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Socialist modernism as a grand narrative: a historical review of people's commune housing design (1958–1983)

The aim of this study is to scrutinise the relationship between political ideology and architectural practice by reviewing the design of residential buildings of people's commune. The article starts from a broad perspective that gleans the relevant commune housing design cases in *Architectural Journal* [建筑学报] and summarises the overall common design policies in different stages. This is followed by discussions on how the socio-economic conditions, technological status, and ideology of the time specifically influenced architectural design, thereby observing the correlation between form, politics, and reality. In parallel, from a chronological perspective, this work analyses the evolution of rural housing design and summarises the characteristics of rural housing design. The results show that the design and construction of residential buildings had undergone three main changes: first, the neglect of special needs for rural housing in design was adjusted, such as the problem of insufficient production and storage space being addressed by the architectural community; second, new reinforced concrete structures and construction techniques were introduced to the design of dwellings; and third, since the cultural revolution, the construction of rural dwellings returned to a more realistic yet improved approach. This study concludes that, although ideology influenced everything from institutions and spatial planning to daily life during the Mao Zedong era, the physical distance between rural areas and the state provided space for socio-technical experiments in rural China. This was manifested in continuous cycles of trial and error and refinement in political practice, everyday realities, and technical arrangements, ultimately resulting in a hybrid state that incorporated both industrial elements—such as new structures and techniques—and local traditional components. Ultimately, the design of rural commune residential architecture can be understood as embodying a pragmatic form of socialist modernism—mediating between national imperatives and popular needs. This article provides new understanding and assembly of historical references for understanding modernism in Mao's China.

通过考察人民公社的住宅建筑，本研究旨在深入剖析政治意识形态与建筑实践之间的关联性。文章首先从宏观视角出发，梳理《建筑学报》中相关的人民公社住宅设计案例，总结不同阶段的总体设计方针，继而探讨当时的社

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会经济条件、技术水平以及意识形态如何具体影响建筑设计，从而观察形式、政治与现实三者间的关联。同时，从时间维度分析农村住宅设计的演变历程，归纳其设计特征。研究发现，人民公社住宅的设计与建设经历了三大转变：首先，设计中对农村住宅特殊需求的忽视得到了纠正，例如，当时的中国建筑界注意到了农村住宅生产和储藏空间不足的问题；其次，新型钢筋混凝土结构和施工技术引入住宅设计；第三，自文化大革命以来，农村住宅建设回归到更务实但更完善的发展路径。研究指出，在毛泽东时代，尽管意识形态影响了社会诸多方面，从制度到空间规划，乃至日常生活，但是农村与国家之间的物理距离为中国农村的社会技术实验提供了空间。这种实验体现在政治实践、日常现实和技术统筹之间持续的试错与优化循环，最终形成了一种融合了工业元素（如新结构和新技术）与地方传统要素的混合状态。归根结底，农村公社住宅建筑的设计可被理解为一种务实的社会主义现代主义——在国家意志与民众需求之间寻求平衡。本文为解读毛泽东时代的现代主义提供了新的认知与历史参照框架。

Introduction

In contemporary China, the promotion of rural revitalisation has been a national strategic mission, especially after the issue of the first five-year (2018–2022) action plan for the ‘Rural Revitalisation Strategy’ by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council in 2018.¹ The content of the plan covers almost all aspects from the development of the economic to the prosperity of rural culture. Additionally, improvements in the rural living environment were included in the plan, which should be a point of discussion for contemporary planners and architects. In addition to the strategy of improving sanitation conditions and building basic infrastructures such as roads and water conservancy; rural housing is an important aspect, which directly affects the life of villagers. Modern lifestyle does not purely denote an increase in personal living space or indicate a new architectural work built in a contemporary style with new materials such as steel and concrete, as in urban areas. There should be a definite policy that instructs us on how to build and address the rural living environment since the act of building sometimes denotes destruction. Consequently, it is crucial to rationally plan and design rural housing and promote rural modernisation to satisfy the need for national development.

In fact, most villages in China experienced modernisation for the first time during the era of Mao soon after the founding of the PRC. As a result of the Great Leap Forward movement, the consequent development of collectivised agriculture led to the birth of the people’s commune in 1958. The people’s commune was an idealistic social practice implemented in China in the second half of the twentieth century. Its aim was to promote collective ownership of the means of production in rural China and implement distribution according to need. As one of its basic characteristics, the commune collecti-

vised the lives of villagers, meaning that commune members ate together in public canteens and engaged collectively in labour. Moreover, women also participated in labour and, as a result, household chores that were previously done by individuals were undertaken by communal facilities, such as daycare centres for childcare and nursing homes for the elderly. Because it involves rural political structures, the economy, and social life, most of the existing studies have focused on the humanities disciplines,² and the issues they focus on rarely involve the construction of physical spaces. Due to the large number of people's communes, their widespread distribution, and their limited number of surviving examples, the topic remains underexplored in the field of architectural history.

Since the advent of the post-colonial era, the architectural activities of Third World countries and heritage under socialism have gradually attracted the attention of the international academic community.³ Modernist architecture originating in Europe gradually spread worldwide throughout the twentieth century and was adopted, modified, and interpreted in different parts of the world.⁴ In the 1950s, following the founding of the People's Republic of China, rather than modernism from Western Europe, the principles of 'socialist realism' originating from the Soviet Union profoundly influenced modern Chinese architecture. However, 'Socialist realism' was soon criticised and rejected in China.⁵ As a result, this symbolic architecture featuring the distinctive Chinese-style curved roof has gradually been replaced by architecture that prioritises practicality and economy. The architectural practices of the Mao era were then guided by an official design principle, 'appropriateness, economy, and if possible, beauty' ['适用, 经济, 在可能条件下注意美观'], which was confirmed as a sustained architectural policy from the mid 1950s.⁶ This approach does not point to any specific architectural style but emphasises economy and practicality. It nevertheless carries distinct Chinese characteristics and largely adheres to the principles of modernist architecture. Moreover, most Chinese architects involved in urban and rural construction during this period had received formal architectural education, making them well-versed in modernist architectural principles. Following this historical context, this study introduces the concept of 'socialist modernism', which refers to state-driven efforts to modernise the built environment following the above official guidelines through standardisation, collectivist spatial organisation, and simplified constructional vocabularies.⁷

Research on the built environment of urban and rural areas in the People's Republic of China since 1949 has revealed a trend toward diversification in terms of research subjects, perspectives, and methodologies.⁸ Moreover, the influence of politics could not be ignored at any level in Mao's China, when architecture even became a diplomatic tool by providing economic aid to Third World countries.⁹ These studies demonstrated how politics is involved in the architectural practice. In fact, in current discussions of contemporary Chinese architecture (post-1949) in China, some scholars divide the design concepts during Mao's China into two types. One type is symbolic architecture dominated by national ideology and nationalism, represented by large-

roofed buildings in cities such as Beijing. The other type consists of building products guided by economic principles such as streamlining and cost saving, and based on repetitive production.¹⁰ However, most research focuses on the first type of architecture,¹¹ with insufficient discussion of large-scale, mass-produced, cost-effective buildings, especially rural architecture. This paper does not aim to challenge the established two-track narrative. Nevertheless, research on modern Chinese architectural history often reveals a tendency to privilege one dimension while overlooking the other, creating a persistent analytical imbalance. Notably, public buildings representing state authority and political order were also present within the rural people's communes. From this perspective, the commune constitutes a complex architectural assemblage that accommodates a dual narrative of design concepts. Compared to public administrative buildings like the hall, which symbolised politics and state power, people's communes featured numerous mass-produced buildings serving ordinary people. As the slogan '*wei renmin fuwu*' [为人民服务, 'serving the people'] proclaims, these buildings were designed by architects for the masses, representing a grand narrative initiated by the state. Commune housing is just one type among these building products guided by economic principles.

Above all, the examination of housing in people's communes contributes to expanding this dual narrative in at least three important dimensions:

- (1) In discussions of 'modernism in Mao's China', the scope should extend beyond large-scale urban public buildings and foreign-aid projects in the Global South. Accordingly, analytical attention must also encompass construction practices in secondary and tertiary towns, as well as rural areas.
- (2) Against the unique historical backdrop of China's collectivisation era, beyond the *sanxian jianshe* [三线建设, Third Front construction], urban air-raid shelters, and *danwei* [单位, work unit], the construction activities of rural people's communes — as a significant chapter in China's modern architectural history — should gradually receive greater attention and undergo in-depth discussion.
- (3) In studies of the people's communes, it is important to reconstruct the history of this period in a rational and evidence-based manner, including its planning, design, and production processes rather than dismissing these spatial practices as entirely valueless simply because the system eventually failed. At the same time, the focus of such research should progressively shift from symbolic political expressions embodied in public buildings toward the everyday architecture of ordinary residents.

