

Jiazhai

In Search of My Mother's Childhood House

by

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Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

Abstract

The concept of home has become increasingly complex and challenging to define in modern times, as traditional notions of home are being challenged by diverse family structures, globalization and mobility, economic instability, social and political dynamics, and subjective interpretations of home.

This thesis, *Jiazhai* (In Chinese, “Jia” stands for home, while “Zhai” means house), explores the idea of home and settlement through a collection of recently discovered family stories from my mother’s side in Xiamen, China. Through online interviews with my family members, I asked my mother and my grandmother to recall and draw their childhood memories of home. Based on their stories and drawings, I tried to reconstruct the untold family history, family tree, and the old family house in Kulangsu (historically an international settlement in the early 20th century), which belonged to an unknown family member of mine - my great-grandfather, a Filipino overseas Chinese.

In addition, the thesis documents how the concept of home was experienced and transformed during different periods, including pre-modern China in the 1930s, the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution in the 1960s, and the Chinese economic reform in the 1980s. Through these transformations, it records the journey of my family’s settlement that ultimately led to our current home in Xiamen. While the thesis recollects and reorganizes my family’s journey of placements, it aims to unfold how the idea of home, family, and settlement transformed over the past century in China.

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Preface

In Chinese, “Jiazhai” 家宅 refers to a family house. The word is made up of two characters - “Jia” 家 and “Zhai” 宅, both of which have the meaning of home but are typically used in different contexts.

“Jia” 家 is the most commonly used character for the meaning of family or home in modern Chinese language. It is composed of two radicals, “豕” (shi) and “宀” (mian), with “豕” meaning pig and “宀” representing the roof radical. When combined, the character “Jia” visually represents a pig under a roof. There are two explanations as to why the character for home in Chinese depicts a pig under a roof. One theory is that since pigs were domesticated and lived in built structures, a house with a pig in it must have been a house for people as well. Another explanation is that the pig was used for animal sacrifices offered to family ancestors, which is a traditional custom in China during festivals or special occasions. A house with food offerings to ancestors represents the Chinese value of family kinship.

“Zhai” 宅, on the other hand, is a character that was more commonly used in the past to describe a residence, house, or mansion, usually a larger scaled dwelling like traditional Chinese compound houses. Furthermore, the character “Zhai” also holds another meaning in Chinese – grave, a permanent residence for the dead. Therefore, the word “Jiazhai” with the two characters together not only stands for a family house, but also suggests a strong sense of family and a deep connection between the living and departed family members. The idea of home in Chinese cultural is inseparable from the concept of family.

“Where is your home?” used to be a straightforward question for me to answer. As a child, I would simply give my home address and point towards its general direction. However, since moving to Canada, I’ve become more hesitant when asked this question. I’ve come to realize that “where is your home?” and “where do you live?” are two distinct questions that people often confuse, as the former asks for Jia 家 while the latter asks for Zhai 宅. Now, when asked, I typically answer by stating my current city of residence in Canada and then add, “but my home is in Xiamen, China.”

As I’ve spent more time living in Canada, I’ve become increasingly uncertain about how to define home. This uncertainty has also been accompanied by an inner struggle with my identity as an overseas Chinese. These feelings were further amplified during the pandemic in 2022. I had planned to visit my hometown in China for my initial research attempt about architecture in my hometown and booked my flight months in advance, excited and eager to return home. I even shrugged off the prospect of a 14-day quarantine upon arrival. However, one week before my flight, I received a notification from the airline that my flight had been cancelled. All flights back to China had been cancelled for the next month due to several positive cases found on flights, making the journey risky. As a result, I was plunged into sadness. As a Chinese citizen, I was not allowed to return home - or, at least, what I had always thought of as home.

In an attempt to comfort me from my disappointment, my mother started to chat with me about our home and share family stories that were never told to me before. These untold stories of my family’s history sparked my curiosity and led me to explore the different homes that my family members have lived in over the years, in search of a deeper understanding of what “home” truly means to me.

Introduction

1. Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (Beacon Press, 1994).

The concept of home encompasses various dimensions, including its role as a physical space, a social construct, and a cultural symbol. However, in today's globalized world, the notion of home has become more complex as people move and expand their sense of belonging. Home is no longer confined to a specific physical location, but rather can encompass a combination of local and global places, memories, and imaginings, whether they be familiar or foreign. While the idea of belonging has traditionally been closely associated with a particular place, such as one's childhood residence, evoking feelings of nostalgia as described by philosopher Gaston Bachelard¹, contemporary perspectives on home are evolving. Increasingly, people find a sense of home in multiple places, leading scholars in fields such as sociology, anthropology, geography, urban studies, and architecture to study the concept of home and belonging in a more nuanced and complex manner. This reflects the dynamic and multifaceted nature of home in today's diverse and interconnected world.

Outline of the Thesis

The thesis is structured around two main perspectives: the macro histories of China and the micro histories of my family. It delves into the various displacements experienced by my family members over the past century, starting from my great grandfather's generation in pre-modern China, and tracing our journey to our current home in Xiamen in the present day. By intertwining these macro and micro narratives, the thesis sheds light on the multifaceted experiences of my family and offers a nuanced understanding of our history and home in different eras of China's societal and cultural transformations.

The first chapter revolves around my intriguing discovery of a family house in Kulangsu that belonged to a mysterious family member - my great grandfather, a Filipino overseas Chinese. As I embark on a journey to uncover the history of my family and the origins of the family house, this chapter unravels the complex dynamics of Chinese emigration during the 19th century, the phenomenon of wealthy overseas Chinese returning to China during the 20th century, and the intricacies of family kinship in pre-modern China.

The second chapter delves into an investigation of the social and political transformations that occurred in China from the 1950s to the 1970s, and their impact on traditional Chinese family structures. It employs a parallel narrative approach, incorporating the analysis of the Chinese film *To Live*, along with my mother's personal experiences, to illuminate the specific changes that unfolded within each commune and household during this tumultuous period.

In contrast to the previous chapters discussing home life, the third chapter delves into my aunt's entrepreneurial journey and the family business she established in 1990, following the economic reforms in China. This chapter explores how China experienced significant economic growth, particularly through the construction boom, as a result of its open-door policy. The establishment of our family business during this period marked a pivotal turning point, ultimately improving our family's financial situation and enabling us to afford better homes in the subsequent decades.

The final chapter delves into an analysis of our current home in Xiamen, specifically the apartment units located within the same building. This section examines how modern living arrangements among family members differ from traditional Chinese ways of living. In addition, by

investigating our family's daily rituals and activities within the apartment, this chapter reveals the elements that we continued to carry from family history and traditional homes of the past.

The Methodology

On Interviewing

The research findings are gathered interpretatively from oral history interviews conducted with my mother and my grandmother, taking place virtually over video calls. The interviews center on their childhood experiences of living in the old family house, with a focus on three key areas of inquiry. Firstly, the interviews explore their recollections of the old family house, including its physical characteristics, layout, and significance within the family. Secondly, they delve into their memories of family members who lived in the house, their roles, relationships, and interactions. Lastly, the interviews aim to capture memories associated with the old family house and other homes, including emotional connections, anecdotes, and personal reflections. Through these interviews, the research seeks to gain insights into the multifaceted dimensions of home and family, as recounted by my mother and grandmother, and interpreted through their unique perspectives and recollections.

On Drawing

In addition to conducting oral history interviews, my mother, who is the main interviewee, was asked to draw her childhood home as a way to share her understanding of spaces. She was encouraged to use any style she wishes, such as plans, elevations, perspective drawings, or even furniture she recalls from her memories. As she is not an expert in architectural drawing, the emphasis was on capturing her memories

and reflections, rather than producing technically accurate drawings. The drawings served as visual representations of her memories and shed light on the significance of spaces in her past experiences, even if the drawings are simple or abstract. These drawings provided valuable insights into her personal history and her connection to the physical spaces of her childhood home, adding a visual dimension to the oral history research.

Moreover, I also utilized drawing as a method of research by illustrating scenes from my mother's personal stories as a way of immersing myself into her story. The drawings served as visual aids in connecting with her narratives, offering a different approach to analyzing and interpreting her oral history.

The Old House

... home is not an object, a building, but a diffuse and complex condition that integrates memories and images, desires and fears, the past and the present. A home is also a set of rituals, personal rhythms and routines of everyday life. Home cannot be produced all at once; it has its time dimension and continuum and is a gradual product of the family's and individual's adaptation to the world.

——— Juhani Pallasmaa,
“Identity, Intimacy and Domicile -
Notes on the Phenomenology of Home”

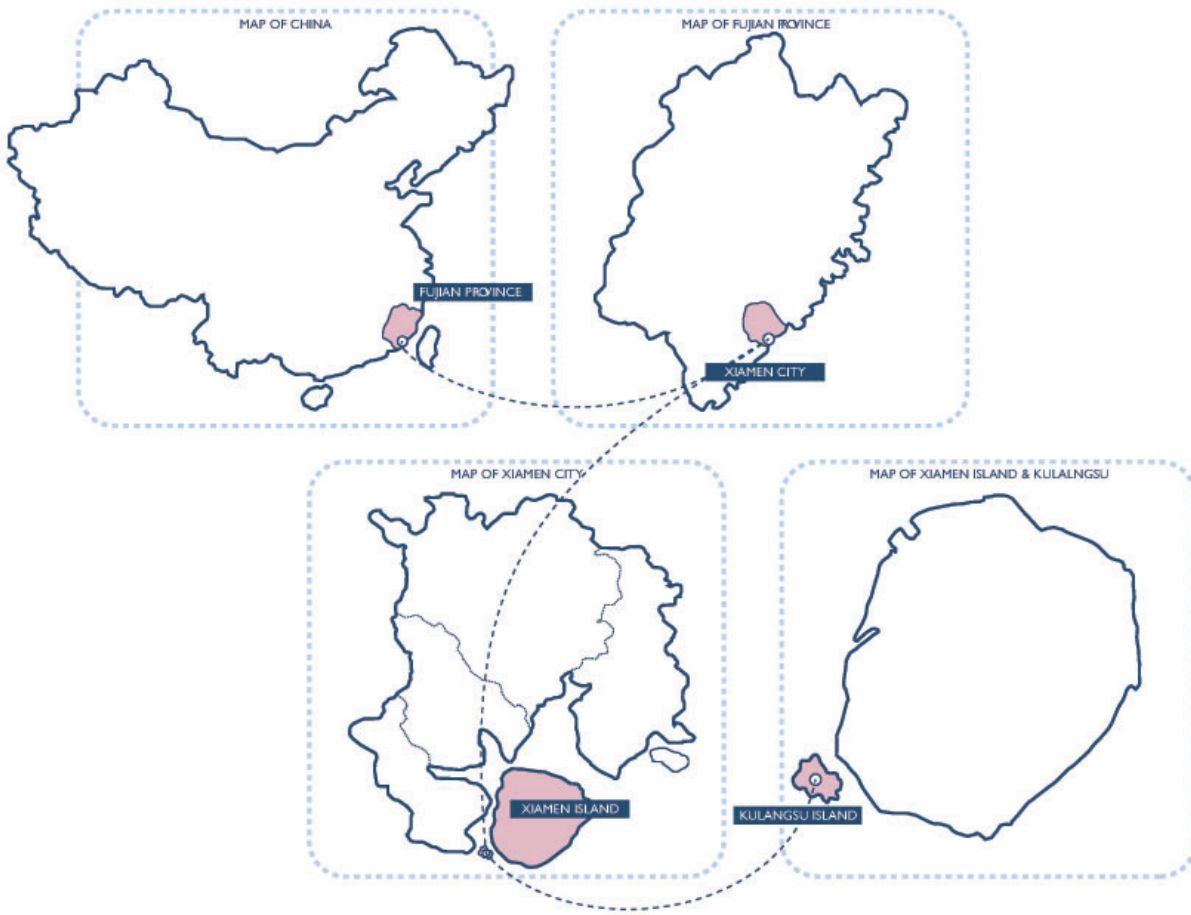


fig.1.1 Location of Xiamen City and Kulangsu Island in relation to Fujian Province and China.

I was born and raised in Xiamen, a coastal city located at the southeast of China. As a member of a typical Minnan (southern Fujian) family, I have been educated to value my family over anything else in the world. And because of this belief inculcated within all family members, I grew up with unconditional loves and supports not only from my parents and siblings, but also from everyone in my extended family, especially my maternal family – my grandmother, my aunt, uncle, aunt-in-law, and cousins. After ten years away from hometown, I still feel closely bounded with all of them.

Since I was little, I was taught that my maternal grandparents both came from families of overseas Chinese. However, without knowing many details about their stories, this identity has been difficult to reconcile in the nationalist context of modern China. Years later, following the path my family planned, I became an overseas Chinese myself when I immigrated to Canada with my father at the age of fifteen. This resulted in my family being separated into two continents, as my mother and sister decided to stay in our hometown and live close to extended family members, while I pursued my education abroad under my father's care. In order to maintain our relationship, the four of us have been constantly travelling between the two countries to be with each other as much as possible.

However, this process of always moving has brought about an inner struggle of identity and the idea of home. What is home? In Chinese culture, the notion of home is a complex and crucial concept that extends beyond the physical house or dwelling place to the ancestral homeland, where one's ancestors are buried. For many overseas Chinese, the idea of returning to their ancestral homeland is deeply ingrained in their cultural identity. The Chinese phrase 落叶归根, which directly translates to “falling leaves return to their roots,” is often used

to express the idea of longing for home and a desire to return to one's cultural or familial roots. This is reflected in the practice of burying one's body back in the hometown, which is believed to allow for the continuation of one's ancestral line and a sense of connection to the past.

The topic of home and house has been studied extensively in various fields, including anthropology, psychology, and architecture. Juhani Pallasmaa, a Finnish architect and author, is one who has written extensively on the themes of home, identity, and the human experience of space. In his essay "Identity, Intimacy and Domicile", Pallasmaa delves into the concept of home and the ways in which architecture shapes our sense of self and belonging. Pallasmaa argues that the home is not just a physical space, but also a psychological and emotional one. He believes that the home is intimately tied to our sense of identity, and that it serves as a kind of mirror that reflects and reinforces our sense of self. As he puts it, "the house is not only a place of dwelling, but also a locus of our identity"².

2. Juhani Pallasmaa, "Identity, Intimacy and Domicile - Notes on the Phenomenology of Home," chap. *The Home of the Memory*, accessed November 7, 2022, http://www.uiah.fi/studies/history2/e_ident.htm#fire.

In addition, French philosopher and phenomenologist Gaston Bachelard's "The Poetics of Space" explores the philosophical and psychological dimensions of architecture and its impact on the human experience of space. For Bachelard, the house is a place of refuge and safety, where we can retreat from the outside world and connect with our inner selves. Bachelard views the house as a repository of memories and emotions, where each room and object holds a particular significance and contributes to the construction of the self. He argues that the experience of home is not limited to the physical space of the house, but also involves the imagination and the dream world. Bachelard also emphasizes the importance of childhood memories and the sense of nostalgia they create in our relationship to the home.³

3. Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*.

From another perspective, John S Allen, an American anthropologist and writer who focuses on the evolution of the human brain and behavior, argues that the concept of “home” has played a critical role in human evolution, influencing the way we think, feel, and interact with our environment, as he writes,

Home is a concept that has evolved with us and, in some respects, it is a reflection of us. Our sense of home provides a sense of security, of place in the world, of familiarity and comfort. It is the foundation for our relationships with others, shaping our cultural practices and values. Our home is where we belong, where we identify ourselves and others, where we find safety and love. It is a central part of our identity as human beings.⁴

4. John S Allen, *Home: How Habitat Made Us Human* (Basic Books, 2015).

In Chinese culture, the home holds a crucial value, as it is considered the foundation of the family unit and the source of individual identity. This emphasis on the importance of the home is reflected in the design and layout of Chinese houses, which embody the significance of the family unit and social hierarchy, as well as the desire for harmony and prosperity. Several Chinese architectural historians, including Qing Mei, Siwei Luo, Yi Qian, and Hongquan Xie, have conducted extensive research on the design of Chinese houses, particularly the residences of overseas Chinese in Fujian, analyzing how their homes are a reflection of value, belief and their unique identity.

As I reflect on the homes I have lived in Xiamen, the first one that comes to mind is not any of the apartment units I lived with my parents, but rather my aunt’s house. The house is a spacious four-story building primarily occupied by my aunt’s family and my grandmother, however, there is a room dedicated to me prepared by my aunt. It was

a place I often stayed at during periods of instability within my family, making me feel safe and surrounded. Even though my aunt's family moved out of the house about seven years ago, memories of us gathering there still vividly appear in my mind. As I embark on my journey of self-discovery regarding the connections between home and identity, I have decided to start with my aunt's house. It was there that my perception of home was first formed, and it holds significant emotional value to me.



fig.1.2 The front view of my aunt's house, which is combined by two semi-detached houses.

The Aunt's House

Located in the heart of Xiamen Island, my aunt's house is a four-storey building created by combining two semi-detached houses. The house underwent several renovations to connect the previously separate areas. On the ground floor, the kitchen is linked to the dining room, while the vestibule opens up to the room with the Buddhist altar, creating a seamless loop that connects the entire ground floor. The programs on the second floor are clearly divided, with only one door connecting the two parts. The tearoom and west living room are used to greet guests, while the family room and my grandmother's bedroom occupy the other half for family members. Upstairs on the third and fourth floors, there are a total of seven bedrooms. While the house was primarily occupied by my aunt, my cousin, my grandmother, and a couple of servants, there are spare bedrooms dedicated to the rest of the extended family.

Ever since I was in kindergarten, we would gather every Friday for dinner as our family tradition. The kids would be picked up from their schools, and the parents usually left from their workplaces earlier to make it to the dinner on time. The parents and the kids were set in different dining areas. All the parents would join my grandmother to eat in the formal dining room on the ground floor linked to the kitchen, where they sat around a circular dining table with a turntable serving tray in the centre. My grandmother would always be settled at the main seat, which faces the television and the door linked to kitchen.

The kids on the other hand, were settled to eat in the family room on the second floor, where we pulled out a squared coffee table and several chairs that were all perfect for our heights. We would drag the table

in front of the television so all of us could watch cartoons while eating, which for me at the time, was only allowed every Friday.

The parents usually finished their dinners before us and made their way up to the second floor following my grandmother. While we were still focusing on the cartoons, all of them would pass-by our table, hurried us to finish our meals soon, then headed straight to my grandmother's bedroom beside the living room. Sitting on the couch, chair, or my grandmother's bed, they would continue their conversations whether its complaining about their works, chatting about next week's plan or simply started watching Chinese drama with my grandmother.

During traditional festivals or important occasions, kids would join the adults in the round dining table downstairs, each sitting besides their parents. To celebrate Chinese New Year, grandmother would cook her best dish – satay hotpot, with all sorts of ingredients placed around the pot waiting to be cooked on the table. The large group of us all together would be squashed around the table with no extra room for one more person.

With no doubt, Friday was my favourite day of the week in my childhood, it was to me the starting day of the weekly cycle, all of us departed from that family house every Friday, and we returned to it every Friday.



- 1 Entry
- 2 Vestibule
- 3 Mahjong Room
- 4 Kitchen
- 5 Dinning Room
- 6 Buddhist Prayer Room
- 7 Storage
- 8 Servant's Room
- 9 Garage

fig.1.3 The ground floor plan drawing of my childhood family house.



- 10 Tearoom
- 11 Living Room
- 12 Family Room
- 13 Grandmother's Bedroom

fig. 1.4 The second-floor plan drawing of my childhood family house.

Despite feeling intimately bonded with all my family members, I was surprised to learn about my mother's childhood home on the small island of Kulangsu during a conversation with her. The existence of the house had never been revealed to me in the past twenty-four years of my life, and it sparked a million questions in my mind. Intrigued by this discovery, I decided to reconstruct the house and learn more about my family stories in Kulangsu.

Kulangsu

Once a legendary island, Kulangsu was the land the old house used to stand on. It is a small island as part of Xiamen City, with a total area less than two square kilometres, sitting southwest to Xiamen Island. Being one of the main tourist attractions of Fujian Province, Kulangsu attracted over 10 million visitors year-round. Through out my childhood, Kulangsu was this tourist-only district that I would not step onto voluntarily as a local, crowds of visitors were always occupying all the spaces of that tiny island, and all you could see are the people's heads in front you. Although I didn't enjoy going there, Kulangsu's unique history of being an international settlement still attracted millions of visitors. Because of this, I was completely surprised when hearing that there was an old house belonged to my family in Kulangsu.

Xiamen has been an important foreign trade city, historically known as Amoy, which was the old English name given by the foreigners in the 16th century based on the pronunciation of local dialect. In 1541, European traders (mainly Portuguese) first visited Xiamen. The Portuguese were expelled shortly after, though British ships occasionally came until 1757 when foreign trade was restricted to Canton (Guangzhou) near what would later develop into Hong Kong. In the nineteenth century, resulting from China's loss in the First Opium War⁵ with Britain, Xiamen was forced to open as one of the five treaty ports⁶ to the western countries, primarily for exporting Chinese tea. Under the Treaty of Nanking⁷ signed between China and Britain, foreigners could freely reside within City of Xiamen, including Kulangsu island. Since then, hundreds of foreigners chose to settle in Kulangsu and quickly transformed the rural island at the time into their main living quarter. Over time, Britain, France, America, and several other western countries es-

5. First Opium War: First Opium War was a series of military engagements fought between Britain and the Qing dynasty between 1839 and 1842. The immediate issue was China's official seizure of opium stocks at Canton to stop the banned opium trade and threaten the death penalty for future offenders. The British government insisted on the principles of free trade, equal diplomatic recognition among nations, and backed the merchants' demands. The British navy defeated the Chinese using technologically superior ships and weapons, and the British then imposed a treaty that granted the territory to Britain and opened trade with China.
6. Under the Treaty of Nanking, there were five treaty ports, Shanghai, Ningbo, Fuzhou, Guangzhou, Xiamen, opened to British merchants.
7. The Treaty of Nanking, signed on August 29, 1842, was a peace agreement between the Qing Empire of China and the United Kingdom, following the First Opium War. The treaty is notable for being the first of the unequal treaties that China was forced to sign with foreign powers during the 19th and early 20th centuries. Under the terms of the treaty, China agreed to pay a large indemnity to Britain, cede the island of Hong Kong to the British, open up five treaty ports for foreign trade, and grant extraterritoriality to British subjects in China. The treaty also signaled the beginning of a period of foreign domination and exploitation in China, and is widely regarded as a symbol of China's "century of humiliation" at the hands of foreign powers.



fig.1.5 Photograph of Kulangsu Island taken in 2022. (Feng Xie)

established their consulates on Kulangsu Island.

Kulangsu International Settlement was established in response to the looming threat of Japanese invasion in the aftermath of the First Sino-Japanese War⁸. Japan was keen on using Xiamen and Kulangsu as a base for launching their attacks on China. In an effort to prevent this, the Qing government proposed setting up an American concession on Kulangsu. However, the United States declined the offer but suggested opening up the island as an international settlement for various countries to settle in, as a means of deterring Japanese aggression. As a result, Kulangsu International Settlement was officially established in 1902 governed by thirteen countries, and similar to the Shanghai International Settlement, Kulangsu was policed by a Sikh police force drawn from Britain's colonies in India.⁹

After the establishment of international settlement 1902, thousands of overseas Chinese, primarily from Southeast Asia, were attracted to build their homes in Kulangsu. These overseas Chinese, mostly came from Guangdong and Fujian, emigrated aboard during the 19th centuries because of both internal and external factors. On the one hand, political and economic instability in China, such as the decline of the Qing dynasty, the Opium Wars and poverty, led many Chinese people to seek opportunities elsewhere. On the other hand, the growth of international trade and the development of overseas Chinese communities presented new opportunities for Chinese migrants. As a result, millions of Chinese people migrated to various parts of the world during this period, including Southeast Asia, the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand.

During the early 20th century, many of the overseas Fujianese decided to return to China. Instead of returning to their hometowns in Fujian,

8. The First Sino-Japanese War took place from 25 July 1894 to 17 April 1895 and was primarily fought between China and Japan over influence in Korea. Japanese forces achieved a series of victories on both land and sea, and after the loss of the port of Weihaiwei, the Qing government sued for peace in February 1895. The resulting Treaty of Shimonoseki, signed on 17 April 1895, included China's recognition of Korea's total independence and the cession of the Liaodong Peninsula, Taiwan, and the Penghu Islands to Japan "in perpetuity".
9. P. W. (Philip Wilson) Pitcher, *In and about Amoy: Some Historical and Other Facts Connected with One of the First Open Ports in China* (Shanghai: Methodist Publishing House in China, 1912), 258, <http://archive.org/details/inaboutamoyosomeh-00pitciala>.

10. “in-between space” is a term Elizabeth Sinn coined to describe migration hubs like Hong Kong and to accentuate the sense of mobility they embody. Elizabeth Sinn, *Pacific Crossing: California Gold, Chinese Migration, and the Making of Hong Kong* (Hong Kong University Press, 2012); quoted in Soon Keong Ong, *Coming Home to a Foreign Country: Xiamen and Returned Overseas Chinese, 1843–1938*, Cornell East Asia Serie (Cornell University Press, 2021), 7.
11. According to the comprehensive survey on overseas Chinese investment compiled by Professors Lin Jinzhi and Zhuang Weijin of the Xiamen University, between 1871 and 1949, overseas Chinese invested almost 87.5 million Chinese Yuan in Xiamen in said period, representing 62.9 percent of their total investment in Fujian, and 12.9 percent in the whole of China. In terms of overseas Chinese investment, Xiamen was the second largest city in China behind Shanghai. Jinzhi Lin 林金枝, *Overseas Chinese Investment in modern China: Fujian* 近代华侨投资国内企业史资料选辑: 福建卷, (Fujian People’s Publishing House 福建人民出版社, 1985).
12. Amoy Deco Style is the name given by Japanese architect Terunobu Fujimori in the book *A Comprehensive Study of East Asian Architecture and Urban Planning: 1840-1945*, which was edited by Terunobu Fujimori and Wang Tan from Japanese Taisei Press in 1996, “Amoy Deco” was used to define the unique architectural form appeared and developed to be in certain scales in Xiamen, Kulangsu and surrounding areas for many times.

