how endogenous development can support sustainable development in these communities (Davidson-Hunt et al., 2012). Based on my results, I argue that biocultural design effectively captures the distinctive characteristics of Manyou Farm, including its diverse projects anchored in the aspirations to safeguard and strengthen rural autonomy; its deliberate efforts to integrate and advance sustainable practices; and its dynamic process of innovation, co-creation, and iteration.

The diversity of Manyou Farm's projects and their multifaceted functions reflect the Farm's positioning, where income generation is not the sole goal, but rather a means toward the broader objective of autonomy. From a business perspective, the Farm's various economic activities — such as the production and sale of tea, local crops, and Miao heritage crafts, as well as the provision of accommodation, meals, and rural experiential activities — can be described using terms such as agritourism, cultural tourism, or rural tourism. However, these terms fall short of capturing the non-market functions and relationships that the family deliberately preserves or incorporates in these activities. For example, the family limits the sale of crops for their own consumption and cultural use, prioritizes their living needs and hires local craftsmen for guesthouse design and renovations, structures hosting arrangements to uphold time flexibility, cultural integrity, and mutual respect, and avoids collaborations that would create inconveniences or deepen power imbalances. Also, tourism does not encompass the Farm's projects that focus on non-economic objectives, such as community development and rural culture documentation. The Farm's approach is notably distinct from more commercialized rural tourism development projects, where local villagers often relinquish their resource management rights and development decision-making authority to external professionals and governments in exchange for dividends, rent, and employment opportunities. These arrangements, which

prioritize profit gains and external demands over preserving the original functions of rural cultural practices, have become a prevalent conceptualization of rural and cultural tourism.

Meanwhile, Manyou Farm also shares similarities with, yet distinguishes itself from, smaller scale, more diversified and locally governed rural tourism forms, such as *nongjiale* (农家乐, literally "farmhouse joy"). Nongjiale a distinctive and widespread form of rural tourism — or more specifically, agri-tainment — in China, typically run by individual peasant households. It originated as an agricultural diversification strategy to supplement peasant farmers' income and focuses on offering urban guests a range of experiences, including rustic food, lodging, locally made products, and opportunities to experience local customs and engage in leisure activities (Su, 2011). While the diversity and non-market functionality of nongjiale activities resemble those of Manyou Farm, most nongjiale enterprises are developed around similar urban-centric values, profit-oriented practices and hierarchical power relations found in large-scale tourism projects, albeit in more nuanced ways. In contrast to Manyou Farm, which strives to balance authenticity with catering to guests' desires, attend to environmental and social impact, and facilitate learning and reflection, the majority of nongjiale operators primarily focus on capitalizing on the appeal of rural life for financial gain, adhering to values, processes, standards, and discourses that are largely shaped by external actors. For example, it is not uncommon for nongjiale enterprises to engage in practices such as hiding or fabricating cultural identities and practices, replacing traditional architecture with modernized accommodation facilities, and supplying contemporary games and recreational amenities (Park, 2014; Wu, 2014).

Compared to the limitations of mainstream tourism categorizations, several alternative concepts better capture Manyou Farm's approach, which prioritizes local autonomy, cultural respect, and sustainability. For example, the concept of community-based ecotourism describes tourism projects developed based on indigenous or local worldviews, values, aspirations, and resource management systems, highlighting their role in integrating conservation and development (Kiss, 2004; Farrelly, 2012). The concept of responsible tourism, as espoused by Xiaoniu, promotes tourism activities that respect and benefit local people and the environment, while also facilitating more meaningful connections with local people and landscapes (Sharpley, 2012). However, despite their success in encapsulating the pertinent values and desirable outcomes, these concepts fail to focus on the critical role of co-creation and adaptive innovation in realizing these values and outcomes. In the context of tourism, Carvahlo et al. (2023) defines

co-creation as a process of facilitating personalized experiences, cognitive and emotional involvement, and active participation, which fosters value creation, learning, memorability, and satisfaction. As a nuanced range rather than a binary, co-creation takes place when tourists are given the opportunity to "be partially responsible for creating his/her experience, assuming the role of experience creator and revealing interest in learning and interacting with others and the experience environment." (Carvahlo et al., 2023). These processes are particularly evident in Manyou Farm: Xiaoniu and Liping's willingness and eagerness to engage in deeper conversations with their guests and to encourage their direct input and contribution to the Farm's activities have significantly enhanced their visitors' sense of memorability and learning. In turn, since the Farm's early years, the family has continuously drawn upon guests' knowledge, information, and support as feedback, sources of ideas, and networks to improve their offerings, access opportunities, and enhance their awareness and capabilities. These boundary-crossing relations and dynamic processes are inherently incompatible with the term "tourism," which, as a noun, tends to invoke a series of organized and consistent processes involving actors with fixed roles.

Considering these limitations, biocultural design provides an original and insightful perspective to characterize Manyou Farm's projects. First, the conceptual breadth and holism of "biocultural" aptly captures the Farm's diverse projects and their multifunctional qualities. By emphasizing the inextricable link between local resources and practices and the values, relationships, knowledge, and rights of local communities, the term substantiates the Farm's approach, where income-generating initiatives are developed in ways that preserve rather than compromise the ethics and internal "functions" of local practices and traditions. Second, the concept's underlying advocacy for biocultural conservation and sustainable development aligns with the family's aspiration to raise awareness and foster collective action around these goals through their projects. It highlights the educational dimensions of their work and their awareness and concern for broader societal issues, setting them apart from similar enterprises not guided by an informed awareness of the broader significance of place-based practices. Lastly, "design" aptly captures the Farm's dynamic organization and adaptive characteristics. As both a noun and a verb, design elucidates the spontaneous process of co-creation underlying the Farm's activities, where visitors are engaged with sincere interest and are allowed to shape, modify, improve, or "design" the Farm's activities in collaboration with the family. The conceptual openness of

"design" can also encapsulate the Farm's non-profit projects and highlight its ongoing processes of experimentation and innovation.

The distinctiveness of Manyou Farm, as encapsulated by the concept of biocultural design, offers valuable insights into alternative pathways for rural economic development. First, the Farm's holistic approach highlights the benefits of preserving the non-market relations and functions in rural practices, as well as enhancing the adaptive capacity of local populations. In contrast, conventional models for rural economic diversification frequently prioritize material and economic indicators, which can lead to issues such as the disruption of local land-use practices by infrastructural development (Zhu, 2021); a lack of skills and financial resources to maintain public infrastructure and services established by external actors (Shen & Shen, 2022); the commodification of cultural practices and reliance on consumption to meet living needs (Hussain et al., 2024); and feelings of inferiority and vulnerability among local people due to their lack of representation in cultural narratives and developmental decision-making (Gao & Wu, 2014). Similarly, many conservation initiatives focus on preserving local landscapes, architecture, and other tangible elements. In contrast, the less tangible knowledge, relations, values, and local populations' actual needs and aspirations are inadequately understood and addressed. This can lead to failed conservation outcomes in the long term (Zhou et al., 2019; Berkes, 2004). Consequently, to achieve more sustainable outcomes, rural development and conservation projects should adopt an autonomy-centered approach that supports local participation and leadership, respects and protects the rights, ethics, and internal functions of local practices, and prioritizes capacity building so that local people can gain the skills to manage projects independently over time.

However, while rural developmental initiatives should reinforce local autonomy for long-term viability, the support for local autonomy alone does not guarantee sustainable outcomes. This is particularly so if local communities are guided by urban-centric values and profit-centric practices. For instance, in many nongjiale enterprises, rural hosts are keen to renovate their guesthouses and surrounding landscapes according to urban-industrial aesthetics and accommodation standards, and to expand their capacity in hopes of growing their businesses. Nevertheless, these endeavors frequently result in commercialization, environmental degradation, and the overall "fading of rurality," which paradoxically diminishes the very appeal that initially attracted visitors (Park, 2014; Hussain et al., 2024). Meanwhile, the success of the

Farm is contingent upon Xiaoniu and Liping's extensive and ongoing engagement with external, sustainability-driven organizations and networks. This engagement provided them with an informed awareness of the significance of local practices in contemporary society and the confidence and support to develop their operations judiciously and in principle. These examples underscore the need for balancing support for local autonomy with critical evaluation of the social and environmental impacts of local practices and collaborations with trans-local actor-groups that share values and aspirations regarding sustainable rural development.

Lastly, the need for cross-boundary alliances and the accommodation, evaluation, and balancing of multiple worldviews, values, and interests to effectively drive sustainable rural development underscores the importance of making visible and supporting innovative and dynamic relations and processes. The multifaceted interactions between the family and Manyou Farm's visitors — extending beyond typical consumer-producer and visitor-host relations to include mentorships, partnerships, and friendships — highlight the value for people to access, experience, and explore unconventional roles within a relationship or system. Such boundary-crossing experiences and opportunities enable diverse stakeholders in rural development to gain a deeper, more multidimensional understanding of the needs, values, worldviews, knowledge, and skills of other actor-groups. This enables individuals to discern the relative strengths and limitations of their cultural perspectives more accurately. When products, services, or other developmental formations are formulated out of such informed awareness and open exchanges, they are more likely to embody socially just and equitable processes and be supported by a plurality of knowledge and capabilities necessary to address various challenges and risks (Pereira et al., 2018). While these innovative formations may require more time, resources, and iterations to establish consensus, balance interests, and experiment — and may not be economically feasible or structurally compatible for direct replication or scaling — they are nonetheless essential and equally necessary as incumbent, "streamlined" approaches (Zhou et al., 2019; Smith & Raven, 2012). The participatory, multi-actor exchanges embodied in these formations are crucial for effectively reconciling grand concepts like conservation or sustainability with local priorities and specificities. Furthermore, the intermingling of diverse actors, knowledge, and interests can give rise to innovative or emergent values, relationships, and processes that can inform broader social movements and guide policy interventions, driving more collective actions toward sustainability.

