

# Center and Periphery: Cultural Identity and Localism of the Southern Chinese Peasantry\*

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*The loosening of political control in rural South China after 1978 was bound to encourage the growth of pre-communist practices and customs. The basic assumption of this article is that the nature of southern Chinese peasant localism has not changed fundamentally over the past decades of communist rule. Southern Chinese peasant localism has shown a remarkable degree of persistence under communist rule; this article will therefore attempt to fill a theoretical vacuum in the study of the southern Chinese peasantry by introducing the view that peasant localism is based on a concept of cultural territory. The geocultural nexus of peasant localism is itself founded on the trinity of lineage, religion, and dialect. With the interrelations among these three cultural variables, peasant localism is viewed as the bastion of a web of peasant culture, defending local communities from the intrusion of the state.*

**Keywords:** peasant localism, South China, lineage, territorial cults, dialect consciousness

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Change and continuity have been underlying features of Chinese rural society since 1949. The 1950s witnessed rapid and revolutionary changes in the Chinese social and economic structures, and the introduction of the commune system and the collectivization of peasant households were the principal features of those changes. On the other

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hand, the rural reform of 1978 is notable for its continuity with pre-1949 social institutions and values, as it witnessed a reemergence of lineage networks, territorial cults, and dialect group consciousness in rural South China. The reform also serves as a prologue to the study of Chinese rural society in the coming decades.<sup>1</sup>

Although China has undergone drastic changes in its political and socioeconomic infrastructure since 1949, beneath the Marxist-Leninist surface, the attitudes of its people are still uniquely Chinese. While the impact of communist rule on the peasant household has been unmistakable and powerful, it has not destroyed certain generic major elements of the Chinese peasantry and social structure. In the countryside, there is a deep sense of cultural continuity and a routine that has hardly changed for generations. Life is centered around the family, the village, lineage, and the temples. These institutions dominate the cultural life in Chinese villages, thus confronting the official state ideology with a powerful ongoing cultural heritage.<sup>2</sup>

As Chinese culture resurfaced in the post-1978 era, ancestor worship and lineage activities reappeared, temples and ancestral halls were rebuilt, religious festivals were reinstated, and dialect consciousness was reinforced;<sup>3</sup> all of these were woven into the daily life of the Chinese peasantry. The decline of collective institutions previously imposed by the communist state has undermined superficial collective values and has been replaced by the revival of time-honored customs, beliefs, and ceremonial rituals. Encountering the least hostility toward cultural tradition in the history of Chinese communist rule, Chinese values, customs, and institutions appear on the verge of challenging state doctrines and power. The reemergence of lineage networks, territorial cults, and dialect group consciousness in rural South China has represented a sharp departure from patterns of power relationships during the first thirty years of communist rule, inhibiting the Party base in rural areas and destabilizing its effective control over the villages.

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<sup>1</sup>See also I Yuan, "State Dominance and Peasant Resistance in Post-1949 South China," *Issues & Studies* 31, no. 9 (September 1995): 55-89.

<sup>2</sup>For a discussion of the North China counterpart, see Myron L. Cohen, "Lineage Organization in North China," *Journal of Asian Studies* 49, no. 3 (1990): 509-34.

<sup>3</sup>On the southern Chinese dialects, see Mary S. Erbaugh, "Southern Chinese Dialects as a Medium for Reconciliation within Greater China," *Language in Society* 24, no. 1 (1995): 79-94.

The development of lineage networks has been detrimental to Party cadre power; lineage networks are fundamental in villages, as lineage group leaders have demonstrated their prowess in managing local politics through astute maneuvers. In some places, lineage power and rules have supplanted official local state power. Should conflict erupt in strife-ridden villages, the lineage leaders' strengthened status may cast them as the main arbiters. These revised cultural elements threaten further damage to the morale of local Party leadership already demoralized by decollectivization.<sup>4</sup>

The loosening of political control in rural society after 1978 was bound to encourage the growth of pre-communist practices and customs. Overall, post-1978 South China has undergone drastic changes in social and political life. The socialist changes have previously misled some observers to suggest the eventual disappearance of inherited peasant culture. Others now point to continuities with past peasant attitudes and behaviors.

Helen F. Siu represents the cultural change school when she states in her *Agents and Victims in South China*, "the revival of popular beliefs and rituals in recent years . . . claims that the Marxist state did not manage to destroy traditional culture and society. However, a closer look at what is practiced and what meanings practitioners draw from the rituals reveals intriguing political implications. . . . The state dominates the public realm of political and symbolic discourse. . . . Moreover, in communicating with their deities, the practitioners are aware of the fact that their acts are subjected to intervention by a powerful atheistic state."<sup>5</sup> Siu therefore considers popular rituals today as new interpretations under the powerful influence of the Marxist state.

On the other hand, Kenneth Dean represents the cultural continuity school when he reveals an entirely new picture of rural Fujian in his *Taoist Ritual and Popular Cults of Southeast China*.<sup>6</sup> Dean suggests that since 1978, when the Chinese authorities relaxed some

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<sup>4</sup>Robert Benewick, "Political Institutionalization at the Basic Level of Government and Below in China," in *The Chinese State in the Era of Economic Reform: The Road to Crisis*, ed. Gordon White (London: Macmillan, 1990), 244.

<sup>5</sup>Helen F. Siu, *Agents and Victims in South China* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1989 and 1992), 10-11.

<sup>6</sup>Kenneth Dean, *Taoist Ritual and Popular Cults of Southeast China* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993), 216.

of their most stringent controls on religion, villagers in isolated areas of Southeast China have maintained an underground effort to restore rituals and local cults. Dean argues that Taoist ritual provides the underlying structure for this unexpected revival of regional cults. Looking at ancient rituals in new cultural contexts reveals the success with which popular cults have manipulated dominant ideological elements to achieve a degree of local autonomy.<sup>7</sup>

### Peasant Localism as an Alternative to State Ideology<sup>8</sup>

The basic assumption of this article has been that the nature of peasant localism has not fundamentally changed during communist rule. Siu simply fails to recognize that close state scrutiny and frequent manipulation of community-based popular cults has been common practice since the imperial state; the promotion of approved deities by state authorities has been one such aspect of China's tradition.<sup>9</sup> On the contrary, state intervention in local cults in order to attain cultural uniformity represents the changing nature of the atheist state, not a changing peasant culture. Moreover, the revitalization of nonrecognized territorial cults parallels the religious diversity of local cults in pre-1949 South China, and is a manifestation of peasant localism's cultural autonomy.<sup>10</sup>

This article attempts to fill a theoretical vacuum in the study of the southern Chinese peasantry by introducing the view that southern Chinese peasant localism has been based on a concept of cultural territory.<sup>11</sup> The geocultural nexus of peasant localism is founded on the trinity of lineage, religion, and dialect. With the interrelations among these three cultural variables, peasant localism is viewed as

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 173-86.

<sup>8</sup>Andrew B. Kipnis, "Within and Against Peasantness: Backwardness and Filiality in Rural China," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 37, no. 1 (1995): 121; and Daniel Kelliher, "Chinese Communist Political Theory and the Rediscovery of the Peasantry," *Modern China* 20, no. 4 (1994): 387-415.

<sup>9</sup>See James L. Watson, "Standardizing the Gods: The Promotion of Tien Hou Along the South China Coast, 960-1960," in *Popular Culture in Late Imperial China*, ed. David Johnson et al. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), chap. 10; and Robert P. Weller, *Unities and Diversities in Chinese Religion* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1987), 9.

<sup>10</sup>Helen F. Siu, "Cultural Identity and the Politics of Difference in South China," *Daedalus* 122, no. 2 (1993): 19-44.

<sup>11</sup>On the territorial importance of the lineage, see David Faure, *The Structure of Chinese Rural Society* (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1986), 11.

the bastion of a web of peasant culture, defending local communities from the intrusion of the state.

Peasant localism is a de facto entity of peasant power, providing a social force and momentum that govern the role of southern Chinese peasants. One assumption of peasant localism rests on the cultural continuity between pre-1949 peasant society and the post-1978 one. Far from falling apart, it continues to provide crucial resources and positioning for southern peasants in a rapidly changing society. Of the attributes most propitious for the formation and maintenance of the revived peasant localism, three stand out.<sup>12</sup> The first involves peasant autonomy, which entails developing social organizations and procedures that are independent of the state. The second is the coherence of functional boundaries between social groupings and procedures for resolving disputes. Third, southern peasants are flexible, displaying a high capacity to change with the environment. All of these fundamental attributes of peasant localism work against the effective implementation of official sanctions. The objectives of state policy frequently conflict with peasants' goals; however, decollectivization has made it more susceptible to peasant initiatives, leading to unintended consequences. Orthodox doctrines such as class conflict, anti-imperial patriotism, leveling, and collectivity have given way as state control of local society and administrative sanctions against lineage feuds and territorial cults run headlong into the perceived self-interest of southern peasants whose territorial identities have been strengthened. The drive by southern peasants to revitalize lineage has led them to expand lineage networks from an intravillage to an intercounty scope, and their worship of territorial cults and dialect group consciousness directly challenge state ideology.

