Landscape, Culture, and Power in Chinese Society

EDITED BY
Wen-hsin Yeh

CHINA RESEARCH MONOGRAPH 49

CHINA RESEARCH MONOGRAPH 49

INSTITUTE OF EAST ASIAN STUDIES
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA • BERKELEY
CENTER FOR CHINESE STUDIES

Landscape, Culture, and Power in Chinese Society

EDITED BY
Wen-hsin Yeh

A publication of the Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, Berkeley. Although the Institute of East Asian Studies is responsible for the selection and acceptance of manuscripts in this series, responsibility for the opinions expressed and for the accuracy of statements rests with their authors.

Correspondence and manuscripts may be sent to:
Ms. Joanne Sandstrom, Managing Editor
Institute of East Asian Studies
University of California
Berkeley, California 94720-2318
E-mail: easia@uclink.berkeley.edu

The China Research Monograph series, whose first title appeared in 1967, is one of several publications series sponsored by the Institute of East Asian Studies in conjunction with its constituent units. The others include the Japan Research Monograph series, the Korea Research Monograph series, the Indochina Research Monograph series, and the Research Papers and Policy Studies series. A list of recent publications appears at the back of the book.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Landscape, culture, and power in Chinese society / edited by
Wen-hsin Yeh.
p. cm. — (China research monograph ; 49)
Includes bibliographical references.
ISBN 1-55729-061-x
1. China—Civilization—Case studies. 2. China—Social life and customs.
I. Yeh, Wen-hsin. III. Series: China research monographs
DS721.L345 1998
951—dc21 97-48842
CIP

Copyright © 1998 by The Regents of the University of California.
Printed in the United States of America.
All rights reserved.

Second printing, 2001

Contents

Acknowledgments vii
Introduction ix
Wen-hsin Yeh
1. When Is a Landscape like a Body? 1
Martin J. Powers
2. Southern Sung Academies and the Construction of Sacred Space 23
Linda A. Walton
3. Mapping China's World: Cultural Cartography in Late Imperial Times 52
Richard J. Smith
4. Chinese Villages as Didactic Texts 110
Ronald G. Knapp
5. Yao: The Practice of Everyday Space in Northern Rural Shaanxi 129
Xin Liu
Contributors 153

Acknowledgments

The essays collected in this volume were first presented at the symposium "Landscape, Culture, and Power in Chinese Society," which was held in March 1996 and sponsored by the Center for Chinese Studies, University of California at Berkeley. As the chair of the Center I took responsibility for the overall organization of the conference. Many individuals contributed papers on that occasion. In addition, others participated by serving as chairs and discussants and by sharing thoughts and comments during and after the event. I wish to thank James Cahill, Susan Glosser, David Johnson, David Keightley, Lydia Liu, Aihwa Ong, Steven Owen, Alan Pred, Elizabeth Perry, Paul Rabinow, Richard Vinograd, Frederic Wakeman, Jr., and Steven West for taking part in the program. I would also like to thank the conference participants, especially the large number of Berkeley graduate students and postdoctoral fellows, for contributing their thoughts and sharing their energy and enthusiasm.

The essays included in this volume involve a process of editorial review and selection. I would like to thank the contributors not just for their initial participation in the symposium, but also for making the necessary revisions to help turn this into a coherent collection.

A large measure of thanks also goes to the able staff at the Center for Chinese Studies and the Institute of East Asian Studies, and to Joanne Sandstrom, managing editor at the Institute of East Asian Studies. It is thanks to Joanne that the project is coming to fruition.