8.3 Sustainability Transitions

Building upon the preceding analysis of Manyou Farm as a grassroots initiative for sustainable rural development, this section explores the sustainability insights that can be extrapolated from this local endeavor to inspire and facilitate broader societal transitions to sustainability. Specifically, it identifies the noteworthy values, relations and processes of sustainability embodied at the Farm that can inform or complement existing conceptualizations of transformation — namely, what should be transformed, for whom, and through what processes. Additionally, this section discusses how larger systemic and structural changes can complement local-level initiatives to address the multifaceted and interrelated socio-environmental challenges facing the global community. The primary questions addressed in this section are: 1) What are the emerging sustainability values, relations and processes embodied in Manyou Farm's projects? and 2) How can broader systemic and structural changes create conditions to foster more collective actions towards sustainability?

For the first question, I have identified three notable features of sustainability that are exemplified at the Farm: "slow", urban-rural integration, and multifunctionality.

8.3.1 Slow

The concept of "slow" is both a core experience and central principle at Manyou Farm. Its centrality is reflected in Farm's name, "Manyou" (慢友), which means "slow friends" in Chinese. As an experience, the perception of "slow" by urban visitors emerges from the stark contrast between the pressuring, fast-paced urban environments they come from and Queniao's serene rural landscape and slow pace of life. The opportunity to experience a state of profound relaxation, leisure, and learning through activities such as walking, resting, scenery-viewing, playing, chatting, and laboring in this landscape is a frequently mentioned factor driving their engagement with the Farm (Section 6.1).

More importantly, slow is the underlying theme connecting the major causes advocated by the family through their business practices and life choices, making it more than just a mere selling point. For instance, Xiaoniu and Liping's pursuit of an autonomous life in the countryside reflects a desire for a "slower" life — one that allows for greater control over time, a more familiar and predictable environment, and more opportunities to provide and receive care in the family. Meanwhile, their vision for local community development is also "slow." They avoid

rapid expansion for profit, instead focusing on other values. These include using natural materials and recycling to minimize environmental impact and conserve biodiversity; preserving communal activities and local heritage to foster community; and prioritizing local materials, seeds, and labor to enhance resilience and food sovereignty. Furthermore, the family's hosting practices align with the concept of "slow travel", which emphasizes quality over quantity in travel experiences (Dickinson & Lumsdon, 2012). This is exemplified through their provision of lengthy, whole-process experiential activities rather than "streamlined" versions, facilitation of in-depth, reciprocal dialogues rather than superficial conversations, and willingness to dedicate additional time and effort to accommodate spontaneous visitor inputs and requests.

On a broader level, the value of "slow" has been explored in numerous sustainability movements and discourses (Mayer & Knox, 2006). Indeed, the plethora of social, economic, and environmental crises identified across sectors and regions may be viewed as negative externalities stemming from the overvaluation of efficiency, material output, economic growth, and wealth accumulation (Fofiu, 2015). The imperative to produce, acquire, accomplish, and access more at increasingly faster speeds — guided by the belief that this leads to better lives and societies — could result in actions that externalize social and environmental costs, or dismantle existing systems that provide resilience, stability, and autonomy. Additionally, glorifying busyness and productivity induces a pressuring experience of time that defocuses the mind and stifles opportunities for critical reflection (Fofiu, 2015). This could result in a vicious cycle of unsustainable practices, as individuals and societies may increasingly seek fast and materialistic solutions under diminished environments, precarious conditions, and agitated mind-states. In this context, the pursuit of "slow" signifies a deliberate departure from the harmful consequences and self-perpetuating tendencies of "fast" paradigms. At the micro level, examples include efforts to reduce consumption, cultivate mindfulness, balance work, rest, and play, and create quality time with family, community, and nature. At the macro level, prominent movements such as Slow City and Slow Food redirect developmental priorities to promote place, heritage, connection, quality, and equity, as opposed to standardization and homogenization (Mayer & Knox, 2006).

8.3.2 Urban-Rural Integration

Apart from "slow," another notable feature of Manyou Farm is urban-rural integration. In particular, the interactions between urban visitors and Liping's family embody a distinctive

urban-rural relationship based on respectful, in-depth, and synergistic exchanges. Unlike many hosts of rural guesthouses and farm stays, Liping's family exert considerable influence over key aspects of the visitor experience, such as determining when visitors can come, what activities they may participate in, and how they conduct themselves in the community. Visitors are treated as guests who come to participate in the hosts' lives rather than as customers whose needs and preferences are prioritized more than anything else. This balanced approach provides Liping's family greater dignity and autonomy in their interactions with tourists and safeguards valuable local cultural practices from the intrusion of urban-centric discourses, values, and practices.

Furthermore, the family's facilitation of in-depth experiential activities and dialogues, rather than merely offering consumption-based entertainment, results in far more meaningful and gratifying interactions between visitors and themselves. This approach enables urban guests to recognize and appreciate the underlying knowledge, wisdom, values, and efforts that help sustain various appealing rural elements — such as tasteful foods, a hospitable community, and pleasant landscapes — elements that are often taken for granted and, as a result, susceptible to overexploitation. As a result of their enhanced comprehension of rural life, many visitors further develop a deeper reflection on the unsustainable qualities of urban lifestyles and systems. At the same time, these in-depth exchanges help Liping's family understand the broader significance of local cultural practices beyond their immediate consumption value, recognizing their importance in areas such as health, biodiversity and heritage conservation, and sustainability. Beyond income generation, the family benefits from these interactions by maintaining connection with urban culture, raising awareness about rural challenges and aspirations, and receiving support and opportunities to promote the Farm's projects and mission. The family's enhanced confidence, awareness, and expanded opportunities allow them to continuously innovate and adapt, which, in turn, attracts more urban visitors to learn about and experience rural culture. This creates a positive, reinforcing relationship that disseminates sustainability values and practices while providing sustained economic and social benefits to the local community.

More broadly, the facilitation of respectful, in-depth, and synergistic exchanges between urban and rural regions is essential for societal transitions toward sustainability. The dichotomy between urbanity and rurality has emerged as one of the major unequal and mutually exacerbating divides in contemporary societies (Liu & Li, 2017) Across geographical and ideological boundaries, urban interests dominate developmental planning, while rural regions are

marginalized. Urban systems, lifestyles, and knowledge are frequently upheld as symbols of modernity and progress, whereas rural regions are often perceived as viewed either as "backward" and "impoverished" or as static, romanticized landscapes of beauty and purity. Both perspectives objectify the rural through an urban-centric lens (Jansson, 2013). Consequently, rural regions often become sources of labor and natural resources to fuel urban development, while receiving inadequate investments and public services. Alternatively, they are transformed into amenity landscapes for leisure consumption. In these processes, rural regions bear the social and environmental costs of biodiversity loss, pollution, gentrification, labor out-migration, and cultural disintegration (Accordino, 2020; Sit & Wong, 2013;).

Meanwhile, the cultural divide between urban and rural cultures continues to widen. Urban economies, cultural life, and environments are increasingly disconnected from material production and direct interactions with living systems, a trend accelerated by informatization, globalization, and automation (Beery et al., 2023; Kesebir & Kesebir, 2017). This disconnect makes it more difficult for urban communities to recognize the environmental and social impact of their lifestyle choices (Sussman, 2022) and to understand rural ways of life, including the importance of communal interdependence, local self-sufficiency, and place-based skills and knowledge in fostering resilience, well-being, and biodiversity (Pretty et al., 2009). Meanwhile, under marginalized socioeconomic positions, many rural communities lack the skills and opportunities to access and benefit from urban services, develop more balanced perspectives on urban culture, and recognize and advocate for rural strengths. The absence of respectful, in-depth exchanges between urban and rural communities reinforces hierarchical developmental discourses, unsustainable practices, and conditions of precarity and alienation, further entrenching polarization and prejudice between these regions (Gabehart, 2023).

In this context, urban-rural integration refers to a relationship between the countryside and the city based on equality and mutual recognition of strengths, with the objective of fostering collaboration for sustainable development. At the local level, this constructive interaction could involve innovative efforts to deepen producer-consumer bonds and promote respectful and reciprocal partnerships. Examples include alternative food networks (Chen & Chen, 2022; Si & Scott, 2016), rural festivals and culture documentation initiatives, and urban-rural exchange programs, crafts and design collaborations, and partnerships on resources management and conservation. These initiatives are consistent with the tenets of cosmopolitan localism and the

concept of “Small, Local, Open, and Connected Systems,” which emphasize fostering new forms of locality rooted in global connectivity (Manzini, 2011). This approach allows small, local systems to exert influence on a large scale while staying open to global flows of people, ideas, and information. At the macro level, urban-rural integration requires bridging regional disparities and promoting more inclusive and integrated forms of development. Notable policies in this direction include China’s Rural Revitalization Initiative and the European Union’s Cohesion Policy (Section 2.2; European Commission, 2024), which aim to incorporate place-sensitive, multidimensional, and plural approaches to mitigate socio-political risks and improve economic competitiveness. These policies represent a shift away from previous, top-down and material-based measures, which have been shown to have structural limitations.

