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In the Ancestors' Shadow: Cultural Heritage Contestations in Chinese Villages

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Abstract

This paper discusses the construction and (re-)interpretation of cultural heritage in Chinese villages within the context of the dramatic political and socio-economic changes that have taken place since the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949. The paper addresses the contestations surrounding heritage sites and cultural heritage policy, and analyses both the ideological framework of cultural heritage policy and the legal and economic context. Particular attention is paid to the views and activities of different actors and stakeholders in heritage management at the village level.

As part of the social and political transformation of the Chinese society after 1949, the Chinese state took over or destroyed many temples and ancestral halls on the countryside. This signified not only a struggle over political power but also a struggle over space, memory, and identity. In the 1980s, the countryside saw a cultural and religious revival as villagers started to reclaim and rebuild their temples and ancestral halls. Since the 1990s, these sites and buildings have also begun to receive attention and protection from the cultural relics bureaus. However, the process of selecting and proclaiming certain buildings as heritage sites, and exhibiting historic figures and events as part of a grand heritage narrative, not only changes the places themselves but also the local community's views of its heritage and ability to control it. The "discovery" of these sites by tourism developers and the growth in tourism in recent years furthermore transforms the rural heritage into something of an economic asset. This development gives rise to new contradictions and conflicts over interpretation and management, and has in some cases led to dissatisfaction among villagers, who find themselves disinherited of their cultural heritage, excluded from the decision-making process, and not benefiting enough from tourism.

Sites and buildings that were but recently recovered from the state today somewhat ironically risk being lost to cultural relics and/or tourism bureaus. This shows that contestations over space and historical memory are not static but change over time, taking different forms and involving new actors. Contestations do not only take place between local communities and the state/market but also within the local communities themselves. Local communities are not homogenous and there exist different views of and attachments to places and sites, depending on for example family history, religious convictions, as well as age and gender. The right to have one's cultural heritage respected and protected, to be able to define it and to participate in decisions affecting it, is important for individual and collective

identity and well-being, as well as a potential resource for and aspect of democracy and sustainable development.

The paper is based upon a case study of the local heritage in selected villages in Zhejiang province.¹ Some of the questions addressed are: What sites are important to the local community and why? What kinds of contestations over space and memory have taken place in the villages since 1949? What kinds of contestations and re-interpretations have occurred after local sites have become elevated to official/national heritage sites and/or become tourist attractions?

Keywords: cultural heritage, space, memory, identity, ancestral halls, temples, religious life, Chinese villages, Zhejiang province

¹ Since 2002 I have made several fieldtrips to villages in Zhejiang province. In 2004 I benefited immensely from participating in a field study arranged by Professor Peter Bol, Harvard University, with his graduate students and volunteers from Earthwatch. My study is based upon interviews with local villagers, cadres, representatives from the cultural relics bureaus, and scholars, as well as a reading of local history, genealogies, laws and policies in the cultural heritage field, and promotional materials etc. I have presented findings from my research at several conferences, including at the conference Structures of Vulnerability, Stockholm University 12-14 January 2005, where I presented the paper "Cultural Heritage Management in Chinese Villages: Cultural, Legal, and Economic Contestations and the Possibility for Sustainable Development," and at the annual conference of the European Association of Chinese Studies, Heidelberg, 25-29 August, 2004, where I presented the paper "Remembering and Marketing Rural Heritage in Zhejiang: Local History, Tourism and Hidden Narratives."

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The Social Construction of Cultural Heritage: Contestations Surrounding Space, Memory, and Identity

The cultural heritage includes both the physical remnants of the past, i.e. the historic environment in the form of archaeological and architectural sites, as well as the non-material aspects of our living past, i.e. the intangible heritage as manifested in music, dance, handicraft, religion and other ritual and cultural practices. The cultural heritage is one of the defining and central aspects of human life, and constitutes an important aspect of people's identity and sense of place.² Implicit in the concept of heritage is the idea that there is a threat that something will be lost unless we make a conscious effort to preserve it. Preservation only becomes necessary when normal institutions and cultural practices no longer guarantee the survival of a site or practice. The mere designation of something as heritage thus seems to indicate the end of it as a living culture/practice. According to Barbara Kirschenblatt-Gimblett, heritage designation gives the endangered a second life as an exhibition of itself.³ This analysis however hides the fact that contestations often exist between local people, who still see the sites as part of their living culture, and other actors, such as governments and experts, who designate them as heritage sites, and to some extent therefore museumify them. Some of the contestations surrounding heritage sites thus originate in differing views and uses of sites and buildings. A living culture is not only often manifested through and in buildings (tangible heritage) but also the best guarantee for the latter's preservation. This can be seen on the Chinese countryside where active clans and religious communities are the best guarantee for the upkeep and survival of ancestral halls and temples.

It is important to be aware of what the cultural heritage is and what it is not, what it does and what it doesn't do. There is always a choice involved as to what to keep and preserve, and what to discard and forget about the past; choices that are based on cultural, economic, and political considerations on both the individual and collective level. Something handed down by earlier generations doesn't become heritage until it is recognised as such by somebody, or, more often, by an institution/body with sufficient prestige and

² There exist a growing and diverse body of literature on cultural heritage that draws on different disciplines. I have found the following two works particularly inspiring, the sociologist Diane Barthel's book, *Historic Preservation. Collective Memory and Historical Identity* New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1996, and the geographer Peter Howard's book, *Heritage. Management, Interpretation, Identity* Continuum: London, 2003.

³ See Barbara Kirschenblatt-Gimblett, "Intangible Heritage as Metacultural Production," *Museum International*, Vol. 56, No. 1-2, 2004, pp. 52-64.

power. The cultural heritage is neither neutral nor self-evident, and it tells us as much or more about the present as about the past. As David Lowenthal argues, "...heritage is not history..., while it borrows from and enlivens historical study, heritage is not an inquiry into the past but a celebration of it, not an effort to know what actually happened but a profession of faith in a past tailored to present-day purposes."⁴ Or as J. E. Tunbridge and G. J. Ashworth put it, "the present selects an inheritance from an imagined past for current use and decides what should be passed on to an imagined future."⁵ Peter Howard and other scholars emphasise that heritage is a process, which further underlines its temporal and contextual character. Heritage sites thus pass through a process that moves from discovery, designation, and protection, to perhaps commodification, where each stage is beset with contestations of different kinds.⁶ The cultural heritage is thus not fixed but developing and in a process of constant negotiation, contestation, and (re-) interpretation.

Decisions on what to remember and preserve, and how to preserve and display it, are therefore inevitably shaped by ideology and power. One could describe the cultural heritage as a social construct related to issues of identity, representativity, ownership, and access. Tunbridge and Ashworth argue that because cultural heritage touches upon issues of cultural and national identity it is inevitably contentious. Different actors and powers are engaged in a struggle to identify and interpret the cultural heritage. The cultural heritage is thus related to the issue of cultural and economic capital, resulting in ideological, cultural, economic, and political contestations. Individuals for example proclaim or reclaim their identity and cultural heritage, and in the process often challenge or resist political and economic power. The central question to ask in heritage studies is: What and whose cultural heritage is protected in society, for what purposes, and by whom?

The discussion about power alerts us to the importance of identifying the different stakeholders and actors in cultural heritage policy and management. Who has the power and economic capital to shape cultural heritage policy and for what purposes? The actors include political leaders and parties, official authorities and local governments, educational and cultural institutions, financial institutions and companies, experts and cultural workers, as well as the general public. The actual influence and contribution of these different

⁴ David Lowenthal, *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, p. x.

⁵ J. E. Tunbridge and G. J. Ashworth, *Dissonant Heritage. The Management of the Past as a Resource in Conflict* John Wiley & Sons, 1996, p. 6.

⁶ Adapted from Howard (2003).

groups and organisations vary from issue to issue, country to country, and over time. Although the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and its propaganda departments continue to play a crucial role in Chinese heritage policy, we see a growing pluralism as a result of ideological and socio-economic changes that has led to the increasing involvement of new actors, such as tourism companies, local governments, experts, and the general public.

Different groups and actors value different things and have different attachments to sites. Their positions reflect their different interests and needs to remember and forget certain aspects of the past. Power holders (political parties, local governments, official institutions, families and other social groups) usually value sites that legitimize their own power and ideology. This is revealed by the direct involvement of the CCP in cultural heritage and museum work and the emphasis put on revolutionary sites and monuments. Experts put more value on the authenticity, age, and architectural quality of buildings and environments, although their appreciation is not neutral or value free but builds upon a culturally and ideologically informed aestheticism.⁷ The general public and local communities, on the other hand, are more motivated by personal attachment, and tend to put greater emphasis on myths and on the cultural and religious significance of sites and buildings. Buildings are very often sites for religious, cultural or other activities, and therefore intimately connected to certain belief systems and cultural practices. Religious sites thus mean more, or have different meanings, to believers than to non-believers and experts. The latter might value a church or temple for its architectural quality and age, although he or she perhaps lacks the knowledge to read and appreciate the religious symbols and does not experience any deeper feelings when entering the building. Commercial enterprises and local governments, for their part, see the cultural heritage as an economic asset and source of revenue, which give rise to other ways to interpret and make use of heritage sites. It is also important to pay attention to gender differences and experiences. Men and women sometimes value different sites and relate to them differently. In China, for example, men are more deeply involved in the preservation of ancestral halls than are women. This is not surprising since men carry the family line and in the past were the ones who performed in the ancestral ceremonies. Ancestral halls are thus predominantly male places.⁸

⁷ We thus see changes over time with respect to privileged heritage sites. In the West this has meant a move from a focus on castles and churches to vernacular houses and industrial sites.

⁸ Chinese houses were also divided into clearly demarcated male and female spaces, see Ronald G. Knapp *China's Living Houses: Folk Beliefs, Symbols, and Household Ornamentation* Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1999

Women, on the other hand, often seem to have more attachment to and responsibility for rebuilding and managing temples.⁹

Since cultural heritage policies reflect power relations in society they usually benefit someone and disadvantage someone else. Depending on the ideology behind the selection of heritage sites, the representation at these sites, as well as the management of them, cultural heritage policy can be blatantly nationalistic, exclusive, sexist, or elitist. But heritage sites and museums are not always that easy to read and decode. It might not be immediately obvious to a casual visitor what stories are hidden or suppressed in heritage sites, or in what way certain groups dominate heritage narratives and representations and suppress other voices. A basic principle in heritage studies must therefore be to seek the disinherited. In the Chinese context, the heritage of so-called class enemies, capitalists, landlords, and religious groups were desecrated, or destroyed and forgotten after 1949. During the Mao Zedong era a revolutionary makeover of Beijing and its central places was for example regarded as necessary in order to create the new society.¹⁰ During this revolutionary period an obliteration of historical memory took place through destroying many old sites and monuments, or reinterpreting and rewriting them through an ideological and political lens as feudal, backward, and superstitious. When the grand mansion of Sichuan's largest landlord, Liu Wencai, was saved it was not in order to celebrate its architectural qualities but so that it could serve as a remainder of "the old days when working people were oppressed and exploited."¹¹ Chinese history was likewise rewritten in museums and other sites order to serve and legitimise the new power holders and their version of history.

The meaning and significance of heritage is in part determined by its location in a specific geographical place, and by people's relationship to these

⁹ This is not always the case however. Some studies indicate that men play a more prominent role in temple building and management, especially when religious activities also become a source for or expression of political power. See Irene Eng and Yi-Min Lin, "Religious Festivities, Communal Rivalry, and Restructuring of Authority Relations in Rural Chaozhou, Southeast Asia," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 61, no. 4 (November 2002), pp. 1259-1285. My own visits to villages in Zhejiang however indicate that women play a more prominent role in the management of local temples. It also seems as if women are playing an increasingly active role in ancestral ceremonies, see Kuah Khun Eng, "The Changing Moral Economy of Ancestor Worship in a Chinese Emigrant District," *Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry*, Vol. 23, No. 1, 1999, p. 112, p. 113, p. 115. My own study indicate that women are more active in cases where ancestors are being worshipped more as a god rather than as an ancestor and when ancestor ceremonies in some ways merge with religious activities, see below.

¹⁰ On the revolutionary remaking of Beijing, see Wu Hung, *Remaking Beijing: Tiananmen Square and the Creation of a Political Space* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005. See also parts of Anne-Marie Broudehoux, *The Making and Selling of post-Mao Beijing* New York: Routledge, 2004.

¹¹ Quoted in Chen Liang, "Sichuan landlord mansions depict past," *China Daily* April 7, 2001. For a similar quote, see also Ronald G. Knapp, *China's Old Dwellings* Honolulu: Hawaii University Press, 2000, p. 327. The mansion was proclaimed a provincial protected site in 1980, and in 1996 designated a national level protected site.

places. When discussing heritage, the concept of space and place and other related ideas, such as place myths and consumption of place etc, become very important.¹² Our identity and memory have a strong spatial dimension. Religious and cultural identities are for example often strongly related to sacred sites and other places. These place-based identities celebrate different types of historical memory and identity at the local, regional, national, and global level.¹³ How do these levels interact with each other, which are more important and to whom? The sites and commemorations will look different at the different levels, although they might overlap and be linked.¹⁴ The actors involved in the designation and management of the sites, and the contestations surrounding them, will also partly differ at the different levels.

The designation of something as national heritage tells us what a nation, or its current power-holders, want to preserve and remember of the past, or how it imagines the past. But it is important to be aware of the potential conflict or gap between the official designation of a site as national heritage and people's personal attachment to and identification with sites at different levels.¹⁵ The construction of national heritage sites, and the tension between local and national memories and identities, underlie many of the contestations surrounding the cultural heritage. Work to preserve the cultural heritage and establish museums have often been driven by the search for, or creation of, a national identity, and myths and nostalgia surrounding the past.¹⁶ The cultural heritage is thus linked to the task of nation building, and put in the service of, or exploited for patriotic reasons. Visitors to Chinese museums and heritage sites would have noticed that many of them have sign boards

¹² For discussion on the concepts of space and place, see among others Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place. The Perspective of Experience* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977, third printing 2003, Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1991, and John Urry, *Consuming Places* London and New York: Routledge, 1996. With special reference to China, see Mayfair Mei-Hui Yang. "Spatial Struggles: Postcolonial Complex, State Disenchantment, and Popular Reappropriation of Space in Rural Southeast China," *Journal of Asian Studies*, 63, no. 3 (August 2004), Jing Wang ed. *Locating China. Space, place, and popular Culture* London and New York: Routledge 2005, and Tim Oakes and Louisa Schein, *Translocal China. Linkages, identities, and the reimagining of space* London and New York: Routledge, 2006.

¹³ See Howard (2003) on heritage sites and levels of geographic identity.

¹⁴ It should be mentioned that people also have translocal identities, which open up new and different understandings of spatial identities. For the case of China, see Oakes and Schein (2006).

¹⁵ One should also distinguish between sites legal-technical status as protected heritage sites and people's emotional and subjective views and memories attaches to sites. In many cases there is also a struggle to designate/elevate something to the status of an officially protected heritage site.

¹⁶ For useful discussions on cultural heritage, nationalism, and national commemoration, see Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum* New York: Routledge, 1995, Stefan Bohman, *Historia, museer och nationalism*. [History, museums and nationalism], Carlssons, 1997, as well as the contributions in John R. Gillis, eds., *Commemorations. The Politics of National Identity*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994. For a more general work on nation building that touches upon the role of museums, see also Benedict Anderson *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* London: Verso, 1983.

declaring the museum or heritage site in question to be a patriotic education base (*aiguo zhuyi jiaoyu jidi*). This holds true of sites as different as ancestral halls, the Great Wall, and the Yan'an Revolutionary Memorial Hall.¹⁷ For all of their differences, these sites are nonetheless perceived as important in promoting national pride and allegiance to the PRC. They are thus part of the same patriotic preservation narrative promoted by the state in an effort to capitalise on the cultural heritage for ideological and political purposes. In the past, sites and buildings associated with important revolutionary events and former residences of political figures were more likely to be elevated to heritage sites and better protected than other historical sites, which shows that the cultural heritage serves to justify both the rule of the Party and its interpretation of history. The political background to heritage designations and the multilayered historical memories and selective narratives found or hidden in many heritage sites can be illustrated by the political ups-and-downs of Deng Xiaoping's family home in Sichuan. After 1952, no members of the Deng family lived in the 17-room house that had been their home for three generations.¹⁸ The house was turned over to the local government and used as a dining hall and kindergarten among other things. During the Cultural Revolution the house was, like its former inhabitant, attacked and suffered some damage. In 1981, as a result of Deng Xiaoping's return to power, the local government however decided to turn the house into a cultural station (*wenhua zhan*) with a retired cadre and a teacher in charge of management and receiving visitors. As a result of the increase in visitors during the next few years, which mirrored Deng's rise in political power, the house was in 1987 turned into the Deng Xiaoping Former Residence Management Site. The 14 families who still lived in the compound then had to move out as the house now was transformed from an ordinary physical building into a heritage site that celebrated its former resident and his political power. The house became a county level heritage site in 1992, a provincial level heritage site in 1996, and finally a national level heritage site in 2001.

