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advised by

professors

L. CHUA

S. HENDERSON

MAPS !

LIVING WITH GHOSTS

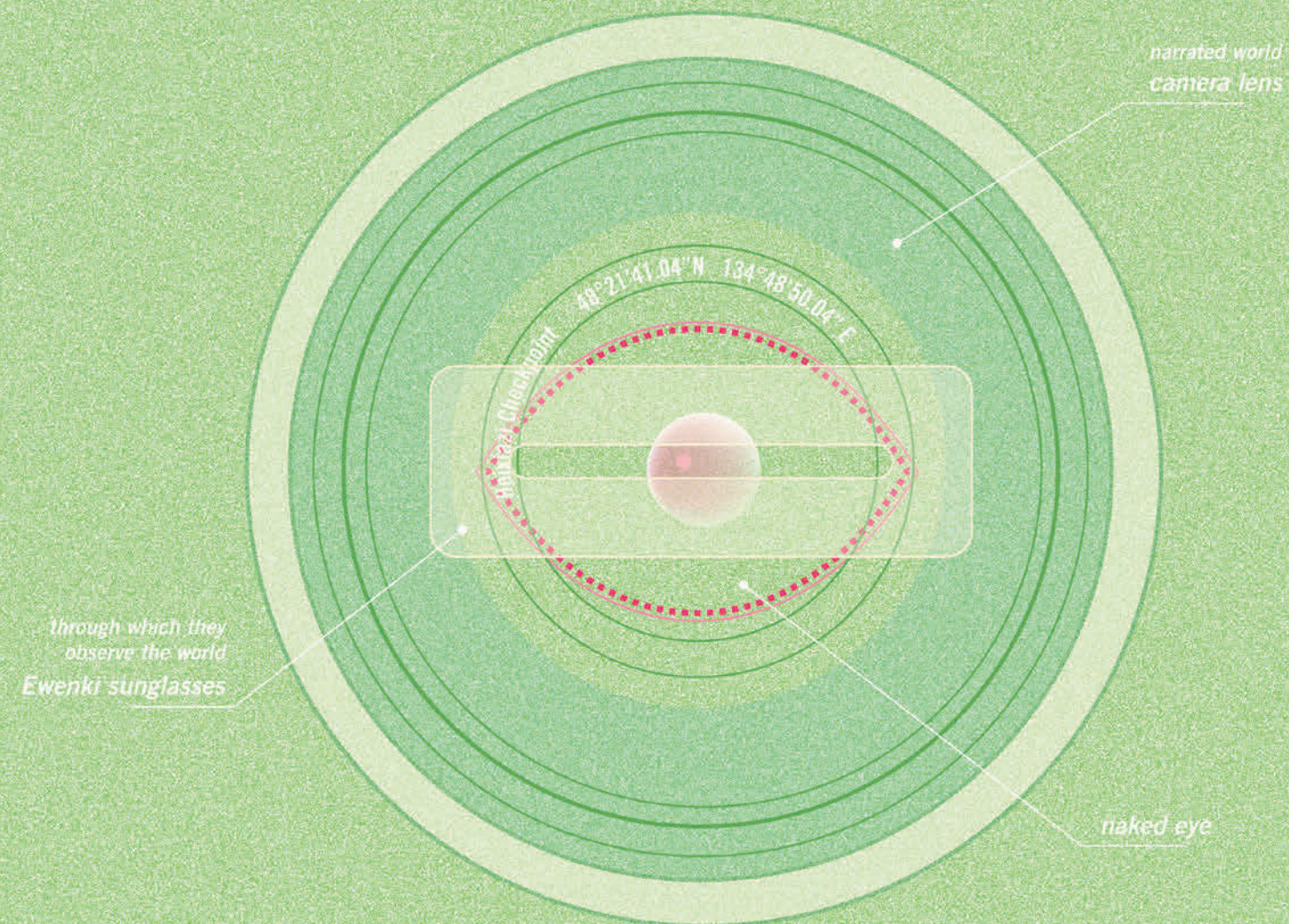


thesis by

XIMENG LUO

SHIHUI ZHU

syracuse university
school of architecture



In a debate with Theaetetus, Socrates explained memory with an analogy to a piece of wax. Everyone has a piece of wax, varied in size, shape, and texture, a gift from Mnemosyne, the goddess of memory. When trying to remember something, an imprint is made on the wax, and the thing being remembered is transformed to an image on the wax, becoming a person's knowledge. Those that cannot leave a mark on the wax will be forgotten.

Plato

Theaetetus.

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APPENDIXES

guides to how to read the book

A01	pencil for making marks on the maps, drawings, and texts.	
A02	folded map of the Heilongjiang 1 rectangular map in three folds showing the river from source to estuary	Part I, Intro
A03	folded hyper-representation drawing 1 rectangular print, white background, of all sites; analysis of memories and contemporary spatial relationships	Part I, Intro
A04	terms list 1 small, rectangular booklet with vellum pages; terms and dialects redefined	Part I, 03
A05	map in O.E.D. 1 thin piece of paper with a thorough definition of the map from the Oxford English Dictionary, reinterpreted	Part I, 04
A06	AI text input 5 square cards, each with 100 words about one specific site; the input that was plugged into an AI to generate images of the sites	Part I, 04
A07	site collage cards 7 square cards, black background; collage of the sampling sites	Part II
A08	site profile cards 5 rectangular cards, white background; background information of the sites	Part II
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INTRODUCTION . /

Cartography, Representation and Image: Ungoverned Spaces

[ximeng luo]



Latour, Bruno.

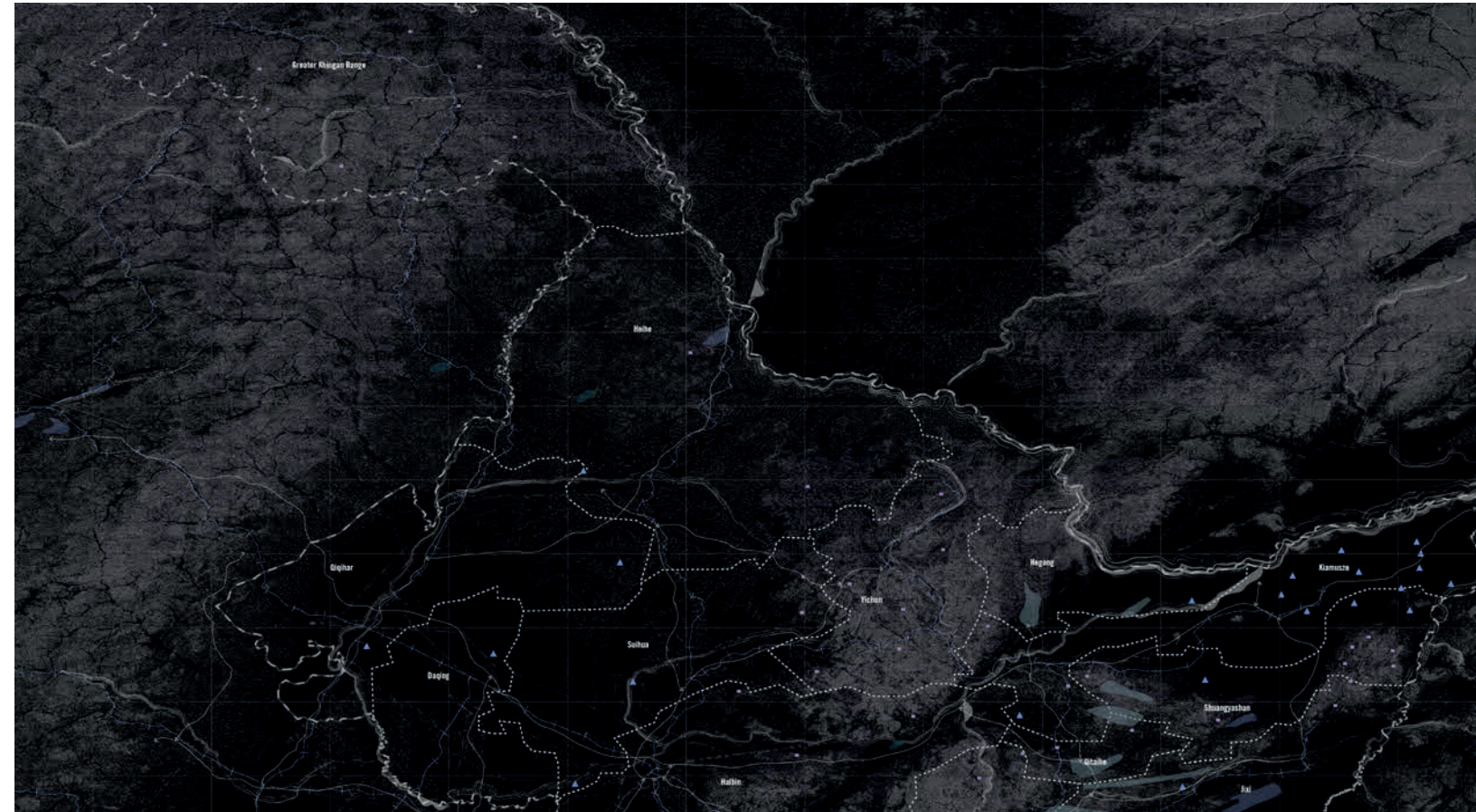
“A World Composed of Objects Does Not Have the Same Type of Resistance as a World Composed of Agents.” In *Down to Earth: Politics in the New Climate Regime*, English Edition. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2018.

Bruno Latour set the stage for us here by claiming that “to define humans is to define the envelopes, the life support systems, the *Umwelt* that makes it possible for them to breathe.” The envelope of our contemporary world, though becoming increasingly homogenized with developing communication and transportation technologies, is still closely tied to localized contexts. From different geographical and ecological conditions to distinct physical and metaphysical human constructions, pieces of land, whether defined by geographical boundaries or political ones, have their own life and character. The envelope created with large-scale contextual information of societies can scale down to shape individual living experiences.

Contemporary narratives deriving from this information define our understanding of reality while constructing and morphing our daily living experiences, manifested through the marks left on the landscape, such as those produced by the practice and performance of architecture. Take the border as an example. The land under our feet is continuous in a material sense, yet sliced and separated in ideological sense—claimed territories of modern nation states set boundaries for real-life activities and result in certain restrictions in visibility and accessibility for subjects involved. Border monuments and checkpoints are just scattered constructions placed on the landscape, yet have the ability to set invisible borders for the physical world, on natural surfaces. The unique duality between existence and non-existence of the border is

Sloterdijk, Peter.

“Foreword to the Theory of Spheres.” In *Cosmograms*. M. Ohanian and J.C. Royoux, ed. New York: Lukas and Sternberg, 2005, 223-241.



an epitome of the envelope: non-existing but with long-lasting material effects. Hence, it makes sense for Peter Sloterdijk to argue that “*modernism is a very specific type of architecture*,” expanding the concept of architecture to the immaterial construction of ideological environments. Similarly, in attempts to understand today’s material architecture, we are always situated in an immaterial architecture built with mega power structures.

what?

In studying the manifestation of such envelopes, the thesis is interested in the concept of governance and its representation—or, image. The presence of the government as a modern device to control land and populations is a medium between the macro-structures of global politics, economy, and history (the reflection of them,) and the micro-environments

of specific cultures (a force behind their formation.) The thesis is set like an experiment, with the level of governance as the variable, and proposes a series of alternative representations of sample sites in addition to existing maps and drawings which are increasingly homogenized with modern cartographical and architectural techniques.

Scott, James C.

The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009.

van Schendel, Willem.

“Geographies of Knowing, Geographies of Ignorance: Jumping Scale in Southeast Asia.” *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 20, no. 6, December 2002, 647–68.

Scott, James C.

2009.

why?

The concept “ungoverned space” is defined by political scientist and anthropologist James Scott as a stateless area and has gradually developed into the mode of an area of “small-scale states encircled by vast and easily reached stateless peripheries.” These territories may be loosely confined within a state’s boundary, but due to geographical obstacles, beyond the reach of state institutions and organization. First proposed by Holland historian Willem van Schendel in 2002, the concept “Zomia” refers to the mountainous region of South Eastern Asia, including parts from claimed territories of nine Asia states. The region became the most known example of ungoverned spaces in Scott’s later theory on geography, agriculture, and governance.

According to Scott in *The Art of Not Being Governed*, his theory of the ungoverned is “a deconstruction of Chinese and other civilizational discourses about the ‘barbarian,’ the ‘raw,’ the ‘primitive.’” Ungoverned is further explained as “not-yet-incorporated,” and areas like Zomia, with its ecological variety and distant relationship to states, still host some of the last ungoverned peoples. Scott’s main argument is that complex geographical conditions found in highlands would serve as a refuge for peoples that refuse to surrender under the control of states. Being physically distant and unreachable from the center of state power protects the

ungoverned peoples so that they maintain their traditional ways of subsistence and living. However, Scott also acknowledges that with developing modern technologies, or “distance-demolishing technologies,” the image of free, ungoverned peoples created in his theory had begun to fade away. Railroads, telegraph, highways, telephone, helicopter, and latest communications technologies all contributed to the defriction of the terrain, smoothing out previously obstacles that rendered the land inaccessible. In the research, we identify these technologies, especially their material forms, as infrastructure that assist in the transition of an ungoverned space. In turn, infrastructure can also be found in the efforts of peoples who resist the modern colonization of nation states.

“Ungoverned space” in this thesis project is understood according to Scott’s definition as “locations where, owing largely to geographical obstacles, the state has particular difficulty in establishing and maintaining its authority.” While Scott’s more or less idyllic take on the land and culture of ungoverned tribal communities may be overly romanticizing life in the peripheries, his analysis provides a point of departure for us to observe and try to understand life and architectural practices in obscure regions distant from the center of discussion—in the state narrative and in the field of architecture. Especially when the concept of the ungoverned came to be re-interpreted with the rise of “terrorism” in the early 21st Century by mass-media,

entering the public’s view as dangerous, chaotic regions occupied by anti-state armed groups, re-reading Scott sparked our interest in the dynamics in distant regions. With attention directed to spaces that are less discussed in the architectural discourse, we investigate how humans make changes to land as they gradually transform ungoverned spaces into governed ones.

Scott, James C.
2009.



van Schendel, Willem.
map of Zomia, 2002. Redrawn.

Areas that are considered “periphery” by the mainstream escape the gradually digitized understanding of the world. Discourse on this unique contemporaneity is largely absent in the discourse of architecture and landscape architecture which grows increasingly obsessed with modern urban environments. The impact of modern systems, resistances of the local people, and transformations in ways of building as these ungoverned spaces clash with the governance of modern states reflect values and relationships different from our own.

While governed spaces remain the protagonists in architectural discourses, vast territories within the boundary of modern nation-states are beyond the reach of governmental control, or rather, exposed to little governmental control. These spaces, whether scarcely populated by groups of humans or transformed by settlements, cities even, present an aporia of boundaries, identities, and materialities. Populations without a written history in mainstream language are often wiped out of existence by official narratives of history coming from modern nation-states. Communities that build temporary structures in wood, bamboo, or reeds left scarce archeological records as well. Towns and cities far from a nation’s center of power are frequently neglected and left to themselves. With an increasing state presence, the relationship between these communities and the natural and built landscape changes, and the graphic representation of these areas shifts accordingly. In borderlands where the presence of nation-states is weak and ambiguous, geographical elements connect various forms of living and play a significant role in local representations of the people’s perception of their surroundings. Empirical knowledge determines how they understand and depict the land. Yet with the increasing penetration of the state, regions that were once “wilderness” become regulated and categorized with modern cartography, aided with modern cartographical techniques, flattened to become 2D graphs.

In the contemporary context, the same piece of natural land often displays a superimposition of various truths. The collapse of overlapping spacetime can be found in marks created by human construction activities, compressed into the concept of contemporaneity. For example, a post-industrial city in Northeastern China often possesses infrastructures and factories built in the last century, orthodox-style architecture left by Russian merchants and residents who still cannot get away from the memories of their collective youth, and on top of that new political boundaries, modern constructions, and natural areas that remain rather intact. The living environment other than our familiar metropolis, advanced technologies and infrastructures seemed to be the B-side of so-called modernity, escaping from the narrative based on data flows and digital devices. Peripheral lands and populations exist beyond the capture of cameras, overlooked by official historical accounts, as real as metropolises but somewhat as a phantom of the “modern” life. The research does not see the development of society as progressive and believes that these lifestyles are not in different stages of development, but are all contemporary. Scarce biological remains and traces left in the vast marginalized regions and glorious metropolises that are portrayed with grand narratives are equivalently important truths under the concept of “contemporaneity.”

Manzhouli Station

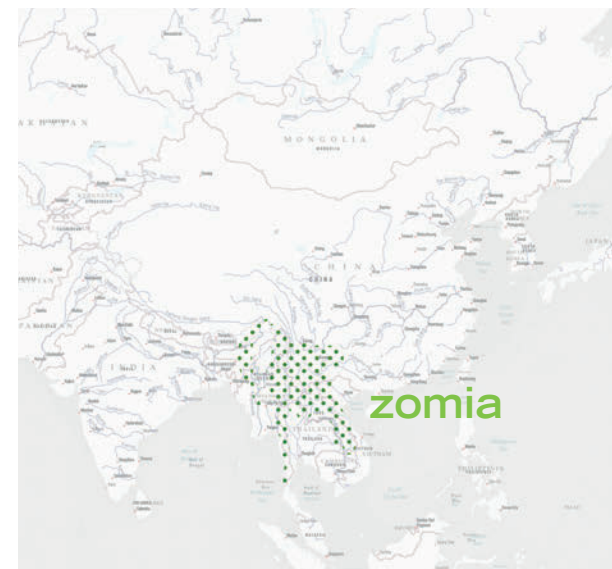
James Palmer.
 "A People's Friendship: a Photo
 Gallery from the Russia-China
 Border." *ChinaFile*. 2016.
 Passengers disembark at the
 Manzhouli railway station.



why bother?

The theories that we are familiar with in architecture seem to lose their validity here. But after all, how do the populations in ungoverned territories modify the natural environment, and how do they create constructions and occupy space? How does their architecture reflect the contemporaneity of the various lifestyles different from our own controlled urban environment? Architecture and actions taken in creating architecture is a product of different relationships between communities and landscape and authority. Human constructions reflect and reinforce existing living relationships, maintain certain social

processes through repeating the practices of daily activities through designed physical spaces. Construction activities reflect what the people consider as important and what not, what to keep and what to destroy as they proceed their lives. On top of this and more specifically, how does modern cartography depict these regions and populations and is it adequate? Would there be an alternative method of representation, coming from a more local perspective, that expands our current understanding of architectural representation? In the project, we will make a few attempts.



where?

The scene is set along the Heilongjiang. Heilongjiang for the Chinese, Sahaliyan Ula for the Manchu, Амар мөрөн for the Mongols, and Река Амур, or the Amur for the Russians, the river contains much richer diversity as compared to Heilongjiang as a provincial concept. A fluid water body with a drainage basin of 1,855,000 square kilometers, it feeds populations in the Russian Far East and Northeastern China, simultaneously delineates the long and winding national border between contemporary Russia and China. When talking about the Chinese Northeast, people immediately think of overwhelming amounts of snow, colorful Russian-style onion domes, traditional padded jackets, blurry steam in public baths and pompous golden necklaces that float in water once you sit in one of the baths. These representations together construct the image of this distant

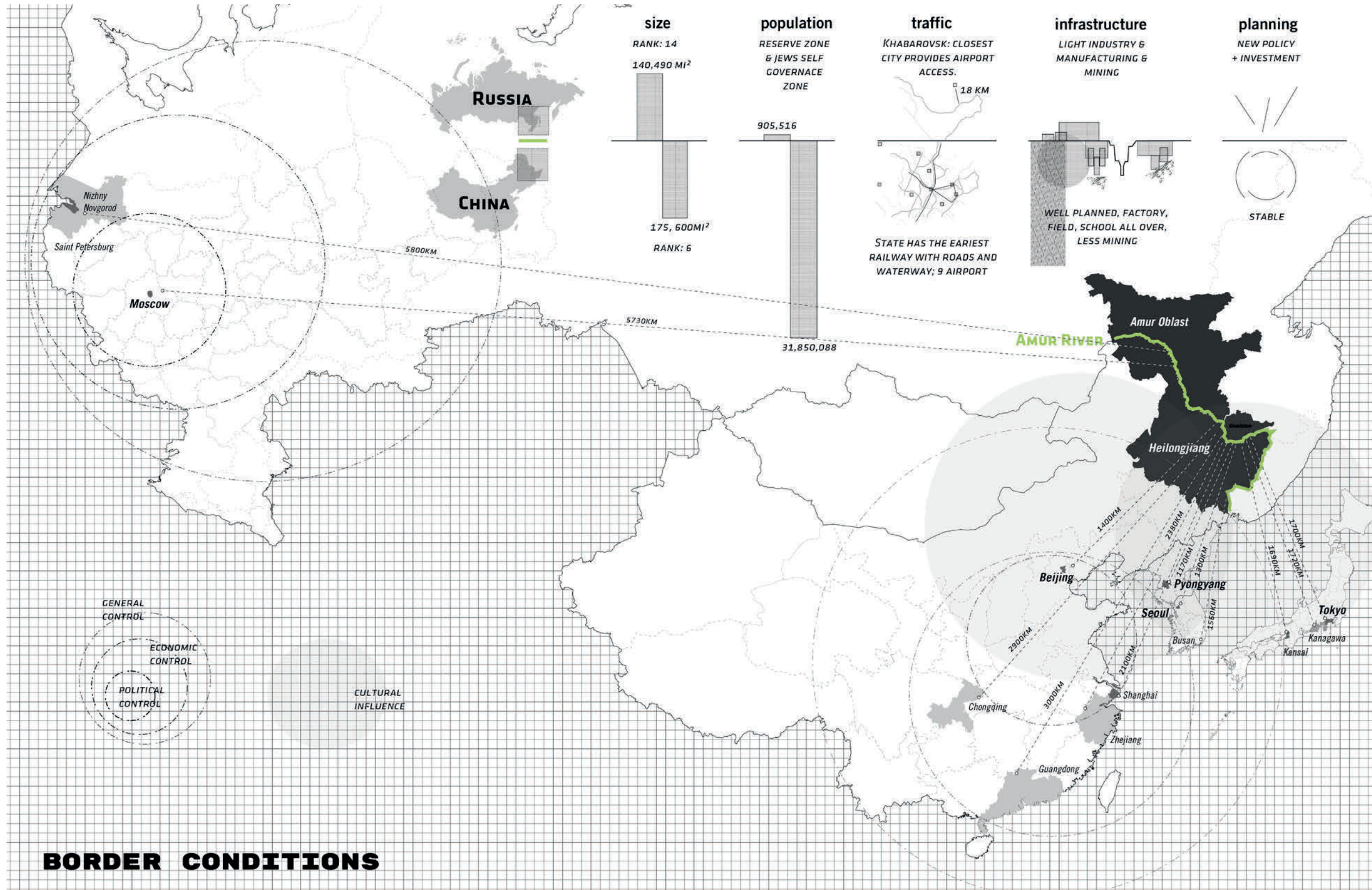
border region. However, when we peel off the pictures from streaming media, what kind of marks does the northeast, once called "the eldest son of the Republic" for its rapid industrial development in the last century, leave on earth? Infrastructure such as collective farms in fields, tree farms in forests, roads and electric towers become devices for the government to exercise control from a distance, and between the network formed by these structures lay scattered villages and towns among untamed wilderness. The project traces the river downstream, investigating specific man-made landscapes in the forms of nomad camp, temporary settlement, village and town, and cities in this borderland far from the state's central power; looking into both the natural landscape and environment, presence of the authority, and the resulting forms of living.

Heilongjiang

or Heilong River, lit. "black dragon river" in Chinese. All names of people and locations in the research, when lacking a general translation, are translated into English based on Mandarin phonetics, followed by Russian or other dialects when applicable.

"The eldest son of the republic"

a term used in Chinese to specifically refer to the general Northeast region which contributed greatly to the industrialization of the PCR since 1949.



how?

The thesis departs from James Scott's theory on ungoverned space, interpreting and analyzing the borderland through which the Heilongjiang flows. Research is conducted on three progressive scales: the Amur River drainage basin, sample settlements, towns, or cities, and specific lifestyles and architectural typologies. The project starts with analyzing large-scale geographical, climatic, and social and political conditions, producing maps and diagrams, then moving on to analyzing the organization and planning of local sites, before finally narrowing down to specific architecture respective to each site, producing architectural drawings and models. Presence of authority, or "governance" in regards of the definition of "ungoverned space," is evaluated in terms of existing state institutions, compliance to laws, alternative source of authority such as tribal leaders, physical infrastructures, control over borders, the monopoly and use of force, and language. Morphing of the landscape is analyzed by three aspects, the actions taken and tools used to make marks on the land and the traces left by such actions. Pieces of architecture are analyzed in terms of material, tectonics, function and symbolic meaning.



When approaching a very specific topic from the perspective of an "outsider," we are inevitably influenced by our backgrounds, values, and biases, resulting in a displacement of viewpoints (between us as researchers and the people who experience that life subject to this research.) Hence, our project does not seek to make any assertions, but aims to produce an observation, a collection of information on contemporary forms of living and the resulting architecture through

an interdisciplinary study of "ungoverned spaces," and use it as a basis to create new ways of graphic representation. We hope that the thesis could shed light on marginalized territories and populations, serving as a useful source for scholars who are interested in the borderland between China and Russia, architecture in ungoverned spaces, and the diversity of manmade landscapes beside the metropolis. ■

Songhua River

James Palmer. 2016.

Songhua River converges with the Heilongjiang at Sanjiang Plain.

"A woman wears a facemask and holds a fishing net while standing knee-deep in the Songhua River in Harbin. A tributary of the Amur (Heilongjiang), the Songhua is another point of connection between the two countries. An explosion at a Chinese chemical plant in November 2005 spilled 100 tonnes of nitrobenzene into the Songhua—a spill local officials were unable to conceal when it became clear the pollutants would quickly drain across the border into Russia."

PART I. / FRAMEWORK

01 Diaspora Creates the Ghost
02 The Body of Water
03 Language, Dialect, Text, Maps
04 Producing Image

01. /

Diaspora Creates the Ghost

[ximeng luo]



Heilongjiang estuary

Shan, Zhiqiang and Wang, Jixin.
"Heilongjiang: a River of Regret
Flows to the Sea." In *Chinese
National Geography*, October
2008.

The Heilongjiang estuary near
Nikolayevsk-on-Amur. The
howling water calms down and
blends into the Tatar Strait.



Scott, James C.

**“Distance-demolishing technologies—railroads,
all-weather roads, telephone, telegraph,
Airpower, helicopters, information technology...”**

*The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast
Asia.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009.

Imagine tracing the Heilongjiang from its source in the Greater Khingan Range in some kind of moving vehicle. Like many other rivers on earth, the sectional profile of the Heilongjiang starts from a drastic fluctuation which marks the mountains, gradually smoothing down to an elegantly descending curve, representing the floodplain. If we have a “map” that records the scenes captured by a quickly moving pan-view vision at eye level, we would have a collage of different scenes by the time we get to the river delta in Russia. Industrial technology found its roots in the flat, frictionless river plain and encroaches on the surrounding environment, spreading to conquer the once wilder northeast Asia.

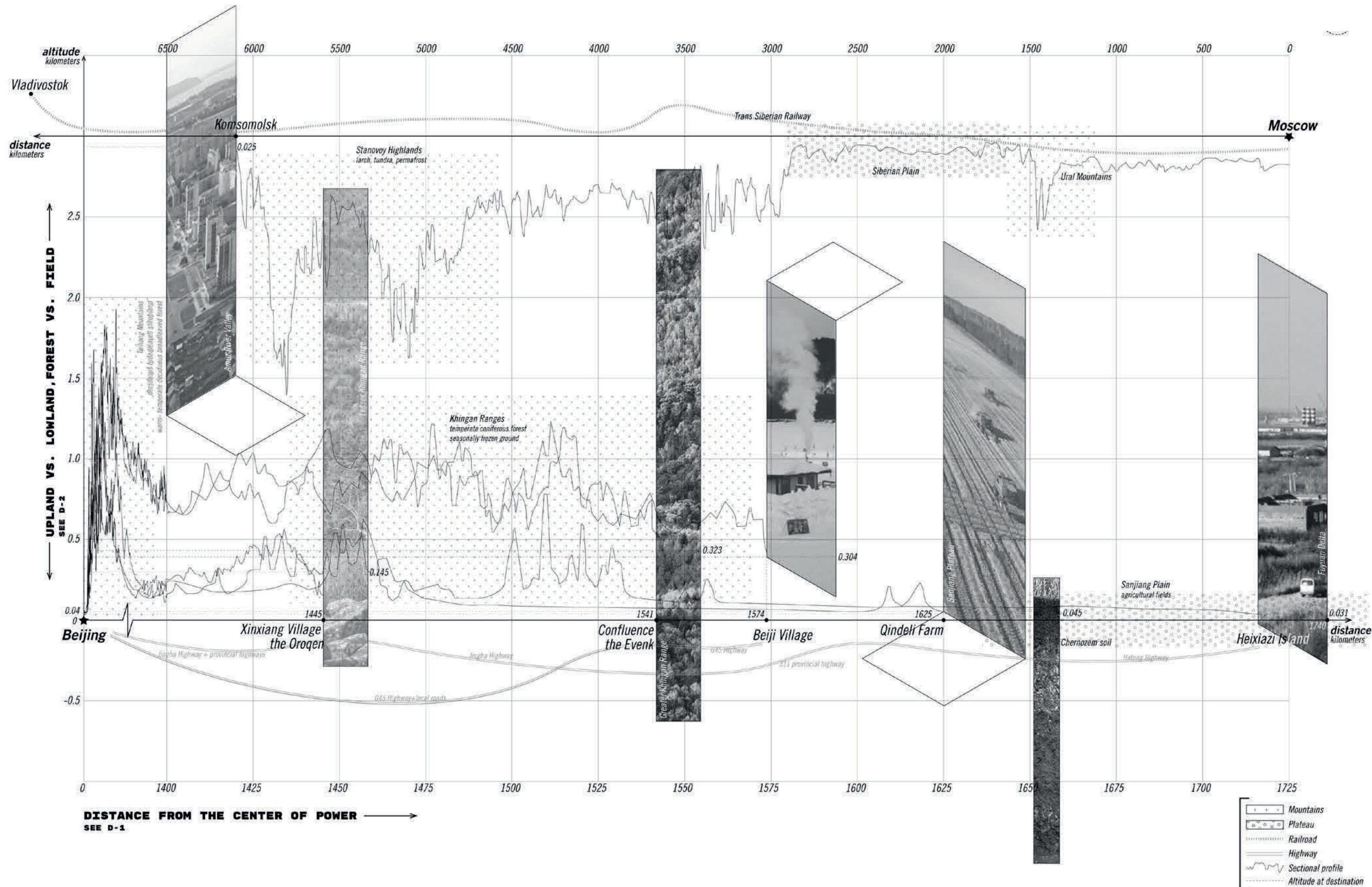
Scenes would flash like a powerpoint slide, jumping from forest and mobile tents to small villages, farms, then to highways and cities.

Civilizations often began from flat and fertile grounds. mountains and hinterlands are like two complimenting pieces of the same puzzle, articulating opposing ends; for anthropologist James Scott, it is the “**state people**” versus the “**stateless people,**” and for geographer Yi-Fu Tuan, it is “**fearless societies**” versus societies that are familiar with fear. The mountains are understood first as physical geographical barriers that define hinterlands, bearing characteristics different from valleys and other flat areas, then as a geographical agent that is somewhat symbolically interpreted by the states, as the B-side of their very own flat-land narrative. Scott defines the state as “**the concentration of as much arable land and as many people to work it as possible within the smallest radius,**” indicating geography and natural conditions as the root for civilizations. The role of the mountain as a geographical barrier is a result of its inaccessibility, aridity, and consequent inability to hold populations; hinterlands, on the contrary, are characterized by their relatively convenient transportation, fertile lowland soils and the tendency for populations to gather and settle down.