8.3.3 Multifunctionality

Lastly, the third notable sustainability characteristic embodied by Manyou Farm is multifunctionality. This refers to the design and utilization of spaces, practices, and resources to serve multiple purposes, which enhances efficiency, sustainability, and community integration. The Farm’s embodiment of multifunctionality is an extension of the local way of life, which is characterized by the profound integration among and inclusiveness within its productive activities, community life, and environmental conservation.

For instance, unlike commercialized hotels and B&Bs, the family’s guesthouse is a highly versatile space. Through designing shared facilities, multi-use areas, and communal dining arrangements, the guesthouse accommodates the living needs of both hosts and guests while fostering in-depth learning experiences between them. In addition, local residences also serve as important sites for the collection and conversion of household and human waste. Another example of such integration is farm work, which, in addition to the material sustenance it produces, offers opportunities for socializing, leisure, exercise, and family care. The low-input and labor-intensive nature of local farming practices also facilitates a deep connection with the land, while contributing to soil conservation and energy efficiency. Furthermore, many local resources are utilized for multiple purposes and to their fullest potential. A notable example is rice, which is cultivated as a staple crop and whose various parts are used as dietary staple, fermentation ingredients, animal feed, seeds, gifts, and ceremonial items. The diverse uses of rice, combined with the profound symbolic importance of rice in local culture, foster deep

emotional connections and mindful interactions with the plant, thereby enriching local communities' cultural life and discouraging wasteful behavior.

From a larger, socio-ecological system perspective, the characteristics and benefits of multifunctionality are reflected in the diversification and inclusiveness within Queniao's economy, culture, and environment. Economically, the community sustains a wide range of livelihood activities. Local households grow a larger variety of crops, raise poultry and livestock, engage in migrant work or local employment, and some practice specialized trades such as handicrafts, carpentry, repair work, or traditional medicine. These activities encompass both market and non-market modes of production and provisioning, with some adaptable to both. Such diversification and versatility help strengthen local resilience by reducing reliance on any single industry or system of exchange (Davidson-Hunt et al., 2016). Culturally, the community maintains a rich variety of traditions and practices that foster social integration. Local families derive a strong sense of autonomy, belonging, and pride through the numerous communal social occasions in the locality, such as inter-family and neighbor visits, local markets, and seasonal festivals. These occasions are more than simply venues for the convivial celebration and impartation of diverse local food practices, crafts, music, dances, language, and other cultural expressions. More importantly, they provide inclusive, collaborative spaces where people of different age groups and backgrounds can come together and find opportunities to engage, contribute, and derive enjoyment and support. The collective, participatory, multi-sensory, and recurrent qualities of these events allow individuals' diverse social, emotional, intellectual, and creative needs to be effectively expressed, recognized, and responded to, facilitating mutual understanding and collaboration.

Additionally, Queniao's productive and cultural activities are deeply intertwined with local land-use practices, which are also relatively diversified and inclusive. The village maintains a variety of natural and built environments, such as forests, rivers, paddies and fields, field and road edges, roads and infrastructure, residential areas, public facilities, and communal spaces. These are either collectively utilized and managed or evenly allocated to individual households. The capacity to access and utilize diverse landscapes forms the basis for local families to engage in diverse productive and cultural activities (Davidson-Hunt et al., 2016). Moreover, these diverse landscapes, along with agricultural practices like crop rotation, intercropping, and crop-livestock integration, support both agrobiodiversity and biodiversity. These practices contribute

to ecological functions such as climate regulation, biological pest control, nutrient recycling, and pollination (Manning et al., 2018). In this sense, the efforts by Liping's family to develop value-adding economic pathways based on local resources and traditions reflect their holistic focus on preserving and enhancing the economic resilience, cultural cohesion, and ecological benefits supported by the local way of life, rather than merely maximizing monetary profit.

On a broader level, a wide range of concepts, practices, and initiatives aimed at optimizing resource use, facilitating social connections, introducing diversity, promoting inclusion, reducing waste, and enhancing resilience can be linked to multifunctionality. For instance, developing products and materials that are durable, repairable, recyclable, and adaptable for different uses helps reduce waste and environmental impact. Implementing sustainable technologies and designs as well as socially inclusive policies in recreational industries also reflects multifunctionality (Hojnik et al., 2020). In work environments, adopting flexible schedules and creating open, collaborative spaces can promote social engagement and work-life balance (Orel, 2020). In urban planning, implementing mixed-use areas, intergenerational programs, and community events in residential and commerical spaces can foster community integration and social well-being (Lee & Chan, 2024). Establishing barter networks and local currencies can enhance economic inclusiveness and community bonds (Seyfang & Longhurst, 2013). The incorporation of diverse green infrastructure, paired with participatory and educational programs, can improve climate adaptation, support urban biodiversity, and promote environmental awareness (Benedict & McMahon, 2006, pp.1-22; Salata & Yiannakou, 2016). Importantly, many of these multifunctional practices also contribute to urban-rural integration and the promotion of "slow", which points to the synergy and interconnectedness of these ideas.

8.3.4 Complementary Structural and Systemic Changes

In light of the values, relations and processes of sustainability discussed above, how can broader systemic and structural changes create conditions that foster more collective actions in these directions? Drawing from Chapter 7's discussion on the drivers and constraints of Manyou Farm, I propose two key areas of change: pursuing holistic, quality-centered developmental paradigms and reducing unequal exchanges between core and peripheral regions.

First, to facilitate broader actions toward slow and multifunctionality, there needs to be a radical transition among government at all levels and the broader international community

toward adopting and promoting holistic, quality-centered developmental paradigms. This requires recognizing the fallacy underlying the current capitalistic world economy, which posits that economic growth and productivity must be sustained at all costs as they are seen as the indispensable foundation for poverty alleviation, job security, and human flourishing. This narrative disregards the finiteness of planetary resources, overlooks economic activities that do not or are inefficient at promoting human well-being, and obscures numerous extractive and exploitative practices that drive inequality, alienation, and environmental degradation (Hickel & Sullivan, 2024). Instead, societal efforts should be re-directed to scale down destructive and less-necessary forms of production, while promoting those that enhance human capabilities and meet human needs. This implies that countries and regions should pursue alternative developmental metrics that, instead of measuring total production output and capital accumulation, focus on the efficiency of converting energy and resources use into meeting specific social and environmental objectives (Hickel & Sullivan, 2024). Such a conceptual reorientation could drive the implementation of corresponding policies and measures that support institutions and industries in transitioning from growth-oriented and growth-dependent practices towards to those that consider, prioritize, and fulfil social and environmental objectives. As these new paradigms emerge and gain mainstream acceptance, local practices and initiatives that embody slow and multifunctionality will be more fully and recognized for their value and develop the long-term, participatory partnerships necessary to drive collective actions.

In addition to moving away from a growth-oriented paradigm, a concomitant change needed for more inclusive and equitable transitions across nations and societies is the reduction of unequal exchanges between core and peripheral regions. The core-periphery dichotomy applies not only to high-income versus low-income countries, but also to urban centers versus rural and remote regions. In many lower-income countries, the capacity for sustainable development is constraint by the concentration of land, labor, and resources for export production at unfavorable terms of trade, on one hand, and the dependency on imported capital goods and technologies, on the other (Hickel et al., 2022; Ellerman, 2005). With deprived resource base and, in many cases, disenfranchised communities, these regions may lack the material security, social capital, and access to trans-local knowledge necessary to organize collectively around social and environmental goals. Similarly, many rural regions continue to experience resource and labor drain for urban development, limiting their transformative

potential. Therefore, these regions need to reclaim the productive capacities currently directed toward globalized commodity production and urban development and redirect them toward sovereign national and autonomous rural development. While measures taken by core regions to mitigate regional imbalances are valuable, this process will more likely be initiated through proactive contestations and negotiations from peripheral regions, as seen in various decolonization and territorial autonomy movements (Hickel, 2021). Specific actions could include soliciting reparations, rights to resources, fair trade terms, and debt cancellations from core regions; internalizing production to reduce dependency on imports; establishing alternative trade networks and alliances with other peripheral actors; and developing sovereign, localized financial and monetary systems to fund national and local development (Olk et al., 2023). The productive capacity reclaimed through these actions could then be used to strengthen democratically governed public provisioning systems, ensuring universal access to basic goods and services such as housing, nutritious food, education, transportation, and communication technologies. These welfare improvements are critical not only for enhancing well-being per se, but also for reducing the cultural and material barriers to enable more in-depth, synergistic exchanges between core and peripheral regions, and thus facilitating urban-rural integration.

