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The Urbanisation of Meifa Village, China

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# TALES OF TERRITORIALITY

Stephan Feuchtwang

## THE URBANISATION OF MEIFA VILLAGE, CHINA\*

**T**O ESTABLISH TERRITORIAL PLACE is a small-scale act. But it is achieved in encounters with processes of territorialisation and reterritorialisation on a larger scale. I want to connect what I have to say on the small scale to a theoretical source on the large scale, to which very many others have already referred. The writings of Deleuze and Guattari (particularly 1992) have charged territoriality, territorialisation and deterritorialisation with a potent load. Territoriality was already, of course, a principle of animal and bird life. But in their work it goes even further and becomes what I would call an arche-metaphor. This both informs and deflects their attention to and from specifically human and historical actions that make territory. So I will start by attaching a transformer to the power supply of Deleuze and Guattari.

### **Territorialisation: Deleuze and Guattari**

Let me be clear that in this article small-scale territorialisation is the marking and therefore the making of a territorial place. A territory is a special kind of place of social interaction. It is special by its openness, in comparison to more enclosed and confined places such as rooms or

halls. By territorial openness I mean the quality of being without walls but not without interiority. A marked territory has a focal point that might well be a building and its interiors. It is usually bounded, clearly or notionally, and is identified by a focal point and often by a name. Furthermore the place may contain smaller-scale places or differently defined places of the same name according to different mental and symbolic maps.<sup>1</sup> But so long as it is marked and centred as opposed to having mere territorial extension, the open ground – the market place, the street, the square, part of a park, the neighbourhood, a territorial cult, the streets of a carnival, or a village – is also an opening to a greater variety of interactions than are more enclosed spaces. And compared with more mental, conceptual and media spaces, the physicality of the social interactions, their bodily and emotional force, in short the multi-sensoriality of interaction is a special quality of territorial places. Lastly, what makes territorial place special is its opening to what are otherwise different specialisations in the division of labour, distinction of life-styles, and exploitation of classes. Deleuze and Guattari (1992: 321) make this point on a far grander scale: territorialisation “groups all the forces of the different milieus [of species] together.”

Deleuze and Guattari have produced a fundamental way of thinking about territorialisation, but I am interested in it at the point where their arche-metaphorical treatment becomes

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\* This paper will be part of a multiple-author publication entitled *Making Place: Reappropriations of Territory in China*, to be edited by Feuchtwang in 2004.

1. For Chinese rural examples, see Feuchtwang (1998).

most political. In the book, *A Thousand Plateaus*, territorialisation is to be understood as a process of bringing different codes into each other's purview such that they decode each other or simply refer to each other – for instance creating a relation of mimicry (*op. cit.*: 10). Territorialisation is thus the adding of dimensions and hierarchy. In my more restricted sense it is the bringing of hierarchically and laterally separated elements together so that they become visible to each other in the most inclusive and substantial way, which is by territorial sharing of place. The counter-process, deterritorialisation, is either negatively 'diagrammatic' or creatively 'axiomatic.' (*Ibid.*: 143) In other words, deterritorialisation turns into one code-substance or into indeterminacy what was more than one code. Negative deterritorialisation is abstraction, in which a single plane, which is a diagram, disposes simply as function and matter whatever constitutes that dimension-diagram. It is an aspect of substance, form, expression and content, but it is the aspect that pilots them all. So, for instance, 'pretensions to a general semiology' (*ibid.*: 143) at the time Deleuze and Guattari were writing abstracts everything into something like a language. It is a process that turns a relation between codes and substances into an order of relations on one plane. The converse move of bringing the plane into a relation of, for instance, conjunction is reterritorialisation.

Positive deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation are transformative clashes, a spilling over, a flight, or a merging. They recode and decode distinctions and separations, reducing and then creating new assemblages and their strata. Capitalism is at once creative and negative, diagrammatic and axiomatic.

Deleuze and Guattari do not confine deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation to any history. They write at a level of generality that includes natural history, thought, and desire in a mood that might once have been religious but in their case is an anarchic materialism. Exposition, at least mine, is extraction rather than comprehension. But it can truthfully be said that what they write does have a definite direction. It is to be used in a current situation, in which capitalism is the ultimate abstraction. 'Capitalism,' as they conceive it after Marx, "forms when the flow of unqualified wealth encounters the flow of unqualified labour and conjugates with it... This amounts to saying that capitalism forms with *a general axiomatic of decoded flows.*" On the same page they comment, again in italics, that this amounts to a '*new threshold of deterritorialisation.*' (*Ibid.*: 453, their emphasis) Capitalism, they claim, is the axiom of the commodity. It has and needs no territory, but on the contrary is realised in everything else as a function that converts everything into abstract values and the abstract right of private property. This is ever more so in the third age of capitalism, that of Information Technology. But I would add the obvious rider that realisation includes certain territorial forms, such as corporate headquarters, shopping malls, golf courses, rows of workers' barracks, the shanties of informal economies, plus the ruined wastes of dislocation and the extraction of raw materials.

For Deleuze and Guattari, states under capitalism are realisations of its abstraction, but they are multiform, different models of capitalism's axiom. I shall be considering later and more concretely how state territorialisation

combines with capitalist territorialisation. At this point I want only to affirm that different states do make a difference, and that capitalist territorialisation has a definite content.