INTRODUCTION

The Spatial Culture of Neo-Confucian China

WEN-HSIN YEH

The essays collected in this volume explore spatial ordering in Chinese culture and society from the Song to the present. The contributors approach the question from a variety of perspectives that include art, history, cartography, geography, and anthropology. The essays explore a wide spectrum of issues ranging from the rise of landscape painting as a new artistic genre to the lasting traits in Chinese mapmaking of the past millennium, from the building of neo-Confucian academies and villages in southeastern coastal mountains to the engendering of domestic space in the cave dwellings of the peasantry in the upper Yellow River plateau in post-Mao years. Two questions, nonetheless, lie at the center of the volume. What does an attention to space, formal or informal, lived or represented, teach us about power relationships and the cultural dynamics that shaped Chinese society? On the other hand, how did space function as a medium for the negotiation of power and politics in the particularities of Chinese society?

Martin Powers's essay, which deals with the rise of landscape painting as a new artistic genre in the tenth century, draws attention to the discourse of landscape painting as well as to its social significance. Powers sees the rise of landscape painting in the Song as a displacement of figure painting that was well established by the Tang. This development was the expression, according to Powers, of a profound social change characterized by the political rise of the civil service examination elite at the expense of hereditary aristocracy. The new genre of painting, in other words, was the tangible product of a new way of seeing the world through the eyes of a new elite, which turned art into a medium of social contestation.

The realignment of the social and the artistic during the Tang-Song transition did not take the form, Powers suggests, of different

strategies competing with each other in the representation of landscapes in paintings. It formed, instead, the backdrop of the rise of landscape and the fall of figure painting as alternative artistic genres. The opposition between figure painting and landscape painting was accompanied, meanwhile, by a shift in artistic discourse that was less the result of a break with the past than a re-appropriation of it. Landscape discourse, Powers shows, borrowed both from the old aristocratic language of social hierarchy and aesthetic discrimination in the stylistics of figure painting and from a long tradition of literati literary theory that injected moral attributes into discrete forms, postures, and spatial positioning. The result of these borrowings and reconfigurations in Song practice was the inscription of an "agonistic framework" in landscape. Powers explains, through a close examination of a technical treatise on brushwork authored by the tenth-century painter Jing Hao, how a lone pine, when presented in a particular way in its surroundings, could be encoded by its stylistic characteristics as a defiant maverick of high moral integrity.

Because landscape was without artifice, its space thus "offers a site within which an educated but nonaristocratic individual could negotiate issues of personal worth in the absence of overt signs of rank and station" (p. 3). Furthermore, because moral claims were universal while rank and hierarchy were not, the lone pine in a landscape painting, in contrast with an embroidered robe in a figure painting, thereby became the ideal medium of a postfeudal, nonaristocratic imperial vision built upon a universalizing claim of moral integrity. Even as landscape painting had originated with painters who worked outside the imperial court in the tenth century, the genre was, according to Powers, appropriated by court painters to represent the imperial order by the mid-eleventh century.

Thinking comparatively with W. J. T. Mitchell's work on British landscape painting in mind, Powers thus concludes that much as in Europe, close connections existed between landscape painting and imperial vision in Chinese society. This connection stemmed from the imperial vision's demand for a medium that was universal in its claim. Because the Song discourse of landscape painting was embedded in an aestheticism that was moral rather than ornamental, spiritual rather than material, it lent itself to the service of this vision as the pictorial parallel to the mutual accommodation between the court and its literati officials.

Linda Walton, like Martin Powers, draws attention to the great divide that separated "medieval" from "late imperial" China during

ONE

When Is a Landscape like a Body?

MARTIN J. POWERS

Throughout most of history, and in much of the world, social prerogative has found easy expression in the human body—its stance, its raiment, its emblems—not in landscape. Within the economics of scarcity, all but universal in premodern times, it took little effort to teach a farmer that a man with gilded belt commanded more resources than he. This eloquence, seemingly too obvious for comment, was a product of artifice. Everything about a ranking person's body—from ornaments to facial muscles—testified to the workings of artifice. Hairstyle disclosed the patient labor of servants; a stylish glance reflected noble breeding; style of cloth recorded the weaver's toil. As Du Fu observed in the mid-eighth century, "The lovely white silk given as presents in this gorgeous palace/was made by a freezing peasant woman/whose husband was beaten with the riding whips of tax collectors/to make him give more."[1] For Du Fu, a noble lady's silk was scrawled all over with the marks of freezing fingers.

