The Veins of the Earth:
Property, Environment, and Cosmology in Nanbu County, 1865-1942

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ABSTRACT

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During the Qing Dynasty (1644-1912) in Nanbu County, land was not only measured in quantitative dimensions, but also assessed through cosmological principles. These understandings of land often framed property claims while shaping rural geographies in the county under study. Drawing on 700 cases from the Nanbu Archive, this dissertation makes two related claims.

First, in the mountainous periphery of Northern Sichuan, situated knowledge of land pervaded contracts, genealogies, stone inscriptions, and official handbooks. This information, composed of vernacular place-names, localized land boundaries, expressions of patrimonial merit and status, and cosmological dimensions of property, was often immediately understandable only to the members of a lineage or community, but could be interpreted by the state if needed. One type of situated information was geomantic information, which regularly entered the magistrate’s court. Local officials engaged this information in legal practice and took geomantic claims or documentation into consideration during litigation. Sites holding great geomantic significance, such as ancient trees, graves, and temples, were often identified by locals as the landmarks or borders of private estates, market towns, or the county itself; these understandings were regularly woven into the administrative documents of the state. During the Qing, such interpretations were even extended to a local shrine of a Muslim (Qadiri) saint. Through routine engagement with these interpretations of the earth throughout the increasing landed commercialization of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries — in processing lawsuits, the Nanbu County yamen (state administrative office) ordered landscapes concerning geomancy to be officially illustrated more than any other genre of claim — the Qing state legitimated highly situated knowledge of the land within the local property regime while upholding
geomantic information as a binding mechanism for the regulation of common lands and resource access. The dissertation’s second point is that, while it is well-known that the early decades of the twentieth century saw increased state penetration into local society across China, Nanbu maintained a remarkable degree of continuity with its imperial heritage. Land surveyors working in the early twentieth century struggled to extract structured knowledge of land from the layered territorialities of the county’s terrains that had persisted from the Qing. This process was highly negotiated and often interpretive, rather than based on precise statistical surveying or the clear directives of a hegemonic state.

Through exploring the legal, environmental, and religious dimensions of a single county’s terrains in the late imperial period, this study identifies situated geomantic information as one of the key arenas for the projection of — and limitations on — state power in the county in relation to the property system. The dissertation also provides the first English-language history of Nanbu, a county with a remarkably complete administrative and legal archive from 1656 to 1951.
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This dissertation uses the Hanyu Pinyin system of transcribing Chinese. Manchu terms and names are given in their Manchu form in accordance with the 2013 edition of Jerry Norman's Manchu-English dictionary. Arabic is rendered when appropriate with the transliteration system of the Library of Congress and the American Library Association.

In late imperial Nanbu (1644-1949), the earth had veins; to be a resident and landowner in the county was to identify and engage with these veins. In lawsuits, people chose their words carefully and with intention and thus I have tried to remain as close as possible to the original texts. Dragon Veins (longmai 龍脈) referred to the veins of mountains. These powerful veins were thought to connect Nanbu with the rest of the lands “Under Heaven” (tianxia 天下) and were anchored by bridges, pagodas, wells, and other prominent buildings of the county. Wind Veins (fengmai 風脈) referred to the veins dictated by the wind and water flows; these were often tied to literacy and academic achievement. This is a translation of convenience: the original meaning emphasized the “circulatory” nature of qi 氣 (as in something like “circulatory vein”). Earth Veins (dimai 地脈) broadly referred to veins that existed in the earth identified through the topography of land; these connected a family, lineage, or community to a significant place, such as an ancestral grave.

This dissertation would not have been possible without extensive archival access in the People’s Republic of China. Every archive has a different notation system and thus the archive is always listed prior to the article number in this dissertation. The largest body of material comes from the Nanbu County Qing Archive, which is stored in the Nanchong Municipal Archive 南充市檔案館. The dissertation also includes materials from the Nanbu County Archive 南部縣檔案局, where the Republican and PRC-era archives of Nanbu County are stored. Nanbu County borders Langzhong City, the old seat of Baoning Prefecture. There, I accessed the Qing and Republican collections of the Langzhong Municipal Archive 閬中市檔案局. I received many documents from the very active Langzhong City Local Gazetteer Office 閬中市人民政府地方志辦公室 and the Langzhong Municipal Library 閬中市圖書館. At Sichuan University’s China Southwest Bibliography Research Center (SUCSBR) 四川大學中國西南地區文獻研究中心, I accessed Republican-era archival collections of Nanbu County 南部縣, Bazhong County 巴中縣, Nanjiang County 南江縣, Santai County 三台縣, Nanxi County 南溪縣, and Bishan County 璧山縣. Of those, all except Nanxi and Bishan were traditionally considered to be in “Northern Sichuan” 川北地區. Materials from the Sichuan Provincial Archives 四川省檔案館, including the Ba County Qing Archive, are scattered throughout the study. Finally, I have drawn on material from the First Historical Archives of China 中國第一歷史檔案館 in Beijing as well as the Shanghai Library’s Ancient Books Depository 上海圖書館古籍館, the Shanghai Library’s Genealogical Database 家譜數據庫, the Shanghai Library’s Periodicals Database 民國時期期刊全文庫, Taiwan’s National Palace Museum Palace Memorial and Grand Council Archives 臺灣清代宮中檔奏摺及軍機處檔摺件, Taiwan’s Academia Sinica's Archives of the Grand Secretariat 臺灣內閣大库檔案, and the archives of Academia Sinica’s Modern Historical Institute 臺灣近史所檔案館. Other materials are supplemented from Columbia University’s Starr East Asian Library and Harvard University’s Yenching Library.
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All mistakes are my own.
查風水字意因貴大臣前次照請詳晰見復。本衙門特舉條約明文所載，如無礙民居，不關方向等語，以聲明其義。中國談風水分陰陽二宅，信陽宅者，既實繁有徒，信陰宅者，尤牢不可破。在貴大臣以為荒邈難憑，而中國信風水者則以為確鑿可據，甚至兩造因爭論風水結訟經年。地方官雖百端開喻，亦難破其成見。此中國數千年來相沿日久，積重難返之事。若因外國租買地基，不准民間信風水之說，必致釀成釁端，殊非中外相安之道。此係中國實在情形，無所容其飾詞。如無礙民居，不關方向，自不得籍端蠱惑。貴大臣來華年久，定能深熟不疑也，為此照復。

[Let me] explain the meaning of “fengshui” because You, the Honorable Ambassador (from Germany), have asked for a detailed explanation in response. This [Zongli] Yamen will specifically cite the clearly-stated writings from our treaty and explain the meaning of these words: “…if [your settlement] does not hinder the dwelling places of the people and their orientations.” When China speaks of fengshui, we separate the yinzhai (“house of the dead;” the grave) and yangzhai (“house of the living;” the house). Believing in yangzhai fengshui, there are many people of that ilk. Believing in yinzhai fengshui, that is even more unbreakable among our people. For you, the Honorable Ambassador, this is absurd, remote, and groundless. But Chinese people who believe in fengshui take it as undeniable. [In our country] people will, because of contestations of fengshui, engage in lawsuits for years! Local officials try a hundred ways to enlighten the people, but preconceived ideas are hard to dispel. In China, it has been like this for thousands of years and it is a habit that is hard to break! If a foreign country rents or purchases a landed foundation and does not permit our people to believe in fengshui, it will surely bring on quarrels — this is not the way for peace between China and foreign peoples. This is really the situation in China, I do not say this as a mere excuse. If [your settlement] does not hinder the dwellings of our people and their orientations, the people of our country will not bother you. You, the Honorable Ambassador, have been in China for many years now, you certainly are very familiar [with our ways] and do not doubt my sincerity. This is the response as requested.
Part One: Dissertation Introduction

At the front of the Hu Family Homestead in Nanbu County’s Nianpan Township 碾盤鄉, there is a stone inscription with a story that locals know by heart. The story relates that, in GX29 (1903), a certain Hu Baolin 胡宝林 opened a hair cutting shop in the county’s walled town. His talent was well-known and he thus became acquainted with Nanbu’s then-serving magistrate, Zhang Jiuzhang 張九章 (1883 jinshi), who frequented his shop. Later that year, when the magistrate heard news that Baolin’s father had passed away, he personally travelled to Hu Family Ditch 胡家溝 to attend the funeral. The members of the Hu lineage, deeply touched by the magistrate’s presence, invited him to select the site of Baolin’s father’s grave. According to the lineage’s records, the magistrate located a site on the mountainous slope of the family’s homestead, offering the following reason for his selection: “The mountain vein of Hu Family Ditch arrives as a single Buddha Vein from Beiyuan Market Town; at this site, the mountain vein is broken, you should connect it.” The locals asked how they could connect it, to which the magistrate responded: “Between these two mountaintops construct a ‘Dry Arched Bridge’ and on the two sides of the bridge plant white fig trees; when the trees grow tall and produce shade, the space between the two mountains will no longer have an obvious depression and the mountain vein will be connected.” Upon leaving, the magistrate promised that this bridge would bring the wealth of the waters of the Jialing River 嘉陵江 to the members of the homestead.

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1Sichuan Province, Nanbu County, Nianpan Township, Hu Family’s Genealogical Records and “The Record of Dry Arched Bridge” 旱拱橋記.
The Hus raised money among the agnates of the lineage, constructed the bridge, and planted the trees. Decades later, the Red Army established a township government in the Hu’s homestead for the Northern Sichuan Soviet (1932-1935), during which time the auspicious bridge was said to allow the army to move quickly and conveniently into and out of the area. During Collectivization in the 1950s, the lands of the village were brought under public ownership and during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), the Earth God Shrine that guarded the bridge was destroyed. Today, the Hus are still in Nanbu’s Nianpan Township, where they live in a place called “the Village of Dry Arched Bridge” 旱拱橋村 — in front of which stands the inscription relating the tale of Magistrate Zhang. The name of the village dates from 1981, when following the end of collectivization in Sichuan Province, locals rushed to publicize the story to make their exclusive claims to the lands of the mountainous ravine known to all.

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To the Zongli Yamen 總理衙門, in a response to the German Ambassador (deguo gongshi 德國公使) Maximilian August Scipio von Brandt in 1880, the wording of the Treaty of Tianjin (1858) was absolutely clear: the Chinese people had the right to practice fengshui in their own country. Burdened as they were by the common lawsuits resulting from geomantic disputes, officials knew that geomantic knowledge formed a foundational basis for how the “people of the old hundred surnames” 老百姓 understood and cared for the homes of their families (yangzhai 陽宅; “houses”) and the homes of their ancestors (yinzhai 陰宅; “graves”). It had been this way long before the Manchus conquered the Ming capital of Beijing in 1644 and within the purview of imperial government in 1880, it probably appeared like it always would be that way. After years of dealing with foreigners in treaty ports, exasperated Qing officials tried another approach following an invitation to account for widespread protests against international settlements: to try
to explain the meaning of *fengshui* 風水. Focusing on an upland county far away from the imperial capital that has a good archive, this dissertation picks up where the Zongli Yamen left off. Along the way, I hope to show why the veins of the earth matter for understanding property rights, kinship strategies, legal territoriality, community negotiation, environmental protection, and the reach of the state in Modern China.

Approaching the topic of real property ("real estate") in history poses several key questions: how were claims to land made and negotiated in the past, from what sources did those claims draw authority, and what do such claims reveal about the workings of larger political ecologies? In American Constitutional Law, the protection of private property begins and largely ends with the Fifth Amendment. While the power of this amendment is not to be underestimated, its significance has always been a matter of interpretation. Throughout the history of the United States, that interpretation has been a contested, violent, and highly localized affair — and once included a power that recognized ownership over humans. A lesser-known case concerns the fact that through the middle of the nineteenth century, tenure arrangements from seventeenth century New Amsterdam (1630-1665) binding tenants to a life of "feudal servitude" were practiced on New York’s Manor of Rensselaerwyck.² British colonial (1665-1776) and later American courts largely recognized the relevant property deeds in legal battles through the 1860s. Local protests by upwards of 10,000 “serfs” from 1839 onward resulted in popular calls for “Land Reform” by a string of state governors. Nineteenth century American jurists had no easy answer to the problem of contractual language that conflicted with the ideals of the *US Constitution* and it was only with

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a resurgent economy and the gradual sale of the manor’s lands that a resolution was reached. Liability for perpetual rent is still included in some parcels of land in New York today.³

That rights of property are a messy affair derives from the fact that they are often socially constructed from below, not bestowed from above.⁴ This is among the reasons why legal scholars speak of a “bundle” of rights, which includes rights of possession, control, exclusion, transfer, lease, enjoyment, and disposition.⁵ As there is no Federal Contract Law in the United States, contractual agreements for property can vary widely between states. This diversity of regulation has seldom been seen as a hindrance to the property regime of the country, where it has long been accepted that strong property rights are essential for economic development and risk-taking on the part of investors. Constitutional scholars of broad political affiliations agree however that the US Constitution contains only an “indirect protection of property rights, mainly through the Fifth and Fourteenth Amendments.”⁶ The rest, they argue, was assumed as a natural right by its drafters and enforced through local regulations and state interpretation.

At the time of the writing of the US Constitution in 1789, the Qing Empire (1644-1912) was the inheritor of one of the world’s oldest codified legal traditions, which can be reliably traced to the law code of the Tang Dynasty (618-907).⁷ Though the last imperial law code, the Great


⁴ This is not to overlook the forceful role of politics in property — one prominent example being the process of enclosure in England. Jeanette M. Neeson, *Commoners: Common Right, Enclosure, and Social Change in England, 1700-1820* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).


⁷ Fragments of law codes have survived from the Warring States Period, but the earliest code to survive in its entirety is the *Tang Code and Its Commentaries* 《唐律疏議》 (653 CE).
Qing Code 大清律例, was condemned by foreigners in the nineteenth century for its failure to secure a "rule of law" in China, it in fact contains many references to the protection of property.

One example is the following statute concerning the protection of trees around graves:

凡盜園陵內樹木者,皆不分首從。杖一百、徒三年。若盜他人墳塋內樹木者,首杖八十。從,減一等。8

Everyone who steals trees from the Emperors’ tombs will, without distinction between principal and accessory, be sentenced to one hundred strokes of the heavy bamboo and penal servitude of three years. If he steals the trees from the grave of someone else’s ancestor, (the principal) will receive eighty strokes of the heavy bamboo. The accessory is reduced one degree.9

On the surface, the Great Qing Code’s statute against the theft of grave trees, albeit a specific application of general property concept, is not that dissimilar from the wording of the Fifth Amendment. Some may claim that embedded in the American Constitution is the idea of governmental restraint (i.e. the Tenth Amendment); that is, the idea that the government does not have the authority to seize the property of a citizen. While this concept was not present in the emperor-subject hierarchy of imperial China, scholarship in the field of Chinese history has now consistently stressed the imperial state’s laissez-faire approach to the property system.10 Thus, while it is true that the Lockean concept of a natural right to property assumed in the American

8 Great Qing Code 《大清律例》 263.
Constitution is not shared with its Chinese counterpart, the Great Qing Code contains assumptions of its own that are worthy of our attention.\(^1\)

From its written law code, we can observe that the imperial Chinese state recognized ownership of property by the family unit ("private" property), a lineage or community unit (property "commons"), as well as a range of leasing and conditional-sale mechanisms under the term dian 佃.\(^2\) Some theorists of property rights such as Garrett Hardin, Harold Demsetz, and Robert Ellickson have identified communally owned property as problematic for inviting great externalities into a land tenure system ("the tragedy of the commons"). In light of this claim, the fact that imperial Chinese law recognized the importance of common property and forbade the "wrongful selling" of ancestral lands 祖遺祀產, grave mountains 祖墳山地, and charitable fields 義田 could invite questions as to whether such recognition subsequently produced great costs or risks in the property system.\(^3\) Yet, the "externalities" Demsetz speaks of did not apply to these common properties in China because they were held not by strangers with no stakes, but by "self-professed patrilineal descent groups," or in other words, family lineages or neighboring lineages who had entered marriage alliances within a village or market town setting.\(^4\)

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\(^1\) It is now widely accepted that Locke’s conceptualization of property rights as produced through the exertion of labor upon natural resources derived from the seventeenth century idea that since Native Americans did not intensively exploit the land, they did not own the land. Andrew Fitzmaurice, Sovereignty, Property and Empire, 1500–2000 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 85-124.

\(^2\) In many parts of the empire, this character was written as dian 典; in Sichuan, dian 佃 was more common.


A related assumption within the imperial law code involved the special recognition that was accorded to patrimony and ancestors, who had something akin to legal standing in imperial China.\textsuperscript{15} For this reason, the living often looked to their ancestors to frame and communicate their property claims. Following the extension of the right of ancestral worship to commoners in the 1530s and the spread of the lineage institution across China during the subsequent centuries, by the height of the Qing Dynasty in eighteenth century, the ancestral cult was found practically everywhere. By that time, in many parts of the empire, including the county under study, to be a property owner in a village setting was to have an identifiable ancestral grave.\textsuperscript{16} Through ceding numerous privileges to the ancestral cult and the lineages that maintained it, the imperial state considerably checked its own power in the final centuries of imperial governance in China. In the context of one county, Nanbu, located in western China not far from the greater Tibetan and Central Asian worlds, the implications of that checked power within the property regime will be made evident in the following pages.

This dissertation begins with an observation drawn from the growing field of “legal geography:” namely, the ways that land could be interpreted in China were related to how land was owned.\textsuperscript{17} In Nanbu County, there were certain assumptions present within the local market in land; among them was the fact that the land was an active agent in human affairs — that the earth was, simply put, “alive.” Ownership over land in late imperial Nanbu County entailed less an extension of power over a lifeless commodity and more a prolonged, anxiety-ridden, and highly


\textsuperscript{17} Nicholas K. Blomley, \textit{Law, Space, and The Geographies of Power} (New Haven: Guilford Press, 1994).
ritualized negotiation with cosmological powers ascribed to the ancestral lands that a lineage or family claimed as property. This appears to have been true in Nanbu through at least 1949.

This negotiation was relevant for the legal territoriality of landed estates. The property regimes of much of the twenty-first century world recognize “bounded” property rights. A house, mining site, oil field, farm, or any other piece of private property is accorded precise boundaries based on a contractual delineation of terms. The imperial Chinese property system absolutely had this “bounded” mode, but it also had a mode which emphasized the “connectivity” of landed space and property, along with moral implications that went with it.

Herein lies the argument of this dissertation. Land in imperial Nanbu possessed a cosmology. This cosmology was part of a wider framework that united heaven with earth and the living with the dead — a framework apparent in the layouts of the imperial capitals and in the placements of the imperial tombs. This cosmology was often articulated by lineages, rural associations, and the county’s gentry through situated knowledge of the land. This situated knowledge included local knowledge, common sense, community preference, ancestral ties, patrimonial merit, and cosmological values. Situated knowledge was information that was primarily understandable to locals but nonetheless interpretable and intelligible — if needed — by the state. This situated knowledge was not structured knowledge, which I define as information procured from statistical and empirical methods that can be measured at any time, at any place, by

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anyone, with the same result. Situated knowledge of land was seldom recorded by the state on a significant scale, but the space it occupied in the imperial legal system was vast. One type of situated knowledge can be seen in the commonplace boundaries written into land deeds, such as 西與鄺姓墳腳為界 “[the field]…extends west to the base of the Kuang family grave” or 西與文 昌會田埂為界 “[the field ]…extends west to the bank of the Wenchang Association’s field.” Only a local would know where the Kuang family grave or the Wenchang Association’s property were, and thus a surveyor recording property boundaries in the twentieth century would need a local interlocutor to reveal where they were.

Another type of situated information that was regularly presented to Nanbu’s court was geomantic knowledge. This knowledge derived from a cultural practice (geomancy; fengshui 风水) wherein the Chinese people applied a cosmological system based on the same principles used to diagnose ailments of the body to their ancestral lands and properties. They did so by identifying veins of qi 气 in the earth (dimai 地脉) just as veins of qi were identified within the human body. This practice, along with other elements of the property system of imperial China such as contracts and genealogies, created rural territorialities that were defined both by landed flows of recognized connectivity and fixed boundaries of precise measurement. My understanding of geomantic knowledge as a type of situated information here does not imply a relative absence of structure; on the contrary, county magistrates in Nanbu, who during the Qing never came from Sichuan, appear quite confident in their abilities to appraise geomancy in an honest and systematic fashion. This is precisely why geomantic knowledge was not simply “local knowledge,” which is information only

understandable to a small group of people. \(^{21}\) Geomantic information was “situated” in the sense that it was experienced as local knowledge by an in-group, but was voiced in a universally recognized language drawn from the *Classic of Changes* (*Yijing*) and from widely circulating principles of how a house or grave should be properly maintained.

In the rural property system, the practice referenced above looked something like this: in imperial China, when a neighbor infringed on a person’s grave, dammed an important river, felled an ancient tree, or opened a mine near a significant temple, a common response for the affected person or group was to walk to the county court and present a lawsuit that claimed an earth vein (*dimai*) was broken or a Dragon Vein (*longmai*) was endangered. \(^{22}\) The deaths of children and spouses resulting from these broken veins were frequently reported. These veins of the “living earth” were often attributed to the ancestors of the living or the cosmological powers

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\(^{22}\) Providing hard data is difficult considering the multi-layered nature of Qing lawsuits, but here are some. Of the 197 territorial land disputes processed by the Department of Works (工房) of the Nanbu County yamen from the Yongzheng (1723-1735) to Xianfeng (1851-1861) reigns, graves, trees, and/or fengshui were involved in 119 of them. For these cases, see: Nanbu County Qing Archive: 2.60, 02.66, 03.86, 04.79, 04.83, 04.95, 04.108, 04.109, 04.111, 04.112, 04.113, 04.115, 04.116, 04.117, 04.118, 04.119, 04.120, 04.121, 04.122, 04.123, 04.124, 04.126, 04.127, 04.128, 04.129, 04.130, 04.131, 04.132, 04.134, 04.135, 04.136, 04.137, 04.138, 04.139, 04.140, 04.141, 04.142, 04.143, 04.144, 04.145, 04.146, 04.147, 04.148, 04.149, 04.150, 04.151, 04.152, 04.153, 04.154, 04.155, 04.156, 04.157, 04.158, 04.159, 04.160, 04.161, 04.162, 04.163, 04.164, 0.254, 04.261, 04.265, 04.268, 04.278, 04.294, 04.297, 04.305, 04.306, 05.44, 05.47, 05.62, 05.64, 05.65, 05.67, 05.68, 05.69, 05.70, 05.71, 05.72, 05.73, 05.74, 05.75, 05.76, 05.77, 05.78, 05.79, 05.80, 05.82, 05.83, 05.84, 05.85, 05.86, 05.87, 05.88, 05.89, 05.90, 05.91, 05.92, 05.93, 05.94, 05.95, 05.96, 05.97, 05.98, 05.99, 05.100, 05.101, 05.102, 05.103, 05.104, 05.105, 05.106, 05.107, 05.108, 05.109, 05.110, 05.113, 05.114, 05.143, 05.145, 05.152. For the numbers on the Department of Works, see: Wu Peilin 吳佩林, *Qingdai xianyu minshi jiufen yu falü zhixu kaocha* [An Investigation on the Legal Order and County-level Civil Cases of the Qing Dynasty] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2013), 11. This was not only the case in Nanbu. Guangyuan Zhou, speaking of the Dan-Xin Archive, notes: “…in the Dan-Xin ‘criminal’ cases, there are 13 cases allegedly about the fengshui of graves, many more than lawsuits over land boundaries. It seems that the restless spirits of the ancestors pushed many litigants to court.” Guangyuan Zhou, “Beneath the Law: Chinese Local Legal Culture in the Qing Dynasty” (University of California, Los Angeles Doctoral Dissertation, 1995), 165. For the Ba County Archive, Wei Shunguang has disaggregated 1,000 territorial property disputes between 1821 and 1838 and has discovered that over twenty-six percent involved graves and fengshui, which is close to Nanbu’s numbers. Wei Shunguang 魏順光, “Qingdai zhongqi de ‘jifen zisong’ xianxiang yanjiu — jiyu baxian dang’an wei zhongxin de kaocha” [“Research on the Phenomenon of ‘Grave Litigation’ in the Qing’s Middle Period — An Investigation Based on the Archives of Ba County”] *Qiu suo* 《求索》2014 (4): 159.
of a landform. The Nanbu Archive reveals that, through the 1940s in the county under study, these claims were taken seriously or at least considered by the state, which routinely responded to such plaints and petitions by dispatching runners to inspect the allegedly compromised veins. This in practice meant that runners had to seek clarity from the explanations of locals and then magistrates had to try to draw out the legal implications of this chain of interpretation that stretched back to a geomancer. Magistrates not infrequently ruled that the veins of a lineage or community had to be protected, or at least issued an official order for the protection of the mountain, river, or forest.

This situated knowledge pervaded the complex “bundle” of strategies and mechanisms that defined the imperial Chinese property system. That bundle was composed of an intricate web of claims and documentation, some formal and some informal. The scope of these claims and documentation was quite large and included knowledge found in contracts (stamped or unstamped), household division registers, tax receipts, family genealogies, stone inscriptions, illustrations of ancestral landscapes, medical conditions, and feelings of general unease. Of this list, the latter five categories would generally be taken as “informal” types of evidence in Qing law, though the state in Nanbu routinely accepted and considered such information in legal practice. State engagement with this broad range of situated information allowed for increased access to the legal system for Nanbu’s subjects, while situated information was regularly legitimated through the state’s engagement.

My use of the word “legitimated” is not to overstate the state’s reluctance to engage this information or locals’ drives to elude the state. This story is not simply a case of the practical métis

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23 Some of the elements of this “bundle” are discussed in Xiaoye Zhang’s article: Xiaoye Zhang, “Legitimate, but Illegal: Case Studies of Civil Justice in the Ming and Qing Dynasties,” *Etudes chinoises* 28 (2009): 73-94.
of locals challenged by a state-directed hegemonic techne. The imperial state routinely recognized and produced geomantic information. Nanbu residents commonly asked the state to interpret their land in the wake of a dispute. The imperial state unambiguously recognized the veins of the earth and the yinyang 隱陽 cosmology that went with it — that was never in question. The problem was that the state often expressed skepticism over whether local people had the ability to hire the appropriately trained ritual specialists to correctly diagnose the problems of their own properties. Further, the state was often concerned that some claims arising from cosmology were presented to gain attention or cause trouble, though it often took them seriously. Hence, county magistrates often had to appraise geomantic claims by examining illustrated yamen maps in court.

In Nanbu County, this engagement was an organic part of a property system that was not heavily regulated by the state. However, we must also note that over the course of some 260 years of Qing imperial rule in Nanbu, the county government accumulated little information of who precisely owned what land. The tax assignments for a population of 70,000 as assigned in 1728 remained, with modest adjustments, the tax assignments for a population of around 700,000 in 1912. In some places in Nanbu by the 1920s, taxes were levied on the population by estimation of wealth, which assigned seven general categories of tax liability regardless of what a landowner owned. State extraction in the twentieth century often took the form of confiscation, which locals

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25 For the beginnings of such concerns in the Song Dynasty, see: Edward L. Davis, Society and The Supernatural in Song China (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2001).

26 This is not to discount the surcharges that were added in the decades during and following the Taiping Rebellion (1850-1864).

27 SUCSBRC [Nanbu Collection]: 466.1831. In Nanbu’s Taiping Bridge Market Town, twenty-seven individuals held exactly 500 or 600 yuan 元 of real estate (budongchan 不動產). Another group of twenty-seven individuals paid exactly two or three yuan when taxes were levied. In Meijia Family Market, fifty-four individuals paid exactly two yuan, while sixty-eight individuals owned exactly 500 or 600 yuan of real estate. Prominent landholders had their
responded to by inundating officials with petitions that frequently touched on cosmological concerns. Elsewhere in China, such petitions increased during this time (if not earlier) to protest railway lines, road construction, church building, and tree felling. Nanbu’s archive reflects uncannily similar protests concerning the cosmology of land during the early twentieth century.

Thus, as a second point in this study, I claim that in Nanbu County a key source of tension and state-local negotiation in the property regime from the late Qing through the warlord era, the communist soviet in Northern Sichuan (1932-1935), or GMD rule through the 1940s was not simply the gap between “registered” and “unregistered” land or “white” and “red” contracts — but rather the tension between situated knowledge of land as expressed through contracts, genealogies, temple locations, and graves placements against the state’s need for structured information to achieve its modernizing aims. Even state efforts in the 1940s to extract such information reveal a strong reliance on situated knowledge and the consent of local elites. Rather than a county of blank or “black” land ready to be filled in with neat statistics by an all-knowing state, surveyors in Nanbu encountered deeply contextualized knowledge of rural landscapes in the form of what Raymond Craib calls “fugitive landscapes,” born out of both the long-standing strategies of locals and the traditional policies of the imperial state being forced to adapt to new forms of measurement and appraisal.28 Such struggles involved challenges in demarcating territory and in allocating resources as the foundations of property ownership were transformed in the early twentieth century.

The dissertation is composed of three sections and uses 700 legal cases drawn from local archives, particularly the Nanbu collection. I have chosen to highlight cases that included

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illustrations of property when possible and have drawn broadly from several local archives based mainly in Northern Sichuan. Cases that underscore a pivotal point are referenced in the main text, while supporting examples are provided in footnotes. I have tried to be generous with primary sources by providing transcribed rulings and translations either in the main text or in footnotes; many cases cited as supporting references can be found in the footnotes. Other sources used in this study include relevant palace memorials, gazetteers, genealogies, inscriptions, ritual manuscripts, newspapers, and miscellaneous government records. Chapter Two contains several ArcGIS maps that illustrate specific aspects of Nanbu’s administrative, economic, and marketing features.

The first section introduces geomancy in Northern Sichuan and follows with an introduction to Nanbu County. I discuss the history of an Islamic Qadiri Sufi lineage that moved into the area during the Qing Dynasty and established property claims over a prominent local mountain by offering to protect the fengshui of the local area. Archival evidence points to the fact that locals took these claims seriously and saw the Muslim community as the lawful steward of the mountain until the end of the imperial period. The community is still there today.

The second section explores how situated information of land was presented and negotiated at Nanbu’s yamen court. I argue that geomantic information was in fact routine and essential for expressing and appraising property claims in nineteenth century Nanbu. Because geomantic understandings were often ascribed to aspects of the natural and built environment that were viewed as having permanence, such as temples, trees, graves, pagodas, and large homes, situated knowledge of land routinely filtered into the administrative geographies of the county. Archival documents further reveal that geomantic interpretations of the land served to regulate the use of and access to common natural resources and protect local environments during an era of increasing commercial pressures on those environments. Local officials in turn saw this information as a
routine part of the property system and engaged with it in court. In other words, it becomes evident that situated information such as geomantic knowledge was an essential component of the property bundle for a highly diverse population in imperial China, not a burden on it.

The third section explores the history of Nanbu County in the Republican period. The argument proceeds to examine why situated information proved to be a challenge in the early twentieth century. Archival records demonstrate that uncertainty was injected into the county’s property system when incentives to privatize common property were promulgated following the Qing New Policies in 1901. These actions likely contributed to well-documented deforestation in Northern Sichuan during that period. Nonetheless, geomantic interpretations of land continued to form central components of popular expressions against mandated school and road building. The lasting power of situated information made significant state penetration in the form of land registration or the fixing of the county’s borders difficult through the 1940s.

This interdisciplinary study conveys a narrative that makes contributions to the growing fields of Chinese legal history, environmental and medical history, cartographic and spatial history, the history of Islam and Muslims in China, and the study of Chinese religion. Further, it furnishes the first English-language history of Nanbu County, where one of the largest archival collections in China will provide scholars with an important window into questions of the country’s past. I hope this study will serve as a small step forward.
Chapter One: The Living Earth of Nanbu County — Approaching Geomancy in Chinese Local History

I. Introduction: Defining Chinese Geomancy

Chinese geomancy (fengshui 風水, dili 地理, kanyu 堪舆), commonly known simply as fengshui 風水, has the distinction of being perhaps one of the most widely recognizable Chinese terms, yet a definitive definition remains elusive. Intertwined with the persistence of this Chinese term in global contexts is the fact that fengshui never found an appropriate corollary in the various “guest” or “host” languages of the early twentieth century Chinese Hypo-colony.29 In an era of “trans-lingual practice,” fengshui was uniquely untranslatable, which made it inscrutable to foreigners and an object of criticism for those within China who increasingly viewed the cultural practice as a “superstition” that hindered the country’s path into modernity.

For many intellectuals in Republican China (1912-1949), defining geomancy by exclusion was perhaps easier than defining what it was. For New Culture vanguards, Chinese geomancy was not science, even as the project of fostering a “hygienic (scientific) modernity” often looked to older terms and concepts (weisheng 衛生; “protecting life”) to introduce newly imported concepts (weisheng 衛生; “hygiene”) that could correspond to encroaching international norms.30 In late imperial China (1368-1912), Chinese geomancy was typically placed under the broader category of dili 地理 (“Earthly Principles”), which was the same word brought into contemporary Chinese (via Japanese: chirigaku) for “geography; the study of geography.” Scholars in the early twentieth century often had to explicitly make this distinction; hence, the Japanese intellectual Kanda Masao


神田正雄 (1879-1961), writing in 1905, opened his Geography Textbook for Sichuan Province 四川地理教科書 with the following introduction:

[As for] the theories of fengshui, learned people do not discuss [them] — but the subject of territory is emphasized by Chinese and foreigners alike. Therefore, without the study of Geography, the magnitude of mountains and rivers, the fertility of soils, the topography of landscapes, the density of populations, the health of customs, the extremes of climates, and the scale of production all remain unknown and unable to be studied.

But even for some of Sichuan’s leading intellectuals after the Xinhai Revolution in 1911, the question of what this new “geography” was — and how it was different from geomancy — remained a source of confusion. In 1912, the Educational Bureau of Sichuan Province issued one of its first textbooks on the subject, titled The Study of Geography for The Republic of China’s Sichuan Province 中華民國四川地理學. In it, the scientific learning of Geography 地理學 was praised and superstition condemned; the planets were shown to orbit the sun, and Sichuan’s place in the greater Republic was depicted on detailed maps. The text proceeds unassumingly until the narrative shifts to the burial and mourning rites of parents, whereupon the authors describe the ritual offerings to be presented at specific times following burial, as well as recommendations on how to bury them with the help of a yinyang master 陰陽家, also known as a dilishi 地理師 (a dili specialist”; a geomancer) or in Northern Sichuan vernacular, a dimaishi 地脈師 (“an earth vein specialist”).


32 Emphasis here is placed on the fact that fengshui is found only in China, but yudi 輿地 is found throughout the world.

Navigating these shifting regimes of scientific knowledge in the first decades of the twentieth century, intellectuals such as Hu Huanyong 胡焕庸 advocated training in “New Geography” 新地理, which was naturally distinct from old and vernacular ways of thinking about the land. “New Geography” and “Geographical Studies” 地理學 were worthy of study, while traditional Chinese approaches to scientific inquiry, including “superstitious” dili, had to be jettisoned. For Wu Wenhui 吳文暉, writing in the 1920s, this “dili called fengshui” was at the heart of China’s “land problem”:

后漢郭璞倡地理風水之說，於是歷代相傳，成為民間根深蒂固的信仰。富豪者乃至一般平民，競因誤信謬說，利用良田作墳場。 Guo Pu of the Later Han (25–220 CE) advocated the theories of dili and fengshui. Thus, they were transmitted across the generations and became a deeply rooted belief among the people. From the wealthiest households to the common people, because they mistakenly believe in erroneous theories, they vie with each other to use good fields to make gravesites.

While there had been a tradition of occasional elite criticism over excessive geomantic anxiety and litigation in imperial China, Wu Wenhui’s writing possibly characterized a new line of twentieth century antagonism towards the practice; namely, the accusation that geomancy wasted potentially lucrative natural resources and land by not using them profitably. Similar observations were made by Graham Peck, an American journalist who witnessed the widespread creation of cemeteries on “good fields” amongst a people he termed “survivors” in the poor region of Northern Sichuan during his sojourn there in 1940s:

On the mountains, the homes of the living were outnumbered by the mounds which housed the dead and the shrines to appease local spirits. Each new grave, always placed in a good field, took more farmland from the survivors…Over the farmhouse doors, pictures of the Yin 隱 and the Yang 陽 and the Eight Signs 八卦 were hung to bring prosperity. On some outer walls, white circles were painted to keep away wolves. On many nights, sticks of


punk smoldered at the corners of the fields. In the mornings, little offerings of food could be found near the mountain shrines. One day, every farm family visited its graves and tied white papers to the grass and bushes growing there. Superstition was the only way these worried and ignorant people had been taught to cope with their problems.³⁶

These descriptions collectively do little to elucidate what the nature of Chinese geomancy was, but we may note that intellectual discourses in Republican China sought to distinguish geography from geomancy, which suggests that the distinction had been ambiguous to some and inscrutable to others.³⁷ This is a valuable point to begin approaching the difficult conceptual terrains of Chinese geomancy. Yet all the authors above make a similar flawed assumption in envisioning geomancy as a practice independent of markets in land and in religious services, both of which functioned within cultural frames that had for centuries defined how people evaluated the earth and their connections to it. Why were locals in Northern Sichuan creating cemeteries on “good fields” through the 1940s? One reason is that they were forging a widely recognized cosmological connection to their landed patrimony within what scholars like Paul Katz have now identified as the highly intertwined legal and religious culture of pre-1949 China.³⁸ To explain the dynamics of such connections, as well as the legal cases presented in the following sections of this dissertation, this chapter will introduce the basic doctrines, practices, actors, and environmental discourses surrounding geomancy as it was practiced in Northern Sichuan during the last century of imperial rule in China. Such an overview will allow us to fully appreciate the prominent appearance of geomantic information within the legal system in the chapters that follow.


³⁷ Laura Hostetler and Emma Teng, in their respective works on Guizhou and Taiwan, have both observed the routine presence of geomantic maps alongside general cartographic works of those regions. Laura Hostetler, *Qing Colonial Enterprise: Ethnography and Cartography in Early Modern China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 58. Emma Teng, *Taiwan's Imagined Geography: Chinese Colonial Travel Writing and Pictures, 1683-1895* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2006), 57.

In Sichuan’s Nanbu County at the turn of the twentieth century, nearly every mountain and hilltop was used as the base of or orientation for a grave, temple, or house. Legal documents, genealogical materials, and official inscriptions unambiguously depict the earth as an active agent in many aspects of human affairs. This does not appear to have been specific to Nanbu County. Drawing on recent anthropological fieldwork in rural Taiwan, Lin Wei-pin provides the following description of a village in Tainan, where geomantic practices have been preserved to a greater degree than in the mainland:

Villagers consider people living in the village as “sharing the same body” (gongti 共體) or “sharing the same veins” (gongmai 共脈). For example, a person whose house was located near the center of the village once tried to move his house physically to the opposite side of the road. The laborers dug deep into the earth, and, to everyone’s surprise, the land started to “bleed” (liuxie 流血)! The explanation was that the professionals had dug too deeply and damaged “the veins of the land (or chi)” (dimai 地脈 or qimai 氣脈). It was only after a spirit medium buried two bamboo sticks (representing bones) wrapped with red cloth (representing blood) in the ground that “the veins were reconnected” (maijiu jieqilai le 脈就接起來了). The concepts of fengshui discussed above and “the bleeding land” both show how the village is conceptualized as a body shared by all the people inhabiting it.

Although separated by over 1,700 kilometers and resting on the other edge of the Chinese cultural sphere, an uncannily similar description could be given for a rural settlement in Qing or Republican

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39 In colloquial usage that filtered into legal plaints in Nanbu, “fengshui” as a stand-alone term could be simply used to refer to trees (“a grave’s fengshui” meaning “a grave’s trees”).

40 My approach to the study of land has been informed by Latour:

…every ethnologist is capable of including within a single monograph the definition of the forces in play; the distribution of powers among human beings, gods, and nonhumans; the procedures for reaching agreements; the connections between religion and power; ancestors; cosmology; property rights; plant and animal taxonomies. The ethnologist will certainly not write three separate books: one dealing with knowledge, another with power, yet another with practices. She will write a single book. Bruno Latour, We Have Never Been Modern, Catherine Porter, trans. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 14.

Nanbu. This can be known through a variety of primary sources: genealogies (jiapu 家譜) from nineteenth century Sichuan portrayed entire market towns in the language of a lineage’s Dragon Veins (longmai 龍脈) and identified the auspicious caverns (xue 穴) of houses and graves. Written contracts identified auspicious lands (jidi 吉地) for burial, as well as the specific conditions for return if a particular site was found not to be auspicious (see contract below). Finally, a

With this invocation of contemporary Taiwan, one might ask how important are geomantic practices in Nanbu today. This inquiry strikes at the heart of the 1949, 1958, and 1978 divides in Modern Chinese History. The evidence for continuity is mixed. Many geomancers say that during the Maoist Era (1949-1976), they or their fathers continued to quietly select auspicious land for people. Although practices such as geomancy were attacked, as Jonathan Unger reminds us, geomancy was still quite popular in many rural areas: in Guangdong, warring groups of Red Guards used the “destroying the four olds” campaign as an excuse to sabotage rival villages’ fengshui. One local newspaper recorded 961 geomantic disputes in a single county between 1961 and the early 1980s. See: Jonathan Unger, “Cultural Revolution Conflict in the Villages,” *The China Quarterly* 153 (1998): 82-106. A further suggestive point is the fact that Nanbu’s first crematorium did not open until 1978. These facts should not give the impression that geomantic practices have continued unhindered from imperial China. The truth is, during the Qing Dynasty — when environmental protection rules, zoning laws, architectural regulations, and many other institutions now taken for granted did not yet exist within a state bureaucracy and most of the country’s population lived in rural settings — there was a much wider arena for geomantic information to circulate and be relevant in local society. Today, there can be no doubt that space, outside of schools, rural villages, and individual grave plots, has narrowed from imperial times.

See for instance the following contract from late nineteenth century Sichuan:

立字送陰地文約人賴星全。今實送與吳秀貴名下陰地窨堂壹穴。其地在太平寺堪下。比[此]日憑證踩踏，指穴看明橫穿心叁丈，直穿心叁丈陸尺。當日吳姓備得掛紅水禮。日後其地有起有復，修整墳墓，任從界外取土打石配補。每年祭掃，吳姓不得借墳生事。地吉起遷復葬，地不吉棄塚，跡歸賴姓開挖耕種。上不得騎龍，下不截穴，牛羊不得踐踏。此係心甘允願，並無逼勒等情。恐口無憑，面立送約一紙，付與吳姓收執為據。在場人賴星寶、賴星洪、張永必、馮貴保、馮成祁、陳聯濤字仝在。光緒十一年六月二十七日立送陰地文約人賴星全。

Lai Xingquan composes a contract for the ceding of grave land. Xingquan now truly cedes to Wu Xiugui one geomantic cavern in the grave land of the Earth God Temple (“the Hall of the Underworld”). This land is under Taiping Temple. On this day, with everyone as a witness, we walked over the borders; we identified the cavern clearly with a horizontal reach of three 張 and a vertical reach of three 張 and six feet. On this day, the Wu lineage may prepare the water rite of “hanging the red festoons.” After today this land may be raised and modified for the creation of the grave. It is permissible to take soil and stones from outside its boundaries for restoring the grave site. Every year [the Wu lineage] may offer sacrifices and sweep [the grave], but the Wu lineage may not use the grave as a pretext to start trouble. If the land is auspicious, then it is permissible to move the grave for reburial; if the land is not auspicious, then it is permissible to relinquish the grave. [In this case], the traces [of the site] will return to the Lai lineage for cultivation. Above the grave, it is not permissible to “ride the Dragon” (add another grave), below the grave, it is not permissible to cut the cavern. Cows and sheep may not trample on this area. This action was done willingly; it was not the product of coercion. Fearing that oral statements do not [adequately] testify, we in person established one contract for the ceding [of land]. We hand this to the Wu lineage as a receipt for evidence. The people present include: Lai Xingbao, Lai Xinghong, Zhang Yongbi, Feng Guibao, Feng Chengqi, Chen Liantao — all are here. Established on GX11 (1885).6.27 by Lai Xingquan for the ceding of grave land.

Hu Kaiquan 胡開全 and Su Donglai 蘇東來, eds., *Chengdu longquanyi bainian qiuyue wenshu* 《成都龍泉驛百年契約文書》 [One Hundred Years of Contracts and Documents from Chengdu's Longquanyi] (Chengdu: Bashu shushe, 2012), 248.
A substantial number of lawsuits preserved in the county archive describe infringements upon earth veins that the state took time and deployed precious resources to resolve.

This study takes Chinese geomancy as a cultural practice found across East Asia that uses cosmological frameworks and the vocabulary of ancient Chinese thought (qi 氣, the Eight Trigrams bagua 八卦, the Heavenly Stems tiangan 天干 and Earthly Branches dizhi 地支) to analyze relationships between humans and their environments so as to diagnose (“inauspicious” xiong 凶) problems and recommend (“auspicious” ji 吉) remedies. Building on the work of Michael Szonyi, this definition rests on conceptualizing geomancy as both a doctrinal system for identifying auspicious land and as a practical strategy for territorial management. Through this interface of system and strategy, these interpretations often incidentally expressed morally-tinged legal bonds over land, status, and territory. By applying the doctrines of geomancy in practice and producing cosmological discourses that were consumed, repeated, and sometimes recorded by their clients, professional geomancers in imperial Nanbu were providers of information. The information they provided had a large market and was highly sought after, though it was discursive by nature. Geomantic information was open to interpretation and re-interpretation, and hence the words of a geomancer who gave one interpretation might well be contradicted by another — or even by a magistrate — who might provide his own interpretation. Despite this fluidity and the perennial possibility of contestation and debate amongst kin and neighbors, the realm of geomantic knowledge held a great deal of data about the values, dimensions, and accessibility of landed resources within the late imperial property regime of Nanbu County.

In introducing how geomancy was practiced in Nanbu County and Northern Sichuan, this chapter contains the following structure: first, after providing an overview of the secondary

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44 Szonyi, *Practicing Kinship: Lineage and Descent in Late Imperial China.*
literature in English, Japanese, and Chinese concerning geomancy, this chapter draws on handwritten manuscripts from Qing and Republican Sichuan to furnish an overview of several critical terms used in geomantic theory. Second, this chapter examines administrative documents from the Nanbu County Archive to outline the Qing state’s institutional support for geomancy on the county and prefectural level. Third, the chapter reviews documents that linked an Islamic (Qadiri) Sufi shrine on Baoning Prefecture’s 保寧府 Coiled Dragon Mountain 蟠龍山 with regional performances in the tri-annual Civil Service Examinations in order to provide a thorough account of the workings of geomantic practice and information in the context of this local history.

II. Secondary Literature on Chinese Geomancy

Geomancy as a historical subject is difficult to study, in part because its practice has been curtailed, with varying degrees of success, by successive Chinese political regimes since the early twentieth century. It is perhaps unsurprising that a series of volumes written by Jan Jakob Maria de Groot (1854-1921) over a century ago remains today one of the main works of secondary literature on the subject.⁴⁵ Important studies of geomancy have also come from anthropologists, who have provided the field with important insights into Chinese geomancy’s current and historical practice.⁴⁶ Work in the field of architectural history by Yinong Xu has noted both the relevance and limitations of geomancy as a guide to architectural design and construction in late


imperial Suzhou.\textsuperscript{47} Chris Coggins has recently added to this conversation through his work on the legacy of geomantic practices in contemporary China, showing that places that have managed to retain \textit{fengshui} forests through the twentieth century today have markedly better environmental conditions and water quality.\textsuperscript{48}

In recent years, Japanese scholars have provided some important treatments of geomancy in historical contexts, such as Minakuchi Takuju’s recently published \textit{Jugaku kara mita fūsui: Sō kara shin ni itaru gensetsu-shi} (Fengshui As Seen Through Confucianism: A History of Discourse from the Song to Qing Periods). Tracing the intellectual history of Chinese geomancy from its endorsement in Zhu Xi’s \textit{Family Rituals} 朱子家禮, where Zhu Xi famously forbade the selling of grave lands and “ritual fields” 祭田 while prescribing geomantic site selection as a filial act performed by children for their parents, to the selection of famous geomantic works for inclusion in the \textit{Library of the Four Treasuries} 四庫全書 of the Qing Dynasty, Minakuchi captures how geomancy remained a subject of robust intellectual inquiry through the late imperial period.\textsuperscript{49}

Another useful approach is found in Segawa Masahisa’s work \textit{Zokubo — Kanan Kan-zoku no sōzoku fūsui ijū} (Genealogies — Lineage, Fengshui, and the Migration of the Han Chinese in South China), which examines geomancy through genealogical literature from southeastern China. Through these sources, Segawa finds a strong correlation between the wealth of a lineage and the

\textsuperscript{47} Xu Yinong, \textit{The Chinese City in Space and Time: The Development of Urban Form in Suzhou} (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2000). According to Xu, geomantic interpretations of Suzhou’s urban form were often applied retroactively (after structures were built).


practice of geomancy; that is, as lineages amassed power locally, they more frequently engaged in reburial and composed geomantic renderings of land into genealogical works.\(^5\) For this reason, Segawa identifies geomancy as a practice intimately intertwined with lineage creation during the Ming and Qing Dynasties, noting that stronger lineages invariably had larger and more diversified grave sites. Segawa also emphasizes the cultural importance of geomancy in discourses concerning the inheritance of ancestral merit across generations. Such a perspective allows us to treat geomancy within the already well-known frameworks used for evaluating land in imperial China; that is, through the measurement of a land’s profitability and of its size. Geomancy, with an eye for the long-term, collapses these measurements into a single axis under terms like “auspiciousness” (ji 吉): a grave, house, or temple is appraised with its own value and territoriality that accounts for potential future wealth (“fortune”) accrued through the initial investment of the site’s creation through ritual divination.

One important caveat to consider is that many of these frequently cited ethnographies were conducted in southeastern China, particularly in Fujian, Taiwan, or Hong Kong’s New Territories. As we saw above, similar geomantic language can be found in use across China. Thus, there is much that we can learn from consulting works focusing on the southeast coastal regions. Nonetheless, the local practice of geomancy varied widely across China, even within the same province. In Sichuan’s Ba County 巴縣, which had a relatively commercialized land market compared to Nanbu’s, reburial of interned bones (to more auspicious lands, or to make way for farmland, or both) was practiced by some locals; in the much poorer region of Northern Sichuan, reburial was only undertaken in special circumstances (the first burial, following a long waiting

period for an auspicious day, was typically the final grave), and tombs were typically aligned in a triangular cemetery pattern seen throughout north China. Magistrates were evidently aware of these differences in dealing with litigation, and hence in Ba County, they would sometimes recommend the relocation of an endangered or contested grave, whereas in Nanbu, they had to find solutions to protect the existing threatened grave or graves. In Cantonese society, where there was considerable wealth in the late imperial period, James Watson has shown that geomancers never dealt with the grave directly after burial, and were only called upon during the third and final stage of the mortuary sequence (seven to ten years after death), with the final entombment of the deceased’s bones. One might wonder whether local traditions of reburial were generally found in regions with high tenancy and a highly commercialized market in land, like the Pearl River Delta’s, though more research would be needed to draw definite conclusions.

In addition to the question of regional variation, there are also questions of historical transformation in the practice of Chinese geomancy. Geomancy was not a static practice in late imperial China. For some scholars of Chinese geomancy in China today, the “popularization” of geomancy after the perceived nadir of its sophisticated conceptualizations in the Tang and Song

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52 For one example of a magistrate ordering a grave moved in Ba County (將其所葬墳塋起遷), see: Ba County Qing Archive: 6.03.01489.


54 Reburial is of course found throughout southeast Asia and its common appearance in south China reflects cultural practices that persisted after the extention of Chinese empire into that region.
periods is often associated with a decline in the “quality” of geomantic practice. Li Dingxin 李定信 discusses how geomancers, emboldened by the increased availability of printed fengshui manuals and the spread of the Chinese lineage institution across the empire, became masters of their own (and others’) fate by selling their services for profit and ignoring what he views as the more “objective” works of earth sciences composed by Han and Tang Dynasty intellectuals. Where Li is certainly correct is in pointing to the degree to which geomancy became intertwined with local markets in land by the late imperial period and thus with all the potential corruption and profit-making that a highly unregulated and very lucrative market creates.

While geomantic practice can be dated to the earliest periods of Chinese history, fengshui does not appear to have played a significant role in the Chinese legal system until the Ming-Qing era (1368-1912). This was a period of low taxation relative to earlier dynasties, as well as an era that saw the spread of the lineage institution throughout China. Ian Miller has outlined how geomancy was transformed in the legal culture of Ming China. Miller shows how grave disputes in the early fourteenth century focused on the identities of prominent elites, but by the sixteenth century, such disputes typically focused on the cosmological powers of the lands surrounding such


graves. In other words, geomancy became the vehicle through which claims to grave lands (among other things) were made and litigation was commenced by the mid-to-late Ming.

By the Qing, this practice was already deeply rooted in many parts of China. The Manchus never attempted to curtail its practice, and themselves participated in geomantic discourses in envisioning their rule over China. “Geomancer” became aptly translated into Manchu as *batuwara niyalma*, which literally means, “a person who is able to read the earth,” or an “earth reader.” Palace Memorials from the Qing regularly reported to the court on the health of the Dragon Veins of the imperial tombs, as well as threats to the geomantic well-being of Banner lands on the Mongol and Russian frontiers. In 1818, the Investigating Censor of the Jiangnan Circuit, 王允輝, sent a memorial to the Grand Council concerning a ban on mining around the capital of Shandong Province, Jinan, for protecting the area’s earth veins and quelling disputes.

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59 Some recent scholarship has placed geomancy within the Confucian tradition of remonstrance before officials. Through a study of Taiwan-based *fengshui* disputes, Hong Jianrong 洪健榮 has suggested that geomancy was an arena for both elites and non-elites to remonstrate before the government in protest of or in advocacy for a particular government action. Hong Jianrong 洪健榮, “Dang *fengshui* chengwei *huoshui* — Qingdai Taiwan shehui de fengshui jiufen xia” “當‘風水’成為‘禍水’— 清代臺灣社會的風水糾紛”下 [*When ‘Fengshui’ becomes ‘Trouble-maker’ — Fengshui Disputes in Taiwan’s Society during the Qing Dynasty*], *Tainan wenhua* 《臺南文化》9 (2008): 46.


62 National Palace Museum Palace Memorial and Grand Council Archives: 053861. The memorial begins as follows: 恭摺奏聞，仰祈聖鑒事。竊照山東濟南城垣，周圍十二里，四面山峰環抱，向禁開採。距城東十里茂稅山西有甸柳莊，附近居民在山下開設窯座，鑿石燒焊，前經地方官，以此山係省垣屏障，禁止燒焊，無如牟利小人逐利作罷，向城一面破碎已甚，以致城東一帶地方日見蕭條。近復聞延至山之南北兩面，大加開採，近山村莊及閭邑紳士以風水攸關，庾官阻止。
such requests and complaints were typical, even routine. While far more data would be needed to prove this conclusively, much evidence points to the idea that geomantic-related infringements were becoming *more frequent* in the last century of imperial rule in China and the early twentieth century — a point also suggested by Weiting Guo, who has noted the increase in grave disputes as agricultural commercialization intensified in nineteenth century Taiwan. In nineteenth century Nanbu, plaints claiming that a family’s earth vein had been broken through land infringement, tree felling, or illicit mining became not simply routine — they had become one of the most common types of lawsuits presented to the county’s court.

III. *The Language and Practice of Geomancy: Popular Manuscripts from Late Imperial Sichuan*

Geomancy had a vocabulary that was easily recognizable to Qing officials, who witnessed marriages, deaths, and house construction from childhood and who, as persons of great learning, would have been often called upon to select a house or grave site. The basic terms of most house and grave geomancy included the following: Dragon (Mountain Range; *long* 龍), Cavern (the Burial Lair; *xue* 穴), Hill (the Hill on which the grave or house was located; *sha* 砂), Water (River; *shui* 水), and Orientation (Direction; *xiang* 向). Geomantic lawsuits from the Qing often referenced

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I respectfully memorialize the Emperor and I entreat the Sage [Ruler] to consider this matter. I humbly convey that for twelve *li* around Shandong’s Jinan’s city wall, there are encircling mountain peaks; mining has been forbidden in these places. Ten *li* east of the city, just west of Mount Maoling, there is a place called Dianliu Village. Near [this place], the inhabitants have opened a kiln, where they are quarrying stones and welding. Previously, local officials had taken this mountain as a protective region for the provincial capital and forbid smelting and chiseling, but [now] petty people seeking profit have been mining off and on in this area, which has greatly destroyed one side of the city’s area. Consequently, the area east of the city is becoming drearier by the day. Recently, we have repeatedly heard that, on this [Maoling] Mountain’s north and south side, there has been increased quarrying. Villagers near the mountain and the county’s gentry both say [these activities] affect [the area’s] *fengshui*, and have petitioned officials to ban them.

63 Weiting Guo, “Social Practice and Judicial Politics in ‘Grave Destruction’ Cases in Qing Taiwan, 1683-1895” in *Chinese Law: Knowledge, Practice, and Transformation, 1530s to 1950s*, Madeleine Zelin and Li Chen, eds., (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 84–123. Ole Bruun has suggested that geomantic protests were used as popular expressions against foreign aggression and state-driven modernization in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, which can also be understood as linked to this phenomenon. Ole Bruun, *Fengshui in China: Geomantic Divination Between State Orthodoxy and Popular Religion* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2003).
Dragon, Cavern, and Orientation: Dragons could be “cut” jie 截, Caverns could be “occupied” zhan 佔, and Orientations could be “blocked” zhe 遮. In traditional China, all matter was composed of qi 氣, which flowed through the earth — and people — in veins mai 脈. For litigants who needed to explain a geomantic problem in the limited space of a plaint form, these veins were often employed as signposts to alert the magistrate that a technical aspect of someone’s fengshui was disturbed. Dragon Veins longmai 龍脈 were the veins of qi that ran along a Mountain Range while Wind Veins fengmai 風脈 were interpreted from wind or water flows. Together, these two types of veins could be generically referred to as “earth veins” dimai 地脈 in contrast to the veins of a human body, jingmai 經脈. As such, Chinese geomancy was closely associated with and in practice no more controversial than Chinese Medicine (there were “bad” geomancers just like there were “bad” doctors). The critical difference of course, which made geomancy an arena of contestation in the Qing and a subject of political controversy later, was that it posed overtly legal implications.

Handwritten geomantic manuscripts from late imperial Sichuan not only shed light on some of the local practices of geomancy in the region, they also reveal how geomantic practice was linked to popular religion, Earth Gods, Spirit Mediums, the Civil Service Examination, taxation, crop fertility, lawsuits, physical health, gambling, gender relations, childbirth, and banditry. Up until now, geomantic knowledge from imperial China has been accessed through printed versions of classical geomantic texts, such as the Book of Burial (Zangshu 葬書), the

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64 Chinese medical terminology can shed light on the nuances of the term “vein” in traditional China. In Chinese medicine, the term “vein” (mai) was often used alongside the term luo 網, which indicated a “web” or a “net” of passageways in the body. Mai on the other hand referred to the veins where palpation of the blood or qi occurred. Shigehisa Kuriyama, The Expressiveness of the Body and the Divergence of Greek and Chinese Medicine (New York: Zone Books, 1999), 160. For more information on the appearance of earth veins in Daoism, see: Livia Kohn, ed., Daoism Handbook (Leiden: Brill, 2000).
Yellow Emperor’s Classic of House Siting (Huangdi zhaijing 黃帝宅經), or Twenty Four Difficult Problems (of Geomancy) (Nanjie ershisipian 難解二十四篇). Some similarities are evident between these foundational texts and handwritten geomantic manuscripts from Qing Sichuan, including the idea that the incorrect siting of a grave might result in illness, poor harvests, or burdensome litigation for a lineage.\(^\text{65}\) Nevertheless, there are clear differences between local manuscripts and these well-known classics of Chinese geomancy. While classical texts of geomancy introduced important concepts of geomantic theory, they were also heavily edited over the centuries and can therefore be taken as a “state-sanctioned” vision of geomantic practice, even though a geomantic “canon,” unlike the Daoist and Buddhist canons, was never produced. In early and medieval China, circulating, handwritten geomantic manuscripts probably led to the creation of these printed geomantic classics, which in turn likely continued to inspire the production of handwritten local manuals. Local manuals were the sources that most geomancers seemed to have used in practice.\(^\text{66}\) These local manuscripts were far more specific in their aims and recommendations, and in some respects, much more terrifying in their admonitions.\(^\text{67}\)

The Preface to the Origins of Earthly Principles 地理原序 was likely composed by a yinyang master in Langzhong County, just north of Nanbu County, during the late Qing Dynasty (1875-1905). The text was not composed any later than this because the manuscript contains numerous geomantic strategies for success in the Civil Service Examinations, which were terminated in 1905. The text opens with a preface on the history of burial in China, which

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\(^\text{65}\) See for instance chapter two of The Yellow Emperor's Classic of House Siting.

\(^\text{66}\) I infer this because these manuscripts detail how a grave is specifically divined and a tombstone placed. In other words, these are not works of doctrine alone; they are works of practice.

\(^\text{67}\) I examined these manuscripts during my fieldwork in Langzhong and Nanbu, which lasted through 2013 and 2014, with return trips in 2015 and 2016. The Preface to the Origins of Earthly Principles was passed down in a lineage of geomancers in Langzhong County and was said to have been used through the first half of the twentieth century.
establishes the work as concerned with grave geomancy. This preface creates a lineage of esoteric geomantic knowledge that connects the text to the geomantic tradition ("school") of Jiangxi Province and Yang Yunsong 楊筠松 (834-900). In this manuscript, the Tang Dynasty (618-907) is ascribed great significance for the rise of professional geomancy in the country. Such references also appear in the preface to the famous Secretly Transmitted Water Dragon Classic (Michuan shuilong jing 秘傳水龍經), on which this local manuscript may have partially been modeled. The first content section of the manuscript deals with strategies for water management based on the birth order or branch order of a lineage 水法分房分法. Different geomantic strategies were employed for different brothers or agnates based on age, and the graves of men and women were also divined differently. This section is divided into two major portions: a discussion of settings that can complete a correct configuration 某水合局 and those that can break a correct configuration 某水破局. The second content section deals with the methods for establishing the correct direction 立向法 of a grave. This is followed by a descriptive series of seventy-one diagrams describing correct and incorrect directions for grave siting in relation to water flows. A third section deals with essential formulae for the selection of grave hills 揮砂要訣. A fourth section deals with proper and improper timing of burials depending on the type of mountain 八山忌用日時. The final section of the manuscript concerns miscellaneous questions, such as how geomancers can select gravesites for men and women 認男女墳.

In the section Strategies for Different Branches of a Lineage 分房分法, the manuscript describes how a cemetery should be created in a triangular fashion with the respective descent lines behind and the common ancestor at the top. In other words, the correct geomantic placement
of each individual grave within a cemetery was important, which is similar to patterns observed by anthropologists working in North China:\textsuperscript{68}

![Figure 1. “Yin and Yang” Diagram](image)

\textit{Preface to the Origins of Earthly Principles (c. 1875-1905)}

§4.2. 6 一宜立午向。坤申水來。乙辰水去。為後天會先天。先發長房。次發二房 [三房等]

(“One” denotes new topic) It is proper to establish the [grave] in the \textit{wu} direction, water comes from \textit{shen} and \textit{kun}, water leaves at \textit{yi} and \textit{chen}. At this place (where the water comes), the Former Heaven Eight Trigram System meets the Latter Heaven Eight Trigram System. This position first makes the household of the oldest son prosper. Next the second oldest son will prosper. Next the third will prosper.

7 據此陽水來去立陽向，則吉。

\textsuperscript{68} Cohen, “Lineage Organization in North China.”
If one establishes the *yang* direction [of the tomb] according to the coming and going direction of the *yang* water, then it will be auspicious.

Here, the manuscript details the order of graves as they should appear in a cemetery. In subsequent legal cases, we will commonly see magistrates recommending that such arrangements be followed. Although the manuscript claims that each son, in accordance with birth order, has a proper place in the cemetery, in actual practice it becomes evident that many Nanbu locals wished to be as close to the oldest tomb as possible — a desire, well-noted by Maurice Freedman, that produced many lawsuits over auspicious land during the Qing Dynasty.\(^69\) The question of the highly cherished graves of wives and mothers, sometimes created next to their husbands, further complicated the spatial orderings of local cemeteries. A poor grave siting for a parent could in fact result in the early death of a wife or other ailments, as the following passage relates:

\[§4.2.8\] 乙卯而水混來上堂。主重妻。若射來成勞病

If *yi* and *mao* water become mixed up in the Upper Hall\(^70\), then this results in the master having a second wife.\(^71\) If the water is straight and does not bend, then you will contract consumption.

Medical conditions were often attributed to the poor geomantic positioning of gravesites. This is reflected in the commonplace presentation of lawsuits resulting from the sudden onset of poor health in relation to a grave, house, or temple infringement. Conditions are also described for the

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\(^69\) In the words of Freedman:

The point that in geomancy competition between agnates is of the essence is brought home most dramatically by the behavior of brothers, among whom in the Chinese system there is a built-in tendency to be rivalrous when they are adult. All brothers must of course benefit from the geomantically sited tomb of a common parent, but in fact the rules of *feng-shui* presuppose that they will not profit equally, for it is laid down that it is virtually impossible so to site and orient a tomb that all children will enjoy a like happiness. The evidence is abundant that brotherly squabbling attends the attempt to get agreement on precisely where, in which direction, and at what time to bury a parent. *By fengshui* men seek to individualize their fate, pressing individualism to the point where each can strive to climb above his fellows, and at their expense, for one man's gain is seen as another's loss.


\(^70\) The Upper Hall refers to the spot above the area directly in front of the grave, which is called “Bright Hall,” named after the emperor’s central court.

\(^71\) This means that his first wife will die, and he will be forced to remarry.
coughing up of blood, the birth of sons, the appearance of disabilities, the contraction of stuttering, proclivities for gambling and sex, suicide, and the decline of a lineage:

§4.2.10 卯多男人吐血。乙多婦人吐血。
[乙]多生女多。卯多生男多。

If the mao [direction] is too much, then the men in the household will cough up blood. If the yi [direction] is too much, then women in the household will cough up blood. If yi is much, then you will have many daughters, if mao is much then you will have many sons.