¹⁷ In 1997, the Central Propaganda Department announced the first round of one hundred heritage sites and museums as bases for patriotic education. These sites were described as places where "the treasures of the long history of the Chinese nation will be demonstrated, the hard struggles of the modern Chinese exhibited, the torrential revolutionary undertakings of the CCP reflected, patriotic sentiment molded, and the will to serve the nation motivated." For more on patriotic education and heritage, see Marina Svensson, "Museums and Historic Buildings as Sites for Patriotic Education in the People's Republic of China," paper presented at the Association of Asian Studies annual meeting, New York, 27-30 March, 2003.

¹⁸ See *Wo shi Zhongguo renmin erzi. Deng Xiaoping guju* [I'm the son of the Chinese people. Deng Xiaoping's old family home], *Baige aiguo zhuyi jiaoyu shifan jidi congshu*. Beijing: Baike quanshu, 1998.

The house was also in the 1990s made into a patriotic education base to further underline its ideological and political use.

China currently has some 1 271 national level protected sites (*guojia wenwu baohu danwei*).¹⁹ The criteria used for selecting these sites have changed dramatically since the first list of 180 sites was adopted in 1962. In the aftermath of CCP's ideological crisis we have seen a partial reinterpretation of the past that has led to the preservation and celebration of new heritage sites. Among the national level sites today are thus sites as different as the Potala Palace in Lhasa, monuments to revolutionary martyrs, traditional villages and ancestral halls, as well as China first nuclear test site. Some of these sites have only belatedly been discovered and claimed as sites of national significance, whereas they earlier were neglected, vilified, or outright destroyed. The number of revolutionary sites of the total protected national heritage sites has dropped to less than ten percent as a result of this partial redefinition of the cultural heritage. The revolutionary patriotic preservation narrative of old is now combined with a cultural-based patriotic narrative that celebrates China's long history and ethnic unity. This redefinition or redirection of patriotism sharply contrasts with the CCP's earlier iconoclasm and attack on traditional culture. One of the first official manifestations of this new brand of patriotism in cultural heritage policy is perhaps Deng Xiaoping's slogan in 1984 to "Love the motherland, restore the Great Wall," which resulted in major restorations of the wall.²⁰

It goes without saying that Chinese people relate to national heritage sites in different ways, depending among other things on their religious conviction and individual and family history. Many of the national level sites are imbued with contestations regarding memory, interpretation, and management. Grand and imperial sites have recently been lavishly repaired or reconstructed since they today are perceived to add glory to the Chinese nation. Many cities and local governments see investment in cultural heritage as adding cultural capital to the local community and themselves, and as a way of promoting

¹⁹ Different countries have different administrative and legal systems for designating heritage sites. In China, the designation of heritage sites follows the general four-level administrative and political system of central, provincial, municipal, and county and district levels. In the following I will refer to protected heritage sites (*wenwu baohu danwei*) but as will be obvious from my discussion other types of designations also exist and sometimes overlap with these designations. At the different administrative levels some particularly important heritage sites are thus designated as patriotic education bases (*aiguo jiaoyu jidi*). Other categories of heritage sites/places include historic cities (*lishi wenhua mingcheng*) and, more relevant for this paper, historic villages (*lishi wenhua mingcun*). Many sites are not listed as protected heritage sites but are of significance to local communities. In China, unlike in Sweden for example, individuals do not have the right to nominate sites for designation as protected heritage sites.

²⁰ See Arthur Waldron, "Scholarship and Patriotic Education: The Great Wall Conference, 1994," *The China Quarterly* Issue 143, September 1995, pp. 844-850.

tourism. Another aspect of the new heritage craze in China today is the many attempts to build fake historical environments and theme parks. This takes place at the same time that authentic old buildings and historic environments are being demolished. The Chinese state is also very eager to have sites declared as World Heritage Sites as this brings international status to China as a cultural nation, which is part of the new soft-power strategy.²¹ These sites are selected on the basis of some general and international criteria but are also chosen in order so as to best represent China abroad.²² Although the sites get some of their glory from their international status they also have deep meanings to local and religious communities that sometimes are not respected or taken into account. Another problem with the representation and management of World Heritage Sites is that they risk becoming inaccessible to the local communities as their new status often results in hefty entrance fees. Like in the case of other sites, some of the sites also have hidden stories or contestations.²³ Tuisiyuan, a garden in Tongli outside of Suzhou, and the Confucius Temple in Qufu, are now World Heritage Sites, but both suffered neglect and were almost destroyed during the Cultural Revolution.²⁴ These facts are usually not mentioned at the sites today, and nor is the fact that parts of the buildings have had to be completely rebuilt. Family members bearing the name Kong in Qufu and elsewhere were viciously attacked during this period because of their famous ancestor.²⁵ They had to disclaim their heritage and their ancestral halls were severely damaged or destroyed. The destruction or revolutionising of these spaces/sites implied a negation of the memories and identities formerly associated with them, memories that are now celebrated but with a different twist in the global tourism market.

Heritage sites at the regional or provincial level proclaim a regional or local identity that has shifted and been contested throughout China's long

²¹ Other examples of this include the setting up of so-called Confucius institutes worldwide serving as cultural and language centres. There has also been an upsurge in cultural exchanges and events, such as the China year in France recently.

²² An international committee selects the sites based on national nominations. The national nominations thus tell us something about which sites are valued in each country. An analysis of this nomination process in China, and comparison with other countries, is beyond the scope of this paper.

²³ For a discussion of some of these contestations in Chengde, see James L. Hevia, "World Heritage, National Culture, and the Restoration of Chengde," *Positions*, 9:1, 2001.

²⁴ A rich official built Tuisiyuan for his retirement. After 1949, five different work units took over the garden and on its premises built new buildings, including a factory. In 1981 restoration gradually began and the work units had to move out. The site first became a provincial level protected site and then in 2000 a World Heritage Site.

²⁵ For the history and destruction of the Confucius Temple in Qufu, see Wang Ling, "The Confucius Temple Tragedy of the Cultural Revolution," in Thomas A. Wilson, ed. *On Sacred Grounds. Culture, Society, Politics and the Formation of the Cult of Confucius* Harvard University Asia Center: Cambridge, 2002, pp. 376-398. For stories of how families bearing the surname Kong suffered in Jiangxi province, see Jun Jing, *The Temple of Memories: History, Power, and Morality in a Chinese Village* Stanford University Press: Stanford, 1996.

history.²⁶ These sites are administratively speaking designated as provincial level protected sites (*shengji wenwu baohu danwei*), or, if more local, constitute municipal and county level sites (*shiji, xianji wenwu baohu danwei*). They might celebrate regional and local history and traditions, but in many cases the local heritage is linked to or subsumed within a national heritage narrative. The local famous son's old home may for example be protected because his service to the nation and the revolution. Examples include the family homes of political leaders, such as Mao Zedong, Deng Xiaoping and Zhou Enlai. Some villages and areas make a living out of this connection, such as Mao Zedong's native Hunan.²⁷ More recently the alleged connection to Jiang Zemin encouraged Yuyuan in Jiangxi to invest big money in the creation of Jiang Zemin's home village. The village has been transformed from an ordinary living village into a model village and political exhibition with re-created and re-built heritage sites. The local authorities have for example rebuilt the old ancestral hall that was demolished in the early 1970s.²⁸

As will be discussed in more detail below, since the early 1980s a cultural and religious revival has taken place in China that to varying degrees is tolerated and even supported by Chinese authorities. This means that the official patriotic and revolutionary heritage narrative now increasingly lives side by side, or is confronted with alternative narratives and new heritage sites and museums. The celebration and re-invention of local history and identity involve many different actors and manifests itself in different kinds of contestations. With the celebration of and investment in selected heritage sites, rapid city-redevelopment, and growth of heritage tourism, the cultural heritage has become the scene of new and complex contestations regarding space, memory, and identity. In order to be able to understand these processes it is necessary to study the ways Chinese citizens seek to simultaneously accommodate and resist the state and its memory practices, and the extent to which different groups of people can create and celebrate alternative historical

²⁶ See for example David S. Goodman, "Structuring Local Identity: Nation, Province and County in Shanxi during the 1990s," *The China Quarterly*, No. 172, December 2002, pp. 837-862, and "Shanxi as translocal imaginary: reforming the local," in Oakes and Schein (2006), pp. 56-73.

²⁷ On the Mao heritage industry more generally, see Geremie R. Barmé, *Shades of Mao: The Posthumous Cult of the Great Leader* Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 1996, pp. 36-39. And on Mao theme parks, see Michael Dutton, *Streetlife China* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, pp. 222-224, 232-234.

²⁸ In the village one can find several big posters declaring it to be Jiang Zemin's hometown as well as posters with smiling children and "granddad" Jiang. Some of the sites fame originates solely from the fact that Jiang Zemin once had visited them. In one house it is thus possible to have one's picture taken sitting in the same chair that Jiang Zemin sat in the picture hanging on the wall behind. Villagers in another village close by claim that the Jiang family actually originated from their village and that the local authorities don't want this to be known due to their endorsement of the other village. Information from interviews with villagers in the two villages in October 2005.

memory practices and identities. The contestations thus take place at traditional spaces and heritage sites but also involve the identification and creation of new spaces and sites.

Sites of Memory and Placed-Based Identities at the Village Level

Towns and villages have landmarks and buildings that commemorate and celebrate local history and place-based identities, and encourage loyalty and attachment to these places. These local sites include various places of historical significance, such as guildhalls, local temples and shrines, ancestral halls, pavilions, pagodas, bridges, and graves etc. People's sense of identity is often very local as family and religion bind one to a specific place. This is very obvious in China where villages sometimes are dominated by one family and its ancestral halls, and where temples are dedicated to local gods.

Ancestral halls are the most central and architecturally magnificent buildings in many Chinese villages.²⁹ They embody both family and place-based identities. It was only during the Ming dynasty that freestanding ancestral halls began to be built; before this period ancestral ceremonies took place exclusively within the home. During the Qing dynasty ancestral halls spread to broader groups and became more numerous. Many of the ancestral halls preserved in Chinese villages today thus date from the Qing dynasty.³⁰ In many villages there exist several ancestral halls, some of which may belong to different lineages. The major, focal, ancestral hall, serves as the ancestral hall for the whole lineage, whereas different family branches often have their own halls. In some villages there could be as many as 20-40 ancestral halls. The halls vary in size and architectural style depending on the family's wealth and status as well as due to geographical and time-period differences. In the halls the ancestral tablets were kept and ancestral ceremonies and other communal activities performed. The use of the halls followed the rhythm of the lunar year with the New Year celebration as one of the most important events of the year. This was the time when the ancestral portraits would be put on display and when elaborated performances to the honour of the ancestors took place. Other events were related to family affairs, such as birth, marriage, and death. Coffins were stored in the halls and funerals could, depending on the age and

²⁹ For an overview of the architecture and meaning of ancestral halls, see Puay-Peng Ho, "Ancestral Halls. Family, Lineage, and Ritual," in Ronald G. Knapp and Kai-Yin Lo *House, Home, Family: Living and Being Chinese* University of Hawaii Press: Honolulu, 2005, pp. 295-323.

³⁰ In Zhejiang many ancestral halls were destroyed during the Taiping rebellion but later rebuilt.

gender of the deceased, also be held there. The halls were furthermore often used as schools and hosted cultural events such as opera performances. Important communal affairs and local and family disputes were also settled in the halls. The ancestral hall was thus a centre for the lineage's and the whole village's social and cultural life. The space was in some sense sacred and closely regulated as to outline and use. Different rooms were used for different purposes and had different decorations and furniture. Access to the hall was usually through the side entrance, whereas the main gate was only opened on special occasions or for important visitors.³¹ The standing and status of the family was revealed through the size of the hall and through other elements, such as the height of the doorstep to the main gate and through flagpoles for successful imperial candidates etc.

Most villages would in the past have had several temples, ranging from Buddhist and Taoist temples to those dedicated to local gods.³² In addition there were a number of smaller religious sites and shrines dedicated to the Earth God, the most placed-based god of all, and other local deities and spirits.³³ The Chinese religious world was dominated by local cults that centred on historic persons that came to serve as patrons for the village or area in question.³⁴ The cults and temples and shrines associated with them thus embodied a strong sense of place-based identity.

Other sites and buildings in the villages reflected other manifestations of historical memory and celebrated local events and individuals. One would thus also find pagodas and pavilions, often established for *fengshui* purposes, or erected in memory of some special event. Other memorial monuments, such as memorial arches (*paifang*), were dedicated to prosperous and successful imperial candidates, virtuous officials, and to chaste widows. The setting of the village and individual houses was traditionally based on *fengshui* principles, where streams and mountains played an important role as locus for

³¹ In Zhuge village it was only during the New Year celebrations that the main gate was open. As a result of tourism the big gate is now constantly open and used as entrance. But when some elderly women go to the hall to offer incense in the early morning hours on the first and fifteenth of the lunar month they still need to access the hall through the smaller side gate.

³² For some recent ethnographic accounts of religious life at the village level, see Gregory A. Ruf, *Cadres and Kin: Making a Socialist Village in West China, 1921-1991* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998, Thomas David Dubois, *The Sacred Village: Social Change and Religious Life in Rural North China* Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2005, and John M. Flower, "A Road is Made: Roads, Temples, and Historical Memory in Ya'an County, Sichuan," *The Journal of Asian Studies* Vol. 63, No. 3, August 2004, pp. 649-685.

³³ For a fascinating study of temples to the Earth God on Taiwan, see Alessandro Dell'Orto, *Place and Spirit in Taiwan. Tudi Gong in the Stories, Strategies and Memories of Everyday Life* London and New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2002.

³⁴ For a general work on local cults and their festivals, see Stephan Feuchtwang, *Popular Religion in China: The Imperial Metaphor* London and New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003.

qi, vital force.³⁵ Dams and spirit walls were built at central locations in the village to add and improve on its *fengshui*. *Fengshui* was also employed for the setting of graves. After 1949 *fengshui* was criticised as a form of superstitious activity although some *fengshui* masters still continued to practice it.³⁶ Not many villagers can today read the *fengshui* settings of their village, although the names of mountains and other sites still give clues of their earlier meaning. Traditional houses in Chinese villages were, as Ronald Knapp quoting Zhu Qiqian, describes it, “living symbols” that reflected the social and spiritual aspirations of the people that built them.³⁷ The villagers would thus decorate their house with auspicious symbols and with motives and figures that would protect the house against evil spirits.

Chinese villages, in other words, had a rich cultural and religious life as manifested in the various types of buildings and in the many festivities and celebrations that took place in them. Buildings such as ancestral halls and temples were sacred spaces used for public and ritual commemorations and practices. They are thus examples of what Henri Lefebvre calls “representational spaces,” that produce lived spatial experiences and nurture place-based identities.³⁸

Loosing and Reclaiming Heritage Sites in the Villages

After the founding of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, many aspects of the Chinese cultural heritage were refuted and attacked as feudal and backward. Traditional buildings, such as temples and palaces, were either demolished to make room for new buildings, or converted into new uses, such as offices, housing, schools, and factories. During the Cultural Revolution, destruction of religious buildings and temples took place on an even more devastating scale. The majority of vernacular houses were however left standing since there simply was not money enough to replace them with new

³⁵ For an account of the *fengshui* outline of one Chinese village, see Patrick H. Hase and Lee Man-Yip, “Sheung Wo Hang Village, Hong Kong: A Village Shaped by *Fengshui*,” in Ronald G. Knapp ed., *Chinese Landscapes: The Village as Place* University of Hawaii Press, 1992, pp. 79-94. On *fengshui* and house building, see Ronald G. Knapp, “Siting and Situating a Dwelling: *Fengshui*, House-Building Rituals, and Amulets,” in Ronald G. Knapp and Kai-Yin Lo eds. (2005), pp. 99-137, and Ronald G. Knapp, *China’s Living Houses: Folk Beliefs, Symbols, and Household Ornamentation* University of Hawaii Press: Honolulu, 1999.