Scott, James C.
2009.

Tuan, Yi-Fu.
Landscapes of Fear. Minneapolis,
MN: University of Minnesota
Press, 1980.

Scott, James C.
*Against the Grain: A Deep
History of the Earliest States.*
New Haven, CT: Yale University
Press, 2017.



Scott, James C.
2017.

Difference in accessibility is the most direct outcome of contrasting geographical conditions. Hinterlands are accessible while mountains are not. Scott argues that the flatness of land reduces friction, that calm, navigable waterways, along with routes that humans and animals can easily trek, is advantageous to the concentration of populations and eventually to state making. Ancient civilizations in Mesopotamia achieved “remotely self-sufficient economies” because of its access to water. The early sedentary community of the Yellow River drainage basin in China also benefited from the convenience in transportation offered by the lower reaches of the river. Mountains, on the other hand, are often rocky and dangerous, difficult even to pass through, let alone fostering concentrated settlements. Thus, they assisted states in maintaining and growing populations in the lowlands, creating societies that are “caged” in the control of the state. These caged societies often maintain a close relationship to its authority’s center of power, directly subject to its or its sub-agencies’ surveillance. The border area of northeast China, however, geographically and politically distant from the authority,

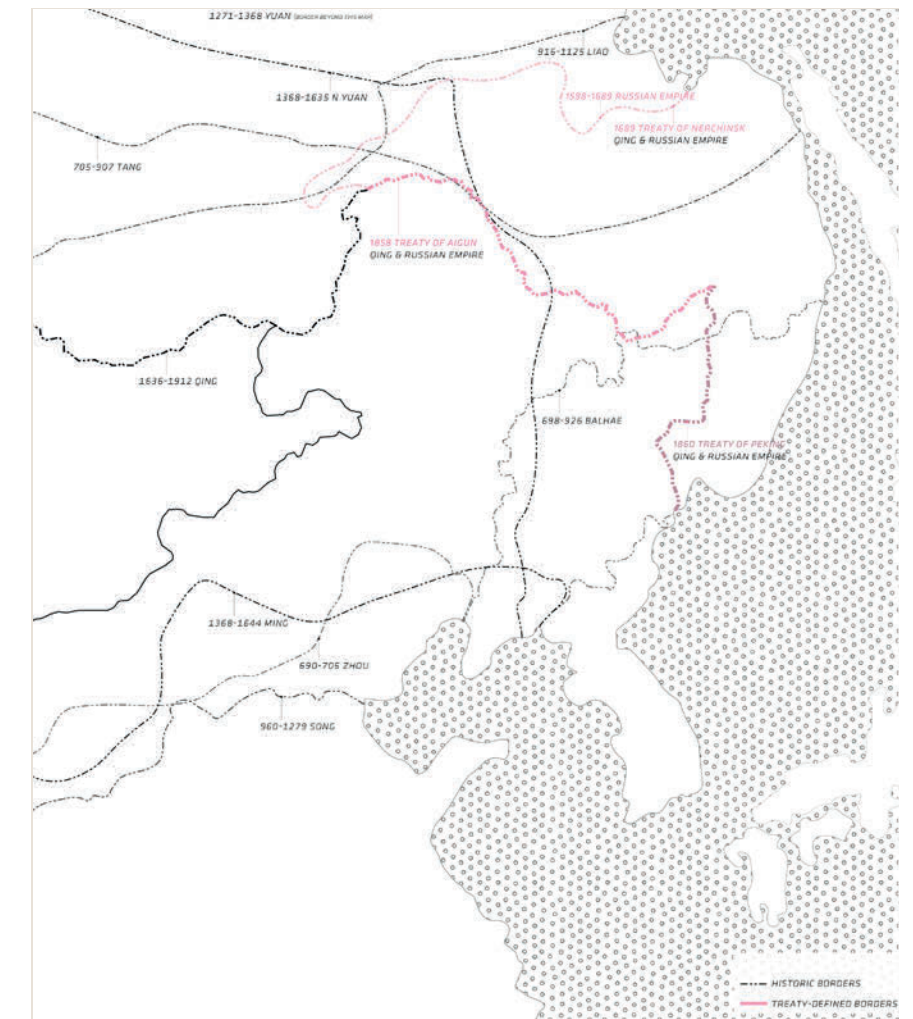
is in a default status of diaspora, with most of its current inhabitants a result of large-scale immigration from the central and southern part of the country since the early 1900s under the central government’s strategic tactic to develop the peripheral regions.

Distance from the center of power reduced the visibility of the border region for the authority, resulting in difficulties in exercising control, specifically in the following terms. First comes the difficulty in access, with no efficient way of transportation in the modern sense. Soil and vegetation conditions in the region determine whether an area is suitable for agriculture or not, and if not alternative means of subsistence must be considered. Though the flood plain of the Heilongjiang provides an ideal geographical condition for agriculture, the long and cold winter hinders the formation of stable, sedentary communities before the mass migration movement. On top of the above, without efficient industrial infrastructure, the state cannot establish valid law systems and institutions, leading to a piece of land, though claimed under an authority, but to

Mann, Michael.
The Sources of Social Power,
vol.1. Cambridge: Cambridge
University Press, 1986.

The Changing Border over time

Determined by texts and maps in
China’s dynastical archives.
Thick pink dashed line marks
the modern border along the
Heilongjiang - set by the Treaty of
Aigun.



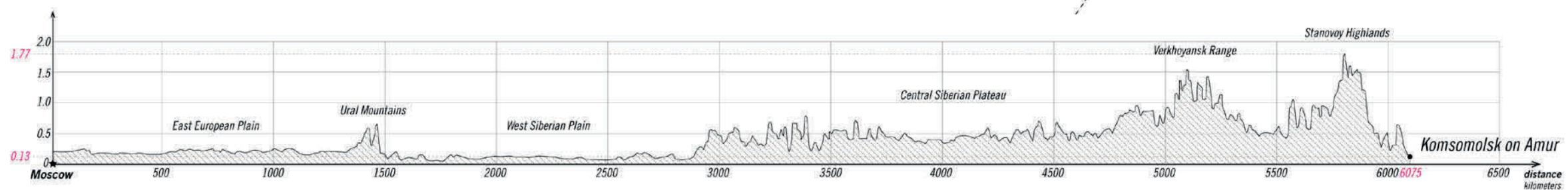
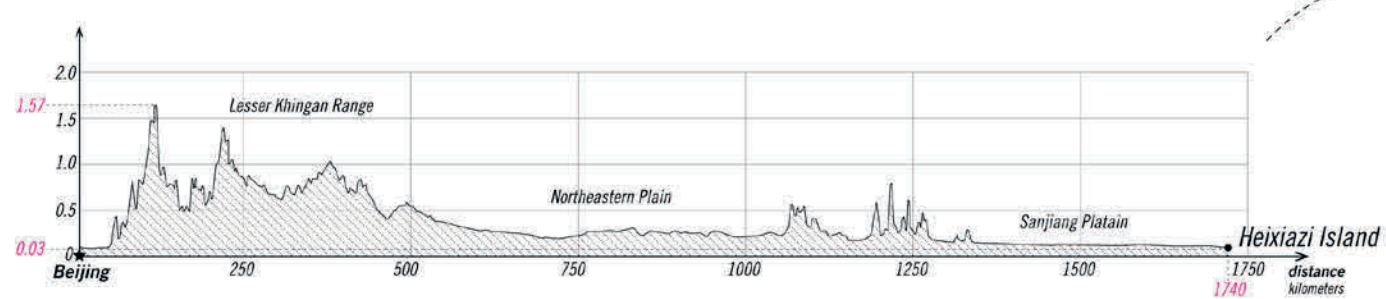
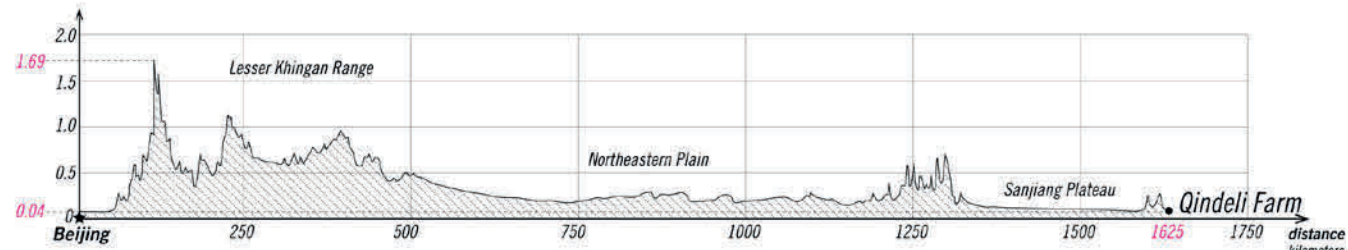
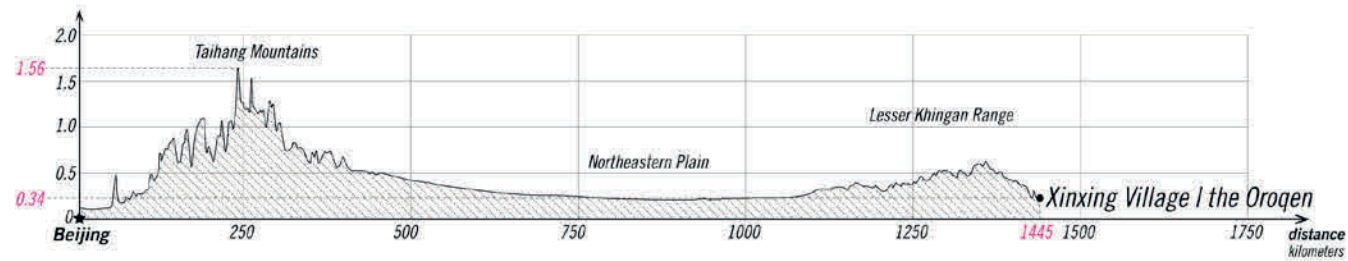
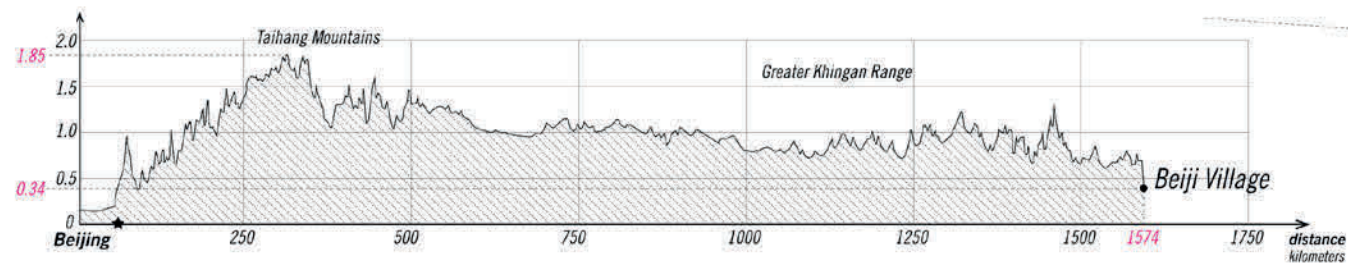
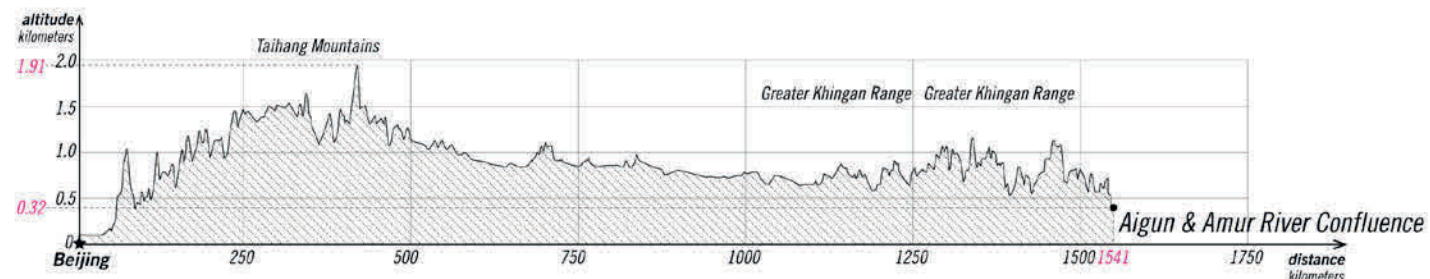
some extent ungoverned. The Heilongjiang, with its upstream in the forests of the Greater Khing’an Range, and despite the increasing state presence which probably brought more difficulty than convenience to the locals who would prefer to maintain their previous life, still provides shelter for some tribal societies.

The Heilongjiang runs through geographical episodes, the wilderness, the transformation (from wilderness to regulated land), the transformed manmade environment, and connects them like a thread. In the process of transformation, or “state-making,” modern technology continues to transform the landscape and creates an overlay of new relationships on top of the old one. Industrialization has created a new kind of human being—the proletariat—one that doesn’t rely on the land and their hands to sustain, but depend on an indirect relationship with the land through the mediation of economy. The new status of the space and people is then articulated through documents, maps, and infrastructure. Since humans transform the external world while themselves adapting to it, “the group’s image of its external

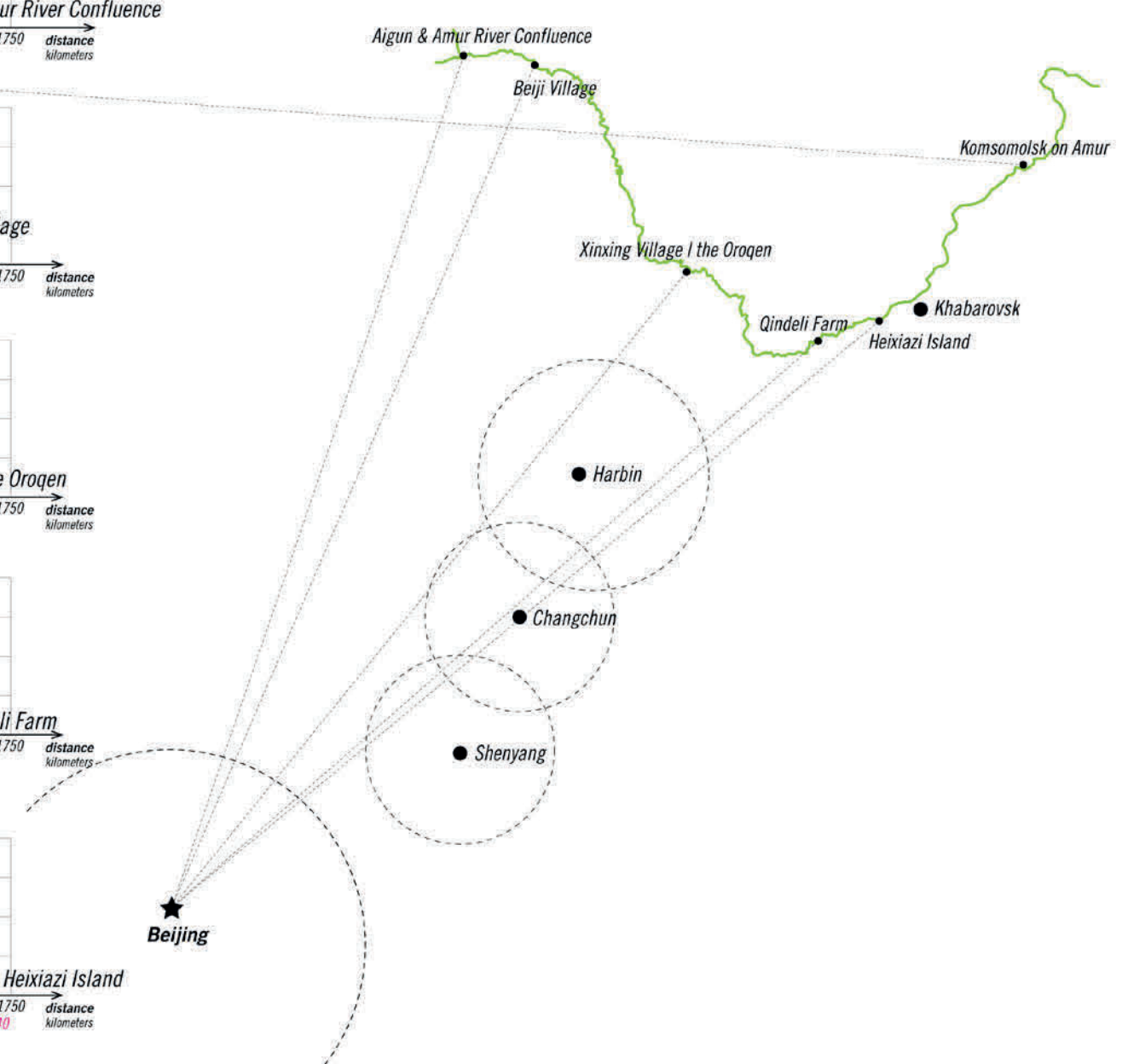
milieu and its stable relationships with this environment become paramount in the idea it forms of itself, permeating every element of its consciousness, moderating and governing its evolution.” The objects and details of a space has specific meanings among members of the group, “for each portion of its spaces corresponds to various and different aspects of the structure and life of their society, at least of what is most stable in it.” When being separated from its familiar context, the collective is detached from its established identity.

Halbwachs, Maurice.
*“Space and the Collective
Memory, 1925.” In Memory.*
Farr, Ian, ed. Documents of
Contemporary Art Series.
London and Cambridge, MA:
Whitechapel and the MIT Press,
2012.

Halbwachs, Maurice.
2012.



D-1 DISTANCE FROM THE CENTER OF POWER





Ewenki with reindeers
Visual Group China.

downhill

Chronicle of the Communist Party in the Oroqen Autonomous State.
Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region:
Inner Mongolia Cultural Press, 2003.
《中共鄂伦春自治旗党史大事记》,
内蒙古文化出版社, 2003.

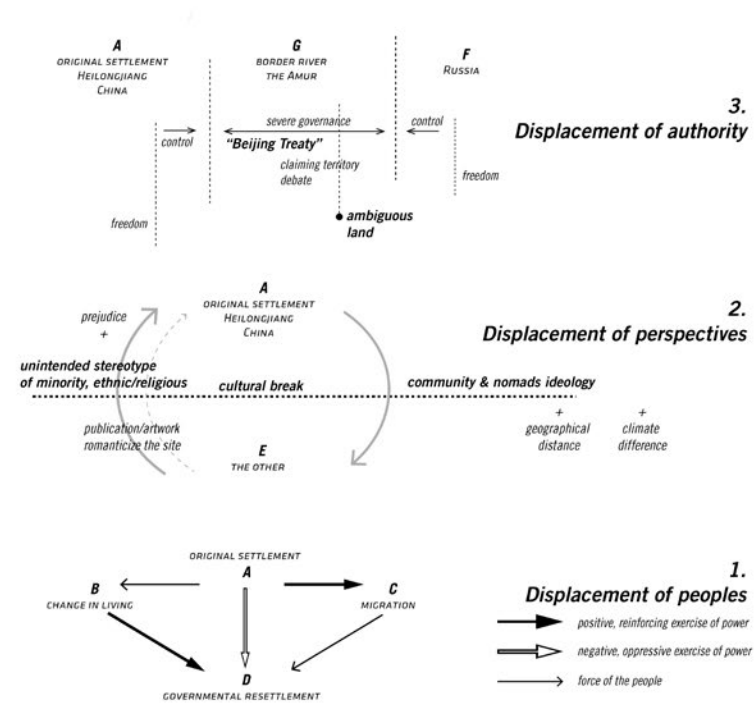
The government of the Oroqen Autonomous State organized the Downhill Movement of its people, in the hope of adapting the tribal people into a “modern” living environment. The government constructed one to two story dwellings and relocated the people from their tents in the forest to newly formed villages at the foot of the mountain. Through mobilization meetings, many of the Oroqens volunteered to leave the mountains.

hunter station

The difficulty in mobilizing and relocating the Ewenki was far more as compared to that with the Oroqens. Many of the Ewenki refused to abandon their previous lifestyle. Not to force the relocation yet to keep track of the tribal Ewenki, the government set up “hunter stations” in the mountains for camping, under the supervision of various sub-branch forestry bureaus.

Diaspora derives from the gap between the old and new relationships, between the people’s memories and the written history. The Oroqens, a tribal people who hover the mountains for centuries, were brought **downhill** to live in settlement villages. The Ewenki, a tribal people who refused to leave the forest, were also provided with newly constructed **hunter stations**, camouflaged to appear as if they were not new installments introduced by the government. The places and events in the mountains that they remembered through words of mouth are re-marked on new maps, if not completely erased from the neat and scientific account. Further down in the flood plains where the great reclamation area of Northeast China lies, as the leftist enthusiasm for a communal society dies down, the past of the collective farms were torn off from the landscape like propaganda posters from the walls. The memory of the people went astray amidst the confusion of diaspora.

Going from indigenous societies without written language like the Ewenki and the Oroqen, to a society with written accounts, memory becomes replaced by history. The individual’s memory of



spaces continue to fill in the blanks left by the general descriptions of an official history; they remain as a type of private history, a collection of imprinted images of events and spaces. An individual’s sense of belonging to a certain place is often “**not anchored in the place as it is now, but in the memories of the place as it was in the past.**” Indigenous knowledge and local understandings get lost in the supersession of the old understanding

of space by the new that is observably dictated by modern maps. Hence, memory itself becomes a representation of the space being understood and remembered, and it continues to influence people’s perception of reality, like a ghost that haunts the living. While the nation state can easily encroach upon ungoverned spaces and wipe out their past, the people who lived on the land carried their ghosts with them as they proceeded in life.

displacement

May, Vanessa.
“Belonging from Afar: Nostalgia, Time and Memory.” *The Sociological Review* 65, no. 2 (May 1, 2017): 401–15.



Evening in Beiji Village.
from the travel log of Hui, 2020.
A worker welding.

Overtaken by the written and recorded history, the ghost in mind often does not align with the reality, producing a displacement between the indigenous knowledge and the information on modern maps, another layer of mental diaspora besides the physical one.

The official understanding of space is incomplete, and to capture the diaspora, to insert such indigenous knowledge and the lost memories, through drawings and representations, back into the material reality—in the project, individual memories are collected and translated into certain forms of representation and overlaid on top of the scientific map, showing transparency as well as complexity, a new composite representation of spatial relationships and identities. ■

Pickering, M.,
Keightley, E.

*Photography, Music and
Memory: Pieces of the Past
in Everyday Life.* Basingstoke:
Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.

Albert, S.

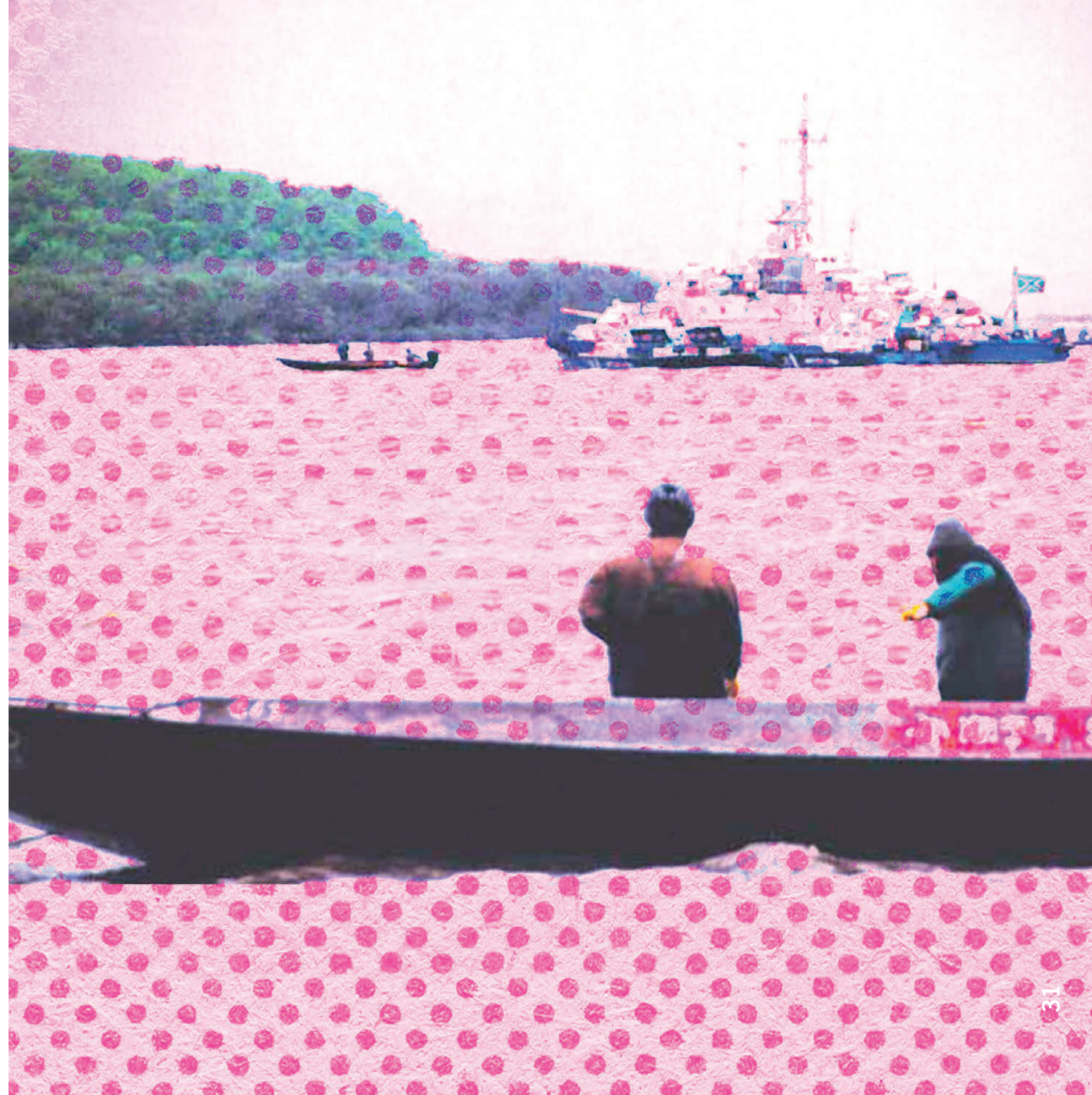
"Temporal Comparison Theory."
Psychological Review, 84(6),
(1977): 485-503.

The past is like a ghost; it appears in society as history, and in the hearts of people as memories. **Humans organize their pasts as memory in ways that are meaningful to others in their shared culture.** Through going back and forth in time, "[one] compares past and present selves, by which [one] construct[s] a culturally appropriate sense of a coherent self." The ghost of memory is a representation of the individual's self-identity, and the elimination of which in today's scientific account of "the past" denies the existence of alternative narratives on a space.

02. /

The Body of Water

[shihui zhu]



Somerville, Margaret

“The human body is the first and the most immediate cultural location of water.”

Water in a Dry Land: Place-Learning through Art and Story. Innovative Ethnography Series. London and New York: Routledge, 2013.

Neimanis, Astrida.

Bodies of Water: Posthuman Feminist Phenomenology. Garrard, Greg and Kerridge, Richard, ed. Environmental Cultures Series. London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017.

Stevens, Philip.

“Interview: Andrés Jaque, chief curator of the shanghai biennale, introduces ‘bodies of water’.” Designboom. June 25, 2020.

“We are the watery world,” cultural theorist Astrida Neimanis claims in her work *Bodies of Water*, which brought our attention to the biological characteristics and implications of water. From elementary school textbooks, we have learned that water has covered the surface of the Earth since its early existence, and that animals evolved from these oceans, step by step set foot on land. In other words, water as the source of life creates everything in the world under the molecular formula H₂O. Architect Andrés Jacques, in describing bodies of water, argues that **“human bodies are interconnected with other bodies, with infrastructures, landscapes and**

environments; through diverse forms of fluidity, breathing, sweating, menstruating, flushing, discharging, ejaculating, feeding, transfusing, decomposing are all bodily features that challenge the notion of the individual bodies as self-confined.” From a single breath to the participation in an ecosystem, humans are so interdependent and interconnected with water. Water as the very basic element of life that runs across land and through blood veins, is often interpreted less in its material sense in today’s discourses, but rather confined to historical, geographic, and environmental topics.

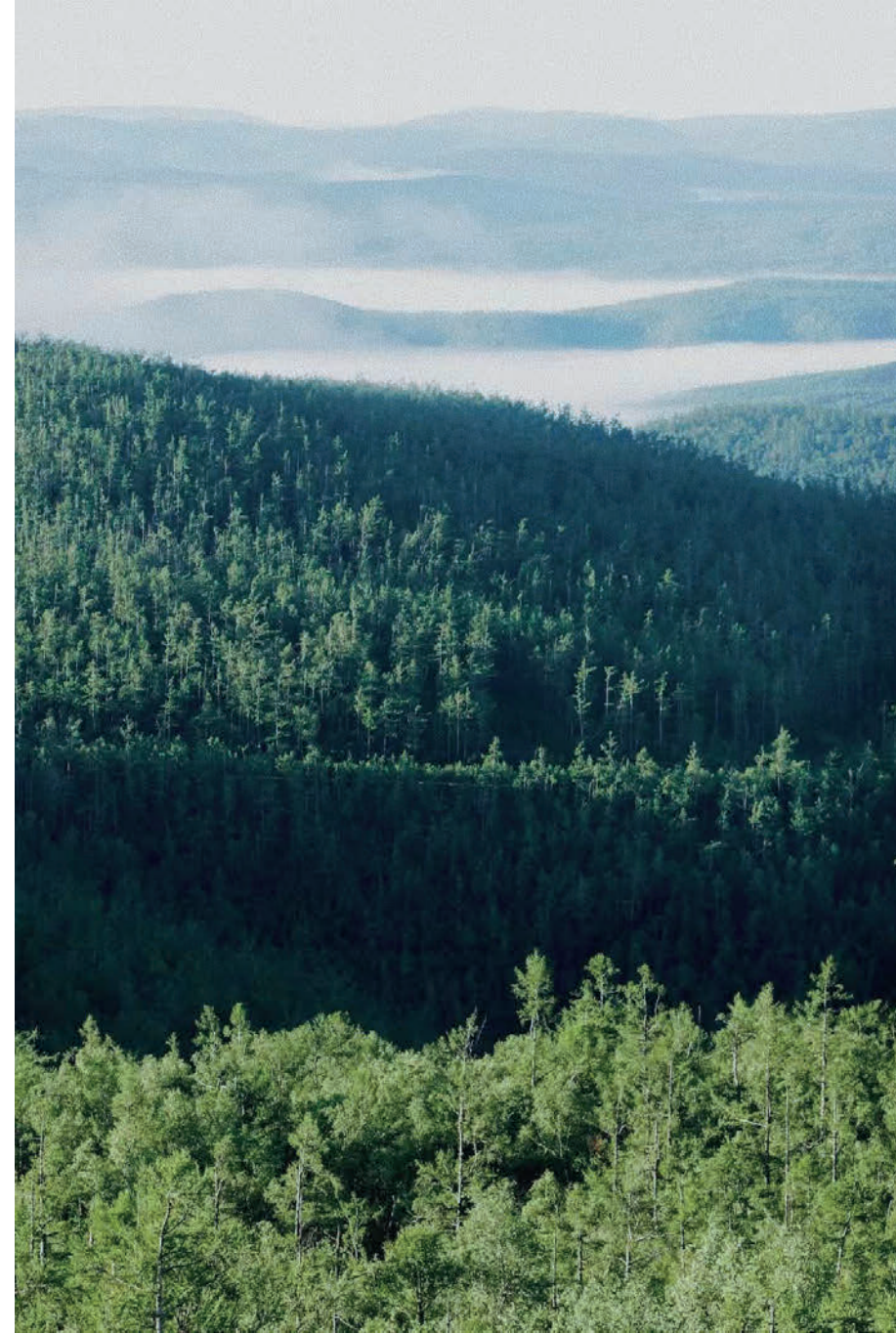
Beyond the physical body, regional characteristics of water are preserved in the geological layers. From dry soils to wet and fertile fields, water changes its surrounding land and consequently, the people. Forms of water vary in oceans, rivers, lakes and ponds, and they create different ecosystems. Bodies of water run through the continents, from the Euphrates and the Tigris in the Mesopotamia, the Nile in Egypt, to the Yellow River in China and the Rhine in Germany, the great river basins gave birth to early human civilizations, and with the flow of water, spread to other parts of the world, eventually weaving the world together as we know today.