§5.1.1 乙辰二水朝來。斷他出拐腳。人出結舌人。若有明堂在乙

[Page fragment]. If you see that two waters come from yi and chen, you can judge that the household will produce a person who is crippled and a person who stutters. If the Bright Hall is in the yi direction,

2 他出吊頸。人落水死。有卯向兼甲者。寅甲水來。

we can then foretell that there will be people in this household who will die of hanging themselves or tossing themselves into a river to drown. If the mao direction is included with jia, and the yin and jia waters arrive, you can judge that there will be a wanderer in the household who likes drinking and sex. This man will often go out and make nothing of himself. He will care for nothing but eating.

3 做。敗家賭博逍遙。若有明堂在寅甲方。出麻瘋。生產死。吊頸死。出家為

He will ruin his family by gambling freely and easily. If the Bright Hall is in the yin and jia directions, the family will be afflicted with leprosy. This family will see the death of the mother in childbirth. A person will die of a stroke. A person from this family will renounce the family and become a monk.

4 僧。一個向兩邊水來。破了陰局。就死人也死得不同，敗家也敗得不同。

If the water comes from the two sides [of mao direction], the yin configuration will be broken. People will die, and they will die in different ways. The family will be ruined and it will be ruined in different ways.

5 不可不慎。

One must be cautious about these things; [If the grave placement is incorrect, there is no way to prevent these things].

These highly specific descriptions of the results of poor geomantic grave placements reflect a deeply held understanding that the health of a grave (or house) directly affected the health and well-being of those associated with it. These understandings contributed to much litigation in Qing and Republican Nanbu and made the grave a central claim to land for any landowner.
These claims, in practice, had the power to mystify and justify wealth. Such understandings were regularly reinforced by the fact that, in imperial China generally, the grave was a site where generous displays of wealth — as performed filial behavior on the part of descendants — were socially sanctioned and even expected; elite families were likely to create lavish gravesites which showed off their accumulated “merit.” As Chapter Three will reveal, such expectations were self-reinforcing within the imperial property system: prominent gravesites often allowed for land to be claimed without official registration and thereby, taxation, thus facilitating the significant storage of wealth at the village level.

Related to the question of wealth, the manuscript emphasizes how not every affliction was related to the grave itself. Tombstones were for instance taken as independent agents from the grave, as of course, was water:

§5.2.11 若陽向遇酉水, 則不肯減力矣。凡陽向 [ ] [ ]
If a tomb facing the yang direction meets the you water, then they will not be able to exhaust energy. In all cases where the yang direction… [Manuscript fragment]

§6.1.1 收酉水者, 主男盜女淫。人命軍流絞斬, 定不饒也。子孫不成器。原來葬坯 墳所以出 [ ] 多 [ ]
receives the you water; this indicates that the men will become bandits and women become prostitutes. It will be [your son’s] fate to face military banishment (“exile with military service”) and execution; he certainly will not be let off. Your sons and your grandsons will not amount to anything. [These bad things] were originally because the ancestors were buried in a pile of earthen clay, out of which came out many [Manuscript fragment] …strange things.

2 怪物。逢凶打架, 縣淫盜竊, 男子混雜, 不關墳事。實關水事。“水是生成, 如何改得?”誰叫你

72 The grave was not the only mechanism for doing this. For an example of the rise of a deity’s cult for similar reasons, see: Richard von Glahn, “The Enchantment of Wealth: The God Wutong in the Social History of Jiangnan,” Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies 51.2 (1991): 651-714.

The sons and grandsons ferociously fight, they rape women and steal things, and engage in illicit homosexual behavior\textsuperscript{74} — these things, however, do not concern the grave, they concern water. “[But since] water is produced naturally, how do you change it?” “Who would tell you to change water [denoting the river]?” Take the tombstone to change the direction, thereby there will be no calamity. In the case that there is no tombstone, then immediately erect a tombstone to change the direction; then there will be tranquility and peace and calamities will dissipate.

Engraved tombstones were expensive investments for lineages, and most locals in Nanbu could not afford to chisel an inscription to erect before a grave. Hence, the description above should be read as an ideal for a lineage or family that could afford such a tombstone. This is not to imply however that families who could not do so did not care about the geomantic positioning of their ancestral graves — much evidence points to the idea that “sepulchral anxiety” was broadly shared across social classes during the Qing. Families would have been aware of the positive repercussions that could arise from “good” grave placements, such as the one below:

\textbf{§15.1.1 成水合局}
\textbf{Description of the Xu Water Uniting the Configuration}

2 辰龍戊水廣田莊，富堪敵國多稅糧。戌水戌砂光照穴，翰林學士近龍光。乾龍遇此砂水秀，科甲丁財遍滿鄉。坤龍得此砂和水，小貴大富亦堪商。戌龍戌砂捍辰向，辰水朝來最為上。忠臣孝子並理

When the \textit{chen} dragon and the \textit{xu} water spread through your country estates, you will be wealthy to the extent that it approaches [the wealth of] the country and you will possess much taxable grain. If the resplendence of the \textit{xu} water and the \textit{xu} hill will illuminate the cavern, and a scholar of the Hanlin Academy will approach the splendor of the Dragon. If the \textit{qian} dragon encounters the beauty of this hill and water, both successful examination candidates, as well as (male) descendants and wealth will fill the entire township. If the \textit{kun} dragon reaches this hill and water, [the chance for one] to become modestly rich or very wealthy can also be considered. The \textit{xu} dragon and the \textit{xu} hill can withstand the \textit{chen} direction, and if the \textit{chen} water comes facing [us] is it the best. Loyal servants of the state and filial sons to a father both pay attention to their

\footnote{This could be read as engaging in inappropriate activity with men, however the text appears to imply illicit sexual acts. Such a reading is in line with the surrounding context and the geomantic manuscript itself, which contains a great deal of anxiety about gendered norms.}
out of the twenty-four possible Dragon configurations, this one is the most prosperous.

The passage above still reflects a common understanding in late imperial China that graves were a source of wealth, which is ironic since graves came to be seen by New Culture reformers in the early twentieth century as hindrances to commercial development. This contextual understanding, however, partially answers Graham Peck’s question as to why so many graves were created on potentially productive farmland in Northern Sichuan.  

In brief, the Preface to the Origins of Earthly Principles makes extraordinary claims about the power of grave placements that geomancers conveyed to clients in a competitive market for religious services. The author of the manuscript was evidently aware of the dynamics of this market and the text often underscores its own potency while warning clients not to rely on “false books” to orient or reorient the grave 不可依偽書而行.  

Preface to the Origins of Earthly Principles is a strictly geomantic text; other manuals blended geomantic elements with those of popular religion, Buddhism, and Daoism. One such manuscript is titled A Primer on the Summoning of Mountains of Ba County 巴縣召山會啟, which dates from 1938 and was written in Sichuan’s Ba County. It details the rituals that need to be performed at the creation of a grave, including the composition of a contract to the Earth God for

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75 The above description may seem hyperbolic, but understanding the transmission of geomantic knowledge across the centuries helps frame such claims. The link between good grave placements and the production of officials can be traced back to the earliest geomantic texts, such as the Archetypal Burial Classic of Qing Wu 《青烏先生葬經》. These texts were written in early medieval and medieval China, when a capital-based aristocracy held strong control over office-holding and the means to produce lavish tombs. As the lineage spread across China in the Ming Dynasty, these descriptions remained present in geomantic works, even as rituals concerning the grave spread to a much wider segment of the population. Nicolas Tackett, The Destruction of the Medieval Chinese Aristocracy (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2014).

the use of his land. This manuscript differs from Preface to the Origins of Earthly Principles because it is not exclusively concerned with geomantic divination, but rather includes rituals that need to be performed after a gravesite has been divined:

§1.2.1 召山會啟 磚墓安龍，納契，筵開，恭對墓前。
For summoning the mountain. [First] build the grave and set the Dragon. Include the contract [for the Earth God]. Open the lineage banquet. Pay homage before the grave.

2稽首皈依土司主者五方鎮位尊神。
Knock one’s head [before the grave] and take refuge in the Lord of the Earth Bureau and the venerable spirits protecting the five directions.

With the Daoist priest or geomancer present before the grave alongside the deceased’s kin, the ritual banquet commenced. Here, the geomantic dimensions of the grave were handled differently

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77 Valerie Hansen has discussed tomb contracts from early and medieval China. The date of this manuscript, which is given in the text, reveals that this type of ritual banquet for the deceased which included the composition of a tomb contract for the Earth God was being performed in Sichuan through the first half of the twentieth century. Valerie Hansen, Negotiating Daily Life in Traditional China (New York: Berghahn Books, 1995).
from the selection of the gravesite, which was the primary concern of Preface to the Origins of Earthly Principles. A Primer on the Summoning of Mountains of Ba County assumed that the grave’s location had already been divined. According to the primer, the geomancer was to take the contract written to the Earth God that requested permission to use the land under his domain and invite him to the ritual banquet. The Earth God, also known as the Lord of the Earth Bureau, was one of the five gods who needed to be present at the presentation of the tomb contract. These gods represented the Five Phases (*wuxing* 五行) often referenced in Chinese geomancy and Daoism, with the Earth God naturally taking the element of Earth 土. The other four — Vermillion Sparrow (*zhuque* 朱雀, South Direction; Fire 火)\(^78\), Black Xuanwu (*xuanwu* 玄武, North Direction; Water 水)\(^79\), Azure Dragon (*qinglong* 青龙, East Direction; Wood 木), White Tiger (*baihu* 白虎, West Direction; Metal 金) — were each summoned. In this ritual, these symbolic figures were simultaneously gods and directions, with the Earth God holding the central place of the grave (*zhongyang* 中央). The gods were installed at and around the grave with the lowering of the body into the ground:

§2.1.1 **願降來臨， [念]: “來臨證盟!”**
Entreat the descent and arrival [of the gods], (chant): “Come down and arrive for the witnessing of the confederation [of gods]!”

2 虔誠奉請後面玄武疊疊祇脈流，來龍自此。
Sincerely invite Xuanwu from behind [the grave]; he wraps around, the Spirit Vein flows and with the Dragon Vein arrives here.

3 [左]右兩邊分 [念]: “來臨受享！”
Divide the left and right into two sides and (chant): “Arrive and receive the offering!”

4 虔誠奉請左邊青龍湧八還，四景、四面、四山川，聞經伸禮[此]。

\(^{78}\) Vermillion Sparrow is referenced on the previous page of the manuscript, A Primer on the Summoning of Mountains of Ba County, and was summoned from the front of the grave.

\(^{79}\) Xuanwu refers to the black tortoise with the serpent coiling around it. During the Qing Dynasty, the name “Xuanwu” became taboo because of the Kangxi Emperor’s (1661-1722) personal Chinese name, Xuanye 玄燁. During the Qing, “Xuanwu” was thus typically referred to as “Yuanwu” 元武 to avoid this taboo.
Sincerely invite the Azure Dragon of the left side who coils eight times over the four seasons, the four directions, and the four mountains and rivers; hear the scripture and extend the ritual [here].

5 願來臨[念]：“來臨掛掃！”
Entreat their arrival, chant: “Come to [here to] sacrifice to and sweep the grave!”

6 虔誠奉請右邊白虎伏舉頭四景、四面、四山川，聞經伸禮此。
Sincerely invite the White Tiger of the right side to raise his head up and down over the four seasons, the four directions, and the four mountains and rivers; hear the sutra and extend the ritual here.

7 願降來臨[念]： “來臨安位！”
Entreat their descent and arrival, chant: “Come down and be installed in this place!”

8 虔誠奉請四井[景]、四面、四山神，迎請中央土德君明。
Sincerely invite the gods of the four seasons, the four directions, and the four mountains to welcome the Central Earth Deity.

As the passage above relates, these gods, who were simultaneously geomantic directions, were summoned to the site upon the creation of the grave. This correlation explains much of Nanbu’s rural geography. Numerous places in Nanbu County were named after these directions, such as “Azure Dragon Mountain” 青龍山 or “White Tiger Ridge” 白虎嘴, which contained pertinent situated information about the land. A legal plaint detailing a broken Wind Vein 風脈 resulting from the destruction of a “Azure Dragon Stone” 青龍石 would alert a Qing magistrate to the fact that rock near a prominent grave or temple had allegedly been quarried. Other information from these rituals was inferred in the legal process. Contracts for the Earth God were typically either burnt before the grave or buried with the body, but their creation was well-known to Qing officials.

These two handwritten manuscripts also exemplify differences in degrees of literacy and socio-economic class. The Preface to the Origins of Earthly Principles was written by the steady

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80 Earth God contracts also proved that a new grave not an illicit burial (daoazang 盜葬). It was popularly believed that the courts of the dead could summon the living for punishment through zhongsong 塚訟 (“sepulchral lawsuits”). One handwritten Daoist manuscript I examined from my fieldwork composed in Baoning Prefecture during the Tongzhi Reign (1862-1874) deals explicitly with these lawsuits. Zhaohua Yang has also discussed these lawsuits in Zhaohua Yang, “Devouring Impurities: Myth, Ritual and Talisman in The Cult of Ucchusma in Tang China” (Stanford University Doctoral Dissertation, 2013). Bin Bai has discussed how grave contracts from the Song Dynasty incorporated geomantic diagrams and information. Bin Bai, “Daoism in Graves” in Modern Chinese Religion, Volume One, Pierre Marsone and John Lagerwey, eds. (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 548-600.
hand of a highly literate geomancer. *A Primer on the Conjuring of Mountains of Ba County* on the other hand contains numerous character variations and awkward grammar. Langzhong’s manuscript is strictly geomantic, while the Ba manuscript blends many elements from popular religion. Because the state did not control the production of these manuscripts or their use, there was a range in the quality of textual production and presumably, the knowledge of their authors.

IV. **Administering the Auspicious: Yinyang Masters at the Nanbu Yamen**

Even if the imperial state did not control the production of geomantic texts, local governments were responsible for hiring talented local geomancers. Professional geomancers, called “yinyang officials” (*yinyangguan* 陰陽官) were hired annually by every county yamen in the empire through the very last year of the dynasty (and in some areas, well beyond), Nanbu County’s being no exception.\(^8^1\)

During the Qing, religious and parareligious ritual specialists were organized into four bureaus within the county yamen, where they were collectively known as “Miscellaneous Officials” (*zaguan* 雜官): 陰陽學訓術 (“The learning and training of the study of yinyang”), 醫學訓科 (“The Medical Training Division”), 道會司道會 (“The Daoist Association of the Daoist Bureau”), 僧會司僧會 (“The Buddhist Monk Association of the Monk Bureau”).\(^8^2\) These “officials” appear often in the Nanbu and Ba County Qing Archives and were paid by the local government on a commission basis: money was dispersed after a ritual, performance or consulting service was completed. The work of Yonghua Liu has illuminated the history of the *yinyang* masters within

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82 Note that this only includes *yinyang* masters who were licensed with the state; most geomancers in late imperial Nanbu were not. For an overview of these bureaus in Nanbu County, see: Cai Dongzhou 蔡東洲, *Qingdai nanbu xianya dang’an yanjiu* 《清代南部縣衙檔案研究》*Research on the Qing Archives of the Nanbu County Yamen* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2011), 96-99.
local governance in China, with the first state bureaus for yinyang masters having been established in regular local practice during the Mongol Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368). Yinyang masters also appear in the Dunhuang manuscripts and were presumably employed by states in earlier centuries.\(^8^3\) In his study of ritual festivals and operatic performances in rural Shanxi Province, David Johnson noted that yinyang masters played critical ritual functions as masters of ceremonies in the sai 賽 rituals of local villages in the absence of significant institutional Daoist influence.\(^8^4\) Stephen Jones’s work on the Daoists of North and Northwest China echoes Johnson’s points in noting that many lay ritual specialists who perform at funerals and temple fairs are today called yinyang.\(^8^5\) While both Daoists and yinyang existed in Qing Nanbu, as we will shortly see, yinyang masters appear to have held significant influence locally during that time period.

_Yinyang_ masters were referenced in a variety of contexts in Sichuan’s Nanbu and Ba Counties, including records of the selection of sites for Confucian academies, temples, and city

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83 Yonghua Liu, “The World of Rituals: Masters of Ceremonies (Lisheng), Ancestral Cults, Community Compacts, and Local Temples in Late Imperial Sibao, Fujian” (McGill University Doctoral Dissertation, 2003), 103-108.


85 Stephen Jones, _In Search of the Folk Daoists in North China_ (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2010). Michael Como has explored the yinyang masters of medieval Japan in a recent issue of _Cahiers d’Extrême-Asie_. Michael Como, “Onmyōji, the Earth God and Ghosts in Ancient Japan,” _La Voie du Yin et du Yang. Techniques divinatoires et pratiques religieuses: Cahiers d’Extrême-Asie_, 21, (2012): 43-62. In north China, northwest China, and northern Sichuan, the relationship between “Daoists” and “yinyang” are at times difficult to differentiate. Northern Sichuan was the birthplace of the Celestial Masters, the first Daoist movement in China. During and after the Ming Dynasty, the Quanzhen Daoists, who lived as celibate monastics, rose to prominence in Sichuan and in North China, though as Stephen Jones has pointed out, lay Celestial Masters did not disappear there. Vincent Goossaert, “The Quanzhen Clergy, 1700-1950” in _Religion and Chinese Society: The Transformation of a Field_, John Lagerwey, ed. (Paris: Ecole Francaise d’Extreme-Orient and Hong Kong; Chinese University Press, 2004), 699-771. While Quanzhen Daoists remained active in Baoning until the early twentieth century, the Nanbu County Qing Archive possesses more records for yinyang masters and the Celestial Masters. Yinyang masters were literate ritual specialists drawn from lay people outside China’s sacerdotal religions. This could have been a reason for the tradition’s local strength, as David Johnson has attested to, in parts of north and northwest China. Guo Wu, “Quanzhendao chuchuan sichuan diqu xiaokao” 全真道初傳四川地區小考 [“A Research Note on the Early Transmission of Quanzhen Daoism in the Region of Sichuan”], _Zhongguo daojiao_《中國道教》4 (2008): 95-96. Liu Yonghua has posited that yinyang masters in North China may have become increasingly responsible for the upkeep of local temples starting from the late Ming. Liu Yonghua, _Confucian Rituals and Chinese Villagers: Ritual Change and Social Transformation in a Southeastern Chinese Community, 1368-1949_ (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 54.
walls, but Qing administrative records from Northern Sichuan’s county government archives reveal four major events that often saw their regular communication with the county yamen: celebrations of the Spring Festival (yìngchūn dàdiàn 迎春大典), Solar (rìshí 日食) and Lunar (yuèshí 月食) Eclipses, and the Civil Service Examinations. The Yinyang Bureau was automatically provided with 200 wen 文 (“copper cash”) for every yinyang master per season to travel to the towns and villages of Nanbu to conduct public rituals or oversee opera performances. Special occasions, such as ritual operas for the Spring Festival in the market towns or a solar eclipse, called for the distribution of additional funds for larger rituals. The Civil Service Examinations, which were inaugurated with a public ritual by a yinyang master to secure auspicious conditions for test taking, were important occasions for the county government. One case from 1859 details how Nanbu’s county magistrate took eight silver taels to pay the yinyang master for his ritual services and travel costs to the kechang 科場 (“Civil Service Examination testing center”). Knowing this well-known yinyang master had to traverse a significant distance to the prefectural seat of Baoning for the examination, the Nanbu County magistrate noted that if he could not make the journey, to simply drop the funds off at a local coffin shop outside of Nanbu’s walled town, where the yinyang masters were known to have worked, so that another yinyang master might make the journey in his place.

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86 Nanbu County Qing Archive: 6.543.02. In the case of Nanbu County’s Buddhist Association, the same amount of money was provided to major temples in the market towns of Nanbu, which in turn used the funds to allow their monks to conduct services in temples. The Daoist Association followed the pattern of the Yinyang Bureau, with funds for each ordained Daoist Priest rather than specific temples, while the Medical Division was provided with funds directly to the local pharmacies (yaofang 藥方) in each of Nanbu’s market towns, which used the money to support the hiring of local doctors and purchasing of needed medicine.

87 Nanbu County Qing Archive: 5.201.03. In China traditionally, coffin-making was an inauspicious job, and thus had to be performed outside of a walled town. The fact that yinyang masters often worked with the dead highlight their ritual importance: yinyang masters identified auspiciousness in inauspicious circumstances. During the Prefectural Examination, official communications were sent to several counties in the prefecture to invite yinyang masters to the prefectural town to secure auspicious conditions for that year’s examinations.
Much evidence points to the fact that yinyang masters were in high demand in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and local sources such as gazetteers speak of yinyang masters positively, such as in the following biography of a yinyang master from Sichuan’s Guan County.

王華國，字珍羽，灌邑人，性至孝，有遠視。雖貧不廢學，兼習陰陽家，從不以風水之說惑人，且隱助其貧不能葬者。88

Wang Huaguó, zi (style-name) Zhenyu, was from Guan County. His character was extremely filial, and he had the talent of far-sightedness. Although he was poor he did not neglect his studies and simultaneously trained as a yinyang master. He never used the theories of fengshui to confuse the people and he would privately help those who were poor and could not afford burial.

Stressed in the above paragraph is the distinction, which was important for official discourses of geomancy in the Qing, between kanyu 堪輿, dili 地理, and yinyang 陰陽 — categories typically considered to be respectable types of geomancy — and fengshui 風水, which was largely used to refer to the popular practice of geomancy. In Qing Nanbu, kanyu was also the most popular term for a generic geomancer, while a yinyang master referred to a kanyu who had been licensed by the state. Interestingly, geomancers today in the county prefer the term “yinyang.” While elite and popular terms for these practices varied, as the biography above relates, the poor placed just as much emphasis on trying to find a good geomancer as wealthier families did.

Yinyang masters often possessed multiple identities: many were doctors, Daoists, monks, yamen runners, litigation specialists, or tax heads, and they were not uncommonly drawn from the gentry. Literacy in Literary Chinese and some fluency in geomantic texts were expected requirements of a good geomancer. That the Classic of Changes was on the official examination

curriculum made the profession of a geomancer appealing and potentially lucrative to those who failed to pass the exam, particularly in light of the fact while only few males would ever sit for the capital examination in Beijing, everyone at some point needed to bury a relative or build a house. In order to become an official yinyang master for the county, a person had to be examined at the local yamen and prove his skills before a magistrate, who would then issue a license (zhizhao 执照) with his seal certifying the man could be hired by locals without concern that he was a charlatan. From a record in Ba County from the eleventh month of DG 21 (1841), we learn of the following candidate named Chen Yourong, who was recommended to the yamen by local gentry upon the death of the previous yinyang official:

堂考騐該陰陽生陳有榮，實係自幼學習陰陽藝術精通，堪以頂補，理合造具年貌籍貫考語清冊。  
The yamen has examined the yinyang master Chen Yourong. Truly, from his youth he has studied the arts of yinyang and is fluent in them. He is an appropriate [candidate] to fill this position, [the clerks] should compile his age, appearance, place of birth, as well as any evaluative comments in a detailed list.

This list has been preserved in the Ba County Archive: Chen was forty-seven sui 歲 (forty-six years of age), lived near the city of Chongqing, and was a man of sound mind and upstanding character with evident talents for geomancy and no criminal record. The yamen was pressed for time — the new yinyang master had to be hired before the Spring Festival to oversee the ritual celebrations for welcoming the New Year. Chen’s file was processed and he received his license the following month (the twelfth), just in time for the county’s New Year festivities.

Between the Spring Festival, the Civil Service Examinations, Solar and Lunar Eclipses, and the demands of private practice (divining graves for neighbors), yinyang masters were busy

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89 There are many references to this in the Nanbu and Ba County Archives. For one such example, see: Ba County Qing Archive: 6.07.00311.

90 Ba County Qing Archive: 6.07.00311.
people. In fact, Chen Yourong in XF8 (1858), after serving in the position for seventeen years, submitted a notice of resignation to the Ba County yamen, saying that he was tired and overworked in his home village. Such notices of resignation were common in both Nanbu and Ba Counties, and at times produced great turn-over for the position. In some years in Nanbu County, the position had to be refilled multiple times because resignations were so frequent. Chen Yourong’s long tenure in the position was exceptional and may have derived from the fact that he lived close to Ba’s walled town. In Nanbu, yinyang masters frequently had to commute to the county town due to the much more dispersed nature of the county’s rural hinterland population. In other words, while there was prestige in receiving an official license and working as an official geomancer for the county yamen, talented geomancers could earn a very profitable living on the private market, particularly after gaining “public sector” experience and building up their reputation. Prominent local families in fact sometimes summoned these official yinyang masters directly to the home to select the grave location and burial time.91 As local gazetteers from nineteenth century Sichuan describe, such experience could involve a wide range of tasks:

趙廷棟，字玉材。直隸人。精堪輿之術。乾隆四十二年丁酉，官四川天全州州判。會丁母憂，養疴避喧於彭。邑令謝生晉，延請詳閱縣治。改修衙署，移南城門，開小北門。先是彭邑數科無中式者，迨改造畢，頓見科第聯翩。92

Zhao Tingdong, zi (style-name) Yucai. He was a man from Zhili. He was very talented in the arts of kanyu (geomancy). In the dingyou year of QL42 (1777), he became the sub-prefectural assistant departmental magistrate of Sichuan’s Tianquan Sub-Prefecture. Following the passing of his mother, to recuperate from his tragic loss and avoid the noise [of official life], he came to Peng County Town. The county magistrate Xie Shengjin invited him to carefully inspect the county seat. Tingdong repaired the county yamen, moved the site of the south gate, and opened a small gate in the north wall. Previously, there were no candidates passing the Civil Service Examination [from our county], but after these changes were made, suddenly we saw candidates passing in wave after wave.

91 One notable example of this is the Jia family in A Dream of Red Mansions 《紅樓夢》, who in chapter thirteen summons “an expert from the Board of Astronomy (the Yinyang Bureau)” to select the proper time for Qin Keqing’s burial following her death.

Other famous yinyang specialists were known in Sichuan for their general abilities in surveying land, which, as we will see in the following chapters, pairs well with the geomancers referenced throughout Nanbu’s legal archive. Auspicious lands for burial were part of the wider land market and could be purchased for a price through a transaction that the geomancer, like a contractual middleman, was witness to:

劉天文，應都人，字全真。精於堪輿，為人覓地，價逾五十金，即不買。安葬後不計謝費。家極貧，然不趨勢利，不為誇大之語以驚人，而所葬之地，卒無有議其非者。93

Liu Tianwen (“Astrology Liu”), was a person of Yingdu, his zi (style-name) was Quanzhen. He was talented at geomancy, and he would seek [auspicious] lands for people, if the price exceeded fifty jin, he would not [recommend they] buy it [seeing it as swindling]. After burial, he would disregard appreciative gifts. His family was extremely poor, but he did not seek power and profit, and he would not use exaggerated language to shock the people. Moreover, [regarding] those places for burial, in the end there was no one who questioned [their efficacy].

Other biographies focused on geomancers’ roles in local administration:

姜高...庠生。習堪輿，精選擇。嘉慶五年庚申，修復州城，度基址，定方位，悉以委生。旁及廟壇衙署諸與作。相宅稽疑，始終其事，刺史劉慕陔，甚禮敬之。94

Jiang Gao...was a xiangsheng (shengyuan) of the local academy. He was practiced in geomancy and good at selecting [auspicious locations]. In JQ5 (1800), the gengshen year, he was completely entrusted to repair the city wall, measure its foundation, and select its orientation and location. He also took up the affairs of the temples, altars, and yamens. He closely examined houses and answered queries [related to geomancy]. From beginning to end, [his life was devoted] to these matters, and the County Magistrate Liu Mugai held him in the highest regard.

李繼香，積學未遇，精堪輿。同治初元，邑修衙署，定方位，及選年月日時。95

Li Jixiang, although he was very learned, he was not recognized [for it], but he was talented at geomancy. In TZ1 (1862), when the county town repaired the yamen, he selected its position; he also selected auspicious times [for the construction].

These biographies of Sichuan geomancers from the Qing Dynasty point to the fact that yinyang masters were drawn from a variety of backgrounds: some were officials, some were gentry, and

93 Ibid., 19:24.
94 Ibid., 19:33.
95 Ibid., 19:38.
others came from poorer backgrounds. In nineteenth century Sichuan, the career of a geomancer was a well-established and respected profession, particularly if a *yinyang* master cultivated a good local reputation. Traditional vehicles of brandishing that reputation, such as degree-holding, were available, but simply being a sound, talented geomancer also evidently made some *yinyang* masters quite famous in nineteenth century Sichuan.

Evidence from the Nanbu County Archive reveals the strength of the *yinyang* masters in the county during the nineteenth century, as well as their frequent conflicts with local Daoists, with whom they evidently vied for local influence. In Nanbu County, official *yinyang* masters came to have a reputation for being an officious lot, and can be seen regularly interfering in the affairs of Spirit Mediums *wu* 巫, Daoists, and even local Christians and foreign missionaries. In 1840, a revealing petition was brought to the Nanbu County yamen by the then-head of Nanbu’s Daoist Association at Sanyi Temple 三義廟, Wang Dechun 汪德春. The petition accused a local *yinyang* master of interfering in Daoist affairs and their historical control over the spirit mediums:

> [I present this petition] to avoid conflict. The establishment of the [Nanbu] Daoist Association is for the investigation of matters relating to Daoist *qingju* (“Pure” celibate, vegetarian Daoist Priests), *huoju* (Married Daoist Priests), spirit mediums, and so on. The establishment of the study of *Yinyang* [Bureau] is for the investigation of matters relating to meteorological divination, geomantic divination, fortune telling, astrology, and so on. Since ancient times, each has had their own distinct specialties. In QL51 (1786), the *yinyang* master Wang Baiheng crossed the line and began to oversee the local spirit

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96 Nanbu County Qing Archive: 4.216.01.

mediums, who were traditionally overseen by the Daoists. He and the former head of the Daoist Association filed petitions against each other in court. The former county magistrate gave a judgment, and since then they had each kept to their own business in accordance with their professions. Several decades passed and there were no problems. Who knew that there has now arisen a new yinyang master named He Xiangkun, who, ever since he took on this position, because of his meanness and cunning garrulousness, does not merely consider the four areas of specialty (meteorological divination, geomantic divination, fortune telling, astrology) under his control? Now among the people, if there is any ritual specialist practicing what he knows, this man is officiously meddling. And he even tricked the previous magistrate to put the spirit mediums under the charge of the Yinyang Bureau from the Daoist Association!

As referenced in Wang Dechun’s petition, the complaints against the yinyang masters in Nanbu County went back several decades to at least the mid-eighteenth century, and I cautiously infer that, in Northern Sichuan during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the influence of the yinyang masters was potentially growing vis-a-vis other ritual specialists.\textsuperscript{98} The ascendancy of yinyang masters in the ritual arena could in part explain why David Johnson observed their visible presence in the ritual life of rural Shanxi. In his response to Wang Dechun’s plaint above, the magistrate noted that both yinyang masters and Daoist monks were responsible for combating illicit cults and reporting any heterodoxy to the county government. Such a statement is important to consider because illicit cults were significant sources of official concern in Northern Sichuan following the White Lotus Rebellion (1796-1806).\textsuperscript{99} Presumably seeking to avoid further involvement, the magistrate recommended that both groups continue managing affairs in relation to their traditional roles set forth by the previous magistrate but kept the spirit mediums under the authority of the yinyang masters.

Further archival cases point to significant roles for these “official” geomancers in local governance. In the year following the case above, 1841, the magistrate of Nanbu called upon the county’s yinyang masters to coordinate with other local elites to check the registrations of foreign Catholics in the county and help arrest a missionary named “Mu Daoyuan” (François Alexis Raméaux, 1802-1845). This was because yinyang masters were viewed as powerful agents to be deployed to control the spread of heterodoxy, as Catholicism was formally deemed during the Daoguang Reign (1821-1850). So powerful were the yinyang masters of Nanbu County in the nineteenth century that in 1869 the county head of the Daoist Association and the head of the Yinyang Bureau found themselves once again in the magistrate’s court arguing over the excessive influence of the county’s geomancers. The county magistrate once again ruled that, following the previous ruling of 1840, the spirit mediums would continue to be directed by the yinyang masters, but both groups were instructed to respect the other’s boundaries. Tensions evidently remained until the end of the Qing: in GX4 (1878), a yinyang master named Yan Yongzhang submitted a petition against the head of the Daoist Association for stealing public funds.101

As previously mentioned, yinyang masters were directly interviewed and hired by magistrates, who themselves were expected to know something about geomancy.102 Much could be said about the expected knowledge about geomancy for county magistrates, but one example

100 Nanbu County Qing Archive: 4.217.01.

101 為禀明道會司雷等串師陶真林收銀私吞誤公藐法事，Nanbu County Qing Archive: 7.644.01.

102 Daniel McMahon has discussed how one prominent late eighteenth-century Qing advisor to the governor of Hunan, Yan Ruyi 袁如熠, recommended the construction of walled forts for both improving fengshui and aiding military defense in the wake of a large-scale Miao uprising in Hunan province, providing an important example of the intertwined considerations of cosmology and military planning in Qing statecraft. Daniel McMahon, “Geomancy and Walled Fortifications in Late Eighteenth Century China” Journal of Military History 76.2 (2012): 373-393.
can suffice here. Before beginning their posts as magistrates, degree holders were likely to consult one of the many magisterial handbooks for training future officials. One of the better known manuals, *A Complete Book Concerning Happiness and Benevolence* 福惠全書, written by Huang Liuhong 黃六鴻, who served as a county magistrate in Shandong and Hebei in the late seventeenth century, contains many geomantic references that were simply included with generic surveys of territory. For instance, when the magistrate first assumes office in a new county, Huang advises him to examine the Dragon Vein of the town to identify auspicious and inauspicious spots.¹⁰³

Huang then turns to the need to construct ditches to defend against bandits and intruders. Here, once again, geomancy (“geography”) was to be considered first:

> 其挑濠之法先要相其地勢。凡人家住居之處, 必有龍氣結聚。煙火多者則龍氣旺, 煙火少者則龍脈小。若不論地勢來龍, 一概混挑, 必致傷損龍月血 [脈], 於 [懲] 人家不吉。宜於高處四望, 本村何方地勢稍高, 非浮土所積者, 是其龍脈到頭跌入, 平陽結為宅地。其兩邊稍低處, 即為宅地界水。其水流聚之處, 即其宅基正向。至 於左右前後案托保護。內外水口灣隱伏, 是又地理之旺相吉凶, 未暇論於此也。惟龍月血 [脈], 來處不可挑挖, 恐傷龍洩氣, 止可開門建樓, 以通往來而迎生炁。其餘俱可挑濠。¹⁰⁴

In constructing of ditches [the magistrate] must first consider the topography of the area. Wherever people congregate there is a concentration of the Dragon *qi*. When the fires from the ovens are many (the population is large), then the Dragon *qi* is prosperous, but when the fires are few (the population is small), then the Dragon *qi* is small. If you do not consider the topography and the Arriving Dragon Vein and indiscriminately dig, then you will certainly harm the Dragon Vein¹⁰⁵ and bring inauspicious things to the people. It is beneficial then to survey the four directions from a high place: the place where there is a rise in the topography that is not [produced] by packing earth and flows into the flat land is where the Dragon Vein lies; the flat land is where people build houses. The depressions on both sides [of the flat land] form the water-marked boundaries of the dwelling sites. The place where the waters converge, this is the direction to which the dwelling sites should face. As for the left, right, front, and back (directions), [the water] supports and protects

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¹⁰⁵ The text literally says “harm the Dragon Moon” (shangsun longyue 傷損龍月), which I take as vernacular for “Dragon Vein” 龍脈.
[the dwelling sites]. The surrounding mouth of the water twists and turns — this once again determines the geomantic 村地 [conditions] of prosperity and the determination of auspiciousness and inauspiciousness, which I am not at leisure to discuss [in detail] here. But the place of the Dragon Vein cannot be used for digging for fear of harming it and causing it to bleed qi; though [here] you can construct gates and build towers, which will lead to the coming and mingling of shengqi 生炁. Ditches can be dug in other places without harm.

This is just one of several instances of geomantic-related advice provided by Huang Liuhong, and before recounting the legal and genealogical materials that invoke geomancy in the following chapters, dwelling on Huang’s description of a town’s Dragon Vein for a moment is helpful. As Huang emphasizes, the dili 地理 of a place was empirically observable — the Dragon Vein of the town may be observed from an elevated position in the county. Huang further suggests that the magistrate is responsible for providing a sound analysis of the vein and maintaining its health to prevent local misfortune. While the relationship between disaster relief and the geomantic arts is outside the scope of this study, it is important to remember that earthquakes were well-known in Sichuan; archival documents from across the province record general understandings that these disasters were linked to the region’s Dragon Veins. In short, like the yinyang masters they were bound to hire during their tenures, magistrates were likely to engage in geomantic practices as part of their tenures.

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106 In Daoism, shengqi 生炁 was produced between midnight and the following day and was taken as auspicious, in contrast to siqi 死炁, which were inauspicious.

107 The imperial view of an imbalance of yin and yang as being the cause of flooding and droughts is well-established. Jeffrey Snyder-Reinke, Dry Spells: State Rainmaking and Local Governance in Late Imperial China, Vol. 311. (Cambridge: Harvard University Council on East Asian Studies, 2009). Earthquakes were rarer phenomena but were relatively common in Sichuan, which lies on a major tectonic fault line, the Longmenshan Fault. Temples and “mountain towers,” popularly known as “fengshui towers” 風水塔, were built on mountains to regulate the flow of qi 通过 mountain veins. The best-preserved set of earthquake-related sources in Sichuan comes from Ningyuan Prefecture’s Xichang County. One example involves the “White Tower Temple” 白塔寺, a Buddhist institution built in the Tang. An earthquake in 1850 brought the temple and its tower down, after which time a fundraising campaign was launched to rebuild it. A yinyang master was hired to position the temple and its tower in an auspicious location on the mountaintop. Liu Hong 劉弘, ed. Xichang dizhen beilin 《西昌地震碑林》 [Inscriptions Concerning Earthquakes from Xichang] (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 2006), 72.
V. Geomantic Discourses: A Daoist Mountain, a Sufi Shrine, and the Civil Service Examinations

As alluded to in the previous section, geomantic discourses were heavily intertwined with the Civil Service Examinations — a fact that the imperial state recognized. County magistrates in the area consistently granted that the correct geomantic placement of schools, temples, and academies was important for the region’s examination success, even if they occasionally complained about geomancy’s excessive influence on gentry incentives. During the Qing Dynasty in Sichuan’s Baoning Prefecture, a visiting Central Asia Sufi teacher — later regarded as a Qadiri saint — recognized the importance of these discourses and directed his followers to address gentry concerns as the Sufi Order purchased land in the township. This final case-study underscores the importance of geomantic understandings of land, which in Northern Sichuan allowed for persons from very different religious backgrounds to not only live next to each other, but to quite literally, “share the land” through establishing negotiated degrees of land ownership and resource access.

Before relating the case, this section first introduces the power of geomantic discourses over the Civil Service Examination, which the Muslim community addressed in their dedication inscriptions for the mountain shrine over the course of the Qing Dynasty.

As Benjamin Elman and Peter Carroll have pointed out, geomancy was a pressing concern for scholars preparing for the examinations in the late imperial period and remained one until the exams were discontinued in 1905.\footnote{Peter J. Carroll, 	extit{Between Heaven and Modernity: Reconstructing Suzhou, 1895-1937} (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 104-107. Benjamin A. Elman, 	extit{A Cultural History of Civil Examinations in Late Imperial China} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 326.} Baoning Prefecture’s Jinping Academy was moved to a spot outside the town in 1758 to enjoy a more bucolic setting with circulating graceful qi 秀氣 and a balance of the Five Phases (\textit{wuxing 五行}) to help produce the finest exam candidates. It was moved
again to the county town in 1801 for other geomantic reasons regarding its proximity to the Prefectural Confucian Temple by the county magistrate Li Tianpei 李天培, who was singled out in Republican-era sources as having been an official particularly “deluded by fengshui” 惑於風水. In 1819 and 1820, the Circuit Attendant of Northern Sichuan moved the academy once again to an area outside the town, citing positive geomantic forces and the possibility of accruing more revenue through leasing the property’s adjacent xuetian (“study fields” 學田) to tenant farmers. In short, any time the academy was moved, it seems that it was incumbent upon the acting official to pose part of his reasoning in terms of the best auspicious placement for the candidates, even if other factors may have influenced the decision. This does not mean that geomancy was the most important factor for such reasoning, only that geomancy was typically the language in which such decisions were publicly justified.

One local edifice, the xuegong 學宮 (“Temple School”) of the county’s Confucian Temple was a particular point of contentiousness between local gentry and officials: in 1810, the County Magistrate Huang Tai 黃泰 raised the possibility of repairing the structure, which had been damaged during the White Lotus Rebellion. An inscription from the County Confucian Temple captures the resultant tension that arose between Magistrate Huang and the local gentry over the building repairs, which were completed with a bit of jousting between the official and locals:

紳士言曰，閬邑代多聞達，科甲鼎盛。近者鄉會榜出，獲選者稀，文風不壯，厥惟不培風脈之故。今日改立宮牆，添設榜星門，增建更衣所，及前後殿東西兩廡，皆一律修建，符禮制而壯觀瞻。將見科第聿興，濟美前代，合邑士民，所當踴躍樂捐者矣。110


110 Li Wenfu 李文福 and Li Yongqi 李永奇, eds., Langzhong guji 《閬中古蹟》[The Ancient Traces of Langzhong] (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 2009), 24-25.
The gentry say: Langzhong County in the years before had many famous people and the results of the examinations were excellent. However, recently when the rankings on the Provincial and Capital Examinations came out, locals who were listed on the ranking pamphlets were very few. The Literary Wind is not strong and the reason is because we have not nurtured the Wind Vein. So now, we are rebuilding the walls of the Confucian Temple School and we will add the Lingxing Gate. We will also add a place to change into the scholarly robes. We will also repair the front and back halls and the two side halls. All of these things we will be building at once in accordance with the Ritual Code to make [the temple school] look splendid. This way, we will see excellent results on the examinations and carry forward the [scholarly tradition] of past ages. All people from the town should be enthusiastically and happily donating [for this venture].

泰曰，朝廷有一州一縣，必有一聖廟，非特為學宮造士致釋菜之敬。蓋聖人為萬世師，詩書固以教士類，即匹夫匹婦，目不識之無，而孝弟忠信之事，從心合軌，亦同非教澤所涵濡。故在朝廷為崇道，在士民為報本，在邑令為典司職守，而風水之說不與焉。且科第之所貴者，為其出則佐天子，以利濟斯民，處則敦品節，以儀型鄉黨。若使達無善政，窮有遺行，無寧布衣好善，尚足為地方培元氣，式後生耳。

Magistrate [Huang] Tai says: in our empire, wherever there is a county or a sub-prefecture, there must be a Sage Temple (a Confucian Temple). It exists not merely for the accomplished scholars in the Temple School to perform the rites and sacrifices. The Sage [Confucius] is the teacher of ten thousand generations. The Classic of Poetry and the Book of Documents of course educate the “literate types” (the gentry scholars), but even if the common men and women are not literate, filial and loyal deeds can be known from the heart; this is none other than that which is penetrated by cultivated learning. Therefore, [establishing the Sage Temple] is for the Imperial Court to honor the Way, for the gentry to give back to society [with their knowledge], and for the magistrate to organize the offices and handle [local] affairs. The theories of fengshui 風水之說 are not part of these things. In addition, the reason the examinations are valued is because if [a person] goes out and serves the Emperor, he will benefit the people, and if he stays in [the county] to advocate moral character, he can serve as a model for local people. If a person with high social status is not good at governance and another is of modest means yet has virtuous conduct — [in this case, the latter] wearing simple clothing yet having charitable conduct is preferable, since his kindness is enough to foster the primary qi for the locality and serve as a model for later generations.

Being the acting county magistrate, Magistrate Huang allows himself a bit more space in the inscription to verbally counter the local gentry, whom Huang considers as misinterpreting the meaning of success in the examination through their obsession with geomancy. Huang’s point here is that preparation for the examinations involves much more than simply adding an auspicious gate to the Confucian Temple. Nevertheless, we must not overlook the fact that Magistrate Huang still

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111 This gate bears a name that corresponds to the astrological symbol of Confucius.
agreed to the changes to the Confucian Temple and Temple School that the gentry advocated, even as he publicly scolded their motivations.

This kind of push and pull between gentry and magistrates over “fortune” versus “talent” in the exams commonly extended into legal cases. For instance, in JQ4 (1799), a petition was presented at the Ba County yamen by a *juren* 举人 named Fu Jiayue 傅嘉樂, who claimed that the addition of a merchant’s highly pungent oil shop harmed the cosmological harmony of the market town and would affect the success of local examination candidates. To this claim the magistrate responded: "查風水系術士虛詫，生意關民生實計。士子欲求科第，只在安分讀書，不在風水。" "I examine [the accusation] of this *fengshui* specialist as a false accusation; business concerning the livelihood of the people is truly of importance. The gentry scholar desires selection in the examination, which can only be found in studiously reading books, not in *fengshui*."

This case is a typical one: magistrates in Nanbu and Ba Counties were often sympathetic with geomantic claims that arose from commoners regarding their graves, temples, and houses, but they can be seen as critical of gentry overly stressing geomantic understandings to improve their examination chances.

At other times, however, magistrates folded. Several decades after Magistrate Huang repaired the Temple School in 1851, a new magistrate, Xu Jiyong 徐繼鏞, moved the same school and the adjacent county Confucian Temple into the walled town after several cycles of poor examination showings. In a stone inscription that was curiously placed directly next to Magistrate Huang’s in the newly relocated Confucian Temple by local scholars (“gentry payback”), Magistrate Xu begins by saying that gentry are defined by their righteous conduct. In his decision

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112 Sichuansheng dang’anguan 四川省檔案館 and Sichuan daxue lishixi 四川大學歷史系, eds., *Qingdai qianjiadao baxian dang’an xuanbian* 《清代乾嘉道巴縣檔案選編》 [A Collection of Archives of Ba County from the Qianlong, Jiaqing, and Daoguang Periods in the Qing Dynasty] (Chengdu: Sichuan daxue chubanshe, 1989), 335.
to move the temple, he also praises Magistrate Huang’s additions to the temple, such the Lingxing Gate and the lotus pond, which was called the *panchi*. But then, in justifying his decision to move the temple, he asserts: “From the Tang Dynasty onward, with the establishment and rise of the Examination System, *kanyu* [geomancy] became “ablaze” [with popularity]. And it is said that the “scholarly wind” (*wenfeng*) depends on the rising and falling of *fengshui*. This is why the Temple School must be in an appropriate location.” Whether from gentry-pressure, on his own volition, or for reasons entirely unspoken, Magistrate Xu moved the temple and framed his decision to do so as part of an official’s vocation to pursue auspicious conditions for the people. This case and the ones above serve to underline the fact that the imperial state protected and respected the geomantic arts, but geomantic petitions and lawsuits sometimes overwhelmed local officials, who occasionally pushed back.

One ancient site in the prefecture that was locally considered of great importance for the Civil Service Examinations was the Coiled Dragon Mountain (*Panlongshan* 蟠龍山), which was well known in both Langzhong and Nanbu Counties. This mountain — long a celebrated Daoist mountain in the north of Sichuan — was transformed into an Islamic pilgrimage site during the Qing Dynasty, during which time the new understandings of the mountain’s magical efficacy, particularly regarding the Civil Service Examinations, were made by the Muslim community.

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113 The term *panchi* ("*pan* pond") is a significant name. To become a *xiucai* was to “*rupan,*” or “enter the *pan.*” *Pan* was a general term for local government-run schools in imperial China. The “*pan pond*” refers to the body of water within the temple over which there existed a bridge that only the newly awarded *xiucai* would be permitted to walk across after receiving the exam results.


115 For a history of the rise of Daoism and its links to this area, see: Terry Kleeman, *Celestial Masters History and Ritual in Early Daoist Communities* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016).
The name “Coiled Dragon” evokes the geomantic image described in the previously mentioned geomantic manuscript from Ba County of a coiling Xuanwu, a Chinese mythological figure imagined as a serpent wrapped around a tortoise. Xuanwu, in geomantic terms, marks the northern direction, and indeed the mountain was located precisely to the north of Langzhong and Nanbu’s walled county towns. Accordingly, the mountain was associated with the water (“north”) element in the Five Phases. An image of Xuanwu was not only carved into the side of the mountain on the property of the shrine (see images below), but is today the symbol of Langzhong Municipality.\textsuperscript{116}

\textsuperscript{116} The following images were taken from a published tourist guide of Langzhong’s Old Town. Langzhongshi wenhua he liyouju 阆中市文化和旅游局, ed., Bamian kan langzhong — liyou zhinan 《八面看閬中 — 旅遊指南》 (Viewing Langzhong in Eight Perspectives — A Tourist Guide) (Langzhong: Langzhongshi jiaoyu yinshuachang, 2012).
Figure 3. Dargâh (Tomb Complex) of the Qadiri Saint and Disciples; Langzhong’s Coiled Dragon Mountain

Figure 4. Carved Image of Xuanwu, Symbol of the Coiled Dragon Mountain; Langzhong (Qing Dynasty, 1644-1912)

Figure 5. Skyline of the Pavilion of Lingering Illumination, with fengshui Forest; Coiled Dragon Mountain

Figure 6. Carved Relief of the Coiled Dragon Mountain, with fengshui Forest, at the Entrance of the Pavilion of Lingering Illumination (Qing Dynasty, 1644-1912)

Figure 7. Front Entrance to the Pavilion of Lingering Illumination (2012); South Side of the Coiled Dragon Mountain
The mountain was long said to be associated with Zhang Daoling 張道陵 (34-156 CE) of the Eastern Han 東漢 (25-220 CE), the founder of China’s first institutional Daoist movement, the Celestial Masters. The great astrologer Luo Xiaohong 落下闳 (156-87 BCE) was said to have lived on the mountain, as did the great Tang Daoist and geomancer Yuan Tiangang 袁天罡 (Dates Unknown), whose “cottage” (grave) was said to have been located in a crevice in the mountain 袁天罡之廬在山側.117 During the Qing Dynasty, the mountain became the resting place of Khoja (Khawajah) ‘Abd Allāh, the “ancestral teacher” of the Islamic Qadiri Sufi Order in China — the history of which is documented below.

According to a 1851 county gazetteer, the mountain had for centuries been the site of charitable cemeteries and the graves of a number of local “exemplary women” (lienü 列女).118 Baoning’s Astrological Platform (zhanxingtai 占星台), located on Coiled Dragon Mountain and administered by local yinyang masters, was rebuilt by Northern Sichuan’s Circuit Attendant in 1819 and named one of the eight great sites of Baoning Prefecture upon the publication of the Baoning Prefectural Gazette in 1843.119 Although the mountain was technically located in Langzhong County, its vein was thought to extend into Nanbu County, and the preface to Nanbu’s gazetteer mentions the Coiled Dragon Mountain along with Mount Siyi as the two greatest mountains of the county.120 The mountain’s geomantic power supposedly could be traced back to

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118 Xianfeng Langzhong xianzhi 《咸豐閬中縣志》(1851) 6:25.

119 Daoguang Baoning fuzhi 《道光保寧府志》(1821) tukao 圖考 section: 4.

120 This is an example of Nanbu literati trying to tap into the charisma of Baoning’s most famous mountain. According to Nanbu County Gazetteer, Nanbu County was home to the “Small Panlong Mountain,” which was described with the following terms: 似閬中之蟠龍, 差小 “[It is] just like Langzhong’s Coiled Dragon Mountain, but a bit smaller.” Nanbu County Gazetteer (Tongzhi Edition) (2014: 64).
the Tang: the county gazetteer describes how, during the reign of Zhenguan 貞觀 (627–649), a “reader of qi” (wangqizhe 望氣者), a literary term for a geomancer, was sent by the court a thousand li to the southwest to scan the landscape in search of places manifesting “royal qi” 王氣. The yinyang master discovered Coiled Dragon Mountain pulsating such qi, and the emperor thereafter ordered people to settle there. As Baoning began to form, [the mountain] was chiseled, which “broke the [mountain’s] stone veins” 鑿斷石脈, at which time water sprang forth from the vein like blood. These actions were said to have formed the topography of Baoning, wherein the peninsula of the town — surrounded by the Jialing River on three (east, south, west) sides — is guarded by the Coiled Dragon Mountain at its sole terrestrial entrance in the north.121 The artificial hill directly north of Beijing’s Forbidden City, called Prospect Mountain (Jingshan 景山) during the Qing, was considered to have protective functions and geomantic meanings similar to those of Baoning’s Coiled Dragon Mountain.122

The mountain evidently retained strong geomantic connotations through the end of imperial China. During the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), Baoning’s Daoist Palace of Great Clarity 太清宮, also called the Hall of the Perfected Warrior (Zhenwudian 真武殿), was built by Yang Zhan 楊瞻, the Sub-Provincial Administrative Commissioner of Northern Sichuan 川北道按察司僉事, who provided the logic behind the Palace of Great Clarity’s selected location next to the Coiled Dragon Mountain:

121 Xianfeng Langzhong xianzhi 《咸豐閬中縣志》 (1851) 1:3. The gazetteer writers add that this story was a legend of the common people, observing: 今名鋸山，荒唐之言，未足徵信 “Today’s name of ‘Cutting Mountain’ is absurd talk and there is not enough [evidence] to reliably examine [this claim]”. In a larger sense, however, the story fits well within a wider literature that identified major geomantic discoveries in the Tang Dynasty.

122 Susan Naquin, Peking: Temples and City Life, 1400-1900 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 309-310. Today the area is called Jingshan Park (Jingshan gongyuan 景山公園).
府城，面諸峰為陽，在五行為火。火盛則回祿之災，歲或不免。余為創建真武殿以壓之。蓋真武，玄武也。唐避玄宗廟號，改真武，位北極，在五行為水。水火既濟，則物無不育，民無不康，時無不和，歲無不豐，而宋無忌當遠遁矣。123

The Prefectural Town [of Baoning] faces numerous peaks and is taken as yang; thus, in the Five Phases [it] is taken as fire. When fire becomes too concentrated, there will be an arson-related disaster by the God of Fire that will be hard to avoid throughout the year. I constructed the Hall of the Perfected Warrior (Zhenwudian) to suppress this [fire]. The Perfected Warrior [Zhenwu] refers to Xuanwu, but the character “Xuan” 玄 became taboo because of Tang Xuanzong’s (r. 712-756) Temple Name and it was thus changed to Zhenwu. The Hall of the Perfected Warrior is located to the north and in the Five Phases it is taken as water. With the balance of fire and water, nothing will not grow, the people will not be unhealthy, the times will not be not peaceful, no year will be infertile, and the fire spirit will depart from this place.

Here, the Administrative Commissioner of Northern Sichuan directly invoked the site’s geomantic qualities as the primary motive for raising funds to construct the Hall of the Perfected Warrior.

The Hall’s potentially auspicious qualities were a reason to extract much needed donations from local gentry. Specifically, through the building of a shrine on the “water” element-associated Coiled Dragon Mountain, dangerous fires would decrease within the prefecture’s wooden town.

Whether the Hall of the Perfected Warrior was in fact built to balance the yin and yang forces of the county town is secondary to the fact that first, such an understanding was possible as well as coherent to the commissioner’s contemporaries, and second, that such an explanation was strategic considering the official’s intentions at that moment in his tenure in Northern Sichuan. That is, regardless of how and why the building was in fact originally constructed, the power of the place was evoked through the cosmology of the discourse. As seen from this dedication as well as the previous story of the geomancer who identified the mountain’s Royal qi 王氣 during the Tang Dynasty, the Coiled Dragon Mountain was evidently associated with powerful geomantic forces and Xuanwu for centuries.

Because of the mountain’s location on the northern side of the Baoning peninsula, it played a prominent role in the Manchu conquest, defense, and re-conquest of the town in the seventeenth century, particularly from 1646 to 1665, when Baoning served as the temporary capital of Sichuan province. During this time period, the first five xiangshi 鄉試 (Provincial Examinations) of Qing Sichuan were held in Baoning, which led to a large influx of Northern Sichuan gentry into officialdom — since the rest of the province was scarcely pacified and saw few exam-takers. After 1665, Baoning continued to administer the county and fushi 府試 (Prefectural Examinations) until 1905. Because of its status as an early Qing examination center for the province, residents of the Baoning area placed strong emphasis on the auspicious fengshui of the mountains, towers, and
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124 Xianfeng Langzhong xianzhi (1851), yutu section: 1-6.

125 Langzhong and Nanbu Counties together produced seventy-two juren for Sichuan between 1646 and 1665, out of a total of 305 for the entire province. Chengdu produced five. Northern Sichuan’s influence via the exams declined precipitously during the eighteenth century, when Chongqing and Chengdu resumed their statuses as the largest producers in the province.
various structures — an atmosphere that seems to have influenced the creation of the Islamic Pavilion of Lingering Illumination (Jiuzhaoting 久照亭).

During the Rebellion of the Three Feudatories (1673-1681), the Kangxi Emperor averred that, within Sichuan Province, Baoning was a most critical place due to its position along the road from Xi’an to Chengdu. During that time, as had been the case during the initial conquest, a Qing garrison camp was established on the Coiled Dragon Mountain. Nanbu County’s late Qing gazetteer claims that “Arab” (Alabo 阿拉伯) soldiers from the region that would become modern-day Xinjiang (Huijiang 回疆) were stationed in these camps in Baoning at the start of the Qing, which may reflect late nineteenth century popular understandings of how a Muslim community came to reside in the area. These soldiers likely referred to Muslims in the Qing’s Green Standard Army (Lüyingbing 綠營兵).


127 The Qingshilu contains several references to the Coiled Dragon Mountain from the early Qing: 諮議政王大臣等: 將軍趙良棟等軍, 深入四川保寧、重慶、夔州諸處, 速宜平定。將軍吳丹、王進寶等軍, 雖抵保寧, 必於蟠龍山相對立營。果爾, 則恐稽時日。今宜面蟠龍山, 分兵堅壘。別遣一軍, 渡昭化江, 壁錦屏山下。滿漢兵合勢, 以規取重慶、夔州。

Kangxichao shilu 《康熙朝實錄》 [The Veritable Records of the Kangxi Reign], 88: 12682 (Kangxi nineteenth year 1680, first month).

A notification to the Deliberative Council of Ministers: General Zhao Liangdong and his armies have penetrated deeply into Sichuan’s various places including Baoning, Chongqing and Kuizhou. They shall quickly be pacified. The Generals Wu Dan and Wang Jinbao, with their armies, although they have arrived at Baoning, they must establish a camp facing the Coiled Dragon Mountain. If this happens, [we] fear that [this will] be delayed [by several] days. Now, it is proper to face the Coiled Dragon Mountain and divide the soldiers to strengthen the ramparts. Dispatch another army, ford the Zhaohua River, and make a fortification under the Jinping Mountain. With the combined forces of the Manchu and Han soldiers, [we] plan to take Chongqing and Kuizhou.

Some of the historical contexts for this conquest, including references to Zhao Liangdong, are found in Nicola Di Cosmo, The Diary of a Manchu Soldier in Seventeenth-century China (Richmond: Curzon Press, 2001).

Due to its strategic placement for the early Qing conquest project, it is safe to assume that a number of Muslim soldiers and merchants had been stationed in or gravitated to Baoning. A mosque was constructed in the prefectural town in 1669, when several Muslims from Xi’an purchased the estate of the old Ming Northern Sichuan Circuit Yamen. Langzhong and Nanbu Counties supported three mosques by the first decade of the twentieth century. As Zvi Ben-Dor has noted, during the 1680s, when the Yunnan-born Muslim literatus Ma Zhu 马注 traveled around the Qing Empire with a copy of his Guide to Islam 清真指南, he stopped in Baoning on his way southward, having travelled from Beijing into Shaanxi, and down through Sichuan on his way back to Yunnan. From the sources, we can discern that Ma Zhu overlapped with the Qadiri Khoja in Baoning, though the terseness of the available records provides few clues as to the extent of their interactions.

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129 No protest against this purchase was recorded in local history. The old Ming Circuit yamen was said to have good fengshui, which may have been one of the reasons the newly arrived Muslim community purchased it for their mosque. A relevant point noted by local historians is that while Christian missionaries constructed their churches in the nineteenth century, the Muslim community had inherited their mosque. It is said that up until the early twentieth century, Muslims referred to praying in the mosque as visiting the “old (dilapidated) yamen” (po yamen 破衙門). Langzhongshi lishi wenhua mingcheng yanjiuhui 阆中市歷史文化名城研究會, ed., Mingcheng yanjiu 《名城研究》 [Research on the Famous Town], Vol. 14. (Langzhong: Gazetteer Office of Langzhong Municipality, 2012), 80.

130 Nanbu’s mosque was in Abundant Village Postal Station. Ma Yiyu 马以愚, ed. Jialing jiangzhi 《嘉陵江志》 (Chongqing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1946), 187.

131 Zvi Ben-Dor Benite, The Dao of Muhammad: A Cultural History of Muslims in Late Imperial China (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 142.

132 Cai Heming 蔡鶴鳴, a local disciple of the Khoja and Prefectural Director of Studies (guangwen 廣文) who was buried in the Muslim cemetery on the side of the Coiled Dragon Mountain, composed a poem for Ma Zhu which was later incorporated into his Guide to Islam. The poem reads as follows:

西方聖子自南歸, 門擁銀鞍鼓角吹。雲簇馬頭天地狹, 山橫人面日星卑。
峨峰未許留嘉客, 蜀水何堪洗是非。幸有遺經存閬苑, 墨車何用路岐悲。

A child (descendant) of the western sage (Muhammad) from the south is returning home. The doorway supports [the traveler’s] silver-saddle; horns are blown and drums played. The clouds touch the head of his horse, and the sky seems close to the earth; the mountain stretches in front of his face, rendering the sun and star abashed. If Mount Emei does not permit to keep such a fine guest, how could the waters of Sichuan wash the truth from the falsehood? Luckily there are remaining (Islamic) Classics saved in Langzhong (Baoning). Thus, for [the traveler in the] unadorned carriage, there is no need to be sad at the forking roads.
We can say with certainty, however, that the Khoja, upon arriving in Baoning, seems to have decided to make it his ultimate resting place. The Qingzhen genyuan 清真根源 (The Root of Islam), compiled by the sixth generation Qadiri teacher Qi Daohe in the 1870s (published in 1924) records, perhaps apocryphally, that the Khoja arrived at Guangzhou from Mecca in 1674 via the sea route. The Khoja was said to have travelled through the northwest, spending a particularly long time instructing disciples such as Qi Jingyi 祁靜一 in Hanzhong 漢中, Shaanxi Province. In 1686, the Khoja received an invitation from a Qing official named Ma Ziyun 馬子云 to travel to Sichuan’s Baoning, where Ma Ziyun had taken up the post of Circuit Attendant (daotai 道台). Upon his arrival to the Baoning area, the Khoja stayed as a guest in a spare room of the Circuit Yamen. Most sources emphasize that the Khoja was struck with the austere beauty of Northern Sichuan’s patchwork of mountains and rivers, which explains why he insisted on becoming a resident teacher for three years until his death in a Buddhist temple, the Temple of the Iron Pagoda.

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133 This geographic route may have been contrived by some Chinese-speaking Muslim communities in the northwest to distance themselves from the unrest in Xinjiang during the middle to late nineteenth century, when this story was written.

134 Ma Ziyun, a Muslim Qing official who previously served as a general in Shaanxi’s Hanzhong, was promoted to the post of the Northern Sichuan Circuit Attendant in 1686. Ma Ziyun remained in that position for nearly twelve years. Much official correspondence between Ma Ziyun and the imperial court has been preserved in the archives of Taipei and Beijing, but for a basic overview, see: Wang, Daqing lichao shilu sichuan shiliao, 170-185.
鉄塔寺. Although it is not stated why the Khoja chose to stay in the Buddhist temple and not the local mosque, oral tradition says that the local gentry of the town insisted that the spacious Buddhist temple was a more comfortable place for him to rest as his health declined. Sources from his tomb emphasize the fact that the Khoja taught astronomy, medicine, and various forms of divination, which impressed locals with the depth of his knowledge.

The original contracts written to secure the property of the Coiled Dragon Mountain for the Muslim community have not survived. The earliest surviving contractual documentation for the mountain dates from the Yongzheng Reign (1722-1735), during which time the region’s sole significant cadastral survey during the Qing was conducted in Sichuan Province.\(^\text{135}\) Compiling their records for the purposes of taxation — by the early eighteenth century the Qadiriyya was a significant landowner and landlord in Northern Sichuan — the Muslim community produced a series of contractual inscriptions and public accounting ledgers. The inscriptions begin with a history of the shrine and the identity of the interred dead, and then turn to descriptions of the organization’s taxable lands. One, dating from QL12 (1747), reads as follows:

有川台鎮台，諱子云，馬公慕師祖之德，於甲子歲迎師祖於官署，以師理事之。師祖名雖出塵，而持身接物，不離夫天常，不墮夫異端。理究太極之化育，神合二五之精微。迨後迴光內徹，自知其脫塵而化也。因預卜佳城於蟠龍山之麓。郡中士大夫咸欣然樂從，願請師祖以培風氣焉。爰於己巳歲三月二十五日，師祖瘞塚。未及數載，人文蔚起，甲弟鱗鱗，四境民物駸駸乎有起色矣。若非師祖之英風爽氣，有以察天文之奧，因地脈之宜，焉能鐘靈毓秀至斯乎。\(^\text{136}\)

The Circuit Intendant of (Northern) Sichuan was surnamed Ma, named Ziyun, and he admired the virtue of the ancestral teacher (i.e., Khoja ‘Abd Allāh), so he welcomed him in the jià zi year (1684) to the yamen and as a distinguished guest. Although this teacher’s reputation exceeded that of this world, in the demands he made upon himself and in his interactions with others, he neither strayed from the heavenly constants nor succumbed to


\(^\text{136}\) Yu Zhengui and Lei Xiaojing, eds., *Zhongguo huizu jinshilu 《中國回族金石錄》 [Stone Inscriptions of Chinese Muslims]* (Yinchuan: Ningxia renmin chubanshe, 2001), 491-492. For the earlier inscription from YZ13 (1735) that contains much of the same information as the one above, see: *Ibid.*, 413-415.
heresies. He studied deeply the transformations of the *taiji* (“the Supreme Ultimate;” “the union of *yin* and *yang*”), and the profundities and subtleties of the adjoined “two” (*yin* and *yang*), and the “five” (“the five phases”: wood, fire, earth, metal, and water). Later, when he came to the end of his life, he saw that he would leave the mortal world and be transformed. And thus, he divined (*yubu* 預卜) that the finest place of Baoning was at the base of the Coiled Dragon Mountain. The gentry of the town were all happy to obey this suggestion and expressed a willingness to invite the teacher to foster the environmental auspiciousness (of the town) [by burying him] there. At the *jisi* year (1689), on the twenty-fifth day of the third month, the teacher was buried. And it was not long after that that the local culture and literacy rose and the number of people who performed well on the Civil Service Exams grew. And the people and objects (i.e. trees, water, mountains, fertility of land) in the town all started to see great improvement. If our teacher did not have the brilliance by which he viewed and understood the abstruseness of the patterns of heaven (*tianwen* 天文) and identified suitable veins of the earth (*dimai* 地脈), how could (this place) have produced such talent and success?