The architectural activities of people's commune include the entire rural built environment ranging from buildings and farmland to water conservancy infrastructure. During this process, many Chinese architects were involved in the planning and design of rural buildings.¹² All construction was aimed at realising the socialist collective life, accompanied by the collapse of a traditional family-

based lifestyle, which encouraged the architectural professionals of that time to conceive a new living scheme for commune members.¹³

Duanfang Lu discussed the relationship between the people's commune and the education of desire and noted that the architectural practice of the people's commune represents part of Third World modernism,¹⁴ which deserves to be explored by academics instead of only centring on the western modernisation process. Sam Jacoby and Jingru (Cyan) Cheng defined the people's commune as a type of collective form, where production, reproduction and administration spaces were unified.¹⁵ In addition to these theoretical explorations, studies have focused on the concrete spatial planning and design of the people's communes. For example, commune master planning and residential district planning have been analysed.¹⁶ By examining communes in Hubei Province and the Shanghai region, Cheng further analyzed architectural practices within the people's commune system and concluded that the commune system both transformed traditional rural society in China and simultaneously preserved and perpetuated traditional elements; for example, rural dwellings retained the use of the traditional three-bay layout.¹⁷ Some scholars have also conducted in-depth case studies of the people's communes in northern and southern China.¹⁸ Although these studies have also analysed the design of rural people's commune architecture, they are all concentrated on specific regional studies. A systematic compendium of changes in residential building design from a historical perspective has not been explored thoroughly.

Therefore, this study aims to examine the general policies on China's commune housing design from a historical perspective and highlights the correlation between architectural forms, political ideology, and technological conditions, which are essential for understanding architectural activities under socialist China.

Materials and methods

In general, the design of the people's commune included three levels, from macro to micro: master planning of the commune, residential district planning, and architecture design.¹⁹ The architecture design consisted of public architecture, such as a halls and canteens, and residential buildings. Existing research primarily draws upon officially published journals, magazines, and design atlases. As the official publication of the Architectural Society of China (ASC) [中国建筑学会], *Architectural Journal* [建筑学报] is an authoritative publication in the Chinese architectural circle that records representative architectural projects and scholarly discourse, and serves as the main data source of this study. Complementary to this, this study presents the findings of field surveys. We mainly investigated the former sites of people's communes in which some architectural structures are still extant today, including the Dazhai commune [大寨公社] and Chaya Mountain Weixing people's commune [嵯峨山卫星人民公社], both of which have been listed as nationally designated key cultural heritage sites. Both sites now function as

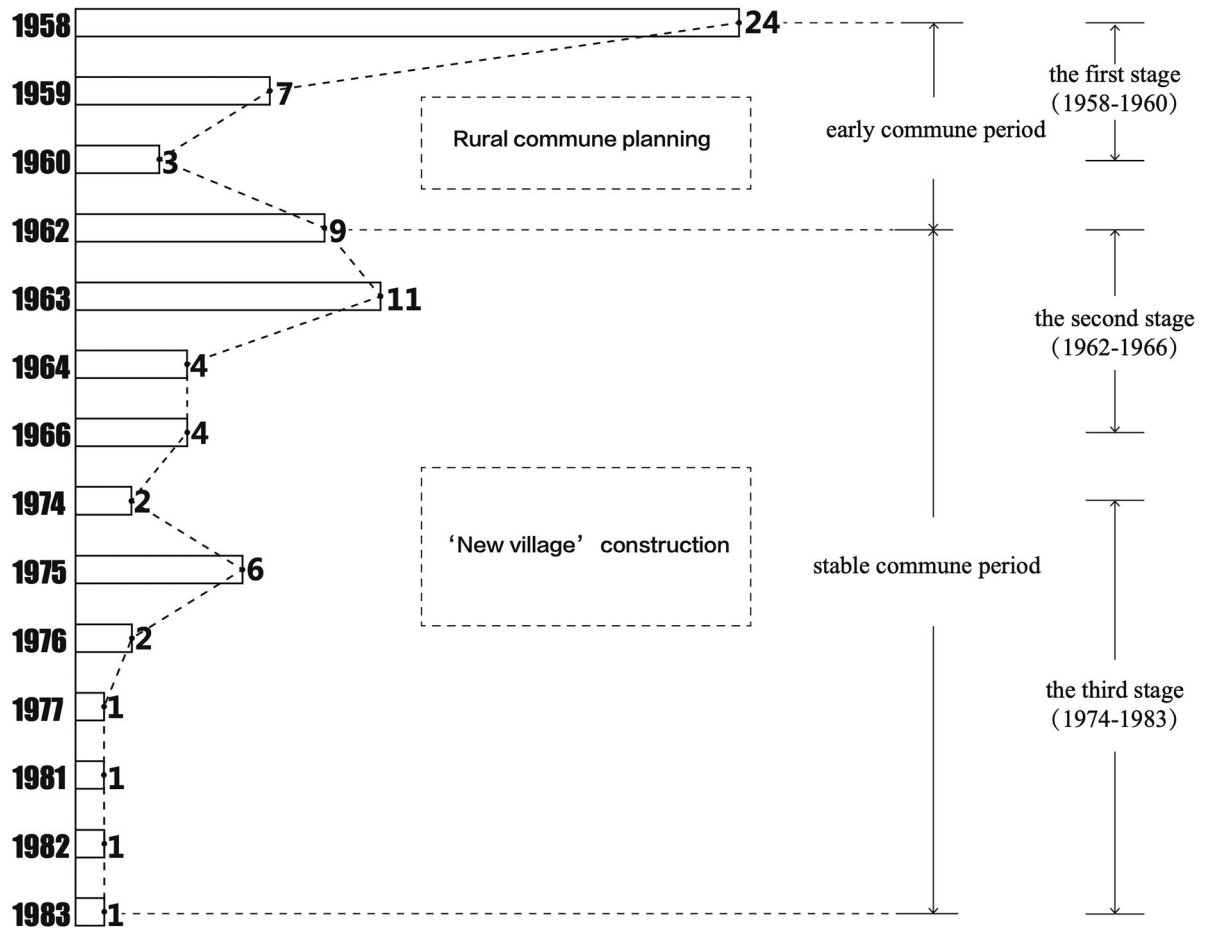
museums to display the social conditions related to the people's commune era. The photographs, drawings, archival materials, and interview information obtained during the survey will serve as supplementary materials for this study. Fieldwork was carried out primarily in two phases: the first phase took place in August 2017, when we carried out our first on-site visits to the two communes mentioned above. The second phase took place in March 2018, during which we carried out surveying and mapping of the Weixing people's commune. The interviewees were primarily staff members of the Weixing people's commune museum. The interviews were used mainly to verify construction methods, to identify differences between published plans and the built reality, and to reconstruct the production processes of surviving buildings. Other sources like *China Pictorial* [人民画报] (a comprehensive national photography magazine published by the new China for the international audience) will serve as supplementary material to provide additional insight into the social circumstances of that era.

Thus, to grasp the overall trend in rural commune housing design, this study first systematically sorted interrelated cases in the *Architectural Journal* [建筑学报] throughout the people's commune period from 1958 to 1983. For each case, an analysis was performed based on the following aspects: the descriptive design strategy (some publications were only proposals and had no concrete drawing plan) and characteristics of a concrete design plan. Then, the general design policies were summarised from a macro perspective for each stage. Second, for each stage of residential building design, this study discusses how the socio-economic conditions, technological status, and ideology of the time specifically influence architectural design. Third, the evolution of the design methodology of rural housing was discussed. Finally, this work explored the modernism reflected behind this particular period of residential construction, elucidating its characteristics and experiences.

The overall picture and phasing of the design of people's commune housing

The people's commune system initially comprised 'large communes' characterised by extensive scale, high levels of collectivisation, and centralised accounting and distribution. However, the lack of experience led to many problems in the operation of the system. After the publication of the 'Urgent Instruction Letter on Current Policy Issues of Rural People's Communes' in 1960, the commune system was divided into communes, production brigades, and production teams, and this three-tier administrative structure persisted for nearly twenty-three years until 1983.²⁰

According to the data (Fig. 1), this paper designated the period from 1958 to 1960 as the first phase, which was the period preceding the birth of the commune system and its early step. With the onset of the widespread famine across China from 1959 to 1961, construction around 1961 was interrupted. Although construction did not come to a complete halt, rural



development projects were hardly as vigorous as they had been in the early stages. Consequently, no articles related to communes were published in the *Architectural Journal* in 1961. Accordingly, in the first phase, we did not include 1961.