Xiamen, as an in-between place¹⁰ like Hong Kong, became the destination of choice because of its proximity to their home villages and the relative safety, urban conveniences, and economic opportunities it offered. As a special case in Xiamen, Kulangsu provided a stable and favorable environment for foreign investment and commerce. The settlement also offered a degree of political and economic autonomy, which made it an attractive destination for overseas Chinese entrepreneurs and investors.¹¹

These returned overseas Chinese brought with them not only wealth, but also new ideas, cultural influences, and a cosmopolitan outlook that helped to transform Kulangsu into a vibrant center of commerce, education, and social life. They built luxurious mansions, established businesses, and contributed to the development of the island’s infrastructure, including schools, hospitals, and public amenities.

The development of Kulangsu reached its peak during the years between 1920s to 1930s. According to most of the buildings were designed in an eclectic style presenting both the western and eastern architectural characteristics, and usually constructed with local materials and materials shipped from oversea, which was later referred to as “Amoy Deco Style”¹². In their study titled “The Integration of Chinese and Western Architectural Cultures in Kulangsu Architecture”, architectural historians Qing Mei and Siwei Luo interpreted the formation of this hybrid language,

On the one hand, the architectures were deeply influenced by the traditional Chinese culture and the local culture of Minnan, and on the other hand, the style flaunted the oversea Chinese’s knowledge and wealth abroad, which is expressed in the style and design of the houses. The buildings had to resemble foreign architecture and have the characteristics of Minnan, this

dilemma of overseas Chinese was directly reflected in their houses, which presents an eclectic style of both Chinese and Western.¹³

While I find these histories interesting to learn about now, when I was young, I was completely disinterested in the Amoy Deco Style in Kulangsu, or this period of Kulangsu's history in general. It was often described as part of the "century of humiliation"¹⁴ in history textbooks, which held little appeal to me.

Never did I think at that time one of the overseas Chinese dwelled in Kulangsu was a family member of mine – my great grandfather.

13. Qing Mei 梅清 and Siwei Luo 罗四维, "The Integration of Chinese and Western Architectural Cultures in Kulangsu Architecture 从鼓浪屿建筑看中西建筑文化的融合", *Chinese and Overseas Architecture*, 1998, 19. Original quote, "一方面, 深受传统中国文化及闽南地方文化的熏陶, 另一方面, 炫耀在国外的见识及拥有的财富, 表现在建筑造型的风格和选择上, 既要洋, 又要中; 既要象外国的建筑, 又要有闽南的特点。华侨这种两难之心态, 直接反映在他们的建筑上, 呈现善亦中亦西的折衷风格。" Translated by author.
14. "Century of humiliation" is a term used in China to describe a period between 1839 and 1949 when Chinese government lost control over large portions of its territory at the hands of foreigners.

Great Grandfather

On the evening of April 16th, I video called my mother from my room in Markham to ask about this mythical figure. At the time, it was morning in Xiamen, as there is a twelve-hour time difference between our locations.

“Hi mom.”

She just arrived at her office as she staged her phone on the desk to free her hands and started preparing for work. I waited there in silence for she to make her first cup of tea while discussing to the urgent tasks of the day with her colleagues, until she finally sat down in front of the phone, facing me. We briefly chatted about our life updates, and I couldn't wait anymore, “So... we talked about my great grandfather last time...”

Our last conversation was abruptly cut short when my mother had to leave for work, right after she mentioned my great grandfather. Before today's call, my mind was overflowing with a million questions. I was desperate to learn about my family's history and understand why it was never discussed with me before. I have never seen a picture of him, but I have done extensive research on overseas Chinese in Kulangsu through books. In my mind, his image appears as a vague outline of an old man in a suit, similar to how other wealthy overseas Chinese were depicted in books about Kulangsu.

“Oh right... my grandfather...”

“You never mentioned anything about him, why?” I could see my

mother hesitating over the other end of the videocall.

“To be honest I wasn’t hiding anything about him, I just didn’t want to bring him up. It’s a long story.” She sipped her cup of tea and sighed, “my grandfather, your great grandfather, was originally from Jinjiang, Fujian. Being the younger son in his family, he was quite spoiled by his family and his older brother – my granduncle ... who was I think ten years older than him. I guess it was due to the age gap... and the responsibility of the oldest son within the family at that time to raise the entire family, my granduncle worked quite hard. And during the 19th century, following the stream of migrating overseas, my granduncle migrated to Philippines, started a family, and made a great fortune there.”

“What about great grandfather? How was he like?”

“He was a completely opposite person as his brother.” She raised her voice, “he was entirely relying on his older brother. He followed his brother migrating to Philippines, and he formed his family there as well with his Filipino wife. To my understanding, he was supposed to assist his older brother’s business, but all he did was enjoying life as an upper-class.”

“Wait a minute... you lost me there... great grandfather’s Filipino wife? I thought great grandmother was Chinese?” Another silence.

“You are right, your great grandmother was Chinese. The thing is... your great grandmother was a concubine of your great grandfather.”

I was completely speechless.



fig.1.6 This is a photograph of my great grandparents and their youngest son, who is the younger brother of my grandmother. (Photograph taken in the 1960s.)



fig.1.7 This is a photograph of my great grandfather's separate family living in Philippines at the time. Most of the people in this photograph are unknown to me, the only person related to me was my great grandfather sitting on the right in the front row. I was told that the Filipino women sitting on the left in the front row is his official wife, which is not my great grandmother who is the concubine. The women standing in the middle at the back was the daughter of my great grandfather and his Filipino wife. (Photograph taken in the 1960s.)

15. Zhao Dexin 赵德馨 and Ma Zhangwei 马长伟, *Oei Tjoe: A Biography* 黄奕住传, (Xiamen University Press 厦门大学出版社, 2019), 367.

16. Yizhu Huang (1868-1945) was born in a small village in southern China. His family farmed a small plot of ancestral land and had been very poor for several generations. Like other members of his family Yizhu Huang had little formal education. He was doomed to a life of menial labour. to escape poverty he sailed to Singapore and later to Java at the age of 16 and worked as a labourer. Later he went into the business of exporting sugar and other commodities and amassed a huge fortune. He then returned to China and used his enormous wealth to modernize the city of Xiamen, Fujian. He established the Xiamen Electric Light and Power Company, the Xiamen Tap Water Company, and the Xiamen Telephone Company. He also founded the China & South Sea Bank, headquartered in Shanghai, and was the only private bank allowed to print its own money for general circulation. He also co-founded China Banking Corporation in Manila and Overseas Chinese Bank in 1919 in Singapore. Zhao and Ma, 黄奕住传 [Oei Tjoe: A Biography].

17. Zhao and Ma, 368.

The system of concubinage and prostitution was not abolished in China until the enactment of the first Marriage Law in 1950 right after the founding of People's Republic of China, but I never realized this period of history was so close to my generation. In premodern China, it was allowed for wealthy man to purchase concubines and added them to the household in addition to their wife. A somewhat different form of it was the so-called “two primary wives” 两头大. A man who suffers chronic separation from his wife, may “marry” another woman where he lives and set up a separate household with her, which the two households was referred as “two-deaded family” 两头家¹⁵. Due to the geographical separation, the second woman often regards herself as a full wife for all practical matters, yet legally this marriage is not recognized, and she is treated as a concubine. This was a common situation for the overseas Chinese males settled in Kulangsu, who constantly traveled between the three places - their hometown in China, their home aboard, and their settlement in Kulangsu.

Yizhu Huang, also known as Oei Tjoe, was a wealthy Indonesian overseas Chinese who was often regarded as the wealthiest overseas Chinese of his time¹⁶. He had a total of two wives and four concubines, with his official wife being Shi Wang, a Chinese lady raised in his family and married to him when they both grew up. In Chinese, this type of wife is known as 童养媳, translated into “child raised daughter in-law”¹⁷. After getting married, Wang stayed in Huang's hometown to take care of his family members, as was typical for many overseas Chinese wives who could only wait for their husbands to visit every few years.

While working in Indonesia, Huang fell in love with Xiuniang Cai, a descendant of an overseas Chinese family. As they got married in Indonesia, Cai became his companion and also served as his business

assistant. Although Cai was considered a concubine of Huang's, she was treated as his wife in Indonesia. Cai accompanied Huang during his thirty-five years in Indonesia until he returned to China and settled in Kulangsu with his family and his official wife Wang for the rest of his life.

For many overseas Chinese, having “two families” meant maintaining separate households with distinct lifestyles and customs in two different countries. Huang attempted to integrate his two families into one by bringing them together in a single location. He made two attempts to do so from his base camp of activities. The first attempt was in 1915 when he tried to convince Wang to stay in Indonesia with him. The second attempt was made in 1922 when he tried to persuade his second wife, Cai, to settle with him in Kulangsu. However, due to language barriers, cultural differences, and different living environments, life was extremely difficult. Both wives returned to their original settlements after a short stay.¹⁸

18. Zhao and Ma, 370.

As the phenomenon of having at least one woman in each overseas Chinese home was quite common at the time, it could be explained with John Allen's argument in his book *Home: How Habitat Made Us Human*. “Around the world, even in male-dominated societies, the home is considered to be the domain of women.”¹⁹ Allen wrote, Allen wrote, approaching the research of home through the lens of an anthropologist. Allen points out that throughout history, women have been tasked with the majority of domestic duties, including cooking, cleaning, and child-rearing. This gendered division of labor has been reinforced by cultural norms and expectations, as well as by biological factors such as pregnancy and breastfeeding. As a result, women have often been seen as tied to the home, while men have been associated with public life and work outside of the household.

19. John S Allen, *Home: How Habitat Made Us Human*, n.d.

The Kulangsu House

From my mother's description, the old family house was a three-storey eclectic styled villa located in the central area of Kulangsu Island, minutes away from the commercial district - Longtou Road, sitting right across from the cemetery dedicated to western merchants, diplomats, and their family members. Over half a century later, neither the old family house nor the cemetery could still be found on the island today. "Unfortunately, your grandmother doesn't remember much about her

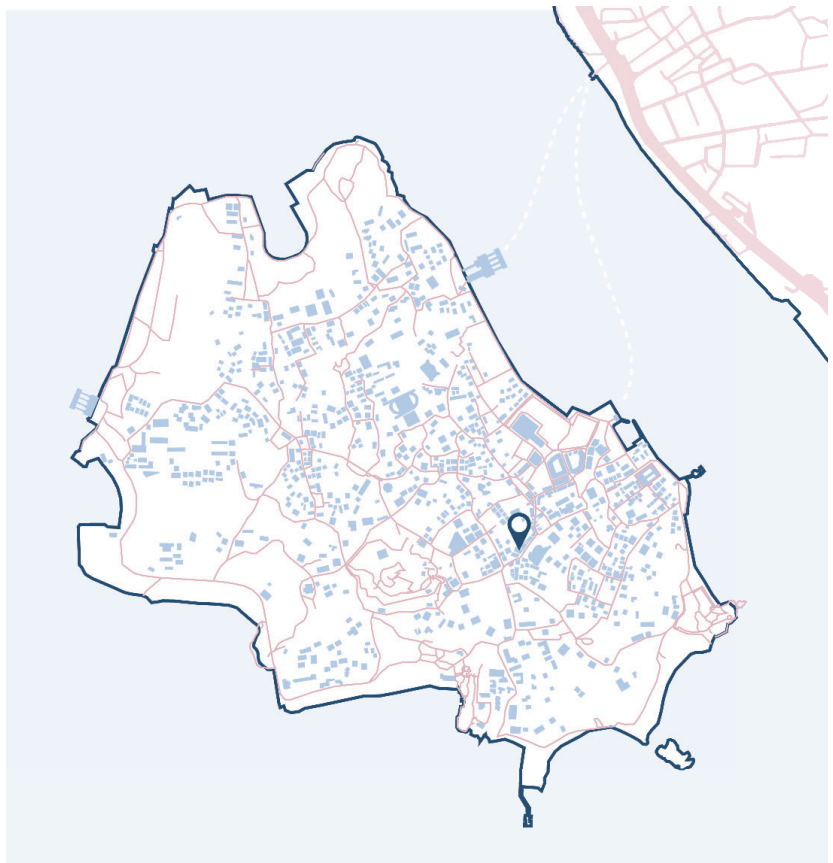


fig. 1.8 Location of the old family house in Kulangsu Island.



fig.1.9 Ariel view of Kulangsu, with the oval-shaped music hall in the centre, which stands on the location of the old cemetery for the westerners during the International Settlement period. Across from it, the location of our family house (highlighted in yellow) was replaced by a later built seafood restaurant. (Base image taken by: Songrong Cai, Kulangsu Administrative Committee)



fig.1.10 Front of the seafood restaurant. From what my mother could remember, unlike the current building, the old house was set back from the street, which was more aligned with the red brick house on the left. (Photography taken by my mother)

childhood in this house, but I still vividly remember some fragments from my childhood living in it.” My mother appeared to be quite excited when I asked about her childhood. Knowing my interest of reconstructing the old family house, my mother visited Kulangsu with my aunt to document the current environment for me. Through the videos she took, I saw her pacing back and forth in front of where the old house located, feeling like she could sense it from the ground up.

To hear the stories happened in the Kulangsu house, we had another video call couple days after the first one. She forwarded a black and white photograph of two people standing in front of the house, “to share our stories living in the house, I must start from the old lady in this photograph, my Jiupo (“grandaunt” in Chinese).”

“She is also a family member?”



fig.1.11 An old photograph of the housekeeper, whom my mother referred to as “Jiupo”, and her older daughter standing in front of the old house by the metal gate.

“Well... not quite. Jiupo was how we called her, but I don't think we were related. She lived in the house with two of her daughters and worked more as a housekeeper. However, she also took on the role of a nanny and took care of the children in the house, including your grandmother.”

“I see. What year did she move in?”

“Your great grandparents left Kulangsu in the mid 1940s back to Philippines. They left without bring their three kids, including your grandmother, so they hired the housekeeper to take care of them in Kulangsu.” When the Communist Party of China was gaining control of the entire country near the end of the Civil War, groups of overseas Chinese decided to once again emigrant aboard due to the fact that most of them were supporters of the nationalist government, which had moved after 1949 to Taiwan.

“They just left the kids in Kulangsu without coming back?” I was shocked to hear this. I had always known that my grandmother grew up on Kulangsu, but no further details about her life there were ever shared with me or my generation.

“Your great grandmother did visit a couple of times, but you know... traveling was not easy at the time. Throughout your grandmother's childhood growing up in that house, the housekeeper essentially became her second mother until your grandmother left Kulangsu.”

Although grandmother never told us about Kulangsu or the housekeeper, she often spoke about my grandfather and their lives after leaving Kulangsu. Unfortunately, I never had the chance to meet my grandfa-

ther as he passed away before I was born, but I did hear he was a loving and responsible husband and father. After marrying my grandfather in her twenties, my grandmother moved out from the Kulangsu house and chose to settle in Xiamen Island with him.

In 1971, in the middle of the Cultural Revolution, a significant number of academics and intellectuals became targets of the movement. This resulted in many of them being sent to rural labor camps. Among those affected was my grandfather, who worked as a middle school teacher at the time. He found himself on the list to be sent to the countryside. However, due to his strong refusal to comply, he was expelled from the school and faced a lack of job opportunities as a consequence. Facing financial struggles, my grandparents were forced to take on multiple jobs to support the family. Unfortunately, this situation made it difficult for them to care for their three children, including my mother and her two siblings. Consequently, the decision was made to send the children to live in the Kulangsu house under the care of a housekeeper, while my grandparents continued to work tirelessly to make ends meet.

“The three of us lived with the housekeeper and her two daughters whom we called aunts. We lived there for almost three years.” She continues.

“What was she like? The housekeeper.” I wonder.

“She was very kind with us, she cooked and took care of us everyday. I don’t remember many details of her, but I do recall watching her do her hair in front of a small mirror every early morning.”

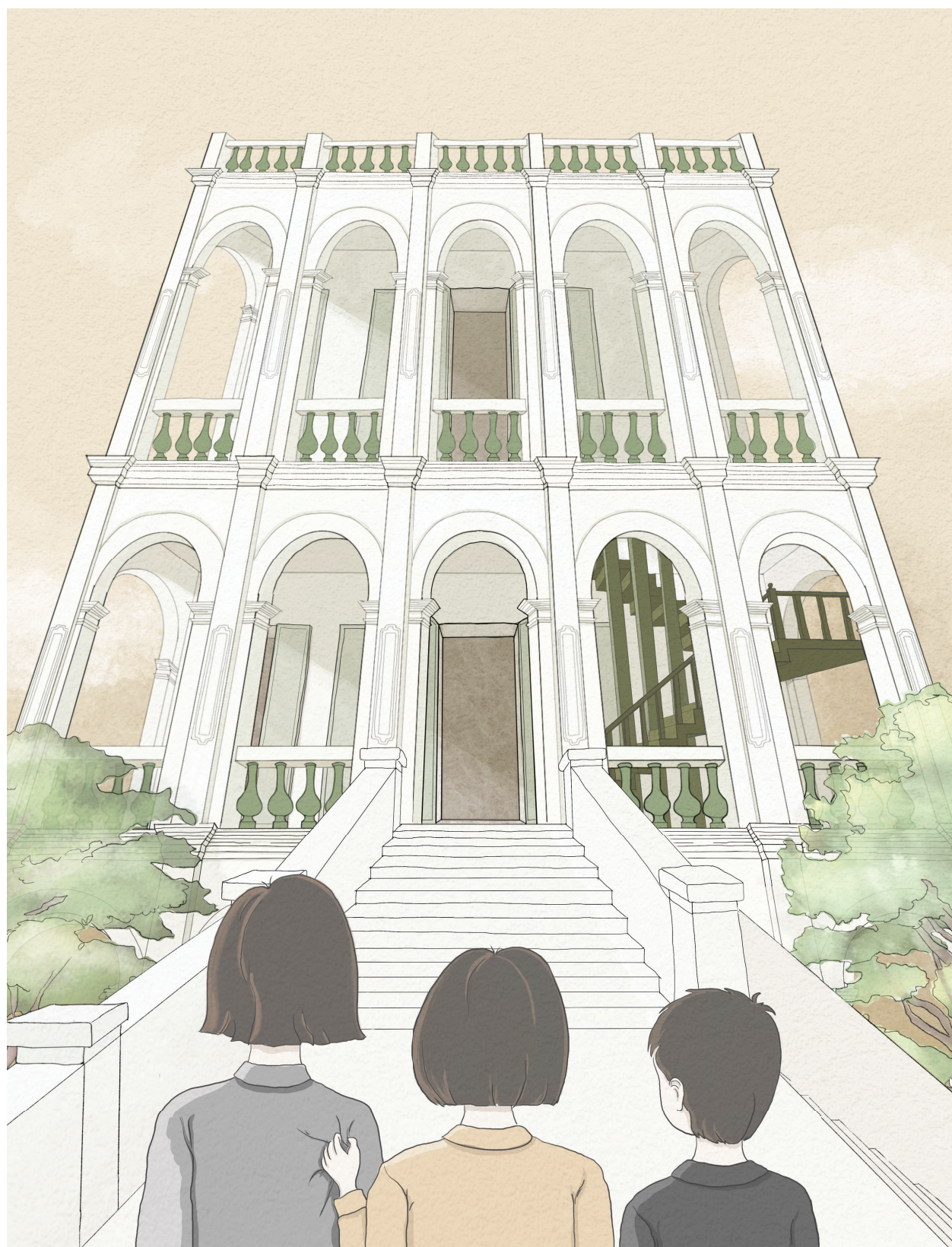


fig.1.12 Arrival of the three children, my aunt, my mother, and my uncle, at the unfamiliar family house in Kulangsu in 1971.

Using the memory palace technique, I asked my mother to recall her childhood memories by mentally walking through her childhood home and sketching out the space on paper. A few days later, she finished her first draft of the house, and soon after, she sent her second draft with some revisions, additional details, and descriptive labeling. The drawings sparked a deeper curiosity about her childhood home. With her drawings as our guide, we walked through the old house and a series of family histories unfolded before us.

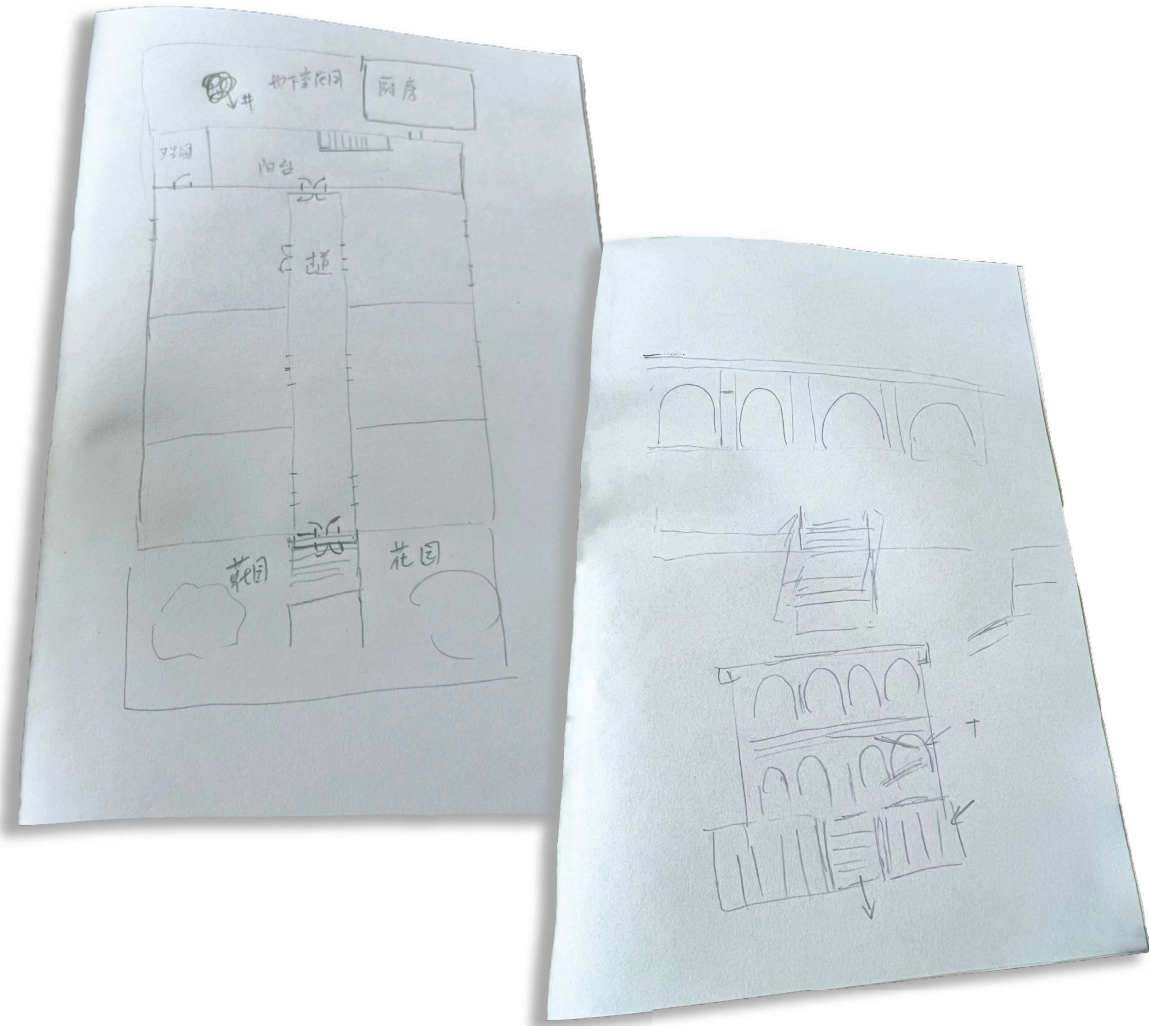


fig.1.13 My mother's first draft of the house, with the attempt of drawing the ground floor plan, the elevation, and a perspective drawing of the grand stairs.