The Muslim community erected another notice forbidding the felling of any trees and committed themselves to protecting all existing graves on the mountain.\(^\text{137}\)

The contracts and accounting documents from the Pavilion of Lingering Illumination exemplify the various methods that the Muslim community employed to purchase and claim land in the area. A combination of geomantic claims, land contracts, tomb placements, and stone inscriptions were deployed to establish the community’s claims to the mountain, which were recognized as legitimate by locals of the town, who continued to have some stake in the health of the mountain. Part of these claims involved a compact to protect the natural features and environment of the mountain, such as its surrounding forest, which locals of the prefecture held as particularly important. The Islamic faith of the Khoja was conveyed in the language of a *yinyang* master: the writers of the inscription, who were identified as “disciples” (*dizi* 弟子) of the lineage,

\(^{137}\) *Langzhongshi renmin zhengfu, Collected Archives of the Shine of the Wiseman, 6.* Yu and Lei, *Zhongguo huizu jinshilu*, 414. A parallel accounting ledger was place to the right of this documenting the community’s commercial landholdings. It began: 爲置附近田地以作此山常住之費 “Several times, [we] have set nearby fields to serve as funding [sources] for the mountain’s endowment.” The writers noted that they possessed tax receipts for all the adjacent commercial land, emphasizing the fact that these properties were registered with the local yamen. The public accounting inscription concludes with the statement: 其地畝弓步糧賦有宮案板籍為據 “Concerning the grain tax on these lands [as measured by] their spans and dimensions, there is within the shrine a government notated order for documentation.” Yu and Lei, *Zhongguo huizu jinshilu*, 413-414.
heavily borrowed from the *Classic of Changes* and its commentaries to celebrate the Khoja’s knowledge. In other words, geomancy provided a vehicle through which this Muslim community could exert an autonomous claim to land that nonetheless addressed the sympathies of a wider, non-Muslim community who saw the mountain as connected to the fortunes of the entire prefecture.

This is not to say, however, that this strategic deployment of geomancy was an act of contrived artifice or that these documents are somehow an “un-Islamic” adoption of Chinese cultural practice. In regions of Eurasia where Sufi communities flourished alongside non-Muslim populations, the shrines of Islamic saints often held efficacious powers for local populations broadly. Carla Bellamy has recently detailed the healing powers of the “ambiguously Islamic” Husain Tekri shrines of India’s Madhya Pradesh, which attract both Muslim and Hindu pilgrims. Sufi shrines in Russia’s Kazan region were often ascribed with sacredness for local populations—a fact which may have facilitated the spread of Islam in that region. The Qadirriya’s extension

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138 The final line in this section modifies a famous quotation from the *Commentary on the Appended Phrases, Part One of the Book of Changes* (*Yijing*): “Looking up, we use it [the Changes] to examine the configurations of Heaven, and, looking down, we use it to examine the patterns of the Earth.” This precise statement was also cited for a Daoist structure also associated with Zhang Daoling on Sichuan’s Mount Qingcheng 青城山, the Jade Emperor Tower of the Celestial Master Cave 天師洞玉皇樓. Long and Huang, eds., *Ba-shu daojiiao beiwen jicheng*, 382-383.

139 Another reads *daoqi youcun* (“The qi of the Dao Remains Here”). To Chinese-speaking Muslims, the meaning of *dao* in this second couplet referred to “Islam,” but for the non-Muslims in the local population, the text conveyed the idea that auspicious and efficacious *qi* was still present and well-protected on the mountain. Dru Gladney has discussed the practice of geomancy by northwestern Sufi lineages. Dru C. Gladney, “Muslim Tombs and Ethnic folklore: Charters for Hui Identity,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 46.3 (1987): 495-532.


of cosmological protection to the non-Muslims of Northern Sichuan follows historical patterns that can be seen elsewhere along the borders of the Muslim world.

The Muslim community of Baoning, in the public record, proudly identified the Khoja as a geomancer, which was not seen by the Qadiri community as an invalidation of his Islamic identity. The adoption of geomantic language addressed local concerns born out of Chinese popular religion as well as Islamic genealogy and lineage. Hence, we have duilian 對聯 (“Poetic couplets inscribed on wooden boards”) composed by Muslim scholars for the shrine reading, yimai tongguang (一脈同光 “A Single Vein With Shared Light”), denoting at once the silsilah (Ar. “Chain of Transmission back to the Prophet”) of which the Khoja was part, and at the same time, a recognizable Chinese kinship institution organized through generational descent (“the lineage vein” zumai 族脈). The community explicitly listed the contributions to the region’s fengshui made by the shrine, which may point to further unspoken dynamics, such as the possibility that the community’s acquisition of the mountain initially unsettled some locals. By claiming the Coiled Dragon Mountain as their property, the Muslim community was also claiming some land that was

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142 Shahab Ahmed has discussed the appearance of non-Islamic practices amongst Muslim populations. Shahab Ahmed, What is Islam?: The Importance of Being Islamic (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015).


144 This section has only tangentially touched on a question related to the study of Muslims in late imperial China: did Chinese-speaking Muslims practice fengshui? While the question of belief is quite complicated, the short answer is that some Muslim communities certainly incorporated geomantic language into their legal documents. Genealogies and contracts of Muslims in Hubei and Sichuan Provinces reveal prominent concern for auspicious lands for burial, fengshui trees, and “forbidden lands.” The Sufi institutions of China’s northwest were not unique among Chinese-speaking Muslims because they invoked geomantic language; rather, their mausoleums stood out because they came to occupy such prominent roles in the greater religious life of the northwestern frontiers. Under the current discourses of minzu policy in China, official “Huizu” representatives will uniformly disavow the practice of fengshui in their communities. Duan Jinlu 段金錄 and Yao Jide 姚繼德, eds., Zhongguo nanfang huizu jingji shangmao ziliao xuanbian 《中國南方回族經濟商業資料選編》 [A Selection of Records Concerning Economy, Trade, and Commerce from Muslims in South China] (Kunming: Yunnan minzu chubanshe, 2002), 155-165. We should also not overlook the historical legacy of Islamic geomancy. Marion B. Smith, “The Nature of Islamic Geomancy with a Critique of a Structuralist's Approach.” Studia Islamica 49 (1979): 5-38.
previously occupied by the Daoist Palace of Great Clarity. As described above, local yin-yang masters and Daoists in this region often saw themselves in competition for local influence, and hence we cannot discount the possibility that the Muslim community was allying themselves with local yin-yang masters as part of their claims to the mountain, or was allaying gentry fears over examination prospects after the mountain came under new stewardship. Doing so, however, in no way underplays the idea that the lineage had created a thoroughly Islamic sacred place in addition to inheriting a sacred landscape from Chinese antiquity.

There is ample evidence that over time the Islamic structure came to inherit the charismatic qualities of the mountain as its own. In 1694, during a regional drought, a public rainmaking ritual was performed at the grave of the Khoja by the Prefect of Baoning and Jiangsu native An Dingchang 安定昌, from which time on the site came to be known for its magically efficacious abilities in combating drought. This of course was likely part of a much longer tradition of associating the mountain with the water element of the Five Phases 五行, and hence rainmaking potency. At the front entrance to the mountain road up to the shrine, a Manchu Imperial Prince of Blood to the Third Degree Titled the Right Chamberlain of the Imperial Clan (Ma. Doro Beile; Ch. Duoluo Beile) 宗人府右宗正多羅貝勒王, inscribed the phrase “Qingxiu” (清修 “Pure Cultivation”) in 1710. Military officials of the northwest, who were often Muslims themselves,

145 Langzhongshi renmin zhengfu, Collected Archives of the Shrine of the Wiseman, 14. These understandings could have been attributed to the mountain from before the Qing. The Sufi order’s sources claim that Muslims and non-Muslims participated in the rainmaking ritual, which was successful in ending the drought. For more on Rain Making Spells, see: Snyder-Reinke, Dry Spells: State Rainmaking and Local Governance in Late Imperial China.

146 Liu Xiancheng 劉先澄, ed., Langyuan: Bianlian jijin 《閬苑:匾聯集錦》[Langyuan: A Collection of Choice Inscribed Panels] (Yinchuan: Ningxia renmin chubanshe, 2010), 199-200. The term, “Qingxiu” alluded to a verse from the Ming-era author Fan Lian’s Yunjian jumu chao 《雲間據目抄》[Topically Arranged Notes on Yunjian]; Preface dated 1593), as well as the name of the ruling dynasty, the “Great Qing” 大清國. According to the eighteenth and nineteenth century records of the shrine, this recognition from the imperial court arose when a Tibetan from the Songpan region of Sichuan converted to Islam through the teachings of the Khoja. After the Tibetan offered rare medicines to the imperial court, the Manchu Prince expressed his gratitude by composing the entrance panel for the
provided dozens of donations and inscriptions to the shrine during their deployments or pilgrimages to Northern Sichuan.\textsuperscript{147} One Chinese-Manchu bilingual dedication, created in 1850, was presented to the shrine by Banner Officials. The dedication, written in Formal Script (\textit{kaishu楷書}), reads: (Ma.) \textit{Bolgo jengge} “Pure Truth,” (Ch.) \textit{jingzhen} 淨真 (denoting Islam; alternative for \textit{qingzhen} 清真).\textsuperscript{148}

\textbf{Figure 9. A Chinese and Manchu Dedication from the Pavilion of Lingering Illumination (1850)}

Local literati and non-Muslim religious specialists also paid their respects. In 1743, Langzhong’s County Magistrate Wang Wenhuan 王文焕 financed the repair of one of the shrine’s doorways, over which he wrote, in reference to the shrine’s association with rainmaking, “The flowers and rains emit fragrance” 花雨吹香. In 1752, a Daoist named “the Old Man of Nanqu” 南渠老人 ascribed his promotion to the Provincial Military Commander of Sichuan to the Khoja’s intervention.

\textsuperscript{147} Though the name “Pavilion of Lingering Illumination” was said to have been given by Qi Jingyi, it was first recorded in a decorative inscription in 1765 by Ma Zhenguo, the Regional Commander (\textit{zongbing總兵}) of Chongqing.

\textsuperscript{148} Liu, \textit{Langyuan: Bianlian jijin}, 201-202. In it, the Regional Commander of Northern Sichuan, Su Hengfu 蘇恆甫, ascribed his promotion to be the Provincial Military Commander of Sichuan to the Khoja’s intervention.
praised the qualities of the “cloudy forest” 雲林 of the shrine in Running Script (xingshu 行書). 149

One of Baoning’s most esteemed Qing poets and local gentlemen, Xie Jialin 謝家麟 (juren 1724), who composed poems for the town’s famous sites such as the Phoenix Tower 鳳凰樓 and local Daoist abbeys, wrote the following poem later preserved in a local gazetteer. Though it is a literary source with choice rhetorical flourishes, the author’s word choice provides some insight into how the shrine may have been received by local literati during the Qing:

蟠龍曲處構精廬,雲是仙人蛻骨居。顏煥清修頒禁苑,亭開久照獲真如。云根已作
靈根宅,手跡猶存鳥跡書。寄語後來崇奉者,好從此地語玄虛。

This excellent cottage [of a Daoist mendicant] was built in a crevice of the Coiled Dragon Mountain. It is said that this is the place where a transcendent’s earthly discarded bones rest. 151 His complexion glows in the “Qingxiu” (“Quiet Cultivation”) Panel bestowed by the “Forbidden Garden.” 152 The “Lingering Illumination” Pavilion opened when he obtained tathā (“suchness”). The stone of the mountain has become a house of ancestral wisdom. The immortal’s written teachings remain in bird script (beautiful calligraphy). 153 Let [me] send words to the incoming worshippers: it is appropriate to speak of “profound emptiness” from this place. 154

In this dedication, Xie Jialin uses Daoist and Buddhist terminology and imagery to refer to the resting place of Khoja ‘Abd Allāh while noting that a Manchu Imperial Prince had patronized the site — a reference to the 1710 inscription, “Qingxiu.” Such a distinguished imperial inscription from the imperial family was not present at any other local religious institutions in the county or


150 Yang, ed., Langzhong lidai shicixuan, 200.


152 The “Forbidden Garden” refers to the prince, a member of the Qing royal family.

153 This is a literary illusion to Li Bai’s 李白 (701-762) poem, “On Visiting Mount Tai” (You Taishan 游泰山). 遺我鳥跡書, 飄然落巖間。其字乃上古, 餘之了不閱。The Bird Script 鳥跡書, also known as 鳥篆, is a form of ancient script so called because it looked like birds’ footprints.

154 The poet juxtaposes two concepts — one Buddhist, zhenru 真如, and one Daoist, xuanxu 玄虛 — in order to describe the essence of the transcendent’s teachings.
the prefecture, and likely raised the profile of the shrine in the eyes of local non-Muslim gentry. But most importantly, this dedication provides insight into how the mountain shrine was seen by local gentry, who had long been aware of gazetteer-recorded tales of the early Daoists and geomancers like Yuan Tiangang 袁天罡, who were closely associated with the mountain. To the literati of Langzhong and Nanbu, the Khoja was another teacher in this great and ancient tradition: in Xie’s dedication above, the “cottage” of the Khoja located in the “crevice” (quchu 曲處) of the mountain mirrored exactly the famed mythic cottage of the great astrologer Yuan Tiangang 袁天罡 from the Tang Dynasty.

This is not to say that locals did not also associate the site with Islam; as seen from the image above from Langzhong’s 1851 county gazetteer, in the years before and during the Muslim rebellions of China’s mid-nineteenth century, the structure was called for a time the Huizisi 回子寺, which we might render as, “The Muslim Temple.” A much longer project would be necessary to determine how locals of Langzhong and Nanbu conceived of Islam as a religion, but at the very least, this appellation did not prevent the structure from being celebrated in the county gazetteer or with officially-endowed inscriptions. With more dedications than almost any other religious structure in Langzhong County, Nanbu County, or the entirety of Baoning Prefecture, this Islamic structure on the Coiled Dragon Mountain had inherited an ancient cultural heritage which local Sichuanese literati — most of whom were recent immigrants themselves — took as part of their own identity. During the Qing, the Islamic tomb became part of that heritage.  

155 Imperial patronage

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155 This is not a conjecture. It is well-known in the region today that the Islamic Pavilion of Lingering Illumination has more dedications from Qing officials than any other structure in the area: Liu, Langyuan: Bianlian jijin, 187-230. Liu Xiancheng specifically has written: "閱苑匾聯最富集的一處名勝巴巴寺之久照亭 “The place in Langyuan (Langzhong) with the richest collection of inscribed wooden boards is the Babasi’s Pavilion of Lingering Illumination,” Ibid., 3.
for the Pavilion of Lingering Illumination may have further legitimized existing understandings (“rainmaking efficacy;” “auspicious conditions for the exam”) of the site in the eyes of locals.

Other dedications provide a telling portrait of the fact that the Islamic shrine continued to be associated with good fengshui and examination results through the end of the dynasty. In 1727, a local who received the juren degree contributed a dedication reading Langfeng 閬風, which is the name for the summit of the Kunlun Mountain 崑崙山 — a home (in Central Asia) for transcendents and the origin of the three great Dragon Veins that stretched across China. During certain examination years, such as 1875 and 1879, locals visited the mountain shrine prior to the autumn examinations to supplicate for good results. On an auspicious day in 1875, the Assistant Instructor 儒學訓導 of Baoning Prefecture’s Guangyuan County’s Confucian Academy contributed a piece, “Traces of the Immortal of the Coiled Dragon Mountain” 蟠龍仙蹟. The Governor General of Sichuan Province, Ding Baozhen 丁寶楨 (1820-1886) dedicated a donation to the shrine before the provincial exams of 1879 with an accompanying inscription that read: “Kindness and Charity Can Transform [the People]” 樂善可風.157

On the one hand, the Pavilion of Lingering Illumination on the Coiled Dragon Mountain has a remarkable history: during the Qing Dynasty, in a corner of Northern Sichuan, a foreign Muslim from Central Asia had, through his charismatic teachings and gestures of good-will to the newly conquered Qing subjects of Baoning, many who had recently arrived themselves, been granted permission to construct a gravesite on one of the most sacred mountains of the region. In

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156 More study would be needed to reach definitive conclusions, but could Chinese geomancy’s great interest in the Kunlun Mountains of Central Asia have been related to the Qadirriya’s adoption of geomantic practices? The Khoja was himself from Central Asia. Liu, Langyuan: Bianlian jijin, 230. Michael Paton, Five Classics of Fengshui: Chinese Spiritual Geography in Historical and Environmental Perspective (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 82.

157 Liu, Langyuan: Bianlian jijin, 216.
the ensuing centuries, members of his Sufi Order became the stewards of the mountain, protecting the grave of the interred saint, the graves of many Muslims and non-Muslims, and the fengshui of the prefecture at large. Members of the Manchu Royal House took notice, and the shrine was patronized for its efficacious qualities and connections to the Qing imperial project in the Islamic northwest. On the other hand, what is most notable is how unremarkable it was to locals, who came to simply see the shrine as an integral part of the local landscape of the town. A 1926, edition of the county’s gazetteer captured a “modern” cartographic depiction of the mountain. Drawing on common knowledge of land in the region, the writers of the gazetteer traced the vein of the Coiled Dragon Mountain from the north and down throughout the significant mountains of the prefecture. Through the detailed illustration, the gazetteer writers in fact explicitly depicted its Dragon Vein, which ends just at the Sufi shrine due north of the walled town.

In this limited space, I have not gotten into the full repertoire of dedications bestowed by Qing Bannermen and officials, many of which deal with fallen Green Standard Army Muslims soldiers from Sichuan who served the Qing during eighteenth and nineteenth century military campaigns in Xinjiang.

The image above, composed in the 1920s as an example of the latest cartographic methods applied in Northern Sichuan, is today commonly cited by scholars as a classical example of a geomantic illustration of a landscape. Yue

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159 The image above, composed in the 1920s as an example of the latest cartographic methods applied in Northern Sichuan, is today commonly cited by scholars as a classical example of a geomantic illustration of a landscape. Yue
Even today, although locals of Langzhong and Nanbu know of the Coiled Dragon Mountain as a place of good fengshui, not everyone can identify the Islamic nature of its protective shrine, which today takes up over three acres (13,000 square meters) of prime real estate in the center of town on the southern slope of the mountain. The city’s largest surviving forest from imperial China today surrounds the mountain, which is now also home (on its northern slope) to the largest public cemetery (gongmu 公墓) in the area — with the priciest grave plots in the municipality.

VI. Chapter Conclusion: The Living Earth

In TZ1.12 (1862), one of most locally celebrated Qing magistrates took up his post at the Nanbu county yamen. A jinshi degree holder (bingchen 丙辰 year; 1856), Huang Qiyuan 黃起元 arrived in the county during a time of great unrest elsewhere in the empire, with rebellions occurring in Jiangnan, the North China Plain, the northwest territories, and the southwest. Upon arriving in the county, Magistrate Huang ordered the construction of a pagoda on the top of Mount Aofeng. The same year, several local candidates performed exceptionally well on the Civil Service Examination. In the fifth month of the jiazi year, a severe drought affected the county, which led Magistrate Huang to supplicate for rain from the Dragon King. The magistrate was able to ascertain that, according to the people of Nanbu, the Dragon King was believed to inhabit a steep cavernous pool located thirty li to the east of the county town called Black Dragon Pool 黑龍潭. Magistrate Huang resolved to travel the thirty li to personally supplicate the deity for rain, whereupon great thunderstorms broke out 雷雨大作 and the people of Nanbu celebrated.


Returning to the county town, Magistrate Huang selected a location, outside of Nanbu’s west gate, for the construction of a Dragon King Shrine 龍王廟, where sacrifices were henceforth offered every spring and autumn well into the twentieth century.

The gentry writers of Nanbu’s gazetteer ascribe these feats of the locally beloved Magistrate Huang to his talent in geomancy (shan kanyu 善堪輿). Such a tale — alongside the many stories shared in this chapter — underscores the necessity and difficulty of arriving at a rigorous definition of what geomancy was in traditional China. Intellectuals in urban China during the Republican Period tended to define geomancy as a superstitious custom inherited from Chinese antiquity that hindered the country’s development of a functioning and “modern” property rights regime. In this chapter, I have attempted, through a local setting (Nanbu County and Baoning Prefecture) to place the vocabulary and discourses of geomancy as an active culture practice that informed how inhabitants of that locality interpreted the earth, attributed value to the land, and negotiated community differences in imperial China; in other words, I have attempted to place geomancy within the cultural frame of a highly-sophisticated property regime that served China well for centuries.

This chapter introduced geomancy from three perspectives. First, the examination of local handwritten geomantic manuscripts revealed that while they contained techniques and ritualized language from classical, printed geomantic texts, local handwritten manuals provided highly detailed remedies and practices in light of specific problems or circumstances relevant to people in late nineteenth century Northern Sichuan; others blended elements from geomancy with Daoism, Buddhism, and popular religion. Second, pushing against the idea that the imperial state found geomancy heretical or controversial, the chapter explored how the employment of talented geomancers was a routine part of county administration. Finally, the chapter identified the Civil
Service Examinations as a key locus of geomantic discourses in the Qing. The Civil Service Examinations were one of the vehicles through which the practice of geomancy was legitimized by the state, and as seen through the geomantic manuscript from Langzhong County, good examination results for future generations were one of the promised results of auspicious grave placements. During the Qing, a Sufi order employed geomantic interpretations of land to guarantee good examination results for the county while contributing to the reinvention of a local sacred mountain that they came to claim ownership over. The state and wider community of the prefecture recognized that lineage’s claims to the mountain, while its generous patronage from various levels of the Qing bureaucracy served to legitimate the magically efficacious elements of the site.

All of this serves to convey a sense of what geomancy was and what it did in local settings in late imperial China. By negotiating the terms of ownership, use, and resource access between a community and private individuals, geomantic discourses shaped the land market and local geography of Nanbu County. While not every parcel of land was ascribed with geomantic significance, general understandings of people’s connections to local environments consistently looked to the geomantic information of temples, academies, pagodas, and of course — graves — as important reference points for a range of other ventures, such as mine creation or house orientations. Related to James Robson’s identification of diverse traditions that could be invoked through “the power of place,” geomancy was intimately intertwined with “place-making” by lending ethical and cosmological weight to property claims and establishing degrees of ownership over land that linked individuals, families, lineages, and communities together in compacts to best allocate resources on the basis of kinship and standing within a community.161 The basis of that standing began with the ancestral grave, even if possible extensions of social status did not end

161 James Robson, Power of Place: The Religious Landscape of the Southern Sacred Peak (Nanyue) in Medieval China (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2009).
there. Speaking against the idea of land as a completely commercialized commodity in imperial China, Matthew Sommer has recently invoked Philip Huang’s description of the embedded meanings of land in imperial China, wherein “land carried a meaning and value very different from those associated with commodities in a capitalist economy”:

Land was much more than just a piece of property to be bought and sold. It was more even than the course of a man’s livelihood. It was the very basis for his sense of dignity, and for his status in the village community. It was what separated him from the sorry lot of the homeless who were forced to drift from place to place, and it embodied the very continuity of his patrilineal ancestry and descent, concretized in the family gravesite.162

This is not to discount the imperial property regime’s ability to permit long term urban and rural capital accumulation through the state’s enforcement of the contractual regime, which as Madeleine Zelin has shown, permitted highly sophisticated business enterprises to flourish in Sichuan’s Zigong自貢.163 The property regime and the state’s recognition of property rights were strong enough to permit remarkable entrepreneurship in regions wealthy enough to foster high-risk investment, but also flexible enough to uphold the importance of ancestral patrimony, community preference, and local cultural practices within a highly diverse general population.

In Chinese antiquity, geomancy had been a system for surveying the auspicious influences of the land, and through the twentieth century in Northern Sichuan, geomancy continued to serve such a function. But in local practice, geomancy was also utilized as a cultural strategy of lineages and local communities for the territorial management of the mountain estates, rivers, and edifices that dotted the county’s vast mountainous terrain. Cosmology was not necessarily the sole force in


the construction of edifices, but it often became a guiding discourse through which power over landed property was subsequently negotiated. The pervasive nature of geomantic information blended these two things (system and strategy) together, creating local discourses of power between subjects and the land that officials were often compelled to comment on. Surrounded by bridges, examination halls, mountains, rivers, hilltop pagodas, yamens, temples, houses, as well as graves — the geographies (dili 地理) of both the living and the dead — local officials presided as protectors, patrons, and parents (fumuguan 父母官) over the living earth of Nanbu County.
Chapter Two: A County of Many Mountains and Four Roads: Introducing Nanbu in the Qing Dynasty through Official Handbooks and Gazetteers

I. Chapter Introduction: The View from the County Yamen

When Nanbu’s cadasters were compiled during the Yongzheng Reign (1722-1735), the county’s population constituted around 74,000 persons; by the start of the Guangxu Reign (1875-1908), it was well over 600,000. In the seventeenth century, wild tigers, crested ibises, deer, foxes, and monkeys still roamed the county’s territory. By the nineteenth century, these species had largely retreated, having been replaced with a patchwork of settlements by upland subjects, who during the last dynasty of imperial China, remade Nanbu’s vast hinterland through the naming of the hills, mountains, and bridges with the surnames of their transplanted lineages.

Nanbu County stretched out for 2,900 square kilometers as measured in the Republican Period, which made it larger than the counties of Chengdu (245.69 square km), Huayang 华 陽 (657.37 square km) or Rong 荃 縣 (1,954.79 square km). This immense terrain was crossed by four dirt roads that ran along and through the county’s mountain passes: a north road, a south road, an east road, and a west road. In the nineteenth century, it was estimated that approximately eighty market towns dotted the landscape of the county. Yet for even these settlements which were identified during the nineteenth century, their locations, character names, and distances were never precisely standardized; it was not uncommon for a single location to be written up to a half-dozen ways with different characters. The borders of the county consistently shifted over the nineteenth

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164 Northern Sichuan was a central region for tiger attacks through the start of the nineteenth century. See for instance the Nanchong County Gazetteer, Jiaqing Period 《嘉慶南充縣志》 6: 2.

When the GMD launched a Land Registration Campaign in Sichuan in the 1940s (Chapter Six), surveyors came to identify more market towns across the county.\(^{167}\) In 1947, the county alerted the provincial government that land surveyors had officially registered 140 market towns.\(^ {168}\)

As the previous chapter introduced geomantic practices in Northern Sichuan, this chapter explores the history of Nanbu County. After introducing the county through several editions of a magistrate’s handbook from the Qing, the *Xianjing fenfang tushuo* 縣境分方圖說 (*The Illustrated Guide to the Sub-County Borders of Nanbu County*), it will give a general history of the county through the late Qing. Second, it will discuss the general economic conditions, taxation, and land tenure system of the county in the mid-nineteenth century. Then, it will discuss the identities of the county’s elite lineages whose genealogies were included in the county’s gazetteer. Finally, it will discuss the significance of Magistrate Zhu’s expansion of the *baojia* 保甲 and the creation of an official geographic handbook for the county in the mid-nineteenth century. This chapter argues that the state relied heavily on local knowledge for a range of administrative tasks, such as border

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166 From the beginning of the Qing Dynasty, it was widely known that Nanbu County was composed of ten townships 郡, but the number and location of market towns and other satellite settlements changed over time. Further, as Nanbu County was filled in with immigrants over the course of the Qing Dynasty, its recognized borders shifted. When we compare the Yongzheng edition (1733) of the *Sichuan tongzhi* 《雍正四川通志》 with the 1870 edition of the *Nanbu County Gazetteer* 《南部縣志》, different boundary differences for the county are evident between the two works, with Nanbu’s southwestern border with Yanting County expanding by some forty li by the nineteenth century. See: Huang Tinggui 黃廷桂, *Yongzheng sichuan tongzhi* 《雍正四川通志》 3 shang: 25. The geographical boundaries for Nanbu County are found throughout this section of the third juan of the provincial gazetteer. When we then examine the geographical distances in the final edition of the *The Illustrated Guide* (1896) and compare them with the 1870 edition of the *Nanbu County Gazetteer*, further changes are evident, with expansion seen to the county’s northwest, northeast, south — and a contraction on its western border. When we further examine the values provided in the 1907 *The Gazetteer of the Land and Towns of Nanbu County*, there is a notable expansion in the county’s western boundary. *Xianjing fenfang tushuo*, 391-392.

167 One count in 1877 yielded 143 market towns within the county, though official communication and yamen orders in the imperial period seldom reached more than eighty. Nanbu County Qing Archive: 7.361.02.

demarcation and baojia regulation. Identifying this reliance allows for a contextualization of the commonplace appearance of one type of situated information — geomantic knowledge — in the county’s legal system in the following chapters.

Nanbu County was not an imperial frontier in the sense invoked by scholars of New Qing History.¹⁶⁹ This region had been part of Chinese empires for several millennia. Locals today vividly share how the roads of the county once carried the Tang Emperor Xuanzong 玄宗 (685-762) to safety on his escape from Chang’an 唐玄宗避難蜀中 during the An Lushan Rebellion (755-763). The emperor’s contemporary, the Tang poet Li Bai 李白 (701-762), lamented of the patchwork of roads from Hanzhong 漢中 to Chengdu 成都 that “the road to Shu is hard, harder than scaling the blue sky.” The flow of immigrants into the region following the Ming-Qing transition resettled the area, but the Qing state exerted little control over this process other than initially encouraging the resettlement.¹⁷⁰ Secret societies with varying degrees of affiliation with the White Lotus launched a rebellion here against the Qing in the final years of the eighteenth century, during which time Nanbu’s serving magistrate, Wang Zanwu 王贊武, was killed (JQ2.2.6; 1797).¹⁷¹ By the 1920s, such societies were openly operating, typically in rural temples, as brokers for key governmental and ritual functions. From 1932 to 1935, the communists founded a base in the region, creating the second largest Soviet area in China at that time.

Following the establishment of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, bandits continued to roam


Nanbu’s hilltops and ravines well into the late 1950s. Though new immigrants had arrived to repopulate the region repeatedly over the centuries, some things never changed; in the early twentieth century, the road to Shu was still hard.

In 1853, Nanbu County Magistrate Zhu Fengyun (朱鳳橒, 1845 jinshi), a native of Kuaiji County, Zhejiang Province, received news of the Taiping Rebellion to the east, and thus ordered the county be mapped along its baojia (household registration and local surveillance) and tuanlian (grouping and drilling; local militias) units, which were expanded from the townships into the market towns during his tenure. The cartographic works composed under Magistrate Zhu were not intended for taxation: they were made to alert future magistrates of the lands they would govern, as well as the locations and distributions of each market town’s tuanlian and baojia for local surveillance. Twelve gentry scholars were dispatched down the four long roads of the county with brush, paper, and ink to capture the settlements of the county where local subjects lived.

When these gentlemen arrived in these places to produce an administrative document that would be eventually used by officials, locals pointed to Azure Dragon Corners (青龍嘴) (a

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172 In his preface to the handbook, Magistrate Zhu drew on one line of Tian Wenjing’s 田文鏡 (1662-1733) Qinban zhouxian shiyi《欽頒州縣事宜》(Instructions for Magistrates Published by Imperial Order), composed during the Yongzheng Reign (1722-1735), to explicate his motivations:

故凡四境之內，毋論遠近，或因公務出赴省郡，或緣命盜往來鄉村，途次所經，必隨事隨時，詳加體訪。凡有踏勘風水，清理地界，稽查保甲，省視農桑之事，皆可順便辦理，無非有益於民。若深居簡出，高坐衙署，使百姓難於見。

Therefore, anywhere within the four borders of the realm, no matter near or far: perhaps because of official business [a magistrate] visits the provincial capital or a prefecture, or for reason of murder or robbery, he visits a township or village — wherever [a magistrate] passes through, he must, in accordance with the circumstances, at all times, apply added meticulousness to his inquiries. [He could also] make an on the spot survey of the fengshui, clear up the land boundaries, check the baojia, and examine carefully matters of agriculture and sericulture; these can be done without much additional effort, with nothing more than simply benefiting the people. If one serves as if residing in seclusion, loftily sitting in the county yamen, it makes the common people hard to see.

Guanzhenshu jicheng, 3: 83.
geomantic term for “east”) and White Tiger Ridges 白虎坪 (a geomantic term for “west”) that gave the hills and mountains their names. People showed them their grave mountains and their Earth God Shrines 土地廟 which marked the presence of a lineage settlement. The scholars crossed and noted Arriving Dragon Vein Bridges 來龍橋, which in Earthly Principles 地理 served to link the veins of two mountains separated by a water crossing. Temples and their ancient trees, the largest structures in the vast hinterland providing a sense of permanence against the frequently exchanged plots of land, were essential for these records. The magistrate’s directions to the gentry were to 先清四至, 繪圖貼說 “first clear up the four boundaries” of each bao 保 area and then to map them with an accompanying explanation.” But where were the boundaries of these bao 保 areas and market towns? At the He Family Bend 何家灣, the head of the He lineage showed the gentry the Azure Dragon Corner 青龍嘴, where the lineage’s ancestral gravesite was located. This came to mark the “southern boundary” of Yangban Market Town 養班場. In Wang Family Market Town 王家場, the Bridge of the Arriving Dragon Vein 來龍橋 and the Well of the Arriving Dragon Vein 來龍井 came to mark the western boundary that aligned Nanbu’s border with Peng Sub-Prefecture 節州. At Long River Market Town 長攤河場, the Ancient Grave Mountain 古墳山 of the 蒲 Pu Lineage came to mark the market town’s, and thus the county’s, border with Jian Sub-Prefecture 劍州. At Jinya Market Town 金埡場, an ancient fengshui tree known to locals as “the Rounded Cypress” 圓柏樹 came to mark the market town’s northern boundary.

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173 Xianjing fenfang tushuo, 255.
174 Ibid., 248.
175 Ibid., 297.
176 Ibid., 314.
In many other cases, such as the Arriving Dragon Vein Market Town 來龍場, locals identified temples and their surrounding trees as the borders that they recognized as the boundary of a market town. Page by page, town by town, temple by temple, a geographic manual came into being for use at the county yamen, and upon its completion, the view from the magistrate’s well had gotten a bit bigger.

Figure 11. Magistrate Handbook’s Illustration of the Market Town of the Arriving Dragon Vein 來龍場 with Borders Notated (1853)\textsuperscript{177}

Yet the emperor remained far away. As remarkable as the creation of this handbook was is how little local officials, or even county town gentry, ever came to know about the vast expanse of Nanbu County; county administration heavily relied on local marketing, religious, and geographic knowledge that circulated along the county’s four roads. Even after the handbook was

\textsuperscript{177}Ibid., 320.
made, dozens of settlements across Nanbu remained unaccounted for, and even for those that were included in the handbook, conflicting information about their locations, dimensions, and distances persisted into the twentieth century. Local geography in Nanbu County was not the product of centralized state planning, but of a constantly evolving and re-interpretable fabric of socio-economic ties and sacred sites produced by the lineages who came together to purchase goods, who named the mountains and ditches after their ancestral surnames, who strategically buried their ancestors in sought-after auspicious fields and hillsides, and who constructed temples and shrines ensuring the protection of local deities. That is, even considering invigorated attempts to extend the _baojia_ system into the market towns and map rural spaces in Nanbu during the nineteenth century, official knowledge of Nanbu’s peripheral geography, rural settlements, and human demographics was quite limited.

II. A History of Nanbu County and Baoning Prefecture to 1865

The preface of the _Nanbu County Gazetteer_ (Daoguang Edition, 1849; Tongzhi Edition, 1870) begins by addressing the meaning of Nanbu’s name, the “southern part”南部: 南部何以得名, 為其居閬中之南 “From where did Nanbu get its name? [It is] because it is located south of Langzhong.”¹⁷⁸ Langzhong was the neighboring county immediately to the north of Nanbu and the two were connected by proximity and state administration. Langzhong was the basis of a prefecture (Baoning Prefecture 保寧府), and a circuit (the Northern Sichuan Circuit 川北道), which also administered Nanbu. The two counties were merged into Lang-nan County 閬南縣

¹⁷⁸ _Nanbu County Gazetteer_ (Daoguang Preface), reprinted in the Tongzhi Edition (2014: 2). Cai Dongzhou has recently argued that “south of Liangzhou” (Liangzhou zhī nán 梁州之南) may be more accurate based on the earliest sources. Liangzhou was based at Hanzhong 漢中 in Shaanxi during the reign of Han Wudi 漢武帝 (r. 141-87 BCE). Cai, _Qingdai nanbu xianya dang’an yanjiu_, 2-3.
under the Sichuan-Shaanxi Soviet (1932-1935; Lang-nan County was established by the communists in September of 1933). Below is a map of Nanbu County in Baoning Prefecture.

The Borders of Langzhong and Nanbu Counties (1912) with Market Towns, Baoning Prefecture, Northern Sichuan

![Map of Nanbu County in Baoning Prefecture](image)

Figure 12. ArcGIS Map of Nanbu County in Baoning Prefecture (c. 1912)
Baoning Prefecture was located on the mountainous edge of the northern Sichuan Basin at the border of Gansu 甘肅 and Shaanxi 陝西 Provinces, close to the contemporary geographic center of the People’s Republic of China. During the Warring States 戰國 (475-221 BCE) Period, Langzhong served as the last capital of the Ba State 巴國 (?-316 BCE).179 In the first centuries of the Common Era, the multi-ethnic, highland region of Northern Sichuan saw the rise of China’s first Daoist movement under Zhang Daoling 張道陵 (34-156 CE), the Celestial Masters 天師道, as well as some of China’s earliest astronomers.180 Zhang Fei 張飛 (d. 221), the famed general from Shu Han in the Three Kingdoms Period (220-280), commanded troops from Baoning, where his body was buried and his tomb is located. This tomb formed the basis of what became one of the most popular temple cults in Northern Sichuan, which, like the cults of many other local Sichuan and Shu Han heroes (Zhuge Liang 諸葛亮 and Liu Bei 劉備), remained locally powerful across dynastic lines even with the arrival of new immigrants over the province’s tumultuous history. These strong regional cults may have contributed to the persistence of a unique “Sichuanese” identity across dynastic periods.181

The southward shift of political and economic activity from northwest China after the Tang Dynasty was also felt within the territory of Ba-Shu 巴蜀, where influence moved south from


181 One potential reason for the persistence of a “Sichuanese” identity across generations is because the graves of many Shu-Han heroes are in Sichuan; as the graves survived through violent political upheavals, their cults were always able to maintain an audience with new waves of arriving immigrants who wanted to demonstrate their new Sichuan pedigree against later arrivals. The charismatic power of these heroes was substantial in late imperial China: Zhu Xi famously argued that Shu Han 蜀漢 was a “legitimate” state in contrast to Sanguo Wei 三國魏. Endymion Wilkinson, Chinese History: A New Manual (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), 8.
Northern Sichuan to the fertile Sichuan Basin.\textsuperscript{182} During the Manchu Conquest, because Baoning was pacified before other regions of Sichuan, Langzhong (Baoning) served as the temporary Qing capital of the province and administered the province’s \textit{xiangshi} \text{("Provincial Examination") for just under twenty years (1646-1665), before Chengdu was restored as the provincial capital.\textsuperscript{183} In the five examination years when Baoning served as the examination site of the provincial exams, 1652, 1654, 1657, 1660, and 1664, a large number of Northern Sichuan locals received the \textit{juren} \text{degree}, including twenty-eight examinees from Langzhong and eighteen from Nanbu (out of 305 total).\textsuperscript{184} This local success was not repeated during the middle and final years of the dynasty, which saw the gradual resurgence of the province’s most fertile areas on the national stage.\textsuperscript{185} As the waterways of Sichuan opened up, Chongqing expanded as a commercial center, and a new


\textsuperscript{183} The Sichuan Governorship 四川巡撫 and the Commissioner for Undertaking the Promulgation of Imperial Orders and for Disseminating Government Policies 四川承宣布政 were established in Baoning in 1646, the Sichuan Provincial Surveillance Commissioner 四川提刑按察使 was established in Baoning in 1647, the Western Sichuan Circuit Attendant 川西道台 was established in Baoning in 1649, the Northern Sichuan Circuit Attendant 川北道台, and the Sichuan Provincial Director of Education 四川提督学政 were established in Baoning in 1651. For a complete list of early Qing administrative posts established in Baoning, see: Liu Xiancheng 劉先澄, ed., \textit{Langyuan jikao} \text{[An Analysis of the Records of Langzhong]} (Chengdu: Bashu shushe, 2011), 178-181. Few archival materials have survived from this period, though some have been preserved in national archives. See for instance: Archive of the Grand Secretariat: 085809-001, 089664-001.

\textsuperscript{184} Liu Xiancheng 劉先澄, ed. \textit{Gongyuan chunqiu \text{[The Spring and Autumn (Records) of (Langzhong’s) Examination Hall]}} (Beijing: Zhongguo wenshi chubanshe, 2013), 46-50.

\textsuperscript{185} Sichuan produced 785 \textit{jinshi} degree holders during the Qing Dynasty. The province in the Qing was composed of 116 counties and sub-prefectures. Although averages must consider the fact that certain “core” counties produced an unusually large share of the province’s \textit{jinshi} (i.e. Huayang County 华阳县, thirty \textit{jinshi}), the average across the province was just under seven per county. Nanbu County produced four \textit{jinshi} during the Qing. Li Chaozheng 李朝正, ed., \textit{Qingdai sichuan jinshi zhenglüe \text{[A Catalogue of Jinshi Degree-Holders in Qing Sichuan]}} (Chengdu: Sichuan daxue chubanshe, 1986).
postal route was established that directly connected Mianyang 綿陽 with Guangyuan 廣元. This provided a direct communication line between Xi’an and Chengdu, resulting in the marginalization of Baoning. Long after the province became deemed part of the empire’s southwest, Northern Sichuan remained more in line with the older pre-1748 Chuan-Shaan (“Sichuan-Shaanxi Governor-General” 川陝總督) administrative designation of the province.

Though not of great importance and located in one of the poorer regions in the province, Baoning boasted a cosmopolitan set of characters by the late nineteenth century, including a modest but persistent foreign missionary population. Women in the region were said to have participated in various forms of agriculture and generally did not bind their feet. Some official communication from Beijing to Tibet was rerouted through the prefecture (and hence, Nanbu) during the rebellion in Amdo during the middle and end of the century. Local sources say the

186 For a comprehensive history of the Ba County Archive, see the first chapter of Maura Dykstra’s dissertation. Maura Dykstra, “Complicated Matters: Commercial Dispute Resolution in Qing Chongqing from 1750 to 1911” (University of California, Los Angeles Doctoral Dissertation, 2014).


188 For discussions of the changing status of Sichuan in relation to “northwest” and “southwest” China, see: R. Kent Guy, Qing Governors and Their Provinces: The Evolution of Territorial Administration in China, 1644-1796 (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2010). Dai, The Sichuan Frontier and Tibet: Imperial Strategy in the Early Qing. Several nineteenth century travel accounts observe that many locally consumed items, such as iron and tobacco, were imported from Shaanxi Province to the north. Edward Harper Parker, Up the Yang-tse (Shanghai: Kelly & Walsh, 1899), 95.

189 Missionary accounts related that many women in Nanbu and Langzhong did not bind their feet so that they could work in the fields, a phenomenon which was typically attributed to the poverty of the region. Edward Harper Parker, Up the Yang-tse (Shanghai: Kelly & Walsh, 1899), 97. Ernest Henry Wilson, A Naturalist in Western China with Vasculum, Camera and Gun: Being Some Account of Eleven Years’ Travel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 92; 103. Another topic related to the history of women in the region is the fact that, during the nineteenth century, a string of Nanbu magistrates issued orders banning “taking life lightly” female suicide, which at least one Nanbu magistrate feared was gradually becoming a common custom in the county 恐相習成風. Janet Theiss has written on this topic: Janet Theiss, Disgraceful Matters: The Politics of Chastity in Eighteenth-Century China (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005). The writers of Nanbu’s county gazetteer note that one county magistrate, Cheng Huan 楊緩 — a Mongol of the Bordered White Banner 長白旗 — professing a concern for the ghosts of those who had unjustly died 慮死冤魂, which included woman driven to suicide, submitted a celestial petition to the City God in TZ9.2 (1870), after which time the number of “taking life lightly” suicide cases was said to have decreased. See: Nanbu County Gazetteer (Tongzhi Edition) (2014: 218).
county had a Tibetan population of 1,850 Gelukpa monks by 1900.\textsuperscript{190} Nanbu County was officially ordered to obtain printed Chinese language editions of the *Qinding huijiang zeli* (Imperially Commissioned Collection of the Regulations and Sub-Statutes of Muslim Xinjiang) and the *Qinding menggu zeli* (Imperially Commissioned Collection of the Regulations and Sub-Statutes of Mongolia) in 1894, but it is unclear if the county yamen ever did.\textsuperscript{191} In short, with a diverse population that took refuge in Nanbu during the Qing, it is unsurprising the state often struggled to know who resided in the county, not to mention where their settlements were located. This context allows us to consider the county’s administration and economy, which is the subject of the following section.

III. *Administering Nanbu County: Economy, Environments, Taxes, and Tenancy*

In contrast to the “complicated” administration of the province’s Ba or Chengdu Counties in the Qing, official assignments to Nanbu County’s magisterial post were officially deemed as “easy” (jianque 簡缺 “easy post”) in terms of difficulty, though this classification — fixed in the eighteenth century — is somewhat misleading. Nanbu was ranked with only one character (fan 繁, “complicated local administration”) in the four-character official ranking system (chong 衝, fan 繁, “complicated local administration”) in the four-character official ranking system (chong 衝, fan 繁, “complicated local administration”) in the four-character official ranking system (chong 衝, fan 繁, “complicated local administration”).

\textsuperscript{190} Nanbu County Qing Archive: 7.692; 08.816; 09.943; 12.239; 16.568; 16.628; 18.662; 18.821; 20.60; 21.103. A 1909 French introduction to the province, *La province du su-tchuen* seems to confirm as much, observing, “La route qui vient de Pékin, passant à Pao-ning, Tchen-tou, Ya-tchou et se continuant par Ta-tsien-lou et Batang jusqu’à Lhassa.” Local gazetteers note a Gelukpa Tibetan Buddhist population of over 1,850 individuals for Nanbu in 1907. References to such a population are sparse within the Nanbu County Archive, though Reginald Fleming Johnson observed on Mount Emei 峨眉山 in 1906 that, “…some yellow-robed monks from a large monastery near Pao-ning-fu (Baoning Prefecture) in northeastern Ssu-ch’uan (Sichuan), and a small group of lamas from Litang, on the Tibetan border, were having their papers sealed at the time of my arrival on the Golden Summit.” For the references to Tibetan monks see the following: 喇嘛教者… 由印度始入中国，有黄红二派，盛行于西藏、蒙古、满洲、延及直隶、山西、陕西、甘肃、四川等处，本境黄教，共计一千八百五十馀人红教无. *Nanbuxian xiangtuzhi*, 390. Reginald Fleming Johnston, *From Peking to Mandalay: A Journey from North China to Burma Through Tibetan Ssuch’uan and Yunnan* (1908 Edition, Reprint) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 105.

\textsuperscript{191} Nanbu County Qing Archive: 12.239.
— ascribed on account of the importance of its salt works, which were the largest in Northern Sichuan. Most of the neighboring counties of Baoning Prefecture, such as Tongjiang 通江 (zero characters), Nanjiang 南江 (zero characters), Jianzhou 剑州 (two characters), Cangxi 蒼溪 (zero characters), were considered easy posts in the Qing because of their low populations, limited commerce, and low tax contributions — deriving from the region’s sparse topography of 山多田少, 地瘠民貧 “many mountains and few fields, infertile soil and poor people.” The Qing official ranking system of posts tended to deem posts in wealthier, “core” regions with large tax contributions or imperial frontiers with non-Han peoples like Qinghai 青海 as difficult. Yet these “easy” counties of Northern Sichuan were centers of the White Lotus Rebellion during the Jiaqing Reign (1796-1820), and constituted part of what William Rowe and Daniel McMahon have deemed highland “internal frontiers” of the empire. An official inventory of the region sent to Beijing in 1817 introduced the topographical conditions that contributed to the proliferation of bandits in Baoning Prefecture: 

保寧屬地處偏隅, 畏盗實少, 幅員遼闊, 地廣人貧。所屬州縣, 大至二千餘里, 小則百餘里不等。僻壤窮鄉, 固多荒陋。即考試之士子衣飾黯敝, 堂服不周緣。194

192 Zhou, Shuhai cong tan, 94. John Grant Birch, Travels in North and Central China (London: Hurst and Blackett, limited, 1902), 188. The Qing system of assigning ranks of difficulty to posts around the empire (chong, fan, pi, nan 衝繁疲難) dates from the Yongzheng Emperor. This system had three subsequent updates to the rankings in the 1730s and 1740s. After additional regulations were applied in 1778 to limit further changes, changes to ranking slowed considerably. Thus, the “easy” rankings of Nanbu and Langzhong Counties — as well as other Northern Sichuan Counties — should be read within an eighteenth-century context. See: Zhang Zhenguo 張振國, “Lun qingdai ‘chong fan pi nan’ zhidu zhi tiaozheng” 論清代“衝繁疲難”制度之調整 [“A Discussion of the Regulation of the Chong, Fan, Pi, Nan System of the Qing Dynasty”] Anhui shixue 《安徽史學》, 3 (2014): 37-45.


194 Beijing Number One Historical Archive (Palace Memorial Collection): 04-01-01-0563-0071. An 1816 capital memorial from the Governor-General of Sichuan, Chang Ming 常明, detailed the persistent problem of grain prices in the prefecture: 保寧一屬米價較他處稍昂, 自應動碾倉穀, 減糶以免民間食貴, 然無錢可買之貧民, 雖減價亦不能買 “The price of hulled grain in Baoning Prefecture is higher relative to other areas, so naturally [we] should open up the stored grains and lower the selling price in order to avoid the occurrence of high price in the market;
The places under the administration of Baoning Prefecture [in Northern Sichuan] are in a remote corner [of Sichuan Province] and align with the lands of Shaanxi Province. The region has a vast territory; the land is broad and the people are poor. As for the various sub-prefectures and counties under its administration, [their size] unevenly ranges from 2000 li across to just over a hundred li. Places are very out of the way and the townships are poor, thus many [townships] are desolate. Even the examination-taking scholars wear shabby clothes and their ornamental dress is [seldom] hemmed.

While the magistracy of Nanbu County was considered an “easy” post in the Qing Dynasty, this classification should be understood against the specific factors that were emphasized by the Qing bureaucracy. Poverty, challenging transportation, and low tax yields were not taken as “difficult” factors for assigning local officials to posts such as Nanbu, while managing the very important revenue and complicated tax arrears from a core region such as Ba County was.

Though Nanbu was territorially large compared with many of its provincial counterparts, its tax output was comparatively lower. Since the region had been completely resettled in the early Qing, Sichuan’s tax quota had been set very low to encourage locals to register their lands; despite this policy, few did. In the Yongzheng Reign, Nanbu’s annual land tax quota was fixed around 5,300 taels, compared with 20,100 taels for Chongqing zhou (Sub-Prefecture), 13,200 taels for Dazhu County 大竹縣, 11,000 for Renshou County 仁壽縣, and 10,700 for Ba County 巴縣 — all of which were set in the 1720s, when the differences between a place like Nanbu and Ba were not as dramatically pronounced as they later became in the second half of the nineteenth century. Like all of Sichuan’s counties however, Nanbu’s tax contributions were increased in the nineteenth century with the addition of surcharges such as the jintie 津貼 subscription, initiated in Sichuan

nonetheless, for people without money to purchase grains, even if the price is lowered, they can still not afford it.”

Taiwan National Palace Museum and Grand Council Archives: 404017806.


I use “Sub-Prefecture” for zhou 州 to contrast with “prefecture” for fu 府. The tax quotas for all of these localities are provided in their introductory descriptions in Zhou, Shuhai congтан.
Province in 1854 to help pay for the increased military expenditures incurred in the wake of the Taiping Rebellion, as well as the *juanshu* 捐輸 contribution, levied in 1860. 197 In addition to the land tax, by 1911, Nanbu’s taxpayers were submitting 5,329 taels annually for the *jintie* subscription and 13,600 taels annually for the *juanshu* levy. 198 With the added surcharges, Nanbu’s annual land tax payments increased five times from its start in the early Qing, to a theoretical total of 25,332 taels — only slightly less in proportion to the province at large, where it increased by six times as much from the early Qing quotas.

The following image provides a geo-spatial analysis of Sichuan based on William Skinner’s datasets. Nanbu was located in a “peripheral” region, with most of its surface area existing in “level six” out of “seven” possible registers between “core” and “periphery.” This status puts it behind most of the province and just in front of regions populated by non-Han peoples. The three “core” regions of Sichuan province were Chengdu, Ba, and Zigong.

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197 Records from the twentieth century suggest that the Republican government inherited the early Qing’s land tax quota of 5,329 taels. Few lands were added to the county’s official registers after 1728. See: Zhengxie sichuansheng nanbuxian weiyuanhui 政協四川省南部縣委員會, ed., *Nanbu wenshi ziliao xuanji, Volume Three* 《南部文史資料選輯第3輯》 [Selected Compilation of the Records of Literature and History of Nanbu County, Volume 3] (Nanbu: Wenshiziliao weiyuanhui 文史資料委員會, 1989), 15.

198 Nanbu County Qing Archive: 22.21.
Upper Yangtze Macro-Region: Core and Periphery


- Langzhong County Seat, Baoning Prefectural Seat, Northern Sichuan Circuit Seat
- Nanbu County Seat

- External Region
- Core Region
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- Periphery

Figure 13. ArcGIS Map of Sichuan’s “Cores” and Peripheries” (c. 1900)
A variety of crops and trees are recorded in the county’s gazetteer from the nineteenth century. In line with trends elsewhere in north and northwest China, immigration, population growth, and environmental degradation of the soil and water systems from the intensified use of marginal lands contributed to the increasing appearance of famine and flooding in the nineteenth century. No major natural disasters are recorded in the Qing editions of Nanbu’s county gazetteer until 1778, which saw a summer drought and famine conditions. In 1813, summer drought brought water levels to record lows that did not stabilize until winter; a drought followed

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199 According to the Nanbu County Gazetteer, by the nineteenth century the county produced croton 巴菽, jizi 稷子 (foxtail millet native to North China), yam 薯蕷, chestnut 栗, mandarin orange 橘, tangerine 橘, orange 橙, loquat 枇杷, walnut 核桃, grape 葡萄, sugar cane 薯蔗, lotus 蓮藕, a type of carp found in the county’s lakes and streams, and honey. Nanbu County Gazetteer (Tongzhi Edition) (2014: 124). The extension of irrigation through tools such as the square-pallet chain pump expanded local corn, sweet potato, rice, and wheat production so that by the early twentieth century Nanchong 南充 (Northern Sichuan) was a significant wheat producer in Sichuan. For clothing, Nanbu produced “big silk” 絹 (large fibers of silkworm cloth), silk woven from the cocoons of wild silkworms 綿綢, and cotton cloth 棉布. After Jiangnan and the Pearl River Delta, Northern Sichuan was also one of the late Qing’s more prominent producers of silk, with Baoning silk earning a nation-wide reputation in the Ming. Smith, “Commerce, Agriculture, and Core Formation in the Upper Yangzi, 2 AD to 1948”: 48. Nanbu, and Northern Sichuan generally, produced a variety of valuable Chinese medicines, some of which were sought across the empire. These included Chinese Knotweed 蘿蔔, Pinellia ternate 半夏, Sweet Flag 菖蒲, Achyranthes 牛膝, Honeysuckle 金银花, Agastache 藿香, a type of labiatae 假蘇, and mint 薄荷. Local gazetters from Nanbu report that in the nineteenth century, cypress 柏, pine 松, camphor 柏, the Chinese Scholar 槐, mulberry 桑, wax 蠟, tung tree 菩桐, Tamarisk Twing 西河柳, sumac 漆, mottled bamboo 斑竹, and “rafter bamboo” 慈竹 grew in the wild. Prohibitive transport costs hindered much commercial forestry in areas not immediately aligning the Jialing River until the 1920s. Poppies were also grown locally in Northern Sichuan by the second half of the nineteenth century, and farmers in Nanbu County came to grow the crop in the isolated mountaintop walled fortresses (zhai 寨) of the rural market towns. Wu Peilin shared this fact with me in the field. Lucien Bianco, “The Response of Opium Growers to Eradication Campaigns and the Poppy Tax 1907-1949” in Opium Regimes: China, Britain, and Japan, Timothy Brook and Bob Tadashi Wakabayashi, eds. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 292-319. According to missionary sources, the late Qing’s anti-opium efforts had some positive effects in Nanbu County:

“From the district of Nanpu (Nanbu) in Eastern (Northern) Szechwan, the area of cultivation in the spring of this year (1908) was scarcely one tenth of what it was formerly. Of the few who had grown the poppy, some pulled it up by the roots before it was ripe, fearing the investigations of officials.”

“The Anti-Opium Campaign,” China’s Millions, September 1908: 140.


the next year (1814), and again the following year (1815), when people were said to have ate tree bark and pestilence spread through the local population. The year 1822 saw an earthquake. Famine occurred again in the summer of 1840 following a drought the previous year, while severe flooding in the eighth month saw water cover Nanbu’s town walls. In 1843, such flooding occurred again, this time inundating the county examination hall. Newspaper reports and archival materials confirm that this trend continued through the nineteenth and into the first half of the twentieth century, when drought and famine regularly plagued the county.

A significant part of Nanbu’s economy was tied up in non-agricultural products. Like many places in Sichuan, the salt industry was Nanbu’s most profitable sector. By the late Qing, Nanbu County was the fourth largest salt-producing county in the province, supplying salt to Northern Sichuan, Gansu, and Shaanxi. Following the Ming-Qing transition, the salt sector gradually rebounded, growing over 400 wells in the late Qianlong period from eighty-five early in the Qing. The number of wells in Nanbu declined precipitously during the White Lotus Rebellion, but quickly rebounded in the nineteenth century, eventually numbering over 5,000 wells by 1900.

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203 Petitions for aid were frequent during these periods. Consider the following one from GX3.6.9 (1877). It was one of thirty-four petitions, all with nearly identical contents, between the sixth and the seventh months of that year:

南邑山多田少，人煙稠密。本地所產穀稻不敷民食。誰意去冬旱至今夏。田禾地糧枯似火燎，米價昂貴，貧民漸多，雖仁天朝夕祈禱，甘霖莫降。為此懇恩申詳以全民生。

The county of Nanbu has many mountains and few fields, but it is densely populated. The grains and rice produced in this place are not enough for the people to eat. Who knew that last winter there was a drought that has continued to this summer. The grains of the wet fields and the grains of the dry land are parched as if they had been burned, while the price of rice is expensive and thus the [number of] poor people is increasing. Although the Emperor prays for [rain] night and day, timely rain has not fallen. For this, I earnestly beseech your grace and describe [the situation] in detail on behalf of all the peoples’ livelihoods.

Nanbu County Qing Archive: 7.390.04.

204 Wu Peilin 吴佩林 and Deng Yong 鄧勇, “Qingdai Sichuan nanbuxian jingyanye gailun — yi qingdai nanbuxian yamen dang’an wei zhongxin de kaocha” “清代四川南部縣井鹽業概論——《以清代四川南部縣衙門檔案》為中心的考察” [“An Introduction to the Salt Industry of Sichuan’s Nanbu County in the Qing Dynasty — An Analysis Based on the Qing Sichuan Nanbu County Yamen Archive”] Yanyeshi yanjiu 《鹽業史研究》1 (2008): 41.
Unlike the Furong salt yard of Zigong, which was blessed with natural gas deposits, the salt industry of Nanbu relied on coal imports from Guangyuan and Shaanxi.205

Because of the importance of the province’s salt works and the great sizes of many counties, in Sichuan it was common for Qing officials to be strategically deployed around a county, beyond the walled county town; this practice may have arisen in Sichuan due to the unique frontier conditions of the province in the first half of the Qing. 206 Nanbu’s xiancheng （assistant county magistrate） was stationed in a branch yamen (fenxianshu 分縣署) at Abundant Village Postal Station 富村驿 (180 li from the county town) from 1768 to 1824, when the post was moved to New Town Embankment 新镇壩 (ninety li from the county town). 207 In 1825, Nanbu’s xunjian 巡检 (county security officer) was moved to Abundant Village Postal Station to take the place of the assistant county magistrate. New Town Embankment was located on the eastern side of Nanbu County, on the banks of the Jialing River. This was the most commercialized region of Nanbu and the area of most of the county’s salt wells. In spite of the prohibition in the Imperially Commissioned Disciplinary Regulations of the Six Boards 六部處分則例 of having no officials other than the magistrate officiate litigation, the Nanbu County Archive reveals that both the assistant county magistrate and the county security officer in fact regularly presided over litigation.208 Plaintiffs who were unsatisfied with the results at one of these two “branch county

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206 Some of these dynamics have been recently discussed by Daniel Koss. See: Daniel Koss, “Political Geography of Empire: Chinese Varieties of Local Government” The Journal of Asian Studies 76 (1) 2017: 159-185.

207 Nanbu County Qing Archive 04-369-02.

yamens” could travel to the county yamen for a second hearing. Many locals also frequented these branches yamen because of the distance to the county town: the average distance from one of the eighty registered market towns to the county yamen in Nanbu was around ninety-five li.

Related to the size of the county was its dearth of fertile soil. Surveys consistently showed the amount of arable land in Nanbu less than thirty-three percent of the county’s surface area. Though the precise numbers for Nanbu County’s tenancy rates (seen below) cannot be accurately verified, it is safe to say that the level of commercialization in Nanbu County was less of a typical wealthy county of the Sichuan Basin and more in line with the land markets of the “Three Province Region” (Northwest Hubei, Southern Shaanxi, Northern Sichuan). The table below echoes Jerome Ch’en’s observations on the unique highland conditions of the Sichuan-Hubei periphery, where most locals — even as late as 1942 — were small owner-cultivators.

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《近代中國史料叢刊》[A Collection of Historical Sources of Modern China], Vol. 332 (Taipei: Wenhai chubanshe, 1983), 973. The relevant line is: 佐雜人員不許準理地方詞訟 “The various personnel around the magistrate are not permitted to permit or resolve local lawsuits.” As evidenced from its legal archive, Ba County also had “branch yamens” during the Qing, where lawsuits were also heard in technical defiance of imperial regulations.


The implications of the chart above offer insight into Nanbu’s land tenure system. Wealthier regions had higher rates of tenancy because the land was inherently more valuable, which made it expensive for many to own it outright. A region with a high rate of tenancy did not mean worse living conditions. Tenancy gave farmers options: if high debts burdened a tenant farmer, he could potentially abscond to a better region without paying his debts (taking a loss on the initial deposit and even “reburying” interred ancestors). Self-cultivators or partial self-cultivators (78.5% of the county’s population as estimated in the 1940s) in Nanbu County were less mobile: since the land they owned often marked a large extent of their possessions, drought

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211 Shanghai Library’s Ancient Books Depository: Sichuansheng nongcun jingji diaocha weiyuanhui 四川省農村經濟調查委員會, ed., Sichuansheng zudian zhidu 《四川省租佃制度》[Sichuan’s Tenancy System], 1941.

212 Dian 佃 (“Conditional Sale”) arrangements were common between and within lineages and on state-managed lands. Nanbu’s Aofeng Academy 龍峰書院 owned wet fields across the county that it rented out to tenant farmers, as well as rooms near the academy that were also rented. Nanbu County Qing Archive: 6.257. In total, in 1870, the county’s academy owned around thirty fen 分 (parcels) or qiu 丘 (mounds) of fields around the county, along with one salt well, a number of shops in the county town, and twenty-eight rooms. Nanbu County Gazetteer (Tongzhi Edition) (2014: 172-175). While the Nanbu County Archive could contain a selection bias in its preserved cases towards state property, the contracts and lawsuits of tenants on academy and charitable school land form a significant share of the tenancy dispute cases from Nanbu for the first half of the nineteenth century. For a very partial list of such cases, see: Nanbu County Qing Archive: 2.67, 2.68, 3.57, 3.70, 3.84, 4.180, 4.202, 4.309, 4.310, 4.313, 4.314, 4.318, 4.319, 4.323, 4.326, 4.329, 4.330, 4.331, 4.334, 4.336, 4.337, 4.338, 4.339, 4.344, 4.345, 4.346, 4.347, 4.348, 3.351, 4.352, 4.366, 5.227, 5.233, 5.240, 5.244, 5.246, 5.269, 5.288, 5.291, 6.199, 6.229, 6.232, 6.483, 6.484, 10.197, and 10.904. The lands of temples, Qingming (or other lineage) Associations, and rural pust 郵司 (“Postal Offices”) also employed a large percentage of Nanbu’s tenant farmers. For a very partial list of such cases, see: Nanbu County Qing Archive: 4.362, 5.186, 5.216, 5.233, 5.239, 5.259, 6.228, 6.230, 6.421, 6.493, 6.496, 7.05, 7.394, 10.600, 10.898, 10.900, and 10.905. In short, Nanbu’s archive points to the idea that during the mid-nineteenth century, the biggest landlords in the county were the Confucian Academies, temples, ancestral halls, and salt wells, though local tenancy arrangements among lineage agnates and neighbors were also common.
or famine conditions meant that they were tied to the land they owned. Non-agnatic tenants in Nanbu County paid higher rents and deposits than their counterparts in wealthier regions where competition drove prices down; lineage agnates bounded by a grave (Qingming) association were ideally given more favorable terms. Using materials from the Northern Sichuan Land Reform Campaign in 1951-1952, Yang Kuisong 楊奎松 provides the following breakdown of the average amount of land owned by landlords during Land Reform, which was overseen in Northern Sichuan by the then early-career Hu Yaobang 胡耀邦:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County Name</th>
<th>Specific Location</th>
<th>Average Amount Owned by a Landlord (mu 亩)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Guanghan County</td>
<td>Lianshan Township 连山鄉</td>
<td>24 mu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mianzhu County</td>
<td>Xinan Township 西南鄉</td>
<td>6 mu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guan County</td>
<td>Twenty-five Townships</td>
<td>41 mu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nanchong County</td>
<td>Longmen Township 龍門鄉</td>
<td>7.1 mu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nanbu County</td>
<td>Sanhe Township 三合鄉</td>
<td>1.6 mu</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As seen from the chart above, Nanbu’s landlords had modest landholdings, even compared with those of neighboring counties. Nonetheless, the county did have a cabal of elite lineages that were well-known to local officials. Their identities and histories are the subject of the following section.

