



## **“A Great Leap for Village Construction”**

**A Closer Look into Zhanqicun’s Developmental Achievements and Conflicts**

**Raised by a Desire to Grow**

Ivygate international education group Chengdu Office

Team 2: Caozidu Liu, Lexian Shuai, Yu Luo, Jiajun Wang, Tao Xue, Zitao Zhang,

Juehui Jia, Jingwen Hao, Zizhou Fang,

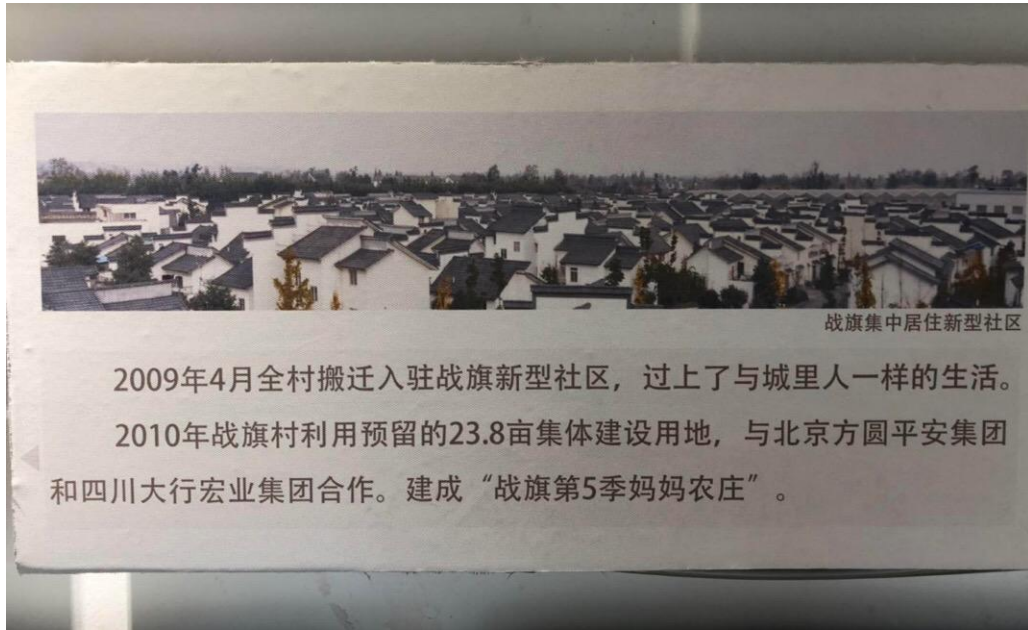
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The photo above in Zhanqicun History Museum shows Zhanqicun in the 1950's. In the 1950's, Zhanqicun was just an open field with little to no buildings and structure, which is why Zhanqicun surprised so many people with its growth.

Photo by Lexian Shuai

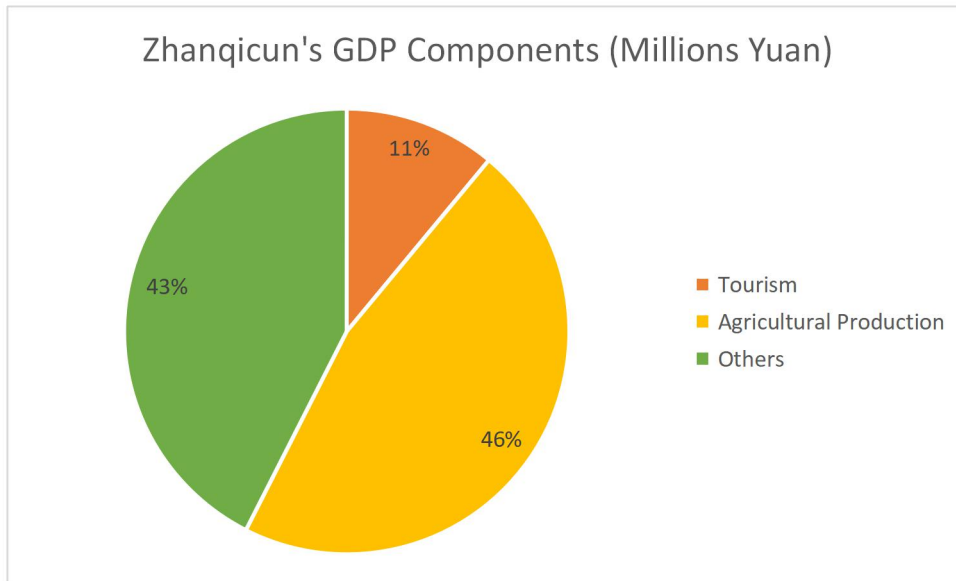
Zhanqicun, which is one of the fastest-growing villages in China, located only 50 kilometers away from Chengdu. The village is trying to accomplish the main goal: revitalize their village. Its accomplishments drew president Xi Jinping to visit the village. During the time he stayed in Zhanqicun, President Xi says, "We need to keep providing vitality for villages. We cannot have prosperous cities but underdeveloped or even declining villages." In fact, such goal described by President Xi is one of the most important developmental focuses of the Chinese government at the moment, and Zhanqicun is a village reflects such values well.



