

Li Jiang 2012 Expedition Report

Village life in South China 1992 and 2012

Sian Lovegrove FRGS

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This is an independent expedition which follows on from fieldwork expeditions to the same area by Brathay Exploration Group in the UK. Using data collected in 1992 and 2012, this report outlines the changes in the lifestyles, economy and land use in 5 remote villages on the Li Jiang (River Li) in South China.

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Abstract

This report examines the people, lifestyles and economy of five rural villages in the area of the Li Jiang (River Li) South China. This is an independent fieldwork expedition but we make comparisons using base line data from a **Brathay Exploration Group** expedition to the area in 1992.

The expedition found that in most respects the lives of villagers have improved considerably. The most common reason given is the increased supply and quality of food and the lack of dependence on subsistence farming. It is noticeable that the village infrastructure has also improved; all villages now have concrete paths and better access to clean water. Compared with 1992, there is a marked absence of rice fields in the river villages and a corresponding increase in fruit production, something the government has promoted because the lack of water makes rice difficult to grow. Those rice fields remaining yield much bigger crops as a result of better irrigation, fertiliser and insecticide.

The biggest change in the economy of the region has been as a result of increased tourism. In 1992 the villages were heavily dependent on agriculture for their income and most inhabitants were peasant farmers. At that time tourism was undeveloped although plans were being drawn up to develop it. Today the majority of people of working age who we interviewed are employed either directly or indirectly in tourism, with the rest having married into other villages or moved to the city. Because of the relative ease of earning money from tourism, many of the young have chosen to stay in the village and not fled to the cities in the numbers seen in other parts of China.

In 1992 professionals and farmers were the top earners but the top spots today have been taken by the hostel owner, blacksmith and bamboo rat breeder, all jobs connected to tourism. Jobs in tourism are generally easier, require less effort than farming and provide more leisure time which in turn has made people happier. Seeing the benefits of this, many younger villagers' ambition was to own a tourist boat.

The villagers are generally optimistic about the future and believe things are getting better all the time. Even those who are still simple peasants and have very little income, claim to be happy with their lot and do not yearn for anything except good health and happiness.

We understand that people are attracted by the opportunity to make money from tourism but we hope that the development of Da He Bei and Leng Shui in particular, will not damage the charm of these villages. If some of the villagers are to be believed there is a danger of a "gold rush" by wealthy businessmen to acquire land and build hostels and restaurants.

If this is not done sympathetically, the developers will be shooting themselves in the foot by damaging just the thing visitors want to see - a glimpse of traditional village life in Guangxi.

Introduction and background

Brathay Exploration Group in the English Lake District ran a series of fieldwork expeditions to the Li Jiang (Li River) in Guangxi Province of China in 1986, 1988, 1990 and 1992. The expeditions were joint British/Chinese undertakings with the cooperation with the Chinese authorities without whom, at that time, it was impossible to travel to these areas. In some cases, we were the first Westerners these villagers had seen.

The earlier expeditions, with the help of the Karst Geology University in Guilin, looked at the geology and geography of the area and the life in three other villages in the Xing Ping area. The 1992 expedition visited three villages on the banks of the river between the market towns of Yang Ti and Xing Ping, south of Guilin city and north of Yangshuo.

Realising it was twenty years since the first data was collected from these villages, Sian Lovegrove, leader of the 1992 expedition, decided that it would be interesting to revisit these three villages and to record the changes that had taken place over what has been an era of huge economic change not just in the region but throughout China. These changes would be recorded through interviews with villagers.

The villages revisited are

- Lang Shi
- Leng Shui
- Da He Bei

The fields of study of the 1992 expedition were

- Land use and water quality
- Village life
- Tourism potential of the villages

Team recruitment

Places on the team were offered to foreigners and Chinese and advertisements were placed online locally in the Shanghai area. Brathay Exploration Group were also invited to send members. Those who could translate from Chinese to English during the interview process were actively sought but such people proved very difficult to find. Because of the need to carry out interviews, the expedition needed one Chinese speaker per foreigner. However, finding such people who had the time, money and linguistic skills was difficult. University departments were contacted, personal contacts used and advertisements posted but brought forward only four interested people.

The expedition could have easily recruited more foreigners to carry out interviews but without interpreters to assist them, it was not possible to offer them a place. It was particularly important to recruit members who could speak the local Guilin dialect as many of the villagers did not speak Putong Hua (standard Chinese). This necessarily reduced the recruitment location to the local Guilin area and we could only find one person, Wei Yi Gang, a leader of the 1992 expedition, who could speak the local dialect. Any future expedition to this area should make efforts to recruit more local translators.

Geography

The whole Guilin region has a subtropical monsoon climate and is famous for its Karst topography which draws millions of tourists from not only China but all over the world. Today it is one of the main stops on the itinerary of tours of China. A detailed description of the area is given in Appendix II.

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Aims of the 2012 expedition

- To locate and interview the same villagers who were questioned in 1992 and record changes in their lives.
- To look at changes to the economy of the villages.
- To examine the extent of human migration and the effect it has had on these rural communities.
- To record the views of the villagers about the future of their communities.

Methodology

The expedition employed exploratory, qualitative research techniques to gather primary data through the use of questionnaires, interviews and photographs to produce ethnography of these communities. Digital voice recorders were used to record interviews and extensive interview notes were also taken.

Questionnaires were used to guide and give structure to the interview although interviewers were encouraged to deviate from the topics to follow an interesting story. It had been hoped to use a rigid questionnaire with closed questions in order to provide quantitative data which could be used to compare with the 1992 data. However, the lack of interview teams meant that quantitative data could not be collected within the time available in the field.

Bibliographic research was carried out using previous Brathay Exploration Group expedition reports to this area and specifically the three villages above.

Data collection

A team of seven interviewers spent five days talking to a cross section of people of different ages, incomes and professions.

Data were collected from five villages in the Xing Ping area. Three of these villages (Lang Shi, Leng Shui and Da He Bei) were the ones surveyed in 1992 and referred to as “the river villages”. Two were villages previously unsurveyed (Shui Shu Cun village and Shu Ji Tou “mountain villages”). The expedition decided to visit two new villages because the surveys in the original villages had produced similar results. It was felt that it would be useful to examine life in more remote, less visited communities in the mountains rather than exclusively on the river.

Each team comprised two or three researchers including at least one Mandarin Chinese speaker and in some cases an interpreter able to speak the local Guilin dialect.

The teams walked through the villagers looking for people who were willing to be interviewed. In each village, we spoke to either the chief or the doctor, both of whom were most likely to know the people we were searching for and help us locate them. They were also able to give us an overview of the village.

Interviews typically lasted ½ - 1 hour and were carried out in people’s houses or place of work. In all cases we were greeted warmly and villagers gave information freely.

In excess of 30 people were interviewed, 28 of these interviews are recorded in Appendix I.

Results

The 1992 expedition interviewed approximately 90 households but because of time constraints and limited number of interviewers and interpreters available to us, we were unable to carry out quantitative research. Therefore we were unable to make a detailed analysis of changes in the family structure, number and gender of children and household possessions as we had in 1992.

However, the interviews carried out in 2012 are in-depth and allow us more than just a glimpse of typical village life in the 21st century. Rather, it allows us to gain a deeper understanding of the villagers' lives, their place within their society, their feelings, experiences, opinions, predictions and hopes for the future.

The expedition managed to find most of the villagers (who were still alive) that were interviewed in 1992 and we were able to refer to the 1992 interviews when speaking to them. This proved an accurate way to record the changes and provided a useful prompt when guiding the conversation.

Lifestyle

The expedition found that in most respects the lives of villagers have improved considerably in the past twenty years. Except in the case of a family who formally owned a rice wine factory but had become bankrupt, all were happier and wealthier than before. Even those who were still very poor peasant farmers reported an increase in living standards and a sense of satisfaction.

The most common reason given for the increase in satisfaction was having more and better food. Except for one family who were so poor they had to rely on hand-outs from the other villagers, families were able to support themselves sometimes with the help of money sent back from their relatives working in the cities.

It was noticeable that the village infrastructure had also been improved. Where there were dirt tracks and cobbled streets, there are now concrete paths. People also had easier access to clean water.

As for possessions, everyone except the very old and very young have a mobile phone. These were used to keep in touch with their children in the cities as well as for business. Smart phones were seen but are not common. All households have at least one television and many have computers and motorbikes. Computers are mostly used for playing computer games and for business. Photographers located in the quay and on floating platforms on the river use laptops and photo quality colour printers for processing photos while the customer waits.

To be peacefully drifting down the spectacular Li River and to sudden come across a floating platform on which there is a bank of computers and printers covered with a tarpaulin canopy, was an unexpected sight and shows to what extent tourism has been encouraged.

Houses in the two more developed river villages (Da He Bei and Leng Shui) ranged from large hostels with air conditioning and other modern facilities, to hastily erected shacks made from concrete blocks with no mortar, no doors and incomplete walls. In Lang Shi and the mountain villages, there were new style houses but still many substandard houses lacking even running water.

Generally, people have more leisure time and are more confident about the future than 20 years ago.

Changes in crops

Time restraints meant that the expedition was not able to collect quantitative data on crops grown but speaking to the villagers we were able to get an overview of the changes.

In 1992 most villagers were peasant farmers heavily dependent on subsistence farming with some growing enough to sell their excess in Yang Ti or Xing Ping. Compared to 1992, there is a marked absence of rice fields in all the river villages and a corresponding increase in fruit production which the government has promoted because of insufficient water for rice growing.

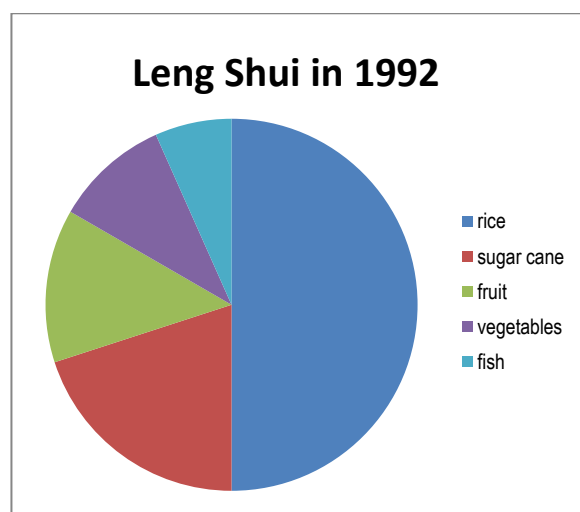
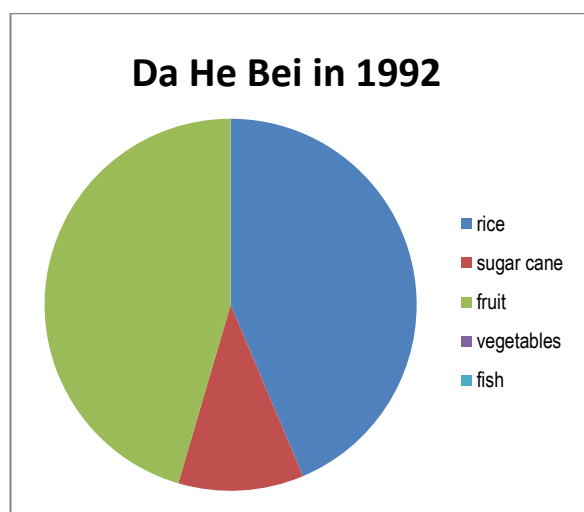
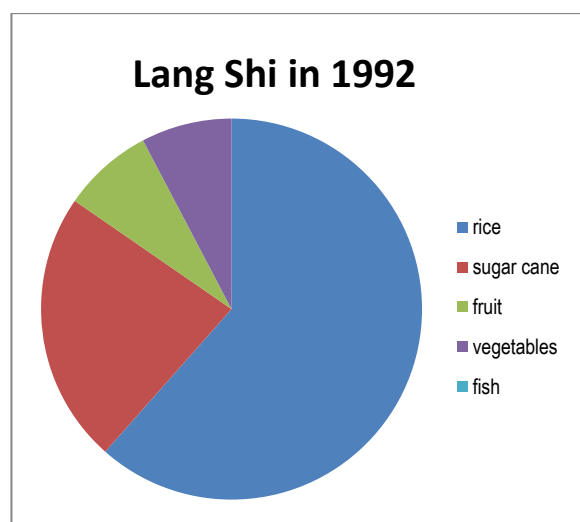
Those rice fields still in existence are yielding hugely improved crops as a result of better irrigation, fertiliser and insecticide.

The fruit most often grown is pomelo, a large citrus fruit endemic to South China, and oranges to a lesser extent.

In 1992 there was a significant amount of fishing in Lang Shi and Da He Bei and fishermen were considered to be some of the wealthiest in the villages. Today very few people fish other than for their own consumption.

This may be because the river is much busier or more likely because earning money from tourism seems easier to them.

Today, cormorants are more often to be seen posing on the end of a long stick for tourists than fishing on a bamboo raft.



Economic change

Twenty years ago the villagers considered the life of the (cormorant and other) fishermen more financially rewarding than other occupations but today, those working directly or indirectly in tourism had the highest incomes.

The biggest change in the economy of the region as a whole has been as a result of the increased tourism and to a lesser extent money sent back by migrant workers. In 1992 the wealthiest villagers in the more developed villages were farmers and in Lang Shi, was the doctor.

In contrast, the wealthiest villagers we encountered in 2012 were indirectly employed in tourism with farmers having the lowest income.

The richest people in the villages are;

- The blacksmith who is the only blacksmith on the river and who fixes propellers all day.
- The bamboo rat breeder who sells to restaurants in Xing Ping.
- The hostel owner in Da He Bei.

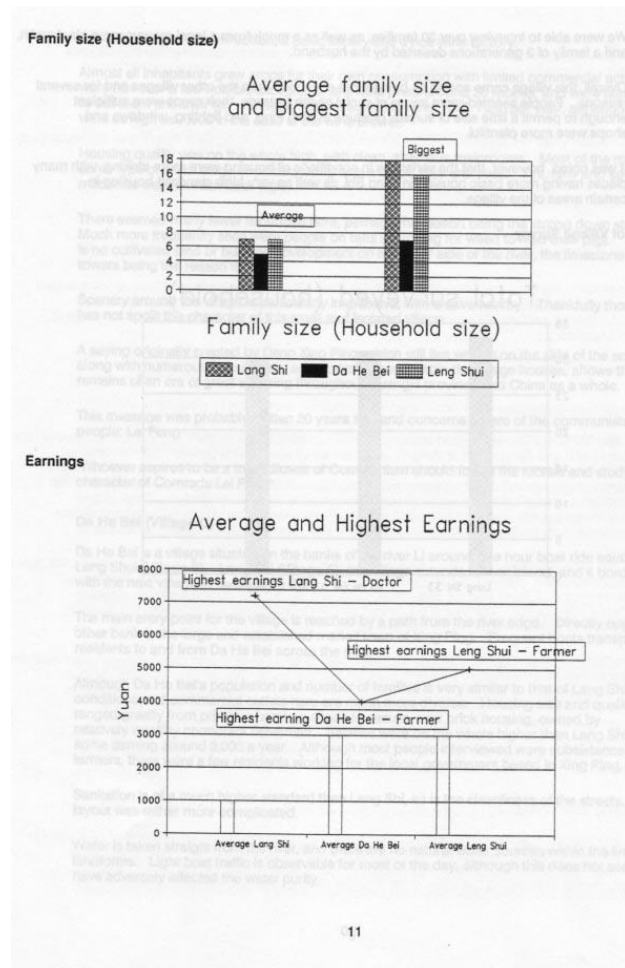
As for tourism, Da He Bei and Leng Shui villages are more easily accessible from the market town of Xing Ping and have embraced tourism by building hostels, cafes and offering pony rides and photographs. This has helped their economy greatly.

