EMPTY HOMES AND DEAD GOAT BONES ON XIJI YU

Field notes of a cultural landscape and co-creating digital deep maps

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ABSTRACT: This article documents the abandoned cultural landscape found on the islet of Xiji in the Penghu Archipelago, in the Taiwan Strait, a heritage site that has been slipping into ruins and rewilding since 1978. This article is written as a response and contribution to the dialogue begun by Cal Flyn (2021) on nature's return to abandoned spaces. In documenting the ruination of Xiji's cultural landscape, I suggest that a new motivation for exploration and documentation of abandoned environments such as Xiji and Cal Flyn's case study island of Swona lies in anticipating the needs of future researchers. The digital turn in the social sciences and humanities has produced conditions in which simple digital survey and research tools are capable of documenting, capturing and reproducing entire cultural landscapes with ease. Collaborative data collection is now a driving force behind spatial humanities, enabling the production of navigable time maps, deep maps and spatiotemporal storyboards. This article presents the cultural landscape of Xiji as it existed in 2017, relying on photographs and observations, and tracks the process of its rewilding through accounts from informants and earlier documentation. Although Xiji's material heritage continues to deteriorate, digital tools have made it possible to reproduce and reclaim it as a dynamic digital space that can be mapped across time.

KEYWORDS: Xiji, Penghu, island studies, rewilding, spatial humanities, deep mapping

Introduction: Xiji Yu, Swona, and Documentation as Praxis

Among the ninety islands, islets and rocks that comprise the Penghu Archipelago in the middle of the Taiwan Strait sits a ghost called Xiji Yu (西吉嶼). It is an islet bearing the ruins of a small fishing village that has sat abandoned for more than four decades, left to its fate in 1978 by a dwindling population that knew their way of life had hit a dead end. Xiji's abandonment is the most extreme example of a depopulation trend that had struck Penghu in the second half of the 20th century, when the industrial success of Taiwan, governed by Republic of China (ROC), became an economic magnet for the young adults of these distant islands. Xiji today is part of the South Penghu Marine National Park (澎湖南方四島國家公園), established in 2014 by Taiwan's legislature, and access to the site has been restricted, effectively ensuring that it will remain an abandoned space.

In 2017 I visited Xiji as part of a broader research project and observed a village that was deep in the process of ruination and rewilding. An overarching goal of this project was to

digitise the island's heritage so that it would later be available in an online database. What I present here are notes from the field from that research trip, and a documentation of the features for the island, its environment and built space, providing a snapshot of Xiji as it existed at that particular point in time. This presentation may benefit researchers today who are interested in the progress of the island's ruination and rewilding, and, I anticipate, for researchers in the future who have some as-yet unknown interest in the status of the island at this point in its 'in betweenness'.

Xiji would fit well alongside the many abandoned spaces explored by Cal Flyn, whose book, *Islands of Abandonment* (2021), documents a variety of locales around the world, the circumstances for their abandonment and the ongoing rewilding processes that follow. Flyn's book inspired this article, which is written as both a response and as a contribution to the dialogue she has begun. Flyn elevates the hobby of urban (and rural) exploration (urbex) to a form of environmental documentary literature. Rewilding requires the non-interference of humans (Flyn, 2021; Monbiot, 2014), which Flyn presents as the result of human dereliction of a once-used location, deliberate or not. All four of the historically inhabited islands of the South Penghu Marine National Park are undergoing the processes of ruination, but only Xiji, without any human habitation, is truly in the rewilding process, having been left completely to the forces of nature for decades.

Figure 1 - The abandoned Village of Xiji. (Author's photo, 2017.)

Though she does not state it, Flyn's explorations are a form of 'deep mapping,' a broad practice of spatiotemporal exploration which can best be defined as the non-cartographic performative wayfinding and navigation of an environment (Roberts, 2016). To document

abandoned spaces means to participate in an experiential mapping project and to pierce through the barriers of privacy. To walk the landscape, to enter the structures and to observe the infrastructure is to perceive and chase spectres of another time. Deep mapping welcomes the experiential: the peeling back of layers, stepping through time and imagining potential. It is well suited for researchers in the digital humanities, especially its subdiscipline of spatial humanities. This present investigation of Xiji is also a form of deep mapping, and similar to Flyn's presentation of Swona in northern Scotland, it relies heavily on notes from the field supplemented by earlier reports. Where it differs is the focus and style of its documentation.

The conditions surrounding Xiji's abandonment are nearly identical to Swona. Flyn describes Swona as a rustic island, little known to the world, a cultural landscape that is deteriorating, rewilding, changing and presently in a liminal state. The world advanced rapidly during the 20th century, and although outside events would manifest themselves in some form on both islands, modernity was largely not part of the package. Both had once been home to traditional fishing communities, supplemented by agriculture, and what could not be caught or grown was procured on the mainland. Depopulation on both islands began in the 20th century due to changes in the fishing industries: for Swona, industrial fishing outcompeted the local community in the 1920s. Swona continued on for the next five decades inhabited by a single family. For Xiji, the lack of infrastructure for its fishermen prevented it from ever finding a place in the growing fishing industry, and market forces elsewhere would draw its villagers away. Both islands were finally abandoned in the 1970s, leaving behind deteriorating stone houses and farm animals that would turn feral: cattle on Swona, goats on Xiji.

Today, both islands sit in a state of 'in-betweenness' made fascinating because of their isolation, inaccessibility and their transcendence of any one category. Xiji and Swona are both human spaces that have fallen out of the sphere of human affairs, no longer suitable for human habitation, but they are also wild spaces in which any discussion of their wild status is thwarted or sidelined by the human-built infrastructure that still dominates the landscape. Flyn's exploration of Swona offers glimpses of the island's former livelihood, but focuses largely on the animals on the island, their populations and their slow reclamation of the formerly human spaces. There were many instances where I was struck by how similar the two islands were, and on many occasions, I found myself thinking "That's Xiji!" The community of Swona is discussed in the book, certain elements of rustic island life are recounted, and the interiors of houses are described, but a description of the village as an explorable cultural landscape, marked by simple infrastructure is noticeably absent. It is one of the few chapters in Flyn's book where a description of the built environment as a human interface with the terrain feels missing, and because of the many similarities that Swona has with Xiji, its absence was all the more felt.

The presentation of Xiji in this article is written in a way that takes into account the principles of opportunity and anticipation, new justifications for research projects in the digital humanities. The digital turn has been a boon for academia, resulting in the development of new fields such as digital humanities, spatial humanities, and spatiotemporal studies. The proliferation of low-cost hardware for data collection and the computational tools for processing and displaying information has resulted in myriad possibilities for new research, documentation projects and open-purposed data collection. In these big data, computational social sciences and volunteered data approaches, there is a dialectic component that opens up data collection for the sake of data collection, documentation as praxis, a seedbed for grounded theory. I arrive at the idea that special

access to abandoned spaces like Swona and Xiji puts the visitor in a position of privilege, and a responsibility falls upon them to anticipate what may need to be documented for others who are not fortunate enough to visit themselves. With this statement I do not intend any criticism of Flyn for the direction of her chapter on Swona; the habitus of the journalist and the social scientist will naturally result in reports of different styles, and knowledge of Swona is enriched thanks to her work. In any case, for the social sciences, the question of access to, and presentation of, sites like Swona and Xiji is a problem which the digital humanities, spatial humanities and deep mapping seem well-suited to address.

I develop the principle of documentation as praxis from the work of Oliver Streiter and Yoann Goudin (2011), whose research was the spiritual predecessor and foundation for the 2017 fieldwork on Xiji. Streiter and Goudin's work began as an investigation of cemetery epigraphy in Taiwan that quickly developed into a response to the destruction of these same sites. The solution was to develop the *ThakBong* digital archive, a corpus of mortuary epigraphy and gravesite metadata (ibid; Streiter & Morris, 2015; Streiter, 2017) and the project has since expanded to incorporate other heritage elements (Streiter, 2019). Though perhaps a fool's errand, documentation for the sake of documentation carries a sense of responsibility and empathy for other academics who may eventually benefit from digitised sets of cultural resources. Like the fable of the Little Red Hen, whose moral extols the labor of preparation, the exercise of data collection for its own sake sets the foundation for a new phase of digital humanities, one very much in harmony with the digital turn, volunteered data sets and deep mapping. Documenting heritage for its own has a place in Taiwan, where many heritage sites that cannot be monetised (gate houses, dilapidated imperial-era homesteads, cemeteries, indigenous burial grounds and historical infrastructure, to name a few examples) are undergoing a process of removal to make way for factories, industrial parks and train stations (Chuang & Mu, 2021; Morris, 2018, 2021).

The digital turn has made data collection at sites like these quicker and simpler, and enables the creation of robust, empirical datasets and digital archives (Streiter, 2017). Digitising tools today are relatively inexpensive high-end consumer electronics such as digital cameras, scanners, sensors and recorders. Most of these capabilities are already present in smartphones today. Digital recording devices have thus become ubiquitous and reliable enough that academia is now able to partner with volunteers to collect information (Jan, 2018; Blundell, Lin, & Morris, 2018; Chuang & Mu, 2021). In order to understand mappable data, surveyors and social scientists turn to geographic information systems (GIS). Combining deep mapping with GIS and big data, a "greedy deep map" results; a "data-rich and data-hungry geospatial resource whose value lies in its capacity to outstrip the ability—and agency—of its human counterparts in terms of spatial praxis" (Roberts, 2016, p. 5). Combined with GIS, the deep map acts as a storyboard. Landscapes have become a basis for modern historical research, but the knowledge gap still exists at the margins where migrations, borders and no man's lands exist (Guldi, 2011). Flyn's project is an indicator that these landscape margins are now being recognised.

Communities co-create their identity, their sense of place and their relations with one another. Heritage is the byproduct of this activity; it is evidence for making claims. Xiji's former villagers still hold their claim as *Xiji ren* (西吉人, people of Xiji), and continue to express their heritage even though they have moved away. Although the island has been abandoned for decades, the former residents and descendants of Xiji still make annual excursions to the island to tend to their ancestors' graves, reconnect with their roots and take photos.