The second stage was from 1962 to 1966, which was the period when the commune system was restructured and the Cultural Revolution had not begun. After that, *Architectural Journal* ceased publication from 1967 to 1972 and resumed only in 1973.²¹ However, only two issues were published that year, and none contained articles related to the people's commune. Accordingly, this study designated the period from 1974 to 1983 as the third phase, which was the end of the Cultural Revolution and the commune system. In short, the division into three phases is based on the development of the people's commune system, political events, and the history of *Architectural Journal* itself rather than strict political boundaries.

Figure 1.
Changes in number of articles on people's commune in *Architectural Journal* [建筑学报] and division of stages, drawn by the authors, 2025

Over the course of these twenty-five years, this study identified 41 commune-related housing projects published in *Architectural Journal* between 1958 and 1983, excluding articles that, while covering construction during the people's commune period, did not include specific design examples. The 'commune-related housing' here refers to a category of buildings newly planned and designed for residential use, excluding those traditional dwellings that already existed in rural areas. Cases were included only when descriptive text or construction records allowed for reliable extraction of design strategies. Projects lacking sufficient material were excluded.

The first stage (1958–1960): envisioning a future communist lifestyle

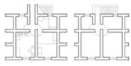
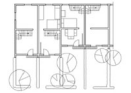
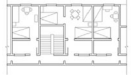
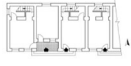
To understand the general strategies for housing design in the first stage, this paper extracted all related cases from 1958 to 1960 (Table 1). The 17 commune cases were located in suburban areas around main cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou (Fig. 2). According to table 1, the general design strategies can be described as follows:

- (1) Except for No. 4, No. 11, No. 14, and No. 16, the other commune houses had no kitchens in each household; they relied on a public canteen.
- (2) Compared with the traditional single-story house, the two-story house was considered the ideal proposal to solve the contradiction between population concentration and limited economic conditions.
- (3) The living space per rural resident was specified and did not exceed 10 msq.
- (4) Except for No. 10 and No. 15, the public residence plans were almost entirely linear in shape, which was easier to extend on the ground and easy to construct.
- (5) In terms of building structure and materials, most of the commune housing adopted a simple method with inexpensive, local materials such as brick, wood, and mud because of the lower economic conditions at that time.

In addition to these common strategies, the designers in some cases considered the local natural conditions. For example, in cases 7, 11, and 15, a side corridor for ventilation and heat dissipation was designed to adapt to the local weather conditions. The regions of Chengdu and Guangdong Provinces, where these three cases are located, belong to the subtropical monsoon climate zone with high temperatures and rainy summers. In case 14, considering the local topography, designers proposed terraced houses to adapt to the sloping land.

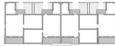
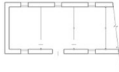
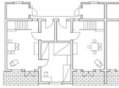
In brief, compared with drawing a special collective housing plan at the design level, providing cheap and easily built public residential buildings in a short time was the essential problem faced by the architectural professionals of this period. The residential architectural design schemes of this period were presented as linear-shaped rowhouses with a combination of standard units at the form level and an emphasis on living space per person at the

Table 1. Analysis on the housing design of people's commune from *Architectural Journal* [建筑学报] (1958–1960), redrawn by and courtesy of Yanfei Zheng, compiled by the authors, 2025

No	summary of housing design strategy	design plan	general information			
			m ² / people	floor	kitchen	pattern
01	per capita living space specified two- and four-story houses planned	—	4	2	—	—
02	two-floor 'villa' for villagers just for living and study storeroom requested by villagers brick arches built without steel		3.7~5	2	—	villa
03	separate housing for each household convenient collective life one- and two-story rowhouses storeroom for bicycles and farm tools brick-wood structure		8.5	1&2	—	rowhouse
04	addressed farmers' needs two-story houses preferred brick-wood structure, tile roof south-facing living room prioritized linear shaped plan		5.3~7.5	2	some has	linear shaped plan
05	self-built by farmers two-story rowhouses brick-wood structure independent entrance per household no kitchen or toilet		5.8	2	—	rowhouse
06	one- and two-story rowhouses vestibule and backyard no kitchen		—	1&2	—	rowhouse
07	two-story rowhouse with side corridor (climate-adapted) no kitchen anteroom for storage brick walls		4	2	—	rowhouse
08	one- and two-story rowhouses no kitchen storage room provided brick-wood structure reused tiles and wood		—	1&2	—	rowhouse

(Table continued)

Table 1. Continued

No	summary of housing design strategy	design plan	general information			
			m ² / people	floor	kitchen	pattern
09	one-story (40%) and two-story house (60%) brick-wood structure reused materials		4~6	1&2	—	linear plan
10	composed of multiple units t-, r-, and rectangular plans independent door for each room		3.5~4	1&2	—	rectangle t-shaped r-shaped plan
11	one- and two-story rowhouses (20%) standardization side corridor for climate adaptation kitchen and bathroom for custom needs traditional architectural style inherited		4.5~7	1&2	has	linear plan
12	designed for collective living needs equipped with lighting, water, and electricity	—	6	2	—	—
13	south-facing houses with vegetable gardens one-story rowhouse wood gable roof, mud walls materials reused from old local houses		—	1	—	rowhouse
14	terraced houses for sloping terrain separate bathroom and private courtyard for crops local folk style incorporated built with mud, brick and concrete		—	1&2	has	linear plan
15	side corridor for climate adaptation public auxiliary rooms (kitchen, bathroom, storage) built with local materials		8~10	2	—	standard unit assembly housing with various types
16	kitchen and storage in each house three large rooms per household residential units combinable all main rooms face south		7.6	2	has	linear plan
17	dormitory style residence local brick decorative elements reed arch roof (low-cost) low housing cost		—	2	—	linear plan

economic level, which were almost identical to the design of modern housing in urban areas. Moreover, in terms of construction materials, most cases highlight the use of inexpensive local materials such as bricks and wood to maximise steel savings.

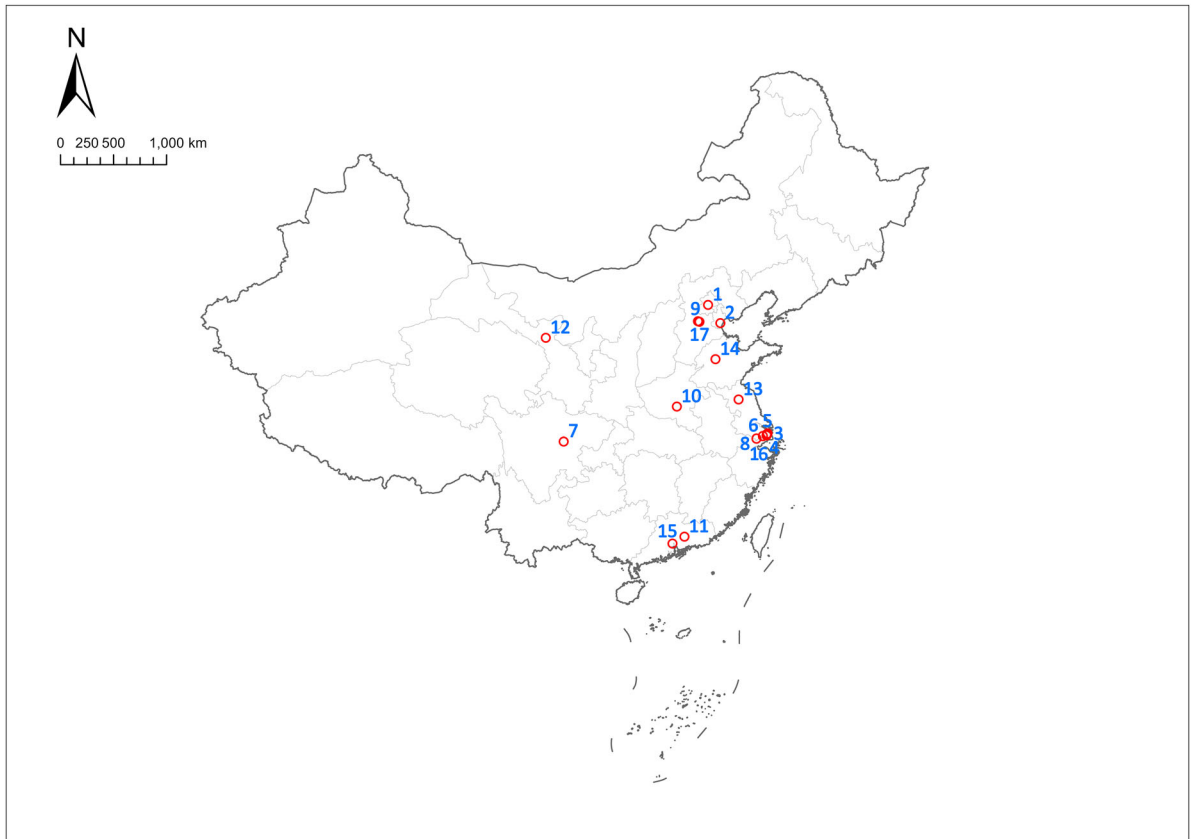


Figure 2.
Examples related to housing design, 1958–1960: (1) Hongqi commune [红旗公社], Tsinghua University, 195809; (2) Xiaozhan commune [小站公社], Tianjing University, 195810; (3) Caoyang villagers' new village [曹阳农民新村], Shanghai Urban Construction Bureau, 195810; (4) Qiyi commune [七一公社], Civil Architecture Design Institute of Shanghai, 195810; (5) Xianfeng commune [先锋农业社], Tongji University, 195810; (6) Hongqi commune of Qingpu country [青浦县红旗公社], Tongji University, 195810; (7) Longtan commune [龙潭公社], Southwest Industrial Architecture Design Institute, 195811; (8) Puzhuang commune [浦庄公社],