8.4 Conclusion of Study

This study set out to document a series of projects pursued by a Miao family in Guizhou, China to revitalize local traditions within a contemporary context. Overall, the objectives, findings, and implications of this research can be understood in three dimensions. First, by tracing the emergence, organization, and impact of Manyou Farm's projects, this study highlights Manyou Farm as an autonomy-centered, sustainability-driven, and dynamic rural family enterprise. It proposes and demonstrates biocultural design as a pertinent framework that can encapsulate these characteristics, which differentiate the Farm's practices from those of prevalent business forms. The Farm's distinctive approach directly contributes to its positive, multi-dimensional impact, including bolstering local economic resilience, enhancing community pride, raising awareness and support for local biocultural heritage, and disseminating sustainable practices. This finding underscores the value of nurturing and supporting rural developmental projects that involve multi-actor and innovative processes — those that consider and engage

diverse perspectives, knowledge systems, and needs, particularly the place-based identities, values, and practices of rural communities — in driving viable and sustainable outcomes.

Second, in exploring the motivations behind Liping's family's commitment, this study reveals that Manyou Farm's projects enable the family to derive significant security, well-being, and pride through the diversified agricultural production systems and communal traditions of local Miao communities, while maintaining integration with mainstream economic systems and sociocultural life. It discusses and affirms autonomy as a key concept that captures the cultural boundaries shaping local people's values, perceptions, and aspirations, as well as the strategic, adaptive means in which they engage with external actors, technologies, discourses, and ways of life. This finding underscores the inadequacy of hierarchical, unilinear developmental discourses, and the agency and capacity of rural communities to identify and pursue their own pathways towards desired futures. It also sheds light on the complex and evolving relations of collaboration and tension among diverse actor-groups involved in developmental processes.

Lastly, in contextualizing the success and significance of Manyou Farm's projects, this study reveals that China's national developmental strategies and QMDAP's regional initiatives have laid the essential groundwork for enabling grassroots tourism initiatives. Their significance is particularly reflected in the improved material standards of living, enhanced infrastructural connectivity, and expanded access to educational and economic opportunities they have facilitated for local communities. Meanwhile, the appeal of Manyou Farm to its guests and supporters reflects prevalent societal concerns arising from China's rapid urbanization and industrialization, such as urban drudgery and stress, community erosion, environmental degradation, declining food quality, and loss of valuable traditional cultural practices. In light of these findings, this study identifies three emerging sustainability values, relations and processes embodied in the Farm's projects: slow, urban-rural integration, and multifunctionality. It further suggests that broader structural changes, particularly a shift away from growth-oriented developmental paradigms and the reduction of unequal changes between core and peripheral regions, are essential to foster more collective action in these directions.

8.5 Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

One of the primary objectives of this research project is to examine and elucidate the linkages among sustainability-related concepts and frameworks that concentrate on disparate

levels of action. As a family-run, community-based enterprise with a strong understanding of and commitment to sustainability goals, Manyou Farm's case provides a valuable opportunity for examining how prominent sustainability concepts and discourses are embedded and redefined in everyday practices, and conversely, how local actions can inform and complement broader structural approaches to transformation. However, in attempting to bridge multiple concepts and frameworks, this study inevitably falls short in exploring each dimension in depth.

For instance, regarding biocultural design, this project is only able to demonstrate its descriptive applicability in one case of local innovation. Documenting additional cases that exemplify the characteristics and principles of biocultural design would provide a stronger empirical foundation for the descriptive value of this concept. Furthermore, since biocultural design is also proposed as an instructional framework for implementing sustainable rural development, future research could focus on exploring how mainstream rural development and conservation projects might transition to more multi-actor and innovative approaches. This could deepen our understanding of how biocultural design can be applied in broader, more complex contexts.

This project's findings on the significance of autonomy in understanding rural communities' aspirations are also insufficiently explored. The depth and validity of the interpretation of the motivation of Liping's family are significantly compromised by the researcher's Han ethnic background and language barrier. These factors preclude the possibility of engaging in direct, lengthy conversations with Liping's mother and grandfather, thereby impeding the ability to gain insight into emic perspectives on the meanings, perceptions, and experiences related to local ways of life and interactions with trans-local forces. Additionally, this study does not incorporate perspectives from other community members in Queniao and neighboring villages, whose viewpoints may diverge due to variations in life experiences and village histories. The researcher's male identity also presented challenges in accessing and understanding women's perspectives. These limitations highlight the need for future research to include a broader range of community voices and to present their direct articulations in the local Miao language, which will facilitate a more enriched and balanced understanding of autonomy.

Lastly, this study's findings on the drivers, constraints, and sustainability insights pertaining to the Farm are preliminary and could benefit from more comprehensive investigation and analysis. For instance, this research does not delve deeply into the distinctions among

projects and policies enacted by different government levels, jurisdictions, departments, and state-affiliated institutions and organizations, nor does it account for variations across different time periods. Such an investigation could reveal the complexities and discrepancies in the efficacy and impact of state developmental initiatives. Similarly, the three sustainability insights identified in this study would benefit from further conceptual development and applied research for them to enhance their credibility and gain broader recognition. This could involve comparing these insights with prevailing sustainability priorities and policy aims and developing practical methods to quantify, implement, and monitor progress in these directions. Such efforts would provide a more robust framework for understanding and advancing sustainability in rural development contexts and beyond.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Ethics Certificates



Human Ethics - Fort Garry
208-194 Dafoe Road
Winnipeg, MB R3T 2N2
T: 204 474 8872
humanethics@umanitoba.ca

PROTOCOL APPROVAL

Effective: March 7, 2022 Expiry: March 6, 2023

Principal Investigator:	James Lam
Advisor:	Iain Davidson-Hunt
Protocol Number:	HE2022-0026
Protocol Title:	*Grassroots Actions for Rural Revitalization: Documenting a Miao Family's Efforts Towards Sustainable and Autonomous Futures Through Biocultural Design*

Julia Witt, Acting Chair, REB2

Research Ethics Board 2 has reviewed and approved the above research. The Human Ethics Office (HEO) is constituted and operates in accordance with the current *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans*- TCPS 2 (2018).

This approval is subject to the following conditions:

i. Approval is granted for the research and purposes described in the protocol only.

ii. Any changes to the protocol or research materials must be approved by the HEO before implementation.

iii. Any deviations to the research or adverse events must be reported to the HEO immediately through an REB Event.

iv. This approval is valid for one year only. A Renewal Request must be submitted and approved prior to the above expiry date.

v. A Protocol Closure must be submitted to the HEO when the research is complete or if the research is terminated.

vi. The University of Manitoba may request to audit your research documentation to confirm compliance with this approved protocol, and with the UM *Ethics of Research Involving Humans*Ethics of Research Involving Humans policies and procedures.

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AMENDMENT APPROVAL

May 30, 2022

Principal Investigator:	James Lam
Advisor:	Iain Davidson-Hunt
Protocol Number:	HE2022-0026
Protocol Title:	*Grassroots Actions for Rural Revitalization: Documenting a Miao Family's Efforts Towards Sustainable and Autonomous Futures Through Biocultural Design*

Andrea L Szwajcer, Chair, REB2

Research Ethics Board 2 has reviewed and approved your Amendment Request submitted on May 19, 2022 to the above-noted protocol. The Human Ethics Office (HEO) is constituted and operates in accordance with the current *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans*- TCPS 2 (2018).

This approval is subject to the following conditions:

i. Approval is granted for this amendment only.

ii. Any further changes to the protocol require subsequent amendment approvals from the HEO before implementation.

iii. Any deviations to the research or adverse events must be reported to the HEO immediately through an REB Event.

iv. Amendment Approvals do not change the protocol expiry date. Please refer to the original Protocol Approval or subsequent Renewal Approvals for the protocol expiry date.

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RENEWAL APPROVAL

Effective: February 6, 2023 New Expiry: March 5, 2024

Principal Investigator:	James Lam
Advisor:	Iain Davidson-Hunt
Protocol Number:	HE2022-0026
Protocol Title:	*Grassroots Actions for Rural Revitalization: Documenting a Miao Family's Efforts Towards Sustainable and Autonomous Futures Through Biocultural Design*

Jonathan Marotta, Chair, REB1

Research Ethics Board 1 has reviewed and renewed the above research. The Human Ethics Office is constituted and operates in accordance with the current *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans*- TCPS 2 (2018).

This approval is subject to the following conditions:

i. Any changes to this research must be approved by the Human Ethics Office before implementation.

ii. Any deviations to the research or adverse events must be reported to the HEO immediately through an REB Event.

iii. This renewal is valid for one year only. A Renewal Request must be submitted and approved prior to the above expiry date.

iv. A Protocol Closure must be submitted to the HEO when the research is complete or if the research is terminated.

University of Manitoba | Research Ethics and Compliance

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RENEWAL APPROVAL

Effective: February 5, 2024 New Expiry: March 5, 2025

Principal Investigator:	James Lam
Advisor(s):	Iain Davidson-Hunt
Protocol Number:	HE2022-0026
Protocol Title:	*Grassroots Actions for Rural Revitalization: Documenting a Miao Family's Efforts Towards Sustainable and Autonomous Futures Through Biocultural Design*

Human Ethics Office as designated by , REB2

Research Ethics Board 2 has reviewed and renewed the above research. The Human Ethics Office is constituted and operates in accordance with the current *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans*- TCPS 2 (2022).

This approval is subject to the following conditions:

i. Any changes to this research must be approved by the Human Ethics Office before implementation.

ii. Any deviations to the research or adverse events must be reported to the HEO immediately through an REB Event.

iii. This renewal is valid for one year only. A Renewal Request must be submitted and approved prior to the above expiry date.

iv. A Protocol Closure must be submitted to the HEO when the research is complete or if the research is terminated.

