

# Governmentality and Translation: Re-thinking the Cultural Politics of Lineage Landscapes in Contemporary Rural China

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## Abstract

This paper explores the cultural politics of lineage landscapes in contemporary rural China. Drawing on a combined governmentality/translation approach and ethnographic fieldwork in rural Wenzhou, it examines how the state governs the production of lineage landscapes and how local lineages translate governmental technologies in complex ways. Empirical evidence reveals that the government develops diversified rationalities and modes of governance to direct the (re)construction of lineage landscapes. It is also found that local lineages are skilled at appropriating state discourses and practices as well as enrolling other (non-)human actors, thereby legitimizing their landscape projects of ancestral tombs and memorials. On the ground, they often displace state objectives with the production of their preferred landscape (for example, “chair” tombs). Respectful of ancestors, state agents sometimes turn a blind eye to local displacement; however, while encountering challenges from the higher-level government, they intensify regulation, but lineages still retain the capacity to negotiate with them. With sensitivity to the entanglement of diversified actors and their dynamic interactions, this paper underlines the multiplicity and contingency of state governance and societal responses. It also foregrounds the cultural politics of lineage landscapes as a process of translating governmental technologies characterized by continuous mobilization, displacement and negotiation in a heterogeneous network.

**Keywords:** lineage landscapes; cultural politics; governmentality; translation; actor-network theory; sacred space; rural China

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In China, a lineage is a group of people with the same surname, sharing “common descent along the male line.”<sup>1</sup> Lineages have produced rich cultural landscapes including material ones, such as ancestral temples and tombs, as well as

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1 Szonyi 2002, 4.

immaterial landscapes of rituals, rules, genealogies, practices and networks. In ancient times, lineages formed the basic social unit and greatly shaped people's identity, status, everyday practices, marriage and funeral arrangements.<sup>2</sup> Lineage culture was greatly diminished during the Republican period (1912–1949) and Maoist era (1949–1976). It has, however, undergone a notable revival in many rural areas especially in the south and south-east of China since the post-socialist reform launched in 1978.<sup>3</sup> This is seen best in the reconstruction of material landscapes and the recovery of ritual performance and genealogy compilation.<sup>4</sup>

The (re)production of lineage landscapes in rural China is imbued with politics and contestations. For villagers, it helps to strengthen their collective identity and social status in local society. The post-Maoist state, however, has an ambivalent attitude towards lineage culture: on the one hand, it is deemed to be indispensable to traditional Chinese culture and perpetuates some commendable values such as filial piety (*xiao* 孝); on the other, it contains many “undesirable” features such as parochial competition and “superstition.” For example, traditional lineage rituals are linked to ancestor worship, which is incompatible with the state-advocated atheism and science-based ideology.<sup>5</sup> The government has actively intervened in the lineage revival in an attempt to maximize its positive effects. A common strategy adopted by local governments over the past few decades is to promote ancestral temples as tourist centres, museums and cultural halls.<sup>6</sup>

Many scholars have drawn attention to the revival and reconfiguration of lineage landscapes during the post-socialist reform. Most research focuses on explaining why lineage landscapes are reconstructed, the features of these landscapes, and the influence of such reconstructions on local governance.<sup>7</sup> A limited but growing body of literature has engaged with the theorization of the cultural politics of lineage landscapes, grounding that research within an analytical framework of the state–society relationship. These studies have moved beyond a dichotomous interpretation of power as active resistance or passive submission<sup>8</sup> towards a dialectical view by acknowledging the mutually constituted state–society relationship.<sup>9</sup> However, they pay little attention to the multiplicity of state rationalities and lineage responses, and they ignore how the lineage–state interaction involves and is shaped by other (non-)human actors entangled in the production of symbolic landscapes.

This paper attempts to fill these gaps using a case study of the construction of lineage buildings in Xincheng Town 莘滕镇, a coastal peri-urban region in

2 Zheng 2001; Feng et al. 2009.

3 Dean, Kenneth 2003; Yang 2004; Chen 2016.

4 Jing 1996; Yang 2004.

5 Yang 2004.

6 Li 2011; Yang 2004; Chen 2016.

7 Yu 2001; Li 2011; Xiao, Luo and Qiu 2010.

8 Jing 1996; Feuchtwang 2000.

9 Chen 2016; Faure 2007; Tsai 2007; Pieke 2003.

Wenzhou 温州, south-east China.<sup>10</sup> The resurgence and transformation of lineage landscapes are particularly evident in Xincheng. Having benefited from the rapid growth of the local private economy, rural people in Wenzhou have invested greatly in spiritual and cultural spheres, including the construction of ancestral temples and tombs.<sup>11</sup> At the same time, lineage landscapes have undergone a significant state-supported transformation. In recent years, the Wenzhou government has launched a series of projects to convert traditional temples and tombs into more modern structures such as ecological tombs, cultural halls and historical memorials.<sup>12</sup> Many local clans, however, have been able to construct new (additional) symbolic spaces. Empowered by their newly acquired affluence and the local private economy, Wenzhou people have enhanced their capacity to negotiate with the state and other actors in various ways.<sup>13</sup> In this sense, the case of rural Wenzhou can provide rich insights into the cultural politics of lineage landscapes in post-reform China.