The name Xiji can be applied to three entities that are all components of the same spatiotemporal heritage: it is the name of a landmass, it is the name of a village and it is the name of a space that exists in the imagination. It is a small island of basalt and coral with a dangerous shore that rises like a tilted mesa out of the sea with a surface area between 0.78 and 0.96 square kms, depending on the tide, and a shoreline of just over 4 kms (Li, 1974, p. 14). The island measures approximately 1.2 kms at its widest point in a line due east to west, and just shy of a kilometre in length from north to south. The village, now abandoned, only appeared in Qing era records in 1893 (Lin, 1998, p. 26), and comprises approximately 54 buildings that are in various states of ruin. At least 45 are houses, two are temples and the rest are unidentifiable.[1] Xiji also exists as a collection of lore, accounts of life on the island from a diaspora community, documented stories in newspaper clippings and magazines, as legends and, as I present here, research papers.

I suggest that Xiji is also undergoing a grassroots digitisation process, and we may consider a fourth entity by that name: digital Xiji. A variety of visitors, explorers and researchers have been recreating (co-creating) Xiji in digital spaces. Online Xiji-oriented communities have begun to digitise and share old photos and stories, including information about the environment, land use and lifestyle. It may be possible that all of these collectors of Xiji's heritage will one day find one another and collaborate to produce a digital Xiji that is mapped across time, using scans of old photos and documents, voice recordings and other media to produce a digital environment and time maps. Digital Xiji can look backwards at its heritage, but can also reflect the latest research and information about a feral island that is continuing to rewild. The data is already out there, including the documentation conducted in 2017. It just needs to be brought together.

Figure 2 - The beginning of Digital Xiji. Photographic metadata has been converted into .kml files that can be mapped onto Google Earth. Each pin represents one photograph taken by the author on Xiji in May, July and August of 2017.

[1] These figures are based on what could be observed of the extant village and foundations in 2017.

The production of descriptions of Xiji in this article is motivated by two factors: 1) to present a rich documentation with the anticipation that these descriptions will benefit others' research; and 2) to satisfy, through Xiji, what felt to be missing in Flyn's account of Swona. As Flyn does with her account of Swona, this examination of Xiji also relies on earlier explorations of the island from which it is possible to mark the passage of time and slow deterioration of the human-built environment. I use two Chinese print sources, the first is an article written by Li Li-guo (李利國) who was accompanied by the photographer Hsieh Chun-te (謝春德) a year after Xiji was abandoned (Li, 1979), and a late-20th century survey of pagodas on the island by Huang You-xing (黃有興) and Gan Cun-ji (甘村吉) (Huang & Gan, 1999). Additional information about Xiji is supplemented by other textual reports, news articles and interviews from informants.

The article will first present Xiji in a spatiotemporal context, giving a brief overview of its location and history. The article then provides notes on the three field visits made in May, July, and August through September of 2017. Descriptions of the island terrain, the village and their features follows. The exploration of Xiji's space and its entities is followed by a presentation of folklore surrounding Xiji and historical events. A discussion section compares Xiji and Swona, identifying the parallels and what was missed in the documentation of Swona, and discusses the utility of spatial humanities and deep mapping for adding to the body of knowledge of these sites. The article concludes with a discussion on the digitisation of Xiji and future possibilities.

Xiji in Time and Place

Penghu has a unique fishing heritage from which its better-known appellation in the West is derived: the Pescadores, *the fishermen's isles*. The communities of the islands are descended from Song and Ming dynasty settlers who migrated from Fujian Province, and for centuries these islands were one of the most remote frontiers of the empire until those same Fujianese began to settle on Taiwan's southwest coast in the early 17th century. Penghu is administered today as a county of Taiwan, officially the Republic of China. The city of Magong is its principal port and the county seat and has long been the economic and administrative centre of the archipelago. Xiji sits at a considerable distance from Magong, more than thirty kms to the south, among a distant group of islands that make up the county's southeastern rim. Each of the islands are in various stages of abandonment: to Xiji's west are Xiyuping Yu (西嶼平嶼) and Dongyuping Yu (東嶼平嶼), which are so close to one another it is said that during low tides it is possible to walk through the surf from one to the other. Xiyuping only contained a single inhabited dwelling near its harbour in 2017, but the ruins of an elementary school, police station, and medical facility are evidence that it once boasted a significant population. Dongyuping maintains an active, though small, fishing harbour and a police station to support the half-populated village that stretches across its southern and western shores. A visitor's centre was under construction in 2017. To Xiji's east is Dongji Yu (東吉嶼), which it had once shared a significant relation with, and in 2017 had maintained a summertime population similar to that of Dongyuping. Dongji featured the most developed and modern infrastructure of the four islands.

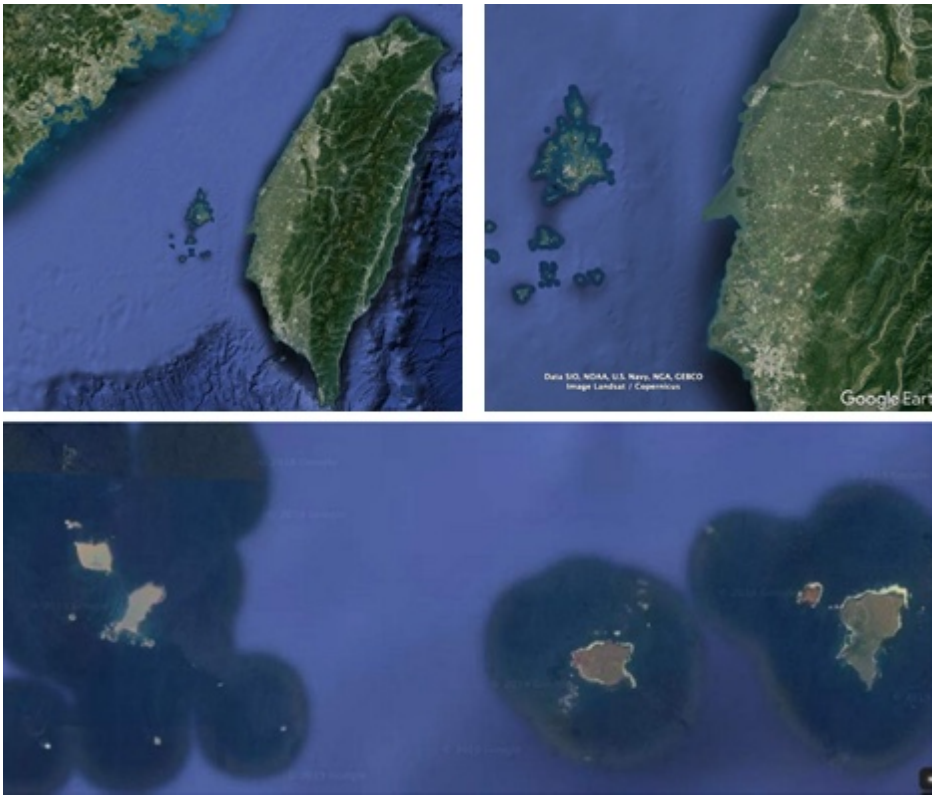

Figure 3 - The Penghu Archipelago. Top left: In the Taiwan Strait, between Fujian Province to the northwest and Taiwan to the east. Top right: As an offshore island system, Penghu sits approximately fifty kms west of Taiwan. The South Penghu Marine National Park sits at the southeastern corner of the archipelago (Source: Google Earth). Bottom: The islands of South Penghu Marine National Park. From left to right: Xiyuping Yu, Dongyuping Yu, Xiji Yu and Dongji Yu. The distance between Xiji Yu and Dongji Yu is 4.5 kms. (Source: Google Maps).

The terrain and climate of Penghu is significantly different from the rolling granite hills and mountains of the Fujian coast and the jungle-clad mountains and fecund coastal plain of Taiwan. Penghu was formed out of the remnants of an enormous extinct shield volcano, resulting in the relatively low profile and basaltic composition of the islands of the archipelago. Although the terrain atop the islands is generally flat, their shorelines feature hills and cliffs. The county lacks forests, but many islands have been overrun by invasive acacia (*Leucaena leucocephala*), locally called *gin hap hoan* (銀合歡). Alexander Chien-chung Yin described the three main difficulties of living on Penghu as "strong wind, sparse average rainfall, and what islanders refer to as 'salty rain'…" (1997, p. 321) which limits agricultural productivity and makes living conditions generally more difficult. Between September and March the winds in Penghu are strong and unceasing, so to combat topsoil erosion the islanders build low stone walls.

The environment of Xiji is harsher still. In the summer the wells dry out. In the winter, stinging wind blows across the island and whips up the sea into large waves. By one

account, winters were miserable; no work could be done outside and islanders suffered from cabin fever (Li, 1979, p. 16). Even in the best of conditions, the island's coast is a navigational challenge of impassable shallow shoals hidden beneath the waves along the southern coast, and the north shore was a palisade of basalt columns. Shipwrecks both large and small are a regular occurrence all around its shores.


Figures 4a & 4b - Xiji's dynamic and dangerous shores. Left: The impregnable northern shore of Xiji. Right: The deceptively treacherous rocky southern shore of Xiji. (Author's photos, 2017.)

Xiji Village is understood to be a relatively late-established settlement on Penghu, settled by families from two islands, Wangan, 16 kms to the northwest, and from Dongji, 4.5 kms east. One of the earliest account of Xiji appears in Lin Hao's 1893 records (Lin, 1998, p. 26; Huang & Gan, 1999, p. 232). Tombs on Xiji dating to the reign of Qing emperor Tongzhi (同治, 1861-1875) suggest the population was there decades earlier. A placard kept within Xiji Gong (西吉宮) in Magong, the spiritual successor to Xiji's abandoned temple Chifu Gong (池府宮), bears a date of 1873 (Penghu.Info, n.d.e), suggesting an initial date for the island's worship community. Lin (1998, p. 26) has identified the date for the construction of Chifu Gong is much later, 1929, which can be confirmed from my own findings of the characters 己巳 (*jisi*), 1929 rendered in the traditional sexagenary year cycle, etched into the temple's door jamb. These wildly varying dates are puzzling, though they may suggest that an earlier temple once existed on Xiji, or that the community on Xiji may not have seen themselves as a distinct social unit from Dongji until well into the 20th century. If the worship community split from Dongji, perhaps the 1873 placard may have been brought to Xiji in 1929. Making sense of these dates will require more investigating.