Thus, this article rejects assumptions of the cultural change school, specifies "concealed continuity" through references to peasant culture, and stresses the maneuverability of cultural forms vis-à-vis state power. This article also will reiterate the theme of culture and politics by examining the relationship of peasant culture to political preferences, beliefs, and collective actions. The article will then consider three major domains of peasant localism that suggest specific mechanisms through which peasant culture directly informs choices

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<sup>12</sup>See Vivienne Shue, *The Reach of the State: Sketches of the Chinese Body Politic* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1988), chap. 2.

through preferences. Finally, this article will examine the empirical relevance of the theory in local-context case studies.

This article focuses on: (1) the changing framework of peasant localism, (2) lineage as a cultural nexus of peasant localism, (3) territorial cults and dialect group consciousness as a cultural nexus of peasant localism, and (4) political dynamics of peasant localism, i.e., state vs. peasant power.

### **The Changing Framework of Peasant Localism: Reemergence of Lineage Village**

Maurice Freedman in his classic work *Lineage Organization in Southeastern China* points out that in Fujian and Guangdong provinces, lineage and village boundaries tend to overlap.<sup>13</sup> This coincidence of lineage and local community is a result of historical development and displays a system of a pronounced wide-ranging localized lineage. Elsewhere in China, there have been no frequent incidences of a large-scale single-lineage community; with this regional particularity in mind, the perpetuation of a wide-scale lineage structure in post-1978 South China simply demonstrates cultural continuity.

Between 1958 and 1977, there was a three-tier commune system. Peasants were administered as brigades and production teams. Both commune and brigade levels supervised subordinated levels: the commune supervised the brigades and the brigade supervised teams. The production team was a segment of a large village or a single tiny hamlet: villages were divided into more or less equal residential districts and the residents of each demarcated area were assigned to one production team.<sup>14</sup> Team boundaries were deliberately drawn to avoid including only members of a single lineage segment within the same team. Each of the old lineage segments was scattered over more than one team, and each team contained more than one lineage segment. Not only were lineage groups deliberately deconstructed as social entities, but close patrilineal relatives were assigned to different teams.<sup>15</sup> The subsequent dismantling of communes and pro-

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<sup>13</sup> Maurice Freedman, *Lineage Organization in Southeastern China* (London: The Athlone Press, 1958), 1.

<sup>14</sup> Sulamith Heins Potter and Jack M. Potter, *China's Peasants: The Anthropology of a Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 66.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 97.

duction teams instantly revitalized the natural bonds of lineage in this region, resulting in a resurgent social network, making it increasingly difficult for the state to crack the shell of village organization and leadership.

The following tables explain the reemergence of lineage villages at the local levels. Table 1 displays the population distribution of twenty-three selected major lineages in all sixteen townships of Pingyuan county, Guangdong. Table 1 also displays lineage population in specific townships and is arranged from left to right in declining order of hierarchy. Vertical rows list all sixteen townships in Pingyuan county, and in horizontal rows, the twenty-three lineages are arranged in the same order. The table indicates a clear trend toward an oligarchical pattern of lineage distribution in the population. Overall, each lineage is spread unevenly across the sixteen townships.

Table 2 exhibits the lineage distribution of ten major lineages in Pingyuan county, arranging lineage population from top down in declining order of hierarchy. This pattern of distribution suggests that each lineage spreads over many villages and tends to concentrate within certain villages.

As indicated earlier, lineage and village boundaries tend to overlap in Fujian and Guangdong provinces, and many villages consist of single lineages. The overlapping of lineage and village also means villages are inhabited completely or predominantly by people of a single surname. Yet, we must also notice that a particular localized lineage is not the only one which bears its surname, according to the Chinese system of surnames, which consists of an oligarchical pattern.<sup>16</sup> This uneven distribution by surname, as shown in table 3, suggests a large number of localized lineages, with all people bearing one surname considered to be descendants of a common ancestor in the male line. On the basis of certain traditional alliances between lineage branches, the possession of a common surname in certain circumstances leads to formal cooperation and solidarity, which appears to have been reflected in the customary practice of mutual help (see tables 4 and 5).

In sum, institutional and structural changes in post-1978 South China have revitalized the importance of natural villages.<sup>17</sup> In doing

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<sup>16</sup>Freedman, *Lineage Organization*, 4.

<sup>17</sup>On the importance of natural villages in post-1978 rural China, see Liu Zhengchuan, *Xiarzicun zuzhi tizhi gaige* (Reforming the organization of township and village) (Beijing: Zhongguo linye chubanshe, 1987), 32-38.

Table 1  
Lineage Distribution in Pingyuan, Guangdong Province

Surname Township	Lin	Liu	Xie	Zhang	Chen	Yao	Ling	Wang	Li	Huang	Han
Renju	426	685	952	656	2,073			850	351	537	93
Chagan			7,041						26	78	
Huangshe		361		603	368						800
Bachi	154	336	157	1,890	139		24	62	58	44	5,873
Hetou	970	2,003		3,992	1,659	163	87	329	453	509	146
Zhongxing	278	261	63	3,679	653	492	56	26	38	179	49
Shangju		220	1,296	282	317					265	
Sishui	866	2,860	263	118	1,185				1,019	489	
Dongshi	12,075	2,316	216	94	124				3,621	3,363	
Maoping	1,050	490		90				775	1,690	610	
Beitou	490	4,256	75	550	25				750		
Datuo	3,125			149	290	8,244	1,303	87	184	115	
Chaozhu	605	231	24		3,486	3,201	202	92	56		
Shizheng	25	1,086	3,600	229	3,048	414	7,884	7,382		25	
Changtian			241		64		245			2,719	
Retuo	191	2,560	813	1,536	118				886	61	
Total	20,255	17,665	14,741	13,868	13,549	12,514	9,801	9,603	9,132	8,994	6,961



Table 1 (Continued)

Surname Township	Wu	Qiu	Xiao	Yu	Lai	Yang	Ma	Zeng	Li	Zhong	Shen	Zhu
Renju	195	829		39	697	587	507	522	239			34
Chagan						170						
Huangshe					558	3,058		189				
Bachi	223		3,950			108		69	441		648	
Hetou	764	121	20				381		28			
Zhongxing	67		54	27	142		27	31	32	71	36	231
Shangju	1,544	1,421	1,677									
Sishui	305	445		71	427					75	789	
Dongshi	1,375	606			268	191		1,194				1,198
Maoping	90				1,045		439	260				
Beitou	485			4,950								
Datuo		142								47		
Chaozhu	42				756							50
Shizheng					57		765	21	1,484	251	441	
Changtian	989	2,366	45				595	171		726		340
Retuo	582	715			287		120			824		
Total	6,661	6,645	5,746	5,087	4,237	4,114	2,834	2,457	2,224	2,015	1,914	1,853

Source: *Pingyuan xianzhi* (Gazetteer of Pingyuan county) (1993), 682-83.

**Table 2**  
**Ten Major Lineages in Pingyuan, Guangdong Province**

Lineage	Population (%)	No. of Households	Population
Lin	9.15	5,039	20,255
Liu	6.83	3,955	17,665
Xie	6.66	2,338	14,741
Zhang	6.27	3,301	13,868
Chen	6.12	3,074	13,549
Yao	5.66	2,971	12,514
Ling	4.43	2,221	9,801
Wang	4.34	2,171	9,603
Li	4.13	2,204	9,132
Huang	4.06	2,216	8,994
Total	57.65	29,490	127,562

Source: See table 1.

**Table 3**  
**Surname Distribution in Pingyuan, Guangdong:**  
**Most-Concentrated Surnames**

Township	Surname	No. (Total Population)	Population (%)
Renju	Chen	2,073 (10,272)	20
Chagan	Xie	7,041 (7,315)	94
Huangshe	Yang	3,058 (5,937)	51
Bachi	Han	5,873 (14,197)	39
Hetou	Zhang	3,992 (12,595)	37
Zhongxing	Zhang	3,679 (6,492)	47
Shangju	Xiao	1,677 (7,022)	23
Sishui	Liu	2,860 (8,912)	32
Dongshi	Lin	12,075 (26,641)	43
Maoping	Li	1,690 (6,539)	25
Beitou	Yu	4,950 (11,581)	45
Datuo	Yao	8,244 (13,686)	56
Chaozhu	Chen	3,486 (8,745)	34
Shizheng	Ling	7,884 (26,712)	27
Changtian	Huang	2,719 (8,501)	30
Retuo	Zhang	1,536 (6,133)	25

Source: See table 1.