I use a combined governmentality/actor-network theory (ANT) approach to examine how lineage landscapes are governed by the state and how governmental technologies are translated by local clans. By adopting an ANT framework, this paper attempts to overcome the governmentality literature's insensitivity to how local people seek to mobilize and negotiate with particular governmental technologies as well as how the governance of lineage landscapes is mediated by other social actors and non-human agents. Based on more than ten months of ethnographic fieldwork in rural Wenzhou, this paper reveals that the government develops diversified rationalities and discursive and practical technologies to govern local clans' production of symbolic landscapes. It also shows that apart from appropriating governmental discourses and practices, local lineages are also adept at co-opting local experts and non-human entities such as tombstones and genealogies to legitimize their projects and deal with challenges from competitors. During construction, local people usually transform the state's will by creating a landscape according to their own customary practices. In awe of ancestors, state agents sometimes turn a blind eye to local challenges; however, they increase regulation over certain practices of displacement that cannot be tolerated. In such a context, local lineages still actively negotiate with the state. The (re)production of lineage landscapes is interwoven with a heterogeneous network of different administrative levels of state agents, lineage members, other-surname villagers, local experts, ancestors, tombstones and genealogies. With sensitivity to the entanglement of multiple actors and their dynamic interactions, this study probes how governmental forms of power are exercised in multi-fold and

10 In 2011, Xincheng Town was redesignated as Xincheng Sub-district and nominally incorporated into the urban zone of Rui'an, a county-level city, although local residents continue to use its original name.

11 Chen 2016.

12 In comparison with traditional "chair" tombs (*yizi fen*), ecological tombs (*shengtai fen*) are without arms and backs. All the bricks used for tomb construction are green rather than white, and the grave face and surroundings are also "greened" with turf, trees and plants.

13 Zhang 2008.

differentiated ways and are also translated by local forms of action in complex ways. I argue that the cultural politics of lineage landscapes is better theorized as a process of translating governmental technologies characterized by constant mobilization, displacement and negotiation in a heterogeneous network.

The empirical data here are based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted from January to mid-November 2014. Three research methods – observations, textual analysis and in-depth interviews – were adopted. I observed and recorded the building material, structures and functions of selected lineage landscapes. Government documents and newspaper reports (both online and print versions) were collected and analysed in order to understand the state discourses and practices in relation to lineage landscapes. I also conducted in-depth and semi-structured interviews with 14 clan elites,<sup>14</sup> 22 clan members and 11 local officials. Clan elites are in charge of collective issues and property, and their interpretations of official discourses and interactions with state agents deserve close analysis. Ordinary clan members were also interviewed about how they made sense of lineage culture and how they were involved in the construction of lineage buildings. The interviews with local officials provide rich information on the state's attitude towards and regulation over lineage landscapes and activities. Before introducing the empirical context and analysing case studies, the next section reviews the existing literature and develops an analytical framework to re-map the cultural politics of lineage landscapes in post-reform China.

### **Re-mapping the Cultural Politics of Lineage Landscapes in Post-reform China: Governmentality and Translation**

A substantive body of research has acknowledged that the reproduction of lineage landscapes in post-Mao China, as a notable manifestation of lineage revival, is not a neutral process but rather is always imbued with contestations and conflicts.<sup>15</sup> One of the prevailing approaches to exploring the cultural politics of lineage landscapes departs from a state-centred view. For instance, Pitman Potter contends that the state has attempted to obtain local people's political loyalty through the reduced control over the revival of religious and cultural practices such as the re-performance of ancestor worship.<sup>16</sup> Scholars have also pointed to the dominant power of the state during the reproduction of lineage landscapes. For instance, in her study of the conversion of ancestral temples into tourist sites in rural Guangxi, Yidan Li documents how local lineages are exploited but gain little material benefit from tourism development.<sup>17</sup>

By adding the voices of local people, another approach has arisen to argue that the lineage resurgence implies that local communities are reasserting their

14 Clan elites include retired cadres, teachers and entrepreneurs as well as ordinary members who are actively involved in lineage activities.

15 Yang 2004; Jing 1996; Chen 2016.

16 Potter 2003.

17 Li 2011.

autonomy in resistance to the state.<sup>18</sup> For instance, Jun Jing posits that the reconstruction of a Confucius lineage temple in a village in Gansu province should be understood as an act of communal resistance to state regulation as it involves the political process of retrieving memories of the community from before its destruction.<sup>19</sup> These studies highlight that the state's cultural hegemony is by no means absolute and that the renewal of traditional landscapes is a backlash against the state ideology. The above two strands of literature denounce power relations between the state and lineage through two opposite forms of coercion and subjection, or dominance and resistance. They not only reify the epistemological separation between the state and local society but also overlook the conditions of cooperation, alliance and mutual constitution during such interactions.<sup>20</sup>

To move beyond the binary understanding of the lineage–state relationship, an emerging (but limited) body of literature has shown that both parties work not as opponents but as mutually dependent entities. Existing studies have demonstrated how lineage cultures are compatible with the state's agenda to develop a “harmonious society” in that they provide socio-welfare services and publicize state-advocated values. For instance, Lily Tsai shows how village officials take advantage of clan resources to provide public goods in the context of limited public funding.<sup>21</sup> Based on his fieldwork in a county-level city, Frank Pieke explores how a lineage genealogy is not simply a record of descent but a “celebration of common descent to a Confucian or culturalist construction of Chinese-ness that focuses on morality and education.”<sup>22</sup> Such constructions of belonging are what he terms as a “genealogical mentality.” In the development of modern society, the “genealogical mentality” is seen as a powerful tool for the nurturing of local forms of governance in fusion with the state ideologies of nation building and modernity.

