

EXTENDED RESEARCH NOTE

Divergent Memories of Tumen *Shan-shui*

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Abstract

Focusing on the interplay between memory and place, this article examines the rationale behind the use of axonometric drawings (axons) in a geographical research study of the Tumen/Tuman River region encompassing the borders shared by China, Russia and North Korea. The concepts of “memory of place” and “place of memory” guide the structure of this project and the flow of this article. “Memory of place” emphasises the lived experience of our physical senses, and helps determine the great potential of visual methodologies in the fields of geographical and landscape research and study. Drawn up using the graphic production techniques of abstracting, foregrounding, highlighting and juxtaposing, axons avail themselves of and inform both realist and idealist states of mind. In contrast, “place of memory” references a particular type of materiality and helps us understand Tumen *Shan-shui* as a library of memories that reveals a profusion of contested aesthetic, cultural and political meanings. Axons serve to tell narratives revealing desires, actions and undertakings that have shaped and continue to shape the substance of the memory sites in question including infrastructure, architecture and signage. Initially adopted by the author as a medium for recording and communicating due to security restrictions imposed in the border areas in question, the creation of axons generated new insights on methods of documentation in landscape research, and the places and landscapes themselves.

Keywords: Tumen/Tuman River, memory of place, place of memory, landscape, documentation

Introduction

The Tumen/Tuman River (圖們江/두만강) rises on the slopes of Changbai/Baekdu Mountain (長白山/백두산) and emerges into the Sea of Japan/East Sea (日本海/동해). Along most of its length it forms the boundary between China and North Korea, with a relatively short section near the mouth of the river forming the boundary between Russia and North Korea. Ever since the Peking Treaty of 1860 when the Russian Empire acquired territory adjacent to the Tumen/Tuman River estuary, the surroundings have been a seismic hotspot in the arena of international power struggles. Violent conflict has erupted repeatedly most notably during the Russo-Japanese War from 1904 to 1905, the establishment of Manchukuo in 1932, the partition of the Korean peninsula in 1945, and the beginning of the Cold War in East Asia since the mid-1950s. Although the development potential of the Tumen/Tuman River region has long been recognised, especially since the trilateral border finally opened to the outside world in the early 1990s, visible change has only become obvious in the past few years. Chinese funded infrastructure designed to facilitate access between her landlocked northeast provinces and seaports in the Russian Far East and North Korea has led this recent building boom.

As part of my research on the ongoing transformation of the Tumen/Tuman River region, I travelled for three weeks along the length of the river in June 2018. In spatial terms my journey was structured not only by the hydrological landscape of the Tumen/Tuman River but also its geopolitical landscape, in particular the reality that China lost 18 kilometres of the lowest reaches of the river and consequently direct access to the Sea of Japan/East Sea in the late 19th century. My journey took me from the river's source at Changbai/Paektu Mountain to the riverside town of Fangchuan where China, North Korea and Russia meet, just 18 kilometres upstream of the mouth of the river. I made side trips towards the two major seaports in the Sea of Japan, Rason in North Korea and Vladivostok in Russia. In terms of time, my journey coincided with two highly significant events, one natural and one political. The annual natural phenomenon of the ice-melt on Heaven Lake atop Changbai/Paektu Mountain occurred on 7 June 2018 and is celebrated by Chinese and Koreans as a symbol of national renewal and vitality. Then the first-ever meeting between the leaders of North Korea and the United States took place at the North Korea–United States Singapore Summit on 12 June 2018 signalling a potential new era of geopolitics in the Korean peninsula and East Asia.

Memory and Place

My research focuses particularly on the idiosyncratic interrelationship between memory and place, within the context of the rapid transformation of cultural and physical landscapes in the transnational regional confluence defined by the Tumen/Tuman River. The critical importance and role of memory as a key to understanding personal, social and cultural identity has been studied by scholars from a wide range of perspectives and disciplines from philosophy, sociology, and anthropology, to those disciplines focused on the built environment such as geography, landscape architecture, urban design, architecture, and interdisciplinary “place studies”. An impressive bibliography of scholarly works already exists.² Here we find the two terms “memory” and “place” are predominantly combined to describe two different trajectories of thought, namely “memory of place” and “place of memory.”

The “memory of place” can be understood as a particular modality of remembering that derives from one’s physical bodily experience and relates to the way the material environment we inhabit and pass through is interwoven with our memories. Although this way of understanding accepts that places and material environments play a pivotal role in shaping, defining, and constituting our sense of self and our perception of the world around us, it admits that places also come to be defined by their connections with the people who inhabit and experience them. In contrast, the “place of memory” or “memory site” can be understood as a physical reality less related to the texture of lived experience, and more to a materiality and a locality where “memory crystallizes and secretes itself” and “the exhausted capital of collective memory condenses and is expressed.”³ Resulting from the interplay of memory and history, the place of memory marks an event that has already occurred in the past, which exists beyond the boundaries of any individual person. This dichotomy between “memory of place” and “place of memory” serves as a springboard for the exploration of the relationship between memory and materiality that follows.

The adoption of the binary guiding structure of “memory of place” and “place of memory” as an approach for this project is reflected in the use of axonometric drawings (hereinafter referred to as axons) to visually communicate its findings. In architectural circles axonometric drawing has long been a powerful, universally understood method of visualising complex spatial conditions, but it has seldom been applied in the fields of geography or landscape research. This project initially adopted drawing as a medium for recording and communicating due to security restrictions imposed in the border areas in question. Axons were made to document site observations in militarily sensitive locations along the

Tumen/Tuman River and other high security special development zones, where the use of cameras or drones were somewhat if not completely prohibited. Experimental drawings originally produced at the beginning of the project to overcome restrictions on the use of technology for record taking, provided novel insights on both the methodology of landscape research documentation, and the place and landscape being documented by a method more widely known as a technique for architectural representation. These reflections led the author to adopt the use of axons systematically throughout the project.

Logic of Reproducibility: Memory of Place

New insights inspired by the use of axons as a means of landscape research documentation are closely related to the idea of “memory of place”. In line with existing scholarship on “memory of place,” this project focuses on the lived experience of the physical body and its role in shaping the content of remembering. However, this project examines “memory of place” under the banner of “visual methodologies” and from the perspective of the person who produced the visual documentation of the places in question (hereinafter referred to as the investigator). This differs from the mainstream framing of “memory of place”, which refers to the way a particular individual’s personal identity is formed or influenced by one’s memories of any given place. Each axon produced in the project emerges from and reflects the investigator’s “memory of place”; an axon is a refabricated “collage” of reality composed partly of the investigator’s own “snapshot” observations memorised on site and partly of other information she heard of or read about off-site from third parties.

While paying tribute to the rich repository of “visual methodologies” in the fields of geography, landscape and architecture, axons represent a novel form of visuality that translates site reading into visual representation. My exploration using axons aims to expand scholarly interest beyond visual media analysis to include visual media production, and widen the range of techniques employed to document and structure research in the field of geography and landscape to include more than conventional “glass geography.” Further, the use of axons in this project demonstrates how the use of digital drawings in the fields of landscape and architecture can be extended to include the documentation and analysis of past and present social and cultural conditions, beyond visualizing design proposals related to future physical spaces as has typically been the case hitherto.

From Media Analysis to Media Production

Geographers have demonstrated the critical role of representations of landscape to our understanding of social geographies. Important work on landscape imagery has highlighted the importance of representations as a way of interpreting and communicating the ideologies of past and present societies. These writers focus on the social production of an image to facilitate critical readings of cultural landscapes. Geographers such as David Harvey⁴ argue that the economic processes embedded in cultural production shape our understanding of visual imagery, despite this position being criticised as economic determinism.⁵ Likewise, geographers such as David Morley and Kevin Robins recognise the importance of both economic and cultural influences but without giving either precedence over the other.⁶ They carry out detailed analyses of particular industries responsible for visual imagery, along with the political and the economic contexts in which those industries operate. There are also geographers who emphasise the social and/or political identities that are mobilised in the making as well as the perception and interpretation of an image. Focusing specifically on street photography, Colin Westerbeck and Joel Meyerowitz portray photography as a truthful instrument for the straightforward act of observing that permits viewers to peer at subjects from the same hidden vantage point as the photographer.⁷

Ironically, these authors who write about landscape imagery seldom create their own representations themselves. Consequently most recent research on visual matters pays little attention to the one element active at the site of production, namely the author or creator of the image. The idea of the author's insignificance in relation to the effects of an image reached its zenith with Roland Barthes' declaration of "the death of the author."⁸ Barthes and others argue that other aspects of an image's production process account for its effects, leaving the author's intentions practically redundant. These other aspects include visual technology "designed either to be looked at or to enhance natural vision,"⁹ formal production strategies related to content, colour and spatial organization, and "the range of economic, social and political relations, institutions and practices that surround an image and through which it is seen and used."¹⁰ In other words, the wider visual context is much more significant to the meaning of an image than anything the authors thought they were doing.

However, this argument falls when we discuss image production as a research method, in this case the production of axons to document landscape as experienced by the investigator. Here the researcher takes on the role of a media maker focused on media production, rather than that of a media observer focused purely on media analysis of images produced by others. In his 2013 article "Worlds Through Glass: Photography and Video as Geographic method,"

Bradley Garrett argues that the title implies that “mediation takes place when we see worlds through glass” and “filtered through the lens,” and that “the process of making photos and videos is just as important as what we do with them.”¹¹ Scholars such as Bauch Nicholas identifies the huge potential for employing visual methodologies, pointing out that visual media are “socially ubiquitous yet almost awkwardly absent” from geography.¹² In an era when life is becoming “a complicated meld of human and machine, culture and biology, analogue and digital”¹³ and when technological devices such as phone cameras are part of our daily existence, engaging with the media critically could offer new ways of representing and even establishing realities.¹⁴

When discussing “the site of production,” Gillian Rose pointed out “all visual representations are made in one way or another and the circumstances of their production may contribute towards the effect they have ... the technologies used in the making of an image determine its form, meaning and effect.”¹⁵ “Glass geography” normally refers to the use of videos and photographs as ways to document and structure research, and the production of axons could be categorised under the same umbrella. However, the way axons are utilized and conceptualized as research tools differs from video and photography. This difference is further complicated by the ongoing debate about the “apparent truthfulness” of visual representation. From the early days of photography, and later videography, most practitioners understood them as technologies that simply record reality, hence the now old adage “the camera cannot lie.” Concurrently an opposing opinion has coexisted which views these technologies as strange and magical, and critics have questioned the “truthfulness” of videographic and photographic representation and have asserted that their production processes are far from straightforwardly technological.¹⁶

As mentioned previously, the creation of axons for this project was initially a response to overcome the reality that cameras were banned in militarily sensitive areas. While the objective is to use axons to record the investigator’s site observations “truthfully,” the very process of axon production makes the representation more subjective than objective, so it balances precariously on the ambiguous boundary between truthfulness and fabrication. Unlike the production of photographs and videos, the production of axons cannot happen on the same spot and at the same moment as the observation. Rather than simply documenting what is seen in front of the camera lens, the production of axons is a process of translating the investigator’s sensory experience on site. The axons are essentially collages synthesizing various types of memory, some intangible and some tangible and retrievable such as “illegal” mobile phone snapshots, quick sketches, short written notes, or audio recordings of conversations on site. In addition to its reliance on

heterogeneous forms of memory, axons are not recorded simultaneously with the immediate experience of the investigator like photos or videos. The fact that they are produced days or weeks after the site visit, makes it inevitable that memories are contaminated by information seen or heard by the investigator during the time lag between site experience and axon production.

Although the site-remote and unspontaneous process of axon production cannot guarantee its truthfulness, it opens up new ways of visual representation and facilitates the creation of a visual reality not achievable with other media. The axons exist as hybrid offspring of the all-pervasive modern glass geography techniques of photography and videography, and the pre-industrial landscape paintings and sketches and logs used by travelers since times immemorial. The digital 3D CAD modeling software such as Rhinoceros compels us to see through “glass,” in this case a computer screen, while the process of exporting the drawings to graphics editors such as Adobe Illustrator and printing onto paper echoes the quality of a landscape sketch or painting. Together they distil and reconstruct a reality scalable in space and time. From the point of view of media production for the purposes of documenting and structuring research, the axons present us with unique memories of place that draw on and speak to both realist and idealist states of mind.