IV. The Great Surnames of Nanbu: Introducing the County’s Local Elites

In GX32 (1906), Wang Daolü 王道履, a linsheng 廩生 (a government salaried xiucai 秀才), oversaw the composition of Nanbu County’s last Qing gazetteer, The Gazetteer of the Land and Towns of Nanbu County (Nanbuxian xiangtuzhi 南部縣鄉土志). In his section on lineages (shizu 氏族), Wang compiled information on the great surnames of the county from publicly

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213 Yang Kuisong 楊奎松, “Xinzhongguo tugai beijing xiade dizhu wenti” 新中國土改背景下的地主問題 [“Problems Regarding Landlords in the Context of the New China’s Land Reform”] Shilin 《史林》 6 (2008): 14-15. Sources from Sichuan Provincial Archive, 建北 and 建西 Collections; statistics are cited from Yang’s secondary work, as I did not get access to this archival collection.
available genealogies. The section thus gives valuable information on where the lineages of Nanbu were said to have come from, and what the local elites who compiled the gazetteer thought about the origins of local lineages.

It is widely known that the province of Sichuan was depopulated during the Ming-Qing transition in the middle of the seventeenth century.\(^{214}\) One might assume therefore that most of the local lineages who lived in Nanbu would claim descent from recent immigrants. Some did. However, not a few lineages claimed improbable early arrivals — claims that, as we will see in the following chapter, due to the loss of state records during the Ming-Qing transition, the Nanbu county yamen often accepted without comment. Most of the lineages claimed that their ancestors were from Hubei, though Henan, Jiangsu, and Jiangxi were also mentioned. The famous Hubei town of Macheng 麻城 was the cited ancestral home of most of the county’s lineages.\(^{215}\)

Many prominent lineages of Nanbu County were said to have arrived in the early Qing.\(^{216}\) These genealogical writings point to some general patterns that likely blurred history and myth:

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\(^{214}\) Robert Entenmann once postulated that because Baoning was the first region to be conquered by the Manchus and on its account of its serving as the provincial capital in the early years of Qing rule, Northern Sichuan may have been relatively less destroyed than other parts of the province. Robert Entenmann, “Migration and Settlement in Sichuan, 1644-1796” (Harvard University Doctoral Dissertation, 1982), 55.

\(^{215}\) For a study of Macheng, see: William T. Rowe, *Crimson Rain: Seven Centuries of Violence in a Chinese County* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007). Liang Yong has, in his study of immigrants to Sichuan, discussed the reasons Hubei’s Macheng was such a focal point of these genealogical claims. Among them includes the idea that immigrants who were not from Hubei wished to construct a genealogy from a well-known Hubei locality to foster native-place ties in their newly adopted Sichuan counties. Immigrant lineages to Nanbu and Ba Counties share similar origin stories. Liang Yong 梁勇, *Yimin, guojia yu difang quanshi: yi qingdai baxian weili* 《移民、國家與地方權勢: 以清代巴縣為例》 [*Immigrants, the State, and Local Power: The Case of Ba County in the Qing Dynasty*] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2014).

\(^{216}\) The Wang 王 lineage was said to have come from Hubei’s Macheng at the start of the Qing and resided in Nanbu for fifteen generations (by 1907). The Zhang 張 lineage was said to have arrived from Hubei’s Macheng, via Sichuan’s Shunqing 順慶 Prefecture, in KX36 (1697); they had lived in Nanbu County for twelve generations. Another branch of the Zhang lineage was said to have arrived in Nanbu from Jiangxi’s Fuzhou 撫州 in QL15 (1750) and thereafter resided in Nanbu for nine generations. The Cheng 程 lineage arrived in Nanbu from Henan at the start of the Qing and had been in Nanbu for nine generations. The Yang 楊 lineage was said to have lived in the county since the early Qing (thirteen generations), having immigrated here from Hubei Province. The Gao 高 lineage also claimed thirteen generations in Nanbu and said their ancestors were from Jiangsu. The Wang 王 lineage claimed to be descended from an
many immigrants to Nanbu arrived in the seventeenth or eighteenth centuries and came from Hubei, with the famous town of Macheng 麻城 as a point of reference for most of these migrants.

Yet, over a half dozen lineages claimed much earlier arrivals and often, much loftier past positions and official titles. The Li 李 lineage was said to have lived in Nanbu for a remarkably long time — twenty-four generations — having descended from an early Ming Prefect. The Xianyu 鮮于 (a double-character surname) lineage had resided in the county for so long that the gazetteer writers simply said they had been there for over sixty generations. The Ren 任 lineage also said their ancestors had been in Nanbu County since the Tang Dynasty, with over sixty generations of constant inhabitation; the He 何 lineage claimed the same. The Chen 陈 lineage had descended from elite degree holders in the Song; they had supposedly lived in Nanbu for over fifty generations. The Pu 蒲 and the Ma 马 lineages both claimed descent from jinshi 进士 degree holders in the Song Dynasty, and were said to have lived in the county for over forty-generations. The Yong 雍 lineage claimed descent from capital officials in the Song and were said to have lived in Nanbu County for thirty-six generations.

Of the twenty-one major surnames mentioned in the late Qing gazetteer, it seems unlikely that seven (over thirty percent) had lived in the county since the Tang or Song Dynasties. As the following chapter will suggest, a lineage’s ability to make dramatic claims of their ancient origins

official who came to Sichuan from Hubei in the early Qing; they claimed to have resided in Nanbu for fifteen generations, as did the Qiu 邱 and Zhao 赵 lineages (also from Hubei). Two major Liu 刘 lineages existed in Nanbu. One claimed descent from Hubei and had lived in the county since the early Qing for fourteen generations; another had arrived during the White Lotus Rebellion and could only trace four generations in the county. The Song 宋, Xie 谢, Zhou 周, and Sun 孙 lineages claimed early Qing arrivals from Hubei and all said to have lived in Nanbu for fourteen generations. The Jing 敬 lineage and Du 杜 lineages arrived from Hubei in the early Qing and both said they had been in Nanbu for sixteen generations. The Fan 范 lineage arrived from Hubei in the early Qing and were said to have been in Nanbu for twelve generations. The Feng 冯 and Huang 黄 lineages both claimed descent from Hubei’s Macheng and were said to have lived in the county for sixteen generations. The Qu 曲 lineage claimed residence in Nanbu for nineteen generations. Nanbuxian xiangtuzhi, 388-390.
in the area came from their ability to prolifically create graves or claim existing ancient graves (where the identity of the interred person is unknown) in the county as their own. Lineages then appealed to the Nanbu yamen to officially protect these graves, which in turn, legitimated their claims. This was not an uncommon practice: when we examine Nanbu’s county gazetteer for its section on “[ancient] mausoleums and tombs” (*lingmu* 陵墓), graves for the following surnames from the Tang Dynasty to the Qing Dynasty are listed: the Xianyu 鮮于, the Chen 陳, the Ma 马, the Xie 謝, the Li 李, the Feng 馮, the Fan 范, the Yong 雍, the Qu 曲, the Liang 梁, the Zhang 張, and the Tao 陶 — which have a high correlation with the lineages who claimed to have been in the county for more than twenty generations.217

None of this is to imply that older lineages were necessarily more wealthy than newer ones. However, lineages who could make claims of ancient pedigrees were bound to have certain advantages over newer lineages.218 That the county gazetteer echoed many of these genealogical claims speaks well to Joseph Dennis’s observation that the production of gazetteers and genealogical media were commonly linked from the Song Dynasty onward.219 The production of many of these genealogies and the printing of the county’s gazetteer also coincided with a major transformation in nineteenth century Nanbu: Magistrate Zhu’s expansion of the *baojia* from the townships into the market towns.


218 Some of these claims travelled up the Qing bureaucracy. For a reference to the famous Xianyu grave of Nanbu County for instance, see: *The Gazetteer of the Great Qing Unification* 《大清一統志》 (He Shen Edition) 298: 22.

V. From Townships to Market Towns: Magistrate Zhu Fengyun and Nanbu’s Baojia

Prior to the 1850s, Nanbu County was administratively divided into ten townships (xiang乡): Anren安仁, Yongfeng永丰, Zhengjiao正教, Xuanhua宣化, Jinxing金兴, Linjiang临江, Chongjiao崇教, Jishang积上, Jixia积下, and Fuyi富义。Locals who did not live near a market town sometimes identified their home to county officials by its location relative to one of these ten townships. For most Nanbu subjects however, a market town was closer, and hence formed their main point of geographic reference. This reality was officially sanctioned in Nanbu County during the 1850s, when Magistrate Zhu expanded the baojia保甲 into and “mapped” it onto the market towns, drawing heavily on existing religious geographies and situated knowledge in the process.

Hsiao Kung-ch’uan once posited that, following its establishment during the Ming Dynasty, the lijia里甲 declined across China in the subsequent centuries, eventually merging with the baojia保甲 during the Qing Dynasty. Richard von Glahn has provided examples of such a merger in parts of China. Huaiyin Li has shown conclusively that in parts of China, such as Hebei, the lijia system effectively declined after the Yongzheng tax reforms, as did the baojia units that had assumed its tax responsibilities in the aftermath; in its place — Li shows — evolved a system of village representation where a locally-known xiangdi鄉地 collected taxes on behalf of a village community. While there was often overlap for the roles of elite actors in the county,

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221 Hsiao Kung-ch’uan, Rural China: Imperial Control in the 19th century (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1960), 89.
the two systems curiously did not merge in Nanbu, where the county’s peripheral, upland conditions and lack of nuclear villages may have worked to preserve older traditions of imperial governance that were lost in other regions of China where lineages became entrenched in single-surnamed village fortresses (in Jiangxi, Anhui, Fujian, Guangdong, etc.). Following the measuring of the county’s taxable lands in the Yongzheng Reign, the *lijia* was assigned directly to Nanbu’s townships, such as 安仁鄉四甲里排 “the *lipai* of the fourth jia of Anren Township.”

Even as the *baojia* units were extended into the market towns during the 1850s, the *lijia* units remained assigned to the townships through the end of the dynasty.

The most local tax-collections functionary in Nanbu County was the *lipai* 里排 (“headman of the *li* grouping in charge of collecting taxes”). The Qing adopted the Ming *lijia* system, in which 110 households constituted one *li* 里. Each *li* was then further divided into ten units called a *jia* 甲. The head of the remaining 10 households was called a *lizhang* 里長, which rotated among the *jiazhang* 甲長 of a *li* on a ten year cycle (theoretically changing every year). In Nanbu, this position was called the *lipai*. When Nanbu’s Fish Scale Registers were created during the Yongzheng Reign, seventy-three *li* 里 areas — which in theory represented 8,030 households — were created among the ten rural townships of the county; Anren 安仁 Township had eight *li* 里 areas for instance, while Fuyi 富義 Township only had two. These seventy-three *li* 里 areas were expected to produce around 5,300 taels in the land tax for the county on an annual basis.

*Lipai* 里排 often became embroiled in litigation in Nanbu County over debts related to tax collection, which reveals them to have adopted tax-farming strategies that were common in parts

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224 Nanbu County Qing Archive: 15.496. Also quoted in Cai, *Qingdai nanbu xianya dang’an yanjiu*, 228, where I was made aware of this source. I attribute the discovery of the discreetness of Nanbu’s *baojia* and *lijia* to Cai Dongzhou.

225 Nanbu County Qing Archive: 2.1.01.
of China, where, as Huaiyin Li has observed, “the government failed to collect taxes on its own and where the community was too weak to pay taxes collectively.”

Northern Sichuan patchwork of diverse, immigrant settlements fits this description quite perfectly. As the head of a *li* area, a *lipai* knew what his grouping’s annual quota was and urged families to make their payments; *lipai* appear to have commonly paid for certain families and took loans of their own in order to do so, charging “fees” and kickbacks for the trouble. While this was burdensome, in Nanbu’s hinterland, such practices were the only mechanisms the Qing state had for detecting registered lands escaping taxation.

For local lineages, as David Faure and Michael Szonyi have suggested, serving as the *lipai* (*lizhang*) conferred and consolidated elite status. This status was evidenced both in the practice of taxation and the knowledge of being aware of which lands were on the books and who was hiding land — powerful blackmail for the courtroom if a *lipai* (or ally) was taken to court. Although the position was meant to rotate among households, a yamen survey from GX6 (1880) points to the entrenched power of local lineages: the second *jia* area of Anren Township had three *lipai*, all surnamed Hu 胡; the first *jia* of Zhengjiao Township had three *lipai*, all surnamed Zhang 张; the seventh *jia* of Yongfeng Township had four *lipai*, all surnamed He 何; the sixth *jia* of

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227 One of the most common types of tax evasion cases in the Nanbu Archive involved a *lipai* 里排 who paid a portion of the grouping’s annual land tax quota to the *tuchai* 圖差 and then visited the local households to collect his payments. He then discovered that one of the households delivered a smaller payment because they claimed they have sold a parcel of registered land (and hence its tax allotment) to another household. The *lipai* 里排 was then required to go hound that household for the payment of the tax allotment — not uncommonly discovering that the land had been permanently sold with a white contract (*baiqi* 白契) and hidden tax assessment (*nishui* 匿稅). In other words, the system worked out of convergent incentives of different actors: the state needed local elites who could be trusted to be responsible for much of a *li* area’s annual allotment and have a stake in delivering it. *Tuchai* were the intermediaries between the *lipai* and the Department of Revenue. There were two *tuchai* stationed in each of Nanbu’s ten rural townships.

Xuanhua Township had five *lipai* from the Du 杜 lineage. In other words, in Nanbu — where the lack of both an elite gentry base and urban commercialization likely bred little local competition in rural areas — the institution appears to have often been a family affair.

While the institution of the *lipai* remained unchanged in Nanbu over the Qing period, Magistrate Zhu’s overhaul of the *baojia* was significant. To get a sense of what Magistrate Zhu accomplished, we could start with the fact that in QL28 (1763), Nanbu County had only twenty-five *bao* 保 areas (hence twenty-five *baozhang* 保长 and 250 *jiazhang* 甲长) spread out across its ten townships. Nanbu theoretically followed the standard procedure of ten *hu* 户 to a *pai* 排, and ten *pai* 排 to a *jia* 甲, and ten *jia* 甲 to a *bao* 保. Magistrate Zhu retained these positions and then assigned additional *bao* 保 units — with corresponding *tuan* 团 units directly to market towns, which were then *de facto* recognized as units of sub-county governance (for the purposes of local militias and rural surveillance, if not for taxation). That is, Magistrate Zhu expanded the *baojia* system that was originally restricted to townships to include market towns, thus officially recognizing the market towns as sub-county administrative units during the 1850s.

By the late nineteenth century, following Magistrate Zhu’s reforms, Nanbu County had over 360 *bao* and *tuan* units and over 3,000 *jiazhang*. This expansion of the *baojia* in the middle of the nineteenth century allowed the yamen to adjust the territorial units of state control to better reflect the demographic and geographic realities of the country after two centuries of inward immigration. Here, Nanbu again fits well into William Skinner’s notion of a provincial periphery

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229 Nanbu County Qing Archive: 8.24.02.

230 Nanbu County Qing Archive: 2.1.1.
— where frontier security was emphasized over revenue extraction. However, as Philip Kuhn has explained for China broadly during this time, such moves had administrative costs. By exponentially increasing the number of *bao* areas across the country — and hence the number of state-backed local militias — magistrates indirectly sanctioned the militarization of the countryside.

The Nanbu Archive points to an additional tradeoff: during the first half of the Qing Dynasty, when the number of *bao* areas was small while their respective geographical sizes were large, the county yamen knew the identities of all twenty-five serving *baozhang* at any given time, just as they were likely to know the identities of the county’s seventy-three *lizhang* (*lipai*). However, with the large-scale expansion of the *baojia*, the county yamen effectively lost control over who was serving as a *baozhang* in the rural market towns. Magistrate Zhu was aware of this possibility during his expansion, and appointed two *zongbaozheng* 总保正 “Chief *baozheng*” for each of the four roads of the county (north, south, east, and west) and the county town, for a total of ten appointed at any given time. Nonetheless, archival evidence points to the idea that by the end of the Qing Dynasty, the state came to have little knowledge over who had been serving as a *baozhang* or *baozheng*.

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233 In one case concerning an infringement on a cemetery’s *jindi* 禁地 (“Forbidden Land”) from 1911, the magistrate fired a *baozheng* on the spot for providing false testimony during the trial; in that case, the *baozheng*, He Ying 何應, turned out to be related to the litigants (also surnamed He 何) and was exposed for corruption; the Hes came from a place alternatively written in the plaints from the same lawsuit as 大埧壩 or 大汾壩 or 大汾壩 “Dafen Embankment,” located near Jinxing Township. Nanbu County Qing Archive: 22-764. 何應保正欠妥，傳倫保董王寶昌另選妥人 可也. The yamen did not previously have a record of the *bao* 保 for that area, where the He lineage had evidently assumed the post of *baozheng* for some time. Cases from Nanbu’s Republican archive show that, by the 1910s, even when *baozhang* or *baozheng* were caught engaging in criminal activities such as poppy cultivation, the state had little power to remove them from office.
In addition to shedding light on the expansion of the *baojia* in the mid-nineteenth century, *The Illustrated Guide* also provides unparalleled access to information about Nanbu’s rural hinterlands in the nineteenth century. The guide’s various editions listed each market town’s market days, which in Nanbu often corresponded with Temple Fairs (*miaohui* 廟會). Using *The Illustrated Guide* along with the 1870 edition of the *Nanbu County Gazetteer* 同治南部縣志 as sources for local history, a few observations can be made about the settlement patterns in Northern Sichuan. Many of Nanbu’s market towns derived their names from their central temples (si 寺 or miao 廟), or nunneries (an 庵), which in addition to sites of religious worship and trade, often served as community granaries (*shecang* 社倉) from the eighteenth century onward.

From the *Illustrated Guide*, we may note that though it is commonly said Sichuan lacked nuclear villages, this is not completely the case for Nanbu and Northern Sichuan generally. The White Lotus Rebellion saw the creation of “fortified villages” (*zhaibao* 寨堡) across the region and by the nineteenth century, some single-surnamed villages (*cun* 村) had developed. Wenshang Wang has described the building of these fortified villages in conjunction with the reforms of the *baojia* and the “grouping and drilling of local armies” (*tuanlian xiangyong* 團練鄉

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234 The manual was reissued in 1869, when the then-serving magistrate, Cheng Huan 永綏, praised the work for its prescience in the wake of the rebellion to the north in Shaanxi and Gansu. Its final edition was composed in 1896 by Yuan Yongbin 袁用賓. One original edition of the 1869 edition is preserved in the Shanghai Library’s Ancient Books Repository; the 1896 edition has been published.

235 For a series of reports to the county yamen from these temple and nunnery-based granaries, see: Nanbu County Qing Archive: 12.855.01-12.855.06.

236 For a discussion of geomantic considerations in the construction of these walled fortresses, see: Daniel McMahon, “Geomancy and Walled Fortifications in Late Eighteenth Century China” *Journal of Military History* 76.2 (2012): 375-376.
勇），both upon the directives of the Jiaqing Emperor (1796-1820). In this context, zhai 寨 referred to the stone walled mountain forts constructed during the White Lotus Rebellion, when locals appointed zhaizhang 寨長 (“fort commanders”) to aid in local defense. Most of these zhai 寨 contained a temple dedicated to a local deity for protection.

These stone walled forts aside, most Nanbu locals lived in satellite communities around market towns and in small hamlets, with a lineage cluster (in Skinner’s terms, “Dispersed Villages”) typically denoted by an Earth God Shrine 土地廟. While the gentry creators of Magistrate’s Zhu’s Illustrated Guide incorporated local knowledge in their creation of a comprehensive geographic manual, much was not known about these rural areas. The 1869 edition of The Illustrated Guide for instance contains detailed information of eighty market towns; the 1870 edition of the Nanbu County Gazetteer lists only fifty-six market towns, many with distances and locations that contradicted those listed in The Illustrated Guide. This discrepancy probably

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238 One example of a Northern Sichuan zhai was Changle 長樂寨, which the Nanbu County Gazetteer describes in the following terms: [Changle Fort] is located one hundred twenty li south of the county town. In the fifth year of the Jiaqing reign (1801), [White Lotus] rebels stormed the area, the government students Xiang Leguan, Wang Guobao, and He Sanyuan were killed at this place.” Nanbu County Gazetteer (Tongzhi Edition) (2014: 70). While naturally many more people probably died at Changle Fort during the rebellion, the gazetteers writers — typically gentry themselves — only noted gentry victims.

239 Nanbu had at least one market town that was based in and around a stone fort and its temples named Dali Stone Fort 大力寨. Xianjing fenfang tushuo, 290. Created during the White Lotus Rebellion, Dali Stone Fort had six bao by the late nineteenth century, which made it one of Nanbu’s larger market towns. The Nanbu County Gazetteer identifies only seven such stone forts, but The Illustrated Guide reveals dozens more, which speaks to the degree to which the White Lotus Rebellion permanently scarred the rural landscapes of Northern Sichuan while shaping marketing and settlement trends. For a temple inscription from a mountain fort in Langzhong, see: Langzhongshi lishi wenhua mingcheng yanjiuhui 阆中市歷史文化名城研究會, ed. Mingcheng yanjiu《名城研究》[Research on the Famous Town], 2010 Edition (No. 12) (Langzhong: Langzhong Gazetteer Office, 2010): 71-73.


241 The county gazetteer lists stone forts as distinct from market towns.
in part derives from the fact that the number of market towns increased during the Qing, so the fifty-six major market towns listed in the gazetteer may reflect older knowledge.  

But it also reflects, to a degree, official attitudes about the market towns. In order for a new market town to be created, a local gentry or notable had to petitioned the yamen for permission to formally establish a “market” (xingshe changshi 興設場市). Sometimes magistrates approved these requests, and sometimes they did not.

As in other regions of Sichuan, the marketing calendars of these towns were flexible and responded to local demand and population growth, as the following GIS analysis of Nanbu’s known Qing-era market towns reveals. The marketing schedules for the towns below were taken from the county gazetteer and GMD surveys of the region. A month was divided into three ten day periods called xun 旬 and a marketing schedule was advertised in the Qing by how many days the market met during that ten-day period. Marketing centers that met nine-times per month were nearly all clustered around the eastern portion of the county and Abundant Village Postal Station.

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242 This campaign in Sichuan is discussed at length in Madeleine Zelin, The Magistrate’s Tael: Rationalizing Fiscal Reform in Eighteenth-century Ch‘ing China, 136-140.

243 In approving the creation of one market town in DG17 (1837), a magistrate wrote: 准如稟，就近在觀子埡地方興設場市，以便通融可也. Nanbu County Qing Archive: 4.213.01. In another instance from DG22 (1842), a magistrate rejected such an appeal, writing: 查該場附近場市不少，並不寫遠僅可買賣，不准另行設場以杜爭競. Nanbu County Qing Archive: 4.220.01

244 Nanbu County Republican Archive: Nanbuxian zhengfu jianyao tongji shouce 南部縣政府簡要統計手冊, 1947, 17-20.
Figure 16. ArcGIS Analysis of Nanbu’s Market Towns’ Marketing Schedules (c.1898)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Color</th>
<th>Market-Temple Fair Schedule</th>
<th>Number of Market Days per Month</th>
<th>Number of Market Towns (Out of 90; If only 1, includes the number of 保)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Three xun (10-day period) per month 上旬 中旬 下旬 (For instance, 2-5-8 would meet on the 2nd, 5th, and 8th day of a xun)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2-5-8 (2nd, 5th, 8th, 12th, 15th, 18th, 22nd, 25th, 28th)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>15</td>
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<td></td>
<td>1-4-7 (1st, 4th, 7th, 11th, 14th, 17th, 21st, 24th, 27th)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NA</td>
<td>3-5-8 (3rd, 5th, 8th, 13th, 15th, 18th, 23rd, 25th, 28th)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1 (6 保)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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### Analysis

32 Market Towns had market days 8 or 9 times a month; 28 Market Towns had market days 5 or 6 times a month; 31 did not hold market days or did so irregularly; No Nanbu Market Towns had market days 4 times a month. Market Towns with unique fair schedules (i.e. Panlong Postal Station, Schedule: 1-4-10, with 13 bao) skewed towards the larger marketing centers.

As William Skinner famously argued, market towns in China possessed both a logical spatial arrangement and regionally coordinated activity, where market towns in close proximity would not adopt the same monthly schedule of temple fairs, and markets would meet on a schedule that reflected a local population’s demand. As the map above reveals, this practice was evidenced in Nanbu County, though the level of commercial activity was much tempered in contrast to the counties of the fertile Sichuan Basin. Nanbu County certainly had several densely populated and commercialized areas. Panlong Postal Station 盤龍驛場 for instance, was assigned

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thirteen bao (thirteen tuan). It had a temple fair that met on the 1st, 4th, 10th, 11th, 14th, 20th, 21st, 24th, and 30th of every month, if a month had thirty days.

But even with these relatively commercialized places, no market outside of the county town met more than nine days per month. Not a single market town in Nanbu County commercially adapted, either in the Qing or the Republic, a four-day-per-xun cycle of market fairs that were commonly found in “core” regions elsewhere in China, such as Sichuan’s Meishan 眉山 or Zhejiang’s Ningbo 宁波. The latter was studied by Yoshinobu Shiba, who identified some towns in Zhejiang with markets meeting five times per xun旬. Three known market towns were noted in The Illustrated Guide for not having any marketing days 無集期: Luxi Market Town (fifty lǐ), Yongding Market Town (thirty lǐ), and Yangban Market Town (thirty lǐ), and a great number had none on the books. This is important for what it reveals about the level of commercialization in the county: the marketing transformation associated with commercial growth from two days per xun to three, and then to four (meeting every other day), did not happen for most Nanbu’s market towns, even by the late nineteenth century.

One typical market town was Pig’s Trough Pass 猪槽埡. Three major lineages dominated the market town: the Huangs 黃, the Mas 馬, and the Lis 李, all of which had numerous branches produced through the division of property since the early eighteenth century. The Li lineage dominated the region south of the river, on the southern and eastern corners of the market town. The Ma lineage was smaller and was concentrated in Ma Family Ditch 馬家溝. The Huang

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247 Legal cases suggest a fourth lineage inhabited the market town, the Pus. For a reference to the Pus, see: Nanbu County Qing Archive: 9.819.05.
lineage was the largest, with the greatest number of branches, though Nanbu’s Republican Archive reveals the Lis were ascendant in local offices during the first decades of the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{248} One mountain stone fort, Tiancheng 天成寨, on the western edge of the market town was constructed during the White Lotus Rebellion by the Huangs and the Lis. By the mid-nineteenth century, the vernacularly-named topography of the market town expressed the longstanding existence of local lineages, which projected a sense of continuous and ancient inhabitation.\textsuperscript{249}

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure17.png}
\caption{Magistrate Handbook’s Illustration of Pig’s Trough Pass 塘槽埡 Market Town with Borders and Villages Notated (1853)\textsuperscript{250}}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{248} SUCSBRC [Nanbu Collection]: 466.5259.

\textsuperscript{249} As Gregory Ruf explains for Sichuan’s Baimapu, “Thus the vernacularly named topography of the local landscape symbolized the proprietary claims that these ancestors had once made to the land. The forms their descendants built on that landscape, such as houses, ancestral halls, and graves, marked the continuing presence of these patri-lines across time.” Ruf, \textit{Cadres and Kin: Making a Socialist Village in West China, 1921-1991}, 12-13.

\textsuperscript{250} \textit{Xianjing fenfang tushuo}, 166. For one approximated distance, see: Nanbu County Qing Archive: 9.819.01.
The Illustrated Guide provides an analysis of the map above. The eastern border of the market town was marked by Bamiaozi Temple 東至神壩場以八廟子為界. Zhang Fei ("Zhangye") Temple and Flying Dragon Temple marked its border to the south 南至蕭家壩以張爺廟飛龍廟為界. Its western border was marked by Zhutou Temple and Tiancheng Stone Fort 西至店子埡以天成寨柱頭廟為界, while its northern border was marked by Changping Temple on Twin Dragon Mountain and the Temple of the Small Pass 北至邱埡場以二龍山昌平廟小埡廟為界. Few of the temples were walled and thus their own territoriality was usually marked by the trees (shenshu 神樹 or fengshuilin 風水林) that surrounded them. Pig’s Trough Pass had only one recognized bao and tuan 共計一保立為一團 and no regular market days. A few shops existed in the sole street of Pig’s Trough Pass’s market and namesake temple. The marketing geography of the market town overlapped with its religious geography: temples marked most of the recognizable boundaries of the market town. By the 1850s, with the expansion and localization of the bao units, this interpretation became officially endorsed as the administrative territoriality of the market town by the county yamen. In Chapter Four, I will return to Pig’s Trough Pass to document how one Nanbu County magistrate applied geomantic values to the above illustration to resolve a property dispute. There, we will see that the southern border of the market town as depicted by the Illustrated Guide precisely overlapped with the Li lineage’s Dragon Vein.

251 This may speak to Daniel Overmyer’s insight that community temples, opera stages, and ancestral halls spatialized community religion, and by extension, local society in North China. Daniel L. Overmyer, Local Religion in North China in the Twentieth Century: The Structure and Organization of Community Rituals and Beliefs (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 4-5. For a relevant case of links between religious territoriality and administrative units from south China, see: Mingming Wang, “Place, Administration, and Territorial Cults in Late Imperial China: A Case Study from South Fujian,” Late Imperial China 16.1 (1995): 33-78.
VI. **Chapter Conclusion: Situating Nanbu**

A modest gentry base, limited levels of agricultural commercialization, a challenging topographical terrain, and a recently arrived population all made official record keeping in Nanbu County challenging. The county in 1870 was a “periphery” against the “core” of the Chengdu Plain and an increasingly evident “hinterland” in the wake of Chongqing’s nineteenth century urban development. Yet, as William Rowe, Pierre-Étienne Will, Daniel McMahon, and Wensheng Wang have argued for the “three province region” (Northern Sichuan, Southern Shaanxi, and Northeastern Hubei) in eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, efficient administration could prevent crises in hinterlands and foster local rehabilitation in the highlands.252 The achievements during the Taiping Rebellion-era magistracy of Zhu Fengyun and his successors should not be underestimated for their reform of the baojia locally and the creation of a handbook illustrating its expansion into the market towns for use by the county yamen’s clerks, runners, and local officials.

And yet, Nanbu’s size and mountainous topography made information gathering about the county difficult. While the reform of the baojia in the first half of the nineteenth century penetrated into some of Nanbu’s market towns from the townships, as William Skinner argued, the baojia machinery was inefficient for data collection, and officials perfunctorily increased the local population by a constant rate over many decades through the early twentieth century.253 The 1870 edition of the *Nanbu County Gazetteer* reveals that, save for an effort to count the population in the mid-Jiaqing reign after the White Lotus Rebellion, the last land measurement for the land tax

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of Nanbu’s lands occurred in YZ6 (1728), when the region was still decades away from being fully settled 雍正六年，奉行清丈. 254 A third of Nanbu’s known market towns had only one baozhang assigned at any given time, and not an insignificant number of marketing communities had none formally on the books. Zhu Fengyun’s Illustrated Guide further reveals that while illustrating the borders of newly created bao areas, an essential part of the state’s conceptualization of its rural hinterland was in the illustration of temples, stone forts, graves, and prominent trees, which provided somewhat stable markings on a highly active land market-landscape that was liable to often change. The marketing geography of Nanbu County overlapped significantly with its religious geography, which in turn came to inform significant portions of the county’s evolving administrative geography in the nineteenth century.

Magistrate Zhu’s vision of a “Cartographic Nanbu” in the 1850s was not a hegemonic projection of state fixations onto rural landscapes, but a locally (gentry)-produced, imperfect lens into the spatial dynamics of a countryside hinterland that were constantly in motion. That the guide aided future magistrates is not in doubt — at least three editions of the manual, which reproduced maps identical to those created in the 1850s (with a few additions) — were issued in the last half-century of Qing imperial rule in the county. But of course, as much as Qing magistrates were expected to remove barriers that hindered them from seeing the common people and the lands they administered, the people of the “old hundred surnames” often came to see the magistrate. Thus, to the magistrate’s court we now turn.

Part Two (Introduction): Situated Knowledge of Land in Qing Law

This introduction to section two provides a basic overview of geomancy in Qing law and a summary of the routine processing of legal cases at the Nanbu yamen. Section two, composed of Chapters Three, Four, and Five, argues that commonly-recorded situated information about the land written into contracts, genealogies, divination records, inscriptions, and household division records was taken as pertinent information in the everyday processing of legal cases in Nanbu’s court. Many lands and sites outside of the official registration system (graves, ancestral halls, mountains, houses, millstones, rivers, trees, and temples) were ascribed with geomantic significance and hence it was often through the presentation of geomantic information or geomantic claims that these places were contested in court. This situated knowledge contributed to the property system’s everyday functioning.

Geomancy’s appearance in Chinese law was long noted by foreign observers; in fact, while numerous “superstitious” practices were described by foreigners in nineteenth century China, what made geomancy particularly scandalous to these observers was the impression that the Qing state took it seriously. Writing in the nineteenth century, Nicholas Dennys observed geomancy’s tendency to check the development of a completely free market in land in China and hence the country’s ability to properly develop: “Without doubt the only secular agent likely to overthrow Fengshui is ‘the spread of the sound views of the natural science,’ combined, as we would venture to add, with a clear demonstration that money is to be made by adopting them.”255 Dennys penned those words in his book review of Ernest Eitel’s study of China’s “natural science” (fengshui) which was the most widely read study of the topic in the late nineteenth century and was notable

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255 Nicholas Belfield Dennys, The China Review, Or, Notes and Queries on the Far East, Volume 2, 1874: 40.
for being the first European-language work to express — with great chagrin — geomancy’s prominent appearance in the Qing legal system:

*Fengshui* is, moreover, so engrafted upon Chinese social life, it has become so firmly intertwined with every possible event of domestic life (birth, marriage, housebuilding, funerals, etc.) that it cannot be uprooted without a complete overthrow and consequent reorganization of all social forms and habits…*Fengshui has a legal status in China.* When there is anywhere in China a dispute between people on the ground of alleged interference with and disturbance of the *fengshui* aspects of a grave or house, the judicial tribunals of China will entertain the claim, examine into its merits and decide the case on the presumption that *fengshui* is a reality and a truth, not a fiction.²⁵⁶

The Nanbu Archive suggests that Eitel’s depiction, at least in its description, was not completely inaccurate. Yet, his observation does not explain how geomantic disputes worked within the legal system or why geomantic claims were successful in Qing courts. I see the role of situated knowledge about the land — in a context where the state knew little about the patterns and distribution of rural landownership — as critical for understanding the reasons why geomantic claims and interpretations suffused the legal process in Nanbu County. In line with James Watson’s distinction between orthodoxy (“correct belief”) and orthopraxy (“correct practice”), magistrates did not have to personally take a specific geomantic claim as correct belief to consider geomantic information as relevant for resolving a case.²⁵⁷

Geomantic claims operated in the Qing legal system by moralizing disputes over property and resources and appealing to legal notions of *qing* 情 (“sentiment produced through the bonds and obligations of human relationships”) and ancestry in order to obtain specific aims.²⁵⁸

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²⁵⁶ Ernest Eitel, *Feng Shui, Or the Rudiments of Natural Science in China* (Hong Kong: Lane, Crawford & Company, 1878), 83-84.


cited geomantic information in their plaints to urge officials to investigate a site by, for instance, claiming that the health of their children was at risk from a broken earth vein. Of the many types of cases routinely presented to magistrates, lawsuits surrounding geomancy and mountain lands were cited as the most difficult lawsuits to process for county magistrates. Nineteenth century manuals for statecraft and law, such as The Compilation of Writings on the Statecraft of Our August Dynasty (Huangchao jingshi wenbian 皇朝經世文編), compiled by He Changling 賀長齡 (1785-1848) and Wei Yuan 魏源 (1794-1856), listed the genres of disputes found in county-level lawsuits over land:

勘丈之事，大端有四：曰風水。曰水利。曰山場。曰田界。其它房屋基址，易見者也。田界水利，亦一覽可知。唯風水山場，有影射，有牽扯，詐偽百出，稍不的實。259

As for the matter of surveying and measuring [lands during litigation], there are four salient points: one is called fengshui; one is called irrigation; one is called mountain plots; and one is called field boundaries. As for others such as houses and building foundations, they are easy to discern. As for field boundaries and irrigation [issues], they also may be known from a glance. Only the [problems of] fengshui and mountain plots feature complicated insinuations and implications; [these lawsuits are] full of false information and are (often) not quite truthful.

This passage, preserved in the nineteenth century compendium, comes from the Opinions on Learning Government (Xuezhi yishuo 學治臆說) of Wang Huizu 汪輝祖, the well-known eighteenth century Qing statesman. As Wang stressed, cases that concerned mountain lands or geomancy involved interpretation, largely because magistrates could not necessarily rely on land registers to make a definitive ruling. Because Qing officials knew well this fact, there was general awareness that the state had less control over the claims and proceedings — hence his statement that such claims could be full of “false information.” Wang critically added for the surveying of

259 He Changling 賀長齡 and Wei Yuan 魏源, eds., Huangchao jingshi wenbian 《皇朝經世文編》 [The Compilation of Writings on the Statecraft of Our August Dynasty] (Shanghai : Jiang zuo shu lin cang ban, 1873), 22: 57. For recent work on false accusations, see: Quinn Javers, “The Logic of Lies: False Accusation and Legal Culture in Late Qing Sichuan” Late Imperial China 35.2 (2014): 27-55.
mountain landscapes and *fengshui*. When investigating [the matter] one must first entreat the two sides to map the site [in question], in order to identify the precise mountain’s identity (“name”) and orientation, then once again carry out an investigation.”260 In other words, in cases over mountain lands, magistrates — in so many words — had to verify the *fengshui*. In places like Nanbu County, where “mountains were many and fields were few” and commoners were many while elite gentry were few, it turns out that the state had to do the mapping.

It should be clear by now that geomancy was big business in late imperial Sichuan — a fact actively discussed by Qing officials in the region. In 1820, the Office of Sichuan’s Provincial Judicial Commissioner (*Sichuansheng anchashi si* 四川省按察使司) issued the following official notice (*gaoshi* 告示) on the subject:

> 川民惑於風水, 聽堪輿之哄騙; 受墓佃之串唆, 見人穴吉, 即生覬覦。川民本係好訟, 訟棍從中撥弄; 争山, 則狀開發塚拋骸。雀角, 則詞列持械抄搶。261
>
> The people of Sichuan are deluded by *fengshui* and listen to trickery of geomancers; Instigated by the grave-managing tenant farmers 262, when they see that another person’s gravesite is auspicious, they immediately become covetous. The people of Sichuan are by nature extremely fond of lawsuits. The “litigation bastards” (writers of lawsuits) [instruct the people] stir up the two sides: if the contest was over mountains, then they would claim in their plaints that tombs were opened and skeletons were tossed. If the litigation was over trifles, then they would claim in their plaints that weapons were involved and looting occurred [to gain the magistrate’s attention].

Sentiments complaining about the frequency of grave and *fengshui*-related disputes in the legal system are also found in the *Great Qing Code*, where statutes (181.00) and sub-statutes (276.06)

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261 *Sichuansheng dang’anguan* and Sichuan daxue lishixi, eds., *Qingdai qianjiadao baxian dang’an xuanbian, xia*, 350.

262 *Mudian* 墓佃 refers to the person hired to guard the tomb, some translate it to be “grave-managing tenant farmer,” see: Guo, “Social Practice and Judicial Politics in ‘Grave Destruction’ Cases in Qing Taiwan, 1683-1895,” 88.
echoed the words above in condemning people “deluded by fengshui” for delaying internment or re-burying corpses. These statements are easily misunderstood outside of the context of a county-level Qing legal archive, as they could give the mistaken impression that geomancy was controversial or “banned” in imperial China. As the previous section emphasized, its cosmology was neither denied nor banned. The imperial state warned against charlatans, excessive practices, and false accusations — not cosmology. In fact, almost all official injunctions against excessive geomantic practices found in the Code or from Judicial Administrators like the one above can be understood from the perspective that the imperial state rhetorically deemed lawsuits as failings in the moral order over which it presided. The basis of criticizing geomancy largely derived from the fact that its practice produced litigation. As we now know through the work of Peng-Sheng Chiu and others, late imperial Chinese society was highly litigious; general comments against litigation and its causes were expressions of ruling ideals, not reflections of local realities.  

Before proceeding to the analysis of geomancy in the Qing legal terrain, it is helpful to establish how the Qing legal system generally worked, particularly in regards to “trivial” cases (xishi 細事), which as recent scholarship on Chinese law has detailed, the imperial state paid significant attention and resources to. As cases that invoked geomancy often (not always) fell under this category, geomantic plaints will serve here as the lens to examine the basic legal functioning of Nanbu’s yamen. As Philip Huang has detailed, during the Qing, the legal system


worked within a cultural frame that he called the “third realm.” Disputes were first argued and mediated at ancestral halls or temples, in the presence of local elites such as a lineage head, a baozheng 保正, or a xiangyue 鄉約. The act of presenting a lawsuit at the county yamen was a long and burdensome proposition, but lineages nevertheless did bring lawsuits when mediation was unsuccessful; in fact, it was expected that plaints presented to the Nanbu County yamen would explain a litigant’s attempts at mediation in his home market town before he “reluctantly” came to court.

During the Qing, a legal case was commenced with the presentation of a plaint (zhuangci 状詞 or zhengzhuang 正狀) and copy plaint (fuzhuang 副狀), the former of which was annotated with magisterial comments (pici 批詞) by a magistrate or perhaps more commonly, a muyou 幕友 (“litigation master” aiding county magistrate). There were different types of legal plaints depending on the litigant’s social standing. Commoners presented legal “plaints” against other commoners: these would be referred to as gaozhuang 告狀 if the litigation was mutual, otherwise only the plaint presented by a plaintiff was called as gaozhuang 告狀, while defendants responded to these with suzhuang 訴狀. Lineage heads, baozheng, gentry, or runners who wished to commence litigation presented bingzhuang 稟狀, which took the form of a “petition” to the court. A muyou’s pici 批詞 gave the yamen’s initial reaction to a presented plaint and could be quite detailed if explicit instructions were necessary.

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266 Chen Li, “Legal Specialists and Judicial Administration in Late Imperial China, 1651–1911,” Late Imperial China 33.1 (2012): 1-54.
Pici were most notable for containing one of two critical phrases that would determine the future of the presented plaint: “permitted” (zhun 准) or “not permitted” (buzhun 不准). There were many ways for a muyou or magistrate to say “not permitted”: a muyou could claim that a particular claim was so small, it should be resolved within a lineage and hence would not be processed by the yamen bureau (不宜轻准 “it is not suitable to flippantly permit [investigation of this matter]”), or that further verification would be necessary to determine the truth of a claim (所呈是否属实, 姑候唤讯察究 “Whether what is presented is true [remains unknown], for the time being, wait for the summons and investigation”). Limiting our inquiry to geomantic cases, we may observe that the relevant pici exhibit an extremely wide range of commentary. A magistrate or muyou might directly comment on a landscape’s fengshui in response to a presented plaint, such as demanding more information. In one case from Ba County, a certain Yang Zailu 楊在祿 presented a plaint against Chen Jihou 陳繼厚 and Chen Jiguang 陳繼光 for breaking an earth vein; the magistrate responded with a pici that demanded more information from the area’s xiangbao (a locally appointed “community leader”), who had not come to testify on behalf of Yang Zailu:

陳繼厚有無縱令陳繼光在爾始祖墳上截脈修造生塋情事，著該約鄰勘明稟覆察奪。267

Whether Chen Jihou connived with Chen Jiguang to construct a grave near your ancestor’s tomb, thereby breaking your earth vein, [I order] the area’s yuelin (a neighboring xiangyue) to clearly investigate [the matter] and report back with the details.

A plaint detailing inauspicious conditions in a house might be accepted, as could a plaint claiming the sudden sickness of a child due to a broken wind vein — albeit with some stern warnings — as seen in the following pici:

堪與風脈，概屬影響之談，龍鳳碑文，並無應禁之例，既據一再呈控，姑候喚訊察奪。268

倘系藉端搕，定行重懲不貸。

267 Ba County Qing Archive: 6.03.01661.

268 Nanbu County Qing Archive: 6.449.01.
[The matters] of geomancy and Wind Veins are generally subjects of hearsay, and the Dragon-Phoenix Inscription does not contain a rule specifying [the land] should be forbidden [from encroachment]; since you have repeatedly submitted petitions [advocating] for litigation, we shall for the time being wait until we obtain [the results of] the full inquest. If this is about stirring up trouble (extorting money), we will certainly establish a harsh punishment with no pardon.

The yamen kept records of submitted plaints and the official comments on them, which allowed for muyou to keep track of potential changes to a story. Litigants and their allies (or adversaries) submitted multiple plaints stressing different angles of a conflict; it only required one plaint to be accepted for litigation for a case to make it to the next round of processing. In a series of plaints regarding the Dong lineage’s fengshui, a muyou commented on a plaint of Dong Yuanda with the following terms: 前詞止言割去茨草, 今稱砍去樹木, 已屬先後不對。況已事隔半年, 何得率意抗瀆, 不准 “your previous plaint only said that only thatched grass had been cut; now you say that trees have been felled — thereby the former and the latter plaints do not correspond. Moreover, it has already been half a year since these events transpired. How can it be that you willfully show such disrespect; the plaint is not permitted.”269 Several weeks later, in the following month, Dong Yuanda submitted yet another plaint (為稟控董元亨私砍祖墳風水樹木懇賞喚究事), which received the following pici: 被割茨草, 事甚細微, 景是去年九月之事, 當時並未報縣有案, 今隔四五月至今始來呈告, 殊不足信, 不准 “As for the cut thatched grass, this matter is truly a minute affair, and moreover it occurred in the ninth month of the previous year; at that time, you did not report this matter to the yamen. Only now, after four or five months have passed you come to submit a petition; this is particularly not convincing — not permitted.”270 Yet because litigants could submit additional plaints (paying the fees for doing so once more),

269 Nanbu County Qing Archive: 4.138.05.
270 Nanbu County Qing Archive: 4.138.07.
initially rejected requests in Nanbu were often ultimately accepted. Three days after the “rejection” of Dong Yuanba’s second plaint, a runner was dispatched from the yamen to attend to the site in question, and not long after, a trial over the fengshui of the Dong cemetery was held at the county yamen.

The examples above, as well as those that will follow in the next three chapters, necessitate some explanation over the question of legitimate evidence for property claims in Qing law. Regarding the types of documentation that could be accepted at court as evidence for the litigation of grave lands, the *Great Qing Code* set out strict standards:

凡民人告爭墳山，近年者以印契為憑；如係遠年之業，須將山地、字號、畝數及庫貯鱗冊並完糧印串，逐一丈勘查對，果相符合，即斷令管業；如勘查不符，又無完糧印串，則所執遠年舊契、碑、譜等項不得執為憑據。即將濫控侵占之人，按例治罪。271

Whenever people sue over grave mountains, those presenting lands acquired in recent years use stamped contracts as proof. If the property in question is from the distant past, one must take the mountain land, the names and aliases [of the interred dead], the number of mu [hectares] and its information from the Fish Scale (Land) Registers as well as the collected tax receipts [from the property], and one by one measure to check and verify them; if the [claims and facts] correspond, judge it as owned property. If, upon verification [the facts are] not in correspondence and there are no tax receipts, then old contracts, inscriptions, and genealogies cannot be taken as evidence. Promptly deal with those who excessively present lawsuits claiming infringement by applying punishments in accordance with the sub-statutes.

Notice that, the regulation above, which dates from QL32 (1767), sets very high standards of evidence for the litigation of grave mountains, which as noted above, were seen as some of the most challenging arenas for magistrates to survey.272 These regulations should thus be read as an ideal and the degree to which they were followed in Nanbu was highly contingent on a magistrate’s

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271 *Great Qing Code*《大清律例》，juan 5，*Statutes of the Board of Revenue, Fields and Zhai Property*《戶律·田宅》: 93.06.

272 1767 was also the year in which contracts were formally written into the law code. Madeleine Zelin, “A Critique of Rights of Property in Prewar China” *Contract and Property in Early Modern China*, Madeleine Zelin, Jonathan Ocko, and Robert Gardella, eds. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 22.
or a muyou’s interpretation of a case. The problem with these regulations begins with the fact that most grave mountains were not officially registered; further, many contracts were never actually stamped. As we have also seen in Chapter Two, there were few “tax receipts” in Nanbu for officials to check, while the official ban referenced above on old contracts, inscriptions, and genealogies alludes to the fact that locals commonly brought such pieces of evidence into court.

The reality in Nanbu was that magistrates leniently “permitted” a wide range of disputes to be investigated even with a lack of proper evidence presented by the accusers. Tax receipts were seldom checked or demanded for many property disputes. Local cases reveal that, from the Qing Dynasty to the 1940s in Nanbu County, it was entirely possible for a person to present no written evidence to the court and effectively obtain an official notice of investigation for, for instance, a felled tree that had resulted in the harming of one’s kin. One case, in Chapter Four, will show the yamen investigating and mapping a newly constructed kitchen on the basis that it threatened the lives of people living in the house; no contracts were presented. The logic for doing so was rooted in the fact that locals strategically presented their claims in the language of ancestry, cosmology, and qing 情, which were difficult for magistrates to easily dismiss.

If a plaint was ultimately “permitted” by the yamen, the muyou  would then need to decide which Department (fang 房) of the yamen the copy plaint should be sent to for processing. To clarify potential uncertainties in this processing for yamen staff, in GX19.10.07 (1893), the Nanbu County magistrate issued a list of possible genres of permissible plaints in line with their appropriate yamen department.273 As a testament to how mundane geomantic disputes were, the instructions to the clerks referenced several of them — including literally, “the breaking of earth veins”:  

273今將各房應辦公件條規開列於後每房繕存一張 SUCSBRC [Nanbu Collection]: 466.12.3.
婚娶、違服、學校、抱嗣、截脈、攢分、祭醮、停殯、阻葬、失序、絕產、祭產、祠玹, 廟會、神樹、邪教應歸禮房。^274
(Cases involving) marriage, violations of kinship, schools, adoption and inheritance, the breaking of earth veins, the appropriation of [common] funds, ritual sacrifices, the halting of encoffining of a corpse, the blocking of a burial, the loss of proper order, property that has not be formally endowed as patrimony (property without a clear owner), ritual property, ancestral halls, temple associations, god (“fengshui”) trees, or heterodox practices should be sent to the Department of Rites.

挖墳、越界、毀碑、砍伐、山溝、河堰、截葬、折房、鋪房、渡口、斗口應歸工房。^275
(Cases involving) the digging of graves, the infringement of borders, the destruction of stelae, the felling of trees, ravines, embankments, the (geomantic) “cutting of a burial”,^276 the harming of a house, shops, and ferry crossings, or quarrels should be sent to the Department of Works.

These lists were merely guidelines, and actual archival cases reveal a great deal of flexibility in actual practice: cases involving “god trees” (shenshu 神樹) — Nanbu vernacular for temple trees — were processed by both the Department of Rites and the Department of Works. Anything that needed mapping had to be passed to the Department of Works. Among the genres of disputes mentioned above, geomantic practices could be seen in several of them, such as terms of inheritance (i.e. questions over access to common resources), adoption (i.e. questions over whether adopted heirs have access to the ancestral gravesite), the breaking of earth veins, as well as a variety of disputes over graves, temples, ancestral halls, ritual fields, stone inscriptions, and houses. In other words, geomantic information pervaded the range of potential disputes that were routinely processed by the Nanbu yamen’s Department of Works and Department of Rites.

^274 SUCSBRC [Nanbu Collection]: 466.12.4.

^275 SUCSBRC [Nanbu Collection]: 466.12.4.

^276 Jiezang 截葬, or “cutting a burial,” involved rendering an auspicious cavern (jixue 吉穴) inauspicious through an illicit infringement.
After reviewing a plaint, clerks would send runners with a notice to visit the site in question and submit a report on their findings. When the runner returned, which was typically three to five days after he was dispatched, a court summons could be granted, depending on what he found. All litigants and witnesses had their names recorded before the start of the trial (dianmingdan 點名單), with the names of those mentioned in the plaint who were not present at the yamen marked as “not here” (budao 不到). A transcript of the trial (gongci 供詞) was recorded by a clerk from the yamen department that was responsible for processing the trial, and the trial would conclude with the ruling of the magistrate (panci 判詞), followed by the issuing of affidavits (jiezhuang 結狀) to each party explaining what was demanded from each side moving forward.

The following three chapters of this dissertation look at geomantic practices and discourses as they were negotiated in Nanbu. Some cases from Ba County underscore relevant similarities and differences. Chapter Three looks at the diverse types of information magistrates had to consider when litigating grave disputes. Chapter Four turns to official ways of appraising cosmological claims concerning houses, graves, rivers, and mines, specifically examining the state’s use of cartography to evaluate cosmological claims. Chapter Five examines the negotiation of geomantic knowledge between the state and local actors in the creation of rural territoriality by examining how geomancy was employed by Nanbu’s grave and temple associations.

277 In Qing Sichuan, it appears that knowledge of rural counties was so low, runners sometimes could not find or identify settlements. Some locals did not leave or know an identifiable address. See the following pici: 原告楊國正既無地址，無從查喚，著將原票繳銷可也. Ba County Qing Archive: 6.08.02657.

278 While these procedures can broadly describe Qing law, there were regional differences that deserve attention. Li Zan, in comparing the Nanbu and Dan-Xin (Taiwan) Archival collections, has pointed out differences in the frequency of trials and judgments. As a “core” region with a wealthy gentry-base, high population density, and strong social institutions, Dan-Xin often saw cases sent back for mediation without judgments. In Nanbu County, where commoners had to traverse great distances to even reach the yamen, trials were, per capita, more common. Li Zan 里贊, Wangqing zhouxian susong zhong de shenduan wenti: cezhong sichuan nanbuxian de shijian 《晚清州縣訴訟中的審斷問題: 側重四川南部縣的實踐》 [Questions on Litigation in Late Qing Sub-Prefectural and County Lawsuits: A Focus on Legal Practice in Sichuan’s Nanbu County] (Beijing: Faliú chubanshe, 2010).
Chapter Three: Fake Graves, Divination Records, and Family Genealogies — Cultural Practices and the Production of Legal Information

I. Chapter Introduction: The Legal Power of Graves

Graves were among the most powerful claims to property in imperial China. This power, however, came with a legal paradox. Even as one of the most protected sites of landed property in Qing law, graves typically occupied tax-exempt lands and hence were seldom registered with the local government. Auspicious caverns (jixue 吉穴) and the coffins that eventually filled them were divined, created, and maintained in a loosely regulated private market in land, where present wealth was often hidden in pursuit of the security of future fortune.

Albeit, on the village level, not much was hidden — at least to locals. This chapter argues that, in Nanbu County, graves were powerful claims to land, but the dimensions through which graves exerted such claims worked differently than the well-known numerical dimensions of agricultural fields. Geomancy was the primary language through which the territoriality of graves was established and envisioned, and thus magistrates in Nanbu often had to consider geomantic understandings and data when reviewing such cases.

279 The Great Qing Code contains extensive protections for graves and strict punishments for the violations of graves. A person who dug up a burial mound so that the coffin was revealed was to be exiled 3000 li after receiving 100 strokes of the heavy bamboo. The Great Qing Code, (276.01. Opening a coffin of a senior or elder was to be met with beheading. The Great Qing Code, 276.02. A person who leveled a grave for a field or garden was to receive 100 strokes of the heavy bamboo. The Great Qing Code, 276.06. A tree stolen from a person’s gravesite was to be met with eighty strokes of the heavy bamboo. The Great Qing Code, 263.01. Even though the yamen was theoretically only supposed to hear cases during the non-harvesting seasons each year, grave lands were cited in the Imperial Authorized Collected Statutes of the Qing Dynasty with Case Precedents (钦定大清會典事例) as a leading genre of case heard throughout the year: 凡地方官於農忙停訟時內，遇有墳山地土等項及自理案件，事關緊要，或証佐人等現非務農，俱仍勘斷 “If local officials, during the time when they cease the processing of lawsuits for the harvest season, encounter [cases concerning] grave mountains and land, since these cases are matters of great importance, and if the witnesses and advocates are not engaged in agriculture, [the magistrates] should continue to investigate and judge [these matters].” Qinding daqing huidian shili 《欽定大清會典事例》 (Imperial Authorized Collected Statutes of the Qing Dynasty with Case Precedents), Section of the Board of Punishments 刑部, Criminal Statutes 刑律, Lawsuits 訴訟, 817.
The need of officials to consider such information is underscored by the sepulchral strategies commonly employed by the residents of Nanbu. Locals created “fake graves” with interred animal bones or claimed a cosmological connection to unmarked “ancient” graves to exert their claims over lands they desired. These lands could later be used for additional graves or to claim resources around the grave. Because Qing law forbade the opening of graves, in such cases, magistrates had to evaluate the environmental contexts around the contested estates in question; that is, magistrates had to determine whether the fengshui of an alleged grave was consistent with the understood practices of divining an actual grave. Graves of course were also used as land claims to evade taxation; this problem was compounded by the fact that genealogical information was highly relevant for tax identification. For much grave litigation, magistrates had to visualize the sites in contention through illustrated maps to gauge the merits of a claim. Contextual information from genealogies, divination records, tomb inscriptions, gazetteers, and orally conveyed geomantic information filled in gaps in the state’s limited knowledge and holes in the evidentiary record on the county level.

Before delving into local cases from Nanbu County, a capital case originating from Sichuan that was preserved in *The Continuation to The Conspectus of Judicial Cases* (Xing’an huilan xubian 刑案匯覽續編, 1886 version) elucidates the special considerations lent to graves. In 1845, the Board of Punishments received a *shuotie* 說貼 (“opinion petition”) from a Sichuan official detailing a grave infringement between the Wang 王, Gou 苟, and Qiao 姚 lineages. During the early Daoguang Reign (1821-1850), the ancestor of Wang Daliang 王大亮 purchased a parcel of land from the Gou lineage for the use of burying his mother. A contract was drawn up that stated only one person could be buried in the plot and no additional graves could be added. The Gou lineage later sold the land surrounding the grave to the Qiao lineage. Then, in 1845, Wang Daliang
broke the terms of the contract by adding another grave next to the grave of his ancestor, infringing on the Qiao’s farmland. When the Qiaos learned of the infringement on their land, they dug up the newly created grave, citing the grave as a violation of the contractual terms. In the communication to the Board of Punishments, the official recommended that the Qiao kinsman be given the Code-prescribed punishment for digging up a grave, though lessened one degree in severity because it was on his land. Wang Daliang was not punished.

This model case from The Continuation to the Conspectus of Judicial Cases presents the unique challenges of sepulchral territoriality in Qing law that resonate with many cases from the Nanbu Archive. The official’s recommended judgment did not condone the wanton breaking of written contractual obligations, but implicitly recognized that the creation of a new grave was the creation of a new kind of bond. This bond was likely forged through a contract between the Wang family and the local Earth God who presided over the area in question. As seen in Chapter One, these Earth God contracts were created at the breaking of a new grave spot and then burnt before the grave or buried with the body. Contracts used for the acquisition of grave property thus liberally use cosmological terms for property dimensions such as, “[the land] extends up to the Heavens; and reaches down to the Earth God’s Prefecture” 上至天空，下齊地府. Once the body of the deceased had been lowered into the selected spot at the divined time, this new contractual relationship between gods, humans, and the dead had been formally witnessed and enacted. The

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281 This is a rather close parallel with the thirteenth century common law property principle, Cuius est solum, eius est usque ad coelum et ad inferos (“whoever’s is the soil, it is theirs all the way to Heaven and all the way to Hell”). This Latin principle was long held as one of the fundamental principles for private property in Europe and is discussed in William Blackstone’s Commentaries on the Laws of England. See: William Blackstone, The Oxford Edition of Blackstone’s: Commentaries on the Laws of England: Book II: Of the Rights of Things (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).
official’s judgment here is thus not that the original contractual agreement forbidding the addition of another grave was legally defunct, but rather, implicitly, that Qiao did not consider the potential consequences for Wang and his descendants following his destruction of their interred grave. That is, a grave’s binding permanence over a plot of land, enacted through a ritual action (i.e. “the burning of an Earth God contract”) was assumed in Qing legal practice.²⁸²

Differing from this model capital case in *The Continuation to The Conspectus of Judicial Cases*, the county-level cases in this chapter present more vernacular logics. The chapter first introduces the concept of “forbidden land” (*jindi* 禁地) around graves as well as the geomantic positioning that informed sepulchral territoriality, and then introduces the legal questions of fake graves and ancient graves that were litigated at the Nanbu yamen. Such cases underscore the extent to which commonly-held gravesites were held as recognized claims to land outside of the registration — and thus taxation — system. The chapter concludes with a case study of one of Nanbu’s most prominent lineages, the Chens 陳, who through the construction of a series of “fake graves” and adoption of several “ancient graves” that were recognized by the Nanbu yamen as dating from the Song Dynasty, legitimized their influence in the county. In conveying the diverse types of information considered by officials in these cases, this chapter shows how the range of land-claiming strategies involving graves (i.e. fake graves, ancient graves) bore resemblances to certain types of land deeds (i.e. fake contracts, ancient contracts) regularly presented to the court.

II. *The Dimensions of “Forbidden Lands”: The Territoriality of Graves*

Lands surrounding graves were called *jindi* 禁地, or forbidden land, a term that was regularly incorporated by magistrates into legal rulings in Sichuan. In Ba County, the dimensions

²⁸² This is not to discount the many bodies that never found proper graves in the nineteenth century. For more on this problem, see: Jeffrey Snyder-Reinke, “Afterlives of the Dead: Uncovering Graves and Mishandling Corpses in Nineteenth-Century China” *Frontiers of History in China* 11.1 (2016): 1-20.
of jindi reached a high degree of standardization by the nineteenth century, with magistrates commonly referring to the “eighteen step” custom 十八步禁地 of the county, wherein land eighteen steps around the grave could not be farmed. Hence, in Ba County we can see judgments that incorporated this custom. Nanbu County, as a poor periphery, had a less advantageous topography than the “core” region around Ba County and thus did not develop or inherit such a standardized legal custom for grave boundaries during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

A typical case from the Nanbu Archive that saw the mapping of a rural settlement captures the territorial complexity of Nanbu’s terrains. In XT3 (1911) members of the Li lineage led by Li Wangchun 李望春 accused two agnates, Li Zhixian 李芝賢 and Li Qiyou 李其友, of infringing on private land. Li Zhixian and Li Qiyou presented a counter-plaint claiming that the others were destroying the Li lineage’s fengshui to repair a private ancestral hall, thus obscuring long-standing land boundaries. The next month, after mediation at the Li Ancestral Hall failed, the Nanbu yamen sent a runner to illustrate the Li Ancestral Mountain 李宗山.

From the runner’s illustration and attached description, we may note that trees and graves covered the mountain. The runner counted over 100 such graves. Members of the Li lineage lived in simple, single-family zhai 宅 dwellings along the mountainside. Three irrigation canals ran horizontally across the mountain and the lineage maintained “common” ancestral farmland for the upkeep of their corporate estate. At the foot of the mountain, one branch of the lineage had

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283 When Du Xiangui 杜顯貴 accused Jiang Tongshu 蔣同書 of damaging his grave’s fengshui through the creation of a wet field, the magistrate ruled that they should keep to the “eighteen step” rule and create a border marker at that point: 斷令…水田以頂心十八步為界址填築埋石. Ba County Qing Archive: 6.01.0654.

284 Nanbu County Qing Archive: 22.180.01.

285 Nanbu County Qing Archive: 22.180.02.

286 Nanbu County Qing Archive: 22.290.07.
some decades earlier constructed a “private” ancestral hall (sici 私祠) — denoting their independence from the rest of the lineage. In another location, a private graveyard (siying 私塋) of Li Wangchun’s family 李望春, the constructor of the ancestral hall, was noted by the runner.

Figure 18. Yamen Runner’s Illustration of Li Ancestral Mountain 李宗山 (1911)²⁸⁷

These details alert us to the intricately interwoven layers of legal territoriality of the mountain: some land was exclusively maintained by one family, while some land was commonly owned by the lineage. Some trees were exclusively owned, while some trees constituted the fengshui of the lineage. At the center of the mountain, the runner noted: 李其友等稱此立界樹株，係屬關塋歷禁風水之物 “Li Qiyou et al said that the trees that mark the border at this location constitute the

²⁸⁷ Nanbu County Qing Archive: 22.180.09.
forbidden *fengshui* trees of the ancestral grave.” That is, while one branch stressed an exclusive claim over trees abutting an agricultural field, Qiyou stressed the idea that they constituted *fengshui*.

Upon considering the map and the litigants’ testimonies, the magistrate gave a judgment:

The court rules: we have investigated that the dividing boundary between the upper and lower plateau is claimed by Li Wangchun et al to be marked by Crossing Hill, and by Li Qiyou et al to be marked by the old road. In fact, neither group has any evidence. Moreover, it appears that the Crossing Hill and the old road constitute the same place — there is no clear distinction, although the road is a bit wider and longer. But because there are trees, disputes have arisen. According to our investigation, these trees that both parties have fought over are growing along the old slope. Since Li Qiyou et al’s ancestors are buried there, how could he [Li Wangchun] claim that land to be exclusively his? I order the trees growing at the old road and the Crossing Hill and the trees that are used as the border of the old graves all be taken as “common” trees for both the upper and the lower plateau, and that neither side is permitted to privately fell them…This is the ruling.

From the magistrate’s ruling we may note that, first, the magistrate observed that neither side had sufficient evidence: the contracts presented did not include the precise information that either side wanted to convey, though the existence of a grave denoted a clear legal claim to the magistrate. Second, the illustration was essential for the magistrate to visualize the ancestral mountain and make a ruling. Finally, the magistrate endorsed the use of “common” trees to denote the boundaries of the lands in contestation, including the boundaries of agricultural farmland. In Nanbu, the “common” trees of a lineage meant *fengshui*. These boundaries were formed from the “Crossing Hill” of the Earth God Temple and the trees around the graves. These arboreal borders of the land would be commonly-managed by all members of the lineage. Since the trees were collectively owned and were likely not to be quickly felled, they served the magistrate’s purpose of fixing a
permanent land boundary that all agnates could recognize. Much of Nanbu County’s mountainous surface area replicated this intricately layered arrangement.