Pieke further argues that this “genealogical mentality” enabled lineages to receive official endorsements during the Ming and Qing periods, and is also acknowledged by the post-Maoist state as a valuable historical resource. Similarly, Mayfair Yang has pointed out that rural lineages in Wenzhou are able to protect their ancestral halls from being destroyed by local governments and business interests by converting them into museums where state values are inculcated.<sup>23</sup> Similar quests for state endorsement are also revealed in many studies about the construction of temples or religious festivals for tourist sites, local landmarks or cultural events.<sup>24</sup> The incorporation of state ideologies suits local communities' objectives, playing out what Adam Chau describes as the “politics of legitimation.”<sup>25</sup>

18 Jing 1996; Feuchtwang 2000.

19 Jing 1996.

20 Chau 2006; Qian and Kong 2018.

21 Tsai 2007.

22 Pieke 2003, 117.

23 Yang 2004.

24 Yu 2001; Chau 2006; Chen 2016.

25 Chau 2005.

Recent theorizations provide an informed departure point from which to understand the mutually constituted relationship between the state and society that is embedded in the (re)production of lineage landscapes. However, existing studies tend to regard state regulation of specific lineage landscapes as monolithic and unitary.<sup>26</sup> To appreciate the multiplicity of state rationalities and modes of governance, I draw on Foucauldian work on governmentality. The notion of governmentality is taken by Michel Foucault to refer to calculated means and techniques for directing human behaviour.<sup>27</sup> It has generated a body of literature examining how the direction of human conduct is thought about and acted upon by authorities in multiple ways according to particular norms, rules or knowledge.<sup>28</sup> Both discursive and practical aspects of governmentalities will be highlighted in this paper. Moreover, governmentality emphasizes the contingent nature of governmental thought and techniques. As Jeff Banister contends, the operation of state power is a process which is “emergent in social relations between differently situated institutions, individuals, and locales.”<sup>29</sup> Thus, the implementation of governmental technologies can face complex and uncertain conditions and require modification at times. It is an open strategic game rather than a fixed regime.<sup>30</sup>

A governmentality perspective offers insights into the diversified rationalities and techniques formulated by the state to govern the reproduction of lineage landscapes; however, it is not sensitive to how local people seek to question or contest particular governance formations and how the governance of lineage landscapes is shaped by other social actors and non-human agents.<sup>31</sup> To respond to this critique, I draw further intellectual nutrition from ANT (or “sociology of translation”) to appreciate the intricate interactions between multiple actors involved in the (re)production of lineage landscapes. Ontologically, ANT understands social relations as a network of various human actors, non-human actants, materials and discourses, etc. It emphasizes the heterogeneity, dynamism and uncertainty of the network. The agency of an actor is not an inherent property,<sup>32</sup> but becomes effective when it enrolls or assembles other (non-)human actors into the network based on a particular scheme. For ANT scholars, power is an “effect of an action upon other actions,” which shares common ground with the governmentality perspective on power.<sup>33</sup>

Lying at the centre of ANT is the notion of translation, which conceptualizes interactions among multiple actors in a heterogeneous network. Translation is a process of continuous appropriation, displacement, negotiation and

26 Jing 1996; Yang 2004; Chen 2016.

27 Dean, Mitchell 1999.

28 Jeffreys and Sigley 2009; Herbert-Cheshire 2003.

29 Banister 2007, 463.

30 Jeffreys and Sigley 2009.

31 Herbert-Cheshire 2003.

32 Ibid.

33 Ibid., 458; Wang 2013.

transformation.<sup>34</sup> To order the network, certain rules, knowledge and discourses are often formulated by “macro” actors – in this study, these are the state agents in the villages, townships, county-level and municipality-level cities. These discourses, orders and norms, although pre-scripted by the state, are never absolute but are instead open for negotiation. “Micro” actors such as the local clans in this study have the capacity to appropriate, add to, modify, deflect or betray orders according to their own interests.<sup>35</sup> Indeed, in certain conditions, “micro” actors can completely displace the state order to serve their own interests. In other circumstances, they may compromise, and in the process of doing so, they still can modify the command into a new form. In this sense, the process of translation is not simply resisting or accepting a command. Instead, it involves actors “adapting their own practices and discourses, actively paralleling and even displacing those of political authorities.”<sup>36</sup> The multiple interactions between “micro” and “macro” actors during the translation are congruent with the recent theorization of the religion–state relationship “involving recognition and collaboration and, at the same time, negotiation and even overt contestation.”<sup>37</sup>

The translation model also informs us that the lineage–state interaction is constitutive of and mediated by various human and non-human actors in a heterogeneous network. As is shown below, the construction of lineage landscapes is not only entangled with the state and lineage groups but also involves other-surname villagers, local experts and non-human entities such as genealogies. Governmental strategies of power over lineage landscapes influence the way local lineages enrol human and non-human actors into the network. Also, the manner in which the state exercises its power is contingent on the responses and power of various non-state actors assembled in the network. Similarly, the ways local lineages appropriate, challenge and transform the state’s will are shaped by interactions among heterogeneous actors. With the entanglement of multiple actors, the translation becomes a “far more open-ended process of contestation and engagement.”<sup>38</sup> Along with the precarious process of translation, lineage landscapes are also constantly being constructed and reconstructed. I contend that all entities, including different state agents, clan members, local experts, other-surname villagers, ancestors, tombstones and genealogies, contribute to redefining the meanings and forms of lineage landscapes in contemporary China.

## The Lineage Structure and Development in Xincheng Town

Xincheng Town is a peri-urban region located in the eastern coastal area of Zhejiang province in China. Specifically, this region is under the administration

34 Latour 1986; Callon 1986; Herbert-Cheshire 2003.

35 Latour 1986.

36 O’Malley 1996, 316.

37 Qian and Kong 2018, 798. See also Williams, Cloke and Thomas 2012.

38 O’Malley 1996, 312.

of Rui'an 瑞安, a county-level city in Wenzhou municipality. It covers a land area of 20.51 square kilometres and comprises 28 villages and seven residential communities. In 2014, it had a population of 77,999 residents, 81.1 per cent of whom held agricultural *hukou*. As a primary birthplace of the rural private economy in Wenzhou, Xincheng has experienced dramatic economic growth over the past four decades.<sup>39</sup> In 2014, the average annual income for local villagers in Xincheng was 25,188 yuan, which was much higher than that for villagers elsewhere in China.<sup>40</sup>

Xincheng is also characterized by its rich and time-honoured lineage culture. The historical development of most lineages in China's south-east coastal areas began in the Yuan and Ming dynasties.<sup>41</sup> It was also during this period that lineages in Xincheng and other parts of Wenzhou started to emerge. They flourished from the mid-Ming to Qing periods, with the establishment of ancestral temples and tombs as markers of lineage status and also as ritual spaces where members worshiped their ancestors. Under the Maoist regime, the lineage culture in Xincheng, as in other regions of China, suffered many attacks. In all, 28 per cent of Xincheng's ancestral temples were destroyed during the Cultural Revolution and 58 per cent were converted into official buildings, common canteens, warehouses and primary schools.<sup>42</sup> Although the power of the clans was substantially diminished during the Maoist era, the lineage-based social structure in Xincheng did not change very much.