From Spatial Production to Spatial Analysis

Axons not only expand the range of “glass geography” media beyond photographs and videos to computer aided drawings, they broaden the use of (digital) drawings from spatial design to spatial research, and redefine the role of drawing in terms of framing the ways we perceive the world around us. Drawings and paintings have traditionally defined the conventions of how we see and appreciate our surroundings, and are closely interwoven with the concept of landscape. The very idea of landscape in the sense of surveying or even arranging distant vistas is reflected in English language dictionary definitions of landscape as “an expanse of the earth’s surface that can be seen from a single viewpoint.” In other words, landscape is not considered to exist independently in its own right, rather it is only extant by virtue of being mediated through the eye of the beholder. William Gilpin (1724–1804) described this actuality to a tee when he defined the picturesque as “that kind of beauty which is agreeable in a picture” in his 1768 art treatise *Essay on Prints*.¹⁷ The picturesque is seen not so much as a naturally occurring phenomenon as it is a created brainchild, either of connoisseurs who can “create” the picturesque in their mind’s eye when they view a landscape, or by painters who are capable of creating a landscape as if framed and reflected in

a Claude Lorraine glass. Later this picturesque tradition rooted in the canons and techniques of painting was unquestioningly transferred to the realm of photography and adopted as a natural mode of depiction for the new technology.¹⁸

Geographers and architects universally employed analogue hand drawn plans and illustrations before the now ubiquitous adoption of digital technologies. Drawing is an important technique in the repertoire of communication methods available to observational disciplines such as geography, which facilitate our understanding and picturing of the world around us, and our interactions with it.¹⁹ Drawing is a critical tool used by architects and landscape architects to not only articulate future designs and visualise spatial arrangements, but also to facilitate critique and speculation in theoretical practice.²⁰ However, the advancement of digital technologies in the past fifty years has led to a divergence in the way drawings are used in the geographical and architectural disciplines. In the case of geography, while photographs and videos have increasingly supplanted hand-drawings, geographical documentation has only made relatively limited use of digital drawings. In the realm of architecture, while digital tools such as computer-aided design (CAD) and computer-aided manufacturing (CAM) have advanced the standardization and accuracy of architectural drawings for spatial production, the role of drawings for spatial analysis and theoretical enquiry has lapsed considerably.

The use of axons in this project aims to demonstrate the feasibility of applying digital drawing in an innovative way that helps frame new ways of looking at the environment. A diverse range of experimental initiatives using digital drawings to analyse and document landscapes and architectural elements inspires this approach. Work by James Corner,²¹ Anuradha Mathur and Dilip da Cunha,²² and Yoshiharu Tsukamoto and Momoyo Kaijima of Atelier Bow-Wow are pertinent.²³ More specifically, this approach resonates with “architectural ethnography,” a method defined by Atelier Bow-Wow as “a new approach in drawing—of, for, among, around—society.”²⁴ By repurposing architectural representation techniques as narrative tools, these drawings offer a novel way of observing and recording the human environment, reflecting both the physical reality of the built environment, and the way it responds to the activities and aspirations of the inhabitants.

Experimenting with digital axons also aims to explore ways of introducing new media technologies and communication paradigms drawn from landscape and architecture into the field of geography. These new media technologies bring with them innovative ways of identifying, tracking, and representing a sense of place including built form and landscape, cultural and social relationships and local heritage, that are too complex and dynamic to be represented by traditional

landscape paintings and surveyors' maps, or even by more advanced media such as photography and videography. The scale and complexity of this research project demand a visual medium that is scalable in time and space, and is capable of synthesizing heterogeneous information types. The Tumen/Tuman River extends over 521 kilometers so the associated region is far greater than the eye can survey at a glance. Being a contested, multicultural region at the intersection of three national boundaries, it is also interlaced with a dizzying array of contemporary cultural and political paradoxes and historical legacies. Digital axons as deployed in this project are reminiscent of zoom lenses, which provide flexible viewing angles and frames allowing seamless shifts between the scales necessary to understand architecture, landscape and geography. They also provide a wide enough range of depth of field that the viewer can focus on specific elements of a narrative in a variety of settings while superfluous information remains out of focus.

Before moving on to elaborate how "place of memory" in the Tumen/Tuman River region is represented in axons in this project, it might be useful to explain the process of generating the axons. In general, axons are perceived somewhere between plan and elevation, with a viewpoint that permits highly descriptive drawings representing three-dimensional space on a two-dimensional plane. These drawings are compelling as they hover between reality and impossibility. On the one hand, axons are similar to landscape and architectural technical drawings in that they are perfectly dimensioned and proportioned, accurately describing the spatial relationships between different elements. On the other hand, axonometric projections (or parallel perspectives) unlike linear perspectives based on Euclidean optics similar to our vision, are non-photorealistic but highly legible.

All the axons in this project share a similar appearance in terms of their perspective and composition, as they were produced under the same modelling and drafting software settings. Referencing the investigator's fieldwork notes as well as satellite images, "memory of place" is first translated into the digital software platform Rhinoceros 3D. 3D digital model are then translated into 2D through axonometric projection. These drawings have no vanishing points, meaning that lines that are parallel in 3-dimensional space remain parallel on the 2-dimensional drawings, and distant elements are drawn to the same scale as nearby objects. Being scale drawings, the width, height, length and depth of any given element within the frame can be measured accurately from the 2D drawing. This project utilizes 45° axonometric projections, known as "military" projections due to the origin of this drawing technique. The military projection depicts the angles of the x- and z-axes at 45°. Since the angle between the x-axis

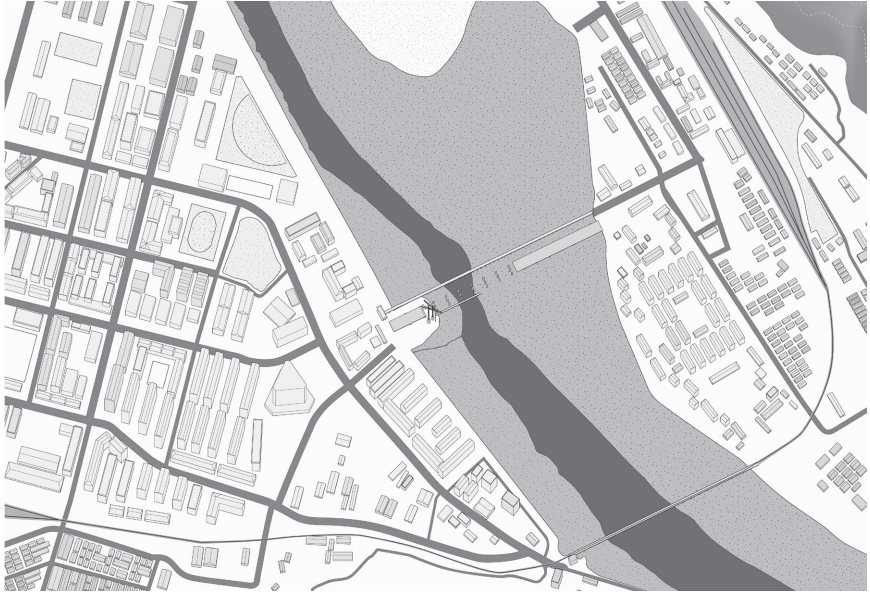


Figure 1a

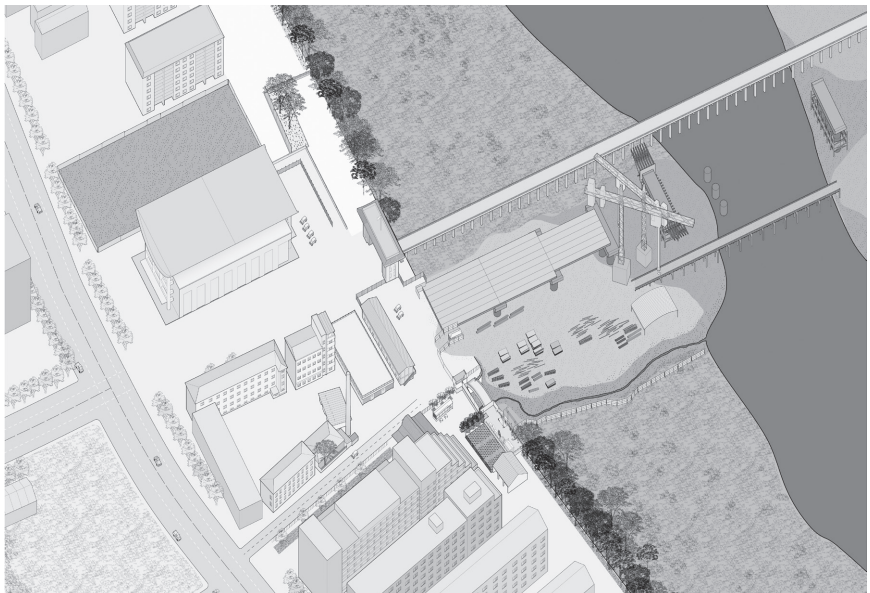


Figure 1b

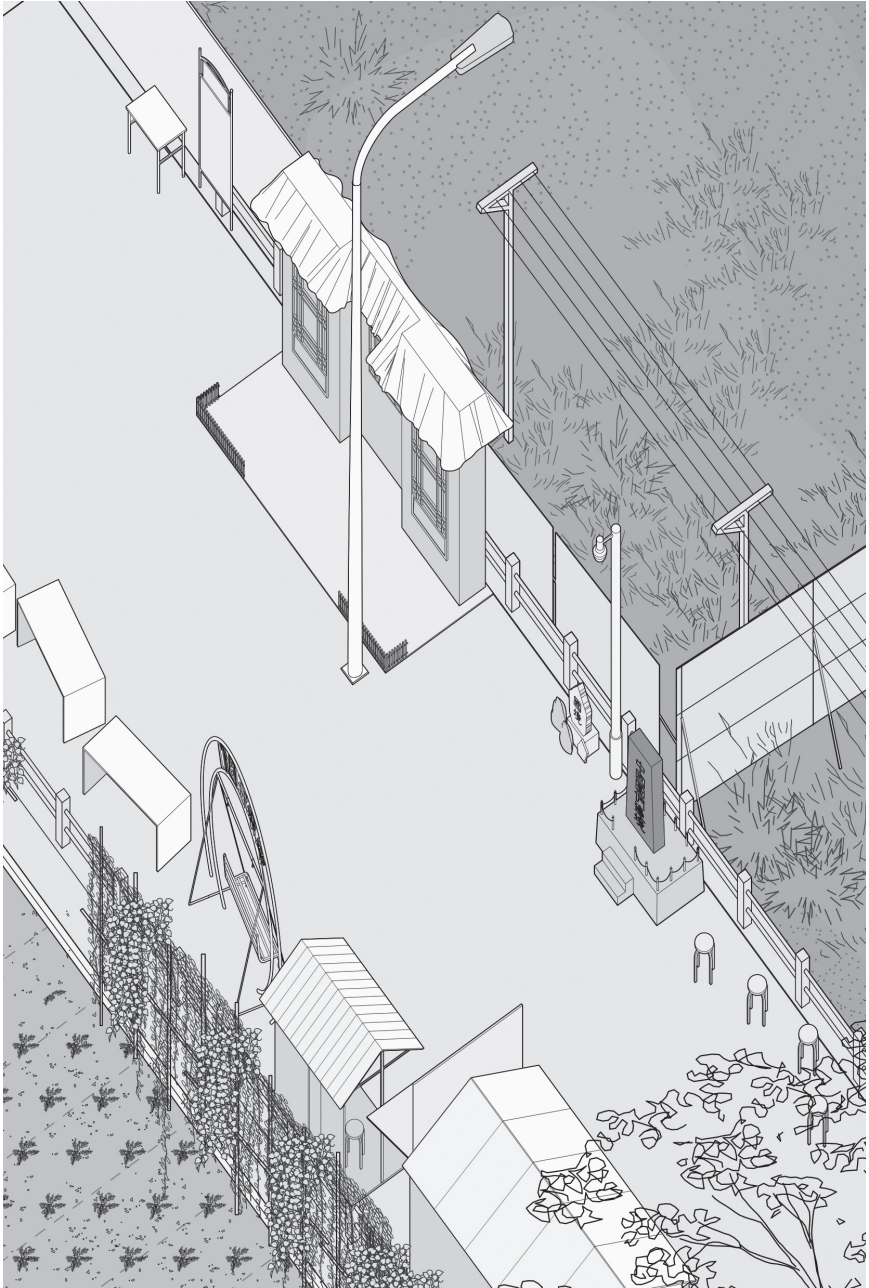


Figure 1c

and the z-axis is 90°, the x-z plane is a true representation of the plan of the site in question, rotated 45° from the horizontal and vertical.

Precise, accurate and unambiguous, the axons produced in this project bear a close resemblance to technical drawings that do not require freehand artistic skills. However the scale, level of detail and allocation of focus of each axon is unique, resulting from the diverse range of graphic record-taking techniques employed in their production. Such graphic production decisions are made based on the narrative that the investigator wants to represent in a particular drawing. Four graphic production techniques are commonly used in this project, namely abstracting, foregrounding, highlighting, and juxtaposing. These are described below and may be applied individually or in combination in any given axon.

First, abstracting. This technique has been employed by artists since the early days of art history to draw out the aesthetics of the subject. Abstraction is deliberately used in this project as a selection process identifying the essential details of the reality that is to be transferred to digital media. The two main criteria applied to this process are the scale of the drawing and the relevance of any particular detail to the overall narrative. For example, very different levels of detail are depicted in a set of three drawings of Tumen City, at scales 1:20000, 1:5000 and 1:100 on A4 size images. The 1:20000 scale drawing depicts the geospatial relationship between Tumen and Namyang, two border cities separated by the Tumen/Tuman River, and the old and new Tumen Border Bridges, the former built in 1941 by the Japanese, and the latter currently under construction since 2016. Showing the disposition of building blocks, road and railway networks, the two bridges and the Tumen/Tuman River is the key function of this drawing, so unnecessary detail is excluded. Zooming in to 1:5000 scale, the second drawing depicts infrastructure in much more detail, focusing on the construction site of the new cross-border bridge. Particular details are selected to better depict the relationships between the old and new bridges, other infrastructure, the rivers, and the surrounding urban context on the China side of the river, so the viewer can better appreciate the process and scale of the ongoing construction activity. The 1:100 scale drawing reveals the human-scale experience on site, within a larger narrative of the local government's efforts to promote the local tourism industry. This drawing allows the viewer to see the Korean-style building facade, the two stone steles engraved with the Chinese characters *guojing* 國境 (national border) and *bianjing* 邊境 (borderland), a street lamp, a CCTV pole, some public seating and a vegetable garden. In this way, we can appreciate the small-scale details of this Instagram-popular spot in Tumen City, right outside the hoarding fence of the bridge construction site (see Figures 1a-c).

