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China's Modernization on Fast Track. Scientists who take part in the 'Research on China's Modernization Strategy' announced lately that China passed the first stage of modernization and is making fast progress on the second. According to China's 'three-step' development strategy, world medium level marking developed countries is expected and the country's modernization will basically come true by 2050.

(People's Daily 25.3.2002).

Hanjiang District Starts 'Six One' Movement to Oppose Feudal Superstition and Popularize Advanced Culture With the beginning of this year [...] every village is to construct a permanent stage for literature and art performances to replace the stage for operas and plays for local deities, control local opera troupes and instead organize the popular performance of literature and art, reduce the expenditures for local operas and organize instead screenings of elegant films, transform the meeting places of temples into regular locations for literature and art activities; allow advanced culture to enter the temples and shrines by setting up a newspaper rail; and spend money and energy on establishing a village-level culture propaganda unit. As the writer has convinced himself, under the effect of these propaganda activities, people in the area from all walks of life have already started to oppose temple processions and cancelled earlier planned performances of *pusa* operas; some villages have put newspaper rails in their temples, and some places are in the process of selecting people for their culture propaganda unit. The masses happily say: 'The advanced culture at last has entered the village on a large scale!'

(Meizhou Ribao 25.4.2001).

These two quotes, taken from Chinese newspapers, illustrate the unique currency that ideas of planned development, social engineering and civilizatory progress have in present-day China, ideas combined with a teleological view of history that has become quite rare in the contemporary world. The prevalence in China of what James Scott calls a 'high modernist agenda' - the notion that 'a planned social order is better than the accidental, irrational deposit of historical practice' and that 'only those who have the scientific knowledge to discern and create this superior social order are fit to rule' (Scott, 1998:94) - reflects the fundamental role high modernist thinking had in the founding of the People's Republic of China and in the subsequent creation of socialist China. It also reflects more generally a long-standing political millennialism among Chinese elites, whose roots go back at least to the May 4th student movement of 1919 that is commonly known as the cradle of the Chinese enlightenment movement and birth hour of the modern Chinese intellectual. In elite discourse whose gist remained the same throughout the 20th century, China was either to choose the way of economic and technological development and civilizatory progress or face the deluge - that is, remain a country forever mired in underdevelopment, superstition, corruption, and crime, and therefore without defences against external aggressors. In these discourses *science* became the dominant signifier for all those forces that promised to deliver 'modern China' and to reinstate the country's rightful place in the international order. This is also the case in the post-Reform era, where a more vaguely defined state of 'being developed' (*fada*) has replaced 'communism' as the endpoint of China's historical trajectory. Its dark opponents are all those negative forces that threaten to derail China's progress towards this imagined modernist future; an 'enemy' at different times discursively constructed as 'tradition' (*chuantong*), 'magic'/'superstition' (*mixin*), or today, as 'chaos' (*luan*) (cf. Anagnost 1987).

The above quotes, however, also testify to what could with Habermas be called 'die neue Unübersichtlichkeit' - the 'new opacity' - of the post-Reform era. The alliance of the socialist state with global capitalism - in what is appropriately but clumsily called the 'Socialist Market Economy with Chinese Characteristics' - spawned developments that 'do not fit' the modernist model of progressive rationalisation, order and orderliness under the central control of the Party. Increasing crime levels, rampant corruption, uncontrollable rural-urban migration streams and also the (re)invention of kinship and religious institutions in rural areas represent the opposite of modernism, ambivalence - i.e. the blurring of categories and the growth of social spheres that escape the disciplining grip of the state. However triumphantly the party-controlled press announces the state's successes in controlling such phenomena, for many Chinese these contradictions have blurred the country's imaginary roadmap to modernity and increased fears of a derailing of modernisation and a regression into 'chaos'. They have also given rise to contestations over the project of modernity as such and 'muddled' the meaning of its essential separations, modern and traditional, good and bad, progressive and backward, order and chaos. Although there remains an essential agreement in China about the value of development and controlled order versus social chaos, what content is attached to these terms has become increasingly fragmented, as have modernist discourses themselves.