Despite the merging and re-configuration of natural villages during the post-socialist reform, lineages have remained as important social groups in rural Xincheng. Currently, Xincheng has five single-lineage villages, which mainly accommodate villagers coming from the same lineage and sharing the same surname. The rest of the 23 villages in the town are multi-lineage ones, with their residents from two or more lineages. In most circumstances, the settlement of a lineage is not confined to the administrative boundary of a village but rather is spread across several villages. For example, the Ye clan in Xincheng is a multi-village lineage, with the majority of their members distributed across the three neighbouring villages of Heping, Xinghuo and Sitan. Only a small number of members reside in other villages of the township or beyond.

Most lineage organizations in Xincheng consist of several segments (*fang* 房), which comprise the descendants of the sons of their original ancestor. Each segment enshrines the spirit tablets of its own ancestors in a shared ancestral temple. These segments share the ownership of ancestral halls as well as the responsibility of organizing ancestor worship and other collective activities. Although there are conflicts between different segments that often arise from property issues, in the

39 Chen 2017.

40 The exchange rate for yuan to US\$ is currently about 0.14.

41 Zheng 2001.

42 Zhu and Chen 2009.



case of extra-lineage conflicts, these segments unite with one another to fight for their collective interests. Lineage groups, especially those in the same village, often compete with one another for local social status, reputation and benefits. Rarely, though, does the competition lead to violence or physical conflicts owing to the many inter-lineage marriages. According to local historical records, only one big lineage fight ever occurred in Xincheng – during a dragon boat race about 120 years ago.

The landholding is a significant feature of contemporary lineage development in Xincheng and characterized by the widespread construction of lineage buildings. In the past, lineage landholdings included not only ancestral halls but also ritual land. However, the ritual land was confiscated and redistributed to poor peasants during the land reform movement in the 1950s and the Cultural Revolution.<sup>43</sup> Since the post-socialist reform, although many lineages in Wenzhou have been able to reclaim ancestral halls that had been turned into official government buildings in the Maoist era, they were not able to reclaim large stretches of ritual land.<sup>44</sup> Thus, the reconstruction of lineage buildings is the only way of expanding lineage property today. By 2014, having benefited from the local economic boom, local people in Xincheng had built 44 ancestral temples, with each village having at least one temple. Three lineages erected new tombs for their founding ancestors; four others built additional “modern” landscapes such as historical memorials and gymnasiums. This reconstruction of lineage landscapes has also been accompanied by the revival of ritual performances and genealogy compilation.

For local villagers, the construction of lineage buildings is a crucial means to carry forward traditional values, forge a collective identity and enhance local social status. To create lineage spaces is to show filial piety to ancestors. Based on Confucian tenets, most local people often worship ancestors in temples and tombs by accommodating ancestral portraits and spirit vessels, offering paper money, lighting incense and candles, and kneeling in front of shrines to communicate with ancestral spirits.<sup>45</sup> Material buildings also have spiritual significance in that they reinforce a collective identity among members. As one elite pointed out, “if there were no ancestral temples, the lineage would lose a spiritual carrier and become a pile of sand.”<sup>46</sup> In addition, the existence of physical buildings symbolizes lineage power. As Maurice Freedman contended, landholdings demonstrate the economic condition of lineages as well as their social status and influence in localities.<sup>47</sup> Given such socio-cultural significance, lineages in Xincheng are motivated to engage in the (re)construction of material buildings.

43 Also see Chan, Madsen and Unger 2009.

44 Yang 2004.

45 Chen 2017.

46 Interview with a Chen clan member, Dongsi, March 2014.

47 Freedman 1958.

## Governing the Construction of Lineage Landscapes: Discursive and Practical Technologies

In response to the rapid growth of the market economy, the post-Maoist state has increasingly shifted from coercive controls towards indirect and “soft” mechanisms to regulate the conduct of the human population.<sup>48</sup> Since the early 1980s, the government has incorporated folk culture and religion into the tasks of nation-building, patriotic education and maintaining social stability.<sup>49</sup> As well as being turned into a positive force for economic development, social harmony and spiritual civilization,<sup>50</sup> folk culture and religion have provided a channel through which to change the mentality and conduct of rural people and to forge their modern subjectivities. This cultural governance has historical roots and can be traced back to the Ming and Qing periods.<sup>51</sup> For instance, rituals of ancestor worship were officially promoted at that time and served as intermediaries to maintain social order and govern the local population.<sup>52</sup>

In terms of the revived lineage cultures, the post-Maoist government recognized certain “positive” aspects of traditional culture and history, such as *xiao* (filial piety) and root culture. *Xiao* emphasizes children’s obligation to their parents and encourages family-based care of the elderly. As such, it can ease the pressure on the state to provide welfare to rural elders. Seen as another key component of traditional culture, root culture is linked to state strategies to reinforce connections between overseas Chinese/rural emigrants and their home villages. Such ancestral ties encourage contributions from these populations towards rural development.<sup>53</sup> In this way, traditional lineage culture can be integrated into the state agendas of rural social welfare and economic development as well as the preservation of “positive” traditional cultures.