³⁶ On official attitudes towards *fengshui*, see Ole Bruun, “The *Fengshui* Resurgence in China: Conflicting Cosmologies between State and Peasantry,” *The China Journal*, No. 36, July 1996, pp. 47-65.

³⁷ See Ronald G. Knapp (1999) for a rich account of Chinese houses and their symbols.

³⁸ Lefebvre (1991).

modern buildings. It was not until well after the economic reforms had begun, and city redevelopments picked up steam in the 1990s, that the destruction of China's built heritage took on really dramatic proportions in the cities.³⁹

On the countryside, clan and family based communities and religious communities were broken up, and all forms of ancestral and religious worship and commemorative activities were forbidden.⁴⁰ In their efforts to eradicate "superstitious" ideas and activities, officials also attacked the sheer physical structures of ancestral halls and temples. The state thus took over and transformed these traditional spaces into "socialist spaces," thereby ensuring the elimination of old power elites and alternative historic memories and identities.⁴¹ These socialist spaces had the dual purpose of ideologically moulding and controlling the new Chinese citizen.

Ancestral halls and temples were thus either demolished in order to make use of scarce building material or appropriated for official use. This development was accelerated with the Great Leap Forward in 1958.⁴² Many of the buildings came to be used as schools, assembly halls, government offices, granaries, or cowsheds over the next decades. While the buildings themselves were kept, religious and other ornaments were destroyed, desecrated, and replaced with revolutionary slogans and symbols.⁴³ The historical and artistic value of these buildings was refuted as they were seen as feudal remnants of an oppressive society. Rich families who were classified as landlords saw their big houses confiscated and transferred to poor peasants, or else had to share house with these families. During the land reforms, land was confiscated from rich landlords and peasants and distributed among poor peasants, only to later be pooled and collectively farmed. Collective farming and investment in infrastructure such as new roads and dams further changed the physical landscape. New buildings, such as meeting halls, communal dining halls and schools, were also erected in the 1950s and 1960s.⁴⁴ But it was not until the

³⁹ City re-developments have sometimes led to violent struggles between real estate developers and residents over housing and compensation. These struggles are not only about economic benefits but also about place and access to the city, including ownership of historical environments. For information on city-redevelopments and preservation in Beijing, see Aurore Merle and Peng Youju, "Peking Between Modernisation and Preservation," *China Perspectives*, no. 45, Jan-Feb 2003, pp. 37-41, and Jasper Goldman, *From Hutong to High-Rise: Explaining the Redevelopment of Old Beijing 1990-2002*, Master in City Planning at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, September 2003, available at <http://web.mit.edu/jbg/www> and then clicking on [JBGThesis15.10.03.pdf](http://web.mit.edu/jbg/www).

⁴⁰ See Jun Jing (1996) for examples from Jiangxi province.

⁴¹ On the concept of socialist spaces, see Yang (2004).

⁴² The more relaxed policy after the Great Leap Forward however briefly led to new efforts to repair ancestral halls, something that was heavily criticised. See Ralph C. Croizier, *China's Cultural Legacy and Communism* Praeger Publishers: New York, 1970, pp. 48-49.

⁴³ For photographic evidence of this revolutionary take-over, see Knapp (1999), pp. 160-166.

⁴⁴ For discussions of the changing village landscapes after 1949, see Ronald G. Knapp and Shen Dongqi, "Changing Village Landscapes," in Ronald G. Knapp (1992), pp. 47-72, and Ronald G.

reforms of the early 1980s, when economic prosperity enabled many peasants to invest in new houses and when many factories and villages enterprises were established, that the villagescape dramatically changed.⁴⁵

As the Chinese countryside was swept up in a revolutionary tide, the cultural and political landscape of the villages was radically transformed.⁴⁶ This revolutionary development changed people's attachment to the land and to traditional buildings and sites. The changes of the physical landscape were thus matched by a change in the cultural and ideological reading and use of the villagescape and its buildings. During the Cultural Revolution people had to show their revolutionary fervour by smashing the remaining statues in temples and destroying the elaborate ornaments that decorated houses and ancestral halls. Heads were chopped off and Chinese characters chiselled off the beautiful wood and stone carvings that decorated the houses and depicted auspicious symbols or historic and literary scenes. Many buildings today show signs and scars from this destructive period. Despite the revolutionary fervour of the period, and the dangers that non-compliance entailed, many villagers nonetheless took pain to hide and protect ornaments through, for example, dismantling and hiding carved window frames or covering wood carvings with revolutionary slogans and Mao quotes.⁴⁷ In many villages people also hid ancestral tablets and portraits that otherwise would have been destroyed. People would also hide statues from temples in safe places. This shows that many people retained a strong attachment to both the traditional buildings themselves and to the ritual practices that took place in them.

Still, more than fifty years of dramatic changes and revolutionary upheavals, and the socialist take-over and suppression of historical memory, meant that traditional spaces and buildings were transformed and gradually emptied of their original meaning and significance. The ancestral halls thus became silent monuments that the younger generations could not read since the meaning of traditional ornaments and symbols had been forgotten and suppressed, or else had been re-written as feudal and superstitious. The ancestral halls no longer inspired the same awe as they had in the past, and they didn't any longer stand as symbols of political authority and economic power. Instead they

Knapp, "Rural Housing and Village Transformation in Taiwan and Fujian," *China Quarterly*, No. 147, September 1996, pp. 776-794.

⁴⁵ For a discussion on house building in Zhejiang in recent years, see Sally Sargeson, "Subduing 'The Rural House-building Craze': Attitudes Towards Housing Construction and Land Use Controls in Four Zhejiang Villages," *China Quarterly* No. 169, 2002, pp. 927-955.

⁴⁶ For a general overview of village as a bounded space under revolution and during the reform period, see Stephan Feuchtwang, "What is a Village?" in Eduard B. Vermeer, Frank N. Pieke, and Woei Lien Chong eds. *Cooperative and Collective in China's Rural Development. Between State and Private Interests* Armonk NY: M.E.Sharpe, 1998, pp. 46-73.

⁴⁷ Information obtained from interviews with villagers in many villages in Zhejiang and elsewhere.

became more mundane as they were used for socialist production (as granaries and mills etc), or as ideological and political spaces for the new power holders (being used as office spaces or as schools etc).

With the more relaxed official cultural and ideological policy in the early 1980s, and with greater prosperity, villagers felt encouraged to get together to reclaim, renovate, and rebuild their ancestral halls and temples. These early preservation efforts were in the majority of cases local initiatives, coming from village and clan elders and religious believers in the villages. What motivated them was not the historical and architectural value of the buildings per se. It was rather a question of a cultural and religious revival that was a result of a wish to honour the ancestors and a sign of religious devotion.⁴⁸ People painstakingly collected money and invested their own labour in this renovation and construction work. In some cases, money was collected from family and clan members living in other places, including abroad, and from religious followers living in other villages.⁴⁹ After so many years, many of the old rites and regulations pertaining to, for example, ancestral ceremonies had either been lost or forgotten. To the extent that ancestral ceremonies have been revived they have therefore had to be partly re-invented.⁵⁰

In many cases the villagers' attempts to reclaim their ancestral halls met with resistance from government bureaus that had been given these buildings when the state confiscated them in the 1950s. In some villages in Zhejiang, ancestral halls are still used for communal purposes, for example as schools and old peoples' activity centres, or are under the control of grain companies. From a sample of twelve villages recently visited in Zhejiang, the majority of which have several remaining ancestral halls, although many were also destroyed after 1949, it is possible to get some picture of the use of ancestral halls today.⁵¹ Three villages have ancestral halls that are currently opened for tourism, two have an ancestral hall currently used as a kindergarten, one has an ancestral hall that but recently was used as a school, one has an ancestral hall just recently bought back from the grain company, two have ancestral halls that

⁴⁸ This is evident from talks with people engaged in this revival and from a reading of genealogies in several of the villages I have visited.

⁴⁹ In Fujian, overseas Chinese have been particularly active in restoring ancestral halls and temples, see Eng (1999), Shu Ping, "Lineage Making in Southern China since the 1980s," paper presented to the 15th Biennial Conference of the Asian Studies Association of Australai, Canberra, 29 June-2 July 2004, accessed at www.coombs.anu.edu.au/ASAA/conference/proceedings/Shu-P-ASAA2004.pdf, and Susanne Brandtstädter, "Redefining place in southern Fujian: How ancestral halls and overseas mansions re-appropriate the local from the state," Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, Working Paper, 30, 2001, accessed at <http://www.eth.mpg.de/dynamic-index.html?http://www.eth.mpg.de/pubs/wps/mpi-eth-working-paper-0030.html>

⁵⁰ See Jun Jing (1996) on this development in some villages in Jiangxi.

⁵¹ The villages are: Xinye in Jiande municipality, and Zhuge, Changle, Zhiyan, Shangtang, Yao village, Siping, Shantouxia, Yuyuan, Guodong, Lingxiatang, Shanxiabao, and Houwu in Jinhua municipality.

are used as offices for the village committee, three have ancestral halls that are used as old people's activity centres, and two have ancestral halls that are used as shops. In many of these villages, the biggest ancestral hall is also used during elections in the case the village isn't too big and they instead practice roving election boxes. In six of the villages at least some of the ancestral halls now house ancestral tablets and coffins and villagers also perform their funerals there. In five-six villages operas are staged in the halls during festivities such as the New Year. In many cases, the halls are also used to store tools and as a place to carry out small repair work etc. This shows that many traditional practices have been revived in the halls but that these co-exist or conflict with new uses that have developed since 1949. The extent to which villagers have been eager and active in reclaiming their ancestral halls vary quite a lot between different villages, depending on the strength of the lineage and the energy and initiative of individual villagers. In at least seven of the villages in my sample, local residents have restored one or more of the ancestral halls. In four villages support has in recent years also come from the provincial or national cultural relics bureaus.

Religious revival and rebuilding of local temples have taken place since the early 1980s, albeit being constrained by periodic crackdowns. After a boom in temple buildings, new regulations in 1994 made registration obligatory and put a halt to temple building in many places. From time to time the authorities have also razed illegal temples even though smaller temples and shrines often are left alone.⁵² In many of the villages I've visited, temples have been rebuilt without having been officially registered. In other cases villagers have had to struggle for approval or tried other means to circumvent the restrictions. In one village, the villagers together with other neighbouring villages set up a memorial park in order not to have to seek official permission and register the temples on the premise. Of the twelve villages in my sample, only two didn't currently have any temples, although they had had temples in the past and there were temples in neighbouring villages.⁵³ The other villages had between one or two temples, one had three temples and one village had as many as 4-5 temples and small shrines. These temples were all very small and local and catered for the village only. In some cases, villagers would also visit neighbouring temples. Apart from Buddha, Guanyin,

⁵² For the religious revival in one village in Sichuan and the struggles around the temple, see John Flower and Pamela Leonard, "Defining Cultural Life in the Chinese Countryside. The Case of the Chuan Zhu Temple," in Eduard B. Vermeer, Frank N. Pieke, and Woei Lien Chong eds. *China's Rural Development. Between State and Private Interests* Armonk NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1998, pp. 273-289.

⁵³ These two villages however had a small church respectively a house church and smaller churches were also found in at least one of the other villages.

Guandi, and Earth God statues, which are found in most Chinese temples, many of the temples also have local deities that are said to protect the village. Some villages would also have shrines where people went to pray to the Dragon King for rain and Earth God shrines etc. Like in the case of ancestral halls, several of the temples were after 1949 appropriated for official use. One has thus been used as a rice mill and another as storage for tobacco. In at least one case a temple had also been used as housing for poor peasants. Many temples were destroyed or left to fall apart during the 1950s. In several cases schools or other buildings had been built at the old site of the temples. All temples and shrines had without exception been restored by the villagers themselves, in many cases through small donations of as little as five yuan and over a long period of time. Most of the temples seemed to be taken care of by elderly women although in a couple of instances men were in charge of the temples. Most village heads and party secretaries were careful to keep a distance from the temples and claimed that they themselves never went there. One of the villages that didn't have any temple was contemplating to re-build one that had been destroyed in the 1950s. The major reason seemed to be that the tourism company run by the village wanted to increase its available tourist attractions. The party secretary also argued that building a temple could help promote social stability and that it shouldn't be regarded as superstition.⁵⁴ It should also be mentioned that many local government see the rebuilding of temples as good business as it attracts tourists and can boost the local economy. In the Jinhua area, where much of my fieldwork has been done, several new temples dedicated to the famous Huang Daxian have thus been built with support from the local government and private enterprises as part of a conscious commercial strategy.⁵⁵

People's sense of and identification with place, and interest in preserving memorial practices and traditions, have been crucial factors behind preservation efforts on the countryside. Older people of a certain level of education, such as teachers and officials, have been the most active in the preservation of ancestral halls, whereas the rebuilding of temples seems to attract mostly elderly and uneducated women. Many of those active in rebuilding the ancestral halls have worked outside of the village but retain deep feelings for their lineage and home village and have returned as retirees. The question today is whether young people, who leave their villages for jobs

⁵⁴ The same reasoning was put forward by one official interviewed by John Flower in a village in Sichuan, Flower (2004), p. 673.

⁵⁵ See Graeme Lang, Selina Ching Chan, and Lars Ragvald, "Temples and the Religious Economy," *Interdisciplinary Journal of Research on Religion* Vol. 1, 2005, No.1. Accessed at <http://www.bepress.com/ijrr/vol1/iss1/art4>

in the cities, will retain the same attachment to the village as older generations, or whether their attachment, sense of place, and memorial practices, will take different forms.⁵⁶ Be that as it may, many young people still retain close contacts with their home community through visits during the Chinese New Year, Qingming festival, and other festivities. They furthermore invest money in the construction and upkeep of family graves, ancestral halls, and temples. They also often take a strong interest in and contribute to the compilation of new genealogies. At least four of the twelve villages in my sample have recently completed new genealogies, usually with the active support from family members who have left the village, and many would like to do so if the financial situation permitted.⁵⁷

Discovering the Rural Heritage: Experts, Tourism Officials, and the General Public

Local governments and cultural relics bureaus were at first not so appreciative of or interested in the renovation of ancestral halls and temples. For ideological and political reasons there existed a disinterest and even hostility towards attempts to renovate and restore ancestral halls and local temples. Local governments and cadres see lineage solidarity and religious revival as examples of feudal and superstitious activities, and as potentially threatening and subversive of the political order.⁵⁸ Renovations and restorations were furthermore seen as wasteful and not fitting a modern economy, and therefore constituted something of an embarrassment to local governments bent on modernisation.⁵⁹ Cultural relics bureaus and other cultural authorities for their part initially did not place much value on vernacular buildings on the countryside. Their priorities were on monuments and sites of a national significance on a grander and more imperial scale; consequently few vernacular buildings were listed as protected sites until the late 1980s. Many local governments of course also experienced a genuine lack of funding to take

⁵⁶ For one article that discusses the new identity formation and sense of place as a result of migration, see Sun Wanning, "Anhui baomu in Shanghai: Gender, class, and a sense of place," in Jing Wang eds. (2005), pp. 171-189.

⁵⁷ For a discussion of this new trend and contemporary genealogies, see Frank N. Pieke, "The Genealogical Mentality in Modern China," *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 62, No. 2, February 2003, pp. 101-128. In contrast to Pieke I had no difficulties to see and even photograph genealogies in the villages I visited.

⁵⁸ For the social and political role of lineages in contemporary Chinese society, see Lily Lee Tsai, "Cadres, Temple and Lineage Institutions, and Governance in Rural China," *The China Journal*, No. 48, July, 2002, pp. 1-27, and Zhou Daming and Yang Xiaolu, guest editors, "Power Sharing in Chinese Villages, Part II," *Chinese Sociology and Anthropology*, Fall 2004.

⁵⁹ See Yang (2004).

on so many new sites. This disinterest among cultural relics bureaus has however recently been somewhat modified. Today we find ancestral halls and whole villages among local and national level protected sites.⁶⁰ In 1988, ancestral halls and villages were for the first time listed as national level protected sites. Currently four ancestral halls are listed as national level protected sites. We also find 32 whole villages listed, some of which of course then have ancestral halls among their protected buildings. The total number of national level listed vernacular buildings (*minju*) is 50 out of a total figure of 1 271 protected sites, but this figure also includes palaces and other grand buildings in the cities.⁶¹ In December 2003, the State Council announced the first round of thirteen national level protected historical villages.

