



最後的穴居人 CAVING IN

中國中部黃土高原的窯洞曾經是數百萬人世代相傳的家園，現卻行將人去穴空
For generations, the caves of central China have been home to millions
of people. Today, their way of life is fast disappearing

撰文 WORDS MARK ANDREWS



地下生活
中國中部現有數百萬位穴居人

Life underground
Millions of people live in central
China's cave homes



周民才家中的電視、煮飯鍋和舊家具很平凡，是每位長者都有的尋常物品，但他腳下踩著的，卻是一片黃土。臨近黃昏的秋日餘暉，以及頭頂上的40瓦特燈泡，照亮了這個家，但周遭的昏暗環境卻提醒我們正身處於洞穴內，屋內平滑的牆身原來是被鑿平的山壁。

對於83歲的周民才來說，生活並不容易。他操著獨特的西安方言說：「從井裡打水很不方便，餵羊也很費力，羊又不聽話，而我年紀也大了。」

周民才很可能是陝西省西安市最後一代的穴居人。西安和鄰近的山西省和河南省是中國穴居人聚居的主要地方，這種住屋形式甚至可以追溯到青銅時代。儘管今日穴居人的確實數目不詳，但可以肯定的是人數正在急速減少。

將這類民居稱為「洞穴」可能並不是個確切的說法，因為它並非天然的岩石結構，而是人手挖掘的黃土窯洞。該區的山丘的土質就好像瑞士芝士般滿佈小孔，就連中國前領導人毛澤東也曾於窯洞居住

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I like living here. I'll stay until the last moment

過。1930及1940年代，共產黨幹部曾以西安北面的延安窯洞作總部；於國民黨空襲期間，延安各地亦被破壞殆盡，但這些窯洞卻成為共產黨員的庇護所。

旅遊公司Xi'an Insiders的經理Julia Bartaux第一次遇見周民才的時候，周伯伯正在放羊。在陝西，其實到處都可看見人放羊。Xi'an Insiders的旅行團現在經常到周家溝村造訪周民才的窯洞。由於周民才的子女不便邀請兩老同住，兩夫妻只好繼續在窯洞生活。

現在大部分窯洞都已有電力供應，部分甚至有自來水，但每個窯洞的居住

THE TELEVISION, cooking pots and worn furniture inside Zhou Mincai's home are unremarkable – a collection of items that could belong to any elderly person. But underfoot, it's a floor of earth. The late afternoon autumnal light does its best to light the home, helped by a bare 40-watt bulb – but the darkness is a reminder that we're in a cave, its walls once part of a hill that's been hewn into smooth surfaces.

Times aren't easy for 83-year-old Zhou. 'It's not convenient for me to get water from the well, plus it's difficult for me to feed the goat. The goat is naughty and I'm old,' he says in Xi'an's distinctive dialect.

Zhou is likely to be one of the last generations to live in cave dwellings around Xi'an in Shaanxi province. This area, together with neighbouring Shanxi and Henan provinces, is home to most of China's cave dwellers, whose style of home dates back to the Bronze Age. There aren't reliable figures on the number of people living in caves today, but one thing for sure is this population is shrinking rapidly.

Cave is perhaps the wrong term. These are not natural rock structures but dugouts formed by hand from the loess earth. Hills in the area are like Swiss cheese, filled with holes. Even the former Chinese leader Mao Zedong lived in a cave: Communist commanders used the caves of Yan'an, to the north of Xi'an, as headquarters from the 1930s to '40s, and during Kuomintang airstrikes the dugouts provided protection as the rest of Yan'an was destroyed.

Julia Bartaux, manager of tour company Xi'an Insiders, first met Zhou when he was out walking his goat – a surprisingly common sight in Shaanxi. The company's tour groups now frequently turn up to his cave in the village of Zhoujiagou. Zhou's children are either unwilling or unable to take him and his wife into their own homes, so the elderly couple remains in the cave.

Today, most remaining cave dwellings are hooked up to mains electricity and some even have running water. But there is a big difference in the standard of caves; as with conventional homes, the size and condition of each cave reflects the economic means of the owners. Zhou's consists of three connected rooms burrowed into a hill. But it stands in contrast to the residence belonging to the Wang family in Xi'an's Hanyu village, which is little different to a house. Visitors to the area can stay here through Xi'an



Photos: Top: Cancan Chu. Bottom left and right: VCG. Opposite Page: Wang jingwu/Imaginechina. Previous spread: VCG



照料窯洞相當耗時費力 Maintaining a cave takes time and energy

水平相當參差，因為和普通民居一樣，窯洞的大小和環境反映著屋主經濟狀況。周民才的家建於山丘內，由三個相連的窯洞組成，不過與西安韓峪村王先生的窯洞相比卻仍差很遠。王先生的窯洞與普通樓房並無兩樣，Xi'an Insiders旅行團會在此留宿，旅客亦可於Airbnb網上預訂住宿。

王先生的居所比普通窯洞華麗得多，他將山丘的中央部分掏空，改建成中庭，旁邊的窯洞更有門口可進入中庭。王先生的妻子劉燕蓮負責打理家中的四個睡房及準備膳食，她指：「照料窯洞相當耗時費力，而且大部分窯洞都建在山邊裡頭，建築本身承受了很大壓力。」她又笑著說：「但這是男人負責的活了。」