In contrast, the residents of Lang Shi village, although receiving groups of Chinese tourists every day, have little interest in offering any goods or services to them. The small village shop is still only open on demand and even though the village has a lot of offer visitors (the cave, the old house, and numerous scenic spots), the opportunity to boost their economy is wasted. It may be no coincidence that this village was the poorest village in 1992 and again in 2012.

As for migrant workers, families often rely upon regular and irregular money sent home by their children working in the cities although most of these children only return to their families at festivals such as Chinese New Year. The villagers are generally optimistic about the future and believe things are getting better all the time

Even those who are still simple peasants and have very low income claim to happy with their lot and do not yearn for anything except good health and happiness for their family.

Many younger villagers' ambition was to own a tourist boat even though incomes have been slashed recently as a result of changes in local government policy reducing the proportion of the ticket price allotted to the owners.



1992 data

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Conclusions

Before arriving in the field we had expected the migration of the young to the cities to be as big a problem here as in the rest of China and were interested in how this had affected the communities. However it soon became clear that although some have gone, many have grasped the opportunity to work in tourism and this has kept many of them in their villages. Why would they move to polluted, noisy cities when they can earn easy money, have more leisure time and breathe fresh air in their own village?

On the one hand tourism is responsible for keeping the young in the villages but on the other hand their desire to make as much money as possible from tourism by erecting big buildings and hi-tech floating platforms risks damaging the charm of the area.

The 1992 expedition report gave recommendations to the Guilin City Authority on how the villages could be sensitively developed for tourism. The report says *"The villages are isolated from the tourist not benefitting in any way from their potential spending"* and gives this warning.

"The development of tourism is an emotive issue, however, the balance between regulated and mass tourism is a very fine one. Allowing large influxes of tourists into this area from the river tour boats could have a worse effect than leaving the villages alone."

Although willing to accept more tourists, these villages have little idea of what changes this could bring about. Traditional farming techniques and ways could be changed in such a way that an area becomes no longer attractive to tourism and, smaller incoming revenue and deeper financial hardship than before."

Increased tourism would also put a strain on the already limited infrastructure like running water, waste disposal and sewerage systems. There is also the possible problem of little capital feedback to the villages, the revenue generated being put to other purposes."

Bearing in mind these issues, the Li Jiang area could be developed further to increase tourists especially those from the West. Funding from local or national government is necessary; strict controls must be imposed and the appropriate advertising needs to be concise and widespread. In these ways, with the boosting of tourism here, one of the most scenic areas of China can be preserved." Author, Graham Barrow.

Who could have predicted the huge growth in the prosperity of the Chinese middle classes? These people now comprise the vast majority of tourists with villagers reporting a surprising drop in the numbers of Westerners. This might be as a percentage of the whole rather than a drop in real terms.

It is pleasing that the concerns set out in the 1992 report have not become reality and the villages are still pleasant places to visit. It would be interesting to return in several years to see whether the predicted continued development has changed this position.

Villagers were asked about what the future holds for them and their community. Many considered it a strange question with some unwilling to look more than a few days ahead and many others who feel they have no control over their future because the government controls everything.

As an example of this, many of the boat owners told us that the government recently reduced the amount they receive from each ticket. The owners, facing a huge drop in income, joined together and went on strike but this was forcefully quashed by police arrests and imprisonment. Such control over their lives and incomes by the government has added to a feeling of helplessness amongst the villagers.

We also heard of successful industrial action several years ago. The government set up a sugar beet factory and forced the farmers to grow sugar beet but because they could only sell the crop to the government at below market rates, they suffered financially and all refused to grow it any longer. This resulted in the closure of the factory.

Other observations

Schools

All the villages had middle schools in 1992 but in 2012 they had all disappeared and students travel further to Yang Ti and Xing Ping. The only school we found was a kindergarten in Lang Shi. It had 1 teacher and 10 students in one room with the rest of the building lying empty.

Disabled student

In Lang Shi we came across an old lady looking after her mentally handicapped grandson who was not permitted to go to school as the teacher refused to have him in the class. The family had spent a large amount of money trying to cure him but with no success. This boy received no education and all his care was provided by his grandmother. We wonder what will happen to him when his grandmother is unable to care for him any longer. What help, if any, will the state provide?

The village doctors

There was a doctor in each village apart from Lang Shi, the previous incumbent having moved out to Guilin. We interviewed the retired barefoot doctor and he explained that the villagers preferred to come to him for medical advice rather than the formally trained doctor and this has resulted in the doctor leaving.

Opportunities for further work

Mountain villages

There is plenty of opportunity to carry out further work in this region. In particular, the villages in the mountains are relatively untouched by tourism and it would be interesting to compare lifestyles of those with the river villages. They are undeveloped and have a similar atmosphere to the river villages in 1992.

Fishing Village and Bill Clinton

Yu Cun (also known as The Fishing Village), was built by rich men in the Qing and Ming dynasties and was visited by the 1986 & 1988 Brathay Exploration Group expeditions. An extract of that report is reproduced in Appendix IV. Ten years later, in 1998, it was visited by Bill Clinton on his cruise down the river. By this time the houses in the village had already started using bio-gas and solar energy.

Today tours to Yu Cun are advertised everywhere. Its beautiful architecture and idyllic position on a huge bend of the river make it a popular stopping point. The 2012 expedition did not visit the village but it would be interesting to see what effect tourism has had here.

The 1986 & 1988 expedition report made no mention of tourism whatsoever and stated that the villagers were farmers and income came from pomelo fruit.

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Village profiles and extent of change 1992 – 2012

Lang Shi

Lang Shi village lies 15 minutes by barge from its administrative centre Yang Ti. It is situated on the banks of the Li Jiang south of Yang Ti, and consists of roughly 500 people [100-110 families].

The village lies in a linear fashion, stretching southwards alongside the river. Cultivation extends right up to the base of numerous karst tower landforms.

Many of the landforms contain caves, one of which supplies fresh water to the village. There is no similar settlement on the bank of the river, mainly due to lack of space from karst towers.



In 1992 Lang Shi had limited electricity and primitive sanitation and washing facilities. In 2012 electricity supply is available to all although washing facilities are still communal.

Some villagers wash clothes using the irrigation system running from the well and some still wash in the river even though it is not fenced off from animals and pollution from the heavy volume of boats is visible.



The charm of the village is diminished by the amount of rubbish strewn in open places, especially in an old fish pond.



Sian Lovegrove making friends!

A small shop selling beer, food, tobacco and basic medicine is located on the main street and is open on demand.

In 1992 there was a primitive clinic staffed by Lu Feng Giao, who had 3 years of formal training. He was employed by the Yang Ti Commune to look after 1700 patients in Lang Shi and the surrounding area. However, today there is no qualified doctor. We interviewed the retired "barefoot doctor" who had received 10 days training and worked for over 20 years in the village. He suggested that the clinic had closed because villagers preferred to go to him for advice instead of the formally trained doctor.

Consequently the doctor had lost face and left. We could not verify this but whatever the story, the retired "barefoot doctor" is the only medical man in the village today.

In 1992 Lang Shi had a primary school with 8 teachers and 120 students ranging from 5-12 in classes of 20. Twenty years later there is only one class with 10 kindergarten students. The rest of the schools lies empty.
An enterprising villager might see potential in this empty space.



Cultivated land extends out from both ends of the village and in 1992 crops consisted of corn, rice, sugar cane, sweet potato, peanuts, pumpkin and various Chinese green vegetables, most of which were grown for subsistence use.

In 2012, most of these crops have been replaced with fruit trees due, we were told, to the shortage of water and (although it was not verified) a drop in water quality.



In 1992, the fields were full of rice (Photo SL)



In 2012 they were full of fruit trees.

However, in 1992 the cave water was tested and was found to be the cleanest in the whole valley. Although no test was carried out in 2012, it was drunk and still found to be excellent so it is unclear why the villagers say this.

Most of Lang Shi's residents have spent all their lives here. In 1992 outside contact reached only as far as Yang Ti market. Today although many of the villagers themselves are disinterested in travelling, there are countless Chinese and other tourists alighting from boats on the bank and wandering through the village.

Although this is a very poor village, nobody has taken any initiative or seems at all interested in making money from those Chinese tourists who wander through the village. This is in contrast to the other river villages (Leng Shui and Da He Bei) which rely heavily on tourists and have opened cafes, guest houses and offer other services.

We suggested that they could offer walking tours to the Chinese tourists, showing them the "old house", the cave, the scenic photographic spots etc. but nobody we spoke to seemed to care. A walking tour of the village was also suggested in the 1992 report of the tourism potential of the village.

Coming from a culture which encourages entrepreneurship, it is strange for us Westerners to see a community short of money but choosing not to grasp the opportunity to earn relatively easy money from rich tourists literally walking past their door.

They told us that, although they were still poor, life was better than in 1992 and they were content. Who are we say that increased tourism would make them happier?



A girl at the cave 1992 (Photo SL)



Xiao Min at the cave 2012

The cave was a hive of activity in 1992 but water is not collected there any longer, it is piped into the village instead. The original path follows an irrigation channel also running to the village, is overgrown and full of dragonflies and butterflies and would be ideal stopping point on any organised tour of the village. This stunningly beautiful landscape rich in flora and fauna would be interesting to any nature lover.



The main street in 1992. The street was cobbled and you can see the old houses further down the street on the right. (Photo SL)



The main street in 2012. The cobbles replaced by a concrete path. Although this man's house still stands, his pig sty and the old houses had been demolished.

This village is a lot more insular than the others on the river with little movement of families in and out of the village. There seems to be a lot of inter-relationships. In 1992 most of the people in the village were called Lu. This year, we found Lu and Su/Shu to be common.

In 1992 the village held a huge party for our group concluding with a dragon dance by the school children. It's a pity that the primary school has now closed as it gave life to the village. Now, there are only the very young and the old.

Overall this village has the most charm of any we visited on the river; the people were incredibly welcoming to us and if not welcoming, at least tolerant of the stream of Chinese tourists wandering through their streets with their big cameras. It would be interesting to revisit this village in several years to see whether, like the other villages on the river, they have realised the potential of tourism as an economic asset.

Leng Shui

Leng Shui is situated on the banks of the river Li 40 minutes down river from Lang Shi. In 1992 there were 570 inhabitants and 110 households and there is a similar number today. The school which was newly built in 1992, has disappeared and there are now two cafes near the quay serving villagers and tourists.



Leng Shui has the benefit of being on the opposite bank to one the most iconic scenes on the river, "Moral Hill". As a result, several photographers have set up their stalls on the quay and boat owners get a commission from the photographers to stop there.

Cultivated land extends alongside the river upstream towards Lang Shi for 2-3 kilometres, and as in the other villages on the river, rice and other crops have been largely replaced by fruit trees.

The rice wine factory in the hills has now closed due to a crop disaster but the family still live locally.

In 1992 almost all inhabitants grew crops for their own consumption with limited commercial activity including a 30 rabbit breeder.

Twenty years ago, the village was closed to tourists who did not have government permission, had no jetty and no tourist facilities.



The 1992 report recommended wandering around the terraced fields and fish ponds, visiting the tile maker and a visit to the goat herder in the hills. Because of the changes in lifestyle and crops in this village, none of these are available to tourists today.

However, today most families rely to a varying extent on the tourism industry with common jobs being photographer and boat owner. Others are not directly employed in the tourist industry but benefit by an increase in people in the area generally, for example the bamboo rat breeder.

The sight of the cormorant fishermen on the river is the iconic image of this region and one which is recognisable throughout China as being "Guilin". Is it sad that today, these fishermen can earn money more easily by posing with their cormorants for tourists.

On one occasion we came across a cormorant fisherman actually fishing on a quiet stretch of the river. When we sailed closer to have a look, the man shouted out that he wanted money in order for us to take photographs.

They have learnt the true value of their birds and it has nothing to do with the amount of fish they can catch. There was a huge different in quality of housing in Leng Shui.



While there are a number of large new houses with air-conditioning and washing machines, there are also very basic houses with no doors and exterior walls which are not built with mortar.

Scenery around the village is particularly impressive especially to the north where the road leads out of the village into the hills.

The older houses still have a Mao poster and show the remains of an era of great suffering throughout Guangxi province and China as a whole.

Although there are many more tourists here than in 1992, it has not yet spoilt the character of this small village. People are keen to grow tourism in the village as they believe it's the best way to improve their lifestyle. Farming, although easier now that there are more orchards and fewer rice fields, is still hard work.

There is no sentimentality regarding the possibility of land farmed by their families for generations lying empty. The people we spoke to in Leng Shui have more interest in earning money from tourists and less interest in growing fruit or crops.



A modern house

What makes this village attractive is not only its position on the river but the orchards full of pomelo, oranges and other fruit.

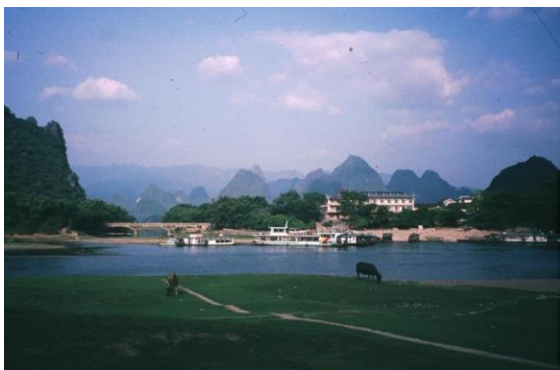
For those who take the trouble to walk to the back of the village, the rice fields and lines of trees will remind them of a more traditional way of life and form a bed of soft green against the dark green background of some of the most spectacular karst scenery in the valley.



The Chief's house in 1992 (Photo SL)

Da He Bei

Da He Bei is a village situated on the banks of the River Li around one hour boat ride southwards from Leng Shui. The main entry point for the village is reached by a path from the river edge. In 1992 this path was a narrow dirt track but today it is a wide concrete road.



The track to the beach in 1992 (Photo SL)

Directly opposite on the other bank is the large and established market town of Xing Ping where there are several good hostels and Western as well as Chinese restaurants.

Frequent boats transport residents to and from Da He Bei across the river for a very small fee. Social conditions and commercial outlets here are much more diverse than in the other villages.

In 1992 the wealthiest villagers were likely to be the cormorant fishermen but today the hostel owners have

the highest incomes.

The blacksmith formerly of Da He Bei has moved to Xing Ping and has become very wealthy.

Twenty years ago most people interviewed were peasant farmers but there were also a few residents working for the local government based in Xing Ping.

This year we were pleased to be able to return to a few old friends whom we had interviewed in 1992. These included the monks at the monastery, the former villager chief as well as the blacksmith and several very elderly women.

Overall, this village came across as being more advanced than the other villages mainly because of its proximity to Xing Ping.



One of the hostels in the village

In 1992 villagers were already realising the potential of tourist to the village economy and some had tourist boats and several homestays (called “Inns”) were being established though not yet open.

Ideas for tourism development given in the 1992 report included a visit to the blacksmith (see interview with this blacksmith in Appendix I), bike hire and a cycling route to see the Buddhist Monastery (see interview with the monks in Appendix I), a demonstration of cormorant fishing and the placing of a large map of the village at its entrance.