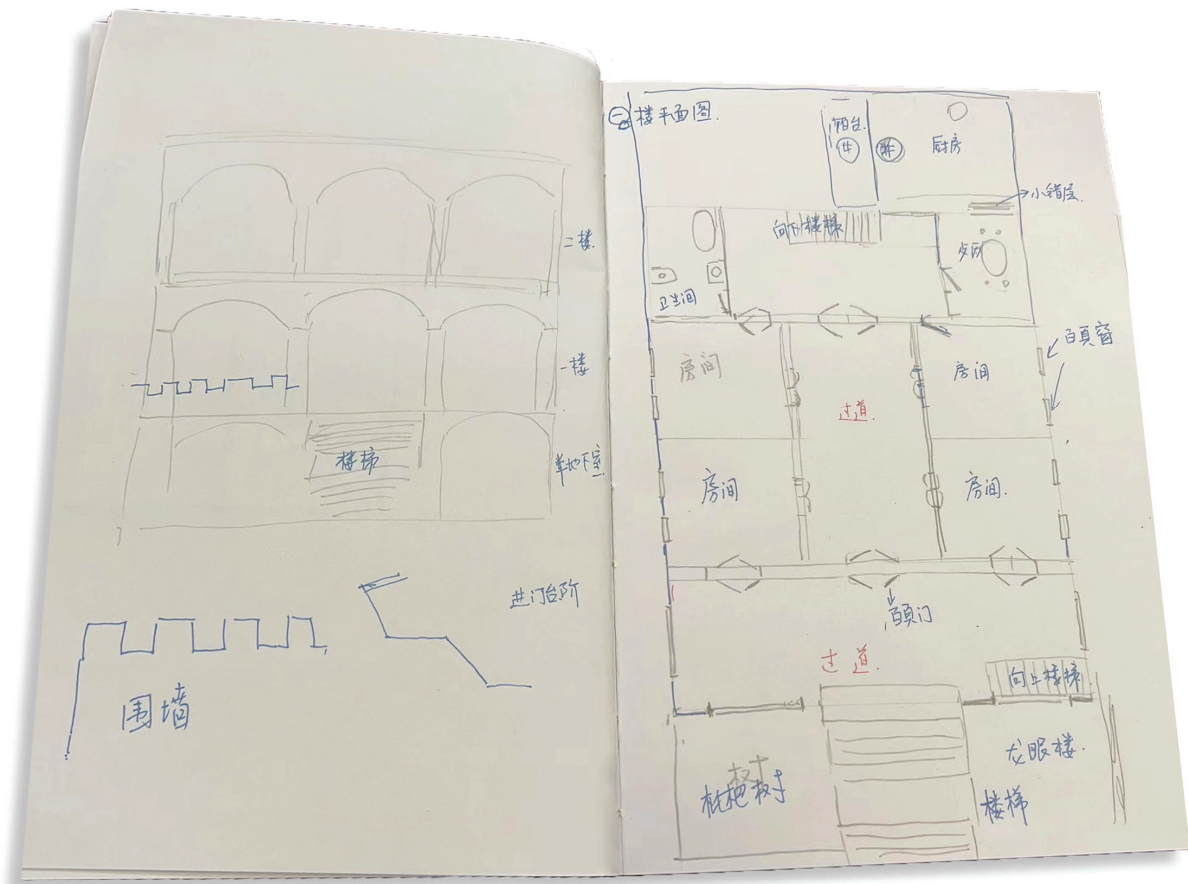


fig.1.14 My mother's second attempt of drawing the house, with the front elevation, section of the grand stairs, some close-up drawing of the railings on the left side; and the ground floor plan drawn on the right side.

The Grand Stair

The grand stair in front of the house was the key feature of this property, as my mother explained to me. Going over the front yard, the grand stair acted like a bridge linking the front gate and the front verandah. At the time when photography was expensive in China, it was extremely precious to have a photo taken, and the grand stair naturally became the perfect stage for documentation. My mother found few old photographs from the relatives and shown them to me, seeing the fragments of the old house and all the “family members” I’ve never seen makes me feel surreal. When I asked my mother who were the people in the photographs, she hesitated a little, “The left two in the first photo are my aunts, the two daughters of the housekeeper. And the one on the right is my aunt-in-law, my uncle’s wife. As for the second photo, I was told that they were the family members of your great grandfather’s mistress in Hong Kong. This photograph was taken when they came to visit Kulangsu.”



fig.1.15 An old photograph taken in front of the old family house, the family of my great grandfather's mistress (the right one at the back row), with the housekeeper (the third on the left at the back row), and her two daughters (the second and the fourth on the left at the back row). (Photograph taken in the 1980s.)



fig.1.16 An old photograph taken in front of the old family house, the two on the right were my mother's aunts, and the lady on the left was my mother's aunt-in-law. (Photograph taken in the 1980s.)

The Verandahs

Coming up from the grand stairs, you landed at the front verandah on the first floor. The verandah first appeared in Xiamen in the early 1840s, introduced by Europeans and Southeast Asian overseas Chinese. It was originally an open space located inside the house complex and adjoining the courtyards on the ground in India. The space was rearranged to the outside of the house for conducting trade and exchange, thus formed a new type of dwelling-bungalow, surrounded by verandahs on three sides, sometimes all around. This type of dwelling was popular in India since the 15th century, and it later became the architectural style commonly used by British in many colonial countries in Southeast Asia, and semi-colonial cities along the southeast coast of China in the 19th century.²⁰ The verandah style was originally an archetype popularized by Europeans for the adaptation to the tropical climate in Southeast Asia, and it developed into a common practice of overseas Chinese villas constructed in China, as it was “a representation of their wealth, modernized lifestyle, and this superiority from their experience aboard.”²¹

In the process of localization, the designs of the front verandah gradually integrated with features from traditional Chinese architectures, which were categorized into three types, Ta-xiu 塌岫, Chu-gui 出龟, and Five-foot Way 五脚基.²² Ta-xiu and Chu-gui are the local dialects to describe the layout of the entrance specifically for the traditional Minnan courtyard houses, the former stands for the indented entrance while the latter describes the extruded entrance. Alternatively, Five-foot Way was a term used to describe this required architectural feature for the shophouses in Singapore, “each house should have a verandah of certain depth, open at all times as a continued and covered passage on each side of the street.”²³ The term was later used by the overseas

20. Qing Mei, “Houses and Settlements: Returned Overseas Chinese Architecture in Xiamen, 1890s-1930s” (The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2003), 137, <https://repository.lib.cuhk.edu.hk/en/item/cuhk-343390>.
21. Yi Qian 钱毅, “From Colonial Veranda Style to “Amoy Deco” Style: Modernization and Localization of Veranda Style in Kulangsu 从殖民地外廊式到‘厦门装饰风格’-鼓浪屿近代外廊建筑的演变”, *Architectural Journal*, 2011, 108. Translated by author.
22. Hongquan Xie 谢鸿权, “An Initial Exploration on the Yang-Lou House of Quanzhou in Modern Times 泉州近代洋楼民居初探” (Huaqiao University 华侨大学, 1999), 20.
23. Charles Burton Buckley, *An Anecdotal History of Old Times in Singapore*. (Singapore, Printed by Fraser & Neave, limited, 1902), 84, <http://archive.org/details/ananeecdotalhist-00buckgoog>.

24. Xie, "An Initial Exploration on the Yang-Lou House of Quanzhou in Modern Times 泉州近代洋楼民居初探," 23.

Chinese to refer to the flat-fronted verandah spaces.²⁴

There were two verandahs located at the front and back of my mother's childhood house, both fell under the category of Five-foot Way 五脚基. The verandahs were primarily used for circulation, each having a set of stairs built, connecting the ground floor and the second floor from the front verandah, while the stairs at the back verandah led you down to the basement level. Meanwhile, the verandahs served as thresholds between exterior and interior. There were five entrances laid symmetrically at each verandah connecting you to the indoor spaces, each entrance consisted of two double-doors, with a solid wooden double-door located on the inside and a louvered wooden double-door layered on the outside. The tiny in-between spaces between the two double doors were these secret spaces my mother and her childhood friends love to hide. Peeking through the openings of the louvered doors, the kids were able to see the empty land right across previously used as the cemetery for westerners before it was destructed in the 1950s. As the nooks between doors were dark and private, where naturally became their favourite place to share horror stories about the cemetery and the island.

Other than functioning for circulation, architectural historian Hongquan Xie, who has done extensive research about eclectic style mansions in South Fujian, expressed that verandahs are the extensions of the interior living spaces in his thesis *An Initial Exploration on the Yang-Lou House of Quanzhou in Modern Times*, "The Five-foot Way verandah could be seemed as an indoor space without windows and doors, and also an outdoor space with a roof. The ambiguity of this space allows the verandahs to function in a variety of ways and become a stage of daily life scenes, which made it an important living spaces for the residences."²⁵ Standing at the front verandah, my mother

25. Xie, 23. Translated by author.

and her childhood friends used to pick longans growing on the tree planted in the front yard. Using a long stick, one of the kids would kick the branches while the other kid reaching out a net to catch the falling fruits.

In my mother's memory, the back verandah was where the memories associated with food were stored since it was the transitional space in-between the additionally built kitchen at the back of the building and their dining table. With food passing around, the passage structured their daily life as it made the rhythm of the days. Standing at the back verandah, you overlooked at the small backyard at the basement level where a well was constructed next to the kitchen building. During the old days in Kulangsu, water supply on the island was extremely limited, wells became the main source of water for the residences. To transport the water up to the ground floor more easily, they built a balcony outside of the kitchen right above the well, with a round cut-out on the balcony, a bucket and a pulley could go right pass the balcony down to the well one storey below. During extremely hot summer days, the housekeeper would place a watermelon in the bucket and lowered it down into the well to be cooled overnight.



fig.1.17 Photograph of housekeeper's two daughters standing in front of the stairs located at the front verandah connecting to the second floor. (Photograph taken in the 1980s.)

The Central Hall

Stepping into the interior space from the front verandah, we would be led into the central hall, where originally dedicated as ancestral hall.

In Minnan red-brick courtyard houses²⁶, “the spatial layouts and the composition of house complexes were influenced by social system, family organization, habits and customs, ways of living, and by natural condition,”²⁷ explained by Mei Qing in her thesis titled *Houses and Settlements: Returned Overseas Chinese Architecture in Xiamen, 1890s-1930s*. The distinction between major space and minor space is very clear that was divided by ritual system. The main hall, referred as Ting 厅 or Tang 堂 in Chinese, located at the heart of the housing complex that was usually bilaterally symmetrical with family altar placed facing the courtyard.

Based on the extensive research of architectural historian Yi Qian on Kulangsu architecture, the central hall is believed to be an element of the Amoy Deco Style that was inherited from the traditional red-brick courtyard houses.²⁸ The central hall houses the deceased ancestors of the family, surrounded by living spaces on both sides, it provides a direct connection between the live and dead. Chinese believe that the spirits of departed still remain and influence the world of living, we pray to the ancestors by burning candles and joss sticks in front of the family altar. As the smoke raise in the air, our words would be delivered into the sky and brought to the ancestors who would bless and guide the family in the future. To honor and appease the ancestors, daily and seasonal offerings are made with fresh fruits and cooked food that deceased enjoyed having in his or her lifetime.

26. Red-brick Courtyard House, locally referred as Cuo 厝, is the traditional vernacular architecture in South Fujian started in the middle of Ming dynasty (the 16th century). It inherits the traditional courtyard-style architecture with a central axis for a symmetrical layout. As the local material – red bricks were used as the primary material to build a Cuo, they are called Red-brick Courtyard Houses. Before the arrival of westerners, Red-brick Courtyard House was the most typical architecture style used for dwelling residences in Kulangsu.

27. Mei, “Houses and Settlements: Returned Overseas Chinese Architecture in Xiamen, 1890s-1930s,” 127.

28. Yi Qian 钱毅, “Research on Amoy Deco Style of Modern Architecture in Kulangsu 鼓浪屿近代建筑中的 ‘厦门装饰风格’”, *Huazhong Architecture 华中建筑*, no. 6 (2013): 29–32.



红砖厝建筑——中华路23号

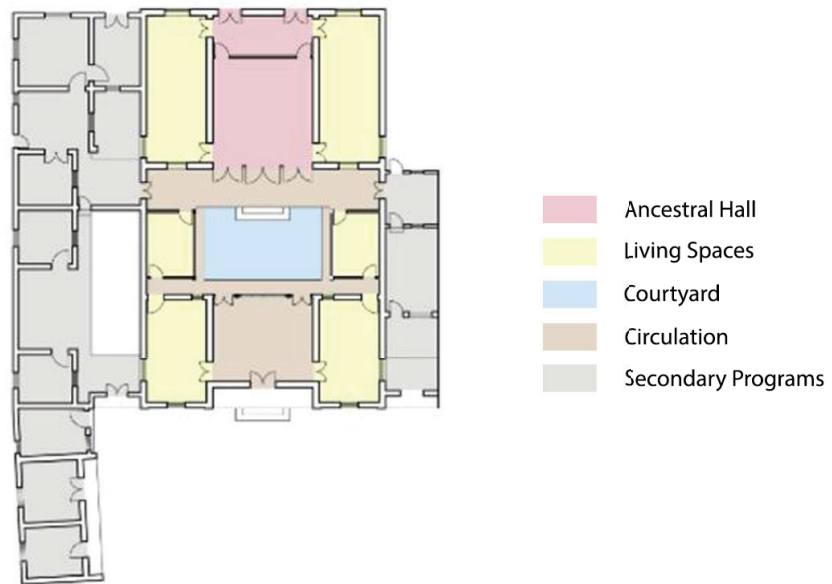


fig.1.18 Diagram of Four-courtyard Mansion in Kulangsu, a typical traditional red-brick courtyard houses in South Fujian Province. (Yi Qian)



殖民地外廊式建筑——福州路199号

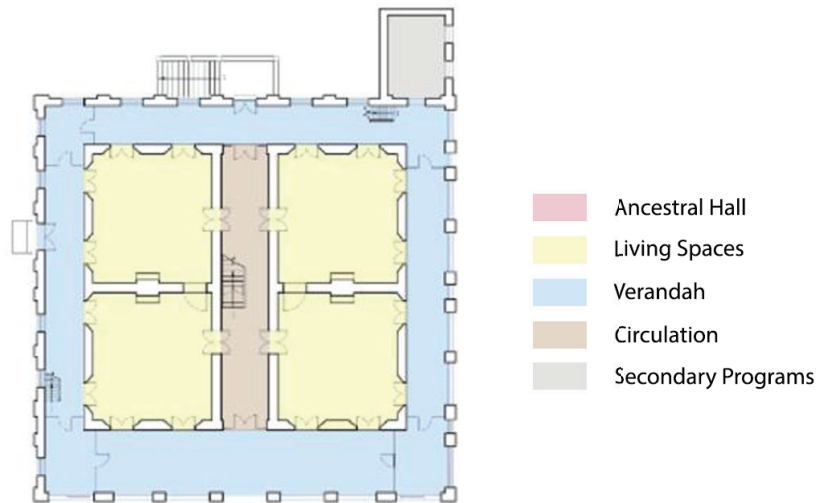


fig. 1.19 Diagram of British Pastor Rev. James Sadlerin's residence in Kulangsu, a Colonial Verandah Style architecture. (Yi Qian)



本土化的外廊建筑——福建路24号

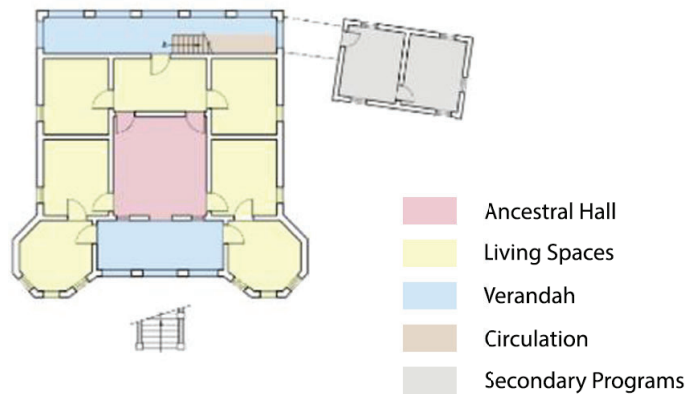


fig. 1.20 Diagram of Yi Garden, a Localized Verandah Style architecture in South Fujian Province. (Yi Qian)



厦门装饰风格建筑——福建路30号

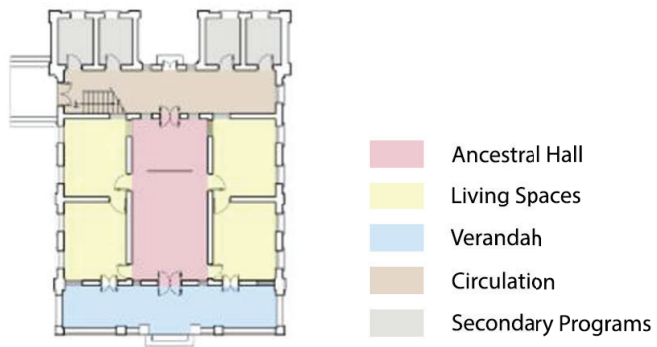


fig. 1.21 Diagram of Four-courtyard Mansion in Kulangsu, a typical traditional red-brick courtyard houses in South Fujian Province. (Yi Qian)

Though the program of ancestor hall was later eliminated during the Cultural Revolution by Chairman Mao as the strategy to break down the family structure. The central hall in my mother's childhood house was turned into a dining space for the living, instead of being a space dwelled and dinned by the departed.

The Bedrooms

Another iteration of the ground floor plan was received from my mother days after our last conversation, she drew the placement of furniture in the left two bedrooms with much more details. I was quite surprised seeing my mother's improvement in drawing spaces as a non-expert, at the meantime, the overseas Chinese's luxurious living style was evident through the furniture and the design of the rooms.

The two rooms on the left together were considered the master suit, originally dwelled by my great grandparents before they left, the suit was consisted of a living room located at the south and the master bedroom on the north end connecting to the only bathroom within the entire villa. There was a fireplace constructed in the living room, a couch and a small dining table were also placed within it. The two adjoining rooms were connected by two bi-fold doors with stained glass in the middle. The bedroom on the other side had a bed, a desk, couple dressers and closets each placed against the walls. All together, the master suit was the bourgeois symbol of life.

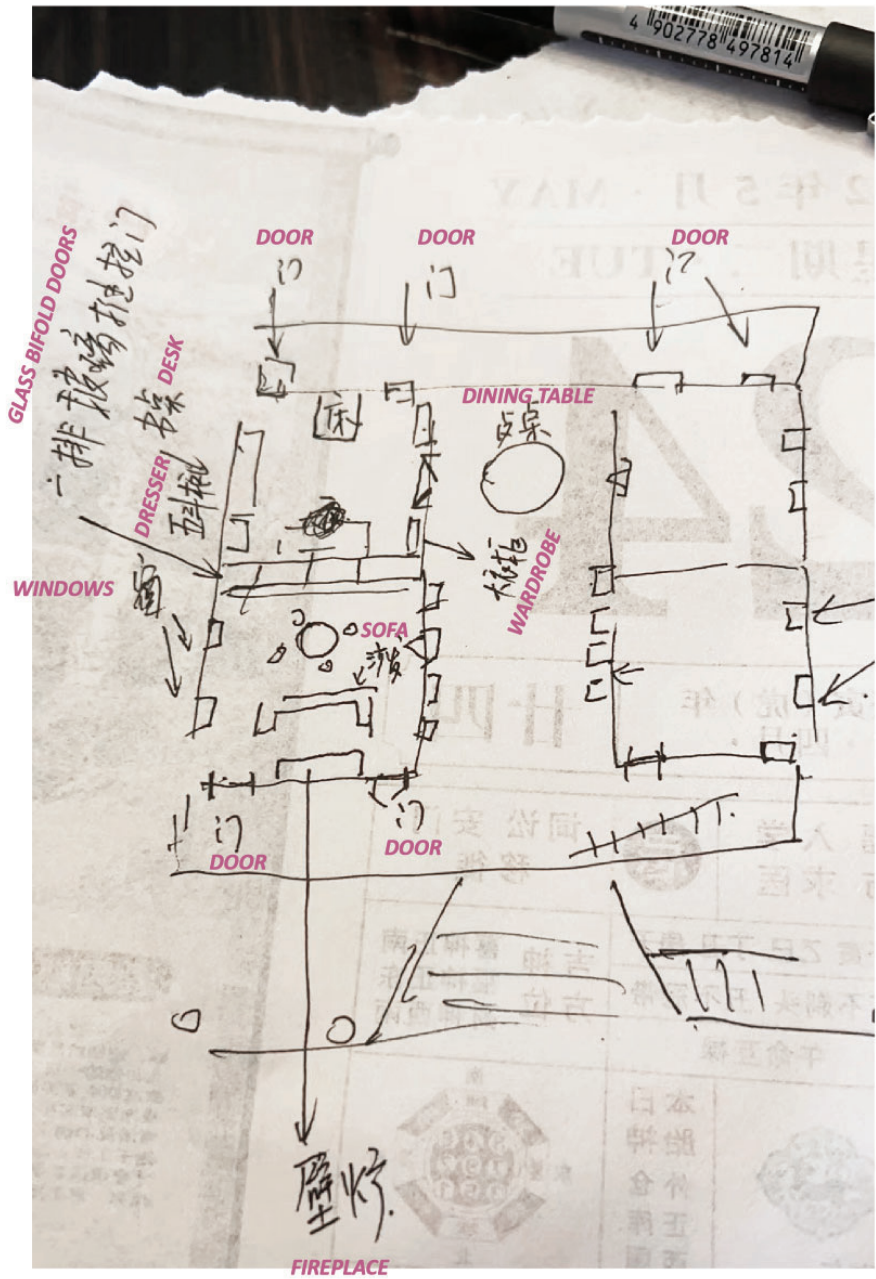


fig.1.22 My mother's third draft of the grand floor plan, with my translation in pink, which she included more details of the furniture for the two bedrooms on the left.

The Spiral Stairs and the Rooftop

Couple days later, my mother’s third draft of drawings were done, on the back of some calendar paper. I immediately recognized the traditional Chinese calendar, which is hanged on my grandmother’s bedroom.



fig.1.23 The front of my grandmother’s traditional Chinese calendar, showing the lunisolar calendar. It is commonly used to determine festival dates, such as Chinese New Year, as well as auspicious dates, such as wedding dates. It is also used to determine Moon phases as it follows the moon cycle.

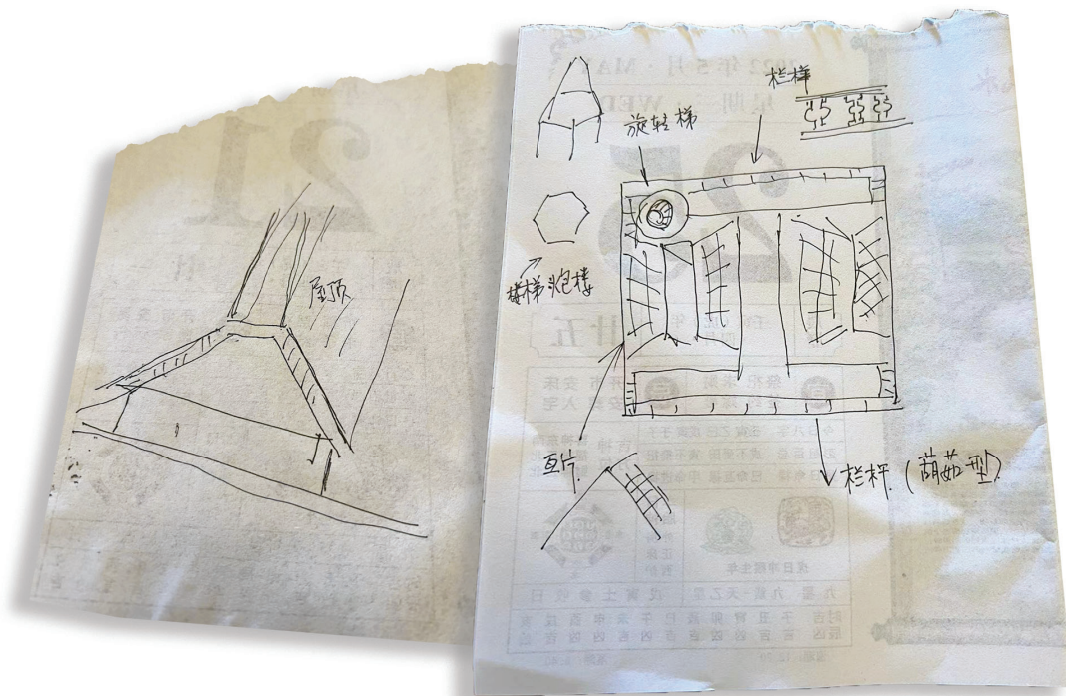


fig.1.24 My mother's fourth set of the drawings on the back of the calendar, capturing the roof top from my grandmother's description of her childhood.

Through the process of research, I have been expecting some stories from my grandmother's perspective, the use of the calendar paper indicated that there must be some new information my mother discovered from my grandmother.

Through a videocall, I asked my mother to walk me through the new drawings, "I'm at grandmother's place, wait a second, let me get grandmother here." She was sitting at the round dining table in my grandmother's apartment.

"Xin?" I heard my grandmother calling my name. She sat down next to my mother and wore a pair of reading glasses on the tip of her nose, "you want to know more about the old house?"

"Yes, grandmother."

She was taking a bit of time reading my mother's sketch, "Yea, I was telling your mother about these spiral stairs that take you from the second-floor balcony up to the roof top."

Just when they were in the middle of explaining, my uncle showed up in my grandmother's place, after greeting with my grandmother and my mother, he turned to me with a smile in front of the screen, "Is that Xin? What are you guys talking about?"

"Hi uncle, I'm asking grandmother about the old house in Kulangsu." My mother showed him her drawing of the roof plan, asking "do you know there were these stairs up to the roof top?"