Rivers not only change the geological conditions of its surroundings, but also enhance the diversity of ecosystems and allocation of resources on both shores. Fish, algae and other aquatic animals travel with the river, and fruit trees along the river banks spread seeds through water. Communities are fed by the river, using water for drinking, washing, and irrigation. By examining the soil wetness and changing color, the level of minerals and other chemicals, and the contained organisms of the river basin, archaeologists can develop a thorough natural image of the land; sediments capturing the geological movements and human activities along the banks are recorded in the government's documents and maps. The gradual changes from dry to wet soil as one approaches the river slices reveal physical traces of indigenous cultures, even if very scarce. The river grants fluidity and viscosity to the territory, neither entirely liquid nor solid, but like an amphibian that depends simultaneously on water and land, linking the living and non-living parties.

Water also carries cultural contents through its ripples. A city or a town's memory is often tied to the memory of water, let it be natural bodies of water or simply water coming from pipes. The connections between people, between the body and the environment emerge since. The "body of water" we are concerned about in the project, the Heilongjiang, is both a border river between modern China and Russia and a system of local human-water memories, from which different communities build up their respective lives.

The two principal rivers in Eastern Asia, the Yangtze River and the Yellow River, originate from the glacial meltwaters from the Tanggula Mountains and Bayan Har Mountains on the Tibetan Plateau, and together their drainage area cover approximately one-third of modern China's territory. Both run from west to east, nurturing almost all of China's culturally rich cities along their ways, supporting more than half of the country's population. They are known as China's mother rivers.



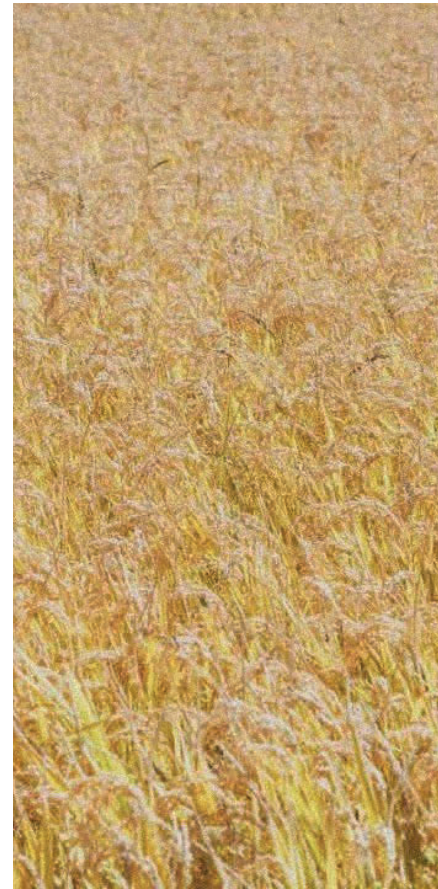
Trees in the Greater Khing'an Range

Visual Group China.

rice on the farm
from the travel log of Hui, 2020.

The Heilongjiang develops a unique identity in the northeast of China through a mixture of indigenous knowledge, local memories, and the implementation of modern technology which aims at introducing a sense of nationhood, especially in places with territorial disputes. The current reshapes the geographical feature and brings a rough vitality to life.

Geographical samples selected for this study echo the human geography of the Heilongjiang's upstream and downstream, from the historical habitat of the Ewenki and Oroqen peoples to the vast reclamation area at Sanjiang Plain, and to the contested Heixiazi Island, or Bolshoy Ussuriysky Island (in Russian) on the national border. As one of the earliest national "barn" and "mine" of China, the drainage basin of the Heilongjiang had once provided a constant supply of food and energy for the development of agriculture, industry, and infrastructure throughout China, accelerating industrial production and the



circulation of populations throughout the country. Though that aspect of the river had gradually died down as the country leapt into industrialization, the Heilongjiang as the divider of China and Russia's water network and political body, continued to carry out its responsibility as the connector between the culture and people on both sides of the river, which is a crucial part of its diversity.



The historical and political upheavals that the Heilongjiang region has experienced in its modern history have created a distinctive landscape centered around a body of water. A specific school of writers and artists rose from the history and culture of the northeast. Since the beginning of the 20th Century, this region has confronted protracted territorial disputes and cultural invasions of Japan and Russia; these social and cultural intruders inspired native authors to create unique works concerning their collective identity. This attempt has resulted in the specific "Heilongjiang experience" of a group of young literary workers, from Xiao Hong and Xiao Jun to Chi Zijian, Shuang Xuetao, and Jia Xingjia; their literature spread with the water, shaping the outside world's understandings and assumptions of the region.

The Hulan River by Xiao Hong and *The Last Quarter of the Moon* by Chi Zijian, along with the other works by authors native to the Chinese Northeast become a series of textual references that link the border sentiments of the Heilongjiang, the characters become derivatives of the river, and the blurred ex-utopia depicted by the mottled texts demonstrates a dream-like quality. The proses by Shuang Xuetao and Jia Xingjia, as representatives of this school, focus on the physical and psychological space of the marginalized peoples in this region. Fragmented history transforms into ghosts of memory in literary narratives that present a wet, fresh reminiscence uniquely linked to the Heilongjiang.

Couple on bikes
Cui, Boqian.
"Shenyang: the Style of a Metropolis." In *Chinese National Geography*, October 2008.
A newly married couple riding their bikes in the 1980s.

The title was an adaptation into English. The original title of the novel would have been translated directly as "the right bank of the Ergune River."

Dong, Liansheng

“Map with places manually marked in Ewenki language of the Shilu Branch” and “Gazetteer in Ewenki language of the Shilu Branch.” In *China’s Last Hunting Tribe*. Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region: Inner Mongolia People’s Publishing House, 2007.

Besides the literary texts, there are also documentary texts such as “Map with places manually marked in Ewenki language of the Shilu Branch” and “Gazetteer in Ewenki language of the Shilu Branch” by Dong Liansheng, which, in collaboration with the indigenous Ewenki people, contribute to an academic catalog, labeling the origins and meanings of more than 300 Ewenki names in the northwest region of the Great Khing’an Range. Unlike the ambiguous place names found commonly in traditional literature, these texts from an indigenous perspective are reproduced in the mouths of the local people, confirming the accurate data on names of places. These documents preserve knowledge that otherwise would have been like “meteors that glides across the sky” and “small right-bank tributaries of the Ergune that are mostly disappeared.”

Chi, Zijian

The Last Quarter of the Moon.
Translated by Bruce Humes.
New York: Penguin Random House, 2013.

The water body of the Heilongjiang is linked to the bodies of local inhabitants. A languid river extends between the people and the land while its natural environment, political significance, and historical ramifications strengthen the intrinsic connection between the local inhabitants’ bodies and the environment. Thus in the project, the Heilongjiang is an assemblage of everything. When the peripheral geographical location and neglect resulted in a less systematic collection of data and conventional cartography cannot fully

depict the symbolism and meaning of this meandering river, we proposed a secondary analysis of the local literature, memoirs, reports, and other human-centered information. Combined with mapping methodology and techniques from ancient and indigenous maps, the project attempts to systematically present the superfluidity of the Heilongjiang. ■



Fuyuan Wetland

Shan, Zhiqiang and Wang, Jixin
“Heilongjiang: a River of Regret
Flows to the Sea.” In *Chinese
National Geography*, October
2008.

Photography.
Fuyuan Wetland is at the heart
of Sanjiang Wetland, a crucial
geographical feature at the
downstream of the Heilongjiang.

03. /

Languages, Dialects, Texts

[shihui zhu]



Sutton, David E. and Wogan, Peter.

“Introduction.” In *Hollywood Blockbusters: The Anthropology of Popular Movies*. London: Verso Books, 2009.

Sutton, David E. and Wogan, Peter.

2009.

Villeneuve, Denis

Arrival. 2016. Hollywood, CA: Paramount Pictures.

Villeneuve, Denis

2016.

Civilizations are born alongside their languages. Improved language led to efficiency in communication, and eventually to the development of more complex social relationships. *Our perception of the external world is constructed in relation to our spoken and written language.* The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis of linguistic relativity, proposed by Sapir and further developed by Whorf, explained the idea more descriptively. The anthropologists claim that the particular language one speaks influences how one thinks about reality; the structure of the sentence, grammar, and indication between the word’s female and male tense could affect the speaker’s understanding of the world. Linguistic relativity is related to semiotic-level concerns with the general reference to language and thoughts. *It generates a discourse-level influence on how patterns of language used in cultural context can affect thoughts.*

The theory has been dramatically discussed in “The Story of Your Life,” a short science fiction written by Ted Chiang and later adapted into the movie *Arrival*, adapted into a theory proposed by the protagonist, in which she argues that *“language is the cornerstone of civilization.”* In the film, countries are trying to comprehend the language of invading aliens, drastically different from the human language. Human languages are based on linear logic and texts, in which one thing leads to

another in causal relationships, while the alien’s writing is circular with no forward or backward direction, sentences appear as images to be read at once. *“Nonlinear orthography needs the alien to know the whole process before they speak, which eventually allows them to think circularly.”* In other words, this language enables them to understand issues four-dimensionally, in terms of past, present, and future at the same time. The book (film) reaches its climax when the character understands the language and can think circularly like the alien.



Arrival, 2016

film still.

The protagonist, a linguist, standing in front of a circular sentence written by an alien.

Heisserer, Eric and Chiang, Ted

“Language is the foundation of civilization. It is the glue that holds a people together. It is the first weapon drawn in a conflict.”

Villeneuve, Denis, dir. *Arrival*. 2016. Hollywood, CA: Paramount Pictures.

GQ Report

Deep in the Greater Khingan Range, a Oroqen Language Lesson in a WeChat Group.
2021.

In reality, different languages and dialects do not have the same drastic effects as claimed in the romanticized interpretation of the film; yet still, dialects may depict a world different from our standardized worldviews, with distinct thought processes and lives. Dialects are often tightly connected to the repeated daily activities of a people. The Oroqen language used by the tribal Oroqen peoples living in the mountains in the Heilongjiang region was born out of their hunter-gatherer lifestyle. The Oroqen language, especially when it comes to depicting animals, **makes very clear differences between male, female, adult or cub, age, being in mating season or not, to the convenience of hunters.** Words for bear and tiger are viewed as taboos for the traditional Oroqen language, not only due to the local Shaman and Animistic beliefs, but also because these fierce animals were of direct threat to a hunter's life. **The language also has nouns for “respected hunter” and adjectives describing “the wobbly figure of a drunken person riding on a horse.”** With the central government's strategic policy to preserve natural resources and to fully prohibit hunting, the dialect and taboos are just like traditional Shaman clothing that ended up behind the glass in museums,

GQ Report

2021.

exhibiting as cultural heritage; nobody cares about the possible dangers on life when a certain word is being uttered.

In preserving and translating words that belong to a dialect, especially when the specific context of which is gradually vanishing, poses an intricate problem to scholars. Though primary schools in the Oroqen Autonomous Region can incorporate a Oroqen lesson into its curriculum, none of the kids would have the associative memory to understand the meaning behind the words. Translations either focuses too much on the sound and pronunciation, or are burdened with long phrases trying to explain what it means. There are of course terms that cross the cultural and language boundary: the word for “mother” often seems to be mama or has a nasal sound similar to m, like nana. The word for “father” often seems either papa or has a sound similar sound, like b. Shared memory and experience allow humans to create word phrases with similar pronunciations and meanings. The Heilongjiang falls under this category, as its meaning in different settings are all linked to “river with black waters.” However, more frequently found is the differences between dialects

and widely-used official languages. For example, the name of places are often bonded with vital geographical features or cultural implications in dialects, and the meanings of which are very likely to be lost in translation, especially when many translators choose to translate names phonetically.



Ewenki and roe deers.
Visual Group China.

 Statue of Matsu, Macau

ChongMing, 2017.
film still.



The objective world is in fact far more complex as compared to its neat image in maps. Our understanding of everyday social activities turns into the “particular language which has become the medium of expression for our society.” One example of cultural meaning lost in translation is the name 澳门 (Macau). The Chinese name 澳门 (phonetically translated as Ao'men) means “inlet gates,” referring to two gate-like mountains, the Nantai and Beitai. However, with the the English name “Macau,” the reference to geographical features are lost. “Macau” is thought to be derived from the Templo de A-Má (妈阁庙), a still-existing landmark built in 1448, dedicated to the goddess of seafarers and fishermen, Matsu. There is a well-known mythology about how the name came to be: when Portuguese sailors arrived in the region for the first time, they inquired about the name of this region. The miscommunication led the locals to believe they were asking about the name of the temple, and they responded: “妈祖 (Matsu).” The Portuguese subsequently named the peninsula Macau, and the name was spread throughout the world. Similar stories can be found elsewhere in the world. Hence, **interacting with a community and understanding their behaviors isolated from the context, causes and effects, would lead to mistakes and misunderstandings.**

 Sapir, Edward.

Language: An Introduction to the Study of Speech. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co, 1949.

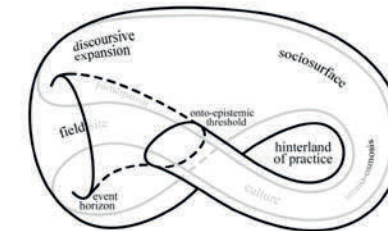
 Sapir, Edward.
1949.



Map of the Jing-Hang Canal

Qing Dynasty. 78.5x1783.6 cm, silk.
Chinese ancient map.
The map portrays the grand canal from Beijing to Hangzhou in a mixture of 2D and 3D graphics and shows geographic information as well as scenic views.

Experimental ethnography: 31 prompts | 实验民族志: 31个提示



1. K-diagram of ethnographic practice.

K-Diagram of Ethnographic Practice

de Seta, Gabriele. "Experimental Ethnography: 31 Prompts." *Grotesque realism, speculative praxiography, postdigital folklore.*

Seeing the language as a tool for determining people's minds and expressing their culture, anthropologist Akhil Gupta assigns the tongue a third-primary role by describing how countries' borders are divided as a result of different languages. Gupta points out that the map is a tool for division, and that different languages that cause less communication or miscommunication is one of the primary supporting sources. After the development of European cartography, modern maps reached a kind of institutional unification, scattering the land under the European gaze, losing the knowledge and perspective of the indigenous peoples. Recognizing conventional mapping as a traditional historical document that solely records facts, the idea of indigenous maps generated by a group of Japanese anthropologists advocates to record a region in correspondence to its cultural background, using maps as the "ethnography type of writing." The methodology aims to preserve at least part

of the information embedded in dialects, portraying the bottom-up understanding of the local civilians on their homeland.

Indigenous maps embrace the changes that happen along language changes; these formats include the different identity of nationality, while the political boundary is no longer the only line that separates the land, religious boundary and self-identity boundary.....all these definitions converge at the borderline and enrich the context of the map. The locally-generated map acknowledges the blurriness generated from the combination of psychological maps, ancient maps, and collages of memory. The contemporary map standardizes language, encourages a more direct comprehension and comparison between regions and eliminates distinctive place-specific identity. Perhaps everyone living on earth would end up in countries with all kinds of culture and simultaneously no culture at all, with the trend of globalization. ■

Gupta, Akhil and Ferguson, James

"Beyond 'Culture': Space, Identity and the Politics of Difference." *Cultural Anthropology*, vol. 7, no. 1 (1992): 6-23.

Winichakul, Thongchai

Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-Body of a Nation. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994.

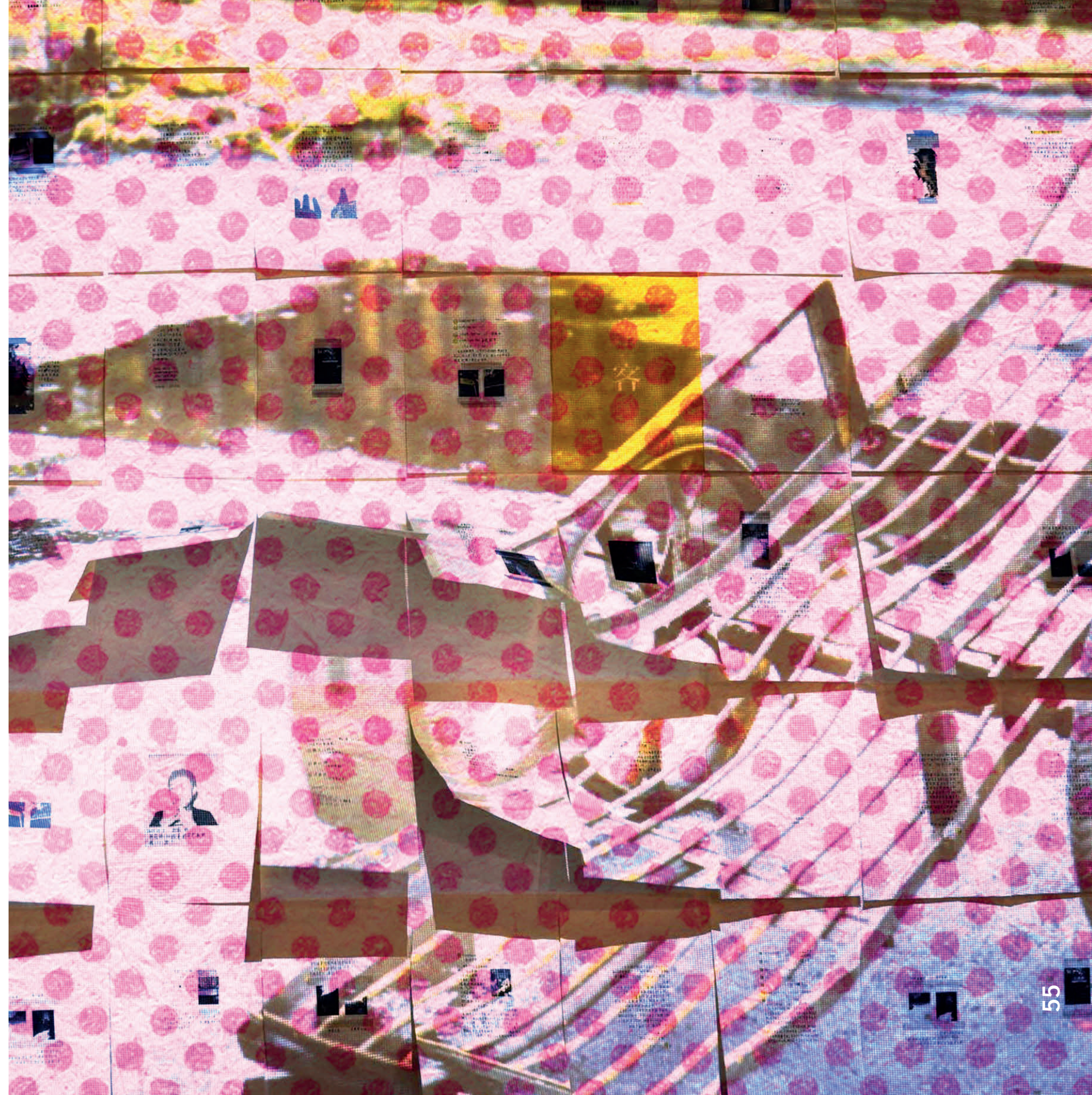
Clifford, James

"Introduction: Partial Truths." In *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography.* James Clifford and George E. Marcus ed. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1986.

04. /

Producing Images

[ximeng lu]



“...we conceive the world via the mediation of a certain conception.”

Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-Body of a Nation. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994.

Winichakul, Thongchai

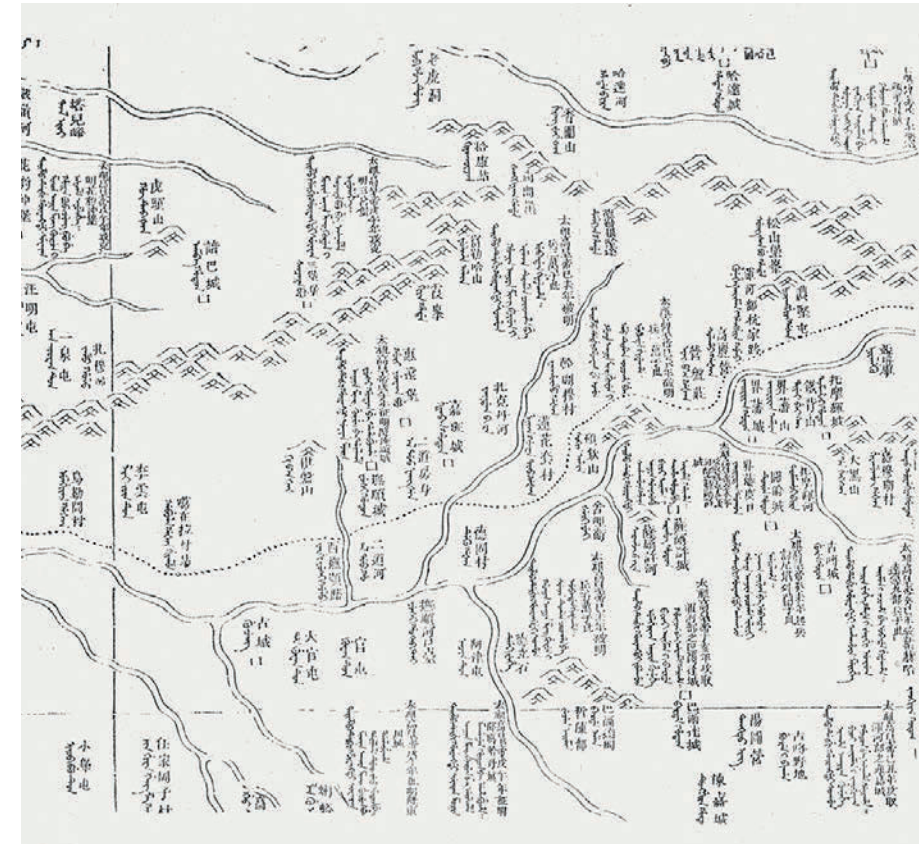
Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-Body of a Nation. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994.

The perception of our surrounding world as a whole, with the developing graphic and communications technologies since the last century, has largely depended on the images and graphs that circulate through different forms of media. Even before the emergence of modern technology, people benefited from information collected and compiled by external parties, let it be other people or institutions. As the scale of the earth grew, it became inadequate to solely rely on personal empirical knowledge in understanding the full complexity of the world. Representation creates narratives—or, interpretations of material reality. Despite some level of abstraction, representations are often built from associations with real-life objects and relationships.

The map as a form of representation does the translation job: it is “a medium between spatial reality and human, of both cartographer and user, to help human beings perceive such space without the need of direct experience.” Maps translate from 3D to 2D, from the producer to the reader, from object to signs. It is a coded language which only those who know the rules can comprehend. A local map drawn by an indigenous person may only be legible to community members who are familiar with their set of signs, while modern, scientific maps share a common set of labels and are available to a much broader audience. The modern map hence becomes a global

language, and due to its ability to “mimic relationship with reality” and to accurately depict territories and their boundaries, it has gained increasing political significance with the development of nation states. The growing accuracy of maps in representing physical space resulted in the increasing political sensitivity in the practice of cartography, especially when it comes to contested areas. The decision of where to put the boundary line is influenced by political strategies and standpoints, and may result in various consequences from different parties.

When we expand the boundary of the map and take a step aside from the scientific version of the map which the contemporary person has become so accustomed with, maps, instead of making an imprint of physical landscapes with invisible, political marks, play a more important role in revealing their creator’s perception of space and spatial relationships. The modern map is heavily impacted by the conceptions of nation states and their consciousness on territory and sovereignty, and is hence devoted to a pre-dedicated determination as of form and style, while ancient maps and indigenous maps emphasize on expressing an understanding of land and objects it contains. They choose to include different sets of data. In the absence of precise data, the latter is informed by religion, folk tales, local knowledge and imagination, and



Ancient map
Qing Dynasty.
combination of river, mountains,
and text in mandarin and
manchu.

the portrayed space may not correspond correctly to the physical earth. Distances between places are often adjusted according to how they are felt by the observer, and the size of certain places may not match the overall scale in the sense of underlining their cultural or religious significance. In ancient Chinese maps, specifically those produced by provincial governments to obtain an understanding of their territories, the size of buildings and temples are almost the same as mountains, clearly standing out to the reader. In addition, instead of using a standardized set of legends, these ancient maps would incorporate a large body of text

embedded between lines that represent rivers, mountains and checkpoints, as a graphic device to add complexity and information to the drawing. They “operate in a certain domain of human affairs and everyday life.” In this sense, spaces are made meaningful by making connections to symbolic objects (institutional buildings and temples) and memories of events. Similarly, in indigenous maps, certain features on the landscape are magnified to show importance, and the position and distance between places are based on loose measurements and experiences.

Winichakul, Thongchai
1994.

Winichakul, Thongchai
1994.



Dong, Liansheng
 “Map with places manually marked in Ewenki language of the Shilu Branch.”

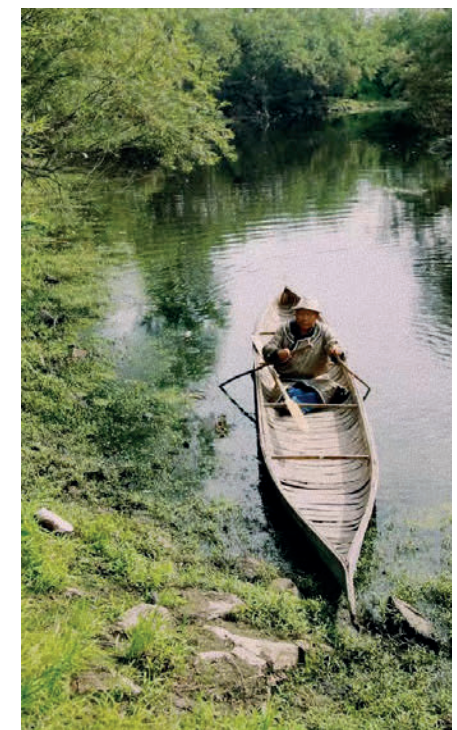
Typing in “indigenous map” in the search bar, most of the returned results are “maps of distribution of indigenous peoples” in different countries or continents on a familiar base map. Finding a map produced from the local perspective takes much longer. In the governmental archives of different ethnic autonomous regions in

China, atlases are all “official” maps produced by either a committee or an institution using general cartographic techniques, making marks on standardized, GIS-generated base maps. Some indigenous information, such as “Map with places manually marked in Ewenki language of the Shilu Branch” by Dong Liansheng, was produced following a similar methodology, only that the person who makes marks belongs to the indigenous group, not a geographer approaching from an “outsider” perspective. Through our research, it was especially hard to obtain maps produced solely by the local people, not even from local cultural museums and ethnic scholar’s archives. This may also be because of indigenous peoples of the Heilongjiang region don’t have written languages. We were able to find traces of how they understand space: in both Ewenki and Oroqen communities, the group leader’s tent is usually the largest, with a piece of public space in front for rituals and gatherings; the river is used as a natural mark on the ground to orient themselves, especially in the summer when they retreat to the mountains to avoid the heat; they use the surface of trees’ stem as paper to leave marks claiming that there are supplies such as fresh bark and timber buried under the trees. The Oroqens also draw on boiled and dried birch bark, mostly scenic pictures, animals, or scenes depicting a certain event, for example hunting or religious

rituals. Knowledge on geography and events passed around through words of mouth, forming a series of “oral maps” that are not necessarily accurate, but enough for the people to identify locations and places. The main task of these cartographic information is to strengthen the community members’ collective spatial understanding, reinforcing the idea that **the leader’s home is larger and hence more prestigious, that the river is the main “road” and activities happen around it, and that the soils in empty lots under trees can often be used as a storage space.** These places and geographical features sew together the daily life of the local people, giving them a sense of familiarity and belonging.

Societies without a written language understands and remembers space through the creation and reinforcement of a collective memory. The natural landscape, as a physical surrounding, **“bears ours and others’ imprint.”** The imprints are easily decipherable by members of the same community, and from which knowledge of space can be extracted. However, literate societies with full capacity to record information in texts and images still, besides documents and standardized drawings, rely heavily on memory and spoken language to retrospect familiar spaces in their cognition. In essence, spatial memories of humans are sensational, complex, sometimes ambivalent and

random, mingling 2D and 3D perspectives. Even with the neat and precise cartographic techniques today, people nonetheless don’t think and perceive in accordance with cartographic methodology, but remain rather subjective—empiricism in this sense preserves irrationalities in life, and the capture and record of which has been a particularly difficult task.



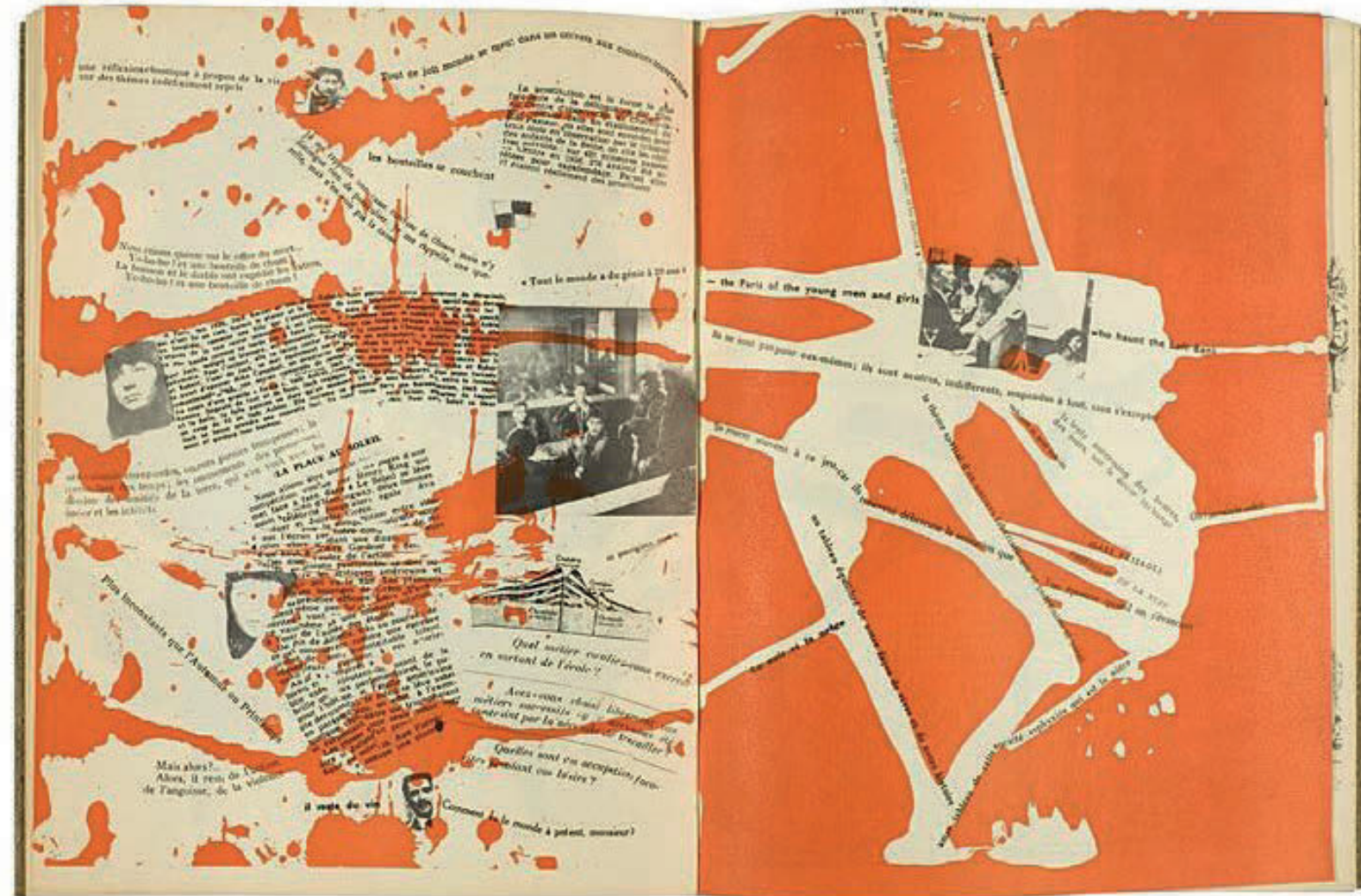
GQ Report
 Deep in the Greater Khingan Range, a Oroqen Language Lesson in a WeChat Group. 2021.