Today, the monastery does have foreign and Chinese visitors and the cormorant fishermen have realised the value of their trade to tourists but there is no bicycle hire or tourist information in the village.

The expedition report from that trip said *“It would not be suitable for this village to have any specific tourist accommodation as it would encourage too many visitors and in turn alter the nature of the village”*. We are pleased to report that, although there are a handful of hostels, the village has kept its character.



*Members of the 1992 walking to the monastery through rice fields in 1992 (centre Sian Lovegrove)
These rice fields have gone now, replaced by fruit trees.
(Photo SL)*

Not only are markets for their produce closer but there are more tourists here.

People who stay in Xing Ping can make multiple visits to Da He Bei easily and cheaply by jumping on a ferry across the river, whereas a trip to the other villages need organisation.

It was interesting to note that there were a handful of hostels in the village with their own websites which were successful in attracting both Western and Chinese customers.





Our old friend the former village chief in 1992. He now drives a ferry boat across the river.

There is some concern amongst the villagers today that the village was being developed very quickly and government officials and businessmen were snapping up all the land to build hotels and other facilities.

They believed that the locals would be pushed out in the rush for tourist money.

People we talked to in the village have the same complaint that the government has reduced the income of the boat owner to a fraction of what they used to earn. The boat owners used to get most of the ticket price but now they get 34RMB (£3.40) for each 116RMB (£11.60) ticket.

Xing Ping market town

This thriving market town is located 39 miles downstream of Guilin and 15 miles upstream of Yangshuo. In the past twenty years it has become something of a backpacker's haven and now boasts a handful of reasonable Western cafés.

In 1992 the harbour was approached from the town along a dirt track and there were only a few boats docked there. Today there is a new harbour choked with boats of all description and hawkers greet tourists as soon as they step onto land.



1992 - Walking towards Xing Ping harbour from the town. Da He Bei can be seen across the river (photo SL)

The town, along with Yang Ti upstream, are the only market towns on the river where villagers can buy and sell produce.

The two towns are also the location of the schools which have replaced those in the three villages on the river.

It is an important stopping point on the river from Guilin/Yang Ti and Yangshuo and benefits greatly from tourism.



Xing Ping harbour today

The expedition used Xing Ping as its base while in the field as, with the exception of Lang Shi, the villages are easily reached from here.

Any future expedition to the same area might think about staying in Da He Bei instead as it's quieter, has fewer hawkers and more charm.

The expedition focussed on interviewing villagers rather than those living in Xing Ping but occasionally the opportunity to interview workers here arose.

Shi Ji Tou

We decided, that as all the villages we had planned to visit were on the river banks, it would be interesting to see what life was like in villagers which were in the hills and less visited by tourists.



In the village the main street is wide and well maintained and side streets are generally in good condition and clean.

The village is little visited by tourists being difficult to get to but is picturesque, nestling at the foot of a cluster of limestone peaks.

There seemed to be more rice grown here than in the villages on the river and this could well be due to heavier rain fall and/or the irrigation channels.

It was surprising if not a little worrying, to find a village in 2012 which is still so insular that the population has only two surnames, Mo and Cai.

We therefore decided to go up into the hills above Xing Ping and see what we could find. We caught the Yangshuo bus and got off at a village called Fei Long Chun and then turned left across the fields towards the hills.

Here we found a charming village called Shi Ji Tou, home to 600 – 700 people.

There is a rough track which leads to the village and takes you through rice fields and small orchards.



The villagers explained that, for obvious reasons, it is an unwritten rule that you cannot marry anyone with the same name as you.

For this reason young people now often choose to marry out of the village.

It would be interesting to do some more work in this village as it is less developed and does not benefit directly from tourism.

It has the same feel and character that the other villages had when we visited in 1992.

Shui Shu Cun

We had been told that there were several villages off the road which were less visited by tourists and decided that we would see if we could find them. We rented bicycles in Xing Ping and cycled along the river towards the pier where the boats leave for Leng Shui. After 15 minutes we turned right off the road, tethered our bikes in an orchard and completed the journey on foot.



Unfortunately, we had taken a path less travelled and this took us along narrow strips of land which divided paddy fields and then we had to fight our way through hedges and over banks, finally landing on a track which led to the village.

Welcoming villagers were busy tilling the land and attending their pomelo trees.

Shui Shu Cun has a population of about 300 in 70 families and sits at the foot of a cluster of limestone karst near a cave called Goblin Cave which draws a few Chinese tourists.

We quickly came upon a group of villagers laying a concrete path. Predictably, they all stopped what they were doing to look at this group of foreigners and Chinese in their village.

They greeted us warmly and, seeing my camera, took it and got me to pose for pictures helping them shovel cement.

“Do you want to see the old house?” they asked, and because it was the first thing they said to us, it occurred this, in addition to the cave, might be the reason tourists come here.



We didn't know anything about the old house and were keen to have a look. It was impressive and was claimed by the villagers to be over 400 years old. It had beautiful ceramic windows (which might not be 400 years old) and what appeared to the untrained eye to be an old millstone.



Like Shi Ji Tou, the village seemed poorer than those on the river bank and more rice is grown. There were numerous wells in the village.

According to the villagers a few tourists come here although we saw no sign of any while we were there and from the amazement on their faces and the warm greeting, we suspect very few of them are Western.

In addition to the interview below, we spoke to several other villagers but had problems making ourselves understood because of the strong dialect.

The older and less well educated people did not understand Putong Hua.

We followed a man a few kilometres above the village where he and his wife kept a number of bee hives.

Our time in the village was very limited and like Shi Ji Tou, it would be interesting to return and spend more time here. Any group which decided to do this would have to take interpreters who understand the local dialect.



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Appendix I: Interviews with villagers

The villages include those surveyed in 1992 (Lang Shi, Leng Shui and Da He Bei) as well as the market town of Xing Ping and two mountain villages, Shi Ji Tou and Shui Shu Cun.

Use the links in the table below to be taken directly to the interview or scroll down for all.

Interviews have been written up by Sian Lovegrove, Stephanie Lill and John Etchells. Where the interview includes photographs they belong to the author unless otherwise stated.

Lang Shi	
SU JI YING	Builder and farmer in 1992 but now a boat owner. Was drunk when we saw him in the morning. Took us on a tour of the village and took us on a drunken boat ride to Yang Ti for lunch.
SU RAN SAN	<i>Brother of the above.</i> Retired "barefoot doctor". Left school at 10, married at 15 and became the village doctor after 10 days training. Covered 7 villages by foot for over 20 years for no payment. Brought up his own 8 children plus 2 of his brothers.
LU SHUN YAO & LU LOW	Elderly couple, she with magnificent false teeth and he without any. They used to live in the mountains in a simple shelter before living in a proper house in the village.
SU YU YING	Boat owner and farmer. She is married into the largest family in the village.
LU XIAO DI & LU JI YANG	Unmarried brothers have only one bed between them. Earn £6 - £8 a month collecting sticks from the mountains. Had to sell their land to bury their mother.
LIAO XIU DI & SU YI YANG	Grandmother and grandson who has a mental disability. Every day he packs his bag and walks to school only to be turned away and sent home.
SU WU ER	81 year old retired farmer who has never left the village and never plans to.
SU YUE GUANG	He gets a pension as a result of his father dying as a martyr in the People's Liberation Army. Very proud of his grandson's many school certificates on the walls of his home.
Leng Shui	
XIE JI CHANG	Rice wine brewer fallen on hard times, now drives an electric tourist bus in Xing Ping.
ZHAO ZHU FANG	Takes photographs of tourists at the quay
XU QIAO XIU	Mother of above and wife of man interviewed in 1992. He is now a miner working away leaving his family in the village.
HUANG	Old lady who is not sure of her name as she has never used it. Cannot read or write.
ZHAO JIN HUAN	Unemployed man dissatisfied who wants the government to help the villagers benefit more from the tourist money.

MR ZHAO	In 1992 was a subsistence farmer with 14 people living in the same house. Now he is a beekeeper up in the hills.
MR ZHAO SON OF THE ABOVE	Takes photos of tourists
ZHAO DONG PING	A migrant worker in a factory in Qingdao returning home to see her parents.
YANG BING HUA	Cormorant owner and farmer
ZHAO DONG YUAN	Breeder of bamboo rats
FENG FENG ZHAO	Housewife who spends time working on the land but mostly sitting, eating peanuts and gossiping with the other wives.
Da He Bei	
DA DI & DA QUN	The Buddhists monastery in the cave has been there for over 500 years. Life for the monks has changed little in that time.
DENG JIE	The village doctor
ZHAO YU YHIN	Widowed farmer first spoken to in 1992, related to Zhao Er Mei (above). Was bent double, deaf and confused.
ZHAO ER MEI	Widowed farmer first spoken to in 1992, now 90 years old living in a house with 4 generations and living off her son-in-law's tofu business.
FENG ZHENG KE	Boat owner went on strike against new government taxes on boat tickets.
SHIRLEY LI	Hostel Owner
XIAO MEI	She and her husband have a tourist boat in Xing Ping
Xing Ping	
XIE ZHU AN	Manager at the electric bus company
Shi Ji Tou	
MRS MO	Shop Owner and farmer
Shui Shu Cun	
WU ZHONG FA	Fruit Farmer

Su Ji Ying	1992	2012
Occupation	Builder and farmer	Boat owner
Family	Husband, wife, 2 sons, 2 daughters. All children are students in village.	Husbands, wife, 2 sons, 2 daughters, 3 granddaughters, 2 grandsons
Village/town	Lang Shi	Lang Shi
Tel		159 7740 3443
Interviewers	Stephanie Lill and Becky Li	

Su Ji Ying was interviewed 20 years ago and was happy, if not a little drunk, to speak to us again. We bumped into him looking for the shop. He was helping the men of the village build a road but was more than happy to come with us and gave us an impromptu tour of the village.

All of his children are married and live outside the village. He was particularly proud of his eldest son who he says studies at Beijing Normal University.



However, considering that in 1992 his eldest son was 13, he must now be 33 and so has probably finished his studies. The younger son is 27 and works in Wuzhou polishing minerals. All the children come home every year for Spring Festival which is a great time for him.



Su Yi Ying is a very jolly man who likes drinking wine, he says 1 kg a day. We asked him what his wife thought, he said she was OK with it, she sometimes drunk some wine too.

He showed us oranges and pomelo trees, walked us down a street that is over 300 years old with the original entrance gate to the village and explained some of the mountain formations.

He told us that the paths in the village were paid for by the government but they had to build them themselves.

He took us to his house where earlier we had seen a man selling pieces of meat off a tray. He gave us some peanuts and tea which tasted very earthy. We wondered whether this was because the water had come directly from the cave.

He owns a mobile phone and in his house is a clock, TV, stereo system, electric fan, fridge, rice cooker and gas canister. He also has a large Buddha shrine at the back of his house. He has started building his new house next door but he has run out of money so he has to wait till he can finish it.

When was spoke to him in 1992 he was growing maize, cabbage, peanuts, sugar, pumpkin (speciality) and rice and raised sheep, pigs and dogs to eat as well as fishing for crabs. He told us that due to the water quality (though possibly *quantity*) this has become too difficult. He now grows fruit trees and maize.



When we asked him if he still made doors for sale as he had done in 1992 but he told us he only made them for himself now. He lives in a house which he had started building in 1989. When we saw him in 1992 it was still under construction. He explained that his parents had died when he was 6 years old so he'd had to build his house himself.

In 1992 he was working in the fields and making doors from 6am. Today he owns a small tourist boat which seats 4. He only uses it occasionally because he only gets 34.5RMB (£3.40) from the ticket price of 116RMB (£11.60) and so it's not worth it. He only uses it if people ask him or call him directly from Yang Ti. He uses his neighbours' boats for larger groups. He was very proud of his driving license and put it on and made us take a photo of him wearing it.

Although he has been to Guilin (he helped building the airport) and likes the bigger towns and cities he has no desire to leave the village again and has never been to see his children as it costs too much money and takes up too much time.

He said that life is better than in 1992 as there is enough food to eat and it is better quality. He can eat what he wants when he wants. Previously he would go hungry and go to the mountains to try and find grass or leaves to eat. It is clear that in 2012 has enough money to buy wine!

In 1992 Mr Su wore no shoes, a very ripped 'T' Shirt and patched trousers with no zip. 20 years later we found him in a similar state of dress! He was one of the friendliest people we met in any of the villages.

Su Ran San and his wife	1992	2012
Occupation		Retired "barefoot doctor"
Family		Husband, wife
Village / Town		Lang Shi,
Interviewers		Sian Lovegrove and Xiao Min (track 21)

Su Ran San is 77 years old and his wife is 76. We were amazed to learn that he had 8 children (3 sons and 5 daughters) and had also brought up his brother's 2 children (brother is Su Ji Ying – above)

On arrival at the village we tried to find the people we interviewed 20 years ago and were taken to Su Run San.

Being the former doctor, he would know everyone. I was particularly interested to find out what had happened to a girl whose photo I had taken 20 years ago at the cave in the village.



On showing him the photo he said “Yes, I know this girl, I brought her up”. We were amazed. He explained that she was not his daughter but his brother’s daughter. His brother is Shi Ji Ying and was interviewed carried out by Stephanie and Becky (above). (*pin Yin varies and as neither brother can read or write well surname could be Shu or Su*).

His brother had been ill and he had brought up two of his children in addition to his own. It must have been a very lively household!



Su Run San is a remarkable man and of all the people we met in the villages, is the one which will remain with me the longest. He understood that we had left Xing Ping at 6am without any breakfast and offered to cook us some noodles. We were very grateful although had I known how poor he was I might not have accepted.

He was educated in the village school until the age of 10 and has never learned to read or write well. He was married at 15 to a 16 year old girl from a remote village who was introduced to him by a matchmaker. They have been happily married for over 60 years.

He was working as a vet when the village chief informed him that he was going to become the village doctor. He didn’t really want to become a doctor but he had no choice. Even though he could barely read or write he was sent on a ten day course to learn his trade. He learned to write the names of the medicines he would be dispensing.

Su Ran San is what used to be called a “barefoot doctor”. He was responsible for the health of people in 7 villages, holding consultations and dispensing Chinese medicines. The government gave a budget of 5 jiao per year (5p) for each villager to be spent on medicine. If he needed more medicines he could have 60RMB (£6) extra per annum from the local administrative government. If that was not enough, he would have to climb the mountains to pick herbs to make his own medicines.



He explained that he had received no salary from the government, he was meant to charge the villagers for the medicines. Predictably, the vast majority of patients were far too poor to pay so he usually worked for free.

He was not angry as it made him happy to be helping others. However he was very angry that he didn’t receive a pension from the government like other doctors.

He had worked for over 20 years as a doctor, leaving his wife and 10 children at home to walk from village to village, seeing patients, prescribing medicines, collecting plants from the mountain and making his own medicines all with no pay and receives no pension. He and his wife rely on money their sons send from their work in a fish sauce factory in Guangdong.