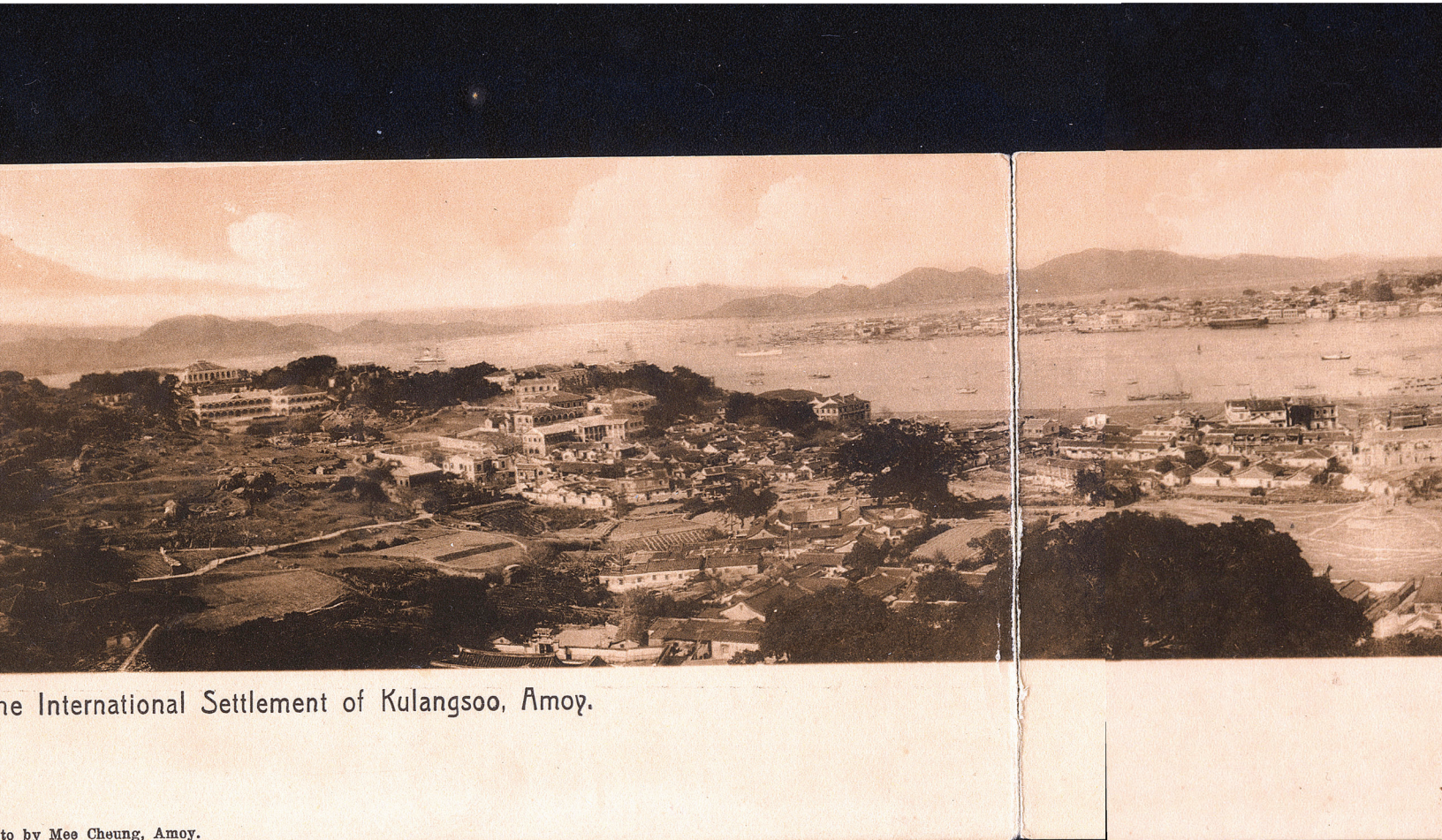
He turned around and looked at my grandmother, "really? I never knew about that."

My grandmother continued to explain, “You guys did not know about this because you never had the chance to go up to the second floor. When I was little, I used to go up to the roof top with my siblings everyday. We would climb up the ridges of those two sloped roofs, sit on top of the roof and just play there.”

My mother laughed, “your grandmother got to look up from the roof.” I didn’t quite understand her at first, “when we were living there, all we focused on were the falling Longans and the cooled watermelons in the well. We never knew about the things up there because we were always looking down.”

The Photographs

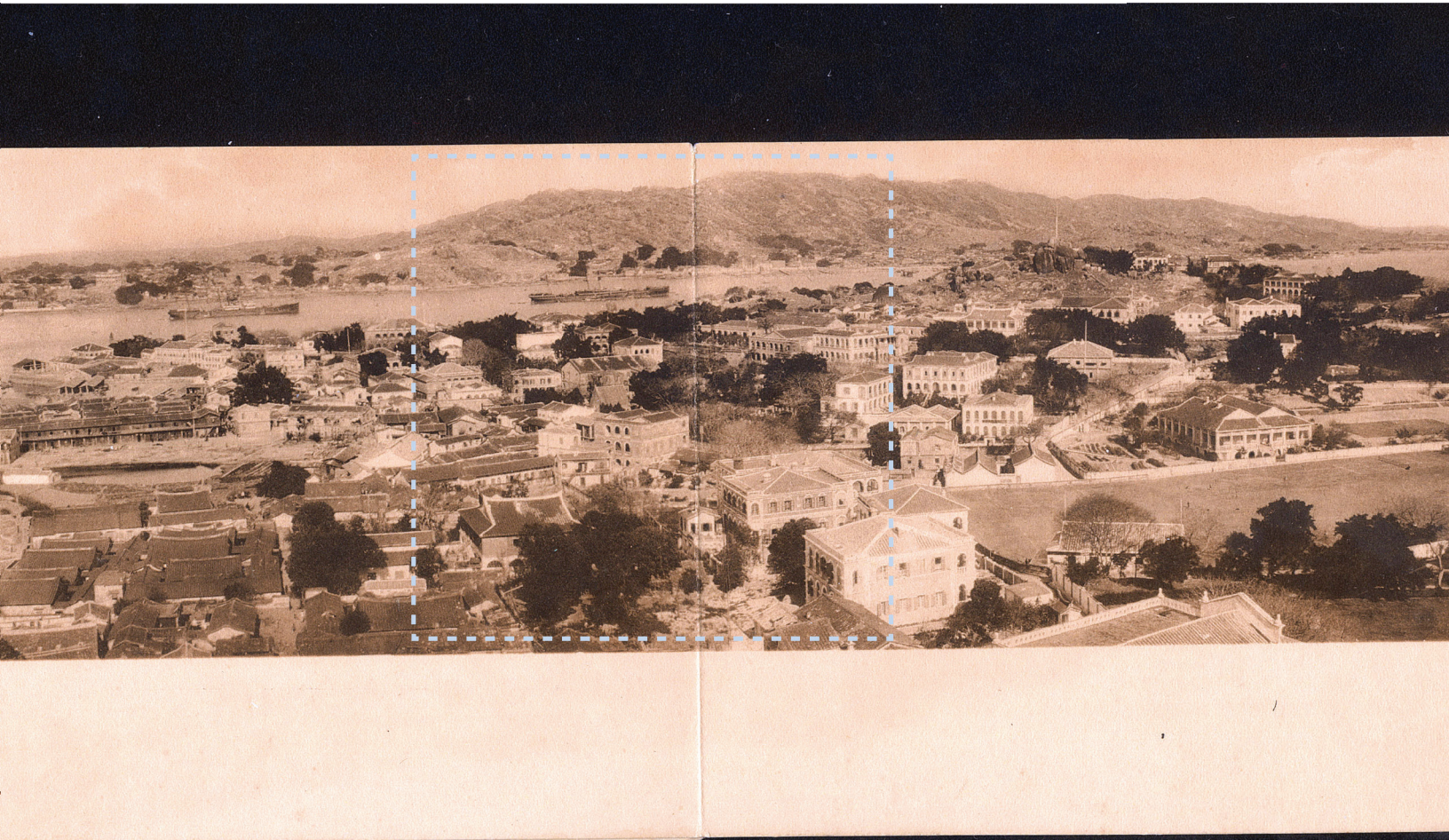
While searching for my mother's childhood house, the year of its construction remained a mystery, as both my mother and grandmother had no exact information about it. My grandmother insisted that the house was built by either my great grandfather or great granduncle between the 1920s to the 1930s. Just when I was about to accept this information, a black and white archival photograph of the entire Kulangsu was discovered. The photograph was taken in 1907 by a local photo studio, and from the stamp on the photograph, we were certain of its authenticity. Zooming into the center of the photograph, I first noticed the cemetery with a small chapel sitting in the center of the island. Next to it was a building with two sloped roofs that looked exactly like how my grandmother described it. Everything about the house matched the information my family provided, and I was quite certain that it was our family house. The only thing missing from the photograph was the spiral staircases with an overhang that led to the rooftop.



the International Settlement of Kulangsoo, Amoy.

to by Mee Cheung, Amoy.

fig. 1.25 The front of my grandmother's traditional Chinese calendar, showing the lunisolar calendar. It is commonly used to determine festival dates, such as Chinese New Year, as well as auspicious dates, such as wedding dates. It is also used to determine Moon phases as it follows the moon cycle.



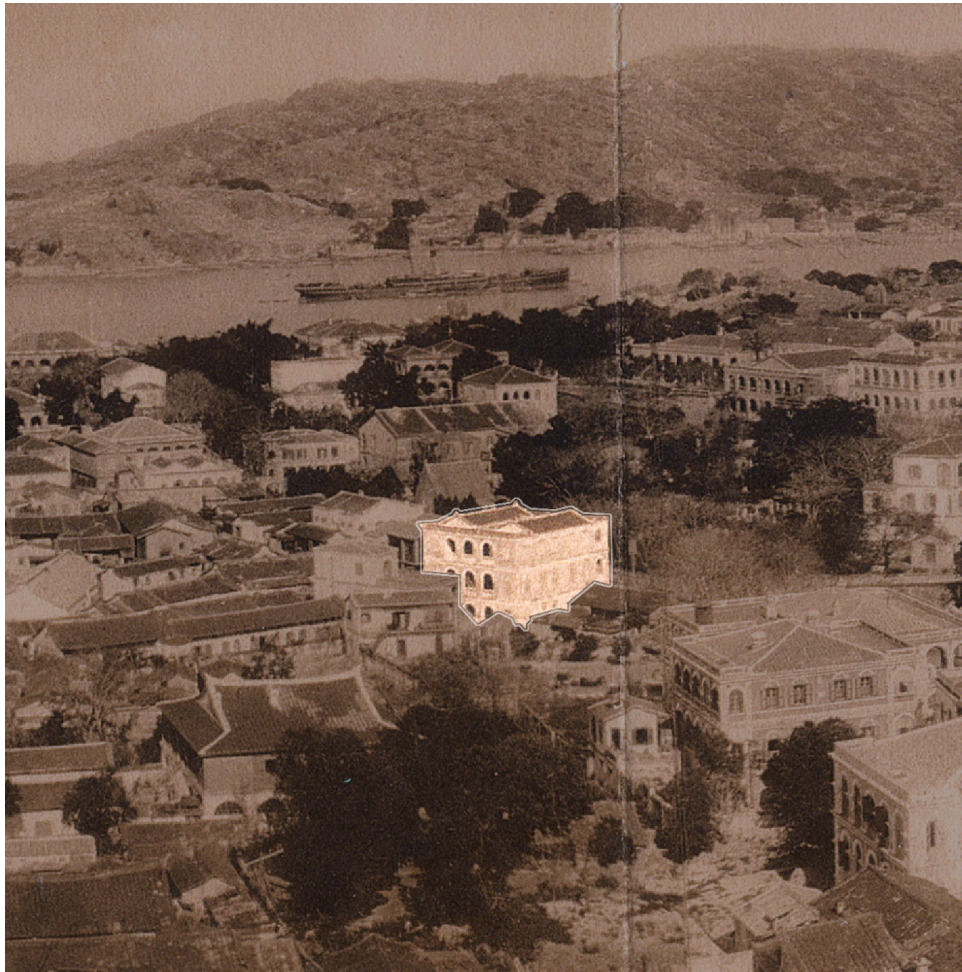


fig.1.26 Enlarged photograph of Figure 1.21, with our family's old house highlighted in the middle.
(Original photograph provided by Songrong Cai, Kulangsu Administrative Committee)

Digging through all the archival materials I could find, I finally stumbled upon another old photograph taken from a similar angle in the 1920s. I could vaguely recognize the outline of the overhang covering the spiral stairs, which had been added to the house years later.

Excitedly, I shared my discovery with my mother and asked her to confirm if that was indeed her childhood house. After hearing my detailed analysis of the roof and the stairs, I could tell from her expression that it was.

“Yes, I’m sure. That was it,” she said.



fig.1.27 Archival photograph of Kulangsu taken in the 1930s. The old family house sits at the bottom of the portion highlighted by the dash line, the enlarged photograph is shown as Figure 1.24 on the next page. (Source: Kulangsu Administrative Committee)



fig.1.28 Enlarged photograph of Figure 1.23, with our family's old house sitting at the bottom. Comparing this with the photograph taken in 1907, you could see there is a spiral stairs covered with roof at the roof top in between the two sloped roofs, it could be an addition constructed after 1907. (Source: Kulangsu Administrative Committee)

The Family Tree

Family tree, or “zupu” 族谱 in Chinese, is a significant part of Chinese culture as it documents the lineage, ancestors, and descendants of a family. It is considered an essential tool for tracing one’s ancestry and maintaining family connections. In traditional Chinese society, the family tree was seen as a symbol of the family’s legacy, and it played an important role in maintaining the family’s reputation and social status.

The practice of keeping family trees in China can be traced back to the Qin Dynasty (221-207 BC). During this time, the government began to keep detailed records of its citizens, including their family history, for the purpose of taxation and military service. This practice of documenting family lineage soon spread to the general population, and by the time of the Han Dynasty (206 BC - 220 AD), family trees had become a common practice among the upper class. Chinese family trees can be incredibly detailed, with information on each family member’s name, date of birth, place of birth, occupation, and even their personality traits. Some family trees can even go back hundreds or even thousands of years. Maintaining a family tree was often the responsibility of the eldest son, who would pass it down to his own eldest son upon his death.

The family tree played an important role in maintaining family connections in traditional Chinese society. It was used to determine marriage partners, settle disputes, and establish family hierarchies. It was also a source of pride for many families, as it documented the accomplishments and contributions of their ancestors.

Despite the significance of family trees in Chinese culture, they are not as common as they once were. Modernization, urbanization, and globalization have all contributed to the decline of traditional family structures and the practice of maintaining family trees. Today, many Chinese families do not have a physical family tree, and the practice of keeping one is becoming increasingly rare.

Unfortunately, my own family is one of those families that do not possess a physical family tree. While I have heard stories of my ancestors from my parents and grandparents, I have never seen a document that traces my family's lineage back through the generations.

Without a physical family tree, I have had to rely on stories passed down by my mother and grandmother to piece together fragments of my family's history. Before embarking on this research, my knowledge of our family lineage was limited to my grandparents, my mother, my aunt, my uncle, and my cousins and sister who make up my generation. However, as I delved deeper into my family's history, I discovered that our lineage is much more extensive than I had previously known.

In traditional Chinese culture, passing down the family lineage is one of the most fundamental beliefs. However, not all biological children necessarily carry on the family line and continue the incense. Adopted children also bear a great responsibility in this aspect. The adoption of children is a widespread practice in Guangdong, Fujian, and Taiwan, with its origins dating back to the Song and Ming Dynasties and flourishing in the Qing Dynasty. During the Ming and Qing Dynasties, many families had no heirs due to their low economic status, and the adoption of children became a vital means of maintaining the family lineage. There are two types of adoption relationships in the system. The first involves adopting children with different surnames to contin-

ue the family line when the family has no heirs. The second involves transferring a brother's children within the clan to the adopting brother's heirs when the brother has no children of his own.

In the 19th and 20th century, the adoption system in southern Fujian underwent a significant transformation. Some overseas Chinese businessmen who already had one or more sons continued to adopt children, sometimes even several. Their reasons for doing so were not solely related to the traditional practice of ensuring the continuation of the family lineage, but also to meet the needs of their economic endeavors. These adoptive children were seen as potential helpers in building and expanding the family business, adding a new economic dimension to the patriarchal system.

At the time, there was a significant wealth disparity between the rich and the poor, resulting in some families being able to afford to have more children to expand their family while others struggled to survive. In dire situations, some parents were forced to sell their children to wealthier families, hoping that in exchange for their child, they would receive a sum of money to ease their extreme circumstances. These parents believed that their children would have better opportunities and a brighter future in the care of wealthier families. While it was a difficult decision for these parents to make, it was sometimes seen as the only way to provide their children with a chance at a better life.

In the social environment of that time, my grandmother, along with her older sister and older brother, were all adopted. While I'm not sure about the details of how her siblings were adopted by my great grandparents, my grandmother's adoption was different. According to my mother, my grandmother was actually sold by her biological parents. She would recall vague memories of being sent to my great grand-

parents' house by her birth parents, who were apparently begging for them to take in the child. As the third child adopted, and not a voluntary adoption, my grandmother was considered the extra child in the family and received less attention from my great grandparents. This childhood experience left a profound void in her life, causing her to place a great deal of value on our family. For my grandmother, our family served as a way to compensate for the sense of disconnection she experienced as a child.

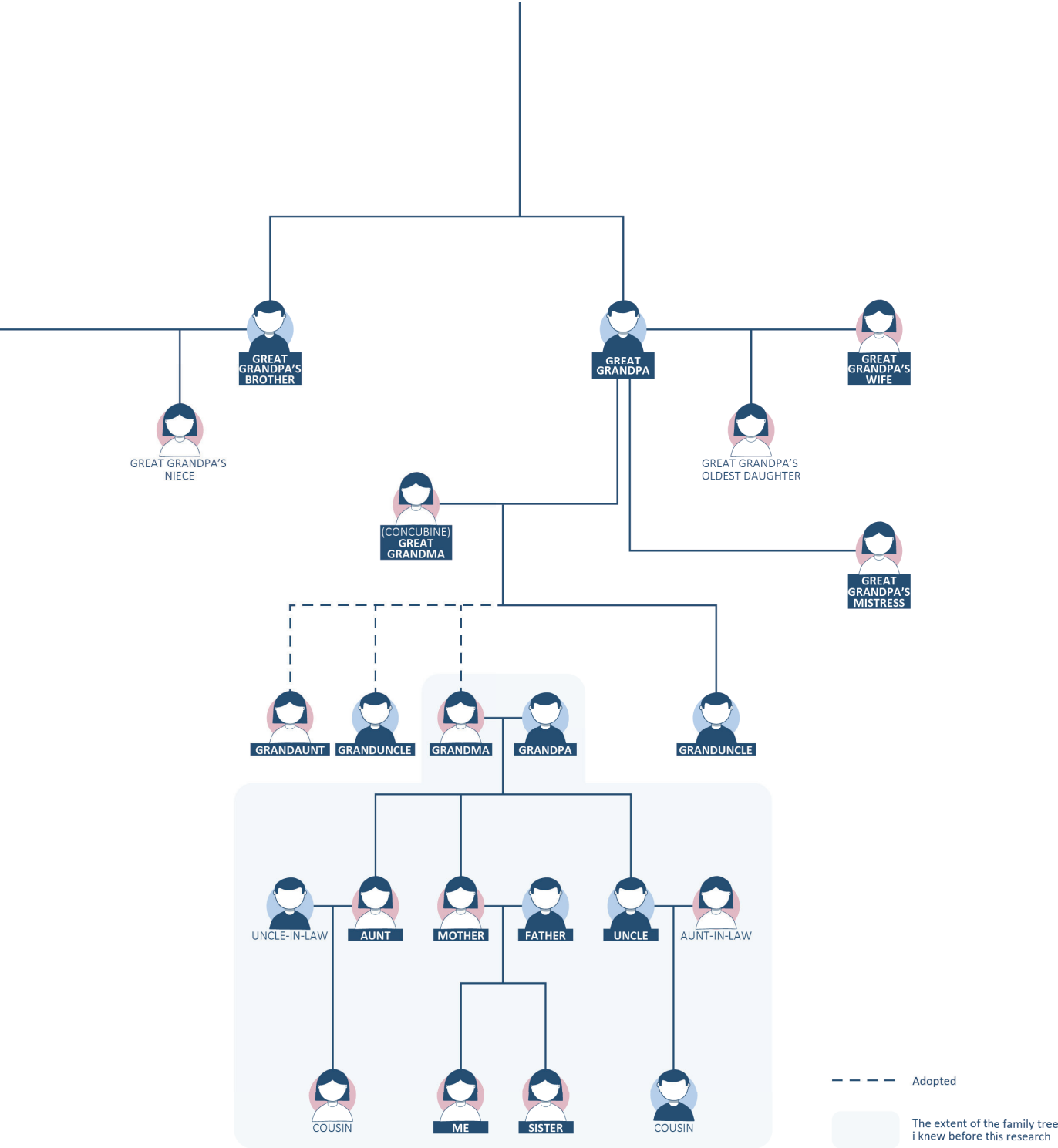


fig. 1.29 Family tree of my family, an incomplete version I constructed based on the family stories I heard. Before I started this thesis, the extent of the family tree that I knew is highlighted in blue. During my research, the family members I didn't know before were introduced to me through a series of family stories.

***The Expropriation of Private Property,
the Great Leap Forward,
and the Cultural Revolution***

In 1949, the People's Republic of China was founded, leading to significant changes in ideology and political economy that dramatically transformed people's lives. Firstly, the government began a slow expropriation of housing in 1956, with the goal of turning the original housing system into a welfare-oriented housing system. This marked a significant shift in the concept of home ownership and living arrangements. Secondly, the Great Leap Forward, which started in 1958 and ended in 1962, aimed to modernize China's economy through rapid industrialization and collectivization. The people were organized into communes where they worked together to produce goods for the collective. Then, from 1966 to 1976, the Cultural Revolution swept across China, resulting in widespread political and social upheaval. During the Cultural Revolution, the Chinese Communist Party declared that "superstitious" practices, such as ancestor worship and tomb sweeping, were "feudal" and "backward", leading to widespread mass destructions of cemeteries and grave markers. This cut off the original way for the Chinese to connect to their ancestors, ultimately resulting in many families being unable to properly honor their ancestors and maintain their connection to their family history and cultural heritage.

The Expropriation of Private Property, the Great Leap Forward, and the Cultural Revolution

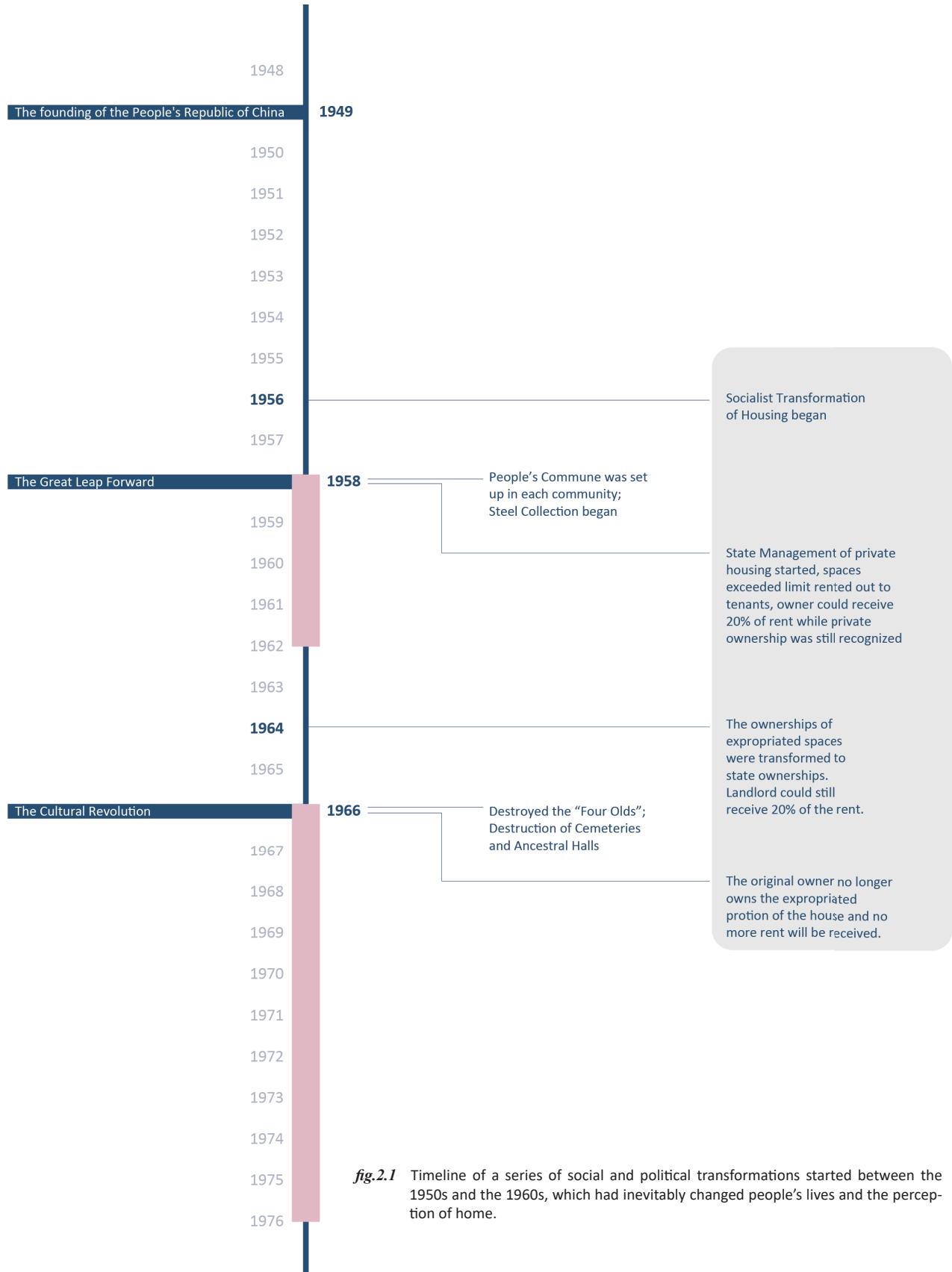


fig.2.1 Timeline of a series of social and political transformations started between the 1950s and the 1960s, which had inevitably changed people's lives and the perception of home.

1956

The Beginning of Expropriation of Private Property

The housing system in urban China has followed a zigzag path in the last 50 years because of dramatic changes in ideology and political economy. It has changed from a market-oriented housing system dominated by private housing before the mid-1950s, to a welfare-oriented housing system dominated by public rental in the following three decades.