### **Postmodernity and Modernity: The Colonial Combination**

Before coming back to that assertion, I want first to deal with a mode of theorising that also tends to the very general: the extensive theorisation of the postmodern condition.

Post-modern presumes, exceeds but does not surpass ‘modern,’ so let us understand with Deleuze, Guattari and many others that ‘modernisation’ is the commoditisation of all production and exchange, in other words, the emergence and self-transformation of a capitalist economy. For the developing world, including China, there has been no rejection of the project of modernisation. At the same time there is the common sense, governmental rhetoric and economic policies for dealing with and taking advantage of ‘globalisation.’

At the level of politics modernisation is the formation of a state and a bureaucratic administration that can manage and regulate such an economy and have the powers of territorial sovereignty to protect a local instance of it. At the level of ideology, modernisation is a state project and the idea of private property. In social science and historiography modernisation is teleology – a process in a definite direction that is both law-like and politically driven.

Postmodernism, then, as a kind of knowledge is a critique and a rejection. As critique it is the exposure of modernisation as ideology and teleology. With the critique comes the rejection of a pair of assumptions. One is the

assumption of progress or development. The idea that economic development is necessarily good is rejected with the knowledge that it is also a massive dislocation and incapacitation of human populations and that it can become – on a global scale – self-defeating by destroying the resources on which growth depends. The other rejected assumption is that of structural and functional determination. But a close substitute for it is ‘globalisation.’ Replacing the grand narrative of modernity, globalisation stands as an equally grand spatial determinant in various formulations of a new era, in which the whole globe is affected by transnational corporations, massive dislocation, accelerated and increased migration, and the capitalism of electronic data storage and transmission.

In sum, there has been no liberation from economic constraints; it is just that they have to be specified. They are not assumed to be a determiner in the last instance of everything else social and cultural. But capitalism is known and understood to be a process that makes anything else into a commodity. I will suggest that this process in its territorialising aspect is effective in an interesting way that is misapprehended as ‘hybridity,’ and that it is not all-conquering.

In built environments, modernism, as opposed to modernity, is a movement in architecture, town planning, and design (as well as other arts). It has been a break with all conventions, an iconoclasm, to rethink old forms and create new structures that use the latest developments of materials and technologies, no longer disguised either as forms or as materials. As against modernism, postmodernism is eclectic and a play of surfaces, whatever their structures.

As for eclecticism and globalisation, it must be noted that the colonial condition was post-modern. Colonial subjects experienced dislocation and the acute ambivalence of desire for and deep resentment of the (dominating) other. The dominating other was global: the system of imperialist nation states. Imperialist agents too experienced an acute ambivalence of desire as they projected 'culture' and 'civilisation' upon the people and landscape of the colonised and what they projected came back with results that were disturbingly different.<sup>2</sup> In other words, the indeterminacy of form, discourse and population, which usually comes under the label 'hybridity,' including eclectic agglomerations of architectural styles and syncretic mixes of religions and cults, is both colonial and postcolonial, modern and postmodern. This and an almost complete absence of modernism<sup>3</sup> were true of China, even though China was not fully colonised.

As in the colonised continents, modernity in China was confined to enclaves of capital accumulation, capitalist industrialisation, and cities with finance at their centre and urban workers in their sprawling peripheries. What has characterised the last fifty years in China has been a spread of modernity but not of modernism from a few to a great many cities and large towns. In cultural terms, the particularly fast spread of the past twenty years has brought about a mixing of styles of food, clothing, and architecture in all but the most remote zones. More generally it has been a turning of what was taken as normal and done as habit into something done with an element of choice, including rituals and festivals of territorial cults. It will be necessary to specify the extent of such penetration and self-consciousness.

### **Modernisation in China**

In fact there have been three modernisations in China.<sup>4</sup> The first was a combination of imperialist and republican modernisation, which lasted for about a century from 1850. The second lasted twenty-five years from 1953 to 1978. It was a planned and collectivist modernisation, an anti-capitalist modernisation defined against private property and imperialist domination, that included much large and heavy industry and some rural as well as urban small and light industry. Since then there has been the fastest modernisation of the three, with private and transnational corporations supplementing state-backed corporations. It has been a revision of the second, a project of the state with many administrative powers but no longer directed through a strictly limited number of state and collective forms of organisation. Colonial hybridity has been replaced by consumerist hybridity – by the unleashing of barely regulated market forces and a bewildering plethora of inducements to consume, increasing every year with very fast economic growth and the opening of borders.

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2. This point was made with his habitual attention to the middle ground of uncertainty, or indeterminacy between the coupling implied by 'hybridity,' by Bhabha (1994).

3. The original plan of the city of Chandigar in India (by Le Corbusier), and a number of buildings in Hong Kong, including those of the Bank of China and the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank, are some of the exceptional few.

4. This is to discount the very much longer and slower (a thousand years long) process of commoditisation of China's economy, including its commercialisation and the spreading of contracts, paper money and banking, that preceded fully-fledged industrial and finance capitalism in China.