Figure 19. Photograph of Lineage Cemetery Occupying “Almost a Whole Field,” with Fengshui Trees in North China (c. 1920)

The “eighteen-step” custom in Ba County was incorporated into the local practice of Qing law so that county magistrates did not have to directly engage with overly complicated geomantic questions that arose from grave disputes. Under this rule, an actual infringement within eighteen

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290 The practice in fact did not originate in Ba County or even Sichuan specifically, but can be traced to Hubei, where communities, including local Muslim communities, in the Ming Dynasty can be seen divining auspicious gravesites and composing contracts under the custom. For an example, see the Muslim Wang 王 lineage from Mianyang 江南, Hubei, who in 1517 composed the following grave contract. This contract involves the “sale” of grave land, which was uncommon in Nanbu County, as will be discussed later in this chapter.

立大賣陰地文約
人應朝綱、朝論。今將自己受分祖產陰地一塊，座落土名野貓墩，應中出筆賣與竹林灣王忠紀葬父為塋。當日得受地價文銀八兩五錢整，應人親手接訖。其地穿心一十八步，聽從王人擇吉安葬。

Ying Chaogang and Ying Chaolun compose a contract for the permanent sale of grave land. Now they will take one piece of their own inherited ancestral grave land, which is located at a place called Wild Cat Mound, and with a middleman composing [the contract], sell it to Wang Zhongji of Bamboo Forest Gulf for the burial of his father. On this day, they will receive an exact price of eight taels and five qian; the persons should personally receive the payment. The land should be protected for eighteen steps around [the future grave], and they will comply with how the Wang family divines an auspicious spot for burial.

This contract was preserved in the Wang Lineage Genealogy, published in TZ3 (1864). Duan and Yao, eds., Zhongguo nanfang huizu jingji shangmao ziliao xuanbian, 155.
steps of a grave would be ruled as if it had disturbed a grave. Because Nanbu’s mountainous surface area was composed of such a limited amount of agricultural land, it was impractical to fix a “one-size” approach to grave territoriality. 291 But this meant that, in Nanbu, magistrates did not have a standardized custom of grave measurement such as the “eighteen-step” rule to fall back on when litigating cases. This is not to overstate the extent of territory that geomantic claims could be applied to in Nanbu. Cases in this study show a range of territorial influence that could be successfully invoked through a grave; the social standing of a claimant certainly influenced this.

One cultural practice that informed grave territoriality in Nanbu County (and elsewhere) was geomantic divination. Grave divination was not only an essential practice to ensure the proper timing and location of a grave for cosmological considerations, but in a cultural setting where “public cemeteries” (gongmu 公墓) did not exist and the large majority of graves did not have headstones, geomantic information was also in practice essential for grave identification, either within a lineage cemetery or alone alongside a mountainside or hill slope.

The image of a traditional Chinese tomb (mu 墓) with a large, inscribed headstone on a mountain ridge is an elite depiction, representative of a lineage branch that had the capital to erect a tombstone with identifying markers in the first place, and one that by selecting an independent location for a grave spot, sought to differentiate their branch’s fortune from the other lineage lines. Inscriptions for such tombs were regulated in size by the imperial state to ensure that stele sizes

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291 It is important to clarify here that, even considering the “eighteen step” rule that was invoked by lineages and incorporated into the customary jurisprudence of Ba County’s court, litigants in the county still commonly submitted plaints in the language of geomancy. That is, the “eighteen step” rule in Ba County did not replace fengshui’s local influence, but rather, standardized, to a degree, its management in the courts. For example, during a dispute over quarrying stones and felling trees near a gravesite — activities that were claimed by the plaintiff to harm the fengshui of his ancestral grave, the Ba County magistrate ruled: 令王照品故父墳界內樹木仍已保蓄, 周圍以穿心十八步為界, 日後不得籍墳侵占 “I order the trees around grave of Wang Zhaopin’s deceased father to remain, as they have been, protected; the surrounding border of [the grave] should adhere to the ‘eighteen step’ [rule] as a border, and from today on, it is not permissible to invade the space of the grave.” Ba County Qing Archive: 6.08.03322.
were created in accordance with proper rank and status. Most earth mound graves (fen 墳) for commoners were divined and dug within lineage cemeteries, themselves selected in auspicious locations such as an Azure Dragon Corner. Any addition of new graves had to be built with respect to the geomantic ordering of the cemetery — which mirrored the lineage’s internal composition, with the greatest common ancestor at the front and subsequent generations behind.

After several generations, a lineage cemetery would come to hold dozens of graves. These graves often lacked tombstones or identifying markers and were composed of packed earth mounds surrounded by protective trees. Their individual identification came from their geomantic data that was recorded in a lineage contract, divination record, or a family genealogy. An example of how this worked in practice can be found in a handwritten Northern Sichuan genealogy, the *Wan Lineage Genealogy of Sichuan’s Guangyuan County* 四川廣元县萬氏家譜, dated MG33 (1944). Upon arriving to Northern Sichuan from Fengxiang County 凤翔縣 in Shaanxi during the mid-Qing Dynasty, the Wans acquired land on the Zhao Family Plain 趙家坪, where they established a graveyard. Every mound in the cemetery could be identified by its unique positioning.

Legal cases suggest that, while not immediately evident to an outsider, this information could be gauged by magistrates through their own knowledge of geomantic practice. The third branch of [our lineage]

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293 Cohen, “Lineage Organization in North China.”

294 Tombs that did possess stone inscriptions would typically engrave geomantic data directly onto the inscription.

295 Note that wives buried directly next to their husbands were sometimes buried in the same geomantic positioning as their spouse; this may have depended on whether the wife was buried with her husband (hezang 合葬), or whether her family wished to hire a new yinyang master for the purposes of a separate grave location. Sometimes wives were separately buried, but if a family lacked such funds, the previous divinatory schema of her husband could be used to create a new grave for her besides her husband’s. The geomantic positioning of mother’s graves is an important and challenging topic that needs more research. Divining a unique position for a mother was likely a highly personal question for a family that likely involved negotiations with the mother’s relatives, if they lived close by.
Every generation in the male patriline had to have a distinct geomantic orientation. The use of the term “mountain” did not denote separate mountains. Rather, “mountain” 山 (distinct from Dragon 龍, “mountain range”) referred to the mound where the grave’s xue 穴 (“cavern”; node of auspicious qi along a vein) was located inside of the lineage cemetery.

In addition to genealogies, contracts from Nanbu and Sichuan broadly are replete with geomantic information. This is not to overstate the case. Many land deeds from the Nanbu Archive do not contain geomantic data; however, a significant number — particularly for graves, houses, timber, and records of household division — do. In the contract below, the grave created for a mother was on the shen mountain facing the yin direction (shensha yinxia 公山寅向):

立借陰地安葬文約

人曾文中，貴中，先中，發中，賓中等。母親身故，無處安葬，
今來憑證哀求主家蘇邦賢名下契買李姓業內，踩得陰地壹棺，並無餘地，當將母親

296 Langzhong Municipal Library, Local Rare Books Collection, Sichuan Guangyuan xian Wanshi jiapu 《四川廣元縣萬氏家譜》 [Wan Lineage Genealogy of Sichuan’s Guangyuan County], 1:9.

297 For an example of a contract containing geomantic directions for the sale of commercial property 為書立決賣田地山場林木事, see: Nanbu County Qing Archive: 2.59.04. For an example of a Household Division register with typical geomantic notations (外有當門側邊後脈風水竹木未分 “additionally, there are facing the gate [of our house] on the side along the Rear Earth Vein, fengshui trees that that not been divided”), see: Nanbu County Qing Archive: 22.177.06.
安葬於申山寅向。此葬以後，曾姓祇許祭掃，永不得藉故滋事生端培補。日後起骸，不得復葬，將原跡退還交回。今欲無憑，立借葬約為據。在場人：蘇綁興，曾憲華，劉日聰，蘇邦賢，曾玉華，仝在。代筆人：黃于琇。道光十八年四月二十五日立約。298

Zeng Wenzhong, Zeng Guizhong, Zeng Xianzhong, Zeng Fazhong, and Zeng Binzhong compose a contract to borrow a gravesite for burial. Since their mother passed away and they have no place to bury her, they came to entreat the property owner Su Bangxian to use land purchased under his name from the Li lineage to establish burial land for one grave. There is no additional land [ceded]. The Zengs will take their mother and bury her on the shen mountain facing the yin direction. After the burial, the Zengs are only permitted to come to offer sacrifices and sweep the grave, and they must never take advantage of this arrangement and cause discord. If the corpse is later moved, reburial [in this spot] is not permitted and the spot must be returned to the original owner. Now on the point of lacking proof, we establish a contract of “borrowing a burial site” as evidence. People Present: Su Bangxing, Ceng Xianhua, Liu Ricong, Su Bangxian, Zeng Yuhua, Tong Zai. Written by: Huang Yuxiu. Established on DG18 (1838), fourth month, twenty-fifth day.

In line with Zhu Xi’s prohibition on the sale of grave land, land for graves was seldom bought in Qing Sichuan, but was rather lent or leased in perpetuity to a family or lineage for a fee that might or might not be stated in the contract. In the above contract, the fee was not stated: a “donation” was likely given to the Sus for the use of their land for a grave. It also exemplifies a case where a mother’s grave was independently divined, evidently at the behest of her sons, who may have not had space available in a lineage cemetery next to their father’s grave.

County archives in Sichuan are in possession of divination records because they were invoked during the legal process to prove the authenticity or condition of a grave. This recorded information frequently entered into the legal process: in GX5 (1879), wensheng 文生 Jing Shenyi 敬慎儀 brought a plaint against a geomancer Zhang Xichou 張錫疇 for burying his father at the inauspicious yin 寅 time on the yichou mountain in the guiding direction 乙丑山向癸丁. This produced the “General-Archer” (jiangjunjian 將軍箭) condition for geomantic death (sha 煞), which resulted in the demise of Jing Shenyi’s son in the following year. Upon the yamen’s

298 Hu and Su, eds., Chengdu Longquanyi bainian qiyue wenshu, 222.
investigation of the site, the presiding magistrate agreed that this divinatory schema had been inappropriate for Jing’s father and conceded that his son’s death was likely tied to the inauspicious placement.299 In a lawsuit from 1932, runners mapped a grave in the Jiang 姜 cemetery that was notated as being located on the hai mountain facing the ren direction (haishan renxiang 亥山壬向), thus identifying the grave in contention and its territorial scope.300 This information was necessary for the magistrate to visualize the grave in the Jiang cemetery as well as its direction.

These details were invoked in cases and trials in Sichuan through the 1940s.301

299 Nanbu County Qing Archive: 7.844.03. The “General-Archer” (jiangjunjian 將軍箭) formation in the Eight Characters 八字, when invoked at the yin 宥 time, was thought to lead to the death of a son, which happened in Jing’s case. Jing later attacked Zhang in Jianxing Market Town. The magistrate’s ruling (07.844.05) was as follows:

今沐深訊，查張錫疇擇術不精，以致文生（敬慎儀）葬父不及三年，即有子死之痛。且墳上不生寸草，穴內生有白蟻。張錫疇的地理可知矣…斷令文生（敬慎儀）不許再向張錫疇滋事，如文生敬氏子弟有向張錫疇滋事者，惟文生是問。遵依具結就是。

Now the court has investigated this matter and we observe that Zhang Xichou’s skill at site selection is not good, since Jing Shenyi’s father has not been buried for three years and already there has been the pain of the loss of a son. Furthermore, on the grave, not an inch of grass will grow; within the divined cavern, there are now termites. Therefore, Zhang Xichou’s [lack of skill in] dili can be known…I order that wensheng Jing is not permitted to stir up trouble eagainst Zhang Xichou and if Jing’s wife, sons, or brother attacks Zhang Xichou, wensheng Jing will be questioned. [Wensheng Jing] pledges to follow [this resolution] as is.

300 SUCSBRC [Santai Collection]: 9.3.1065.1551. A plaint from XF7 (1857) claimed that the construction of a house 遮定山向截斷墳脈 “blocked the established orientation [of the] mountain and broke the grave’s vein.” Nanbu County Qing Archive: 5.95.01. To evaluate this claim, the yamen needed to know the grave’s direction.

301 See the following lawsuit from December of 1940 (SUCSBRC [Nanxi 南溪 Collection]: 5.1.744.7860), presented to the Nanxi County Judicial Office 南溪縣司法處 on a form that was virtually identical with a Qing plaint:

民等祖母譚伍氏於民國十九年病故，殯在廟墳下。擇吉於民二十年辛未歲正月十二日安葬此處，扦立壬山丙向為吉穴。歷代十餘年之久，民等各房子孫拜掃無異，族內子孫無敢毀損侵害。突於今八月冤遭孫輩譚樹森（即被告人）侵占吉穴；自無尊親，騎墳進葬，敢將姪媳譚葉氏騎葬於祖母墳墓之上，騎壓墳尾，不遺三尺，仍立壬山丙向置。

Our paternal grandmother of the Tan Lineage, surnamed Wu, on MG19 (1930) passed away. We encoffined and placed her among the graves of the temple. We selected an auspicious [time], and in MG20 (1931), the xinwei year, on the twelfth day of the first month, we buried her in this place, taking the ren mountain facing the bing direction 壬山丙向 as an auspicious cavern. For the past ten years, descendants from every branch of our lineage venerated and swept the grave without issue; no descendant from inside the lineage would dare to harm this grave. Suddenly, in the eight month of this year MG29 (1940), [the grave] was wrongly invaded by a member of the grandson generation, Tan Shusen (the defendant), who took over the auspicious cavern; with no regard for his elders, he overrode the grave and forcefully buried another corpse in it; he dared to take his nephew’s daughter-in-law, Lady Ye of the Tan Lineage and bury her above our grandmother’s grave. The new grave straddled over and pressed the end of the [our grandmother's] grave and does not even leave three feet. And they established it by taking the ren mountain facing the bing direction 壬山丙向 as well!
In Langzhong County, in 1887, a divination record was presented as evidence alongside a Qianlong-era (1736-1795) stamped contract (by then an “old contract” jiuqi 舊契 or guqi 古契) to prove the authenticity of the gravesite during a dispute over the land of a rural pusi 舖司 (courier relay station). In this case, the geomantic divinatory schema had been composed alongside a tax assessment. The local geomancer, contractual middleman, and tax headman were likely the same person, and probably one of the few literate people in the market town. The record reads as follows.

Figure 20. Divinatory Schema (Mao Mountain Facing the You Direction) for a Father’s Grave with Land Tax Estimation for Adjacent Agricultural Fields (c. 1886)

(Discussion of the four preceding elements before the final element of “Earth”) ...Earth is born from the shen branch, qi is born at the yin branch, and its peak carries [through] the four seasons. [Your] father should be buried on the sixth day of the eleventh lunar month, with the following time frame [in mind]: at the jimao time which is the earth phase, on the yiwei day, which is the metal phase, in the jihai month which is the wood phase, in the

302 Langzhong Municipal Archive: 343.7.04-05.
149

*bingxu* year (1886) which is the earth phase. [He will be buried on] the *mao* mountain, facing the *you* direction.  

地丁銀每兩加壹伍火耗銀算法…  
The formula for calculating the “fire loss” surcharge of “one-fifth” for each *liang* of silver in the land tax is as follows…  

丁銀算法：貳「兩」，伍「斤」，陸「釐」，柒「銖」，陸「毫」。  
Land tax estimation: two (*liang*), five (*jin*), six (*li*), seven (*qian*), and six (*hao*).

Though we cannot be sure whether in this specific case it was the geomantic formula or the adjacent tax calculation that held more sway at court, the document above suggests that locals saw geomantic and tax information within a general continuum of landed information. Just as locals likely knew their annual tax liabilities, they were also aware of the positions and orientations of their parents’ or grandparents’ graves.

III. *Fake Graves and Ancient Graves*

Divinatory and genealogical data were particularly necessary when magistrates confronted two very common types of land disputes in Nanbu: accusations that a newly constructed grave was fake or claims based on an alleged connection to an ancient grave. Under Qing law, graves were not allowed to be dug up and opened, which would be the most obvious way to verify the authenticity of a grave. To gauge whether a grave was fake, magistrates often had to decide whether the environmental context of an alleged grave aligned with the common understandings of a good grave spot. Likewise, many graves lacking inscriptions did not record who an ancestor’s descendants were, particularly if a grave was ancient. An overview of the following cases illustrates how, in the legal crevices formed by these issues, geomantic and genealogical information regularly came to inform official resolutions.

The case of the Zhong 鍾 lineage of Anren 安仁 Township (ninety *li*) from 1887 is one such case of an alleged “fake grave” (*jiafen* 假墳).  

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303 Nanbu County Qing Archive: 9.675.
contested burial spot, in New Town Embankment, the site of one of Nanbu’s nineteenth century “branch yamens.” At that time, the assistant magistrate ruled that the cemetery mountain should be common land for all lineage members while banning farming on it 公共禁蓄地, rendering it a “forbidden land” 禁地. The source of the new conflict was an accusation, by Zhong Chaogui 鍾朝貴 and Zhong Tingzhen 鍾廷珍 that their relative of another branch, Chaoping, had snuck into the area in the middle of the night and constructed a “fake grave,” which had broken the earth vein of Chaogui’s relative, Tingzhen, causing Tingzhen’s youngest son to be struck with a sudden illness from which he did not recover 私埋假墳，戴脈犯害，廷珍幼子身死. The implications of this were evident: Chaoping had added the “fake grave” to claim the land in an auspicious spot for a future burial in which a coffin would be placed within the dirt mound.

Contracts from opposing sides were collected. Chaoping’s side spoke first, saying that in the past, they had buried a member of their branch without a single contentious word uttered by the other branch. Chaoping added that he turned seventy sui this year and often felt ill, so he had begun preparing for his death by building the base of a future grave on the mountain.304 When the other branch discovered this, they intimidated him by claiming that the auspicious site belonged exclusively to them and that he had hurt their earth vein, causing bodily harm to members of their branch. Chaoping claimed that they had used the excuse that Tingzhen’s four-year old (three sui) son had died that year of a wind illness (fengbing 風病).

Chaogui countered such assertions by claiming that he privately owned an auspicious burial plot at the base of the grave mountain 私塋吉穴, on which Chaoping had greedily set his

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304 Religious context can help explain why Chaoping would want to do this. From the Song Dynasty onward, a phenomenon called “graves for the living” appeared across China. These graves were constructed on auspicious plots and were thought to extend the lifespan of the future grave occupant. Bai, “Daoism in Graves,” 548-600.
sights in 1879 by claiming it was part of the original mountain. Chaogui argued that Chaoping forged a Xianfeng-era (1851-1861) contract as proof of his exclusive claim to land around the mountain. He then demanded that the other branch pay to use the site to bury Chaogui’s father. At the first court hearing at the branch yamen, the mountain was declared to be common land for Zhong lineage members. Yet, because Chaoping was so reluctant to give up his claims on the auspicious land, he created a fake grave for permanently claiming that land. According to Chaogui’s branch, since this fake grave was located next to Chaogui’s father’s tomb, the earth vein had been cut to great harm. Chaogui never attempted to explain why Tingzhen’s son, not his own, had died because of the alleged broken vein, though he did convey the fact that members of his branch unanimously viewed the death of Tingzhen’s son as linked to the broken vein; Chaoping’s own testimony in opposition did concede that Tingzhen’s son had indeed died that year.

Chaoping’s Xianfeng-era (1851-1861) fen Yue 分約 (“Record of Household Division”), which Chaogui’s branch had claimed was forged, prohibited the construction of a well and the construction of a yangzhai (“residential house”) around the mountain. Chaogui’s branch produced a white contract from the Jiaqing Reign (1796-1820) that was explicitly about the grave mountain’s geomancy. Dismissing both contracts, the magistrate noted that 呈字據供詞不符 “their (the two sides) submitted written testimonies (including contracts) and depositions did not correspond” and that it was impossible to discern which contract, if either, was forged. The Nanbu County’s Department of Works sent a runner to identify the character of the “fake” grave in question and ascertain whether this structure affected the earth vein of the grave. In his illustration and appended commentary, the runner noted that Chaoping had erected an unmarked gravestone five chi 尺 (feet) behind the grave of Chaogui’s father’s grave; it appeared that this was the foundation of a future
grave. With this information and the visible depiction of the positioning of the graves on the mountain, the magistrate gave his final ruling:

断令，伊等坟山仍照原议三房公共护蓄。至钟朝平在钟朝贵父坟后所修生基，应即折去於坟旁左右丈以外另修，以免截脉遮向，生顺死安，两造悦服，各结完案，约据发还。此判。305

I order their grave hill continue to be managed according to the previous assessment [of the New Town Embankment’s branch yamen]: it is common [land] for the three branches of the Zhong lineage and is to be protected by the lineage. As for Zhong Chaoping’s grave base constructed behind Chaogui’s father’s grave, Chaoping should remove it immediately and reestablish the grave one zhang (3.2 meters; 10.5 feet) to the right or left of Chaogui’s father’s grave so that it does not break the earth vein or block its direction. Thereby, life can be smooth and death will be peaceful, and the two sides will now be both satisfied. This case is concluded. We return your contracts and evidence. This is the judgment.

In the months following the conclusion of this case by the magistrate, the accusing branch of the Zhong lineage brought additional plaints regarding the broken vein. They even cited a baozhang from the neighboring Yang lineage as a witness to the fact that two girls and a boy had died in Zhong Chaoting’s branch because of the broken earth vein. But the clerks of the Department of Works noted that their runners had reported that the originally planned grave had been correctly moved by Zhong Chaoping. The magistrate would not re-hear the case because the conditions stipulated under the previous ruling had been met by Chaoping’s branch. 306

In his final ruling for this case, the Nanbu magistrate directly addressed the geomantic concerns of Tingzhen’s line, while at the same time affirming that the existence of the grave on

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305 Nanbu County Qing Archive: 9.675.06.

306 For another case that saw a magistrate speak of a broken earth vein of the Liao lineage by the neighboring Pengs, see the following ruling from Ba County Qing Archive: 6.08.02805: 彭為源截脈包砌祖塋開挖水溝屬實。斷令彭為源不許截脈包砌祖塋，將水溝塘塞。Peng Weiyuan’s breaking of the earth vein through constructing a grave and opening an irrigation ditch [near Liao’s] ancestral graves is true. I order that Peng Weiyuan is not permitted to break the earth vein by building a grave and that he should fill in the irrigation ditch.” For another example, a magistrate ruled that a certain Xiao Chaopin should not break Xiao Chaotai’s earth vein by adding the grave of his mother on Chaotai’s grave mountain: 断令肖朝聘不應截脈壓葬，賻令將肖朝聘之母屍棺提遷另葬. Ba County Qing Archive: 6.09.03321. For another case where an earth vein was inspected and found to not be broken, see: Ba County Qing Archive: 6.08.03876.
the ancestral hill was not illicit. By stating his objective to avoid “breaking the earth vein or blocking its direction”以免截脈遮向, the magistrate was addressing the type of information found in the divination records profiled above (i.e. “the gui mountain facing the ding direction”癸山丁向). As such, this case emphasizes the two main points at the center of this chapter: first, that graves were powerful claims to land and second, that officials engaged with situated information of land in the absence of, or as a supplement to, other forms of evidence that the state was technically supposed to have (i.e. extensive land registers). Even with the fact that the evidentiary record for the Zhongs (an allegedly forged contract and an unstamped contract) was not particularly strong, the magistrate did not deny their claims to the site. After the trial, he even returned their contracts.

Many other cases saw the creation of “fake graves” for the claiming of farmland. In a case that was also first heard at one of Nanbu’s branch yamens in 1877 (GX3.10.9), Zhang Wengui 張文貴 accused Chen Xiuguang 陳修廣 of destroying his ancestral grave while farming. Through the runner’s inspection of the gravesite and relevant contracts for the purchase of land, the magistrate ascertained that Zhang Wengui had buried animal bones into Chen’s farmland to create fake graves. The burial of animal bones in the creation of fake graves was common. For a case where the Wangs 汪 planted such bones next to an ancient grave to feign an infringement and extort money, see: Nanbu County Qing Archive: 7.169.

307 The following (Nanbu Qing County Archive: 7.336.09) is from the concluding affidavit (jiezhuang 结狀) given to Zhang Wengui after his trial:
蒙訊明查伊呈念早買民等宗祠地土，並無墳塚字樣。陳會龍現耕多年，民等亦未稱說地內有墳等語。致民張文貴不應埋骨侵害，民張文喜亦不應與民張國奇詐控作包，應重懲。從寬將民張文貴、張文喜均各掌責，斷令民歸家安分守己，日後不得均伊等詐控。此判。
The court has clearly investigated [this matter]: the contract that he [Chen Huilong] submitted to the court for the long-ago purchase of land around the Zhang Ancestral Hall does not contain the characters for “graves.” Chen Huilong has now farmed this land for many years, and [for that period] the Zhangs never said anything about the existence of such a grave within the land. As for Zhang Wengui, he should not bury animal bones and invade [Chen Huilong’s] land; Zhang Wenxi should also not, alongside Zhang Guoqi serve as the witnesses in a false accusation. They should be severely punished. But we will handle this leniently, having both Zhang Wengui and Zhang Wenxi beaten. I order that all of you return home and keep to your proper place, and after today to never engage in a false accusation. This is the ruling.

The burial of animal bones in the creation of fake graves was common. For a case where the Wangs 汪 planted such bones next to an ancient grave to feign an infringement and extort money, see: Nanbu County Qing Archive: 7.169.
a “fake grave,” to claim it for himself. In the final ruling, although the magistrate should have punished the Zhangs for burying animal bones into Chen’s property and providing false testimony, he was also aware that, several decades before, the Zhangs — falling on difficult times — had permanently sold a ritual wet field (jitian 祭田) adjacent to their ancestral hall to the Chens. This may have factored into the magistrate’s relative leniency, though we should not overlook the fact that, in this case, it was the creator of the fake grave who had the audacity to commence litigation.

The construction of “fake graves” in a similar circumstance, and the need to consider a grave’s geomantic context, is exemplified in the following case. On GX30.2.21 (1904), a tribute student (gongsheng 貢生) named He Binlin 何炳麟 presented a plaint against the Xu lineage. According to He, during the Jiaqing Reign (1796-1820), He’s ancestors had purchased a field that had been part of the Xus property and constructed a dividing border to maintain a boundary. He subsequently moved away from the site and hired a tenant, Tang Shangfu 唐尚富, to work the land.308 Sometime in the first ten days of the second month of GX30, several dozen men of the Xus breached the dividing line and added five fake graves for claiming land. Members of the He lineage invited the Xus several times to a teahouse to negotiate the matter, but the Xus refused, so He had no choice but to bring a plaint. He concluded by saying the land had been in his lineage’s name for several generations and he possessed a contract for the purchase of the property. 309

The Xus presented a counter-plaint which admitted that their ancestor had sold the land next to their graves (a “ritual field;” 祭田 jitian) in question to the He lineage during the Jiaqing Reign.310 Even though it had been nearly a century since the land was sold, the Xus still referred

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308 Note that even after a century, the land was still referred to as “the purchased land” by both sides.

309 Nanbu County Qing Archive: 16.640.01.

310 Nanbu County Qing Archive: 16.640.02.
to the area as their “ancestral land [that our ancestors had] sold to the Hes.” They claimed that during the previous year, the tenant had infringed on their cemetery’s “forbidden land” and in the winter months of 1903, they had brought a plaint to the local branch yamen of New Town Embankment, where it was decided that the He lineage would return the boundary to its former place in accordance with the original contract. The Xus claimed that the tenant, Tang, had not respected the old boundary. According to them, none of the graves were fake, and the lands around the graves belonged exclusively to them.

Figure 21. Yamen Runner’s Illustration of the Xu Lineage Cemetery and the He Property (1904)

In this description of the illustration above, the runner from the Department of Works observed that He Binglin possessed a contract for the purchase of this land that allowed the Xus to retain their old graveyard — this was commonly called *maidì liúfèn* (賣地留墳 “sell the land but

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311 Nanbu County Qing Archive: 16.640.06.
Ditches and stone walls demarcated the borders. The runner conveyed that, due to heavy rainfall over the past years, the ditch boundaries had become muddled. When there was a conflict with He’s tenant farmer the previous year, the Xus had grown worried and eventually decided to act by constructing five fake graves to reclaim the land.

The runner claimed that the graves were clearly fake and had only been recently constructed. No coffins were present near the graves. As seen from the earlier case of the Zhongs, the bases of graves were constructed long before a coffin was placed into them. Lineages waited for an auspicious time as designated by a geomancer to place a coffin into the grave, often leaving the coffin above ground next to the grave, Earth God Temple, or Ancestral Hall for months before the formal burial took place. Further, around the five fake graves in question, the yamen runner noted no fengshui or “forbidden” trees (jinshu) of the kind that existed in the cemetery of the Xus. The magistrate drew heavily on the runner’s report in crafting his own ruling:

堂諭：察訊得何炳麟等供伊等買業，周圍俱與徐紹金等祖塋挨連，有界各管。去因佃戶將其塋禁崙腳剷刨肇訟。前經訊明，飭令照界另埋，以杜混淆。乃徐紹金等藐斷不遵，突在炳麟等買明地內估埋假墳五所…斷令何炳麟等地內有無古墓，既被徐紹金等壘好，任由炳麟等管蓄柴草，不與紹金等相涉。所毀塋界，仍照老石埋界各管，永杜後衅。何炳麟等稱徐德齋等六人所借賬項，應該約期攤還，以清轃葛，免後滋生事端，各結完案。此判。

The court rules: we have learned that the land He Binglin purchased from the Xus has an aligning border with Xu Shaojin’s ancestral graves. There is a dividing border with each in control of their side. Last year, because He’s tenant infringed on the forbidden area of the cemetery by digging, litigation was commenced. The matter was previously investigated thoroughly and [the magistrate] ordered that digging [should occur] in another place in accordance with the existing border to prevent confusion. Yet, Xu Shaojin and the others disregarded [this ruling] and did not follow it, and suddenly constructed five fake graves in He Binglin’s clearly purchased lands…I rule that He Binglin’s lands do not have any old graves on it, and since the area was piled with dirt [to create the fake graves] by Xu Shaojin, it should be up to He Binglin to stockpile firewood and grass, which should not concern Xu Shaojin’s side. As for the destroyed grave boundary, it should be [re-
established] along the old stone border, with each in control of their side to permanently prevent future conflicts. As for the debt that He Binglin et al. state is owed by the six Xus, it should be returned by a fixed date to clear any confusion and prevent this conflict from arising again. This case is over, all is finished. This is the ruling.

Through the runner’s map and He Binglin’s contract, the magistrate ascertained that the Xu’s construction of the graves was a blatant land grab so that the Xus could reclaim the ancestral lands sold in the early nineteenth century. He Binglin’s contract affirmed that this had been a valid transaction, approved by both sides through a middleman, while the geomantic conditions of the five newly constructed graves — specifically the lack of trees — made it evident that they were built for claiming land. In his judgment, the magistrate specifically mentioned that the Xus were forbidden from gathering grasses or felling trees that were on He’s property under the pretense that such vegetation was connected to the Xu graves through fengshui.

These “fake grave” cases — three samples among the many examples in the Nanbu Archive — exhibit some important procedural convergences and divergences.314 To learn more about the site in question, yamen authorities ordered two of the disputes mapped for the magistrate’s perusal. The first case reveals a gravesite that was created with the intention of an eventual burial, while the second and third cases are examples of the use of grave construction to claim agricultural fields. Also important is that the latter two cases which truly involved the construction of “fake” graves both concerned previously owned lineage lands (“ritual fields” jitian 祭田) permanently sold to an outside surname at an earlier time — in the second case, several decades earlier and in the third case, nearly a century earlier. For the second case, the contractual documentation was strong enough to render a judgment on the gravesite’s inauthenticity; for the third case, the map which

314 For another example of a fake grave case between two lineages, the Fongs 馮 and the Zhangs 張, see: Nanbu County Qing Archive: 6.00133. For an example of a case that involved ascertaining whether a real grave existed next to potentially illicitly sold tree, see: Nanbu County Qing Archive: 8.543. For an example of a “fake inscription,” wherein locals manipulated the location of an inscription to collect firewood, see: Nanbu County Qing Archive: 9.00651.
revealed the muddled borders and the “fake graves” with no tree cover (which real graves need for good *fengshui*), provided the rationale for the final judgment.

These numerous “fake grave” cases have another commonplace corollary in Nanbu’s legal archive: cases that involved a person or lineage branch claiming a connection with an ancient grave that most likely did not contain the remains of his ancestors. Because late imperial Chinese society was highly mobile, Nanbu’s hilltops were dotted with the “ancient” graves (*gufen* 古墳) of families who had long moved away and seldom returned to offer sacrifices. When this happened, locals might strategically light candles and burn incense to make a public display of ownership. If such tactics worked, this in turn gave them access to the natural resources around the grave, such as timber and water resources, as well as an area with demonstrably good *fengshui*. Many locals popularly believed that the good fortune of “ancient” graves could be passed onto their families. For this reason, “ancient” graves were the cosmological and legal antipodes of “fake graves,” which were “fake” because they lacked bodies as well as proper geomantic positioning (an observable condition); “ancient” graves on the other hand were recognized as having excellent *fengshui*, but determining who was connected to an ancient grave was a difficult matter. In these cases, magistrates had to study contracts, flip through genealogies, and scan rural landscapes to distinguish between *gufen* 古墳 (“ancient graves”) and *zufen* 祖墳 (“ancestral graves”).

Sometimes, magistrates sanctioned the transformation of *gufen* 古墳 (“ancient graves”) into *zufen* 祖墳 (“ancestral graves”), as seen through the following case. On XT3.6.6 (1911), a certain Xu Longfu 徐隆富 presented a plaint against Xu Yingcheng 徐應成 for creating a grave on his land; Xu Yingcheng quickly responded with a plaint against Xu Longfu.315 The contentious

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315 Nanbu County Qing Archive: 22.204.01; 22.204.02.
battle over territory boiled down to the following details. Xu Longfu was a landowner of the
lineage who owned several wet fields. Near one of his wet fields were three grave mounds that
had no tombstones; they had existed near Longfu’s land for as long as he could remember, and he
and his immediate agnates referred to them as ancient graves. These graves were never swept
during the Qingming Festival, and Longfu estimated that they predated the arrival of the Xu lineage
to Nanbu. Longfu’s distant agnate, Xu Yingcheng, was a poorer member of the lineage with no
land of his own who worked on the lineage’s communal ritual fields. The Xu lineage cemetery,
filled with graves and fengshui trees, had by the late nineteenth century become full. In the fifth
month of XT3 (1911), Xu Yingcheng’s mother passed away. With few funds to hire his own
geomancer or purchase auspicious land on the private market, Xu Yingcheng set his sights on the
three unmarked graves near Longfu’s fields. There, he created the grave of his mother.

At court, Yingcheng contended that the three unmarked graves constituted the graves of
his ancestors. Both sides looked to contracts owned by the lineage as proof for their claims. Longfu
presented his Daoguang-era (1821-1850) contract for the exclusive purchase of the wet field in
question. The runner examined this contract and wrote 字樣未註明界址 “the characters of the
contract do not clearly specify the clear limits of [this land].”316 Yingcheng, exclusively owning
nothing of his own, cited the lineage’s household division register that dated from the Qianlong
Reign (1736-1795). This register conveyed that the lineage gravesite and fengshui of the Xu family
cemetery would be common to all agnates. The implication here is that Yingcheng had been exiled
from the common ancestral cemetery, or at least told there were no spots left for him.317 The
magistrate, after reviewing the map illustrated by the yamen runner from the Department of Works,

316 Nanbu County Qing Archive: 22.204.06.

317 Sometimes contracts were directly presented to courts, other times they were simply read by yamen runners and
summarized in their reports.
forged a compromise:

堂諭: 查徐應成所葬墳地在徐隆富買明業內, 原有古墳三座, 無人祭掃, 究係何人之墳, 並不可知; 乃徐應成突於今年葬此墳內, 確係盜葬掌責。惟究既已葬定, 難難遷移, 著徐應成以錢一百串, 將此古墳全行買明, 聽由自便可也。其買界仍照珠筆所繪界線為界。鎖押限半月繳價。此判。318

The court rules: Xu Yingcheng’s mother’s grave has been created in what is clearly Xu Longfu’s purchased land. Originally there were three ancient graves that no one came and ritually swept; to carefully inquire as to whose graves these belong to — we simply cannot know this. Then, this year, Xu Yingcheng suddenly placed a grave here — this is truly a case of “stealing a burial,” and [the offender should be] flogged as penalty.319 However, considering that it has already been buried and it would be hard to move, [I order] Xu Yingcheng to pay 100 chuan to purchase these old graves clearly; then it will be entirely up to Xu to use the lands. The borders of the land to be purchased shall follow the vermilion lines illustrated [by the yamen runner]; to secure this land there is a half month time limit to hand over the funds. This is the ruling.

Figure 22. Yamen Runner’s Illustration of Xu Lineage Cemetery (Far Right), Xu Lineage Lands, and Xu Longfu’s Private Lands (1911) 320

In this ruling by the county magistrate, Xu Yingcheng was permitted to retain his illicitly created grave because the deceased was already interred in it. Yet this ruling is interesting for another

318 Nanbu County Qing Archive: 22.204.06.
319 In Qing law, “stealing a burial” referred to burying a dead person on another person’s land.
320 Nanbu County Qing Archive: 22.204.04.
reason: here, the magistrate not only required Yingcheng to purchase the land around the grave he created for his mother, but he also ordered him to purchase the three ancient graves that he used to divine his mother’s grave. That is, while the magistrate’s order for Yingcheng to pay money to compensate Longfu could be interpreted as a punishment, the magistrate also allowed for Yingcheng to legitimize his claim to the land by adopting the three unmarked graves as the graves of his alleged ancestors, rendering the three 古墳 “gufen” his 祖墳 “zufen”, even though the magistrate emphasized that he was intellectually agnostic on the question of their origin. That is, the magistrate recognized the fact that finding a spot with good fengshui for his mother was a filial act for Yingcheng, who was obviously in a desperate situation. As such, he was compelled by the magistrate to purchase the area’s “fengshui.”

In the prior case, the magistrate noted a lack of genealogical writing that could facilitate identifying the ancient graves. In the following case from MG17 (1928), a resolution hinged on the presentation of genealogical materials to gauge legitimate geomantic bonds. That year, a certain Zhao Tingxuan 趙廷選 presented a plaint against Guoxiang 趙國祥 over the destruction of fengshui. Zhao Tingxuan had a peculiar backstory. He had traveled hundreds of li with an entourage from Jian Sub-Prefecture 劍州 in the far north of Sichuan to the Nanbu yamen. He claimed that the Zhao lineage had a common ancestor in Nanbu named Zhao Chunrui 趙春銳,

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321 Nanbu County Qing Archive: 22.204.6. For a similar case from Ba County wherein the magistrate also permitted the illicit grave of a mother on another person’s farmland to remain untouched, see: Ba County Qing Archive: 6.08.02602. The ruling is as follows: 斷明葉峻琨越葬屬實，本應照例究遷，但念其母已葬年餘，從寬免於起遷。日後不得藉墳進葬滋事 “I rule that Ye Junkun buried [his mother] on another person’s (Xu Dengjia 徐登甲) property — this is true. I should have in accordance with custom ordered him to move [the grave], however considering his mother has been buried here for over a year, I will be lenient and not have him move it. Hereafter you are not permitted to add another grave and stir up trouble.” The timing of a burial was considered important in Qing law and it appears that the existence of the grave for a year rendered it so that the magistrate was reluctant to have it moved. As much depended on local custom and immediate circumstance, I hesitate to draw broad conclusions.

322 SUCSBRC [Nanbu Collection]: 466.456.06.
whose line had produced two branches in Nanbu. Tingxuan’s branch (represented by the ancestor Zhao Hong 趙洪) had migrated out of Nanbu during the Qianlong Reign (1736-1795), leaving behind his brother, Zhao Dian 趙典, who continued to reside in Nanbu. Tingxuan claimed that property of their common ancestor had been divided between the descendants, but because Zhao Hong had moved away, it was impractical for him to farm his share of land. The share in question was thus effectively inherited by the descendants of Zhao Dian. However, before Zhao Hong had moved, his wife Lady Zuo 左氏 passed away and was buried in the Old Grave Cliff 老墳岩 in Shenba Market Town. On her tombstone was inscribed the location and dimensions of the apportioned estate 老屋產業座落向段全載於左氏之碑.

In the autumn of 1928, Zhao Hong’s branch in Jian Sub-Prefecture was made aware of the fact that the Zhaos of Nanbu were planning on rebuilding their ancestral hall and updating the family genealogy. They packed their things and headed out on the long journey for the Festival of Sending Winter Clothing to the Dead 寒衣節, held on the first day of the tenth lunar month. But that day in the morning when they arrived at the ancestral hall, the reception from the Nanbu Zhaos was awkward and chilly. In the afternoon, the assembly ascended to the gravesite and Earth God Temple, where they found no trace of the inscription to Lady Zuo’s tomb. Upon investigating the matter, they discovered that Zhao Guoxiang 趙國祥, of the Nanbu Zhaos, had felled ten fengshui trees around the graves and previously had destroyed Lady Zuo’s tomb inscription. The magistrate asked that a copied version of Lady Zuo’s grave inscription be submitted to the court 仰將爾祖左氏墓誌抄呈 and that a runner should be sent to examine the site.
Guoxiang of the Nanbu Zhaos soon travelled to the yamen (MG17.12.01) and presented his own plaint. He claimed that no one from outside of Nanbu County had come to see the graves for a hundred years, and that he had no idea who Zhao Tingxuan was. According to Guoxiang, Tingxuan and his entourage showed up suddenly on the Festival of Sending Winter Clothes to the Dead and began inspecting their ancestral gravesite. After seeing that the Nanbu Zhaos had collectively agreed to cut some grave trees to distribute to agnates in preparation for winter, Tingxuan and his group suddenly demanded access to the timber, claiming that they had a connection to the fengshui. Zhao Guoxiang fetched his written version of the family genealogy to see if any of their names were written in it. They were not. After reviewing Guoxiang’s plaint, the magistrate requested that the genealogy be presented to the court 仰將爾世系族譜呈案察核訊奪.

A runner located the grave of Zhao Chunrui with an accompanying inscription, which he copied onto paper. Inscribed on Zhao Chunrui’s tomb was a QL52.10.22 (1787) genealogical chart to which the runner added information from Tingxuan’s testimony and Guoxiang’s written genealogy. In Zhao Chunrui’s tomb inscription, a single line was devoted to the Jian Sub-Prefectural branch of the family; this line simply read that, the eldest son lived in Jian Sub-Prefecture where his branch owned property, the next son lived in the old Nanbu homestead with his own property — all land shares had been divided — and their descendants should not be in conflict. From the genealogy presented to the court, we learn that Chunrui’s grandson, Zhao Hong, moved to Jian Sub-Prefecture, where a new generation of Hong’s branch — sharing the same “generational character” (zibei 字輩) shi 仕, with their Nanbu kin, had already been born.

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323 SUCSBRC [Nanbu Collection]: 466.456.09.
324 SUCSBRC [Nanbu Collection]: 466.456.16.
325 長子住劍州下中房管業，次子住老家管業，各有分段，後嗣不紊亂等語. SUCSBRC [Nanbu Collection]: 466.456.13.
The subsequent generations of Zhao Tingxuan’s branch bore the generation characters guo 国, kun 坤, jian 建, and so forth, but critically, after the guo 国-character generation, the generation characters of Zhao Guoxiang’s Jianzhou branch were different from the Nanbu branch. This alerted the magistrate to the fact that following the guo 国-character generation, communication between the branches had effectively ceased.

The legal question presented before the magistrate was whether Zhao Tingxuan, who had a distant ancestral link to the gravesite in question, had a cosmological connection to the site’s fengshui. The magistrate, considering that Tingxuan’s branch had not regularly participated in the ritual events around the Nanbu graves and the fact that their branch’s “generational characters” for sons were different, concluded that not enough evidence was presented to successfully make such claims to the fengshui:

堂判: 查趙廷選以毀碑謀產告趙國祥, 殊無實據。復據該族塋遺碑載明, 趙洪趙典各受各業, 子孫不得紊亂, 則廷選亦屬妄爭。茲念該廷選來, 剎令趙國祥等著給旅費養四元, 以敦和好。此判。³²⁶

The court rules: we have investigated the claim of Zhao Tingxuan against Zhao Guoxiang on the topic of destroying the tomb inscription with the intent to claim property and found that there is no real evidence of this. And again, according to the remaining tomb inscription of this lineage, Zhao Hong and Zhao Dian each received their own plots and that their descendants should not fight over this. Thus, Tingxuan has made a preposterous contention; however, now considering he came [from such a long way], I order Zhao Guoxiang’s branch to pay four yuan for his travel fees as a gesture of kindness and reconciliation. This is the ruling.

Though Tingxuan was ultimately not successful, this case underscores the importance of diverse record-keeping, genealogy writing, and public ritual practice around the communal gravesite. Neither branch had preserved a household division record from the late nineteenth century, which made the court look to other potential sources of evidence. This included the genealogical materials

³²⁶ SUCSBRC [Nanbu Collection]: 466.456.04.
concerning the generation-names of male agnates, stone inscriptions, and orally conveyed information concerning ritual practice at the grave.

The “fake” graves and “ancient” graves cases studied here were part of the small percentage of such phenomena that were reported to officials, accepted by officials, and judged by officials.327

327 There are many. See: Nanbu County Qing Archive: 11.262.01. On GX18.6.30 (1892), Gao Daqing 高大定 presented a plaint against Jing Deyu 敬德興, claiming that Jing had harmed his ancestral grave. Gao produced a contract for the purchase of land dating from the late eighteenth century, which cited the existence of graves near the boundary of the purchased land. Jing responded by saying that there were no graves of the Gao lineage near his land. To support his case, Jing produced a contract for the permanent purchase of land from the neighboring Huang family dated DG28.4.24 (1848), which did not mention a grave for the Gaos. A runner was sent to map the site. Arriving at the homesteads of the Gaos and the Jings, the runner identified the two graves in contention. Located on a nearby hillside, the graves had no inscriptions or identifying features. A modest grove grew around the graves; Gao had claimed that these trees were infringed upon by Jing. The runner discovered that neither lineage had a written genealogy 並無家譜, but claimants from both sides described their respective histories. The Jings and the Gaos had resided in Sichuan for several generations and had lived in Nanbu as neighbors since either side could remember. The two sides were linked through a local marriage alliance, a fact that the magistrate drew on as he rendered his verdict:

今祭掃而已, 所有古墓兩塚亦不知為誰氏之先人。高氏與敬氏同宗祖認宗, 意圖侵佔, 殊屬無恥。但高大定等所呈遠年契約, 二張即同廢紙, 不足為憑取具, 各結完案。此判。

I order the graves be presented with sacrifices and swept — that is all. We still do not know these two graves hold the ancestors of which lineage; [today] the Gao lineage and the Jing lineage are of shared ancestry, and their respective descendants recognize these ancestors. The intention of invading [the territory of the grave] is truly shameless. Moreover, the contracts that Gao Daqing presented are from nearly one hundred years ago and thus the two contracts are the same as waste paper — they are not sufficient to take as legal evidence. Everything is finished, the case is over. This is the ruling.

In short, the magistrate ruled that the graves continue to be protected, but the graves — in the eyes of the state — did not belong to either lineage. Sacrifices could be offered at the graves, but activities that could be construed as an infringement, such as the addition of new graves or the felling of nearby trees, were forbidden. The inability of the court to identify the identity of an ancient grave was common: in a case from GX11.11.11 (1885), washeng Lin Zerun 林澤潤 accused Lin Kaifu 林開福 of infringing on his ancestral grave. When genealogical materials were presented to the court, the magistrate allowed for further investigation:

堂諭：訟得武生林澤潤等祖墳, 稱林開福挑田挖毀, 僅伊弟兄不依, 家族外無有人; 勸無碑志, 乃係古墓。且林開福呈驗契約, 只注堰塘塆老墳字樣, 並無載有林澤潤等祖墳。林澤沛刁狡已極, 本應責懲, 姑從寬免。林澤潤即供挖毀祖墳情真, 投具甘結, 指出伊先祖系何名字。俟親詣履勘, 再行覆訊, 實究虛坐。林開福歧控之案, 檢歸並訊, 未到銷案, 林開福約據發還。此判。

The court rules: washeng Lin Zerun et al claim that their ancestral grave has been destroyed by Lin Kaifu’s 林開福 planting an agricultural field, but it is only his brothers who do not agree with [Kaifu’s] act, no one outside of the family does. We have investigated that there is no grave inscription; hence, it is an “ancient grave.” Moreover, the contract presented by Lin Kaifu for examination only notes that there is an “old grave” at the irrigation embankment, it does not say that Lin Zerun has an old grave there. Lin Zepei is truly cunning to the extreme and should be punished; however, I will be lenient for the moment. Lin Zerun has testified that the destruction of his ancestral grave is real and has submitted a written pledge to the yamen indicating the name of his ancestor. I will wait after I have personally inspected the grave, and then conduct the interrogation. If [the claim] is verified, then [Lin Kaifu] will be punished, but if it is false then [Lin Zerun] will be. Lin Kailian’s separate lawsuit will be examined and returned to for later interrogations — this case is not closed.

I return Lin Kaifu’s contract. This is the ruling.

Nanbu County Qing Archive: 9.194.03. For another example of a case in which the graves were deemed “ancient graves” and not “ancestral graves,” see: Nanbu County Qing Archive: 9.686. For another example where not enough evidence was presented, see: Nanbu County Qing Archive: 5.107.
These cases suggest that strategies such as the construction of “fake” grave, the adoption of “ancient” graves, or the wholesale adoption of new lineal identities were sometimes successful in Nanbu. The fact that in so many of these cases, officials had to rely on “unofficial” geomantic, genealogical, or epigraphic sources (even bemoaning the lack thereof) speaks to the difficulty for local courts to render judgments on some legal questions. Since there was such diversity in the strategies related to the grave that could be employed to claim land and a diversity of written and physical materials needed to record such claims, as well as possible — if not likely — contradictions within written records and popular understandings that formed over time, the state relied on the institution of the lineage and its records for information. Because the imperial state did not control the production of legal information, it had to consider a broad array of information.

IV. The “Grain Names” of Ancestors: Graves and Taxation

As Tobie Meyer-Fong has demonstrated in her recent study of the Taiping Rebellion, grave lands, cemeteries, and charitable estates were often used as tax havens during the pervasive destruction of the mid-nineteenth century.\(^{328}\) David and Isabel Crook observed related strategies through the beginnings of the Communist revolution in a north China village:

…The area around the grave mounds presented a special problem (for the measuring of land in the entire village), for all cemetery land was traditionally free from taxation. This meant that before the Communists came to Ten Mile Inn the size of the poor families’ graves was underestimated while that of the wealthy families was exaggerated. With the introduction of the Communists’ reforms the poor were, of course, exempted from taxation, but the rich strove persistently to keep the old, exaggerated measurements of their grave areas in the village records — to gain the maximum exemption.\(^{329}\)


The practice observed by David and Isabel Crook stretched far back into imperial Chinese history, and was evidenced in Nanbu. This section will provide an overview of how lands were hidden from taxation through sources in the Nanbu County Archive and highlight the important roles that sepulchral territoriality played in that process. It will also underline the reality that, since taxpayers were identified in the Fish Scale Registers by their ancestral “grain names” (liangming 糧名) — the names of their long-deceased ancestors who had once registered land — graves were indirectly linked to the tax identities of the living through genealogical data.

In Qing Nanbu, there were two major avenues for producing unregistered lands. One way was to simply not declare land. A second avenue produced much litigation in Qing and Republican Nanbu: a resident could engage in the sale or purchase of taxed land from a neighboring local but fail to report the transfer of the land tax duty by not obtaining a “red” stamp on the “white” contract. Graves were related to these avenues in several ways. First, graves were a way to claim lands not registered during the county’s 1720s cadastral survey.330 Grave territoriality in Nanbu, without Ba County’s “eighteen step rule,” was particularly discursive and could be generously

330 Consider the following example from a contract preserved in the Ba County Archive (dated QL13; 1748) that saw Huo Mingxuan 霍明選 permanently sell an ancestral wet field (zutian 祖田) to a man surnamed Zhang in order to pay for his debts. The wet field had a tax liability of five dou 秩五斗, which was listed during the Yongzheng cadastral campaign as worth one qian four fen of copper cash 條糧一錢四分. The field was adjoined by a yangzhai of the Huos and a yinzhai of the Chens that informed the territoriality, and hence the tax liability, of the site in question:

憑鄰族人等踏踏分明，兼之祖墳前後柏樹一共八根，永作二姓陰陽二宅風水，勿許砍伐，其餘隨意砍取。並未包賣他人寸地。自賣之後，不留寸地。任憑張姓撥立稅契，遷修陰陽二宅，勿得阻滯。With the witnesses of the neighboring kinsman, we walked over and distinguished clearly the borders. In addition to these, the eight cypress trees before and behind the ancestral grave will forever protect the fengshui of the yinzhai and the yangzhai of the two surnames (Huo and Chen), it is not permissible for them to be felled. The remaining trees may be felled and collected as [Zhang] wishes. This does not include measured tax-liable lands sold to other people. After the sale of this field, there is no remaining measured land [with tax liability for the Huos]. It is entirely up to the Zhangs to establish the tax deed [on these lands], and repair the yinzhai and yangzhai. [The Huos] are not allowed to interfere.

Sichuansheng dang'anguan 四川省檔案館, ed. Qingdai baxian dang'an huibian. Qianlong juan 《清代巴縣檔案彙編, 乾隆卷》 [A Compendium of Qing Archives from Ba County, Qianlong Collection] (Beijing: Dang’an chubanshe, 1991), 85.
Predatory investors looking to profit off their neighbor’s misfortunes would sometimes explicitly look to purchase a lineage’s “grave fields” or “ancestral hall fields” with the security that such fields were never registered in the first place.332

In the following case, members of the Shi 石 lineage of Jishang Township went so far in defending their claims to a grave-site that they accidentally revealed a contract that contained a bit too much information. On GX26.3.12 (1900), Shi Yingliang 石應良 and Shi Yingrong 石應榮 presented two legal plaints detailing a troubling situation at their auspicious burial plot.333 In their lawsuit, they explained that the Shi lineage had three branches, of which they represented two. The branches had formally divided their landholdings some time before, but their two branches maintained a private ancestral burial place in front of the common lineage graveyard below the Earth God Temple at the lineage’s Azure Dragon Corner. Yingliang cited his contract of purchase for this private land, which was separated from the older lineage cemetery. According to him, a set of distant agnatic relations, led by a man named Yingdou 应斗, had illicitly placed a grave for their mother in a spot for which they had no shares.

That same day, Shi Youzheng 石有政 (seventy-two sui), the father of Yingdou, presented a counter plaint against Yingliang and Yingrong’s branches. They said that for the three

331 Twentieth century land surveyors elsewhere in South China discovered that some highland mountain lands were claimed exclusively through grave placements, lacking even basic contractual documentation. Shi Peisheng 施沛生, ed. Minshi xiguan daquan 《民事習慣大全》 [A Complete Collection of Civil Customs] (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian chubanshe, 2002), 3.22a-b; 3.27b-28a. I thank Ian Miller for directing me to this source.

332 For instance, in 1908, a person named Cao Zizhang 曹子章 was detained for not reporting taxable lands. In his possession were eleven unstamped “white” contracts as well as eighteen “red” contracts. Of interest is that all the red contracts dated from JQ2 (1797) to TZ8 (1869) (the first half of the nineteenth century), while the white contracts all dated from then to GX30 (the second half of the nineteenth century), which corresponds with a general trend of the increasing appearance of white contracts in the second half of the nineteenth century. A number of the white contracts were for lands around Earth God Temples 土地廟水井田 and “grave fields” (fentian 墳田) — in other words, lands that, as originally collectively held by a lineage, would not have been registered. Nanbu County Qing Archive: 18.1071.

333 Nanbu County Qing Archive: 15.74.01.
generations, there had been no disputes over the shared grave land beneath the Earth God Temple. In other words, they were unaware of any privately owned land at the Earth God Temple. With the sudden passing of Youzheng’s wife in the fifth month of the previous year (1900), they needed to secure an auspicious grave plot. After writing a contract to the Earth God for use of his land, they had taken her corpse, placed it in a coffin, and positioned it atop the soil in the ancestral graveyard for seven months, waiting for an auspicious time to bury her. During this time, no protest was made by any lineage branches. A local geomancer named Luo Yuantong 羅元同 was hired to determine the position and timing of her burial. The name of the geomancer was provided in the plaint to emphasize that Luo was not a relative of the Shis and hence was an “objective” outsider for the selection of good grave land. Youzheng called for a banquet on this occasion, arranging

If a burial occurred wherein the geomancer was a relative of the lineage, the opposing side typically mentioned that fact to stress the fact that the geomancer was unskilled. A case (SUCSBRC [Nanbu Collection]: 466.3079a) from 1928 discusses a geomancer who was hired “on the cheap” from within the lineage. Earlier that year, Li Guofu 李國輔 set out to bury his father in the ancestral cemetery. Traditionally, the Lis had sought out the well-respected yinyang master Xie Pingzhang 謝平章, but to the lineage’s horror, a untrained relation, Li Yusan 李雨三 was tasked with the job: 隨事李雨三，喪葬故犯山煞，害及李載華忽然病垂危，巫醫無效，另請堪輿查看，不但侵傷光祖老墳，葬期不利，且又無故損傷人命。Because of “magician” Li Yusan’s burial, the mountain was harmed and the harm from the geomantic sha was felt, so that Li Zaihua suddenly fell critically ill. Spirit mediums and doctors were of no use; thus, we invited a geomancer to inspect the situation. Not only was the ancestral grave injured, the burial time was not advantageous to our people (lineage) and thus it is hard to protect our family. We had no choice but to take up this matter with the gentry leader of our community. That Li Guofu violated us with geomantic sha is true and caused our entire lineage to be not at peace. Calamities have been piling up in our community: not only have we suffered from hot diseases, the disasters of bandits, but also the inexplicable harming of life.

A runner mapped the gravesite. Following imperial practice, the magistrate ruled that the grave was not to be moved: 堂諭：訊得李國輔於本年十月二十八日，安葬其父李德華，不葬於祖墳開空地方，而獨於兩墳之間，穴地狹窄，對於左右墳墓不無妨礙，好在未傷他墳。今既埋葬，未便令其起遷，著令李國輔買火紙三石，交該族清明會酌費祖先，並賠被告人訴訟費五十串。兩造既甘願了結，以後該族人等不得再向李國輔滋事。如違，即以李國佐是究，此諭。The court rules: we have learned that Li Guofu on the ten month, twenty-eighth day of 1928 buried his father Li Dehua. He did not bury him in an open section of the ancestral cemetery, but placed him in a geomantic cavern between two existing graves that was exceedingly narrow. The graves to the left and right were not disturbed, and thank goodness [this addition] did not disturb other graves. Now, although this burial was not appropriate, it is difficult to move it to another location. I command Li Guofu to purchase three shi of paper money and provide it to his lineage’s Qingming Association for honoring the ancestors. I also order him to compensate the defendant’s litigation fees in the amount of fifty chuan. The two sides are now at peace, and going forward you are not allow to enter conflict with Li Guofu. If this is violated in the future, then Li Guozuo should investigate it. This is the ruling.
food and alcohol for the entire lineage, during which time no one raised any protest. They claimed that Yingliang’s branch suddenly demanded that they move the grave to another spot outside of the cemetery and pay fifteen chuan.

A runner from the Department of Works was sent to map the site in contention. The cemetery was composed of simple earth mounds, none of which possessed a formal stone inscription. The runner observed that the cemetery was almost full and that graves had been separately added to the neighboring hill beneath the Earth God Temple. Yingdou had placed his mother’s grave on the front left side of Yingliang’s grandmother’s grave. Yingliang claimed that a dirt road marked the border between the original cemetery and the neighboring hill’s private cemetery. The runner was unable to locate this dividing road, though in the illustration he surmised where it may have been.

During the court proceedings, as the various branches provided their testimonies, the magistrate began reviewing the contractual information and runner’s illustration. Shi Yingliang cited his contract for the purchase of land around the cemetery. Yingliang had acquired land that could one day be used for new graves, but for the time being could be used for crop production. Considering this information, the magistrate weighed the different registers of legal territoriality of the Shi’s Azure Dragon Corner in rendering a judgment:

堂諭：訊得石應良等據供青龍嘴關共墳塋與石應斗等無分，至石有政等稱此塋上半節係屬關公，伊等葬有祖父母墳塋。因至去臘石應斗旋將母喪抬挨祖墳上面，失序安葬，於理不合。本應起遷另厝，既已安埋，姑念一脈，從寬免究，以後不准進葬。著飭備辦香燭化帛祭醮，以妥先靈。確查石應良等當堂呈驗墳塋買契，乃係嘉慶年間字樣。臨訊印約，故意匿稅，亦有不是。理應將業充公，念在鄉愚，加倍稅投，以示懲儆。斷令兩造歸家，安業息事，勿再滋生訟端，各結完案。此判。

The court rules: it has been learned that, Shi Yingliang has testified that in the common lineage cemetery of Azure Dragon Corner, Shi Yingdou possesses no shares; Shi Youzheng says that the upper portion of the cemetery constitutes a [portion of] the common cemetery and that his branch has buried ancestors there. In the last month of the last lunar year, Shi

335 Nanbu County Qing Archive: 15.74.07.
Yingdou quickly took the corpse of his mother and placed the coffin on the upper section of the ancestral graves. The burial confused the proper hierarchical order within the lineage, thus does not conform to principle. It should have been moved to another provisional burial site [before formal burial]. Since it has already been buried and, on account of the fact you are of the same vein (mai 系; lineage), I shall be lenient and not investigate further, but you shall not bury other people in this place in the future. I order that you properly arrange and prepare incense, candles, and silk for the dead for sacrificial offerings (jiao) to pacify the ancestral spirits. I have closely examined the contract for the purchase of the grave land presented to court by the Shi Yingliang branch, and found that it bears the date of the Jiaqing Reign (1796-1820). When we investigated the stamped contract, [we find that] you intentionally hid and did not pay the land tax [on this property], which is illegal. According to the custom, your land should be confiscated. However, since you are ignorant people of a rural township, I will only double the tax as a warning to you. I order both sides to return home and peacefully put this matter to rest; do not again engage in litigation over this matter. Everything is finished, and the case is concluded. This is the ruling.

Figure 23. Yamen Runner’s Illustration of the Shi Lineage Cemetery at the Azure Dragon Corner (1900)336

336 Nanbu County Qing Archive: 15.74.04.
In his ruling, the magistrate exploited several missteps by Shi lineage members. The magistrate observed that Yingdou’s geomancer did not do a good job of selecting land within the cemetery for Yingdou’s mother’s grave. By placing his mother’s coffin in alignment with other graves towards the top half of the cemetery, Yingdou had disturbed the proper ordering of the cemetery. However, as the grave had already been constructed, it could not be moved. The magistrate’s main concern thus shifted to the well-being of ancestors around Yingdou’s mother’s grave and thus he ordered the jiao ritual be performed to pacify potentially disturbed spirits around her grave.\(^{337}\) This public ritual would firmly announce to the Shi lineage that this grave was now a permanent fixture in the lineage cemetery; further protest or contestation was not allowed. Settling Yingdou’s matter, the magistrate then turned to the legal aspects of the property ownership. The magistrate pointed out the issues with Yingliang’s contractual evidence. Although we cannot know for certain from the terseness of the ruling above, something was potentially wrong with the stamp of Yingliang’s contract, or the contract may have lacked a valid stamp.\(^{338}\) By emphasizing his exclusive claims to the land, Yingliang was arguing for the fact that the lands written in the contract were not

\(^{337}\) In Chinese religion, a person has two souls: a yang hun 魂, which leaves the body after death, and a yin po 魄, which stays in the corpse of the deceased. In this lawsuit, the magistrate expressed concern for the po 魄 spirits around Yingdou’s mother’s grave. Myron Cohen has pointed out that this binary of souls is a simplification and that in fact many souls were identified in local society. Myron L. Cohen, “Souls and Salvation: Conflicting Themes in Chinese Popular Religion” in Death Ritual in Late Imperial and Modern China, James Watson and Evelyn Rawski, eds. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 180-202.

\(^{338}\) There is another phenomenon in the Nanbu Archive related to graves and taxation known as fenliang 墳糧 (“grave grain”). When a lineage decided to sell land around a grave but retain the gravesite, they sometimes negotiated to pay a small amount of the transferred tax liability to emphasize their lasting claim to the land; this appears to have been done when the grave or graves in question lacked inscriptions, which otherwise provided a strong legal claim to the land. For instance, in GX3 (1877), Wang Rujin 王汝金 related how his ancestors had sold the land around the lineage’s gravesite on Wang Family Bend 王家塆 to another lineage but retained two ge 合 of tax liability as fenliang in addition to the fengshui of the grave; Rujin accused the new landowner of felling fengshui trees on that land. Nanbu County Qing Archive: 7.306.01. Note that in the yamen’s response, the runner was instructed to examine the status of the trees around the graves; the tax liability was not checked. Nanbu County Qing Archive: 7.306.03. The communists later noted that this practice was sometimes used for exploitation, wherein “landlords” would charge fenliang to locals for the creation of graves on their land. Qin Yigao 秦一高 and Qin Tingguang 秦廷光, eds., Chuanbei suqu 《川北蘇區》 [The Soviet Area of Northern Sichuan] (Chengdu: Dianzi keji daxue chubanshe, 2012), 6.
commonly owned “ritual fields,” but rather, his private land. Claimants for grave lands walked a fine line: communally owned lands that were not divided and farmed (through subleasing to agnates) for the ritual upkeep of graves, shrines, or temples could remain unregistered; private lands — even those with graves — could not. Yingliang’s branch had not paid tax on their land for nearly a century — or in other words — ever.