**Table 4**  
**Selected Lineage Halls in Pingyuan, Guangdong Province**

Surname	Lineage Hall	No. of Households
Lin	Ji'nan, Xihe	5,039
Liu	Pengcheng	3,955
Xie	Dongshan, Chenliu	2,338
Yao	Wuxing	2,971
Zhang	Qinghe, Bairen	3,301
Chen	Yingchuan	3,074
Ling	Hejian, Wuxing	2,221
Wang	Taiyuan	2,171
Li	Longxi	2,204
Huang	Jiangxia	2,116
Han	Nanyang	1,469
Qiu	Henan	1,427
Wu	Zhide	1,442
Xiao	Henan	1,275
Yu	Xin'an	1,274
Yang	Hongnong, Baozhao	873
Lai	Yingchuan	686
Zhong	Yingchuan	799
Ma	Fufeng, Fubo	541
Zeng	Luguo, Zhongshu	567
Li	Jingzhao	458
Zhu	Peiguo	432
Shen	Wuxing	420

Source: *Pingyuan xianzhi* (1993), 680.

so, the state need for social control has been blocked by progress toward greater social autonomy and initiative.<sup>18</sup> Three decades after communist revolutionaries disbanded the lineage system, confiscated lineage property, and denounced lineage leadership, lineages are returning in rural South China. They have renewed their influence in villages, spontaneously rising as a potential social force, taking the law into their hands and dominating village politics. Lineages are

<sup>18</sup>Elisabeth J. Croll, "Reform, Local Political Institutions and the Village Economy in China," *Journal of Communist Studies* 3, no. 4 (December 1987): 43-45; James L. Watson, ed., *Class and Social Stratification in Post-Revolution China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984); and Andrew Watson, ed., *Economic Reform and Social Change in China* (London: Routledge, 1992).

**Table 5**  
**Selected Lineage Branches in Pingyuan, Guangdong Province**

Surname	Branch	Township	Generation Depth	Population
Lin	Yanying	Sishui	29th	866
		Dongshi	26th	12,075
		Maoping	24th	1,050
	Yanchang	Dongshi	26th	—
		Hetou	24th	970
	Wangxu	Datuo	28th	3,125
		Renju	28th	426
		Beitou	28th	490
	Hou	Chaozhu	27th	605
	Liu	Juhe	Beitou	27th
Dongshi			27th	2,316
Sishui			30th	2,860
Retuo			26th	360
Juquan		Retuo	26th	2,200
Julian		Hetou	26th	2,003
		Shizheng	28th	1,086
Xie		Dongyue	Chagan	24th
	Shangju		23rd	1,296
	Dongyuan	Renju	21st	952
	Tichuang	Retuo	23rd	813
Yao	Zhongli	Datuo	28th	8,244
		Chaozhu	28th	3,201
Zhang	Tengyu	Hetou	29th	3,992
		Zhongxing	29th	3,679
		Retuo	22nd	1,536
	Fazhen	Renju	26th	656
		Bachi	24th	1,890
	Yuchong	Shangju	28th	282
Chen	Nianshilang	Renju	25th	2,073
		Sishui	26th	1,185
		Chaozhu	27th	3,486
	Nianshiyilang	Hetou	26th	1,659
		Zhongxing	23rd	653
	Nianshiqilang	Shizheng	26th	3,048

Source: *Pingyuan xianzhi* (1993), 683-86.

also regaining their roles among southern Chinese peasantry as a powerful source of moral authority and discipline independent of the state.<sup>19</sup>

### **Lineage as a Cultural Nexus of Peasant Localism**

Collective identity and a supravillage network have provided the basic arena for rural politics and conflicts in post-1978 South China. Attention to these factors not only exposes the ramification of southern rural politics today, but also shows how lineage affects broader state-society relations. Accordingly, the normative, ritual, organizational, and territorial features of lineage groups shed light on peasant localism as a cultural nexus in post-1978 rural South China.

If lineage has become the dominant social focus for rural South China politics, the founding and perpetuation of a lineage with regard to ancestral cults, ancestral halls, interlineage alliances, and feuds requires detailed study. We will now examine the ways in which the power and influence of lineage in post-1978 South China has been sustained.

#### *Ancestor Cults and Supravillage Lineage Networks*

The restored social importance of lineage in South China is being expressed in the revived practice of ancestral cults which are essential to the collective peasant conscience. The meaning derived from the practice of ancestor worship is both spiritual and social.

Spiritually, ancestors were thought to ensure prosperity provided that descendants protected their graves and performed appropriate ceremonies. Ancestors enshrined in tables on the altars of the central ancestral halls are the foci of worship, ancestral hall rites are held twice a year, and ancestral tombs located in the surrounding hills and mountains are worshipped collectively by descendants during a period of several weeks in the autumn. One tenet is that the world contains a supernatural power called "wind and water" (*fengshui*, geomancy) which flows from the earth's surface. *Fengshui* is therefore believed to be a primary source of luck and efficacy. Success

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<sup>19</sup>Regarding the reform of rural political institutions, see J. Bruce Jacobs, "Political and Economic Organizational Changes and Continuities in Six Rural Chinese Locations," *Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs*, no. 14 (July 1985): 109-14.

is associated with the control of good *fengshui* and can be a beneficial force if properly handled. The fortune of descendants is believed to depend on the ancestral tombs; wealthy and powerful lineages choose the tomb in an excellent *fengshui* location so that it will tap the earth's supernatural powers and favor succeeding generations.<sup>20</sup>

Socially, localized lineage group cohesion is expressed and reinforced during the course of religious rites. Secular functions in ancestor worship encourage lineage values such as loyalty and cohesion. These rites help to perpetuate the sentiments of the lineage group, sustain its moral beliefs, and revive group cohesiveness. Through these rites and the presence of the lineage group in its full numerical strength, the lineage renews its pride and unity.<sup>21</sup>

The larger and more elaborate the ancestral temples, the greater the wealth, power, and distinction of the lineage. In recent years, lineage groups in South China have repaired ancestral halls and erected stages to put on operas to entertain their ancestors. As early as March 1981, massive gatherings of members from one lineage group in Shanghang county, Fujian were reported. According to the report, on March 21, 1981 some seven hundred lineage members with the surname Wen gathered at an ancestral tomb to worship their common ancestor. They came from three Hakka-populated counties in western Fujian, including Shanghang, Longyan, and Yongding, and one Hakka county in Guangdong.<sup>22</sup> In Guangdong, a similar pattern of supravillage lineage networks exists; these networks are summarized in table 6. Three dialect groups were identified—the Hakka, Leizhou, and Taizhou. As has been pointed out earlier, supravillage lineage networks in post-1978 South China have reaffirmed the expansive tendencies of these lineage groups.

### *Revival of Lineage Head Power and Authority*

The traditional authority of lineage heads is displayed in various ways. For example, a lineage head's approval is required in land transactions and loans, as well as in partition and adoption deeds. The lineage head plays an important role in his group's organization

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<sup>20</sup>Potter and Potter, *China's Peasants*, 23-25.

<sup>21</sup>Freedman, *Lineage Organization*, chap. 11.

<sup>22</sup>I have outlined the Hakka-populated regions in another paper entitled "Reinventing Mao's Peasant Revolution in South China" (forthcoming).

Table 6  
Selected Supravillage Lineage Networks of Guangdong Province

Village	Township	County	Dialect Group
Qian'an	Yongning	Taizhou	Taizhou
		Yangchun	Leizhou
		Lianjiang	Leizhou
		Huashan	Hakka
		Jiaoling	Hakka
Shigang	Zhanlong	Meizhou	Hakka
		Puning	Hakka
		Huidong	Leizhou
		Zijing	Hakka
		Mei	Hakka
		Haikang	Leizhou
		Wuchuan	Leizhou

Sources: *Nanfang ribao* (Southern Daily), September 1, 1987, 1; April 6, 1987, 2; January 9, 1989, 2; June 27, 1989, 4; July 25, 1989, 4; August 8, 1989, 2; August 15, 1989, 2; August 22, 1989, 4; January 6, 1990, 2; and March 27, 1990, 4.

and ceremonial affairs, including supravillage lineage networkings, constructing genealogy, building and maintaining the ancestral hall, and conducting religious *saihui* (festivals).<sup>23</sup> In virtually all the cases studied, it appears that celebrations were financed by contributions from each household in the village raised by the lineage head and elders.