When the Qing Dynasty was defeated by Japan at the end of the First Sino-Japanese War in 1895, Penghu and Taiwan were handed over as spoils of war. It was during the Japanese period (1895-1945) that the islands of Penghu were modernised and all children were given a Japanese education. The Japanese introduced improved construction techniques to Taiwan and Penghu, including high quality concrete and rebar. Houses on Xiji built in this modern fashion have withstood the elements far better than their traditional counterparts. Two houses along Xiji's southern shore that utilised modern building materials have withstood the elements relatively well in comparison to other nearby structures. Though the elements have battered them, one semi-roofless house reveals the use of concrete in its rafters and beams that has allowed it to withstand four decades of storms with no maintenance. The concrete porch ceiling of another house has not fared as well, and although it has begun to crumble, it has not collapsed: reinforced concrete dangles by a piece of rebar over the courtyard.

On Dongji a lighthouse and military garrison were established and a harbour was developed for the village. The difficulty of Xiji's shores meant that it was passed over and Xiji villagers would regularly sail to Dongji at this time to collect supplies imported from Tainan's Anping Port (Huang & Gan, 1999, p. 233). On Xiji and Dongji the Japanese mobilised every man aged 18 and older into a laborious project of building a grid of stonewalls across the islands' hinterlands and a ring of double walls around their perimeters to mitigate the effects of the wind. The project took more than two decades to complete.

When Japan surrendered at the conclusion of the Second World War in 1945 the Republic of China (ROC), the successor to the Qing state, asserted their claims over the islands. The arrival of the ROC presented new economic opportunities for unskilled labourers on Taiwan, and many men began to migrate from Penghu. After the 1950s Taiwan's economy presented opportunities for Penghu's educated women, who also began to migrate. The motivation for moving away was predominantly due to the hardships on the islands: "ecological conditions had limited agriculture and the mechanisation of fishing had resulted in a depletion of marine foods" (Pasternak, 1997, p. 176).

In 1945 the two islands were consolidated into a single village, Shuangji Cun (雙吉村) (Lin, 1998, p. 26; Huang & Gan, 1999, p. 232). They were divided again in 1951 (Penghu.Info, n.d.d), but linkages remained, and services on Xiji were supplied through Dongji. The school on Xiji was officially the 'Dongji Elementary School, Xiji Branch.' In the 1960s the ROC began improving Penghu's harbours and infrastructure. Xiji was arguably in the greatest need of harbour development, as it did not have one, but the same shoreline problems that had prevented any harbour from being developed in the past continued to be an obstacle. Meanwhile, Dongji's harbour was doubled in size, and, according to its residents, Dongji became a boom town: the harbour enlargement project had brought more activity to the community already buoyed by police, soldiers, and medical services. The tiny harbour was so full of life that it had gained a nickname: Little Shanghai. Informants still living there in 2017 indicated Dongji had a population of 3,000, and there were seventy boats.

Xiji languished. The villagers there had to work more than one job. One informant stated that he worked catching sharks at sea and raising pigs that would be sold in Magong in the autumn. With those proceeds he could buy rice and supplies for the winter on Xiji. Families began to move, and Wangan Township began to draw up plans for what could be done about the 12 remaining households (Li, 1979, p. 16). In 1968 the population dropped to only 60 people, 24 women and 46 men (Huang & Gan, 1999, p. 232). In 1978, only five families remained. There was not a single young man among them (Li, 1979).

The economic incentive to move away became stronger in the 1970s as Taiwan industrialised and its cities offered higher pay and a modern lifestyle (Pasternak, 1997; Yin, 1997). The young adults chose factories over fisheries, and the dwindling population of older residents on Xiji would have to take on greater risks as a result. Accidents that could be treatable elsewhere began to prove deadly. The community had lost its resiliency. Dongji was also beginning to fade at this time but its harbour kept it sustainable. On Xiji, it was the end. There were not enough people to put the boats in the water, nor were there enough villagers to man a boat to make fishing turn a profit. A former resident surnamed Xu is reported to have said that, "only the elderly, women and children were left. Once winter came, we could not ask for help when we were sick" (Li, 1979, p. 16). The government offered to relocate them, and they took it.

Moving forward, I will draw comparisons between my observations of Xiji with those of the Journalist Li Li-guo (李利國), who visited the island with photographer Hsieh Chun-te (謝春德) only a year after the village was abandoned. Li wrote an article, 'Uninhabited Island Xiji Islet at the southeastern tip of Penghu' (無人島來去澎湖東南端西吉嶼), which appeared in the September 2-8, 1979 issue of the *China Times Weekly* (時報周刊) from which I will draw quotes and inferences to help make sense of my own observations.

Visiting Xiji

For such a small island, Xiji has an ability to feel big. The terrain is flat with gentle troughs running north to south. The repetitive tussock patches and stone walls that stretch to the horizon, and the subtle, nearly imperceptible northward incline of the terrain that blocks the horizon creates a landscape that plays with the mind and influences how its space is interpreted. It is only once the visitor stands atop the island's prominent hill that the sea becomes visible in all directions. It allows the visitor to get their bearings, but can be unnerving. When journalist Li Li-guo climbed the hill in 1979, he felt that the sea "squeezed in from all sides" (1979, p. 15).

From neighbouring Dongji Island, Xiji appears as a wedge on the horizon: like a door stop floating on the sea, its south shore dipping down into the Taiwan Strait, and its northern end rising as impressive bluffs. A hill visible in the centre of the island's profile divides the island neatly into its northern elevations and the southern lowlands. This hill extends from the eastern shore to the centre of the island, where a seasonal creek runs the full length of Xiji, dividing it into eastern and western halves. The eastern half of the island is more developed, featuring most of the island's structures, including Xiji Village, which can be found in the southeast, nestled in the wind shadow created by the hill. The village space is surrounded by magico-religious structures: two temples, four pagodas for safety and spiritual protection, two dolmens to watch the eastern half of the southern shore, and two cemeteries to the east and southwest. The northern half of the island is generally barren, featuring short grasses and extensive stone walls built during the Japanese period. In the island's west, these walls have been cannibalised for the construction of smaller garden enclosures. Across the south, where the water table is higher, many wells dot the terrain, sometimes visible, other times unmarked and hidden by tussocks of grass, proving to be a major safety hazard for any adventure-seeker and the final resting place for several of the island's goats. The island's southwest corner is the lowest elevation and the most fertile terrain. An informant on Dongji indicated that sweet potatoes and sorghum were common crops grown on the islands' elevations. Additional reports indicate that radishes (Huang & Gan, 1999, p. 233), peanuts, cabbage were grown and that and pickled vegetables were common fare (Li, 1979, pp. 14-16). Because of the lowland's vulnerability and importance, an enormous stone and earthen berm was constructed across the shore to prevent seawater intrusion.

Figure 5 - Xiji Yu viewed from Dongji Yu. (Author's photo, 2017.)

There are three locations along Xiji's southern shorelines where village boats could pull ashore but approaching each location is to run a gauntlet. The cove along the east coast is the most obvious site, but the shoals just below the water and driving winds from the northeast often proved the ruin of boats. At the island's southeast point, a gap in the stones allowed boats to bring supplies to the villagers but offered no protection. Towards the centre of the southern coast, near the mouth of the seasonal creek, Huang and Gan (1999) identified another gap called Xingang (新港), meaning 'new harbour,' where boats could pull ashore. Like the other sites, this was also small and surrounded by dangers. If the seas were too strong, Xiji's boats would wait overnight in Dongji's harbour. Sometimes a passenger would attempt the swim to shore to let the villagers know (Li, 1979, p. 17).

Boats generally keep their distance from Xiji. The broken hulls of at least three different fishing vessels on the southern and eastern shores are more than enough warning. Nevertheless, ships continue to run aground on the island, most recently a cargo ship on its northern cliffs in 2021 (Liu, 2021). But along the palisades of the northern shore can also be found the safest access that will not threaten to break a boat. Here exists a low, stony ledge that leads to a gap in the cliff side. It requires leaping from a boat onto the dry spaces among deep tide pools, then a delicate clamber over a steep slope of semi-loose stones. The park requires all visitors to Xiji obtain official permission beforehand in the form of a *gongwen* (公文), an official paper. With this in hand, local fishing boat captains will be willing to bring researchers to the island.

For anybody who climbs up the tumbled stones on the north shore, arriving at the top of the island presents its own different set of challenges. There is no natural shade anywhere to be found, nor is water present in sufficient quantities for the entirety of the year. At times when water is present, the quality is generally unfit for consumption, and the water on the western half of the island is brackish. All of these conditions, plus others, are probably why this island was given the name *Verdritig Eyl*, 'Sad Island,' by the Dutch mariners who mapped the Pescadores in the early 17th century. These same harsh factors may also explain how this island received its Chinese name. *Xiji Yu* means 'Western Auspicious Islet,' which could have been an attempt to add some element of favorability to such a bleak environment.

Figure 6 - Climbing down the broken stones to the ledge to catch the boat from Xiji.
(Author's photo, 2017.)

Roaming freely across Xiji are goats that, for four decades, have been the masters of the island. It is apparently due to them that no other plants have been able to take root and colonise the landscape, with the exception of two different groves of screwpine that have grown out of the ruins of two buildings. Interestingly, the photos taken by Li and Hsieh that accompany Li's 1979 article depict a village space replete with acacia growing among the buildings. I recall seeing what appeared to be the stump of one single acacia, only a few inches tall and dead, sticking out of the ground in the island's southeast. It is difficult to determine whether or not the goats were responsible for the vegetation's disappearance, and one may assume the goats were emboldened by the lack of humans, but all of the other islands of the park are also home to goats and still have dense groves of acacia.

Xiji has also become a collection point for the garbage floating in the Taiwan Strait. In 2017 heaps of garbage ringed the island like a girdle consisting of plastic buoys, nets, metal barrels and styrofoam. Atop the island, bits of styrofoam, plastic and cellophane wrappers could be found among the grasses, in the courtyards of abandoned houses and at the bottom of every well where the remains of goats were occasionally observed.