By acknowledging the laudable qualities inherent in lineage cultures, the government contrives to “guide” lineage development in a “modern” and “civilized” way rather than rely on coercive measures of control.<sup>54</sup> Towards this end, the discursive construction of the “problems” of traditional lineage landscapes is a crucial governmental technology. The state views some of the traditional values embedded in lineage landscapes as a challenge to its civilizing agenda.<sup>55</sup> For instance, the customary practice of building “chair” tombs by Wenzhou people is framed as “backward” or “anti-ecological” in dominant official discourses. In a similar vein, although ancestor worship is allowed in ancestral temples and tombs as it is linked to the Confucian value of *xiao*, the government still views ancestral rituals as out of step with its official atheist ideology.

48 Jeffreys and Sigley 2009.

49 Cooke 2009; Chen 2016.

50 Thøgersen 2000; Cooke 2009.

51 Faure 2007; Pieke 2003.

52 Faure 2007.

53 Kuah-Pearce 2011.

54 Chen 2016.

55 Thøgersen 2000.

The state also contends that the competition between rural lineages to construct ever larger buildings has led to widespread land grabs. During the past four decades, clans have competed with one another for rural land in order to build ancestral temples and other lineage properties.<sup>56</sup> There have been cases where influential groups have challenged local authorities and erected temples and other clan buildings without official permission. For instance, the Cai clan, the largest clan in Xianjia 仙甲 village, has built three new ancestral temples in the last 40 years, two of which had no official permission. Illegal land grabs and construction have become so common that the local government has had to seriously consider the impact on land scarcity and rural development. An official pointed out:

In the near future, we are going to implement a large-scale reconstruction of the countryside. Some ancestral temples might be dismantled and used for other purposes. Because of this, clans are likely to ask a ridiculous price for compensation. This will put us in a difficult position during the negotiation and hinder future development.<sup>57</sup>

Local officials further consider traditional lineage landscapes as a threat to rural safety and social order. The official discourses highlight that religious worship activities can present fire hazards. As one official complained, “every Qingming Festival, I have to send many security guards to prevent fire from breaking out in the mountains and ancestral temples. This is a great burden imposed on us.” Some officials also mentioned that they received numerous complaints from rural residents living close to ancestral temples. In Wenzhou, local residents vigorously oppose the construction of ancestral temples in their vicinity because they fear that temple buildings will create bad *fengshui* 风水 for their houses.<sup>58</sup>

These “problematic” understandings are created by the state rationalities of imposing regulations on traditional lineage spaces. In practice, the Wenzhou government permits clans to rebuild or repair ancestral temples. However, this has to be done within the bounds of the original site and height; reconstruction on new sites or expansion plans are prohibited. Since the early 2000s, the government has encouraged clans to exhume their famous ancestors and commemorate them with historical memorials rather than ancestral temples. In the state’s view, memorials are an important form of cultural construction in the countryside as they can publicize ancestors’ good deeds and thoughts and influence the behaviour of local people.

In comparison with the regulations on temple construction, the Wenzhou government’s restrictions on tomb construction have been more strongly enforced. The building of new tombs has been forbidden since a policy of cremation was implemented in 1959.<sup>59</sup> In the 1980s and 1990s, the Wenzhou government

56 Chen 2016.

57 Interview with a county-level official, Ruian, October 2014.

58 According to local beliefs, living close to ancestral temples and Buddhist and Taoist temples might cause health and safety problems for residents, especially children. Because of such traditional beliefs, residential houses close to temples are much cheaper than houses elsewhere.

59 Yang 2004.

launched a series of campaigns, under the broad rhetoric of “removing habits and changing customs” (*yifeng yisu* 移风易俗), to dismantle “chair” tombs. Such efforts came up against strong resistance from local residents and so, in recent years, the state has shifted towards a “soft” mode of governance by launching a programme to modify “chair” tombs into ecological tombs. In the context of land scarcity, mountains are regarded as important leisure spaces for local people. Thus, the Wenzhou government has incorporated the preservation of green mountains into its official agenda to construct a “beautiful” and “ecological” countryside. Moreover, tomb modification is deemed to be more acceptable by local people than total tomb demolition since demolition violates local cultural customs.

Those practices and programmes, operating as governmental technologies, concretize the state’s discursive construction of the “problems” of lineage buildings and shape the conduct of rural people more directly. Nevertheless, in the face of multiple state rationalities and governmental technologies, rural people in Xincheng are not passive receivers. Rather, they develop agency in mobilizing and transforming these technologies to serve their own ends. The following sections draw on the experiences of the Ye clan as it built a memorial and the Lin clan as it constructed a tomb in order to explore how governance over lineage landscapes is translated through negotiation between state agents and local lineages as well as the entanglement of other (non)human actors.

### **Legitimizing Landscape Projects: The Mobilization of State Discourses and Practices and the Enrolment of Heterogeneous Actors**

A few lineages in Xincheng have successfully created additional landscapes in recent years in spite of the state’s governance technologies to restrict such constructions. Through their long-term lived experiences of local governance, local people do not seek to oppose the existing discourses or structures of government. Instead, they realize that their capacity for success is largely dependent on the ways they legitimize landscape projects and obtain state support. This produces one form of translation: “playing along with” or mobilizing state discourses and practices.

An effective form of mobilization is to position landscape programmes in line with the state’s interests. The Ye clan, for example, initiated a bottom-up construction of a memorial for Yeshe 叶适.<sup>60</sup> Under the guidance of a local expert, the Ye clan discovered that Yeshe was an ancestor.<sup>61</sup> The expert encouraged the clan to construct a memorial hall to commemorate its famous ancestor, a suggestion supported by the elites who wished to construct an additional site both to boost their local status and accommodate clan activities. Yet, in their application

60 Yeshe (1150–1223) was the most renowned figure of the Yongjia School, a neo-Confucian school in the Song Dynasty. His philosophy emphasizes pragmatic learning and the importance of business and has had a profound influence on the development of the private economy in Wenzhou.