The cultural relics bureaus' discovery of the rural heritage imbues places and buildings with new meanings, and privileges new narratives that partly erases past memories. When ancestral halls for example are designated as heritage sites, they undergo changes that transform both their meaning and use. They are thus reinterpreted and re-contextualised. Cultural relics authorities often prefer to see ancestral halls as a cultural relic rather than as a living monument to the ancestors.⁶² They therefore focus on the architectural quality of the halls rather than help preserve its functions. Although exhibitions in ancestral halls usually focus on lineage history, they don't address the social and political structure of traditional village life, the later destruction of the buildings and attacks on lineage power, or indicate whether lineages still play a social or political role in the villages. When ancestral halls today are renovated, whether by the villagers or by the cultural relics authorities, political slogans are usually carefully removed so as not to remind visitors of past acts of violence.⁶³ This erases some thirty years of the building's history and hides the revolutionary struggles and secular uses of the halls. The original function of ancestral halls, to the extent it has been revived, often has to be abandoned when cultural relics bureaus and tourism companies get a say over their use and management. The designation of an ancestral hall as a protected heritage site

⁶⁰ There are 1 271 national level protected sites, some 7 000 provincial level sites, and ca 60 000 lower level protected sites. The sites can be graves, ruins, individual buildings, clusters of buildings, or whole villages.

⁶¹ See Sun Dazhang, *Zhongguo minju yanjiu* [Research on Chinese Vernacular Architecture], Zhongguo jianzhu gongye chubanshe: Beijing, 2004, pp. 646-647.

⁶² See Mayfair Mei-Hui Yang (2004) for an example from Wenzhou. My own findings in other parts of Zhejiang indicate some of the same tendencies but that the major problem of ownership and access arise when tourism enters into the picture.

⁶³ The cultural relics bureau in Longyou, Zhejiang, has however deliberately refrained from removing the revolutionary slogans in the houses that it has gathered from the region and placed in the Mimingshan vernacular house park. The park is now a provincial level protected site.

thus risks turning it into a museum.⁶⁴ When ancestral halls are appropriated for tourism consumption, coffins can often no longer be stored in the halls and funerals have to be conducted elsewhere. To the extent that ancestral ceremonies still are conducted, they become tourist spectacles rather than family events; sometimes they are revived just for the benefit of the tourists.⁶⁵ Instead of being sites of embodied memory for the local community, ancestral halls become disembodied tourist sites that primarily are valued for their aesthetic and architectural qualities.

Whereas ancestral halls originally nurtured place-based and family identities, they are today also expected to promote state values such as patriotism and socialism. This is accomplished through the designation of some of them as patriotic education bases.⁶⁶ The Chinese authorities are concerned that local and/or family based identities could challenge or threaten loyalty to the state and the party and thereby undermine national unity. Chinese villagers however also make use of patriotism as a kind of counter-discourse in order to strengthen and claim glory for their ancestors and themselves.⁶⁷ In Zhuge village, for example, the villagers make careful use of the patriotic narrative surrounding their famous ancestor Zhuge Liang.⁶⁸ In the reform era, ancestral halls have become sites for new contestations. The cultural relics bureaus and the state value the ancestral halls for their architectural qualities as well as try to incorporate them within a patriotic narrative. But this understanding is however challenged by or has to co-exist with the local community's own narrative and memory practices, and wish to use the halls for family purposes. The contestations thus take place on different levels and concern issues related both to narrative, management, and use of the ancestral halls. But in no way should one interpret the reclaiming of ancestral halls and other traditional

⁶⁴ Many of the ancestral halls designated as protected sites house small exhibitions on village and lineage history. Sometimes they also house ethnographic exhibitions. In my sample of twelve villages four have small exhibitions in one or two of their ancestral halls. Three of the villages were open for tourism. However, there is no contradiction per se to lend some space to exhibitions and still use the halls for family affairs.

⁶⁵ Whereas Yang (2004) was prevented from attending an ancestral ceremony in her field site, ancestral ceremonies have elsewhere become important tourist events, as the example of Zhuge below shows. In Fujian, ancestral halls and ancestral ceremonies are encouraged by local governments as a way to strengthen contacts between local communities and relatives in Taiwan, see Shu Ping (2004). In many places ancestral ceremonies are of course still a purely family affair.

⁶⁶ Several ancestral halls in the villages I have visited have thus been designated patriotic education bases. Other types of designations also exist, such as national defence educational bases, see Yang (2004), p. 735, p. 737.

⁶⁷ For more on patriotism as a counter-discourse in cultural heritage contestations, see Marina Svensson, 'The Struggle over Cultural Heritage: A Tale of Three Cities,' paper presented at the second SSAAPS conference, Lund October 24-26, 2003.

⁶⁸ For another interesting example of patriotism as a heritage strategy, see Selina Ching Chan, 'Memory Making, Identity Building: The Dynamics of Economics and Politics in the New Territories of Hong Kong,' *China Information*, Vol. XVII, No. 1, 2003, pp. 66-91.

spaces as reactive and a simple return to traditional practices. The situation is much more complex as the local communities create new narratives and historic memories for themselves that alternatively accommodate, make use of, or resist official and tourist heritage narratives. Villagers in Zhuge can for instance tap into a patriotic narrative whereas other villagers create new ancestral myths for themselves that build upon or feed into the general interest in local and national history.⁶⁹

Domestic tourism has grown in China in recent years as a result of growing incomes, more leisure time, and longer public holidays. This growth and higher frequency of travel among broader groups of people have led to the development of new types of tourist attractions, including well-preserved villages. In the past, popular tourist sites and scenery were those of a poetic and aesthetic fame, places celebrated in poetry and paintings, as well as those of a historical and national significance, such as the Great Wall and the Forbidden Palace. But today's tourists are also motivated by other sensibilities and interests, and for example interested in vernacular architecture, minority cultures, and unspoilt nature. Historically and culturally important cities such as Beijing, Xi'an, Suzhou, and Hangzhou continue to receive many tourists, but smaller cities and villages with well-preserved old buildings, such as Lijiang and Pingyao, are now also receiving increasing numbers of visitors. To traditional sites, such as famous and sacred mountains (Emei Mountain, Yellow Mountain) and other scenic spots (Guilin, Three Gorges), have been added other natural sites and scenery, such as minority villages and national parks in Yunnan, Guangxi, and Tibet. But these villages are often reconstructed and improved upon with fake historic elements and buildings. The demand for entertainment and leisure activities has also led to the development of theme and amusement parks, including those focusing on historical time periods and minority cultures.⁷⁰

Tourism to the Chinese countryside was in the past mostly configured around natural scenic spots, famous mountains, caves and rivers, as well as sites of cultural or religious significance, such as famous temples. But in the 1990s minority villages in Yunnan, Guangxi, and Hainan have become highly successful rural heritage tourist attractions.⁷¹ Local governments often see tourism development in minority areas as the only and most promising way to

⁶⁹ Villagers in Shantouxia for example have in recent years tried to make a claim that they are related to Shen Yue, a famous historical figure in the Jinhua area, something that they until very recently were unaware of. Together with other villages in the neighbourhood they have now built a memorial park to his honour and people go there to offer to him.

⁷⁰ For something on theme parks, see Ann Anagnost, *National Past-Times: Narrative, Representation, and Power in Modern China* Duke University Press: Durham & London, 1997.

⁷¹ See among others, Tim Oakes, *Tourism and modernity in China*, Routledge: London, 1998.

generate economic growth and promote modernisation.⁷² In recent years, villages and townships in Han-areas have also been able to capitalise on their heritage to promote tourism. Traditional water towns in the Jiangnan area have been very successful in attracting tourists and have spent huge sums to restore and recreate old buildings. Other Han-areas that have been successful are Pingyao and some nearby locations in Shanxi, as well as villages in Anhui close to the Yellow Mountain, two of which are now listed as World Heritage Sites. Local governments that once hesitated to spend money on preservation have now come to see the built heritage as an economic asset and begun to invest heavily in tourism.

The growing interest in historic villages can be gathered from the recent boom in travel guides focusing on villages and traditional architecture. Several publishing houses have published books focusing either on specific villages, regions and provinces, or having a nationwide scope. In 2002, the Shanxi Normal University Publishing Press for example published *Tourism to Chinese Old Towns*, containing information on 114 old villages and towns. A new edition was published the following year with information on 205 sites, and in 2004 another edition with information on 220 sites followed. There also exist more academic/historic and in-depth works on traditional architecture and customs in specific regions or individual villages.⁷³ The authors of these books are very often architects, historians, or journalists. Many of the authors work in close cooperation with professional photographers, which mean that the books often focus on the visual appearance and aesthetic qualities of the villages, resulting in an aestheticisation of the villages.

Preservation movements and an interest in buildings as heritage arise as a result of a (perceived) threat to traditional ways of life and old buildings. The interest in the West to preserve the rural heritage arose when industrialisation and urbanisation became a threat to traditional rural life. The world's first open-air museum, Skansen, was created in Stockholm in the 1890s as an effort to save vernacular houses from different parts of Sweden. The growing appreciation of traditional architecture and villages in China is also due to an increasing awareness of the threat that economic development and modernisation brings. Like in the West, many of those advocating protection of the rural heritage (including folk traditions and vernacular houses) are

⁷² See Susan McCarthy, "Gods of Wealth, Temples of Prosperity: Party-State Participation in the Minority Cultural Revival," *China: An International Journal*, Vol. 2, No. 1, March 2004, pp. 28-52.

⁷³ Two series in particular are worth mentioning. The Chinese Old Villages (*Zhongguo gu cunluo*) series is put out by Hebei Educational Publishing House and include many works by Chen Zhihua and his colleagues at Qinghua University. The Chinese Villages (*Xiangtu Zhongguo*) series is put out by Sanlian Bookstore and include works by historians, anthropologists, and architects.

intellectuals, including architects and cultural relics experts, living in cities.⁷⁴ In the documentary, *Xunzhao yaoyuan the jiayuan*, In Search of the Distant Homeland, produced by Phoenix Television in 2001, for example, city folks and intellectuals expressed strong admiration for old houses, whereas those actually living in the houses in contrast often wanted to move to more modern housing. This illustrates the ironic fact that those wanting to preserve cultural practices and ways of life often are the ones that have left them far behind and can afford to take a nostalgic view.

How should one then interpret this new interest in vernacular architecture and village life? In part it is nostalgia for the past and an appreciation of traditional architecture as economic developments and Western cultural influences pose more of a threat to Chinese culture. The interest in the rural can also be interpreted as an aesthetic appreciation of old houses and villages. In this respect, then, the new interest can be compared with similar developments in the West in the late nineteenth century. In Sweden, like elsewhere in Europe, country life and the rural landscape in the nineteenth century became an object of the romantic gaze.⁷⁵ The rural landscape and its built heritage were presented as idylls where poverty and social and economic conflicts were erased or downplayed. The virtues of tradition and rural life were furthermore held up and contrasted with a demoralising city life and its debasing and monotonous industrial work.

In China, the appreciation of picturesque villages and landscapes feeds into an already existing aesthetic appreciation of the landscape as manifested in traditional art and poetry. Landscapes such as Jiangnan, “the land of fish and rice,” with villages dotting the many canals, are particularly appreciated. This landscape and others attract artists who through their paintings shape people’s views and experiences of the landscape. Filmmakers have reinforced and elaborated upon these representations of selected landscapes and villagescapes. Several recent films have been set in picturesque villages where the villagescape and the vernacular architecture play an important role and serve as a physical manifestation of traditional society, while at the same time being visually very appealing.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ The author Feng Jikai is one of those active in trying to preserve folk customs and traditional houses. Among his many works, see *Qiangjiu lao jie* [Rushing to save the old street] Xifan chubanshe: Beijing, 2000, and *Shouwang minjian* [Keeping watch over folk traditions] Xifan chubanshe: Beijing, 2002.

⁷⁵ See John Urry, *Consuming Places* Routledge: London & New York, 1995, and *The Tourist Gaze* Sage Publications: London, second edition 2002, pp. 88-90.

⁷⁶ Examples of very skilful use of villages and vernacular architecture can be found in the works of the celebrated filmmakers Zhang Yimou and Chen Kaige. Examples include *Raise the Red Lantern* that was filmed on location in Shanxi, *Ju Dou* that was filmed in villages in Anhui, *Shanghai Triad* that was partly filmed in Zhouzhuang, and *Together* that was partly filmed in Wuzhen. These directors have

In China there is today an attempt to recreate lost communities in the form of historic villages. But like in the case of Skansen and Colonial Williamsburg, these efforts present a very romantic view of the past.⁷⁷ This might come as a surprise as it contrasts with the earlier vilification of the old society and so-called feudal practices. Rural life and the peasantry are however not depicted in the same romantic way as in Europe in the nineteenth century. One reason is that the majority of the Chinese people still live on the countryside, and those who don't are happy to have escaped the harsh life and have yet to come to see the countryside in a romantic light. There is still a widespread negative view of peasants in Chinese society. Peasants are regarded as backward and uneducated, holding feudal and superstitious beliefs, rather than symbolising a glorified national character, as was the case of "odalbonden" and "dalmasen" in Sweden of the nineteenth century.⁷⁸ In the picturesque villages visited by Chinese tourists, the peasants and their daily work are absent as they would rather destroy the serene and visual experience. People don't come to the villages in order to see the peasants' harsh toil on the fields or in township and village enterprises (TVEs). The villages are therefore cleaned up and sanitised for tourist consumption and presented as quaint and serene. In minority areas villagers are furthermore expected to dress up in folk costumes and engage in song and dance performances.⁷⁹ Although many of the villages open for tourism have small museums with rural exhibits, such as tools or rice mills, these form a very small part of the tourist experience.⁸⁰

made individual houses and village scenery an integrated part of their films. Although these buildings clearly have a strong visual and aesthetic function they also serve as a manifestation of the closed, segmented, and oppressive traditional society. It is however the visual and aesthetic quality of the houses and villages that motivates the viewers to travel to these villages.

⁷⁷ See for example Barthel (1996). Another interesting issue is of course what happens when/if Chinese houses are removed from their own setting to another country. What kinds of narratives are told and how do they differ from heritage narratives in vernacular houses in China? For an interesting account of the saving of one Chinese house and its transfer to the US, see the account of the Yin Yu Tang that was acquired by the Peabody Essex Museum by Nancy Berliner, *Yin Yu Tang: The Architecture and Daily Life of a Chinese House* Tuttle Publishing: Boston, 2003.

⁷⁸ It should however be mentioned that in the immediate post-1949 period the countryside and the peasants were held up as embodying the new revolutionary spirit and contrasted with decadent urban life.

⁷⁹ See for example Oakes (1998). These villagers are however not victims but sometimes very skilfully make use of their culture and talk back and challenge the visitors.

⁸⁰ This can be compared with exhibits in traditional villages and open-door museums in Sweden, where traditional handicraft and agricultural work using traditional tools and crops are central to the tourist experience. See for example Åsen village in Småland, www.asensby.com/ But although there is an attempt to depict traditional work in all its aspects, the visitors' probably fail to see and understand much of the harshness of the peasants' lives but come away with a more nostalgic and romantic view, especially since most visits take place during the summer months and not during the winter. The interest in traditional handicraft and farming is also partly motivated about a contemporary concern about large scale modern farming and an interest in, what is believed to be, a more environmental friendly traditional farming.