Before 1949, when socialist China was founded, the majority of urban housing was private, and the share of public housing was negligible because of the government's long-term involvement in wars. Although the socialist government built some public housing and transformed some private housing into public housing during the early 1950s, private housing continued to dominate the housing stock. Based on a 1955 survey conducted by the Chinese Communist Party Central Committee, private housing made up a significant percentage of the housing market in several major cities in China in 1955. Specifically, the survey found that private housing accounted for 53.85% in Beijing, 53.99% in Tianjin, 66.00% in Shanghai, 78.00% in Jinan, 86.00% in Suzhou, 61.30% in Nanjing, and 80.30% in Wuxi.²⁹ Private housing was also predominately in the hands of a few large landlords, and the majority of the working class suffered from excessively high rents, crowding and poor housing conditions.

29. "Opinions on the Current Basic Situation of Private Urban Housing and Socialist Transformation 关于目前城市私有房产基本情况及进行社会主义改造的意见" (the State Council 中央书记处第二办公室, January 18, 1956), <http://fgcx.bjcourt.gov.cn:4601/law?fn=chl256s039.txt&dbt=chl>.

Due to the recognition of the severe housing problems, the socialist government had a firm determination to reshape the housing system according to their ideology that housing was a public welfare benefit.

As a result, private homeowners were permitted to retain the portion of their residence that was essential to accommodate their family, while the remaining housing was seized by the state and distributed among the general public.

Starting from 1956, the government began the process of socialist transformation in housing. Three methods were adopted to transform private housing – ‘state management’, ‘public-private ownership’ and ‘a regulation approach’. The term “state management” refers to the state taking over private rental housing operations, including housing allocation, rent standards, maintenance, and day-to-day management. While landlords remained the nominal owners who received rent payments from the state, tenants were no longer in direct contact with them. This change was intended to protect tenants from excessive rents and poor housing conditions by eliminating the direct relationship between landlords and tenants, and by allowing for government intervention in housing maintenance. Due to the government’s lack of experience in housing management, a “public-private partnership” was formed between landlords and public housing agencies to operate rental housing businesses. The third approach involved rent regulation and price control, which was primarily aimed at small landlords. These landlords were allowed to keep their properties and lease them on the market but were required to do so under state supervision.³⁰

30. “Opinions on the Current Basic Situation of Private Urban Housing and Socialist Transformation 关于目前城市私有房产基本情况及进行社会主义改造的意见。”

1958

The Great Leap Forward

The Great Leap Forward was a campaign launched by the Chinese Communist Party in 1958, aimed at rapidly transforming China's economy from an agricultural to an industrial society. As part of this campaign, the government implemented the People's Commune system, which aimed to consolidate agricultural production and communalize property, labor, and income.

Under the People's Commune system, rural areas were organized into large collective units, where all aspects of production and daily life were managed by the commune. The land was no longer privately owned, but instead, it was collectively owned by the commune, and the means of production, such as tools and animals, were shared by the members of the commune.

In 1994, the Chinese film *To Live*, directed by Yimou Zhang and based on the novel of the same name by Hua Yu, depicted the story of a couple, Fugui and Jiazhen, living through tumultuous periods of modern Chinese history. The couple survived enormous personal difficulties and tragedies, witnessing the vast changes of modern China. The film depicted the Great Leap Forward through the story of the steel production movement initiated in 1958, which Fugui and Jiazhen, along with their entire village, were forced to engage in.

Mao encouraged the establishment of small backyard steel furnaces in every commune and each urban neighborhood, leading to the denudation of the local environment of trees and wood taken from the doors



fig.2.2 Film stills from *To Live*, showing the backyard furnace constructed in the commune, where a group of villagers is sitting beside it to make sure the furnace is working all times.

and furniture of peasants' houses. Pots, pans, and other metal artifacts were requisitioned to supply the "scrap" for the furnaces so that the wildly optimistic production targets could be met.

In the film, Fugui and Jiazhen sit in their courtyard with all their pans, pots and metal utensils piled in the courtyard. "It's time for your household to donate metal." The team leader of the commune yells as he progresses into their home with some helpers. Jiazhen leans forward and wonders how they should cook and eat after donating everything.



fig.2.3 Film stills from To Live, Fugui, Jiazhen and their daughter sitting in the courtyard waiting for steel collection.



fig.2.4 Film stills from To Live, Fugui and Jiazhen piled their metal utensils, pot and pans all together.

The team leader looks at her, “you won’t be starved if you are part of the Communist Party. We set up the communal kitchen in our commune. Just come to the kitchen when you are hungry, there will have meat, fish, any food you want.”

Communal kitchens were typically set up in rural areas and operated by local communes. They were often housed in large buildings and staffed by trained cooks who prepared meals for communal dining halls. Members of the commune would bring their own bowls and utensils and eat together in the dining hall. The government promoted communal kitchens as a way to reduce individual cooking and cleaning tasks, allowing people to focus on production and other activities that would benefit the community as a whole. They also aimed to promote the ideals of collectivism and mutual aid.



fig.2.5 Film stills from *To Live*, depicting the communal kitchen in Fugui and Jiazhen’s village, with slogan “communal kitchen is heaven” hanging on top.

The team leader turns around asking if there is any more metal, and just as Fugui answers no, “Here! There is more metal here!” Fugui’s son shouts and points at the metal bolts on Fugui’s box of shadow puppets.

Shadow puppetry is a traditional form of storytelling that uses shadow puppets made of animal hides, cardboard or paper to narrate stories accompanied by music and narration. In China, shadow play has a long history that dates back to the Han Dynasty (206 BCE - 220 CE). The stories told in shadow play vary depending on the region and the performers. Many of the stories are based on Chinese folklore, mythology, and historical events. They often include tales of love, heroism, and supernatural beings. Some of the most popular stories include “Journey to the West,” “Romance of the Three Kingdoms,” and “Water Margin.”



fig.2.6 Film stills from To Live, Team leader asks if there is any more metal while collecting the pots.



fig.2.7 Film stills from To Live, showing Fugui performing shadow puppets behind a translucent cloth.

With the box opens, Fugui's son grabs one of the shadow puppets and says, "there are some metal wires here too." Fugui panics as he asks the team leader, "those doesn't worth much right?" The team leader looks at Fugui's little boy and smiles, "of course that counts, you are less conscious than your son. Those metal could be processed into two bullets, and they will be useful for the war with Nationalist."

As an alternative, Fugui offers to entertain the workers in steel production with his shadow puppets performance, eventually persuading the team leader to agree to preserve his precious box.



fig.2.8 Film stills from *To Live*, Fugui's son points at the metal bolts to the team leader and yells: "there is more metal."



fig.2.9 Film stills from *To Live*, Fugui's son grabs the metal wire on the shadow puppet and indicates there is more metal in the box.

Many people in the commune were forced to abandon their jobs in agriculture and other industries to work in the backyard furnaces. As a result, agricultural production declined, and shortages of food and other basic necessities became widespread. The furnaces themselves were often poorly constructed and operated, leading to accidents and injuries.

Furthermore, the quality of the steel produced in the backyard furnaces was also poor, and it could not meet the demands of industry. In some cases, the steel produced was even unusable, leading to wasted resources and economic losses. Overall, the backyard furnace campaign was a failure, and it contributed to the economic and social turmoil of the Great Leap Forward.

My mother considers herself to be lucky as she and her siblings were born years after the Great Leap Forward, and due to the fact of living in a dense urban environment, my grandparent's neighborhood did not implement the idea of communal kitchen and shared dining hall. For this reason, they got to keep their cooking utensils, and preserved their own kitchen and dining space in the household. Yet, the copper bars installed outside the windows of my grandparent's shophouse on Xiamen Island, which were employed for security reason at the same time a symbol of wealth, did not escape being collected for steel production. Meanwhile, wooden furniture like bed frames, and dressers were forced to be donated as the fuel for the furnace. Without a bed frame, the housekeeper living in the Kulangsu house was sleeping on a bed puzzled together by several wooden travel suitcases they managed to hide from the commune. The kids, on the other hand, had to sleep on the ground. From my mother's description, all rooms in the old family house appeared to be extremely spacious, it was later realized that the impression was formed because there was barely any furniture in their

home, described in the Chinese phrase 家徒四壁 – having nothing but four bare walls in one’s house.

The government believed that the collective management of resources would lead to increased efficiency and productivity, but the reality was quite different. The Great Leap Forward resulted in a catastrophic failure, leading to famine, poverty, and death. The policies implemented under the Great Leap Forward, including the People’s Commune system and the campaign of backyard furnace, were eventually abandoned. For a long time, this period of history was buried and avoid by the country.

The Second Phase of Expropriation of Private Property

31. "Issues Concerning the Socialist Transformation of Private Rental Housing 关于私有出租房屋社会主义改造问题的报告" (National Property Administration 国家房产管理局, January 13, 1964), <http://fgcx.bjcourt.gov.cn:4601/law?fn=chl256s015.txt&dbt=chl>.

In 1958, the Chinese central government sought to accelerate the expropriation of private property by adopting "state management"³¹ as the primary form of socialist transformation. To achieve this, detailed instructions were provided, based on policies enacted in large Chinese cities. Under this system, any housing exceeding the limited living area of 150 square meters in large cities (and smaller limits in medium-sized cities and towns) was to be rented out to others as a form of welfare and entirely managed by the government. The landlord would receive 20 to 40 percent of the rent, while the municipal government collected the remainder for state management. At this time, these transformed portion of the private houses were still privately owned by the landlord.

Our family's house in Kulangsu was also partly transformed as it exceeded the living area of 150 square metres. Although there is no record of when the changes occurred, by the time my mother moved in in 1971, the government had rented out the basement level and second floor, while the ground floor remained occupied by the housekeeper and my family.

The basement level of our family's house in Kulangsu was divided into two separate units, each rented to a different family. My mother and her siblings would often peek down through the gaps in the wooden floorboards from the ground floor to observe the daily lives of the tenants downstairs. According to my mother, there were two elderly women living in each suite. One of them was described as grumpy, while the other was more elegant. Both were qiaojuan (family members of overseas Chinese), who had remained in Kulangsu after the overseas

Chinese left in the 1940s. They each had a servant living with them, and some of their family members would visit occasionally.

The second floor, on the other hand, was entirely occupied by the family of an officer in the People's Liberation Army³². Because they were living on the upper floor, my mother never had the chance to go up there and didn't know what the second floor looked like.

32. The People's Liberation Army (PLA) is the principal military force of the People's Republic of China and the armed wing of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).

1964

The Third Phase of Expropriation of Housing

By 1964, 70% of the private rental housing had been transformed, but a key issue arose regarding the ownership of these expropriated properties. People were unsure if they still held ownership of the houses that were previously theirs. In response, the State Council approved the “Opinions on the Current Basic Situation of Private Urban Housing and Socialist Transformation” and the report on “Issues Concerning the Socialist Transformation of Private Rental Housing” on January 13th, 1964.³³ These documents clarified that state-rented housing was intended to “gradually transfer ownership to occupants through a redemption-like method by providing them with a fixed rent for a certain period of time”. This meant that the owner of state-rented housing had lost the ownership of the expropriated area, and after their death, the property could not be inherited by their family members. However, the family could continue to receive the fixed rent provided by the state.

33. “Issues Concerning the Socialist Transformation of Private Rental Housing”关于私有出租房屋社会主义改造问题的报告。”

1966

The Cultural Revolution

The Cultural Revolution was a sociopolitical movement in the People's Republic of China launched by Mao Zedong in 1966, with the main goal of purging remnants of capitalist and traditional elements from Chinese society and re-imposing Mao Zedong Thought as the dominant ideology in the PRC. The Revolution was also a movement against Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping, who were accused of opposing Mao's policies, and it marked the effective commanding return of Mao—who was still the Chairman of the Chinese Communist Party—to the centre of power, after a period of self-abstention and ceding to less radical leadership in the aftermath of the Mao-led Great Leap Forward debacle. However, to understand the context of the Cultural Revolution, we need to go back to the time when China was facing significant challenges. During the early 20th century, China was in a state of turmoil. Foreign powers had taken advantage of China's weakened state and were exploiting the country's resources. The Republic was struggling to address the nation's problems, and there was widespread confusion and self-doubt. In this context, traditional culture was increasingly seen as the reason for China's disadvantaged position against foreign powers and the Republic's failures.

To address this, Mao Zedong launched the Cultural Revolution, with the aim of destructing the “four olds” - old customs, old culture, old habits, and old ideas. This involved attacking intellectuals, artists, and anyone considered to be a “bourgeois” element in society. Many cultural artifacts were destroyed, including books, artwork, and even ancient buildings. The idea was to create a “new socialist man” and

eradicate any traces of the old feudal society.

In the film *To Live*, Fugui's shadow puppets are a poignant representation of traditional art that was threatened during the Cultural Revolution. When the team leader orders Fugui to burn the puppets, it symbolizes the destruction of traditional culture. The team leader's orders reflect the sentiment that classic feudal characters such as emperors, scholars, and beauties are a relic of the past that needed to be eradicated in the pursuit of Mao Zedong's vision of a new China. The burning of the puppets is also symbolic of the loss of personal expression and individualism, which were suppressed during the Cultural Revolution.

Fugui's subsequent commitment to the new regime's ideology after burning the puppets is indicative of the pressure many people faced to abandon their past and conform to the new system. The burning of the puppets represents a turning point for Fugui, as he must choose between his personal identity and the political ideology of the new China. The lingering shot of the burning puppets emphasizes the sense of loss that Fugui and others like him experienced during this tumultuous time. The film portrays how the Cultural Revolution brought about a profound change in Chinese society, affecting not only politics and economics but also art and culture.



fig.2.10 Film stills from *To Live*, Fugui asks her daughter to burn the shadow puppets.



fig.2.11 Film stills from *To Live*, depicting the scene of burning shadow puppets.

The Ancestor Altars and Cemeteries

During the Cultural Revolution in China, cemeteries were among the many targets of destruction. The Red Guards, a group of young people who were loyal to Mao Zedong and his ideology, carried out attacks on cemeteries and other cultural and religious sites, as part of their efforts to eliminate the “four olds”. The destruction of cemeteries was seen as a way to break with traditional practices and beliefs, and to erase the memory of the past.

The Red Guards would target traditional burial customs, such as the practice of burning incense or offering food to the deceased, which they saw as superstitious and backwards. They would also target the graves of those who were considered to be enemies of the Communist Party, such as former landlords or capitalists, and would destroy the tombs and the surrounding structures.

The destruction of cemeteries was not limited to Chinese burial grounds, but also foreign ones. For instance, the British and French cemeteries in Shanghai were vandalized, with headstones and memorials destroyed. Christian cemeteries were also targeted, as the Communist Party viewed Christianity as a threat to its ideology. The Fanzai Cemetery, dedicated for western merchants, missionaries, and their family members in Kulangsu, went through two destructions. While the first destruction happened in 1957³⁴ by Xiamen residents in protest of Britain’s invasion of the Suez³⁵, the remaining part of the cemetery was again destroyed by Red Guards during the Cultural Revolution. According to local residents, the bones of the deceased were tossed into the ocean, and the broken tombstones were disposed of and used for city constructions. The destruction of foreign cemeteries was not limited to Shanghai and Kulangsu but also occurred in other parts of

34. Gong Jie 龚洁, *Kulangsu Architectures 鼓浪屿建筑丛谈* (Lujiang Publisher 鹭江出版社, 1997), 164.

35. The Suez Crisis, also called the Second Arab-Israeli War, was an invasion of Egypt in the late 1956 by Israel, United Kingdom and France. The aims were to regain control of the Suez Canal for the Western powers and to remove Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser, who had just swiftly nationalised the foreign-owned Suez Canal Company, which administered the canal.

China, which had a significant impact on the relationship between China and foreign countries.

In addition, the hatred towards capitalists reached its peak during the Cultural Revolution. Huang Yizhu was one of the overseas Chinese who were hated during this time. In the Cultural Revolution, the rebels among students from Xiamen No.2 Middle School (which was founded with Huang Yizhu's financial support) were incited to use violence to force Huang Yizhu's immediate family members to open up the tombs of Huang Yizhu, his mother, his wife, and others, and to expose their remains in the open.³⁶

36. Zhao and Ma, Oei Tjoe: A Biography
黄奕住传, 415.

The destruction of cemeteries caused immense pain and trauma for many families, who saw their loved ones' final resting places desecrated and destroyed. Before the Cultural Revolution, Chinese would choose to bury their own body back to their hometown as 落叶归根, the idea of returning to one's roots like fallen leaves. The destruction disconnected the linkage between the people and their land, causing a sense of loss and displacement. In some cases, families were forced to move the remains of their ancestors to avoid further damage or to bury them in secret. In addition, the traditional ancestor altars placed in each household and ancestral halls constructed in villages, which were housing the spirits of deceased family members and considered a symbol of family and kinship, were destroyed, and banned from use. After the end of the Cultural Revolution, many people worked to rebuild the cemeteries and restore the graves of their ancestors. However, the destruction of cultural and historical sites during this time had a profound impact on Chinese society, and the scars of this period continue to be felt to this day.

The Final Phase of Expropriation of Housing

In 1966, the expropriation of private property was finalized. On September 23rd of that year, the Office of Finance and Trade of the State Council and the National Economic Commission issued a report on “Several Policy Issues in Finance and Trade Industry,” which stated that “public-private joint ventures should be converted into state-owned enterprises, and fixed interest on capital should be eliminated”³⁷. As a result of this announcement, the original owners were no longer entitled to receive the 20% rent, as it was believed that they had already received their capital returns over the years.

37. “Report on Several Policy Issues Regarding Finance and Trade Industry 关于财政贸易和手工业方面若干政策问题的报告” (State Council Financial and Economic Affairs Office 国务院财贸办公室, National Economic Commission 国家经济委员会, September 23, 1966), <http://m.wyxxwk.com/content.php?classid=21&id=99908>.

Interlude

“When did you leave that old house?”

“Emm... We lived there till 1973, and we returned to our home on Xiamen Island living with our parents when we reached the age to attend elementary school.”

They didn't move too far, their home in Xiamen was a small unit located on the second floor of a shophouse, sitting next to the harbour looking over Kulangsu Island. After moving back to Xiamen Island, they would occasionally visit the housekeeper, and her daughters in Kulangsu, and there were few times they visited my great-grandmother who came back from Philippines for short visits.



fig.3.1 This is the front of the shophouse they dwelled after moving back from Kulangsu, their unit located on the second floor.

“When was your last time visiting the old house?”

38. “the Implementation of the Policy on Overseas Chinese Private Properties 关于加快落实华侨私房政策的意见” (the General Office of the Communist Party of China 中共中央办公厅, the General Office of the State Council 国务院办公厅, December 24, 1984), <http://fgcx.bjcourt.gov.cn:4601/law?fn=chl011s101.txt&dbt=chl>.

“I can’t remember the exact year I last visited it, but it was in the 80s.” In 1984, the Central Office of the Chinese Communist Party announced to return the private properties transformed during the Cultural Revolution back to the overseas Chinese owners.³⁸ This was an action taken to promote the Chinese economic reform launched near the end of 70s, which was one of the strategies to please and attract the overseas merchants.

This new successfully attracted my great-grandfather back to Kulangsu, which was his first time coming back since he left China in the 1940s, and it was the first time my mother and her siblings met him. However, it didn’t end up being a lovely family reunion as everyone found out his purpose coming back was to sell the property.

“This situation quickly turned all of us into enemies. Other than my mother, my uncle, aunt, grandparents all wanted that property.” As my mother described, she was using her fingers to count how many family members were eyeing on that property. “Even the housekeeper and her daughters claimed that they should share part of the property as they were the ones living there the longest. It was really heart-breaking seeing families went against each other, especially when Jiupo was seemed the closest with us.”

“Is there anything you took from the old house?”

“A necklace, that was the only thing we took. That was a gift your great-grandmother gave to your grandmother, it was probably the only thing she gave her.”

My mother forwarded a picture of the necklace she found in my grandmother’s closet, and continues with the story, “ironically, this necklace, was later used as a weapon against your grandmother, as they claimed that it was something stolen by your grandmother from your great-grandmother’s room. They were using this as an excuse to kick us out of this fight.”



fig.3.2 The necklace my great-grandmother left to my grandmother.

“What happen to the old house and the family at the end?”

My great-grandfather was desperate to sell the house since he had squandered all his inheritance from his older brother. The old house was eventually sold by my great-grandfather, without sharing the money with his families, he carried the entire amount of money to Philippines and never came back.

After a year or two, the old house was demolished by the new owner, along with the demolition of the house, the home and family was also destructed. My grandmother eventually decided to leave the family and ended all connection with them. “After breaking up with the family, your grandmother kept telling us three that only the five of us, your grandparents, your aunt, uncle and myself, are the true family in this world.”

The Workshop

In pursuit of a better life, my grandparents made the difficult decision to leave behind their larger family and focus on their careers. My grandfather resumed his teaching position at a middle school, while my grandmother took on a job at the school cafeteria where he worked, serving up delicious satay noodles. Meanwhile, their three children were busy completing their undergraduate programs at university. Of the three, my aunt was the standout, displaying exceptional intelligence and graduating with a degree in Malay from Beijing Foreign Studies University.

Initially, my aunt had dreams of working for the Ministry of Foreign Relations, but an unexpected event changed her course. My grandfather's health began to deteriorate, and my aunt made the decision to return to Xiamen to care for him. Amidst the economic reforms of the time, my aunt founded a business with some Taiwanese investors. As it gradually became a family business, it served as a turning point that transformed our lives after we broke away from the rest of the family. Despite the challenges, our family business continued to thrive, and stories about my aunt and her achievements became a source of inspiration for younger generations in our family.



fig.4.1 A family photo of my mother, my aunt, my grandfather, my grandmother, and my uncle (left to right) in Hong Kong. (Photograph taken around the year of 1992, date unknown.)

In May 1978, China announced the launch of economic reforms after the tumultuous Cultural Revolution. The policy aimed to introduce market-oriented reforms and attract foreign investment, which contributed to a surge in China's GDP from the late 1970s to the present day. The policy also led to the establishment of special economic zones, which offered preferential policies to attract foreign investment, contributing to a surge in foreign investment in China during the 1980s and 1990s. The first special economic zone was established in Shenzhen in 1980, followed by Zhuhai and Shantou. Xiamen was designated as a special economic zone in October of that same year. These cities were chosen for their proximity to Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan, as well as their coastal location and history of foreign contact. The zones offered preferential policies to attract foreign investment, including tax incentives and simplified regulations³⁹. This influx of foreign investment helped fuel China's rapid economic growth, making it one of the top destinations for foreign investment worldwide at the time.

39. Douglas Zhihua Zeng, "Special Economic Zones in China: A Testing Lab for the Market Economy," *China's Special Economic Zones and Industrial Clusters*: (Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, 2012), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep18404.5>.

Xiamen was one of the first Special Economic Zones designated for foreign investment and was located just a short ferry ride from Taiwan. This proximity, combined with the Taiwanese businessmen's experience in the manufacturing industry, made them ideal investors in the region. In the early 1990s, more than one third of the foreign investment in Xiamen was from Taiwanese investors⁴⁰.

40. Christopher Hudson, ed., *The China Handbook, Regional Handbooks of Economic Development* (Taylor & Francis, 2014), 63, <https://books.google.ca/books?id=hm63AwwAAQ-BAJ>.

As a result of the reform, a private business landscape that had been previously wiped-out during Mao Zedong's reign began to sprout roots. By the end of the 1980s, there were around 90,000 private enterprises in China, including consumer goods giant Haier (now a Fortune 500 company) and tech firm Lenovo. Further support for liberalization led to the existence of 238,000 private companies by 1994, all riding the wave of China's golden age of growth in which its economy ex-

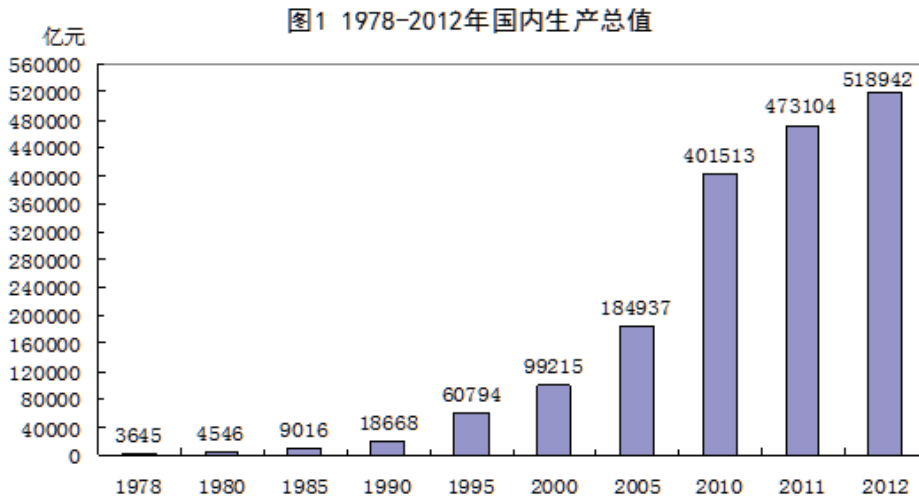


fig.4.2 Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in China from 1978 to 2018. (National Bureau of Statistics)

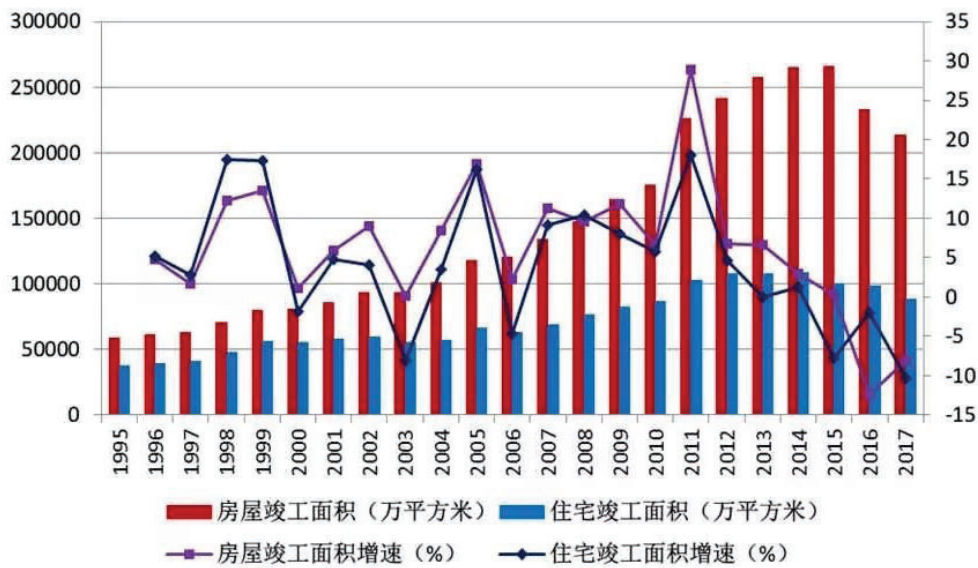


图 12 1995-2017 年房屋竣工面积、住宅竣工面积及其增速

fig.4.3 This chart shows the finished area of construction in China each year from 1995 to 2017. The red bar indicates the total finished area of all construction, while the blue bars illustrate the total finished area of residential construction. The purple line shows the growth of total finished area of all construction, and the dark blue link shows the growth of total finished area of residential construction. (Hunan Construction Industry Association)

41. Peter Vogel, Yunfei Feng, and Lise Møller, "China's Succession Panic Is a Wake-up Call for Family Business - I by IMD," November 22, 2021, <https://www.imd.org/ibyimd/leadership/chinas-succession-panic-is-a-wake-up-call-for-family-business-everywhere/>.