Halbwachs, Maurice.
 “Space and the Collective Memory, 1925.” In *Memory*. Farr, Ian, ed. Documents of Contemporary Art Series. London and Cambridge, MA: Whitechapel and the MIT Press, 2012.

Oroqen birch bark boat
 Dongbei Net.
 The Oroqens travel along the river in traditional birch-bark boats in summers. With hunting being banned, they trace their tribal past through rafting along familiar routes.

McDonough, Tom.
 "Situationist Space." In *Guy Debora and the Situationist International: Texts and Documents*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002.

Expanding on the sensu stricto "indigenous map," our definition of an indigenous map is a drawing coming from a local perspective, based on individual understandings and experiences, in which spaces are linked by events, or occurrences, and their significance and meaning to the individual. Under this conception, a situationist would very likely agree that what we consider as indigenous maps fall under the realm of psychogeography—where "unities of atmosphere" are connected by arrows, marked on the basis of an urban map. Situationists focus on the map as "a figurative narrative rather than as a tool of universal knowledge," turning the map into a device to record emotions and significant moments in daily life. When approaching the concept of indigenous knowledge and its representations in an abstracted state, it becomes a specific method of capturing and expressing a subject's surrounding environment, and jumps out of the platitudinous misconception that indigenous knowledge has temporal restrictions and belongs only to certain pre-modern societies, suffering from the deficiencies that comes from the lack of an adequate scientific system to help interpret the world. Some may still think that indigenous maps are

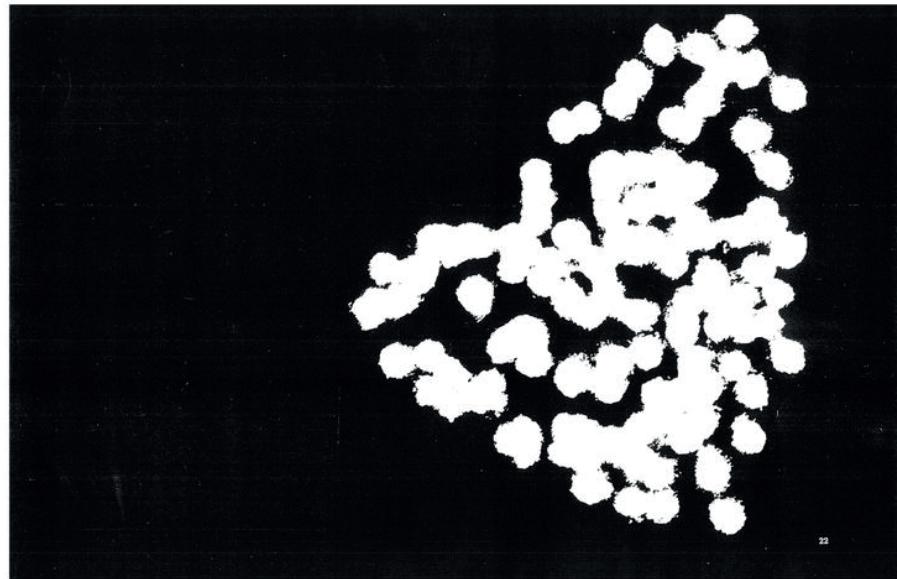


carved in stone or scratched on dried animal skin, crude and simple; yet maps based on indigenous knowledge are not necessarily ancient maps but can be contemporary and relevant. They are alternatives to their scientific counterparts, directing attention to spatial indicators that otherwise would not be included in a map, adding layers of sensational, subjective, ambiguous, and sometimes irrational information to the category.

Situationist Map

Debord, Guy and Jorn, Asger.
Memoires. Copenhagen:
 Situationist Internationale, 1959.

Wood, Denis
 "Street Light Map."
 In *Everything Sings: Maps for a Narrative Atlas*. Los Angeles and New York: Siglio Press, 2010.



In the attempt to represent shared spaces in Boylan Heights neighborhood in North Carolina, artist and cartographer Denis Wood chose to map pools of light casted by streetlights on the ground at night. Without any additional lines, puddles of light that look like splashes of white paint on a black background outlined the streets in the neighborhood. The map presents a human perspective, input being a person's walk at night under the guidance of streetlights, a street-level experience that would easily be ignored in maps. Another example is the "Free Entry" atlas drawn by architect Theo

Deutinger. Departing from the perspective of a citizen of a certain nation state, Deutinger carved out countries that do not allow free entry to this citizen of a specific nationality from the world map, and what is left is the "size of earth" to people from that country. This is a visualization of "access" under modern concepts of sovereignty, diplomatic relations and visa, very specific to each state, for its people automatically forms a collective which shares the same national identity—essential to a modern person's living experience in a globalized world.



Deutinger, Theo
 "Free Entry."
 In *The Handbook of Tyranny*.
 Baden: Lars Müller Publishers,
 2018.

Hu, Wei

*Proposal for Public Assembly/
Encounter, 2018–2019*
Single channel video, black and
white, sound, 16'01"
video stills



The faceless

However, the entire statue was always hidden in the shadow.

Behind the economic play of mass production performance

Mass collective performance were used to aestheticise the mass production

Shifting to a more relevant context, artists and architects from Northeast China had experimented with similar techniques to make sense of their identities in relation to events in history and emotions in memory. Artist Wei Hu created a temporal map through superimposing images from different time periods on People's Square, formerly known as Stalin Square, in Dalian, a port city in northeastern China with a heavy Russian cultural influence.

As a major city in this peripheral region, Dalian shifted from colonial land to a socialist ideology testing ground, then to the paradise of market economy, and the image of People's Square changed accordingly. The installation and removal of a statue of Stalin, collapsed into a few frames of picture, is transformed into a social drama. **The artist used archival photos to piece out a map that narrates the changes of a piece of public space**

through time, incorporating the authority's power in controlling what can be seen by the people and the wobbly collective identity. Hu's practice is also about images, their production, interpretation, and how information is processed when producing such images. The artist implemented a vicarious, de-regionalized approach to depict a familiar space, which corresponds with the production of contemporary images: a miscellaneous, heterogenous status.

A+ Contemporary.
*Elegy: Five Desire-Driven
Mechanisms about Nostalgia—
Hu Wei.* Shanghai, 2019.



Hu, Wei

Public Fountain, (details), 2019
resin, photosensitive resin, steel,
water pump, 180x180x100cm

The contemporary practice of image production is always conducted under a certain conception, creating narratives that fit into certain values. Representation shapes our perception of reality and determines how we approach our physical spaces, and in a way, plays the crucial role of recreating realities for different groups of people. Representation is in a reciprocal relationship with our world's macro-structure (the "envelope" proposed by Latour,) born out of its narrative while reinforcing the narrative through the ability to disseminate it. Images and narratives are often regarded as media between the object being represented and the subject receiving information, while the subject or object producing the images are like ghosts, floating with their biases in images and narratives that pervade life, influencing the receiver's perspective. There is always an input for any representational output, yet the process of transforming that

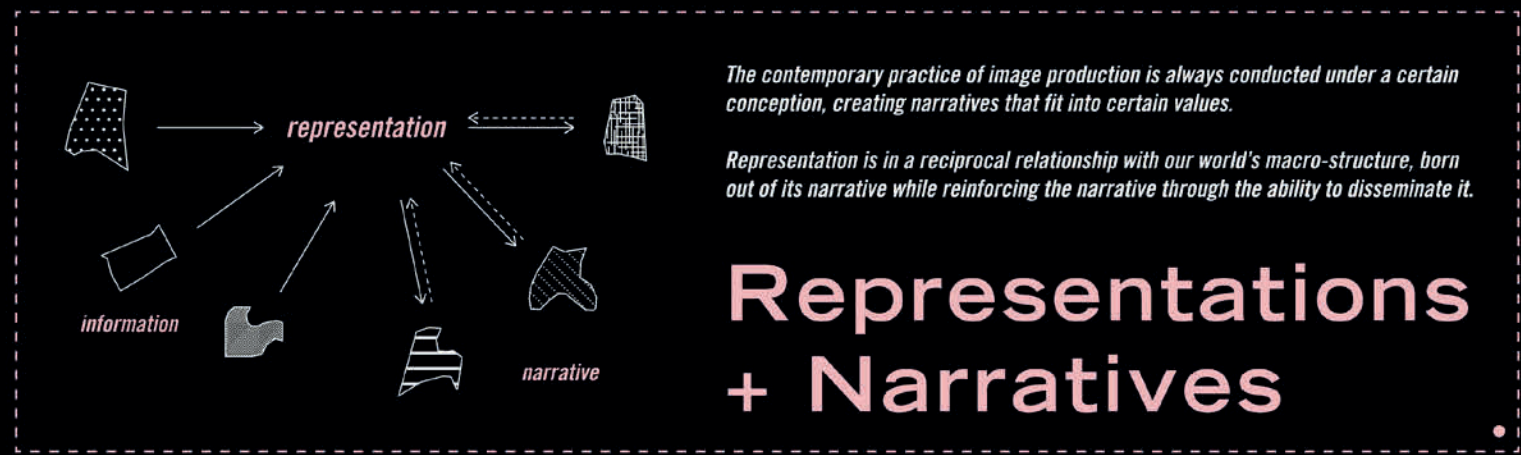
input into something comprehensible and accessible to the public is largely neglected and invisible. In the thesis research, we collected local narratives from interviews, casual conversations in travel logs and local literature, hoping to piece together a rough image of the physical spaces, histories, and memories from an indigenous perspective. We summarized the findings in words and plugged them into an online algorithm that then gave us graphic results of what it thinks should be the resulting image. In analogy, during the process of creating drawings from the indigenous point of view, we as the producers of images—or equivalently the producers of narratives—act just as the AI, masticate the collected data before generating an output through our own algorithm. The process is subjective, impacted by our background, thoughts and thinking process. Yes, we are creating an alternative reality for the local communities through our drawings.

online AI generated images

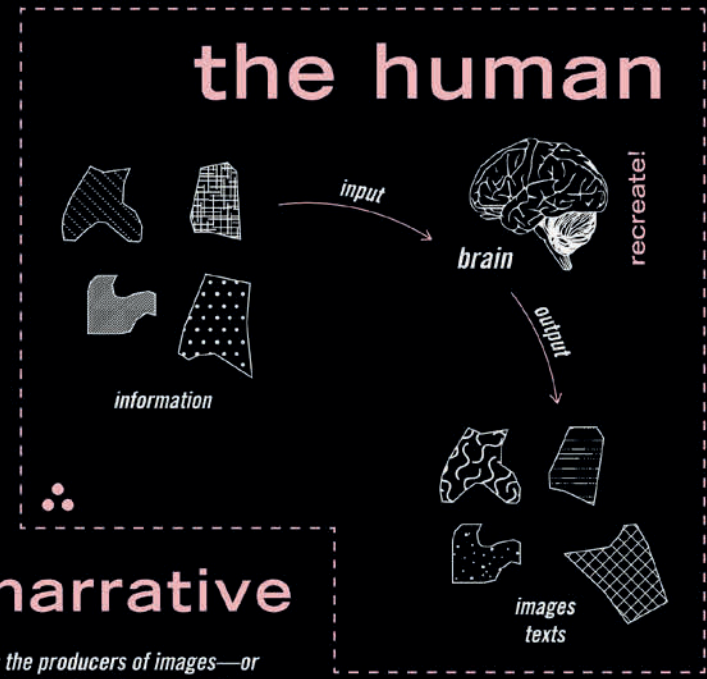
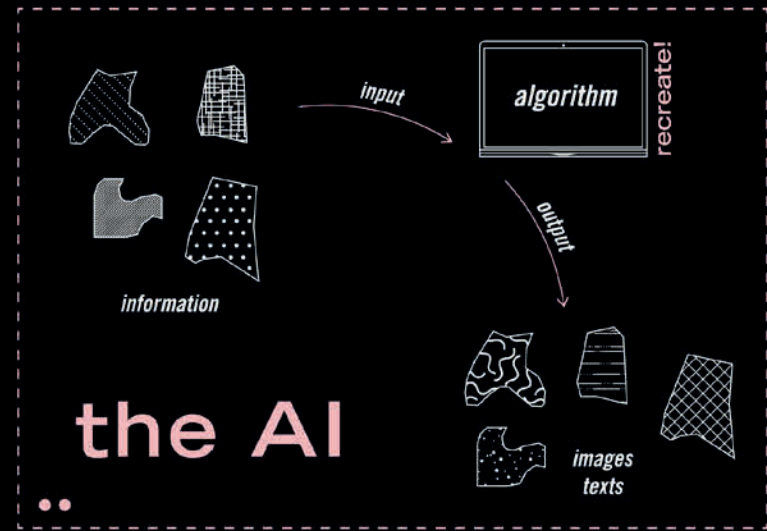
We selected 100 words for each sample sites, and randomly choose some as the input information for an online AI program. The AI processed the texts and generated the following images (right.)



Living in the 21st century is to accept that the intertwining realities and representations of realities are of equal importance in our time. Bear in mind that there is inevitable displacement between the contents presented in this research, the indigenous people's cognition, and the physical reality. Now join us and see through our eyes. ■

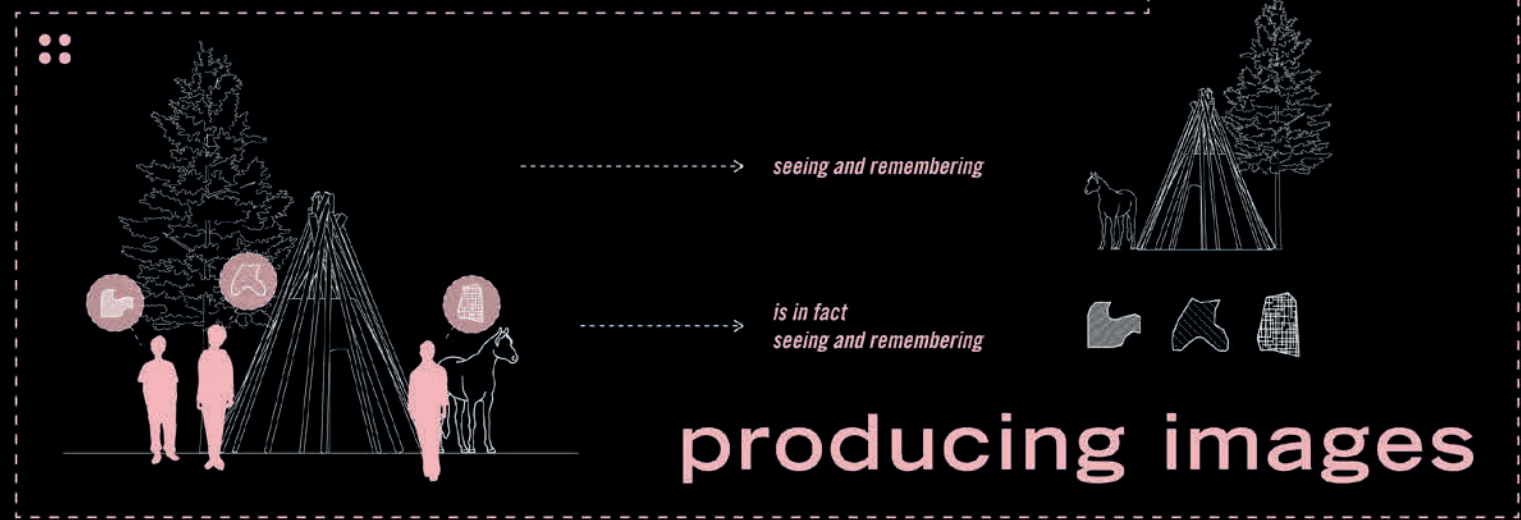


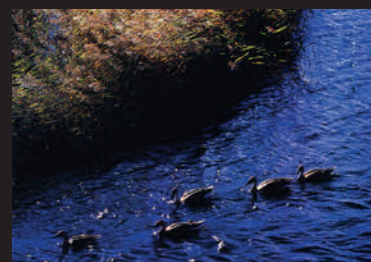
Representations + Narratives



data $\xrightarrow{\text{input}}$ medium $\xrightarrow{\text{output}}$ narrative

In analogy, during the process of creating drawings from the indigenous point of view, we as the producers of images—or equivalently the producers of narratives—act just as the AI, masticate the collected data before generating an output through our own algorithm.





PART II. / SAMPLES

05 Manmade Land
01 Ridge People
02 The North
03 Field of Hope
04 "Border"
05 "Border"



Ridge People



NOMADS

Though tribal people leaving the forest and gathering ashunter's village, they constantly travel back and to live inside the woods

OROQEN AUTONOMOUS BANNER

Oroqen in Inner Mongolia is strictly regulated and has experienced the Great Leap Forward, the People's Commune, and the Cultural Revolution. In 1996, they fully banned hunting to develop husbandry.

DOWNHILL

The government intervened Oroqen original settlements and move them in plain to live inside the "modern" houses



EWENKI

The Ewenki people believe that all things have anims and worship different gods. Ewenki is also the last group of reindeer in China and has multiple stocking points around the settlement.

RESETTLEMENT

This ethnic group are hunting people located in mountain forests around the Ergun River, some of them chose to move out of the mountains to the grasslands & river-valley plains, while some remain in the mountains and forests.

Ewenki

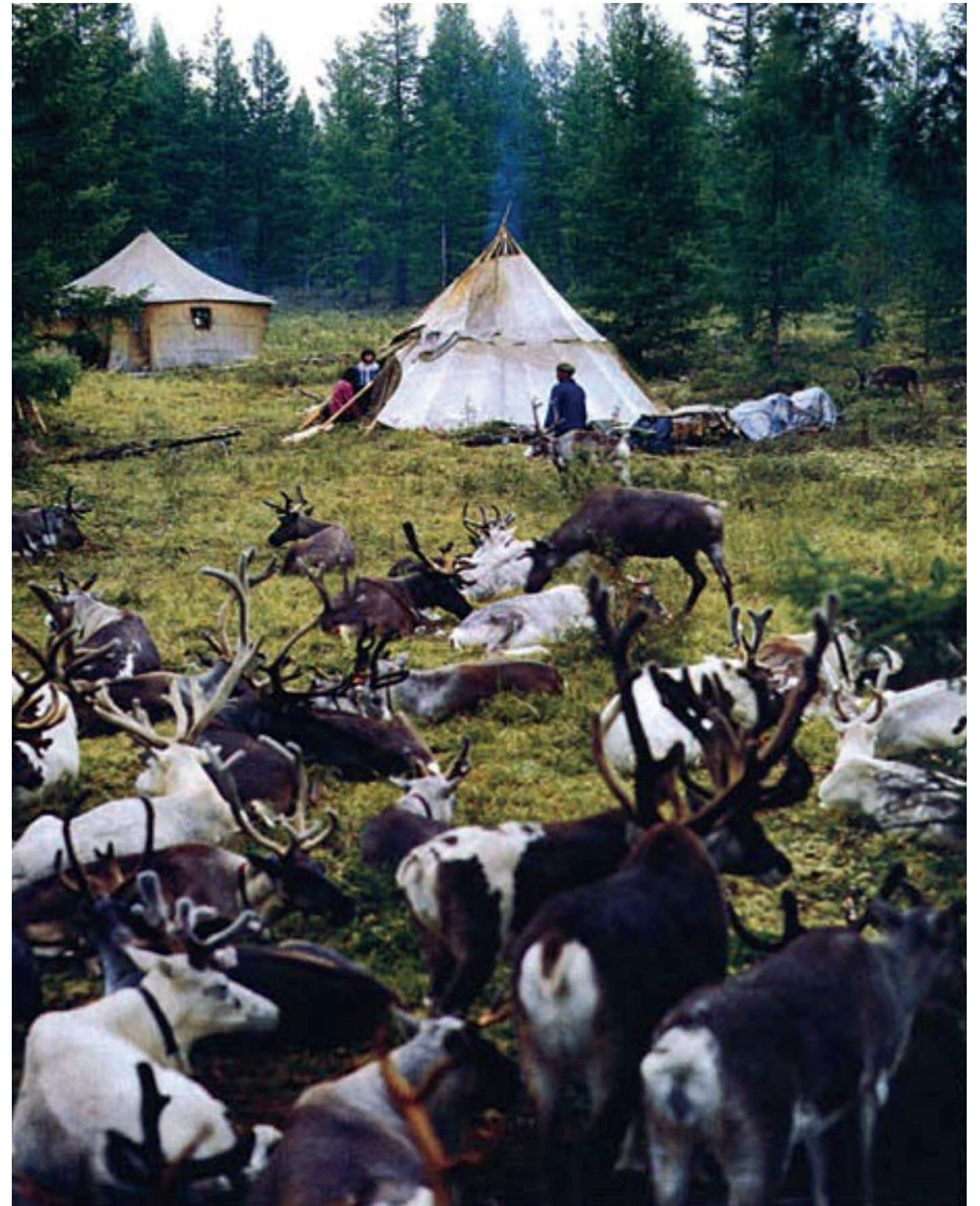
Altaic languages, Tungusic language family
people who live in the mountains, people who live on the southern slope of the mountains, people who come down from the mountains.

Oroqen

Altaic languages, Tungusic language family
people who live in the mountains, people who own reindeers.

the Ewenki and Reindeers

Li, Shan and Du, Dianwen
"The 'Weightless' Days of Three Ethnic Minority Groups." In *Chinese National Geography*, October 2008.
Photography, the mid 1990s.
Reindeers and "cuoluozhi," the traditional tent, are two major features of an Ewenki hunter point.



Ridge People

the Ewenki | the Oroqens./

2000 BCE

The ancestors of the Ewenki/Oroqen people lived on the shores of Inner and Outer Lake Baikal (贝加尔湖)

1640. /

Qing Dynasty

The central government moved the Oroqens, Ewenki, and Daur minorities to the Greater Khing'an Range in response to Tsarist Russian invasion.



Mid-17 Century

Tsarist Russia invaded China's Heilongjiang, and Oroqen fight against

1900. /

Ewenki & Oroqens

People of Jiangdong 64 Tun (江东六十四屯) were rushed to the river and murdered by Russian soldiers



1931

After the "September 18th" Incident, Japan Imperialist Army invaded and occupied Northeastern China.

1931 Jan. /

Oroqens

Japan invaded and occupied the Northeastern China. The area where the Oroqen people lived was ruled under the jurisdiction of the Puppet Manchukuo.

The oroqens were isolated under the regime, and their long-lasting ties with other ethnic groups were cut

1945

End of WWII, the Japanese Empire lose and returned the occupied land to the Chinese government.

The Oroqen Autonomous Banner (鄂伦春族自治旗) was established.



1951. /

Oroqens

The contious ruling of Japan caused younger generation Oroqens be isolated from other chinese ethic group

1953

The Chinese government set up a mission to "Han-ize" (to make them adapt to the mainstream Han lifestyle) the Oroqen culture by studying, publicizing and implementing the General Line of the Party.

With a series of policies, the Chinese government re-introduced the cultural tie back to the Oroqen community.

1958

Ewenki

Ewenki Autonomous Banner was established.

1987. /

Ewenki

With a wild fire in the Greater Khing'an Range, a large number of Ewenki were forced to migrate from mountain to plains.



2003

Chinese government implemented law to ban private possession of guns

2013

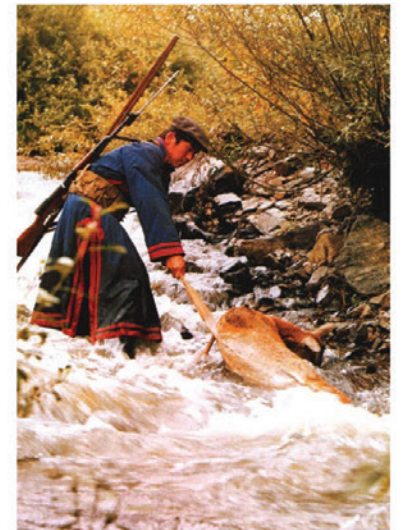
Oroqen

All the traditional Oroqen villages migrate to the modern village

2017. /

Ewenki

The Aoluguya Scenic Management Committee (敖鲁古雅景区管委会) was established to promote tourism in Ewenki villages. Residents set up onsite/online stores to sell deer products and ethnic specialties. Government also promoted new industry in the autonomous region to combine "culture + history" to attract more visitors



山岭上的人
鄂温克人和鄂伦春人

Let's start from the origins of the Heilongjiang—the Ergun River. The body of water originates from the west side of the Greater Khing'an Range, runs east as it collects the winding inland streams, finally converges with the Shika River and forms the Heilongjiang that flows toward the Pacific Ocean. During the Qing Dynasty, the Ergun was recognized as the imperial border by both sides. With the signing of the Treaty of Nibuchu by both countries in the 1660s, the Ergun became the earliest national border of modern China, meanwhile becoming one of the first rivers to obtain a political significance on top of its geographic feature. Besides the powerful political symbolism, the Ergun River also has a unique ethnic trait. Tribal peoples that wander the forests of the Greater Khing'an Range relied extensively on the river, notably the Ewenki and Oroqen people, who live in the upper reaches of the Ergun since the Qing Dynasty.

Unlike many recorded ethnic minority groups in China, the Ewenki and the Oroqen who lived in this region have strived to preserve their nomadic characteristics even in contemporary society. As they migrate according to seasonal changes between the mountains and the plains, they build up a specific culture of food, clothing, housing, and transportation, often determined by the most commonly available animals and plants in the region. The people wear clothes made from animal skin, eat half-cooked or salted raw meat, dwell in a lightweight umbrella-like tent, the "Xielengzhu," to facilitate hunting, and transport mainly on foot, with the reindeers carrying the old and weak, etc. This unique way of living, translated into a shared cultural bond, enables the people to form a local consciousness of the land and environment.