In short, in response to Mao's people's commune movement, the Chinese architectural community at the time envisioned a future communist utopia for rural areas. In this picture, there emerged public welfare facilities such as large canteens, assembly halls, nurseries, and clubs, which were previously unheard of in 'old' China. Behind these 'luxurious' new architectural forms were standardised, economical, mass-produced collective residences. These dwellings lacked spaces for daily cooking, childcare, and elder care, instead serving as rooms for sleeping. In fact, many of the architects involved in the planning of the people's communes during this period had studied abroad,²² yet their work demonstrated little evidence of individualised creative expression. In the first stage, from the perspective of architectural form and spatial composition, the adoption of standardised linear rowhouses without kitchens, the focus on unit aggregation, and the pursuit of minimal per-capita floor area were not only design strategies proposed by architects but also embodied the prevailing social policies of the period. In particular, the state's drive for industrial development and increased steel output²³ encouraged architects to rely on inexpensive local materials and adopt simplified con-

Nanjing Institute of Technology, 195811; (9) Suicheng commune [遂城公社], Planning and Construction Bureau of Hebei province, 195811; (10) Weixing commune [卫星公社], South China Institute of Technology, 195811; (11) Gongzhuang commune [公庄公社], Urban Architecture Design Institute of Guangdong province, 195812; (12) Jinyang commune [金羊公社], Planning and Construction Bureau of Gansu province, 195812; (13) Dingji commune [丁集公社], Nanjing Institute of Technology, 195901; (14) Zhonggong commune [仲宫公社], China Academy of Building Research, 195901; (15) Panyu commune [番禺公社], South China Institute of Technology, 195902; (16) Changzheng commune [长征公社], Eastern China Industrial Architectural Design Institute, 196003; and (17) Xushui commune [徐水公社], Tsinghua University, 196004; drawn by the authors, 2025

struction techniques. Even women actively participated in making steel throughout the country.²⁴ In rural construction, the limited supply of steel materials was almost entirely allocated to productive infrastructure such as factories and railways, leading to a shortage of steel for residential and communal buildings, particularly residential construction. On the other hand, this efficient functional layout also reveals the prevailing architectural principles of the time, namely 'appropriateness, economy, and, if possible, beauty'.²⁵

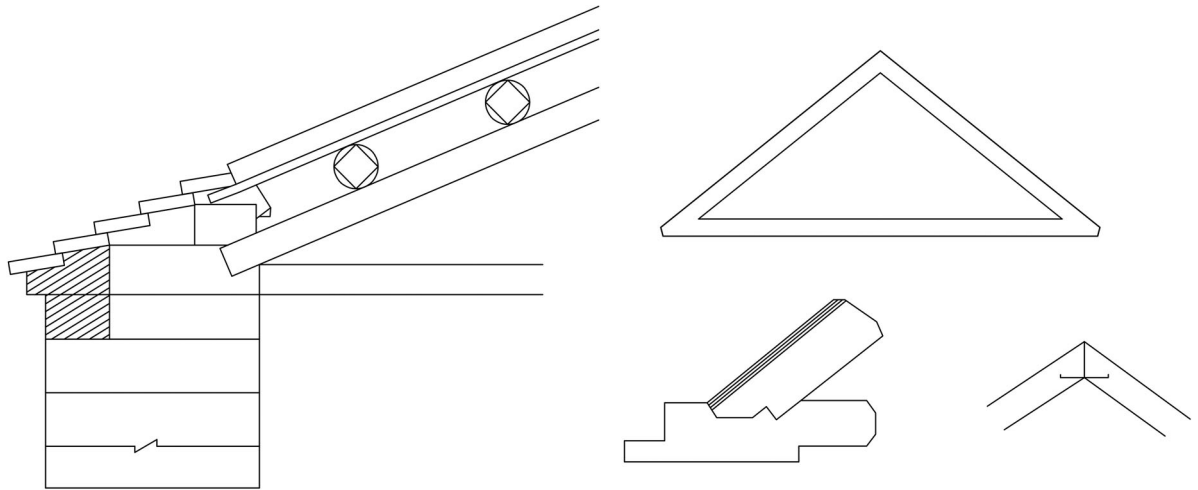
Moreover, in the first phase of commune housing design, architects adopted standardised floor plans while simultaneously drawing on local materials and, in some cases, traditional construction techniques. Prior to the design process, architects conducted detailed surveys of local dwellings (Fig. 3), identified the conventional methods used in roof structures, and then directly incorporated these practices into the commune housing design. This also reflects Mao's call at the time: 'learn through manual labour and from the people'.²⁶

The second stage (1962–1966): standardised production supported by industry

The 11 commune cases extracted and sorted from 1962 to 1966 (Table 2) were mainly located in north China (Fig. 4). The general design strategies can be summarized as follows:

- (1) All rural commune housing had a kitchen in the plan.
- (2) Except for No. 02 and No. 08, the floor plan and overall external form of the house were almost exclusively in the style of traditional local dwellings to follow local customs.
- (3) Except for No. 02, the living space per rural resident was de-emphasised.
- (4) Except for No. 05, the single-story house accounted for the most cases.
- (5) Except for No. 11, the use of precast reinforced concrete components was emphasised in the construction materials.
- (6) The use of local materials was promoted during construction, and farmers were able to build by themselves.

In rural construction, two major shifts emerged during this period compared with the first phase. First, with the exception of the unique rammed earth construction technique developed at the Daqing Oilfield (*Gandalei* [干打垒, rammed-earth construction], No. 11),²⁷ regarding architectural form and constructional choice, the second phase adopted designs grounded in traditional courtyard-style and single-story residential structures, combined with prefabricated concrete components. Second, at the spatial level, the reintroduction of kitchens, courtyards, and production spaces provides spatial evidence of the evolving lifestyle of the commune. In practical construction, the adoption of prefabricated components demonstrates both the state's policy adjustments in industry and agriculture and the construc-



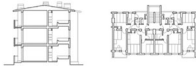
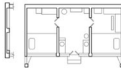
tion sector's response to the call for extending technological support to rural areas.²⁸

During the first phase of steelmaking, wood was used as a readily available fuel, resulting in the depletion of most of the timber in the forests surrounding rural areas and leading to a shortage of wood. In contrast, materials such as sand and gravel for the production of precast concrete components were readily available in almost all regions. At the same time, the country gradually increased its steel production and began supporting rural areas by supplying steel as a building material. In 1961, building on the Great Leap Forward, the steel industry saw an increase in variety and improvement in quality, with some large steel companies, such as Anshan Iron and Steel, achieving significant production gains.²⁹ From the perspective of materials and construction, reinforced concrete was durable, economical, and easy to dismantle, replace, and install, reflecting the advantages of industrialised mass production and standardised assembly. This construction method aligned with the policy of '*duo, kuai, hao, sheng*' ['多快好省', 'more faster, better, and more economical']. As early as the beginning of 1960, the ASC and the Ministry of Construction held several meetings to propose in-depth technological innovation and to support the construction of small and medium-sized towns and people's communes. Specifically, they proposed to actively promote mechanisation and prefabrication while encouraging the use of new materials and new structures.³⁰ In short, the construction of commune housing during this period reflects a microcosm of the technological innovation and building at a faster pace promoted by the state at that time.