I shall be concerned with the last two modernisations. I stress, along with Dirlik and Zhang that both have been state projects. “While Chinese leaders like to speak of ‘using capitalism to develop socialism’, the current reality may well be the reverse: the use of ‘socialism’ to achieve capitalist development.” (2000: 5) The first thing Dirlik and Zhang cite under the current ‘socialism’ of the Chinese state is its partial control and release of enormous amounts of cheap labour. This has been the greatest single factor behind the extraordinary growth of the Chinese economy, its successful attraction of foreign investment and its ability to under-price the products of other economies in foreign markets.

The main characteristic of the most recent modernisation is the speed and penetration of commodification, which had been severely reduced and held in check for twenty-five years. This includes land and real estate, even while the state retains an element of control through the legal qualification of ultimate ownership by the people or the state. Decollectivisation of labour organisation, the sale of labour-power, the loosening of controls over the sale of the use of land, and lax (or ineffective) regulation of its exploitation, have intimately affected villages as populations and as territory. Released from restraints, commodification has indeed affected all aspects of social life, including what can be understood in the broadest sense as ‘culture.’

The result is that within a single geography a state project, transnational capitalism, and other senses of being in the world and ways of producing a livelihood co-exist. Within the same borders, within the same person, there are

different modes of being, different senses of time, different narrations of their own and collective stories. In the words of Dirlik and Zhang, ‘spatial fracturing and temporal dissonance’ may be the ‘ultimate justification for the use of the term’ postmodernity (*op. cit.*: 4).

It is possible that these different senses of being in the world are sealed off from each other, but reference to the sharing of a civilizational and a political centre called ‘China’ bring them together. What might otherwise have been sealed off is thus reflected in and by other modes and times, each becomes self-conscious, reflected in the other codifications, or in what Foucault named ‘heterotopias.’ (1986) In the process of juxtaposition what was a heterotopia can be deterritorialised into a commodity. For instance, marketing the remote as a commodity for tourism makes self-consciousness into a resource for an industry. Or take another instance, the state project of creating heritage symbols for ethnic or civic pride is at the same time a corporate identity to attract investment and trade and an opportunity for the reconstruction of local temples. These are examples of twin processes of deterritorialisation. In one it is decentralised in that it is purely for marketing. In the other it is state centralised. Both at the same time reflect and disrupt other markings of territorial space. But instead of ‘deterritorialisation’ I will argue that the processes of commodification and state abstraction are territorialisations on a larger scale.

### **State Territorialisation and Compromise**

State projects and commodification are abstractions of territory that can annihilate territorial places. James Scott’s book, *Seeing Like a State*

(1998), describes state territorialisation as the creation of legibility and simplification. It is the turning of multiplicity and interwoven senses of being into the maps, censuses, and infrastructures of a regulated and husbanded capitalist economy and its administration. It is the turning of territorial places into extensions of the more abstract territory of a sovereign, capitalist state. It serves the territorialisation of capitalist instrumentality, including the sites for outlets, housing, storage, plants, and means of transport and communication for the production and marketing of commodities. Each market will have its own codes and needs, not just tourism of course, but markets of finance, of food and apparel, of hardware, of raw materials and of capital goods, each specifying their own uses of space and construction. So we have two simplifications of territory, that of the state administration and that of capitalist instrumentality. Of course, they are always combined but it is possible to concentrate on one or the other.

Scott sees state territorialisation through the prism of utopian projects, such as the landscape of Soviet collectivisation and the city of High Modernisation exemplified by Brasilia and Chandigarh. These utopian projects are state territorialisation at its most simplistic: the narrowing of complexity into facts relevant for centralised administration on the one hand and for a purified aesthetic on the other. Against such extremes he contrasts the grass-roots practical knowledge that cannot be written into a programme, drawn into a design or used as a universal recipe. This knowledge has great local precision and is at once conservative and adaptive, accumulating and discarding elements over time and with practice. He uses the

Greek word *metis* to describe this practical, agglomerative knowledge.

Abstraction versus *metis* is a clear and intriguing contrast. But its attractive clarity misses the compromises with the particular and the local that is much more characteristic of modern states. Modern states leave room for the particular in processes such as that of statistical survey or the surveillance that Foucault described as normalisation. Normalisation is neither rationalisation nor measure but governed by the notion of probability and the techniques of epidemiology, which are by nature about co-variation. "Statistics of populations and of deviancy form an integral part of the industrial state." (Hacking 1991: 183) Similarly the Rule of Law, based on a universalising drive from a sovereign centre, nonetheless includes devices for practical variation in the use and creation of precedent and the notion of the 'reasonable person' which changes with changes in conventional mores. A third and last point to add to this list is that state projects include policies to cultivate a sense of the local that is not subversive but is a point of negotiation and manoeuvre for other senses and stories of place than those of the state and its locations. In all of these cases the state project destroys but at the same time recreates a mix that it makes legible to itself but does not fully incorporate.