In the following paper I look at these 'muddled modernities' of the post-Reform period from the perspective of Chinese peasants (*nongmin*). Peasants or *nongmin* is used here as an emic category and not as an objective economic category. *Nongmin* is, first, the name that the villagers I lived with during fieldwork used whenever they described themselves and their reality in relation to the state and to the imagined nation. *Nongmin* is also an official political and administrative (rather than an economic) category and identity assigned to those Chinese who hold a rural household registration (*hukou*). The figure of the peasant, whether positively or negatively valued, has always occupied centre stage in China's modernist visions; it was never a neutral category. As the socialist state's other, changing imaginations of *nongmin* have indexed changing state-society relations in China, a relation central in bringing about a desired modernity. But they had also very real consequences in terms of state policies towards rural people, and affected the social status and self-image of those who call themselves *nongmin*. The Reform era brought new ruptures in this relation. The post-Mao state has build its new modernist project on the alienation of *nongmin* as 'feudal' (*fengjian*) and 'backward' (*luohuo*), delegating those who stick to their 'peasant consciousness' (*nongmin yishi*) to the world of ambivalence or orderlessness, to a residual negative category. Paradoxically, or maybe typically for high-modernist projects (Bauman 1991), radical efforts to purge society of ambivalence only produced more ambivalence - both in society and in the state. One such typical case has been the active re-appraisal of local traditions of kinship and religion, traditions that the Maoist aimed to eliminate as 'feudal superstition' (*fengjian mixin*) and that post-Mao modernism associates negatively with 'peasant consciousness' (*nongmin yishi*) (see, e.g. Kipnis 1995; Yang 2004).

Instead of viewing a new emphasis on tradition as a case of peasant resistance to a new modernist project - a line the Chinese state takes itself - I will follow other scholars (e.g. Dorfman 1996; Feuchtwang 2000; Flower 2004) in arguing for a more complex relationship between an assertion of 'peasantness', development ideologies and China's new modernist vision. On the basis of ethnography from three villages in Southern Fujian, I will argue that the contradictions and fragmentations of the modernist project, China's new 'muddled modernities', paradoxically left 'peasant tradition' as the only force to sort out new contradictions, reinforce foundational separations and to try to reinstate the unity between the 'masses' and the state that has been the fundamental trope of Chinese socialism.

Peasants and Progress: Three Vignettes on the ‘Social Life’ of Imagined Modernities in South Fujian

South Fujian, with the Xiamen Special Economic Zone (SEZ), forms part of coastal China that state policies allowed to ‘get rich first’, by encouraging at the onset of the reforms foreign investment and market production in these regions. What was during the Maoist era a cause of political marginalisation became the region’s most important asset: geographical closeness to Taiwan, Hong Kong and Southeast Asia and historical migratory links with Overseas Chinese communities in these countries. The Chinese government constructed Xiamen SEZ with the express intention of attracting Taiwanese investments to a place where investors spoke the same regional Chinese language and where some of them still maintained ties to a former ‘home village’. The massive investments from Taiwan and Southeast Asia into South Fujian that followed, and the new stream of people, goods and images across borders, changed the daily life of all people living in this area with a velocity and to a degree hardly matched even by the early years of the People’s Republic.

Because of this history, South Fujian is a region where the impact of different modernist discourse on rural life can be particularly well observed, discourses which differ centrally in how they cast the relation between peasants/peasant tradition and the imagined nation. In the following, I illustrate the ‘social life’ of different modernist discourses that co-exist in China with ethnographic vignettes from three different villages. All three villages are historically mixed fishing and farming villages and located on the sea coast of Southern Fujian.

Meidao: A Forgotten Revolutionary Village

According to Zygmunt Bauman (1991), the typical work of the modern ‘gardening state’ is the labour of separation, categorisation and weeding out, the last of these including attempts to purge the social order of that which refuses categorization and assimilation to the foundational separations of a particular project of modernity. The Chinese socialist state is built around three fundamental categories or separations: *guojia* (state), *nongmin* (peasants) and *feinongmin* (‘non-peasants’). The absence of a generic category for non-peasants underlines that the central separation in socialist China has been that between the state and the ‘peasant masses’ (Dorfman 1996:255–256). Until the economic reforms, *nongmin* held a particularly elevated place in the socialist order as Maoism’s main revolutionary subject and as the class that continued to drive the nation towards communism (Kipnis 1995: 120). It was the ‘peasant problem’ (*nongmin wenti*) that fuelled the revolution, and it were the peasant masses that the Maoist state claimed to be ‘one’ with in the sense of total congruence. The labour of arduously separating *guojia* and *nongmin* was the necessary pre-condition for then ideologically collapsing them together.