Tourism consumption might clash with local residents' own sense of place and place myths, as tourism emphasises or creates other myths and narratives.⁸¹ The tourist narrative in Chinese villages mainly focuses on the history, architecture, and scenery of the villages. Tourist guides describe the history of the villages and famous individuals, such as successful imperial candidates and officials. They also point out the age and exquisite craftsmanship of the houses, and the cultural and traditional beliefs and stories manifested in ornaments and carvings. The *fengshui* outline of the villages is also a major attraction and narrative in the marketing of many villages. It is interesting to note that *fengshui* practices and other cultural beliefs now constitute a part of a privileged heritage narrative and marketing strategy when they not long ago were attacked as superstitious and feudal.⁸² Visits to local temples and ancestral halls are central in the tourist experience and often include some element of either observation or participation in ritual performances. Tourists offer incense in temples and can in some villages also observe ancestral ceremonies, which sometimes seem to be performed more for the benefit of the tourists than for the local community. Although fortune telling is officially seen as superstitious, fortune-tellers are nonetheless often part of the villages' attractions.⁸³

Rural heritage tourism in China should not be seen as a search for the pastoral or a wish to return to a lost way of life, but as a search for the exotic in one's own backyard, particularly in the context of minority villages, and as an escape or brief interlude from city life. Most of all, however, it is a show and manifestation of economic wealth and more leisure that allow people to travel to different and new sites. But some individuals travel to villages because they genuinely appreciate traditional architecture and are interested in local history. Those interested in photography and art also find such visits aesthetically rewarding. The interest and support from cultural relics experts and architects, as well as the growing interest from tourists and the general public, have been instrumental in bringing attention to the vanishing heritage on the Chinese countryside. This new interest has resulted in preservation efforts and tourism development that however bring about both promises and threats to local communities and their heritage.

⁸¹ For a discussion of the creation of new heritage myths as a result of tourism in Hong Kong, Anhui, and Lijiang, see Puay-peng Ho, "Preservation Versus Profit: Recent Developments in Village Tourism in China," *Traditional Dwellings and Settlements Working Paper Series*, Vol. 138, 2000, pp. 27-53.

⁸² For past attacks on *fengshui* practices and the recent resurgence, see Bruun (1996).

⁸³ In several villages I have watched higher officials somewhat sheepishly and jokingly seek out fortune-tellers. In one village the party secretary became visibly embarrassed when I asked about the increasing number of fortune-tellers in his village. On the official view on fortune telling, see Yang (2004), p. 743.

Stakeholders and Contestations in Cultural Heritage Management at the Village Level

The motives and interests and relative power of different stakeholders and actors in the field of cultural heritage often differ and sometimes clash. As already mentioned, it was villagers themselves who were the first and the most active to save the local heritage and restore sites and buildings of importance to the community. Local residents want to preserve physical structures that have a meaning to them and are important for their identity and for the locality. They are more interested in preserving their cultural heritage as a living heritage, in the process often having to revive cultural and religious traditions that have been forbidden and/or lost. Villagers have in many cases spent considerable efforts to retrieve ancestral halls from the state and invested in repair long before the authorities and tourism developers took an interest in the buildings. It was only at a later stage that some villages were discovered by cultural experts and came to be regarded as valuable national treasures. In contrast to the villagers, experts and the state mostly focus on the architectural and historical value and authenticity of the buildings. This has led experts to sometimes put preservation interests over the interest of the community to access and everyday use.

Local governments and tourism developers see the built heritage as an economic asset. As the village is discovered and found to be a prospective source of revenue, high level authorities and tourism companies often move in to take over the management of the sites and reap the profits. Their argument is very often that the peasants are not able to develop tourism due to poor knowledge and lack of education. In some cases tourism companies from Beijing and other big cities have been given/bought the license to set up a company in the villages. This means that they are responsible for investment in necessary facilities, such as parking lots and toilets, and for the marketing of the village. It is also the tourism company that write and develop the heritage narrative. In many cases staff and tourist guides are professionals hired from outside of the village rather than local residents. The village committee will get either a fix sum from the tourism company or else a certain percentage of the income from the entrance fee. Villagers who open their houses for tourists receive some monetary compensation and some are also able to get jobs selling tickets and doing sanitation work etc. Other villagers work in restaurants and shops that are either put up by the tourism companies or set-up by the villagers themselves. The involvement of tourism companies and higher authorities has in many cases led to resentment as villagers feel they don't have a say and don't benefit much from tourism. In Hongcun village, Anhui

province, resentment built up since tourism was controlled by a Beijing based company.⁸⁴ The villagers felt that their heritage was being exploited without bringing them any benefits and complained that the percentage of profits accruing to the village was too low.

It is difficult to estimate how much profit investors make, and the extent to which villagers directly and indirectly benefit from tourism, and this also vary from village to village (see below). In the case of small and fairly remote villages people might have too high expectations on the potential for tourism. In general most tourists don't spend more than a couple of hours in a village before moving on to other tourist sites in the area. Due to their short stay, the prospect of rural heritage tourism generating high incomes for the community is generally quite slim, unless we are talking high numbers of tourists. Tourism however also generates some general and non-monetary benefits to the communities in the form of improved sanitation and infrastructure. It can also strengthen civic pride in the cultural heritage and increase awareness regarding preservation.

Sites that are commercially very successful can also have negative effects on the local communities and their heritage. Some of the more successful Jiangnan water towns close to Shanghai are experiencing serious overcrowding, which detracts from their attraction and deters future tourists. There is also a strong tendency of commercialisation and museumification in many of these villages that is problematic for both the local community and for the tourist experience. In some small villages there is an influx of outsiders who try to benefit from tourism but thereby change the composition and make-up of the village. This has been particularly serious in Lijiang, a small minority town in Yunnan, where many of the newcomers are Han-Chinese.⁸⁵ While such development to some extent might be inevitable, it weakens the traditional culture, the town's main attraction. Local residents thus risk becoming a minority in their own villages and their cultural heritage turned into a commodity. This being said, villages are living places that in the past

⁸⁴ In the spring of 2002, this conflict got headlines in the Chinese media. On 21 March 2002, the Southern Weekend (*Nanfang zhoumo*) carried a lengthy and critical article that led the tourism company to sue the newspaper for libel. On 29 April, the programme *Shishi zhui zong* (News Analysis) on Anhui TV broadcast a special programme on the contestations between the residents and the tourism company. A visit by the author to the village in October 2005 revealed that many residents still felt resentful over the fact that they didn't benefit much from tourism. The entrance fee to the village includes visits to a small number of houses whose owners receive compensation. People whose houses have not been included in the tourist itinerary charge a fee for a visit to their house. The owner of one such house argued that the tourist guides were not knowledgeable about village history and revealed some of the hidden and constructed narratives behind the tourism company's official version.

⁸⁵ On Lijiang, see Duang Dongting, "A Heritage Protection and Tourism Development Study of Lijiang Ancient Town China," report submitted to UNESCO 2000, accessed at www.unescobkk.org/fileadmin/user_upload/culture/Tourism/lijiang-2.pdf

also saw changes and developments, including the growth and decline of old families and the influx of migrants, which changed their socio-economic fabric.

Tourism companies are sometimes responsible for insensitive development that harms the cultural heritage and are often likely to neglect investments in preservation work for the sake of economic profits. Another type of problems occur when cultural relics bureaus and tourism companies out of an interest to preserve buildings choose to move people from their old buildings or villages. This is sometimes done out of a belief that preservation is better guaranteed if nobody lives in the building. But there is also often a commercial side to this policy as the companies want to open an old building for tourism or turn it into a museum. In Wuzhen, a water town in Zhejiang, this policy has been carried out to the extreme as all residents, some 2 000 people, will be moved from a new district that opened to the public on October 1, 2005.

Local communities' resentment over tourism seems to be most articulate over issues related to compensation, ownership, and land use. It is more difficult to assess whether and to what extent the local community perceive the fact that tourism companies and the state take over and interpret their cultural heritage as insensitive or conflicting with their own understanding and use of the cultural heritage. In one village I visited, one family branch however refused to let the tourism company use their ancestral hall with the argument that they themselves then would be unable to use it. In another village, an aborted tourism endeavour for a brief period prevented the villagers from storing coffins in the ancestral hall. This practice was however rapidly picked up again when the tourism business faltered. In other villages and townships, tourism has meant that temples are taken over, or rebuilt, and managed by the tourism company. In Wuzhen, the tourism company thus rebuilt a former Daoist temple that earlier had been demolished to make way for a shop. The company then hired Daoist priests to work in the temple. The tourism company has also approached an existing Buddhist temple on the outskirts of an area currently being developed for tourism with a suggestion to incorporate the temple in the tourist itinerary. The temple however refused this offer. The abbot in charge, and an abbot in a nearby temple, argued that it was against the principle of a temple to charge entrance fees. They also felt that the tourism company wasn't respectful of or interested in religion but just wanted more attractions and the spectacle that a temple could bring. One of the temples had been spectacularly successful in attracting large crowds of people who joined the newly appointed abbot in his efforts to rebuild the temple. In Xitang, another water town in Zhejiang, an old temple was

likewise taken over by the tourism company so that a visit now requires that one pays the entrance fee to the whole village. The local residents can however visit the temple at a reduced price. Another temple in the village has been completely rebuilt and is now also among the tourist attractions included in the entrance ticket to the village. In Zhuge village, discussed below, the tourism company is currently contemplating to rebuild a temple that was destroyed in the 1950s. The party secretary in charge of the company argues that this would increase the attraction of the village. Many local governments see visits and pilgrimages to temples as a way to boost the local economy and encourage visits to other tourist sites in the neighbourhood.⁸⁶

It should be noted that local communities are not homogenous and that they don't speak with one voice. Local residents have access to and are attached to different heritage sites, and they take part in cultural and religious activities in varying degrees. Villagers might differ on what narratives and buildings are central to the local community and how these narratives should be told. In villages dominated by one surname, this family is also able to control social and cultural life. This means that it also controls and defines the cultural heritage, and for instance might privilege its own family history and ancestral halls over that of other families. We also find gender differences with respect to sense of place and attachment to different sites. There are also conflicting heritage narratives as a result of post-1949 developments when rich families were suppressed and vilified and had their houses confiscated. This means that the histories and heritage of these groups of people have been forgotten or suppressed.

Respect for cultural diversity and local participation in the designation and management of cultural heritage is central but all too often heritage management becomes the prerogative of experts. When discussing stakeholders and different interests, we should however not fall prey to the romantic notion of seeing villagers as the only or authentic voice and interpreter of the local heritage. It is important to strike a balance between the legitimate concern of local residents to interpret and continue to use sites, while making an effort to restore and preserve these sites for posterity and for people outside of the village. But to preserve sites without paying respect to the cultural heritage as a living culture will only result in making people feel detached from their heritage, or, even more worrying, lead to them being disinherited of their heritage. Myth-making and personal attachment to sites should be taken into consideration and respected in preservation work while

⁸⁶ See Lang, Chan and Ragvald (2005).

at the same time paying attention to historians' and architects' search for historical facts.⁸⁷

Cultural Heritage Protection: The Legal, Institutional, and Economic Framework

Despite a growing appreciation of the rural heritage much destruction of the built heritage continues to take place on the Chinese countryside.⁸⁸ Whereas poverty is a big problem in some areas, economic growth and rapid construction explains much of the destruction in Zhejiang. Another general problem is conflicting laws and policies and the problem of implementing existing laws. The major law regarding protection of heritage sites is the Cultural Relics Law adopted in 1982 and extensively revised in 2002. If the cultural relics bureaus do not list individual buildings or whole villages as protected sites (*wenwu baohu danwei*), there is no guarantee for their protection or that repair and new constructions will not destroy the historical environment. The lack of administrative and legal protection has resulted in much destruction in recent years. When individual buildings or villages are listed, they are, on paper at least, better protected, but in reality many problems exist due to financial, institutional, and legal weaknesses. Even though preservation plans are mandatory for listed sites and villages (articles 15, 16, 17, 18, 19 and 20), financial and other problems often delay the work and implementation of such plans. If properties are privately owned, or owned by lower level authorities, these are responsible for the upkeep and repair of the sites (article 21). But this can become a heavy burden for local residents and communities without the financial means for such work. In 2001, Zhang'gu ying village in Hunan was designated a national level protected site. A peasant who lacked funding to repair a crumbling wall was

⁸⁷ There can however be an strong and insoluble tension between local residents' relation to sites based on myths and personal attachment and the more scientific approach of experts in a Swedish context. For a Swedish example, see Margareta Bergvall, "Pluralismen i landskapet. Några kulturmiljöer i Ångermanland sedda ur olika perspektiv," [The pluralism of landscape: Different approaches to cultural environments in Ångermanland] in Fredrik Fahlander, Kristian Kristiansen, Jan Nordbladh *Texter om arkeologisk kulturmiljövård*, [Texts about archaeological work] Department of Archaeology, Gothenburg University: Sollentuna, 2000, pp. 141-156. In a case study I undertook in Hangzhou, a similar divergence between local residents and experts was found with respect to myth-making and authenticity, see Svensson (2003b).

⁸⁸ On the World Monument Foundation's 2006 list, six of the 100 endangered monuments and sites are found in China: four villages and small towns in different parts of the country, one big mansion, and a group of stone towers. Apart from the mansion, which is set in an urban environment in the prosperous Zhejiang province, all the other sites are found in more rural settings in poor provinces. For the list, see www.wmf.org

turned down when he asked the cultural relics bureau for financial support. He then didn't have any other option but to tear down the wall and was charged with violating the cultural relics law.⁸⁹ Building restrictions, in theory at least, puts limits on both the use of old buildings and on new constructions (articles 17, 18, and 19) but they can also be problematic for the local community and prevent economic development. The major problem seems to be that laws and restrictions are not upheld or only in a very random and ad hoc way.⁹⁰

The cultural relics bureaus at different levels have funding for preservation but it is quite scarce. The likelihood to receive funding increases if the site is a provincial or national level protected site. Many protected sites, especially in poor areas, do not receive any funding at all for necessary repair or preservation work. One of the problems for poor villages with old houses and/or protected sites is how these villages will be able to shoulder this responsibility and financial burden. The situation and problems of preservation differ between different villages and regions. The Zhejiang provincial level cultural relics bureau as of 2005 had a budget of ca 15 million yuan for preservation and repair etc.⁹¹ The head of State Administration of Cultural Heritage (SACH) recently announced that the body will set aside 250 million yuan annually for protection of large heritage sites, although there was no references to the amount set aside for villages and vernacular architecture.⁹²

In most cases buildings in villages are not protected at all, which has led to much destruction. Although many villagers are eager to preserve their ancestral halls, they often prefer to live in new modern houses in brick and concrete as they aspire to a modern and more comfortable lifestyle.⁹³ The

⁸⁹ This case was reported in the media and taken up on several programs on the television. See *Oriental Horizon (Dongfang shikong)* October 18, 2003, accessed at <http://www.cctv.com/oriental/skx/jmnr/20021018/19.html> and *Law Today (Jinri shuo fa)* on April 23, 2003, see <http://www.cctv.com/program/lawtoday/20030432/100760.shtml> See also report on www.eeast-law.com on July 16, 2003

⁹⁰ In many villages, new constructions are rampant and the local authorities often look the other way. But now and then higher authorities launch a campaign in order to demolish new illegal constructions. In Liukeng village, Jiangxi, a national level protected village since 2001, the authorities in the spring of 2005 sent a group of officials to the village to launch a campaign that in four months time demolished 59 illegal constructions (information from local officials in August 2005 and from a visit to the village in October 2005). In a village outside of Suzhou in Jiangsu the cultural relics and tourism bureaus tried to tidy up the village for both preservation reasons and tourism purposes and demolished some illegal buildings. But the demolitions caused a lot of resentment and protests as people regarded them as arbitrary (coming out of the blue) and violating their rights. Observations from a visit in August 2005.

⁹¹ Interview with a provincial level cultural relics official, June 2005.

⁹² Reported by Xinhua on 14 December, 2005, see http://en.ce.cn/Life/arts&heritage/200512/14/t20051214_5520887.shtml

⁹³ Sargeson (2002).

demolition of old houses is thus often due to growing prosperity and new tastes. The younger generation usually prefer more modern housing, and in many instances a new modern house is a prerequisite for men who want to find a bride. The growing prosperity in particularly the Eastern part of China is resulting in new constructions that rapidly change the physical landscape and outline of the villages. In many villages new modern houses are now interspersed with and clash with houses built in traditional style, which destroys the traditional outline based on *fengshui* beliefs. Poverty is also a reason for destruction as houses in poor areas are left to fall apart due to lack of economic means, and as young people leave the villages in search for a better life in the cities.