Second, foregrounding. Some of the axons feature cutaway graphics (also known as sectional perspectives) in order to foreground information that would otherwise be invisible to the viewer. Cutaway graphics can be used at multiple scales to reveal narratives embedded in architecture, infrastructure and landscape, to facilitate a better understanding of spatial organisation. For example, this technique is applied at the architectural scale, in a detailed drawing of an observation tower in Fangchuan 防川. At the furthest extremity of Chinese territory along the Tumen/Tuman River at the convergence of Russian, Chinese, and North Korean territories, stands the *Long hu ge* 龍虎閣 (Dragon and Tiger Pagodas), a 65 meter tall eight sided concrete tower decked out like a traditional Chinese pagoda. A cutaway axon of the tower's top floor reveals how both the exterior architectural form and the interior viewing equipment represent two different styles of perception and observation. In addition to a 360-degree view of the landscape where three countries meet, visitors can peer through paid binoculars to where the Tumen/Tuman River enters the Sea of Japan 18 kilometers away (see Figures 2a–b). Cutaway graphics are also used in this project at the landscape scale, particularly for depicting the border roads that follow the banks of the Tumen/Tuman River. These landscape cutaways delineate the relationship between the infrastructure, the Tumen/Tuman River and the surrounding topography. For example, the axon drawing of Provincial Road 201 in Jingxin Town 敬信鎮 reveals how a recently built riverside berm was deliberately constructed to block views of North Korean territory on the other side of the Tumen/Tuman River. Another axon drawing of Provincial Road 201 near the China–Russia border in Fuangchuan village shows the slope regrading underway in order to widen the road from two lanes to four, allowing the viewer a glimpse of China's recent expansion and reinforcement of border road infrastructure as part of the Belt and Road project (see Figures 3a–b).

Third, highlighting. A common technique used in comics, annotated close ups are added within the axon to highlight particularly important signage that better explains the narrative in view. The structure of power does not only reveal itself through the physical form of buildings and infrastructure, but also through numerous bilingual and sometimes trilingual signs in Chinese, Korean and Russian, which are displayed at prominent locations and emphasize the local “sense of place.” Close-ups can be inserted within an axon in various ways. For example, two enlargements of roadside signs are inserted in callout bubbles overlaid on the axon of Provincial Road 201 near the China–Russia border to highlight the geographical and geopolitical context of this particular section of the road. The sign to the left displays text in Chinese and Korean declaring, “It is our common responsibility to protect border facilities” (保護邊防設施是你我共同的責任),