Meidao was the site of my first fieldwork in China in 1994. Located on a small island off the South Fujian coast, Meidao acted as a window onto socialist achievements and progress for most of the Maoist era. The village’s particular location in close proximity to the Taiwanese outpost on neighbouring Jinmen Island had strongly impacted life and politics in the village. As villagers remembered, within eyeshot of the ‘enemy’ and with many personal relations to Jinmen and Taiwan, in Meidao revolutionary policies were implemented with greater zeal, class enemies more heavily persecuted and villagers more thoroughly subjected to ideological re-education than in other places. Moreover, Meidao had been located within the ‘battle zone’ during the aborted effort to ‘liberate Jinmen’ in 1958, and the spoils of this war were still visible in the many graves of villagers who died in the conflict. But as an outpost of socialist China, the village was also one of the first in Fujian Province to receive electricity in the early 1970s. However small, rural, badly connected in terms of transport and far away from economic and political centres Meidao was, the revolution had turned it into a place where history was made and where the struggle for the building of bright future and the creation of a socialist society and socialist citizens was fought.

Part of the state's project to create *nongmin* was the re-ordering of space, time and individual appearances, practices that assimilated and harnessed local forces for the socialist cause and that inscribed the socialist state into the daily routines of village life. In Meidao, as anywhere else, brigade headquarters and storehouses replaced ancestral halls and temples as the new focal points of village identity, the uniform blue Mao suit replaced local customs and individual tastes, and work in local production brigades was orchestrated similarly to the rhythms of factory labour. In the early 1970s, the village received a public broadcasting system which, from then onwards broadcasted around 10 hours every day. It was not only the content of these broadcasts, the new songs and socialist operas, rousing marches, news and tributes to the Great Helmsman, but their structure too that formed a part of this great national effort to create socialist *nongmin*. They divided the day (in an interesting inversion of what one would expect from a Western perspective), into time devoted to 'public labour' when the broadcasts were *on*, and 'private' time when the broadcasts were *off*. *On* signalled the time of production and the umbilical cord that linked the individual and collective work of the villagers to the national modernist project, as the speeches and revolutionary songs that accompanied their work turned them into socialist workers and motors of progress. *Off*, in contrast, signalled the 'private' time reserved for family life, recreation and meals.

In 1994, when the teams and brigades had long gone, the broadcasting system was still in place and working. Every morning at six o'clock the village (including the anthropologist) was awakened by rousing military music, and then the day continued with several hours of broadcasts, interrupted over midday and ending at around 8 pm. The content of the broadcasts, however, had changed beyond recognition, as had the relation between the peasant and the state after the advent of the 'socialist market economy'. The new mantra in the Reform era was 'development' (*fazhan*) through 'opening up' (*kaifang*), an aim that Chinese citizens, however, were to engage with revolutionary zeal. Everything associated with 'peasantness' was antithetical to this. As Kipnis writes, in the new era,

[...] peasants should get rich, thus eliminating that part of their identity that was valued positively under Maoism. More importantly, peasants as a class should work for their own transformation into a proletariat, eliminating the farming identity part of their identity.

(1995:121)

In the early years of the reforms, Meidao villagers still had upbeat hopes that after the failure of the planned economy, progress and modernity would finally arrive in China and they were again at the forefront of a new era - which *de facto* had again started in the countryside. In this spirit, the brigade in 1979 planned to build a new village that was to have a decisively more modern and 'orderly' outlook. The old village embodied and reflected, in its outlook and layout, 'peasant consciousness' - small, dark houses along narrow, crooked village lanes, with earthen floors and no tap water or own bathroom. The new village, in contrast, was built grid-like in parallel rows around the old centre, with houses constructed from uniform, grey stone blocks; a look that villagers far preferred over the old, 'messy' (*luan*) one. Flat roofs expressed the hope for future 'development' (in form of added floors), and modern appliances, especially an own bathroom with tap water, symbolized modernity and progress. Night soil from public toilets was no longer needed to fertilize the fields; not only because chemical fertilizers had become easily available, but because less and less villagers chose to work in agriculture. But Meidao villagers soon had to realise that the peasant 'condition' was less important to the post-Mao state than it had been to the Maoist state. When Taiwanese were allowed to travel freely in China in the 1980s, Meidao's electricity system began to fail; in a border village that had been promised it would never encounter a power cut, power cuts were suddenly a daily nuisance. The model citizen was now an imaginary urban middle class individual of whom Meidao's peasants learned through commercials and daily soap operas zoomed onto their TV screens. *Nongmin* were urged to emulate this ideal *feinongmin* or non-

peasant, who, however, holders of a 'peasant household register' (*nongmin hukou*) by definition could not become.