42. Joyce Yanyun Man, Siqi Zheng, and Rongrong Ren, "Housing Policy and Housing Markets: Trends, Patterns, and Affordability," in *China's Housing Reform and Outcomes* (Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, 2011), 3, <https://www.lincolninst.edu/publications/books/chinas-housing-reform-outcomes>.

43. Man, Zheng, and Ren, 5.

panded more than 40 times in the space of 30 years⁴¹.

In parallel, the housing system in the cities also underwent dramatic changes since 1978. The privatization of public housing and reliance on the market for housing supply in the late 1990s, as opposed to the socialistic housing allocation system, have led to profound changes in housing distribution and consumption in urban China. This has greatly affected social and economic life. The housing reform in 1998 totally abandoned the old system of linking housing distribution with employment units. The housing sector has become a significant segment of economic activity and has provided a sizable tax base for the Chinese government. The housing conditions of urban residents, whose floor area per capita increased from 6.7 square meters in 1978 to 28.3 square meters in 2007⁴², have greatly improved.

The development of China's housing markets was accompanied by rapid economic growth during the period between 1999 and 2010, when both the gross domestic product and urban household disposable income experienced an annual growth rate of about 10 percent on average. The rapid urbanization, from about 20 percent of the total population living in urban areas in the early 1980s to nearly 45 percent in 2007⁴³, was also a driving force behind the fast growth of housing markets in urban areas.

As China's economy grew and urbanization accelerated, demand for housing, commercial real estate and other related industry skyrocketed. The Chinese government encouraged and supported the growth of the construction industry by providing subsidies, tax incentives, and other favorable policies to developers and investors. The rapid expansion of the construction industry in turn fueled economic growth and job creation and helped to sustain the country's high GDP growth rates.

The First Office

In this economic environment, my aunt was able to establish her business through connections with few Taiwanese investors who were at the time looking to establish a factory in Xiamen to produce plumbing valves and faucets. Recognizing the potential in the economic environment, my aunt seized the opportunity and founded her business in 1990. Interestingly, this business model echoed the approach taken during the Great Leap Forward in the 1950s and 1960s, when the government encouraged the collection of scrap metal and other materials to support industrialization. However, unlike the failures of that era where essential household utensils were taken away from families, my aunt's company processed the metal correctly and produced essential household products.

The business was initially founded in an office located at the heart of Xiamen Island, employing around 20 people. The company did not engage in production activities but focused solely on international trade of plumbing valves.



fig.4.4 The old office of where the family business started. (Photograph taken around the year of 1992, date unknown.)



fig.4.5 The showroom in the office. (Photograph taken around the year of 1992, date unknown.)



fig.4.6 The first office of the family business. (Photograph taken around the year of 1992, date unknown.)

The First Factory

In 1994, four years after the business started, its very first faucet assembly factory, Xibin Factory, was established at the edge of Xiamen City to achieve a transformation from valve trade to the production and sales of a full range of hardware products.

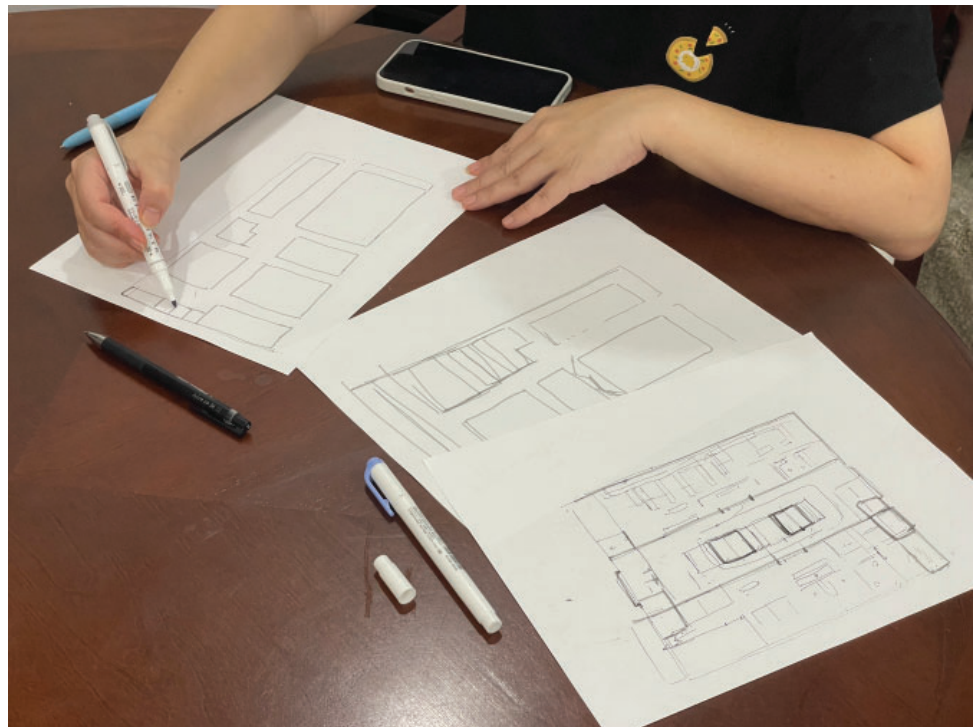


fig.4.7 My mother sketching the first office and the first factory.

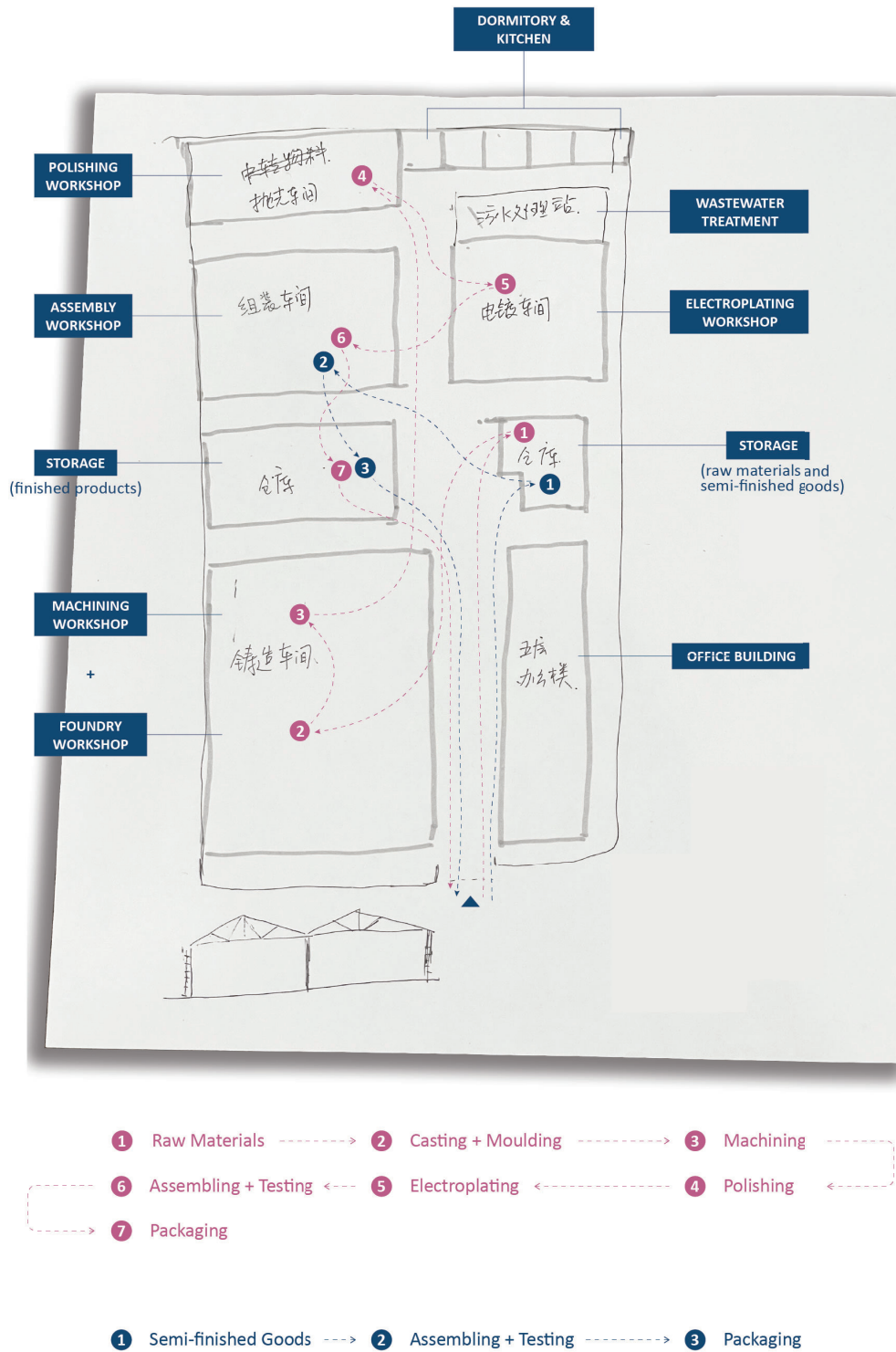


fig.4.8 Diagram illustrating the process of production in the Xibin Factory constructed in 1994. The pink route shows the process of how raw materials were processed into finished products, while the blue route indicates the process of producing products using semi-finished goods. (Base drawing produced by my mother.)

The Xibin factory spans across an area of approximately five acres, comprising of nine buildings that serve different functions. These include an office building, four workshops, two storage facilities, a wastewater treatment station. Beside these facilities for production, there is also a dormitory and kitchen built to accommodate workers, most of whom were from rural areas of Xiamen and other cities from Fujian Province. The workshops were constructed using masonry walls and corrugated metal roofs and are still in use to this day. To maximize land utilization for production purposes, all the buildings except for the office building have been interconnected with roofs covering the passages between them. The office building, which is a five-storey structure, was constructed a few years after the workshops. It stands as a separate building from the workshops and provides a space for administrative and managerial activities.

The factory engages in a variety of processes such as casting, moulding, machining, polishing, electroplating, assembling, and testing to produce faucets and plumbing valves from raw materials. Once these processes are complete, the products are packaged and distributed for sale. In addition to producing its own line of products, the factory also assembles semi-finished goods from other brands and sells them as finished products.



fig.4.9 A photograph of the machining workshop in the Xibin Factory. (Photograph taken on October 29th, 1994).



fig.4.10 Few stations set up for testing plumbing valves beside the machining workshop in the Xibin Factory. (Photograph taken on October 29th, 1994)



fig.4.11 Few office stations set up beside the machining workshop in the Xibin Factory. (Photograph taken on October 29th, 1994)



fig.4.12 Photograph of workers in uniforms checking the faucet spouts for quality control purpose before they were assembled. (Photograph taken on March 31st, 1999)

On-going Development

Since its establishment, the family business has been dedicated to providing quality hardware products to its customers. With its commitment to excellence, the company has experienced remarkable growth over the years. In order to meet the demands of its overseas customers, it established two sales offices in the United States and the United Kingdom respectively. These offices have played a critical role in strengthening the company's relationships with its international partners and expanding its global reach.

As the company continued to expand, it opened its Xing Nan plant in 2004 not too far from its first workshop, which brought its total square footage to 3.2 million and expanded its annual volume to 10 million sets. The Xing Nan plant has been equipped with advanced machinery and modern technology, allowing the company to produce hardware products at a faster rate and with greater precision.

To promote product innovation, the company established its own lab for experimenting with new metal materials and creating new designs. The lab is staffed by a team of experienced engineers and designers who work tirelessly to develop cutting-edge products that meet the evolving needs of the market. This commitment to innovation has helped Xing Nan stay ahead of the competition and maintain its position as a leader in the industry.

In 2012, another plant was opened for production in Tongan, another suburban region of Xiamen, which brought its total square footage to 10 million and expanded its annual volume to 47 million sets. This new plant was designed to meet the growing demand for the compa-

ny's products and provide faster delivery times to its customers.

Most recently, in 2020, Xing Nan opened its Vietnam facility, which has exceeded 1 million sets of shipment. This new facility has helped the company strengthen its position in the Southeast Asian market and expand its reach to new customers.

As the company grows, it became more or less like another "home" for my aunt, my mother and my uncle. This connection between family and business is deeply rooted in Chinese culture, where the family unit is highly valued and considered as the foundation of society. In a family-owned business, members work together towards common goals, and the company is seen as an extension of the family's legacy. As such, family businesses often have a strong sense of tradition and continuity, as they are passed down from generation to generation.

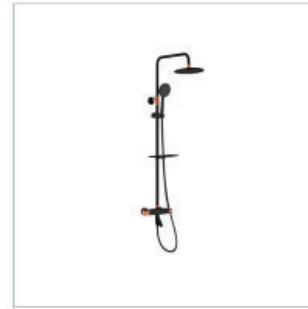
Catalogue

The family business manufactures a range of products, including but not limited to faucets, showering products, bath accessories, and plumbing valves. These products are primarily made out of metals such as copper, steel, bronze, and brass. The following pages showcase a selection of products produced by my family's business.

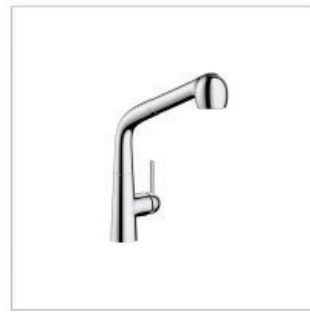
BATHROOM FAUCETS



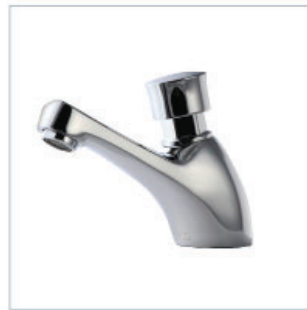
SHOWERHEADS AND OTHER COMPONENTS



KITCHEN FAUCETS AND SINKS



TOUCHLESS FAUCETS AND TOILET FLUSHERS



BATHROOM SAFETY PRODUCTS FOR SENIORS



The Apartments

In 2015, the three households - my aunt's family with my grandmother, my uncle's family, and our family - made a collective decision to relocate. Even though our homes were already in close proximity, within a fifteen-minute drive, family members wanted to live even closer. Thus, we moved to the same residential tower and found separate units located just a few floors away from each other.

After much discussion and consideration, we settled on a residential tower located at the southwest of Xiamen Island with the stunning view of Kulangsu as it is situated right across from it. We were able to secure five units in total with each family settled in different floors. My aunt's family, with my grandmother in tow, opted for a spacious unit on the highest floor, with sweeping views of the coastline of Xiamen. My uncle's family selected a cozy unit couple floors below my aunt's, while our family chose a comfortable unit few floors below my uncle's.

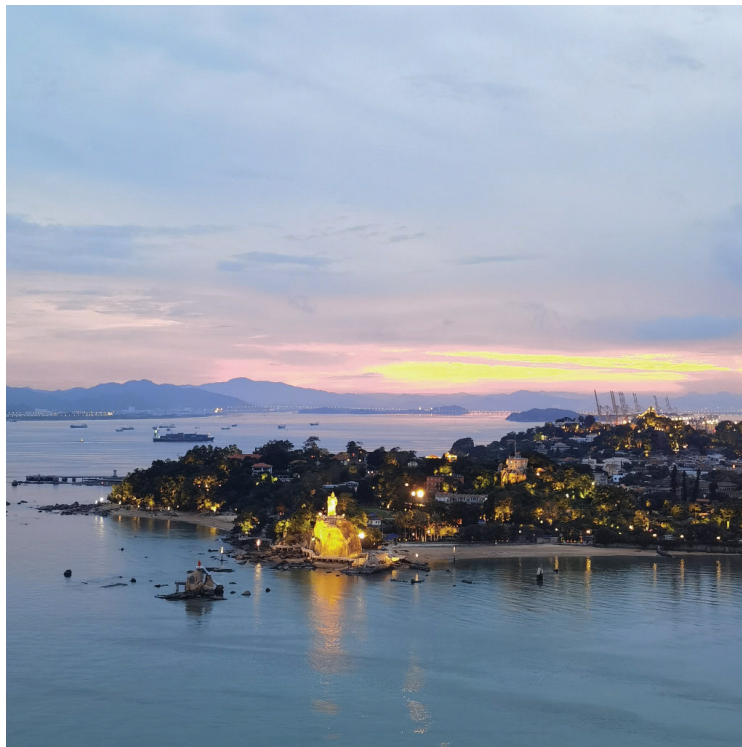


fig.5.1 Photograph of Kulangsu island taken from our home balcony at dawn.

Two Doors, One Soup

The living arrangement of families living in different units within the same residential tower or neighborhood is not uncommon. In my observations, I have seen few other families adopt this living pattern in our apartment building, with elders living in one unit while their married children live in a separate unit with their spouses. Chinese describes this arrangement as “two doors, one soup” 两扇门，一碗汤， which is an ideal solution for two generations living together⁴⁴. This arrangement fosters mutual care, emotional exchange, and clear separation of space and responsibilities, making it an appealing option. The phrase “two doors” refers to the recommendation that two generations should live in separate households, even if they live in the same building. The key is to keep a comfortable distance between the two doors, a distance that is not too far, but not too close either. This ideal distance is referred to as a “soup distance,” which means that one person can cook a pot of soup and deliver it to the other person’s home while the soup is still hot. For this arrangement to work, the two households need to be close enough to each other, ideally within walking distance. People have different opinions on what constitutes a “soup distance.” Some believe that one or two bus stops away is appropriate, while others insist that it should be accessible by bike, and there are also people feel that it is best to live in the same community.

44. Liping Zhang 张丽萍, “Living Arrangements and Living Willingness of the Aged Population 老年人口居住安排与居住意愿研究,” *Population Journal 人口学刊*, no. 06 (2012), https://en.cnki.com.cn/Article_en/CJFDTotal-RKXK201206003.htm.

Although the soup distance is just a metaphor of describing the proximity between families, the three families of us do carrying soups and other food from one unit to another, of course, most of the soups were delivered to my grandmother’s unit.

We love soups! It seems to be typical among Fujian people, we cannot

have a meal without soup. There are countless different kind of soups we cook, but in general, we prefer two types, slow-cooked soups with either pork bones, chicken, or ducks, and seafood soups. Because I am living away from home, soup-cooking is one of the skills I brought from hometown. The following are two soup recipes that my family often cooks.

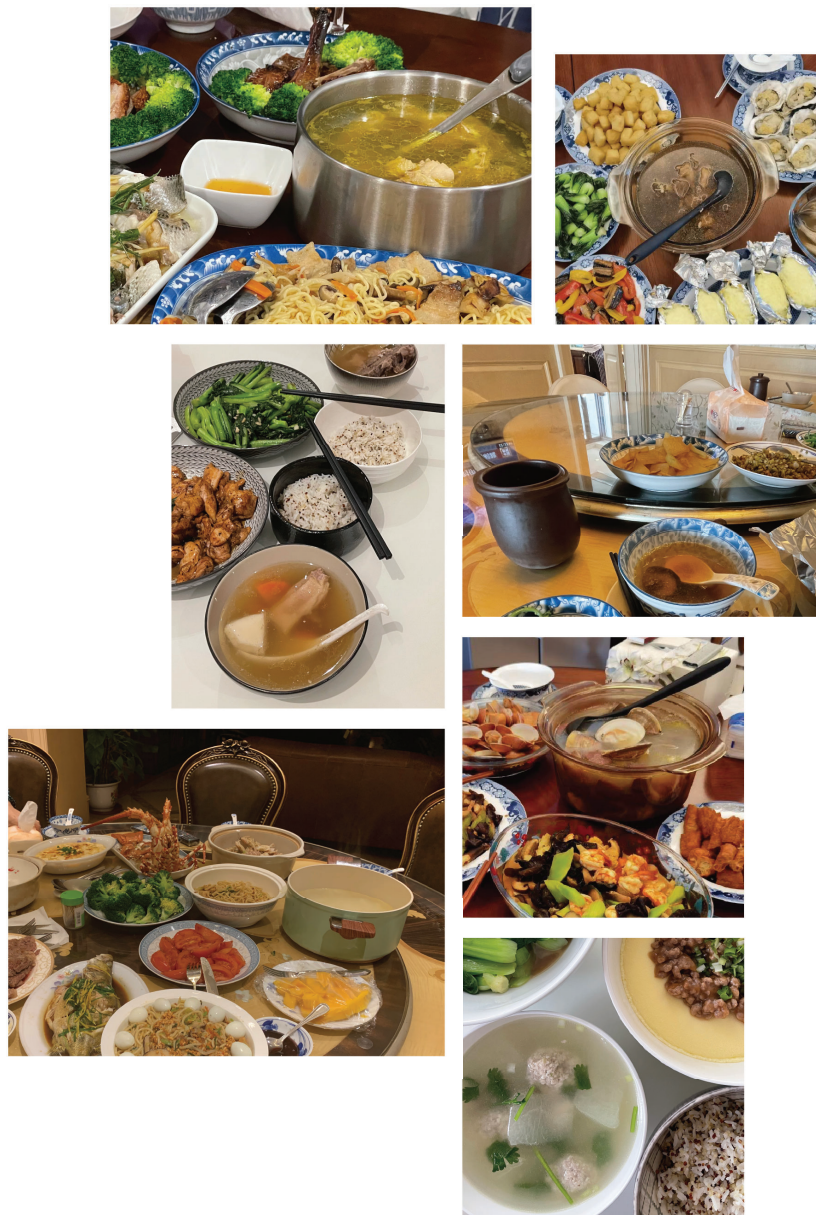


fig.5.2 Photographs of some soups my family or myself cooked.



Clam Soup

This soup is especially popular in coastal cities in Fujian Province, and it's one of the easiest one to make. It takes only a few ingredients and practically 15 minutes to prepare, but the end result is absolutely pleasing.

Ingredients:

- couple pieces of fresh ginger, peeled and cut into thin strips.
- 500g of clams, rinsed, scrubbed, and let them sit in salted water for around an hour to let clams spilt the sand.
- A little bit of Chinese rice wine
- Salt to taste
- Dash of white pepper

Directions:

1. Bring the water to boil and add the ginger and clams. Cover the pot, add some Chinese rice wine and let cook for about 3-5 minutes, or until all clams are all open.
2. Add salt to taste, and pepper. Dish out and serve immediately.



Pork Bone Soup with Carrot and Corn

To the Chinese, soups are highly nourishing as each ingredient in the soup delivers a certain health (and beauty) benefit and promotes overall vitality to the body. Pork Bone Soups are among one of the most popular soups in daily meals, it can be paired with endless variations of ingredients.

Ingredients:

- 4-6 pieces pork bones, parboiled.
- 2 large carrots, roughly chopped.
- 2 corn on cob, chopped.
- Couple thin slices of ginger.
- A little bit of Chinese rice wine.
- Salt to taste.
- Chopped green onions.

Directions:

1. Clean Pork Bone – Place all pork bones into cold water, add a bit of Chinese rice wine, slices of ginger. Then, boil the pork bones for 3 minutes to clean and remove the excess fat. Remove the pork bones and rinse them in cold tap water. We take this step whenever we make Chinese soups with pork bones or any other bones and meat.
2. Place the parboiled pork bones, and all the other ingredients into the pressure cook. Add enough water to fill the top of all ingredients. Do not add any salt yet. Close the pressure cook to let it cook for at least half an hour.
3. Before serving, add a bit of chopped green onions and salt to taste.

While the “two doors, one soup” living arrangement may be viewed as an ideal settlement for families today, it was not always considered culturally appropriate in traditional Chinese culture. Filial piety was highly valued, emphasizing the importance of taking care of one’s parents and ancestors, and this was commonly seen in extended families living under the same roof where several generations would reside together. This was also reflected in the architectural design of traditional Chinese courtyard houses. The design allowed for a sense of privacy and separation between family members, with each family occupying a separate wing of the compound. However, the shared courtyard also allowed for communal activities and interactions between family members. In these courtyard houses, family members were able to share resources, such as food and water, and work together to maintain the household. This communal living arrangement also allowed for the transmission of cultural traditions and values from one generation to the next.