Yingliang may have simply assumed that his lands adjacent to the cemetery would be tax-exempt, like the lands of the common cemetery. This assumption would not have been completely misplaced, as magistrates had a great amount of autonomy to decide when to enforce certain rules. This case is just one of many in the Nanbu County Archive that depict sepulchral territoriality alongside questions of taxability. 339

Other cases reveal links between tax-paying and genealogical identities, which were naturally bound up with ancestral graves. In cases concerning land sold within a lineage (see 22.199 in the footnote below as an example), magistrates not infrequently commented that it was

339 For others, see: Nanbu County Qing Archive: 5.44, 18.355, and 22.199.08. In latter case, per Nanbu custom, the graves were illustrated to allow the magistrate to appraise the site in light of joint accusations of hidden taxation and stone quarrying next to cemetery land, which adjoined the allegedly untaxed field. The ruling was as follows:

堂諭: 查周學德之祖所賣於周學榮先祖之業, 據稱已隔八十餘年, 並無憑証, 是否匿稅, 從何得知? 又查所崩石岩離周學德墳山一丈有餘, 又係自崩, 並非人毀, 乃周學德憑空控, 可惡已極, 重責鎖押, 頭顱示眾, 以為誣告者戒。此判。

The court rules: considering the property that was sold by Zhou Xuede’s ancestor to Zhou Xuerong’s ancestor, according to the testimony, it has been already over eighty years since the sale and no evidence has been presented [for tax evasion]; whether the tax was evaded, how are we supposed to know that? As for the stone rock that has collapsed, it is over one zhang from Zhou Xuede’s cemetery mountain, and this rock collapsed by itself — no person intentionally did it. This is clearly a baseless accusation bought up by Zhou Xuede. How extremely annoying! For a heavy punishment, lock [Zhou Xuede] up and escort him to the front gate of [the yamen] for public viewing, as a warning to those who dare to bring false accusations. This is the ruling. For another case which saw the Tangs 唐 bring a case against the Zhaoos 趙 for adding a grave on his land while the Zhaoos accused the Tangs of evading taxation on the same land, see: Ba County Qing Archive: 6.08.02818. The court ruled against the Zhaoos: 趙世龍等不應妄稱唐明德匿契漏稅, 將趙世龍等責懲. For a case from the Republican Period (1922), Liao Daren 廖大任 accused Hu Sanyuan 胡三元 of listening to the “enchanting words” of a geomancer named Zhang Shunan 堪輿張樹楠迷言 by burying his mother in an auspicious plot of his land. For evidence, Liao claimed that he had “declared taxed” 投税撥糧 on the land in contention. At the trial, the magistrate ordered the site mapped before proceedings continued. SUCSBRC [Nanbu Collection]: 466.2512. The runner found that the infringement had truly occurred.
impossible to know whether liabilities had been transferred, as the agnates likely had the same common ancestor. The following case of Old Abbey Market Town 老觀場 (seventy li) highlights the fact that the identities of the deceased were relevant for identifying the tax identities of living persons, whose ancestors’ names were the ones written into the tax registers. This idea was first alluded to in the dual-divination record and tax assessment presented earlier in this chapter.\(^{340}\) As David Faure explains, “the gravesite…defined the living community, even though it was no doubt, only one of the many factors that defined it.”\(^{341}\) The “tax head,” who was sometimes the local geomancer, needed to know where the dead were buried to determine who the living taxpayers were, which is why village membership in many regions, including Nanbu, began with the ancestral grave. Hence we see the following case: on DG27.10.3 (1847), two male members of a branch of the Deng 鄧 lineage found themselves in debt and behind on their annual tax obligations.\(^{342}\) Devising a plan, the two decided on a course of action. Pretending to be members of the neighboring Li 李 lineage, the Dens sought out the local lipai 里排 and claimed that the descendants of Deng Maohu 鄧茂虎 (themselves) were all tragically killed by a sudden plague. This would allow the tax head to remove their ancestor’s name from the “granary book”\(^ {343}\) of their local tax area. The two then changed their names to Li Zuohong 李作洪 and Li Yuanchun 李元春.

\(^{340}\) Duara alludes to this phenomenon in North China: “Land, too, often continued to be held in the name of the ancestor for legal purposes even after the partition of family property. In this way, the inheritors could avoid paying both the deed tax and the fees of the registration clerk for entering the changes.” Duara, *Culture, Power, and the State: Rural North China, 1900-1942*, 91.

\(^{341}\) Faure, *Emperor and Ancestor*, 222.

\(^{342}\) SUCSBRC [Nanbu Collection]: 466.1829.126. Gregory Ruf has, in another region of Sichuan, provided another example where the local geomancer was also the head of the township. See: Gregory Ruf, *Cadres and Kin: Making a Socialist Village in West China, 1921-1991* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 196.

\(^{343}\) “Granary books” (aoce 廬冊) were the vernacular versions of the Fish Scale Registers that were kept in the rural townships and community granaries. These were updated more regularly — theoretically annually — than the Fish Scale Registers, which were kept at the county yamen.
respectively, and covertly dismantled their ancestral gravesite so as to convert it into farmland, which could then be farmed without being registered or taxed. To do this, the two newly named Lis arranged to fell and sell the *fengshui* trees around the grave to people outside their lineage.

The plan of the Lis nearly worked, until an older member of the lineage (eighty *sui*), Deng Linrong 鄧林榮, noticed that the ancestral tablets of a number of Deng ancestors were missing at the Deng Ancestral Hall. Heading over to the gravesite, Linrong noticed that the *fengshui* of the grave hill had been disturbed. After learning that his kin were involved, Linrong sought out the local *lipai* 里排, who confirmed that the ancestral “grain name” Deng Maohu had been removed from the local granary books. Linrong then presented a plaint at the county yamen. A runner confirmed the story, and after a short trial that saw the two Lis detained for punishment, the magistrate issued the following judgment with all members of the Deng lineage present:

堂諭: 查實李作洪膽敢將伊高祖鄧扳龍墳塚平地耕種，並將鄧扳龍、鄧遵、鄧茂虎神主焚毁。李元春將伊曾祖鄧茂虎墳禁柏樹賣與王子林、何自觀，價錢十六千錢。嫡祖鄧林榮，年已八十，孝思不匱，往阻賣伊父墳風樹株。今蒙恩訊，飭作洪等不應改姓忘本滅恩，仍將鄧茂虎原名原糧註載廒冊，歸[作]洪等世代完納國課，監理鄧扳龍、鄧遵、鄧茂虎墓碑，供奉神主。現毀鄧登耳、登旺等假約。此判。344

The court rules: it has been investigated as true that Li Zuohong had the audacity to level the ancestral grave of his great-great-grandfather Deng Banlong for farmland, and that he destroyed the ancestral tablets of Deng Banlong, Deng Zun, and Deng Maohu. Li Yuanchun took his great grandfather Deng Maohu’s grave’s forbidden trees and sold them to Wang Zilin and He Ziguan for a price of 16,000 cash. Their grandfather Deng Linrong, who is already eighty *sui* and forever a filial man, went forth to block the sale of the *fengshui* trees around his father’s grave. Now the court orders that [Li] Zuohong and [Li Yuanchun] to not change their surname, forget their roots, and extinguish the kindness [of their ancestors]. [The court orders that] Deng Maohu’s name and his originally registered grain tax obligation be re-recorded in the granary books, so Zuohong and Yuanchun fulfill their [historically-true] tax obligations. [The court also orders] the [lineage] inspect and manage Deng Banlong, Deng Zun, and Deng Maohu’s tomb steles and worship their ancestral tablets. Now, we will destroy the fake contract (for the sale of the *fengshui* trees) [witnessed by] Deng Deng’er and [Deng] Dengwang. This is the ruling.

344 SUCSBRC [Nanbu Collection]: 466.1829.128.
This case elucidates two important points relevant to property ownership and graves. First, although grave lands were not typically registered with the county government, the interred dead — the ancestors of the living — were the ones listed in the Fish-Scale Registers. Hence, taxpaying identification in Nanbu was, as the generations passed on from the county’s 1720s cadastral campaign, increasingly linked to the genealogical identities of ancestors as maintained by lineages.

As seen in the many cases of this chapter, submitted evidence, written and oral testimonies, and family histories were presented strategically by respective sides of a dispute. This wide array of information was then drawn upon and analyzed by a magistrate to produce a ruling in the hope of ending a dispute. The informal role for situated geomantic information was born out of the practical crevice between two contradictory realities: on the one hand, graves were powerful claims to space and status (hence the phenomena of fake grave creation, ancient grave adoption, and tensions over auspicious lands), and on the other hand, grave lands were seldom registered with the state. This made the grave and strategic grave creation one of the most obvious sites through which to claim land and merit-based status — a practice most evidently witnessed in the county’s most famous owner of “ancient” graves, the Nanbu Chens.

V. “Here Since the Song Dynasty”: The “Ancient” Graves of the Chen Lineage

In the late imperial period, a county was in part known by the famous tombs that existed within its borders. In nineteenth century editions of Nanbu’s gazetteer, the list of lingmu 陵墓 (“Mausoleums and Tombs”) was placed prominently before the lists of ci 祠 (shrines), miao 庙 (temples without resident monks), si 寺 (Buddhist monasteries), and guan 觀 (Daoist abbeys) in the county’s gazetteer.\textsuperscript{345} The Baoning Prefectural yamen annually requested an updated list of old

\textsuperscript{345}Nanbu County Gazetteer (Tongzhi Edition) (2014: 77-79). The gazetteer lists three ancient graves from the Tang, six from the Song, one from the Yuan, fourteen from the Ming, and four from the Qing.
graves for protection from the Nanbu County yamen.\textsuperscript{346} One revealing administrative case, which underscores the yamen’s commitment to grave protection along with pronounced gaps in its knowledge of the county, concerns the tombs of the Chen lineage.\textsuperscript{347} Evidence from the Nanbu Archive reveals that this case repeatedly ended up on the desks of magistrates, who consistently responded to it in inconsistent ways. During the Xianfeng Reign (1851-1861), a genealogy of a Chen-surnamed lineage surfaced, which claimed a direct relation to the famous Chen statesmen; this genealogy thus was printed around the same time as Nanbu’s earliest surviving gazetteer.\textsuperscript{348} This section explores how the Nanbu County yamen came to officially protect a series of graves during the late nineteenth century and then turns to the processes behind which these graves were created and presented by a lineage that in fact only came to prominence in the county in the mid-nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{349} This example thus ties together all the previous examples of this chapter concerning the strategies of sepulchral claims but provides an example of them working successfully: the Chens constructed “fake” graves, identified “ancient” graves that they claimed

\textsuperscript{346}每年造具境内古昔陵寝祠墓防護無誤清冊送部; see: Nanbu County Qing Archive: 7.104, 7.816, 8.686, 10.161, 10.550, 10.890, and 13.954.

\textsuperscript{347} This case was brought to my attention by scholars at West China Normal University. While I have drawn my own conclusions about the Chen lineage from my time at the Nanbu Archive, this section is indebted to the work of Cai Dongzhou, who I credit here with first identifying with great rigor the “fakeness” of the Chen graves. A penetrating analysis of the Chen tombs in Nanbu can be found in: Cai Dongzhou 蔡東洲 and Zhang Liang 張亮, Nanbu dang’an zhong youguan Songdai Langzhou chenshi jiazu mu dang’an yanjiu” 南部檔案中有關宋代閬州陳氏家族墓檔案研究 [“Research on Archives Related to the Song Dynasty Chen Lineage Graves of Langzhou from the Nanbu Archives”]. Zhonghua wenhua luntan 《中華文化論壇》 (2014): 98-104.

\textsuperscript{348} The genealogy was published in 1858, while Nanbu’s first surviving Qing gazetteer was published in 1849, or nine years earlier. Drafts of the genealogy likely circulated before the gazetteer was published, though we also cannot discount the fact that the lineage may have drawn on information contained in the gazetteer to create their genealogy. The process of exchange and borrowing likely worked in both directions, as there likely was an overlap in the people creating both works. A number of Chens are listed in the gazetteer’s editor list and the genealogy ends with the same maps of Nanbu County that are found at the beginning of gazetteer.

\textsuperscript{349} The earliest references in the Nanbu Archive to an ancestral hall of the Chens date from TZ4 (1865). The lineage claimed to have lived in Nanbu for almost 800 years, and had resided in Nanbu under the Qing for nearly two hundred years before making these claims to the state. This is obviously suspicious. See: Nanbu County Qing Archive: 6.539.01.
belonged to them, and wrote a genealogy that contained information that was included in the county’s gazetteer.

Chen Yaozuo 陳堯佐 (963-1044), Chen Yaosou 陳堯叟 (961-1027), and Chen Yaozi 陳堯咨 (Dates Unknown) were brothers from Langzhong who became prominent statesmen of the Northern Song Dynasty (960-1127). Much has been written about these figures. Chen Yaozuo became famous for his contributions to Song-era hydraulic works.³⁵⁰ Chen Yaosou was sent to the Vietnamese court in 996 to direct the pacification of the southern border.³⁵¹ Chen Yaozi, the youngest, was a zhuangyuan 状元 (first ranked) for his year for the jinshi 進士 degree.³⁵²

Archival records reveal that local officials were never quite sure which, how many, or even exactly where the tombs of the Chens were in Nanbu.³⁵³ Authoritative sources at the national level said the Chens were buried in Henan 河南.³⁵⁴ Ouyang Xiu’s 欧陽修 (1007-1072) memorial inscription for Chen Yaozuo, (Dated 1044), begins with the unambiguous declaration: “The Dignitary of Yingchuan (Central Henan) has been buried at Xinzhen” 領川公既葬於新鄭.³⁵⁵

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³⁵³ Nanbu County Qing Archive: 8.686, 10.161, 10.550, 10.890.

³⁵⁴ These include *Records of the Unity of the Great Ming* 《大明一統志》, *Records of the Unity of the Great Qing* 《大清一統志》, and the *Comprehensive Gazetteer of Henan Province* 《河南通志》, which definitively state that the Chens were buried in Xinzhen County, Henan near the Northern Song capital of Kaifeng. 陳省華墓在新鄭縣北三十里，省華，宋人，子堯佐、堯叟、堯諮皆葬墓側。See: *Henan Tongzhi* (1735) 49:45-46, *Da Ming Yitongzhi* 26: 22, *Da Qing Yitongzhi* 150: 29.

Nonetheless, popular, if contradictory, understandings that the Song-era Chens were buried in Nanbu persisted through the end of the dynasty (and till today). In 1875 for instance, a Nanbu magistrate claimed that two authentic tombs of the Chens existed in the county, as seen in the official notice below:

兹查縣屬境內，有宋代名臣陳堯叟、陳堯諮墳墓二塚：一在崇教鄉岑子山，一在永豐鄉醴峰觀…惟查陳堯諮公塚塚，其嫡裔子孫相距較遠，照守自難周到，所有香火一切，向歸附近之醴峰觀住持經理。356

Here we have examined that, under the jurisdiction of [Nanbu] County, there are the tombs of the famous officials of the Song Dynasty, Chen Yaosou and Chen Yaozi. One tomb is located on Cenzi Mountain in Chongjiao Township; the other is located [near] Li Peak Abbey in Yongfeng Township…We have carefully examined the tomb of Chen Yaozi; as his descendants are far from here, it is difficult for them to have satisfactorily taken care of it, hence all matters, including “incense-fire” [lands], have always been managed by the abbot of the nearby Li Peak Abbey.

The official notice proceeded to instruct the monastics that it was forbidden to engage in agriculture on these lands, to allow farm animals to roam on the lands, to cut down any of the lands’ trees for firewood, or to sharpen knives on the tombstones. The responsibility for planting trees to protect the fengshui of the tomb’s “forbidden area” was given to the local Daoist abbey because the Chen Yaozi’s descendants lived “relatively far away.”

By 1890 however, we find the sudden appearance of other Chen tombs in Nanbu. That year, a magistrate addressed the ancestral tombs of the “Chen Zhuanyuan (Chen Yaozi)” 陳狀元之祖塋, now purportedly located near an Earth God Temple in Great Bridge Market Town of Nanbu’s Zhengjiao Township 政教鄉; here, the magistrate issued a formal announcement for the protection of the ancient grave by forbidding the breaking of earth veins through adding graves around the tomb 不得截脈盗葬. Any violations on this were to be reported by local tuanbao 團保 and the Chen descendants — presuming the fact that there were real descendants of the Song Dynasty

356 Nanbu County Qing Archive: 7.104.07.
Chens in Nanbu County 示仰該處附近居民團保及陳氏後裔人, an assumption that appears to contradict the 1875 edict of a previous magistrate, who did not seem to have been aware that descendants of the Chens lived nearby.\textsuperscript{357} This is only one possible reading of this order, as the previous magistrate may have simply assumed the Chen descendants lived in another part of Nanbu. Different magistrates filled their reports with different locations for these tombs.\textsuperscript{358} In total, no less than seven gravesites — with claims ranging from two locations to seven different ones — were identified by the Nanbu yamen, with the number seeming to increase at the turn of the twentieth century. The Baoning Prefectural yamen never pointed out these inconsistencies.\textsuperscript{359}

One of the conditions for the county’s management of ancient graves was the illustration of the gravesites by runners from the Department of Works — a requirement that dated to an edict of the Yongzheng Emperor (1729) for the annual reporting of ancient tombs.\textsuperscript{360} Most reports to Baoning Prefecture did not include these illustrations and most of the time the prefecture seemed not to have cared. As the Yongzheng Emperor’s edict coincided with an empire-wide cadastral

\textsuperscript{357} Nanbu County Qing Archive: 10.890.03.

\textsuperscript{358} Nanbu County Qing Archive: 10.890.10.

\textsuperscript{359} Today, the Chens remain a well-known fixture in the county, but even the description of the lineage and their genealogy seems to hint at the pronounced “gap” between the Song Dynasty Chens and the Qing Nanbu Chens:南部縣《陳氏家乘譜》, 始修於宋紹興三十二年 (1162年)。明清皆有續修，清咸豐八年 (1858年) 陳氏合族重刊，譜中記述了陳翔由河朔入蜀 “為新井令、因家焉” 的過程，記述了陳省華及其三子一門二相昆季雙魁之盛況，其後裔有名在冊者 319人，並載有家法榜戒以示後人。Taken from the website of the Nanchong Tourism Bureau, article entitled “The Customs and Airs of Nanbu County”南部縣民俗風情, 2015.

\textsuperscript{360} Runners were required to abide by the following regulations:從前古昔陵寢有無拆毀之處，並現在添建專祠，無論官建民建，一併繪具圖說，具造規模、式樣、尺寸清冊，限文到三個月。Whether there is any damage to the ancient tombs and mausoleums, together with whether there are any new additions of shrines, regardless of whether they are constructed by the government or by individuals — all need to be mapped and illustrated completely and accurately [and presented] along with a detailed record of their sizes, styles, and dimensions; this is to be submitted within three months [of receiving this order]. Nanbu County Qing Archive: 7.104.06. For the Yongzheng edict on the annual reporting of ancient graves across the empire, see: Qingshilu Yongzhengchao shilu《清實錄雍正朝實錄》[The Veritable Records of the Qing Yongzheng Emperor’s Reign]: 159.
effort, these maps were originally intended to identify tombs that were otherwise not registered with the state. While county governments such as Nanbu’s only loosely followed this edict, lineages appear to have responded to it by creating broad geomantic renderings of their graves, houses, lands their ancestors once claimed to project influence over a general territory. The Chen genealogy discovered in the mid-nineteenth century contained detailed illustrations that mimicked the requirements for reports to the prefecture. Such illustrations began appearing in genealogies across China from the mid-eighteenth century.

An original printed edition of the 1858 *Chen Lineage Genealogy of Northern Sichuan* 蜀北陳氏族譜 survives in the Langzhong Municipal Library. The genealogy consists of twelve *juan* and claims to be the surviving record of the patrilineal kin of the famed Chen Brothers of the Song Dynasty. The genealogy repeatedly claims the Chen’s continuous residence in the county from the Tang Dynasty (618–907). The genealogy contains a collection of quotations from the *Song* and *Ming Veritable Records* (宋實錄 and 明實錄) alongside long reasonably-sounding lists of lineage branches arranged by generational characters (*zibei* 字輩). Chen Tingxian 陳廷賢, a member of the twenty-seventh generation of the lineage, compiled these documents. The falsity of the claims does not in any sense undercut what the genealogy achieves as a text that claimed (or projected claims to) large tracts of land in Nanbu County for a lineage group that most likely arrived in the early Qing and happened to be surnamed, or adopted the surname, Chen. The text’s

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361 There are several ways to poke holes in the veracity of the claims in the *Chen Lineage Genealogy of Northern Sichuan*. Chen Tingxian claimed that he was merely updated a genealogy which had consistently been updated throughout its history based faithfully on older versions 我陳氏舊有譜，此次續修，謹遵舊譜世系. (Langzhong Municipal Library, Local Rare Books Collection, *Shubei chenshi zupu* 《蜀北陳氏族譜》, 1: 3). But, as local historians of the region have pointed out, if the genealogy had in fact been based on previous, consistently updated editions, it would have included a number of the Chen Yaozuo’s well-known descendants, such as Chen Chong 陳充 (1084-1143) and Chen Tian (1058-1131) of the Song Dynasty, not to mention known descendants in the Ming Dynasty. See: Cai Dongzhou 蔡東洲, “Langzhong chenshi zupu kaolun” 阆中陳氏族譜考論 [“A Discussion of the Examination of the Chen Lineage Genealogy of Langzhong”], *Wenxian* 《文獻》3, 1997: 134-151.
success is exemplified by the fact that a string of Nanbu County magistrates relied on its contents for reporting the whereabouts of the Chen ancestral graves in the nineteenth century.

The genealogy provides clues as to the actual origins of the Chen lineage. The writers of the genealogy note that their lineage’s branches lived exclusively in Nanbu and Langzhong Counties; a lineage dating from the Song would naturally have much more widely spread ties. This is not to dismiss the influence of the Qing-era Nanbu Chens, who did have the resources to publish a large genealogy and who claimed around thirty burial spots in Nanbu and Langzhong Counties. The genealogy provides the alleged locations of the original Song Dynasty Chen graves. These often were locations where the Qing-era Chen lineage claimed land and placed recent graves. In one of the more revealing prefaces to the genealogy, the writer claimed that his ancestors were farmers, and that the common ancestor of his branch came to Nanbu County at the end of the Ming to divine a homestead and a gravesite. This ancestor and his kin were buried at a place outside of the market town, where in 1773 a lineage paifang ("memorial archway") was constructed, tracing the lineage back to the Song Dynasty Chens. An inscription was said to exist behind the paifang that dated from the last years of the Chongzhen Reign (1627-1644), which would put this ancestor’s arrival right at the Ming-Qing transition.

The Chen’s mobilization of graves in the staking out of property claims can be seen throughout Nanbu. Branches would first identify an ancestor that could be traced back to the Song or Ming Dynasties, construct an inscription or paifang to them, and then expand with newer graves.

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362 Chen Shenghua’s ancestral grave was in Nanbu’s Great Bridge Market Town’s near Jiqing Temple 積慶寺, Lady Feng’s grave (a spouse of one of the Chens) was in Baoming Prefecture’s Cangxi County 蒼溪縣, Chen Yaowen’s grave was at Cenzi Mountain 岑子山, Chen Yaozuo’s grave was at Banqiao Temple 板橋寺, and Chen Yaozi’s grave was at Li Peak Abbey 醴峰觀.

363 Langzhong Municipal Library, Local Rare Books Collection, Shubei chenshi zupu, 1: 32-33.
around these sites. The graves, ancestral halls, residential houses, “ancestral wet fields” (*jitian* 祭田), and “ancestral dry lands” (*jidi* 祭地) were then strategically depicted in the genealogy by one continuous vein that marked the lineage’s claim to the land. In mimicking the illustrations

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On GX2.7.19 (1876), a certain Xu Shiju accused an agnate Xu Shangyu of quarrying stones near the ancestral graves, hence “hitting the apex qi vein” 为具告徐尚於墳下取後打壞胎脈崩毁墳墓事. Nanbu County Qing Archive: 7.181.02.

For another example of this practice in Northern Sichuan, see the 1896 manuscript genealogy (1933 published) of the Li 李 lineage of Northern Sichuan’s Cangxi 蒲溪 County. In illustrating their “yangju yinzang dilitu” 陽居陰葬地理圖 (“Geomantic Illustration of the Residences of the Living and the Burial Places of the Dead”), the Lis wrote:

[We took the] ancestral cemetery of the single vein and illustrated its likeness for inclusion in the genealogy. Moreover [we] differentiated this territoriality and fixed its scope so [people of] other surnames cannot invade [this territory]; while it is a small matter, it has a large connection to the creation of the genealogy, is this not apparent? The ancestral cemetery’s topography, inscriptions from every lineage branch, and the names and aliases of the interred dead have been checked and amended one-by-one for compilation; these have been illustrated within the genealogy; this will allow future generations to know where the ancestors of our lineage were buried, so that there is no confusion when offering sacrifices.
of ancient graves that were expected to be presented to the Prefectural yamen, the Chens illustrated the geomantic geographies of their graves and residences. One revealing example from the genealogy (1858) can be compared with a representation of the same market town in Zhu Fengyun’s *Illustrated Guide* (1853).

![Figure 24. Magistrate Handbook’s Illustration of Jianxing Market Town 建興場 with Borders Notated (1853)](image)

We might observe that, as was the case with the Chens, the illustration of the Li ancestral cemetery involved mapping a broad area of settlement. In their description, the Lis emphasized that the territory’s illustration — determined by their interpretation of the landscape — was not invaded by other surnames. Like the Chen lineage illustration above, the illustration of the Li’s spatialized vein was an idealistic depiction of territory. Li Chenghua 李成華, ed. *Sichuansheng cangxixian hexi fenghuanggong hedong yangyueshan lishi zongpu* 《四川省蒼溪縣河西鳳凰宮河東陽岳山李氏宗譜》 [The Li Lineage Genealogy of Sichuan Province’s Cangxi County’s Yangyue Mountain of Hedong and Phoenix Abbey of Hexi] (Cangxi: Cangxixian xingzi diannao wenyinbu, 2002), 11-12.

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366 *Xianjing fenfang tushuo*, 268.
The two illustrations share some common features: Humin ("Protecting the People") Nunnery was located behind Jianxing’s active market town to the south. The Chen Family Corner was located to the southeast of the market town. The notations for the walking path and rivers are shared in both images. The image of water, which was extremely important for determining the potential fortune that could be gained from a gravesite, features prominently here. The image above would lead one to believe that all the Chen lineage’s houses, graves, and

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368 Rivers around graves were never supposed to flow in a straight line, since in that case the “fortune” could not pool in an area in front of a grave. A bend in the river was critical for gaining positive fortune.
ancestral halls were selected in accordance with the most auspicious geomantic arrangements; of course, what is depicted above is an ideal, rather than a realistic depiction. Such ideals can be noted by a few details. The geomantic map of the Chen’s estate presents the lineage’s estate in Jianxing Market Town along a single Dragon Vein, which is denoted by the wave-like line along which all the relevant sites appear. This interpretation of land connected the lineage’s residential houses, graves, ancestral halls, and fields within a shared cosmological frame.

Another difference of interest is the presentation of Jianhao Temple 建浩寺 and Erlang Temple 二郎廟. This branch of the Chens owned shares in the “Incense-Fire Lands” around Erlang Temple, located on Erlang Mountain, hence its prominent position in the image along the Dragon Vein that connects with the rest of their properties. Jianhao Temple, which was located near the Chen Family Corner next to the Old Ancestral Hall, is presented in an inaccurate location outside of the lineage’s vein in the geomantic illustration, behind Jianxing Market town to the northwest, when it was in fact located to the southeast. The Chens’ lack of an affiliation with Jianhao Temple rendered the representation of its placement in the geomantic image away from the Chen Family Corner and the lineage’s territorialized vein; Jianhao Temple was evidently patronized by neighboring lineages, such as the Hu 戶 and the Bai 白. In this sense, the Chens spatially visualized and documented the ascriptive, territorial communities that Duara has identified around tutelary deities in North China. Yet, while a temple’s deity was of great importance to local communities, a temple also had its own territoriality that could be expressed in the geomantic language linked by patronage from a lineage. The major point here is that geomantic illustrations

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369 Familial connections to various local temples and their auspicious lands (jidi 吉地), such as Tuwang Temple, Banqiao Temple, Jiqing Temple, Erlang Temple, are traced in the second juan of the genealogy.

of lineage lands did not represent space factually; they represented space ideally and strategically. The lands that the lineage owned were imagined as adjacently linked together, with the lands of other lineages simply conveniently moved outside of the mapped unitary Dragon Vein.

There is a limit to how much a single genealogy can reveal about the reception of these claims. Nonetheless, the greatest proof of their efficacy is found in the previously outlined yamen reports about the Song Dynasty Chen graves to Baoning Prefecture. The grave of Chen Xinshun, who was not a relation of the Song Dynasty Chen brothers, was included by magistrates in the aforementioned protection orders with the graves of the other Chens; this was an official adoption of a claim made in the genealogy.371 A variety of other errors and claims reported in the genealogy also appeared in magisterial reports and the county gazetteer, so there is no doubt information presented in the genealogy penetrated beyond the lineage’s immediate sphere of influence.372 In fact, the compilers of Nanbu’s nineteenth century gazetteers incorporated the preface of the genealogy into the “literature” (yiwen 藝文) section of the gazetteer — a testament to the passage of these claims from inherited family legends into officially published local history.

Though the case of the Chens is an atypical example of genealogical claims translating into state action, it points to several important characteristics of late imperial Nanbu governance. Even in the wake of Zhu Fengyun’s extension and mapping of the baojia system as introduced in Chapter Two, there was a pronounced deficit in what officials knew about the county. The disruption of the Ming-Qing transition resulted in the loss of many sources of information about local society, including land registers and gazetteers. The information gap meant that elite lineages could use

371 Nanbu County Qing Archive: 10.890.07.
372 Cai and Liang, “Nanbu dang’an zhong youguan songdai langzhou chenshi jiazhu mu dang’an yanjiu”: 102.
pieces of fragmentary data from the past to make claims of ancestral inheritance and ancient inhabitation.

Furthermore, though the Chens were perhaps unique in their remarkable success at making these claims, they were not alone. The strategies employed by the Chens successfully were also attempted by lineages and families throughout this chapter (“fake graves”; “ancient graves”). Such practices among elite lineages are easily observed: the 1906 edition of Nanbu’s county gazetteer contains the genealogical information of the Xianyu 鮮于, the He 何, and the Ren 任 lineages, all of whom claimed to have lived in the county, with sepulchral proof, since the Tang Dynasty. Earlier nineteenth century editions of the county’s gazetteer record the existence of the “ancient” graves of the Nanbu Xianyu 鮮于 lineage from the Tang Dynasty. The Pu 蒲, the Ma 馬, and the Yong 雍 lineages — like the Chens — claimed residence in the county since the Song Dynasty, having all supposedly descended from jinshi degree holders. By publishing these genealogies in the county’s gazetteer — the county government, which had commissioned the work — effectively endorsed them. That endorsement thus meant legitimizing the historical claims to land by several lineages who almost certainly did not live in Nanbu County prior to the Qing Dynasty, or at least the late Ming. The evidence required to establish significant ancestral ties to land did not have to be particularly accurate to be functionally effective. That is, from the perspective of a lineage and by extension the state, all graves were real, unless proven otherwise.

VII. Chapter Conclusion: Graves and Situated Information

This chapter has demonstrated the important role played by geomantic knowledge in litigation through an examination of both cultural strategies involving graves and the production of legal information related to the creation and maintenance of gravesites in Nanbu County. In

doing so, the chapter has argued first that in popular religious practice the grave was envisioned as a powerful claim to land and that geomantic territoriality, which was invoked through the “gods-directions” of an Earth God contract, was a language of its landed dimensions. Second, this chapter has argued that because many graves occupied space that could be claimed in court without official registration, officials in Nanbu had to consider a range of information during litigation that was unofficial in light of the law code.

A grave was a permanent fact on the ground in Nanbu. Magistrates were reluctant to move them even when they were created under illicit circumstances. Further, the cases of this chapter suggest that there were some notable similarities between graves and contracts. This is not to say that locals conceived of the two as the same, but rather that these objects and documents were authenticated through a similar ritual process. The divining of a grave saw a banquet, with the lineage present, to which a geomancer was invited; the writing of a contract saw a banquet, with the buyer and seller present, to which a middleman was invited. As this chapter has revealed, just as there were numerous allegations of “fake” contracts 假契 presented to the magistrate’s court, Nanbu County saw the creation of many “fake” graves 假墳 with the intention of claiming land — often on ritual lands that had been previously sold by a lineage during a time of hardship. Just as there were “ancient” contracts 古契 containing potentially outdated land boundaries with questionable legal validity in court, there were “ancient” graves 古墳 that could be claimed by reworking the identities of the interred dead. Through similar mechanisms of validation, forgery,

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374 For example, see: Nanbu County Qing Archive: 9.00368. Naturally, coffins not yet interred could be moved to another site. Nanbu County Qing Archive: 4.00268, 04.278.

375 The late Qing Diaocha chuansheng susong xiguan baogao shu 《調查川省訴訟習慣報告書》[Report on the Survey of the Legal Customs of Sichuan Province] observed a proliferation of 偽造契約 “forged contracts” and forged “ancient contracts” 偽造遠年字約 in county courts in Sichuan. See: Wu, Qingdai xianyu minshi jujen yu falü zhixu kaocha, 414.
and transfiguration, both graves and contracts served as central technologies in the imperial property regime. In analyzing contracts, magistrates parsed the details of their language; in analyzing graves, magistrates scanned their environmental characteristics, while simultaneously appraising the relevant implications for the well-being of ancestors and the living.

Given a bureaucratic state that did not extensively interfere in the property regime, much information about the land was produced by locals, including a plot’s value, its auspiciousness, and its relationship to one or more branches of a lineage. The state was the final recipient of information that had been already processed through layers of interlocutors, such as middlemen and geomancers. One such type of information was geomantic knowledge, the importance of which was elevated by the fact that many estates protected under Qing law — such as graves — were ones that did not require official registration with the state.

Questions of geomancy that arose during the litigation did not only concern the dynamics of earth veins — sometimes they did, but the applications of geomantic information were broader. Magistrates often had to determine who had a connection to a site, whether a site was communally owned, or even whether a fengshui tree had been felled with the proper consent of all those who may have had a connection to it. If they possessed the means, lineages created inscriptions for their graves and wrote genealogies for their lineages. By the mid-to-late Qing, these genealogies used the language of Dragon Veins to illustrate gravesites, villages, and market towns. Situated knowledge of the land and its embedded powers entered the magistrate’s court through the crevice formed between the state’s ideals of registered land, stamped contracts, and tax receipts on the one hand and the realities of rural life in the highlands on the other. The following chapter will elaborate how magistrates engaged that information through the employment of yamen runners and their cartographic skills.
Chapter Four: Between *Yin* and *Yang* — Geomantic Knowledge and Environmental Cartography at the Magistrate’s Court

I. **Chapter Introduction: A Cartography of Cosmology**

During the nineteenth century, Sichuan’s economy and ecology were undergoing profound changes related to landed commercialization.\(^{376}\) Having been fully repopulated following its destruction during the Ming-Qing transition, the province by 1850 had a population that was placing great pressure on the natural resources of the land.\(^{377}\) First among these resources were woodlands, which provided the necessary energy needs and building materials of local people. The highlands of Northern Sichuan, having high transportation costs, lacked much commercial forestry and hence individual trees or small grave groves were greatly valued by local lineages. As such, woodlands tended to be kept as village commons, understood as significant to a lineage’s or community’s *fengshui* — often through strategic grave, house, or temple placements. During the nineteenth century, coal mining and other ecologically-intensive activities accelerated across the province. Local communities addressed the negotiation of mining and water rights through applying customary strategies of land management traditionally used for woodlands onto the coal and water energy sectors. Through showcasing petitions presented to the county yamen by locals

\(^{376}\) Farmland in Sichuan province increased from 46 million *mu* in 1766 to 78 million *mu* in 1812. According to Eduard Vermeer, “By the mid-Qianlong period, all potential lowland farmland in the Sichuan basin had been reclaimed, and subsequent expansion had to be in the mountain areas...One might conclude that at the end of the Qianlong period Sichuan was perceived as being overpopulated because its previous relative abundance of farmland was rapidly dwindling, but that it still had an advantage over most other areas in China until the 1840s.” Eduard B. Vermeer, “Population and Ecology along the Frontier in Qing China” in *Sediments of Time: Environment and Society in Chinese History*, Mark Elvin and Ts'ui-jung Liu, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 271. Jiayan Zhang has discussed locals’ strategies, such as crop selection, for dealing with environmental change in neighboring Hubei. Jiayan Zhang, *Coping with Calamity: Environmental Change and Peasant Response in Central China, 1736-1949* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2014). Micah Muscolino has discussed locals’ diversified family strategies for fishing against a changing environmental landscape in the late Qing. Micah S. Muscolino, *Fishing Wars and Environmental Change in Late Imperial and Modern China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009).

\(^{377}\) In 1889, Sichuan’s population was estimated at 68,000,000, up from 38,000,000 in 1840. Man-Houng Lin, “China’s “Dual Economy” in China's “Dual Economy” in International Trade Relations, International Trade Relations, 1842–1949” in *Japan, China, and the Growth of the Asian International Economy, 1850-1949*, Kaoru Sugihara, ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 188.
concerned over the health of their houses, graves, and marketing centers, this chapter documents some of those strategies.

Having established in the previous chapter that geomantic information concerning graves was regularly presented to and considered by Nanbu’s court, this chapter shifts perspective to focus on how magistrates processed and resolved disputes arising from cosmology. Some popular perceptions of this process have emphasized the personal views of officials: perhaps some magistrates “believed” in cosmology, while others did not. Here, I contest that view, arguing instead that the personal beliefs of officials likely had limited roles in the legal processes under study. Geomantic information was produced through routine cultural practices for a household, lineage, or community that were strongly tied with Confucian ritual, Buddhism, Daoism, and popular religion. Geomantic claims were, in short, made within the common cultural frame of appraising land, while geomantic information was related to shared community knowledge and the stewardship of local settlements. Magistrates had to decide whether, under the general principles of geomancy known throughout China and through a survey of the environmental circumstances of an alleged violation, a specific claim was valid.

Yet, there were certain protocols that geomantic lawsuits, more than other claims, seemed to have followed with relative consistency in Nanbu County. This chapter reveals three such protocols. First, plaints concerning cosmological claims were more likely to be illustrated by yamen runners (yayi 衙役) from the county’s Department of Works (gongfang 工房) than any other type of land dispute. These maps provided magistrates with an opportunity to interpret landscapes that were far away from the county yamen. Second, in the case of a valid geomantic obstruction or concern of a possible future one, magistrates would order an activity (i.e. mining)

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banned or an object (i.e. a kitchen) moved. Third, in the case that a magistrate determined an area’s fengshui had not been harmed, magistrates would draw on their knowledge of geomancy to state specific reasons — such as elapsed time spans, ranges of geographic influence, or analyses of Heavenly Stems (tiangan 天干) and Earthly Branches (dizhi 地支) — to explain why. Magistrates serving in Nanbu County understood and spoke to their audience.

This chapter addresses the standards by which magistrates accepted and judged geomantic lawsuits in three arenas: yangzhai 阳宅 (“Houses of the Living”: houses) cases, yinzhai 陰宅 (“Houses of the Dead”: graves) cases, and lawsuits related to the geomancy regarding the commercial arena 商店 (shangdian, “shops and stores”). These three arenas, though diverse in scope, shared a common thread related to the practice of fengshui: these were all places in which the claims of a community were weighed against the exclusive privileges of certain individuals in that community. For each of these three arenas, I will draw on a geomantic or a ritual text, most of which were locally produced in nineteenth century Sichuan, to show that their contents can illuminate the logic behind a local’s motive for — or an official resolution of — a corresponding lawsuit. Doing so allows us to consider the highly intertwined legal, environmental, and religious dimensions of the properties in dispute.

A few prefatory observations are in order regarding geomancy’s relationship to the wider economy in land and the natural environment — much talked about subjects in nineteenth century foreign accounts on the topic. Social status influenced how a geomantic lawsuit would be presented: gentry tended to present claims based on the auspicious conditions necessary for the Civil Service Examinations on behalf of the entire county, while commoners tended to focus on the immediate problems of their houses and graves. Gentry had the standing necessary to present claims over expansive Dragon Veins 龍脈 that connected Nanbu to the greater empire, while commoners
tended to present claims over more localized earth veins 地脈. The cases here suggest that magistrates did not inherently favor the claims of those from privileged backgrounds over those of modest means. Further, while the effects of geomantic practices on economic growth need more study, through these cases we may conclude that most official remedies for concerns over mining or road building involved selecting another site for construction to not harm the local *fengshui*; no magistrate on record in the archive ever said mines or shops in general could not be created. I expand on the implications of these observations in relation to the limited regulatory nature of the Qing state in Nanbu County at the conclusion of this chapter.

As previously mentioned, when a plaint that referenced geomancy was submitted to the yamen for review, the site in question was often mapped. This was not, however, done for every plaint. Magistrates, *muyou*, and clerks at the Department of Works had a large amount of agency to make these decisions, often asking runners to 細勘明繪圖貼說 “[in accordance with the details], carefully investigate [the matter], draw a map, and attach an explanation.”[^379] Sometimes, even without being officially ordered to map a site, runners would do it anyway.[^380] Other times, magistrates would read a runner’s initial report for a grave then ask for an illustration to be composed to help discern the landscape.[^381] Fortunately, Nanbu’s map collection has been made available to researchers in its known form, and I have disaggregated the maps and cases below.

[^379]: Nanbu County Qing Archive: 5.67.06, 6.151.03.

[^380]: Nanbu County Qing Archive: 7.308.02. That maps were an important part of Qing law has been identified by Quinn Javers in his dissertation on Ba County 巴縣. Quinn Doyle Javers, “Conflict, Community and Crime in Fin-de-

[^381]: Nanbu County Qing Archive: 5.67.
Figure 26. Disaggregated Nanbu County Litigation Map Collection, 1829-1912 (π=162 Maps, 154 Cases)\(^{382}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Map</th>
<th>Number of Maps (Percentage)</th>
<th>Drawn by Department of Works (Percentage)</th>
<th>Drawn by Litigants</th>
<th>Origin Unknown</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Farmland 田地</td>
<td>48 (30%)</td>
<td>38 (25%)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graves yinzhai 隱宅, Houses yangzhai 陽宅, and Temples simiao 寺廟</td>
<td>108 (66 %)</td>
<td>105 (70%)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (Corpses, Stolen Property)</td>
<td>6 (4%)</td>
<td>6 (5%)</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Total                           | 162                         | 149                                       | 10                 | 3              |

This collection can be compared with one of the other well-preserved litigation map collections: the Dan-Xin 淡新 Archive. In the “core,” highly commercialized region of northern Taiwan, where a strong gentry base was located, litigants often drew maps themselves and presented them to the court.\(^{383}\) In Nanbu County, as a much poorer periphery, litigants seldom submitted their own maps to make a legal claim: the yamen’s Department of Works sent a runner to map the property in question, and the final illustration, with its appended commentary, was

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\(^{383}\) This came to my attention from the work of Sen-hao Yang at National Taiwan University. Sen-hao to my knowledge has not published on this topic, but a discussion of the map collection of Dan-Xin can be found in the following presentation: Yang Sen-hao 楊森豪, “Mapping-and-Writing: Mapping and Map Use in Tan-Hsin Archives” 繪圖註說：《淡新檔案》之地圖繪製與地圖使用 [“Notes on Yamen Illustrations: The Dan-xin Archive’s Creation and Use of Litigation Maps”].
For a link, see: http://www.digital.ntu.edu.tw/workshop0121/ppt/01.pdf
typically considered a complete and reliable piece of evidence for the magistrate to consider.\textsuperscript{384} This of course meant that, in Nanbu, local officials had to play a more active role in appraising these types of lawsuits. As Bradley Reed has discussed through his studies of the Ba County Archive, yamen runners were generally despised in Sichuan during the Qing and we must not overlook the fact that runners had a remarkable amount of power for appraising the merits of these interpretively-challenging cases.\textsuperscript{385} It is difficult to gauge the accuracy of the images produced, but the following regulation from a set of “lineage rules” (zugui 族規) of the Chen 陳 lineage presented to the Nanbu yamen likely captures a common sentiment:

俳優、皂隸、差役三等, 實屬下賤之極, 族中子弟有不尋正業而甘為此三等者, 生不准入宗祠, 死不准上祖塋。\textsuperscript{386}

Drama actors, lictors, and yamen runners — these three categories [of professions] are truly base to the extreme. If there are descendants in our lineage who do not seek out righteous professions and willingly become one of these three categories of person, in life they are not permitted to enter the ancestral hall and in death they are not permitted to rise to the ancestral cemetery.

As discussed in the previous chapter, magistrates evaluated information at the yamen only after a long chain of communication and interpretation starting from kinsmen, middlemen, and ritual specialists and later channeled through litigants, guarantors, and yamen runners. While the accuracy of the runner illustrations throughout this chapter cannot be verified, magistrates heavily relied upon them for resolutions. This is particularly evident in cases about courtyard homes and the residences of the living, which is the subject of the following section.

\textsuperscript{384} For the cases in the Dan-Xin Archive that contain litigation (non-administrative) maps, see: Dan-Xin Archive: 22101, 22102, 22213, 22223, 22409, 22410, 22412, 22416, 22419, 22420, 22422, 22424, 22434, 22436, 22438, 22502, 22503, 22505, 22506, 22507, 22508, 22510, 22511, 22512, 22513, 22514, 22515, 22517, 22518, 22519, 22521, 22523, 22526, 22527, 22708, 22803, 22804, 31604, 31606, 32107, 32604, 33128, 33320, 33404, 33902, 34108, 33407, 35201, 35206, and 35207.

\textsuperscript{385} Bradley Reed, \textit{Talons and teeth: County Clerks and Runners in the Qing Dynasty} (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000).

\textsuperscript{386} Nanbu County Qing Archive: 6.539.01.
II. *Houses of the Living: Mapping Family Residences*

House geomancy 阳宅风水 is one of the two main geomantic traditions of China. Nanbu’s archive reflects that, just like concerns over grave geomancy 阴宅风水, cosmological questions over residences regularly found their way into the magistrate’s court. 387 This section will first provide a brief overview of house geomancy and then examine how magistrates evaluated these cases.

Prior the Communist Revolution, Nanbu County never had enough housing for the people who lived within its borders. Simple single-family homes (zhai 宅), built of rammed earth and local wood, dotted the county’s mountainous terrains, often directly abutting the grave groves that had provided timber for the dwellings. More prosperous lineages or joint-families built courtyard homes, which archival records depict as always packed to capacity. Although during the division of household property it was commonly said that lineages “divided the yang (“house”) but kept common the yin (“cemetery”)” (yangfen yingong 阳分阴共), this in practice meant that they divided the rooms within a house to different male children, who naturally lived there with their wives and children. 388 The courtyard house of a family with four male children could, by the time of their marriages, become home to dozens of individuals as their wives moved in and the new generation of children was brought into the lineage; some kin were naturally encouraged to move, but this did not always happen.

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387 One of the reasons why we can surmise that Chinese geomancy originated from grave geomancy is the fact that house geomantic manuals, such as the one cited in this section, extensively discuss houses in relation to grave placements, but grave manuals rarely discuss houses. House geomancy, and geomantic interpretations of other sites, drew on the well-known ancient knowledge surrounding grave placements to construct new applications of geomantic theory during the Ming and Qing Dynasties.

With all their commotion and crowdedness, courtyard homes in Nanbu were thoroughly ritualized spaces. Some of Nanbu’s lineages maintained freestanding ancestral halls (citang 祠堂), but most houses had a shrine in the rear of the Central Hall (zhongtang 中堂) where the ancestral tablets were kept and portraits of the ancestors were hung. Before a funeral, the coffin for the recently deceased was laid here (without the body) — symbolic of the process through which the recently deceased was transformed into an ancestor and indicative of the highly intertwined nature of the yinzhai 陰宅 (grave) and yangzhai 陽宅 (house). The yang hun 魂 souls of the departed were worshiped in the ancestral shrine of a house’s Central Hall, while the yin po 魈 souls remained in the grave.

House geomancy was not a style of architecture. Every region of China has its own distinctive architectural style, Sichuan being no exception. More aptly, in the imperial period, families in Nanbu County knew some basic guidelines about how a proper home should look and function that can be traced through general cosmological principles preserved in printed texts about house geomancy. While geomancers certainly could have been called for the construction of houses, as they were for the selection of gravesites, cosmological analyses of a house were not blueprints for the dwelling as much as components of a discourse of power that its inhabitants engaged with after a house was already built. A text printed in QL45 (1780), The Golden Mirror for Peaceful Living (Anju jinjing 安居金鏡) captures popular house geomantic practices from the Qing. The book contains information on choosing a proper place to build a house, maintaining the Dragon Vein (longmai 龍脈) of the house, selecting the wood to be used, and various illnesses

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389 In Nanbu, some older people prepared the coffin in advance and placed it in the ancestral hall when they reached a certain age. Some placed the coffin in the graveyard. I suspect there was some variation of local practice depending on the custom of the local settlement.

that a house could contract (zhaiying 宅病; “house illnesses”). One of the characteristics of house geomancy is the identification of “auspicious houses” (jizhai 吉宅) and “inauspicious houses” (xiongzhai 凶宅). Unlike grave geomancy, where the east-west axis of a site (“Azure Dragon” qinglong 青龍 — “White Tiger” baihu 白虎) was paramount, in house geomancy, the north-south orientation (“Serpent-Coiled-Turtle” xuanwu 玄武 — “Vermillion-Sparrow” zhuque 朱雀) was more important. The illustration and description below, from The Golden Mirror for Peaceful Living, depicts a xiongzhai 凶宅 with an elevated front portion along the north-south axis:

§38.1 前高 A House with an Elevated Front

10-11 此宅名為過頭屋，前高後低，二姓族主，出
This house is called a “Protruding [Front]” House. Its front is high and its rear is low. Its master will bear two surnames (the family’s estate will be split), and [the house will produce]

12-13 孤寡，損少年，並招瘟火，年年哭。
orphans and widows; [it will] hurt young men; [it will summon] disease and fire, and every year will be [marked with] tears.

14-15 屋宜前低，後要高。前太低後重者，凶；西廂
[For peaceful living], the front must be lower and the back must be higher. If the front is too low and the rear is heavy, it is inauspicious. If the Western Chamber is

16 高，壓正堂者，亦不宜。
high, pressing the Central Hall, this is also not suitable.

As will be shortly shown, these general principles circulated widely, and should be read in the social context of the late imperial period, where questions such as zoning, structural design, and

391 Zhou Nan 周南 and Lü Lin 呂臨, eds, Anju jinjing 《安居金鏡》 [The Golden Mirror for Peaceful Living] (Suzhou: Shounantang, 1780). Timber selection for coffins was an important practice in the imperial period to ensure an auspicious burial; one prominent example of this practice can be seen in chapter thirteen of A Dream of Red Mansions.
environmental impacts were neither conceptualized as they are now nor regulated by the central state. Like the grave, fengshui trees often grew around a yangzhai, typically at the rear of the house.\(^{392}\) In Nanbu County, the idea that the human life cycle and the future fortune of generations was tied to the health of the zhai 宅 was a self-evident proposition. The following case from Nanbu’s Huanglian Pass 黃連埡 Market Town deals precisely with the “Protruding Front” configuration of the inauspicious house discussed above.\(^{393}\)

On GX16.2.16 (1890), a certain Wang Guobin 王國斌 traveled forty li up Nanbu’s south road to present a plaint against his cousin, Wang Guoshun 王國順.\(^{394}\) The two men were the grandchildren of a common ancestor who had divided rooms in the courtyard house among his sons, who in turn divided the rooms further among their sons. While the rooms of the courtyard house were private, the open courtyard area and the Central Hall were common to all members of the Wang joint-family. According to Guobin, Guoshun had constructed a cooking area (zaofang 灶房) at the front of the common courtyard and a room with a water vessel for oxen. He also added connecting beams across the courtyard. According to Guobin, this addition overlapped with the foundation of his house by over one zhang\(^{395}\) 丈 and 故截中堂正脈遮向 “thereby cut the principal vein of the Central Hall and obscured its direction,” creating inauspicious conditions that could harm all the inhabitants of the house. Here, we might note that, just like graves, courtyard houses also had divinatory schema (i.e. “a house on the zi mountain facing the wu direction” 子山午向),

\(^{392}\) For a case involving a fengshui tree at the rear of a house, see: Nanbu County Qing Archive: 8.906.

\(^{393}\) For another house case, see: Nanbu County Qing Archive: 7.720.

\(^{394}\) Nanbu County Qing Archive: 10.689.

\(^{395}\) In the Qing Dynasty, one chi (“foot”) was approximately thirty-two centimeters. Ten chi form one zhang.
that would have been common knowledge to the residents of the dwelling.\(^\text{396}\) Suspecting the worst, Guobin “invited a geomancer to inspect [the house], and he affirmed that it truly was the broken vein and the obscured [house’s] orientation that had been infringed upon” 請堪與查看宴因截脈遮向所犯。\(^\text{397}\) Guobin eventually sought out the family head, Wang Zhizhou 王志周, who ordered Guoshun and Guobin’s nephew Xuejun 學俊 to tear down the kitchen area and the overhead beam, which Xuejun attempted to do. However, Guoshun proceeded to tell Xuejun that if the beam was touched, he would break his arms and legs. Guobin and his branch, feeling insecure by the now inauspicious courtyard house, felt they had no choice but to seek legal recourse at the yamen.\(^\text{398}\)

Wang Guoshun presented a counter-plaint. Guoshun noted that the courtyard was composed of various sections for each family, and previously Guobin and Xuejun had constructed their own cooking area in the courtyard, which was met with no protest by his side. Guoshun claimed that Guobin’s true intent in presenting this lawsuit was to scam his family and claim additional property. According to Guoshun, on the sixteenth day of the second month of the year, Wang Guobin had conspired with a yamen runner, whom he bribed to help him present a lawsuit. This runner, who was also surnamed Wang (possibly a relation) gave Guobin the idea to present a false accusation against him saying that he (Guoshun) encroached on common property and caused harm through a [geomantic] infringement. Guoshun thus insinuated that the so-called geomancer was in fact a yamen runner who was giving advice on how to best present a lawsuit.\(^\text{399}\)

\(^\text{396}\) As previously mentioned, the critical difference was that graves were divined on an east-west axis while houses were divined on a north-south axis.

\(^\text{397}\) Isabel Crook, who lived in Sichuan’s Bishan County in the 1940s, saw concerns like this lawsuit, particularly regarding the Central Halls of houses. Isabel Brown Crook and Christina Kelley Gilmartin, *Prosperity’s Predicament: Identity, Reform, and Resistance in Rural Wartime China* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2013), 56-57.

\(^\text{398}\) Nanbu County Qing Archive: 10.689.02.

\(^\text{399}\) Nanbu County Qing Archive: Nanbu County Qing Archive: 10.689.03
The plaints were approved for consideration and passed to the Department of Works, where the clerks drafted instructions for the yamen runner. The runner was instructed to investigate the Wang courtyard, with attention to the addition of the kitchen, the Central Hall, and the overhead beam. After surveying the fengshui, the runner was instructed to illustrate the site and return. He produced the following description:

差書前往，勘得王國斌與王國順同居一院公共中堂院榧。上年因國斌胞侄王學俊乃在院榧右邊前向修築茅房一間居住，而王國順同伯胞兄王國忠在左挨連接修造房牛棬；二間遮蔽中堂房向屬實。今王國斌指稱牛棬一間地基並非公共，系伊早買族業，約寬六尺餘。茲奉差勘理合，呈圖稟明。400

[The yamen] dispatched me (the runner); according to my investigation, Wang Guobin and Wang Guoshun live around one common courtyard of the [house’s] Central Hall. Last year, Guobin’s nephew Wang Xuejun, on the right side of the courtyard, constructed a thatched house to live in. Wang Guoshun and his uncle’s son Wang Guozhong joined the left [area] with a newly built cooking area and a [room with a] water trough for oxen. It is true that these two rooms do obstruct the Central Hall’s orientation. Now Wang Guobin points out that the foundation for the room for the water trough is not common to the lineage; he claims to have many years before purchased it from the lineage, at a width of around or above six chi (“feet”). This [image] I, the runner, drew it upon carefully observing the conditions. I humbly submit this image to make [the facts] clear.

In other words, not all looked well at the Wang Homestead. Upon examining the courtyard, the runner concluded that the cooking area and the water trough for oxen obstructed the Central Hall, which would seem to support Guobin’s contention that the fengshui of the house had been harmed. In his illustration, the runner depicted the Central Hall, which revealed a detail about the height of the structure that the magistrate quickly noticed.

In analyzing the submitted plaints and the illustration composed by the yamen runner, the magistrate was perturbed by Guobin’s chosen process, not his underlying concerns. Since so many members of the Wang joint-family lived in the house, why had this concern come all the way to the court without first attempting mediation? The family head Wang Zhizhou had not attended the

400 Nanbu County Qing Archive: 10.689.05.
trial — a fact not lost on the magistrate. Further, during the trial, Guoshun averred that he was willing to move the cooking area. The magistrate considered this information in his ruling:

Figure 28. Yamen Runner’s Illustration of the Wang’s Courtyard House

The court rules…Wang Guoshun [and others] last year on the level ground in front of the courtyard created a room. This room was lower than the Central Hall, so how can it be said to pose geomantic harm to the people (in the house)? Further, it is the case that Wang Guoshun is willing to take down the constructed building and move it to another place. Wang Guobin did not carefully consider the [relations of] kin who live [in the house] and commenced litigation over trivial matters. This is not right! Since Wang Guoshun is willing to move the structure to another location, there is no need for discord. The two of you should return home, keep peace and harmony in the whole family, and avoid injuring the familial relations of one root (lineage). All is finished and the case is over, this is the ruling.

401 Nanbu County Qing Archive: 10.689.06.

402 Nanbu County Qing Archive: 10.689.07.
As seen in the judgment above, the magistrate’s central concern was Guobin’s over-eagerness to engage in litigation rather than first attempting mediation. The geomantic question was more complicated: drawing on the fact that the runner’s map depicted the cooking area as lower than the Central Hall, the magistrate was able to contend that the vein of the Central Hall had not been cut. At first glance, it appears that Guobin was the “loser” of the litigation since he was scolded by the magistrate, but closer scrutiny of this case opens other possibilities. For reasons stated and some perhaps unstated, Guobin and his family were opposed to Guoshun’s addition of the kitchen area in the common area of the courtyard house. By invoking the functional needs of the house as a place of ancestral devotion, Guobin was able to push the issue to the extent that Guoshun, at the conclusion of the trial, was forced to publicly agree to move the controversial kitchen.

Wang Guobin’s accusation against his cousin Guoshun for fomenting inauspicious conditions shares an important characteristic with the lawsuits we have seen in previous chapter and the ones we will continue to see in this chapter: the site of an alleged geomantic infringement was mapped.\footnote{For other yangzhai fengshui cases, see: Nanbu County Qing Archive: 7.720; 09.673. For a case from 1930 over a dispute resulting from trees felled to construct a kitchen, see: SUCSBRC [Nanbu Collection]: 466.6069. For another Republican yangzhai fengshui case, see: SUCSBRC [Nanbu Collection]: 466.95.22. The wood used to construct the structure of a house often came from the fengshui trees around a gravesite. For a case involving the negotiation of the use and protection of fengshui in relation to building a house, see: Nanbu County Qing Archive: 22.177.07. For a case where the construction of a house broke an earth vein, see Nanbu County Qing Archive: 5.95. For a geomantic case where a magistrate ordered a manure pit (fenchi 糞池) near a house moved, see: Nanbu County Qing Archive: 7.326.} This is not to say that only geomantic disputes were mapped by Qing authorities, but rather that the nature of geomantic plaints often required the gathering of additional evidence by the state. The mapping of geomantic lawsuits worked two ways: the resources provided for the official illustration of houses, trees, and graves gave the state the means to consider a claim more carefully, but the very act of illustration legitimized the logic of the underlying claims. That is, mapping did not guarantee that a plaintiff would win a case, but it meant — in this case of Wang Guobin — that the state conceded that it was possible for the vein of the Central Hall to be broken
and for the state to be capable of diagnosing such a condition. Because the Qing state operated as an upholder of moral conduct and the cosmic order, the local functioning of its legal system was highly intertwined with the ritual and religious culture of the late imperial period, of which geomancy was a major component. This is further witnessed in one detail in the case above: was the guest invited to the house a geomancer, as cited by Guobin, or a yamen runner, as suspected by Guoshun? We cannot discount the possibility that he may have been both, as the identities of elite local actors in the Qing were often heavily intertwined.

The yangzhai 阳宅 and the yinzhai 隐宅 of lineages were also heavily intertwined. Locals in Nanbu ascribed living “veins” broadly to houses, ancestral halls, and graves. Houses and graves were often invoked together in both genealogical media and legal claims. In one case, Wang Guoxi 王國喜 accused Wang Jiaqi 王加奇 of selling a portion of his inheritance in a commonly held courtyard house along with surrounding fields, which were sold without transferring the tax liability. In appraising this case, the yamen’s method was notable. Taking a contract for the protection of the Wang’s ancestral fengshui 逢山水 dating from DG6 (1826) and another for the division of property from QL47 (1782), which was accused of being altered, the Nanbu yamen proceeded to construct a family genealogy for the Wangs, with all agnates present (ji kai zupu dan 計開族譜

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404 In one example from 1922, Zhang Zhizhu 张芝株 accused Zhang Zhilin 張芝林 of destroying the vein of the Zhang Ancestral Hall. The magistrate responded with the following comment:

据称张芝林毁墓修房、栽压祠脉，如果属实，当其动工之初何不按族理阻？及至成功，始生异议，恐是挟嫌逞訟，不予准理。此批。

According to [your plaint], Zhang Zhilin destroyed a grave and built a house, which has placed pressure on the vein of the ancestral hall. If this is true, then why did you not call together the lineage at the start of the construction to block [these changes]? Now that [the building] is complete, you begin to protest. I fear this is a lawsuit presented from a grudge and I do not permit it [to be investigated]. This is the comment.

SUCSBRG [Nanbu Collection]: 466.5376. For an 1861 case where the creation of a house allegedly broke an earth vein, leading the yamen to map the site, see: Sichuansheng dang’anju 四川省檔案局, ed., Qingdai Sichuan Baxian Yamen Xianfengchao dang’an xuanbian《清代四川巴縣衙門咸豐朝檔案選編》[Selection of Qing Archives of the Xianfeng Reign from Sichuan’s Ba County Yamen], Vol. 9 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2011), 229.
A resolution was obtained when the magistrate ruled that the Wangs constituted a single vein and that they were forbidden from altering the household division register.

This is not the only case from the Nanbu yamen where a genealogy was constructed from scratch by the yamen for solving a dispute about graves, houses, common land, or inheritance.  

The poverty of many lineages in Northern Sichuan rendered it so that they could not produce their own genealogies, which at times galvanized magistrates to take the lead in writing one for them.

Figure 29. Genealogy of the Wang Lineage Composed at the Nanbu Yamen (1826)

In another case, the Wangs of Siyi Market Town 慮依場 (eighty li) entered into a dispute over fengshui trees that were felled by strong winds. To resolve the case, the yamen composed a genealogical record of the Wangs — with all the relevant agnates present. Beginning with the phrase, 計開:青山發脈王德榮祖遷居於松溪灣安葬於雲溪 “to record: the [Wang] Vein of Qingshan began when Wang Derong’s ancestor moved to Songxi Gulf and buried [ancestors] at Yunxi,” the parchment records the history of the Wang’s fengshui. We learn for instance that, 道光初六年間演戲治酒封禁外房人等 “in the sixth year of Daoguang, [this branch] performed an opera and held a banquet and sealed the grave mountain from other branches of the lineage.” After the record was composed at the yamen, the Wangs collectively agreed not to contest the fengshui of the mountain. Nanbu County Qing Archive: 5.00083.05.

Nanbu County Qing Archive: 5.48.05.
Of course, in addition to occasionally composing genealogies for lineages, magistrates in Nanbu sometimes had to illustrate the cosmological dimensions of an ancestral grave, which is the topic of the following section.

III. *Houses of the Dead: Mapping the Grave*

For locals in Nanbu, geomantic interpretations of a grave’s environmental forces were major sources of ancestral anxiety, which was often expressed publicly through the presentation of a lawsuit at the county yamen over a grave. In such cases, magistrates would have to interpret the geomantic forces around a gravesite to gauge the degree of legitimacy behind the professed anxiety. This was particularly true for powerful notables with the means to erect prominent tombs outside of a lineage cemetery. Grave cases — and illustrations — occurred more frequently than those concerning human residences cases for at least one reason: “houses of the dead” significantly outnumbered “houses of the living” along Nanbu’s rural landscapes. Such a reality is depicted below in the GX3 (1877) yamen illustration of the Pu 蒲 lineage’s *fengshui*.

![Figure 30. Yamen Runner’s Illustration of Pu Lineage’s “House of the Living” and “Houses of the Dead”](image)

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407 Nanbu County Qing Archive: 7.354.05.
A case of the Li lineage at Pig’s Trough Pass Market Town 豬槽埡場 saw Nanbu’s county magistrate interpret the geomantic positioning of an ancestral gravesite through an illustrated depiction of its divinatory attributes.\textsuperscript{408} The Li lineage locally dominated the market town up to 1949; they in fact still live there today. This particular case of the Lis began in GX13.7.23 (1887), when Li Zaitang 李在棠 presented a plaint against his cousin Li Jiran 李吉然 over unpaid debts. According to Zaitang, who was identified by his title of zhiyuan 職員\textsuperscript{409}, Jiran had borrowed over one hundred strings （chuan 串） of copper cash and nine taels of silver from him in order to purchase a wet field. As collateral, Jiran had agreed to mortgage （dian 佃） his share of rooms in the Li Family Homestead to Zaitang, with a contract created for the arrangement. Zaitang claimed that the money was lent years ago but had not been returned to him. Jiran countered that Zaitang had changed the terms of the loan agreement, with Zaitang later demanding that the interest on his loan would pay for his extended use of Jiran’s properties. That is, Jiran claimed that Zaitang had tricked him into using seven of his properties for free, with Jiran expected in the end to pay back more than he had originally given. At the conclusion of his plaint, Jiran said that Zaitang had sought to move the commonly maintained millstone （nianzi 碾子） of the Li lineage onto his own property.\textsuperscript{410}

No runner’s description of the scene was preserved in the case file, though a runner from the Department of Household （hufang 戶房） evidently visited the site. The clerks who processed the plaints simply assumed that this was a financial dispute, not a property boundary dispute per se, which would have otherwise seen the lawsuit sent to the Department of Works. However, when

\textsuperscript{408} Nanbu County Qing Archive: 9.819.01.

\textsuperscript{409} It is unclear what position Li Zaitang held in the local government, though clerks in Nanbu County sometimes identified themselves with this term, which could be translated as “staff worker.”