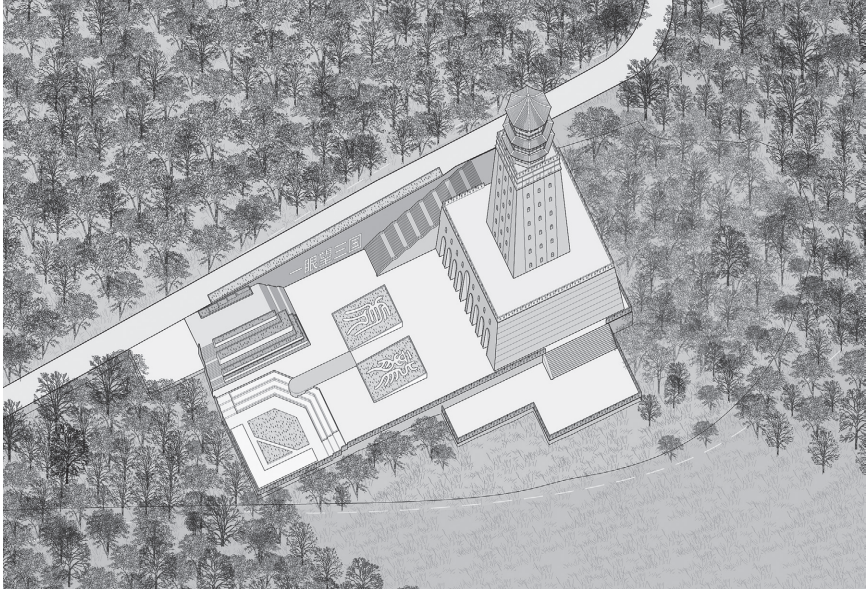


Figure 2a

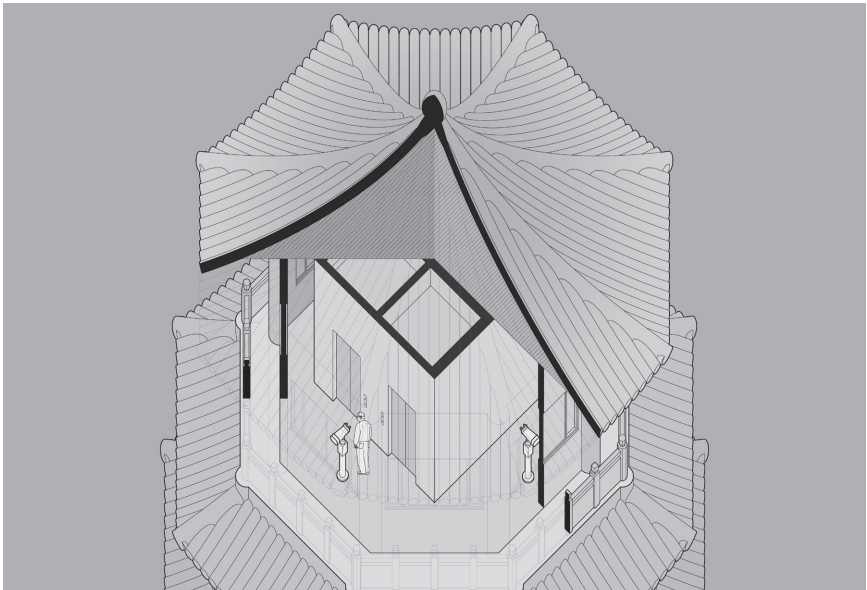


Figure 2b

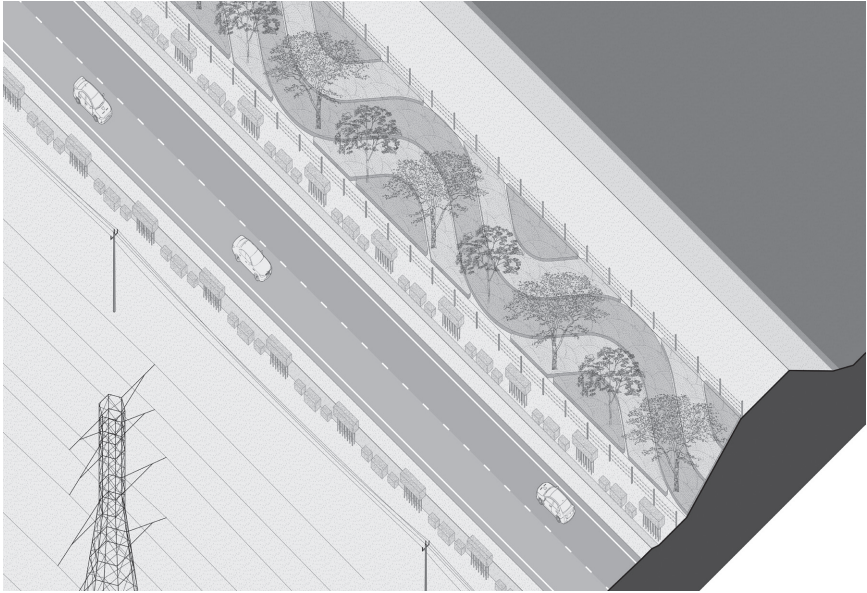


Figure 3a

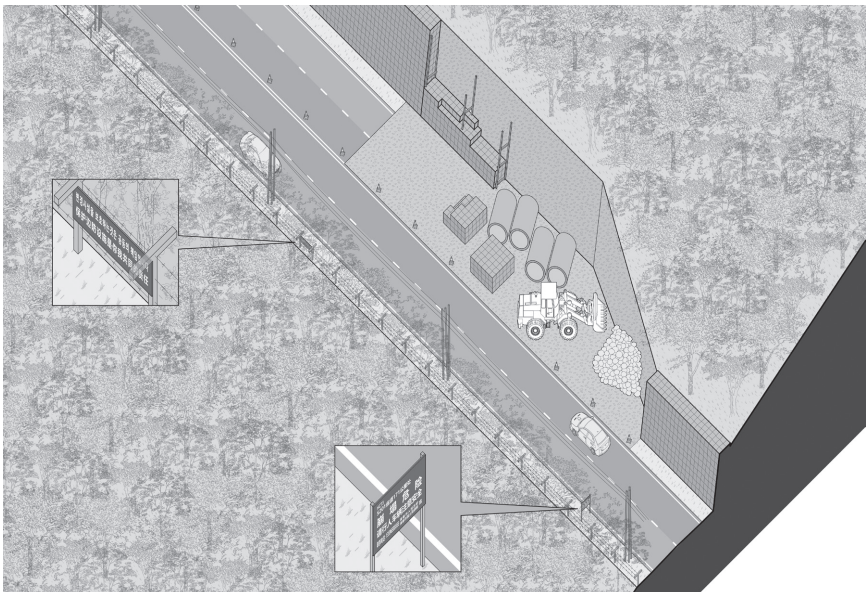


Figure 3b

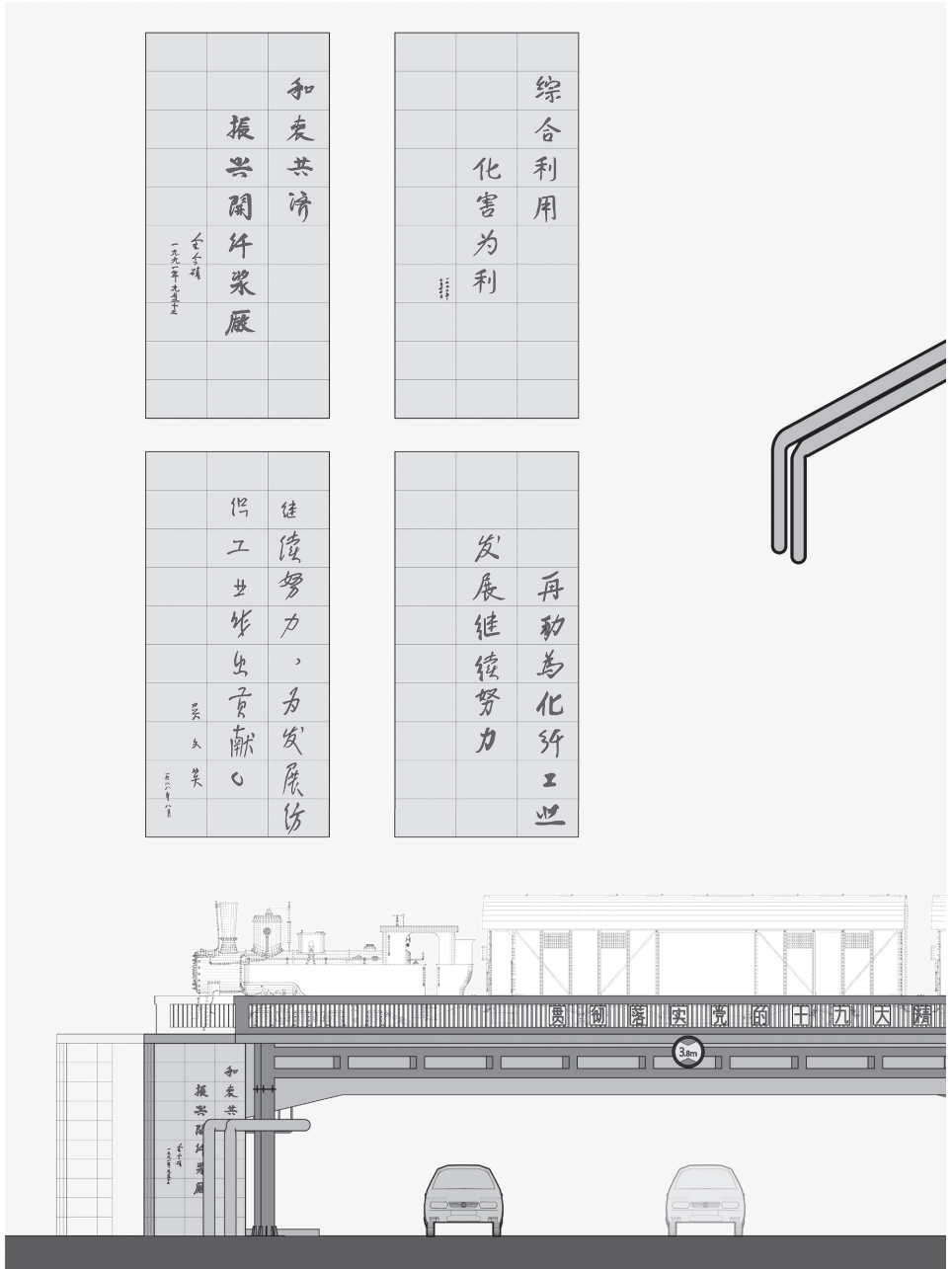
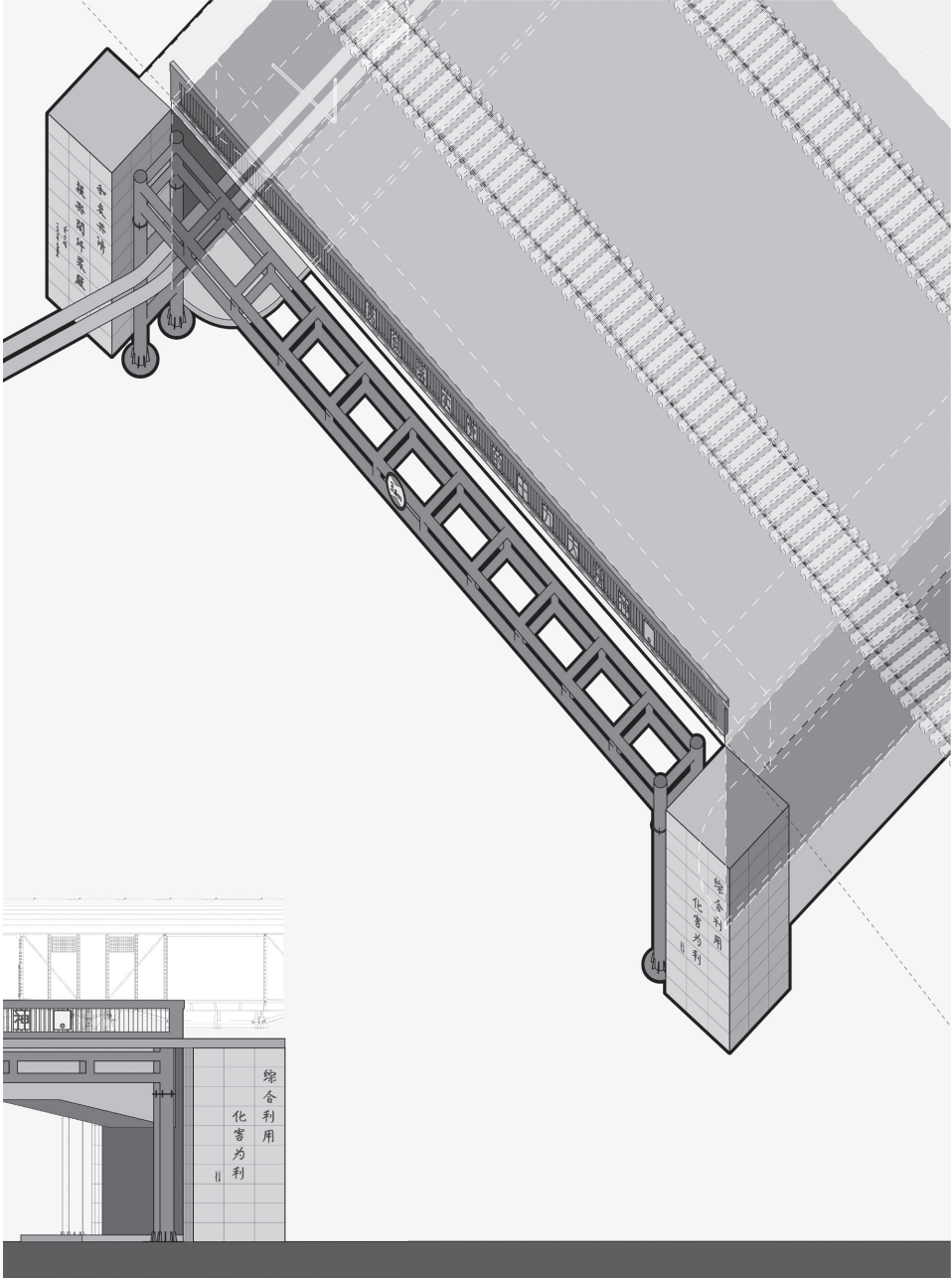


Figure 4



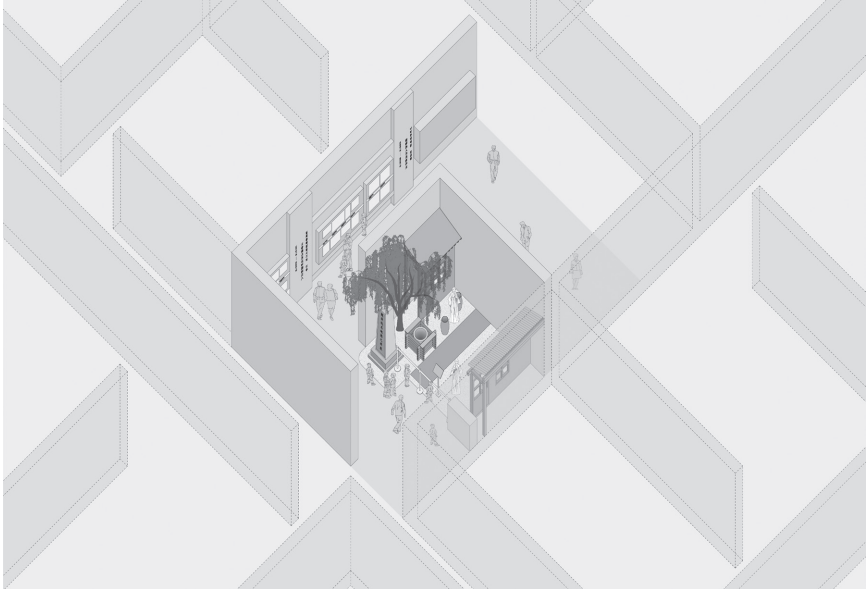


Figure 5a

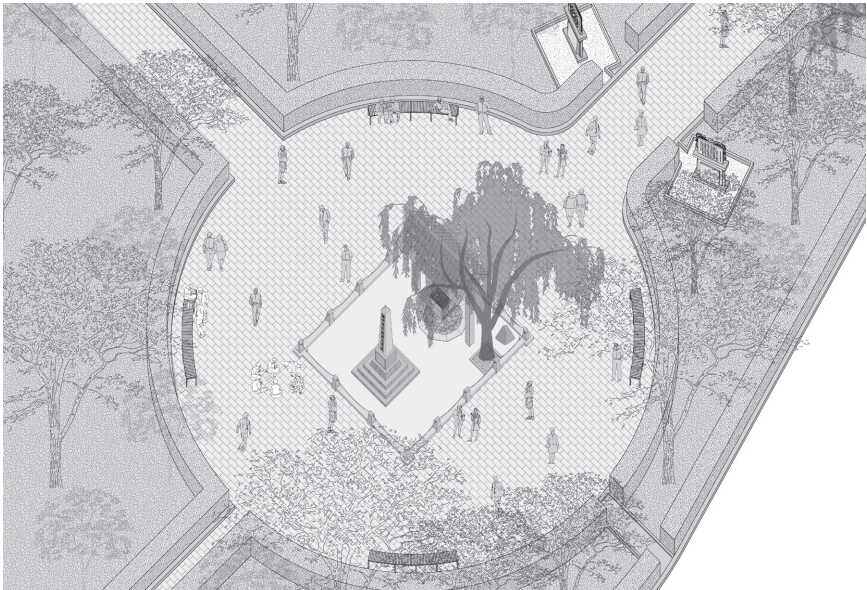


Figure 5b

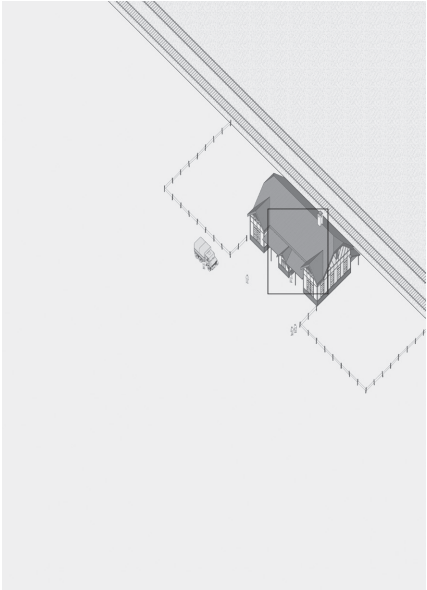


Figure 6a

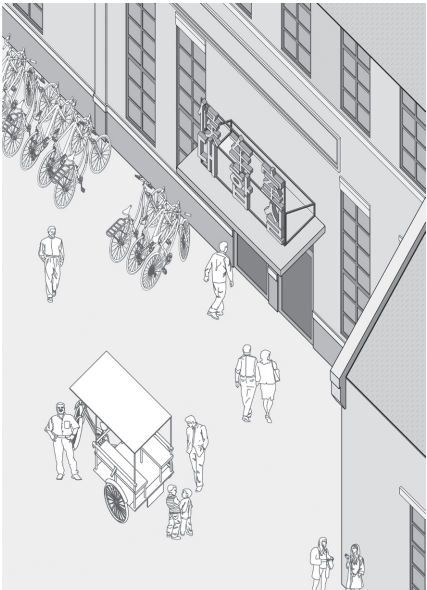
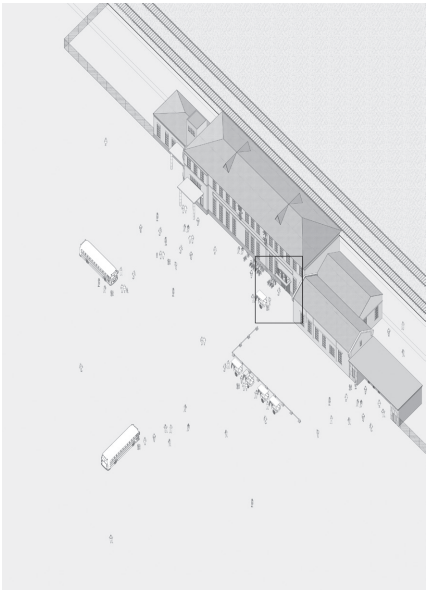


Figure 6b

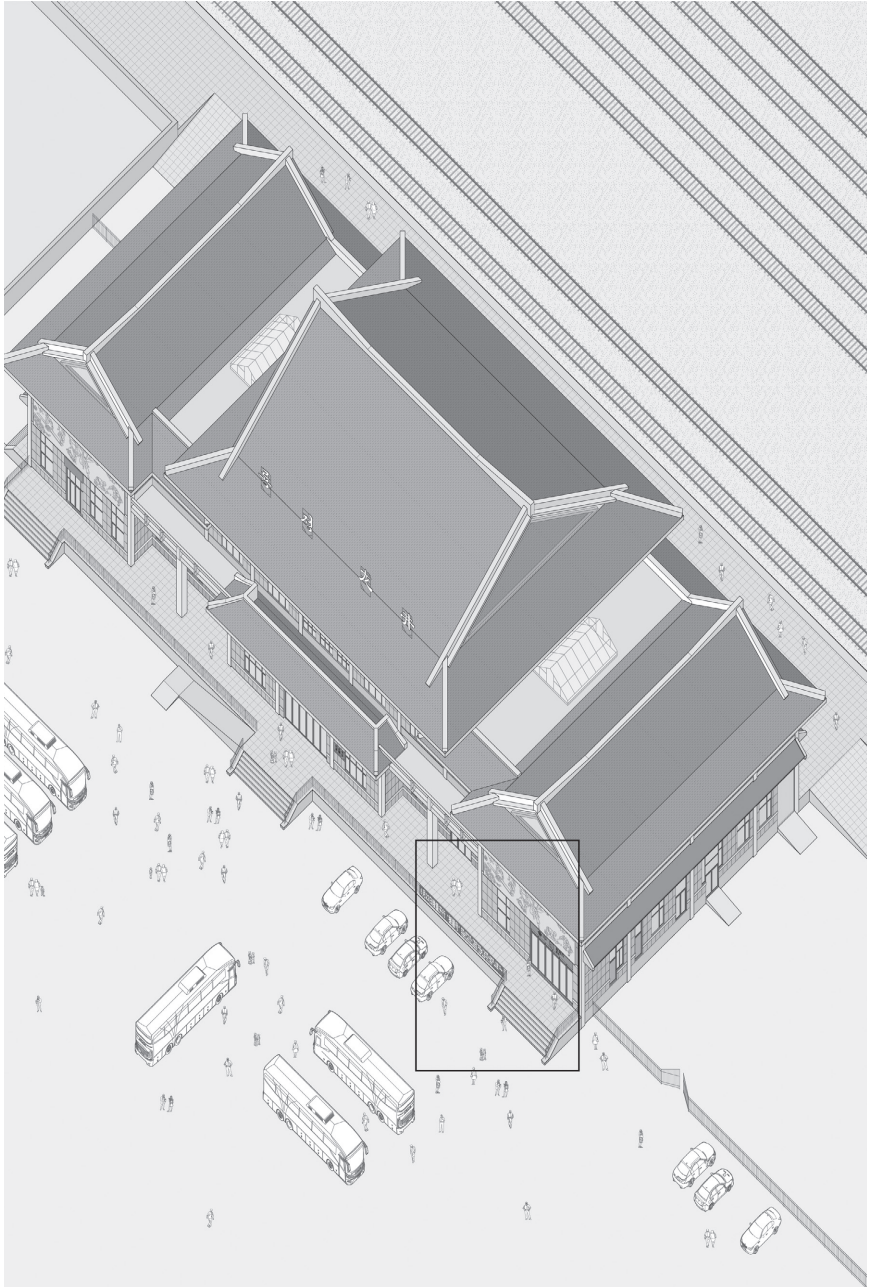


Figure 6c



thus affirming the status of this border road. The sign to the right reads, “Watch for falling rocks. Pedestrians and cars should be careful when passing through road upgrading zone!” (崩塌危險。請行人車輛注意安全!). This sign acknowledges a sense of caution in relation to the construction site and betrays the challenges of road construction in such hilly terrain (see Figure 3b). Some axons utilize more flexible and innovative ways of displaying details of relevant text in the picture. For example, a composite drawing showing an axon, an elevation and details of signs inscribed and hung on an element of infrastructure, depicts a railway bridge in Kaishantun 開山屯. 1980s propaganda proclaiming “Join the fight to revitalize Kaishantun Chemical Fibre Pulp Mill” (振興開纖漿場) inscribed on the bridge pillars coexists with hanging signage panels installed in 2017 declaring “We should fully implement the spirit of the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China” (貫徹落實黨的十九大精神). The juxtaposition of these signs belies a sense of uncertainty for the future of a derelict industrial town on the Tumen/Tuman River (see Figure 4).