Baisha Village: Thrown out of 'Development Paradise'

In Baisha Village, situated directly opposite Xiamen Harbour in Haicang Investment Zone (*Haicang touzi qu*), the marginalisation of *nongmin* for China's new modernist projects had been evident since the village lost half of its land to a golf course in 1991. Six of the twelve former production teams lost all their rights to land and forty-four households had to be resettled. The golf course was only the latest in a long string of developments that had destroyed village resources and infringed on the collective rights of villagers. But of all negative developments, villagers in particular resented the golf course, which was used mainly by expats and local Chinese businessmen. To use land in such an unproductive way seemed an unacceptable waste in a place where land had become an increasingly rare and highly priced good. Also, in contrast to nearby factories, the golf course only offered little employment possibility; in 2001 only 20 villagers had found employment there as gardeners, guards or cleaners, much less, as I was told, than the number of employed *waidiren* (outsiders). Baisha villagers in many ways did conform to the 'ideal' of the new entrepreneurial *nongmin* that the government was propagating. The large majority of village families had turned to commercial shrimp farming in recent years, a business so financially rewarding that Baisha became famous in the region as the 'shrimp village', attracting both interest from economists in Xiamen University and reaping praise in the local press. But however quickly Baisha's villagers quit agriculture and became rich rural entrepreneurs, the development around them *that did not include them* signalled that they still were coarse, backward (*luohuo*) peasants. For the golf course's management next door, peasants remained the antidote to even a caddie or waiter working in a country golf club. The rejection or revulsion that many urban Chinese today feel towards *nongmin* reflects their growing exclusion from the 'imagined community' of a *modern* Chinese nation.

Maoism and post-Maoist modernism thus differed in their views of the 'peasant masses': Mao's dictum 'from the masses, for the masses' made peasants both the main object and, if only on an ideological level, the main *subject* of the revolution. The latter granted *nongmin* a certain responsibility in ideological terms: the task to 'struggle' against a state and party not anymore 'one' with the revolutionary masses. Under Deng and his followers, society beyond the grip of a state that disciplines and 'civilizes' is seen as a source of fearsome *luan* ('chaos'), a 'scandal of ambivalence' that refuses modern categorizations (Bauman 1991). Post-Maoist peasants should acquire 'advanced culture' and become 'civilized', not least in order to be attractive to capital. 'From the masses' and especially 'from the *peasant* masses' has no ideological place left in this new vision of state-society relations. Where Maoism and Post-Mao modernism *converged* was in their rejection of 'feudal superstition'. In contrast, Confucian (or Chinese) Capitalism, the trade name for an alternative modernity that emerged in the late 20th century in the world of transnational Chinese business, celebrates reified 'Confucian' family values such as filial piety, loyalty to place of origin and subordination to traditional authority as its core virtues. The very elements of 'feudalism' are here constructed as the source of an Asian modernity that is both morally and economically superior to the 'West'. Of course, the villagers, whose lives inform this article, were not only *not* active participants in this elite discourse, but also largely unaware of its existence as an alternative modernist project. But the successful inclusion of Southern China into transnational economic exchanges, the emerging alliances between local governments and overseas Chinese businessmen, and the money invested from overseas into the reconstruction of temples and ancestral halls gave this much more fragmented discourse an important reality in rural southern China.

Nanjiang: New 'Confucian Capitalists' and the Re-Invented Home Village

In Nanjiang, a classic *qiaoxiang* or 'overseas Chinese home village' in Jinjiang County, rich members of the village's overseas community in Manila and Hong Kong have for a long time informed villagers' desires and hopes for personal 'development' (*fazhan*). Villagers still imagine going abroad to be a secure way to 'get rich quickly'; an increasingly mistaken idea fuelled by the large mansions rich overseas Chinese have built in Nanjiang. (One such mansion built already in 1964, as I was told, was at that time the largest private home in the whole province.) Furthermore, when the reforms facilitated extended contacts between Nanjiang and the village's overseas businessmen, the latter quickly re-appropriated their old role of village patrons, while Nanjiang re-appropriated its old role as the grateful home village. The result was large investments from overseas into the village's public infrastructure. Overseas funds financed the building of a new primary school and its computer equipment, the village kindergarten, a cultural centre and a village library. Money from overseas paid most of the teachers' wages, supplied the village with electricity and tap water and built most of the village streets. When I visited Nanjiang in 2000 and 2001, overseas Chinese were even constructing a new office for the village government and a building for the village's old people's association. The grateful home village, in exchange, started a village journal to inform the overseas communities of new developments and praise new investment in Nanjiang - a journal published on the Internet and also printed in Hong Kong.