\textsuperscript{410} Nanbu County Qing Archive: 9.819.02.
the trial began at the end of the month, the six present members of the Li lineage began to share a
different story. During the trial, the magistrate learned that the financial dispute between Jiran and
Zaitang had been going on for several years. Specifically, he learned that the matter that had
recently inflamed tensions in the lineage was over the commonly-held millstone, which Zaitang
wished to move. Zaitang claimed that this millstone, in its current location, harmed the fengshui
of his father’s grave. Zaitang wanted to do this to move the millstone away from the lineage’s
“common” land and onto his private land, effectively claiming it as his own property. The
millstone was likely paid for by funds from the Li lineage’s Qingming Association, to which
Zaitang — as a wealthier agnate — was a major contributor. In the view of Zaitang, the
confiscation of the common millstone would serve as a form of repayment for Jiran’s debts.
Because of Zaitang’s professed anxiety, during the proceedings, the magistrate halted the
testimonies to illustrate the grave of Zaitang’s father in relation to the common millstone and find
the underlying cause of the geomantic concerns.

The image directly below was produced at the county yamen by the county magistrate. It
was apparently based on the illustration of Pig’s Trough Pass Market Town found in the
magistrate’s geographic handbook, *The Illustrated Guide to the Sub-County Borders of Nanbu
County (Xianjing fenfang tushuo 縣境分方圖說, 1853)*, which was stored at the county yamen.
Based on the case file, it appears that the magistrate called for paper and a brush, and — listening
to Li Zaitang’s description of his father’s grave — composed the image. The resultant illustration
appears below, juxtaposed against the annotated map of the market town from *The Illustrated
Guide to the Sub-County Borders of Nanbu County*.411

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411 The reason for magistrate’s illustration of this highly situated landscape in court derived from the fact that a runner
had not been instructed to map the site — because this case at first did not appear to be about a grave.
Figure 31. Geomantic Map of the Li Lineage Property Composed by the Nanbu County Magistrate (1887)\textsuperscript{412}

(Dragon Vein and Divinatory Schema in Red; Temples along Dragon Vein in Dark Blue)

\textsuperscript{412} Nanbu County Qing Archive: 9.819.05.
At the yamen court, the magistrate began by drawing the Dragon Vein of the Li lineage, an imitation of the type of image that would be commonly seen in family genealogies across China by the nineteenth century. The magistrate did this in the presence of various members of the Li lineage to first gain consensus. The Dragon Vein extended through all the properties owned by Li lineage agnates; temples locally patronized by lineage members formed the contours through which the Dragon Vein was traced. This vein also corresponded quite closely to the mid-nineteenth century rendition of the market town in the magistrate’s geographic handbook profiled above: as discussed in Chapter Two, the state’s creation of administrative units in rural market towns in the mid-nineteenth century strongly relied on existing vernacular geographies. The magistrate’s...

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413 Xianjing fenfang tushuo, 305.
rendering of the Li lineage’s Dragon Vein precisely overlapped with the state-recognized southern boundaries of the market town where the lineage lived.

Li Zaitang proceeded to identify the location of his father’s grave, which was not located in the Li ancestral cemetery on the Li Ancestral Mountain but rather on a separate, individual mountain — a spot which evoked the power of Zaitang’s lineage branch and his differentiated fortune from other lineage agnates. Zaitang told the magistrate that his father’s grave existed on the mao mountain facing the you direction (maoshan youxiang 卯山酉向). To the left of that grave was the grave of another of Zaitang’s immediate kin — perhaps his mother (it is unstated) — that was divined for the gen mountain facing the kun direction (genshan kunxiang 艮山坤向). Zaitang’s description of his ancestral graves revealed to the magistrate his elevated status and wealth in the family: not only were these graves divined on a well-placed mountain surrounded by a grove of qinggang 青杠 trees414, but a river ran across the image, bending just before Zaitang’s ancestral graves — allowing the water (“wealth”) to pool just before his father’s grave.

In presence of the six lineage agnates, the magistrate ascertained the location of the common millstone, which was located close to a large cypress tree. With this information in mind, the magistrate, beginning with Zaitang’s father’s grave mountain, began labeling the geomantic placements of the environmentally relevant objects around the tomb. Though the magistrate likely did this through his own knowledge, a useful visualization of his thought process can be found in local geomantic manuscripts. Below is the divinatory description of a grave with Li Zaitang’s father’s tomb’s characteristics, a grave on the mao 卯 mountain facing you 酉, from a local

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414 Qinggang 青杠 is a type of oak that grows in Northern Sichuan. It is related to the Chinese Cork Oak (Quercus variabilis).
handwritten geomantic manuscript from the Qing Dynasty, *Preface to the Origins of Earthly Principles* 地理原序, first introduced in Chapter One.

As the description from the Northern Sichuan manuscript below reveals, Zaitang’s father’s grave’s positioning was extremely auspicious — a cosmological status that Zaitang wished to preserve through the moving of the common millstone. In analyzing the scene, the magistrate focused on the surrounding elements. If Zaitang’s father’s grave was located on the mao 卯 mountain facing you 酉 and his mother’s grave on the gen 艮 mountain facing kun 坤, then the adjacent mountains had to fall in the shen 申, xin 辛, and qian 乾 directions. After discerning this, the magistrate turned to the millstone, which was located just to the northwest of Zaitang’s father’s grave. This, according to the magistrate, meant that the millstone was located in the geng 庚 direction, the Heavenly Stem that was traditionally envisioned as directly next to you 酉, but completely distinct from you 酉. In other words, the magistrate publicly ascertained in the courtroom that the millstone did not hinder the geomantic territoriality of Zaitang’s father’s grave as a grave divined on the mao 卯 mountain facing you 酉. The millstone could remain in its previous place for use by all lineage agnates.
To make the point clear to Zaitang, the magistrate in his final ruling focused on the unmarked tree across from the millstone and scolded him for not previously realizing its cosmologically significant relation to his own father’s grave:
The court rules...[I] order Li Jiran and Li Zailin (another relative) to return home and clearly and earnestly settle each person’s accounts with Li Zaitang with the lineage as a witness; the return of the funds should be done in a set time limit within the year. Regarding Li Zaitang’s seizing of the common millstone, it should remain for the common use [in its previous location]. By the entrance of Li Zaitang’s house is a large cypress tree that is forbidden to be disturbed — it may not be cut down. I order Li Zaitang to consider the relationships within the family. It is not necessary to take the ordering of accounts that seriously. Both sides pledge to follow [this ruling], return to their homes, settle the family finances, and avoid harming peace and harmony. This is the ruling.

Through his illustration of the property, the annotation of that illustration, and his judgment, the magistrate re-interpreted the geomantic landscape of Li Zaitang’s father’s grave in a way to allow the millstone to remain in its original location and thus be accessible to all agnates. No case can be said to be completely typical, but this legal proceeding builds on prior examples in revealing a strong role of the magistrate for intervening in a geomantic dispute. Li Zaitang attempted to use geomantic analyses of the land to influence the placement of the common millstone — probably with the intention of bringing the millstone onto his land and charge agnates for its use. Critical however is the fact that Zaitang did not use this as a legal strategy, as he assumed his claim over the debts would suffice. The geomantic analysis of the grave’s territoriality was injected into the trial proceedings by the magistrate, when he understood the full implications of Jiran’s testimony.

Similar to the altercation over the Wang Family courtyard’s inauspicious kitchen, through the mapping of a geomantic claim, a county magistrate was able to provide an alternative explanation — arguing essentially that Zaitang had incorrectly read the cosmological dimensions of his father’s grave — in order to close the proceedings and send the litigants on their way. But to do that, the magistrate had to engage with geomantic knowledge as produced by locals as

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415 Nanbu County Qing Archive: 9.819.5.
pertinent information. Geomancy was taken as relevant information for these cases in part because knowledge about geomancy was so diffused, and hence potently applicable, throughout Nanbu’s society. It is likely that wealthier notables with freestanding graves, such as Zaitang in this case above, could sometimes make cosmological claims over a general area. Since such a claim arose during the trial, the magistrate intervened. In doing so, he probably did not even have to reference a text such as the *Preface to the Origins of Earthly Principles*, because basic geomantic diagrams would have been familiar to most literate persons in imperial China.

IV. Mines, Bridges, and Wells: Geomancy in the Negotiation of Commercial Legal Territoriality

Having now examined examples of Nanbu’s magistrates’ routine processing of *yangzhai* and *yinzhai* cases, the chapter turns to the commercial realm. I interpret the commercial realm broadly here to include shops and mines — in short, arenas for which geomantic lawsuits were common outside of house and grave sites. Of course, houses and graves were commonly cited in these lawsuits, so a fine dividing line cannot be drawn between commercial and uncommercial cases. This body of cases allows us to consider how magistrates handled county-level lawsuits that sought to stop small scale development — that is, not disputes over auspicious territory such as grave plots, but claims that a commercial activity harmed general auspiciousness. Most of the cases in this section came from Nanbu County, but because mining was more developed in Sichuan’s Ba County 巴縣, cases from there are referenced as well.

The following case reveals an instance in which local notables attempted to read a Dragon Vein in such a way to curb economic activity. On DG18.2.13 (1838), a merchant named Zhang Songsheng 張松盛 presented a lawsuit at a branch yamen with a troubling tale.416 Zhang had

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416 *Qingdai qianjiadao baxian dang’an xuanbian*, 335.
opened an oil press shop in White Postal Station Market Town 白驛場 that month by purchasing a room in a building that belonged to the Chen 陳 family. The art of making lard was pungent and unsightly, as Zhang had to take hides and carcasses of dead pigs and boil them down to the bone. 417

A few days after opening his shop, the xiangyue 鄉約 of the area, Qi Deshan 戚德善 along with five other local notables and merchants approached him to say that it was best he close the shop, as it was disturbing the fengshui of the town. When Zhang refused, saying that the oil shop was the means of his livelihood, the cabal ransacked his shop, destroying all his implements. Zhang then proceeded to bring his plaint to the branch yamen that was closest to his market town of residence. The assistant magistrate stationed at the branch yamen did not have all the resources available to the county magistrate at the county yamen to investigate the issue, but on Zhang’s plaint he composed the following comment:

查爾榨房安置場頭,原與合場來龍有礙,本分縣勸爾另擇地方安置。一則為合場居民起見; 一則恐將來地方不安, 喷有煩言, 致煩案牘, 宦係天地父母之心…爾速自擇善地安榨, 毋得砲詞多瀆, 自干罪戾。419

I investigate that your oil shop was set up at the head of the market town and naturally disturbed the Dragon Vein of the entire town. This branch yamen urges you to set up your oil shop in another place. On the one hand, this is for all of the residents of the market town; on the other hand, I fear that, in the future, if the locality is not at peace, there would be a lot of rumors around town [regarding your shop] and it could likely produce burdensome litigation — [I only say this] truly with the mind of a heaven and earth parent [official]…You should quickly select “good” land for establishing your shop and must not set words alight (make excuses) and increase your disrespect or let yourself engage in wrongdoing.

417 Oil press shops were unpopular and often attracted the attentions of geomancers in nineteenth century Sichuan. For a similar case involving the breaking of an earth vein related to the opening of such a shop in Nanbu, see: Nanbu County Qing Archive: 10.624. In another case, the Hes accused the Lis of setting up an oil press shop that disturbed their fengshui. In this case, the yamen, which inspected the scene’s environmental conditions, ruled that there was enough space between the oil press shop and the graves. Ba County Qing Archive: 6.08.03482.

418 Xiangyue refers to a local community leader.

419 Qingdai qianjiadao baxian dang’an xuanbian, 336.
In this comment on merchant Zhang’s plaint, the assistant magistrate essentially agreed with the local notables of the market town out of expedience, which is not to say he did not believe in the logic presented above. Because a mass of people likely believed that merchant Zhang’s oil shop disturbed the *fengshui* of the town, the assistant magistrate had to consider and, in this case, endorse that view to avoid future litigation. That is, although Zhang had entered a contractual agreement with the Chens to open a shop, because that contract was not subsequently accepted by the locals of the market town due to its geomantic implications, it was rendered invalid — a status that the state, in rejecting Zhang’s plaint, upheld.

Three months later, in the fifth month, merchant Zhang returned to the branch yamen with another plaint saying that, with the loss of his shop in the Chen family building, he did not know where to go. Here, the assistant magistrate instructed him on how to proceed:

爾立榨場頭，恐礙地脈，前已批示明在案；本分縣父母之心，總以居民為念，毫無成見。據立榨無礙，著即邀會合驛紳耆公同稟復察專。

You established an oil press shop at the head of the market town and [we] fear it disturbs the earth vein — there is already an official comment on record for this issue. This assistant magistrate has the mind of a parent [official] and always considers the needs of local people without prejudice. To establish your oil press shop without detriment, call together a meeting of the gentry and elders [of White Market Postal Station Market Town] and come to a consensus [over a good location] and then report back for an official investigation.

In this second official comment, the presiding official posed an alternative for merchant Zhang. He instructed Zhang to forge a consensus with the local elites of the town regarding the placement of the oil press shop. The problem, which the assistant magistrate knew well, was that oil press shops were particularly unsightly and unpleasant places and hence many locals did not want to do business next to one. Merchant Zhang followed this advice and called together the local gentry to select a new location for the oil press shop. Ten days later, a local gentleman (a “military student,”

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420 *Qingdai qianjiadao baxian dang’an xuanbian*, 336.
who had originally opposed merchant Zhang’s shop, arrived at the branch yamen to submit his own petition. Zhang had proposed to place the oil press shop at the end of the town next to the river, but others had opposed this decision, fearing runoff from the oil shop into the clean waters of the brook, where many in the community fished. Responding to the gentleman’s petition, the assistant magistrate gave his final piece of advice:

橋頭來龍之所，爾等既云有礙地脈，公同具稟立案保全地方。張松盛著即另選善地，毋得違眾干咎。421

The head of the bridge [by the river] is where the Dragon Vein arrives; since you and the others say that [this location] would hurt the earth vein, you should all report in detail and set up a record for this case to protect the locality. Zhang Songsheng should immediately select good land in another location; do not act against the community and let yourself engage in wrongdoing.

As previously mentioned, bridges — which in Nanbu were frequently termed “Arriving Dragon Vein Bridges” — were thought to connect the veins of two mountains separated by a water crossing. This understanding appears to have been shared all over Sichuan, if not further afield.422

The story which opened this dissertation, of the “Dry Arched Bridge” of the Hu Family of Nianpan Township, was one such bridge. Thus, in the legal case above, the creation of the shop near the bridge would still disturb the Dragon Vein. Through the assistant magistrate’s correspondence with merchant Zhang and the gentry, we may observe that what the official was seeking to accomplish was local mediation outside of the courts. Yet for this mediation to proceed, the court had to first endorse an interpretation of the land around the market town that held sway with evidently a wide group of people in the town. It is critical to point out that the assistant magistrate

421 Qingdai qianjiadao baxian dang’an xuanbian, 336.

422 Mark Elvin discusses the environmental implications of bridge-building and bridges in the late imperial period and references their perceived links to fortune (i.e. “Goodluck Bridge,” “Dragon-Sighting Bridge”), including their perceived influences on examination results. Mark Elvin, The Retreat of The Elephants: An Environmental History of China (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 187-190; 199. The name of the “Dragon-Sighting Bridge” above may have originally been in reference to a donor.
did not claim that Zhang could not open his shop in the town, only that, giving the nature of the work involved, a location for the shop had to be selected with the consent of the gentry and elders of the town. While geomancers were not required to hire to open a simple shop, the invitation of locally respected geomancers to an area before the creation of a mine, a bridge, or a shop worked as a kind of community-recognized insurance against future legal claims, such as the one presented here against merchant Zhang.

Mining became an increasingly large sector in Sichuan’s economy during the nineteenth century, in Ba County more obviously than Nanbu County, though both regions saw mines open during that time.\(^\text{423}\) The increasing intensification of mining activities during that period led to an increased demand in ritual specialists who were hired to be present at the opening of mines, so that merchants and miners could have insurance against the liability of potential lawsuits. One exemplary case in point is the publication of the *Candle Offering Ritual on the Occasion of Opening a Mine* (Kaikuang gongzhu keyi開礦供燭科儀) in Sichuan in the middle of the nineteenth century. In this popular mining liturgy, a presiding Daoist priest began by composing a memorial to the Great Baoying (“Treasure Responding”) Heavenly Worthy of the Numinous Mountain 靈山寶應大天尊 upon the opening of a mine. This involved constructing an altar next to the site where the mine was located. The terms of that memorial were as follows:

§1.11 伏以，
I humbly submit [the following memorial]:
12-14 混沌初開，民生罕沾美利，陰陽既剖，天心丕著休祥。巢居穴處之俗已遙，
When the universe was first divided, the peoples’ livelihoods were hardly saturated by wondrous felicity; after the *yin* and *yang* were split, the Mind of the Heaven manifested auspiciousness. The custom of living in caves and trees was far past and the strategies for molding metals and packing the earth gradually arose.

\(^{423}\) Madeleine Zelin, “Eastern Sichuan Coal Mines in the Late Qing” in *Empire, Nation and Beyond: Chinese History in Late Imperial and Modern Times, A Festschrift in honor of Frederic Wakeman, Jr.*, Joseph W. Esherick, Wen-hsin Yeh, and Madeleine Zelin, eds. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 105-22.
silk, people in remote antiquity only emphasized awe-inspiring and dignified manners. [Regarding] rice, shells (currency), metals, and jewels, later rulers gradually increased regulations [over currency, mining, and so forth].

In addition to exploiting mountains and water as well as making furnaces and coal, various skills and techniques [at mining] were all used to benefit the people; everywhere the planning and managing [of mines] created wealth. As a result, the national expenditures were bountiful, and the people were happy and content.

Now, there is a Sage Ruler on the Throne (the Daoguang Emperor, 1821-1850), and he takes the prosperity of the people as his concern; as such, the officials are elevated to good conduct, and everyone knows that not being greedy is treasured. But [in our empire] the large population increases daily; everywhere people clamor for food and it is hard to fulfill their daily needs.

We will venture to search high and low for these things [for minerals obtained through mining]. Fearing that [these truths are] hard for mortal minds to understand, we rely on the merit of the gods and pray.

This is an allusion to the phrase “gold is born in Lishui, jade comes from Kunguang” 金生麗水,玉出昆光. Gold was thought to come from the area today known as Lijiang 丽江 in Yunnan. Jade was thought to come from the “twin southern” Shuangnan 双南 peaks of the Kunlun Mountains of Central Asia.

This liturgy is found in a compilation of Sichuan Daoist texts, titled Fayan huizuan 《法言會纂》 [Compendium of Ritual Words], compiled by Liu Yuan 劉沅 (1768-1856). Hu Daojing 胡道靜, ed., Zangwai daoshu 《藏外道書》 [Daoist Texts Outside the Canon]. (Chengdu: Bashu shushe, 1992), 598-599. This memorial summoned Ucchusma 魯卑訶陳, the patron deity of the province. Zhaohua Yang, “Devouring Impurities: Myth, Ritual and Talisman in The Cult of Ucchusma in Tang China” (Stanford University Doctoral Dissertation, 2013).
As we can see here, the Daoist priest framed his logic in the idea that, due to population increases, the exploitation of resources had become more necessary. This fact needed to be explained to the gods — in the same way an official would report to the emperor — to prevent calamity upon the opening of a new mine, even as a new mining site was sanctioned through the presentation of the memorial. In Chapter One, a ritual manuscript from Ba County for the writing of Earth God contracts gave instructions for inviting the gods to descend to witness the breaking of the earth for a grave; here, the gods needed be summoned to witness the breaking of the earth for a mine. The existence of such texts from nineteenth century Sichuan attests to the anxiety people had when opening mines, as digging into the earth to extract such resources was thought to disturb local gods and *fengshui.* Performance of a temple ritual prior to the opening of a salt well or coal mine

426 These perceived repercussions were well-known amongst Qing statesmen in the nineteenth century. For instance, see the following letter from 郭嵩焘 Guo Songtao (1818-1891) to Li Hongzhang 李鴻章 (1823-1901), dated 1877:

The critics merely say that wherever the machines of foreigners reach, the local geomantic harmony (*fengshui*) is injured. This is a great error. Railways and telegraph lines are always built on level ground following the state roads. There is nothing to dig up or to destroy. As for the machinery used in opening coal mines and pumping water, it is for making the mine deeper. The deeper one digs the better the quality of coal. When Chinese dig coal, they like to penetrate from the sides; when foreigners dig coal, they like to get it in depth. Both are opening the mine. The shallow method and deep method have the same result. What harm is there?

Take for instance the natural resources in Hunan: the iron mines are mostly in Pao-ch’ing (保靖) and the coal mines mostly in Heng-ch’ou (衡州), and yet the people who are famous in passing high literary examinations are particularly numerous in these two districts.

Ssu-yü Teng and John King Fairbank, *China’s Response to the West: A Documentary Survey. 1839-1923* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), 101-102. A 1899 editorial in *Shenbao* 《申報》 discussed the limitations on mining in Sichuan Province because of geomantic considerations. This source, along with the letter above to Li Hongzhang, are valuable for their insights into the discourse of the period, though we should be mindful that these are opinions of the national elite, not voices from Nanbu or even Sichuan:

中國礦產之富，甲於五洲…尤以四川為多。大抵金銀銅鐵錫煤鉛諸礦，多蘊於山。蜀中巖巒層疊，絕少平原，宜乎銅鐵甚多，而諸礦無不畢備也。惜我華人不知開採，以濬利源，任天地自然之利，委棄於地，而漠然無動於中，甚且惑於堪輿家言，謂：“鑿殘地脈，必致有碍風水。” 一遇開礦之事，必多方阻止，釀成禍端。

The riches of China’s mines are first amongst the five continents…Foremost among [the provinces] is Sichuan, which has the better part of [the minerals] gold, silver, copper, iron, tin, coal, and lead, which are all stored in its mountains. In Sichuan, the mountains and hills are piled on top of one another and there are few flatlands; thus, it is suitable for holding many treasures. All of these minerals are stored here. It is a shame that my countrymen do not know that quarrying mines is for extracting profits; they let the natural profits from heaven and earth be abandoned in the ground, and they are apathetic and indifferent. They are deluded by the words of geomancers and say: “chiseling [the earth] breaks the veins of the earth and this will definitely hurt the *fengshui* [of an area].” Whenever they encounter a matter involving mining, they must try every way to prevent it, causing disasters.
upon the signing of a contractual agreement had a dual purpose of announcing new legal bonds to the community while allaying local fears of inauspicious repercussions.

Unsurprisingly, geomantic concerns were often voiced during mining operations, particularly around temple properties. Just like graves and houses, temples had their own fengshui and territorial implications, as these were the edifices where the gods “lived” and around which dead were often buried. As we have previously seen, lineages often expressed affiliations with certain temples in their genealogies through fengshui. Geomancy appears to have been a common strategy for laity to influence the management of a monastic property and nineteenth century Sichuan saw communities regularly present petitions to the county yamen requesting an official ban on mining activities around a temple on the basis of local fengshui. In Ba County, official bans of this nature were granted for Tiger Peak Immortal Temple 虎峰仙廟 in JQ15 (1810) and again in JQ24 (1819), when the monks of the temple attempted to exploit the mountain’s coal deposits. When coal mining was said to have disturbed Dragon Chariot Temple 龍車寺 and disturbed the fengshui of local graves, a magistrate responded: 久經官斷，嚴禁之處，周思聰等 膽敢復興開挖，殊屬玩梗，准久逐 “for a long time officials have ordered this place forbidden (from mining), but Zhou Sicong has the audacity to once again commence mining; this is truly

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"Kai shukuang yi" 開蜀礦議 ["An Opinion on Opening Mines in Sichuan"] Shenbao 《申報》 01 (1899.09.06): 9481. For an article describing geomantic concerns over salt wells in Sichuan in light of the government’s plan to expand them, see: “Huiyi guangkai chuansheng yanjing” 會議廣開川省鹽井 [“A Meeting to Expand Sichuan’s Salt Wells”] Shenbao 《申報》 11(1907.07.17): 12299. For a discussion of the re-conceptualization of coal in China from the late Qing into the Republic, see: Shellen Wu, Empires of Coal: Fueling China’s Entry into the Modern World Order, 1860-1920 (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015).

427 In a case concerning Qushui Temple 曲水寺, a monk allegedly dredged the mountain fortification of Dragon Pool 龍潭山堡 and thus 有礙風水 “hindered [the area’s] fengshui.” See: Sichuansheng dang’anju, Qingdai sichuan baxian yamen xianfengchao dang’an xuanbian, Vol. 9, 9. The magistrate did not find the fengshui hindered 毫無關礙.

428 Qingdai qianjiadao baxian dang’an xuanbian, 280.
obstinate, it is permissible to permanently expel him.” Similar appeals were made for White Cloud Temple 白雲寺. But such bans on mining came with practical limitations: the territoriality of temple estates was often subjectively determined, not precisely fixed. Hence, as seen in the following petition from DG18 (1838), presented by gentry from both Ba and the neighboring Bishan 璧山 Counties, the yamen could be called upon to interpret the extent of an enforceable ban along a rural landscape embedded with various levels of meaning:

We gentry (jiansheng; “purchased degree holders”) [verily report], we are people from the ancient temple, Jinyun Temple; [the temple] is also called Crimson Silk Cloud Mountain. The place the temple is located is that the intersection of Ba County with Bishan County. The temple towers tall and at the top it has the Son of Heaven’s Palace, which was created for presenting offerings to a statue of Guandi. It is the place where gentry and commoners from near and far come to offer sacrifices. During the time of the Jiaqing Emperor (1796-1820), there was a now deceased monk who took the landed endowment of the temple, a place called Yellow Mud Corner, the upper section of which included one share of a coal mountain, and leased it to Wan Yusan for quarrying. This has been its status for over twenty years. The result of this has been that Yusan got the upper hand in the temple’s property, and he came to see the property as his own; now he is again employing several workers to quarry the outer mountain. This has obstructed the temple and, as the coal became depleted, the temple began to sink. The abbot of the monastery, Monk Zhifu along with the jiazhang and xiangyue, Peng Zixian, hid this fact and did not report it. But this temple is a mountain of immortals — one of the “nine great peaks and eight sceneries” — it is not only connected to the Literary Wind of both Ba County and Bishan County — but moreover is part of the Dragon Vein of Yucheng (Chongqing). The preface of the inscription [of the temple] illuminates this evidence, and now it can be visited and examined. So as [the temple’s estate]

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429 Qingdai baxian dang’an huibian, Qianlong juan, 273.
430 Qingdai baxian dang’an huibian, Qianlong juan, 274.
431 Qingdai qianjiadao baxian dang’an xuanbian, 285. The full record of this case in the Ba County Archive is scattered over four case files. For these files, see: Ba County Qing Archive: 6.15.17045, 6.15.17095, 6.15.17103, and 6.15.17133. I thank Gilbert Zhe Chen for directing me to these sources.
encountered Yusan’s antagonism, the overstepping of the mining excavations became increasingly broad, destroying the foundations of the temple — how can the gods and sages be pacified? Therefore, we jointly submit this petition to the magistr ate, to grant a personal inspection of the site and sincerely and strictly issue a ban, not permitting Yusan to quarry and mine, to completely protect the ancient temple’s base property.

The gentry positioned their petition within two frames, the first of which drew on the religious geography of the temple and the second of which explored its geomantic significance. If the mining continued in the vicinity of the temple, the gentry contended, the gods and sages would not be pacified. The second interpreted the temple as aligning along a flowing Dragon Vein that held great significance for the town of Chongqing. As we have seen from the cases of the Lis of Pig’s Trough Pass, the Chen genealogy, or the Islamic Pavilion of Lingering Illumination, temple or shrine locations were frequently understood in geomantic terms in late imperial Sichuan. Of interest in this petition is the projected territorial impact of the temple, which hugged the border between two counties and hence was seen as possessing influence for both of them. This was also quite common, as temples were regularly taken as the border-marking structures of market towns and counties. There was another reason the gentry invoked the geomantic interpretation of the temple: the monks had colluded with the miners to allow quarrying around the site. Posing their concern in the language of geomancy allowed the gentry to convey the wider community’s concern for the environmental conditions of the temple against both the miners and the complicit monks.

The petition above was accepted, and a runner from the Ba County Department of Works was sent to the temple to inspect and map the environmental conditions of the temple in question. A counter plaint was submitted by Wan Yusan who claimed that the portion of the mountain forbidden from mining (deemed as such as result of earlier litigation) was the upper section, while his mine was located on the lower side of the mountain, at a distance from the temple. 432 In other

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432 Qingdai qianjiadao baxian dang’an xuanbian, 285.
words, Wan Yusan had to claim that the *fengshui* of the temple had not been harmed through the mining; he did not claim that the gentry could not have a say in the health of the temple.\(^{433}\)

\(^{433}\) For another example of how geomantic interpretation of land were used to stop mining activities, see the following testimony from a trial at the county yamen, which also led to a geomantic landscape being mapped.

問據：楊朝相、騰志安、楊佐廷同供：小的是仁里七甲，祖輩以來插佔為業。陰陽二宅，靠山來脈。大山有溪洞之水，原由山腳田外坑暗洞流硝，毫無紊亂。有楊正凡的祖人買羅洪儒、秦文賢們田，連大山腳溪水，出於硝洞。不料正凡、正錫們於二月十四，督率他佃客李大龍、肖鬚子三十餘人，將小的們陰陽二宅後山崗挖了一大溝，寬約丈餘，深有二三丈，把小的們後山來脈挖斷。楊正凡把水放出，衝溢小的們千餘石谷田。他連日開挖，小的們經憑約鄰陳開元、藍添相、張任龍理說，楊正凡弟兄勢如狼虎。小的們三月十四日來城，同齊把他弟兄告在案下。今蒙審訊，斷令飭委書差下鄉繪圖査勘，禀覆，再經覆訊。

I Inquiry: Yang Chaoxiang, Teng Zhi’an, Yang Zuoting testify: we live in the seventh *jia* of Renli and from the time of our ancestors we have reclaimed land as property. Regarding our *yinzhai* and our *yangzhai*, the Dragon Vein comes from the supporting mountain. The great mountain has a small brook cave of water. Previously, at the foot of the mountain outside the wet fields, there was a not-visible cave that trickled out niter (the mineral form of nitrate), but it did not produce any conflict. Yang Zhengfan’s ancestors purchased Luo Hongru and Qin Wenxian’s fields, which aligned the brook at the foot of the great mountain, where the niter cave was located. Unexpectedly, Zhengfan and Zhengxi, in the second month on the fourteenth day, led their tenant farmers Li Dalong, Xiao Xuzi and over thirty other people, and quarried a large ditch into the rear mountain of our *yinzhai* and *yangzhai*; the width was over one *zhang*, and the depth was two or three *zhang*, and thus they cut the Arriving Dragon Vein of our properties. Yang Zhengfan also released water, which flooded over 1,000 *dan* of our grain fields — he has been quarrying in this area for days on end. We have invited the *yuelin* Chen Kaiyuan, Lan Tianxiang, Zhang Renlong for mediation, but Yang Zhengfan and his brothers have the appearance of fierce tigers. We, on the third month, fourteenth day came to the town, and we all together presented a plaint against the Yang brothers.

[County Magistrate]: Now that the court is investigating, I order a yamen runner to attend to this township and illustrate the site, return with a report, and then we will proceed with interrogation.

*Qingdai qianjiadao baxian dang’an xuanbian*, 1-2. For another example regarding the breaking of an earth vein due to coal mining, see: *Qingdai qianjiadao baxian dang’an xuanbian*, 282.
The yamen runner’s illustration of the environmental contexts around Jinyun Temple revealed a large monastic estate that covered a significant portion of the mountain. The runner, upon arriving at the site, discovered that Wan Yusan had not quarried for coal in the forbidden area of the temple; the area where the mining occurred was located “more than ten zhang” 相隔十餘丈 (~32 meters; 105 feet) below the forbidden temple area. The gentry nonetheless insisted that stones and other materials had been taken from the upper area to support the mine, which they claimed weakened the foundation of the temple. When a trial was held at the yamen, the magistrate

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434 Ba County Qing Archive: 6.15.17133.
upheld the runner’s assessment that the mining had not disturbed the temple’s fengshui, but he did expel Abbot Zhifu for creating profit-driven conditions that led to burdensome litigation.

Nanbu’s Archive reflect similar local strategies and official resolutions. For instance in XF7 (1857), wensheng 文生 Zhang Bing 張炳 accused Chen Shaoxun 陳紹勳 of creating a workshop for the panning of minerals on the mountain behind the Zhang ancestral graves 佔在民等塋後山腳開挖地硐淘金設廠, thereby breaking the Rear Vein 後脈 of the mountain.435 No contracts were presented or referenced. A runner was dispatched to inspect the scene, following which he replied:

差書前往，查張炳等祖塋後脈山梁，約隔里許，與陳紹勳坡地接連，今陳紹勳在伊坡地內雇一十餘人挖硐淘金屬實，滋奉差勘，理合稟明。436

[The yamen] dispatched me (the runner); according to my investigation, the Rear Vein of the ridge [behind] Zhang Bing et al’s ancestral cemetery is approximately one li away [from Shao Xun’s slope]. It aligns with Chen Shaoxun’s slope. Now, Chen Shaoxun has on his slope employed over ten people to mine for minerals; this is true. Now I respectfully present this report to illuminate the facts.

Following the runner’s report, a trial was held at the yamen between the two sides. Following the two testimonies, the magistrate ruled that the mining had “blocked” 填塞 Zhang’s Rear Vein and banned future mining on the site.437 Of note for this ruling is the fact that, the runner reported that the mining had occurred approximately one li away from the gravesite, which is not an

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435 Nanbu County Qing Archive: 5.86.01.

436 Nanbu County Qing Archive: 5.86.03.

437 Nanbu County Qing Archive: 5.86.05. The ruling was as follows:

今蒙審訊查小的（即陳紹勳）開挖土硐，業已填塞，斷令日後不准再行私淘，小的遵斷具結就是。

Now the court has determined that I (Chen Shaoxun) have dredged a hole in the earth [for mining] and [the estate] is already blocked; [the court orders] that after today it is not permissible to privately mine [in this area] again. I (Chen Shaoxun) will follow this resolution as is.

This style of judgment where the magistrate’s resolution is attached to the end of a person’s testimony (the “jiushi” 就是 style), was popular among Nanbu magistrates prior to the Guangxu Reign (1875-1908). During the Guangxu and Xuantong (1908-1912) reigns, rulings became almost exclusively formulated in the “judgment” at the end of the trial (the “cipan” 此判 style).
inconsiderable distance. Geomantic plaints concerning mining activities in Nanbu, as in Ba County, demonstrate a range of official resolutions.\textsuperscript{438}

The intended emphasis here is not to imply that cosmological interpretations of land were always accepted at face value by Qing officials. Qing officials in Nanbu or Ba Counties neither said, to my knowledge, that Dragon Veins were not relevant, nor did they ever unilaterally ban all ecologically intensive activities such as mining. From examining these mining-related archival cases from Nanbu and Ba Counties, we can observe that a great number of geomantic lawsuits exist, a great number of official bans exist, and a great number of rejected plaints exist — like any other type of petition, everything depended on immediate circumstance, the identities of the petitioners, presented evidence, and local precedence. Officials considered geomantic information potentially relevant during litigations, but naturally preferred that local communities resolve issues outside of court. If endorsing a geomantic understanding of land could prevent future litigation, officials seem to have been inclined to do it; if a commercial activity had already occurred in an area for some time without issue, magistrates can be also seen expressing skepticism that sudden inauspicious events could be realistically traced back to mining activity.

The following case illustrates this last point nicely. On GX16.2.22 (1890), Deng Yulong 鄧愈隆, presented a plaint against Deng Xiaotong 鄧孝統.\textsuperscript{439} Yulong noted that, in the past,

\textsuperscript{438} Mining and quarrying cases in Nanbu frequently concerned Wind Veins 風脈. For such cases, see: Nanbu County Qing Archive: 10.654, 10.656, 22.193. For the construction of a bridge that allegedly disturbed a Wind Vein, see: Nanbu County Qing Archive: 12.85. For the building of a road that allegedly disturbed a Wind Vein, see: Nanbu County Qing Archive: 12.429. For the dredging of ditches that allegedly disturbed Wind Veins, see: Nanbu County Qing Archive: 12.558, 17.35. For examples of geomantic lawsuits related to the creation of salt wells, see: Nanbu County Qing Archive: 9.658, 12.460. For a case regarding the breaking of a Wind Vein following the quarrying of a “Eight Trigram Stone” 八卦石 to make way for farmland, see: Nanbu County Qing Archive: 17.102. In this case, a Lady Zhang of the Song Lineage walked sixty li to present her case. The case was accepted at the yamen, and a runner was sent to Nanmu Temple Market Town to inspect the stone. The following week, a trial was held at the Nanbu yamen. For a case concerning the quarrying of stones near an ancient grave for which the magistrate ordered an inscription be created to prevent future disputes, see: Nanbu County Qing Archive: 7.171.

\textsuperscript{439} Nanbu County Qing Archive: 10.662.01.
members of the Deng lineage needed stones for construction of a road; Yulong resisted attempts to quarry stones on his land, but that Xiaotong and his gang persisted in their bullying. Then suddenly in the second month of the previous year, Xiaotong quarried a large section of the Azure Dragon Corner 青龍嘴 to build the road, which harmed the lineage’s Wind Vein and caused inauspicious events to befall his household 作路敗民風脈犯民人口不吉. The plaint was accepted, and a runner from the Department of Works was sent 110 li to inspect and map the site.

![Diagram of Deng lineage's land](image)

**Figure 35. Yamen Runner’s Illustration of Deng Lineage’s Azure Dragon Corner (1890)**

Xiaotong’s branch of the lineage responded with a counter-plaint. They claimed that three years had passed since the stones in questioned were quarried, and that each time stones were taken from the Azure Dragon Corner, which was considered commonly held lineage land, a banquet was held with all members of the lineage present. Considering the mining liturgy profiled earlier in this chapter, this admission indicates that lineages saw the quarrying of stones from a significant mountain as an activity that necessitated a communal banquet. They then proceeded to tell a very

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440 Nanbu County Qing Archive: 10.662.04.
dark tale of the lineage’s finances over the past months, wherein Yulong’s branch had stolen the betrothal gifts of a fellow relation through a fake contract. Yulong’s branch — one of the poorer families in the lineage — needed money to bury a recently deceased relative, which in turn spurred struggles ensued over funds from the Qingming (Grave) Association (qingminghui 清明會).

There was no doubt that the Dengs had witnessed a difficult year. Marriages and deaths in the lineage had created new tensions over funding for burials, access to raw materials for building, and questions of agnates’ shares in the common Azure Dragon Corner. The runner’s illustration alerted the magistrate to the fact that Yulong’s property was located directly next to that corner, which explains the reason Yulong was so sensitive about the quarrying activities. The magistrate would not address the financial questions of the lineage dispute as he likely had no way to determine whether the cited contracts were forged, but he did discuss the geomantic timeline. The first quarrying of the stones for the road construction had occurred three years previously; tensions built up over the subsequent years and reach a breaking point in the past year. This gave the magistrate an opportunity to disassociate the challenging events of the past year with the original quarrying three years earlier:

堂諭...即稱以前打石挖伊宅後青龍嘴有礙風脈, 已經三載, 兩造係屬一脈, 不應失和興訟, 著令鄧忠純私下與伊二比理息, 再無滋生事端, 各結完案。此判。441

The court rules...even if [Yulong] claims that, in the past, stones were quarried from the Azure Dragon Corner behind his house, thereby obstructing the Wind Vein — three years have already passed [since the stones were quarried], and the two sides in this dispute constitute a single vein, they should not lose peaceful relations and engage in litigation. Now I order Deng Zhongchun (a witness and relation) to privately meet with them individually to resolve the conflict, so that such incidents do not occur again. Everything is finished and the case is over; this is the ruling.

In his ruling, the magistrate subtly pointed out two problems with Yulong’s claims against his relatives. First, as seen in local divination manuals (Chapter One), litigation was considered a xiong

441 Nanbu County Qing Archive: 10.662.07.
(i.e. “inauspicious”) phenomenon in traditional conceptions of geomancy; magistrates frequently reminded litigants of this fact. That is, divination manuals held that inauspicious grave placements or a compromising of a grave’s integrity could cause litigation. Thus, in this case, the magistrate noted that the two lineage branches in conflict constituted a single vein and their fortunes would be equally shared; resorting to formal litigation without first attempting mediation was not appropriate. Second, the Azure Dragon Corner had been originally quarried for stones three years previously, while unfortunate events (i.e. over marriage, health, finances, etc.) had transpired only two years later. Here, the presiding magistrate drew on popular understandings of geomantic misfortune to rationalize the judgment: misfortune related to a grave infringement would likely occur within the lunar year of its occurrence — not three years later.

This overview of official handlings of geomantic cases in the commercial realm allows for several conclusions. Whether geomancy hindered economic development — a subject for another study — does not detract from the fact that, over the millennia in which geomantic practices flourished, *fengshui* was associated with abundance, wealth, and good fortune — not commercial austerity. Officials engaged with geomantic information for similar reasons that compel states to enact zoning laws, establish environmental protection agencies, or pass regulations on construction. They did so in legal practice through acknowledging the power of such information within popular discourse to morally express the property claims of a lineage or a community.

This is not to claim that geomancy directly produced sustainable or environmentally-friendly economic growth in imperial China. As Robert Marks has argued, population growth and prosperity (with resultant landed commercialization), which were things that *fengshui* was thought to secure, were bound to have adverse effects on local environments and ecology.442 The degree

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to which geomantic practices protected natural environments is a challenging question, though anthropologists such as Chris Coggins have indeed suggested they have had positive effects that can be observed today. In the case of Nanbu, much more research on changes in soil conditions, forest cover, and water quality over time would be necessary to reach definitive conclusions and it perhaps best to conclude that geomantic practices had the potential to check unwanted development in local communities. Nonetheless, scientists currently working on this topic in the region have yielded some surprising results: in 2013, a team of American, Chinese, and Japanese botanists announced that a rare tree species, the Chinese tulip poplar, had been discovered in village fengshui forests of Chongqing and Hubei. There may yet be evidence to suggest, as was common knowledge in imperial China, the dead retain a distinct capacity to sustain the living.

V. Chapter Conclusion: Lailong qumai 來龍去脈: The Appraisal of Geomantic Claims in Nanbu’s Court

This chapter has argued that officials in Nanbu County evaluated geomantic claims over houses, graves, and commercial sites on the basis of available information and immediate context rather than on the basis of personal belief. It has suggested that an appreciation for the widely-circulating knowledge informing geomantic claims is critical to understanding how the property system worked in imperial China. It has also argued that magistrates in Nanbu County applied specific standards over which the seriousness of an allegation would be evaluated. The application of these protocols, such as the mapping of sites of contention, diverted some of the preciously scarce resources of the local government to the appraisal of these claims. Like the well-known


Chinese proverb that derives from geomancy, *lailong qumai* 來龍去脈 “[where] the Dragon comes and the Vein goes” (“origin and development” or “cause and effect”), magistrates used the standards of geomancy as practiced in Nanbu to systematically determine whether a claim, under those standards, was valid. And just like any other type of lawsuit during the Qing Dynasty, some were valid and some were not, and many were somewhere in between. Thus, in concluding, this chapter identifies several implications related to the resolutions of the disputes introduced herein. Magistrates in Nanbu presided over a strong property regime, the strength of which was derived from several sources. Exclusive or semi-exclusive claims to land could be established through contracts for the purchase 買契 (maiqi), sale 賣契 (maiqi), or lease 佃契 (dianqi) of land, that is, the acquisition of property, or for household division 分約 (fenyue), that is, the inheritance of property. Geomantic claims covered all aspects of this contractual regime, as good fengshui could be purchased, sold, or inherited in a competitive market in land for building a house, burying the dead, or opening a mine.

In examining this contractual regime, we cannot help but take note of the sheer number of land deeds, the impressive rate of their production, and the evident range in their quality. A full understanding of their contents additionally requires an appreciation of the cultural knowledge and local customs these documents took for granted, and likewise, we must come to terms with the situated place names and geographic sensibilities recorded within the universally recognized language of the Chinese contractual form. It is beyond doubt that these contracts served as a

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cornerstone of the property regime, but historical documents — including the contracts themselves — demonstrate an additional source of strength. This strength was reflected in family genealogies, graves, inscriptions, temple dedications, shrine placements, house orientations, and simply everyday knowledge passed from neighbor to neighbor and from parents to children. In Nanbu County, there was a remarkably wide range of ways for communities, families, and persons to claim some connection to a place. The ability to do so was tied to socio-educational status (i.e. gentry or commoner) or the location of ancestral lands — particularly the sites of graves of ancestors or temples of patronage. In court, where the claims of individuals clashed with the claims of wider communities, officials had to determine “[where] the dragon came and the vein departed” as they sifted through the minutiae of a file to determine which details mattered most for a resolution.

Throughout this chapter, I have shown locals to have regularly voiced concerns over the cosmological implications of changes to a landscape; the Qing state’s primary interest was in managing these changes while allowing for both healthy commercial activity and the preservation of social order. The limited regulatory nature of the Qing state can be readily seen in the fact that, in dealing with these cases, the Nanbu yamen did not attempt to systemize situated, often highly cosmological knowledge into reproducible structured knowledge. The information presented in court, whether in the form of contracts, illustrations, genealogies, or simply allegations based on cosmology, was too varied and dispersed to seriously attempt such a venture. Thus, in Qing Nanbu, local, situated knowledge about the land and environment was not translated into the recognized units of landed registration or property records that could be used to further facilitate governance; magistrates dealt with claims as is, as needed, while in practice recognizing the power of other languages and knowledge outside of the hectares and feet of the official registration system. The
state readily drew on this knowledge to resolve disputes. But considering the implications of this leads to an important conclusion: locals in Nanbu County can often be seen directly telling officials what their connections to the earth meant, not the other way around.

For precisely this reason, when the county yamen did illustrate a site in pursuit of more information, we should pay attention. It has been suggested that the Department of Works’ penchant for illustrating geomantic disputes was connected to the environmental conditions of the county, namely its mountainous, upland topography. But the litigation map collection also reveals another aspect of how magistrates viewed these cases. These were illustrations created in specific moments for specific purposes; they were not intended to transmit information years later as were records produced by locals, such as contracts or genealogies. Documents of record were produced far more often by locals than by the state, which readily mapped a house or grave to solve an immediate dispute and then stepped away. At the same time, the state’s illustration of these geomantic landscapes represented the incorporation of a regulatory instrument for managing and adjudicating land disputes (the yamen map) into the religious and cosmological realm — the symbols and practices of which, as scholars such as Prasenjit Duara have shown, were central to the functioning of local governance in China in the late imperial period.  

In short, when needed, the Nanbu yamen mapped yin 陰, it mapped yang 陽, and it mapped some things in-between, but there was a remarkable amount of information that was neither mapped nor recorded, including — as the next chapter relates — the borders of county, the locations of which were highly tied up with the fortunes and interpretations of those who lived and died along them.

Chapter Five: The Lineage Rules — Rural Associations, Cosmology, and Community Territoriality in Nanbu County

I. Chapter Introduction: The Vein of a Lineage, the Fengshui of a Temple, and the Dragon of the Gentry

The uses and functions of geomantic information in Nanbu’s rural hinterlands went far beyond interpretations of the health of graves and houses. This chapter expands on the cases found in the previous two chapters by examining the role of geomancy in the practices of rural lineage and temple associations as well as the county gentry, or in other words, in the practices of community groups. Archives concerning official engagement with these collective status-groups demonstrate how the state consistently deferred to lineage rules (zugui 族規) and community custom for a large number of legal and administrative matters.

In conveying this argument, this chapter highlights the ways in which geomantic claims could empower local communities for collective action. Studies of Chinese lineages have now shown the variety of practices and strategies that kinship groups drew upon for status-making in local society, legitimization via the state and its brokered institutions at the sub-county level, and community negotiation within ethnically diverse localities. David Faure has discussed the links between gravesites and temples, which help to explain why monastic sites in Nanbu (and Sichuan broadly) were often ascribed with geomantic significance, particularly by resident laity living around a temple. Myron Cohen and Prasenjit Duara have discussed the centrality of the gravesite in north China in the absence of many freestanding ancestral halls, which is highly relevant for the case of Nanbu, where most lineages lacked a freestanding ancestral hall. Of course, some Nanbu lineages did manage to construct freestanding ancestral halls in the nineteenth and twentieth

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447 Faure, Emperor and Ancestor, 353.

centuries.\textsuperscript{449} Zhang Peiguo has examined the links between Neo-Confucian orthodoxy and geomantic lawsuits in late imperial Anhui, arguing for a strong role of geomancy in shaping the territoriality of mountain estates.\textsuperscript{450} Michael Szonyi has posed a modification of James Watson’s conceptualization of orthopraxy in late imperial Chinese society in writing, “what was more or less universal [in China] was the practice of strategies in which conformity, or the appearance of conformity, to orthodoxy played an important role.”\textsuperscript{451}

When locals in Nanbu presented matter-of-fact claims to the county court over earth veins, Wind Veins, or Dragon Veins, they did so with the understanding that the state was supposed to recognize and protect these things. As per Szonyi’s phrasing above, locals did so with their own aims through a language and understanding of their claims over land that they assumed conformed to both state orthodoxy and orthopraxy, even if more strategic intentions were concealed. More imperative to consider than occasional elite disapproval of litigation-producing cosmological anxiety over graves and houses is the profound and prolonged official engagement with these claims by local officials in court.

Nanbu County poses geographic and cultural challenges to easily situate in the scholarship referenced above. On the one hand, many of Nanbu’s lineages had been transplanted to the region from other parts of south China. On the other hand, the newness of many of these lineages meant that Qingming Associations based around communal cemeteries were, as in north China, the most common organizational unit of kinship solidarity. Hence, this chapter builds on Duara’s typology

\textsuperscript{449} Based on ethnographic fieldwork in the region involving forty-one ancestral halls in the county, Wu Peilin shows that most date to the nineteenth century, which is also when most of the county’s lineages’ genealogies were published. Wu, \textit{Qingdai xianyu minshi jiufen yu falü zhixu kaocha}, 96-99.


\textsuperscript{451} Szonyi, \textit{Practicing Kinship}, 204.
of rural associations in North China, but focuses on the appearance of geomantic practices in the workings of these institutions. Beginning with a study of the formulation of “lineage rules” (zugui 族規) which in Nanbu almost universally prescribed the protection of fengshui, the chapter proceeds with a case study of a well-documented Nanbu Qingming Association. Here, geomancy’s many uses in local practice are evident, such as in levying fines, providing loans to agnates in need, and creating flexible boundaries of place and affiliation. The chapter then proceeds to examine temple associations, which in Nanbu regularly employed geomantic interpretations of monastic estates to exert control and influence over them. Finally, the chapter turns to a case that concerns the county gentry’s analysis of Nanbu County’s Dragon Vein to counter what they perceived to be illicit practices of a local lineage.

In exploring these cases, we see the state’s regular legitimation of situated knowledge of the land, including the land’s territoriality, values, and collective ownership status. When a lineage conflict saw a “collective” claim presented against an exclusive claim of one family or individual, magistrates in Nanbu tended to protect the “collective” claim, which often included tacitly or overtly recognizing the geomantic significance of an estate. The legitimation of discursive understandings, particularly of temple estates and their dimensions, was relevant for the administrative geography of the county, which relied on these structures to create legible units of governance. This was likely the case well beyond Nanbu: as the case from the previous chapter concerning the fengshui of Jinyun Temple 錦雲寺, which marked the boundary of Ba and Bishan Counties, demonstrated, temples and their territorial implications were significant for border demarcation across Sichuan Province. Of course, as Jinyun Temple was said to have been cosmologically important through a channeled Dragon Vein for both Ba and Bishan Counties, locals from either county would likely claim the border-marking temple as their own. The
sanctioning of the use of cosmological interpretations by families, lineages, temple-based communities, and local gentry speak to the state’s reluctance to extensively interfere in the workings of local society, its relinquishing of significant power to local elites, and its desire (in engaging with these claims) to ultimately decrease the rate of litigation within and among lineages.

II. Writing at the Lineage Banquet: Geomancy and Lineage Regulations

Lineage associations, such as Qingming Associations (Qingminghui 清明會), did not simply use geomancy as a legal strategy in Nanbu’s yamen court; geomantic terms and conditions were broadly written into lineage regulations and contracts. The first case study that follows here involves a lineage applying for permission at the yamen to erect a stone inscription for displaying their lineage regulations, while the second involves a conflict over the interpretation of a contract containing geomantic information relevant to one such association. Both examples come from Shengzhong Temple Market Town 昇鐘寺.

Shengzhong Temple Market Town was located 120 li away from Nanbu’s county town on the north road. The center of the market town, Shengzhong Temple, straddled the border of two counties — Nanbu and Langzhong — while a prominent ancient fengshui tree (shown below) marked that border. This made the territoriality of the market town complex, in that a person could be in either county while in the same market town. Lineages took advantage of this by declaring portions of taxable lands to li units in both counties, which gave them access to two

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452 For an explanation of the likely significance of this tree, see: Isabel Crook’s comments on market town territoriality in Sichuan in the 1940s:

Site selection (for a new marketing center) usually entailed identifying a propitious natural feature, which in this case (Zitong market village) was a huge banyan tree, a few hundred meters from where a brook fell from a rocky ledge into a sixty-foot cataract. Banyan trees had the dual benefit of providing an expansive canopy blocking the intense Sichuan sun and of possessing auspicious place-making qualities according to the laws of fengshui.

courts if needed. The following two case studies do not immediately concern the territoriality of the market town itself, but I will return to that topic later in this chapter.

![Figure 36. Magistrate Handbook’s Illustration of Shengzhong Temple Market Town with Borders Denoted; Du Family Ditch Denoted for Legal Case Below (1853)](image)

Most lineage regulations from Qing Nanbu mentioned the protection of the lineage’s fengshui as incumbent upon all agnates. The Jing 敬 lineage of Shengzhong Temple Market Town in XT1 (1909) publicly inscribed a list of sixteen lineage regulations, which appear to have been loosely modeled on the sixteen maxims of Kangxi’s Sacred Edict — with some strategic alterations. A copy of the lineage regulations survived at the county yamen because the lineage head, Jing Wenkuan 敬文宽, petitioned the Nanbu yamen in that year for permission to inscribe

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453 Xianjing fenfang tushuo, 315.

454 Nanbu County Qing Archive: 20.1076.01.
the regulations onto a stele for display in their market town settlement; the request was officially granted. As the Jings lived on the border of Nanbu and Langzhong in Shengzhong Market Town, they may have wished to publicly make their affiliation with Nanbu clear for reasons unstated in their petition. Regarding the contents of the Jing regulations, we learn that agnates were forbidden from violating proper human relationships against their superiors 禁逆倫犯上, injuring the morals and decency of the lineage 禁傷風敗化, adopting sons into the lineage 禁異子亂宗, engaging in prostitution 禁窩娼, gambling 禁窩賭, drinking to excess and acting violent 禁嗜酒逞兇, joining secret societies 禁結盟燒香, instigating litigation 戒唆訟, reporting taxes on land 戒糧稅, having superiors take advantage of inferiors 戒伙尊壓卑, stealing 戒偷竊, and harboring grudges and conspiring wicked plots 戒挾仇陰謀.455

The regulations then turned to matters of the grave, the ancestral hall, burial, and the vein

455 For instance, Kangxi’s Sacred Edict says 完税糧以省催科 “Promptly and fully pay your taxes lest you need be pressed to pay them,” while the corresponding phrase in the Jing lineage regulations is “we admonish against reporting taxes.” The Jings presented this list to the Nanbu yamen for approval. Essentially, the rule stated that the divided property of the Jing lineage was to be held in the name of the Jing common ancestor to avoid paying the deed tax and other surcharges. White contracts were encouraged between agnates and any tax-related conflicts had to be reported first to the lineage elders. The rule stipulates that agnates may need to “delay” the reporting of taxes, which in practice likely meant to simply not report them. The carefully worded regulation is as follows:

我們應先稟同堂, 然後出外, 明白無疵, 倫免叫稅之累。倘有抗違, 合族裡處。

We admonish against reporting taxes. There are times when people are in desperate circumstances; thus, the buying and selling [of land], who could eliminate that (i.e. “it is impossible”? However, if one establishes a contract today, and the next day the tax notification quickly comes. How can one withstand the harm of being rushed so much? If there is a remote piece of land, one quietly purchases it and hides the tax liability, then it is of course appropriate to report this; yet, still there are those who barely have enough funds to buy land, feel uncomfortable to pay tax right away and need to delay some time to [pay tax]. If they are then met with excessive demands (i.e. by tax heads), so how can they deal with it? The origin of these malpractices all come from relatives or neighbors serving at the yamen taking advantage of opportunities to inflict harm on people with whom they harbor grudges; with so many uncertainties, who would dare buy land? Upon discussion of the four branches, now that they have already divided the homestead and already divided the land — if someone sells land, first report it to the kinsmen, and only then release [the land]; when it is determined that there are no problems, the lineage may avoid the burden of being rushed to pay tax. If anyone disobeys this, the entire lineage will discuss how to handle it.

Nanbu County Qing Archive: 20.1076.01. Cited from Wu, Qingdai xianyu minshi jiufen yu falü zhixu kaocha, 79.

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of the lineage:

戒敗壞墳塋風水。祖宗雖遠，墳塋應該保蓄。況風水樹木，又培養人材之淵源。倘有踐踏墳塋，敗壞風水者，合族議罰。456

We admonish against ruining the fengshui of the ancestral cemetery. Although our ancestors are distant [from us], the cemetery must be protected and preserved. Moreover, the fengshui trees are the source for the cultivation of talented people. If anyone tramples upon the cemetery and ruins the fengshui, the entire lineage will discuss a punishment.

戒紊亂宗派。詩云: “螽斯衍慶，麟趾呈祥。”皆由篤宗盟所致。四支人稠代遠，總係一脈。如有混亂派名，尊卑顛倒者，議罰。456

We admonish against disorder in the ranking of the lineage ancestral generations (i.e. the ancestral hall’s ancestral tablets). The Book of Odes says: “grasshoppers (male descendants) prosper [worthy of] congratulations, and the foot of the qilin (denoting the birth of a son) assumes auspiciousness.” These all arise from the sincere union of the lineage. The people of the four branches are many and the generations grow distant, but they together constitute a single vein. If anyone creates disorder among the names of the branches and inverts the status of those of senior status and those of junior status, then [the lineage] will discuss a penalty.

In these two final regulations of the published Jing regulations, we see several geomantic focal points encountered throughout the legal cases of this study. Jing agnates constituted a single “vein” 脈, which was spatialized onto the territory of the lineage cemetery and possibly the ancestral hall in the language of earth veins.457 One way this spatiality was created and maintained was through the presence of fengshui trees around the cemetery. If a freestanding ancestral hall existed, the ancestral tablets presented the identities of the progenitors and thus denoted the identities of the living agnates of the lineage who were connected to this vein. In a genealogy, as we have seen, the “vein” of the lineage was spatialized to project outward from the ancestral gravesite (or gravesites) and encompassed the lands owned by lineage agnates, the houses owned by living agnates of the lineage, the temples the agnates patronized, and the mountains that were associated with the lineage’s settlement.

456 Nanbu County Qing Archive: 20.1076.01. Cited from Wu, Qingdai xianyu minsh i jiufen yu falü zhixu kaocha, 78-80.

457 Some lineage regulations specifically mandated that a spot for a new grave be checked by every household to not disturb an earth vein. See: Nanbu County Qing Archive: 6.539.01.
Lineage regulations that were officially endorsed by the yamen held potent legal power in rural society. For instance, in DG12 (1832), the Hes 何 of Anren Township presented a plaint at the Nanbu yamen saying that the ancient cypress trees that fostered their Wind Vein 寶城山祖墳培風脈蓄長古大柏樹 were under attack and the lineage was in need of an official ban on cutting them down issued by the yamen; they related to the yamen that they had a lineage rule against felling the fengshui trees of the lineage.\(^\text{458}\) In their plaint, the Hes said that they were engaged in a separate property dispute with the neighboring Huangs 黃 and were being compelled to cut down their fengshui trees to pay for the necessary fees associated with that property conflict. The yamen approved the ban and issued a statement warning those who tried to disturb the trees of the He lineage.

Lineage rules often found their ways into contracts with neighboring families or lineages, as seen in the following dispute, also from Shengzhong Temple Market Town. On MG14.12.30 (1925), Lady Pu of the Wei family 魏蒲氏 presented a plaint at the county yamen against Du

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\(^{458}\) Nanbu County Qing Archive: 4.141.01. The ban from the Nanbu yamen read as follows:

為此示，仰該族眾人等知悉。爾等關共寶城山祖墳大小樹株永遠護蓄，不許砍賣。倘有不法之徒串同木商，擅行砍伐者，除令族眾人等指名具稟，以憑從重究治，決不姑寬，各宜凜遵，毋違。特示。

For this purpose, we issue a notification: we hope that the members of this lineage will all be informed of this. Your common trees, large or small, of the ancestral gravesite on Baocheng Mountain will forever be protected; it is not permissible to cut them down. If there are any people colluding against the law who are rounding up timber merchants to cut down the trees, it is permitted for lineage members to give their names and submit a petition to the court so that we can deal with them severely—we will not be lenient—everyone should abide by this, do not disobey it—[for this] we specifically issue this order.

There are many cases like this. See for instance an inscription erected by the Qu 曲 lineage. This was erected after the magistrate provided the following ruling: 斷令回家憑家後立石岸監碑，嚴禁本族詞訟，護蓄各處風水 “I order [the Qus] to return home and, upon gathering the entire family, erect a stone base and inscription to forbid this lineage from engaging in lawsuits and to protect the fengshui of the area.” Nanbu County Qing Archive: 11.562.04. For another example of the yamen interfering to protect the fengshui of the Song 宋 lineage, see: Nanbu County Qing Archive: 14.84. When some members of a lineage, such as the Zhous 周 in 1880, wished to fell fengshui trees to pay outstanding debts— even applying to the yamen for permission to do so —the yamen forbade the felling, saying the fengshui had to be protected. Nanbu County Qing Archive: 8.85.01. Even in cases where details—such as coffin exposure—were exaggerated, magistrates in rulings frequently sided with the need to protect the common fengshui: 今蒙審訊，查貢生們與馬驤們俱係親族，開公祖塋樹株應宜培護風水 “Now upon the court’s interrogation, we observe that the group of tribute students and Ma Xiang et al are relatives, thus the trees of the common ancestral cemetery should be used to foster and protect fengshui.” Nanbu County Qing Archive: 7.721.06.
The homestead of the Dus, at Du Family Ditch 杜家溝, can be seen on the illustration above, west of Beiya Temple 碑埡廟. Lady Pu said that the Weis, in GX32 (1906), had purchased auspicious lands for the burial of Lady Pu’s father-in-law. Two other graves were subsequently added. During that time, some members of the Du lineage’s Qingming Association were concerned that since the land purchased by the Wei for burials was located on the backside of a mountain belonging to the Dus, the Dragon Vein of the Du’s ancestral cemetery could be easily disturbed. A white contract was thus drawn up between the two sides with the local tuanbao present, with detail paid to the distinct Dragon Veins belonging to each lineage. Lady Pu later presented the 1906 contract to the court in 1925:


With the witnesses of the Du and Wei lineages, the kinsmen of the two lineages, Du Zhongyao, Du Yuzong, Du Fenglin, Du Guilin, and Wei Ziyu willingly establish a contract to forever maintain peace and avoid [future] discord. Now, Wei Ziyu has buried his father on new yin land. The land is technically on Wei’s property, but its earth vein is in fact connected to the Dragon Vein of the Dus. With the two lineages as witnesses, we now state clearly, that from today hereafter, the base land of Du Zhongyao et al’s yangzhai (house) is the upper boundary. The Wei lineage is not allowed to add a grave to the left of [this house] and break the stability of the Du lineage’s rear earth vein, but the Wei lineage can create one grave on the left border [of the property]. It is permissible for the Wei lineage to establish an inscription and offer sacrifices at the graves, but they are not permitted to add a grave [on the right bank] and break the earth vein. If a grave is added and the earth vein is broken, the two lineages will stand as witnesses. Guangxu thirty-second year (1906), the third month, the twelfth day.
The contract that Lady Pu presented to the court captures the intricate layering of property claims that could be made to a single parcel of land, with the Dragon Vein of one lineage potentially overlapping with the contractual land claims of another. The Dus conceded that the Weis had lawfully purchased the land near their ancestral mountain for the creation of new graves, yet held that they could still dictate the number and eventual location of those gravesites — as evidenced by the contractual documentation provided by Lady Pu to the court.\textsuperscript{461} The ability of a lineage to dictate such powers probably derived from the perceived strength of a lineage in a market town: on the map above of Shengzhong Temple Market Town, the Du lineage’s ancestral territory was denoted on the illustration (“Du Family Ditch”), while the Weis, as likely latecomers to the area, were not represented in the recorded geography or written description of the market town.

When Lady Pu’s husband passed away, she called upon a geomancer to help her find another spot for her late husband’s grave. The geomancer divined the \textit{mao} \textsuperscript{卯} time on second day of the twelfth month of 1924 for her husband’s burial and selected a location behind his father’s grave, to the right (not left) of the Du’s \textit{yangzhai}. Shortly after the burial, over ten men and women of the Du household suddenly appeared and accused Lady Pu of breaking the Du’s Dragon Vein. The local \textit{tuanjia} soon after arrived and demanded to see the contracts presented by both sides. Du Fenglin produced a contract that demanded the payment of twenty \textit{yuan}; Lady Pu immediately said that the terms of the 1906 contract had not been broken and that Fenglin had forged another contract in secret 私造偽約 to demand monetary payment for the use of the Du’s land.