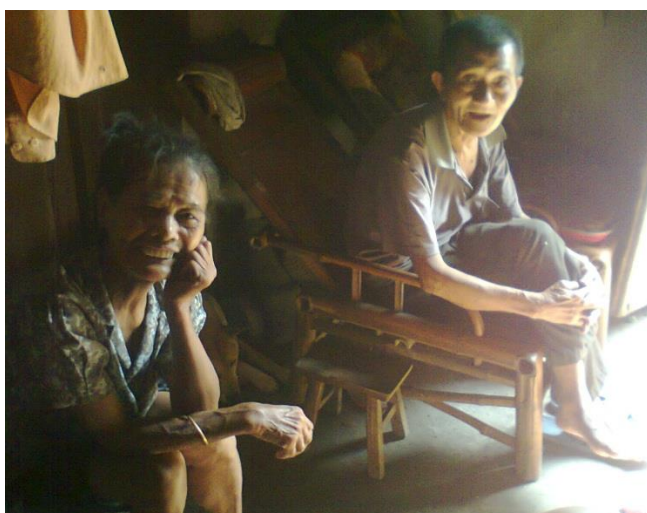
His wife has recently had a cataract operation so is wearing dark glasses even in the house although it is already very dark and dirty with smoke stained walls. The kitchen has a log burning stove on which he cooks us a breakfast of noodles and sour bamboo. As we sat at the breakfast table, two cats fought noisily under the bench by the door.

He has two tvs (one broken), and a mobile phone which he uses to contact his children. He believes that the people who have left the village to work in the cities will come back when they are old and farm the land again.

Although he was a little better dressed than his brother (above) he also likes to drink wine at breakfast time.

Lu Shun Yao & Lu Lou Mei	1992	2012
Occupation		Retired
Family		Husband, wife, 3 sons, 1 granddaughter
Village / Town		Lang Shi, house 96/2
Interviewed by		Stephanie Lill and Becky Li

Lu Shun Yao and Lu Low Mei are a very loving couple who have been married their whole adult lives. Neither could remember how old they were when they got married but they said they are very happy together. They are both from the village and their families have been in the village for at least 5 generations.



They invited us into their house which they built themselves 44/45 years ago. It was a very old style house with 2 rooms coming off the main living space and was very dark with a mud floor. They had an electric plate but mainly relied on the wood stove for cooking.

They had a TV, electric kettle and rice cooker, two wicker chairs, many small stools and lots of clothes hanging on a rail.

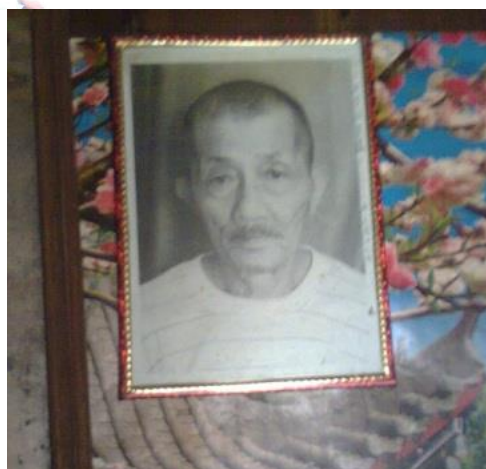
Neither of them have a mobile phone and although old, would like a boat to make some money from the tourists.

There is a black and white A4 picture of Lu Shun Yao on the wall and they explained that a few years ago a photo booth came to Yang Ti and they saved up so he could have his picture taken.

They were proud of this picture.

When we went in the house, there was a lot of smoke; they were making TCM for the husband as he is suffering with a bad cough. There was a lot of smoke and a bitter smell but it was not unpleasant.

Now the wife, Lu Low Mei, works on the land as her husband is sick and can't work.



Before they grew crops but now she says the water is bad and the crops don't survive so they grow a little fruit. She said there used to be a lot of water from the cave but now it is disappearing and what is left is not good quality.



When they are hungry they eat the sweet potato they grow as it doesn't need oil to be cooked – they can't afford to buy oil. Now and then they eat rice but they have to pay 2.5RMB for 1 jin (about half a kilo) and this is not something they can afford all the time.

They try selling their fruit to the tourists but because the fruit is heavy it is hard for Lu Low Mei to carry it far but she knows this is the only way to get money.

Their children send them 800RMB a month.

They said they are happy with their life now as they have more food and more freedom but life is still hard. Before they had their house they had lived in the hills using the trees to make a simple shelter. They and a few other families had lived that way for 10.

Lu Low Mei has an amazing set of false teeth (top teeth) which are like a gun shield with teeth that were far too big but made her smile all that more amazing. She was particularly proud of her teeth and said she had paid 250RMB (£25) for them 3 years ago. She says they both like sweet things so she had to buy them. Her husband on the other hand had no teeth as he lost them all 20 years ago. The dentist comes to the village from time to time to sort out people's teeth problems.

Su Yu Ying	1992	2012
Occupation		Boat driver and housewife
Family		Husband, wife, 1 son, 1 daughter, 1 granddaughter
Village / Town		Lang Shi, house 102
Interviewers		Stephanie Lill & Becky Li



Walking through the village we came across Su Ya Ying sitting outside her relatively modern house with her grandson. She was relaxing in a wicker chair next to a big pile of rubble, gravel, bricks and bamboo.

Su Ya Ying looks much younger than her 45 years and is married with 1 son and 1 daughter. She lives at home with her husband, son, his wife and their 3 month old grandson Su Pang.

Her son is 23 years old and married to a local girl. Her daughter lives in Guilin selling cars and comes back once a month. Her husband and son are both farmers.

Su Ya Ying's husband comes from the biggest family in the village and has 4 brothers. All the brothers live next to each other on the street and have either built or are in the process of building their new houses. The older houses are very traditional style, yellow bricks and a cement-like mixture, lots of wood and only one storey. Now Su Ya Ying lives in a three storey house that was built in 2001 by her husband and brothers.

Every member of her family owns a mobile phone; she has a stereo system, TV and a broken sewing machine. Her family own 2 boats, 1 for her son and 1 for her and her son has a computer to make adverts and to contact potential buyers for their fruit and guests for their boats.

Su Ya Ying's family used to farm crops but as the water quality has got worse, they have built on the land and now grow fruit on what is remaining. She grows oranges and pomelo even though the price to sell these fruits is very low. They can sell 1 jin of rice for 1.2RMB and 1 jin of fruit for 0.7RMB. She has to buy rice at 2.5RMB per jin (50p a kg). She said she doesn't want to own animals as they are hard to raise and time consuming and it is too difficult and expensive to get them to a market.

She said that 20 years ago when we were last in the village, nearly everyone worked in the village but now most of the young people now work in surrounding towns and they now grow fewer crops such as rice and much more fruit.

The quality of life has improved as there is enough food to eat and the standard of living is better. Several years ago the government tax of 30kg per mu was abandoned and so they keep everything they grow.

Although foreign tourist number have declined, Su Ya Ying mainland Chinese tourists have increased. Fewer tourists stop at the village as the price of the ticket from Yang Ti has risen from 5 mao (5p) per person to 10RMB (£1) per person. People in the village liked seeing foreign tourists and would shout “allo” to them and wave as no one could speak English and no tourists could speak Chinese.

She said that even if there were more tourists coming to the area, it wouldn't make any difference as the money earned from the boat is so small. After the government's has taken its share of the 116RMB (£11) ticket price they are left with only 34.5RMB, (£3.40) and as you can only have a maximum of 4 people in a boat, the most you can earn from a trip is 138RMB (£13).

As for the future, although she is poor she is content. There is nothing she particularly needs. She does not want to look too far into the future, life is hard and she prefers to take it one day at a time.

Lu Xiao Di and Lu Ji Yang	1992	2012
Occupation		Stick collector
Family		Two unmarried brothers
Village / Town		Lang Shi,
Interviewers		Sian Lovegrove and Xiao Min

Two unmarried brothers (Lu Xiao Di and Lu Ji Yang) live in a house which you could see was once grand. It is tall, has huge beams blackened with age and massive wooden supports standing on a footing of carved stone. We were told that it used to be the house of the wealthy land owner but many years ago the government had a policy of giving away the property of the wealthy to the poor and this is how the family came to live in it.



These brothers were the poorest we had seen in any of the villages. Their income came from collecting sticks from the mountains and selling them to other villagers for 15RMB per bundle.

They were clearly not very successful as they earned only 60 – 80RMB per month (£6 - £8) and rely on the generosity of the other villagers to give them vegetables. They have half a kg of pork once a month.

The house was open to the elements on one side and had only one bed which the brothers shared. We found Lu Xiao Di sitting on a low chair in his house watching as other men laid a concrete path behind his house.

He was fanning himself with a fan he had made out of a stick and a piece of cardboard which he generously gave to me as I sat down.

The brothers have no possessions of any description and had recently sold their land to bury their 95 year old mother (Lu Dong Sao). Their father had died some 20 years earlier.



Over 60's receive a pension of 100RMB per month and 50kg of rice and so they are looking forward to Lu Ji Yang turning 60 soon. It will make a big difference to their lives.

Post script

Later, when we spoke to another villager, he told us that the brothers (and in fact the whole family) were very lazy and this was the reason they were poor. They are not well thought of in the village. Other villagers work in the fields all their lives but these brothers considered 55 to be too old. Lazy or not, the lives of these brothers was the most pitiful we had seen.

Liao Xiu Di and her grandson Su Yi Yang	1992	2012
Occupation		Retired
Family		Grandmother and three grandchildren
Village / Town		Lang Shi,
Interviewers		Sian Lovegrove and Xiao Min



We had spotted 55 year old Liao Xiu Di and her grandson several times as we were walking around the village and assumed she was in her 70's or possibly 80's.

The little boy is rather fat, seemed like a quiet boy and didn't say anything when we gave him a pencil. We put it down to shyness rather than ingratitude.

Later as we were finishing our day we spotted them again and started chatting to old lady. The two of them live in house number 79 with her two granddaughters (the boy's cousins).

The boy is the son of her first son and when I asked her why he wasn't in school she explained that he was mentally disabled. His brain had not developed fully and he was unable to speak except for a few words.

The family had already paid 10,000RMB on trying to cure him without any luck.

Both her sons work in Guangdong although she doesn't know what they do there. They usually come back every 6 months at important festivals.

The family used to grow fruit, rice, corn and peanuts but they only have a small amount of land. She thinks that when the sons get older they will come back to the village and work the land again.

She considers herself much better off than when we first visited the village 20 years ago as she has enough food to eat.



She told us a very sad story about her disabled grandson. Every morning when his cousins get ready for school he also packs his school bag and walks to school with them. When he gets there he is not permitted to join the class and is sent back home. The teacher refuses to teach him as he is not normal.

Su Wu Er 苏五二	1992	2012
Occupation		Retired
Family		Wife, 4 sons, 2 daughters, 3 grandsons, 4 granddaughters and 1 great grandson
Village / Town		Lang Shi, house 112
Interviewers		Stephanie Lill and Becky Li



Su Wu Er is 81 years old, he lives with his wife (78) who was not in at the time as she was out having fun, walking round the village and his eldest son.

Su Wu Er is a small man, quiet but with a very endearing smile. He invited us into his house and offered us tea. He built his house 20 years ago and it has 4 bedrooms downstairs and an attic area to store grain.

The walls have many posters of brightly coloured scenes and the 4 seasons along with Mao's poster. He also had 3 calendars on the walls. He doesn't own a lot of things, just a TV and clock. He has an electric light bulb hanging from the ceiling and a big gas canister for cooking.

Now Su Wu Er is retired but before he was a crop farmer, he said it was an OK job, nothing special but not terrible. He said that life is better now, there is a lot to eat, more freedom and better crops and above all he doesn't have to work.

3 of his 6 children work in the tourist industry locally (tour guides and boat driver), one son has died, another is a doctor in Yang Ti. His fourth son is a migrant worker in Guangdong but he doesn't know where and hasn't seen him for two years.

He has never left the village or has any desire to do so. He said that the government gives him and the village very little and he doesn't think this will change but in the future. He was very positive about the tourists visiting the village; they are lively and boisterous and give the village energy and atmosphere. However, there are fewer western tourists now than before.

As we were talking to Su Wu Er, his friends and neighbours (all men) came into his house to see what was going on and all proceeded to smoke heavily.

Some smoked very fat blunt roll up cigarettes and one man smoked a pipe. When we asked him why everyone smoked they all said for fun to relax. They used to grow their own tobacco but now you can buy a 10RMB (£1) pouch of tobacco which will last a month so it's not worth growing it.



Su Yue Guang 苏月光	1992	2012
Occupation		Retired
Family		Wife, Elder sister, 2 sons, 1 daughter, 1 grandson
Village / Town		Lang Shi, house 106
Interviewers		Stephanie and Becky Li

Su Yue Guang came to Su Wu Er's house when we were there and was very interested to see written English as he had never seen it before. When we had finished talking to Su Wu Er, he invited us to his house next door.

His house in comparison to his neighbour gave the impression he was reasonably well off. He is 68 years old and lives at home with his wife and his 2 sons. His wife was sitting on a low stool in the doorway busy shelling peas. His family is well established in the village, over 10 generations having lived there and whilst he hasn't ever left, he very much wants to but has no money.



Su Yue Guang's oldest son is 40 years old and an unmarried boat driver. His younger son is 36, and married with a 10 year old son. His daughter is 32 and unmarried. She works in a nearby province but he does not know where or what she does.

They were reasonably well equipped, having a TV, stereo system, kettle, fridge, freezer, washing machine, DVD player, clock, shoe rack with over 10 pairs of shoes, an electric fan and a children's bike. He was also wearing a wrist watch and has glasses for his poor eyesight.

The walls of his house were covered with brightly coloured posters of mountains and lakes and children's scribbles. He was very proud of his grandson's school certificates which he had also put on the wall.

He suddenly jumped up and got another certificate to show us. It was a certificate from the Chinese Government stating that his father was a martyr in the People's Liberation Army and because of that he gets 300RMB (£300) a month from the government.

He used to be a subsistence farmer growing crops but now grows oranges and pomelo. The price of fruit has fallen as last year he could sell 1 jin of oranges for 1.8RMB (£3.60 per kg) now he can only sell 1 jin of oranges for 0.8RMB (£1.60 per kg).

He has 2 pigs which he sells when they reach 100 kg for 2000RMB each (£200).

Life has got easier over the last 20 years. The village has roads now and there is more food to eat.

The cave on the edge of the village used to supply enough water to irrigate everyone's rice fields. Life was hard then and people worked long hours. Now that many people work in tourism life is easier and there is more free time.



Xie Ji Chang & his son Xie Zu Jun	1992	2012
Occupation	Rice wine brewer	Bus driver for the government
Family	Husband wife, 4 sons all working at the factory	Son and mother. 3 brothers work in Guangdong.
Village / Town	Leng Shui	Moved to Xing Ping
Interviewers	Wei Yi Gang & Sian Lovegrove	Stephanie Lill & Becky Li
Assisted by		His friend, Zhang Bo Rong 张伯荣 (tel 139 7733 1397)

In 1989 Xie Ji Chang decided that he was tired of being peasant and took the big decision to rent some government land 2.5km from his house and build a rice wine factory. In 1992 he was the richest man in the village earning 7000 (£700) pa and employed his four sons. He was making 5000 bottles a month and selling them in Xing Ping.



The Leng Shui Rice Factory in 1992

Apart from his wine business, Mr Xie also owned sugar cane and rice plantations. His wife took care of their 60 pigs and feed them the waste products from the rice. He also had one crow and three dogs.

In 1992 he was very optimistic about his future, owned four buildings in the village and hoped to bring his house up to Xing Ping standards.

When we found the family in 2012, they had fallen on hard times.

Xie Ji Chang had died and his son Xie Zu Jun and his mother were living in what he described as “terrible” rented accommodation in Xing Ping which cost him 300RMB (£30) a month.

Xie Zu Jun is a very shy man and wouldn’t speak when others were in the office but when his friend Zhang Bo Rong came in he was more comfortable told his story through him.