This phase of rural commune housing (Fig. 5) replaced wood in traditional dwellings with modern, industrialised materials and structures without changing their basic form. Moreover, the production space, cooking space, and storage space, which had been neglected in the first phase, received increased attention.³¹ If the first stage was still an exploratory phase, with most architects

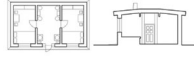
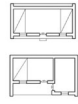
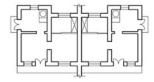
Figure 3.
The roof construction methods of traditional vernacular house in Henan Province, in '河南省遂平县卫星人民公社第一基层社规划设计' ['Planning and Design of the First Primary Commune of Weixing People's Commune in Suiping County, Henan Province'], published by 广东人民出版社 [Guangdong Renmin Press], 1958, p. 34, redrawn by and courtesy of Yanfei Zheng, 2025

Table 2. Analysis on the housing design of people's commune from *Architectural Journal* [建筑学报] (1962–1966), redrawn by and courtesy of Yue Yu, compiled by the authors, 2025

No	summary of housing design strategy	design plan	general information			
			m ² / people	floor	kitchen	pattern
01	separate kitchen and poultry space provision for toilet installation		–	1	has	local vernacular housing
	precast reinforced concrete fittings self-built by farmers yard included in floor plan					
02	medium rooms (11 m ²) and small rooms (7–8 m ²) minimal floor plan types meeting housing needs one family per house fire pit adoption most living rooms face south reinforced concrete elements		3~3.5	1~3	has	linear rowhouse
03	non-load-bearing interior and exterior walls built with local materials utilizing local traditional styles reinforced concrete structure	 	–	1	has	local vernacular housing
04	built with local materials precast reinforced concrete elements addressed farmers' needs specification and diversification		–	1	has	local vernacular housing
05	built with local materials facade follows traditional local methods		–	2	has	local vernacular housing
	self-built by farmers courtyard for production precast reinforced concrete elements utilized					
06	protection from cold and heat single-family home with patio and vegetable garden reinforced concrete structure built with local materials		–	1	has	local vernacular housing

(Table continued)

Table 2. Continued

No	summary of housing design strategy	design plan	general information			
			m ² / people	floor	kitchen	pattern
07	walls resistant to rain and snow erosion reinforced concrete elements firewall installation		—	1	has	local vernacular housing
08	flexible floor plan suitable for diverse demographics precast concrete elements		—	1~5	has	linear rowhouse
09	reinforced concrete elements built with local materials separate kitchen column and beam load-bearing structure ·separate courtyard		—	1	has	local vernacular housing
10	precast reinforced concrete components regular and symmetrical local architectural style built with local materials		—	1&2	has	local vernacular housing
11	easy construction simple house plan and structure wooden pillars, beams, and purlins with earth walls new materials for roof waterproofing enhanced fire prevention measures		—	1	has	local vernacular housing

simply transplanting urban housing designs to rural contexts which led to a lack of adaptation to the local environment, the second stage began to experimentally introduce new industrial technologies and effectively combine them with traditional elements.

The third stage (1974–1983): ‘new village’ construction through ‘self-reliance’

After the Cultural Revolution, there was the late period of the commune system and the early period of reform and opening. The 12 commune cases, extracted and sorted between 1974 and 1983 (Table 3), were mainly located in coastal provinces in East China and South China (Fig. 6).

The general design strategies can be summarised as follows:

- (1) Almost all rural commune housing had a kitchen in the plan.
- (2) The residential buildings were presented in the form of rowhouses.



Figure 4.
Examples related to residential design, 1962–1966: (1) rural housing of Huaibei District [淮北地区农村住宅], Design Institute of Anhui Provincial Department of Architecture, 196209; (2) coal miners' housing in Hebei Province [河北省煤炭工人住宅], Design Institute of Hebei Provincial Department of Architecture and Engineering, 196209; (3) rural housing of north China region [华北地区农村住宅], Beijing Architectural Design Institute, 196210; (4) rural housing of Miyun district [密云农村住宅], Beijing Architectural Design Institute, 196210; (5) rural housing of Southern region [南方农村住宅], Guangbin Zeng [曾广彬], 196302;

- (3) The two-story house accounted for the majority of houses.
- (4) Residential buildings were designed on a family-by-family basis.
- (5) Each household was equipped with space for various functions, including living, hospitality, and production.
- (6) The overall planning of the new village, including housing, and the design of public buildings was conducted and organized by the commune.
- (7) The materials and technologies for construction were independently solved by the commune.

The characteristics of rural housing construction in the third phase can be summarised in three main aspects:

- (1) In the above published examples, residential buildings were designed and constructed as part of the commune's overall planning, characterised by a uniform, concentrated, and linear row-style layout.
- (2) Influenced by the Dazhai model, locally produced bricks, cement slabs, and mud bricks became the primary building materials in rural areas. Construc-

tion methods largely relied on traditional local techniques, which facilitated farmers' self-building practices.

- (3) In terms of spatial composition, while retaining the kitchen, bathroom, and courtyard spaces, the design mainly adopted rowhouse forms that allowed for convenient expansion and standardisation, thereby synthesising the characteristics of the previous two stages.

Moreover, as an integral component of the 'new village', in the cases analysed here, rural residential construction was planned and implemented by the commune. Previously dispersed natural villages were consolidated into a centralised settlement to increase the amount of cultivable land. Additionally, rural dwellings were largely designed as household-based rowhouses to facilitate construction and management while also conserving land. Finally, in terms of construction practices, from materials to techniques, rural housing continued to follow a self-sufficient model.

In reality, the unified planning and construction of these new villages reflected a national movement launched by Mao in 1964: 'Learn from Dazhai in Agriculture' ['农业学大寨']. The so-called Dazhai model is '*zìlìgēngshēng*' ['自力更生', 'self-reliance'], whereby local residents produced cement, bricks, and other materials. For example, even the infrastructure projects such as water channel construction were also carried out by the commune using locally produced materials.³² In short, the third phase saw the completion of many 'new villages' under the Dazhai model.³³

(6) rural housing of Northeast region [东北地区农村住宅], Zhijiang Mao [毛之江], 196302; (7) rural housing of Jilin Province [吉林省农村住宅], Binwen Zheng [郑炳文], 196302; (8) housing of Shanghai district [上海地区住宅], Cuifen Chen [陈翠芬], 196302; (9) rural housing of Xingtai and Shijiazhuang [邢台、石家庄地区农村住宅], Beijing Industrial Architecture Design Institute, 196311; (10) rural housing of Shanxi Guanzhong district [陕西关中地区农村住宅], Jiawen Yang and Huaijin Sun [杨家闻, 孙怀瑾], 196403; and (11) 'Gandalei' rural housing ['干打垒'农村住宅], Daqing Oilfield Construction Design and Research Institute, Z1, 1966; drawn by the authors, 2025

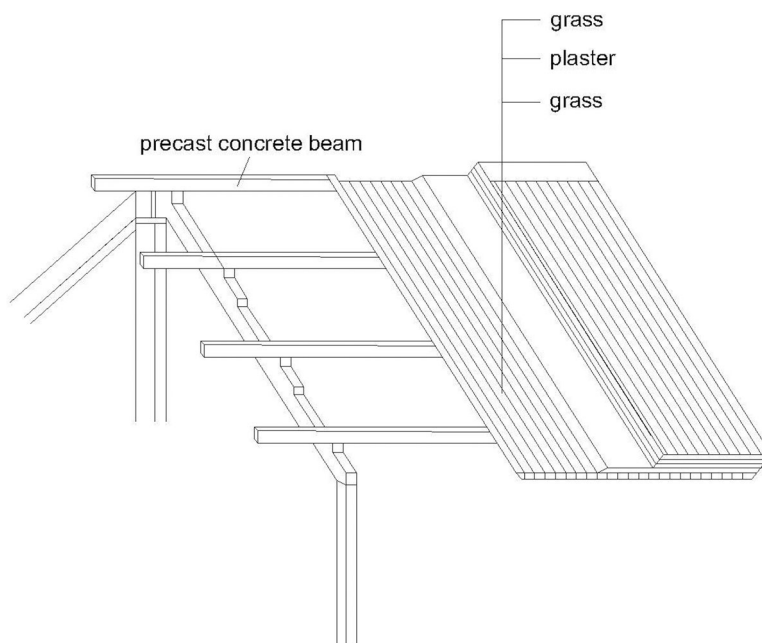
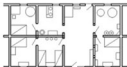
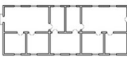
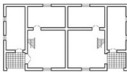
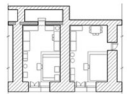
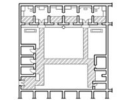
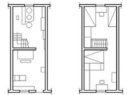
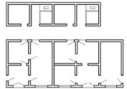