Speculative Map

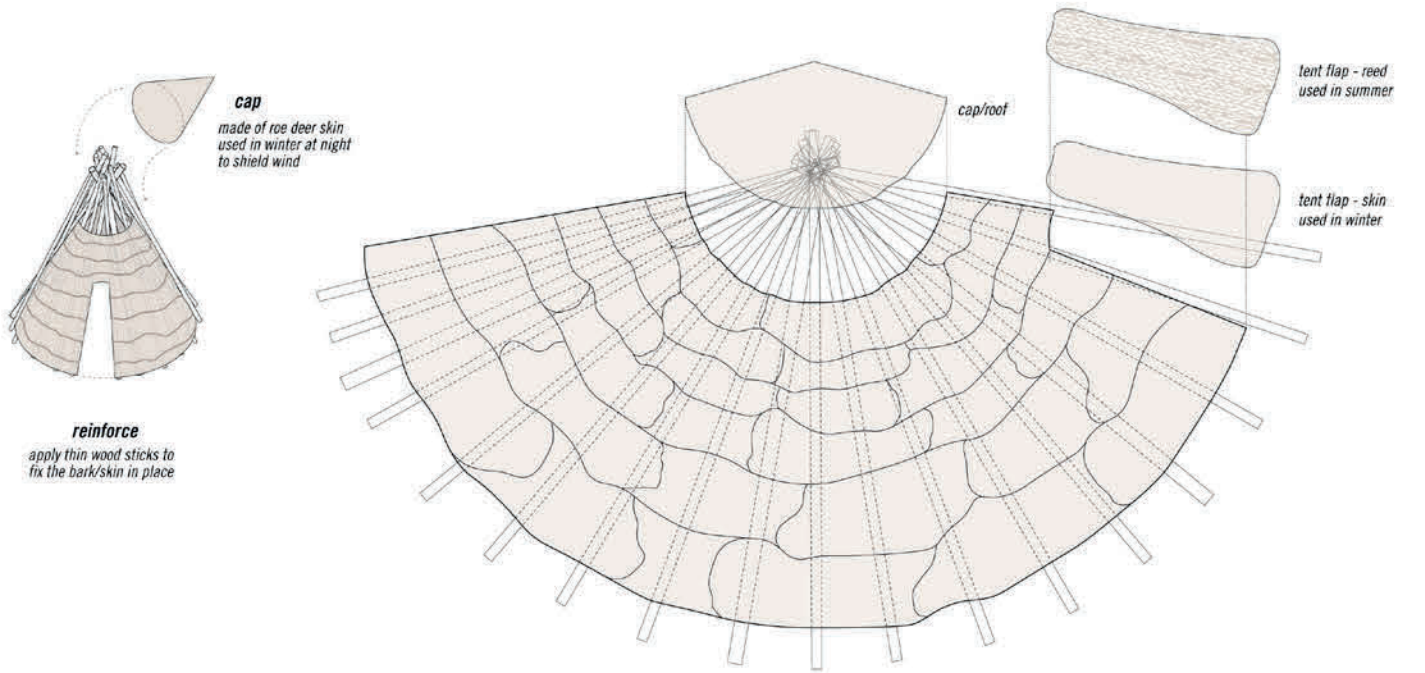
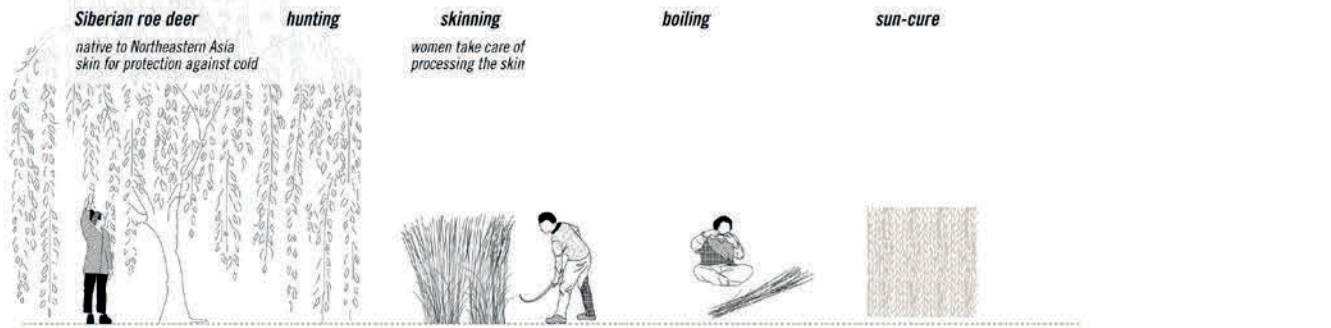
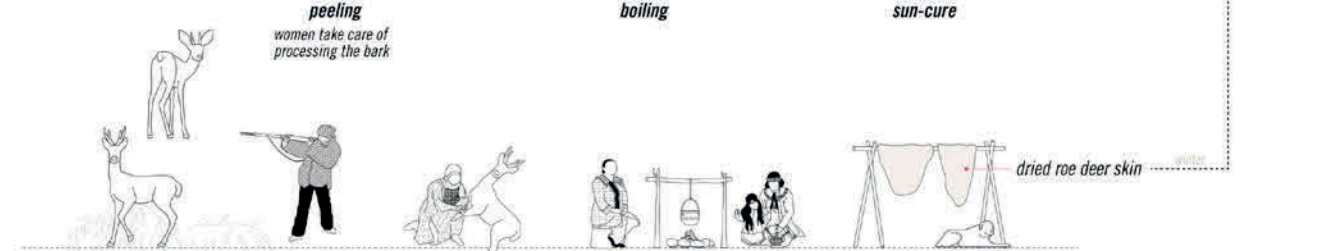
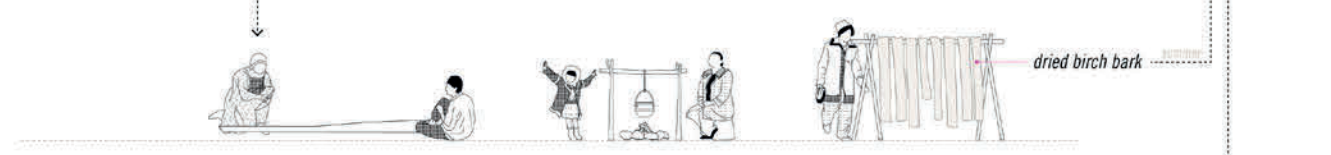
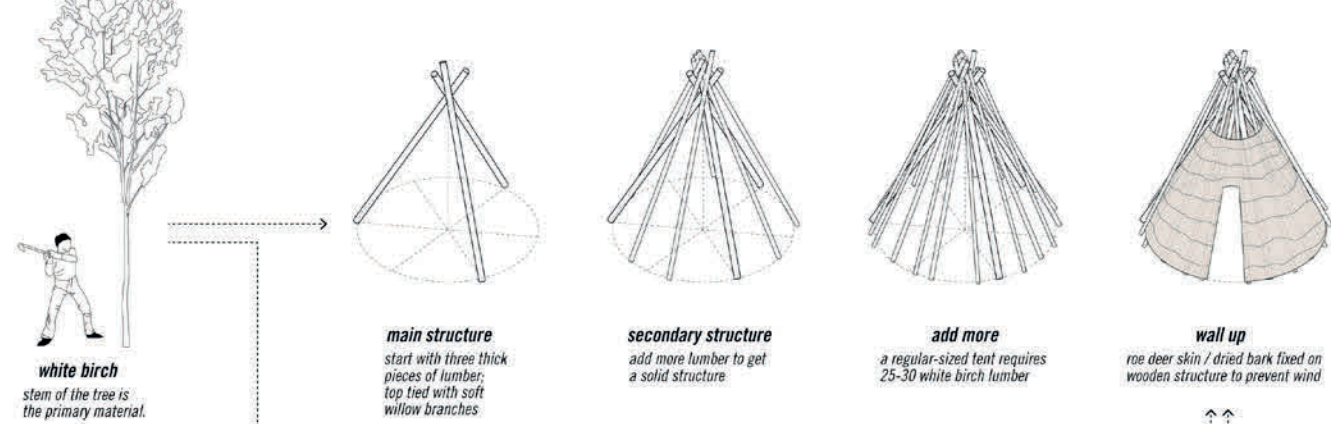
a psycho-geographical interpretation of the Ewenki and Oroqen living environment, along with the invasion of modern technologies

The Greater Khingan Range / Daxing'anling

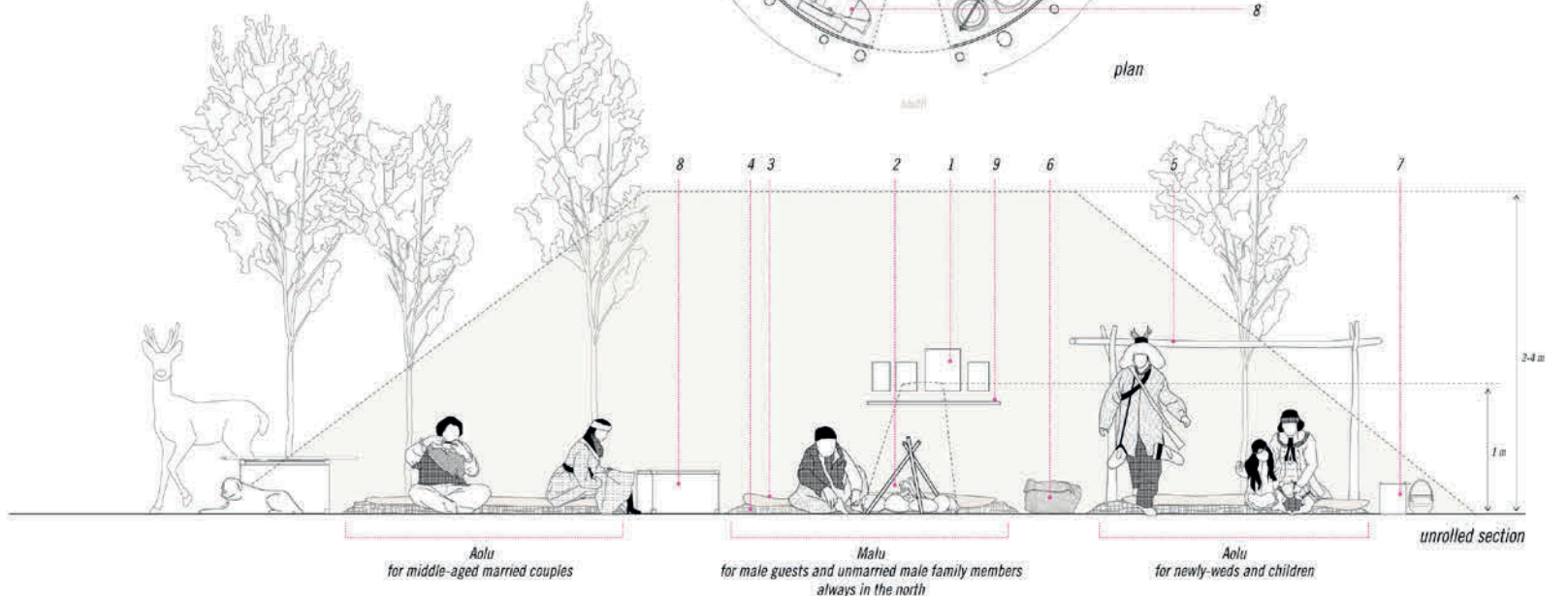
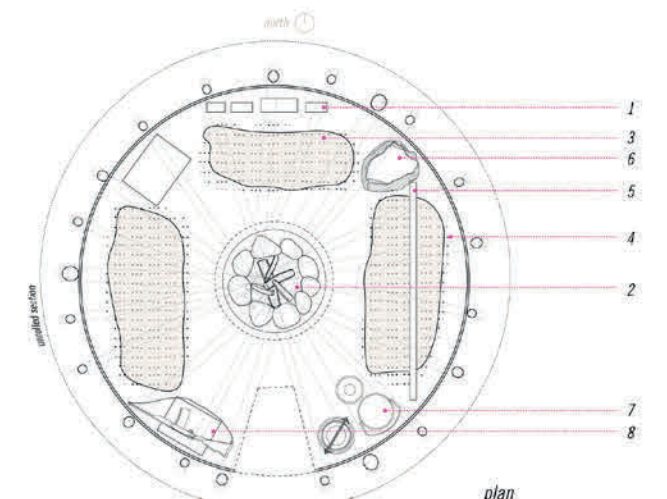


i indigenous dwelling typology

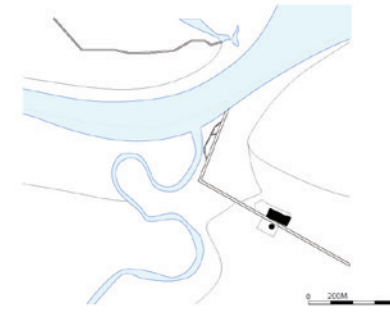
The traditional architecture of the indigenous peoples in the Greater Khingan Range takes a cone-shaped form. *Saxigezhu* in Ewenki language, *Xieren Zhi* in Oroqen language, and *Cuoluozhi* in Mandarin, all three words meant "house made of wood sticks."



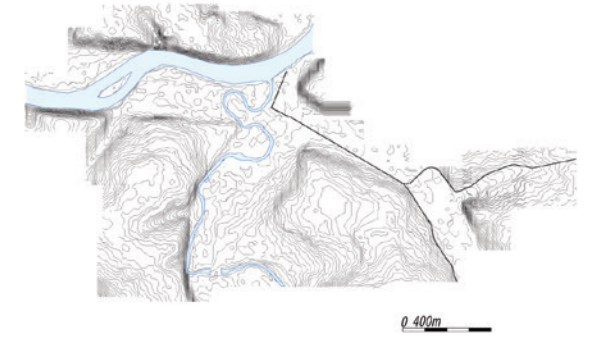
1. **shrine**: statue or drawing of gods and ancestors placed in bark boxes, hanging in the north of the tent; usually 4-5 boxes as a set
2. **fire**: in the middle; smoke exits from the top
3. **mattress**: made of tanned roe deer or deer skin
4. **hay**: laid under the mattress to prevent direct contact with the ground
5. **birch stem**: hanged above the bed of the newly-married, to hang their crib
6. **sack**: made of deer skin, for storage
7. **bucket and kitchen utensils**
8. **case**: made of deer skin, for storage
9. **wooden platform**: for offerings to the gods and ancestors



Under this section, three specific indigenous minority sites are discussed: the Ergun River, Xinsheng Village, and an Ewenki Hunting Point in the Greater Khing'an Range. The trio present the way the two mentioned ethnic minorities groups react to modern state control.



The Ergun-Heilongjiang Confluence



Xinsheng Village



A'longshan Hunter Point





As the birthplace of the two peoples, the Ergun River is distant and has long been deserted, becoming a source for romanticized literature. The novel "The Last Quarter of the Moon" creates a window for the public to sneak a peek at these ethnic groups that seldom appear in mainstream culture. The author, ZiJian Chi, depicts the daily lives of the Oroqen people. The poetic, swirling warmth enhances the strength of everyday diversity. The poetic language promotes the long-forgotten land, acts as a gentle ghost that smooths out the barbarity and cruelty, leading the literary work to become a symbol of romanticized land. The work evoked a wave of interest

in the nomadic life under the modern context through the description of how the indigenous people cherished the Ergun. Our composite representation re-maps the region in the format of extended genealogy, using local mapping techniques such as the Ewenki's practice of making marks on trees.

In the 1950s, the downhill movement of the Oroqens started as an intervention of the central government after a large wildfire took place in the Greater Khing'an Range. The central government set up settlement villages in the valleys and plains for the tribal peoples to live downhill. These



settlements were equipped with collective heating and water supply, built up in reference to the traditional Oroqen tent. Xinsheng Village, located in the western end of the floodplain of the Heilongjiang, is one of the relocating villages that contains more than 200 Oroqen villagers. They had to give up their traditional nomadic culture to adapt to a sedentary living. The formalist transition from "primitive society" to the so-called "modern society," however, was not as smooth as the government expected, since the "modern" is much more than agriculture and being sedentary. Hunters could not be turned into farmers immediately, the adaptation is

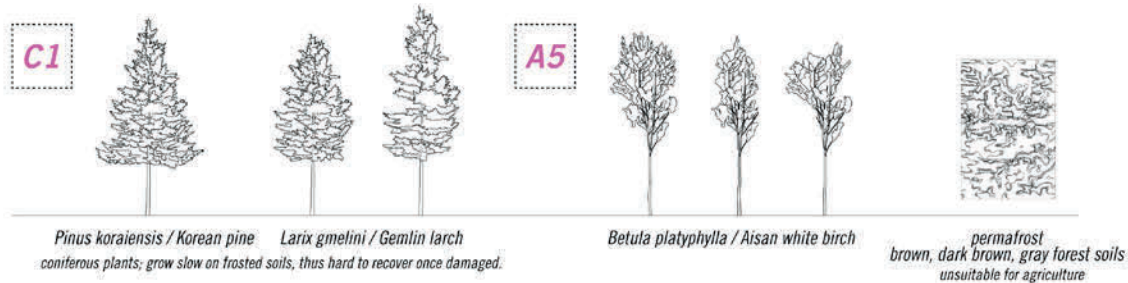
formal as well as psychological. Therefore, the sedentary hunting points in the forest becomes a compromised option between the "civilized life" and the "primitive" nomadic life. In the 2000s, the government set up 14 scattered hunting points, belonging to the Bureau of Forestry, under the jurisdiction of the local government, and the Ewenki or Oroqen villagers who prefer the traditional life may move from the settlement villages to the hunter points to, to some extent, continue their reindeer-related culture and lifestyle.

Xinsheng Village

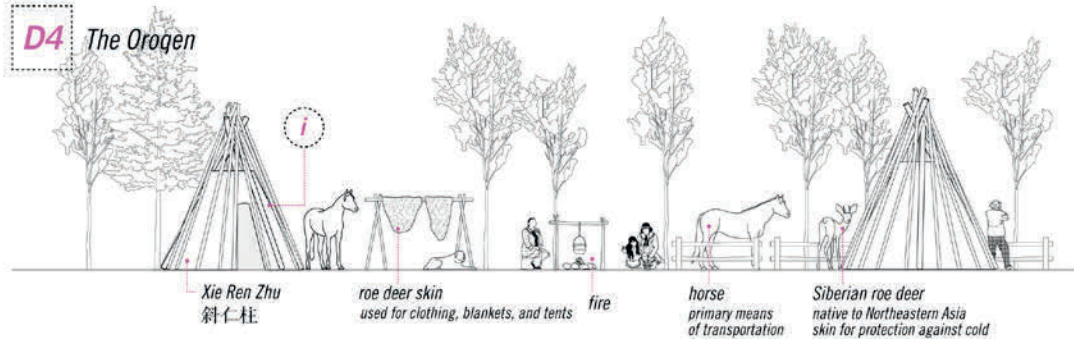
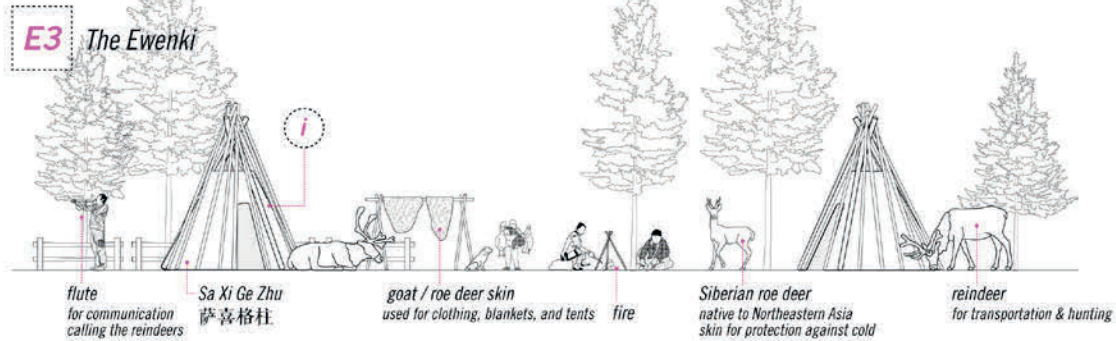
Didaofengwu. "Oroqen: I Only Marry the One Who Loves Me." January 13, 2020.

Photography. Relocation village at the low hills in northwestern Lesser Khing'an Range. Hunters gradually adapted to the sedentary lifestyle.

forest and soil

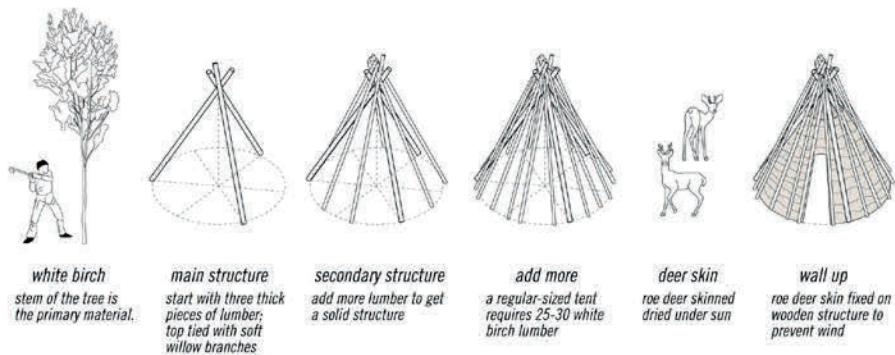


indigenous experience



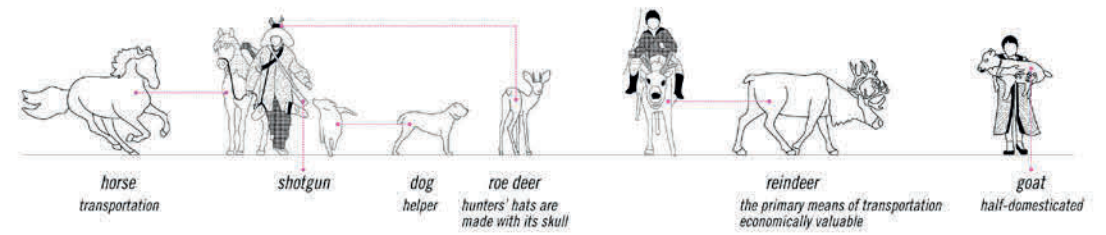
i Tent

The traditional architecture of the indigenous peoples in the Greater Khingan Range takes a cone-shaped form. Saxigezhu in Ewenki language, Xieren Zhu in Oroqen language, and Cuoluozhi in Mandarin, all three words meant "house made of wood sticks."

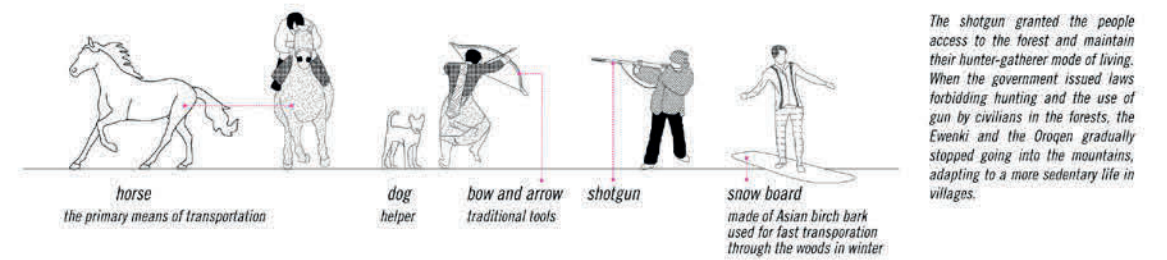


indigenous infrastructure

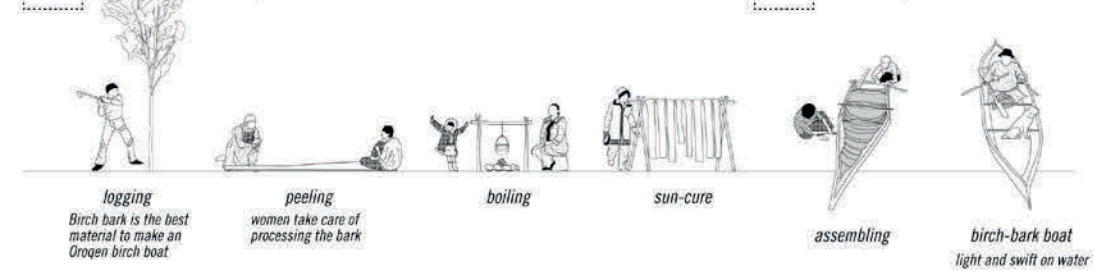
B5 Hunting & access of the Ewenki



C3 Hunting & access of the Oroqen

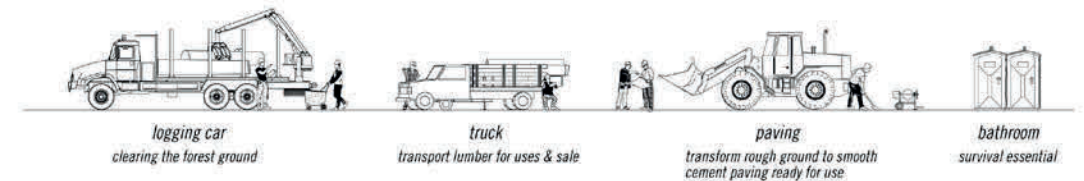


D4 Birch & Waterways

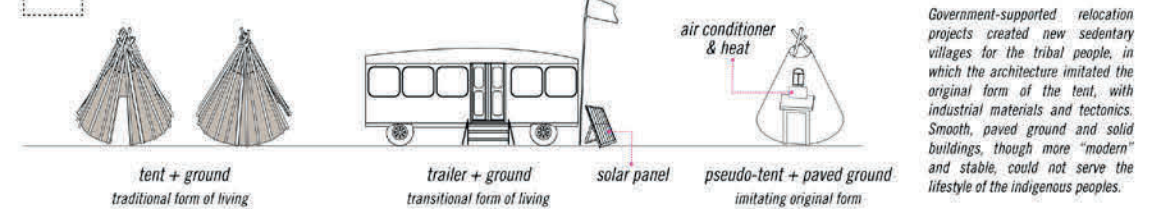


invasion

D8 Road & Logging mill



F6 Transformation





the Ewenki

Li, Shan and Du, Dianwen, 2008.

Photography.

top: the Ewenki traveling on

reindeers, migrating

bottom: the Ewenki women are

drying antlers, the main source
of income for families



Under this cultural background, many of the younger generation who were born downhill and lived a life without nomadic hierarchy. They already cannot understand the indigenous language and did not know nor understand their history. The cultural disconnection makes these ethnic minorities, and many others around the world, to disappear rapidly. In the eyes of the younger generation of Ewenki people, their perception of the home and the land is no longer bonded to indigenous understandings. They see the land similar to the conception of a standardized, scientific map. ■



02./

The Northern -most Point



SHENZHOU ARCTIC STELE

Mounument founded in 1994 by the government using the local granite to show the geographic importance of the site: the northeast side of China (later proven false) to promote the tourism.

HOUSE UNIT

The local housing transformed from wooden house (Mukeden) to the Plastic steel doors & Windows and red tinted steel roof for standardization.

GATE

visitors have to pay ticket for entering the village



ELECTRICITY

The village wasn't completed with electricity transformation unti 2012. Before that, It had unified power generation, and only the New-Year-Eve could have a full night supplied. As electricity meter wasn't available, fee is charged monthly based on each household's lamp holders/TVs number.

THE NORTHEAST VILLAGE

The site is 200 kilometers away from Beiji Village, the famous tourist spot advertised as the northeast settlement, while infact Beihong is the real one. Lackage development has preserve the village's primitive nature.

PASTURE

Created settlement by Russians and Chinese since 1956 who were hunters and gold miners.

Beiji

Mandarin, Sinitic languages
北极, the north pole
bei, 北, the north; ji, 极, pole

Beihong

Mandarin, Sinitic languages
北红, the red village in the north
bei, 北, the north; hong, 红, red

"the northernmost point of China"

Shan, Zhiqiang and Wang, Jixin
"Heilongjiang: a River of Regret Flows to the Sea." In *Chinese National Geography*, October 2008.

Photography.
at the geographical northernmost point, a traveler set up a woodstick on the frozen river, carved "the northernmost point of China."



The Northernmost point

Beiji Village | Beihong Village./

Qing Dynasty

Hunters and farmers who used to work in the gold mines had moved to Dameizizi (大草甸子) - ancient name of the area

1640. /

Beiji v.

Started to be populated
Numbers of Russian women migrated to China through marriage, while Chinese farmers cross the river to make a living



1866

Developed into a Jiangshang station (江上驿站) leading to Yanzhigou (胭脂沟)

1914. /

Beihong v.

Created the administrative bureau of residents affairs (治局公署驻地)

1934. /

Beiji v.

Japan invaded and occupied Mohe. They established a gold mining company and power plant in modern Beiji Village.



1947. /

Beiji & Beihong

Freed from Japanese occupancy with the end of WWII
Establishment of Huma County (呼玛县)

1956

Beihong v.

Establishment of a stockbreeding cooperative on the site originally functioned as a pasture in Mohe Township. The village built after 1949 has more than 90 households with a total population of nearly 400 people

1997. /

Beiji v.

The Mohe government designated the village "Arctic Village Scenic Tourism Area"; it has developed since then and become the northernmost tourist attraction of China



2009. /

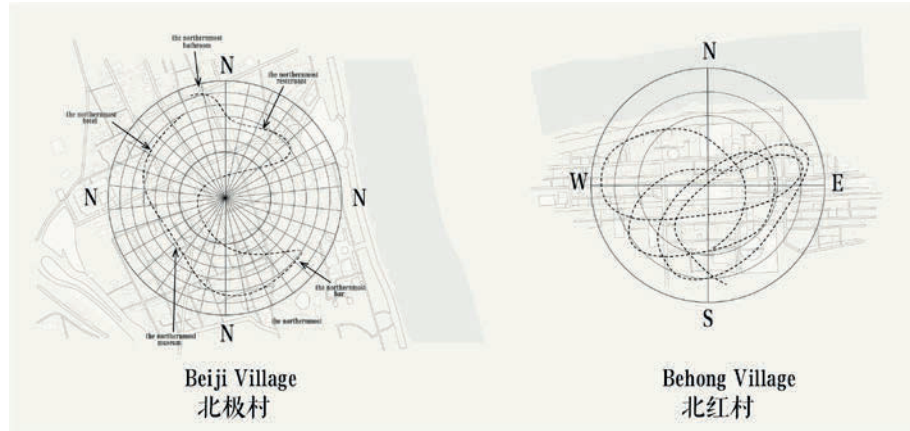
Beihong v.

No electricity and highway, the village used unified power generation and sell to the villagers with time limitation: summer at 19:00-22:00; winter at 16:00-22:00, only the New Year's Eve will have the whole night power supply

2012

Electrification reform
less than 10 years since the villagers gave up their lives with candles and kerosene lamps

最北之地
北极村/北红村



Moving east along the river comes two famous sight-seeing villages located in the arctic circle, under the administration of Mohe City in Heilongjiang Province: the Beiji Village and the Beihong Village. These village duo are frequently presented in different travel guides as the symbolically significant northernmost point of China, and with its cultural and tourist characters integrated, its political attributes of the “first post in the north” were diluted.

Beiji Village (53°29'52.58"N) was commonly recognized as the “northernmost point” of China, yet, this name was merely a cultural product rather than a geographical one. The physical northernmost point is at Ussuri Shoal (53°33'37"N, 123°16'12"E), about 61 kilometers northwest of the Beiji Village. In addition, even the authentic northernmost village is another village called Beihong Village (53°33'43"N.) The Chinese government in the 90s chose to develop tourism in Beiji Village rather than the two other sites due to its more extensive scale and the proximity to the airport. In 1997, the village was designated as a scenic

area. Under the support of governmental policies, Beiji Village soon became a 5A scenic area (a Chinese classification, credited based on traffic, safety, telecommunications services, business management, resources, environmental protection, market attractiveness, annual tourist volume, and tourist satisfaction rate). Since then, the local government had developed a promotional rhetoric: from 2000 onwards, Beiji village was transformed from the original agricultural town into a microcosm of tourism. Visitors have to pay an entrance fee to enter the village gate; restaurants, shopping malls, bars, and even public toilets that serve people's livelihood have a unique naming scheme to attract customers. There are countless “north” characters inside the village, starting from the wooden entrance sign marked the “Northernmost Point,” similar diction appears in every store, every hotel, and every corner of the natural sight, even some written on trees and some carved in stone, encompassing all the “North” Chinese characters that can be found in the ancient and modern worlds.



Shuangfeng Tree Farm

Sang Ke. "The Warm Home amidst the Snow and Ice." In *Chinese National Geography*, October 2008.

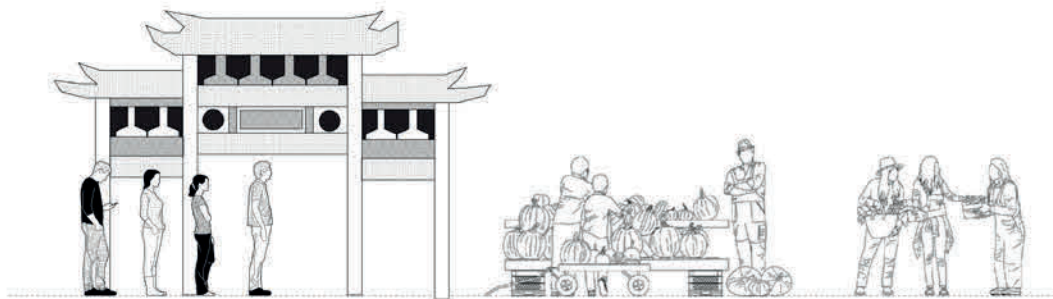
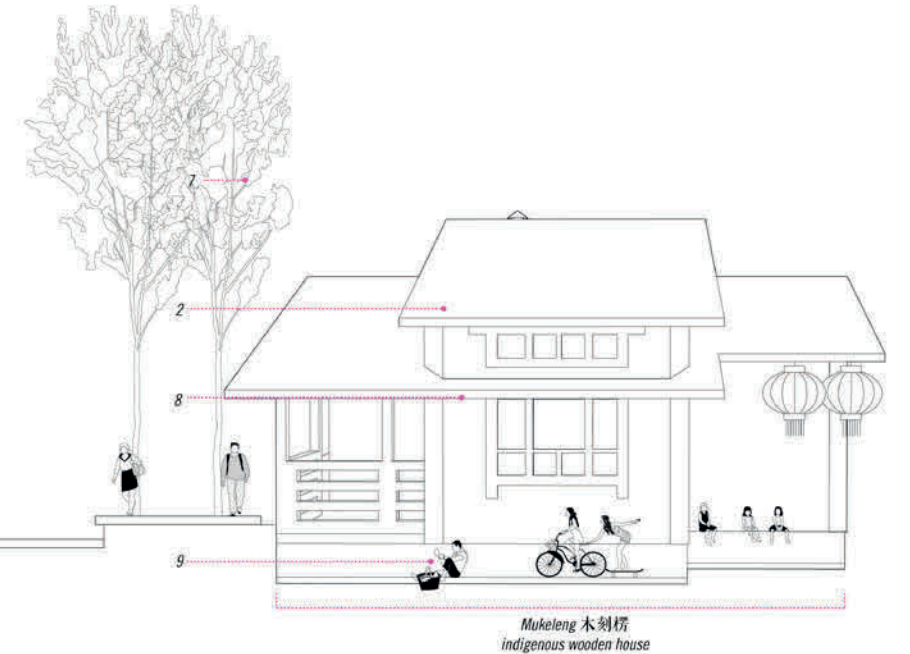
Photography. Settlements in the north display similar characteristics, with tight clusters of one-story buildings right next to trees and hills.



village and the adopted tent

Villagers of the Beiji and Beihong villages typically live in one- or two-story wooden bungalows. In Beiji Village, for the purpose of promoting tourism, the people renamed their wooden houses as "Mukeleng," a synonym of the tribal peoples' tent. The Beiji Village museum and some hotel buildings, however, to fulfill the village's goal to construct its image as "the arctic village," appear somewhat grandeur and western, a weird juxtaposition of an imagined identity on top of a historical one.