Appendix 2: Consent Form Samples

Appendix 2A: Sample Consent Form (Liping's Family)

If you are a monolingual Miao speaker and prefer not to sign a document written in Mandarin, you are free to do a verbal declaration of consent. Are you willing to provide consent through your written signature or prefer to make a verbal declaration of consent? Written ☐ Verbal ☐

- If verbal, the recording will be stored on my university account of OneDrive kept separate from any information you provide through this project and will only be accessible to me and my supervisor. Are you willing for me to record the verbal consent process? Yes ☐ No ☐

Consent Form

Title of Study: Grassroots Actions for Rural Revitalization: Documenting a Miao Family's Efforts Toward Sustainable and Autonomous Futures Through Biocultural Design

Principal Researcher: Wai Lun Lam (Email: _____, Tel: _____

Research Supervisor: Professor Iain Davidson-Hunt (Email_____, Tel: _____)

Sponsor: Social Sciences and Humanities Research Grant

This consent form, a copy of which will be left with you for your records and reference, is only part of the process of informed consent. The consent form should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

Purpose of this Study: My name is Wai Lun Lam, I am a master's student at the University of Manitoba and I am inviting you to participate in my research. The purpose of my research is to document the efforts of a Miao family to pursue sustainable and autonomous rural futures through developing diverse economic pathways rooted in local biocultural heritage. The objectives of this study are to: 1) understand the developmental and sociocultural trends occurring in the region and the meaning of undertaking these projects for the family; 2) document the biocultural pathways being developed by the family and how they organized their efforts; 3) understand the value regimes shared among the family, their collaborators, and their supporters; and 4) identify the enabling and hindering factors of the family's efforts.

Participant Selection: You are being asked to participate in this study because you are a

member of the core family whose projects — organized under your family enterprise named "Queniao Manyou Ecological Family Farm" — are the focus of this study.

Study Procedure: Participation in the study will mainly involve two components: participant observation and interviews. First, for participatory observation, you will be asked to discuss with me to decide on several week-long date openings between May to September of 2022 where I can visit Queniao village to participate in some of your projects as well as your daily activities. These activities may include the sourcing and processing of foods and crafts, the management of your fields, educational and experiential activities for visitors, the exchange of goods and products, activities for your own learning and training, and other social and cultural activities you deem appropriate for me to participate in. During these activities, I may ask you for permission to use my personal mobile phone and camera to conduct textual, audio, photo and video documentation. The information I will be documenting include how you organized your efforts, your social network (information of people and organizations that are generalized), the knowledge, skills, meanings and values involved in these projects and activities, as well as my own thoughts and interpretations. The total number of days I plan on staying is 30-45 days, but this can be adjusted based on your time availability.

Second, you will be asked to participate in an in-person interview of 1-2 hours in length at a time convenient to you during one of my later visits. While you will participate in the interview individually, other family members will be present if you prefer or if there is a need for assistance with Miao language translation. The interview will be audio recorded using my mobile phone while I will also be taking supplementary notes using pen and paper. During the interview, you will be asked questions about: 1) your tasks and roles among the different projects; 2) your personal background and major events leading up to your current involvement in the projects; 3) the emergence of these projects over time and your motivations behind them; 4) the impact of these projects 5) your opinion of why people are interested in the these projects; and 6) you opinion of the enabling and hindering factors for these projects.

In addition to the above, I will also be conducting interviews with collaborators and supporters (which includes consumers) of your projects to gain a deeper understanding of the value regimes associated with these projects.

Please know that for all components of the study, you are encouraged to share only what you are comfortable sharing and participate in only those components you are comfortable participating in. You are free to choose to refrain from answering any question you prefer to omit, or consenting to any requests you prefer to decline, without prejudice or consequence.

If you have any questions regarding the procedures and purpose of the study, please ask at any moment throughout your participation.

Data Storage: All data will be converted to electronic copies and will be stored in my university account of OneDrive, an online software that is encrypted and accessible only to myself and my supervisor. All physical data will be stored in my locked backpack during fieldwork and scanned and uploaded to OneDrive once I return home. Then, they will be immediately shredded and thrown away.

All data will be destroyed after the publication and presentation of research results which is estimated to be June 2024.
Anonymity and Confidentiality: I will not reveal your personal information in this study. You can choose a pseudonym that I will you refer to you by, or I will make up a name for you. On the other hand, you can choose to waive your confidentiality to be recognized for your contributions to this research. In that case, you may also choose how you wish to be referred to in the study.

During fieldwork I will be taking photos and videos of the family's activities in which you may appear. If you wish to remain confidential, do you provide permission for me to use the photos and videos in which you appear in group activities (they will neither be linked to your data nor signal that you were interviewed)? Yes ☐ No ☐

- If no, would you provide permission for these photos and videos to be used if your face is blurred out? Yes ☐ No ☐

Risk and Benefits: For risks, my participation in your daily activities and stay in your guesthouse may make you feel uncomfortable. You may also feel uncomfortable during interviews where I ask you questions on sensitive topics, such as those about your personal background. If you choose to waive your confidential, there are also inherent risks that come with your personal information being exposed to a wider audience through my study. In addition, this study will disclose information about your business practices, social network, and communication strategies which could bring risks to you from a business competition standpoint.

For all of the above, you can choose not to respond to any questions, and you are welcome to only share as much information as you are comfortable with. In addition, you may choose what information I will present about you during the member-checking process explained below in the Feedback/Member-checking section.

Finally, as this study involves my in-person visit to your workshops during the COVID-19 public health crisis, participation in this study may increase your exposure to COVID-19. Please see the COVID-19 Consent Appendix at the bottom of this form for information on additional policies and precautions that will be taken.

The benefits of participating in my study for the family include 1) having a researcher organize and produce materials for your projects which will be useful for your educational and promotional efforts; 2) having the opportunity to share the meanings and reflect on the experiences of working on these projects with another person through interviews and participatory observation; 3) having the visibility of your projects increased through thesis publication, journal presentations and publications; and 4) having opportunities to become co-authors in journal publications and presentations.

The benefits of this research project are to: 1) make visible the importance of place-based practices for rural communities; 2) understand how diverse biocultural resources are utilized for endogenous economic development; 3) reveal emerging values, processes, and structures of sustainability; and 4) identify the enabling and hindering factors for more collective actions towards sustainability.

If you have any concerns, please discuss with me prior to your participation.

Dissemination of Research Results: The research results will be disseminated through 1) the publication of a master's thesis; 2) journal publications and presentations in relevant academic fields; 3) a community outcome provided to the core family utilizing materials produced during the research to assist in their educational and promotional effort; and 4) a translated and summarized report of the research results to be sent to interested family members and the collaborators and supporters of the family's projects.

The translated summary of research results will be delivered to you by April 2023 via email or your preferred communication channel. If you are interested, you could also receive an electronic copy of my thesis, which will be delivered to you in the same month.

Compensation: As negotiated during my preliminary visit, you prefer not to receive monetary compensation but rather in-kind support for your educational and promotional efforts. This community outcome is yet to be defined in detail but will utilize materials that are organized and produced during my research. I will discuss with you on the details of this community outcome in the following months and deliver it to you by April 2023.

Feedback/Member-checking: After I have collected and analyzed all the data, I will produce case themes and descriptions about your projects, which make up two chapters of my thesis and include all research findings except for conceptual discussions. You will have the chance to review the translated copy of the case themes and descriptions to clarify and modify any information I have presented. You will also have the chance to review the photos and videos I have taken for this study in which you have appeared. I will send them to you by September 15th, 2022, and you will be given one month to review them. Once the deadline is passed, you will be informed that I will be using them in the first draft of my thesis, which will be submitted to my advisor for review. However, any changes to the case themes and descriptions you suggest pass this date can still be applied in subsequent drafts.

After I have revised my first draft, the family will be given the chance to receive my revised and translated thesis draft and be given two weeks to conduct additional review. If no response is heard after two weeks, I will inform the family that I will be submitting this draft to my thesis committee for the scheduling of my oral defence, and it will not be possible to make further modifications.

As a member of the core family, would you like to:

1) Review the photos and videos in which you have appeared? Yes ☐ No ☐
2) Review the case themes and descriptions? Yes ☐ No ☐
3) Review the revised draft of my thesis? Yes ☐ No ☐

- If yes to any of the above, please provide your best method of contact:
    - _____

Withdrawal from Research without Negative Consequences: You are free to withdraw from this research, without prejudice or consequence. If you decide to withdrawal completely, your

data will be destroyed within two weeks. You will be asked to discuss with me whether you are still interested in me producing the community outcome using available materials. On the other hand, you are also free to choose to withdraw only specific sections of the information you shared with me or that I have presented. This information will be destroyed the same week you made me aware of your choice.

You will be able to withdraw until the time of thesis publication, which is estimated to be in April 2023. To withdraw, please contact myself or my supervisor by email or phone via the contact information provided above.

Questions: If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact myself or my supervisor with the contact information provided on the first page.

_____

By signing this form [if verbal declaration of consent – by providing your verbal consent], you indicate that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in this research project, that you have had an opportunity to ask questions, that your questions have been answered, and that you agree to participate to the research as a subject and that this decision is taken voluntarily. Your signature does not waive your legal rights nor does it release the researchers, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time and/or choose to refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. You should feel free to ask for clarifications or additional information throughout your ongoing participation.