He told us that he moved to Xing Ping in 1995 and continued to make rice wine with his mother and wife. He was very successful and enjoyed his life. However disaster struck in 2008 when an epidemic damaged the crops. He could not use the rice for the wine and fed it to pigs instead. Inevitably, all 60 of his pigs died and he went bankrupt. He thinks they lost about 100,000RMB (£10,000) which is a vast sum and shows just how wealthy the family had become.



Rice crop 1992

In 2008, he picked himself up, taught himself to drive and borrowed his friend's car. He earned 1,000 – 2,000 (£100 - £200) per month operating a private taxi service. However, in 2010 the government started imposing restrictions and he was unable to continue this line of work.

He managed to find work at the electric bus company where he still works today earning just over 1,000RMB (£100). It seems although he tries hard and is entrepreneurial, Xie Zu Jun’s has little luck and his income and living standards continue to fall.



Stephanie Lill with Zhang Bo Rong & Xie Zhu Jun

He could have left for Guangdong like his other brothers but he decided to stay in the area because he likes it and enjoys the freedom of working for himself.

He doesn't speak to his brothers any longer so he doesn't know what they do or even if they are still there.

He has 2 daughters. The elder daughter graduated from university as a teacher but now works in sales in Guilin. The younger daughter works in China Telecom in Yangshuo but earn too little money to send any home.

Neither of them comes home very often, only at traditional holidays, they prefer to stay in the cities. He wants to build his own house but has no money, suffers from health problems and as he doesn't speak to his brothers he has no family support. He has land in Leng Shui but no money to build on it or cultivate crops.

A general complaint was that due to the increased government of tourism in the area there is no chance for people to make money no matter how hard you work. You need to know the right people to be successful and there is no support for the smaller people. Sadly and perhaps because of the loss of status and probably loss of "face", he said he was much happier 20 years ago. He would like to go back to that way of life but with today's modern standards.

His is a sad story.

Zhao Zhu Feng 赵菊凤 Eldest daughter of Zhao Gun Wan	1992	2012
Occupation	Child	Photographer
Family		Wife, father, mother & son (husband works away)
Village / Town	Leng Shui	Leng Shui
Interviewers		Stephanie Lill & Xiao Min

Zhao Zhu Fang is the daughter of Zhao Gun Wan who was interviewed in 1992 and Xu Qiao Xiu (*interviewed below*). She was on her moped on her way to work when we spoke to her. She works on a floating platform taking photographs of tourists standing in front of the iconic Nine Horses Mountain. She starts about 11.00am and as it was already 10.50am she couldn't speak for long. Her wage covers the basic living cost but because there is more competition now and fewer tourists, she does not do as well as she used to and her family are no longer the richest family in the village.

She is the oldest daughter of Zhao Gun Wan and is 32 years old. She got married when she was 26 or 27 and lives in her father's house with her mother and her 5 year old son. Her son is at kindergarten in Xing Ping.

She said she doesn't like the pressure to marry and she married quite late in her village but she doesn't regret it and thinks it's fine to marry later.



She had once been as far to Beijing as her husband worked had there. She also went to Shanghai 7 years ago and worked there as a waitress for 6 months but returned to get married. We don't know where her husband works now.

She was dressed well, in a Nike t-shirt and jeans. She was carrying a mobile phone and a laptop bag. She was very nice and friendly but had to leave as she had to go to work.

Xu Qiao Xiu 徐巧秀 wife of Zhao Gun Wan	1992	2012
Occupation	Farmer and miner	Farmer and miner
Family		Wife, 2 daughters, 1 son and 3 grandsons (husband lives away)
Village / Town		Leng Shui
Interviewers		Stephanie Lill & Xiao Min

We wanted to find Zhao Guo Wan as we had spoken to him 20 years ago but found his wife, Xu Qiao Xiu instead.

Zhao Guo Wan wasn't there because he works in a mine in Guangdong. In 1992 he already had a history in the mining industry having worked in a zinc and lead mine. His wife told us he had work for some time after that, in a mine in Xing Ping, retiring a few years ago only to return to mining. It seems Mr Zhao either loves mining or needs the money it provides, or both.

They used to be the richest family in the village and built a large 2 story house in 1987 using hired help. Notably, it was the first house in the village with tiles. In 2012, the floor was still beautifully tiled but would have benefitted from a good clean!



In 1992, in breach of the one child policy, they decided to have a third child in the hope it was a son. Fortunately it was a boy and he now rents bikes to tourists in Yangshuo. The older daughter (*her interviewed is above*) takes photos of tourists on the quay and the younger daughter lives in a village near Yangshuo and comes back once a month.

She considers themselves relatively poor now as they spent all their money on their children's education. It was a far-sighted decision to send the eldest daughter to study at the Vocational Tourism College in Guilin.

Twenty years ago, Mr Zhao's views on tourism were very positive and he hoped to see more facilities in the village, like a shop, or restaurant which could sell things to tourists.

Were he alive today, he would no doubt be pleased that his son and older daughter earn a living from tourism and that the village does indeed benefit from the money tourists bring in.

In 1992 the family had 2 mu of land, some wet paddy land, some vegetables and fruit near the house and persimmon and sugar cane elsewhere.



In addition, they had twelve chickens and four pigs of which he sold 2 a year in Xing Ping. His wife, Xu Qiao Xiu, now has 50 pigs and also grows corn and sweet potato. She subsidises her income by collecting and selling plastic bottles for which she gets 5 fen (½ pence). She admits this is not very lucrative because in 6 months she has only collected about 200 bottles worth 10RMB (£1).

She invited us into her house which had a TV and cable box - a gift from her daughter in Yangshuo - and the moment we walked in she turned it on very loudly. She had a ceiling fan and a fridge freezer in the main living space along with 2 rocking chairs facing the TV and two benches running along the walls. There was a clock and a calendar on the wall behind the TV.



She has no formal education, cannot read well and couldn't write her own or her daughter's name for us. Xu Qiao Xiu was in good humour, very engaging, chatty and always laughing. She looked very good for her age and had very few grey hairs and unusually, her teeth were in good condition.

We asked her why so many of the older women were hunched and she was not, she said it was a combination of the poor water quality, hard work in the fields and it was hereditary.

She goes to Yangshuo once a year to see her son and daughter. She was not keen on travelling and has no desire to go to Shanghai or Beijing. She is happy with her life.

Huang	1992	2012
Occupation		Retired
Family		Mother, 2 sons, 3 daughters, 2 granddaughters
Village / Town		Leng Shui, number 48
Interviewers		Stephanie Lill & Xiao Min

Huang does not know her own name. She thinks her name is Huang but she has never had to use it and has not had an education. We found this incredible.

We bumped into her while avoiding some stray dogs and trying to find Zhao Guo Wan (*see above*). She is 78 years old, very short and terribly hunched over and only had 2 teeth. She was very friendly although I don't think she really knew what was going on and had to rely on her nephew's wife to explain things.



Huang showing us the way

Her daughters married out to rural areas near her village. They come back 1-2 times a year to see her and give her money.

Huang's house was very sparse and must have been built a long time ago as the bricks were old and there was no cement used. Outside her house was a courtyard with a few out-houses and these were also sparse. Inside her house there was a TV, stereo with a big speaker system, DVD player, satellite dish, electric fan, water cooler, chest freezer, a clock and an old style wooden Chinese sofa.

The walls and floor were covered with the children's chalk scribbles. Huang also had 3 calendars and 5 posters in English and Chinese, showing numbers, English phonemes, types of people, weather and colours and shapes.



Huang's husband died 27 years ago, she looked sad when saying this. She has 2 sons and 3 daughters and now there are 6 people in her house.

Her eldest son is 50 years old but is not married. He builds houses and can earn 1000/2000RMB (£100 – £200) a month but it is precarious as he only gets paid when the house is finished.

The younger son takes pictures for tourists on the river bank and has 2 daughters. There were 4 certificates on the wall of the living space that belonged the girls and Huang seemed very proud of them.



We asked if anyone could speak English; her nephew's wife could say hello but that was the extent of it and they all laughed.

Huang was getting more uncomfortable and did not answer whether she was happier now or 20 years ago. She seemed very sad when we asked her this question and both her and her nephew's wife averted their eyes. Huang did not seem to follow the conversation, so we gave the children some pencils and left.

Huang said she grows vegetables to eat and has 2 chickens.

Zhao Jin Huan 赵金华	1992	2012
Occupation		Unemployed
Family		Husband, wife and 1 son
Village / Town		Leng Shui, number 48
Interviewers		Stephanie Lill & Xiao Min

Walking through the village, we were greeted by shouts of “Hello” from a house where there were four men. We introduced ourselves and explained what we were doing in Leng Shui. They invited us into the house and we had tea with them and ate their home grown peanuts.

Two of the men had smart phones but none of them have computers or the internet. They want the internet so they can see what it is like outside the village and look for work. There were 4 men in the house.

Home owner

Home owner's friend

Home owner's neighbour and our interviewee – Zhao Jin Huan

How owner's neighbour

All them were initially interested but left one by one until there was only the neighbour Zhao Jin Huan, left.



The home owner is married and has a 17 year old son who lives and works in a factory in ZheJiang province. He had to stop going to school as there was not enough money to continue his education. He wants his son to be at home but there is nothing for his son to do in the village and he can't afford to look after him.

He started building his house in 2009 but only moved in last year. It took a long time to build as he kept running out of money so had to build it in stages. It was still a basic concrete shell but had windows and doors. Inside he had a chest freezer that was not plugged in, 2 hot water flasks, a TV and satellite box, a brand new electric fan, a clock that was broken, an electric kettle and rice cooker. There was a calendar and a huge picture of Mao on the wall; it was very garish.

He eventually left to “get the washing in” but he never came back. He didn’t seem comfortable talking to us but was happy for the others to speak to us.

Zhao Jin Huan, our interviewee, was very vocal and interesting in speaking to us. He is after all, unemployed and had nothing else to do.



Leng Shui beach

He is 37 and married with a 7 year old son who studies in Xing Ping. When he was younger he went to Beijing and was in the army for 3 years. He moved to Shenzhen for 3 years then in 2003 he returned to the village and opened a restaurant on the riverside offering local food for tourists. He was the only person doing this and was making good money but 3 months later he said there were over 30 people offering the same service.

In 2009 the government stopped people working on the riverside and so he lost his livelihood.

He wants to work in the hospitality industry and make money by inviting people to his house for home cooked food but now it is hard to get people to stop at the village.

We saw plenty of boats stopping at the quay for photos and horse rides but most did not venture into the village itself.

Last year the government stopped people being able to buy tickets on the river side which meant that boat owners were unable to pick tourists up who were hiking along the river. Now tourists can only buy tickets in Yang Ti.



This year the tourist numbers have declined as the government has set the boat tickets at 116RMB and they have to buy tickets at Yang Ti. He said that for every 116RMB they get 20RMB of it. There are no private customers any more.

Before 1998 there were no tourists in the area but from 2000 onwards numbers increased sharply. Around 2003 and 2004 there were many Chinese tourists and around 200 foreign tourists a day but now it’s mainly Chinese tourists and around 10 foreign tourists a day.

He believes that 2003 to 2004 was the peak with around 4000 tourists a day on the boats and hiking (note: we have not verified this figure which sounds very high). He said at that time there was a regular trail of hikers from 8am to 8pm and he set up a fridge at the side of the road selling ice-cream. This was enough to earn a living.

He is fatalistic about the future, he can only think to the next holiday which will bring more tourists to the village.



He told us that, while young people who leave the village can earn 20,000RMB a year there is no motivation to stay in the village. Boat owners have seen a fall in incomes recently from 2000RMB to 700RMB a month due to the government taking a much larger percentage of the ticket price.

He wants the government to remove restrictions on trade so that local people can make a better living from tourism by opening the hiking route and letting villagers sell things on the side of the road. He is considering leaving the village and going away to earn some money.

His wish for the village is for a small hospital with young doctors who can administer western medicine and for a school in the village.

There was a school in 1992 but students now have to travel to Xing Ping. He would like more job opportunities and for local people to benefit more from tourist revenue.

He was a very nice man and keen and had lots to say.

Mr Zhao	1992	2012
Occupation	Farmer	Beekeeper
Family	Husband, wife three sons	Husband, three sons and daughter
Village / Town	Leng Shui	Leng Shui
Interviewers	Graham Barrow	Wei Yi Gang & Sian Lovegrove

In 1992, Zhao lived with his three sons, their wives and their children. It was a lively household with his 71 year old father, also coming to his house every day for meals.

In total there were 14 people living in the 5 roomed house. There was very little furniture with the notable exception of two large and impressive clocks hanging on the back wall which were wedding gifts when his first two sons married.



Going up into the hills with Mr Zhao's son.

The family had lived in the village for 13 generations, spanning almost 300 years. Yet despite this Mr Zhao's total family income was only 2,000RMB (£200).

The family lived off 4.2mu on which they grew rice and had some pomelo trees, but could not grow enough food to feed themselves.

The family owned 10 pigs, over 20 chickens and one buffalo which they use for working the land. In addition Mr Zhao owned 3 fish ponds where he raised small fish to sell to the other villagers.

When we spoke to Mr Zhao in 1992 he told us that he intended to plant young trees which he could sell back to the government. The price of trees was not fixed like the price of sugar cane and therefore he was hoping for a better income.

Twenty years ago the family considered their life to be very hard, with not enough land and no money to build houses for the three sons and their families. Even so, they all agreed that living standards were increasing now that they could choose what to grow and had access to the free market. At that time, only Mr Zhao's father and one of the children were wearing shoes, both were several sizes too large for the feet that occupied them.

Even though they were so poor, the family considered themselves to have a slightly higher than average income. They also owned a rice harvester that they freely lent to other villagers.

We were fortunate to find Mr Zhao again in 2012



Mr Zhao with his bees

With the help of the villagers we found Mr Zhao's son and he told us that his father was now a beekeeper up in the hills above Leng Shui. He and his friend offered to take us on their motorbikes to see him. 15 minutes later we were on top of a hill, in a clearing where a small green tent stood surrounded by over 20 hives.

Mr Zhao has been a beekeeper for the last 10 years, spending half his time in his tent in the hills and half his time in the village. His wife died 4 years ago. Of his sons, one also keeps bees but he tells us is wealthier than him.

The son on whose motorbike we arrived, earns a living, like Zhao Zhu Fang (above) takes photos of tourists on the quay at Leng Shui and sells them for 10 - 15RMB. The last son has moved out of the village. His daughter is married and also lives outside the village.

Mr Zhao decided to move into beekeeping as he was getting too old for farming.



He fulfils orders for his honey and has no need to go anywhere to sell it. He told us that he had started his business by building some boxes, then catching bees from the fields.

When asked whether he kept animals like in 1992. He thought it was a funny question and laughed. He explained that it's difficult to make money from raising animals, everyone these days can earn a lot more from tourism and it's an easier life.

When we spoke to him in 1992 he was planning to grow small trees but he had tried it and it had not been financially successful. The government at that time built a sugar cane factory and every farmer had to cultivate sugar cane to feed it. However, the factory closed as the farmers eventually refused to grow the sugar cane, a rare example of "people power" in China!

Mr Zhao opened up one of his hives to show us the queen bee. We were hesitant to go close but the bees were very docile and posed no threat.

After a cup of liquid honey he insisted we try, we left him with a souvenir of the London Olympics. He seemed happy to have had us visit him.

He leads a solitary life on the hill in his tent with nobody for company except a few thousand bees. Nevertheless, he is happier than before as life is easier and he has more money.