The following are six case studies:

1. Liwu village, Ende county, Guangdong (April 7, 1988): Li Qilai, a Communist Party member and village head of Liwu village in Shihuipu township of Ende county, led his lineage group members in lineage activities. Since 1987, using his dual positions as village head and lineage head, he guided his fellow lineage members in building an ancestral hall. A board of directors for construction was established under Li's leadership to collect donations: each household was required to pay 500 RMB, each village male and marry-in-woman 100 RMB, and each unmarried village woman 20 RMB, respectively. The ancestral hall occupies 600 square meters and is composed of six sets of halls, each equipped with an ancestral altar. At the front

<sup>23</sup>Potter and Potter, *China's Peasants*, 10-11.

hangs a stone-carved plaque with four characters reading “Lineage Hall of Surname Li.” On the day the hall was put in use on January 26, 1988, thousands of Li lineage members attended the opening ceremony.<sup>24</sup>

2. Jiebei township, Lufeng county, Guangdong (December 1, 1988): This case involved five townships and some 100,000 lineage members in a large-scale collective effort to construct a Chenghuang temple in Jiebei, Lufeng county. In the pre-1949 period, a Chenghuang temple was very popular among the locals. After the communists took over in 1949, it was first converted into a state grain house and then, in 1957, into a township government building. When the township government moved to a new location in February 1988, eight local lineage group elders decided to revitalize this old temple. In five neighboring townships—Jiebei, Jieshi, Hudong, Nangtang, and Jinxiang—some 100,000 people were mobilized to donate construction fees. Over 100,000 RMB was collected to renovate this temple on November 14, 1988.<sup>25</sup>

3. Shanhai village, Xuwen county, Guangdong (May 3, 1989): In February 1988, a village elder initiated a project to construct a new Sanwang temple (Three Kings temple) near the local elementary school, as the old Sanwang temple had been torn down in 1976 and the elementary school built on the old temple site in 1981. A few days after the elder’s proposal was made, some 1,800 RMB had been collected from the village members, an average of 12 RMB per village male.<sup>26</sup>

4. Shidun village, Gaopo district, Heyuan city, Guangdong (June 20, 1989): The Huang lineage, which is composed of some one hundred households residing in Gaopo, Huangpi, and Yujing (three adjacent villages under the leadership of Huang Yulai, village head of Shidun), decided to rebuild their ancestral hall. Huang’s old hall had long been destroyed, and since 1968, the site had been occupied by eight non-local, dam construction-related migrant households. The Huangs believed that this site belongs to them and has good *fengshui*. In 1988, an eight-member committee was formed to engage in necessary preparatory tasks for the Huang’s new ancestral hall.

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<sup>24</sup>*Nanfang ribao* (Southern Daily), April 17, 1988, 1-2.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, December 1, 1988, 2.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*, May 3, 1989, 2.



Each Huang male was required to donate 10 RMB, and donation letters were also sent to out-of-town lineage members to collect funds. Village head Huang eventually forced the eight households to move out of the lineage hall site, threatening to destroy their houses if they refused to comply.<sup>27</sup>

5. Qianbian village, Dongjia township, Lufeng county, Guangdong (March 19, 1991): Since 1986, under the leadership of several elders in Qianbian village, the Qi lineage group had collected donations from local villagers and overseas Chinese to build several temples and lineage halls such as Tongde Shantang (Hall of United Charity), Sanshan Guowang Miao (Temple of Three Mountain Kings), and Huangshi Zuci (Ancestral Hall of Huang).<sup>28</sup>

6. Naxiandong village and Tuza village, Huguang township, Zhanjiang city, Guangdong (November 19, 1991): Before 1949, a Zhou lineage hall was located at the campus of the Xinxu primary school. It was destroyed by a typhoon in 1954. In September 1990, heads of the Zhou lineage collected funds to build a "Lineage Hall of Zhouzai Tiangong." Construction was located at the hall's former site and was completed in July 1991. The Zhouzai Tiangong lineage hall is now located at the center of the school site, occupying half of its field.<sup>29</sup>

In conclusion, despite the absence of large amounts of corporate property in present South China lineage, the authority of lineage heads or elders has played an important role in social and ceremonial matters. This has been particularly evident in life-cycle ceremonies, which define the unity of the lineage. Efforts to perpetuate descendent group rituals have been continued even in the face of pressure from official sanctions.

Judging from the resilience of indigenous lineage power and authority, and its reactions to imposed state power, the state has not displaced lineage influence. In fact, in some cases local cadres have tended to become attributes of the lineage system, as many of their positions correspond to lineage leadership. Therefore, the disarticulation of local cadre authority from state hierarchy has undermined the state's legitimacy.

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<sup>27</sup>Ibid., June 20, 1989, 4.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., March 19, 1991, 4.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., November 19, 1991, 4.

*Lineage Halls and Absentee Lineage Leadership*

Most lineage groups in pre-1949 South China had halls where they would worship their ancestors twice a year. In the spring and fall, the members would assemble to carry out ritual sacrifices for their ancestors and ensure lineage unity and cohesion. The following case illustrates the renewed importance and significance of lineage in Anxi county, Fujian, as expressed through the revived interest in lineage halls and the importance associated with lineage.

This case study focuses on Hutou township, Anxi county, Fujian. Li is one of the major lineages in the Hutou township, and its importance is brought out most distinctly by the role that one of its members, Li Guangdi, played as Grand Secretary for the Emperor Guangxu of the Qing Dynasty.<sup>30</sup> Li Guangdi had two sons (Zhonglong and Zhongzuo) and five grandsons (Qingji, Qingze, Qingzao, Qingfu, and Qingtai). In Hutou, the Li lineage is thus divided into five branches, as detailed on a sheet of red paper pasted to the back wall of the ancestral hall. Before 1949, the observance of ancestral rites in the village was organized by the entire lineage in unison and celebrated once a year in winter. After the communist takeover, the Li ancestral hall was confiscated and shut down with all the ancestral tables intact. However, during the Cultural Revolution, all the ancestral tables of the lineage, family genealogy, and the founding ancestor were all burned down.

The second generation of Li Guangdi's second grandson, Qingze, was raised in Indonesia after leaving home in 1949. Two sons, Li Luda and Li Shangda, became very successful businessmen in the Indonesian timber industry, and also set up business branches in Taiwan to manufacture furniture. They became actively involved in organizing an association of fellow townsmen from Anxi (Anxi tongxianghui) in Indonesia. The Taipei branch of the Anxi Association was established in 1956, and one of Li Qingji's grandsons, Li Qingyun, was elected secretary-general of the Taipei branch.<sup>31</sup> Through the years, these Li descendants have maintained very close contacts among themselves. In 1965, the Taipei branch began editing and publishing the *Anxi Gazetteer*, and through Anxi Association activ-

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<sup>30</sup> *Anxi xianzhi* (Gazetteer of Anxi county) (Beijing: Xinhua chubanshe, 1994), 1190-93.

<sup>31</sup> Wang Jicheng and Chen Huoyao, *Taipei Anxi tongxianghui* (The Anxi Association of Taipei) (Taipei: The Anxi Association of Taipei, 1982).

ities, Li lineage members reestablished their natural bonds. When the communists reopened the door to overseas Chinese in 1978 and Taiwan lifted the ban on visiting China in 1987, hundreds of thousands of overseas Fujianese poured back to their homeland. Li Luda spearheaded several homecoming tours composed of various branches of Li lineage members of Anxi, as well as donating one elementary school and one local bridge to his hometown of Hutou, Anxi. Under his strong leadership, the Li lineage hall in Hutou was reestablished. He donated a statue of the Lis' founding ancestor and returned his parents' altar to the lineage hall. On the day his parents' altar was put into place, fifty local Taoist priests performed the ritual and a feast was held with some two hundred tables.

Inside the Li lineage hall, the founding ancestral statue, the largest statue, was placed in the middle of the main hall with two statues of children standing by its side. Each generation also has its ancestral altar along two flanks of the hall, including one of Li Guangdi. Inside the main hall hangs a wooden plate inscribed with the four characters "Huangmin jiache" (Emperor's Endorsement). Beneath that is draped a piece of red silk banner embroidered with several characters indicating the origins of the Li lineage.

This case involved a joint effort by overseas and local Chinese who share a common name and a common origin to revitalize the Li's lineage hall in Hutou, Anxi. Li Luda, in particular, organized his members at home to their most impressive display of lineage cohesion. In doing so, he emerged as one of the most effective supporters in revamping the Li's ancestral hall, the hallmark of the Li lineage.<sup>32</sup>

#### *Intralineage Cooperation and Conflicts: Mechanisms of Dispute Resolution*

Traditional feuds between rival lineage or surname groups in Fujian and Guangdong have been well documented; since 1978, it has become endemic in the coastal regions where *xiedou* (gang violence) incidents have persisted. This region has a dense and unruly population, which in turn has nurtured fierce rivalries and violence. Under these unstable conditions, the regional milieu has harbored subcultures in conflict with neighboring groups' norms and practices.

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<sup>32</sup>A field trip was made to Hutou on April 6-7, 1995.

Previous discussions have addressed the historical background and local settings that gave rise to lineage feuding, especially between the Hakka and locals, in Republican China years. Villagers have tended to cluster in discrete surname communities and speak unintelligible dialects that nurture distant and unfriendly relationships with other neighboring groups. When *xiedou* incidents were first reported in Zhanjiang, Guangdong in 1980, it marked the reappearance of such communal feuds in this region.

The reemergence of ancient lineage feuds in the economic liberalization era poses a threat to China's local communities. Huge fights between rival lineages are regularly reported in South China; for example, a December 1992 battle led to a riot and several deaths in Panshi, Guangdong.<sup>33</sup> Lineage rivalries are an ancient tradition in South China, and they have returned in the last decade as communist influence has subsided and tradition has reemerged.