Fourth, juxtaposing. Each axon is intended to contain its own self-sufficient narrative, but the technique of judiciously positioning different axons together generates new permutations of their combined narratives. This technique is particularly useful to help visualize the duration of a timeline or the interrelationship between elements that are physically far apart. Juxtaposing allows a set of axons to show the transformation of a particular place or piece of infrastructure over time, or show how points of interest in different locations collectively reveal a coherent narrative. For example, visualizations of replicas of *long jing* 龍井 (dragon well) are juxtaposed to form a coherent narrative about the role of this type of monument in everyday life. Replicas of the dragon well and stone steles engraved with its name could be found in a number of locations in the Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture, being monuments of particular importance to the irrigation and agricultural practices of early Korean immigrants to China. One replica in the Yanji Museum is woven into a chronological narrative describing how the ethnic Koreans and Han Chinese fought together against the Japanese and then transformed barren wastelands into productive farmland. Another is situated in Dragon Park 巨龍公園 surrounded by large shade trees and presides over local leisure pursuits such as picnicking and playing poker (see Figures 5a–b). Another example depicts three drawings of Longjing Railway Station from the 1930s, 1970s and 2010s juxtaposed to reveal how the form, scale, and meaning of this critical infrastructure has been transformed over the course of eight decades. Situated at the junction of the Chaikai railway 朝開鐵路 and the Helong railway 和龍鐵路, this station was originally built and rebuilt by the Japanese in the style of *nihon kenchiku* 日本建築 (Japanese architecture) in the 1930s. A major

renovation carried out in the 1970s saw the station expand in area to 1012 sqm. The station was then rebuilt in 2013 in the style of *joseonjok geonchook* 朝鮮族建築 (Korean architecture), and tripled in size to 3030 sqm to accommodate increasing passenger demand (see Figures 6a–c).

Forms of Living History: Place of Memory

These early experiments with axons also provided new insights on the place and landscape being documented which are closely related to the idea of “place of memory”. “Place of memory” is less about the texture of lived experiences than “memory of place”, and more about the type of materiality and formation of memory within a social context. The term *lieux de mémoire* (“place of memory” or “memory site”), first coined between 1984 and 1992 by French historian Pierre Nora, stems from two traditions. First, the concept is rooted in French philosopher Maurice Halbwachs’ research about the social frameworks of collective memories.²⁵ Halbwachs’ research posited that the specific shapes and social, cultural and political functions of the remembered past are dependent on the nature and organisation of social groups, institutions and government authorities. Second, the concept embraces Frances Yates’ research on mnemonics employed by ancient and medieval rhetoricians who regarded places as custodians capable of producing appropriate “deposits” or images.²⁶ This tradition posits that the selection of particular memory sites and deposits (images) located within them, can be understood as a technique to augment the process of remembering.

Although the notion of *lieux de mémoire* was never precisely defined, Nora’s intent was to call attention to the diverse forms of depositories in which the past can be accumulated and from which it can be reanimated in the present. Nora sees memory sites as unwitting keepers of a literal and metaphorical living history where one can continuously and unendingly unearth diverse values “revealing new, overlooked or underappreciated aspects of the past.”²⁷ The concept of place of memory was originally conceived in the context of French cultural memories but has since been widely adopted as a tool to analyse artefacts and depositories far beyond French historiographical consciousness. The critical adaptation of the idea of “place of memory” has led to a number of narratives. Here I will focus on three dialectics closely related to this project.

Three Dialectics

The first dialectic is the tension between linear and nonlinear time. The place of memory is inherently spatial but it is also temporal. The last two or three decades

have seen a rapid rise in interest in conceptions of time and the nature of memory sites. These discussions challenge the traditionally dominant linear understanding of time where the past, present and future are linked in a chronological chain of causation. This construct of linear time is inextricably tied up with the idea of modernity, where the distinction between past and present ages is unquestioned. Modernity, understanding time in terms of the two contrasting experiences of acceleration and loss, provokes the capitalistic use of time as a tool for controlling and imposing routines on human behaviour.²⁸ In the West this linear conception of time has been and is still widely understood to be fundamental to personal and group integrity and coherence, and the purpose of cultural memory is understood to be the facilitation of past examples to inform the present through a process of rational analysis.²⁹

In contrast to the linear “historical” chronological understanding associated with modernity, postmodern culture embraces a more fluid conception of time and attempts to reconstruct the relationships between the past, present and future. In response to the lack of continuity in the contemporary world, cultural geographers have pointed out the difficulty of describing the temporality of place in linear time “as the whole disperses into a series of ephemeral, randomly appearing and shifting islands.”³⁰ Concepts such as the “extended present”, the “global present” and the “dominance of presentism” are indicative of the ambiguous place occupied by the present in our contemporary world. Unlike linear time where the past is clearly separated from the present by the immutable passage of time, the postmodern nonlinear conception of time sees past and present merge into one illimitable “now”. Nonlinear time is anathema to static memories that emphasise particular historical events and public figures. Instead, it recognises a continual state of social transformation where social constructs are discontinuous, and the groups, communities, identity forming processes and senses of belonging that people experience are characterised by temporariness, impermanence and randomness.³¹ This state envisages the cohabitation of divergent permutations of experiences and memories and the existence of a multilinear and multidirectional history containing different times at the same time.

The second dialectic is the tension between memory and counter-memory. If the nonlinear conception of time redefines the temporality of history, then the idea of counter-memory critically reappraises the relationship between history and identity. Understanding the concept of nationhood as a cultural artefact, scholars have long recognised the significance of memories in the manufacture of national identities, where selective recollections of past events form the invented traditions that serve to invoke the unity of the modern nation.³² As mentioned previously, Nora’s early discussion of “place of memory” was drawn from his analysis of

the French context: “I had thought that the rapid disappearance of our national memory required an inventory of the places where it had effectively been played out.”³³ Although he was criticised for nostalgically yearning for a (French) past that might never have existed, and for putting “place of memory” in the service of the nation, he in fact argues in favour of a shift from the glorification of the memory-nation towards an era of commemoration in the final section of his three-volume collection *Les Lieux de Mémoire*.

In the era of commemoration, people question whose memory is being appropriated to form the identity of a collective group. It challenges the absoluteness of the nation and how memories and monuments are unquestioningly put at its disposal. Concepts such as “counter-memory” and “counter-monument” are proposed as alternatives to memory and memory sites allowing for the retrospection of long repressed memories and depositories that evoke “otherness and divergent memories of the past” hitherto excluded from public debates.³⁴ The concept of the counter-monument invites both a response to the dominant cultural memory and criticism of the monument as an art form. By suggesting ambivalence rather than closure, counter-monuments such as the disappearing counter-monument in Harburg, Germany, and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C., United States, invite viewers to critically reflect on their own links to past history and future ventures.³⁵ James Young’s study of Holocaust memorials in Germany, Austria, Poland and the United States,³⁶ Andrew Herscher’s reflection on the state-sponsored efforts to curate a multi-ethnic heritage in post-war Kosovo³⁷ and Andrea Carlà and Johanna Mitterhofer’s study of the Bolzano Victory Monument in South Tyrol, part of Europe characterised by shifting borders and complex language politics,³⁸ all critically examined places of memory and counter-memories in regions that are rich in legacies of historical conflicts, particularly those multi-ethnic societies.

The third dialectic is the tension between monumental and ordinary artefacts. If the nonlinear conception of time and the concept of counter-memory challenge the dominant narrative that history unfolds along an unequivocal timeline in service of the nation, then the celebration of ordinary artefacts broadens the range of forms of memory sites and permits memory to have dominion over history. Until recently the prioritisation of history over memory has led to memory sites being understood almost exclusively as history sites. This has been epitomised by the rich literature on “place of memory” focusing on monuments, memorials and museums, where national history is imposed and famous personalities are amplified. These monumental sites are frequently associated with warfare,³⁹ violence, tragedy⁴⁰ and idealised visions of the unification of different regions and ethnic groups.⁴¹ The idea of a “monument” as an enduring physical construct

is so strong it persists even in those writings that focus on counter-memory and counter-monument.

Despite the dominance of the history-centric idea of monuments, there are notable exceptions that focus on ordinary artefacts and everyday culture. For example, John Gillis argued in favour of the rise of private memory in a global economy where “everyone is his or her own historian”⁴² and suggested embracing multiple identities as a survival strategy in an age of continuous change and uncertainty.⁴³ Another case in point is Divya Tolia-Kelly’s work on “re-memory”, a conceptualisation of encounters with memories stimulated by ordinary everyday objects⁴⁴ and the “everyday modes of memory work” of the multiplicity of diasporic identities and spaces.⁴⁵ These writings reemphasise the essence of personal “memory” which privileges private, emotional, subjective and bodily recollections and differentiates memory from history. In contrast to the history beloved of officialdom, memory embodies local, ordinary and everyday life experiences and events. Memory nurtures pluralism in defiance of history’s totalitarianism. This interpretation of memory broadens the meaning of “place of memory” from the monumental to the ordinary and invites a re-evaluation of “artefacts of no importance” such as sections of wall, cobblestones, street signs and household items as depositories of the past with important cultural and social significance. In contrast to monumental artefacts that epitomise centralisation and permanence, ordinary artefacts personify decentralisation, ephemerality and flexibility. The humdrum and unnoteworthy facilitate critical dialogues about time, decay and degradation while evading politicisation by the state.

Divergent Memories of Tumen Shan-shui

All the dialectics above can be applied to the case of Tumen *Shan-shui*, shifting between linear and nonlinear time, between dominant and overlooked narratives and between monumental and mundane artefacts. The term *Shan-shui* 山水, literally mountain water, is used in this project to refer to the landscapes in question. *Shan-shui* is a genre of Chinese art that rose to prominence in the Tang dynasty (618–906) and had a powerful influence on landscape painting across East Asia especially Japan and Korea. It seeks to express the inner essence or spirit of the subject matter at hand rather than just its exterior form. In this sense, *Shan-shui* resonates with the term *genius loci* from Roman mythology which literally means the “spirit of a place.” Although it is typically used in an aesthetic context, here the term *Shan-shui* is used interchangeably with the word “landscape” to set the scene for the examination of memory sites subject to a plurality of contested meanings including aesthetic, cultural and political aspects.

Tumen *Shan-shui*, at once natural and artificial, is experienced at a purely physical level yet is also “susceptible to the most abstract elaboration.”⁴⁶

The long history of Tumen *Shan-shui*, characterised by its unique cocktail of multi-national and multi-ethnic migration, conflicts and ever shifting borders, is steeped in a multitude of divergent memories deposited in its various memory sites. The Tumen/Tuman River region reveals itself as a “trans-systematic society”, a concept coined by the Chinese scholar Wang Hui, which refers to “an interrelated social and cultural pattern, formed through the interactions, communications and coexistence of different cultures, ethnic groups and regions.”⁴⁷ For the Koreans, this place inspires a progressive narrative of past and present, with the Changbai or Paektu Mountain being understood as the cradle of both ancient Korean civilisation and the modern Korean states. For Japan, this area connected Korea and Manchuria, the two most important colonies of the Japanese Empire, and was a testing ground for the Japanese dream of building a pan-Asian empire in the first half of the 20th century. For Russia, the region was the frontier of her “power expansion” in the Asia-Pacific region and still forms a major component of Russia’s “Pivot to the East”. For China, the meaning of this place was and is dominated by the process of “interiorization” as it was and remains an ethnic frontier, first Manchu, now Korean.