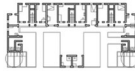
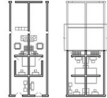
Figure 5.
Diagram of a rural residential structure using precast concrete beams, in '安徽省淮北市农村住宅设计' ['Rural Residential Design in Huaibei District, Anhui Province, China'], *建筑学报* [*Architectural Journal*] (September 1962), p. 11, redrawn and annotated by, and courtesy of, Jin Tingting, 2025

Table 3. Analysis on the housing design of people's commune from *Architectural Journal* [建筑学报] (1974–1983), redrawn by and courtesy of Tingting Jin, compiled by the authors, 2025

No	summary of housing design strategy	design plan	general information			
			m ² / people	floor	kitchen	pattern
1	dedicated study room per capita living space ≥ 10 m ² earthen brick inner walls on second-class blue brick base-gable roof with eaves		10~10.6	1	–	linear plan
2	dispersed villages reorganized into planned residential areas production buildings, storage, and public service/education facilities living space per capita increased housing to the south, kitchen to the north		18.4	1	has	rowhouse
3	independent entrance in housing layout brick walls for load-bearing use local Materials construction by professional teams and the commune members		–	2	has	rowhouse
4	one living room, two bedrooms, one kitchen, one porch per household household area > 50 m ² precast reinforced concrete slab flooring; concrete purlins, wooden rafters, double-layer tile roof		–	2	has	rowhouse
5	main housing form: <i>yaodong</i> low-cost construction self-reliant use of local stone for walls		–	1&2	–	linear plan
6	house types based on household population brick and wood structure courtyard for production and storage planned, designed, and organized by the commune		–	1	has	rowhouse
7	practical, economical, with aesthetic consideration if possible specialized space for storage and livestock penning single-story house allocated per household self-reliance: materials from the commune		–	1&2	has	rowhouse
8	houses connected but unique pigsty, toilet, and living space separated reuse of old materials simple structure, easy construction mainly relied on bricks to build suited to humid, hot climates		–	1&2	has	rowhouse

(Table continued)

Table 3. Continued

No	summary of housing design strategy	design plan	general information			
			m ² / people	floor	kitchen	pattern
9	single-story houses (kitchen) combined with multistory houses (living areas) south-facing courtyard entrances one or two ground-floor rooms for elderly convenience flexible housing allocation based on family size consider household sideline production needs		12–17	2	has	rowhouse
10	adapted to local conditions, used local materials members involved in design bedroom on the second floor, living room on the first floor supply space for raising livestock		—	2	has	rowhouse
11	two-story house per household with private entrance and front/back courtyards simple structural layout clear separation of living and working spaces brick as primary construction material most materials produced by the brigade		—	2	has	rowhouse
12	two-story house per household with private entrance variety of indoor furniture includes bathroom, toilet, and shower storage room and backyard provided		—	2	has	rowhouse
13	multiple floor plan options large front yards for production in rural Xuzhou residences large living space per household than in urban dwellings		—	1&2	has	rowhouse

Taking the Dazhai commune as an example (Fig. 7), the commune's residences were built using bricks, stones, and mortar, adopting the arch structure of *yaodong* [窑洞, cave dwellings]. Based on the results of field research (Fig. 8), several buildings remain at the Dazhai commune site exhibiting an overall concentrated layout.

Evolution of rural commune residential construction

A systematic review of the practice of rural residential design and construction throughout the people's commune period can be summarised by the following changes and characteristics: First, in the early stages of the people's commune,

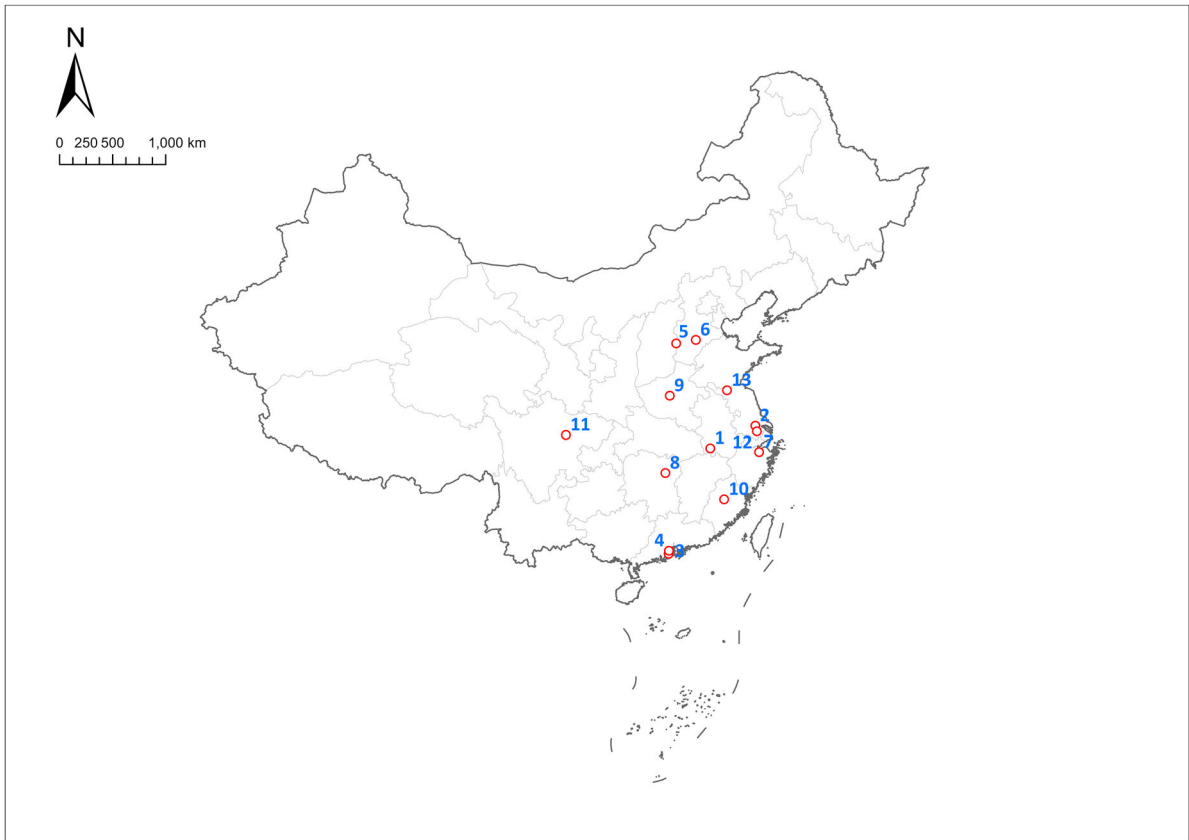


Figure 6.
Examples related to residential design, 1974–1983: (1) housing of Anqing region for educated youth [安庆地区上山下乡知识青年住宅], Anqing Region Office for Educated Youth Going to the Countryside, 197402; (2) New Village, Huashi commune, Huashi brigade [华士公社华西大队新村], Jiangsu Province Jiangyin County Revolutionary Committee Investigation Team, 197503; (3) Yanan commune [崖南公社], Weiminyue brigade [卫民渔业大队], Xinhui County Construction Engineering Bureau, 197503; (4) Sanjiang commune [三江公社], Yuye brigade [渔业大队], Xinhui County Construction Engineering Bureau, 197503; (5) Dazhai commune [大寨公社],

since the architectural professionals at that time were faced with the subject of planning a new communist society for the first time, they almost practically copied the design experience in urban construction.³⁴ This is evidenced by a preference for economy and efficiency in the design of dwellings, which raises various issues. For example, the neglect of productive and storage space in rural dwellings, the inconvenience of eliminating the kitchen from the housing, and inadequate rural infrastructure contribute to the impracticality of flush toilets in dwellings. We cannot ignore the social context of this phase, which was the time when the government attempted to implement a fully communist social ambition and mobilise the people to produce steel. Both politically and in terms of architectural practice, there was excessive idealism and a disregard for practical conditions due to a lack of experience.

In the second phase, more rural housing designs focused on adhering to established customs and almost entirely followed the form of a traditional local house, which appeared to go to the other extreme. However, during this period, valuable experiments involving rural residential construction also occurred. They effectively reduced the cost of traditional wood consumption

by replacing it with precast concrete elements and used agricultural by-products such as straw for roofing materials. More importantly, the Chinese architects of this period had considered methods to help rural villagers build houses by themselves. They designed and supplied many standardised concrete components as a catalogue for building houses. In short, this phase represents a pragmatic exploration driven by technological ambition and political pressure, as well as by the reality of severe scarcity.