A decade of open policy which includes overseas trade, interregional trade, and remittances from communities abroad has brought wealth to this region. Local business—commercial agriculture, rural industries, and entrepreneurship—has also helped to enrich the regional economy. These new socioeconomic conditions and the ensuing keen competition and rivalry for resources and wealth currently prevail, and issues of local contention, including land and boundary disputes and controversies over mines and forestry, have become catalysts for lineage feuds (see table 7).<sup>34</sup>

Lineage feuds can be categorized as two types. The first type relates to conflict over *fengshui*, or the right to choose a good grave site. For example, in 1984, villagers of Xinche, Hejiang township went to Datang village, Zhongtong township to sweep an ancestral grave. They found a unknown pot buried in their graveyard and dug it out; when Datang villagers discovered this, they accused the Xinche villagers of stealing their property, resulting in a fight between these two lineage groups.<sup>35</sup> Another case involved two lineage groups in Fengbei and Lishitang, Lianjiang county in a dispute over an ancestral grave. This issue can be traced back to before 1949, as feuds have

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<sup>33</sup>Panshi was founded two hundred years ago by the Mai lineage. The Mais originally came from a nearby village which they shared with the Li lineage. Due to constant feuding between the two lineages, a group of Mais resettled in Panshi.

<sup>34</sup>*Shijie ribao* (The World Journal), August 27, 1992, 11.

<sup>35</sup>*Nanfang ribao*, April 20, 1984, 4.

Table 7  
Major Lineage Feuds in Post-1978 Guangdong Province

Date/Year	County	Villages
1980-83	Lingao	42 incidents, 165 villages
1981-84	Lianjiang	Fengbei, Lishitang
1986	Huazhou	Xinche, Datang (Grave)
April 1988	Dapu	Cheshang, Mingde (Grave)
Oct. 1988	Jiexi	Yuliang (Grave)
Oct. 1988	Haifeng	Gaozhong (Shrine)
May 12, 1991	Suixi	Huanglue, Wenche (Borders)
Oct. 8, 1992	Zhanjiang	(Borders)
Dec. 1992	Panshi	(Borders)
Jan. 26, 1993	Yangchun, Yunfu	(Borders)

Sources: *Nanfang ribao*, April 20, 1984, 4; May 7, 1988, 2; August 16, 1988, 2; October 6, 1988, 2; October 25, 1988, 2; June 26, 1991, 2; June 27, 1991, 2; and July 3, 1991, 2; *Fazhi ribao* (Legal Daily), August 7, 1985, 1; *Shijie ribao* (The World Journal), March 12, 1992, 11; October 27, 1992, 11; and February 11, 1993, 11.

occurred continuously over the years. One woman named Lin Meipong who was originally from Fengbei village was married into Lishitang village in the 1950s, prompting a scolding from her parents, who feared that she would receive a beating at the hands of hostile Lishitang villagers. A piece of land located between the two villages was left unattended for similar reasons.<sup>36</sup> A third case involved two neighboring villages of Cheshang and Mingde in Dapu county. In April 1988, villagers of Cheshang planned to expand their ancestral grave site at Mingde village. This move was perceived by the Mingde villagers as a threat to their *fengshui*, and a feud was imminent.<sup>37</sup> A fourth case involved two segments of Li lineage in Jiexi county who quarreled over a piece of graveyard land at Erdelong. It was reported that both sides had mobilized their lineage members and were ready to fight.<sup>38</sup> A fifth case involved Huang and Cai lineage groups in Gaozhong village, Meilong township, Haifeng county. The minority Huangs built a lineage hall in 1988, prompting comments that the Huangs were “bees” and the Cais “cabbage”; that is to say, the Huangs were changing their nest, while the Cais were left

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., May 7, 1988, 2.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., August 16, 1988, 2.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., October 25, 1988, 2.

to decay. The only solution for the Cais was to destroy the Huang lineage hall. Dynamite was prepared, and a stipulation was written by the Cais demanding that anyone who failed to sign would be punished by lineage law, expelled from the village, and his home demolished. The Huangs responded by rapidly mobilizing their forces.<sup>39</sup> In another example, in Wuchun county from 1961 to 1990, there were 961 cases of lineage feuds as a result of seizing *fengshui*.<sup>40</sup>

The second type of lineage feud relates to large-scale fights over village boundaries. The following are two in-depth cases.

1. The Suixi (May 12, 1991) incident:<sup>41</sup> Since 1980, there have been some 2,029 lineage feuds in Suixi county, which is considered one of the most strife-ridden areas in terms of lineage feuds. Suixi is located at western Guangdong, with a population of 761,169, and is one of the six counties that make up the Leizhou peninsula. On May 12, 1991, a large-scale lineage feud occurred in the two villages of Huanglue and Wenche in Suixi county. In the process, three died and fifty were wounded. The feud, which was a continuation of previous feuds, lasted for nine days and cost the local government 600,000 RMB.

Huanglue and Wenche are located three miles from the municipal Communist Party headquarters of Suixi city. Huanglue village is famous for its anti-French history during the Sino-French war of 1844-45 and is much larger in size than Wenche village. On May 12, a small dispute sparked a fight between these two villages; local police intervened but were attacked by Huanglue villagers, and a police pistol was taken. On the next evening, the two villages gathered together some one thousand people in an overnight battle that left two Huanglue villagers dead. After the defeat, one hundred Huanglue villagers forcibly entered the Xingjiao Sugar Mill at 1 a.m. on May 14, stealing the mill militia's six 12.7 mm antiaircraft machine guns and fifty-one boxes of ammunition. On the morning of May 14, thousands of Huanglue villagers attacked the Agriculture Bank and local police station, kidnapping the township militia chief and compelling him to release his guns and ammunition. On the same day, the Huanglue lineage group summoned all its villagers

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., October 6, 1988, 2.

<sup>40</sup>*Fazhi ribao* (Legal Daily), August 7, 1985, 1.

<sup>41</sup>*Nanfang ribao*, June 26, 1991, 2; June 27, 1991, 2; and July 3, 1991, 2; *Shijie ribao*, March 12, 1992, 11 and October 27, 1992, 11.

to join the fight; for those who refused to fight, there was a requirement to contribute money for the fighting. Within a few days, many out-of-town villagers had returned and 200,000 RMB had been collected. A 4,000-person militia team was formed to attack Wenche village with the six antiaircraft machine guns. In addition, all villagers were mobilized to set up three tiers of barricades. By then, a 900-member work team, composed of county-level Party, government, military, and public security branches, was sent to the two feuding villages. One work team successfully entered Wenche village, but a 250-member work team headed by the deputy county chief of Suixi was surrounded by villagers on entering Huanglue village and turned back. A second work team was then dispatched and stopped at the village entrance. In Huanglue village, two married women originally from Wenche village attempted to sneak back to Wenche village and were accused of spying; they were forced to carry the dead bodies killed in feuds on their backs for one day.

Upon hearing of the incident, the Beijing authorities ordered a quick settlement. A provincial-level work team composed of deputy provincial governor Zhang Gaoli and deputy provincial military commander Chen Tianlin was rushed to the scene. As the sensitive date of June 4 drew near, the Beijing authorities, afraid of the possible transition from a lineage feud to a political incident, ordered a "must-control" outcome. On May 15, Huanglue villagers attempted to parade the two dead bodies inside Zhanjiang city and were stopped by surrounding military personnel. On May 17, thousands of heavily armed military personnel forcibly entered the village and met with residual resistance. On the morning of May 18, the stand-off came to an end, as the military confiscated all the weapons and arrested all the lineage heads.

2. The Yangchun and Yunfu (January 26, 1993) incident:<sup>42</sup> This incident involved two neighboring counties, Yunfu and Yangchun, in Guangdong. A scenic spot, Linxiaoyan (named as the best in South China), was totally devastated by bombs on January 26, 1992 as a result of a conflict of interest between the two counties. The park is located on the boundary between Yangchun and Yunfu counties, where there has been a long history of dispute over boundary rights. Based on previous mediations by the Guangdong provincial govern-

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<sup>42</sup>*Shijie ribao*, February 11, 1993, 11.

ment in 1964 and 1984, the planning and administrative rights of the park were stated to belong to Yangchun county. With a booming tourist business in recent years, Yunfu villagers have opined that the previous settlement was biased and unfair to their economic well-being. Unable to settle this dispute peacefully, they decided to use forcible means to destroy the park.

At 3 p.m. on January 26, as tourists were still enjoying the beauty of this underground cave and sightseeing boats were packed with visitors, a series of blasts came without warning. The bombing continued until 3 a.m. of the next morning. On the next day, unaware tourists continued to arrive at the scenic spot, and at 10 a.m., hundreds of people on top of the rocks threw explosives toward them. Overwhelmed with surprise, the tourists nevertheless managed to escape unharmed. At noon, fire began to spread over the mountain top. Four security personnel attempted to approach the fire but were stopped by gunfire. The bombings continued to destroy the adjacent buildings, restaurants and warehouses, the power station, and other recreational facilities of the park. According to one eyewitness account, the bombing lasted until 2 a.m. of January 28. A total of 700 blasts were made, and an estimated 4,400,000 RMB lost.