In many cases the demolition of old houses is also due to inflexible laws and lack of land. Due to the scarcity of farmland there are restrictions on new constructions, which means that in order to build a new house people often need to build on the site of an old house. According to article 62 of the Law on Land Management (revised and adopted on 28 August, 2004), people on the countryside are forbidden to have more than one house per household. The provincial government decides the total area of the house. In Zhejiang the allowed space is currently 45 square metres per person, or 75 square per three persons.⁹⁴ The extent to which this policy is followed however seems to vary. In many of the villages visited in Zhejiang many families owned several houses and many houses were considerably bigger than formally permitted. It is very common to find three story houses but that nobody lives on the highest floor or that it isn't even finished. In some cases the older generation continue to live in the old house whereas the younger generation when they are married build new modern housing. In some cases the older house is rented out to other families or migrants. In other cases the old houses are simply left uninhabited to fall apart when the family moves to a new house. The authorities have taken different countermeasures to deal with this situation as discussed in the case studies below.

As a result of the land reform in the early 1950s, many big houses were confiscated and previous owners had to share once spacious houses with poor families. Many houses are now inhabited by several families and/or partly owned by the village. The complex situation of ownership creates problems for preservation as not all families are interested in the upkeep of the house or has the economic means to undertake such work. There sometimes arise conflicts between residents and village officials regarding the house and its preservation. In some instances where a house is protected or situated in a

⁹⁴ Interview with the party secretary in Zhuge village, Jinhua, June 2004.

historic village that has become a tourist attraction, the village and/or tourist company and cultural relics bureau have tried to make people move and take over the house. Sometimes these conflicts can be solved but very often the residents are in a weak position and forced to comply with the authorities' wishes. In some villages in Zhejiang, tourism has thus resulted in efforts to take over some historical properties. In other cases it might however be the residents who want the government to buy the house but at a higher price than the government can afford or is prepared to pay. In one village, not included in my sample, the residents of one particularly nice Ming house wanted to sell the house to the tourism company at the hefty sum of 5 million yuan. The company refused and only agreed to pay for repairs and the upkeep of the house. The residents refused this offer and decided to stop allowing tourists into the house with the result that the tourism company had to take the house out of their itinerary.

Many villagers put a high value on their ancestral halls but have not always been able to protect or repair them. The problem of preservation is complicated by the fact that old buildings and their ornaments have become attractive goods on the market. There are many reports of thefts of woodcarvings in unprotected ancestral halls in remote areas. People also sell parts of their houses' beams and windows for use as decoration in city restaurants. In some instances poor villages have also sold ancestral halls and other old houses to tourism developers. In Hengdian in Zhejiang province, one of China's most successful private companies has started to build up an open-air museum consisting of old houses that they have bought from neighbouring villages and from poor villages in other provinces. The plan is to have a total of some 70 buildings when finished.⁹⁵ There are a couple of other companies in Zhejiang that have also set-up this kind of open-air museums. In Longyou the cultural relics bureau also runs an open-air museum with old houses that have been moved from the area. But in contrast to many of the commercial enterprises, the renovations and protection of the houses are carefully done with respect to the choice of original materials etc. The cultural relics bureau has even decided to keep the faded revolutionary slogans that were painted on the walls. The commercial enterprises don't pay the same attention to authenticity or try to document the houses' history. Villages that already are tourist attractions have also in some cases bought old houses,

⁹⁵ Personal observations in the museum in June 2004 and interview with one of the managers. The park currently has four ancestral halls that have been bought from villages in the area and elsewhere in Zhejiang. In an interview with cultural relics officials in Lanxi I was later told that the company had tried to buy an ancestral hall in Zhanglin village, Yongchang, but that the villagers had refused to sell their hall.

bridges, and ancestral halls from poor villages in order to add to their own attractions. A poor village in Zhejiang recently sold an ancestral hall that had been used as a school to a tourism developer in Anhui province in order to afford to build a new school.⁹⁶ If ancestral halls and other historical buildings are not listed as a protected site no laws or regulations forbid their sale.

Poverty can thus deprive people of their cultural heritage and turn old buildings into commodities. Mangers and others engaged in the buying of old houses and parts of old houses often defend this by claiming that the houses otherwise would have been lost and that they help spread knowledge and pride in Chinese architecture. There might be some truth to this but old buildings that are moved to a completely new setting and environment however lose something of their historical and cultural context and significance. Instead of being sites of embodied memory they become disembodied sites whose value is mainly visual and aesthetical. This is particularly striking if the building in question is an ancestral hall as these buildings are intrinsically place-bounded and closely connected with one individual family's history.

Exploring Zhejiang Villages and their Cultural Heritage

Zhejiang province is a comparatively prosperous province with an average income of 20 147 yuan in 2004, compared with a national average of 9 101 yuan. But there are great differences within the province and in particular between its cities and the countryside. In 2003, a survey of 2 700 households in the countryside revealed an average income of only 5 431 yuan.⁹⁷ Zhejiang has a developed industrial economy but development is rather uneven in the province. The largest concentrations of industries and small businesses are found in the north close to Shanghai, around Hangzhou, in Yiwu in the central parts of the province, and in the coastal areas of Ningbo and Wenzhou. Pockets of poor areas exist, especially in the mountainous areas in the central and southern parts of the province. The average income in the villages I visited vary from as low as 1 300 yuan (a village in a designated poor county) to 4 450 yuan. The landscape is very varied in character, with lowland

⁹⁶ Reported on 21 September 2002 in *Zhongguo wenhua bao*. Hangzhou for its part has recently bought two houses from Anhui, which incongruously have been placed at the shore of the famous West Lake. Wuzhen, a booming tourist town, has bought an old bridge to replace a new one and has reportedly also bought an ancestral hall.

⁹⁷ See Wan Wu, *Zhejiang lanpi shu 2005, Shehui juan* [Blue Book of Zhejiang. Social Issues Part], Hangzhou chubanshe: Hangzhou, 2005, p. 57.

crisscrossed by canals in the north and mountains in the south, and with a coast dotted with small islands and fishing communities. The greater part of the province is very fertile. On the hill slopes people tend fruit orchards and tea plantations. Farmland is getting increasingly scarce however, especially in the outskirts of bigger cities where new residential areas and industrial development zones are being built. In villages such as Zhuge (see below) many families had lost all their farmland. The average land per capita in the twelve villages in my sample varied from 1/3 mu to one mu (one mu is 1/6 acre). At least four villages were facing immediate loss of smaller or bigger parts of their land for either industrial purposes, the building of dams, or as a result of tourism. The villagers in Shantouxia were thus to lose all of their farmland due to the building of an industrial development zone in the neighbourhood (the village is close to the booming town of Yiwu). In many cases the villagers expressed dissatisfaction about economic compensation as well as concern about the future.

Reflecting the great geographical variations, and the remoteness of some areas, the village outline and vernacular architecture vary quite a lot.⁹⁸ In the north, villages are clustered along canals with houses that partly stand on poles in the water and are accessible from boats. In the Western part of the province, one finds grand houses that are similar to those of Anhui, with whitewashed walls made of stone and with striking so-called horse head walls. The interiors have elaborated carved wooden elements such as windows and beams etc. In the more mountainous areas villages are smaller and houses, partly made of stone slabs, climb on the hill slopes. The villages come in different types and sizes, ranging from elongated to more clustered shapes, and with inhabitants from less than one hundred to several thousands. Some villages are single surname villages. The lineages have been quite strong in many parts of the province as can be seen by the many ancestral halls found in the villages. In some villages there were at the height of the family's prosperity often some 20-40 ancestral halls as new branch halls were built when the family expanded and prospered.

There are currently 73 national level protected sites in Zhejiang, 442 provincial level sites, and ca 2000 municipal and county level sites. One ancestral hall in the province is listed as a national level protected site and so are three villages. Two villages are national level historic villages. Until 2005, only nine ancestral halls had been listed as provincial level protected sites, but

⁹⁸ For descriptions of villages in Zhejiang, see among other works, Ronald G. Knapp *China's Old Dwellings* University of Hawaii Press: Honolulu, 2000, pp. 246-256, and Ronald G. Knapp, "Cangpo Village, Zhejiang: A Relict with a Future?" in Ronald G. Knapp (1992), pp. 173-185.

an additional 19 ancestral halls were added that year when the new round of 163 protected sites was announced. Of the 442 provincial level protected sites, 28 are now ancestral halls. Zhejiang has listed five villages as provincial level protected sites, and some 43 villages as provincial level protected historical villages. This development indicates an increasing appreciation of the rural and vernacular heritage among experts in the provincial cultural relics bureau. The rich heritage of Zhejiang's villages has in recent years also become something of a tourist attraction that many local governments try to capitalise upon. In *Tourism to Chinese Old Cities* published by the Shanxi Normal University Publishing Press in 2004, 25 of the 220 villages and townships listed are found in Zhejiang.⁹⁹ This is next highest regional number after Sichuan and Chongqing. Despite this listing, however, not all of the villages receive many tourists, and in few villages does tourism play any dominant role in the local economy.¹⁰⁰

In the following, I will discuss the cultural heritage in a selected number of villages in Zhejiang and analyse the contestations over heritage sites since 1949. I will also discuss to what extent the villages have been successful in preserving their cultural heritage, and why, and if not, what the reasons are.¹⁰¹ As can be expected, a whole set of factors, ranging from geographical location and infrastructure, level of development, political leadership, and general interest and awareness among the local residents, explain the different development in the villages, some of which are only a few kilometres from each other. Some of the villages are currently listed as national or provincial level protected sites or villages, or are aspiring to achieve this status, which provides some benefits. But this status alone doesn't guarantee successful protection and even less that cultural heritage management is conflict free.

I will first discuss two villages that although being listed as national level protected villages nonetheless are experiencing a number of problems and

⁹⁹ 20 of them are villages, whereas three are townships and two are cities.

¹⁰⁰ I have visited 13 of the 20 villages in Zhejiang listed in the book. I have in addition visited another nine villages in the province. Of these 22 villages, three are national level protected sites, two are national level protected historic villages, five are provincial level protected sites, nine are provincial level protected historic villages, and one is a municipal level protected village. Six villages are not listed although several of them have some protected sites in the village. In the following discussion, I will limit myself to seven villages of the twelve already mentioned, although I also draw on experiences and visits to the other villages. I have visited most of the villages on several occasions and conducted interviews with villagers, village leaders, and officials in the cultural relics bureaus and other experts. I also base my account on different written sources, such as genealogies, accounts of village history of both an official and non-official character, works on architectural history, as well as tourism promotional material.

¹⁰¹ For an account of the rural heritage in Anhui, see Ronald G. Knapp, "(Re)Presenting Rural Heritage: The Preservation of China's Vernacular Landscape," paper presented at the symposium 'The Persistence of Traditions: Monuments and Preservation in Late Imperial and Modern China,' Columbia University, April 2-3, 2004.

contestations related to preservation, local ownership, and development. These villages will then be contrasted with a more successful example of a national level protected village that has been able to control its cultural heritage and benefit from tourism. In its close neighbourhood there are however four villages that despite a rich heritage have experienced difficulties, mainly because of poverty but also because of poor leadership. In almost all of the villages, local residents were the first to restore and rebuild their ancestral halls and temples. But the process of reclaiming the local heritage has not been without difficulties. In many cases the heritage narratives offered visitors build upon the local community's own place myths, but sometimes the tourist produced and induced narratives hide conflicts and contestations, or shift the focus away from sites and cultural and religious practices of importance to the local community. In many cases it is only if the village can boost some more extraordinary and spectacular heritage sites that it becomes a successful tourist attraction while the ordinary and local heritage is ignored.

Yuyuan and Guodong: Legal and Economic Contestations over the Cultural Heritage

Yuyuan village in Wuyi County in central Zhejiang became a county level protected site in 1996, a provincial level site in 1999, and a national level site in 2001. In 2003, the village was among the first thirteen villages to be listed as a national historic village. The local cultural relics bureau is currently working to draw up a protection plan that is long overdue. The village has as yet not received any funding from SACH towards renovations but would be eligible once the plan is in place.

The village has 730 families, totalling 2000 people, 70 percent of whom are surnamed Yu; 12 percent of the village population are surnamed Li. Yuyuan is circa half an hours drive from Wuyi and the site of the township government. Before 1949 the village was quite rich, as can be seen from its many old big houses, and owned land far away. When a new road in the 1950s was built further away from the village it lost its central role and the economy took a downturn. Today the average annual income is only circa 2000 yuan. Agriculture is still very important to the village although farmland is getting increasingly scarce. An estimated 70 percent of those between the age of 18 and 40 now work outside the village that doesn't have any industries or commercial enterprises.

There are two ancestral halls in the village, one belonging to the Yu family, and a smaller hall belonging to the Li family. The Yu ancestral hall was taken over and used as a granary after 1949. When the state grain company in the

1980s wanted to demolish the hall in order to build a new storage facility the villagers protested. The building was therefore saved and in 2000 bought by the new tourism company. The Li ancestral hall was first used as a school until the new school was built. Today parts of the hall are used as an activity centre for old people. Another part since 1995 houses an exhibition of ethnographic objects. There are some 39 well-preserved houses in the village, the majority from the Qing dynasty. In the past there were several temples and two memorial arches in the village. Today only one temple, the Dongzhumiao, remains. The temple was widely known for its so-called dream festival, which attracted many people from other villages. The temple was saved from destruction because it was used to store tobacco. In 1985, the villagers got together to renovate the temple, collecting 30 000 yuan. The local authorities were at first negative toward re-opening the temple and in 1987 the county government closed down the temple amid critique of feudal practices. The nine people who had been in charge of the temple were forced to attend a day of ideology classes and the then party secretary had to leave his position. But in 1990 the villagers finally got official approval to re-open the temple and revive the festival. Around 1995-96 they also set up a tourism organisation and opened a small ethnographic exhibition in the Li ancestral hall.

In 1999, under the impact of growing domestic tourism elsewhere, a tourism company was set-up jointly controlled by the township and the village (some said 50-50, others 60-40 share). Business has been poor, however, and there were only some 20 000 visitors in 2003. In 2004 the company was therefore licensed to a private businessman, who incidentally happened to work for the township's tourism bureau. The company has some 20 employees, including 10 guides. It has recently taken a loan of 6 million yuan (some sources say 3,5 millions) in order to buy some of the old houses, move people, demolish new houses that clash with the historical environment, and build a new residential area. The buildings opposite the Yu ancestral hall have thus been demolished and there is a plan to build a small park there. The villagers are critical of the tourism development which they feel hasn't brought them any benefits. According to villagers, the village doesn't receive more than 30 000 yuan per year from the tourism company. The families whose houses are open to tourism receive some money in compensation. In one house the three families living there get 400 yuan per year to divide among themselves. Many villagers have in recent years set up small stalls selling antiquities, souvenirs, and local products. The villagers are not happy with the local

leadership and despair of their ability to affect decision-making, and don't regard the village elections to make any difference in the state of affairs.

Much of the resentment seems to be centred on the fact that the tourism company/village is planning to buy several old houses and force the villagers to move to a new residential area. In 2004, the village/tourism company bought one of the biggest mansions, Liufengtang. The 15 families then living in the house all had to move. The families, who apart from one person all were assigned housing in the mansion after 1949, were dissatisfied with the compensation, which is not enough to build a new house. Some of the older people didn't want to be uprooted and didn't see the point of building a new house at this stage of their life. The tourism company and some cultural experts however believed that the compensation was quite generous, although they admitted that it wasn't enough to build a new house, and argued that those who wanted to could rent other housing in the village. The tourism company plans to open the house for tourism and arrange some exhibitions. The argument is that this would not only be attractive and interesting to tourists but also guarantee better protection of the building since the risk of fire is higher if people live in the house. In the past some residents have sold parts of the exquisite lattice windows and there have also been reports of attempted theft. There are plans/rumours that the company will buy more houses and most people in these houses seem to be very resentful of this. When people from the tourism company went to another big mansion, Jingshenlou, to discuss this issue in April 2004, the seven families that live in the building all refused. In interviews I later had with some of them they interestingly referred to the 2004 revision of the constitution that now includes a reference to the protection of the right to private property. As a result of their opposition the tourism company had to give up its plan for the time being.

The village is going to lose a total of 115 mu of land because of new projects, including the new residential area (66 mu), road constructions (20 mu), a new government building for the township government (12 mu), and a new shopping area for tourists. Villagers are unhappy about this loss of land and about the lack of information about compensation etc. In 2003 some villagers therefore decided to go to Hangzhou to petition the provincial government. When the township government found out about their intention they contacted the county government that then interceded and stopped the villagers as they were boarding the train from Wuyi to Hangzhou. The villagers were sent back to the village but later managed to get to Hangzhou by car. A couple of them were however briefly detained after they returned.