Wei Yi Gang drinking honey with Mr Zhao

Mr Zhao "the younger"	1992	2012
Occupation	Student	Photographer
Family		Husband, wife, 1 son, 1 daughter
Village / Town	Leng Shui	Leng Shui
Interviewers		Wei Yi Gang & Sian Lovegrove <i>track 12 – Z000024</i>

We sat in an outdoor café near the river and spoke to the youngest son of the beekeeper. He could not talk for long as he had already been up in the mountains with us and the tourists were due to come to the quay. His business is taking photographs of tourists.



He gets between 10 – 15RMB for each photo of which he gives the boat owner 5RMB commission. Most of his customers are Chinese.

He earns between 3 – 4,000RMB per month and between 5 – 10,000RMB per annum from fruit farming. Some people who claim unused land in the hills can earn a lot more.

He thought that 20 – 30 people from the village lived off tourism doing jobs ranging from taking photos, selling fish from BBQ's and horse rides.

Each family has a boat which costs about 10,000RMB but he tells us that the government only give them 20RMB (£2) per passenger.

He dreams of owning a boat. He has a 20 year old son who works in a factory in Shenzhen and comes back once a year at Spring Festival for a month. He also has a 23 year old daughter. He owns a motorbike and a computer which he used to process the photos.

As we talk, Zhao Zhu Fang goes past (see interview above). They do the same job but in different places on the river. They shout greetings to each other. He takes a call and he's off. The tourists are coming.



Mr Zhao and his father outside his father's tent

Zhao Dong Ping (赵东萍)	1992	2012
Occupation		Factory Worker
Family		Daughter, mother, father
Village / Town		Leng Shui
Interviewers		Wei Yi Gang & Sian Lovegrove <i>Track 13 – Z000024</i>
Telephone		1319 579 8509

We found Zhao Dong Ping in the house of her parents. Their house is one of the most basic we had seen. It has three rooms, a back and front entrance but no doors to fill the spaces. Entering the house there is a store room to the right and then a bedroom with a double bed without sheets, one pillow and a mosquito net canopy. There is a cupboard and a tv, various bags of possessions and many bottles of lemonade.



A year ago she followed her classmate and took up a job in a clothing factory in Qingdao. She thinks that on average half of her class have moved away from the area to work as factory workers.

She sits on a low stool by a low round table on which stands a single gas burner. A large fan behind her keeps her cool.

The house was crudely built 8 years ago; the walls are made of concrete blocks which have been so hastily put up and without cement that they do not fit together well and there are many gaps.

The exterior walls of the house do not meet the roof and the only interior wall separating the store room and the bedroom is made of thin pieces of wood which go only part of the way to the roof.

Outside the house is a huge pile of stone which partially blocks the main entrance, many empty beer bottles, a broken umbrella, a broken mirror, several brooms and fishing nets strung up on a wooden support.



There is also a rudimentary BBQ made of loose bricks. The roof is a piece of tarpaulin covering wooden beams. Everything about the house speaks of poverty.

The parents used to work as farmers but now her father has a tourist boat. Her ambition is to marry and have children.



Yang Bing Hua 杨炳华	1992	2012
Occupation		Farmer and cormorant owner
Family		Husband, wife, daughter
Village / Town		Leng Shui
Interviewers		John Etchells & Ivy Duan

We stood in the narrow lane in Leng Shui and watched as an old woman led her water buffalo towards the river. The peace was shattered by the sound of some squawking Cormorants. We followed the sounds and found Yang Bing Hua, a 60 year old farmer tending some fruit trees (Longan) in a garden adjacent to a house. Beside him two magnificent cormorants were tied to an old tree stump anchored to the ground in the shade of a fruit tree.

He was happy to stop and share his story with us. Both Mr Yang and his wife have lived in Leng Shui all of their life. They have a 23 year old daughter who is married with a child and lives in Guilin.

Although he was living in the same house 20 years ago, Yang Bing Hua's life has changed for the better since

then. Whereas he used to be a subsistence farmer growing rice, he now has 20 fruit trees as well as his cormorant and some chickens. The trees and cormorants yield a combined income of 10,000 – 12,000RMB (£1,000 - £2000) per year.



On the beach

Mr Yang is content with his life. He spends his days maintaining his fruit trees by watering, weeding, pruning, clearing weeds and spraying for insects/worms.

His wife spends 6 to 8 hours a day at the quay with the cormorants posing for pictures.

It is sad that although the image of the cormorant fishermen on the Li Jiang is the iconic image of the region, very few are still used for fishing, most now being used in tourism.

These cormorants are two such birds. He told us that a pair of cormorants cost 2,000 – 3000RMB (£200 – £300) and she can expect 3 – 5 tourists a day who pay 10 RMB (£1) for each picture. Chinese holidays are the busiest time but there is increased competition nowadays and it's harder to make money.

Overall, they are very grateful for the tourist money and it has had a very positive effect on the economy this village of 600 people. Mr Yang sells his Longan fruit at the local market in Xing Ping and this also generates around 5,000 – 6,000RMB per annum (£500 - £600).



Yang Bing Hua (photo SL)

When they are not working they enjoy talking to friends and neighbours in the village, where everyone knows everybody else. Both own cell phones, which they use to stay in touch with their daughter and each other. They own nothing of note except a TV and a sewing machine.

A typical day for Mr Yang and his wife is a 7am rise, a breakfast of vegetables and steamed bread and 6 - 8 hours of work depending on the season. In the evenings they like to watch the TV and retire early at 8pm or 9pm. The couple are happy with their simple way of life and their earnings are enough to provide what they need.



There were many cormorant fishermen in 1992 although now they have all but disappeared except those posing for tourists.(Photo SL)

All they want for the future is good health and prosperity for their family. Due to time constraints, we had to turn down their kind offer of lunch and left their house humbled by the genuine hospitality of the Leng Shui villagers.

Zhao Dong Yuan 赵东远	1992	2012
Occupation		Businessman
Family		Mother, 2 x brother, 2 nephews, 1 neice, 2 young children.
Village / Town		Leng Shui
Interviewers		John Etchells & Ivy Duan

We came across Zhao Dong Yuan in the mid afternoon as we were walking through the alleyways of Leng Shui. He was chopping up long shoots of bamboo into smaller pieces and struck up a conversation with him. He was very willing to tell us about himself and his life in the village and we found him interesting and sociable.



Ivy Duan with Zhao Dong Yuan

Zhao has 5 brothers, of which 2 live in other villages. He himself is divorced with no children. In 1992 the whole family (5 brothers plus mother and father) lived in the same house together.

After several years as a migrant worker working on construction sites in the South of China, he returned to his village about three years ago to look for a better life. After finding a pair of bamboo rats in the mountains, he decided to start a small business breeding them.

Within a year he was selling the rats to local restaurants and today business is booming and he breeds 1,000 a year. These rats grow to a weight of 1 – 2kg and he sells them for about 100RMB (£10) per kg.

Income generated from this business is a staggering 80,000RMB (£8,000) per annum, the only costs being the breeding cages, electricity, bamboo and sugar cane. No other livestock are kept, neither are crops grown for additional income.

Life has certainly changed for the better for Mr. Zhao over the past 20 years. From being subsistence farmers, the family now lives in a 3 story home with modest furnishings and decoration. The bamboo rat business has allowed the purchase of luxuries such as TV with DVD player, some electric cooking pots, a computer and a new very large (unpacked) washing machine. He also owns an e-bike and 3 mobile phones. The computer is not connected for internet and is mainly used for storing information.

Having lived in the village all his life, Zhao Dong Yuan has not travelled at all since his migrant working days. Village life and Xing Ping provide limited entertainment other than conversations with neighbours, watching the TV, the occasional card game and family gatherings at national festivals.



Asked what the future holds, he says he wants to expand his business with more cages and continue the stress free life he has now. He is optimistic about the growth of tourism in the area and welcomes it because more tourists mean greater demand for his rats.

He told us he was too busy to find another wife, but he will think about it in the future. Whoever he finds will have to be comfortable living with rats!

Feng Feng Jiao 冯凤娇	1992	2012
Occupation		Housewife
Family		Wife, husband, father-in-law, 2 daughters
Village / Town		Leng Shui
Interviewers		John Etchells & Ivy Duan

As we were strolling down a backstreet on the outskirts of Leng Shui village, we heard some women chatting and laughing. We followed the noise and arrived outside a large two-story home where 4 neighbours were chatting away the afternoon hours waiting for their husbands to return. They invited us in and with no hesitation we accepted and spent the next hour enjoying their conversations about village life.

Mrs Zhao who was the most outgoing and forthcoming of the 4 ladies but did not live there. The householder was a 28-30 year old woman nursing a small baby. Asked what they were doing, they said they were indulging in their favourite pastime 'gossiping'.



John Etchells with Feng Feng Zhao

Mrs Zhao, born in the village, lives with her husband and father-in-law and has 2 daughters living elsewhere in Hunan province.

Her youngest daughter, a 14-year-old girl, lives in Yangshuo where she is enrolled at the Zhang Yimou dancing school. She is studying for a role in the local Zhang Yimou Li River production, which has gained national and international fame.

The daughter earns 1000RMB per month whilst studying and has free accommodation in the school. The elder daughter lives in Hunan.

Mrs Zhao's friends married into the village, and come from different villages along the Li River. None of them were in the village in 1992 but are now all married to men in the building trade.

As a builder, Mrs. Zhao's husband earns about 150RMB per day and they subsidise this by growing oranges and pomelo, which earns another 5000RMB per year. They also grow rice and peanuts for their (and our) own consumption. The family kept a few pigs until a few years ago, but the upkeep, maintenance and feeding did not make it worthwhile.

Asked about the most useful changes in the village in recent years, they feel the improved roads added the most value. The roads are paved or concreted and makes for easier access and less dust and mud. Other improvements include moving from crop farming to growing fruit trees, and improved housing.

Mrs. Zhao and her family do not travel very far preferring to spend their days getting together to gossip, play cards and drink tea. We laughed when we asked about domestic disputes. They told us that there are domestic disputes in the village, especially when alcohol is involved. The disputes are usually between husbands and wives, and are always settled amiably and quickly.

The daily routine is not set, and some days are busier than others. A typical day consists of preparing food, tending the crops and fruit trees and socializing around the village. The husbands have a full day of work in

various villages depending on need, but return home every night. As with most villagers they don't possess major luxury items other than a Cell phone, TV and sewing machine.

They all feel much happier with their lives than 20 years ago and feel no stress or pressure. They don't think too far into the future, but believe the village will thrive and prosper. It was interesting to hear them confirm that young people are beginning to return to the village after spending time as migrant workers in the larger cities.

Asked what they would most like to own, the answers reflect more modern thinking and includes smart phones, a car and brand clothing.

Bi Qiu Ceng	1992	2012
Occupation	Head Monk, Ten Jiao Am Temple	
Da Di 大弟 & Da Qun		
Occupation		Monk, and trainee monk, Ten Jiao Am Temple
Family	Unknown	Wife, husband, 2 sons, 2 grandsons
Village / Town	Da He Bei	Da He Bei
Interviewers	Sian Lovegrove & Wei Yi Gang	Stephanie Lill, John Etchells, Xiao Min, Ivy Duan (written by Stephanie Lill)



The monks in 2012 trying to identify the monk in the picture (right)

In 1992 we interviewed Mr Bi Qiu Ceng the head monk of a Buddhist temple, 30 minutes out of Da He Bei and were keen to see whether he was still there.

At that time he was 62 years old, and had given up subsistence farming in 1989 to devote all his time to studying Buddhism.

The monastery has been in this large cave in the hills, for around 500 years and their daily routine has on the whole remained unchanged. Buddhist monks renounce all material possessions, and their everyday existence depends on donations from worshippers, and from income from the sale of incense sticks.

We found the temple again in 2012 but there was no one about other than a villager washing his clothes in the river below.

We entered the temple and found a lady and a nun in the kitchen. After introducing ourselves and explaining why we were there, we showed them the photos of the Bi Qiu Ceng at the monastery taken in 1992 but they did not recognise him.

Da Di is 68 years old and is one of 2 practising Buddhists there. She has been at the temple for 15 years but is originally from Yangshuo. Da Qun, is 37, and in her first year of a three year process to be a nun. When she has completed it, she can shave her hair and become a practising monk at the temple.

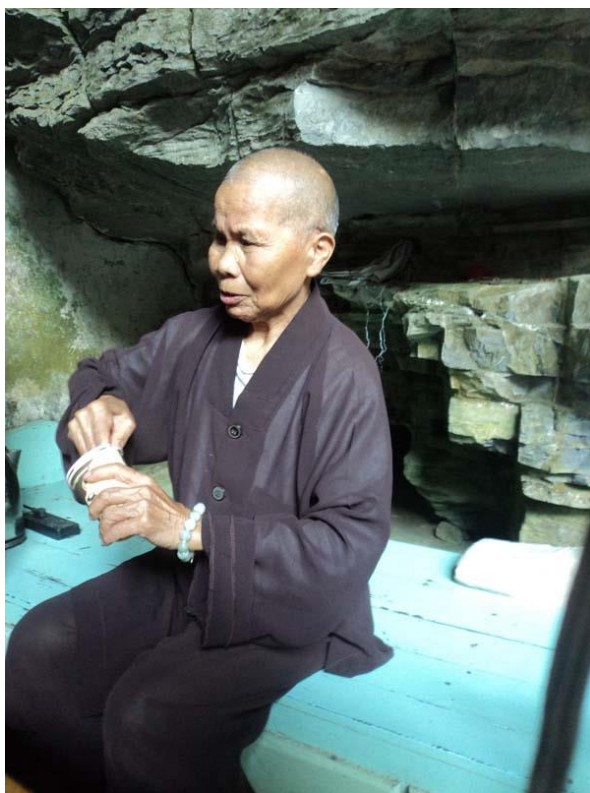
We asked if we could talk to them about life at the temple and they led us to the back of the temple to a bench and table. On the bench was an electric kettle and the ladies produced green tea and paper cups from under the table. They then swung open two wooden doors to the side of us exposing a huge cave from which cool air gushed providing a natural air-conditioning, a welcome relief from the heat of the day.

Da Di waited patiently while Da Qun served us tea and let her answer most of the questions, occasionally offering information if Da Qun did not know. Da Di did answer questions directed at her but was not very willing to give a lot of information. A few times she found something funny and laughed, covering her mouth.

The head monk (慈富) was away today and Da Qun called him on her mobile to find out what happened to Bi Qiu Ceng interviewed in 1992. From what he said, we understood that he has died.



At the monastery interviewing Mr Bi Qiu Ceng in 1992 (Photo SL)



Da Di is married and has 2 sons and 2 daughters-in law which in turn have given her 3 grandsons. She was very proud of them and talked freely, telling us they are farmers and only occasionally come and see her.

She has a mouthful of silver teeth and when we asked about healthcare, she said they have to go to Xing Ping using donations or family to pay for it.

Da Qun is from the next village, Pai Lin (?) and has 20 people in her immediate family, all farmers and all living in the same house. They are happy with her decision and had to have their approval to join the monastery.