The research team visited Xiji a total of four times in 2017: on 6 May, 2 July, 4 July and 31 August. Each visit was undertaken in the early morning hours, traveling to the island in the twilight before the sun fully rose over the horizon, to take advantage of the coolest time of day on an island with no trees. In May all of the island's wells were dry with one exception where the sheen of water was observable at the bottom, but a clear view was blocked by debris that had accumulated within. The two naturally occurring surface water systems were also dry and cracked, except for a single stagnant puddle, roughly one square metre in area in the lower elevations of the creek. In July we observed water in the entirety of both surface systems and in all of the wells. The conditions on Xiji in August were damp and hazy. Rain and drizzle were regular occurrences at this time. The research team brought

several litres of drinking water for each trip, and for additional gear, being aware of the danger that deep wells and venomous snakes on the island posed, brought a first aid kit, ropes, whistles, hiking poles for prodding the grass, and wore appropriate footwear.

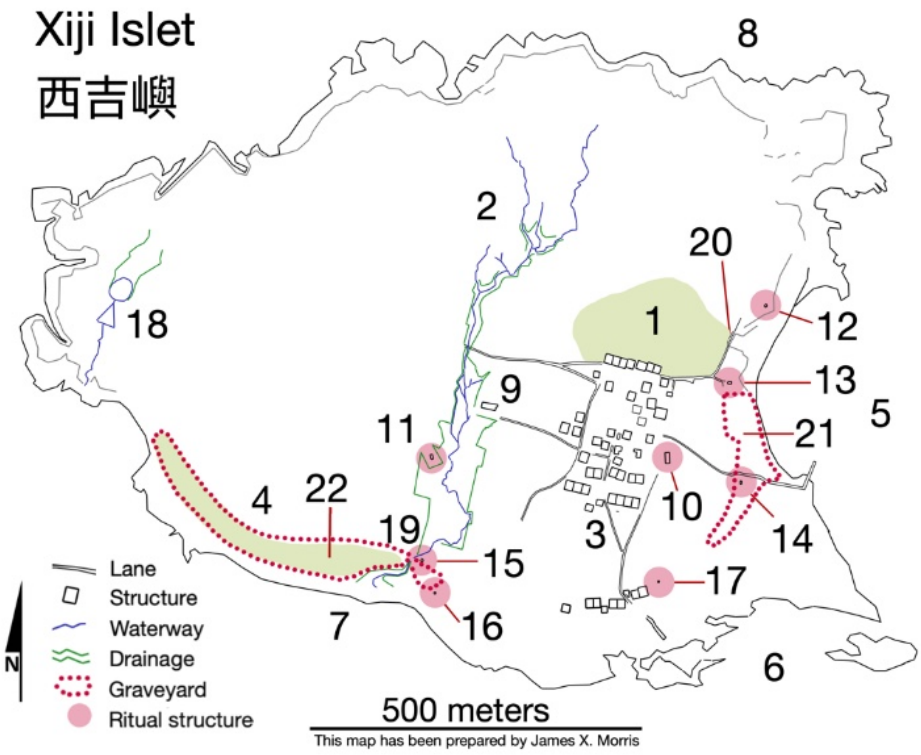

Figure 7 - Features and locations of Xiji Islet that are discussed in this article are listed in the order in which they are first mentioned. The illustration is based on an earlier map created by the author (Morris, 2017).

1. The hill
2. The seasonal creek
3. Xiji Village
4. The berm
5. Eastern cove
6. Southeast gap
7. Xingang (新港)
8. 2017 field access
9. Elementary school
10. Chifu Gong (temple)
11. Xi Gong (temple)
12. Pagoda no. 1
13. Pagoda no. 2
14. Pagoda no. 3
15. Pagoda no. 4
16. Dolmen (southwest)
17. Dolmen (southeast)
18. Containment ponds
19. Zhangsheng Bridge (長勝橋)
20. Retaining wall
21. Eastern graveyard
22. Berm graveyard

Figure 8 - The seasonal creek can be seen in this aerial view of Xiji looking west. The waterway runs from the north (right) to the south (left) across the centre of the island. The seasonal wetlands can be seen on the left side of the image. Xiji Village is visible in the lower left. (Photo by Oliver Streiter, 2017.)

Figures 9a & 9b - The seasonal waterway was full of water in early July 2017. Left: The middle stretch of the seasonal creek on Xiji, looking south. Right: The lower section of the creek fans out into a wetland, looking south. (Author's photos, 2017.)

Figures 10a & 10b - The northern hinterlands. Left: Xiji's western hinterlands, looking west along the remains of a stone wall. Right: The double walls that run around the perimeter of Xiji's hinterland. (Author's photos, 2017.)

Figures 11a & 11b - The southern half of Xiji. Left: Xiji's fertile southwestern corner looking northeast, July 2017. Right: Xiji's southeastern regions. The village is nestled at the foot of the hill. (Author's photos, 2017.)

Figures 12a & 12b - The dangerous harbours with reefs in the shallows. Left: A view of the eastern shore's cove, also showing one of the graveyards. Right: A jetty runs from the lower village to a small opening in the rocks on the southeast shore. (Author's photos, 2017.)

Figure 13 - A grove of screwpine that has colonised the ruins of a structure on Xiji. (Author's photo, 2017.).

Figures 14a & 14b - Xiji the garbage collector. Left: Trash and debris on the northern shoreline. Right: Styrofoam from the sea blown into a well. (Author's photos, 2017.)

Figures 15a & 15b - The wells of Xiji. Left: A communal well northeast of the village. Right: Researchers examine a pair of unmarked, hidden wells in the western hinterlands. (Author's photos, 2017.)

Xiji Village

Because of the difficulties Xiji's shore created for its development and modernisation, the ruins of the village present a unique opportunity to observe a traditional farming-fishing community where much of the infrastructure still remains as it was during the Qing period. The fabric of social life and community organisation in Penghu is steeped in ritual and folk beliefs. On Penghu's islands, magico-religious assemblages still demarcate the boundaries of communities, separating them from the hinterlands and rejecting untoward forces emanating from the sea. These ritual structures are arranged and expressed in each settlement in a manner reflecting each community's unique conditions: patterns of habitation and growth, environmental factors such as the terrain and climate and the immediate needs of the community including its economic orientation.

Xiji was pre-industrial, agrarian and heavily reliant on access to the sea. Walking the terrain, it is apparent that much of the island's infrastructure barely moved out of the 19th century. Villagers relied heavily on wells and home cisterns for their water, and sanitation was taken care of in stone outhouses. A single utility pole was observed near the foundation of a ruined building, though its purpose is today unclear. If the island ever had an electrical grid, evidence of it has long since disappeared. The village lanes were

overgrown with grass in 2017, but were observed to be narrow, bordered by stone walls, and do not appear to have been developed for 20th century use.

Li Li-guo noted during his visit to Xiji in 1979 that what made the village unique was that it was neither centered around its temple, which he noted is conspicuous for its placement outside of the village, nor was it "centered on the port, because there is no port at all" (Li, 1979, p. 15). When viewed from the south, with the exception of its elementary school and the community's two temples, the village is no wider than the hill behind it. Offset from a true north-south axis, it uses the hill as a shield to mitigate the winter winds that blow from the northeast. The wind shadow explanation provides the rationale for the location and shape of the village space, but the hill is more than just a wind block: it is the focal point for the orientation of the whole village's built environment. With only a few exceptions, nearly every building is oriented in the same direction. The back walls of the houses, plus Chifu Gong temple are oriented to the hillside, and their front doors mainly face the same patch of sea. Moreover, the buildings are not the only features aligned with the hill to their backs: nearly all of Xiji's tombs are aligned so that the hill is behind them. The village space appears to be a study in late Qing period geomancy par excellence. A general rule of thumb in the Form School of *feng shui* (風水) is to site a structure with water in front of it and an elevation behind it in order to allow it to best harness the auspicious energy, *qi* (氣), thought to flow down from hills and through the water. Other evidence of celestial moderation is visible throughout the village: a simple stone wall erected opposite from the entrance of a house serves as a *feng shui* screen that prevents inauspicious elements, believed to move only in straight lines, from entering the house. Another house features a small concrete spire above its gate in order to harness *qi* energy in the same way a windmill harnesses wind energy.

Figure 16 - Houses of the upper village area as they appeared in 2017. Xiji's main temple, Chifu Gong, sits at an angle outside of the village core, to the right of the picture. (Photo by Oliver Streiter, 2017.)

Figure 17 - Houses of the lower village as they appeared in 2017. The jetty to the southern shore is in the lower left. (Photo by Oliver Streiter, 2017.)

The elementary school on Xiji is located at some distance to the west of the village. Since being decommissioned in 1977 (Penghu.Info, n.d.b) it had fallen into complete ruin by 2017. An informant living in Magong indicated that there were not many children on Xiji when he was young, and as a result elementary students were lumped together into years of two. Subjects taught included maths, science, and geography but there were no physical education classes. A column still stands near the entrance to the school grounds reading 'Penghu County, Wangan Township, Dongji Elementary School, Xiji Branch' (澎湖縣望安鄉東吉國民小學西吉分校).

Figure 18 - The remains of the old elementary school on Xiji. (Author's photo, 2017.)

When the village was still inhabited it was divided into upper, middle, and lower areas. The upper and middle areas appear to coincide with the main cluster of houses near the hill. A lane runs along the east side of the village to the shore where the lower village is situated in a row along the water. The lane continues past these houses and terminates as a concrete jetty on the stony shore where boats, according to an informant, would deliver necessities. Despite being exposed on all sides to the elements, the houses of the lower village do not appear to have suffered any worse than the main village.