### **Two Cosmologies of State Abstraction: North America and China**

Another, possibly more serious qualification must be made to Scott's account of state abstraction. He writes as if it were anonymous, without a specifiable character. But every state acts within a tradition of abstraction that is or was a cosmology, a mapping of the world. So,



for instance, Richard Sennett (1990: 46-68) can trace a cosmology and its transformations from the grid of Roman camps with enclosed central squares (for gatherings and for the reading of omens) to New York. The Roman square became the grid with neutral squares (sparse gatherings and no omens) of the Puritan settlers in North America. This in turn became the blocks of strip development without any bounds. 'Modern' abstraction is, in short, traceable to a European anonymity required by Puritan self-searching, which turns into the anonymity of individual self-seeking, the shopping plaza, and ribbon development: a particularly North American combination of state and capitalist territorialisation. It has been imported into all countries including China, along with three architectural types: the skyscraper, the apartment block and the villa, as symbols of modernity (King and Kusno 2000).

Another tracing is possible in China. It could start with a grid that in form is exactly the same as the Roman, but whose axial north-south orientation is based on a completely different cosmology, a different conception of the relation between heaven and earth mediated by humanity. The chief mediator was the emperor and his dynasty, whose processions through the grid, and whose territorial space toward the north were not to be seen by any but selected officials, whereas the majesty and triumphs of a Roman emperor were to be seen by all citizens as a pageant. The later high central places of Augustinian and other Christian cities were also to be seen – like skyscrapers. A Chinese city by contrast was an extension of the domestic courtyard space and its rooms or, in grander houses, halls. The authority of an imperial city or of a great temple

within a walled city and its alleys was to be sensed and inferred from the scale of its walls and the sight of the great pitch and elaborated ridges of the roofs of the halls within. The contrast of this architecture and plan with high-rise blocks of apartments and corporate skyscrapers can be seen in every large Chinese city.

To this contrast a further contrasting architecture of grids and enclosed spaces must be added. The remaining walls of most inner cities had been demolished and turned into boulevards during the 1953-1978 period of modernisation, when another architectural grid became the rule. Between boulevards were the enclosed and large expanses of work units, factory buildings with their chimneys or low-rise corridor offices behind grand gated entrances and, within the same enclosure, the large low-rise blocks of dormitories and small apartments for staff and workers. In brief, four kinds of plan co-exist in Chinese cities: the traditional courtyard, the work-unit, the strip, and the broad, tree-lined boulevard that is another, this time European, import from the colonial era.

We can contrast two subjects induced by them. The self-regulating individual of Foucault's biopolitics and Sennett's self-seeker in the age of consumption were introduced into China along with philosophical and market liberalism and the architecture of privacy and the commodity.<sup>5</sup> They are to be contrasted with the imperial, patriarchal and peer-regulated individual, and the extension of peer regulation through the gaze of the Party by its system of files kept on every citizen and through the

5. These are explored in a rural context by Yan Yunxiang (forthcoming).

work-unit.<sup>6</sup> It is a contrast and a co-existence, perhaps also a particular contextual blending of two kinds of conscience or superego: the internalisation of original guilt in the autonomous individual of liberalism versus the internalisation of potential shame and embarrassment in the socially conscious individual of a modified collectivism.

Urban spread in China is like North American strip or ribbon development, sometimes with eclectically added Chinese features, such as the flying eave and the curved roof. But where it meets the architecture of villages and their fields, it meets another version of Chinese cosmology. This is the art called fengshui. It is the art of siting dwellings not according to the authority and privilege of a sovereign, but from the perspective of any central placing. Fengshui as we now know it began in the Song dynasty (11th-12th centuries), and sprang from a social revolution and a radical reform of state ideology: a breaking down of the privileges of noble families. Commoners too could have grave-worship, ancestral halls, genealogies and temples, and the sites of their graves could be as auspicious as any other, even the emperor's (Feuchtwang 2002: chapter 2). Gods in their temple palaces were imagined to be as powerful as emperors. The siting of a local temple could enhance the well-being of those who lived in the territory that it and its festivals defined, just as the siting of an imperial city and imperial tombs could enhance the well-being of a reign and its dynasty. The importance of graves and the territorial fengshui of local temples in cities, towns, and villages remains in much though not all of continental China, long after the end of imperial dynasties

(in 1911) and despite their suppression during the periods of republican and communist modernisation.

Armed with these re-conceptions of the great processes of state and capitalist territorialisation and reterritorialisation, let us now see how they work at the level of the local state in China and let us then see what we can learn about these great processes from this level.

### **Meifa: Encounters with Reterritorialisation**

In an inland part of Fujian province, the county capital of Anxi has been spreading schools, apartment blocks, factories and new streets into neighbouring villages. My colleague Wang Mingming has been studying one of those villages, Meifa, since 1992, and we visited it together in 1992, 1995 and 2002. In those ten years, we have seen the results of the county purchasing 'people's' collective, village land and leasing it to various enterprises as well as constructing new roads through parts of the village. In short, we have witnessed the partial absorption of a village into a city, something happening all over China. Of course, this had been happening for hundreds of years with the increasing number and sizes of towns and cities: as China's economy commercialised from the Song dynasty onwards.<sup>7</sup> But the speed and extent of physical change in territory, landscape and architecture have been dramatic in the past fifty years.