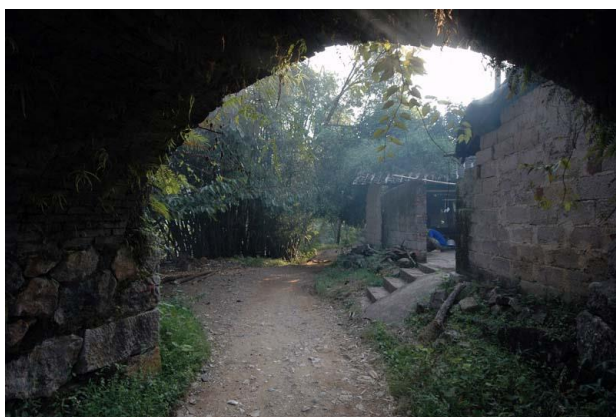
They have an electric kettle at the monastery, as well as a TV that has been broken for ages but they have no need for it to be fixed. The head monk has a computer which he keeps in his room but they don't know what he uses it for. They did not know if they have the internet. Da Qun has a mobile phone but the monk did not and there was no landline in the temple.

They said life was quiet at the monastery and their daily routine has not changed too much from that of previous monks. It only changes if there are people staying at the monastery. They get up early, pray for longer and give classes in Buddhist studies. The temple charges 20RMB (£2) per day for accommodation and food (vegetarian diet). Otherwise they live on donations from visitors.

They have gas, electricity and wood at the temple and have hot water. If the weather is bad the electricity supply is affected then they can use gas and wood instead. With the temple being in cave, it doesn't get too hot or too cold.

Visitors come to the temple for special gatherings and in June this year they had 300 Chinese staying there.

They have had Thai, French and many Europeans in the past year. In 1992 there were also a plentiful supply of western tourists but at that time the monks had mixed feelings about the growth of tourism.



The walk to the monastery (photo SL)

On the one hand the added income made sure they didn't literally starve. However, added tourists had disrupted the peaceful and isolated existence of these monks. 20 years later the monks weren't complaining about the number of tourists.

What did they want for the future? Typically the Buddhists wanted nothing which would enrich themselves personally but would like some money to decorate and repair the temple.

They hoped this would attract more people, more donations and increase interest. We thanked them for their time, left a donation and wished them well.

Deng Jie 邓杰	1992	2012
Occupation		Doctor
Family		Husband wife (lives away), son, daughter
Village / Town		Da He Bei
Interviewers		John Etchells & Xiao Min

We found Deng Jie tending to a patient in a visitor's room adjacent to his small village shop. We were invited into a modest room with a curtain in one corner where medical supplies are kept. A cockerel wandered through the door with much acclaim, but reluctantly left when not given any attention.

Dr. Deng is 58 years old, and has been the doctor in Da He Bei for 30 years having graduated from Nanning University. He is very proud of his 29 year old son who teaches at Nanning University and also has a 28 year old daughter who is the Editor of a local newspaper in Guilin.



Dr Deng with John Etchells outside his surgery

His wife lives with his daughter in Guilin and takes care of their grandchild. He lives well on the income from his practice, his small shop which sells general supplies, some pomelo trees and chickens.

He cares for patients in eight villages along the Li River and the surrounding mountains. He gives vaccinations and inoculations, registers births and deaths, prescribes medicine and other general health related issues including midwifery.

The Government subsidises his medical practice to some extent but he still has to charge a small fee for his services as the government only gives him a salary of 300RMB a month (£30).

Most of the treatment of patients takes place in his makeshift consulting room and in homes and the more serious cases are transported by Yangshuo by boat or bus. Dr Deng knows every villager and told us that Da He Bei had exactly 512 people. His position in the village means that he was able to give an overview for us.

Crop growing in De He Bei is no longer a commercial viability due to the low water levels of the river which made pumping water very difficult. Wells are abundant but for domestic use not for crop growing. In fact, land used for the growing of crops for personal consumption has shrunk to a few patches as increased tourism has resulted in more new buildings.

Livestock farming for commercial purposes has also died out due to the difficulty of keeping animals healthy. Only one villager still keeps pigs, although numerous water buffalo could be seen in the shallow waters of the river near the village. These beasts are used for transporting goods to markets and between villages, and as a symbol of wealth and tradition.

Villagers are generally very healthy and longer life expectancy puts a lot of pressure on young people who have to support the elderly for longer. Dr Deng is concerned about the migration of 18 to 40 year old to the cities and is concerned that that villages only have very young and elderly people. Children working as migrant workers tend to neglect their parents and don't send enough regular money back.

Family life for the elderly is can be very lonely and they are often expected to take care of the grandchildren which sometimes become a burden. He is worried about the problems that an aging population brings to the village. The village had benefitted greatly from tourism and he hopes that opportunities for higher earnings from tourist will tempt the young to return. Dr Deng spends a lot of time travelling to villages on foot (the furthest is about 1 hours walk into the mountains) to see patients. On other days he works in his shop, treats walk-in patients and feeds his chickens.

Asked what he would most like to have to make his life easier, he has no doubt "Oxygen equipment and surgical facilities" he said. With more and older patients, and especially during the winter he treats a lot of chest and lung related illnesses that need oxygen treatment. He shared his passion for surgery with us and told us the following story.

A patient came in to see him with a lump on the side of his head. Dr Deng decided to attempt surgery with the few pieces of equipment he had and the services of his nurse. The surgery did not go as well as he had hoped and the patient started bleeding profusely from the wound. The nurse got such a fright that she took off, ran away and never returned! Dr Deng managed to stitch up the wound and the patient recovered sufficiently to go to a hospital. After this experience he decided not to attempt surgery again, and this saddens him.

We hoped we wouldn't have to call upon his services ourselves!

Asked about his future in the village, Dr Deng said he has been looking for a replacement to take over his practice so that he can retire. However, nobody has been forthcoming; young qualified doctors don't see a future for themselves in a village and he fears he will be stuck in the job forever.



He hopes access for patients to the Yangshuo hospital will become easier and faster and that medical practitioners will come out to visit village patients on a regular basis, relieving him of his responsibility.

He feels that the life of people in Da He Bei has become much better 20 years ago and people are happier because they have enough food and variety to eat and are generally better off. We thanked them for their time, left a donation and wished them well.

He Qing Gui (何庆桂)	1992	2012
Occupation	Blacksmith	Blacksmith
Family	Husband, wife, mother father, 3 sons, 2 daughters	Husband and wife.
Village / Town	Da He Bei	Xing Ping
Interviewers		Sian Lovegrove & Wei Yi Gang

The villager chief in Da He Bei told us that He Qing Gui had moved to Xing Ping and had a workshop next to the toilets. We braced ourselves, crossed the river, and went to find him. We were pleased to see him very happy and enjoying blacksmithing. He is a young looking 65, is married and has 3 sons and 5 daughters.



He had learnt his trade from his father who made farm implements and household utensils in the family's home village of Qiao Tou Pu, a village about 7 miles. He Chin Gui decided to move to Da He Bei as a young man, to make propellers. This decision paid dividends as he has never been short of work and is the only blacksmith in the valley. As we sat with him, two men were waiting for him to fix their propellers.

The house he used to rent in the village belongs to the village chief and he wanted it to use it for tourism so he had to leave. In any case, he felt the villagers weren't very friendly to him as he was not born there.

He lives a simple life and has no need for luxuries owning nothing more than a tv and a mobile phone.

When asked about his earnings, he told us that he earned almost nothing but did it as a service to the community. However, later he took us to his apartment and admitted that he earns a huge amount and with his wife's income from the bus, is among the wealthiest people we had met.

It seems there is plenty of money in propellers especially given the huge number of boats on the river and lack of any competitors. In 1992 one of his sons worked as a blacksmith but He Chin Gui now works alone.

Today, one of his sons owns two buses which go from Yangshuo to Guilin and has done well enough to buy a house in Guilin. He Chin Gui's wife also owns a bus and works in Yangshuo. Another son used to work as a policeman but is now crippled and cannot walk.

Unlike in 1992, the family now have no need to grow crops. Their life is much more comfortable. They are a welcome success story, a hard working family earning good money and very happy with the way their lives have turned out.



The blacksmith with wei Yi Gang in his house

Zhao Yu Ying	1992	2012
Occupation	Widowed farmer	Widowed farmer
Family	Mother, daughter and granddaughter, grandson, son-in-law works away	Mother, daughter and granddaughter, grandson, son-in-law
Village / Town	Da He Bei	Da He Bei
Interviewers		Sian Lovegrove, Xiao Min & Wei Yi Gang

In 1992 Zhao Yu Ying was a 60 year old widow working with her daughter in the fields growing rice and peas for subsistence and a small amount of fruit for sale in Xing Ping. Her daughter's husband worked away and gave little financial support to them. At that time they had several pigs and the 600RMB (£60) they got from their sale formed the majority of their income.



From left: Xiao Min, Zhao Er Mei and Zhao Yu Ying

Twenty years ago they were one of the poorest families in the village. Nevertheless, the house was clean and its inhabitants welcoming.

Zhao Yu Ying is still alive and at 80 years old, is bent almost double and almost completely deaf. We sat in low stools outside her front door and from time to time she disappeared around the corner to her kitchen to check on her cooking.

Zhao Er Mei (interviewed above) is a distant relation of hers and because Zhao Yu Yhin is a little vague and extremely deaf, answers for her.

We learned that she lives with her daughter and son-in-law who have two children, one boy and one girl. Her friend, Zhao Er Mei was keen to point out that it is unusual for the man to move in with his new wife's family.

It didn't seem useful to ask about her hopes for the future as all her answers were given by Zhao Er Mei, who was very helpful but didn't allow her friend to answer.



Zhao Yu Yhin's kitchen

She just sat and looked at us with a blank expression. We learned that the family grows pomello and oranges.

We decided not to ask any more questions as she seemed confused and wasn't answering them herself.

I asked whether I could look in the kitchen and she said I could but she was only boiling water!

Zhao Er Mei	1992	2012
Occupation	Retired Farmer	Retired farmer
Family	Wife, Husband (living away), son 4 grandchildren.	Mother, son, daughter-law, granddaughter and her husband and great granddaughter
Village / Town	Da He Bei	Da He Bei
Interviewers		Sian Lovegrove, Xiao Min & Wei Yi Gang

In 1992 we found Zhao Er Mei sitting on a low stool in the hallway keeping an eye on four of her grandchildren. She lived in the house of her eldest son and spent each day looking after the children, cooking and cleaning, whilst her son and daughter in law were out working in the fields.

Day to day life was hard and unvaried, getting up early, eating simple food and working in the fields until the light went. Zhao Er Mei used to visit her paralysed and bedridden husband who lived with their second son.



Yangshuo was the furthest distance Zhao had travelled voluntarily since she arrived in the village around 1940. She vaguely remembers being sent away to work in a dam-building construction team “far from here” for six months when she was about 30 years old.

We ask her whether this was during the Great Leap Forward, a period in the late 1950s when Mao and his supporters attempted to transform the Chinese economy by mobilising the seasonally under employed labour force to work on various industrial projects. She didn’t know.

Before a Hydro Electric Power station was constructed in 1967 it was not possible to grow rice in this area. When we met her in 1992 electricity powered a water supply system from the Li Jiang, although even then, the water supply was a major concern and it is unsurprising that now in 2012 only a few patches of rice are grown.

When we arrived in Da He Bei, Zhao Er Mei was the first person we tried to find and I shall never forget how we found her.

After a few telephone calls by helpful villagers, the chief arrived to help us find her. He didn’t recognise her name or the description of her and so took us to the doctor (interviewed above) to ask him. The doctor couldn’t think who she was either. Predictably a small crowd soon surrounded around us listening to the discussion and offering suggestions but still, nobody could not identify her.

Behind me stood a little old lady and I suggested to Xiao Min that we ask her as she must be about the same age. When asked if she knew Zhao Er Mei she answered “I am Zhao Er Bei”. We were all amazed. Wei Yi Gang asked her some questions in order to confirm it was indeed her and when she was asked the question “What age were you when you moved to the village?” she answered “14” and everyone clapped and laughed. We had stumbled upon her!

At 90, she is now the oldest person in the village and lives with her son, daughter-in-law their daughter her husband and their son (her great grandson). So there are 4 generations living in five rooms over two floors. She spends every day walking around the village. Her legs are very bowed and so she walks slowly.

The family grows pomelo but no rice any longer (nobody in the village grows rice only fruit). The other main income of the family is the sale of tofu.



Zhao Er Mei leading the way

Everyone in her household except her has a mobile phone “even the 12 year old child”. When she was asked how many bicycles she had, she answered “I have a lot of bicycles but they are all broken”. They also have a small truck and a motorbike for getting around.

When asked what they use their computer for she thought it was strange questions because of course it can only be used for playing games and for the internet. She only has a broken sewing machine as she now buys her clothes.

They have a tv but she doesn’t know much about it as it is upstairs and she never goes upstairs. She doesn’t want for anything, she is happy she has enough to eat and enough to wear. She is optimistic about the future because life in the village is better each year.

Feng Zheng Ke	1992	2012
Occupation		Boat owner
Family		Husband, wife, mother, father, 2 daughters
Village / Town		Da He Bei
Interviewers		Sian Lovegrove & Becky Li

Feng Zheng Ke is 35 years old and lives with his mother, father, wife and twin girls. His parents are farmers but he owns a 50% share of a tourist boat (the metal bamboo style boat with a canopy). His wife works in “This old place” youth hostel across the river in Xing Ping where she earns 700RMB a month. We first came across him when he took us across the river from Da He Bei to Xing Ping at about 7pm one evening after the regular boats had stopped running.

He was generally dissatisfied with his life mainly due to the recently increase in government tax on earnings from his boat. Tourists have to purchase a “river tour” ticket from an official ticket office for 116RMB but the boat owners only get 34RMB. Before the increased taxes he earned about 200RMB per month from his boat. He now earns 800RMB and together with his wife’s wages they have monthly income of about 1,500RMB.

He told us that in March/April boat owners on the Li Jiang refused to pay the increased taxes. The government responded by arresting and locking up many of the owners for between 1 day and a week. Feng Zheng Ke was not arrested but had his motor burnt out by men whom he assumes were sent by the government.



We found him in the “Our Inn” hostel in Da He Bei where he usually waits until his friend calls to say that a tourist boat has arrived. His dream is to own more boats but they cost 20,000RMB each. He is fatalistic about the future and thinks that the only thing which would make his life better would be for the government to take a smaller percentage of the ticket price.

He owned a mobile phone and a tv but no motorbike, computer, bicycle or dvd player.

Shirley Li	1992	2012
Occupation		Hostel owner
Family		Husband, wife
Village / Town		Da He Bei
Interviewers		Sian Lovegrove & Becky Li

Shirley owns a fantastic hostel in the village and speaks excellent English. She is 33 years old and has been running the hostel for the last 4 years. It has 22 beds in 9 rooms. The hostel is in fact her old family home although she had also “swapped” something (unclear what) with her neighbour in exchange for a bit more land which she has made into a garden.

About half of her clients are western, the other half Chinese. She prefers Westerners because they are quieter and more polite.



She has some experience in business organising student tours and this has taught her about the types of activities, food of Westerners. She uses online marketing to good effect and analyses the most successful marketing activity, the most successful being Trip Advisor, Booking.com and Hostelworld, The Rough Guide and the Chinese version of Lonely Planet.

The hostel has its own website at www.ourinnxp.com She would love more customers because although she is full in the high season she is only half full at other times.

One of our expedition members, John Etchells, also owns a guesthouse in South Africa and he spoke to her at length about her business.

Her family used to be farmers growing oranges and other fruit and they still grow 5,000kg of oranges and pomelo per year.

After costs she makes 60,000RMB from room rental, tours and food. Hers story is uplifting and we were all very impressed with her entrepreneurial spirit.



We invited the former Da He Bei chief to lunch at the hostel.