My present day experience travelling along the river opens doors to “past desires and future imaginaries.”⁴⁸ Japanese infrastructure built to export natural resources from China through Korea to Imperial Japan was re-appropriated by Chinese state owned industries as post-1949 China developed its north-eastern frontier. The free-trade zone selling Russian goods is next to a museum displaying panels and videos showing how North-eastern China lost its access to the Sea of Japan after Russia’s annexation of Outer Manchuria from 1858 to 1860. Signs declaring the importance of enhancing border security co-exist with billboards emblazoned with idealistic visions of the transformation of the military outpost and economic backwater into an economic powerhouse, “the Rotterdam of North-eastern China.” Focusing on the physical infrastructure and artefacts that people produce, interact with and consume, the axons presented here aim to synthesise contemporary phenomena, the historical background and ever-changing cultural conceptualisation of the Tumen *Shan-shui*. The materiality of each location is elevated to an event, attesting to the peculiar power of place to freeze a given moment in time. In the following paragraphs I present examples of the three major forms of materiality examined in this project, namely infrastructure, architecture and signage.

First, infrastructure. Infrastructure such as railways, roads and bridges, are commonly recognised for their permanence and for facilitating mobility. In the

Tumen/Tuman River region however, infrastructure is frequently ephemeral and particular elements are appropriated for different roles contingent on the ever-changing geopolitical situation. Bridges, for example, are typically associated with connections, but here this connotation is challenged by often-abrupt construction and demolition events and the sudden acceleration and obstruction of traffic flows. An often cited case that illustrates the geopolitical tensions within the Tumen/Tuman River region is the Korea–Russia Friendship Bridge, the only bridge across the 18 km long border between North Korea and Russia. The Soviet Union built a bridge 500 meters downstream from the China–Korea–Russia tripoint in order to transport military supplies to support the Korean People’s Army during the Korean War (1950–1953). The bridge was further upgraded in 1959. Although China claims navigation rights along the final stretch of the Tumen in accordance with the 1886 Sino–Russian Border Treaty, the 11-meter clearance of the Friendship Bridge effectively blocks any shipping access (see Figures 7a–b). Another case concerns the shifting fortunes of a timber bridge across the Tumen/Tuman River at the border town of Chongshan 崇善 reflecting the changing relationships between China and the two Koreas. Constructed from North Korean timber and Chinese nails, built jointly by soldiers from both sides, the bridge was completed in the 1970s as a symbol of Chinese and North Korean alliance and friendship. But in 1992 the middle section of the bridge was demolished by North Korean soldiers in response to the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and South Korea (see Figures 8a–b). The quandary of connection is also revealed in a more recent incident that took place at the bridge across the Tumen/Tuman River linking Quanhe in China and Wonjong in North Korea. As one of the key regional infrastructure links promulgated by the Belt and Road Initiative, the new Quanhe–Wonjong bridge was completed in late 2016 to improve trade between the two countries. On August 15, 2017, China started imposing import bans on North Korean iron, coal and seafood in accordance with UN sanctions against North Korea. As Quanhe customs officers began refusing customs clearance for seafood on that day, 27 Chinese trucks loaded with North Korean seafood were halted on the bridge for three days. Huge loads of frozen seafood melt with an estimated total loss of 200–300 million yuan (see Figures 9a–b).

Second, architecture. Beyond its functional requirements, architecture is often loaded with political symbolism. Although the Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture region increasingly takes on the generic appearance of other rapidly urbanised Chinese cities, examples of new buildings can be found in Korean, Chinese and Russian traditional styles. Korean-style architecture is preferred for cultural and transport facilities in the major towns because it symbolizes peaceful ethnic coexistence, as the Korean Chinese have long been praised by the central



Figure 7a

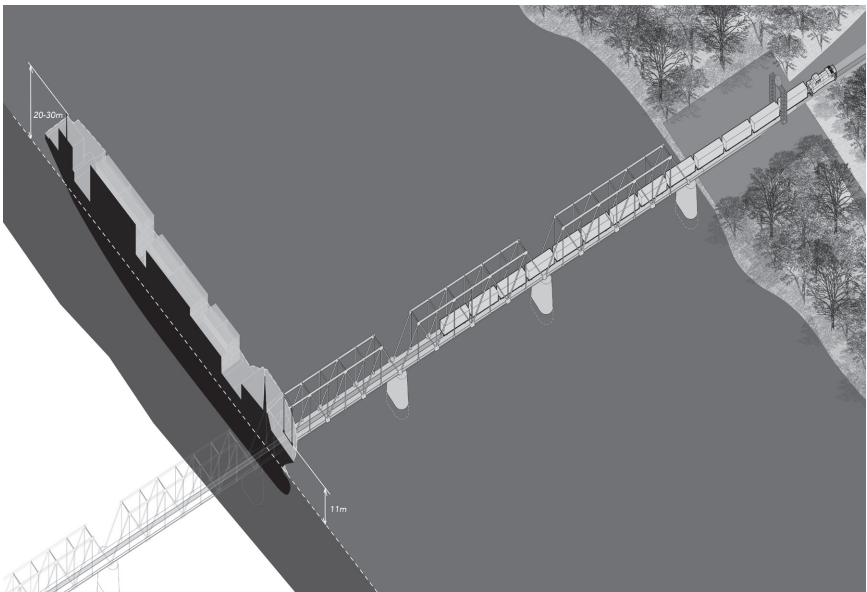


Figure 7b

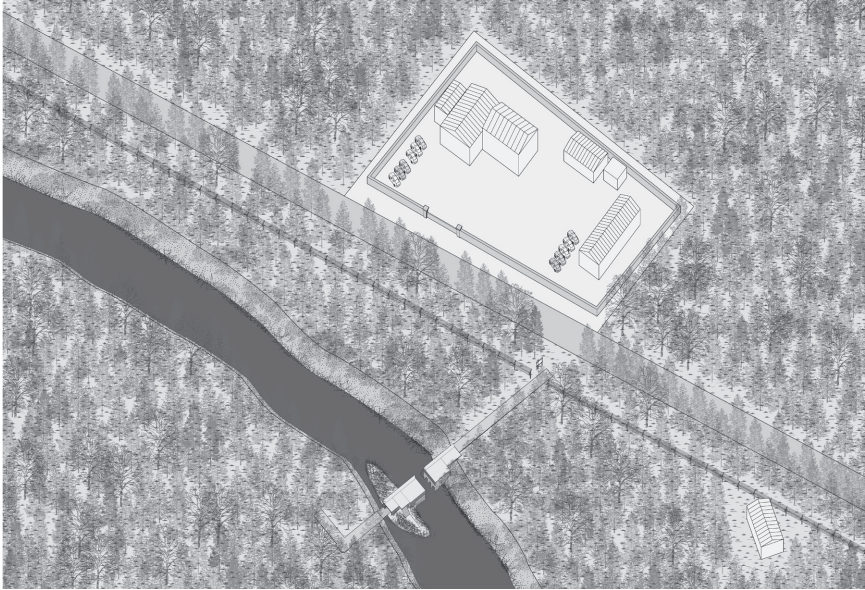


Figure 8a

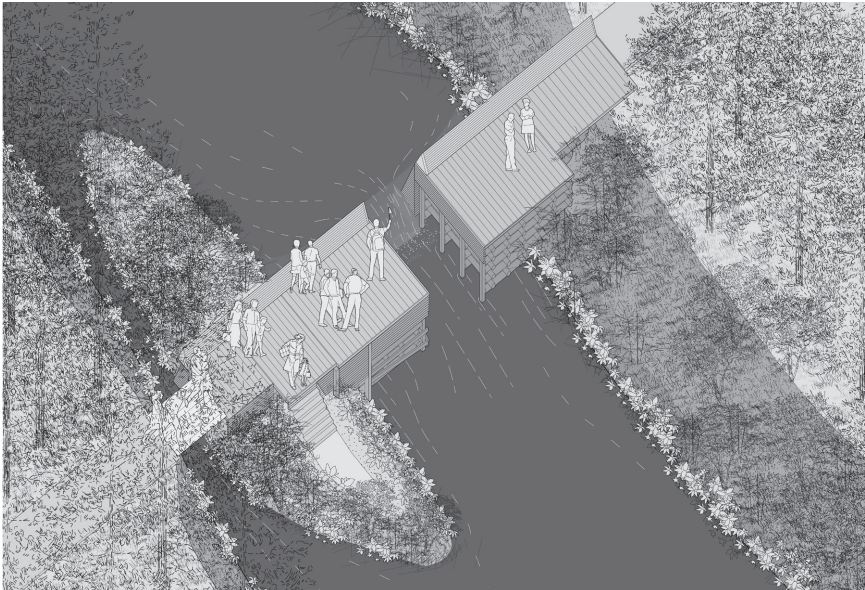


Figure 8b



Figure 9a

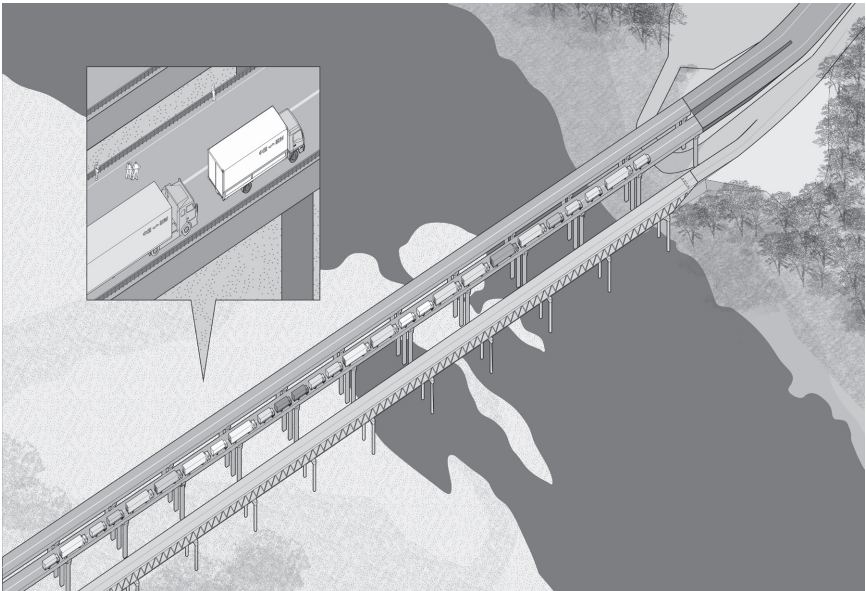


Figure 9b

government as “a model minority” in a *tongyide duominzu guojia* 統一的多民族國家 (united multi-ethnic state). The newly completed Longjing New Railway Station designed by the Department of Architecture at Yanbian University, stands on the site of an older station built by the Japanese more than eight decades ago. Its Korean-style pitched roof is hard to differentiate from Chinese-style, but reference to Korean culture is plain to see in the engraved murals on the front façade which feature traditional Korean games (see Figure 6c). Examples of Chinese-style architecture are more commonly found along China’s borders with North Korea and Russia, as statements of Chinese nationalism and sovereignty. For example, there are two newly constructed Chinese pavilions located at the two ends of a 600-meter riverside walk in Guchengli 古城里, a small Chinese village along the Tumen/Tuman River. The five-sided pavilion located at the east end of the river walk stands right next to the No. 70 border stele erected in 2009, together with two other stone steles, one erected in 1952 engraved with the text *dukou* 渡口 9 river crossing, and one erected in 1994 engraved with the text *guojingqiao* 國境橋 (border crossing bridge). The other pavilion located at the west end of the river walk is eight-sided and stands right next to the border fence which is festooned with a banner reading “Only when everyone participates in strengthening the border security can everyone be able to enjoy a beautiful homeland” (人人參與治安防範 個個擁有美好家園) (see Figures 10a–b). Russian-style architecture has been adopted for the increasing number of Russian-product markets, notably at Hunchun 琿春, a major gateway connecting Yanbian in China and Primorsky Krai in Russia. The establishment of the special zones for processing and trading, the extension of the high-speed railway to Hunchun, and the anticipated extension of the railway into Russia manifest the Chinese central government’s plan to transform a once heavily militarised border into an open trading interface. Further, the Russian-style architecture aims to smooth over any references to China’s territorial loss to Russia in the late 19th century, in favour of the mutual economic benefits for both countries in the 21st century. For example, a border trade complex completed in 2017 next to the Hunchun port is built in the Russian architectural style. The gold stainless steel bilingual China–Russia Border Trade Zone sign and the Chinese and Russian flags prominently guarding both sides of the entrance, further extoll the message of transnational economic partnership (see Figure 11).