After the bombing occurred, several thousand Yangchun villagers rushed to the scene, claiming they would blood-wash Yunfu county. A lineage feud was impending over this property dispute. A deputy county public security director was sent to the scene to maintain law and order, and the feud was avoided.

Traditional tensions between the Fujianese-speaking and indigenous Guangdongese communities have also resulted in a considerable amount of battles. The intensity and frequency with which these local groups have taken up arms against one another still holds at the present day. Evidence of organized violence in Guangdong can help explain this pattern of events. Zhanjiang is perhaps most notorious for this kind of belligerence because it is a Fujianese-speaking area, and the practice of organized violence has been shown to have been general over time. Violence between lineage groups has often been due to economic competition, and has been on a large scale, with several thousands involved. In many cases, hatred has lasted for generations; one side might be defeated and agree to a truce through state mediation, but a trifle would again set off a full-scale conflict. In most cases, exploitation of weak lineage groups by the strong has been the root of conflict, such as disputes over field and graveyard boundaries. Evidence suggests that relationships between localized



lineages in Guangdong have rested on a readiness to settle disputes as much by violence as by appeal to the legal machinery of the state. This preference for informal or communal means of dispute resolution stresses the preservation of social cohesion and reflects the view that China is a society based on the rule of man rather than the rule of law.<sup>43</sup> Peasant localism, regional dialect groups, and historical hatred have defined group identity when conflicts of interest have arisen, and intergroup antagonism in South China, the very force of communal conflict which facilitated communist mobilization in the 1930s, now haunts communist authorities today.

In rural China, social order rests on a dense network of informal groups whose members are identified with individual lineages. Hence, China's social institutions continue to operate in a cultural milieu which resolves disputes via mediation and conciliation over more formal legal proceedings. Despite legal institutions that discourage this kind of private dispute resolution, these arrangements appear to be gradually reducing the state's potential for the arbitrary exercise of authority. In the long run, they may actually diminish the power of the state.

The results of enduring feuds are especially abhorrent and degrading, as not only are lives lost and property destroyed, but local groups are stultified by the perpetuated enmity. Enduring feuds and widespread *xiedou* tend to breed further crime and deviance among hostile groups, which have become disaffected from the state to the point that even harsh measures or reprisals have not assured lasting success in restoring order.

### **Territorial Cults and Dialect Group Consciousness as Cultural Nexus of Peasant Localism**

Throughout Chinese history, leaders have attempted to discourage and outlaw superstition and folk religion, but the attempts all eventually failed. Even Mao Zedong's antireligion policy did not succeed in Fujian, Zhejiang, and Guangdong provinces, where popular religion is making a strong comeback with support from overseas Chinese who have been building factories as well as rebuilding

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<sup>43</sup>Lester Ross, "The Changing Profile of Dispute Resolution in Rural China," *Stanford Journal of International Law* 26 (Fall 1989): 15-66.

village temples and shrines in the region.<sup>44</sup>

Mainland China's recent opening-up policies have released a host of unforeseen social forces, such as the dramatic reemergence of traditional Chinese popular religion, the scale of which has been no less than astonishing. The vast majority of these activities has taken place in the countryside, particularly in remote mountainous areas along the borders between different counties or provinces. Moreover, these popular religions enjoy a definite degree of mass support, extending to many areas and with an extremely large membership. One primary response of the Chinese peasantry to the uncertainties and social dislocations brought about by rural reform has been a reversion to rural tradition. Amidst the rapid decline of communist authority and control, the pattern of the past has reasserted itself in numerous different ways, filling in the ideological vacuum caused by the current crisis of the Marxist-Leninist Chinese state and supplying an organizational mechanism to respond to ideological and spiritual malaise.

To study popular religion as an evolving social phenomenon, Prasenjit Duara identifies four categories of religious organizations, with regard to the scale and principle of affiliation in China:

The first category refers to religious organizations whose scale of activities is subvillage. Affiliation in these organizations is voluntary, and consequently they are not identified with village-wide activities. The second category of organization is also voluntary and not coextensive with the village. This type differs from the first in that it is a part of supra-village organization and the coordination of its activities is often directed from outside the village. The scale of the third type of organization is exactly coextensive with the village. . . . All members of the village were automatically included in the organization, and all those who were not from the village were excluded. . . . The fourth type of religious organization is a combination of type two and three. Like type two, a supra-village religious organization defines and orchestrates the activities of a religious group in the village. However, like type three, the entire village as a collective entity is involved in these activities.<sup>45</sup>

In South China, religious observances of the principal cults have revived considerably since 1978, when the Chinese government relaxed some of its most stringent controls on religion. Using Duara's topology as a reference, this article constructs three categories (state

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<sup>44</sup>Since November 1987, over three million Taiwanese have visited China.

<sup>45</sup>Prasenjit Duara, *Culture, Power, and the State: Rural North China, 1900-1942* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1988), 119-20.

cults, territorial cults, and secret societies) to depict the dynamic religious activities in South China today. We will examine (1) the interaction between religious cults and lineage power in this region and (2) the religious activities and local group consciousness.

Before furthering our analysis, a unique phenomenon must be mentioned. The Chinese government's recent withdrawal of antireligious sentiment is reflected in its official 1982 Party policy paper, "Concerning the Basic Viewpoint and Policy toward the Question of Religion during China's Socialistic Period,"<sup>46</sup> in which it recognizes China as a country of religious pluralism, yet states that an important condition for the normalization of religious activities consists in the Party's efforts to provide suitable places for religious activities.

### *Supravillage Voluntary Associations or Pseudo-State Cults*

State-sponsored official cults or temples are tolerated if not encouraged. Two cases illustrate this type of religious activity.

For example, Mt. Putou in Zhejiang, the home of Guanyin (the Buddhist Goddess of Mercy), is considered one of the four famous mountains in China and attracts thousands of peasant pilgrims daily.<sup>47</sup> The Mazu (Heavenly Mother) cult of Meizhou, Putian county in Fujian is another case in point, as her temples are found all along the South China coast from Zhejiang to Guangdong. A historical parallel has reemerged in which communist state sponsorship of Buddhist and Taoist temple worship resembles Chinese imperial official sacrifice and the promotion of state-approved deities.<sup>48</sup> The communist authorities' efforts to reconstruct the approved temples have imposed a unity on regional and local-level cults, although the Party prohibits its members from participating in any religious activities. However, most of the funds for renovation have come from overseas Chinese and local donations.

The State Council's Religious Affairs Bureau is the main state agency in overall control of religious activities; Party-controlled na-

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<sup>46</sup>Stephan Feuchtwang, "The Problem of Superstition in the People's Republic of China," in *Religion and Political Power*, ed. Gustavo Benavides and M. W. Daly (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York, 1989), chap. 4.

<sup>47</sup>Susan Naquin and Chun-Fang Yu, eds., *Pilgrims and Sacred Sites in China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), chap. 5.

<sup>48</sup>See Watson, "Standardizing the Gods."

**Table 8**  
**Revival of Temples in Fujian, Guangdong, and Zhejiang**

Temple	Deity	Year	County/Province
Wen miao	Confucianism	1986	Yongchun/Fujian
Huiming si		1985	Taocheng/Yongchun/Fujian
Kuixing yang	Buddhism	1985	Shigu/Yongchun/Fujian
Wuji yang	Confucianism	1984	Jindou/Yongchun/Fujian
Huayan si	Buddhism	na	Jiudoushan/Yongchun/Fujian
Luohan si	Buddhism	1985	Taixi/Youxi/Fujian
Jixiang si	Buddhism	1985	Taixi/Youxi/Fujian
Yanting si	Buddhism	1985	Zhongxian/Youxi/Fujian
Jianmen an	Buddhism	1985	Banmen/Youxi/Fujian
Shisun an	Buddhism	1985	Banmen/Youxi/Fujian
Shimen an	Buddhism	1985	Lianhe/Youxi/Fujian
Zhangdao tang	Taoism	1985	Chengguan/Youxi/Fujian
Liu zu miao	Buddhism	1984	Nanxiong/Guangdong
Wanshan an	Buddhism	1984	Nanxiong/Guangdong
Dongzhen guan	Taoism	1987	Nanxiong/Guangdong
Shuanglin si	Buddhism	1985	Yiwu/Zhejiang
Yunhuang si	Buddhism	1985	Yiwu/Zhejiang
Xianshan si	Buddhism	1985	Yiwu/Zhejiang
Jingju si	Buddhism	1985	Yiwu/Zhejiang
Linshan si	Buddhism	1985	Yiwu/Zhejiang
Ruifeng si	Buddhism	1985	Yiwu/Zhejiang
Wanshou si	Buddhism	1987	Hejia/Changshan/Zhejiang
Qingzhen chansi	Buddhism	1985	Pushan/Qingtian/Zhejiang

Sources: *Yongchun xianzhi* (1990), 850-53; *Youxi xianzhi* (1989), 680-81; *Nanxiong xianzhi* (1991), 781-82; *Yiwu xianzhi* (1987), 598-99; *Changshan xianzhi* (1990), 546-48; and *Qingtian xianzhi* (1990), 660.

tional religious bodies such as the Buddhist Association of China and the Taoist Association of China ensure that state policies and directives are carried out at the local levels. Moreover, the local branches of the respective religious associations monitor each temple's daily operations. The end result has been a high degree of uniformity through promotion of state-sanctioned deities.