61 The local expert is a retired official in Dong Tian Community and passed on this information to the Ye clan. He is very interested in and has a great knowledge of the local culture and history of Wenzhou.

report, the Ye clan only indicated that their project would promote Yeshe's thought, cultivate students' sense of patriotism and boost local cultural construction. In addition, the clan prepared one crucial supporting document, a recommendation letter from a local renowned professor who specializes in the Yongjia School 永嘉学派. By "playing along" with state discourses and practices and engaging with local experts, the Ye clan succeeded in gaining the permission of state agents at the village, township and city levels to construct the memorial.

During the process of translation, local lineages are adept at co-opting non-human entities into their negotiations with state agents. To give legitimacy to their tomb construction plans, the Lin clan elites claimed that the original tomb was demolished in the late 1990s by the government to make way for a local middle school. This discursive strategy gave them the justification to ask for permission. However, Peng, the director of the civil affairs department in Xincheng who was in charge of tomb construction and conversion, decisively told them that it was impossible to build a new tomb. The Lin clan elites did not back down in the face of this rejection but instead intensified their efforts to persuade Peng by providing more solid evidence. They managed to find an ancient tombstone in the ancestral temple which recorded the history, site and size of their founding ancestor's tomb. This stone demonstrated not only the existence of the original tomb but also the cultural origins of the Lin clan. As one Lin elite recalled, Peng hesitated for a while before saying, "it [the tombstone] is a historical and cultural relic, a great treasure left by your ancestors. You should look after it ... Yet, it is important to remember that you should keep your tomb small and also as simple as possible."<sup>62</sup> The existence of an actual tombstone was the tool that the Lin clan used to gain official permission.

Involving non-human actants can also enable local lineages to meet unavoidable challenges from their competitors. For reasons of convenience and commercial potential, the Ye clan wanted to build its memorial overlooking the River Zhiluo 直洛河, adjacent to a busy high street. Although the site was approved by rural cadres – most of whom were members of the Ye clan – other lineages in the Zhiluo region 直洛地区 registered serious objections and insisted that the river was owned by all villagers and not just the Ye clan.<sup>63</sup> Together, the other lineages lodged an appeal against the memorial project with the township government. In response, the township government asked the Ye clan to cease construction. This interruption worried many Ye clan members and one elite member asked the clan committee to search for genealogical proof of who owned the River Zhiluo. The committee found some historical records which made clear that the Ye clan had ownership of the Ye Tingda 叶廷大, an early name for the River Zhiluo. Using this information, the Ye clan was able to gain

62 Interview with a Lin clan elite A, Dong'er, March 2014.

63 Zhiluo region was an administrative unit before the founding of the People's Republic of China. Since 1949, this region has been divided into three separate villages: Heping, Xinghuo and Sitan. Yet, up to now, local villagers still refer to the three villages as a whole as "Zhiluo region."

official permission to continue the project and the opposing lineages had to withdraw their appeal. Although the writing of genealogies may be selective, it plays a powerful role in providing charters for the actions of local lineages as well as legitimizes the existing social structure in local society (i.e. the dominant power of the Ye clan).<sup>64</sup>

The above two cases offer insights into how local lineages “play along” with and translate governmental discourses and practices. In doing so, these lineages legitimize their landscape projects, playing out what Adam Chau terms “the politics of legitimation.”<sup>65</sup> Thus, “playing along” is not so much about the clans’ unmitigated acceptance of the state’s will but more about mobilizing it towards their ends. It is also apparent that bringing on board various (non-)human actors, including local experts, tombstones and genealogies, increases the capacity of lineage groups to overcome challenges and obtain state support during the translation process.

### **Transforming Lineage Landscapes: Displacement, “Compliance” and Negotiation**

The notion of translation emphasizes displacement and transformation during the interaction among diverse actors.<sup>66</sup> In the context of Xincheng, clan members do not just “play along with” the state discourses and practices; they also have the capacity to displace the state’s will with the production of their own visions for the landscapes. After obtaining state permission for its project, the Lin clan grew bold and deliberately expanded the scale of its tomb beyond the original plan. Going against the government guidelines for tomb modification, it constructed a grand “chair” tomb of over a 100 square metres, with white marble balls atop of the two back arms. Many clan members believed that this traditional-style tomb would properly show off their lineage wealth as well as enhance their reputation. Similarly, the Ye clan displaced the state’s will by using its memorial as a traditional ancestral temple. The memorial building housed an ancestral shrine with a portrait of Yeshi, a candlestick holder and an incense burner. Upon the memorial building’s completion, many members came to worship Yeshi by offering incense and candles. These traditional ways of commemorating ancestors challenged the state-approved use of modern memorials. Yet, this action cannot be seen as resistance as the Ye clan did not seek to subvert the state power; rather, it attempted to negotiate state objectives with its own vision for the landscape according to local customs and traditions.<sup>67</sup>

The government was inconsistent in its approach towards practices of displacement enacted by local lineages. It considered the Ye clan’s displacement actions

64 Pieke 2003.

65 Chau 2005.

66 Callon 1986.

67 See Herbert-Cheshire 2003.

to be unacceptable since they greatly downplayed the “modern” and “civilized” meanings of a historical memorial. The clan was urged by the township government to erect a bronze statue of Yeshe instead of an ancestral shrine. The curator of the state-run Rui’an Museum warned the clan, “if you insist on housing the ancestral shrine inside the memorial, we will neither help you with the memorial’s interior display, publicity or operation nor offer you any future support.”<sup>68</sup> The strong force of opposition forced the Ye clan to remove the ancestral shrine and instead the memorial was modified to feature a statue, paintings and pictures, and used for exhibitions of Yeshe’s biography, thought and achievements.