Third, signage. Old and new signs prominently displayed on infrastructure elements or building facades afford an additional layer to the divergent narratives of the region. In addition to the figurative and textual content of any given sign, its location and relationships with other signs are important and revealing aspects that deserve attention when examining memory sites. For example,

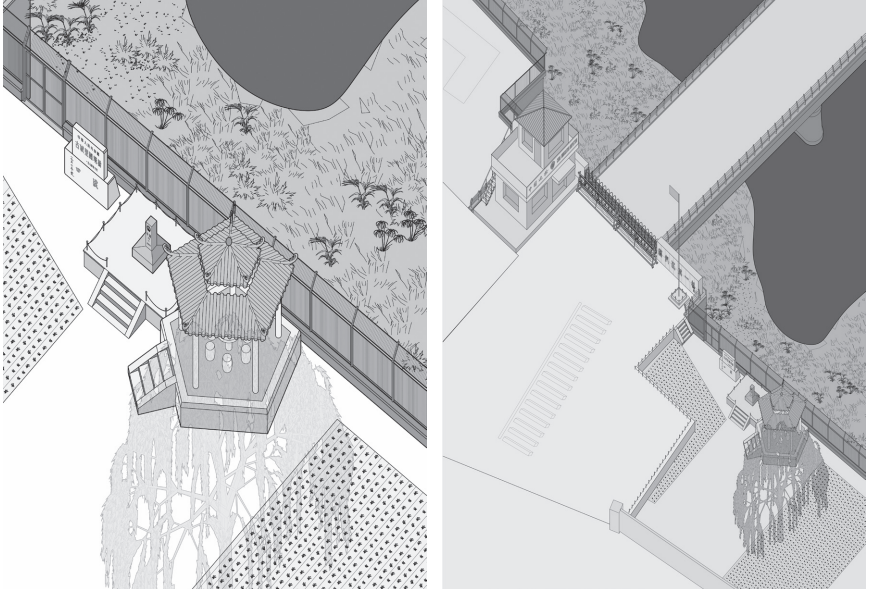


Figure 10a

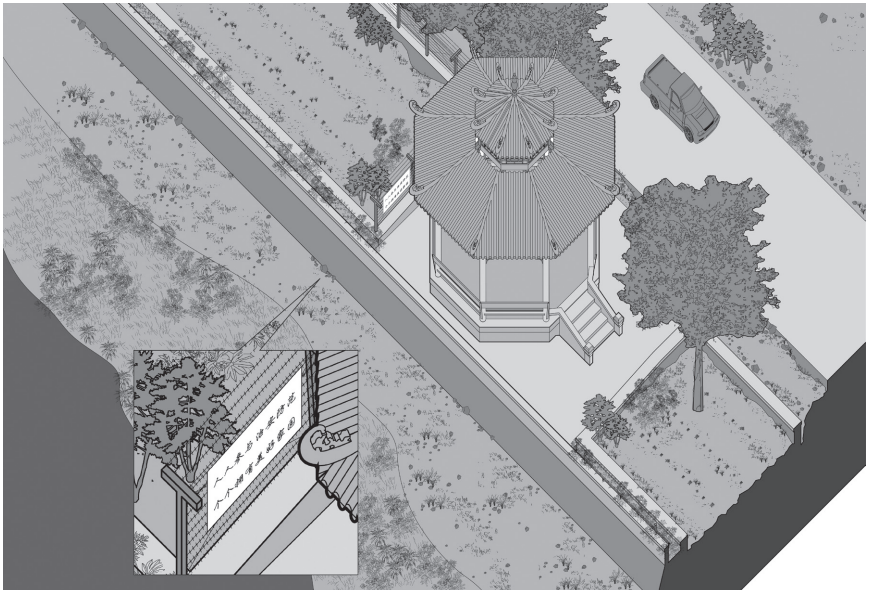


Figure 10b

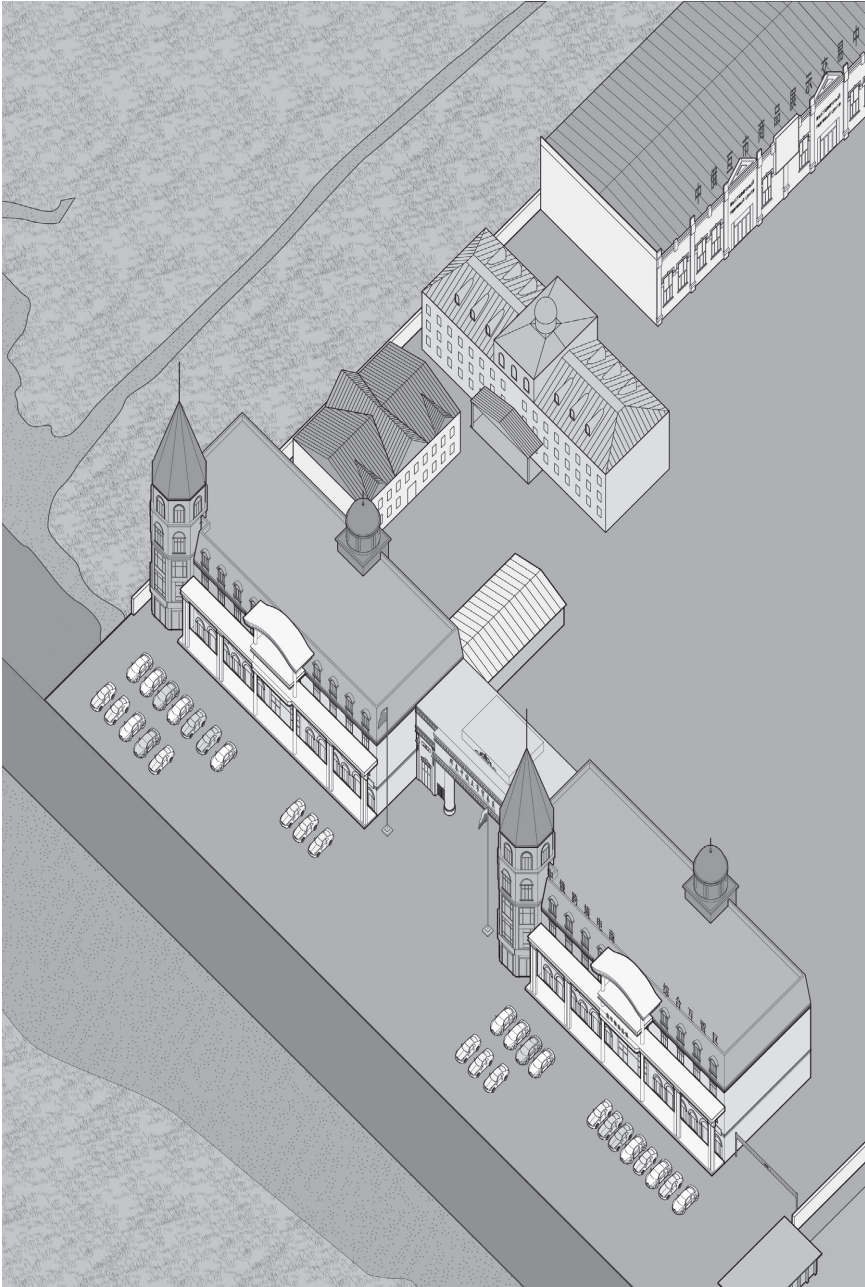


Figure 11

signs displayed in the square in the town centre of Kaishantun 開山屯 visually tell the transformative story of this border town. Kaishantun endowed with rich forest and water resources, was well known for its paper mill. The industry was originally developed by the Japanese in the 1930s then nationalised as a Chinese state-owned factory in the 1950s. After the industry came to an end following the implementation of the Water Pollution Control Ordinance along the Tumen/Tuman River in the 1990s, Kaishantun was left to its post-industrial fate of virtual dereliction and mass unemployment. A roadside banner reading “Hand in hand to build the Great Wall for borderland security; heart to heart to put a stop to all illegal activities” (手拉手共築成邊長城, 心連心抵制違法犯罪) is prominently displayed at the entrance to the square. Texts left over from the 1970s reading “Sailing seas depends on the helmsman; making revolution depends on Mao Zedong’s thought” (大海航行靠舵手, 幹革命靠毛澤東思想) are engraved on top of the three-story workers’ hall. Numerous posters stuck on the building facades with brash headlines such as 出國 (going abroad) advertise job opportunities in far-flung countries including Spain in Europe and Angola in Africa, testifying to the dramatic outflow of labour from this post-industrial border town (see Figure 12). In another case, signs displayed at the entrances and exits of an expressway tunnel near Fangchuan reveal the ambiguities between the region’s current obsession with infrastructure expansion and the country’s mourning over the loss of coastal territory and access to the ocean in the late 19th century. The Chinese central government and the Yanbian prefecture have recently pursued a strategy called *jiegang chuhai* 借港出海 (literally to borrow a foreign port and gain access to the sea) in the unlikely hope of gaining navigation rights to the last 18 km of the Tumen/Tuman River in the foreseeable future. China’s promise of expanding and upgrading railways and roads is considered to be conditional on allowing better connections between land-locked Yanbian to Zarubino port in Russia and Rason port in North Korea. An enormous billboard is mounted above the tunnel entrance sporting Chinese characters reading “Constructing sea-access corridor, promoting development and opening-up” (打通出海通道 推動開發開放) on top of a computer-rendered collage with one tree in the foreground, one road leading to the ocean and a cargo vessel flying a Chinese flag. In addition, bilingual signs reading “Prosperity of the region depends on the protection of its road” (想致富 愛護路) and “A smooth road connection leads to a thriving revolutionary frontier” (道路暢 老區旺) are painted on all four tunnel entrance and exit retaining walls. All these signs emphasise the critical role roads are understood to play in boosting the economic vitality of the borderland (see Figure 13).

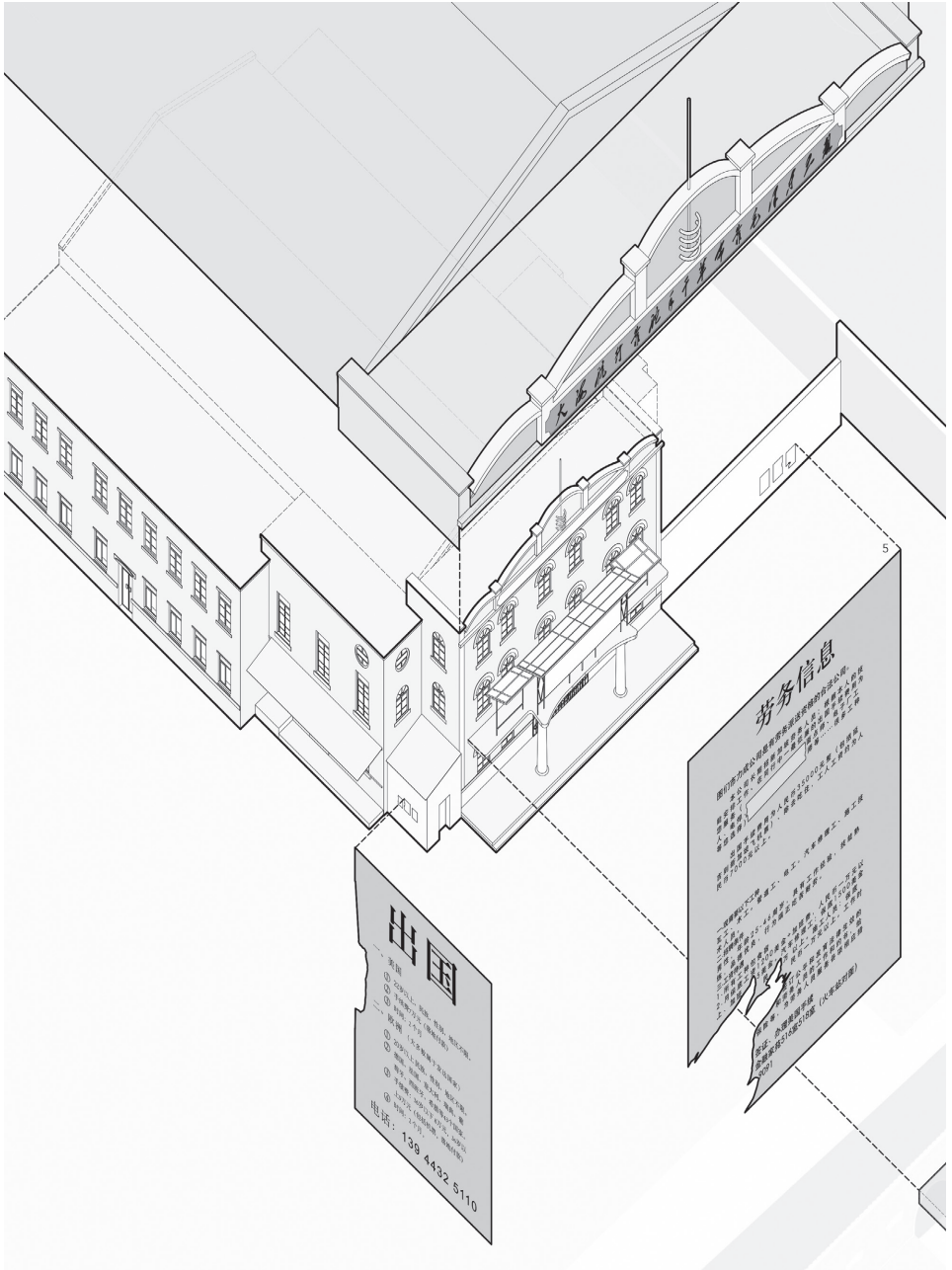
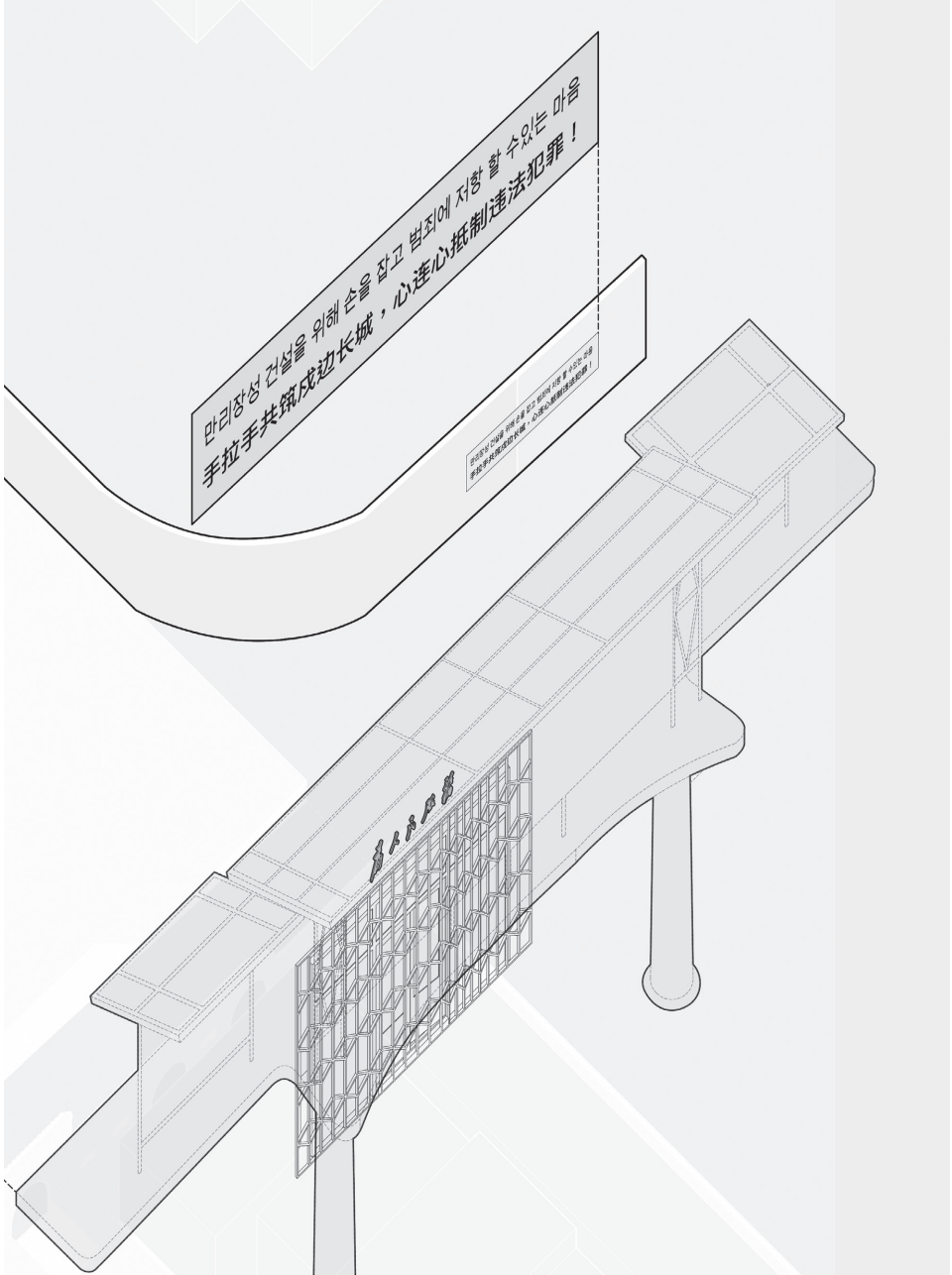