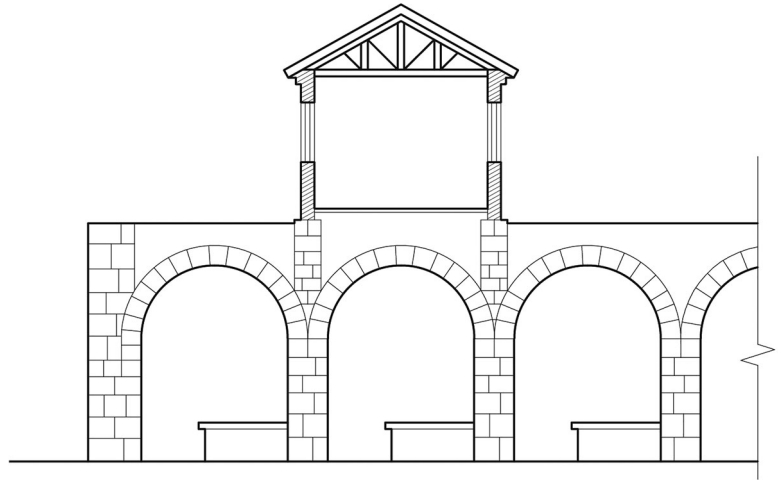
During the late years of the commune system, architects again appeared to have returned to the first stage of the design practice. Under the call of learning from Dazhai in agriculture, they planned and designed the 'new village' by imitating the Dazhai model, which is a new socialist village, to distinguish it from the old society. With the influence of the Cultural Revolution, they rejected the old traditions in their design and replaced them with a completely new rural house, which can be categorised as an improved version of a rowhouse. They considered ancillary spaces such as yards and storage rooms in rural housing and the importance of the family-based lifestyle. Overall, the rural residential construction of this phase demonstrated an improved and more realistic spirit of pragmatism.

Above all, the design practice of residential buildings during the people's commune period exhibited a constant spiral process of experimentation and revision. From the initial 'urban residential model' to the intermediate vernacular houses using prefabricated components, and finally to the 'new village', each design revolution was initiated by the national policies of the time and the unified directives of the construction department. And although each design phase differed in spatial layout and construction methods, they consistently sought to realise a mode of living suitable for collective production. This collective lifestyle initially took shape through communal dining halls in the first phase, which coincided with the removal of household kitchens from floor plans, but this attempt soon proved unsuccessful. Although kitchens and productive courtyards reappeared from the second phase, the elements of collective lifestyle did not disappear immediately; instead, it persisted for a period of time in residual and attenuated forms. For example, standardised rowhouse layouts continued to prevail over individualised dwellings, and communal planning logic remained dominant, with entire 'new villages' conceived collectively and constructed under commune-wide organisation. Unified construction systems and material regimes also persisted, including prefabricated components in the 1960s and self-produced materials under the Dazhai model in the 1970s, both of which reinforced collective production over household autonomy. These characteristics indicate that the manifestations of collectivist lifestyle persisted at least into the mid-1970s, even though household kitchens, yards, and production spaces had already been physically restored. It was not until the late commune period (late 1970s to early 80s) that architectural logic shifted decisively toward family-based living rather than collective ideals.

In short, this portrayal of collective life ultimately manifests in concrete spatial design solutions and is shaped by multiple constraining factors. Influences from the state ideology and political movements can be distilled into material and

Houzhuang brigade [厚庄大队], Jian Zhong [钟剑], 197504; (6) Datun commune [大屯公社], Houtun brigade [后屯大队], Hebei Province Shen County Revolutionary Committee Investigation Team, 197504; (7) Hongshan commune [红山公社], Shangwang brigade [上旺大队], Zhejiang Province Shaoxing County Revolutionary Committee Investigation Team, 197504; (8) rural houses in Hunan Province [湖南农村房屋], Hunan Province Institute of Building Research, Rural Housing Construction Investigation Team, 197602; (9) new villages of the commune named 'vast countryside having plenty of room for us to develop our talents to the full' [广阔天地大有作为公社新村], Civil Engineering Department, Zhengzhou Institute of Technology, 197604; (10) Chaoyang brigade [朝阳大队], Fujian Province Sha County Infrastructure Bureau, 197703; (11) Xiaogan commune [孝感公社], Farmers' New Village [农民新村], Yinfu Long [龙尹富], 198111; (12) Huangdai commune [黄埭公社], Weixing brigade [卫星大队], Deyao Wu [吴德耀], 198204; and (13) rural housing in Xuzhou Region [徐州地区农村住宅], Xuzhou City Architectural Design Institute, 198301; drawn by the authors, 2025

Figure 7.
The traditional arch structures in
local houses, in ‘大寨公社厚庄新
村’ [‘Houzhuang New Village,
Dazhai commune’], *建筑学报*
[*Architectural Journal*] (April 1975),
p. 3, redrawn by and courtesy of
Yue Yu, 2025



formal choices when it comes to specific designs. Unlike urban ‘big’ architecture at the time, for example, the ‘National Style’ architecture, which was required to express non-functional purposes such as nationality and ethnicity, rural residential construction consistently aimed to provide economical and rapid designs. Of course, these residential designs that apply architectural knowledge must take into account the considerations of tradition. Although tradition here also involves formal intent, it is more about respect for local knowledge, such as construction methods, which prioritise efficiency and convenience. Similarly, this emphasis is also shaped by political ideology, namely learning from the people. So, how should we view the design concept behind it? What are its characteristics?

Socialist modernism as a grand narrative

Some scholars summarise modernity in architecture as the new modern attributes brought to architecture in the process of change, which is ultimately reflected in the changes of the four main elements of architectural practice: technology, function, ideology, and system.³⁵ Unlike urban construction, which has clear norms and guidelines covering the entire process from design and construction to management, rural construction during the people’s commune period was an improvised social experiment involving local village officials, architects, and villagers, lacking formal regulations or guidelines. An examination of rural areas during the collectivisation period, even from the most basic technological perspective, shows that they were far from modern. Moreover, whether it was the idealism that was swept up in politics during this process, or the blind replication of existing experiences, rural construction ultimately proved unsuccessful. Thus, why revisit a practice that history has already shown to be a failure? Why interpret it as an exper-



iment in socio-technical standardisation rather than as a belated rural application of an urban model? As a historical inquiry, this paper does not seek to deliver a single evaluative judgment on the commune but instead aims to reconstruct its process objectively and clearly. Examining the communes from this perspective offers several analytical advantages. First, the design of commune housing was not a simple replication of urban model. Communes introduced practices such as self-produced building materials, standardised rural prefabricated components, and collective construction teams, many of which emerged independently from urban contexts and at times even preceded similar urban efforts. Second, in terms of production organisation, the communes operated through a distinctive institutional and technical system. Their three-tier administrative structure, consisting of the commune, brigade, and team, enabled coordinated construction campaigns, unified material production, and consistent design guidelines, creating forms of standardization different from those seen in urban mass housing. Third, this perspective clarifies design decisions that cannot be interpreted through urban precedents. Elements such as productive courtyards, integrated livestock areas, multifunctional yards, and rowhouse arrangements shaped by collective labour reflect a