Traditional houses typically take the shape of a horseshoe: a central dwelling with two wings to either side that create a courtyard. Called a *sanheyuan* (三合院), these houses are found throughout Penghu. On Xiji, many of the houses also feature a wall built across the front of the courtyard, granting privacy and guarding against wind. The courtyard of the house is an important feature where many different activities occur, from laundry and food preparation to playing and leisure. Because many traditional villages are built in dense clusters, and to mitigate against the strong winds on Penghu, there are generally few outward-facing windows. The courtyard provides sunlight to the house onto which open the windows and doors. Cisterns can be found in many courtyards on Xiji, either as concrete features built into the walls or in the form of massive earthenware jugs. In many of Xiji's courtyards a set of stairs can be found running to the roof. Li (1979, p. 15) wrote of the importance of the roof in Penghu: many are designed with a flat section over the entryway as a second floor for drying food, including fish, vegetables and other foodstuffs, when the sun is bright, and as a sleeping platform at night when the interior of the house is too hot and a breeze is desired.

Figure 19 - The foundation of a *sanheyuan* house on Xiji. (Photo by Oliver Streiter, 2017.)

After passing through the courtyard, the main entrance to the house will open into a hall where the lineage ancestors are enshrined on an altar set against the back wall. Many of Xiji's houses feature inscriptions written above the lintel, usually a *tanghao* (堂號): a claim of identity shared among families of the same surname. Placed above the door, it also identifies the room as the ancestral hall. The tablets dedicated to the deceased are often accompanied by images of the Goddess of Mercy, Guanyin (觀音), and the earth deity, Tudi Gong (土地公). The house will have other tutelary deities, such as the stove god, the foundation god, and the door god who are also worshiped domestically. Tian Gong (天公),

the god of heaven, is also worshiped at home. Though commonly worshiped outside of the house by placing incense in a holder mounted to the doorframe, the people of Penghu have guarded against the strong winds by bringing Tian Gong worship inside, constructing special shelves or alcoves above the lintel.

Domestic ritual spaces are typically hidden away, but on Xiji, where doors, roofs and walls have disappeared, glimpses of private life are revealed. As melancholy a scene as the ruination of the village is, the gradual deterioration of the boundary between public and private affords unique views of the inner folklife. When Li and Hsieh visited in 1979, the decay was only beginning to set in, though Li noted some other houses were already undergoing ruination – likely those abandoned in the 1960s or earlier. In one house the bedroom was still intact, though messy. He noted the dirty bedding, a pair of broken glasses, books, pencils and a calendar that had not been flipped past July 12, 1978. In another, a porcelain tea set was still left out. The cup was full of water and tealeaves, covered in a layer of mould. The Xiji he visited still had some hope that perhaps the inhabitants could return and pick up where they had left off.

Figure 20 - A nook above the entrance still contains a ceramic censer for worshipping Tian Gong. (Author's photo, 2017.)

In 2017, there was no sense that anybody was coming back. Every door on Xiji was broken off of its hinges. Barricades that had been made of poles and ropes secured across the doors were smashed after thirty-eight years of typhoons and winter winds. The courtyards were overgrown with grass, filled with bits of flotsam blown in from the shore, and strewn with roof tiles and stones that had come loose. Brick stoves were cracking apart. Grass grew out of the large circular openings on their surfaces where woks once simmered. Altars, cabinets and tables were in various states of collapse. The goats had moved smaller household items about as they shuffled inside during storms: cups, liquor bottles and cans were everywhere. By 2017 only a few objects were left untouched and in situ since their owners left: the

occasional bed frame, a table and an altar where the glass bottles had not been knocked over. The Xiji that Li and Hsieh encountered was long gone. The goats had claimed every inch of the island over the years. The landscape was covered with their droppings: on every stone, beneath every blade of grass and inside every building they had carpeted the floors. Their bones and carcasses could be found across the island, outdoors, in the wells and inside every house scattered and strewn among the other debris, as scattered bones or as complete corpses slowly being mummified by the salty wind.

Figure 21 - Houses of Xiji Village in varying states of ruination. (Author's photo, 2017.)

Figure 22 - Inside a bedroom in Xiji Village. Mattresses would be placed upon the large wooden platform in the back of the room. Bedrooms would also act as storage rooms. Note the large earthen jars. (Author's photo, 2017.)

Figures 23a & 23b - A Xiji house that is still in relatively good condition. Left: the front exterior. Right: the courtyard and stairs to the flat roof. (Author's photos, 2017.)

Figures 24a & 24b - Inside an ancestral hall that is still intact. Left: The shelf on the back wall would act as the altar for ancestor veneration. The floor is covered with debris, broken furniture and goat faeces that give it the appearance of a dirt floor. Right: The remains of dead goats among the debris in the house. (Author's photos, 2017.)

Figures 25a & 25b - Two examples of geomantic architecture found in Xiji Village. Left: A *feng shui* wall opposite the entrance to a house. Right: A short concrete spire atop the entry gate helps to collect *qi* energy. (Author's photos, 2017.)

Figure 26 - Poles and ropes were used to keep the doors fixed shut, but, over time, nature found its way in. Wooden furniture lies broken and scattered among goat remains and trash blown in from the sea. (Author's photo, 2017.)

Chifu Gong (old Xiji Gong)

Inscriptions found at Xiji Village's main temple, Chifu Gong (池府宮), also referred to as the old Xiji Gong (西吉宮), indicate that the present structure was built in 1929, but a placard kept in Magong dating to 1873 suggests an earlier structure may have once stood here. The temple was not oriented on the same axis as the village, but instead was aligned to magnetic north. Prior to Xiji's abandonment it featured a free standing portico in front of its entrance, embraced by walls on either side that splayed out into the temple courtyard. Across the courtyard from the temple was once a free standing archway with a portal shaped like a *bagua* (八卦), an octagon representing components of Daoist cosmology. To either side were wooden spires resembling flagpoles that represented the power of the temple's main deity, Chifu Wangye (池府王爺). The facade of the temple was decorated with many painted tiles, sculptures and wooden carvings. When facing the entrance, the wall to the right features the character for the sun, 日 (*ri*), the 'dragon' side, and to the left, the character for the moon, 月 (*yue*), the 'tiger' side.

Figure 27 - The ruins of Xiji's main temple, *Chifu Gong*. The portico in front of its entrance collapsed only a few years before the research team visited. (Author's photo, 2017.)

When Li Li-guo visited in 1979 the temple still had a roof. He managed to slip through the doors and noted the interior was empty and bore the musty scent of a space not used (Li, 1979, p.14). After the villagers chose to relocate, the deities and worship items had been placed in the care of a former resident surnamed Wu while the villagers attempted to raise money for a new temple in Magong (Li, 1979, p. 17) (see below). Today the portico and archway have collapsed, as has the temple roof. The support columns are scattered about, the plaza's spires have disappeared and some of the decorations on the temple's exterior walls have been removed. Despite this, much of the original epigraphy of Chifu Gong remains. The doorjambs and basalt columns that once held up the roofs have been inscribed with couplets and names of donors who helped fund the temple. The names Xu (許), Chen (陳), and Wu (吳) are the most common. Because of the ephemeral nature of Xiji's built environment, the inscriptions that were identifiable on the columns and jambs are presented below with their transcriptions for future reference. They correspond to the pairs of columns and jambs, read from right (dragon) to left (tiger), starting from the farthest outer pair in the direction of the inner sanctum. Their transcriptions and translations are provided in Table 1, and in them we can note the use of phrases reflecting Xiji's connection to the sea, including "sea" (海), "wave" (浪), and "islanders" (嶋民). Perhaps most significantly is the repetition of the island's name, 西吉, in the first characters of the first two pairs of columns.

	Chinese	English
First set	Dragon: (西昭大海喜)觀千叠浪 Tiger: (吉澤良辰恩庇萬人家)	The vast ocean shimmers to the west, the thousand layers of waves are delightful to behold. The good times are blessed with auspiciousness, the gods' mercy protects ten thousand households.
Second set	Dragon: 西風蕩雲霞長天瑞彩 Tiger: 吉日興土木閤境平安	The west wind sways the rosy clouds, propitious colours bathe the sky. The construction of the temple commenced on an auspicious day, may the entire region be peaceful and safe.
Door jambs	Dragon: 威鎮此方願千秋萬載 Tiger: 恩留斯世頌水遠山長	May the gods' might calm and guard this place for myriad years. May the gods' grace stay with this world and forever be praised.
Third set	Dragon: 喜荷神府咸感三千歲 Tiger: 禺瞻廟貌具存一片誠	The gods' mansion is full of joy, may the harmony last three thousand years. The temple's grand appearance symbolises and manifests the devotees' piousness and sincerity.
Fourth set	Dragon: 王澤沾濡嶋民知仰庇 Tiger: 神威赫濯廟貌慶重新	The lords' beneficence nourishes the islanders, they know to look to him for protection. The divinity is mighty and illustrious, it is time for celebrating the renewal of the temple's appearance.

Table 1 - Epigraphy and English translations of Chifu Gong temple's columns and doorjambs.[2]

[2] Full sets of epigraphy for the first set of inscriptions were not found on-site in 2017 as they had become buried in rubble. Photos from a 2015 blog post (Laopa, 2015), reflecting a 2014 visit, were used to fill in the gaps. This sourced information is presented in parentheses. My gratitude goes to Manwai To for her assistance checking the epigraphy presented in Table 1.

Figures 28a, 28b & 28c - Different views of the ruins of Chifu Gong. Top left: A sun-bleached gable decoration. Top right: The courtyard where the archway and portico roof have collapsed. Bottom: The roofless interior of the temple. Decorations still remain on the interior walls. (Author's photos, 2017.)

Points of Interest in the Hinterlands

The Western Temple

The only structure on the western side of Xiji Island is the ruins of a temple referred to elsewhere as Xi Gong (西宮, 'The West Temple'). Like Chifu Gong, it is oriented with magnetic north, but does not use the hill as a reference point. In 2017 it was in an advanced state of collapse, but photos found online indicate its walls were mostly still standing only a few years earlier. Evidence at the site is scant, and informants were unable to recall why it

was constructed, why it was so far away or to whom it was dedicated. Online sources are equally unclear, but one website indicates that two deities that are now in Magong, Guan Ren (官人) and Huang Da Ma (黃大媽), were once enshrined within (Penghu.Info, n.d.c).

Figure 29 - The West Temple, July 2017. The researchers take a break in what little shade is available at the ruins of the temple. (Author's photo, 2017.)

Figure 30 - What remains of the facade of the West Temple. (Author's photo, 2017.)