Even for the overseas Chinese residing in Kulangsu who were influenced by western culture during their time aboard, the traditional arrangement of extended families living under one roof was still chosen and continued. Many families of overseas Chinese were residing within one mansion, with different floors occupied by different branches of the family. This allowed for intergenerational care and support, as well as the sharing of resources and responsibilities. In addition, some wealthy overseas Chinese in Kulangsu built housing complexes for their extended families to occupy. These complexes, like the Huang Family Mansions and Yang Family Mansions, consisted of multiple buildings and living spaces for different branches of the family. This allowed for even greater autonomy and independence among family members while still maintaining close proximity and intergenerational care.

With the social and economic changes that have occurred in China over the last century, the traditional living arrangement has shifted. One major factor has been the urbanization of the country, with people moving to cities in search of better job opportunities. This has led to smaller living spaces, making it less practical for extended families to live together.

Additionally, the one-child policy implemented in China from 1979 to 2015 also had an impact on the traditional living arrangement. Families were limited to having only one child, and as a result, children became more independent and self-sufficient. This created a cultural shift where parents began to encourage their children to pursue their own dreams and careers, rather than focusing solely on taking care of the family.

Finally, the growth of the economy has also played a role in the shift away from traditional living arrangements. As families become more prosperous, they are able to afford their own homes, leading to a greater emphasis on individual living spaces.

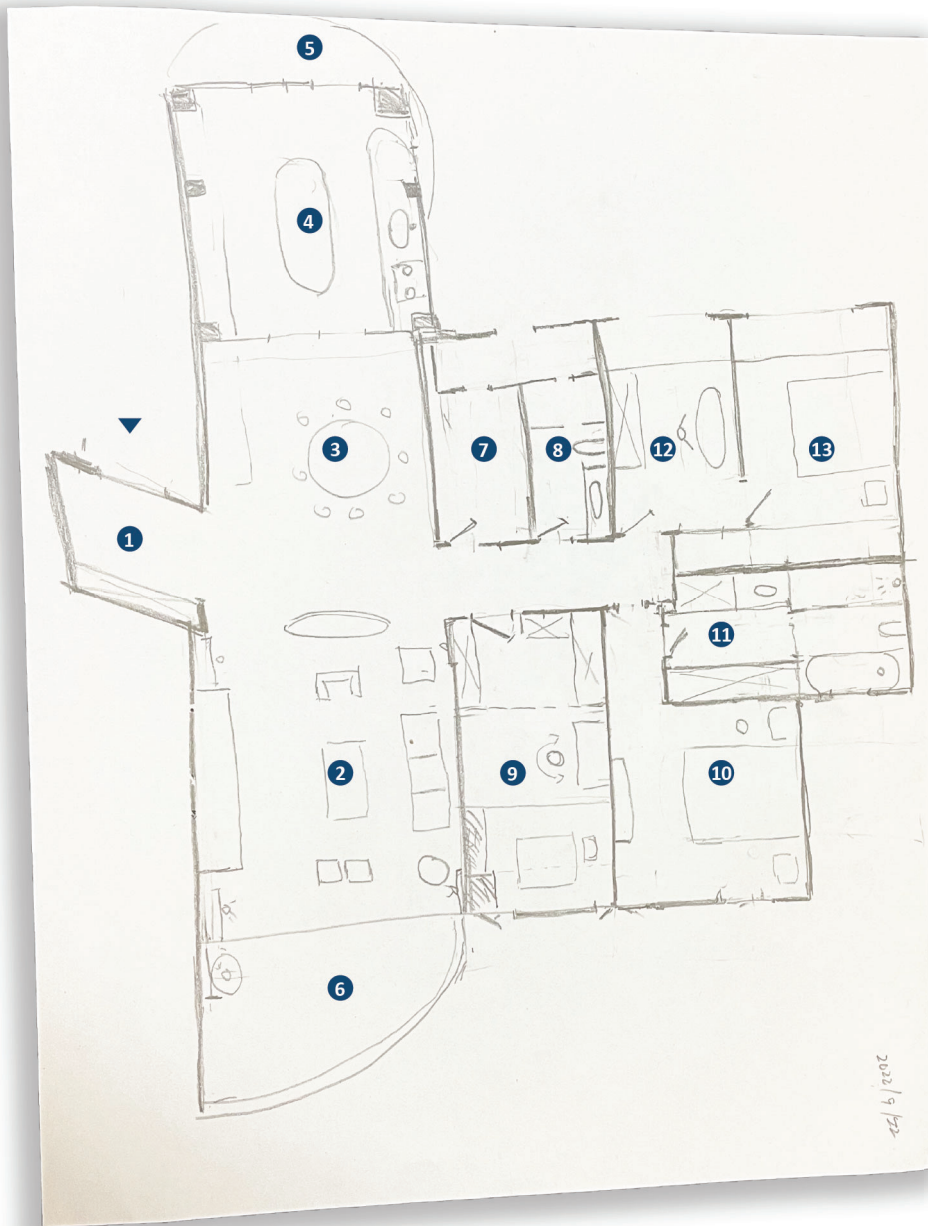
My Family Unit

To analyze the unit plans, I asked my mother to sketch the spaces from memory without any references. Unlike sketching the spaces for our no longer existing house in Kulangsu, the sketches for the apartment units now serve as evidence of my mother's recollection, rather than evidence of the living spaces. Her recent drawings were noticeably more professional than those for Kulangsu. This was partly due to the fact that these apartments are our current homes in Xiamen, and she is more familiar with the spaces. Additionally, my mother was highly involved in the renovation process with the interior designer, frequently reviewing the designer's CAD drawings and becoming extremely familiar with the layout. Although my mother and sister have recently moved to Canada, I still used my mother's sketches for analysis to incorporate her into the research process and to evoke memories of homes we cannot currently visit. On the other hand, I wanted to see if there were any differences between how my mother remembers the spaces and the actual spaces. Although there are some minor discrepancies, such as the location of the door to my grandmother and aunt's bedroom suites, the majority of the drawings are accurate.

Our unit, located on the east side of the building, is situated at the lowest level out of all three apartment units, two floors below my uncle's unit and three floors below my aunt's.

Before moving in, all three homes underwent several renovations led by interior designers, and our unit, in particular, was largely designed by my mother. The overall layout is divided into two areas: the public sector and the private sector. The public sector comprises the living room, dining room, kitchen, and two balconies. The north balcony is

dedicated to laundry with washing machines and hanging space, while the south balcony offers stunning views of Kulangsu and is used for leisure. During the interior design process, my mother requested a spacious kitchen as she values it as an important space. Originally located in the servant's room, the kitchen was relocated to the north end and expanded to occupy half of the north balcony space. The private sector on the other side is consisting of four bedrooms for my parents, my sister, myself and a babysitter taking care of my younger sister.



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|-----------------|--------------------|--------------------------|
| ① Vestibule | ⑥ South Balcony | ⑪ Closet + Washroom |
| ② Living Room | ⑦ Servant's Room | ⑫ Study |
| ③ Dining Room | ⑧ Washroom | ⑬ Guest Room/ My Bedroom |
| ④ Kitchen | ⑨ Sister's Bedroom | |
| ⑤ North Balcony | ⑩ Parent's Bedroom | |

fig.5.3 My mother's sketch of our apartment unit in Xiamen.

Uncle's Unit

My uncle's unit, situated two floors above ours, is of the same east unit type, with a similar overall layout, but noticeable distinctions. It boasts three balconies, including an additional one on the east side. Unlike my mother and aunt, who favor a western-styled interior, my uncle's preference for traditional Chinese wooden furniture gives his unit a unique decoration that sets it apart from the other two units. Moreover, his unit's interior has been renovated to reflect his family's particular values, preferences, and habits. For instance, he enclosed the north balcony to create a piano room and transformed one of the rooms into a spacious walk-in closet.



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|------------------|--------------------|-------------------|
| ① Vestibule | ⑦ Kitchen | ⑬ Uncle's Bedroom |
| ② Living Room | ⑧ Storage | ⑭ Washroom |
| ③ Dining Room | ⑨ Cousin's Bedroom | ⑮ Closet |
| ④ Ancestor Altar | ⑩ Washroom | ⑯ East Balcony |
| ⑤ Piano Room | ⑪ Washroom | |
| ⑥ South Balcony | ⑫ Guest Room | |

fig.5.4 My mother's sketch of my uncle's unit.

Aside from its unique decorations and layout, my uncle's apartment holds significant cultural importance to our family as the only male heir, and it is natural that the family altar is located there. During traditional festivals such as the Spring Festival, Lantern Festival, Qingming Festival, Dragon Boat Festival, Mid-Autumn Festival, and Winter Solstice, we hold small ancestral worship ceremonies in his apartment, in keeping with the customs of most people in Southern Fujian. Our family prepares flowers, fruits, and food served on plates and bowls, along with some wine, to be placed in front of the ancestor tablet. The head of the household burns incense while the offspring kneel and kowtow in respect. After the prayer ceremony, we gather in my grandmother's apartment for a sumptuous feast. Before we remove the food offerings in front of the tablet, we would use a traditional ritual to ask if the ancestors have accepted the offerings presented to them. After receiving a positive response from the ancestors, we remove the offerings and begin our meal together.

One interesting story about the family altar involves the day it was moved into my uncle's unit. In Chinese traditional culture, there are several rituals for people to follow when moving into a new place, one of which is settling the family altar before moving in. Although the family altar is a piece of furniture, it is customary to seek the ancestor's permission before moving it to a new home, and there is a specific ritual that Minnan people follow to seek divine guidance. We use wooden blocks called "poe" or moon blocks⁴⁵, which are made of wood or bamboo and carved into a crescent shape. Each block has a flat side (the yang side) and a round side (the yin side). To seek confirmation or disconfirmation of an answer, the prayer questions in front of the altar while holding the blocks with the flat sides together, then throws a pair of moon blocks onto the ground. If both blocks fall with their curved sides facing up, it signifies disconfirmation of the answer, while if both

45. Moon block, some people called it poe while others referred to it as ji-aobei. are wooden divination tools originating from China, which are used in pairs and thrown to seek divine guidance in the form of a yes or no question. Aside from questioning the deities on mundane affairs, moon blocks are also used to verify a range of issues, such as proper ritual protocol, spiritual presence of the gods or if they have eaten the offerings presented to them.

blocks fall with their flat sides facing up, it signifies the deity's amusement at the prayer's question or plea. If they fall differently (one flat-side-up, the other curved-side-up), it represents a positive response.

On the day that the family altar was moved into my uncle's unit, they threw the moon blocks onto the ground multiple times but failed to receive a positive response from my grandfather regarding the move-in. My uncle-in-law realized that the reason for this might be that they had not invited my grandmother to the ceremony, and as a result, my grandfather was displeased. In a rush, they invited my grandmother to come, and once she arrived, they repeated the throwing of the blocks. This time, they immediately received my grandfather's approval for the move-in.



fig.5.5 Illustration of the scene my uncle holding the ancestor tablet while using moon blocks to ask if grandfather agree to move in.

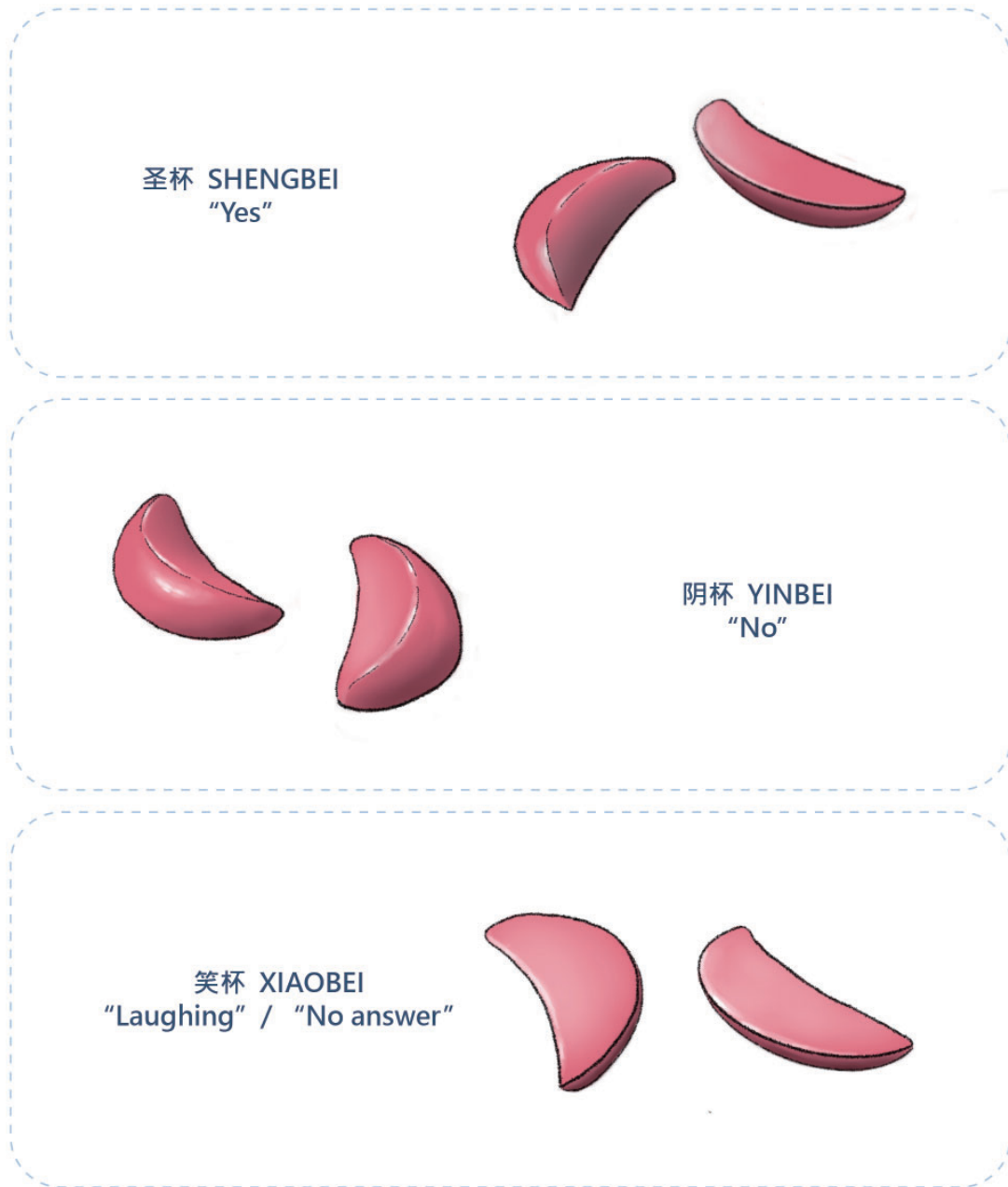


fig.5.6 Three possible outcomes, "Yes", "No" and "No answer", based on the positions of the moon blocks on the ground after they are thrown.

Aunt and Grandmother's Unit

My aunt's home differs from the other two units as it occupies the entire level, consisting of three individual units. The western unit is reserved for my grandmother and her servant, while the southern unit is used as a guest suite. My aunt and cousin reside in the eastern unit. As the entire floor belongs to our family, a main entrance door is installed next to the elevators to ensure security. Once inside, a common hallway connects all three units, but each unit has its own entrance door to provide separation and privacy.

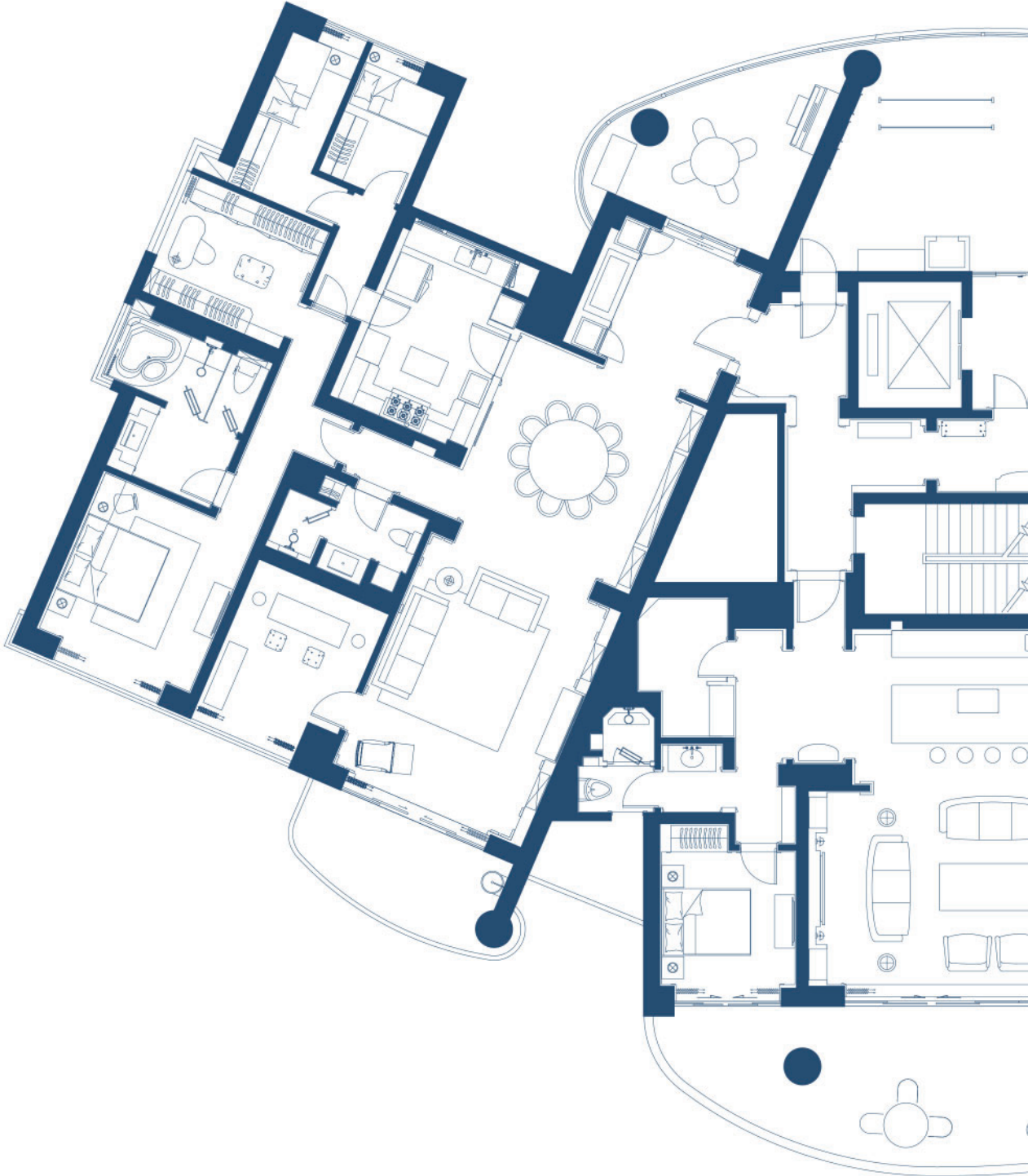


fig.5.7 Floor plan of my grandmother's unit, the guest unit, and my aunt's unit.



Aunt's Unit

My aunt's unit is situated at the eastern end of the floor, providing a haven of privacy for my aunt and cousin. Unlike the other units on the floor, the layout of this unit is relatively simple. As my aunt and cousin typically dine in my grandmother's unit, there is no formal dining room in their unit. The kitchen is compact and only features a refrigerator for drinks and snacks. However, the unit makes up for this with a spacious study where my aunt can focus on her work. The north balcony has also been converted into a serene and enclosed fitness room where she can exercise in tranquility. Additionally, my aunt has renovated one of the bedrooms at the east end into a spacious walk-in closet, just like my uncle's unit. The unit is designed for private use, and it provides a quiet and comfortable living space for my aunt and cousin, with enough room to accommodate their needs.



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|-----------------|--------------------|------------|
| ① Vestibule | ⑥ Kitchen | ⑪ Washroom |
| ② Living Room | ⑦ Washroom | |
| ③ South Balcony | ⑧ Cousin's Bedroom | |
| ④ Study | ⑨ Aunt's Bedroom | |
| ⑤ Fitness Room | ⑩ Closet | |

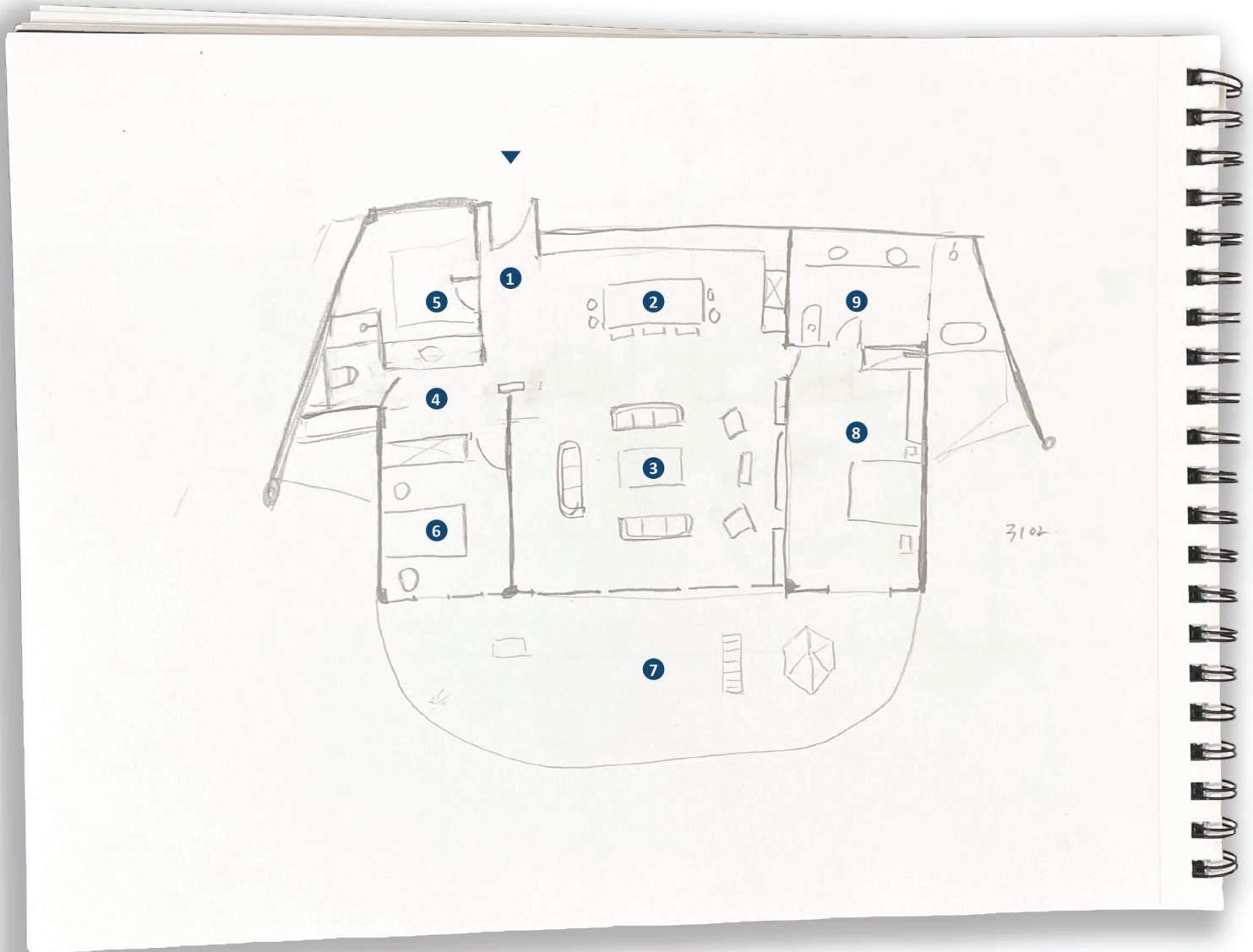
fig.5.8 My mother's sketch of my aunt's unit.

The Guest Unit

As previously mentioned, the south unit of the floor is dedicated to hosting guests. It has an open layout with a large kitchen and living room, which we use to invite friends over for afternoon tea parties. The unit also contains two bedroom-suites, separate from my grandmother's and my aunt's units, allowing guests to have better privacy. The unit also boasts the largest balcony on the entire floor, receiving the most sunlight and where my grandmother likes to place her plants. Sometimes, our entire family will gather here to enjoy the panoramic view of Kulangsu, bask in the sun, or watch the sunset together.



fig.5.9 Photograph of my grandmother's dog and her flowers on the guest unit balcony with Kulangsu in the background. (Photograph taken on February 17th, 2021)



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|---------------|--------------|-----------------|
| ① Vestibule | ④ Washroom | ⑦ South Balcony |
| ② Kitchen | ⑤ Storage | ⑧ Guest Room |
| ③ Living Room | ⑥ Guest Room | ⑨ Washroom |

fig.5.10 My mother's sketch of the guest unit.

My Grandmother's Unit

My grandmother's unit comprises a kitchen, dining room, living room, a prayer room, a bedroom suite, a servant's room, and a dedicated mah-jong room that she created by renovating the north balcony.

My grandmother's unit is the center of family activity, particularly when it comes to meals. It's where we gather to eat the most, and I have more memories of eating in her dining room than in the dining room of our own unit. Similar with my aunt's old house, the dining table is large and round, with a lazy susan in the middle to facilitate passing dishes around. My grandmother has a dedicated seat at the table facing the television, where she likes to watch daily news while she eats. The rest of us sit randomly around the table, chatting and enjoying the food.