The Hangzhou authorities referred the land issue to the county government that however already had approved of the project.¹⁰²

The tourist itinerary in Yuyuan includes several exhibitions, including those in the two ancestral halls, visits to architecturally outstanding houses, and a visit to the temple. The village has a rather interesting history and a lively place myth exists around its creation and *fengshui* outline. The guides and the exhibitions focus on these narratives, on the Yu family history and its clan rules, the architectural elements of the houses, and some famous people who have visited the village. In the temple an old fortune-teller is available and it is also possible to offer incense to the different gods.

In nearby Guodong tourism has been more successful. The village, which is much smaller, is also a national historic village. The success of Guodong might partly be due to the fact that it is at a closer distance from Wuyi. Tourism investment also began earlier and is run by the Wuyi County Tourism Bureau, which has better resources to market the village than the local government/village would have. Still there is resentment in the village regarding the share of the profits given to the village and the management of the different sites in the village. Villagers also feel that not enough money is spent on renovations; there are several small branch halls in the village that are rapidly falling apart. There is also an unevenness of the economic development in the village with people in the lower part of the village having more possibilities to prosper and take advantage of their land at the entrance to the village. New shops, a couple of small hotels, and a huge parking lot are now found at the entrance to the village. Many restaurants and shops have appeared in recent years and villagers also trade their wares in small stalls that are found everywhere in the village. Tourism business is quite bustling and many tourist buses find their way to the village. Not far from the village new hotels have recently been built at a hot spring that might also benefit tourism in the village. The village's main attraction is its surroundings and its natural scenery; it is nested in a small and beautiful valley. There are in fact rather few attractions and striking buildings in the village. There is a temple that the villagers renovated in 1994, an ancestral hall, a Temple to the God of Literature, and a magnificent old house inhabited by one family. There are also some exhibitions of ethnographic objects, including a rice mill. The ancestral hall is quite big and striking with an opera stage that is still in use. In

¹⁰² The issue of land confiscation is becoming increasingly problematic all over China. In many cases corruption and unsatisfying compensation have led to unrest and open protests. Peasants have small possibilities to get their voices heard. Since local officials are responsible for social stability in their area, and petitions to higher authorities deduct from their performance, they try to prevent people from appealing to higher authorities.

the second hall coffins are stored and ancestral tablets kept in a spirit cupboard. There are also some ethnographic exhibitions in the hall. While Yuyuan is promoted as a Taiji diagram shaped village Guodong is marketed as an ecological village.

The examples of Yuyuan and Guodong illustrate that not even national protected status is a guarantee for good protection or a healthy and sustainable development that benefits all the villagers. The lack of transparency and ability to take part in the decision-making process as it relates both to cultural heritage management and tourism development create a lot of resentment, unfounded or not is perhaps beside the point, among the local residents, who are deeply suspicious of both local authorities, cultural relics experts, and tourism developers. It should be noted that in both villages the villagers were the first to document the village's history and renovate the main buildings of importance. In Yuyuan, the villagers have for example written and published two small books documenting the village's history and traditions.¹⁰³

Zhuge Village: Local Ownership of Cultural Heritage and Tourism

Zhuge village in Lanxi municipality is home to the largest concentration of descendants to Zhuge Liang, the famous general and politician of the Three Kingdoms period. According to the Zhuge genealogy, his descendant of the 27th generation, Zhuge Dashi, arrived in the village, then known as Gaolong gang, during the Song dynasty. The village's name was changed to Zhuge village during the Ming dynasty. Today some 90 percent, or 3000, of the villagers carry the surname Zhuge. Before 1949, the village prospered from its medicine trade and because it served as a market place for the surrounding villages. The medicine business was nationalised after 1949 and many of the village's rich families suffered during the following decades. At least some 33 people in the village were classified as landlords, 28 of who were surnamed Zhuge. Their houses were confiscated or divided among poor families and they were struggled against during different political campaigns. One family, the descendant of which still lives in the village, had to share their house with ten families and was only allowed to keep three rooms.

¹⁰³ One, *Zhongguo gu cun Yuyuan* [Yuyuan an old Chinese village], was published in 2001 as an internal book without a ISBN number and sold in the village. The other book, *Zou jin Yuyuan* [Getting to know Yuyuan], Zhongguo wenlian chubanshe: Beijing, 2002, was edited by Zheng Weiping, a writer and vice-head of the Wuyi tourism bureau, and Yu Songfa, a local villager who was instrumental in saving the last remaining copy of the Yu genealogy in the village.

There were originally 45 ancestral halls in the village although some had already been destroyed or disappeared before 1949.¹⁰⁴ The remaining ancestral halls were taken over by the state after 1949 and used for various official purposes, although some were destroyed or left to fall apart. The biggest ancestral halls in the village were either used to store grain and as a soy sauce factory (Chengxiangtang) or as cowsheds (Dagongtang and Chongxintang). Today ten ancestral halls remain. Three smaller one were already before 1949 partly used as residences. Three ancestral halls, including the main hall and the so-called memorial hall, have now been taken over by the tourism company and are open to the public. Three other halls are controlled by the former production teams and are used to store tools and for other communal purposes.¹⁰⁵ At least one of them is still used to store coffins and hold funerals.¹⁰⁶ The tourism company recently rebuilt one ancestral hall that had been destroyed before 1949. The five temples that existed in the village were all destroyed in the 1950s. In 1958, during the Great Leap Forward, the biggest of the many dams in the village was filled in and shops and official buildings built on the site. The village has several dams that according to *fengshui* practices were placed at central locations in the village. The dams also play a central role in village life as both a source of water and as a meeting place for the women who go there to wash clothes and vegetables.

Officials from the north was sent down to undertake land reform in the early 1950s but the majority of village officials have continued to come from the Zhuge family, although mainly from the poorer branch of the family that before 1949 was dominated by peasants. The village is today the site of the Zhuge township government that consists of 27 administrative villages and 108 natural villages and has a total population of 277 000 people. The village is quite rich in comparisons with other villages in the neighbourhood. The official average income per year is 4 450 yuan, to be compared with 3000 yuan in neighbouring Changle and 2000 yuan in Xinye. The village still serves as something of a market town and has many shops and small industries. The villagers don't have much land, on average only 1 mu per three persons, and

¹⁰⁴ The main information about the history and architecture of Zhuge is Chen Zhihua et al, *Zhugue Village* (in Chinese), Hebei jiaoyu chubanshe: Shijiazhuang, 2003, and the Zhuge genealogy from 1995. I was able to read and copy parts of the genealogy kept by the village accountant. The genealogies are usually kept by the village accountant.

¹⁰⁵ Originally there were 14 production brigades in the village that later were divided into 32 production teams. Although the ownership belongs to the collective, the user right to the different branch ancestral halls belongs to the different production teams and several production teams thus share one ancestral hall. The halls are thus no longer associated with or used by different branches of the family but by all families belonging to the team regardless of surname. Chengxiangtang and Dagongtang are owned collectively by the whole village.

¹⁰⁶ I've got some conflicting information on this but in only one hall have I actually seen coffins.

in contrast to Xinye agriculture is not the main source of income. Many villagers have lost their land as it has been claimed for construction etc. There are some small private businesses and factories in the village and the village itself still owns two factories (in most villages collective enterprises have been sold out to private entrepreneurs). Many young people work outside of the village in Jinhua or further away in Hangzhou and Shanghai.

In the late 1980s, a group of elderly villagers got together and collected money toward restoring some of the ancestral halls. Members of the Shanglitang branch hall were in 1988 the first to renovate their hall. In 1990, the renovation of Dagongtang, the memorial hall, engaged the whole village and was led by a group of 23 people. They collected money in the village but also tried to reach family members outside of the village, including abroad. Members of the Chongxintang, Chongxingtang and the Yongmutang also renovated their branch halls in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Many of those active in this work were former officials or teachers. The motive behind the renovation was pride over their illustrious ancestor and a wish to honour those who in the past had built and cared for the halls.¹⁰⁷ There have been no attempts to rebuild any of the demolished temples although the tourism company now is contemplating such a move in order to increase the number of tourist sites in the village. There are several newly renovated temples in neighbouring villages however. In the past two-three years, at least three villages have renovated/rebuilt their temples. It seems that some elderly women in Zhuge have begun to worship Zhuge Liang more as a god than as an ancestor. This is revealed by the fact that many of them go to Chengxiangtang to offer incense on the first and fifteenth day of the month according to the lunar calendar and that some of them are not surnamed Zhuge. Some of the other villagers, mostly men, dismiss this as a superstitious practice and claim that the women pray to Zhuge Liang as to Buddha for good health etc.¹⁰⁸ The old men in contrast tend to spend their pastime in the many teahouses that are found in the village. They gather there to talk, play cards and mahjong, and watch television. The teahouse is thus an almost exclusive male place only frequented by old men and by younger men who go there before or after work. There are thus quite clearly delineated gendered spaces and activities in the village.

¹⁰⁷ Respect for the ancestors is mentioned when discussing the renovations in the new genealogy compiled in 1995. This sentiment was also evident in my interviews with Zhuge Da, who was one of the elders active in the early work.

¹⁰⁸ Some of the men and younger people also argue that women are more superstitious than men as well as have plenty of time for this kind of activities.

The renovations of the ancestral halls were a local initiative that didn't receive any support from the local government or the cultural relics bureau. There hadn't been any survey of the cultural heritage in Zhuge before Chen Zhihua, an architect from Qinghua University, visited the village in 1991. Chen wrote a book about the village, first published in Taiwan and later on the mainland, outlining the history and the architecture of the village. He also recommended the local authorities to list Zhuge as a protected site; the village became a municipal heritage site in 1992. But it was not until the village, together with neighbouring Changle, was listed as a national level protected site in 1996, that the local and provincial level cultural relics bureau became engaged in preservation work in the village. Chen and his colleagues were then commissioned to draw up a preservation plan and list the most outstanding houses in the village. The listed buildings now number 94, of which all buildings, apart from the ancestral halls and four other houses that have recently been bought by the tourism company, are privately owned. The preservation plan and the listing put constraints on both the use and repair of the old buildings as well as on new constructions in the village. Work on a revised protection plan is now underway. In 1996, the local cultural relics bureau set up an office in the village responsible for preservation work in Zhuge and Changle. The bureau administers funding from SACH for renovations; to date it has renovated four buildings. The bureau has put most of its money into Changle since Zhuge has been able to use parts of the income from tourism for renovations.

In the early 1990s, the village's relationship to Zhuge Liang became known nationwide, which spurred interest in the village's cultural heritage. Since then local officials participate in the regular meetings that the Zhuge Liang Association holds around the country. It was also in the early 1990s that the ancestral ceremonies were revived. Traditionally one ceremony would take place in the fourth month of the lunar calendar on the occasion of Zhuge Liang's birthday and one in the eighth month on the occasion of the day of his death. Today the autumn ceremony is taking place on irregular intervals. It seems to be as much, or more, of a tourist spectacle, than an activity for the Zhuge family.¹⁰⁹ Because some of the ancestral halls are open for tourism and house different exhibitions, they cannot any longer be used for private activities such as funeral ceremonies. In none of the ancestral halls are

¹⁰⁹ I have not yet been able to visit the village during this ceremony but once I saw it broadcast on a tourism programme on Zhejiang television. In May 2005, I visited the village during the spring celebrations that were very modest in scale. A group of villagers went to Chengxiangtang in the early morning hours, well before any tourist had arrived, to make offerings to their ancestors. This ceremony takes place at the same time as a market day is held in the village that gather many businessmen from further away and villagers from neighbouring villages.

ancestral tablets kept and instead some families keep the tablets at home, although many have dispensed with this tradition altogether. In only one branch hall are coffins stored. In contrast to Zhuge, several other villages in the neighbourhood still keep both ancestral tablets and coffins in the ancestral halls and also carry out their funeral ceremonies there. The local party secretary argues that new funeral practices have evolved that make traditional funerals in the halls outdated. Due to lack of land villagers now have to cremate their dead and use collective burial places.¹¹⁰ The end for earth burials thus makes coffins superfluous. But in Yao village close by, the villagers place the body in the coffin for some time before the cremation, and in other places the cremated ashes are put in the coffin before it is burnt too.¹¹¹

The party secretary also argues that there is a risk of fire if incense is burnt. Protection concerns thus seem to partly override respect for the traditional use of the ancestral halls. He and other villagers in the village argue that one of the ancestral halls can still be used for funerals, even by people of other surnames, but that people prefer to have the funeral at home. Tourism sometimes also is a reason for why the practice of storing coffins and holding funerals in the ancestral halls has come to a stop as city people would feel uncomfortable upon seeing coffins. In neighbouring Xinye, villagers had to stop storing coffins in the ancestral halls when the village briefly attempted to promote tourism but when this enterprise didn't succeed they have taken up this practice again. In some tourist sites old coffins in contrast now seem to serve as props that tantalise the visitors and strengthen the historical ambience of the halls. The coffins, like the ancestral tablets, are thus placed in the halls more as part of the tourist exhibition and spectacle than for actual use.

Since tourism developed so quickly and successfully in Zhuge, traditional practices perhaps didn't have time or a chance to be completely revived. But it is interesting to note that villagers in Zhuge began to renovate their ancestral halls before many of the other villages and that they also have compiled a new genealogy. One would have assumed that using the ancestral halls for funerals and keeping ancestral tablets there would have been one important aspect and motivation behind the renovations. Still, it could also be the case that people's attachment to the ancestral halls and ancestor take new and different forms

¹¹⁰ On the regulations regarding burial practices and the struggle over graves, see Yang (2004), pp. 729-734.

¹¹¹ Yao, Xinye, and Zhiyan still keep ancestral tablets and store coffins in the halls, and also carry out funerals there. In Yao village I happened to visit while one funeral ceremony took place and in this case the coffin was placed in the ancestral hall for three days before being burnt. In Zhiyan I came across the village head while he was making a coffin and was told that they still practiced earth burials as they had plenty of hill land. In another village close by, I visited a funeral ceremony presided over by Daoist priests where the body had already been cremated and no coffin was used. The funeral ceremony took place at the home of the family.

today. The ancestral halls might thus be valued as a physical manifestation of the grandeur of the village and its ancestor whereas the actual use of the site would be irrelevant or partly reformed. It could also be the case that because of their ancestor's national and historical importance, villagers in Zhuge relate to and honour Zhuge Liang and other ancestors in a different way. It is interesting to note that in contrast to other villages, and perhaps to pre-1949 practices in the village, the distant figure of Zhuge Liang looms larger than do other more immediate ancestors. Although it is true that many later ancestors of fame, such as successful imperial candidates, also are commemorated and exhibited in some of the halls the ancestral ceremonies centre around the figure of Zhuge Liang.

Drawing on the interest for their village, the villagers in 1993 opened the renovated Dagongtang for tourism. In 1994 they sold tickets for some 20 000 yuan, and in 1995 for 80 000 yuan. In 1996 tourism really took off with a revenue of 500 000 yuan. In 1996 the village took a loan and spent some 500 000 yuan on renovating old houses. But that year the Lanxi Municipality decided that tourism should be managed by the township and not by the villagers themselves. The villagers were unhappy with this decision and not very co-operative, whereas the township didn't do much to promote tourism. Already one year later the tourism company was returned to the villagers with the village party secretary as director. The company made some important decisions and investments over the next few years. In 1997, it bought Tianyitang from the company that owned it and renovated the house and adjacent garden. The company also remade the government building on the premises into a small hotel. In 2000, the village bought and demolished the houses that had been built on the refilled dam and restored the dam. In order to cover the costs the village took a bank loan but was able to keep the costs down by doing most of the construction work themselves. Not all in the village were happy about this costly investment at first but the village committee approved of the decision.

The number of tourists vary but are estimated at around 1 500 to 2 000 per day during weekends and big holidays. The tourists generally don't stay for more than a couple of hours in the village, and although the different sites can become very crowded life in the village is not much affected. The tourism company today make some 5 million yuan per year from entrance fees (tickets are now priced at 40 yuan). It takes in another 600 000 yuan from licensing permissions for shops and stalls as well as from renting out the renovated shops around the upper dam etc. The tourism company employs 6-7 people in the office (working on the economy and on marketing etc), 15 people as

guides, and some 16 people who check tickets, work in the hotel, and do sanitation work etc. In addition the company employs 10 people who work in the fire brigade; guarding against fire being an important task in a village where the main asset is its old buildings. It is estimated that the villagers themselves make some 5 million yuan from tourism related business, such as shops and restaurants etc. The village per se is not so dependent on tourism but 80 percent of the village's collective income comes from tourism. Of the revenue some 50 percent is put into the company, covering salaries, advertisements and other necessary investments. The remaining 50 percent is put aside for renovations and other investments in the village. All villagers over the age of 60 are given 70 yuan per month and those above the age of 70 get 80 yuan. (An estimated 15 percent of the villagers are above the age of 60). It is estimated that the village has spent some 40 million yuan over the years on protection and tourism development.