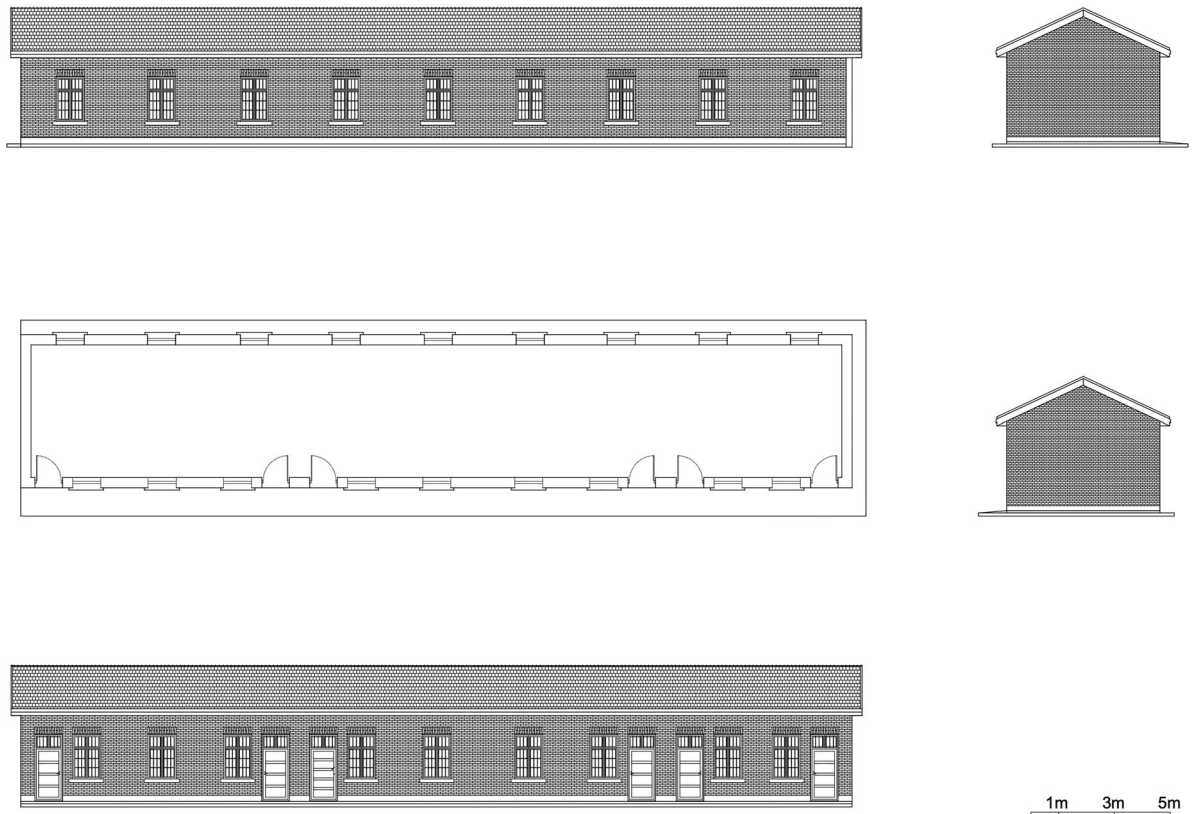
Figure 8.
The scene of Dazhai commune
[大寨公社], Jinzhong City [晋中市],
Shanxi Province, PRC, 2018,
photographed by the authors

rationale rooted in rural production rather than a delayed adoption of urban housing forms. This reading also reveals the material expression of ideology. Standardisation in the communes was not only aesthetic or economic but also embodied socialist ideals of collective production, labour organization, and resource sharing. These insights become visible only when the commune is understood as an active socio-technical testing ground. What characteristics, then, define this rural design experiment?

There is one common fact that has been overlooked in the designs of these three different stages: Chinese architects have repeatedly designed for the *renmin* [人民, people] while facing the predicament of political and practical conditions. The people here are not independent individuals, but the 'nameless' masses. The design is not about providing artistic commodities according to the requirements of owners under the logic of commercial capital operations, but rather about providing basic, economically viable solutions for most of the Commune member. From this perspective, this study argues that the design of the people's commune housing embodies a form of socialist modernism that is characterised by its nature as a 'grand narrative' (from the nation, ultimately to the people), rather than individualistic in its heroic expression.

Although it remains difficult to accurately assess the extent to which architects have influenced rural modernisation, their influence appears to have been minimal. By late 1958, official statistics showed that more than 26,000 communes had been established across the country,³⁶ yet, by late 1959, only 320 people's communes and 472 commune settlements were formally planned nationwide.³⁷ Moreover, a similar pattern can be observed in specific local cases.

According to the results of our on-site survey, at the former site of the Weixing people's commune in Henan Province, the actual buildings constructed in 1958 did not resemble the design shown in case No. 10, as shown in Table 1, of the first phase, but were instead simple brick and wood houses (Fig. 9). Most of the remaining buildings in the Weixing commune site are currently single-story, linear structures with sloping roofs typical of local dwellings (Fig. 10). These buildings were part of the Weixing commune's administrative centre, but according to the interviews, they were also used as dormitories for the administrators during that period. Although the actual construction process of these buildings cannot be ascertained, the roof structure of the canteen (Fig. 11) indicates that it still employed the local traditional methods shown in the survey drawings, as shown in figure 3.³⁸ In brief, in the few communes that were planned and designed at the time, both the architects and other intellectuals, as well as the local craftsmen, contributed modestly to the final construction of the rural built environment. They used the materials and techniques available to them to construct the 'mansion' that symbolised the commune.³⁹



The value and experience of the commune houses design practice

In contemporary China, rural development has consistently remained a national priority. The rural construction undertaken during the people's commune era, as the first large-scale initiative in the history of the People's Republic of China, provides valuable historical insights. By revisiting the commune housing design history of the period from 1958 to 1983, this paper argues that China's rural areas provided a ground for socio-technical laboratories. Although the people's commune system ultimately failed, the experiment itself holds historical value. The value is primarily manifested in the process of modernist architecture's localisation. While commune design introduced modern elements such as efficient layout, industrialised products, and new structural technologies to vast rural areas, it inevitably encountered the realities of local rural life, naturally yielding experimental outcomes distinct from those in urban contexts. In short, the history of commune housing design reveals a distinct character markedly different from urban architectural production activities.

Moreover, in the pursuit of national modernisation and industrialisation, the state assumed the role of a key decision-maker, with the ultimate goal of elevat-

Figure 9.
The survey drawings of Weixing
commune [卫星公社] buildings,
Zhumadian City [驻马店市], Henan
Province, PRC, drawn by the
authors, 2021

Figure 10.
 The remaining buildings of Weixing
 commune [卫星公社], Zhumadian
 City [驻马店市], Henan Province,
 PRC, 2018, photographed by the
 authors

Figure 11.
 The roof structure of Weixing
 commune canteen [卫星公社食堂],
 Zhumadian City [驻马店市], Henan
 Province, PRC, 2018,
 photographed by the authors

ing the living standards of its people. As a vital component of basic necessities such as food, clothing, shelter, and transportation, the residential housing design of the people's commune was a key component. Architects of the era fulfilled the state's mandate to design for the 'nameless' people, thereby realising this national call to action through their work. This paper concludes that this represents a concentrated manifestation of socialist modernism in Mao's China.

Conclusion

During the people's commune period, political ideology had a profound influence on the architectural production. The practice of rural housing construction displayed distinct characteristics across different stages. In the early stage of the people's commune (1958–1960), in the documented cases, architectural professionals focused attention on satisfying the per capita size of the unit and on standardised housing schemes that were quickly built, which raised various issues such as the neglect of productive spaces in rural dwellings. And the lack of attention to the condition of rural infrastructure has caused difficulties in the implementation of many residential planes. During this period, the state's policy of prioritising heavy industry and pursuing steel production led to the conservation of construction materials, particularly steel in construction, while encouraging the use of cost-effective materials such as bricks and wood. At the same time, the debate over architectural style in the 1950s led to the adoption of practical and economical design principles throughout the people's commune period, which prompted architects at the time to limit creative experimentation in architectural form.

After reflection and adjustment, in the second phase of the housing design (1962–1966), the architects focused on how to introduce modern industrial materials and structures into old traditional rural houses. Thus, the traditional living habits of farmers can be satisfied, wood materials can be saved, and construction can be accelerated even by villagers. National policies promoting technological innovation led architects to experiment with the introduction of new prefabricated concrete structures into rural residential design in the 1960s. However, due to adherence to tradition, the architectural style of this period fully retained the external form of traditional dwellings and did not generate new architectural forms.

At the end of the people's commune system (1974–1983), after undergoing the trials of the Cultural Revolution, and in response to the nationwide call to emulate Dazhai, numerous communes began to replicate Dazhai's development model. Under the banner of self-reliance, construction materials such as bricks and cement were produced independently by the communes, and construction methods and techniques continued to follow traditional practices. Nevertheless, during this period, most 'new villages' introduced some innovations in architectural form design.

Above all, as part of a special period of social practice, the rural housing construction of the people's commune reflects the thinking and exploration of Chinese architects about rural modernisation during a difficult period, which



demonstrates both an experimental bent and errors. Across these three phases, the communes functioned less as fully industrialised building sites and more as socio-technical experiments. For example, from the second stage on, even as 'standardisation' was promoted, the construction reality relied overwhelmingly on local materials, self-made components, and non-mechanised rural labour. Industrial elements have always coexisted with vernacular construction in a hybrid state. This hybrid state reflects the deep integration of advanced systems and technological frameworks—such as those of the state and government—with the wisdom of rural communities and grassroots traditions. And by reading communes as laboratories of socio-technical standardisation rather than as a belated rural application of urban models, the historical process and even the historical value of commune architecture and spatial design practices can be revealed more accurately and in greater depth.

The design of commune housing embodies modernism that is constantly being revised to reconcile realities at different stages. The reality comes from the ideological level of society and the level of the underlying rural society. The architectural professionals of that time experimented step by step in the shackles of time and reality, and emerged with a mode of socialist modernism, which this paper proposes as a mode of 'grand narrative': designed for the nameless *renmin*.

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