The four pagodas

Along Xiji's coast are four pagodas that were constructed as a response to the island's dangerous coastline and to counteract inauspicious elements that were acting upon the community. They are all of varying sizes and shapes, appearing to be made of local basalt stones, held together with concrete. Three of the pagodas are arranged along the island's eastern shore, and the fourth in the middle of the southern shoreline. Here I will present them in the same order as Huang and Gan's study (1999). Pagoda number 1 is in the northeast and is called the Headland Bend Watchtower (彎墩頭塔, *wan dun tou ta*). Pagoda number 2 is the Safety Treasure Pagoda (安全寶塔, *anquan bao ta*) located at the centre point of the eastern shoreline, just north of the rocky cove. Pagoda number 3 is the Sand Ditch Pagoda (沙溝塔, *sha gou ta*), just south of the cove. Pagoda number 4 in the south is the Qilin (Unicorn) Treasure Pagoda (麒麟寶塔, *qilin bao ta*). In the past, these pagodas all featured artifacts at the top of their spires that were no longer present in 2017.

Pagoda No. 1: Headland Bend Watchtower (彎墩頭塔). Named after the location where it was built, this pagoda was originally constructed in 1894 after the god of Chifu Temple told the villagers to do so. It is reported to have collapsed in 1968, and was soon rebuilt. A copper lantern, common on fishing vessels, is said to have been donated to Chifu Temple, from where it was lit daily at 5 o'clock in the evening, and was then moved to the top of the tower to serve as a navigation light for ships (Huang & Gan, 1999, pp. 235–236). Evidence of the copper lantern can still be seen today with the use of aerial equipment, by the green staining atop the pagoda. In 2017 part of a shattered lens was observed on the ground at the base of the pagoda. A post on social media indicates that the lantern was removed by descendants of the Xiji community (Zheng, 2018).

Figures 31a & 31b - Headland Bend Watchtower. Left: The pagoda from the ground (author's photo). Right: from the air, the remains of the copper lantern can be seen atop the pagoda. (Photo by Oliver Streiter, 2017.)

Pagoda No. 2: The Safety Treasure Pagoda (安全寶塔). The assemblage was constructed as a marker for ships to avoid this part of Xiji's coast. Because the shore bends inward into a rocky cove, the northeast winter winds would tend to drive them towards the shoals where they would break apart (Huang & Gan, 1999, p. 239). A small shrine is associated with the pagoda, being constructed on its west side. Huang and Gan indicate that it is a

Tudi Gong (tutelary earth deity) shrine, but in 2017 an informant in Magong indicated that it was not. Both structures, the pagoda and the shrine, face south. There is uncertainty whether a kerosene lantern was at the top of the pagoda (ibid.), or whether the small domed structure at ground level contained one. An inscription and its English translation is reproduced in Table 2, of note, it references Mazu (媽祖), the goddess of the sea and sailors.

Chinese	English
西吉村安全寶塔 境主 謝媽祖設立地穴築 造安全寶塔恭奉 福德諸神巡守海濱 瞻於本月初四日 慶獻普施庇佑合境 平安五谷豐登海利 大進四時無災八節有慶 中華民國四十年農八月吉日	Xiji Village Safety Treasure Pagoda Realm protector Thank you, Goddess Mazu for revealing to us this auspicious site We build this pagoda to honor and serve The land god and other deities, let them guard the waterfront On the fourth day of the month We host celebrations and almsgiving events and pray for the whole region Safety, abundance of all five grains, and harvest from the sea Abundant fish, and all seasons without disaster Year 40 of the Republic of China (1951) eighth lunar month, an auspicious day

Table 2 - Epigraphy and English translation on the Safety Treasure Pagoda's commemorative placard.

Figure 32 - The Safety Treasure Pagoda. (Author's photo, 2017)

Pagoda No. 3: Sand Ditch Pagoda (沙溝塔). The Sand Ditch Pagoda received its name due to the sandy terrain and a small ditch at this location. Huang and Gan (1999, pp. 242–243) indicate that this pagoda served the same purpose as the Safety Pagoda, but its construction is attributed to an epidemic believed to have originated on Dongji in the 1960s, explaining why it is oriented primarily towards the east. The small structure attached to it was once a shrine. A thin slab of concrete was set atop as a roof but now lays overturned behind the structure. Huang and Gan suggest that this was also a Tudi Gong shrine (1999, p. 244), but informants in Magong disagree. This pagoda is the closest to the village, and the pathway to a small jetty on the cove runs by it. A stone placard erected by the government sits nearby with an introduction to Xiji and its history.

At the top of the pagoda is a hollow space that once featured two windows, one looking east, and the other looking south. With time, as the pagoda has crumbled, these two openings have become one large gap. An informant living on Dongji indicated that the spire once featured an eagle, but no evidence has been found.

Figure 33 - The Sand Ditch Pagoda. (Author's photo, 2017.)

Pagoda No. 4: Qilin Treasure Pagoda (麒麟寶塔). This pagoda received its name from a small *qilin* (麒麟, a Chinese unicorn) that once stood on its summit. This area of Xiji, according to Huang and Gan, was called Hugou Kou (滬溝口), and featured a small natural harbour, called by locals Xingang (新港, 'new harbour'). The pagoda was built in 1956 in response to a tragic accident when a boat carrying more than one hundred people ran aground on the shoals. Only six people survived (Huang & Gan 1999, p. 245). The research

team asked an informant in Magong why a pagoda was constructed after the accident and not a beacon. Their response was that the gods instructed the villagers to do so. In 2017 I noticed that the *qilin* did not share the same alignment as the altar below it. The altar appeared to be oriented towards the village, whereas the *qilin* was aligned to face the top of the hill.

A concrete tablet is built into the face of the pagoda above the altar that reads: 麒麟塔, 'Qilin Pagoda.' There is a crude inscription made in the frontispiece of the altar reproduced in Table 3.

Chinese	English
中華民國伍拾伍年陰曆三月二十六日 衆弟子一立 弟子許進企寄付水泥拾包	55th year of the Republic of China (1966), 3rd lunar month, 26th day Congregation of disciples stand as one Disciple Xu Jin-qi sends ten bags of cement

Table 3 - Epigraphy and English translation of Qilin Pagoda's altar.

Figures 34a & 34b - Qilin Pagoda. Left: the pagoda and its surroundings. Right: minus the *qilin*. (Author's photos, 2017.)

The Dolmens

On the southeast shore are two dolmens facing the sea that were constructed for the protection of boats. One sits near the Qilin Treasure Pagoda and is made of local basalt and concrete, the other in the southeast corner of the island is made of non-native granite or andesite, likely originating as ballast stones in ships from Fujian Province. This latter dolmen once contained three deities according to an informant: one who watched the boats, an earth deity and a third who was not identified. Within, there still remains a deity image made of coral stone, likely the earth deity who had to remain behind on the island when all the others could be relocated.

Figures 35a & 35b - The dolmens. Left: The southwestern dolmen near Qilin Pagoda. Right: The southeastern dolmen of non-native stone. (Author's photos, 2017).

Earthworks

There are four major earthworks on Xiji: a series of water catchment ponds on the western cape; a massive berm constructed along the southwest shore to protect the low-lying terrain from wind and seawater intrusion; a bridge and lock structure named the Zhangsheng Bridge (長勝橋) at the site of the aforementioned Hugou Kou on the southern shore, where the seasonal creek empties into the ocean at the Qilin Pagoda and Xingang boat site; and a retaining wall northeast of the village, between the hill and the east coast.

The catchment ponds. The catchment ponds are two connected basins called *You Fu Chi* (有福池) (the 'Fortune Pond') that collect surface water on the western side of the island and make use of a natural trough in the terrain. The water here is said to be brackish, and the ponds were generally thought unclean due to their use by livestock. The water collected here passes through an embankment on its way to the sea, where a concrete tablet had been placed. Its transcription and English translation are provided in Table 4.

Figure 36 - The catchment ponds on the western cape of Xiji. (Photo by Oliver Streiter, 2017.)

Chinese	English
有福池 (中華民)國 三十七年 十月二十二日 境主州府太成 正頭家許僕 富頭家陳帕 正董吳蠻 富董陳別 合境有福	Fortune Pond Republic of China Year 37 (1948) 10th lunar month, 22nd day The territory is overseen by Taisui Chief ritual convocant Xu Pu Deputy ritual convocant Chen Pa Head supervisor Wu Man Deputy supervisor Chen Bie The entire area is blessed with fortune

Table 4 - The epigraphy of the *You Fu Chi* containment pond commemorative tablet, depicted in figure 38.[3]

Figures 37a & 37b - The catchment ponds from below, July 2017. Left: the lower pond, looking north. Right: Investigating the broken monument at the outlet of the catchment ponds. (Author's photos, 2017.)

[3] Several comments must be made about the transcriptions and translations in Table 4. First, due to degradation the full column proclaiming the Republic of China has crumbled, but the inscription can be realised by the position of the surviving character 國 (kingdom, country). The missing characters are placed in parentheses. Second, some sources indicate that the second date line inscription should be interpreted as the 23rd day (十月二十三日). This cannot be corroborated with my own data, which depicts the number 22 (see Figure 38). Third, several instances of shorthand are used in this inscription. For example, 太 成 (*tai cheng*) is meant to be read as 太歲 (*Taisui*), the name used for the counting of years in the sixty year cycle, the title used for annual horoscope deities and the planet Jupiter. If it were to be interpreted directly as the line is written, the meaning is nonsense ('The territory is overseen by *extreme accomplishing*'. Elsewhere, the character 富 (*fu*), meaning 'wealthy,' is a homophone of 副 (*fu*), meaning 'deputy.' Again, as written, the lines are nonsensical. These errors were kept in the transcriptions, but are corrected in the English translations.

Figure 38 - The tablet of the catchment pond monument. (Author's photo, 2017.)

The berm. Both Xiji and its eastern neighbor Dongji feature massive berms across their lowest points to protect their most fertile terrain from seawater intrusion. Xiji's berm runs along the southwestern shore between its two surface water features. Atop the berm can be found tombs and burial mounds due to its relatively loose material composition. A collapsing stone wall built for added protection against wind runs along the top, but many stones have been cannibalised for other projects, including the tombs.