- 1. **museum roof:** wooden exterior with concrete interior roofing.
- 2. **house roof:** wooden exterior with steel interior roofing, coded with color based on preference.
- 3. **postal office:** sightseeing spot where visitors could mail with stamp of "the northern-most in China."
- 4. **giftshop:** sightseeing spots.
- 5. **tour guide:** career of local villagers.
- 6. **taxi bicycle:** 3 wheels loaded bicycle with cabin
- 7. **fake flower tree:** blossom in all four seasons
- 8. **aqua privy 厕所:** single-chamber septic tank, except the toilet is located directly over the tan
- 9. **courtyard**
- 10. **lanterns:** transforming the village's color to a bright red at night



village entrance
free for visitors/100yuan for locals (20 dollar)

store

souvenir shopping
with "northern-most" stamp



candle

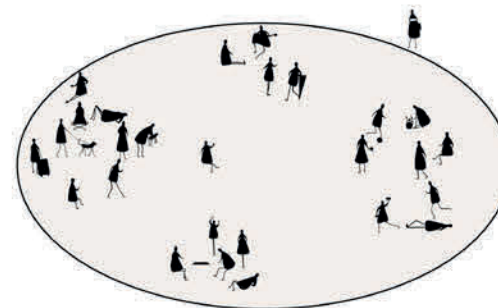
electricity
support electricity time period
summer: 19-22/ winter: 16-22

modern housing unit

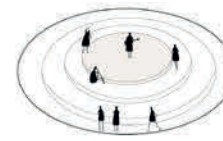
village square
semi-open space for villagers and visitors to occupy, could be transformed for different function by adding setups.

the two most famous squares are located at the village entrance and village border with both square have stone monument stand in center.

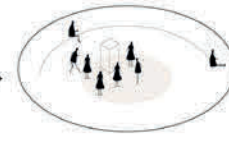
"beiji village (北极村)"



community dancing



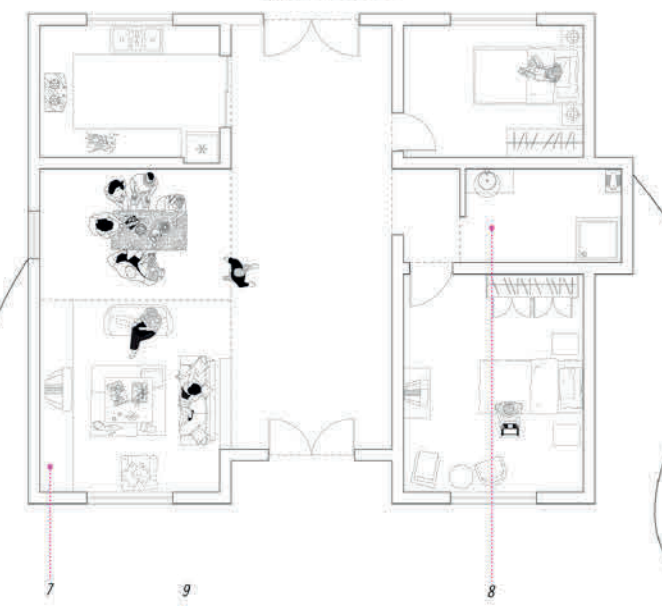
giving speech



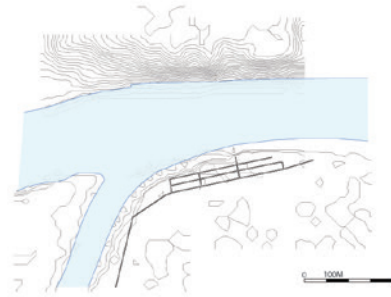
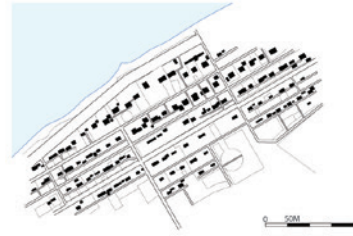
site-seeing (visitors)



propoganda



Mukeleng 木刻楞
indigenous wooden house



Beihong Village



Beiji Village

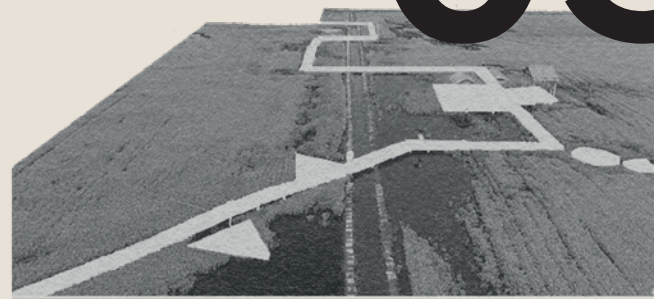
In comparison, Beihong Village, the de facto northernmost village in China, rarely received the credit it deserved. In 1997, the “Land of the Far North” monument was removed from its original site in Beihong Village and relocated in Beiji Village, an addition to the latter’s fetishized “north” mania. By ceding the title of the northernmost point to Beiji Village, Beihong Village had escaped the fate of being reiterated by the modern perspective, yet at the same time it had lost its chance to economic prosperity. Beihong village did not have full electricity coverage until 2009; before that, the residents lived on

a unified power generator which has a daily time limit. Only on New Year’s Eve of each year, the village would have an overnight power supply. Nowadays, Beihong village still lays under-developed with only 320 villagers. Though tourists have gradually recognized the site for its original geographic meanings, the underdeveloped transportation system hindered the development of its tourism industry, and maintained its primitive characteristics. Beihong villagers still live on farming and fishing rather than tourism; hand tractors, motorcycles, cows, and horses are still their primary labor tools. ■



Monument of "the Northernmost Point"

Source unknown.
Photography.
top: monument of the northernmost point, set up for tourism at the northern edge of Beiji Village
bottom: in winters, tourists drive on the frozen Heilongjiang, looking for the "real" north point.



03./

Field of Hope



RECLAMATION

The Jian Sanjiang System was established in 1969. The country's large-scale reclamation of land made 80% of the entire area covered by farms. It was a completely controlled man-made landscape. The entire place had a long political background and no urban political system.



GELISOLS

"Gelisols" soils of very cold climates, contain permafrost within two meters of the surface. Site belongs to seasonally frozen ground, allowing farm in these area.



EDUCATION BASE

In response to the detention of Falun Gong, there are some concentrated resistance in these area; Jiansanjiang, as the main plain in the province, has set up legal bases as a reeducation center for those people through labor.

Jiansanjiang

Mandarin, Sinitic languages
建三江 ; Developing the Sanjiang
Plateau.

jian 建, to construct, to develop;
Sanjiang, 三江, the three rivers,
referring to the Sanjiang or
Three-River Plateau formed
by the convergence of
Heilongjiang/Amur, Songhua and
Ussuri Rivers

Qindeli

Mandarin, Sinitic languages
勤得利 ; diligence makes a
fortune.

qin, 勤, diligence;
de, 得, to obtain, to gain;
li, 利, profit, fortune

Jiansanjiang

Shan, Zhiqiang and Wang, Jixin
"Chuang Guandong:
Restructuring the Modern
Northeast." In *Chinese National
Geography*, October 2008.
Photography.
Black soils in a farm in the
Heilongjiang floodplain



The Field of Hope

The Great Collective Farms of Jiansanjiang
Qindeli Farm, Heilongjiang Province, China./

1957. /

Start-up

General Wang Zhen led 100,000 demobilized officers & soldiers to reclaim the Great Northern Wilderness; youth from the frontline and college students began to flow into this area and help cultivating the land.



1960-1970s

Establishment of the Jiansanjiang Branch to organize reclamation affairs, with three branch farm established

1976. /

Development

Restructured into a reclamation area, establishment of the Sanjiang State Farm Management Bureau (建三江国有农场管理局); The organization served both as food provider and as border defense



1986

Developed into family farms format under the methodology of "a big farm take charge of a small farm"

1988

15 modern state-owned farm administration were stationed in Jiansanjiang

1992. /

Reformation

The Reform and Reopen Policy started, the site is organized through administrative management-enterprise management; The goal is to change the original model of state-owned farms to become more like enterprises.

2014. /

Resistance

A series of Jiansanjiang Rightist protest event against the central government; As Falungong supporter protested in Northeastern China, some got detained and sent to local prisons, the rest are sent to labour camps, also referred to as re-educational camps in Jiansanjiang.



2018. /

Completion

The government-enterprise integrated system of the General Administration of Land Reclamation ended. 14 modern farms remained directly governed by the state government under the shared name of Jiansanjiang.

2020. /

Upgrade

This region became a limited liability company directly managed by the Ministry of Finance of China



Now we are downstream of the great river Heilongjiang. The river runs towards east, mighty and fast, meeting the west-east Songhua River and south-north Ussuri River at the Chinese-Russian border. The flood plain of these three rivers are called Sanjiang, meaning literally “three rivers.” Rivers brought fertile soils from upstream, and sedimentation on this flat landscape eventually formed the Sanjiang Plateau. This northeastern flood plain had not come near any of the dynastic capitals in Chinese history, let alone the Russian one, and had consequently remained the major habitat for many ethnic groups, notably the Manchu and Nanai, who lived in tribal societies that subsisted on hunting and fishing.

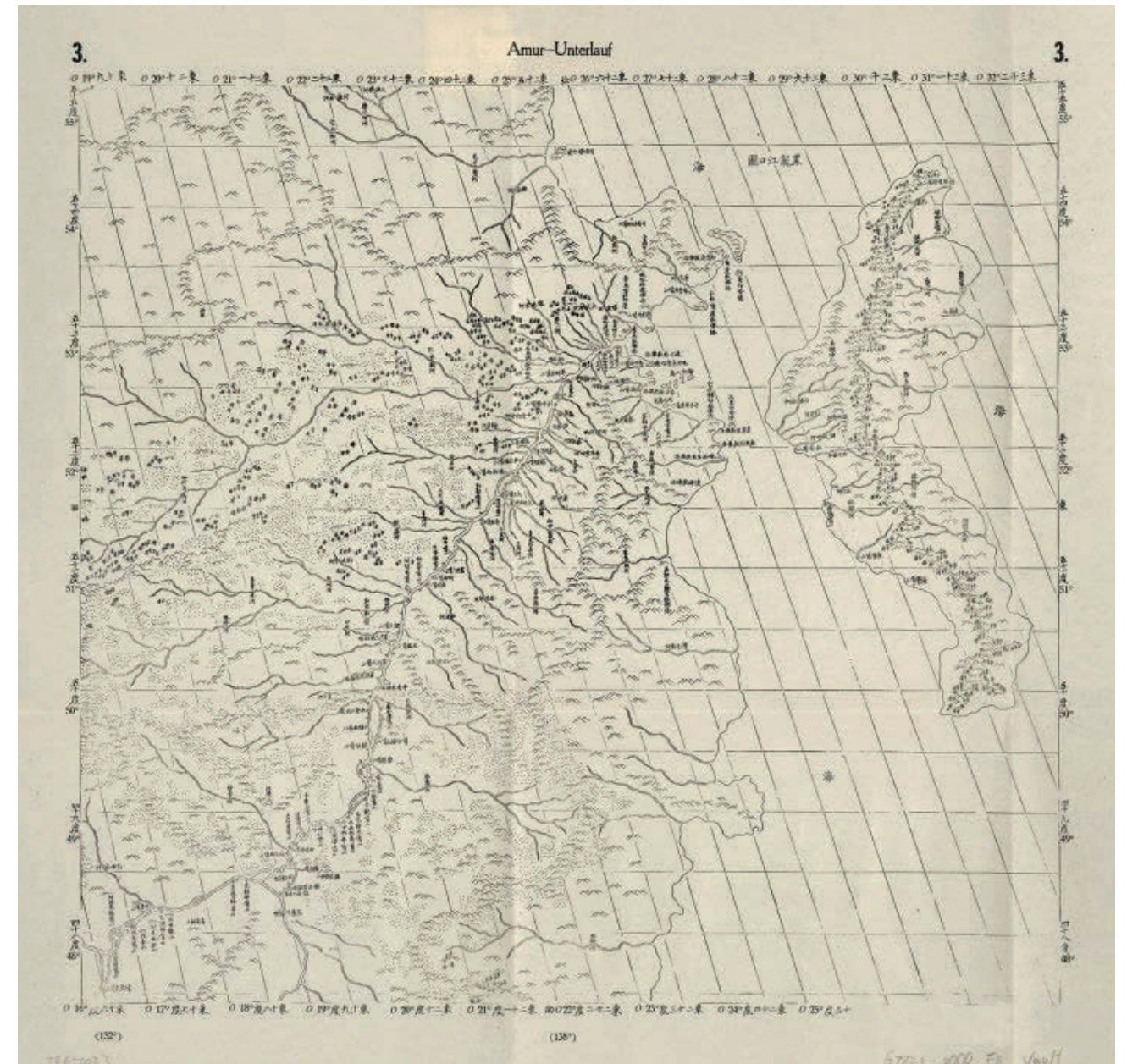
The area that we now consider as the Chinese northeast was gradually claimed by Chinese dynasties over the course of centuries, starting from Xia Dynasty (2205-1766 BC), the first dynasty of China which claimed part of modern-day Liaoning, continuing to Tang Dynasty (618-907 AD),

which gained control over almost half of the region, and finally Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368 AD) whose territory expanded beyond modern borders into outer Manchuria. The Russians only started to expand eastwards across the Ural Mountains in the late years of Yuan Dynasty, around 1598, after the death of Tsar Fyodor I. Qing Dynasty (1636-1912 AD), the last in China’s imperial history, through a series of lost wars and treaties with Russia, agreed to the cession of part of its northeast and settled with the result that Heilongjiang becomes the border river between the two countries.

Despite the fact that the Chinese dynasties had claimed authority over the northeast for over thousands of years, they had established loose control over the region through a series of subordinate authorities, some self-governed by ethnic group leaders, some led by officials sent from the capital. Before the establishment of the PRC in 1949, tribal groups still roam the marsh lands of the north.

Heilongjiang ancient map

"Overview of the Imperial Paths."
Qing Dynasty, Emperor Kangxi
< 皇輿全覽圖 >, 清朝康熙年
Photography.
map of the Heilongjiang. Place names marked in Manchu, the official language of Qing Dynasty



Xi Jinping in Jiansanjiang

On-site inspection of the Heilongjiang Province by Xi. In *Xinhuanet*. photography



During the early years of the republic, the northeastern region was previously referred to as Beidahuang, meaning the “great northern wilderness,” due to the extreme cold weather and its sparse population. Since 1950, the central government had decided to take advantage of the natural resources and develop the once wild northeast into a lively mixture of farmlands, oil fields, and mines, so that it feeds the nation while powering its aspiration for rapid industrialization. The operation was named “Jiansanjiang,” literally meaning “developing the Sanjiang Plateau.” The region was then referred to as Jiansanjiang Reclamation Area. The late 1950s saw over 140,000 veterans and civil servants, 200,000 border-support youths and 540,000

educated youths departed for the northeast. Together these new “immigrants” set up 4 farms in the Sanjiang Plateau, yet large-scale, centrally planned development of land did not start until the establishment of the 6th division of Heilongjiang Production and Construction Corp in 1968, which specifically aimed at developing the great collective farms at Sanjiang Plateau. In 1976, the Corp was restructured as Jiansanjiang State-Operated Farm Administration, further dividing the duties of the 4 farms, and eventually formed 15 state-owned farms, covering around 12,400 square kilometers of land. Administrative bodies entered Jiansanjiang after the formation of the administration.



harvesting corn on the farm

Wang, tongri. "Corn: the Magical Crop Made for 'Chuang Guandong.'" In *Chinese National Geography*, October 2008. Photography.
workers harvesting corn. Due to the hi-yield, Corn has become a major crop in the region.



15 farms of Jiansanjiang

name interpretation.
The farms back then were always named either after names of geographical features or visions, such as Shengli - Victory, Hongwei - the Red Guard, etc.

plan of the Qindeli Farm

governmental institutions and residences cluster together in town, and farms were scattered further out.

With the 1992 Economic Reform, the state farms started shifting from administrative management to enterprise-style management. However, the Heilongjiang Province Reclamation Area Ordinance was announced to cease to have effect in as late as 2018, and the farms had finally transformed into a limited liability company in 2020, and came directly under control of the Central Ministry of Finance. Currently the 15 farms remain as sub-branches of the company, continuing their duty as the “national barn.”

Farms were developed in the flat floodplain on a large scale. From satellite maps, each farm appears as a light green patch with linear patterns on the ground, with small clusters of three or four farmhouses popping up every now and then. Today with the aid of modern agricultural equipment, the humans occupying spaces as small as three or four bungalows were able to exercise control over a considerably large piece of land, nonetheless it was the early surge of volunteers and veterans who pulled through difficulties and transformed the hard frozen soils into today’s fertile black soils, ultimately changing the natural landscape.

At first the difficult winter weather and the barren land was a major and deadly obstacle, and the fact that volunteers had to abandon their previous lives and move to an unknown region was a huge personal sacrifice. With a faith tied to ideology and practical needs, the people pulled through. After two generations’ effort, by the end of 1980s, the 15 farms together yield more than 2 billion kilograms of grains per year.



harvesting corn on the farm

Tian, Weitao. "Corn: the magical crop made for Chuang Guandong." In *Chinese National Geography*, October 2008.

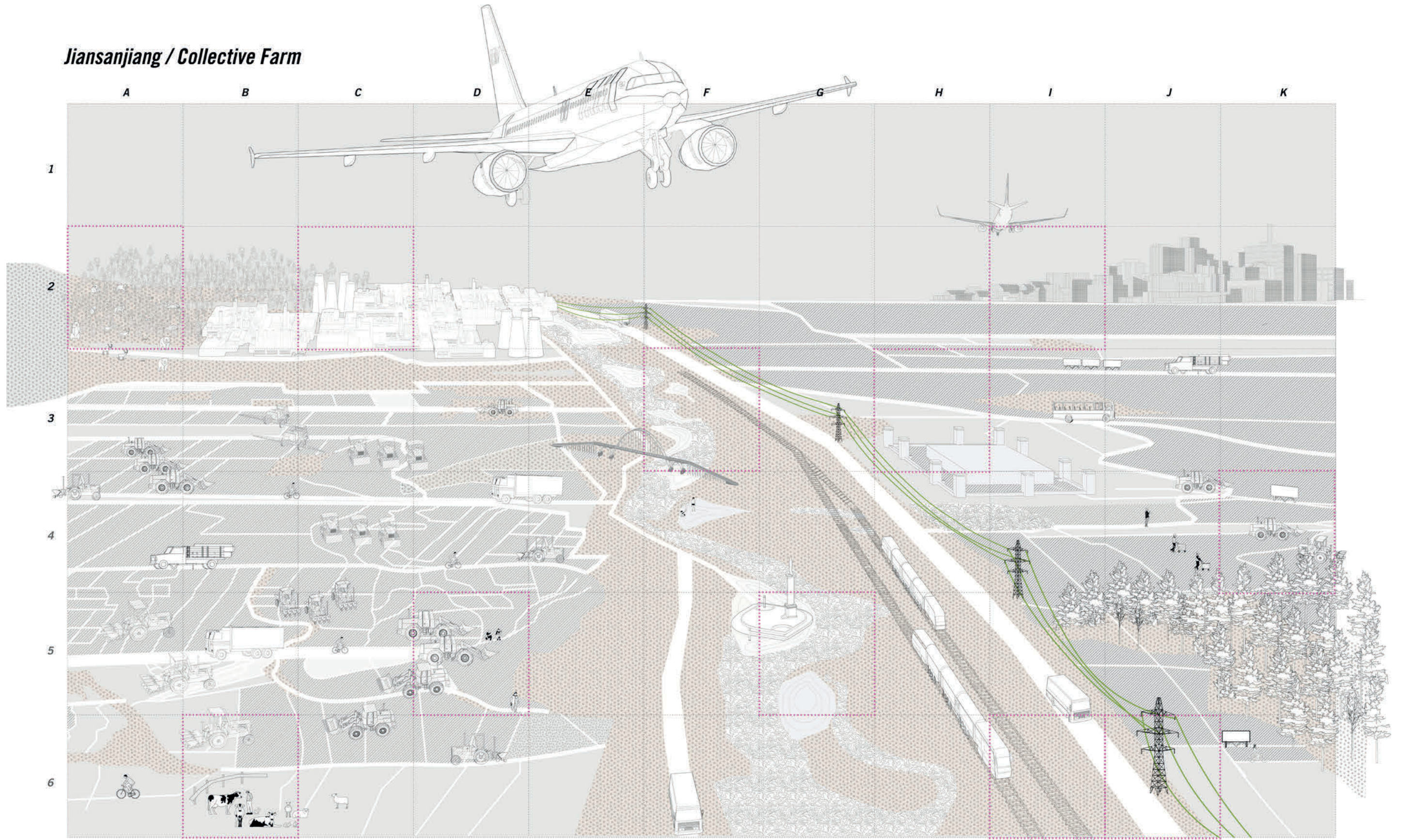
Photography.

At the Yingkou Port in Liaoning, corn produced in the great farms are being loaded onto ships and getting ready to be exported to foreign markets

Following the people came radio, railroads and highways, electricity, and much later an airport, making the region more accessible from the central hinterlands. The reclamation area has its own governance system in which production teams report to the farms, and the farms report to the Jiansanjiang administration bureau, yet due to its vastness and distance, inevitable gaps between the governed and

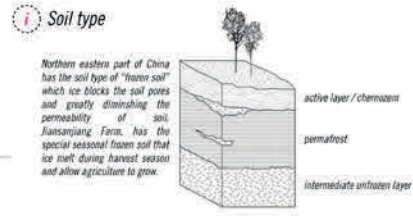
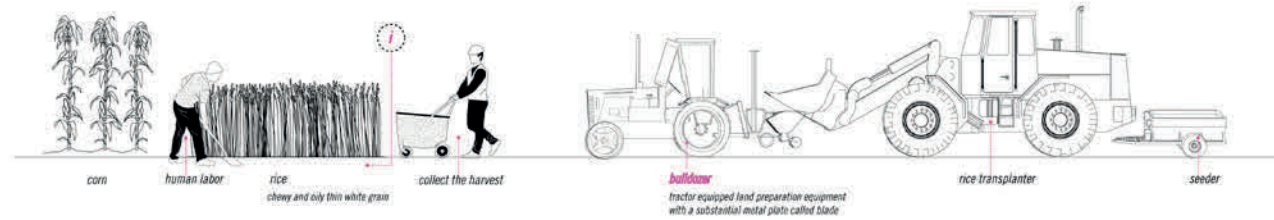
the ungoverned allow for ambiguity. Local gangs, labor camps for political prisoners, and mental health facilities for detaining people who were reluctant to migrate and support the Jiansanjiang operation can all be found in the region, and one of the most famous dissident religious group in PRC history, the Falun Gong, emerged from this area. Things that were difficult to take root in mainstream reality were nurtured here.

Jiansanjiang / Collective Farm



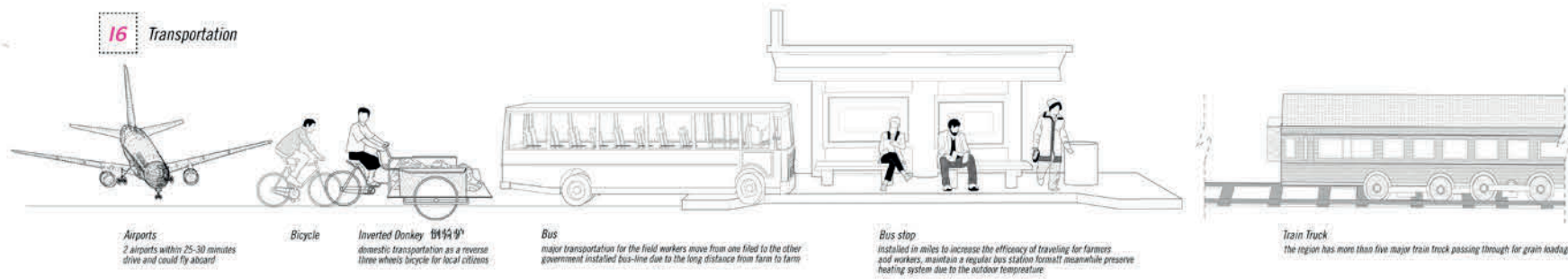
farm

D5 Plantation



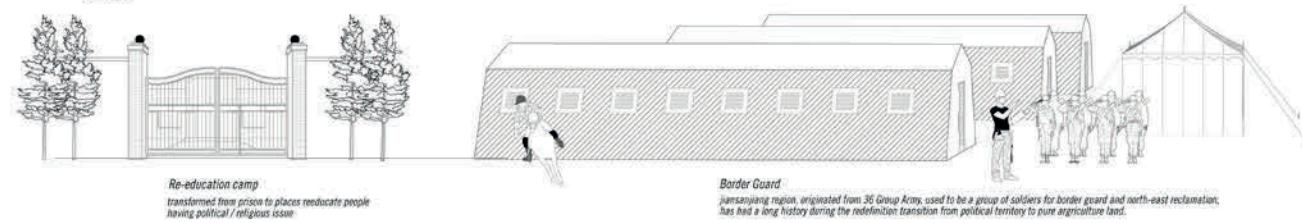
infrastructure

16 Transportation

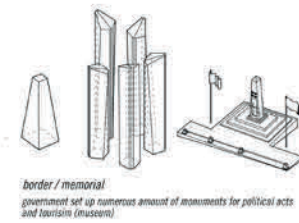


governance

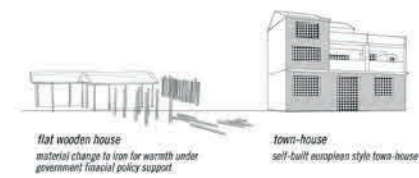
H3 Censorship



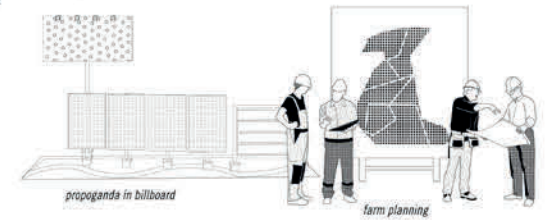
G5 Monument



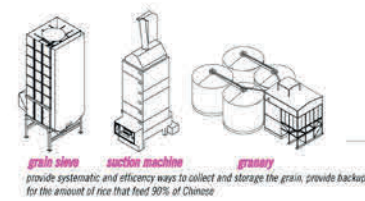
12 Vernacular architecture



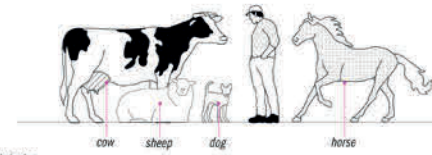
F5 Planning



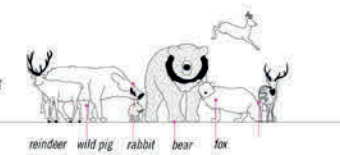
C2 Storage



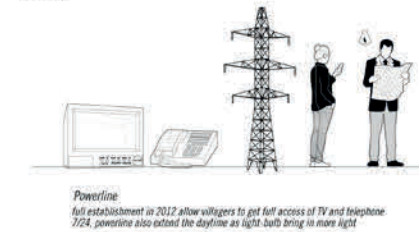
B6 Domesticated animals



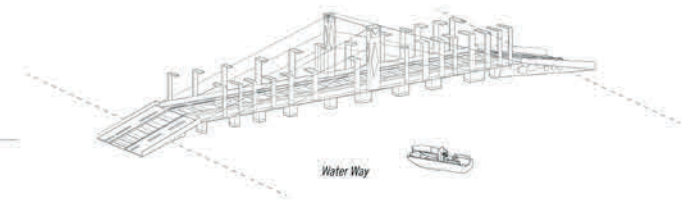
A3 Wild animals

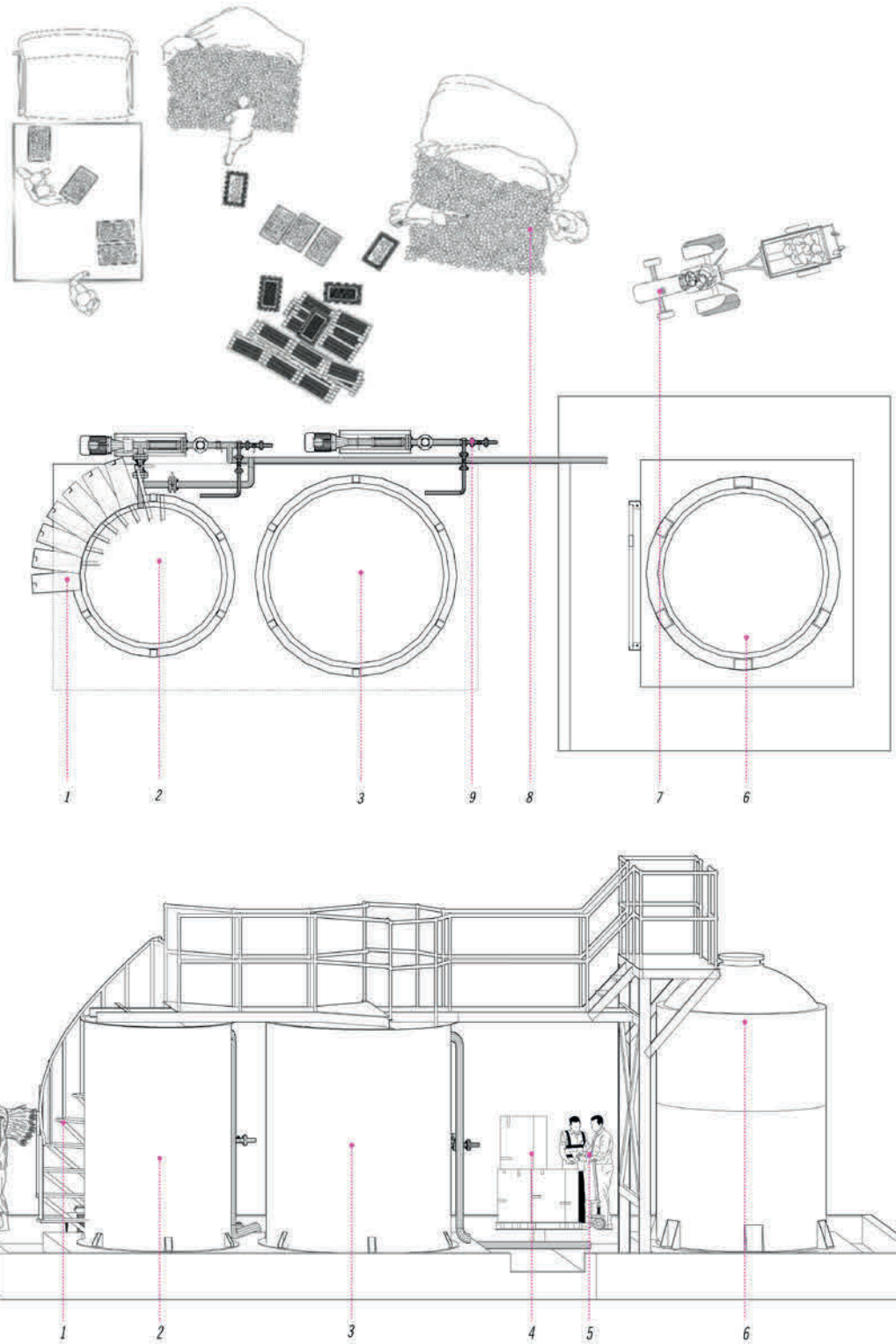


J6 Electric wires



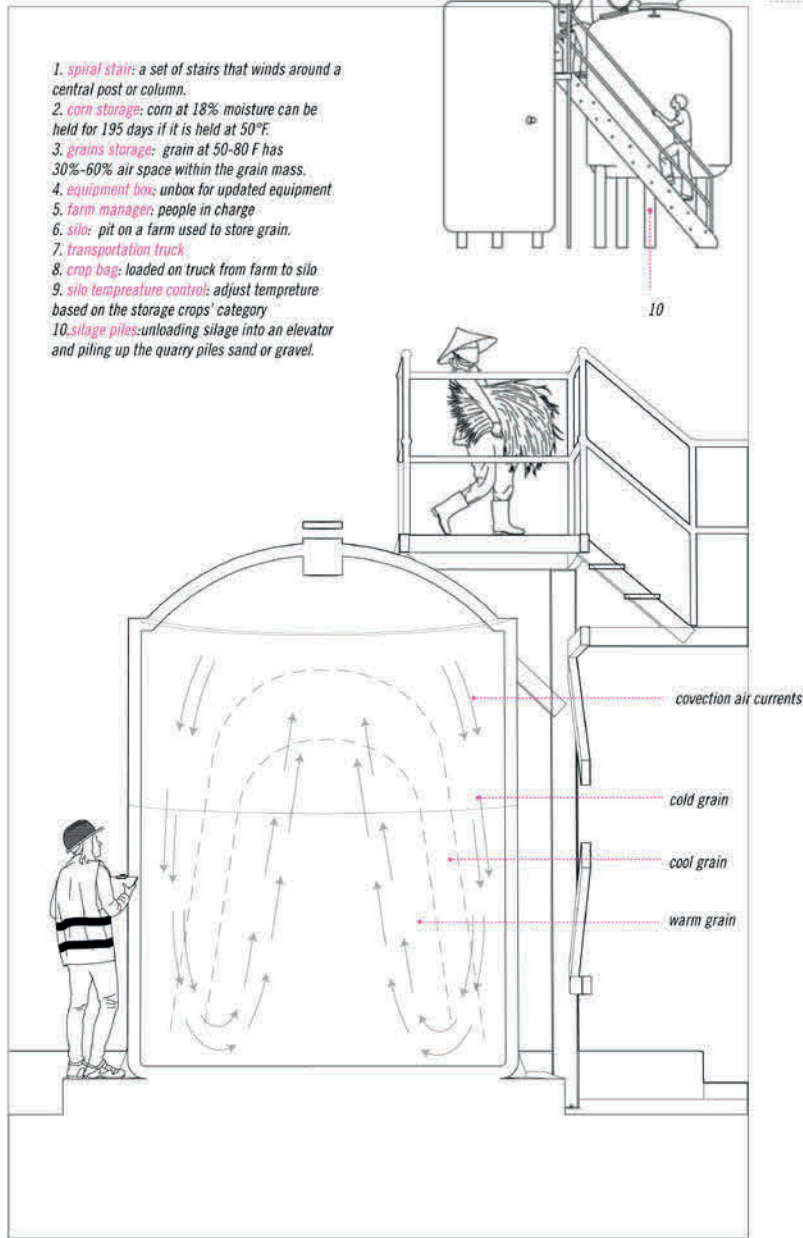
F3 Bridge





silos and offices

Grain storage is one of the major concerns of the vast farms on Sanjiang Plains. Commonly found are the silos, responsible for the storage of various kinds of grains. Residential buildings on the farms are similar to the wooden and brick bungalows found in Beiji and Beihong Villages, clustered around the office and commercial buildings in town.