大部分有人居住的窯洞都鋪上了草泥，王家有一個睡房甚至刷上了白色灰水、鋪了地板。此舉有助鞏固窯洞的圓拱形結構，避免坍塌，每隔數年要再做一遍。此外，濕氣是窯洞自古以來的問題，

而且在雨季特別嚴重，很多居民會以舊報紙和日曆頁覆蓋牆身，吸走洞內濕氣。

周民才與家人本居於另一條村的窯洞，但在他約12歲時窯洞倒塌，之後他們就搬進了周家溝的窯洞。多年來，他見盡居民遷離窯洞的情景。他還記得自己年輕的時候，周家溝附近的窯洞有70至80戶人居住，但現在餘下的只有六戶人家。韓峪村的情況也是一樣，大部分人已經搬到村內的房屋居住，連接屋後的洞穴只用作儲物室。年輕一輩承認洞穴環境能抵受極端天氣，但他們還是寧願過現代化的生活。而老一輩的年紀實在太大，難以獨立生活，只好搬進子女的新款房屋同住。

為了將王先生的窯洞打造成適合待客的民宿，Xi'an Insiders為其中一個睡房開闢一個新入口，更安裝了一個流動洗手間。Bartaux指：「我們早前著手在郊外尋找環境合適的民宿，好讓旅客在此過夜，不用趕回城市落腳。我們之前已經來過這

個窯洞，覺得這裡一定能為旅客帶來難忘的經驗。」事實上，許多在此過夜的住客是希望體驗窯洞生活的中國遊客。

對於65歲的劉燕蓮來說，打理民宿已經成為她的全職工作，她也很高興見到旅客對這種另類生活方式感興趣：「我發現原來人們會來這裡，不是因為覺得我們窮，而是想來看看我們的生活，是因為他們喜歡這個地方，想來這裡體驗一下。」

在中國這個快速發展的國家，窯洞亦經常面臨被清拆的危機，韓峪村亦如是。高速公路的建設正逐步逼近此地，居民目前雖然仍然不知道公路的確實路線，也不知道哪個洞穴將遭清拆，但王先生的家很有可能受到影響。

劉燕蓮在22歲嫁給王先生之前，一直住在普通房子，但她現在已是擁護窯洞生活的中流砥柱。她估計自家的窯洞在丈夫的家族中已傳承了七代，如果有幸逃離被清拆的命運，她的長子將會搬回洞中，將這窯洞繼續承傳下去。她的長子在這個窯洞長大，窯洞的環境令他倍感舒適。

劉燕蓮無可奈何地嘆了一句「沒辦法」，然後又堅定地道：「我喜歡住在這裡，我會在這裡留到最後一刻。」

Photos: This spread (all): Mark Andrews

Insiders' tours, and it's even offered on the online homestay service Airbnb.

The Wangs' residence is grander than most cave dwellings. Here, the centre of a hill was removed to create a central courtyard with caves opening onto it. Liu Yanlian, Wang's wife, looks after the home's four bedrooms and kitchen. 'Maintaining a cave takes time and energy – most caves are just in the side of a hill and are under great pressure,' she says, before continuing with a laugh, 'but that's the man's job.'

Most inhabited portions of caves are plastered in cob. One of Wang's bedrooms has even been whitewashed and has a paved floor. This helps to strengthen the domed caves from the threat of collapse and needs to be redone every few years. Dampness is a constant problem, particularly in the rainy season, so many cave dwellers cover the walls with old newspaper or calendar pages.

Zhou moved to his dwelling in Zhoujiagou when he was about 12 after his family's original cave home in another village collapsed. Over the years he has witnessed the exodus from cave homes: he remembers 70 to 80 families in his youth living in the dugouts around Zhoujiagou, but now that number has dwindled to just six. It's a similar story in Hanyu, where most people now live in

houses in the village, often with a cave still accessible behind their house but just used for storage. While the younger generation recognises the cave's benefits of insulation from weather extremes, they would rather have a modern lifestyle. As the older generation grows too old to live by themselves, most have gone to live with their children in these houses.

To bring the Wang family cave up to a required standard for housing guests, Xi'an Insiders created a new entrance to one of the bedrooms and brought in a portable toilet. 'I was looking for a place of a suitable standard in the countryside so we didn't have to keep bringing overnight tour guests back to the city,' says Bartaux. 'We were already visiting this cave and thought it would be an ideal location and great experience for guests.' Many of the overnight guests are in fact Chinese wanting to experience cave life.

For 65-year-old Liu, looking after the complex has become a full-time job and she welcomes visitors' interest in this alternate lifestyle. 'People come because they like the place and want to experience it, not because they think we are poor.'

In fast-developing China there is also the ever-prevalent threat of demolition. Such a threat is now facing the Hanyu caves as a highway inches its way closer.

室雅何須大
周民才及他的妻子(左下圖)，
周家溝村內的窯洞居所

Simple life
Zhou Mincai and his wife (below), and
the homes of Zhoujiagou village

Currently the residents are uncertain of the exact route and which dwellings will disappear, but the Wang family's cave is likely to be affected.

Liu lived in a regular house until age 22, when she married Wang, but she is now a staunch proponent of living in caves. She estimates this cave has belonged to her husband's family for seven generations. If it does escape the bulldozer, her eldest son would like to live there after her – he grew up there and finds it comfortable.

'There's nothing we can do about it,' says Liu with resignation. But she adds firmly, 'I like living here. I'll stay until the last moment.' ■



探索西安

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香港飛往西安的
航班，每周有七班

DISCOVER XI'AN

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