The photo above taken from Zhanqicun History Museum shows that the villagers are now living in properly built houses. The first line reads, “In April, 2009, the whole village moved into a new living space, and are now living like people who are in the cities.”

Photo by Lexian Shuai

Zhanqicun locates at the intersection of three areas: Dujiangyan, Pidu and Pengzhou. There are 1704 people in this village which with an area of 2909.12 *mu* (194 hectares) used for agriculture. In terms of finances, Zhanqicun has 8 collective enterprises and 5 private companies. In 2018, the village generated 32 million yuan from tourism, and 134.7 million yuan from agricultural production. Due to the village's accomplishments Zhanqicun became one of the Villages of Beauty and Relaxation in China, and it was rated to be AAAA National Tourist Attraction in March, 2019.

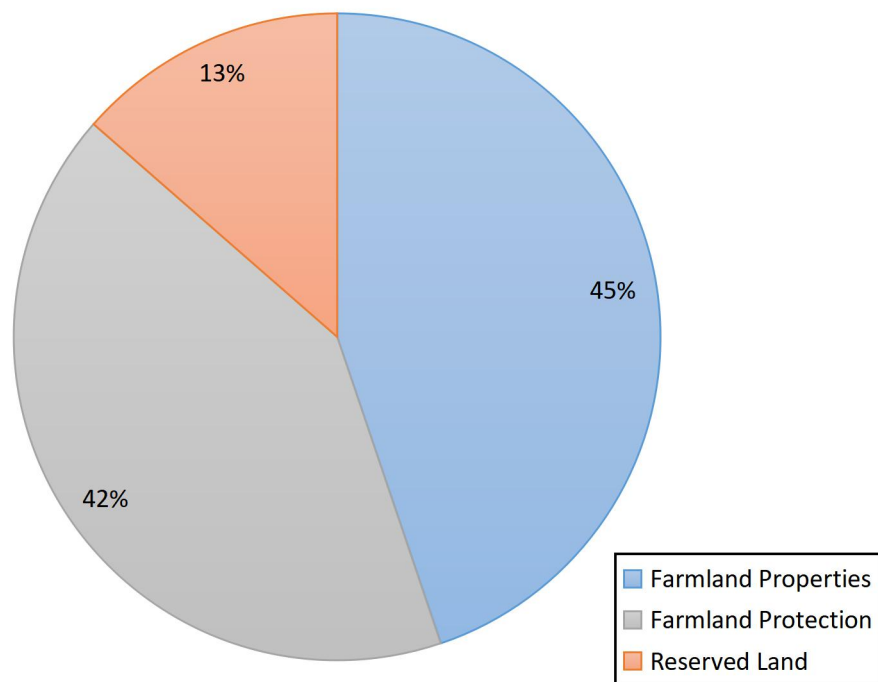


Source: Baidu

As stated above, the new rural construction and reform are one of the most significant focuses of the Chinese government. This objective was established due to several reasons such as unbalanced development between urban and rural areas, problematic living standards in villages, and enormous difficulties to stay above the poverty line from the unequal economic distribution. As a result, catching up with the city's development pace becomes important for the conditions for a large portion of the Chinese population.

To achieve this national goal, the government of Chengdu's Pidu District, where Zhanqicun is located, has implemented land policies to allow for better development progress. As an example, the government rearranged the plowing areas: for Zhanqicun and 4 other nearby villages, they made the goal that there will be 957.31 hectares of farmland properties, 889.09 hectares of farmland protection and 290.95 hectares of land reserved for construction.

The plow land re-arrangement in Zhanqicun and other 4 villages  
(hectares)



Source: Village Officials

In addition to managing land, government officials boost the village's economy by risk guaranties and financing awards. At present, since the licensing of lands is difficult, the district government adopted the strategy of "One Mode, Two Awards". "Mode" is the sharing of innovation risks; while "awards" are the credit loan and the special incentives provided to financial organizations. Zhanqicun, in particular, was able to put 4.1M yuan worth of land on the stock market. This process solves the problem of finance construction for investing enterprises.