Reflecting on this power of body and attire, one can scarcely marvel at the variety of figurative painting traditions across Europe and Asia or the multifarious ways in which authority could be encoded in the sag of a cuff, the curve of a brow. The relatively late appearance of landscape painting as a conscious genre appears more intelligible in this light. What authorizes a cuff or brow is precisely its artifice, whereas, in landscape painting, trees and rocks appear as raw materials, unshaped by human industry. This is not to suggest that landscape lacks social coding—quite the opposite—but it is coding of a special kind. John Barrell, Ann Bermingham, Stephen

[1] Du Fu, *Du shi xiangzhu,* annot. Chou Zhao'ao, 5 vols. (Beijing, 1979), 1:269. Translation based upon Rewi Alley, trans., *Tu Fu: Selected Poems,* comp. Feng Zhi (Hong Kong, 1974), 28. Many thanks to Peter Bol and Stephen Owen for wise advice in the early stages of this essay.

TWO

Southern Sung Academies and the Construction of Sacred Space

LINDA A. WALTON

The proliferation of academies (*shu-yüan*) in Southern Sung China has traditionally been associated with the rise and spread of neo-Confucian doctrines,[1] largely through the efforts of Chu Hsi (1130–1200) and his followers, who promoted their ideas through the institution of the academy. Like temples, shrines, gardens, walled towns, and rural villages, academies were part of a built environment that imposed human cultural meaning on the natural landscape. Since the idea of nature itself, and consequently the natural landscape, is a cultural construction, even in the absence of the physical imprints of human habitation, the natural landscape has cultural meaning that can be deciphered. Any landscape contains a variety of ideological representations, so that a description of its appearance must also logically be "thickened" (in Geertzian terms) into an interpretation of its meaning.[2] If we regard culture as a text to be read and interpreted,[3] then both the natural landscape and the built environment are part of that text and, like any other text, can also be read at multiple levels of meaning.

In China, to a greater degree than in many other societies, a powerful and coherent intellectual system—geomancy (*feng-shui*)—

[1] Throughout this paper, I use the term "neo-Confucianism" in a general sense, referring to the intellectual transformations of the T'ang-Sung era that focused on redefinitions and reinterpretations of the Confucian Way. This usage includes the more specific classification of *tao-hsüeh*, but it does not exclude thinkers who were not directly associated with that movement. Such distinctions, though important in themselves, are not crucial to the argument made here.

[2] Alan R. H. Baker and Gideon Biger, eds., *Ideology and Landscape in Historical Perspective* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 4.

[3] For a now classic statement of this, see Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), chap. 1.

THREE

Mapping China's World: Cultural Cartography in Late Imperial Times

RICHARD J. SMITH

> "The Son of Heaven receives maps and registers from the Four Seas."
>
> —Ban Gu (Han dynasty)[1]

For encapsulating a worldview there is nothing quite like a world map. As with other forms of cartography, *mappaemundi*—whether medieval or modern, Asian or Western—tell us about values and attitudes, aims and aspirations, hopes and fears; but they express them on a particularly grand, indeed global, scale.[2] To the extent that such productions in any given society share affinities across space and time, they reveal significant features of that culture's self-image (and, of course, its conceptions of the "other"); and to the degree that they do not, they suggest changes, ruptures, tensions, and conflicts within the larger cultural system. With these considerations in mind, I would like to look at the evolution of Chinese maps of the world during late imperial times—from the twelfth century to the twentieth—focusing on two basic questions: How did changing conceptions of "the world" shape the contours of Chinese cartography, and how did changing (as well as enduring) cartographic practices affect Chinese conceptions of the world?[3]

---

[1] Cited by Cordell Yee in Harley and Woodward (1994, 77). I would like to acknowledge here Professor Yee's support and assistance, as well as that of my colleague in Chinese Literature at Rice University, Professor Qian Nanxiu.