Table 8 lists the state-approved revitalized temples in these three provinces since 1978. It illustrates type two of Duara's topology, which tends to encourage solidarity, cutting across boundaries between lineage groups and local communities. In addition, it is linked to the officially-sanctioned state cults only. Pilgrimages to Mt. Putou in the Zhoushan archipelago of Zhejiang and Meizhou island of Fujian are cases in point; since all these temples are located in mountain or

**Table 9**  
**Numbers of Revitalized Temples vs. Pre-1949 Temples**

Post-1978 Temples	Pre-1949 Temples	County/Province
6	170	Yongchun/Fujian
5	100	Nanxiong/Guangdong
9	117	Yiwu/Zhejiang
4	63	Changshan/Zhejiang
0	31	Chun'an/Zhejiang
1	638	Yuhang/Zhejiang
11	328	Xiaoshan/Zhejiang
9	82	Pujiang/Zhejiang
1	70	Shengxian/Zhejiang
2	87	Wuyi/Zhejiang
1	23	Qingtian/Zhejiang

**Sources:** *Yongchun xianzhi* (1990), 850-53; *Nanxiong xianzhi* (1991), 781-82; *Yiwu xianzhi* (1987), 598-99; *Changshan xianzhi* (1990), 546-48; *Chun'an xianzhi* (1990), 643; *Xiaoshan xianzhi* (1987), 981-82; and *Qingtian xianzhi* (1990), 660.

offshore islands, the state has relegated pilgrimages to these marginal positions in order to contain religious activities. The process of incorporating Buddhist deities such as Mazu and Guanyin into the state-approved pantheon suggests an effort to reinforce state authority, civic virtues, and stability.

For the pilgrims, the motivation for undertaking pilgrimages to these temples usually involves seeking a vision of the deity, performing a penance, asking for heirs, or praying for good health and longevity for themselves and their family members. However, the limited accessibility of mountain temples, long-distance travelling, and rigid temple formalities are less attractive than the diversified features of local regional cults. For instance, the numbers of revitalized temples are limited compared with the pre-1949 temples. (See table 9. The pre-1949 number on each county level represents a total of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism temples.) As C. K. Yang suggests in his classic *Religion in Chinese Society*, 22 percent of the major temples in China house official cults.<sup>49</sup> The presence of official cults in Chinese temples attests to their importance in the traditional political order; indeed, the traditional state played an important role

<sup>49</sup>C. K. Yang, *Religion in Chinese Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 147.

**Table 10**  
**Religious Spheres of Temples in Pre-1949 Haiyan, Guangdong**

Temple/Deity	Village/Religious Sphere
Guanyin miao	Shalan/Donggu, Qiyou, Dadan/Yanxi, Xiaojiangxu
Wenwu miao	Xiaocun/Donggu, Xincun/Lianhe, Dantang/Zhongjancun, Nafuying
Hongsheng gong	Shangxiashan/Donggu, Nanzhou/Yanxi, Shapu, Lianhe/Youcun, Tuku/Nafu
Guandi miao	Shushan/Lianhe, Haiyan/Yanzhong, Shalan/Donggu, Jiufukeng/Shenjing, Shenjingxu
Panhuang miao	Yamudi/Donggu, Shuoren, Donggang, Hetian, Renhe, Tanchang, Zaimen, Shazuijiao, Shangdong/Doumen, Shiliukeng
Kangwang miao	Xiaocun/Donggu, Tongheng, Wutong, Chunchang/Lianhe, Dantang Beitou/Lianhe, Liukeng, Lianxing/Yanzhong, Chaodong/Longkou, Lunding/Sanli, Shapu/Yanxi
Suijingbo miao	Liugang/Donggu, Meikeng/Yanxi
Huaguang miao	Xiaocun/Donggu, Fuwan/Xiachuan, Chunchang/Lianhe

**Source:** Li Bianji, *Haiyan xiangtu shi* (A township history of Haiyan) (Hong Kong: Yu Zhonghuan, 1960), 301-2.

in promoting approved deities. Yet, a closer look at the classification of major temples by their distribution of cults worshipped showed that a larger portion (78 percent) emphasized popular cults.

#### *Ascriptive Village Associations and Territorial Cults*

The second type of cult is made up exclusively of deified spirits of men and women who won moral and political distinction in their lifetime, and its distinguishing feature is the interplay between lineage and territorial cults.<sup>50</sup> Table 10 outlines a particular temple and its corresponding pre-1949 religious sphere in Haiyan township, Guangdong.

Until the decollectivization of the commune system, supravillage lineage networking was hampered by the rigid household registration system and a low level of social mobility. Decollectivization changed this, as for the first time since 1949, members of lineage expanded their relationships by organizing supravillage networks. This reemer-

<sup>50</sup>See Chen Ziping, *Jin wubainian lai Fujian de jiazhu shehui yu wenhua* (The lineage society and culture of Fujian in the last five hundred years) (Shanghai: Sanlian chubanshe, 1991), chap. 1.

gence of supravillage lineage networks bears a twofold political significance.

One of the most important consequences has been a revitalization of lineage-based territorial cults. This type of religious organization encourages solidarity within a lineage whose deities are often conceived as tutelary guardians of the lineage and thus linked to lineage cohesion. The jurisdiction of these deities include lineage members only, and this ascriptive lineage association type is territorial in the sense that most lineage members live within a community. A second consequence is that since state cults lack a local-specific identity, they have not satisfied the communal needs of local groups and thus have indirectly contributed to lineage revitalization.<sup>51</sup>

As argued previously, South China dialect group consciousness has been too strong to be dissolved by state efforts.<sup>52</sup> When the state loosened its control over rural society in 1979, a religious sphere, or local religious activities, emerged which overlapped with dialect groups. In South China four levels of religious spheres may be identified: (1) the hamlet level, (2) the village level, (3) the supravillage level, and (4) the township level. On the hamlet level, most hamlets only worship an earth god. On the village level, most religious spheres take a local deity as its main god. On the supravillage level, a dominant surname group tends to organize itself into one religious sphere. On the township level, a township-wide religious sphere is developed.

Several reasons may be identified as to why religious spheres exist. The need for communal worship of deities and solidarity at the hamlet, village, and township levels is the basic reason. In addition, several essential organizational elements are involved in these cult activities: (1) collective contributions to the construction or repair of the local temples, (2) equal shares in the expenses or random donation for communal rituals, (3) *toujia* and *louzhu* as representatives who take the responsibility for communal worship, (4) performances of local operas for the god, (5) inspection of the territory by the major god in a parade, and (6) the feast.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup>Regarding the religious sphere, see Lin Mei-rong, "The Religious Sphere as a Form of Local Organization: A Case Study from Tsautun Township," *Bulletin of the Institute of Ethnology*, no. 62 (1987): 53-114.

<sup>52</sup>*Nanfang ribao*, March 19, 1979, 1 and February 24, 1992, 1.

<sup>53</sup>See note 51 above.

**Table 11**  
**Religious Spheres of Temples in Post-1978 Fujian and Guangdong**

Temple/Deity	Village/Religious Sphere
Tongtian shengmu miao	Xijiu township, Banxi township, Bailin township, Qinyu township, Xiamen township, Fuding county, Fujian
Local deity	Hongshan village, Wenchun township; Liancheng county, Fujian
Guanyin miao	Qianyang village, Xiangshan village, Xianyou county, Fujian
Haichao an	Shuidou, Sishidu, Pujia, Nan'an county, Fujian
Local deity	Xinbo, Makeng, Xikou village/Baisha township, Baisha, Damucheng, Dalai, Shangqi, Tangju, Wenxi village, Minhou county, Fujian
Linshui gong	Gutian, Pingdong, Fuan, Zhouning, Ningde, Shouning, Jianou, Lianjiang, Jianyang, Zhenghe county, Fujian
Huaguang gong	Liantangkou, Jiaohualing, Henpuzai, Chengsha, Shanbei, Tianxin village, Hechun township, Lianjiang county, Guangdong
Tianhou gong	Xingkang, Nanlou township/Zhanjiang county, Guangdong
Chenghuang miao	Jiebei, Jieshi, Hudong, Nantang, Jinxiang township, Lufeng county, Guangdong

Sources: *Fujian ribao* (Fujian Daily), January 13, 1986, 2; January 20, 1986, 4; March 22, 1986, 3; April 26, 1986, 3; December 1, 1986, 4; and June 8, 1987, 1; *Nanfang ribao*, May 3, 1980, 2 and December 1, 1988, 1.