In this village, rich overseas patrons have replaced heroes of the revolution as village idols and as models that younger villagers are urged to emulate. Their pictures decorate school classrooms, and their generosity is publicized on commemorative plaques all over the village. These plaques also often relate their heroic life stories, following a standardized pattern from a dangerous departure, a rags-to-riches, peasant-to-millionaire career in foreign lands to the final return to the never-forgotten, sadly-missed home village in order to share some of their wealth. What turns these overseas Chinese for people in Nanjiang today into 'heroic models' similar to the 'revolutionary heroes' of the past, is not in the least the post-Mao developmental Chinese state and its 'peasant paradox'. The vast majority of the villagers I encountered whole-heartedly shared the national desire for development and welcomed the idea of 'getting rich quickly', but whatever they did, as *nongmin* they were increasingly excluded from the larger modernist project, with the state 'not caring' (*bu guan*). Overseas businessmen, instead, were a success story that provided an intelligible way out of the paradox of how values associated with peasantness *and* being 'advanced' could be combined. Though obviously modern, rich, and educated - that is, endowed with all the 'cultural capital' of the new era - overseas businessmen were still members of Nanjiang, a peasant village, 'locals who have not yet returned' (*hai mei huilai de bendiren*). To the contrast, they openly cherished local 'customs and traditions' (*fengsu xiguan*) and shared their wealth with their village compatriots. That is, they combined all that that seemed un-combinable in Reform China: they were part of the peasant village and powerful, they were developed and actively fostered 'feudal' peasant traditions,¹ and they appeared, in contrast to the local state or business elite, as rich *and* moral at the same time.

The war of words

The ethnographic vignettes from the three villages illustrate different modernist discourses in China which have their source in different formations of power (the Maoist State, the post-Mao State, the transnational economy), which all objectify the peasantry and whose major agents are economic, intellectual and political elites. From the perspective of these modernist elites, *nongmin* are an object of action, a category whose content is defined by the state. Diane Dorfman (1996: 255-257) calls this a 'reactive' perspective in which the state acts and *nongmin* comply or exert resistance. She argues that this obscures how villagers partake in the production of power and selves by creating themselves as *nongmin*, an entity through which

the state is named. Behind an overt 'reactive relationship' exists *de facto* a messy reality of articulations, 'an interweaving of meanings drawn from throughout society to mutually constitute categories [state and *nongmin*, S.B.] then recognized as separate and opposed.'

In the following I use Dorfman's perspective to analyse how in Meidao, Baisha and Nanjiang people recycled and recombined fragments from different modernist projects and different constructions of the peasantry in the effort to recreate coherent, meaningful *nongmin*. The three villages in Fujian erupted after the reforms into a 'war of words', after the ripping of the ideological veil and the shake up of the established order. In conversations around money, corruption and superstition, villagers expressed new fears of social disorder and exclusion, grappled with contradiction between local reality and official representations, and tried to re-establish a meaningful relation between *nongmin* and *guojia*. What is striking is the emphasis on the very traditions that Mao tried to purge from *nongmin* and that contemporary China identifies with them.

As an outsider with possible connections, and probably also as a visitor from 'developed country' (*fada de guojia*), villagers often used my presence to articulate fears, discuss local development, and draw boundaries between themselves and the others who, in their view, undermined the proper order and aborted development of modernity. Elderly people complained about the 'unfiliality' (*bu xiaoshun*) of their *nouveaux riches* sons and related that theft had become frequent in Meidao. Poor villagers complained of richer neighbours who suddenly demanded cash for lending a hand, and of cadres who looked down on poor people. Others talked about a 'chaotic' village government that did not care for village development, embezzled taxes and behaved like 'local emperors' (*tu huangdi*). The party secretary, on the other hand, toed the official line by warning me that my poor neighbourhood was lacking in 'quality' (*suzhi cha*). A mutual exchange of insults also characterized relations between the richer and poorer part of the village. Villagers in the richer part who lived in the new 'modern' houses slighted those in the poorer part as being 'poor (*qiong*), backward (*luohuo*) and low (*di*)', while the latter retaliated with calling rich villagers 'money-minded, greedy and without *renqingwei*' (without moral standards and human feelings). A manager of the revived temple challenged the 'scientific' leadership of the party by alleging that Meidao's party secretary was 'more afraid of the gods' than anyone else in the village. Mr Hong, a former brigade head in Meidao, who had been in office during the Cultural Revolution, once told me that while the central government was 'ok' (*hai keyi*), the local government in the post-Reform era was 'in chaos' (*tai luan*). Though a large number of villagers shared his opinion, expectations were that the local government should 'care' and take the lead in village development - reflecting the national discourse of state-organized local development.