Figures 39a & 39b - The berm. Left: Atop the berm looking east. Right: Atop the berm looking towards the western cape. (Author's photos, 2017.)

Zhangsheng Bridge. The eastern end of the berm is marked by the Zhangsheng Bridge (長勝橋), where the seasonal creek is channeled through a lock. Exiting the assemblage, the stream bed turns sharply to the west, where it has begun to undercut the berm.

Figures 40a & 40b - Zhangsheng Bridge and the channeled creek. Left: The bridge and outlet from the lock (partially obscured by a large piece of driftwood), at the berm's east terminus, formed by earthworks and retaining walls. Viewed from the shore looking north. Right: The final channeled section of the creek before it exits through the lock, looking northeast. (Author's photos, 2017.)

The retaining wall. The retaining wall takes on the appearance of a bridge due to the gravel track above it and the construction of two stone and concrete commemorative columns at its north and south ends. These columns are inscribed on multiple sides with the same message, reproduced in Table 5.

Chinese	English
高山穴安 民國 55 年 一九六六年 境肖千峯 主湄州媽祖 丙午年拾弍月吉旦	High mountain cave peace 55th year of the Republic of China, 1966 The territory resembles many peaks The Master of the Meizhou Province, Mazu Bingwu year (1966), second lunar month, auspicious day

Table 5 - Epigraphy and English translation of the retaining wall commemorative columns.

Figure 41 - The retaining wall and bridge. (Author's photo, 2017.)

The cemeteries and burial grounds

Burials occurred outside of Xiji's village space, beyond the perimeter defined by the island's magico-religious structures. The burials were clustered together in the island's more productive lower elevations, producing two distinct graveyard sites along the shore, one on the east coast, between the village and the cove, bounded by the Safety Treasure Pagoda and the Sand Ditch Pagoda to the north and south, and the second built along the surface of the berm. A third less populous cluster was observed on the western cape, arranged on either side of the catchment ponds and their drainage. These tombs were arranged facing the water system and exhibited more modern construction materials. Had the island not depopulated, it is likely this site would have continued to develop. In the northern hinterlands tombs were scattered about, and no clear planning was visible in their distribution.

An informant indicated that men on the island were buried at high tide whereas women were buried when the tide was low, a reflection of the gender roles' connection to the sea: men would take their boats out when the tide was high, and women would gather shellfish and seaweed when the tide was out.

Figures 42a & 42b - The two shoreline graveyards. Left: Graves arranged along the seaward side of the berm, aligned towards the hill behind the village. (Photo by Oliver Streiter, 2017.) Right: Along the east coast, looking north. (Author's photo, 2017.)

Folktales about Xiji

The spiritual successor to Chifu Gong is a narrow two-story building in downtown Magong located at Number 61 Weilin Street called Xiji Gong (西吉宮). Constructed by former residents who moved to this part of Magong in 1978, it contains all of the deities and ritual objects from the 1929 era temple and the West Temple; presided over by Chifu Wangye. The former residents have hung old photos on the walls, and still gather to continue their traditions. It was at Xiji Temple where informants were able to explain more about living on the island. It is necessary to pick through the folklore surrounding Xiji because, as cultural legends, this lore yields important insights to life on Xiji. Simultaneously, it is necessary to clear up legends that have arisen about Xiji in the absence of villagers: for example, guides will tell tourists that Xiji is a haunted island. The former residents do not think so, and stated that this is not what the island should be known for. Three examples are presented below.

Figure 43 - The new Xiji Gong, the spiritual centre for Xiji Residents in Magong, where the deities and artifacts from the abandoned temples on Xiji have been relocated. (Author's photo, 2017.)

Shipwrecks

Shipwrecks were and still are common events on Xiji, and led to the development of three of its four pagodas. Here I highlight three stories from the 20th century that appear to have had a significant impact on the island.

On November 16, 1956 the Second Guangsheng Ship (第二光盛輪) of the Guanghe Line (光和輪船公司), carrying 106 passengers and crew, ran aground on Xiji's southwestern shore around 5 o'clock in the morning. It sent out a distress signal, and the residents of the island ran to the shore to begin a rescue attempt. Due to heavy seas, only one villager was able to swim to the ship to begin the rescue. Only six people were saved before the ship sank. A memorial for the victims stands at the Magong Guanyin Pavilion (Penghu.Info, n.d.a).

In the early morning hours of October 10, 1973 a Korean fishing boat, the Dong Wha 102, lost power and ran aground on Xiji. On board were 20 fishermen who were rescued by the villagers and given shelter until help could arrive. The event made the newspapers, and on December 22 the Director General of the Office of Fisheries of the Republic of Korea, Dong Soo Kim wrote a letter of gratitude to the authorities on Penghu to express his appreciation (Wu, 2018).

Because of Xiji's conditions, the community could only rely on small boats to get on and off of the island, but this meant that they were more affected by the weather than other, larger

boats. One year a boat capsized in the strong waves, and the owner returned home bleeding. The villagers could not send for help because the conditions had worsened, and the man bled to death. This event strengthened the resolve of the remaining villagers to seek better living conditions, and led to the accelerated depopulation of Xiji (Li, 1979, pp. 16–17).

Figures 44a, 44b, 44c & 44d - The remains of three different fishing boats on Xiji's shore in 2017. Top left: The broken keel of a fishing vessel on the rocky east coast. Top right: The foredeck of a fishing vessel (likely belonging to the same boat as the keel) on the rocky east coast. Bottom left: The starboard hull of a different fishing vessel on the southeastern shore. Bottom right: The bow of a third fishing vessel broken upon Xiji's southwestern shore. (Author's photos, 2017.)

Snakes

Before arriving in the South Penghu Marine National Park, the research team members had heard a rumour about Xiji being snake-infested. Even on Dongji we had been warned over and over, yet we had seen none during our first visit in May, nor our second or third visits in July and August. We had also been warned about snakes on Dongji by its elderly residents, but encountered none there either. This does not mean they do not exist on these islands—they very likely still can be found if one searches for them. For Xiji, we theorised that in the years since its abandonment, the snake population may have crashed due to a lack of prey. In the absence of humans, it would seem likely that rodents that subsist on human refuse have died out. Those that survived likely were then outcompeted by the goats.

Disease and a cosmological arms race

In the 1960s the residents of Xiji and Dongji were afflicted by a mysterious epidemic that manifested itself as red spots and bloodshot eyes. Residents from both islands attribute the cause to bad geomancy caused by the ROC government dynamiting a hill south of Dongji Harbour known as Tiger Mountain (虎頭山). The folklore contends that the epidemic disappeared after the island communities constructed new pagodas to bring the geomancy back into alignment.

Different sources indicate different chronologies, but it appears that symptoms appeared on Xiji first, and bounced back and forth between the islands, manifesting in different ways. An informant indicated that red spots began developing on Xiji's newborns soon after the hill was blasted, which the villagers came to believe was the tiger of the hill leaving bite marks. Xiji Village responded by constructing the Sand Ditch Pagoda (number 3), which, according to one informant, featured an eagle at its top that could swoop down on the tiger from the air. Once completed, the problem is said to have stopped afflicting Xiji's newborns, but simultaneously the infant mortality rate of Dongji rose. Dongji's villagers, believing the problem was being deflected onto them, constructed their own pagoda atop the Tiger Hill. The leader of the five celestial generals, Taizi (太子), was brought out of the temple and set atop an incantation stele on the pagoda, holding a bow and arrow ready to shoot down the eagle. Transcriptions of the stele are reproduced in Table 6.

Figures 45a & 45b - The pagoda on Dongji Yu's Tiger Mountain. Left: Oriented towards Xiji. Right: Taizi holds a bow. (Author's photos, 2017.)

This then appears to have deflected the problem back to Xiji, where an informant states that the construction of Dongji's pagoda resulted in the people of Xiji being afflicted by bloodshot eyes.

A slightly different account is given by Huang and Gan which states that around 1961 70% of the newborns on Xiji were born with bloodshot in the corner of their eyes which disappeared naturally within a year (1999, p. 242). In any case, the problem eventually died down, but the presence of the two pagodas is evidence that something was afflicting the populations.

Chinese	English
民國五十八己酉年孟冬吉旦 西處射弓保龍球 東吉村啟明宮置	Fifty-eighth year of the Republic of China (1969), an auspicious day in the first month of winter. Westward, tiger, shoot the bow to protect (dragon ball) Established by Dongji Village Qiuming Temple

Table 6 - Epigraphy and English translation of Dongji's Tiger Mountain Pagoda.[4]

Epidemiologists would be better suited to solve this mystery, but it was nevertheless a topic of discussion among the research team members in 2017, and the possibility of venereal disease or something of a similar nature being communicated between the two islands emerged as one possible hypothesis. There are several factors to consider: we were informed that the construction workers blasting the new harbour in the 1960s were not Penghu natives. Informants also made clear that the presence of soldiers had already resulted in many itinerant romances on the island; no doubt the construction workers also had their trysts. Dongji's appellation 'Little Shanghai' may also have had less to do with the population and more with the nightlife that sprang up. If so, they would have also provided entertainment for the Xiji fishing boats that had to wait the night on Dongji. By reproducing this hypothesis here, I do not mean to disparage Dongji. It is simply a line of inquiry to pursue to solve a sixty year old mystery. If this inquiry bears fruit, then the dynamiting of the Tiger Mountain was not necessarily the starting point of cosmic punishment but instead was a convenient distraction from a more pressing social problem.

Discussion: Xiji, Swona, spatial humanities, and deep mapping

Above, I have produced a detailed picture of Xiji Yu as it was observed in 2017: a sunbaked and windswept island waste of crumbling houses, temples, and stonewalls. Yet even in this state, it offers unique perspectives on its former community and on traditional life in Penghu. In fact, it is thanks in part to its deterioration that it has become so understandable: The environment has stripped away doors, walls and roofs, enabling a more intimate look at the community than would have been possible had every building still been occupied. In some ways, knowledge and understanding of Xiji have been enhanced, while other entities have been lost. A regular checking-in on such cultural landscapes from time to time is well worth the effort of gaining access, made all the more worthwhile if the knowledge of the environment is shared.