6. For an extended exposition of this kind of regulation see Dutton (1992).

7. As Skinner (1964) made elegantly clear. See also Gates (1997).

In 1992, I walked along narrow dikes between paddy plots that would not have existed fifteen years before, when the village was a brigade within a commune and when land was consolidated. In those fifteen years the second of two decollectivisations had taken place. The first was the land reform of 1950-1952. It was a decollectivisation of communal land, which is to say the fields belonging to the local lineage and the fields belonging to the local territorial cult. Revenue from the farming of those fields had sustained the festivals and the building of the lineage hall and the local temple. Each institution defined and now once again defines Meifa as a territorial place in different ways. The lineage hall defines it as the centre of co-residence of those related in descent from four brothers, and as a hall where the elders of the lineage can gather, be respected and feasted at lineage ceremonies. The ancestral land was in five parts, two belonging to the hall and the rest in three trusts attached to the tombs of three brothers, founding ancestors of three of the four branches of the lineage. In other words, this focus makes Meifa a nested hierarchy of territorial places that are the segments of a local lineage. The temple defines Meifa more inclusively as a territorial place, without reference to line of descent, and in relation to greater regional centres of pilgrimage procession, which depart from Meifa to one or another of these centres at the beginning of the lunar year. The temple and the space in front of it, thronged with villagers and festival guests watching the theatre on the external stage, are also important as a centre of the village at ordinary times. It is where women as well as men come to bring offerings and chat, whereas the

ancestral hall is a male affair. The temple is also where children from different parts of the village come and play together.

After the lands of hall and temple were confiscated and redistributed to poor peasants in the early 1950s, the financing of the two institutions came solely from subscriptions and donations of villagers. That is how it remains after the second decollectivisation of land, distributed to households in 1980-1982. Even so, the green paddy fields in front of the temple that were its communal land have a special significance. And so do the space and a very important tree in front of the ancestral hall. All of them are sites of encounter with state and capitalist territorialisation.

### **The Ancestral Hall and a Fengshui Tree**

When I first visited Meifa in 1992, it was at the time of the seventh lunar month festival in which both named ancestors are honoured and the ghosts of forgotten and neglected ancestors are succoured with offerings of food, paper spirit clothing and paper spirit money.<sup>8</sup> I was taken to a place where many villagers had placed their ghost offerings in the open. It was a 'corner' of the village (as neighbourhoods are called in this part of China) near the bank of the broad river that flows through Anxi and just beyond this point bends to pass the county seat and go on to the regional city of Quanzhou. There was a broad path along the bank, lined by bamboo groves. The offerings were arranged slightly inland from this path, on a rise that was

8. The long history of this festival can be read in Teiser (1988); for an account of how it is performed in Taiwan, within the same religious culture as that of Anxi in Fujian, see Weller (1987).

a clear space between the village houses of that neighbourhood and the bamboo groves. I was told that this was the place where there had been an ancestral hall. Later Wang Mingming learned that in fact the hall had been rebuilt by the villagers in 1962 but destroyed during the Cultural Revolution only five years later in 1967.

Among the trees that lined the riverbank was one particularly large and gnarled tree. Further along the bank below it, near the surface of the water, was a small shrine to the Earth God of that part of the riverbank. This part of the river and the neighbourhood beyond it are called Cui-a-be. Cui-a-be mean 'water's tail.' When we were told of this name it was always associated with water control. We were told that the tree had been planted several hundred years previously to prevent the river flooding the village. The way in which I had seen the riverbank and the offerings in the open was a reversion to a time several hundred years earlier when the tree existed but no hall had yet been built. The tree's roots, and those of the neighbouring trees, probably did hold the bank together and thus act as a preventor of floods. But the tree was also described as a fengshui tree, planted to enhance the gathering of *qi*, flows of material energy, in a perceivable site that encompassed the neighbourhood. In short, it constituted the focal point that marked a territorial place whose borders were notional but perceivable and which included the houses of a definite neighbourhood. But the reversion to that time in 1992 was filled with the memories and the effects of the most thorough state project in Chinese history.

The destruction of the ancestral hall in the Cultural Revolution left the tree intact. It also

left intact vivid memories of the hall. They remained in conjunction with the culmination of collectivisation. Collectivisation of land and labour organisation in 1956, interrupted by the great starvation and the partial decollectivisation of 1961-1963 that engineered a recovery of agricultural production, continued from 1963 to 1978. Through the hierarchy of Party branches down to the level of the production brigade (a large village or collection of smaller villages) it was a state project which consolidated land and replaced all other centres of territorial place with brigade halls and offices. It was also the mobilisation of labour for the building of roads and village streets, and for the digging of irrigation channels and the building of flood controls. And finally it introduced, in Meifa as elsewhere, small-scale rural industrial plants closely related to agricultural crops and local construction – rice mills, brick kilns, fertiliser and cement plants, and timber yards. Long before, it had abolished the cash earning activities of the earlier republican period, which in Meifa had included working as river boatmen.