We decided to have lunch with her at the hostel and invited the former chief of Da He Bei to join us. He remembered our 1992 expedition well and greeted us warmly.

She plans to shut the hostel in December and travel to Cambodia and Burma for a month.



Xiao Mei 小妹	1992	2012
Occupation		Sells boat rides
Family		Husband, wife, 2 sons
Village / Town		Da He Bei
Interviewers		Stephanie Lill & Becky Li

Xiao Mei tried selling us tickets to go on her husband's boat from XingPing and was very helpful when we were trying to locate some other people from Da He Bei.

Xiao Mei is 50 years old and lives in Da He Bei with her husband. She pointed her house out; it was 3 or 4 storeys high and built in a modern style. It took 2 years to build as they had to save for the raw materials and wait for them to be delivered to Xing Ping.

Xiao Mei's spends the day persuading tourists to take her husband's boat up the river. The tickets can only be bought at the official government ticket office and the boat owner gets 34RMB (£3.40) regardless of the ticket price.



When her husband is not operating his boat he earns money as a licensed fisherman. Unlicensed fishermen have to fish at night so they don't get caught and fined.

She has 2 sons, 22 years old and 20 years old. The elder son has just finished at a tourism college in Guilin and hope to get a job as a tour guide. The younger son used to drive a bamboo boat as he dropped out of school but he didn't like it and left for Guilin to try his luck there.

She and her husband used to have 3 boats but sold 2 when her sons left. They only got 3,000RMB (£300) each, a lot less than a new boat which is 10,000RMB (£1000).

In the past 20 years there have been many big changes in the local area, more Chinese but fewer western tourists. The cost of living has risen to such a high level it is hard to cover all their expenses on their combined incomes of 1,000 – 2,000RMB (£100 - £200) a month.

They would love to have a bigger boat to increase their earnings but at 600,000RMB (£60,000) it is far too much. Her main goal at the moment is to save for her sons to get married, that is all she wants in the immediate future.

Xie Zhu An 谢祖安	1992	2012
Occupation		Manager at the electric bus depot in Xing Ping.
Family		Husband, wife, 2 sons
Village / Town		Da He Bei
Interviewers		Stephanie Lill & Xiao Min

When we were looking for Xie Ju Jun (the former rice wine brewer from Leng Shui) in the electric bus station, he said he knew about him and when we explained why we were looking for him, he said he knew about the expedition from last time and he knew about this one as his sister knows Wei Yi Gang & remembers Sian Lovegrove.

He took us to his office which he shared with someone else. He was well dressed but had very bad teeth and his skin was very aged. His office was new and had two big wooden desks with two leather office chairs, an electric kettle, smartphone, water cooler, en-suite squat toilet, air conditioning unit, traditional Chinese tea set and many ashtrays and packets of cigarettes.

He is married and has a 22 year old daughter who studies in a teaching university in Guilin. His wife works for the government in the department dealing with food rations if there is an emergency.

His house cost 500,000RMB (£50,000) to build his large house with the help of his friends and is still waiting to decorate it.

He explained the how the electric buses work. When tourists buy a boat ticket, they get a free ticket for the electric buses which takes them to and from the port and the bus station and to the pier where you can a boat to Leng Shui.

He was getting more uncomfortable and less willing to give us information so he said he had to go but in the meantime another man had arrived and he was introduced as Xie Zhu Jun 谢祖军, the rice wine maker's son.

Mrs Mo	1992	2012
Occupation		Shop owner
Family		Husband, wife, 2 sons
Village / Town		Shi Ji Tou
Interviewers		Sian Lovegrove, Ivy Guan and John Etchells

Mrs Mo is 51 and married to Mr Cai.

Mrs Mo owns the only shop in the village and sells such things as snacks, sweets, noodles, household cleaners, shampoo, fire-crackers, beer and rice wine. The shop makes a profit of 20 – 30RMB (£2- £3) a day and is open 7 days a week when she is not working in the fields. At the moment her husband is selling fertiliser to other villagers but he sells anything he can find. He is a general trader.

She sits on a low stool on the floor just inside the doorway picking at cotton buds. She uses the cotton for making bedding and clothes and doesn't sell it but if she did, she would get 20RMB (£2) per kg.

She and her husband live in the house. They have two sons, one of whom is married and lives in Nanning, the other one sells air conditioning parts in Yangshuo. They communicate with their sons using the QQ instant messaging system on a computer they bought for them. In addition they own a motorbike, a mobile phone each, a sewing machine and tv.

She would like a new house but a 100sqm house costs 50 – 60,000RMB (£5,000 – £6,000) to build and they cannot afford it. They are farmers and she tells us that they used to harvest 150kg of rice per mu but now they have irrigation channels which carry water and pesticides they can achieve 500kg per mu, a huge increase in yield.

She is much happier now than in the past because they can grow a lot more rice and have enough to eat. The quality of that food is better and they are able to buy more meat.

She is optimistic about the future because each year life gets better. She thinks that the young people will eventually return to the village to work in the fields.

Wu Zhong Fa 吴忠发	1992	2012
Occupation		Fruit Farmer
Family		Man, mother and brother
Village / Town		Shui Shu Cun (Fruit tree village)
Interviewers		Stephanie Lill & Becky Li

Wandering round the village, we heard a voice shout out “Hello” so we wondered over and found Wu Zhong Fa. He invited us into his house and we sat on small wooden stools while he told us his story. His family came from Hunan but has been in the village for about 300 years.

Wu Zhong Fa is 60 and lives with his 80 year old mother who is blind and deaf. He has a younger brother in Shenzhen who survives on occasional work as a labourer. Sadly, neither he nor his brother is married or have children.



Village children with new pencils (photo SL)

His house was completed in 2000 and was built using his money and a government subsidiary. In the corner was a pile of sticks in a corner, lots of small stools and a rocking chair. When we found him, he was sitting on a wooden chair next to a small table watching his flat screen TV.

The small kitchen area had a concrete shelf which held a chopping board, electric hot plate and rice cooker.

He is a pomelo farmer, has 40 trees and he sells his produce to a trader who then takes them to the city. He makes very little money from this but was not willing to say how much.

Every day is the same, he gets up when he wakes up and goes to his orchard to water and prune them and treat them for disease.

He said that the village has developed only a little in the past 20 years and some tourists staying in Xing Ping now come here. He is not sure on numbers as people visit by car, bike and on foot and he is not always in his house so he can't keep track. Most of the tourists are Chinese and he thinks it is because of the cave (signs to “Goblin Cave” can be seen on the road from Xing Ping). Surprisingly, given the interest from tourist, he has no idea what's in the cave or why it's famous as he has never been to it.



Detail of the Old House (photo SL)

The small village shop is run by an elderly couple and sells bottles of water and fizzy drinks, a few Chinese snacks and noodles. There is no school in the village and children have to go each day to Hope School about 5 mins walk from the main village entrance.

The village is not bigger enough to have its own doctor.

Wu Zhong Fa is content to stay in the village and has only been as far as Guilin which he visited once.

For fun he likes to spend time with his friends by the shop, watch TV and drink beer. He says village life is better than before as there is better medical care and people can eat what they want as there is more food. He has no plans for the future; he takes each day as it comes.

He did not want us to take his picture and was not comfortable with pictures being taken of his house.

Appendix II: Geology of the region

Extract from 1992 expedition report

The Guilin area is famous for its spectacular tower karst scenery, developed in the Devonian and Carboniferous limestones. There is a large variety of karst landforms in the area and these can be divided into three groups.

Peak forest (feng lin), where individual near-vertical towers stand isolated on a corrosional plain which is covered by alluvial veneer.

Peak cluster (feng cong), where a number of steeply sloping conical hills are separated by closed depressions which are normally non-alluviated.

The Li Jiang gorge (in which the three original villages lie) is in an area of peak cluster. The elevations of peaks are in the order of 200 metres.

The majority of limestone hills around the villages have slope angles between 55 and 75 degrees. They are covered by thin scrub and unsuitable for agriculture. Around the tower bases on the slopes there is some quarrying for building stone.

The limestone hills are riddled with caves. These appear at 3-4 distinct levels and would have been formed by groundwater when flood plains were higher. Some villages use karst springs and caves for drinking water supplies.

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Appendix III: Expedition members

<p>Sian Lovegrove FRGS ACIM</p> <p>Contact sian.lovegrove@virgin.net +86 13255 289881</p>	<p>Sian Lovegrove is from the UK and now lives and works in Nanjing and Shanghai. Educated at London School of Marketing and London School of Journalism, she now works as a freelance educator, writer and photographer.</p> <p>She was a leader on the 1992 Li Jiang expedition and has also led expeditions to Morocco, South Africa, Siberia, Ireland and Scotland. She is a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society in London.</p>
<p>Prof Wei Yi Gang</p>	<p>Wei Yi Gang was a leader of the 1992 expedition and still lives and works in Guilin. He is now Professor at Guangxi Institute of Botany and an international expert in the flora of Southern China. He has described 1 new genus , 50 new species and published 30 articles.</p> <p>He regularly collaborates with The Royal Botanical Gardens in Edinburgh, The Natural History Museum, London, The Gesneriads Society in the USA and The Vietnam National Museum of Nature.</p>
<p>John Eтчells BA Law</p>	<p>John Eтчells has had a varied career in Human Resources (Labour Law), General Management and Education. Originally from South Africa he has spent the last 8 years living and working in Shanghai as Academic Production Manager for an international education group.</p> <p>Having been part of major change in his native country South Africa, both politically and socially, he has always had special interest in countries and areas where change is prominent and prevalent.</p>
<p>Stephanie Lill BA Tourism</p>	<p>Stephanie Lill is from England and now works in Shanghai. After graduating from the University of Brighton in Tourism Management, she became interested in the ESL industry and has since worked in England, Thailand and China in both a professional and volunteer role.</p> <p>She now works as an Academic and Quality Manager for an international education group.</p>
<p>Xiao Min Xue MA Education (Mina)</p>	<p>Xiao Min graduated from University of Leeds with an MA in General Education. She started own company in 2011 to help students study overseas and organize international summer schools.</p>
<p>Li Jian Jun BA Biology Technology (Becky)</p>	<p>Becky is from Shandong Province, China. She has lived in Guilin for six years and is currently studying in Guangxi Normal University for her Master Degree in comparative education.</p>
<p>Ivy Guan B.com (Ivy)</p>	<p>Ivy graduated from University in Inner Mongolia (Hohhot) majoring in Business Economics, and spent 7 years working in the Shipping Industry in Shanghai. She now runs her own business, in the overseas education field.</p>

Appendix IV: Extract from 1986 & 1988 Expedition Report

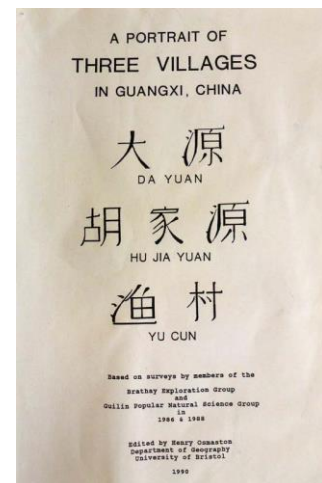
Yu Cun Fishing Village

Area of village: 4 ha
Cultivated area: 35+ ha
Population: 500 people about equal male/female, 90 families
80 people work in cities (incl Yangshuo)
Oldest person 83, life expectancy 65 (m), 68 (F)
Living space: 25m per family

Yun Cun village is located on the east bank of the river about 2km downstream from Xing Ping and is most easily reached by boat although there is a path through the hills. Maize and rice is grown with the help of water pumped from the river. Most families also have pomelo trees.

There are large vegetable plots around the village often surrounded by large stone walls where beans, sweet potato, chills etc. are grown. There are many drying floors used for groundnuts.

Along the river are groves of very tall thick bamboo use for construction and for simple river rafts.



Edited by Henry Osmaston, Dept of Geography, Bristol University.



Sketch by Marcus Rowcliffe

Many of the houses are very large and imposing, well built of good quality grey bricks with thin mortar lines with doorways of cut and carved limestone, one doorway being 4m x .4m x .2m in a single slab. The wide gates are of carved wood and the best house has bronze window barriers and an elaborate front door.

This door comprised an outer sliding frame of horizontal bars moving on wheels and steel track which fitted into notches in the opposite door post; inside this are wooden double doors supported against pressure from the outside by stout vertical timbers notched into floor and overhead beams. Inside the large entrance hall is a high lattice screen of carved wood behind which is a well-paved courtyard.

Many of the houses are still in good condition, though probably in multiple occupation, shown by a tendency to build smaller shacks inside.

The whole impression is one of decayed gentility confirmed by the history of the village. Formerly the village was owned by a few rich landlords and was a favourite country resort for the prosperous officials and scholars from Guilin.

There was a Buddhist temple, now the primary school (and temporarily our dormitory). The biggest landlord was very rich with large pomelo orchards, many of which were cleared for food crops when his land was confiscated.

He himself was killed but his family still live on his former house and have a normal allocation of land. A new house is being built in the village by a "new rich man" who has made his money from selling pomelo.

200 metres above the village, nestling between four jagged peaks lie the ruins of a small village, Tian Shui Zhai, meaning “Sky water walled village” i.e. one dependent upon rain water. Little remains but the ruined south and east gateways, built of square stones with sections of wall about 4m high on each side.

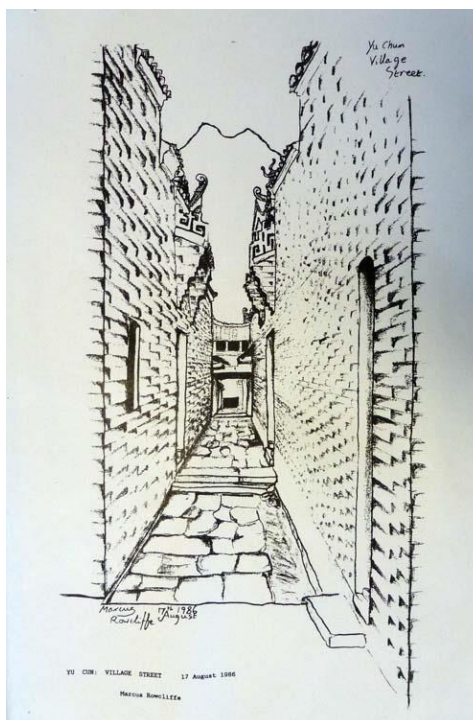
Conclusions

The striking feature of villages in this region is the relative prosperity compared with many rural villages in Asia. We saw no signs of serious poverty, hunger or disease; houses are well built and furnished and often have expensive electrical goods.

People we spoke to were content with conditions that had significantly improved since the introduction of the new economic reforms.

It will be interesting to see what indications of change can be gathered by the 1990 expedition, especially in administration, prosperity and diversity.

Detailed statistics on population and the local economy are also needed to complete the overall picture.



Sketch by Marcus Rowcliffe - 1988

Appendix V: Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Mr Qi, Head of Guilin City Authority for his logistical support and hospitality. His contacts in Yang Ti and Xing Ping were much appreciated and although we didn't take him up on the offer of a speed boat to transport us down the river, it was a kind thought.

Thanks also to Brathay Exploration Group in the English Lake District for making available previous expedition reports. I hope that they will consider running another expedition to this area in the future.

Julian Ipsen in Guilin was a great support to us in planning the trip and whilst in the field. If you need a freelance tourism consultant, Julian is your man.

And finally, the people of the villages we visited. They were, without exception, welcoming and hospitable. We are grateful for them tolerating our numerous questions and for their willingness to share their stories, both happy and sad.

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