The University of Manitoba may look at your research records to see that the research is being done in a safe and proper way.

This research has been approved by the Research Ethics Board at the University of Manitoba, Fort Garry campus. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact any of the persons previously named or the Human Ethics Coordinator at _____or _____. A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

_____

Consent Signatures: For your participation in the research, please indicate your consent to the following elements [if verbal declaration of consent – do you give the researcher your verbal consent to the following elements]:

1. I am over 18 years of age. Yes ☐ No ☐
2. I give you permission to conduct textual, audio, photo, and video recording on parts of my daily activities that I am comfortable sharing for this study. Yes ☐ No ☐
3. I give you permission to audio record the interview. Yes ☐ No ☐
4. I wish to remain confidential. Yes ☐ No ☐
5. I wish to remain confidential, but you may refer to me by my familial title and a pseudonym. Yes ☐ No ☐
    - The pseudonym I choose for myself is: _____

6. I choose to waive my confidentiality and be identified by a name and my familial title with any information I provide in this study. Yes ☐ No ☐
    - The name I wish to be identified by is: _____
7. I would like to receive a translated summary report of this research (by April 2023). Yes ☐ No ☐
8. I would like to receive a translated electronic copy of the thesis (by April 2023) Yes ☐ No ☐
    - If yes, please provide your best method of contact: _____

Participant's Printed Name_____ Date _____

Participant's Signature _____Date_____

- **[If verbal declaration of consent] The researcher (and Miao translator) has read the informed consent and allowed me the opportunities to ask questions. Do you give your consent to participate in this research? Yes ☐ No ☐**

Researcher's Signature _____Date _____

Thank you for your time!

COVID-19 Consent Appendix

Title of Study: Grassroots Actions for Rural Revitalization: Documenting a Miao Family's Efforts Toward Sustainable and Autonomous Futures Through Biocultural Design

Principal Researcher: Wai Lun Lam (Email: _____, Tel: _____,

Research Supervisor: Professor Iain Davidson-Hunt (Email: _____, Tel: _____,)

Sponsor: Social Sciences and Humanities Research Grant

This appendix contains important information about in-person research during the COVID-19 public health crisis. COVID-19 (also called SARS-CoV2) is an illness caused by the coronavirus. Coronaviruses are most commonly spread from an infected person through: a) respiratory droplets when you cough or sneeze; b) close personal contact, such as touching or shaking hands; or c) touching something with the virus on it, then touching your eyes, nose or mouth before washing your hands.

The University of Manitoba is committed to taking measures to protect the health and safety of the wider community. Your safety is important to us. The university has suspended most research that cannot be conducted remotely or virtually. This project requires in-person visits.

Therefore, it is important to understand that your participation in this study may increase your exposure to COVID-19.

Our project has been approved to proceed by the Research Ethics Board, our Faculty, the COVID Recovery Response Team, the COVID Recovery Steering Committee, and the University Provost. In order to gain approval, we created policies to ensure the safety of research personnel and participants. These plans were reviewed and approved by the parties above. These precautions include:

- *The principle researcher, Wai Lun Lam (hereafter referred to as "I"), will travel betewen his home in Shenzhen and Queniao village through: 1) High-speed railway between Shenzhen and Kaili; 2) Bus between Kaili and Leishan county seat; and 3) Local bus between Leishan county seat and Queniao village. The ability to travel by these public transport routes is regulated by a national QR-code system that is used and connected to every citizen's phone to monitor for COVID-19. Citizens are not permitted — or would be required to present up-to-date negative COVID test results — to travel to and from certain regions if those regions have recently reported COVID-19 cases that are not contained. This national system is implemented by all levels of state bodies and is enforced at most public spaces and checkpoints. Thus, I will only be able to travel domestically and enter public spaces without restrictions if my personal QR code is highlighted green, which signifies having low risks.*
- *I will only visit the community when the family is actively hosting other visitors, which means all participants would be required to have a green COVID-19 QR code both to host the activities and to participate in the activities. This will be achieved by making arrangements with the family at least one week before each visit and staying in contact throughout the week.*
- *During travel and fieldwork, I will practice basic safety measures including wearing 3-ply disposable masks in indoor spaces, physical distancing, and using hand sanitizers.*
- *By February 2022, I will have received three shots of Sinovac COVID-19 vaccine.*
- *I will make sure to follow up on, and abide by the COVID-19 prevention policies at the study region, my home area, and at the national level.*

COVID-19 is a serious health threat and the situation is evolving rapidly. If you feel that you are from a group that is more vulnerable to COVID-19 effects (e.g., senior (over the age of 60 years), immuno-compromised), please discuss your participation with the research team before providing your consent. You are under no obligation to participate and can change your mind about participating in the research at any time and without consequence.

The University of Manitoba is closing watching the situation in Manitoba and may restrict in-person research at any time. We will continue to keep you informed as to changes that may occur to this study.

If the researcher comes down with COVID following the period he was participating in the workshops, he will inform the family.

If you have questions regarding this study, measures we are taking to keep all parties safe, or have any concerns, please do not hesitate to ask. You can contact any of the above named researchers or the Human Ethics office at _____.

By signing this form [if verbal declaration of consent – by providing your verbal consent], you indicate that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation and the COVID-19 risk and agree to participate. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researchers, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

Participant Name _____

Participant's Signature _____ Date: _____

- **[If verbal declaration of consent] The researcher (and Miao translator) has read the COVID-19 Consent Appendix and allowed me the opportunities to ask questions. Do you give your consent to participate in this research despite the risks? Yes ☐ No ☐**

Appendix 2B: Sample Consent Form (Supporters)

If you are a monolingual Miao speaker and prefer not to sign a document written in Mandarin, you are free to do a verbal declaration of consent. Are you willing to provide consent through your written signature or prefer to make a verbal declaration of consent? Written ☐ Verbal ☐

- If verbal, the recording will be stored on my university account of OneDrive kept separate from any information you provide through this project and will only be accessible to me and my supervisor. Are you willing for me to record the verbal consent process? Yes ☐ No ☐

Consent Form

Title of Study: Grassroots Actions for Rural Revitalization: Documenting a Miao Family's Efforts Toward Sustainable and Autonomous Futures Through Biocultural Design

Principal Researcher: Wai Lun Lam (Email: _____, Tel: _____

Research Supervisor: Professor Iain Davidson-Hunt (Email: _____, Tel: _____)

Sponsor: Social Sciences and Humanities Research Grant

This consent form, a copy of which will be left with you for your records and reference, is only part of the process of informed consent. The consent form should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

Purpose of this Study: My name is Wai Lun Lam, I am a master's student at the University of Manitoba and I am inviting you to participate in my research. The purpose of my research is to document the efforts of a Miao family to pursue sustainable and autonomous rural futures through developing diverse economic pathways rooted in local biocultural heritage. The objectives of this study are to: 1) understand the developmental and sociocultural trends occurring in the region and the meaning of undertaking these projects for the family; 2) document the biocultural pathways being developed by the family and how they organized their efforts; 3) understand the value regimes shared among the family, their collaborators and their supporters; and 4) identify the enabling and hindering factors of the family's efforts.

Participant Selection: You are being asked to participate in this study because you are a supporter or collaborator of the family's projects organized under their family enterprise "Queniao Manyou Ecological Family Farm." This is determined based on 1) your voluntary participation in at least one of the projects or activities organized by the family; 2) your having more than once purchased products sold by the family; or 3) your having offered knowledge, labor, capital, promotional support, or other forms of assistance and support to the family's projects.

Study Procedure: Participation in the study will involve an interview of 1 hour in length that is held at a time of your choosing. The interview will be held in-person or remotely via phone call depending on your location and preference. If it is held in-person, I will audio record the interview using my personal mobile phone. If the interview is held remotely via a phone call, I will audio record the interview through my laptop computer. In both cases, I will be taking supplementary notes using pen and paper during the interview. The interview will be held with you individually unless there is a need for a translator. If the latter, the translator will be asked to sign an oath of confidentiality before the interview.

During the interview, you will be asked questions about 1) your past and current involvement in the family's projects and activities (including consumption of their products and services); 2) your motivations behind participating in these projects and activities; 3) your opinion of the value of the family's effort; and 4) your aspirations for the future of the family's projects. These questions will allow me to better understand the value regimes shared among the family, their supporters, and their collaborators.

Please know that you are encouraged to share only what you are comfortable sharing, and that you are free to choose to refrain from answering any question you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence.

If you have any questions regarding the procedures and purpose of the study, please do not hesitate to ask at any moment throughout your participation.

Data Storage: All data will be converted to electronic copies and will be stored in my university account of OneDrive, an online software that is encrypted and accessible only to myself and my supervisor. All physical data will be stored in my locked backpack during fieldwork and scanned and uploaded to OneDrive once I return home. Then, they will be immediately shredded and thrown away.
All data will be destroyed after the publication and presentation of research results which is estimated to be June 2024.

Anonymity and Confidentiality: I will not reveal information that could identify you in this study. You can choose a pseudonym that I will you refer to you by, or I will make up a name for you. You cannot waive your anonymity for this study.

