

Document 1.5: Excerpts from “The Village With No Name,” in *Daughter of Heaven* by Leslie Li, 2005

In 1990, Leslie Li traveled to Guangxi Province with her father to celebrate her grandmother’s one-hundredth birthday. While there, they visited Cuntoucun, the village where her grandmother had grown up.

The driver stopped where the gravel-paved road did... To get [to Cuntoucun] I needed to make my way over a very irregular path (wide enough for bullock carts, as it was strewn with the beasts’ generous droppings) of flagstones, each a good foot or so distant from each other.... [My father’s and my] journey was more like an extra-challenging game of hopscotch, jumping from one rock to the next, all the while trying to avoid the dung and mud... We arrived at Cuntoucun’s village gate hot, tired...

The village was enclosed, strangled really, by a high stone wall, which blocked out not only the sun’s debilitating heat but also its life-giving light. Within this tight embrace, each lane—flanked by the outer stone walls of the two-story houses themselves—was narrow and labyrinthine, its flagstones smeared with animal dung. Lanes led, torturously, to different family compounds, all in a sad state of disrepair and disuse. I peered inside the various gates at the wooden houses and open courtyards. Clucking hens wandered in and out of the rooms. A dirty, half-naked child played with a plastic rice bowl and a knotted piece of rope. A woman appeared in one doorway and stared at me with undisguised suspicion, then disappeared inside. A man in a stained tunic, smoking a pipe, studied me with grave indifference and held his ground.... There was no electricity, no plumbing here, not even an open sewer to flush away waste.... I was appalled by the poverty, the squalid living conditions....

Source: Li, Leslie. *Daughter of Heaven: A Memoir With Earthly Recipes*. New York: Arcade Publishing, 2005. 222–225.