In short, collectivisation territorialised the whole of China and its landscape in a remarkably monolithic image that was legible to a centre and through which the production and distribution of nearly every rural good and service was organised. But as so many studies of villages in China starting with *Chen Village* (Chan, Madsen and Unger 1984) have shown, local leaders nevertheless had the capacity and room to manoeuvre in their interpretations of central policy directives. They manoeuvred to protect and serve their fellow villagers in ways that varied even within a single village. Local

loyalty remained a primary criterion of respect for local leaders. In Meifa this included admiration for the senior cadre who had unofficially aided the reconstruction of the ancestral hall in 1962. He had eventually been removed from his post and the Party for subsequent acts of loyalty to his fellow villagers, when his county-level protectors' powers declined in factional strife. Even so, even in his disgrace, his friend the brigade Party Secretary put him in charge of local small-scale industrial projects.<sup>9</sup> You could say that he and the many others in his position throughout China were using a kind of political *metis*, using Scott's term, but this did not just mean local practical knowledge. It is political *nous* without which, together with unofficial entrepreneurial 'fixing' between units of production, the objectives of central plans could not have been met in China or any of the Soviet bloc countries. It is a *nous* that creates compromises within state projects.

Flood control included reinforcing the river-bank. But, as I say, the tree remained, and so did the memory of the ancestral hall and of this cadre's loyalty to his fellow villagers. By the time I returned to Meifa in 1995 the same ex-cadre had managed a reconstruction of the ancestral hall for a second time in his life, on its old site. At the same time he had continued to be an industrial manager, but now working for a Hong Kong Chinese investor, not the village collective. He had managed the building of a factory for this investor on a piece of village land where the collective brick kiln had been. In this he had again demonstrated his loyalty to fellow villagers by successfully insisting that the factory employ at least 100 Meifa residents, whereas the investor wanted to employ only

people from his ancestral home village, further away. Like others from more remote areas of the same province working in shops and factories on the spreading industrial estates of Anxi county city, they were housed on a new street built by the county on land bought from Meifa. So this ex-cadre manager was an agent for both the new, post-Mao, capitalist and state territorialisation and also a leader of the re-assertion of patriarchal territorial place. But there was a clash between the two.

The newly rebuilt ancestral hall now had a clear view onto the river. This might have been welcome, but the reason why the view was clear was a very destructive county project. The bamboo and all the other trees along the river had been cleared, and the no-longer wooded path had been broadened and raised as the foundations for an all-weather surfaced road were laid down. The fengshui tree was left standing, but only because it had been saved by a large-scale protest from Meifa villagers. They mobilised all the connections they could muster through residents holding government posts, such as the man who had been Party Secretary of Meifa and had employed the manager of the ancestral hall to manage industries in Meifa. From village Party Secretary he had risen to become chairman of the assembly of a neighbouring township. He and others succeeded in preventing the county road crew from destroying the ancient tree. To seal their identification with Meifa they were given prominent roles in the ceremonies for the opening of the new ancestral hall. On the

9. For the full story and for many more details of the history of Meifa, read Feuchtwang and Wang (2001: chapters 3-5).

instructions of the geomancer, who had also oriented the whole building at an angle to the riverbank, the hall had been built on a higher platform than its predecessor in order that the height of the new road would not block its view onto the broad expanse of river water gathering in front of it. But the foundations of the road were now higher, obscuring some of the view he had envisaged. The road was causing further disruption because apart from the ancestral hall all the buildings to its inland side had to be cleared to make way for new commercial and industrial buildings.

Ribbon development was conflicting with neighbourhood place, focused on the tree, and lineage place focused on the hall. A heated confrontation between the county work team managing this disruption and villagers furious about the inadequate compensation paid them to rebuild or buy new homes elsewhere was defused by the manager of the ancestral hall. He denounced corrupt county cadres who kept the proceeds of the leasing of land to themselves, while urging on the villagers the new job opportunities that industrial developments such as the one he himself managed could offer them. So the villagers withdrew and the road and the two territorial places were maintained in a state of tense peace.

In 1995 the riverbank had been even more firmly reinforced with a lining of concrete blocks, and a few yards further down a new bridge connected the road to the county city on the other bank. But the earth god shrine had also been rebuilt. A ramp of stone stairs descended from the end of the bridge down to the small promontory on which the shrine lay. Beyond the shrine, the water's edge was a place

where women from the neighbourhood washed clothes in the shallows. In short, Cui-a-be was being maintained as a territorial place, while a state-capitalist territorialisation ran a scar through it.

On my return in 2002, new trees had been planted on the riverbank beside the road. But factories flanked the ancestral hall. Where in 1995 on one side there had been two half-destroyed village houses there was now a four-storey plastics factory. Its exterior was surfaced with glazed white tiles and green reflecting glass, but it also featured a curved front veranda and low rear wings roofed with red tiles and stumpy winged eaves in the Chinese style. The manager of the ancestral hall now worked as catering manager in this factory. But he also spent time in a new old people's recreation hall, an addition to the ancestral hall whose construction he had overseen.