In contrast, local officials tolerated the Lin clan’s displacement practices from the outset. This was owing to the power of ancestral beliefs. When the director, Peng, came to check on the project with other local officials, he turned a blind eye to the Lin clan’s “chair” tomb and only reprimanded the clan for building such a large tomb. Many local officials are fearful of disturbing ancestral souls (*hunpo* 魂魄). As Peng pointed out, “we cannot be so cruel to destroy a newly constructed tomb. We would feel guilty doing this.”<sup>69</sup> Many Chinese people believe that their ancestors will use supernatural powers to punish them if they do not show filial piety or if they harm ancestral souls by destroying their “residence” (i.e. tombs).<sup>70</sup> Thus, local officials overlooked the Lin clan’s “chair” tomb. This demonstrates the human side of state agents.<sup>71</sup> It also refutes the prevailing view of the Chinese state as a homogeneous and monolithic apparatus.<sup>72</sup>

It is worth noting that state attitudes towards local displacement are not fixed but shift with changing circumstances. Half a year after it had built its “chair” tomb, the Lin clan was informed that it had to transform the tomb into an ecological one. The tomb was so grand that it had attracted the attention of a high-level official in Rui’an, who had spotted the vast expanse of white marble on the side of the mountain while driving down the 104 national highway one day. This official demanded that the tomb be modified. The county-level government attention and intervention forced the township officials to issue a modification order. As Peng explained to the clan:

Tomb modification is now a mainstream trend in Wenzhou. If you agree with the modification, the township government will make your tomb an exemplar and pay all reconstruction fees. If you do not agree with that, the tomb will certainly be dismantled sooner or later since it has been targeted by the Rui’an government.<sup>73</sup>

The Lin clan elites realized that it was impossible to contest or disobey the government order. While they were worried about disturbing the ancestral souls by modifying the tomb, they were more afraid of the threat of forced demolition. As such, they agreed to make changes to their tomb to suit the ecological criteria.

68 Interview with a museum curator, Rui’an, October 2014.

69 Interview with the director of the civil affairs department, Xincheng, October 2014.

70 Chao 1983.

71 Jones 2012.

72 Feuchtwang 2000; Yang 2004; Jing 1996.

73 Interview with a Lin clan elite A, March 2014.

As the cases of Lin and Ye clans reveal, the displacement behaviour enacted by lineage groups may shift to a form of compliance when the government intensifies its regulation. Yet, this type of conduct is not a simple acceptance of the state's will. Rather, it is still a form of translation since lineage groups gain certain advantages by complying. By going ahead with the modification, the Lin clan's tomb was officially registered and clan members would not suffer from any anxiety about future demolition. Also, the Ye clan was offered an annual subsidy of 15,000 yuan towards the running costs of its memorial building. The memorial also received official publicity and various state-sanctioned awards (for example, the Advanced Unit of Spiritual Civilization Construction Award), which enhanced the Ye's regional reputation and local influence.

Moreover, by compromising, rural people retain the capacity to negotiate with the state and transform their landscapes to suit their own interests. This is evident from the Lin clan's tomb pavilion proposal. To make up for the modified tomb's loss of grandeur, the Lin clan leader proposed to use the surplus stones removed during the modifications to build a pavilion near the tomb. The township government agreed as it viewed this project as enhancing the facilities on the mountain. Although the clan members preferred the previous tomb's structure and style, they expressed their satisfaction with the modified tomb and accompanying pavilion. As one member shared, "now, surrounded by trees and especially adorned with an exquisite pavilion, the atmosphere of the whole tomb area becomes lively and animated."<sup>74</sup>

The above translation is characterized by the multifaceted and evolving processes of displacement, compromise and negotiation between the clans and the state. Local state agents exercise their power with multiple and fluid modalities. Their ways of governing lineage landscapes depend on the power of ancestral beliefs and the pressures exerted by the higher-level government as well as specific forms of local displacement. In addition, the shift from local displacement behaviour to compliance or negotiation also reveals the multiple and contingent responses of lineage groups when encountering governmental practices.

## Conclusion

Drawing on a case study of the (re)construction of lineage landscapes in rural Wenzhou, this paper has examined the ways in which the state governs the construction of lineage landscapes and how lineage groups translate governmental technologies in a heterogeneous network of diversified (non)human actors. The paper has adopted a combined governmentality/ANT theoretical approach. As indicated above, it uses ANT to complement the governmentality perspective's neglect of how local people engage with the state discourses and practices.<sup>75</sup> Yet, it is worth mentioning that the ANT has some drawbacks in understanding

<sup>74</sup> Interview with a Lin clan member, March 2014.

<sup>75</sup> Herbert-Cheshire 2003.



the complex network of landscape (re)production. One major limitation directs to the inclusion of (non-)human actors into the network. As Nick Lee and Steve Brown point out, there are thousands of entities that influence the network and the inclusion of which actors for analysis is “solely the result of human activity.”<sup>76</sup> The “demiurgic” character of ANT, for one thing, raises concerns about non-enrolled actors and their potential power to disrupt the outcome of the network. For another, it leads us to question the role of non-human actors. Although the ANT emphasizes the agency of non-human agents, they do not have freedom of action.<sup>77</sup> Indeed, lineage members have decisive roles in enrolling certain non-human actants such as lineage genealogies as well as in ascribing certain characteristics to them.