Figure 12



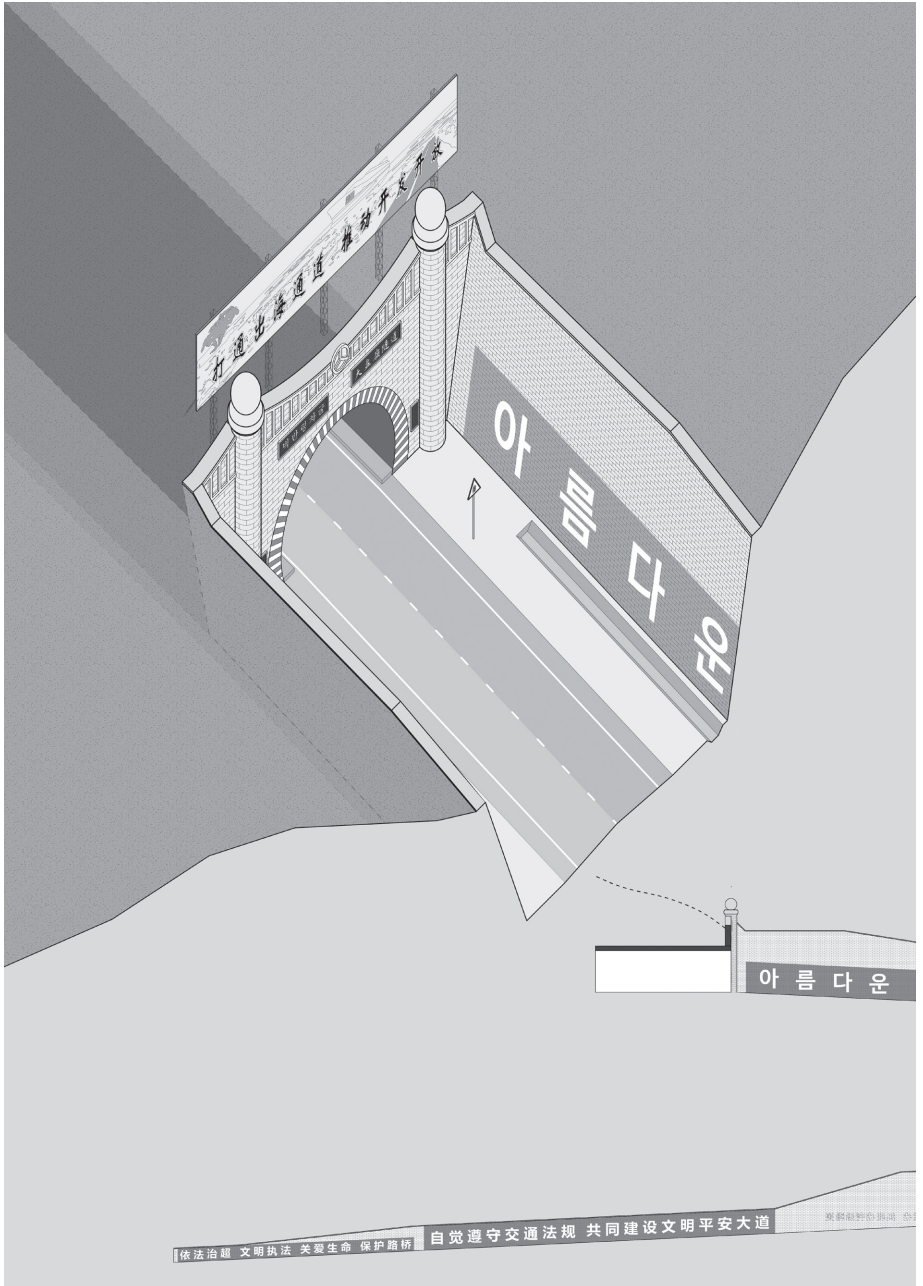
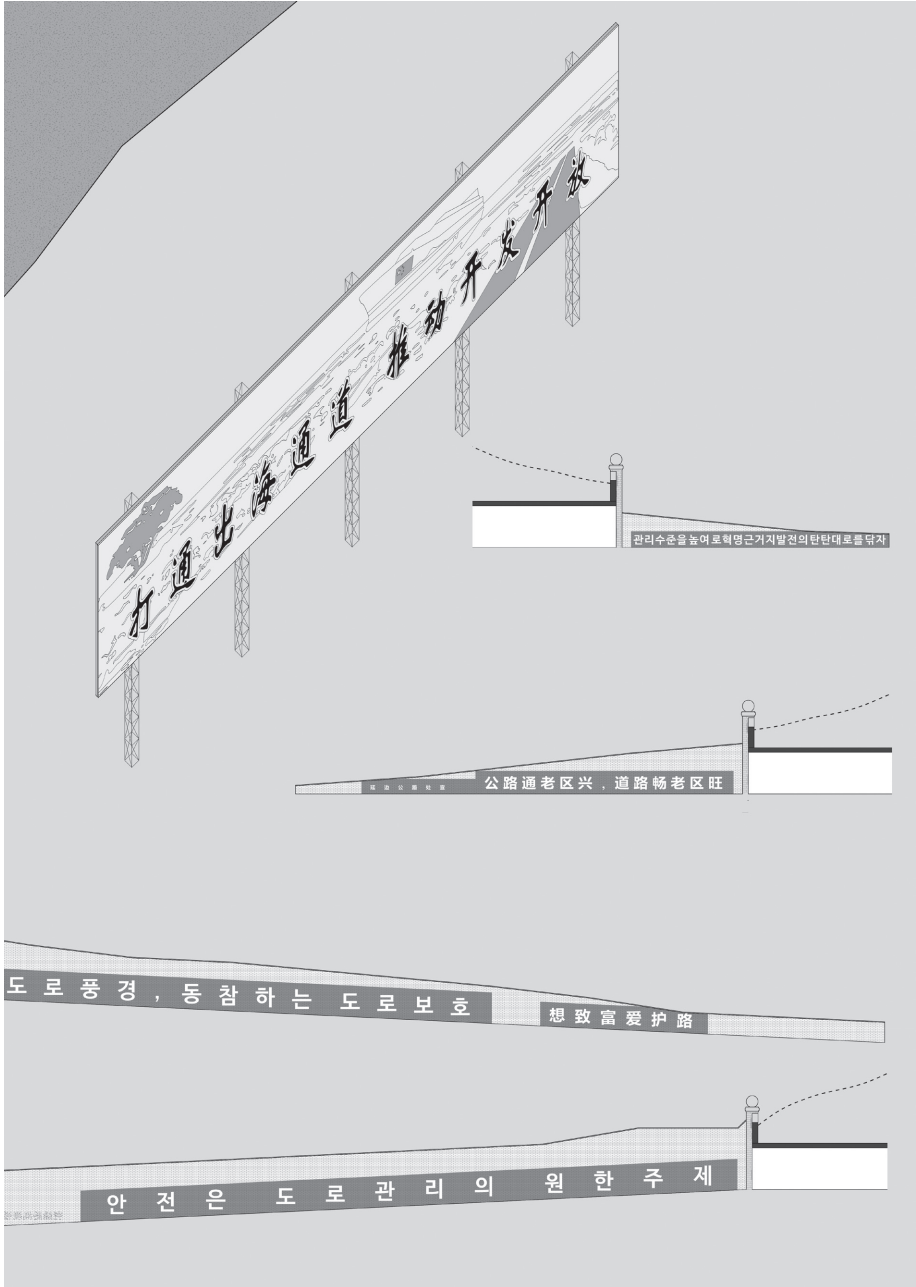


Figure 13



Conclusion

Focusing on the interplay between memory and place, this article examines the rationale behind the use of axonometric drawings (axons) in a geographical research study of the Tumen/Tuman River region encompassing the borders shared by China, Russia and North Korea. The use of axons was initially in response to the reality that cameras are banned in these militarily sensitive areas. This experimental approach to record taking generated new insights on methods of documentation in landscape research, and the places and landscapes themselves. Consequently, this led to the systematic use of axons throughout the project.

The concepts of “memory of place” and “place of memory” guide the structure of this project and the flow of this article. “Memory of place” emphasises the lived experience of our physical senses, and helps determine the great potential of visual methodologies in the fields of geographical and landscape research and study. I focus on the practice of creating representations rather than the analysis of visual media that currently dominates these fields of study, thereby positioning computer-aided drawings as a medium closely related to photography and landscape painting. The production of axons is discussed as a new way of looking at the environment. They are scalable in time and space and capable of accommodating and synthesising heterogeneous types of information. They allow researchers to visually present their site records in a way that makes information more accessible than is the case with traditional landscape paintings, surveyors’ maps or more advanced media such as photographs and videos.

The “place of memory” or “memory site” references a particular type of materiality and helps us understand Tumen *Shan-shui* as a library of memories that reveals a profusion of contested aesthetic, cultural and political meanings. I focus on the ambiguities that exist between linear and nonlinear time, dominant and mundane narratives, monumental and ordinary artefacts, and position the material culture that people ordinarily produce, interact with and consume at the centre of this investigation. Tumen *Shan-shui* is characterised by its unique multi-national and multi-ethnic circumstances and its long history of migration, shifting borders and political and military conflicts. The axons allow us to visualise multiple storylines and narratives while synthesising contemporary phenomena, the historical background and the ever-changing, interwoven conceptions of the Tumen *Shan-shui*.

More than a hundred axons have been produced for this study since the end of my trip in June 2018. Drawn up using the graphic production techniques of abstracting, foregrounding, highlighting and juxtaposing, these axons avail themselves of and inform both realist and idealist states of mind. They serve to tell narratives revealing desires, actions and undertakings that have shaped and

continue to shape the substance of the memory sites in question including infrastructure, architecture and signage. They assemble a variety of ways of examining a territory that allows us to comprehend a range of visual information far greater than the eye can decipher at a glance, and that enables us to grasp the interweaving significances of old and new events too complicated to interpret on a conventional chronological timeline. They physically and historically contextualise the divergent memories of Tumen *Shan-shui*, permitting us to simultaneously visualise and appreciate the ecological, cultural and political *genii locorum*.

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