From the point of view of someone driving along this quite pleasant extension of the county city, the ancestral hall appears suddenly in the opening between two factories, lower than they are. The black tiles and the upturns at the ends of the ridges of its roofs could be seen as a symbol of Chinese historicity, but it is not a tourist destination. It functions as all its predecessors did, as the focal building of a local co-residential lineage. But now that function appears as an interval in an entirely different territorialisation, that of capitalist industrialisation stretching in a ribbon out of the capital city of the county that promotes it and provides some of its infrastructure. Each has compromised with the other, after quite acrimonious negotiations and some stylistic nods by the Malaysian Chinese investor in the plastics factory toward his Chinese

identification with his county of origin. There is an element of self-consciousness in this juxtaposition but it has been neither commodified nor sponsored by the county as 'heritage.' Its foundation and significance is too low-level and small to merit the attention of county historians or archaeologists.

The head of the village committee, elected for the third time, told us that since the ancestral hall was rebuilt the people in the village had become more united (*tong+e*) and he added that they now understand better how they can benefit from the building of factories. On the same occasion, the ex-cadre manager, an older man, introduced a much longer view of history. He told us that he had once visited a Buddhist monk in the neighbouring region of Zhangzhou who told him that history was a series of alternations of destruction and construction. Now Mao's destruction had given way to the current period (since 1978) of construction. By 'construction' he also meant reconstruction. "But, he added, young people are forgetful, so I am not sure..." The element of doubt as to whether the assertion of territorial place that he had led would be maintained is both poignant and realistic.

### Temple and Green Fields

Nearly ten years before taking on the reconstruction of the ancestral hall, he had been the manager of the rebuilding of the more inclusive focus of the village as a territorial place, its local temple. When I visited Meifa in 1992 I asked three other villagers of his age why the temple and not the hall had been rebuilt. They said that the temple is where festivals are held for the whole village as a living entity, whereas

the ancestral hall is just for commemoration of ancestors. The temple festivals are the greatest occasions of gathering, entertainment and feasting in the village year. Bringing food from every house in the village to tables where it is presented in the large space in front of the temple, emptying that same space in the evenings to watch theatre performances on the stage to the side of the temple, the comings and goings from house to temple retrace the territorial place of co-residence and its main focus.

In front of the temple and its open space the view continues onto paddy fields flanked on the other three sides in the middle distance by village houses. No single-storey courtyard houses remain. They are all two or more storeys high, with flat roofs and walls lined by white tiles. But within this changed frame, the fields have a special significance. In one of the legends of the founding of the temple it had once faced in the opposite direction, toward the river. According to this legend, customary regulation stated that the land in front was communal, for the upkeep of the village temple and its festivals. But the piece of land in front was little and infertile. In the other direction, the land behind was fertile and extensive but belonged to one rich man. The inequality between private and communal land caused unrest among the villagers. They consulted the temple god through a spirit medium. The god's advice was to reverse the temple's orientation so that its front entrance faced onto the rich man's fields. By this ruse, they would become communal by virtue of the customary regulation. Overnight, so the story goes, the efficacious god himself produced the miracle of this reversal.

As I have said, these fertile village fields were confiscated and redistributed in the first decollectivisation. They were then collectivised into the land of one or more of the production teams of the brigade and redistributed once again in the 1980s to villagers. Beyond them is another open space that is ready for industrial development. But it has not been filled. There is no industrial threat to the fields, which are still cultivated by village women (men are in paid employment). The spacious view from the temple's entrance is open to a gap in the hills beyond, and when the paddy is flooded waters gather in the foreground, a manifestation of the accumulation of *qi* energies. The distributed green fields are still important to the temple and the fengshui of the whole village.

In 1995 the temple stood alone in open fields with trees behind it, the river hidden behind them, and the hills beyond the river visible above the trees. They still provide a good rear protection. But in 2002 a pair of smooth pink, plastered buildings had been built inside a walled enclosure a few metres to one side of the temple. These pink cubes were a little higher than the black tiles and winged ridges of the temple's roofs. When we asked about them, we learned that the land on which they were built had been bought and set aside as industrial land. A man of the same surname as the village residents but from another place had bought the lease, built these cubes as a factory, and had then wanted to add a large hall for his own ancestors. The county would not, apparently, have opposed this affront, but Meifa villagers resisted in strength. We have not yet had time to ascertain details of the confrontation, but the hall had not been built and the factory buildings had

been left empty, new but abandoned for the time being. The ancestral hall of their owner would have become a gathering place for the diaspora of one large family from another place, encroaching upon the territorial place of a village that happened to be a local lineage of the same name.

I asked the ex-cadre who had managed the rebuilding of the temple and the ancestral hall whether he thinks the fields in front of the temple could be turned into an industrial park. "Not while people feel as they do now, it would not be possible." Again, he expressed a firm resolve but with a hint of times changing. Thus far, then, on the outskirts of a small city in the mountains of southern Fujian province, the drama of encroachment on a territorial place by city developers and capitalist entrepreneurs has been played out with mixed success on all sides. It is a drama of negotiated conflict and compromise, in which territorial place is defined and retained against other territorialisations. Those other territorialisations create nodes that do not make territorial places but instead create territory of a more abstract kind with centres that are on a larger scale – city region, or commercial region of marketing and other operations, such as the diaspora of an entrepreneur's family and the nodes in the operations that export the goods his factory might eventually produce.