If you decide to review your transcript, your contact information will be kept in an encrypted codebook on my OneDrive account. The codebook will contain a list of codes and pseudonyms to store participants' contact information and interview data separately. Your contact information will be kept until your reviewed transcript is returned to me and I have generalized the data, which is estimated to be September 8th, 2022. After this date your contact information will be permanently deleted, making your data fully anonymous.
If you do not wish to review your interview transcript, I will not keep your name and contact information in the codebook, and your data will be fully anonymous after the informed consent process. Consent forms and identifying information will be accessible only to myself and my supervisor and will be stored separately from interview data. I will use your name and contact information in your consent form to send you the summary of my study results.

Risk and Benefits: In terms of risks, temporary emotional discomforts may arise during interview conversations that shift towards sensitive topics even though the interview questions do not involve sensitive topics per se. You can choose not to respond to any questions you wish to omit, and you are encouraged to only share as much information as you are comfortable.

As this study is taking place during the COVID-19 public health crisis, if the interview is to be conducted in-person, participation in this study may increase your exposure to COVID-19. Please see the COVID-19 Consent Appendix at the bottom of this form for information on additional policies and precautions that will be taken.

A potential benefit of this research for you is the opportunity to reflect on and express your experience in participating in the family's projects and activities, and to share the value regimes you uphold and share with the family through your participation. Your contribution to this research will also help support the family's goals toward sustainable rural development and Miao cultural revitalization.

The benefits of this research project are to: 1) make visible the importance of place-based practices for rural communities; 2) understand how diverse biocultural resources are utilized for endogenous economic development; 3) reveal emerging values, processes, and structures of sustainability; and 4) identify the enabling and hindering factors for more collective actions towards sustainability.

If you have any concerns, please discuss with me prior to your participation.

Dissemination of Research Results: The research results will be disseminated through 1) the publication of a master's thesis; 2) journal publications and presentations in relevant academic fields; 3) a community outcome provided to the core family utilizing materials produced during the research to assist in their educational and promotional effort; and 4) a translated and summarized report of the research results to be sent to interested family members and the collaborators and supporters of the family's projects.

If you are interested in receiving the translated summary of research results, I will deliver it to you by April 2023 via email or your preferred communication channel. If you are interested, you could also receive an electronic copy of my thesis, which will be delivered to you in the same month.

Compensation: You will be offered a ￥150 RMB honorarium that can be transferred via e-transfer or cash based on your preferences (only e-transfer will be available for remote interviews). The honorarium will be e-transferred to participants immediately after your interview.

Would you like to receive the ￥150 honorarium? Yes ☐ No ☐

Feedback/Member-checking: You will be given the chance to review your interview transcript before the information is generalized and used for academic and non-academic publications. In reviewing the transcript, you will have the opportunity to clarify information you shared during the interview.

Once I email you your interview transcript, you will be given two weeks to review it. If I have not heard back from you after two weeks, I will send a message to you with a reminder to review your transcript.

- As a participant, would you like to review your interview transcript? Yes ☐ No ☐
  If yes, please provide your best method of contact:
  - _____

If you have not returned your reviewed transcripts after two weeks, I will inform you that the deadline for handing in your reviewed transcript is September 1st, 2022. Once the deadline is passed, I will inform you that I will begin analyzing and generalizing the transcript data so it will not be possible to remove or make further modifications to the transcript.

Withdrawal from Research without Negative Consequences: You are free to withdraw from this research, without prejudice or consequence. If you decide to withdraw, your data will be destroyed the same week you made me aware of your choice.

If you wish to review your interview transcript, you will be able to withdraw until all interviews are transcribed and data is generalized. I anticipate this date to be September 8th, 2022. After that date, data will be generalized, and it will not be possible to remove your information from data analysis. If you do not wish to review your interview transcript, you will be able to withdraw from this research up until the end of your interview.

Questions: If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact myself or my supervisor with the contact information provided on the first page.

_____

By signing this form [if verbal declaration of consent – by providing your verbal consent], you indicate that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in this research project, that you have had an opportunity to ask questions, that your questions have been answered, and that you agree to participate to the research as a subject and that this decision is taken voluntarily. Your signature does not waive your legal rights nor does it release the researchers, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time and/or choose to refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. You should feel free to ask for clarifications or additional information throughout your ongoing participation.

The University of Manitoba may look at your research records to see that the research is being done in a safe and proper way.

This research has been approved by the Research Ethics Board at the University of Manitoba, Fort Garry campus. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact any of the persons previously named or the Human Ethics Coordinator at _____or _____. A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

_____

Consent Signatures: For your participation in the interview, please indicate your consent to the following elements [if verbal declaration of consent – do you give the researcher your verbal consent to the following elements]:

9. I am over 18 years of age. Yes ☐ No ☐
10. I give you permission to audio record the interview. Yes ☐ No ☐
11. I understand that I cannot waive anonymity for this study, and agree to remain anonymous. Yes ☐ No ☐
    - If yes, I would like to choose a pseudonym for myself. Yes ☐ No ☐
        - If yes, the pseudonym I choose for myself is:_____
12. I would like to receive a translated summary report of this research (by April 2023). Yes ☐ No ☐
    - If yes, please provide your best method of contact: _____

Participant's Printed Name_____ **Date** _____

Participant's Signature _____**Date**_____

- **[If verbal declaration of consent] The researcher (and Miao translator) has read the COVID-19 Consent Appendix and allowed me the opportunities to ask questions. Do you give your consent to participate in this research? Yes ☐ No ☐**

Researcher's Signature _____Date _____

Thank you for your time!

COVID-19 Consent Appendix

Title of Study: Grassroots Actions for Rural Revitalization: Documenting a Miao Family's Efforts Toward Sustainable and Autonomous Futures Through Biocultural Design

Principal Researcher: Wai Lun Lam (Email: _____, Tel: _____)

Research Supervisor: Professor Iain Davidson-Hunt (Email: _____, Tel: _____)

Sponsor: Social Sciences and Humanities Research Grant

This appendix contains important information about in-person research during the COVID-19 public health crisis. COVID-19 (also called SARS-CoV2) is an illness caused by the coronavirus. Coronaviruses are most commonly spread from an infected person through: a) respiratory droplets when you cough or sneeze; b) close personal contact, such as touching or shaking hands; or c) touching something with the virus on it, then touching your eyes, nose or mouth before washing your hands.

The University of Manitoba is committed to taking measures to protect the health and safety of their campuses and the wider community. Your safety is important to us. The university has suspended most research that cannot be conducted remotely or virtually. This project may utilize in-person interviews. Therefore, it is important to understand that your participation in this study may increase your exposure to COVID-19.

Our project has been approved to proceed by the Research Ethics Board, our Faculty, the COVID Recovery Response Team, the COVID Recovery Steering Committee, and the University Provost. In order to gain approval, we created policies to ensure the safety of the research team and participants. These plans were reviewed and approved by the parties above. These precautions include:

- *The principle researcher, Wai Lun Lam (hereafter referred to as "I"), will travel betewen his home in Shenzhen and Queniao village through: 1) High-speed railway between Shenzhen and Kaili; 2) Bus between Kaili and Leishan county seat; and 3) Local bus between Leishan county seat and Queniao village. The ability to travel by these public transport routes is regulated by a national QR-code system that is used and connected to every citizen's phone to monitor for COVID-19. Citizens are not permitted — or would be required to present up-to-date negative COVID test results — to travel to and from certain regions if those regions have recently reported COVID-19 cases that are not contained. This national system is implemented by all levels of state bodies and is enforced at most public spaces and checkpoints. Thus, I will only be able to travel domestically and enter public spaces without restrictions if my personal QR code is highlighted green, which signifies having low risks.*
- *I will only visit the community when the family is actively hosting other visitors, which means all participants would be required to have a green COVID-19 QR code both to host the activities and to participate in the activities. This will be achieved by making arrangements with the family at least one week before each visit and staying in contact throughout the week.*
- *During travel and fieldwork, I will practice basic safety measures including wearing 3-ply disposable masks in indoor spaces, physical distancing, and using hand sanitizers.*
- *By February 2022, I will have received three shots of Sinovac COVID-19 vaccine.*
- *I will make sure to follow up on, and abide by the COVID-19 prevention policies at the study region, my home area, and at the national level.*

COVID-19 is a serious health threat and the situation is evolving rapidly. If you feel that you are from a group that is more vulnerable to COVID-19 effects (e.g., senior (over the age of 60 years), immuno-compromised), please discuss your participation with the research team before providing your consent. You are under no obligation to participate and can change your mind about participating in the research at any time and without consequence.

The University of Manitoba is closing watching the situation in Manitoba and may restrict in-person research at any time. We will continue to keep you informed as to changes that may occur to this study.

If the researcher comes down with COVID following an in-person interview with you, he will inform you via the contact information provided.

If you have questions regarding this study, measures we are taking to keep all parties safe, or have any concerns, please do not hesitate to ask. You can contact any of the above named researchers or the Human Ethics office at humanethics@umanitoba.ca.

By signing this form [if verbal declaration of consent – by providing your verbal consent], you indicate that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation and the COVID-19 risk and agree to participate. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor

release the researchers, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

Participant Name _____

Participant's Signature _____ Date: _____

- **[If verbal declaration of consent] The researcher (and Miao translator) has read the COVID-19 Consent Appendix and allowed me the opportunities to ask questions. Do you give your consent to participate in this research despite the risks? Yes ☐ No ☐**

Appendix 3: Photo/Video Release Form Sample

I ("Participant") authorize Wai Lun Lam — a master's student at the University of Manitoba in Canada — to take photographs and video recordings of me for the research project entitled "Grassroots Actions for Rural Revitalization: Documenting a Miao Family's Efforts Toward Sustainable and Autonomous Futures Through Biocultural Design."