[2] David Woodward's analysis of medieval *mappaemundi* in the West has important implications for an understanding of Chinese maps of the world, since both tended to blend time and space and to project "historical events on a geographic framework." See Woodward 1985, esp. 514.

[3] For an illuminating overview of Chinese perceptions of the "other," both before and after the Han dynasty, see the articles by Gu Jiegang and Tong Shuye (pre-Han) and by He Changqun (1936) (post-Han) in *Yugong* (1936, 97–120 and 121–136).

FOUR

Chinese Villages as Didactic Texts

RONALD G. KNAPP

It is a paradox that traditional Chinese society was both conspicuously diverse and strikingly integrated. Although it is possible to document differences through time and across space, there is substantial evidence of the emergence of a broad consensus concerning basic ideas, beliefs, and values that were shared by commoners and elites in spite of significant social and dialect boundaries. Elements of elite culture were formally and informally transmitted among those who were literate through written texts and an articulated set of rituals. These same elements were shared with the population at large via plays and performance, folk ballads, admonitory tracts, moralistic primers, genealogies, family instructions, woodblock prints, calendrical and life-cycle activities, domestic ritual, temple decorations, thereby promoting orthodox ideas in Chinese villages. In addition, it is now acknowledged that the iconography found within and about village buildings also had a symbolic power that elevated it beyond mere ornamentation. The representative density of images and words found above and around entryways and windows, on interior lattice door and window panels, as well as in and about altar rooms, kitchens, bedsteads, and on other furniture contributed to shaping popular mentalities (Berliner, Berliner and Handler, Chow, Ebrey, Johnson, Knapp, Li, Liu Dingkun, Liu Su, Murray, Po and Johnson, Smith, Wu, Xu, among others). This essay introduces an additional means by which the highly textualized literary culture of China's elites was communicated to illiterate villagers through the "scripting" of narrative village landscapes by local gentry.

Drafts of this paper were presented at the International Conference on Chinese Architecture, Chinese University of Hong Kong, August 1995, and the "Landscape, Culture, and Power in Chinese Society" symposium, Center for Chinese Studies, University of California, Berkeley, March 1996.

FIVE

Yao: The Practice of Everyday Space in Northern Rural Shaanxi

XIN LIU

> It is because agents never know completely what they are doing that what they do has more sense than they know.
>
> Pierre Bourdieu

Central to this essay is the problem of cultural continuity and social change in rural China. The essay is particularly concerned with the effect of the Maoist revolution on traditional cultural practices and institutions, the changes that the Maoist regime claimed to have made on the society that is now seeking a farewell to its recent past.[1] Rural China in the past few decades has gone through an unusual path of development, comprising a bizarre mixture of "traditional," "revolutionary," and "modern" features. At a particular period of the recent past, rural society experienced a distinct combination of these features as a result of the constantly shifting economic policies and political orientations of the socialist state. The recent years of economic reforms seem to have brought back a

---

An earlier version of this paper, with a quite different emphasis and theoretical orientation, was presented at the Center for Chinese Studies Annual Symposium—"Landscape, Culture, and Power in Chinese Society"—Berkeley, March 1996. I benefited from the discussions of our session and wish to thank particularly the session's discussant, Professor Allan Pred, for his critical comments. I am indebted to Professor Wen-hsin Yeh for her insightful remarks before, during, and after the symposium. Professor Alan Dundes and Professor Elizabeth Perry read a later version of this paper, and I am indebted to their helpful suggestions. Special thanks to Joanne Sandstrom for her valuable editorial help.

[1] The title of Li Zehou and Liu Zaifu's recent book (1995), *Farewell to Revolution*, represents a general sentiment, particularly among Chinese intellectuals, toward the Maoist revolution. Both of them are expatriate Chinese intellectuals now residing in the United States. Their book—subtitled "A Retrospect of Twentieth-Century China" —covers a wide range of discussions on philosophy, history, and literature and is formulated in the form of a dialogue.