Despite the above limited explanatory analysis offered by ANT, this paper has advanced our understanding of the cultural politics of lineage landscapes in the following ways. First, it extends the existing discussion of the cultural politics of lineage landscapes beyond the lineage–state interaction to include a broader network of diversified, heterogeneous actors. As shown, different administrative levels of state agents, local experts, clan members and elites, other-surname villagers, ancestors, tombstones and genealogies are all involved and play a role in landscape production. The ways in which local state agents exercise their power are largely contingent on the interaction with higher-level governments, local experts, lineage groups and their competitors and, at the same time, are shaped by the power of ancestors and material entities (for example, tombstones and genealogies). Similarly, lineage responses are also contingent on the extent to which the state strengthens its regulation, the challenges received from other-surname villagers, and the clan’s capacity to enrol other (non-)human actors to support and legitimize its projects. Thus, I argue that the theorization of the cultural politics of lineage landscapes should be situated in a heterogeneous network of diverse social actors and non-human actants.

This paper also contributes to the understanding of the multiple, differentiated, human and fluid modalities in the state’s enactment of governmental strategies of power. The state has developed multi-fold governmental rationalities and adopted diverse discursive and practical techniques to direct the ways local lineages construct their landscapes. Yet, on the ground, different levels of state agents often have different attitudes towards implementing governmental practices because of their distinct obligations and objectives. In the case of the Lin clan’s tomb, township officials showed a human side by turning a blind eye to the clan’s deliberate expansion of its original construction plan, whereas county-level state agents imposed strict regulations. Compared with higher-level government officials, grassroots state agents have close linkages to rural society and are inclined to exercise power in a flexible way, which sometimes reduces the effect of state-led cultural governance. However, this does not deny the fact that different

<sup>76</sup> Lee and Brown 1994, 774; Wang 2013.

<sup>77</sup> Woods 1997.

state agents in the administrative hierarchy still maintain effective coordination, as was demonstrated in the Ye clan case. The two cases also emphasize the power of ancestors and material entities in shaping the exercise of state power. Overall, the local government does not operate as a unitary and monolithic entity but instead implements governing techniques in complex, differentiated and unstable ways.

Moreover, this paper foregrounds our understanding of the cultural politics of lineage landscapes as a process of translating governmental technologies characterized by continuous mobilization, displacement and negotiation that take place in a heterogeneous network. The state's multiple and changing modes of governance provide space for local lineages to appropriate, challenge and negotiate with the state ideologies and practices. By co-opting local experts and officially recognized non-human entities such as genealogies into the network of landscape production, local lineages show their capacity to legitimize their landscape projects and deal with challenges from their competitors. They even displace the state's will on the ground, as is evident in the cases of the Lin and Ye clans. In awe of ancestors, local state agents sometimes overlook such challenges; however, they have to enforce regulations when local transgressions of government rules cross a threshold, or when pressured by higher-level governments. In such situations, lineage members sometimes “compromise” by actively negotiating with the state. By being sensitive to different actors and their dynamic interactions, we gain a better understanding that local people's responses constitute and co-evolve with, rather than simply resist or submit to, the state discourses and practices. This echoes the recent theorization of the state–religion relationship during the reproduction of religious landscapes.<sup>78</sup>

Last but not least, the combined governmentality/translation approach is not only applicable to the rural Wenzhou context; it can also be adopted to map out the complex cultural politics of lineage landscapes in many other parts of rural south-east China where lineage-based cultures and social structures are prominent. Since the post-socialist reform, south-east China has undergone a rapid process of rural commercialization and industrialization, which has given rise to the development of a more democratic climate in local society.<sup>79</sup> In such a context, for one thing, local governments increasingly adopt governing technologies to direct lineage development rather than use coercive or suppressive tactics.<sup>80</sup> For another, rural people have developed their capacity to translate the state discourses and practices as well as to draw on other human and non-human actants to benefit their interests. For instance, many rural lineages in south-east China have compiled genealogies over the past decades.<sup>81</sup> These are valued by the government and can be mobilized to power up clan negotiations with the state.

78 Chau 2006; Qian and Kong 2018; Williams, Cloke and Thomas 2012.

79 Zhang 2008; Oakes 2012.

80 Oakes 2012; Thøgersen 2000.

81 Tsai 2007.

Faced with intervention from the state and other parties, local lineages also understand the futility of holding on to traditional landscape styles. Instead, they re-model and hybridize traditional ancestral temples and rituals with the state-advocated forms and meanings, as is evident in existing studies of lineage landscapes in other locations in south-east China such as Guangxi<sup>82</sup> and Fujian.<sup>83</sup> With the incorporation of state-advocated modern elements, lineage cultures can flourish and regenerate in contemporary rural China.

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## Conflicts of interest

None.

## Biographical note

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**摘要：** 本文探讨当代中国农村宗族景观的文化政治。采用“治理术”和“翻译”为理论框架，文章分析了政府如何治理宗族景观的生产并探讨了农村宗族如何翻译政府的治理策略。基于温州农村的田野调研，本文揭示了当地政府采取了各种合理化策略和治理模式来规范宗族景观的重建。另外，此研究也表明温州农村宗族具有极大的能动性，既擅长挪用政府话语和实践并且吸纳其他人类和非人类行动者以此来合法化他们的景观建设项目。在实际建设过程中，他们往往违背政府意志而生产出他们想要的诸如“椅子坟”宗族景观。基于对祖先的敬畏，基层政府官员有时候对这些移置行

82 Li 2011.

83 Yu 2001.

为睁一只眼闭一只眼，但有时候在受到上级政府干预时又对这些行为加强管制。然而当地宗族仍积极地与政府各部门进行协商。总而言之，此研究让我们认识到政府与民间社会（宗族）关系的多样性和变动性，并对如何阐释宗族景观生产中的文化政治提供了新的理论视角。

**关键词：**宗族景观；文化政治；治理术；翻译；行动者网络理论；神圣空间；乡土中国

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