A procession festival which focuses on a temple is essentially a territorial tour of boundaries.<sup>54</sup> Territorial cult festivals, or *miaohui* (temple fairs), include processions, a display of martial arts, musical bands, and feasts. They are financed by local contributions collected from households in the locality. In addition, the organization of the procession is itself defined by territory. A temple area is made up of several subregions whose boundaries coincide with administrative boundaries, and festival neighborhood heads have the function of collecting festival fees from the households of their area. Table 11 provides data on this type of territorial cult in post-1978 Fujian and Guangdong. According to table 11, similar religious sphere patterns have been identified at both the village and township levels in Fujian

<sup>54</sup>On procession festivals, see Stephan Feuchtwang, *The Imperial Metaphor: Popular Religion in China* (London: Routledge, 1992), 76-79; and Weller, *Unities and Diversities in Chinese Religion*, chap. 2.



and Guangdong. This demonstrates the significance of lineage-based territorial cults and their prowess in organizing religious activities through astute maneuvers. The following case study also illustrates the point.

*Case Study:*

*The Qingshui Zushi Zumiao in Anxi of Fujian*

The Qingshui Zushi Zumiao, also known as Qingshuiyan, is located on Mt. Penglai outside Anxi county of southeast Fujian. This temple was dedicated to a Buddhist monk named Puzu Chen who was born in Song Dynasty (1044 A.D.) in Yongchun county.<sup>55</sup> He was famous for fulfilling worshippers' pleas for relief from natural calamity, gradually achieving a wide recognition and developing a large following. After his death in 1109 A.D., he was preserved in a pagoda behind the temple, where he has responded to the prayers of the devoted and fueled the growth of the temple since. For eight hundred years, this temple was rewarded with imperial patronage and attracted large pilgrimages. Before 1949, a large temple fair was held every year on the birthday of Qingshui Zushi. Between 1949 and 1982, all temple activities were shut down, but after 1982, money was collected both at home and abroad to restore this ancient temple. The temple itself is an ornate construction: it is three stories tall, with two lower flanks attached; it has a flying roof with golden dragons on each edge and beneath the roof is a layer of hand-carved ornaments in navy blue; it is made of red bricks with an arch gate-look window on sides; the lower part is covered with castle limestone. Inside, it is supported by round red pillars with golden Chinese characters praising the outstanding deeds of the Zushigong. The front wall of each hall is decorated with various paintings and calligraphy. Red lanterns are draped in the hallways, and a red wooden box hangs at the entrance of the flanking wall for donation. Zushigong is worshipped at the main hall, Guanyin rests in the left flank hall, and a laughing Buddha sits in the right flank.

The first large-scale *jiao* (a religious pageant usually held at rural market towns dedicated to a tutelary deity) in forty years was held at the temple on January 4-6, 1990, according to the lunar cal-

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<sup>55</sup>Lin Sisui, *Anxi xianzhi fubian* (A supplementary to Anxi gazetteer) (Taipei: The Anxi Association of Taipei, 1967), 165-70.

endar.<sup>56</sup> This three-day *jiao* attracted ten thousand attendants, and peasants from neighboring counties such as Nan'an and Quanzhou participated. In addition, a three-hundred-person delegation from Taiwan also joined this ceremony.<sup>57</sup> In this case, the religious sphere also covered Hutou, Shishan, Kuidou, and Jiandou townships. Four major lineages such as Li, Lin, Wu, and Zhou took responsibility in organizing the *jiao*, and the ritual was first and foremost a restoration of local traditions as well as an attempt at local autonomy.

Local official attitudes to such occurrences have been ambivalent. According to state policy, these networks of local cults, festivals, and lineage worship of spiritual agency belief are considered superstitious practices and therefore illegal. An agreement has been made between the *jiao* committee and local authorities that the community leaders can only consent to ritual visits from four nearby townships.

#### *Supravillage Ascriptive Associations and Secret Societies*

The third type of religious activities is the centuries-old secret societies, which have persisted throughout the communist era. No doubt revitalized by the dismantling of the commune system, religious sects reappeared in Zhejiang and Fujian during 1981-85. The revival of Wuweijiao, Yiguandao, and Xiantiandao cults have been more local in character. The majority of the principal culprits are elderly former sect leaders and disciples who were once active members and still persist in these activities.<sup>58</sup> Most of them are poorly educated peasants. Overall, the rapid growth and expansion of sect membership and organization suggest that such a social force will be viable for years to come (see table 12).

There are three conclusions regarding how religious institutions provide the framework for organizing authority in rural communities, as follows: first, popular religion constitutes the public domain through which non-Party religious leadership is able to exert influence. Secondly, because of dialect group boundaries, villagers often perform

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<sup>56</sup>This data was provided by Liu Yuming, director of the administrative committee of the Qingshui Zushi Zumiao.

<sup>57</sup>Feuchtwang, *The Imperial Metaphor*, 69-71.

<sup>58</sup>PRC Ministry of Public Security First Bureau, "Main Activities of the Sects and Societies in Recent Years," *Chinese Sociology and Anthropology* 21, no. 4 (Summer 1989): 49-84.

**Table 12**  
**Secret Societies in Post-1978 Zhejiang**

County/Province	Sect	Year
Chun'an, Zhejiang	Wuweijiao	May 1983
Yuhang, Zhejiang	Yiguandao	1984
Pujiang, Zhejiang	Xiantiandao	May 1983
Pingyang, Zhejiang	Xiantiandao	1981
Taizhou, Zhejiang	Hangjijiao	June 1983
Xinchang, Zhejiang	Changshengdao	1982

**Sources:** *Chun'an xianzhi* (1990), 519; *Yuhang xianzhi* (1990), 597; *Pujiang xianzhi* (1991), 447; and Chen Yu and Zhang Shenghua, "The Rise and Fall of Emperor Zheng Min," *Chinese Sociology and Anthropology* 21, no. 4 (Summer 1989): 37-48.

ritual activities in the name of community, thereby marking its exclusive status among specific popular cults. Finally, through patronage of local cults, the religious leadership is able to express its identification with the local consciousness.

### **Political Dynamics of Peasant Localism: State vs. Peasant Power**

The preceding discussion has analyzed Chinese peasant localism in post-1978 South China. From what we have discussed so far, it is clear that the seemingly omnipresent Marxist-Leninist state has not featured prominently in the social and cultural sphere of the southern Chinese peasantry. The official Chinese society consisting of a single, uniform basis of solidarity under the state simply does not exist. Instead, in southern rural society, there are a number of competing social groups as well as competitive social institutions attached to distinct social groupings and identities. The southern peasant society is manifested by lineage networks, territorial cults, and dialect group consciousness; these parochial groups are coterminous, and their divisions have persisted throughout the communist era.

A fundamental question raised by students of China studies since 1978 is the extent to which the Chinese peasantry has a significant impact on political and social change under the Chinese socialist state. The above evidence suggests that the Chinese peasantry indeed has a capacity to alter state policy and thereby change political outcomes. Under the rubric of peasant localism, peasants' capacity to restore lineage networks and worship local cults exemplifies the conditions

in which peasant has attained a significant level of power and authority. Peasant localism denotes a social mechanism of power, authority, and initiatives. In its organizational aspect, it serves as the framework of peasant power in rural South China, which affects the exercise of state power. It also serves as the arena in which politics is contested and leadership developed. Thus, peasant localism enables us to understand the dynamic nature of power and authority between state and society in rural South China today. It can be defined as a historical process, and as a social entity within the broader framework of society, yet with a structure and momentum of its own, emerging as a prevailing social force.

Moreover, the overriding importance of territorial boundaries as delineated by lineage compositions in rural communities indicates that lineage has been the essential element in territorial control of local daily politics. The perpetuation of lineage has also been reinforced in written and oral genealogies, worship associations, ancestral halls, and dialect group consciousness, the intensity of which has been expressed in the rigidity of each group's boundaries. The socialist state has attempted to integrate these dialect groups through class consciousness and nationalism, but evidence suggests that dialect group consciousness has been too strong to be dissolved. It is distinct not only as a unit in the lineage system, but also as a ritual unit in a subsystem of local cults and local temples. Hence, the coincidence of local dialects and local cults has been an integrative process within the locality's social formation.

In conclusion, southern Chinese peasants have found ways to prosper in locales outside immediate state purview in the post-1978 era. The easing of social regimentation since rural reform has slackened the rigid lines of socialist orthodoxy, and the decline in state power in the countryside has given rise to peasant autonomy in rural South China. Taking advantage of the region's extensive lineage past, the southern Chinese peasants have revived a distinctive social structure and culture of their own liking.