Les Roberts has written that the spatial humanities "engages and incites curiosity precisely on account of what it does not succeed in detailing with any great precision" (2016, p. 1), and if these notes on Xiji are any indicator, it is an easy rabbit hole to fall into. I have

[4] This translation is partially incomplete. The use of the characters 龍球, which directly translated mean 'dragon ball,' is uncertain. Rather than produce an inaccurate translation, I have left the direct translation in parentheses to indicate that this is incomplete. It is possible that the inscription is meant to be read as an incantation for protection and thus lacks a grammatical logic, the character for dragon may have been inserted to reflect and balance the position of the character for tiger. Alternatively, dragons are often represented with a ball or pearl, said to represent the domain over which the dragon protects or has control. This latter possibility may reflect that a dragon is being invoked to handle affairs to the west (the direction of Xiji).

attempted to document Xiji Yu as thoroughly as I can within the limitations of this medium, but I have left many things out, and am encouraged that my omissions will likely inspire others. This article started as a response to Cal Flyn's *Islands of Abandonment*, but the next step is to bolster the information collected on Xiji and shared here using GIS systems. Now that a detailed description of Xiji has been provided, I wish to turn to a comparison between it and Swona.

The parallels between Xiji and Swona are numerous. They are islets that were part of larger island systems sitting in the midst of busy shipping lanes. They are both small, Xiji is less than 1 square km in area, Swona at approximately 1.2 square kms, and both are surrounded by hidden reefs which proved disastrous for many ships and sailors (Donaldson, 1936). Forced into unsustainable economic situations due to the industrialisation of their traditional economic base in the 20th century, they both began a long process of depopulation until finally being abandoned in the 1970s; Swona in 1974, Xiji in 1978. The slow process of their dereliction has been documented at regular intervals by journalists and photographers; Swona since as early as 1936 and Xiji since 1979, though earlier documentations likely exist in some form.

The beginning of Swona's depopulation began much earlier than Xiji. By 1927 only one family remained. We are told conditions were frugal, but the family head, James Rosie, felt they were in better shape than those living down and out in London (Donaldson, 1936). They kept animals, repaired nets, and scavenged the shore for whatever washed up. Mr. Rosie built boats and manned a small lighthouse. The children played all over the island, and the family read and played musical instruments for entertainment. The island had been touched by modernity, as a 1936 article indicates: motorboats, oil-powered engines, and an electricity-generating windmill were all present on the island. The inhabitants of Swona supported themselves by keeping chickens and cattle, fishing, lobstering, and tilling the soil for barley, oats, rhubarb, and potatoes (Donaldson, 1936; Flyn, 2021, pp. 228–229). Eggs, cattle, and sheep were sent to market (Donaldson, 1936). Like Xiji, stone walls were built to protect the gardens from harsh winds (Flyn, 2021, p. 229).

Li Li-guo commented on Xiji in 1979 that the island "is not mysterious, but Xiji's geography and natural environment make it out of touch with time" (1979, p. 14). Its isolation produced a community that had to continue to rely on pre-industrial approaches in a rapidly modernising island system up until the point where the aging population recognised their limitations. It was the aging process that ended Swona as well, Flyn explains that in the 1970s the Rosie siblings recognised they were becoming too frail to continue on in isolation, so they packed their belongings and radioed their family to come collect them (Flyn, 2021).

John E. Donaldson described the empty houses of Swona in the 1930s as "silent memorials of a once-flourishing community," though "most of them still habitable" many years after they had been abandoned (Donaldson, 1936). When the Photographer John S. Findlay visited in 1984, the houses of the island still carried a "feeling that the owner was only in the next room," and the "sense of human presence was still so strong as to prompt him to knock upon every door before he entered" (Flyn, 2021, p. 232). Cal Flyn spent the night on the island, taking shelter in one of the abandoned houses. Although the decay had set in and it was evident that the home had been empty for a long time, she noted there were still aspects to it that made it feel like it was still in use.

In the notes at the end of *Islands of Abandonment*, Flyn writes that the Annal family, the descendants of James Rosie's daughter Eva, "are in the process of creating a foundation for the preservation of the island's built and natural heritage" (Flyn, 2021, p. 325). The Swona Heritage group's website (www.swona.net) has begun the process of creating a digital Swona, making full use of GIS tools to navigate the isle's cultural landscape, presenting contemporary Swona alongside scanned black and white photographs, news articles, audio recordings and folklore. It is possible to tour Swona virtually, as they have integrated 360 degree photography to help visitors navigate the space. The descendants of Swona, being in a privileged position, have simultaneously staked their claim on the island while anticipating the needs of future researchers and heritage enthusiasts. From their website, it is possible to learn that Swona once had a chapel, a corn mill, a malt kiln, workshops, infrastructure built in support of the First and Second World wars and many wells among other features. I am curious why Flyn only briefly referenced some of these entities and skipped over the rest.

Swona must have had a village gathering space, whether it was at the chapel, near the small haven where the boats would pull up and launch or, perhaps, at someone's home. Isolated island villages display a communal dependency and group cohesion to a stronger degree than communities on the mainland, and it would be strange if people did not have a place (or site) to socialise. During our investigations, the 2017 research team stayed on Xiji's neighbor, Dongji, for our accommodations. There, we observed the hub of communal activity was centered around one of the houses at the temple square where the owners had converted a side room into a store that was stocked with snacks and drinks that were delivered by supply boats that made regular rounds of the islands.[5] Tables were set up outside where villagers would gather, eat or chat during the day and into the evening. An informant in Magong indicated that Xiji had also had a similar house-based store arrangement near its temple, but the researchers could not find any evidence of it in 2017.

Commerce on Dongji was very simple. Exchanges at the store involved keeping a tab that would later be settled once it had run up to an amount that could be rounded to the nearest bank note: making change for small purchases would be impossible with the limited currency on the island. At the store we would give our daily food orders and a resident would prepare the day's meals: rice, vegetables and squid were the most common fare in our lunch boxes. The patterns of communal reliance we observed on Dongji offers an understanding of how these small island communities were reliant upon their members: catching, gathering and growing food, preparing and distributing it and other necessities. These support structures are an important part of the daily economy among Penghu's small islands and are a crucial for sustainable island life, without which the communities disappear. There is a fragility to the communal balance on Penghu's small islands which is best described by Flyn herself in an interview about Swona with *The Sunday Post*:

> *It does show that these communities are fragile and can reach a tipping point when it no longer makes sense to live there, especially in smaller islands. if you*

[5] I should note that these delivery boats played an interesting timekeeping role, as the passage of time on Dongji was slower, more cyclical and had less structure than elsewhere on Penghu or Taiwan. One of our informants would only tell the days of the week based on whether the delivery boats had come or not, and recounted stories in terms of the 'recent past,' 'past' or 'before now.' I also note that our host would prepare his breakfast around three in the morning before returning to bed, and the entire village observed the midday siesta. It seems likely that time would have passed in much the same way on Xiji.

> *want to keep islands alive they do need some minimum services, a sense of community and an ability to make a living otherwise they can collapse, almost overnight.* (McDonald, 2022).

Figure 46 - The research team takes in the nightlife at the store at Dongji's temple square in 2017. The tables are set outside of the island's store, run out of a spare room in the side of a house. Perhaps Xiji had a similar community gathering space in its heyday. (Author's photo, 2017.)

Conclusion: Digitising Abandoned Spaces

The digital turn in the social sciences and humanities has produced conditions of collaboration rather than competition. This is evident in the ever-growing reliance on citizen science and volunteered data for a variety of research projects. Simultaneously, there exists a responsibility for such big data-oriented research to anticipate the needs of future researchers. The guiding principle behind this turn is an empathetic understanding of, and value for, the collaborative process, which Streiter et al. comment upon in their attempts to revisit and re-document epigraphy recorded by Wolfgang Franke in Southeast Asia: "[w]hile few researchers might start with this task, its completion will have to rest on many shoulders" (2019, p. 106).

The photographs taken during the 2017 field visit to Xiji have been added and organised in the *ThakBong* project's digital archive,[6] which is growing as an anticipatory database and virtual space, featuring digitised heritage data from cultural landscapes around the globe, including Penghu County.[7] This digital environment acts as an organisational tool for the corpus of data collected and digitised by the project, but maintains an online GIS-based interface for public access, one that is dynamically changing as the project regularly

[6] For Xiji Village, see: http://thakbong.dyndns.tv/site/108619

[7] For Penghu, see: http://thakbong.dyndns.tv/thakbong/sites.penghu.html

"reshapes its conceptual model" as new entities are recognised as important for its framework (Streiter, 2019, p. 39). Gravesites remain its main subject, but it has so far proven to be a versatile archive suitable for the storage and presentation of data relating to a variety of entities.

This documentation of Xiji has produced a spatiotemporal cross-section of the island as it existed in 2017; a snapshot of a point in time as it continues its slow transition from being an inhabited village to a wilderness. It contributes to a body of work already written about Xiji, since Li Li-guo and Hsieh Chun-te visited in 1979, though I suspect there are earlier contemporaneous accounts of its folk life that I have not yet identified. These documentations parallel the many accounts of Swona, to which Cal Flyn has contributed. It is Flyn's documentation of rewilding abandoned spaces that has inspired this article, and it is my hope that I have been able to respond to her work in a way that continues the dialogue while exploring new avenues for inquiry that utilise the digital turn in the social sciences, employing GIS tools, big data approaches, and deep mapping principles. By visiting these cultural landscapes, collecting accounts of them and adding photographs and oral histories, the transitional processes occurring of these islands of abandonment can be better understood. This has already been started by Flyn's documentations in *Islands of Abandonment* and by the Swona Heritage group on their website through the digitisation of Swona's cultural landscape. Expanding the picture, looking deeper into the past, the addition of historical documents to the corpus of knowledge, such as receipts, registries, and titles, and the use of non-invasive remote sensing technology could provide an even greater picture, one that begins at the point in time when a site is initially settled, spanning a greater period of time, from the early 'unwilding' to the present rewilding. Data for projects like this will not be collected all at once, but the tools and capability to begin collecting data and collaborating with others already exists. These projects are worthwhile, and they will rest on many shoulders.

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