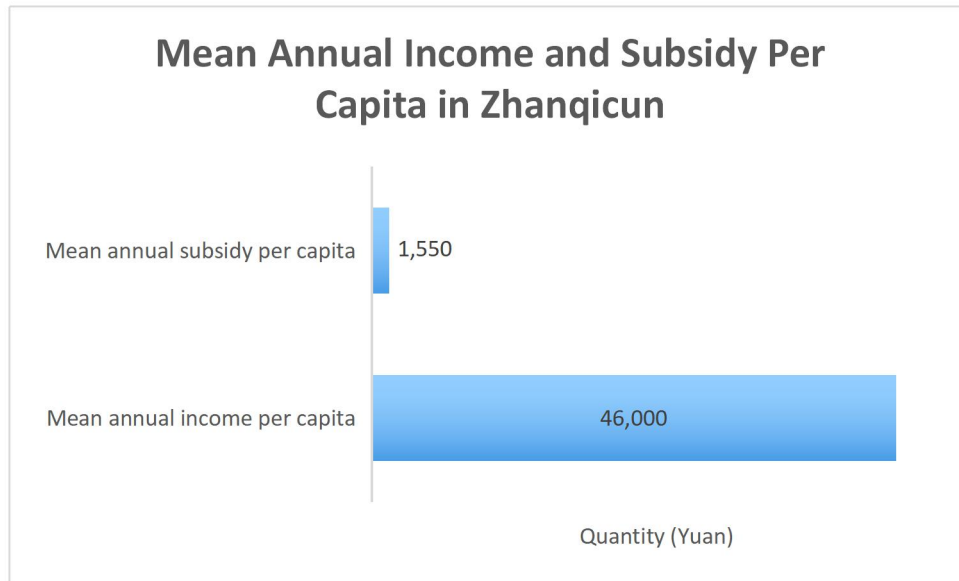
Lastly, the government also kept their eyes on the health of the public in the village. For instance, the government opened the Zhanqi Villager Night School, expanding farmers' knowledge about hi-tech machines, musical instruments, and all types of arts. They also established a series of conveniences for the village population. For example, they established a Zhanqicun Public Clinic in hopes of allowing the farmers to find a cure for minor illnesses without leaving the village. Additionally,

they built a kindergarten, named Zhanqi kindergarten, and an elementary school, named Tangchanglinsheng Elementary School, for the young.

Although meant for positive outcomes, the growth raised inherent issues between village officials and regular residents in Zhanqicun. The village officials prioritized economic potential by using their money on anything that could achieve sustainable growth for the village. Due to a lack of transparency from village officials, many residents even feared that the village officials put some of the money the village earned in their own pockets.

For village officials, they wanted growth for the village to be sustainable and not short-term. During our interview with the village head, Yang Yong, he says, “As an example, we (village officials) tried to build a parking space for every household in the village in 2007. The majority of the villagers felt it was unnecessary since most of them cannot afford cars. They never expected that some of the households were even able to afford 3 cars shortly after that. We were more experienced and we can see farther into the future as to what we need as a village and why we need it. The villagers might not understand at first, but we hope they can see why we did so when it is put to the test.”

For villagers, they have their own opinions toward the policies. According to our interviews with several villagers, one of the statistics they never agreed with is the annual income per capita, which is 46,000 yuan. They stated that it was just the mean value, and many of them are far away from it. They could receive the annual farmland subsidy of 1,550 yuan (per capita), with the monthly subsidy of 100 yuan per capita and 200 yuan per capita for the elderly (aged over 70), but for them this subsidy is not enough in their income.



Source: Village Officials

What the villagers feel worried about is that they found that the income of government officials was much higher than theirs (which also explains the average annual income per capita to them). Since the villagers moved to the new house from their old ones in recent years, they needed to pay for the price difference, which further augmented their economic pressure.



This location is where village residents make handcrafts. It is one of the most distinctive places in Zhanqicun. Here, almost every craftsman in Zhanqicun works in their own store to sell what they crafted.

Photo by Lexian Shuai

A convenience store owner we interviewed, Mi Wenhua, reflects that they already have tried to improve their income. When she was asked what exactly happened, she responds, “since the income is too low, we already talked to the village officials in hopes of a raise for the jobs. Since the village’s income mainly comes from the regular villagers, the officials should respect the opinions and wishes of people like me.” The convenience store owner’s husband is a tour guide for Zhanqicun. He works every single day under the hot and bright sun, but he only earns about 2000 yuan per month (not including subsidies). “We already raised a petition with signatures from the majority of the village,” she adds, “but it did not help since it was already cut and dried amongst the village officials. A simple petition can’t change anything”.

On the other hand, village officials were more careful with the wages and subsidies of village residents. During our interview with village head Yang Yong, he states, “[Increasing the subsidies] will only serve lazy people, and such mindsets reflects the lazy behavior. If the village earns 100 yuan and everybody wants to put that into their own pocket, how can the village work together as a group with that kind of self-centered mindset? If all [village officials] do is increase subsidies for village residents, they would spend them all at their leisure and leave none to their younger generation. It is normal that some of the villagers feel unbalanced since their mindsets still haven’t changed to see the bigger picture yet; however, as the village grows over time, they will be able to see that what we did was for their good since our main objective is to help the village grow as a whole.

All in all, a village with rapid development like Zhanqicun will play an important role, as it will drive the development of other rural areas in China and



promote rural growth to other parts of the world. Zhanqicun successfully showed the other villages that it is possible for villagers to live a life similar to those in the cities. For example, Zhanqicun's GDP is actually higher than the world's smallest national economy, Tuvalu. However, the balance between personal and public wealth is always an issue that needs to be solved in developing areas and even big cities. How can a regular villager understand the purpose behind every move by the government? How can a village official completely persuade the village that it is for the common good? Although there might be differences in what the village officials and village residents believe is more important, it can be solved with the joined efforts of everybody over time.