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What do these small-scale dramas say about the large processes by which I introduced them, state and capitalist territorialisations? First let me point out that the relatively small industries that are being built on the outskirts of Anxi's



county seat in Meifa produce for export from China. They are a small part of globalised capitalism. Next let me underline that villagers are themselves involved as employees of these enterprises, at levels from management down to worker. And let me add that in 1995 there were three Meifa businessmen running their own manufacturing operations elsewhere and seldom at home in their village houses. In other words, the village included agents of the county and of industrial estate developments.

The concatenation of these different agencies was not only territorial. It could easily occur in the same person. The same person could be a protagonist in county and industrial development and in the retention and redefinitions of the village as a territorial place focused on a temple, a local lineage focused on an ancestral hall, and, within both, the neighbourhood focused on the riverbank fengshui tree and the small Earth God temple. For instance, the ex-cadre is a department manager of a plastics factory, and in that position he is functioning as an earner of income for a family of whom he is both patriarch and family manager. Through connections to officials in the county government he has in the near past negotiated the extension of county transport and its infrastructure through parts of Meifa village. And of course he has all this time maintained his ideal persona of local loyalist, most recently by being involved in the addition of an old people's centre to the ancestral hall. The young villagers, about whose memory he wonders, work for income that they use instrumentally as consumers of what they consider to be the most modern products. In that respect they are liberal, self-seeking individualists living in an ahistorical search for a secure

livelihood and material enjoyment. Their sense of family in this respect is confined to a conjugal family. It may well be that as elsewhere in rural China their relation with their elders is negotiable rather than assumed and guaranteed. At the same time they take enthusiastic part in the temple's festivals, as members of their households and beneficiaries of the fortunes of the place in which they live.

Of course there is more to come in Meifa. Over the next twenty years the gradual incorporation of the village into the county city may turn the territory of the local temple into an urban neighbourhood. That would make its temple an equivalent of the neighbourhood temples of the older parts of the city across the river, which have been revived and continue to thrive. The ancestral hall will probably remain but may become more like a centre for lineage members, many of whom will have been dispersed into other parts of the province and the world: a diasporic centre like the one that the interloping businessman tried to build next to the temple. By then both hall and temple may have been brought to the attention of county historians and visitors. Perhaps they will introduce themselves as places with illustrated pamphlets and websites telling the story of the green fields, the ancient riverbank tree and other stories that hint at a far longer history of Chinese fengshui cosmology. But so far they have not been turned into heritage sites. The way in which the city, capitalist and place codes refer to each other has remained a mutually resistant compromise, not a mutual incorporation.

At this reduced scale, the processes that have been described in the most general terms

by theorists and social scientists translate the concatenation of different subjectivities, with the quite different senses of time and history that accompany the different territorialisations that code and decode each other at this level. Nothing is quited as abstract, general or destructive and enveloping as the theorists make out. First, there are the specifiable abstract territorialisations of the state and of capitalism – with their peculiar mixes of styles and of traces of different cosmologies and subjectivities. Then there are the nodes of these large-scale, decentralised territorialisations, the factories and apartment blocks, which can be appropriated as new kinds of territorial places. Finally,

my main emphasis is on the remaking of territorial places that tell a local history. There are other territorialities that tell a history on a far greater scale, in particular those of a sovereign state. But they do not define places in the physical, multi-sensorial sense I have emphasized. Their centres are referential and virtual, destinations for travel and communication. Territorial place can only work below a certain scale. But its remaking is done in reference to the larger, abstract scales of territorialisation and it re-orientates state and capitalist projects through the room for manoeuvre that it and countless others make, stretch and link laterally through the greater scales of reference.

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**Abstract**

Stephan Feuchtwang, *Tales of Territoriality. The Urbanisation of Meifa Village, China*

Territorial place is the most open and inclusive of places. At the same scale the terrifying abstractions of deterritorialisation can be seen to be a negotiated stand-off between different territorialisations. In other words, the deterritorialisation thesis of Deleuze and Guattari, the state project thesis of James Scott, and the dislocation thesis of postmodernists need severe modification. That modification is carried out by ethnography and local history, here by a case study of a Chinese village that is in the process of being urbanised. What is revealed when this is done is that so-called deterritorialisation is a pair of territorialisations, of state projects and of capitalist ribbon development and the nodes of its economic institutions and functions. At this scale they are brought into negotiation with reappropriations of territorial place by local actors.

**Résumé**

Stephan Feuchtwang, *Récits de territorialité. L'urbanisation du village Meifa, Chine*

Le territoire est le plus ouvert et le plus inclusif de tous les lieux. À cette échelle les redoutables abstractions que représente la déterritorialisation peuvent être vues comme un compromis entre différentes formes de territorialisation. En d'autres termes, les thèses de Deleuze et Guattari, de James Scott et des postmodernes, qui mettent l'accent sur la dislocation, doivent être révisées. Cette tâche incombe à l'ethnographie et à l'histoire locale. Dans cet article, une étude de cas sur un village chinois en voie d'urbanisation fait ressortir que la soi-disant déterritorialisation est en fait le résultat de deux territorialisations : celle qui relève du programme de l'État et celle qui s'appuie sur une frange capitaliste de développement dont les points nodaux constituent les institutions économiques et leurs fonctions. À ce niveau, la négociation s'impose avec la réappropriation par les acteurs locaux du territoire.