1. spiral stair: a set of stairs that winds around a central post or column.
2. corn storage: corn at 18% moisture can be held for 195 days if it is held at 50°F.
3. grains storage: grain at 50-80 F has 30%-60% air space within the grain mass.
4. equipment box: unbox for updated equipment.
5. farm manager: people in charge.
6. silo: pit on a farm used to store grain.
7. transportation truck
8. crop bag: loaded on truck from farm to silo.
9. silo temperature control: adjust temperature based on the storage crops' category.
10. silage piles: unloading silage into an elevator and piling up the quarry piles sand or gravel.



nursing home

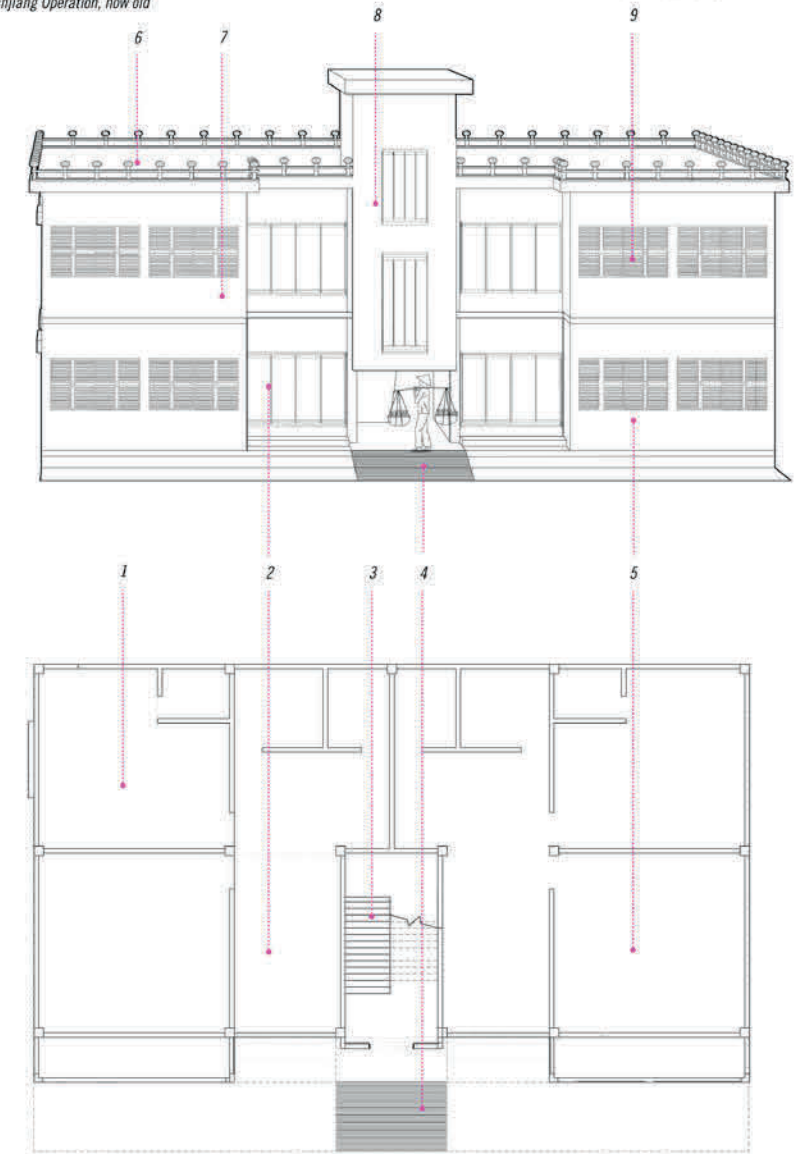
the youths that voluntarily migrated to the northeast in support of the Jiansanjiang Operation, now old

re-education camp

dissidents—prisoner

governmental building

collective dining hall, bathroom and adminster office



1. back functional space: space with more privacy and less noise.
2. service space: in the middle; serve as reception or administration zone.
3. central stair: staircase with large handle.
4. grande entrance slope: textured slope entrance; always pair with slogan or picture on the ground.

5. front functional space: space with less privacy and more noise.
6. rooftop balcony: made of deer skin, for storage.
7. upperfloor functional space
8. central office: office for the head of the department.
9. framed window: prevent accidental drop or escape from the interior to exterior.

Beidahuang Pictorial.
北大荒画报

Heilongjiang Railroader
Reclamation Bureau, Political
Department ed. China Agriculture
and Reclamation Press. 1959.

Scans by Zhao, Guowei.

Pictorial contents, containing
prints and paintings by
intellectuals and artists who
migrate and supported the
development of the Northeast.



Not only serving as the major fields that yield grains for the country, the great farms also carried the political task of setting a successful standard for “the modern socialist large-scale agricultural practice.” Propaganda posters, wall newspapers and prints were enthusiastically produced with a high level of artistic value and circulated around the region. Public spaces were



decorated with posters and blackboard art, creating an incessant exposure to the ideology. The positive image that has to be maintained for propaganda and the bitter reality in the 20th century lead to a unique artistic school in the Northeast. Intellectuals gathered in Jiansanjiang from different parts of the country, and together built a new culture that is a mixture of everything



they've learned from their previous lives, blended with the cold, ice, and dull sky. Traces can be found in prints, drawings, and literature, in which artists and writers sought to break from the mainstream narrative and reiterate their de-familiarized life, looking for a more precise method to produce works that are relatable and empathetic. The phrase used by the official

media is “the spirit of the great northern wilderness,” while more privately, the creators themselves like to say it’s “the spirit of the frozen soil.” Characters, or simply the content, seem uncertain and bewildered, often focusing on the ordinary person and his or her circumstances.

Propaganda Posters

top: strive for the acceleration
of achieving agricultural
mechanicization.
bottom:triving in the wild world.

Factory buildings in
Shenyang, Liaoning

Wang, Bing. *Remaining Images*,
1994-2001.

Photography.

Album contains 102 photos.

“This collection of images is a certain kind of memory kept by individuals, which does not belong to a society or to a certain broad history. It is not a social elaboration, but a memory that remains from the images that each person gradually accumulates.”



Qindeli Farm

The image of the Chinese northeast remains distant and ambiguous, especially in the 21st century in which the region had long completed its role as the major, if not only engine during China’s rapid industrialization process and fall silent in obscurity. Even literature and art today, following their predecessor’s paths, struggle to develop a contemporary profile of the region. Temporal elements can still be found in much of today’s northeastern literature, depicting past events and their repercussions, showing a sense of powerlessness regarding the inability to fully understand and analyze from a perspective that goes beyond the event itself. Yet almost every child could sing a popular verse promoted by the

Communist Youth League: “our hometown/is the field of hope; our dreams/is planted on the field of hope; our future/lies in the field of hope...”

Now, brushing away the excess of images, memes, and video clips on streaming media, the foggy image of the northeast lies somewhere between the glory of the mega-factories and the honorable accomplishments of the great farms. No matter the former pop-culture representation or the later classic official one, the complexity of the place is flattened on a 2D surface composed of key words and pictures. Behind the noise, what is the afterlife of the collective farms? ■



04./

"Border" Border



GUARDIAN

The island is ruled under military control with more than 5 border guards around the Orthodox Church. There are barbed wire fences for about 40 kilometers along the border, and gunboats are stationed in the waterways.

BORDER DISPUTE

Continuously debate about the island belonging between China and Russia, the most recent treaty in 2004 split the Bolshoy Ussuriysky Island half and half, and would be governed under strict military inspection.

INDUSTRIAL & FARMING

The site is used for both functions during the colonization, and was left with large chimneys, water towers, oil tanks, clubs, warehouses and two farm lands.

Heixiazi Island

Mandarin, Sinitic languages
 黑瞎子 ; the black blind.
 黑, black; 瞎子, blind.

geographically, Fuyuan Delta

Mandarin, Sinitic languages
 抚远, pacify the distant lands

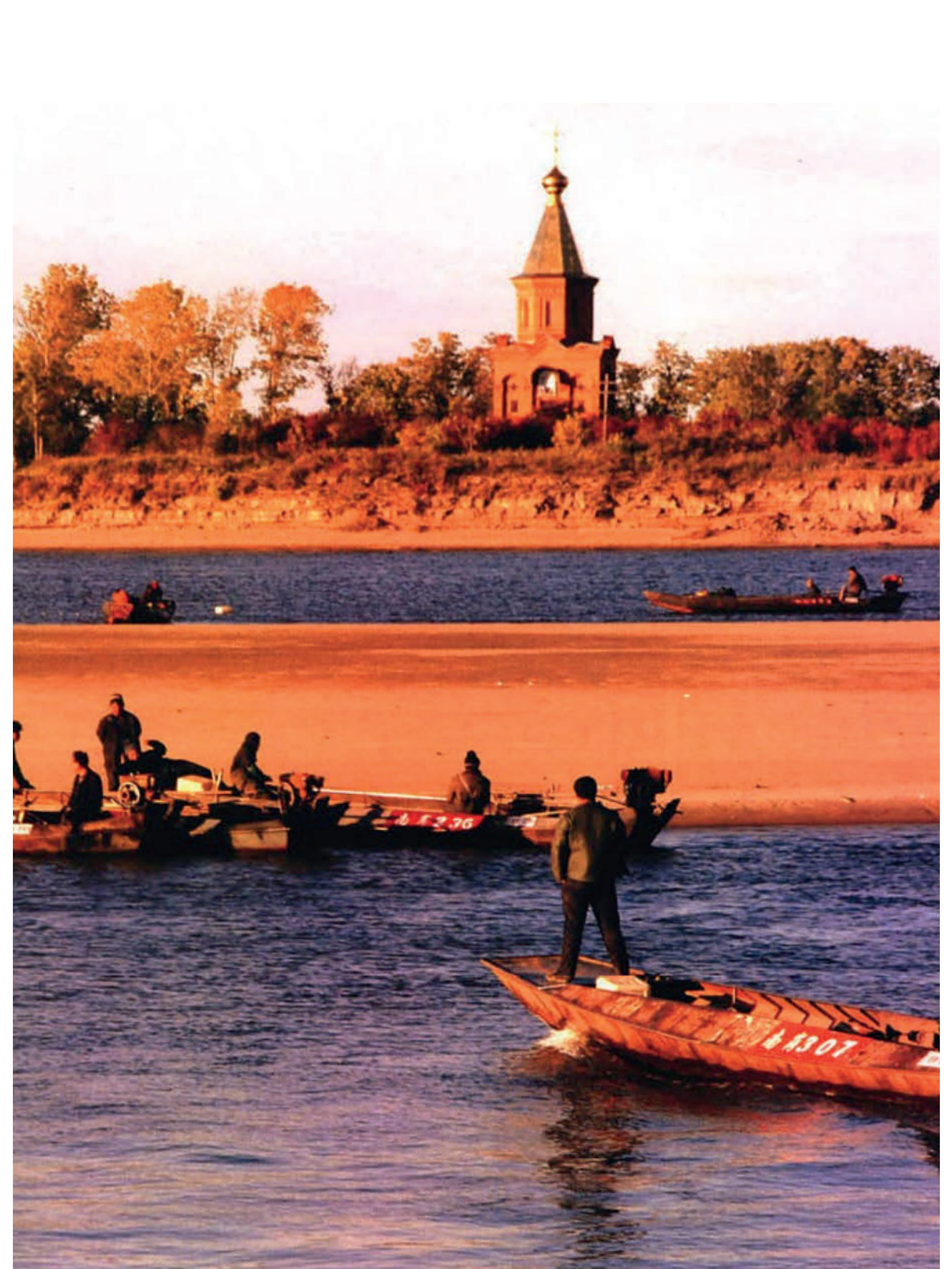
or, Остров Большой Уссурийский

Russian, east Slavic language
 the Great Ussuri Island

Heixiazi Island

Yuan, Zhizhu. In "Heilongjiang: a River of Regret Flows to the Sea."
 In *Chinese National Geography*,
 October 2008.
 Photography.

The Fuyuan Waterway facing
 Heixiazi Island is just a shallow
 river branch, and Chinese
 fishermen would fish here. Not
 far away is a Russian church on
 the island.



"Border" Border

Heixiazi Island (Bolshoy Ussuriysky Island) ./

1901. /

China

15 families including Hezhe people (赫哲人) migrated and lived on the island



1928. /

China

According to census data, there were 30 Chinese households and 17 Soviet households, all of them made a living by fishing and mowing.

1929. /

Russia

Invasion of Soviet army
After the September 18th Japanese invasion, the island became the frontline of the Soviet-Japan war.

1954

Chinese fishermen were no longer allowed to board the island



1960s

PCR and the Soviet Union maintained friendly relations, and border residents of both countries can visit the island.

1964. /

China & Russia

1st negotiation between PCR and the Soviet Union. Both sides held 8 plenary meetings and 30 affiliated meetings of advisers and experts, with both sides agreed on the ownership of Heixiazi Island and reached a basic agreement on the eastern boundary between China and the Soviet Union. Negotiations were suspended when Khrushchev abruptly stepped down.

1969

2nd negotiation, suspended when the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan.

1987

3rd negotiation, signed contract

2004. /

China & Russia

4th negotiation, China and Russia signed the "Supplementary Agreement between the People's Republic of China and the Russian Federation on the Eastern Section of the Sino-Russian Boundary."
The contents of the agreement were not disclosed to the public.



2008. /

China & Russia

Transferred the western half of Heixiazi Island to China, and the border troops of the both countries had begun to perform defense duties along the demarcation line demarcated by the two sides.



2012

China

Announced the establishment of the Heixiazi Island public security border guard post

模糊的边界
黑瞎子岛



Approaching the border in the northeast corner of China, at the confluence of the Heilongjiang and Ussuri River, lies a triangular sandbar formed from the sediment brought by the two rivers. This is the Fuyuan Delta, with a major island call Heixiangzi Island (黑瞎子岛), also known as Bolshoy Ussuriysky Island in Russia. The island region consists of 93 islands and sandbars, including larger ones such as Yinlong Island (银龙岛) and Heixiangzi Island, with a total island area of around 335 square kilometers, which is about one-third of Hong Kong, 12 times the area of Macau, and a little smaller than the land area of Singapore.

610 years ago, the northeast was under the control of the Yuan Dynasty. The fleet of Yishiha (亦失哈) landed in the region and set up an official post connecting the hinterlands of the North China Plain and the flood plain of the Heilongjiang, which determined the geographical and political significance of the Fuyuan Delta. Though the Heixiazi Island has been recognized as part of the Chinese territory since the Yuan Dynasty, in the contemporary context, the ownership of this site has been under constant dispute. The difficulty in settling the border dispute involved competing interests between modern states of Russia and China.

To settle the boundary along the lines claimed by China would have caused a small Russian population in the area to fall under the range of an artillery emplaced on the Heixiazi. However, if China cedes the entire island to Russia, the latter would have controlled the entire Heilongjiang and Ussuri waterways, creating a comfortable buffer zone on the Far East and could refuse navigational access of the Heilongjiang and the Ussuri to Chinese ships.

The Convention of Peking in 1860 stipulated that the boundary between Russia and China lay along the Heilongjiang and Ussuri rivers. As such, the islands at the confluence of the two rivers were Chinese. Fast forward to the 20th century, the Soviet Union occupied Bolshoy Ussuriysky and Yinlong Islands in 1929 by force in the wake of a Russo-Manchurian conflict, which was not accepted by China. While Russia placed the islands as part of Khabarovsk Krai, China claimed them as under Fuyuan County in Heilongjiang Province, the easternmost part of China. The border dispute led to military presence at the border, with both sides imposing military control, putting up guarded posts and barbed wire fences along the border line and gunboats stationed at the waterway. **In 1949**, the People's Republic of China was established, and due to a shared political

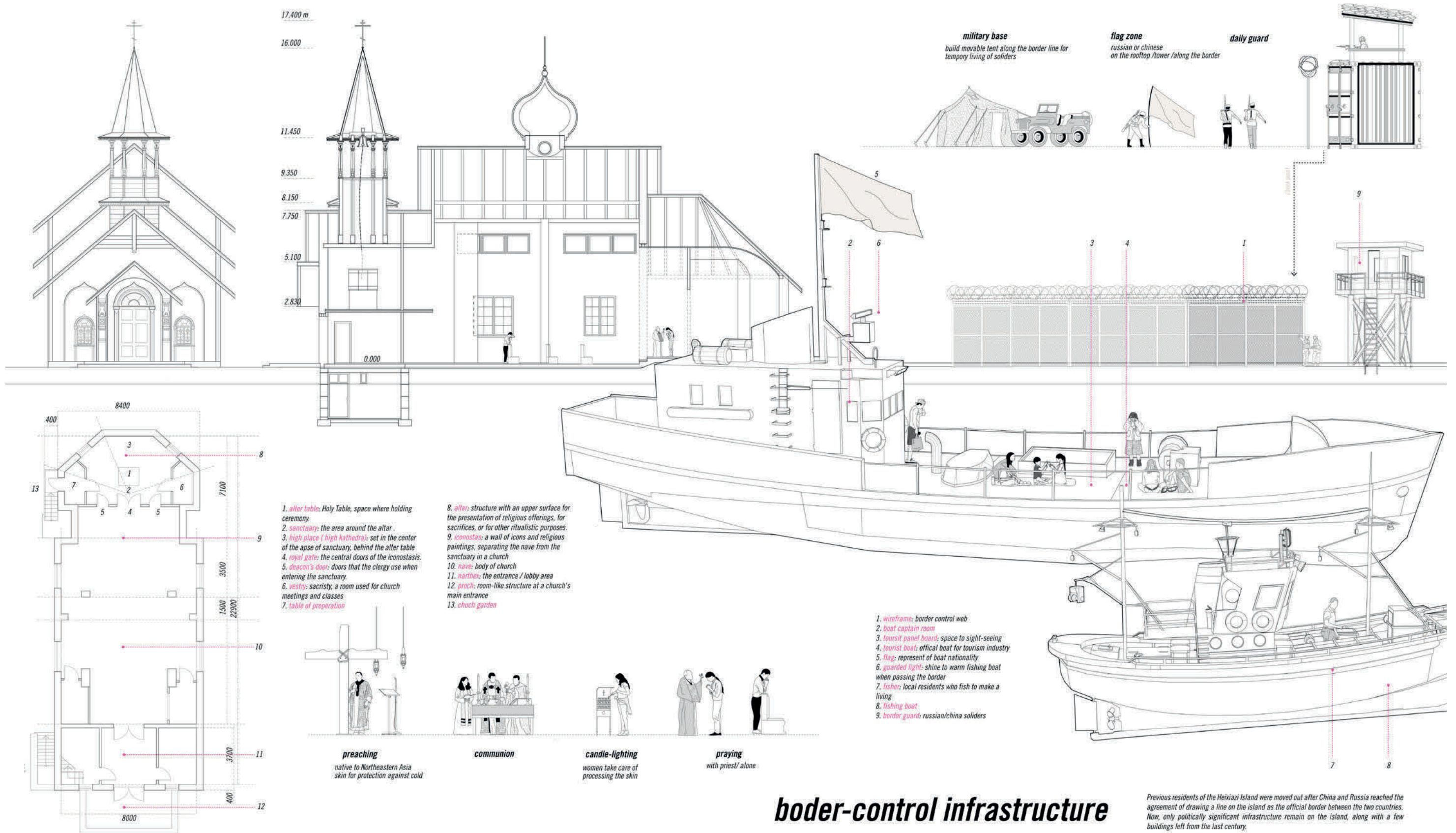
lineage with the Soviet Union, both countries maintained a relatively friendly border relationship. The Heixiazi Island had become a buffer zone for them. From February 25 to August 15, 1964, the PRC and the Soviet Union started the first border negotiation in Beijing. The two sides held eight plenary sessions to reach a consensus on the eastern section of the border, however, the sudden step-down of Khrushchev paused the session. From October 1969 to June 1978, the second border negotiation between the two parties was held. The discussions were suspended again when the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan. In February 1987, the third Sino-Soviet border negotiation took place, which lasted for four years. The then Chinese President Jiang Zemin (江泽民) signed the Agreement, which would officially take power in 2004.

Heixiazi Island

Author Unknown.

Photography.

A few small buildings scatter on Heixiazi Island, connected by a dirt road.



17.400 m
16.000
11.450
9.350
8.150
7.750
5.100
2.830
0.000

military base
build movable tent along the border line for temporary living of soliders

flag zone
russian or chinese on the rooftop /tower /along the border

daily guard

- 1. **alter table:** Holy Table, space where holding ceremony
- 2. **sanctuary:** the area around the altar
- 3. **high place (high kathedra):** set in the center of the apse of sanctuary, behind the alter table
- 4. **royal gate:** the central doors of the iconostasis
- 5. **deacon's door:** doors that the clergy use when entering the sanctuary
- 6. **vestry:** sacristy, a room used for church meetings and classes
- 7. **table of preperation**

- 8. **alter:** structure with an upper surface for the presentation of religious offerings, for sacrifices, or for other ritualistic purposes.
- 9. **iconostas:** a wall of icons and religious paintings, separating the nave from the sanctuary in a church
- 10. **nave:** body of church
- 11. **narthex:** the entrance / lobby area
- 12. **proch:** room-like structure at a church's main entrance
- 13. **chuch garden**

- 1. **wireframe:** border control web
- 2. **boat captain room**
- 3. **tourist panel board:** space to sight-seeing
- 4. **tourist boat:** official boat for tourism industry
- 5. **flag:** represent of boat nationality
- 6. **guarded light:** shine to warm fishing boat when passing the border
- 7. **fisher:** local residents who fish to make a living
- 8. **fishing boat**
- 9. **border guard:** russian/china soliders

preaching
native to Northeastern Asia
skin for protection against cold

communion

candle-lighting
women take care of
processing the skin

praying
with priest/ alone

boder-control infrastructure

Previous residents of the Heixiazi Island were moved out after China and Russia reached the agreement of drawing a line on the island as the official border between the two countries. Now, only politically significant infrastructure remain on the island, along with a few buildings left from the last century.

Cruise ship

Author unknown.

Photography.

Chinese fishermen who practice near the Fuyuan Delta always have to keep an eye on the cruise ships from both sides. The exact location of the borderline remains unknown to the public, and it is only after one goes cross border and the cruise ship rings its siren can one realize that he/she ended up in Russia.



Pontoon bridge on the Ussuri River

Ma, Hongjie. In "Heilongjiang: a River of Regret Flows to the Sea." In *Chinese National Geography*, October 2008.

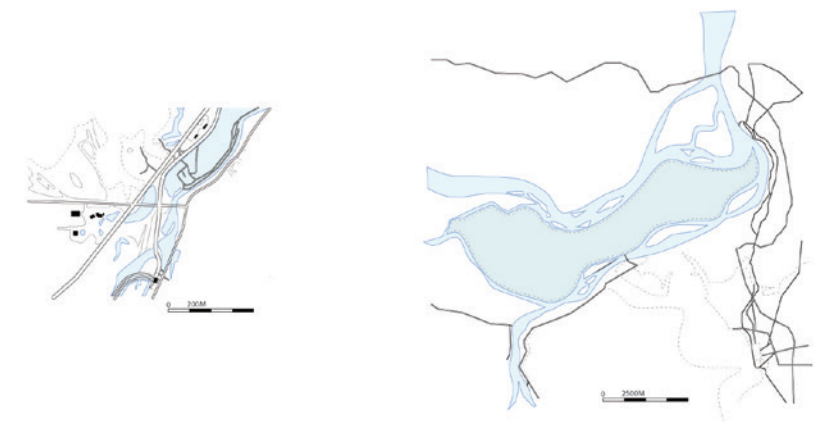
Photography.

To access the Heixiazi Island from Russia, through the Ussuri River, requires one to go through a pontoon bridge on the river guarded by Russian soldiers.



On October 14, 2004, the Complementary Agreement on the Eastern Section of the China-Russia Boundary between the People's Republic of China and the Russian Federation came into effect. Russia agreed to hand over the control of Yinlong Island and roughly half of Heixiazi Island. The territory ceded to China was around 170 square kilometers, with the rest remaining under Russian control. China agreed to relinquish any territorial claims to the remaining Bolshoy Ussuriysky held by Russia in exchange for the ability to

navigate ships through Heilongjiang's main channel. The agreement, however, was never published to the public for various reasons, and only the local officials in-charge have the knowledge of where exactly the line falls and where access can be legally made. The unknown national boundary spans the open fields and rivers, and the mysterious ambiguity attracted tourists to pay visits and take cruise ship tours led by the local shipmen, or simply stand on the river bank to look at a point somewhere in the void. While the small fishing boats driven in the

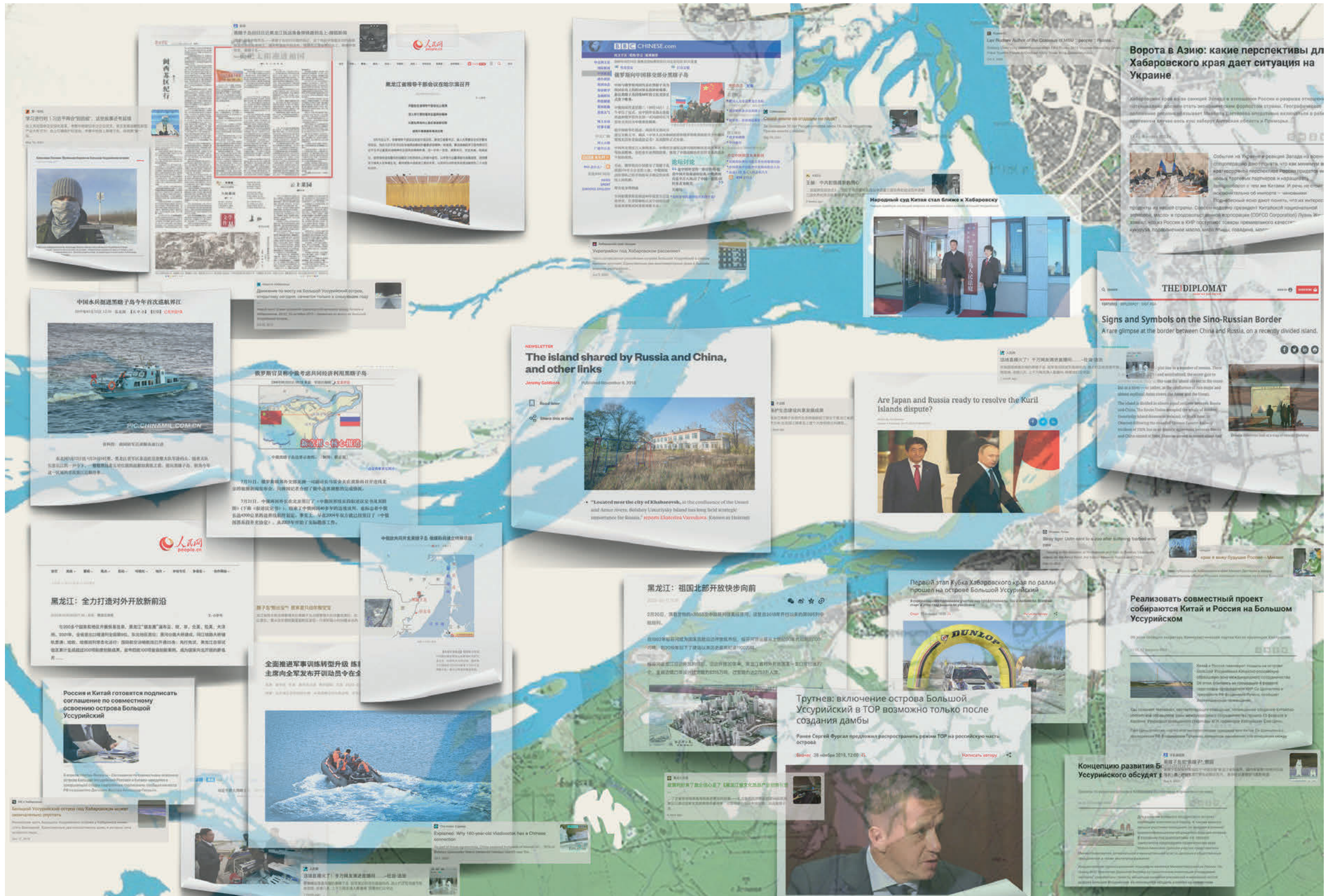


Heixiazi Island

shallow Fuyuan waterway may occasionally cross the national boundary unknowingly, the cruise ships would suddenly come alive and ring their sirens as warning.