I understand that these images and videos may be used for research dissemination and Queniao Ecological Family Farm's educational and promotional initiatives in print publications, online publications, presentations, websites, and social media.

I understand that my name will not be revealed in the descriptions of these photos and videos.

I understand that no royalty, fee, or other compensation shall become payable to me by reason of such use.

I understand that if I have any questions or would require further information about the study, I may contact Wai Lun Lam (Tel: _____; Email: _____) or his research supervisor Dr. Iain Davidson-Hunt (Tel: _____; Email: _____).

By signing below, I acknowledge that I fully understand and agree to all the above information. I certify that my age is above 18 years old, or, if I am under 18 years old, my parent or legal guardian has also signed below.

Participant's Printed Name_____

Participant's Signature _____

Date _____

(For participants under 18 years old)

Parent/Guardian's Printed Name_____

Parent/Guardian's Signature_____

Appendix 4: Oath of Confidentiality Form Sample

Oath of Confidentiality

I, _____, am a participant involved in the research project entitled "Grassroots Actions for Rural Revitalization: Documenting a Miao Family's Efforts Toward Sustainable and Autonomous Futures Through Biocultural Design" (the "Research Project")

In connection with the Research Project I hereby agree as follows:

- As a core family member who will assist in Miao language translation during interviews with other family members and/or local community members who are not fluent in Chinese Mandarin, I will respect the right to privacy and confidentiality of all participants in this Research Project.

Participant's Printed Name_____

Participant's Signature _____

Date _____

Appendix 5: Semi-Structured Interview Schedules

Below are the interview schedules tailored to the two participant groups of this study. The wording, sequence, content, and selection of the interviews questions as well as introductory and connecting sentences were modified during the actual interviews. Specifically, the modifications were based on the informant's identity and response, the researcher's existing knowledge gathered through the other research methods, and the particular communication style the researcher judged the informant were comfortable in.

Appendix 5A: Interview Schedule (Liping's Family)

Introduction

As you know, the purpose of this research is to document the projects being undertaken at Queniao Manyou Ecological Family Farm as a case of grassroot effort towards sustainable and autonomous rural futures through developing diverse economic pathways rooted in local biocultural heritage. In this interview, my role as a researcher is to understand 1) your tasks and roles among the Farm's different projects; 2) your personal background and major events leading up to your current involvement in these projects; 3) the emergence of these projects and your motivations behind them; 4) the impact of these projects; 5) your opinion of why people are interested in the these projects; and 6) you opinion of the enabling and hindering factors for these projects. These questions are meant to guide our conversations — please don't feel limited by them and please feel free to discuss and expand on them.

Also, before we begin I want to highlight that throughout this interview there is no pressure to discuss anything you are not comfortable with. Please know that you can skip questions at any time without prejudice or consequence, and feel free to ask me any question you may have during the interview.

A. Tasks and Roles

First, I would like to get an overview of the different projects and activities you are currently involved in.

1. Based on my current knowledge from reviewing your documents and staying in the community, it seems that you are mainly involved in [name of project(s)], is that correct?

2. For each project:
    a. Can you broadly describe what this project involves, and what are your specific tasks and role in it?
    b. Can you describe this part in more detail? What kinds of things do you need to do?
    c. How long have you been doing this?
3. Are you also involved in the other projects, such as _____?

B. Personal Background

Next, I would like to know more about your personal background.

4. Can you provide a brief outline of your upbringing and major life events leading up to today? Some examples include your childhood, any education or training you received, the different occupations you have undertaken, marriage and having children, relocating to different place, and other changes you perceive to be important to you.
5. For each event of interest:
    a. Why did this change happen?
    b. How has this change affected you?

C. Emergence and Motivations

Now I would like to learn more about how these projects have emerged and evolved over time and the underlying motivations behind your commitment.

6. Can you describe how these projects took shape in the beginning — or the process of how they had become viable projects for you?
7. What types of considerations and aspirations have driven you to undertake these activities? These could include economic, social, cultural factors, or a combination of them.
8. Can you describe how these projects have evolved over time since the beginning? What caused these changes?

D. Impact

Now I would like to talk a bit about the impacts that these projects have had.

9. In your view, what kinds of changes and impact have these projects brought to you and the family?

10. What about the village community? For example, these can include impact on the local people, the local landscape, or the local biocultural heritage.
11. What about broader societal impact? For example, these can include impact on your supporters and collaborators, as well as other changes directly and indirectly because of your effort.
12. Going forward, do you have any aspirations for the future of these projects in terms of their organization, scale, the people involved, and their impact?

E. Value Regimes

Now I would like to talk about the value of the products, services, and activities you offer to your supporters.

13. Why do you think people are interested in the products, services, and activities you offer?
14. What about the other projects, such as _____?

F. Enabling and Hindering Factors

Finally, I would like to ask you to reflect a bit on the enabling and hindering factors of your projects.

15. In your opinion, what are some key factors that have made this project work? For example, these can include individual capabilities, social network, local resources, developmental trends, and policy support.
16. Do you see any challenges or barriers for these projects?
17. From my background research and observation, I have noticed the importance of [insert factor]. What do you think about this factor in shaping your project?

Thank you so much for sharing your experiences with me today. Our conversations today will be valuable in helping me gain a more in-depth understand of your projects and some key topics of my research.

Appendix 5B: Interview Schedule (Supporters)

Introduction

The purpose of this research is to document the projects being undertaken at Queniao Manyou Ecological Family Farm as a case of grassroot effort towards sustainable and autonomous rural futures through developing diverse economic pathways rooted in local biocultural heritage. In this interview, my role as a researcher is to understand 1) your past and current involvement in Manyou Farm's projects and activities, which also include the consumption of their products and services; 2) your motivations behind participating in these projects and activities; 3) your opinion of the value of these projects; and 4) any suggestions or aspirations you have for these projects. These questions are meant to guide our conversations — please don't feel limited by them and please feel free to discuss and expand on them.

Also, before we begin, I want to highlight that throughout this interview there is no pressure to discuss anything you are not comfortable with. Please know that you can skip questions at any time without prejudice or consequence, and feel free to ask me any question you may have during the interview.

A. Involvement

First, I would like to get a general understanding of your involvement in the Farm's projects.

18. From my current understanding, it seems you are mainly involved in [name of project(s)], is that correct?
19. For each project:
    a. How are you involved in this activity? What kinds of things do you assist in/participate in /purchase?
    b. How long you been involved?
    c. How did you come to know this product/service/activity/project?
20. Are you aware of the other projects the family is working on, such as _____?

B. Motivations

Next, I would like to know more about the motivations behind your involvement.

21. What is it about this product/service/activity/project that attracts you?

C. Value Regimes

Now I would like to learn more about the value of the family's products/services/activities/projects in your view.

22. What are your opinions in terms of the value of the product/service/activity/project in general?

D. Aspirations

Now I would like to learn about if you have any aspirations or suggestions for the family's projects.

23. Do you have any aspirations or suggestions for the family's projects in the future? Please feel free to think up on any possibilities or to provide some suggestions or critiques so that the family can improve on what they are doing.

E. Demographic Questions

Finally, I would like to ask you some demographic questions.

1. What is your age group (18-30, 31-49, 50-69, 70+)?
2. What is your occupation?
3. How do you best describe your racial or ethnic background?

Thank you so much for sharing your experiences with me today. Our conversations today will be valuable in helping me gain a more in-depth understand of your projects and some key topics of my research.

Appendix 6: Recruitment Poster Sample

Seeking supporters and collaborators of Queniao Manyou Ecological Family Farm for study on grassroots actions towards sustainable rural development through biocultural design

Are you an adult who is familiar with the various projects being undertaken at Queniao Manyou Ecological Family's Farm? If you believe you are adequately familiar with, and interested in these projects through 1) having taken the initiative to participate in at least one of the projects; 2) having more than once purchased the farm's products; or 3) having offered knowledge, labor, capital, promotional support, or other forms of assistance and support to these projects, then you are invited to be interviewed as part of a study being conducted through the Natural Resources Institute (University of Manitoba).

The purpose of this study is to document the projects being undertaken at Queniao Manyou Ecological Family Farm as a case of grassroots effort towards autonomous and sustainable rural futures through developing diverse economic pathways based on local biocultural heritage. Part of this study involves conducting one-on-one interviews of around 1 hour, either in-person or remotely through a phone call, with the family's supporters and collaborators. Questions will explore your past and current involvement in the family's projects and activities (including consumption of their products and services), the motivations behind your involvement, your opinion of the value of the family's effort, and your aspirations for the future of these projects. Your participation will provide valuable information pertinent to the objectives of this study. Interview participants will also be offered a ￥150 honorarium.

If you are interested in being interviewed or would like more information, please contact Wai Lun Lam by emailing to _____ or calling or texting my mobile number at _____ so we can discuss more and set up a time for your interview!

My advisor is Dr. Iain Davidson-Hunt and his contact information is _____ or _____. This research has been approved by the Research Ethics Board at the University of Manitoba, Fort Garry campus. This research is supported in part by funding from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council in Canada.

Thanks!