In Baisha, the 'shrimp village' in Haicang Investment Area, the total marginalisation of *nongmin* found its expression instead in a view of the local government as totally useless (*mei you yong*) for the village. Even the successful shrimp farmers wanted to have nothing to do with village cadres. In their opinion, the *only reason* for village cadres to take over office had been to get their hands on village funds and make deals with outside investors. As Mr Wu, the owner of a flower farm on Baisha's former land once told me, he had sold business shares to the village government in order to use it in possible conflicts with locals (*bendiren*). This was in his words the ordinary strategy of outside investors to deal with local unrest. Because of this, village meetings on local development often ended in shouting matches, as in a meeting that the village government had convened to ask farm owners to pay for a new water pipeline.

In contrast to their disenchantment with the local government, villagers were proud of Baisha's success as a shrimp village. And they were proud of the local temple, which they had rebuilt in 1991 financed with donations both from overseas and from every local household. From their perspective it was the 'feudal' temple which represented the new ideal of combining development with morality - an ideal that on which also the legitimacy of the post-Maoist Chinese state draws - while the local government opposed it in being broke and

corrupt. It was also 'one' with the state's idea of good local government. Drawing in a large number of worshippers, Baisha's temple had amassed large funds and had started to re-invested collected donations and 'incense money' (*qianghuo qian* or *tianyou qian*) into village development, while the local government continued to embezzle village funds. Mr. Xia, the current financial manager of the temple, told me that all new streets were, as a rule, built by three parties: the households who lived on this street, the village government and the temple. The village government was the only party of the three devoid of cash; in the past it had donated concrete from a now bankrupt plant they owned, the previous year they had to borrow their share from the temple. Mr Xia predicted that if they would not return the money this year, the temple would never lend them money again. The village temple now also housed meetings of Baisha's former old people's association that disbanded after it stopped receiving financial support from the village government.

In Baisha, land expropriation meant that the socialist collective that had encompassed *nongmin* and *ganbu* (cadres) had fallen to pieces. *Ganbu* and *nongmin* were now on other sides of the Great Divide that separated 'order' from 'disorder' (*luan*). From the perspective of the villagers, however, it was clearly the local state that 'betrayed' China's new modernist project. Discussions of corruption as a social 'disorder' had shaped the Reform Era; and corruption challenged the local state's self-image as the source of a more rational, scientific and better order. But *nongmin* had no longer the ideological authority to 'struggle' against an immoral local government; instead, resistance, complaints and the defence of local interests were seen as representing modern China's growing 'peasant problem' (*nongmin wenti*). The village cadres' associations with outside investors was, from this perspective, the right thing to do: it located the local state firmly on the side of order and progress, defending development and progress against opposition from backward peasants, and bringing civilisation (*wenming*) to the villages. From the villagers' perspective, *nongmin* were abandoned and thereby thrown back onto themselves - to develop the 'peasant consciousness' that the Reform state attributed to them anyway.

In Nanjiang, the re-emergence of ancestral halls had recreated powerful new collectives from the debris of the socialist collectives (Brandstädter 2001). As in Baisha, the village government's main income source was the sale of village lands, in this case to overseas Chinese who built large mansions in Nanjiang. Though the protest against these practices, which emptied out the socialist collective and drove land prices up, was much more muted than in Baisha, villagers also suspected village cadres of embezzling the money from these land transactions. The new collective stood in direct competition to the village as an administrative unit of the state. This was because temples and ancestral halls existed in the same space as the administrative village, with their collectives rooted in shares to collective property similar to the old socialist collective. Not surprisingly, new 'traditional institutions' were often a haven for retired party secretaries and brigade heads who, having 'served' during the Mao era, where the most outspoken critics of the local state I encountered (also see Feuchtwang and Wang 2001). From their position in this collective and in their critique of the corruption and chaos of the local state, *nongmin* construct themselves as moral beings. They use an idealist Maoist past and re-invented 'traditional' institutions as an ideological and physical space from which to demand a new unity between hardworking *nongmin* and local governments who 'serve the people' (Feuchtwang 1998, 2000). In Nanjiang and Baisha, the traditional collective and its leaders had also produced more real 'development' for the village than the local state, but the Reform state would still classify the reconstruction ancestral halls and temples negatively as 'feudal superstition'. Nanjiang's ancestral halls and Baisha's temple were far richer than, and already creditors of, the village government. They were also regarded as more moral: in contrast to corrupt cadres who stole from the village and the state, as the villagers told me, no member of a temple committee would dare to steal from a 'god', and no lineage representative would be so 'stupid' as to steal money that belongs to the ancestors, that is, money used for lineage feasts and for the care of the dead.