The village/tourism company has renovated the shopping street around the upper dam as well as some 10 private houses. In order to assure that the old buildings are preserved, the village has drawn up a contract with families that move to the new residential area. According to this contract the owners are responsible for repair of the old house. If the owners fail to repair the house the village can pay for necessary repairs, but if the family is not able to repay this loan the village has the right to buy the house. The village has thus far bought three houses. As far as I know, and in contrast to Yuyuan, nobody has been forced to move. In a couple of instances where ownership of a house belongs to several families as well as to the village, the village has tried to convince the other owners to move. At least in one case two families refused as they found the compensation too low and as they couldn't afford to move to a new house.

The sites open for tourism belong to the village except for one house where the family is compensated with 200 yuan per month for opening the house to the public. (The owners also make a handsome income on the calligraphy and other souvenirs that they sell in their house.) There are currently nine sites open for tourists, including three ancestral halls. Some of the houses have exhibitions on family history, including important and successful family members who took the imperial examination, Chinese medicine, as well as agricultural and ethnographic objects. It is also possible to visit an exhibition on the history and architecture of the village, but it requires a separate ticket and the exhibition is quite hidden away.¹¹²

¹¹² On my last visit the exhibition seemed to have been closed. A new exhibition was planned detailing the life of Zhuge Liang.

The main heritage narrative in the village is that of Zhuge Liang, family history and lineage rituals, and the medicine trade. The architecture and *fengshui* character of the village is much emphasised and celebrated in the promotional materials. The *fengshui* of the village has become something of a marketing strategy or ploy. The village is now known as the *Zhuge bagua cun*, Zhuge Eight Trigrams Village. The tourist guides will point out the village's special *fengshui* characteristics, such as the eight hills and the eight dams, including the dam in the shape of *yin* and *yang*. But the tourist guides don't mentioned the symbols and objects, such as Eight Trigrams painted above the doors and mirrors and scissors that hang above the doors to ward of evil spirits, which show that traditional beliefs and practices are still alive in the village. Many of the souvenirs on sale are related to Zhuge Liang and to *fengshui* practices (one can buy Eight Trigrams mirrors, *luopan*, i.e. *fengshui* compasses, as well as books on *fengshui*). One also finds traditional cookies and agricultural products.

The municipal authorities have as mentioned tried to get a footing in the lucrative tourism business in the village. It was the municipal authorities that pushed ahead with building a row of shops and restaurants along the old road leading into the village, which both local residents and cultural experts have criticised for being insensitive to the ambience and traditional architecture of the village. Merchants and craftsmen from other parts of Zhejiang and further away have also arrived in the village to open shops. They mostly rent the newly renovated shops around the upper dam where one finds wood carvers from Dongyang and merchants selling glass from Lishui, silk embroidery from Suzhou, and hams from Jinhua.

The main ancestral hall has been listed as a so-called patriotic education base, which can be regarded as an official effort to link the national with the local and bridge love for the family and one's hometown with love for the country. In this particular case it might not be so farfetched as in Yuyuan and other places since Zhuge Liang also is remembered and hailed as a patriotic hero. The hall is currently a municipal level patriotic base but the village was aspiring to also get the provincial level title. But when the tourism company realised that such a designation would mean that children below the age of 18 wouldn't have to pay any entrance fee they changed their mind because they didn't want to loose the income. Financial considerations thus trumped patriotism in this case.

In contrast to many other villages Zhuge has been able to benefit from tourism as well as protect its cultural heritage. There are a number of factors that explains this rather favourable development. First of all the village was

fairly well preserved to start with due to a bit of good luck as it was spared too devastating destruction during the Cultural Revolution. When the village was discovered and tourism took off, the traditional layout of the village had not yet been destroyed by the more recent housing craze that can be seen all over Zhejiang. The village also benefits from a good geographical location and infrastructure that makes visits to the village rather easy and has helped tourism take off. The fact that Zhuge is a market town has helped its economy and enabled the village to invest in infrastructure, renovations and other developments. As in other villages, it was the villagers themselves who initiated renovations of the ancestral halls. But the fame of Zhuge Liang has ensured the village a marketable heritage that few other villages can rival. Preservation work has also been helped through the discovery and support of Chen Zhihua, and by the fact that the village as early as 1996 became a national level protected site. But this fact alone doesn't explain its success. The cultural relics bureau has only provided very limited funding, and other villages in the province with the same status have not had the same favourable development. One big difference with other villages is that Zhuge has been able to both secure local ownership over its cultural heritage and reap the benefits from tourism. The village has however had to struggle with the township and municipal authorities over control of the tourism company. The political leadership in the village, and in particular the good management and farsightedness of the current party secretary, who came to power in 1997, has been very crucial for ensuring local control. The party secretary has also been able to convince his fellow villagers to continue to invest in preservation work, managing to strike a good balance between protection concerns and tourism development. The village committee has tried to raise awareness of cultural heritage protection in the village through meetings and regulations. This cannot fail to be rather top-down although there have been some efforts to involve the earlier group of elderly villagers. One could of course criticise the fact that the party secretary also is the director of the tourism company, and wonder to what extent the village committee and individual villagers have any say in developments, and how open and democratic the decision-making process has been. There are some people who grumble of not benefiting much by tourism but on the whole resentment seems to be small when compared to other villages. In 2004, the party secretary was voted into office by first having been elected a member of the village committee as is now required. This could perhaps be seen as a vote of confidence.¹¹³

¹¹³ It is of course be difficult for a stranger to judge and get insight into the political affairs of the village. In my discussions with villagers there have however been no hints of any wrongdoing or

The village elders, who began to renovate the ancestral halls in the late 1980s and also were in charge of compiling the new genealogy in 1995, are no longer so active and influential in the village's cultural and political life. This is not only a result of their increasing age but a result of their marginalisation and the coming to power of a new generation. With the elevation of the village to a protected site and the growth of tourism new actors have become more powerful. Management and political skills have been necessary to build up the tourism business and ward off outside interference.¹¹⁴ Although there is a strong pride among the younger political leadership they are not spurred by the same ideas and motivations as the older generation.¹¹⁵ They are further removed from the past and their positions depend more on whether they can generate economic growth in the village. They also have to be careful so that they are not seen as promoting the Zhuge family at the expense of other surnames in the village, although the majority of village cadres are surnamed Zhuge. There is no denying that tourism results in commercialisation of the village's heritage, as manifested in souvenirs related to Zhuge Liang. These developments to some extent change the way people look at and relate to their cultural heritage. One should also note that the celebrated heritage in the village is associated with Zhuge Liang and his descendants. A large group of people in the village and township don't share this kinship attachment although they can relate to Zhuge Liang as a national hero. There doesn't seem to exist any open resentment or questioning of the role of Zhuge Liang in the village. In fact, some people with other surnames also claim to be descendants of Zhuge Liang as this helps their business.

Changle Village: A Forgotten Village

Changle village, circa 10 minutes drive from Zhuge, shares the advantage of being a national level protected site, but it has been much less successful in protecting and promoting its cultural heritage. Some houses in the village have been renovated with funding from SACH but as yet there is no tourism

corruption on the part of the party secretary or other village officials.

¹¹⁴ The struggle is however not over. There is considerable pressure on the village from higher authorities to further promote tourism and help the local economy, and some villagers are also impatient and want to see more development. The party secretary is satisfied with the current number of tourists as it is manageable and don't disturb village life too much as well as don't threaten preservation. In this view he has no doubt been influenced by professor Chen Zhihua who frequently visit the village and by officials at the provincial cultural relics bureau. Other current worries for the party secretary is the township's plan to build a huge concrete factory in the vicinity of the village.

¹¹⁵ The current party secretary gives voice to a strong pride in his ancestor but combines this with a new rhetoric of cultural heritage that refers to more general historical and architectural motivations and values.

to speak of. If a straying tourist finds his way to the village he might be showed around by some of the old men in the village. But there are no advertisements or signs directing prospective tourists to the village, no ticket office, no permanent staff or guides, and no exhibitions. Changle however caught the attention of provincial cultural relics experts earlier than Zhuge as its architecture is older and more refined than that of Zhuge. The destruction during the Cultural Revolution and recent demolitions however seem to have been more devastating for the village outline. There is also a polluting concrete factory close to the village. Although some of the houses in Changle are older than in Zhuge, the set-up of the village is much less attractive, there are not as many winding lanes and dams for example. There is however a strong local interest in the history of the village and family pride as a new genealogy has recently been compiled. Local operas are still staged in one of the halls in the village and the villagers have also recently rebuilt an old temple on a nearby hilltop. The historical narrative is not as striking as in Zhuge, there is no Zhuge Liang to attract tourists. The majority of the villagers are surnamed Jin and descendants of Jin Lüxiang, a famous thinker from the Song dynasty, but he can hardly beat Zhuge Liang for fame. Those interested in architecture however appreciate Changle's old houses. According to some observers, some of the blame for the state of affairs falls on the village leaders in Changle that have not taken the initiative or been bold enough to invest in tourism. Despite the short distance between the two villages there have been no efforts at coordinating and developing tourism and nor has the municipal government shown any interest in developing tourism in the village.

Xinye Village: A Living Heritage amidst Uncontrolled Construction

Xinye has experienced something of the same difficulties as Changle. The village, which belongs to another municipality, Jiande, is a 30-40 minutes drive from Zhuge, on a rather poor road. The landscape is however very beautiful and the village has many more interesting buildings than either Changle or Zhuge. Xinye boasts eleven ancestral halls, several other nice old houses, a pagoda, a Temple to the Literary God, and two temples. The village is dominated by the Ye family, who make up more than 90 percent of the inhabitants. The Yes arrived in this area already in the early thirteenth century and although they gradually prospered the family didn't produce any famous figures. When the architect Chen Zhihua first arrived in the village in the late 1980s, he was struck by its architecture and well-preserved outline. Today the original set-up of the village is threatened by uncontrolled construction and it is also quite dirty with a lot of garbage on the streets and in the waterways.

Although the village since 2000 is a provincial level historic village this has not put a stop to these negative developments. Like many other poor and remote villages Xinye has also suffered from cases of thefts of woodcarvings (in 1996 from the Temple to the Literary God and in 1998 from one ancestral hall). Developments in Xinye illustrate some of the rapid changes and challenges that Chinese villages are currently going through.

Like in other villages, the eleven ancestral halls that exist today were taken over by the state after 1949 and used as among other things a mill, a shop, and as granaries. In the mid-1980s, the ancestral halls were returned to the village and the villagers began to renovate them. The village committee administers two of the ancestral halls and the other halls belong to the respective family branch organisation. It was also around this time that the major temple began to be restored and that the religious festival was revived. The other temple, the Temple to the Literary God, was rebuilt in 2003. In the 1990s, the village received some funding from the state to renovate the pagoda, and in 2004 it received some funding from the provincial level cultural relics bureau toward renovation of the main ancestral hall. The hall had served as a school for the village and some neighbouring villages until a new school was built in 2002. Some of the renovations do not seem to have been very successful and are of dubious quality. The ancestral halls are used for storing coffins, holding funerals and other communal events, including staging opera performances. The villagers have recently compiled a new genealogy, and like in Yuyuan there are several individuals interested in documenting the village history.

The village is quite big with some 3 000 inhabitants, but remote with only a few small shops and no factories. In contrast to Changle and Zhuge, the villagers in Xinye are mainly farmers. The village has quite a lot of land, circa 1 mu per person. Some of the land is these days let to be fallow as the new seeds give more plentiful harvests. The Jiande government at one point tried to open tourism in the village but for some reasons it never took off. Currently hardly any tourists find their way to the village although it is listed in many guidebooks specialising on traditional villages. The local leaders, including the party secretary and the village head, are interested and take a pride in the cultural heritage of the village, and have for example taken part in renovations of their respective ancestral halls.

Despite its many problems and disadvantages, such as poor economy, remoteness, weak local leadership, and lack of interest and support from higher authorities, Xinye has managed to keep its cultural heritage and local traditions very much alive. There is a strong interest in family and village

history as manifested through renovations of ancestral halls and recent revision of the genealogy and work on a village history. The annual temple fair and its festivities engage the whole village and many family members living outside of the village then return home for a visit. Several retired people have also chosen to move back to the village after retirement. The ancestral halls are still in use and retain several of their original functions as centre for communal and cultural activities. Traditional religion also flourishes although it seems to be mostly elderly women who take care of and visit the temples. There are also close contacts with temples in the neighbourhood. In short, the village is very rich and active when it comes to upholding cultural and religious practices when compared with many other villages.

Zhiyan and Shangtang: The Difference State Protection Makes

Zhiyan and Shangtang are both at close distance from Zhuge, although there are no direct roads connecting them. The two villages also belong to the Lanxi municipality. In 2004 a road was built across the hills connecting Xinye and Zhiyan. Zhiyan and Shangtang both belong to the Zhiyan Township but their situation look quite different when it comes to preservation. Zhiyan and Shangtang are much poorer than the other villages due to their remoteness and poor roads. Shangtang was in 2003 designated as one of the 36 poor villages in the municipality with an average income of only 1700 yuan and a population of 1875 residents. The village has several old ancestral halls, one memorial arch, and three temples. Several of the ancestral halls are in very poor state; one has been used a school but it now deserted, several are used as housing, and one serves as office for the village leaders. In contrast to other villages in the neighbourhood, the villagers have only made very small investment in the repair of the ancestral halls, mainly on the building now used as office for the cadres. To date the village has not received any funding from the municipality or any higher authorities. The municipality is admittedly quite poor but the village was nonetheless in 1997 designated a municipal level protected site (in 1996 the memorial arch had received this status). The political leadership seems rather weak and the township has had to appoint a party secretary from the township.

Zhiyan is dominated by the Chen family (90 percent) and has a total of some 1600 residents. The village has some 30 structures that date from the Ming and Qing dynasties. The main ancestral hall still exists. Parts of it are used as a kindergarten but the hall also houses an exhibition on the family and its history. There are also four branch halls and some smaller sub-halls in the village. In some of these halls people now live. But other halls are used to store

coffins and ancestral tablets and funerals still take place there. There are two small temples in the village. One of the temples was recently rebuilt on a new site as the original structure was demolished in the 1950s because of the construction of a big dam close by. The village became a provincial level protected site already in 1994. This has afforded Zhiyan better protection than Xinye as it means higher status and stronger legal protection than the status as protected historic village confers. The village has since 2001 received funding from the provincial cultural heritage bureau towards restoring two of its ancestral halls, but many of the other halls and houses are also in need of repair. The local authorities have nominated Zhiyan to the sixth round of national protected sites to be announced in late 2005.

Concluding Remarks

The Chinese rural heritage faces considerable threats not only because of poverty but paradoxically also often because of modernisation and economic development. During the past 10-20 years many traditional buildings in Chinese villages have been demolished and replaced with new modern buildings. On the positive side one should emphasise the great pride many villagers despite difficult circumstances take in their cultural heritage, and their painstaking efforts to preserve and document this heritage. Chinese cultural experts and local authorities have also increasingly come to acknowledge and value the vernacular architecture on the countryside. But many problems still exist of an institutional and legal nature, such as lack of funding and poor implementation of existing laws and regulations. Another problem with cultural heritage management and tourism development is their top-down character and lack of mechanisms that guarantee local residents a say in the management. Management and ownership issues are closely related to issues of political participation and democracy. Only if local people are involved in the documentation, interpretation, and management of the cultural heritage can protection be ensured and culture kept alive.

Chinese villagers' sense of place, memory and identity are today negotiated and accommodated in a new socio-economic context and cultural-ideological environment. The villagers are not simply reacting to, or contesting official policies and official memory politics, but are actively engaging the state and other actors in the creation of partly new spatial identities. The construction of space and memory on the countryside thus involve both villagers and new and old actors, such as cultural relics experts and tourism officials. These new

contestations in their turn give rise to new heritage narratives. Like elsewhere in China, spatial struggles and memory practices on the countryside are shaped by traditional values, new ideas and identities, and economic interests.

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