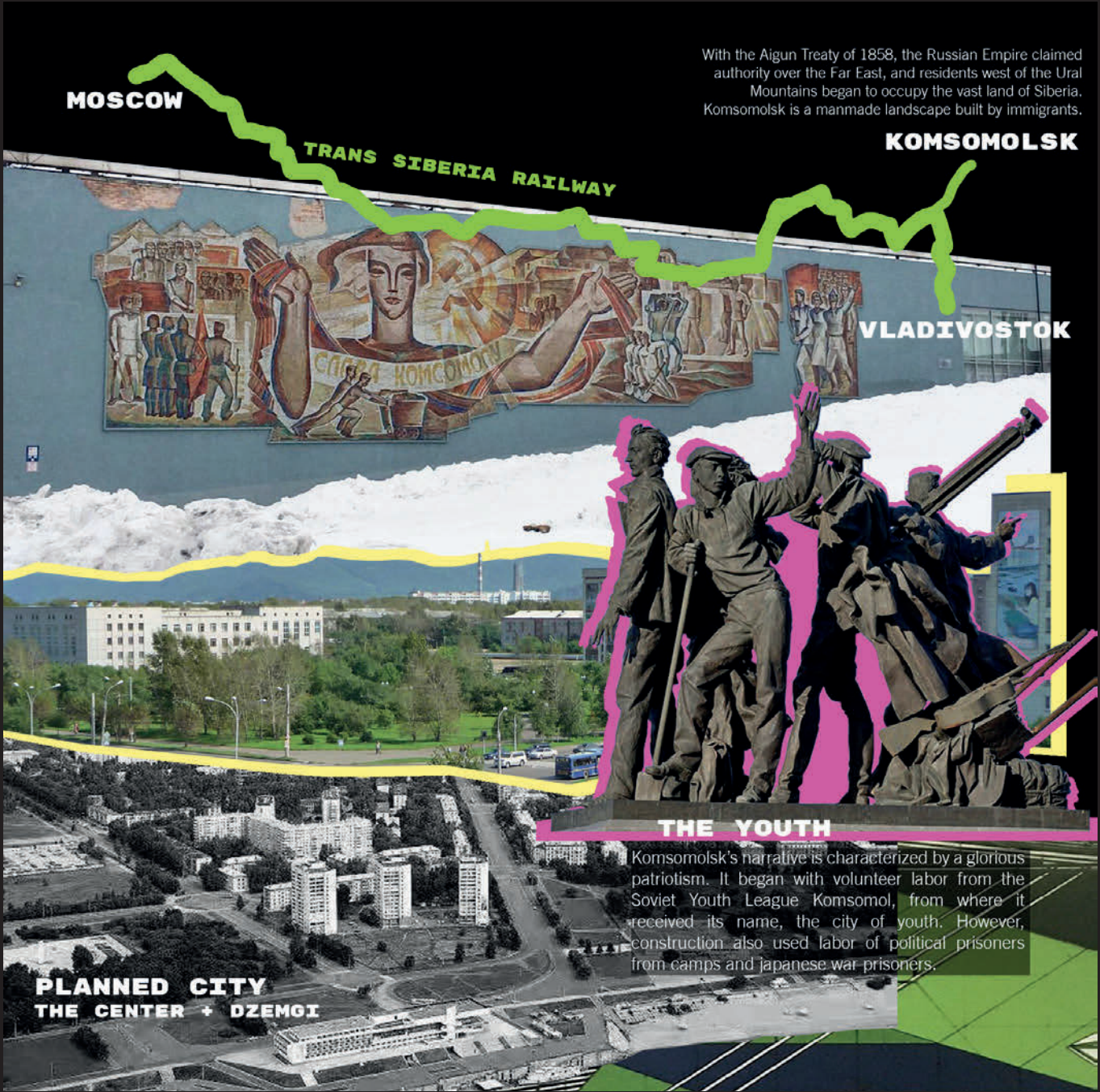
The barren land decorated with scattered monuments and protected areas is engulfed by a plethora of policies and historical news; its political implications deconstruct its landscape. The Chinese and Russian governments have pursued radically divergent development strategies in recent years, with the Chinese side constructing a vast network of transportation infrastructure including bridges, motorways, protected landscapes, and several monuments. The Russian side, however, is still in a barbaric state. On the map, there should be some farms on the Russian side further east of the national border, yet sitting on the scenic bus, tourists could only see the post from a distance, and an Orthodox church on the Russian side. Beyond the reach of tourists, there is a barbed wire fence along the border, mercilessly cutting the island in half. ■

Newspaper Cutouts from various paper and online media, events and comments relating to the border dispute





Man -made Land



With the Aigun Treaty of 1858, the Russian Empire claimed authority over the Far East, and residents west of the Ural Mountains began to occupy the vast land of Siberia. Komsomolsk is a manmade landscape built by immigrants.

MOSCOW

KOMSOMLSK

TRANS SIBERIA RAILWAY

VLADIVOSTOK

THE YOUTH

Komsomolsk's narrative is characterized by a glorious patriotism. It began with volunteer labor from the Soviet Youth League Komsomol, from where it received its name, the city of youth. However, construction also used labor of political prisoners from camps and Japanese war prisoners.

PLANNED CITY
THE CENTER + DZEMOI

komsomolsk-on-amur

Russian, east Slavic language

Комсомольск-на-Амуре

Комсомольск, komsomolsk, the city of youths

from komsomol, a syllabic abbreviation of the Russian

Коммунистический **Союз** **Мол**одёжи,

breviation of a youth

organization in the Soviet Union.

also as Всесоюзный ленинский

коммунистический союз молодёжи

(ВЛКСМ), the All-Union Leninist

Young Communist League

Youth Square Площадь Юности

Trip Advisor.
Photography.

Youth Square, considered among the 47 things to do in Komsomolsk-on-Amur. Front-facing is the former Palace of Culture, now leased off to private businesses.



Manmade Land

Komsomolsk-on-Amur./

13th century

first claimed by the Mongolian Empire,
became part of the Yuan Dynasty

1858. /

China

Treaty of Aigun
Qing Dynasty ceded the area to the
Russian Empire.

1860. /

Tsarist Russia

Peasants migrated from Perm Krai, west
of the Ural Mountains, The Soviet
government also established the small
village of Permskoye to bump the overall
economic.



1932. /

USSR

Construction of Komsomolsk began, with
volunteer labor from the Soviet Youth
League, Komsomol
Construction also used the labor of
political prisoners and Japanese war
prisoners

1937. /

USSR

The region suffered from the Great Purge
under Stalin
became a major Gulag (concentration
camp) center in the Russian Far East.

1940

Developed into a major industrial center
in the Far East, with industries in
aircraft manufacturing, metallurgy,
machinery, oil refining, shipbuilding



1959. /

USSR

The cultural brainwash spread out in
the region
Prohibition of foreign visitors until 1993

1971

A railway bridge across the Heilongjiang
was completed, connecting the
Baikal-Amur Trans-Siberia route

1991

Collapse of the USSR

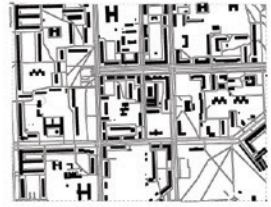
Soviet government collapsed.
The end of Cold War.

2009. /

Modern Russia

The site remains its urban-plan and
building functions since 1991
large numbers of factories and
governmental building remained.
Strong presence of security police,
censorship of citizens and visitors
prevail.





0 100M

0 100M



0 400M

Komsomolsk-on-Amur

The Russian's first attempt to successfully cross the Ural Mountains at the border of Europe and Asia by the end of the 16th century marked the beginning of its long presence in Asia. The Russian Empire stretched from the Baltic Sea all the way to the Pacific, running across the vast Siberia region, taking the Far East region from the hands of the Mongol Empire. Snow-covered coniferous forests, tundra, and firm permafrost had hence become an important part of Russian memory. Komsomolsk-on-Amur, as its name tells, rests on the shore of the Amur River (Russian name for the Heilongjiang), towards the end of the Trans-Siberian Railway, the world's longest railway line. It is a city built from scratch at the command of a strategic order from Moscow in the 1930s.

Sporadic migrations of Russian peasants from Perm Krai, the western slope of the Ural Mountains, began to occupy what is now known as Komsomolsk and established the small village of Permskoye. The plan to

build a military base on the Pacific shore almost 6,000 kilometers away from Moscow was made in 1931, a distant result of the bitter defeat in the Russo-Japanese war of 1904-05. At the order, volunteer labor from the Soviet Youth League, Komsomol, began to migrate to the Far East. The city got its name accordingly—Komsomol, the city of youths, a made-up word that is probably a perfect description of the completely artificial city. The village Permskoye was wiped out, replaced by the newly constructed city.

At first it was extremely difficult, for the area was unbearably cold, and the small agricultural practices of the villagers could not support the lives of the newcomers that flooded in all at once, nor were there enough shelter for all. Construction had to start from clearing out the woods and making room for cultivation, and the long winter months spent in wait caused high mortality rates among the young volunteers.

Monument to First Builders of Komsomolsk-on-Amur, 1982
Statue, facing the Amur River

Japanese soldiers repatriated from the Soviet Union, 1946
author unknown.



Relying solely on the youths would not have had an industrial city this scale and this far from the economic center of a country built. War prisoners and political prisoners were also sent to camps near the site, joining in the effort to turn a magnificent city from blueprint to reality. By September 1933, the first wave of prisoners, around 2500 people, arrived at Komsomolsk; the winter in high latitudes took away most of the lives, and by spring there were only 57 people left. The city was built on flesh to fulfill a vision. During the Stalinist Purge from 1936 to 1938, the site became a major gulag center in the Far East, with a number of prison camps and up to a million prisoners. These labor were used extensively in the construction of Komsomolsk, indeed making great progress.

During the 1940s, Komsomolsk took shape and developed into a major industrial center in the Far East. At first the plan was to build a shipyard, but by then it already had industries also in metallurgy, machinery, oil refining, and aircraft manufacturing. The aircraft factories produced planes that supported the Red Army in the western front

fighting against Germany. After 1945, a second surge of war prisoners from WWII were sent to the gulags at Komsomolsk in support of further construction and factory work. From 1959 to 1993, due to the political sensitivity of the military aircraft industry, the city was closed to visitors, and reciprocally the residents were unable to leave. It was only until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 did the environment start to loosen.

According to the Supreme Soviet of the RSFSR in 1943, the city was divided into Leninsky, Stalinsky and Central districts based on different major enterprises that operated in each district. In 1972, the city was re-divided along the Silinka River into the Center where the shipyard was located, and the Dzemgi, the “sleeping” area, and the districts last until today. While the Center is composed by a mixture of 40s and 50s Stalinist buildings and factories, the Dzemgi was made of typical panel apartment blocks. Though given the name “the sleeping area,” Dzemgi also has factories and many of its residents work within the district.



Aerial view of Dzemgi

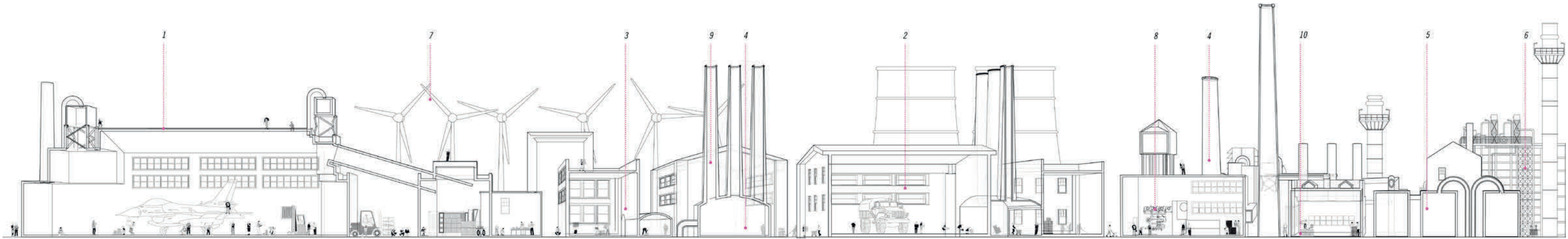
Author unknown.

Photography.

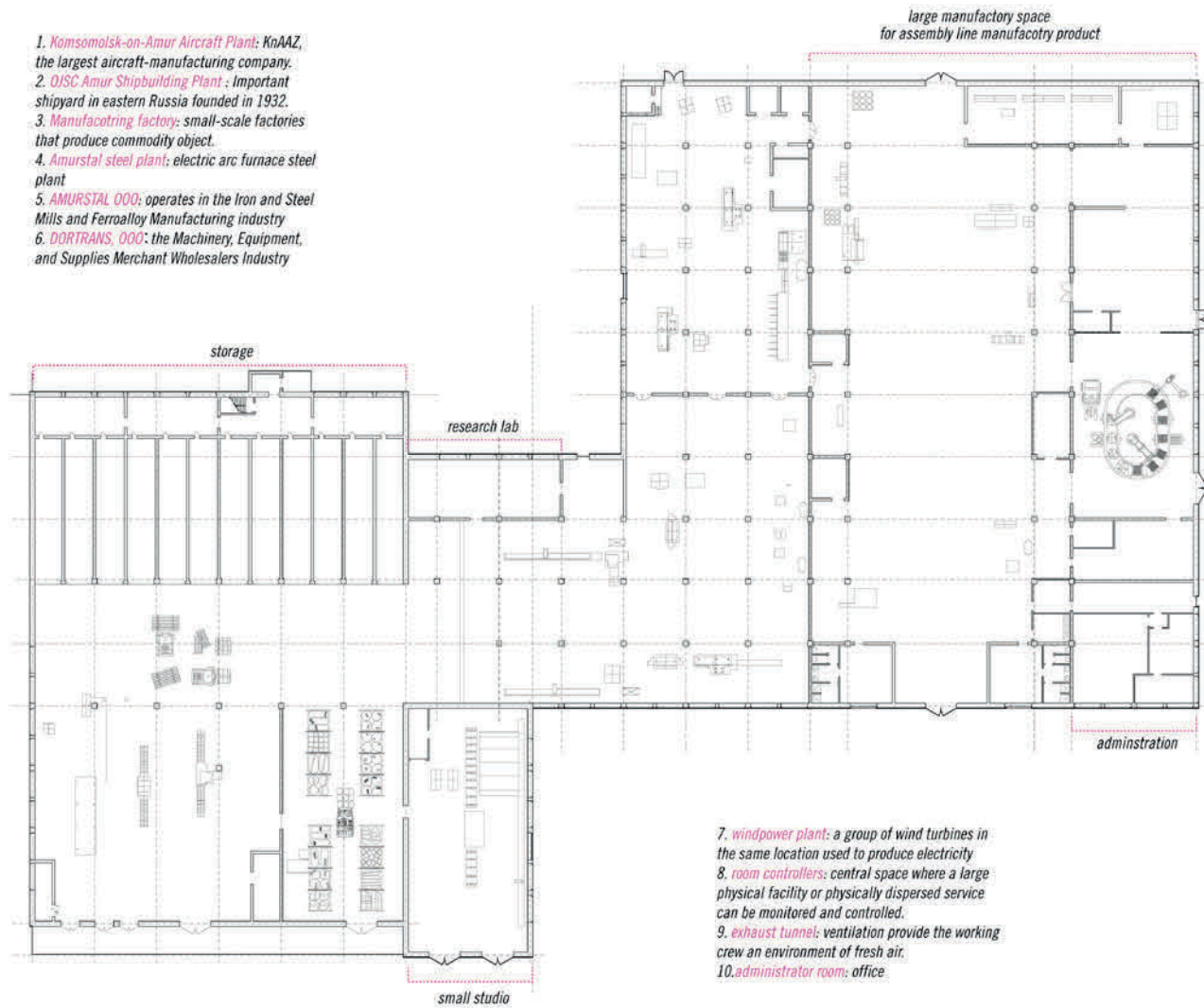
The district of Dzemgi displays typical Soviet city planning characteristics with panel apartment blocks and plain ground, in contrast to the one-story houses at the bottom of the image.

the Komsomolsky factory

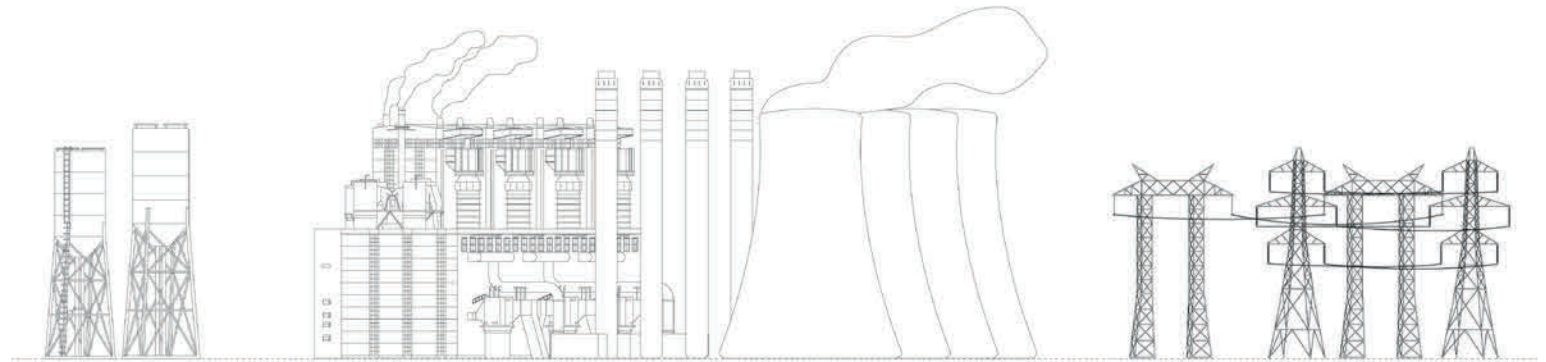
Since the beginning of the city's existence, factories had been the central part of its city planning. Most of the city's residents' lives were divided into half, one in the factories and one at the apartment. Production in the factories, ranging from ships to aircraft, to steel, metal, and machinery, reinforced the city's political status in the Far East.



- 1. *Komsomolsk-on-Amur Aircraft Plant*: KnAAZ, the largest aircraft-manufacturing company.
- 2. *OJSC Amur Shipbuilding Plant*: Important shipyard in eastern Russia founded in 1932.
- 3. *Manufacturing factory*: small-scale factories that produce commodity object.
- 4. *Amurstal steel plant*: electric arc furnace steel plant
- 5. *AMURSTAL OOO*: operates in the Iron and Steel Mills and Ferroalloy Manufacturing industry
- 6. *DORTRANS, OOO*: the Machinery, Equipment, and Supplies Merchant Wholesalers Industry



- 7. *windpower plant*: a group of wind turbines in the same location used to produce electricity
- 8. *room controllers*: central space where a large physical facility or physically dispersed service can be monitored and controlled.
- 9. *exhaust tunnel*: ventilation provide the working crew an environment of fresh air.
- 10. *administrator room*: office.



Manufacture

transportation tools such as airplane and ship manufactory

steel production

steel and iron mills and ferroalloy Manufacturing

electricity plant



transportation
moving the boxes



administration
office worker



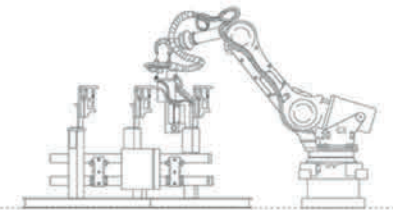
disinfection
post-production cleaning



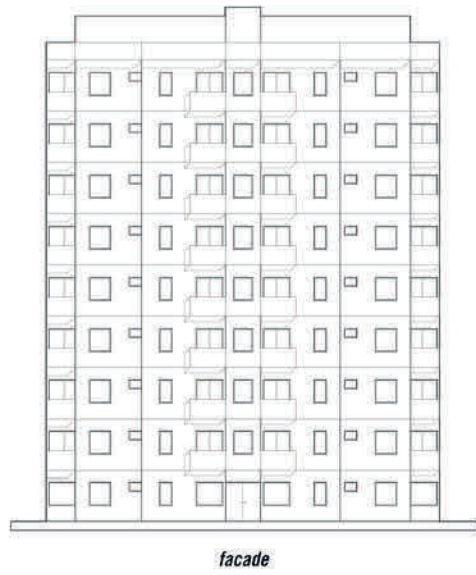
packaging



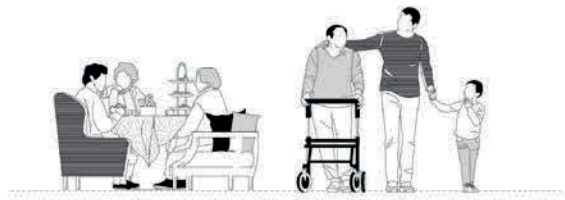
traditional manufacture



high-tech manufacture
AI supported manufacturing



facade



elders

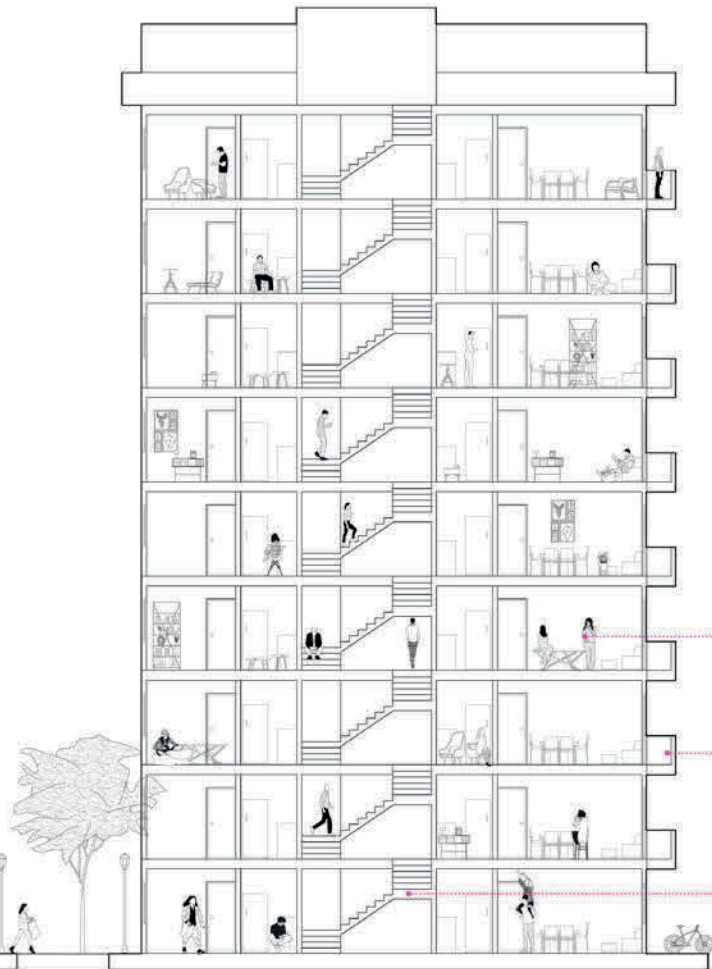
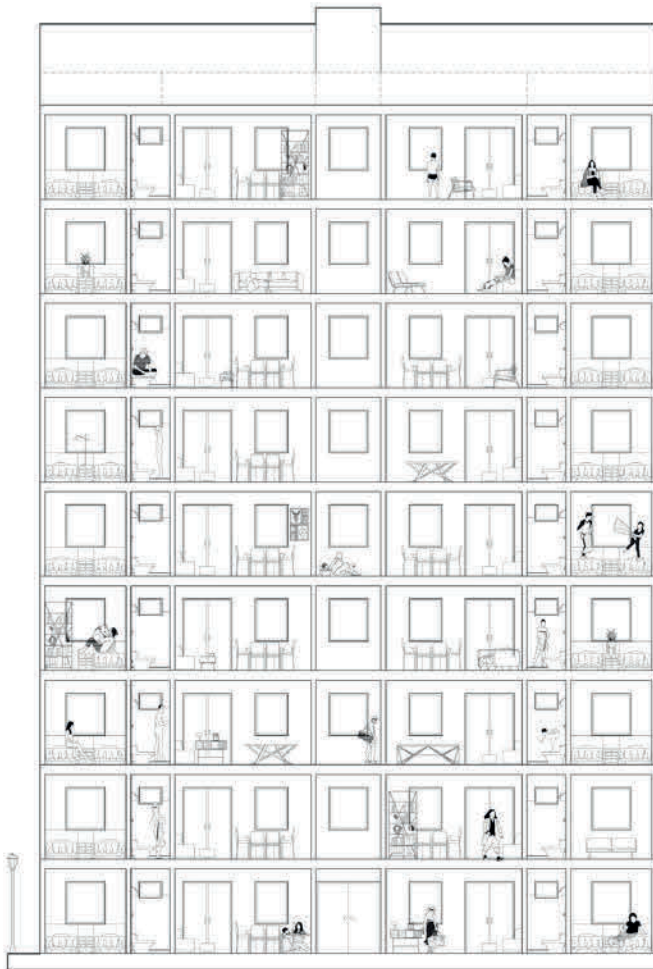


student

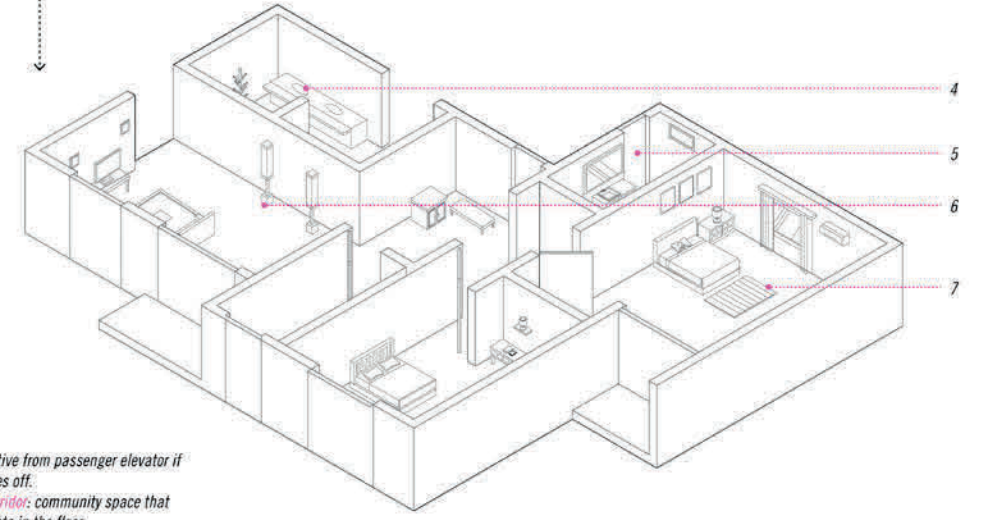
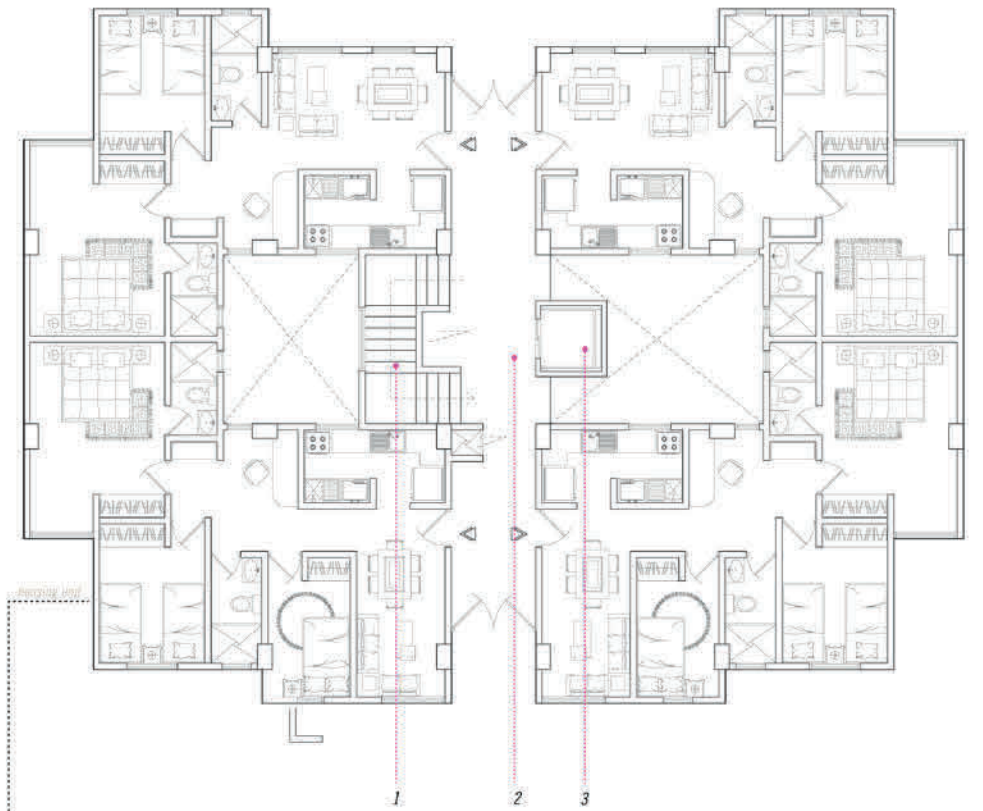
working class



multi-family unit



6
2
1



- 1. stairs: alternative from passenger elevator if the electricity goes off.
- 2. community corridor: community space that shared by residents in the floor.
- 3. freight elevator: designed to stand tougher working conditions, transport slower and carry much heavier loads.
- 4. kitchen: often shared with all residents on a floor.
- 5. bathroom: often shared with all residents on a floor.
- 6. livingroom
- 7. bedroom

the komsomolsky apartment

Typical if not stereotypical, the apartments in the Dzengji District of Komsomolsk-on-Amur were constructed in a crude Soviet style that is sometimes referred to as "socialist modernism." The apartments were rigidly planned and tightly spaced, with shared kitchens and bathrooms on each floor, yet nonetheless carried the lives of many through bitter winters one after another.

Mosaic on the exterior wall of the Youth House

Robb, James. "A City Built on the Bones of Prisoners." *Communist at Large*. August 25, 2016.

Photography.
Slogan says "Glory to the Union of Communist Youth."



In an environment carefully planned and monitored, life was subject to constant control from clerks, police, and from supervisors in work. Even in regions as far from the capital as Komsomolsk, its strategic importance and bureaucratic structure transformed it into another starched satellite city under the tight grip of the state. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the city is forgotten in time. Lingered on the streets were the atmosphere of fear from the previous decades' life under surveillance. In travel logs and a few journal articles, the authors reflect that the city feels very much like back in the Soviet era, with police officers on the streets

questioning pedestrians at will; the title on the police uniforms are still Okhrana, used way back in the Tsarist era. Despite the nostalgic architecture, mosaics on the buildings' party walls showed images of communist youths hard at work and constructions, factories, and airplanes; statues that decorated the city's public squares, streets and water fronts together tell a story of the Soviet achievement, adding to the sense of temporal stagnation. The factories and ex-military sites are now open to visitors if registered a month before the visit, though there are hardly a few travelers who end up here on their own accord. ■



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Photography.

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