Besides the obvious local re-evaluation of peasant traditions and resistance towards a modernisation project that excludes them (Kipnis 1995), it is interesting to note that the ‘war of words’ in all three villages did not challenge the fundamental binary oppositions of the post-Reform era: state/peasant or development/chaos. Instead, villagers in these discourses recycled fragments of different imagined modernities and moral pasts to recreate a meaningful, productive relationship between peasant (*nongmin*) and state (*guojia*). This relationship between the reinvention of tradition and the reconstruction of local identities, between reinvented local institutions and new spaces from where to criticize the state, between traditional temples and modern hopes for development has frequently been noted by scholars who reject to see in these phenomena simply the revival of old China (Flower 1998, 2004; Brandtstädter 2001, 2003; Feuchtwang 1998, 2000 Kipnis 1995; Jing 1996, 1999).

But I believe that it is Diane Dorfman (1996) who makes an even more radical argument for a ‘mixture’: she points out that although society is represented as a product of the state, and state and society as separate, *de facto* both are categories produced by all social forces in articulation. In the same vein, I argue that villagers did *much more* than simply resist when they used ‘tradition’ or evoked ‘traditional values’ to criticize the growing corruption in state and society: they reproduced the fundamental category *nongmin* while at the same time linking it positively to the state’s larger modernist project, and they tried to re-integrate the local state by alluding to the ‘peasantness’ of local cadres and by reinventing a collective that encompassed both local state and *nongmin*.

Healing the rift

In his paper on roads and visions of development in rural Sichuan, John Flower provides an insightful analysis of how temples, as modern/traditional hybrids, attempt to engage an increasingly remote state in the interest of local development. He writes:

The temple’s revival was an attempt to restore the road, and the harmony that the state had ruined through neglect. Restoring harmony meant reintegrating local society with the nation-state, but only on terms that would respect the villagers’ interests and local identity

(Flower 2004: 677).

Many *feinongmin* (non-peasants, city dwellers) and *guojia ganbu* (state cadres, officials), in contrast, increasingly see *nongmin* as representing all that should not exist in modern China: dirt, disease, superstition and poverty, as well as the multitude of bodies that are considered the main cause of China’s underdevelopment. Land expropriation, the destruction of villages and ancestral graves, and the resettlement of whole villages into apartment blocks (all of which can be observed in Xiamen and its hinterlands) are thus not only a particularly reckless way for an authoritarian state to modernize China’s economy, but also a programme to eliminate ‘peasantness’ altogether by throwing peasants off the land, by destroying local collectives and wiping out local histories. In this situation, temples and ancestral halls as territorial institutions link villagers to a particular place and, by standing on the land, act like exclamation marks which remind the state of the community’s collective existence. More than that: formed from the debris of the socialist collective - a collective rooted in its property rights to socialist land - and re-creating and ‘re-attaching’ the peasant collective to the land, ancestral halls and temples also re-produce socialist *nongmin* and thereby directly ‘speak to’ the state (Brandtstädter 2001)

In Nanjiang, the revival of ancestral halls was precipitated by a form of hand-over: the return of buildings appropriated by the local state (to be used at different times as store rooms, the village school or brigade offices) into (informal) lineage ownership. The intervention of

overseas relatives was crucial here as it assured that no problems were to be expected when the first hall was rebuilt in 1985. The most striking example of this reverse process of place-making was the construction of an entirely new ancestral hall by a smaller village lineage. As there was no land or building that could have been returned to lineage use, the lineage simply used land on which 'their production team' had built a storehouse and a sporting ground. A lineage representative found nothing unusual in this, as he said; the place was collective before and afterwards (*jitime*). In Baisha, the temple had been rebuilt on its old place, where it had been blown up during the Cultural Revolution. The colonisation of formerly socialist space by the traditional collective was here evident in the appropriation of production teams (*dui*, the word villagers still used nearly twenty years after the name had been abolished) as temple subunits. Within the socialist collective *dui* or small groups (*xiaozu*) as they are now officially called had next to no property left and no relevance; within the temple, the old production teams became units that worshipped together on certain occasions and that selected temple leaders among their male household heads. Furthermore, the golf course (that was now private property and off-limits for peasants in general and locals in particular), was once a year ritually re-appropriated as collective village property by the local temple. With its attached modern bungalows, mowed lawn and tranquil slopes, heavily guarded against the surrounding rural reality by high walls, protected gates and a new police station built next to the main entrance, the golf course demonstrated to every villager in Baisha that China's new imagined modernity constructs itself against the peasantry. But once a year during the New Year festivities, the whole village under the leadership of the temple gods toured the original boundaries of the village parts that had been replaced by the golf course, a ceremony that lasted for two days and in which the locals 'invaded' and reclaimed the golf course as village land. As in the case of Meidao's party secretary who was 'more afraid of the gods than anyone else', the re-appropriation of the golf course by the *nongmin* was possible because the golf course owner, a Taiwanese, 'feared in the gods'. Villagers told me that the owner had refused to let them in the first year, but after the golf course then stopped making money, he invited them to enter in the following years. The 'gods' here did two things: first, for a moment they re-installed the village's rightful ownership over the golf course, and, by having the whole village in these exceptional two days parade over and re-appropriate it as village space, reversed the exclusion of the *nongmin* from a developed future. It also included the golf course manager - a model of modernity - into the ranks of the superstitious *nongmin*, re-establishing *nongmin* as the relevant 'other' of the Chinese *guojia*. Second, the gods 'taught' the golf course manager to submit to their authority and to reciprocate to them (read: to the local community); more concretely meaning an annual large financial donation to the temple on this occasion.