While the servant who lives with my grandmother takes care of most of the cooking, my grandmother herself is an excellent cook and takes pleasure in preparing traditional Minnan dishes that she enjoys. Her satay noodles and Minnan spring rolls are particularly beloved by the family, and she takes great pride in sharing her culinary creations with us. One of my personal favorites is her homemade satay sauce, which I always ask her to make for me to bring back to Canada before I leave. On special occasions, like Chinese New Year or birthdays, my family and my uncle's family bring our own dishes up to my grandmother's unit to make a potluck. It's a time of celebration and togetherness, and we all enjoy sampling each other's dishes and catching up on each other's lives.



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|-----------------|-------------------------|------------------|
| ① Vestibule | ⑥ Kitchen | ⑪ Closet |
| ② Mahjong Room | ⑦ Washroom | ⑫ Servant's Room |
| ③ Dining Room | ⑧ Buddhist Prayer Room | |
| ④ Living Room | ⑨ Grandmother's Bedroom | |
| ⑤ South Balcony | ⑩ Washroom | |

fig.5.11 My mother's sketch of my grandmother's unit.

Before we During Chinese New Year, we would gather in my grandmother's living room to prepare for the ritual of burning joss paper 烧金, which we offer to our ancestors and gods. A large pile of joss paper would be purchased, and while some of it was burned directly, the rest was meticulously folded into the shape of Chinese ingots. According to my grandmother, the folded ingots carry more value than the regular paper ones. During the folding process, all family members would sit in silence, working together quickly to fold as many ingots as possible. At times, we would even compete to see who could fold the fastest, creating an intense but fun atmosphere that felt like a small workshop dedicated to the production of ingots. Once we finish folding the ingots, we would burn all of them in a metal bucket on our balcony, letting the smoke carry all our wishes to the ancestors.



fig.5.12 Photograph of my family preparing joss paper during the Spring Festival in China. The boxes on the right are filled with folded ingot-shaped joss paper, while the box on the left is where my grandmother used to store the purchased ingots. In the left corner, a red metal bucket is used for burning joss paper. The offerings to our ancestors and gods are placed on the table in the background. (Photograph taken on February 19th, 2021)

Conclusion

Home is a multifaceted concept that holds different meanings for each individual. For some, home is a physical place that provides a sense of belonging, such as a childhood residence, a current house or apartment, or a hometown or country. For others, home is an abstract notion that encompasses feelings of comfort, familiarity, and community, or simply a place where loved ones are located. Regardless of its interpretation, home remains an integral part of our identity and sense of self.

My thesis delves into the concept of home and its significance throughout different generations of my family. Starting from my grandmother's generation in pre-modern China, to my mother's generation during China's massive transformation, and finally analyzing our current home, the thesis documents our family's past and present of home. It showcases the continued value of family, traditional living arrangements, and customs that have been passed down through the generations. As a result, my thesis has become an integral part of my "home," reflecting the memories and values that have shaped our family over time.

On the other hand, our current apartment units spread over three floors have ultimately become a reconstructed version of the Kulangsu house - the childhood home of my family members. The two elevators that service all of the apartment floors function as the connection between units, similar to the stairs and passages in the original Kulangsu house. Beyond the shared spatial arrangement, the apartments still retain the habits and elements that were once used by my grandmother, aunt, uncle, and mother. The reconstructed Kulangsu house serves as a physical reminder of the importance of family and tradition, as it preserves the memories and values that have shaped our family over the years.

In the midst of writing my thesis, my mother and sister have made the decision to leave our hometown of Xiamen and settle in Canada with my father and me. We are currently in the process of settling down, not too far from now, we will be moving to a new “home”. While I am excited about this new chapter in our lives, I cannot help but reflect on the memories and traditions we will leave behind. Our home in Xiamen was filled with cherished memories and unique elements that defined our family culture. As we begin to recreate our home in Canada, I am eager to see which of these elements we will carry with us and which new traditions we will create. The continuity of our sense of value of family, whether in China or Canada, will always be a central part of our sense of home.

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Appendix

Concession History of China

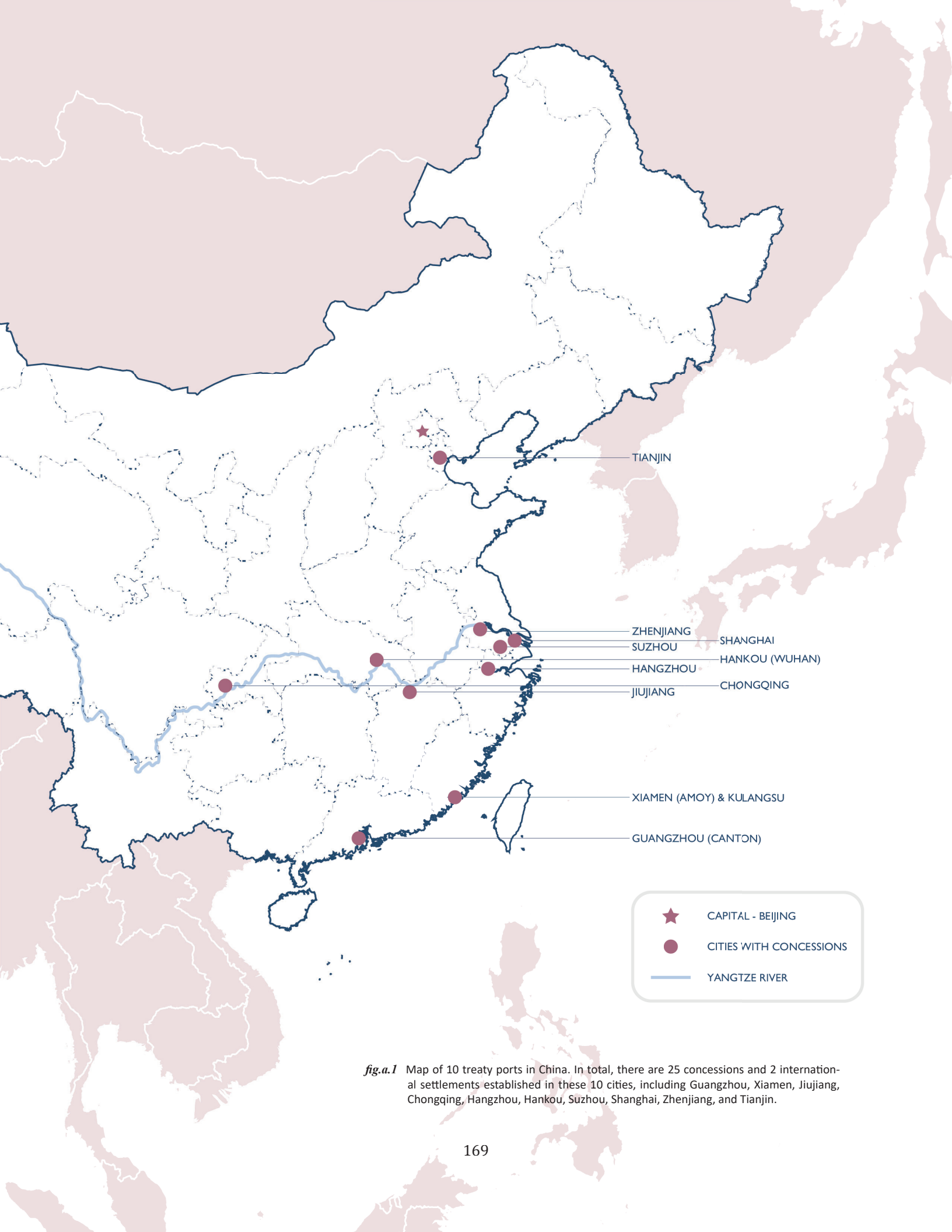


fig.a.1 Map of 10 treaty ports in China. In total, there are 25 concessions and 2 international settlements established in these 10 cities, including Guangzhou, Xiamen, Jiujiang, Chongqing, Hangzhou, Hankou, Suzhou, Shanghai, Zhenjiang, and Tianjin.

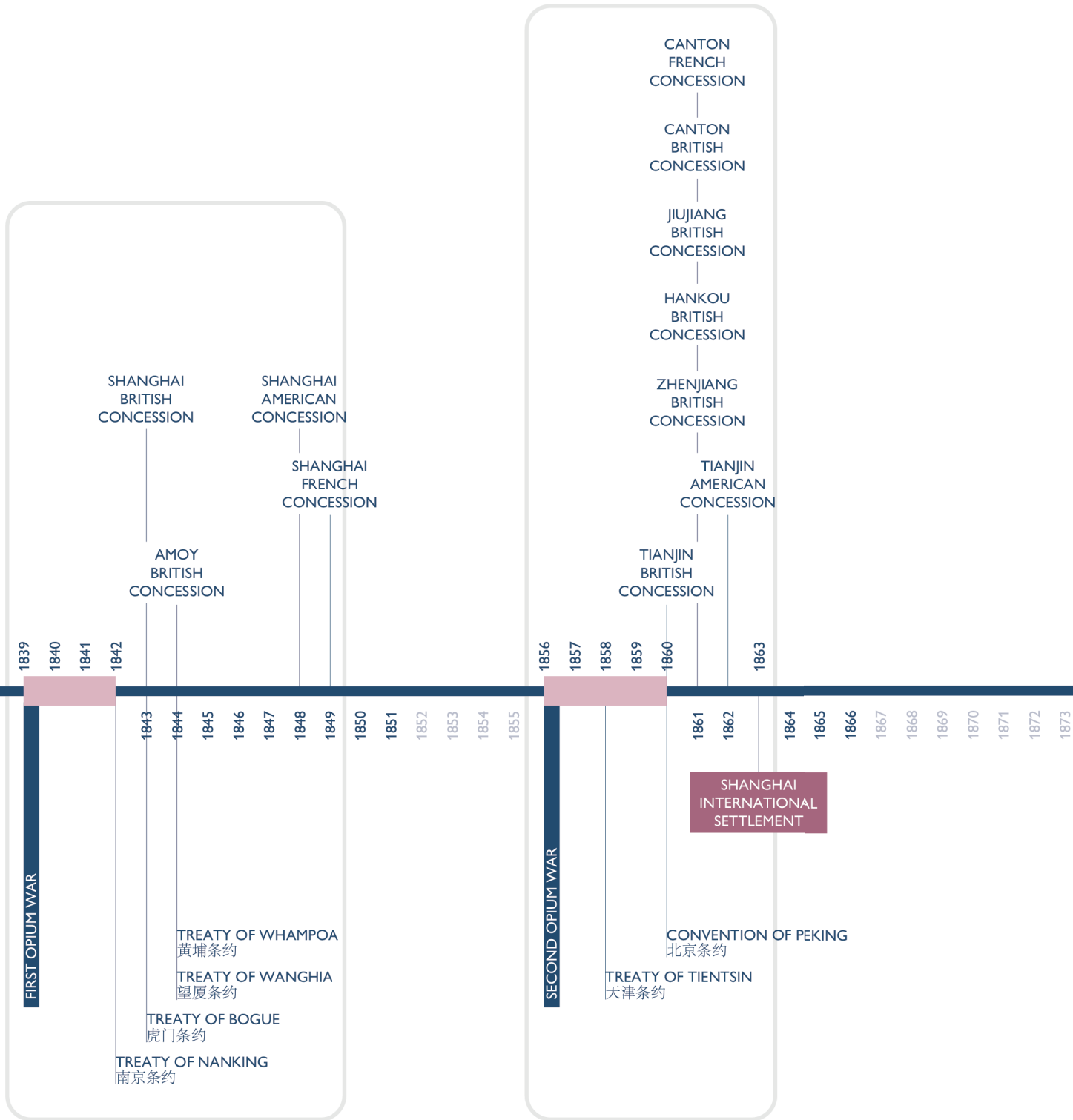
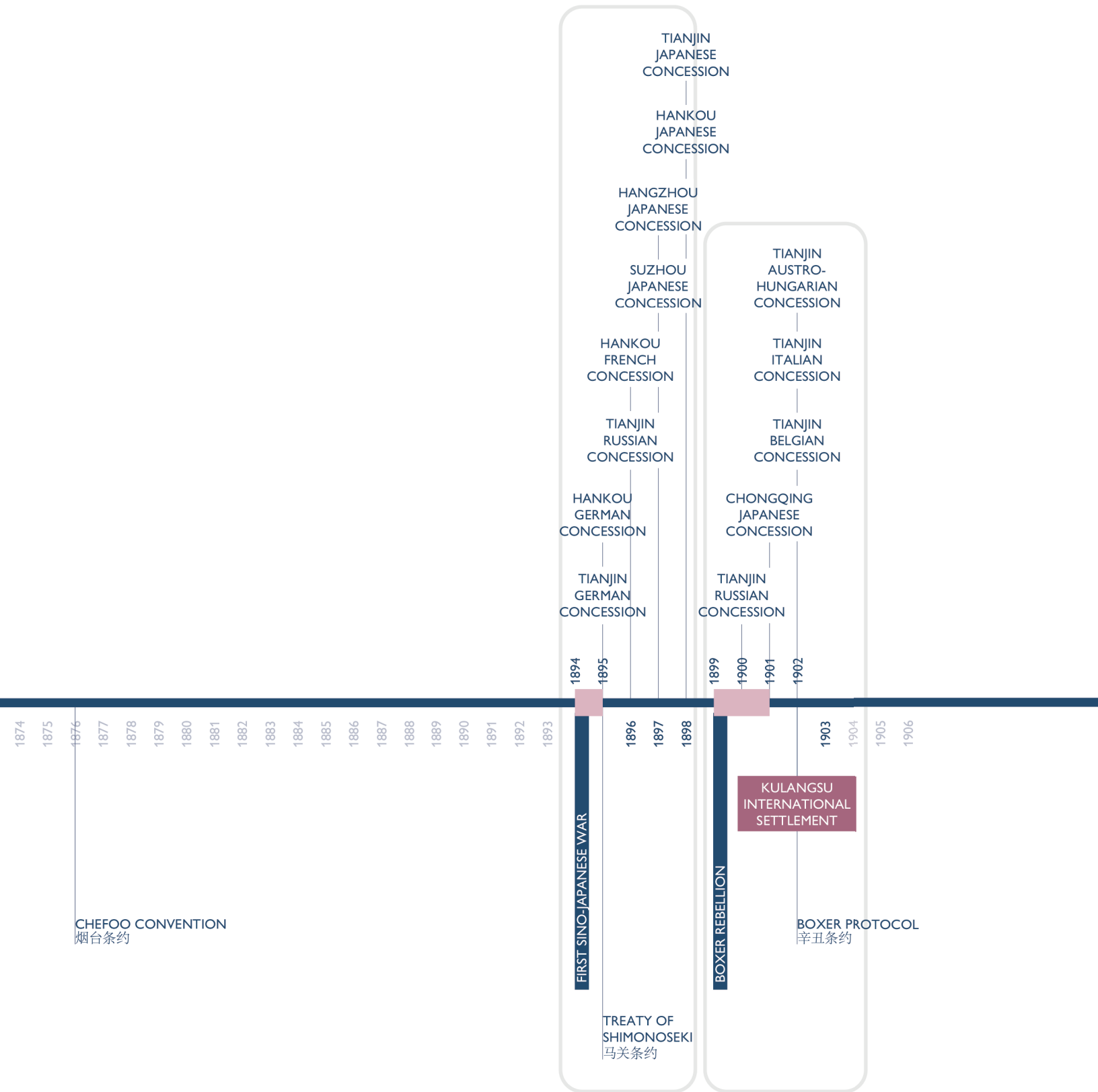
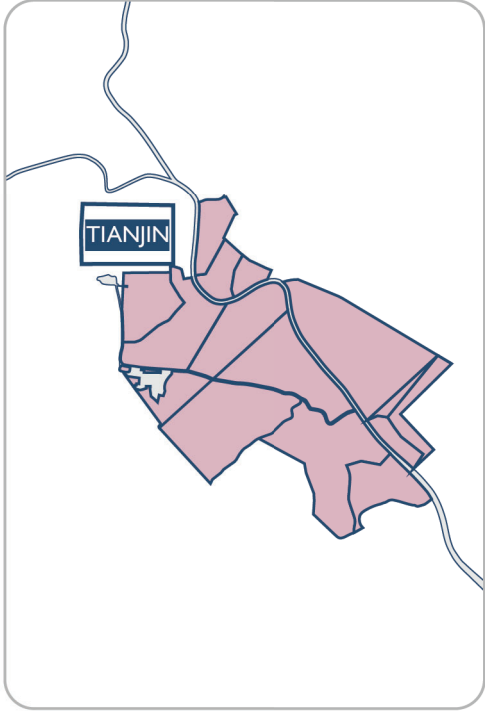
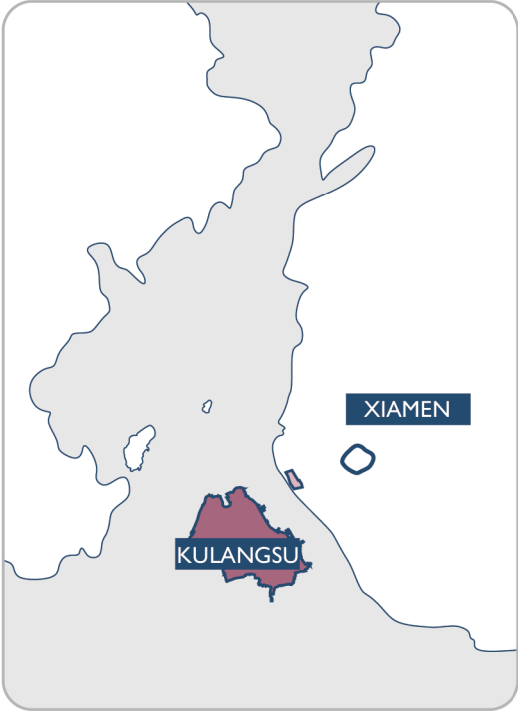
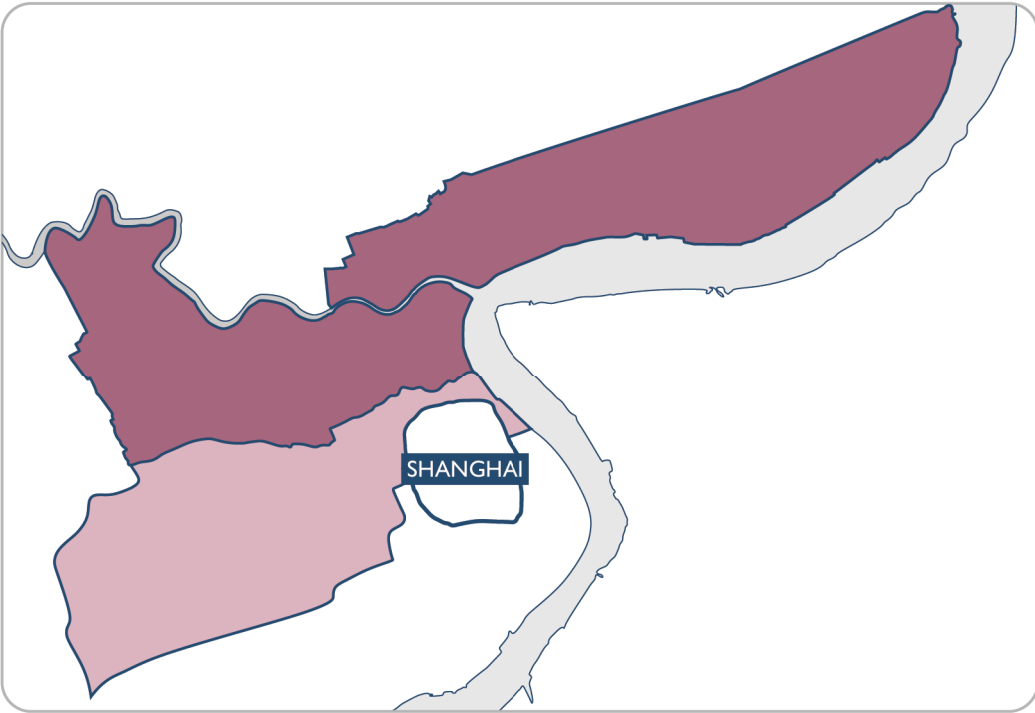


fig.a.2 Timeline of concession history in China, the establishment of concessions is divided in four stages according to Chinese historian Chengkang Fei, with crucial historical events and treaties labeled.





CONCESSIONS INTERNATIONAL SETTLEMENTS CITY WALLS

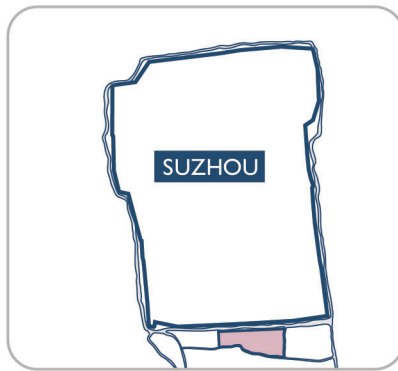
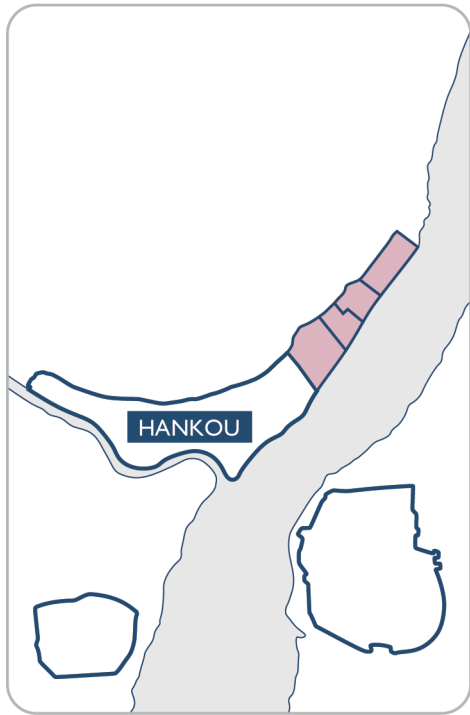
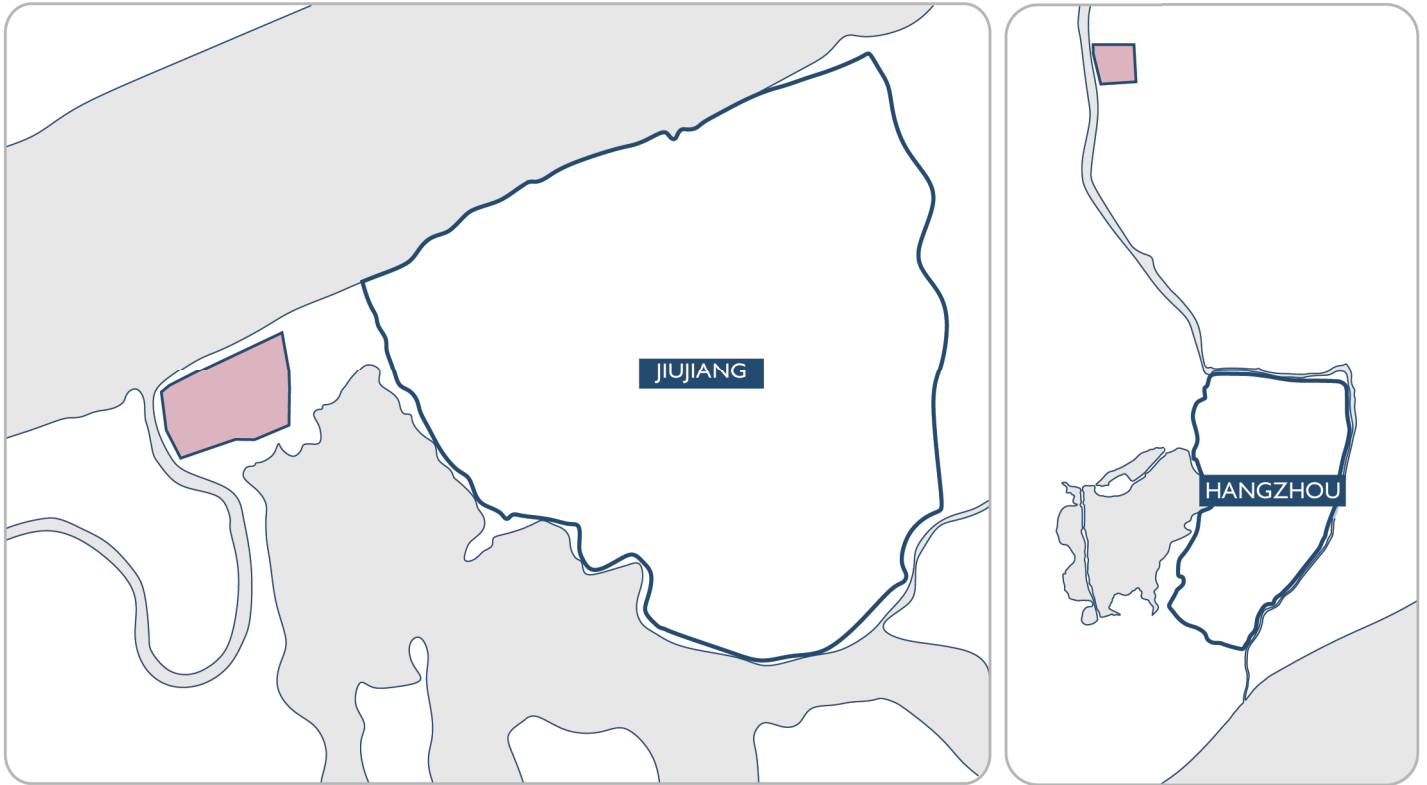


fig.a.3 Maps of all concessions and international settlements established in China, at the meantime, the walled Chinese cities are also shown for reference.