This underlines how the re-invention of a pre-Revolutionary collective actually re-established the proper order of the socialist state and the fundamentals of socialist citizenship in the countryside - the attachment of households and individuals to a landed, propertied collective that establishes rights and duties and that shapes notions of entitlements, reciprocity and accountability. In rural China, the contradictions between different modernist discourses and between the propaganda of centrally planned development and a messy social reality 'muddled' the meaning of modernity and of the relation between the fundamental categories of the socialist order (*guojia*, *nongmin*, *feinongmin*/state, peasant, non-peasant). But China is also a country where decades of high modernism and of a strong 'gardening' state turned a situation of not belonging to any category - having no 'order' - into a scandal of ambivalence, into an unacceptable form of existence. A majority of villagers could legally not become *feinongmin*, so by re-inventing temples and ancestral halls - institutions that more than anything represent feudal superstition and peasant consciousness - they acquired agency by actively turning themselves into *nongmin* - the other of *guojia* and the category through which the state can be named (Dorfman 1996). However, *nongmin* today live in a reality in which what, from a state perspective, represents development and civilisation - the alliance between local governments and outside investors - appears as its opposite from a local perspective: as *luan*, i.e. social and moral disorder, and even economic stagnation in terms of *local*

development. And while the post-Reform high modernist agenda tries to purge the Chinese nation of 'peasantness', from a local perspective, the defining characteristic of *nongmin* becomes again the motor of local progress. Now, paradoxically, its 'feudal' institutions are a source of economic development and of social and moral order where the socialist collective fails; a social and moral order that, with the increasing strength of the traditional collective, also re-integrates representatives of the local state and of translocal and transnational capital (Brandstädter 2003). *Nongmin* thereby also create a new 'unity' between the masses and the state: feudal superstition and traditional peasant values such as 'filial piety' enforce new forms of reciprocity and 'caring' between society, state, and market, and collapse the arduously separated categories between state, peasant and non-peasant businessman by showing that all believe in the spirits and ancestors - that is, share the central aspects of 'peasantness'.

While 'from below' re-integration with China's modernist project is sought through processes of colonising space, re-appropriating property and re-integrating the local state, similar processes are attempted from above when these traditional collectives become both too powerful and economically too important to destroy them. Typical attempts to harness these local forces are redefining them as tourist sites or as museums, both categories under which past and tradition are allowed to exist in China (because museums and tourists themselves stand for a leisured modern life style and thus symbolize a desired modernity) (Flower 2004; Yang 2004). Other attempts include transforming temples from being propagators of feudal superstition into propagators of advanced culture and spiritual civilisation, as shown in the introductory quote. The logic is of course not only to make their existence acceptable from the state's perspective, but also to re-establish central authority and to defuse the threat of rival centres of power in the countryside. From the side of the *nongmin*, these top-down strategies of appropriation will again provoke local counter-strategies, which localize central policies and that allows villagers to actively produce meaningful *nongmin* and the relationship between *nongmin* and *guojia*. But even then, feudal superstition has forced the state to engage and to re-establish a relationship with the countryside

¹This did create some confusion among some more educated villagers, who themselves had come to cherish 'science' against 'feudal superstition', and who were suddenly officially asked to recreate these embarrassing peasant traditions. For example, the local school director suddenly faced the task to organise the re-writing of his lineage genealogy after funding came from overseas, although he did not 'understand these things.' Overseas Chinese, he said with slight unease, want these things because they are more 'traditional' (*chuantong*) than local people.

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