A runner was dispatched from the county yamen, who upon arriving at the site, gathered local notables together to discuss the issue. It was concluded that the grave created by Lady Pu did

\textsuperscript{461} For a case involving a broken earth vein and a disturbed ghost that was investigated by the county yamen, see: \textit{Qingdai baxian dang’an huibian}, \textit{Qianlong juan}, 289.
not harm Du Fenglin’s vein. Examining the Guangxu-era contract, the community of notables and the runner determined that, because the deed allowed for the creation of another grave — even the erection of a stone inscription, which the Weis had not yet done — the addition of her late husband’s grave to the right of the Du’s yangzhai did not violate the contractual terms of the past agreement. In a report sent back to the county yamen, the serving magistrate permitted the recommended resolution for reconciliation.\textsuperscript{462}

These two cases from Shengzhong Temple Market Town reveal the influence of geomantic knowledge in creating rural geographies of landed power by rural associations. Geomancy was not simply an “excuse” used in court to gain a magistrate’s attention, it was landed information written on stone inscriptions, in family genealogies, and into lineage regulations and contracts that the state upheld as legitimate legal tender. Naturally, the command to “protect the fengshui of the ancestral cemetery” could be interpreted in several ways by local people, which at times necessitated the arrival of lineage heads, middlemen, or gentry for informal mediation. A trip to the yamen to see the magistrate was possible for a formal resolution. The formulation of geomantic stipulations within lineage rules and contracts shaped the contours of wider community land markets as lineages attempted to retain their own strength and influence while negotiating the ability of other lineages to challenge them.\textsuperscript{463}

\textsuperscript{462} For a case about an illicit sale of a territory’s earth vein, see Nanbu County Qing Archive: 8.87.03. For the map of the vein, see Nanbu County Qing Archive: 8.87.04.

\textsuperscript{463} Magistrates commonly drew upon lineage regulations and practices to resolve disputes. See: Nanbu County Qing Archive: 12.44. In GX20 (1894), a man named Su Qixian brought a plaint against Su Jigui and two other relations. There were four branches in his lineage, all of which shared an ancestral gravesite, around which grew fengshui trees. Some members of the lineage bullied Qixian and his kin to cut down fifty of these trees that surrounded the gravesite. While doing so, two graves were destroyed, revealing the coffins. They sought out the head of the lineage, Su Quanyi, who ordered sacrifices to be made at the gravesite, the performance of an opera on a local temple stage, and monetary compensation for the trees. Ritual opera had long been part of Chinese funerary rites, particularly the work \textit{Mulian} — a drama described by David Johnson as fundamentally “about ghosts: their omnipresence, their power, and their subjugation.” David Johnson, “Actions Speak Louder than
III. Qingming 清明 and Ghost Festival 中元 Associations: The Case of the Zhang Lineage

In late imperial Nanbu, the ancestral cemetery of a lineage was visited by agnates not only on the Qingming Festival 清明節 (the fifteenth day after the Spring Equinox; April 4th, 5th, or 6th in the solar calendar), but also on nearly every other ritual event in the lunar calendar, including the Lunar New Year 春節 (the first day of the new lunar year; between January 21st and February

Words: The Cultural Significance of Chinese Ritual Opera” in Ritual Opera, Operatic Ritual: “Mu-lien Rescues His Mother” in Chinese Popular Culture, David Johnson, ed. (Berkeley: Chinese Popular Culture Project, 1989), 26. The trial of the Su family did not last long. The magistrate gave the following ruling:

堂諭：訊得蘇繼鉑之雇工砍伐其親祖塚樹木屬實，特斷令繼鉑等與其親等齋贈塚祭並演戲，以儆將來，各結完案。此判。

The court rules: we have learned that the felling of Su Qixian’s ancestral grave trees by Su Jigui’s workers is true, I therefore order that Jigui and others, along with Qixian, perform the jiao ritual before the graves, offer the ancestral sacrifices, and have the opera performed, as a warning to future [offenders]. All is finished, the case is over. This is the judgment.

Nanbu County Qing Archive: 12.44.09. Magistrates commonly drew on ritual performance to pose legal solutions. In the case of a broken earth vein from GX16 (1890) the magistrate gave the following ruling:

堂諭：訊得，王宗鎮因葬伊故兄於祖塚內，致驚犯王宗碧祖塚，本係無心之錯，然而齋謝之禮亦不可廢，斷令王宗鎮經祭一日，燒紙四張，請浮家業三席，以妥地靈而安幽魂，完案。此判。

The court rules: we have learned that Wang Zongzhen, upon burying his deceased older brother in the lineage cemetery, startled and offended Wang Zongbi’s ancestral grave. This is a careless, unintentional error, however, the rite of the jiao sacrificial penitence cannot be dispensed with. I order Wang Zongzhen to perform a full day’s worth of the jiao sacrifice and burn four dan of paper. He should invite the lineage’s “three tables” to pacify the spirits of the earth and to settle the souls of the underworld. The case is finished. This is the judgment.

Nanbu County Qing Archive: 10.671.7. I speculate that the “three tables” above may refer to the three branches of the lineage, though it also could be interpreted as three “banquets.” For another case involving fengshui trees and opera performances, see: Nanbu County Qing Archive: 5.50. In another example involving struggles over an auspicious earth vein and an allegation of a forged contract, the magistrate took issue with the recent haircut of a litigant:

堂諭：訊得汪紹碧等嘉慶時分關有“分陽不分陰”一語。梨樹為汪氏五房祖塚。現在两家爭此凃土地，即著兩造均不得爭葬此穴，即勒碑示禁，以斷後患。汪香山母死未滿一百日，即使剃頭，違例不孝，著杖責拾串，以示薄懲。此判。

The court rules: we have learned that the Jiaqing Reign record of household division of Wang Shaobi et al includes a remark that reads, “the yang (house) will be divided, but the yin (cemetery) will remain common.” Pear Tree Grove is the place of the ancestral graves of the five branches of the Wang Lineage. Now, two families [of the Wangs] are fighting over the land for one coffin. I order that the two sides cannot fight over this grave spot, and that an inscription be constructed forbidding any side to use it to avoid future discord. It has not yet been one hundred days since the death of Wang Xiangshan’s (Zonglun’s brother) mother, and yet he has shaved his hair. This is against customary practice and is not filial: twenty chuan of copper cash is to be charged as a light penalty. This is the judgment.

Nanbu County Qing Archive: 20.272.08. For monetary compensatory resolutions to fengshui tree felling or grave infringement cases, see: Nanbu County Qing Archive: 9.00051, 09.00064. For such a case from Ba County, see: Ba County Qing Archive: 6.08.2790. For a case where a magistrate sent a family home to tend to their fengshui trees by 只准獲豔，再不許糟踐 “only permitting collection, not allowing destruction,” see: Nanbu County Qing Archive: 9.00655. For a case where the magistrate just sent everyone home and told them never to disturb the fengshui again, see: Nanbu County Qing Archive: 9.00683.
20th in the solar calendar), the Hungry Ghost Festival 中元節 (the fifteenth night of the seventh month; between August 12th and September 5th in the solar calendar), and the Sending Clothing to the Dead Festival 寒衣節 (the first day of the tenth month; between October 27th and November 20th in the solar calendar). Lineages often had individual associations for separate festivals, but it was common for even a modest lineage with a communal graveyard to at the very least have a Qingming 清明會 Association. A major task of these organizations was protecting the fengshui of the ancestral cemetery and determining when revenue from this fengshui could be distributed to agnates. On a basic level, a Qingming Association dictated who had access to the natural resources of common estates, such as trees. But as this section will reveal, the wasting of a Qingming Association’s funds could result in the harming of a lineage’s fengshui. Those who were connected to the fengshui of the ancestral cemetery received preferential treatment for loans and needed aid during a famine year. Though many cases from the Nanbu Archive concern these associations, this section will focus solely on the extensive records of the Qingming and Ghost Festival Association of the Zhang 張 Lineage dating from the last decade of Qing rule.

On GX31.3.25 (1905), Zhang Qiyu 張其玉 (whose name is also written as Zhang Qiyu 張奇玉 in certain plaints) presented a plaint against Zhang Qizhong 張奇忠. Zhang Qiyu began his plaint by saying that his lineage had a Ghost Festival Association 中元會 to make offerings to the deceased with a base capital of sixty chuan of copper cash. Zhang Qizhong’s branch had from 1875 served as the official head (zongguan 總官) of the Ghost Festival Association. Every year,

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464 Dai Rong has conducted an extensive survey of Qingming Associations in Nanbu County and has revealed their participation in tax collection, militia organization, and local security. See: Dai Rong 代容, “Qingdai qingminghui huodong kaocha — yi ‘Nanbu dang'an’ wei zhongxin” 清代清明會活動考察 — 以《南部檔案》為中心 [“An Investigation of Qingming Associations in the Qing Dynasty Based on the Nanbu Archive”] Changjiang shifan xueyuan xuebao 《長江師範學院學報》 31:6 (2015): 63-67.
the Association made around twenty chuan in interest off renting communally-held lands to members of the lineage. The lineage also had a Qingming Association. Several years prior, the activities of presenting prayers and sacrifices for the departed agnates ceased, but Qizhong, as the head of the two associations, had continued to pocket the accruing interest. They beseeched Qizhong to pay up, but he concealed the original accounting documents of the Ghost Festival Association 隱匿老簿 while secretly forging a false ledger 私造偽簿. Because of the Qing New Policies, the Zhang lineage had been compelled to open a new school; the money for this venture, the lineage was told, would come from the lineage’s Qingming and Ghost Festival Associations, since all the lineage’s (male) children would be encouraged to attend the school. Lineage members attempted to get the ledger from Qizhong, who proceeded to threaten them severely and refused to let them take the ledger. This first plaint was rejected by the magistrate, who pushed the issue back on the lineage intermediaries.

Three months later, on GX31.6.23 (1905), Zhang Qiyu presented a second plaint against Zhang Qizhong for stealing funds from the lineage’s Qingming and Ghost Festival Associations. Qiyu accused Qizhong’s father of stealing over 400 chuan of copper cash in accumulated interest from the Ghost Festival Association, as well as over 600 chuan in primary capital from the Qingming Association. Through negotiations, branches of the lineage represented in the Qingming and Ghost Festival Associations had agreed that money would be allocated for the past year in the following way: twenty chuan would go to shore up the school built in one of the lineage’s affiliated temples, while the remaining funds would go to create irrigation embankments and construct a new road for common use by the lineage (“construct a great road with common funds for the common use” 修大路以公濟公). However, claiming circumstances wherein he was down on his luck, Qizhong sought out the baozhang 保長, Zhang Zhishou 張芝壽, to request that his share be
given after the harvest in late autumn. It was precisely then when the lineage was in most need of common funds and members of the associations begged Zhang Qizhong to contribute his share and release the funds. But Zhang Qizhong was not only one of the better off members of the lineage, he was also well-connected: his paternal uncle, Zhang Fu 張富, was a local “litigation bastard” (songgun 訟棍). Taking the stolen funds for their own use, Zhang Qizhong leased a salt well for profit — taking the well as a convenient place to hold the money for the meantime, while the entire lineage suffered.

On GX31.7.24 (1905), a month after Zhang Qiyu’s second plaint was presented, Zhang Qizhong presented a counter-plaint claiming he had been falsely accused, after which all relevant documentation was gathered by a runner and litigation was formally commenced by the Nanbu yamen. Qizhong attached the surviving ledgers and documents from the lineage’s Ghost Festival Association.

Unsurprisingly, there was a back story to the tensions between different branches of the lineage that involved the both branches of poor Zhang Qiyu and the association’s head Zhang Qizhong. Seven years prior, members of the lineage and the respective associations had met at the lineage’s ancestral hall to discuss a costly legal case that threatened the Zhang lineage’s reputation.465 Zhang Qiyu 張其玉 and Zhang Qijiu 張其玖 were brothers who had a niece named Zhang Jingu 張金姑; Jingu’s father had died when she was a child and her mother was forced to remarry to have a source of income. The two brothers cared for her as she grew up, and when she came of age, married her to Yang Chunjian 杨春健. Yang Chunjian proved to be a cruel and abusive husband, and thus she fled and took refuge in a local nunnery. Chunjian discovered upon

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465 Nanbu County Qing Archive: 17.394.05.
finding her at the nunnery that Qijiu and Qiyu were responsible for these actions, as the brothers had covertly transported their niece to the nunnery so that she could take vows and annul the marriage. At the Zhang Ancestral Hall, the lineage angrily confronted the two Zhang brothers over their inclinations to protect their niece. At present, the lineage faced steep legal fees associated with the ninety li journey to the yamen, the cost of employing a litigation master to compose legal plaints, the cost of inn fees for an extended stay in the county town, and the potential — and likely — costs of paying damages to the Yang lineage. A contract was thus drawn up by the lineage heads with the declaration that, 其玉玖弟兄教女不正，有傷本族風化 “the brothers Qiyu and Qijiu’s did not instruct the young woman (their niece) correctly [in morals] and offended the decency of the lineage.”

Collectively, the lineage agreed to support Qiyu and Qijiu’s legal fees through funds from the Qingming and Ghost Associations, but Qiyu and Qijiu would be required to pay a penalty for the funding of future lineage banquets (i.e. reimbursing the ritual activities of the lineage associations for the lost capital spent on the legal fees); moreover the contract read that, 出戒約一張，永警後世，以正人論 “[we] issue [this] forbidding contract to warn later generations against [disobeying] the morals of upright persons.”

The contract concluded with the stipulation that 倘日後楊姓再控張其玉其玖，家族收執此戒約為據 “if the Yang lineage brings another lawsuit against Zhang Qiyu and Zhang Qiyou brothers, our lineage has this record as evidence.”

Twenty-two lineage members, not including Zhang Qiyu and Qijiu, were present at the signing of the contract at the ancestral hall.

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466 Nanbu County Qing Archive: 17.394.05.
467 Nanbu County Qing Archive: 17.394.05.
468 Nanbu County Qing Archive: 17.394.05.
This first contract was the public document that depicted the moralistic, monetized punishment for the two brothers; as such, it served as a piece of potential legal evidence demonstrating to a future magistrate how the Zhang lineage had scolded the two brothers and forbade this type of behavior from happening again. The second contract got into the details of how the two brothers would reimburse the lineage for the help with the legal fees. Because it was unlikely that the two brothers would be able to pay the penalty upfront, they had no choice but to turn to a contractual sale of their household divisional shares within their lineage branch. A contract was thus drawn up with the following terms:

立文約人張其玉、張其玖二人。情因須錢使用，願將受分己業，座落老屋後頭山熟地一塊，上與張其順連界，下與付主連界，左與張國喜連界，右與官業連界。四肢界畔，憑族腳踏實指，付與本族張國禄、國宇、其壽、其明四房人等永遠管業，栽培風水。憑族公義敷補價錢陸串文整，其錢一手現交付主，弟兄親手領明。無人自今付業以後，弟兄大小以至未至人等，不得異言推諉。今恐人心不古，特立付約一紙，付與四房人等，永遠照存。

Composing this contract are the two persons, Zhang Qiyu and Zhang Qijiu. Because the brothers need money, they are willing to sell one share of their divided allotment of land — a piece of farmland located behind the Zhang’s Old House at the head of the mountain. The upper border of the land aligns with Zhang Qishun’s land, the lower border of the land aligns with the sellers’ land, the left border of the land aligns with Zhang Guoxi’s land, the right border of the land aligns with “official” (public) land. These four “limbs” of the land and their borders have been witnessed by the lineage and [the property] have been handed over to lineage members Zhang Guolu, Guoyu, Qishou, Qiming — of the four branches [of the Zhang lineage] — who will forever administer this land and plant [trees] to cultivate fengshui. With the lineage as a witness, there is a shared agreement to fix a price for the brothers amounting to exactly six chuan of copper cash. This money is now given to the sellers personally. The brothers have personally received [the money]. No one, from now on, following the sale of this land, including both the brothers — old and young and those who are not present, should dispute [the terms of this agreement]. Now fear that morals are not what they used to be, we explicitly compose one contract of payment with the four branches. This contract will forever illuminate [the facts through its] preservation.

The language of this contract attracts our attention for the terms through which the transaction occurred. It was well known that without any claims to land, the brother Qiyu and Qijiu would

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469 Nanbu County Qing Archive: 17.394.04.
effectively lose a major source of income and perhaps their livelihood. But by describing the land of the Zhang lineage as a living body, the contract positioned the four boundaries of the land in question as “limbs” — components of a greater body centered around Qiyu and Qijiu’s portion of land. Though the two brothers relinquished their individual claims to their allotted share of divided territory from their ancestors, their agnates, representing the four branches, promised to preserve the land by planting trees to “cultivate the fengshui” of the entire lineage. Qiyu and Qijiu remained bound to these communal lands of the lineage through that fengshui. The customary practice of geomancy, which delegated degrees of access between “common” and “private” claims to resources amongst agnates, (i.e. land rights of individuals, land rights of branch agnates, land rights of all agnates, “common lands”) allowed the brothers to forever retain a connection to the relinquished land, which as inherited patrimony would ideally never be sold outside the lineage. The brothers would still be allowed to obtain much needed firewood and timber for cooking and building. We might note that the fact the brothers’ inherited shares of farmland could be so easily converted into woodland speaks to the possibility that the land around the settlement was not particularly fertile. As the two contracts date from 1899, we can assume that this is around the time when conflicts surrounding the management of the Ghost Festival and Qingming Associations began.

Turning to the accounting ledger, we can ascertain how the budgeting for these associations worked in late nineteenth century Nanbu, even if the ledger above was indeed forged, as some agnates claimed. The accounting records of the Ghost Festival Association start from the Ghost Festival of 1896, whereas the accounts for the Qingming Association begin in 1885. The Qingming Association generally had more cash on hand at any given time, possibly because it controlled the highly valuable timber around the gravesite.
Figure 37. Accounting Ledger for the Grave and Ghost Festival Associations of the Zhang Lineage (1905)\textsuperscript{470}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year of Ghost Festival</th>
<th>Interest</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GX22 (1896)</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GX23 (1897)</td>
<td>20,400 cash</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GX24 (1898)</td>
<td>20,400 cash</td>
<td>Additional shares acquired: 55,100 cash added with monthly interest rate of 1,377 cash. 1,100 cash reinvested, with remaining 277 cash added to coffers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GX25 (1899)</td>
<td>20,400 cash</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GX26 (1900)</td>
<td>20,400 cash</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GX27 (1901)</td>
<td>20,400 cash</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GX28 (1902)</td>
<td>20,400 cash</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GX29 (1903)</td>
<td>20,400 cash</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GX30 (1904)</td>
<td>20,400 cash</td>
<td>20,816 cash collected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GX31 (1905)</td>
<td>20,400 cash</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Total (on hand and invested): 251,600 cash</td>
<td>107,537 cash on hand</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 38. Finances (Capital and Interest) of the Zhang Lineage Ghost Festival Association (Base Capital \textit{本錢} 68 \textit{chuan}串)

Figure 39. Finances (Capital and Interest) of the Zhang Lineage Qingming Association (Base Capital 38 \textit{chuan})

\textsuperscript{470} Nanbu County Qing Archive: 17.00394.6.

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GX11 (1885)</th>
<th>Zhang Wenpei applies for permission to fell a fengshui tree; timber sold for ten taels, 16,000 cash</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GX12 (1886)</td>
<td>16,200 cash</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GX13 (1887)</td>
<td>16,200 cash</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GX14 (1888)</td>
<td>16,200 cash</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GX15 (1889)</td>
<td>16,200 cash</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GX16 (1890)</td>
<td>16,200 cash</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GX17 (1891)</td>
<td>Branches apply for permission to fell a fengshui tree; timber sold for 40,000 cash</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GX18 (1892)</td>
<td>28,200 cash</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GX19 (1893)</td>
<td>28,200 cash</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GX20 (1894)</td>
<td>28,200 cash</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GX21 (1895)</td>
<td>28,200 cash</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GX22 (1896)</td>
<td>28,200 cash</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GX23 (1897)</td>
<td>40,200 cash</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GX24 (1898)</td>
<td>Damage to lineage’s fengshui after repairs made to Wailang Bridge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GX25 (1899)</td>
<td>43,800 cash</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GX26 (1900)</td>
<td>43,800 cash</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GX27 (1901)</td>
<td>43,800 cash</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GX28 (1902)</td>
<td>43,800 cash</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GX29 (1903)</td>
<td>43,800 cash</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GX30 (1904)</td>
<td>43,800 cash</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GX31 (1905)</td>
<td>43,800 cash</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total (on hand and invested): 791,000 cash</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above data provides some insights into the two Zhang lineage associations. Like lineages elsewhere in China, the lineage operated as a corporation, and the Zhang lineage was wealthier than most Nanbu lineages, many of which lacked a freestanding ancestral hall that came to represent much familial-based corporate activity during the Ming Dynasty. One noteworthy type of asset owned by the Qingming Association were the trees around the lineage’s graves and

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ancestral hall, which protected the *fengshui* and were in fact called simply called “*fengshui*” in Nanbu vernacular. Timber and firewood were provided to lineage agnates, and trees around the ancestral graves could be felled for timber, which fetched a high price in the county: depending on the size and age, the timber from a single tree could match or exceed the yearly interest on the collective lineage estates. Attached to the ledger above was a record of outstanding loans given out to various agnates and the organization of the Ghost Festival Association.\(^{472}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Person</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Zhang Guolu 張國錄</td>
<td>3,000 cash</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zhang Qidong 張其東</td>
<td>5,000 cash</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zhang Qizhi 張其治</td>
<td>2,000 cash</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zhang Qisheng 張其陞</td>
<td>3,200 cash</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yong Zhiqi 雍至歧</td>
<td>1,400 cash</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zhang Qiming 張其明</td>
<td>2,500 cash</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zhang Guozheng 張國政</td>
<td>1,500 cash</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zhang Guoyu 張國宇</td>
<td>1,000 cash</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zhang Qibin 張其斌</td>
<td>1,500 cash</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zhang Qigui 張其貴</td>
<td>2,000 cash</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zhang Zhijin 張之金</td>
<td>1,810 cash</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zhang Zhifu 張之福</td>
<td>2,000 cash</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zhang Zhishou 張之壽</td>
<td>3,000 cash</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zhang Qiyu 張其玉</td>
<td>3,000 cash</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zhang Zhiji 張之紀</td>
<td>1,200 cash</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zhang Zhiji 張之紀</td>
<td>1,200 cash</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yong Zhiqi 雍至歧</td>
<td>200 cash</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{472}\) Nanbu County Qing Archive: 17.394.09.
The original ledger and accounting records were signed by eleven representatives of the four Zhang lineage branches. Zhang Qizhong claimed that this record was stolen by Zhang Zhishou, Zhang Zhizi, and Zhang Wenrong.

Figure 42. Structure of the Zhang Lineage's Qingming and Ghost Festival Association (1905)

The above records provide insight into how the Zhang Ghost Festival and Qingming Associations operated in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As previously mentioned, the Qingming Association was the biggest lender and first port of call for most agnates. At least one identifiable non-agnate, Yong Zhiqi, was provided a total of three loans by the Zhang lineage associations; supporting material points to the idea that the Yongs were tied to the Zangs through a marriage alliance. Loans accumulated interest monthly, and the average

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473 Women of the Yong lineage are found in the financial and legal documents of the Zhang lineage.
loan was around 3,000 cash. The Zhangs, who possessed the means to run two corporate organizations, did not generally lend money to those outside the lineage.

One source of income for the association came from fining agnates and neighbors for perceived infringements on the lineage’s well-being. These fines were negotiated through informal mediation for the avoidance of formal litigation. One illuminating case involving the repairs to Wailang Bridge provides insight into how the lineage’s income could be envisioned in geomantic terms. In GX23 (1897), two branches of the neighboring Li lineage and one branch of the Zhang lineage put up funds for the collective repairing of the bridge, which bordered on the lands between the two families. Funds were released from the Zhang’s Qingming Association to repair the bridge, but the repairs were never executed. In a contract between two Zhang lineage branches and the Lis that sought to avoid litigation, representatives from the Zhang lineage described the problem in the following terms:

代文約人張李三支人等。情因外郎橋培補，橋功無出，鄉約張懷廣私通老屋外裏兒嶺族人，殊屬不成事體。當既請憑家族理論，顯係敗壞祖塋風水。文武紳衿勸阻，總宜和睦宗族，不可爭訟拖累，大傷雅道。故此罰備酒水，傷壞本根。庶幾枝繁葉茂，子貴孫榮。但恐人眾事繁，難保無籍公肥己。覆蹈禁永封。如敢犯禁，百斤豬酒，罰伍拾千文。並無異言推諉。今恐人心不古。此據。474

We compose this contract on behalf of three branches from the Zhang and Li lineages. On account of the fact that Wailang Bridge [needed] repairs, but the repairs were not carried out, xiangyue Zhang Huaiguang privately colluded with a kinsman from Mount Zao’er outside the Old Homestead; this is truly inappropriate. Thereby, we invited the lineage as a witness to discuss the matter, and it was clear that these [bridge repairs] damaged the fengshui of our ancestral graves. The gentry of both civil and military urged [us] to stop and to always preserve harmony, because the lineage cannot engage in cumbersome litigation and because involving [the lineage in litigation] brings great injury to the moral way. This penalty of preparing the Ritual Alcohol (“funds for the Qingming Association”) is meant to punish those who harm the root [of our lineage] (harm the inter-and-intra-lineage relations). We hope that the branches multiply and the leaves prosper and that the sons are wealthy and the grandsons prosper, but we fear that because our people are many and human affairs are complicated, it cannot be guaranteed that someone would not take the common funds for his own private use and step again on the forbidden. If someone dares to violate the forbidden, a penalty of one hundred jin of pork and a Ritual Alcohol,

474 Nanbu County Qing Archive: 17.394.08.
as well as a fine of 50,000 wen [will be fined]. [This agreement] receives no contests or
blames from [those present]. Now, fearing that morals are not what they used to be, this
[document] is evidence.

What makes the result of this meditation particularly important is that in this case, there was no
physical damage done to the Zhang’s ancestral grave. The fengshui of the Zhang lineage was said
to have been injured because funds lent from the Qingming Association, which would have
otherwise paid for ancestral sacrifices, had gone to the repairs of a bridge that were not
appropriately completed. We can thus note that fengshui did not always refer to defined physical
spaces: the collective liquid assets of a lineage in the form of capital could in Nanbu County also
be described in geomantic language, or simply as “fengshui.” As stated above, this may have
derived from the high value of timber in the region, so that the trees around the gravesite
constituted a significant portion of the community’s wealth.

So acrimonious was the feud in this lineage, three separate court sessions were held, two
in the eighth month of GX31 (1905) and one in the eleventh month. Thus far the records have been
detailed, so I will recap the essence of the dispute. The Zhangs were a large lineage with a corporate
estate spread over four branches, some richer, some poorer. Collectively, the lineage supported
two associations: a Qingming Association and a Ghost Festival Association. Zhang Qiyu and
Zhang Qijiu, because of their involvement in a lawsuit over a marriage alliance with the Yang
Family some years prior, had cost the Zhang lineage in both capital and reputation and were forced
to pay handsomely for it. Zhang Qiyu essentially lost much of his inherited farmland. All the while,
the Zhang lineage as a corporation was in fact making money through the interests on various
loans to different agnates. Anger clearly built, however, when it was gradually revealed that Zhang
Qizhong had been making private investments with the account ledgers of the Qingming
Association, all the while using his connections with a well-placed litigation specialist to prevent
lawsuits against his stewardship from making their way into the magistrate’s court, not to mention negotiating hard bargains on behalf of the Qingming Association when disputes with neighbors occurred. Adding to this, when the county government had announced that schools would be built and funded with money from rural associations that year, the Zhang corporate lineage came under significant strain. Large sums of money went missing, accusations hit a new high, and there were physical altercations over the accounting ledgers of the lineage. On the twelfth of the eighth month of GX31, seventeen Zhang lineage members from all four branches crowded into the magistrate’s court.\footnote{As the three hearings effectively recount much of the same information, I will focus on the judgment of the second hearing, which was the most detailed:}

I rule that the interest on your Ghost Festival Association, from GX22 (1896) is to be allocated and returned \([by Zhang Qizhong]\), and the money be used to overcome the deficiencies in the association’s accounting and the ceased ritual activities. I order the yamen clerk (from the Department of Rites) to take the accounting items with the witness of everyone and calculate clearly \([the accounts]\) the correct compensation. As for the sold \(\text{fengshui}\) trees, their price will enter the Qingming Association’s coffers and Zhang Fu must calculate clearly and return \([these funds]\) and report back with an official report listing the funds \([inappropriately]\) seized. Zhang Qizhong et al’s Ghost Festival Association annual interest of 4,000 \(\text{wen}\) should go into its proper place, and this should cover and support the Primary Education School’s operating costs. This is the judgment.

\footnote{The first hearing began with Zhang Qiyu, who recounted the public reckoning of accounts in the family’s Temple of the Five Manifestations 五顯寺, where the lineage’s New Style School had been established. While the records of interest were accounted for between GX29 and GX31, it became clear that the money had been privately confiscated, while ritual activities for the dead were no longer being performed. Zhang Qizhong and Zhang Fu retorted that from GX22 to GX31, the assets of the Ghost Festival Association had accrued over 190 \(\text{chuan}\) in interest, which could be accounted for on the ledger; however, there were many people who had requested loans, the association was obliged to provide them. They claimed that, as it had been a famine year, not all the money had yet been returned 中元會本利共銀一百九十串, 均係在會之人多寡使用, 委因歲旱, 兩從措還. In the first ruling, the magistrate ordered that a new account ledger needed to be drawn up as soon as possible with all the loans and accrued interest, and that if any funds did not match up, it would be the responsibility of Zhang Qizhong to pay up. Nanbu County Qing Archive: 17.394.13. By the twenty-eighth day of the same month, the lineage’s Tribute Student, Zhang Wenpei, returned to the yamen with a request for the magistrate to re-hear the case, as the new ledger revealed significant discrepancies in the lineage’s accounting.}

\footnote{Nanbu County Qing Archive: 17.394.14.}
In the above judgment, the magistrate settled any doubt that Zhang Qizhong had indeed mismanaged the lineage’s funds, and demanded that money obtained from felling trees from the ancestral gravesite would find its way back to the lineage’s coffers. During the final, mediated tallying of the Ghost Festival and Qingming Association’s assets in front of the yamen clerk from the Department of Rites, the outstanding loans made by the Qingming Association were laid out in full, and the clerk went through the origin and fate of the money gained from the felling of the lineage’s fengshui trees. As for the fate of poor Zhang Qiyu, the clerk had Qizhong write a promise that his circumstances would be handled with a degree of benevolence:

張奇忠等憑眾云稱，憑族眾伐墳山乾柏樹一根，賣與族人，張其成買去，議價錢六串。此錢經族眾承買張其玉、張其玖二人挨墳山條地一塊，栽插護蓄風水，現至付約一紙。

Zhang Qizhong et al, with everyone as a witness, say the following: with the witness of the lineage, as for the one cypress tree felled on the ridge of the Zhang Ancestral Grave Mountain to be sold to agnates — it was bought by agnate Zhang Qicheng. The selling price was negotiated to be six chuan. This money will go to the lineage to purchase Zhang Qijiu and Zhang Qiyu’s piece of land aligning the Ancestral Grave Mountain, where we will plant [trees] to foster and protect the fengshui of the lineage. We now arrive at one contract for payment.

張奇忠等憑眾云稱，張其玖玉弟兄誘女私逃訐訟，經族眾不依，罰錢四十串，伊等以熟地一塊、旱田一坵出當。合族清明內耕管，議當價二十串。其餘二十串作集理伙食族眾酒醴用。訖。現呈當約二紙、戒約一紙。477

Zhang Qizhong et al, with everyone has a witness, says the following: Zhang Qijiu and Zhang Qiyu, these brothers, instigated their niece to secretly abscond [from her husband] and produced litigation — since the lineage does not comply with their actions, it fined them forty chuan of copper cash. They will take one piece of their farmland and one mound of a dry field and pawn them. Collectively, the lineage will administer the farming of these lands within the Qingming Association and decide the price of these lands to be worth of twenty chuan. The remaining twenty chuan will be used for organizing the ritual meals for the entire lineage and supplying sweet wine for the sacrifices. [The issue] is completed, and now we submit two copies of the pawning contract and one copy of the admonishing contract [for Qiyu and Qijiu to not repeat their immoral behavior].

In these final accountings of the Qingming Association’s assets, we see the county clerk mediating for a slightly fairer settlement between Zhang Qiyu and the lineage. Qiyu and Qijiu retained the

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477 Nanbu County Qing Archive: 17.794.20.
legal right to some of their property through a pawn settlement, while some of the penalty money would go towards restoring the ceased ritual activities of the lineage.

The implications this extensive case involving a Qingming Association are many, but a few major ones can be highlighted. In Nanbu County, for many lineages the ancestral gravesite was the central place and the central symbol of agnatic relations, through which one could obtain much needed loans, aid in the wake of a lawsuit, and important natural resources; it was, in other words, the “social security” of late imperial Nanbu. References to geomantic data are found on nearly every page of this case, although none of the conflicts in the case above were directly about the destruction of the lineage’s ancestral graves. Instead, we see the appearance of fengshui being used to describe not only the sacred space around the ancestral graves, but also the trees around the grave, the trees to be planted on the relinquished land of a lineage agnate, and even more generally, the current and future financial health of the lineage. This is of course precisely what geomantic divination manuals said (the gravesite determines a lineage’s fortune) and, through this and other cases, we might note that it is how the corporate lineage in Nanbu acted. For this reason, affiliation with a gravesite and the cosmological bonds that were expressed through fengshui served both as a rural safety net and a projection of patriarchal power in rural society. Theoretically, the trees around the gravesite could not be felled without the consent of all living agnates, though in practice, probably only a small handful of lineage heads had much sway over the final say. Poorer branches of the lineages naturally were consistently in need of more funding than wealthier ones, and hence supplicated more often to fell such trees; at the same time, wealthier agnates who controlled the ledger or purse strings had greater agency to decide when to fell them. For agnates who possessed no exclusive claims of land of their own, fengshui provided a
connection to the ancestral gravesite, which allowed the most fundamental condition for community (“village”) membership.478

But the Qingming Associations, though powerful, were not the only organizations active in late imperial Nanbu. Lineage alliances formed powerful associations around Buddhist temples 香火会 and Daoist abbeys 清醮会, which through similar mechanisms, could also protect the fengshui of wider communities, entire market towns, or the county itself.

IV. The Borders of the County: Temple Associations and Geomantic Territoriality

The highly interpretative nature of Nanbu’s sub-county and county borders has been referenced throughout this study. This section demonstrates how geomantic interpretations of temple estates often influenced how these boundaries were interpreted. These interpretations were often produced by temple associations, which in Nanbu were called “Incense-Fire Associations” (xianghuohui 香火会) for Buddhist temples and “Pure-Sacrifice Associations” (qingjiaohui 清醮会) for Daoist abbeys.

The flexibility of county borders across the empire was well-known to Qing officials. The Great Qing Code contained regulations for the processing of lawsuits between the peoples of neighboring counties, with a well-known rule that saw the legal process customarily transferred to the county of the defendant, or rather, the county where an illicit action was thought to have occurred. Hence, a plaintiff from Nanbu who submitted a plaint against a defendant from Langzhong would first submit with the Nanbu yamen, who then would send a “transfer message” (yiwen 移文) to the Langzhong yamen directing them to send their own yamen runners to

478 For a case involving inter-lineage tenancy on “common” fields and conflicts over the felling of fengshui trees, see: Nanbu County Qing Archive: 9.00340. For another involving tenancy, burial, and the Qingming Association of the Lis 李, see: Nanbu County Qing Archive: 9.00677. For a similar case involving the Qingming Association of the Gus 顾, see: Nanbu County Qing Archive: 9.00936.
investigate the quarrel. But even with these written regulations and well-worn customs, there is a remarkable number of cases in the Nanbu Archive that show the stated uncertainty as to which county the litigants came from — a fact expressed in the wording of one such county government document from GX34.2.23 (1908), found below:

(兩縣)交界地方，居民往往兩縣均有糧籍。遇有事故，有原告已在此處控理，而被告奔往鄰邑歧控者；有此間控案已結，理屈者輒隱瞞原情，潛往他邑翻告者；有原告慮被告歧控，既告之，於彼處復告之，於彼有歧控之情。種種不一。479

In the place where two counties meet, the locals usually create a tax identity with both counties. Whenever a mishap occurs, there are cases when a “plaintiff” has already in this place [the county yamen] submitted a lawsuit, and the “defendant” will run to the neighboring county to present a separate accusation. There are also cases where in this yamen submitted lawsuits have already been resolved, but those who have a weak case for themselves will conceal the original situation (the fact that the case was already resolved, or that the plaintiff was rejected) and secretly run to the other county and present another lawsuit! There are still cases where a plaintiff is concerned that the defendant would submit a plaint against them in the other county, so after they have submitted a case here, they will go to the neighboring county to submit another case, thus causing duplicated accusations in the other place. There are all sorts of such incongruities.

In this revealing government communiqué, it is conveyed that county officials were aware that one’s tax identity was often not a “real” or trustworthy one. While many lands were never registered at all, it was easy for a lineage to get their surname on two sets of “granary books” — registering one set of lands with one of Nanbu’s li tax units and another set with one of Langzhong’s. There were only benefits for doing this: potential litigants had two sets of lizhang to turn to for dispute mediation, as well as two yamens to present lawsuits to if needed. This also provided an obvious avenue for hiding taxable land.

Because it was widely known that tax identities were easily creatable by registering just a bit of land between two or more administrative units (li areas or even counties), litigants often claimed for or against a “native-place” affiliation by presenting arguments over the geomantic

479 Nanbu County Qing Archive; 18.01326.01. Cited from Wu, Qingdai xianyu minshi jiufen yu falü zhixu kaocha, 286.
connection between temples (and/or graves) and subjects — forcing the yamen to scan a local environment in order to determine the “true” affiliation of a person or a community. If the temple or grave was located in Nanbu, then its patrons were deemed subjects of Nanbu. But if temples and gravesites were often taken as the boundaries of the county and market towns, how was the territoriality of temples appraised? During the imperial period, the trees and natural topography present around a temple were often seen as connected to the fortunes of the community that patronized the temple.

Nowhere can the dynamics of this be seen better than the 1857 case of Gaoguan Temple 高觀寺. In 1857, jiazhang 甲長 Gao Daxing and paitou 牌頭 Gao Daxian brought a petition against members of the Zhao 趙 lineage in the Baoning Prefectural Yamen (Baoning Prefecture, Langzhong County). The group had travelled from Nanbu to Langzhong, and were staying at an inn on the street of the Tower of the Heavens (zhongtianlou 中天樓), which today still stands in the old city of Langzhong as a popular tourist destination. Because the two Gaos were brothers, they had asked an additional jiazhang, Liu Junwan, from a neighboring jia 甲 to accompany them as a witness, probably to increase the cogency of their testimony. They lived near the Gaoguan Temple 高觀寺, which gave their settlement its name (“Gaoguan Temple”). This estate constituted the “Incense-Fire Lands” (xianghuodi 香火地) of the “five surnames” who lived around it: the Hes

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480 This is also discussed by Gregory Ruf for Sichuan’s Baimapu; see: Ruf, Cadres and Kin: Making A Socialist Village in West China, 1921-1991, 21; 61. Temple trees were considered to hold special meanings, and according to Ruf, many in Baimapu were feared through the first half of the twentieth century by locals, who frequently commented on the cosmological power of these trees.

481 This tradition can be clearly seen in one of the most common terms for a Buddhist monastery, conglin 叢林 — literally, “a densely packed forest.” This term came into the Chinese language from the Sanskrit term Piṇḍavana (“a mass of forest”).

482 Nanbu County Qing Archive: 5.92.
According to the plaint, 周圍蓄有古大柏樹數十餘，亦關等眾姓風水 “around the [Fire-Incense Lands] grows several dozen ancient cypress trees, which have a connection to the fengshui of the [five] surnames” on account of the fact that the trees protected the temple and shrouded a number of local lineages’ graves. A subtext of this assertion is that these five surnames shared in the natural resources (i.e. trees) of the temple. The ancestors of the five surnames were said to have lived in Nanbu for generations. In a copy of an earlier plaint, we learn specifically that there were sixty-five cypress trees on site. In 1855, some members of the Zhao 趙 lineage declared that they wanted to cut the trees down and sell them for timber. That year, representatives of the He 何 and the Yang 楊 lineages had presented a plaint to the Nanbu County magistrate, Magistrate Gu 顧, who had admonished the Zhaos and ordered an announcement erected next to the temple saying that the trees could never be cut down for sale. The Zhaos 趙 thereupon created a scheme in which they declared that they were the subjects of Langzhong, not of Nanbu, and hence claimed that the official notice from the Nanbu magistrate did not apply to them or the temple since locals could only heed the notices of the Langzhong magistrates. The Zhaos once again attempted to cut the trees down. The new Nanbu magistrate, Magistrate Wang 王, once again sent runners to mark the forbidden area around the fengshui trees and admonish the Zhaos for their machinations.

483 Most lineages had their own Earth God Temples for reporting the births and deaths of people within their lineage. Larger temples were the sites of devotion for a collection of lineages, who often established a cemetery ground in the back or side of the temple for the poorer members of the lineages. For information on “Incense-Fire Lands” and shares in temple property, see: Weiwei Luo, “Land, Lineage and the Laity: Transactions of a Qing Monastery,” Late Imperial China Vol. 36, No. 1 (2015): 88–123.

484 The original plaints are found here: Nanbu County Qing Archive: 5.80. Similar warnings officially prohibiting the cutting of Dragon Veins around temples were erected in Taiwan 禁止斬鑿龍脈. For one such example in Nanbu, see: Nanbu County Qing Archive: 04-146. For additional examples, see also: the Digital Archives Project of Taiwan National University: 嚴禁剷鑿石條殘害劍潭寺龍脈碑記 and 禁止私挖煤炭示告碑.
Then, in 1857, the Zhaos hatched another scheme, this time with a man surnamed Zhou 周, who had the idea of selling the trees to a timber merchant, surnamed Su 蘇, from Chongqing 重慶, through covertly transporting them down the Jialing River. They appeared with a large group of over a hundred people (probably an exaggerated number) to cut the trees down, so the five lineages called upon the local elites, specifically jiazhang 甲長 Gao 高 and jiazhang 甲長 Li 李, to evidence the scene and halt the felling of the trees. Gao 高 sent messengers to the county yamen, which in turn sent runners to bring the Zhaos to the county seat for interrogation. The Zhaos had prepared a strategy in advance: Zhao Bing 趙炳 was well-acquainted with a fangban of the Langzhong County yamen 阆邑房班, a powerful figure within the yamen responsible for administering the clerks and runners. Thus, they would pretend that the timber merchant Su was from Langzhong, where he would bring a plaint against the five lineages saying that he had a contract for the felling of these trees around the temple, which would be claimed to be within Langzhong’s jurisdictional boundaries; the Zhao’s 趙 corrupted fangban would then tilt the proceedings in their favor by sending a runner who would agree that the temple was on the Langzhong side of the counties’ boundaries and map the site as such. The Gao brothers presented the two previous judgments from Nanbu’s Magistrates Gu and Wang to the prefectural yamen, along with the public notice for the protection of the sacred grove. They petitioned that the fengshui 風水 be protected, so that disaster would not come upon the five lineages’ fortunes.

A clerk at the Department of Works at the Baoning prefectural yamen drew up an official communiqué, which he sent to the yamen of Nanbu County. The prefect’s question was simple: was Gaoguan Temple in Nanbu County or Langzhong County? The Nanbu magistrate replied that, upon a Nanbu runner’s investigation of the county’s border with Langzhong, which involved
investigating the temple, its trees, and its surrounding graves, Gaoguan Temple and its surrounding “forbidden” cypresses were in Nanbu County, situated about one li (~1,700 feet) from Langzhong.

高觀寺地方係卑縣所屬，距閬中交界地面約一里. In other words, the temple was taken as the boundary between the two counties, but the fengshui of the temple for the purposes of this case was interpreted as linked to Nanbu through the lineages who expressed affiliations with Nanbu. The prefect thus ordered the litigants back to Nanbu, where the magistrate upheld the previous rulings for a third time by protecting the fengshui trees from being cut down and admonishing the Zhaos 趙. An official notice was once again erected besides the temple and its surrounding forest with the name of the current magistrate, with the following dedication:

本縣訊明，仍照原斷，不許砍伐高觀寺五姓等香火地風水樹株，現出示禁，俾使叢林永固，奸宄不生，則眾姓與合殿諸佛沾之恩，將與古柏樹，並永垂不朽。485

The county [magistrate’s] inquest makes clear that the previous ruling will still be followed: it is not permissible to fell the fengshui trees of the five lineages’ Incense Fire Lands of Gaoguan Temple. Now we issue a notice forbidding this [so that] this temple is perpetually secured, and that violations do not arise. The [five] surnames, along with the deep blessings of the Buddhas of the combined shrines [inside the temple] will, with these ancient trees, endure forever.

In this case’s resolution, we see a recurring theme found in many of the cases of this dissertation, wherein the claims of an individual or family conflicted with the claims of a lineage or community.486 In these cases, as was the case here, the state sided with the collective. Here, that...

485 Nanbu County Qing Archive: 5.92.08.

486 Another case that was mapped by the Nanbu yamen involved Xuanfan Temple 宣梵廟, which was also a border marking structure on the eastern edge of Baocheng Temple Market Town (160 li). In the first month of 1890, Zhao Yuanbing presented a plaint against two monks. Xuanfan Temple was managed by an “Incense-Fire Association” of four surnames that lived around the temple: the Zhaos, Chens, Gaos, and Pengs. Around the temple grew 200 fengshui trees. According to the plaint, in the tenth month of the previous year (1889), two wicked monks, who “did not obey the ‘pure’ rules (rules of chastity, abstinence, vegetarianism, and so on) and had engaged in prostitution, gambled, and smoked opium,” cut down thirty cypress trees. The lineages initially wished to banish them, but the monks had knelt before them and begged forgiveness, so the lineages acquiesced. But later, the monks dug up the grave of the founding monk of the temple, as well as three other graves, to plant grain for profit. The yamen sent a runner from the Department of Works to map the site. The runners found that, 宣梵寺後蓄大小柏樹二百餘根。因去僧元性培修寺後禪房，砍柏樹三十餘根 “In the rear of Xuanfan Temple grew over 200 cypress trees; because last year Monk Yuanxing was making repairs to the Meditation Hall at the back of the temple, he cut down more than thirty trees.”
involved ordering a protection for the *fengshui* even though one of the shareholders in the Incense-Fire Lands of the temple (the Zhaos 趙) wished to cut down the cypresses.  

From this case specifically, we might note the question of jurisdiction mattered in late imperial Chinese law: whether the temple was in Langzhong or Nanbu could have directly affected which magistrate was responsible for hearing the case. But this naturally involved interpreting the position and

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Nanbu County Qing Archive: 10.638.04. The monks had simply cut down a few of the trees to pay for the required repairs. Because the felled trees were going to repair the temple property, the geomantic claims to the site, clearly exaggerated in Zhao’s original plaint, were not persuasive enough to proceed with litigation.

487 Though many temples marked their territoriality in geomantic terms, this was often when a temple was primarily administered through the patronage of local lineages (our “*fengshui*”). Some monasteries administered by independent corporate estates or by the state possessed “god” trees (*shenshu* 神樹). How locals refer to the trees of a temple (*fengshuishu* 風水樹 or *shenshu*) reveals how a temple was likely managed. One such “*shenshu*” estate is as follows:

> 且毋伐一樹，即誠經一卷，神明洞鑑。日後士農工商及官長等，毁此一株者，護教龍神，伽藍，土地鑑察。既本寺僧，只宜培補，不得毁敗。倘砍一株，栽十株。違此，必墮地獄，不得超生。因此，本境紳士，公應縣主郎垂諄諄，神明眾宮。立石鎻碑，永垂萬古。Therefore, for every tree planted, it is akin to reading one *juan* of a Buddhist Sutra — all the gods and spirits witness it [such actions]. From now on, all ranks of peoples, whoever destroys one tree, the Dragon God, the Temple’s Protector Deity, and the Earth God will all know it. Even the monks of this temple may only repair (foster) the trees, they are not allowed to cut down the trees. If you cut down a single tree, you must plant ten. If this [rule] is not followed, the person will descend to Hell, with no chance of rebirth. Therefore, the gentry of this area, [we] asked the County Magistrate Shao to pass down an instruction and protect [this forest], the benefit of which the gods and people all get to share. We erect this stone and have it inscribed, and it will be here forever.

From Sichuan sheng wenwu guanliju 四川省文物管理局, ed. *Sichuan wenwu zhi 《四川文物志》* [Sichuan’s Cultural Relics], Vol. 1. (Chengdu: Bashu shushe, 2005), 414-415. An example of geomantic and religious analyses of a temple’s boundaries expressed through a contractual inscription from Northern Sichuan follows below. Of interest is the regulation against raising bridges near the temple; bridges, as we have seen elsewhere in this study, had specific geomantic significance related to their channeling of mountains’ Dragon Veins:

> 到閩逢名下柏樹須損出山場。地基山樹，上抵山邊，下抵河心，左抵青龍，右抵白虎。四至界限分明，並無委亂。基內cean修川土廟宇神像，以作眾姓里地之處。自修之後，廟內不得鑄鐘造鼓，面交僧道，停留歹人。不得高修戲台，階脊擼瓜。前後左右，五里之內，不得營梁架橋。廟牆外松柏九十六株，永培廟宇。界限照前規，永不越界寬估。

Under the name of Shi Yingfeng, the mountain estate was donated from Cypress Corner. The base of the land is [marked by] the trees that rise to reach the mountain’s side and extend down to reach the heart of the river. To the left, it reaches the Azure Dragon [marking the western point] and to the right, it reaches the White Tiger [marking the eastern point]. These four [places] are the boundaries and they are marked clearly so there is no confusion. Within the base of this estate, we constructed a statue of the River God for the temple, to mark this as the place of the surnames (shareholders). From the time of this construction, people are not allowed to forge bells or create drums, to entertain [outside] Buddhist monks or Daoist priests, or let bad people stay in the temple. No one may construct a high opera stage or move one of the foundation’s beams. For five *li* around the temple, it is not permissible to construct a raised beam bridge. Outside the walls of the temple, there are ninety-six cypress and pine trees which forever cultivate the temple. The boundaries have been marked in accordance with the above regulations and they can never be infringed upon.

distribution of the “forbidden” trees in question, as well as identifying how the border of the county was conceived by a plurality of locals. That Gaoguan Temple and its surrounding settlement was not located near a well-known market town made determining its location relative to Nanbu’s jurisdiction challenging for this case. The temple was not known to the Nanbu or Langzhong county yamens prior to this case, even though county magistrates had issued protection orders for its trees in the past; they had evidently done so without enforcing a strict boundary line between Langzhong-affiliated lineages and Nanbu-affiliated lineages.  

Some market towns, such as Shengzhong Temple Market Town (referenced at the start of this chapter) were imagined as being both in Langzhong and Nanbu Counties 自場中分交閬中縣界, and it is likely that locals from such places brought plaints to whichever yamen they felt would most serve their interests. Even there, readers will recall that the namesake temple and its ancient fengshui tree marked the border between the two counties.

Associations around Daoist abbeys also utilized geomantic understandings of land to express community affiliation and territorial demarcation. Like the example above, this was often ascribed through the trees around a structure, but was also commonly invoked through Dragon Veins and river flows.  

Geomantic descriptions of Daoist abbeys and their territoriality were

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488 For a similar case concerning the fengshui trees of a Daoist Abbey, Azure Dragon Palace 青龍宮, see: Nanbu County Qing Archive: 5.90. The magistrate here also ordered the abbey’s trees protected.

489 In a case (SUCSBRC [Nanbu Collection]: 466.245.9) from 1924 concerning a Daoist “Pure Sacrifice” Association, Zhang Yingshu 張應書 presented a lawsuit against Yang Zonghe 楊宗和. At the start of the Republican Period, the association installed a new altar in the God of the Five Manifestations 五顯神像. Shortly after, merchants came to market town to pray at the temple. Yang Zonghe, a patron, allegedly became greedy from this windfall and sought to move an adjacent Earth God Temple to free up additional land while cutting down several fengshui trees. Yang countered that the Earth God Temple did not belong to the common “Pure Sacrifice Association,” but rather to his lineage’s Wenchang Association, which managed the Yang ancestral cemetery. The ruling was as follows:

堂諭: 試得張應書控楊宗和一案, 因該處有會業一股, 上有土地廟一座, 挨近又有墳塋一座。去冬楊宗和私將土地廟移走, 并將附廟之樹二根砍伐, 後又將塋內柏樹砍伐三根。張應書等興訟來案, 准理後派書勘明, 移廟砍伐均係屬實。本日集訊該廟所在地點, 一說係文昌會, 一說係清醮會, 均係信口攻擊, 惟遷移廟宇亦民間恆有之事, 此挨近土地廟之樹二根即作為修廟之用。應飭令該楊宗和將廟擇地培修完好, 以妥神靈。至該處墳塋, 既有楊姓封山界石, 足徵此塋為楊姓所有, 張應書
ubiquitous across Sichuan, particularly for shrines to the deity Wenchang 文昌, who was a patron deity of examination candidates and whose cult originated in Northern Sichuan. Shrines to Wenchang were typically placed within a county town close to the county’s academy or constructed on an important Dragon Vein. In the early Qing, newly arrived lineages to Sichuan would first construct small temples for their kin. In Stone Bridge River Market Town 石橋河

不能爭執,但非該宗和一人私有之物,觸然砍伐,殊有未和。著將此樹三根退出,由楊姓族眾公同處理,以後永遠禁砍,不准私砍。楊宗和私行移廟砍樹,負擔訟費。此判。

The court rules: Zhang Yingshu has presented a lawsuit against Yang Zonghe. This place has the property of an association in one share; above is the Earth God Temple and aligning it is a cemetery. Last winter, Yang Zonghe privately moved the Earth God Temple, cut down two trees around the temple, and also cut down three cypress trees inside the gravesite. At that time, Zhang Yingshu commenced litigation at the yamen. The yamen permitted investigation into the case and a runner was sent to inspect the site; he found that it was true that the temple trees had been felled. At that time, he inquired into the location of the temple: one person said the temple belonged to the Wenchang Association and one said the temple belonged to the Pure Sacrifice Association — these two testimonies are thoughtless attacks. Moving temples are always a matter among the people. As for the two trees aligning the Earth God Temple, the [funds from their felling] should be used to repair the temple. I order this Yang Zonghe to select an appropriate location to restore the structure to pacify the enshrined divinities. As for the place of the cemetery, there is the Yang lineage’s border stone which seals the mountain off — this insignia is enough to mark the cemetery as the property of the Yang lineage. Zhang Yingshu should not contest that, but [the property] does not belong to Yang Zonghe alone. That he suddenly cut down trees is truly not a peaceful action. I order for these three trees to be returned, and for the Yang lineage to discuss a resolution amongst themselves; from now on, the trees will be forever protected and it is not permissible to cut them down. Because Yang Zonghe privately moved the temple and felled the trees, he shall bear the cost of the litigation. This is the ruling.


491 It is challenging to exhaust this list as Sichuan’s temples so regularly invoked geomantic significance. In Nanxi County 南溪縣, an Azure Dragon Pavilion was constructed to cultivate the region’s Literary Wind (wenfeng 文風). Long and Huang, eds., Ba-shu daojiao beiwen jicheng, 490-491. For an example of the same thing in Dazu County 大足縣, see: Ibid., 426-427. For the same thing in Yunlian County 筠連縣, see: Ibid., 357-358. Repairs to a “qian-direction mountain tower” (a “fengshui tower”) 乾峰塔 in Bishan County had similar effects. Ibid., 474-475. Qianjiang County repaired a Wenchang Pavilion 文昌閣 in the Daoguang Reign to cultivate the fengshui of an area. Ibid., 472-473. A temple was built along Seven Bend Mountain’s 七曲山 mountain vein 山脈 at Stone Ox Fortification 石牛堡 in 1852 to fix the town’s border. Ibid., 471. In one locality, the analysis of an area’s yinyang and water veins (shuimai 水脈) galvanized the construction of a Wenchang Pavilion 文昌閣. Ibid., 472. To heighten a peripheral temple’s profile, communities could claim the Dragon Vein of a temple was connected to a famous mountain. Mabian Sub-Prefecture’s 马邊州 Wenchang Temple 文昌廟 claimed a link to the numinous vein (lingmai 靈脈) of Mountain Emei 峨眉山. Ibid., 393. One magistrate inaugurated the needed repairs of the gate of a Zhenwu Temple 真武寺 by noting that, 署北真武山，為縣治來龍 “the Zhenwu Mountain located north of the yamen constitutes the Arriving Dragon [Vein] of the county seat.” Ibid., 355. This is by no means an exhaustive list and from the Nanbu County Archive, the Ba County Archive, and preserved stone inscriptions from the Qing, I am inclined to believe that temples regularly evoked geomantic interpretations by resident laity in Sichuan. Geomancy empowered laity to exert control over estates otherwise managed by monks.
The Li 李 lineage constructed the Wenchang Palace 文昌宮 in the early Qing for such a purpose. Following the White Lotus Rebellion, the temple fell into disrepair and other neighboring lineages offered money for repairs. In 1861, the gentry of the town recommended the creation of a Wenchang Association 文昌會, in which a handful (typically three to five) of local lineages would be stakeholders. As a temple grew in importance over the course of the Qing, its patronage structure tended to branch out to several lineages, who would then come to see the temple as a common resource for the wider community as well as a marker of the territorial community. A Wenchang Palace 文昌宮 marked the boundary between Zitong 梓潼 and Luojiang 羅江 Counties and specifically, South Village 南村 and River Village 河村, even as it was patronized by lineages in both districts. Another border of Luojiang saw the construction of a Zitong (“Wenchang”) Palace 梓潼宮 following an analysis of the mountain’s Dragon Vein. Repairs to the Three Teachings Temple 三教寺 at the northeastern border of Qu County 梁縣 was said to have increased the culture and education (wenjiao 文教) of the surrounding communities. In Leshan County 樂山縣, the Temple of the Five Manifestations 五顯廟 was constructed at the county’s eastern border at a place where a geomancer found that mountain veins and river flows produced the highly important Coiled Dragon Formation (panlong xingshi 蟠龍形勢). This site then marked that border.

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492 Ibid., 491.
493 Ibid., 336-337.
494 Ibid., 328.
495 Ibid., 351.
496 For a similar case, see: SUCSBRC [Nanbu Collection]: 466.1506.126. Nanbu’s Dingshui Temple Market Town 定水寺場 (20 li), shared a border with Langzhong County; this border was marked by Nandeng Abbey 南登觀, which was patronized by the Lis 李. In the tenth month of MG12 (1923), a number of Li agnates presented a lawsuit at the
The complexity of the role of temples in demarcating sub-county spaces for local administration was compounded by a temple’s own legal territoriality regarding both the boundaries of a monastic estate and who could claim a cosmological connection to a temple. In the case of Nanbu’s Gaoguan Temple above, it is likely that few of the lands around the temple were ever officially registered: locals registered a bit of land with li units in both Nanbu and Langzhong and if a yamen runner ever inquired into the tax status of a certain plot, locals could always say that the plot was registered with the neighboring county. The ability of locals to do this derived from the fact that, in late imperial Nanbu, commonly held properties or natural landmarks that were taken as convenient borders for rural administration by the state were taken by locals as centers for kinship institutions and religious practice. As we will shortly see in the following section, both GMD surveyors and the resident Zhao lineage came to have a very different understanding of Gaoguan Temple’s location in the 1940s.

V. *The County in the Empire: Nanbu’s Gentry Trace the Dragon Vein*

As the previous cases have shown, the fengshui of a Qingming Association often marked the territoriality of the grave while also expressing the collective wealth of the lineage; the fengshui of a temple association often denoted the boundaries of a temple, the boundaries of a market town and the claim of individuals to belong to a lineage.

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Nanbu yamen claiming that their relative, Li Qingxiao 李清孝 had stolen funds from the lineage’s Qingming Association. Li Qingxiao refused to present a counter-plaint at the Nanbu yamen, since he claimed the Lis were people of Langzhong County. At the Langzhong yamen, Qingxiao had presented a plaint saying that the Li ancestral cemetery’s fengshui had been destroyed by the self-identified Nanbu Lis. The Nanbu Lis insisted the Li lineage had historically lived and buried their ancestors in Nanbu. For evidence, they presented a graduation diploma of one of their sons, Li Zizhang, who had attended one of Nanbu’s schools 李子章係南籍，畢業生文憑可證. Tax records were neither cited by locals nor examined by the state. A runner from the Nanbu yamen was sent to Dingshui Temple Market Town to inspect and map the graves of the Lis. This illustration has been preserved in the county archive. SUCSBRC [Nanbu Collection]: 466.1506.136. In his report to the yamen, the runner reported that the Lis occupied a single courtyard house that sat on the border of the two counties, but that a river was taken by most locals as the border between Langzhong and Nanbu; the ancestral graves were located on the Nanbu side of the river. Li Qingxiao was thus summoned to the Nanbu yamen to present his grievance.

Sidney Gamble found that the locations of temples in North China were at times directed by geomantic placements. Sidney David Gamble, *North China Villages: Social, Political, and Economic Activities Before 1933* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963), 197.
settlement, and the existence of a recognizable community that patronized the temple. For the
gentry of the county, *fengshui* could also be invoked to situate Nanbu within the greater Qing
Empire. Sometimes, a lineage’s drive to foster *fengshui* came into conflict with what local gentry
perceived as the health of the Dragon Vein of the county. In the following case, a few gentry of
Nanbu presented a case against the Yan lineage based on an interpretation of the county’s
*fengshui* within the Qing Empire.

On GX16.2.25 (1890), *wusheng* Zhang Zhan’ao 張占鳌 travelled 180 *li* from Baocheng
Temple Market Town 保城廟 to the county town of Nanbu to present a petition at the yamen
against his neighbor.⁴⁹⁸ According to this certain Zhang Zhan’ao, his neighbor, Yan Shiyu 嚴仕虞,
was a man of no rank, title, or education. That month, Zhang had heard news that a new arched
bridge and stone inscription had been erected outside of the market town, on Yan’s property. Zhang
and his gentry acquaintances travelled over to inspect the new structures. What they found
horrified them: Yan had erected a stone inscription that was over four *zhang* 長 high and six *zhang*
wide, with a Dragon 龍, a Phoenix 鳳, a Lion 獅, and an Elephant 象 inscribed on the top. Behind
the stone inscription was a newly erected crescent-arched stone bridge that bore the mark of the
Kuixing Constellation 魁星, the auspicious sign for the county’s military and civil officials.⁴⁹⁹
Zhang gathered with the market town’s gentry, who collectively concluded that the two edifices
had obstructed the Arriving Dragon Vein of the surnames of those living in the town 故壓生等各
姓來脈. Even worse, Zhang had consulted with a local geomancer, who affirmed that the bridge

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⁴⁹⁸ Nanbu County Qing Archive: 10.657.01. Zhang Zhan’ao was well-known at the yamen. On GX3.6.9 (1877),
thirteen years earlier, he made a trip to the yamen from Baosheng Temple Market Town to describe drought conditions
on behalf of local people. Nanbu County Qing Archive: 7.401.18.

⁴⁹⁹ The Kuixing Constellation 魁星 was associated with 大魁星君, the god of the official examination system.
had disturbed the Literary Wind Vein (wenfeng 文風) of the entire county. If the bridge and inscription remained standing, Nanbu County could expect to have no successful candidates in the following examination year.

Zhang’s petition was accepted. The Department of Works dispatched a runner with the instructions to investigate whether an inscription had been carved and a bridge created by a lineage which did not have the proper pedigree of ancestry to include such important astrological symbols in these edifices.\(^{500}\) The runner from the county yamen discovered that Zhang Zhan’ao had exaggerated the dimensions of the inscription in question: it was officially measured at its height with one zhang and at its width with one zhang, five chi. Yet, Zhang was somewhat accurate in his description of the inscription. There were a number of inscribed animals, including two golden dragons (jinlong 金龍), one precious stone (baoshi 寶石), two stone figurines (shiren 石人), two stone horses (shima 石馬), and two ancient turtles (aoyu 龜魚). Around the stone inscription were over 100 carved stone human beings 其碑側左右鏨有石人百餘個. There were no phoenixes, lions, or elephants and no moon arched stone bridge over the nearby brook. There was no doubt that the Yans had spent quite a bit of capital on the project, but the runner did not directly comment on whether its creation exceeded the legal limitations on such constructions.

After receiving a visit from a yamen runner, Yan Shiyu traveled to the county yamen to tell his lineage’s side of the story. He countered that his ancestor had served as a county clerk, who upon his retirement was awarded a gift of a calligraphic work from the then-presiding magistrate that now hung in the Yan Ancestral Hall. He claimed this could be examined by the court if needed. Three years earlier, the Yan lineage had come into a bit of money and so decided to rebuild the Yan ancestral hall and added a stone inscription to commemorate this ancestor; the entire lineage

\(^{500}\) Nanbu County Qing Archive: 10.657.02.
was aware of ritual expectations and legal regulations on such edifices. He further claimed that this wusheng Zhang Zhan’ao was not in fact his neighbor and had presented a false accusation against him to extort him out of money.

Through these petitions, plaints, and the runner’s description, the magistrate obtained general sense of the problem at hand. The Yans had created an inscription that was a bit too lavish to the extent that it likely overstepped regulations on erected stelae (“to overstep one’s share,” jianfen 僭分) for non-officials. Wusheng Zhang’s petition was likely not a false accusation in the sense of completely baseless claim, but he had officiously meddled in business that was not his own, and there was no evidence that the two were in fact immediate neighbors. The Yans had as a lineage collectively funded the project in Baocheng Temple Market Town, and they were the ones who lived immediately next to the site. Outrage had come not from a local community per se, but rather from a half dozen gentry who were concerned about the construction of the inscription and bridge. While the addition of a crescent-arched stone bridge with the mark of the Kuixing Constellation could theoretically have infringed on the market town’s Dragon Vein, that component of Zhang’s petition was not true, according to the yamen runner.

But Zhang pressed on, claiming that the clerk of the Department of Works had been bribed by the Yans to tone down the true appearance of the gaudy inscription: the site, after all, was not actually mapped by the runner for the magistrate to see for himself — a fact not lost on Zhang. Before the trial at the end of the third month, Zhang and the other gentry invited a geomancer to analyze the Dragon Vein of the county, and submitted another plaint to the yamen for consideration:

生等延堪舆确卜本城结穴，係五子山来脉，被伊僭修墳碑遮压，有碍官民文風五載，現絕科第，未敢允和。⁵⁰¹

⁵⁰¹ Nanbu County Qing Archive: 10.657.05.
We gentry invited a geomancer to accurately divine our county’s geomantic cavern where the *qi* of the vein is congealed.\(^502\) [Nanbu County’s] Dragon Vein derives from Wuzi Mountain\(^503\) and it was obstructed and impeded by his overstepping proper boundaries in the construction of the tomb’s inscription. This has harmed the Literary Wind of the officials and people of the county for five years. Our county has not had any successful candidates in the Civil Service Examinations and this is not acceptable!

Reflecting on the case of the Islamic shrine on the Coiled Dragon Mountain from Chapter One will clarify Zhang’s intended meaning here. Most of the geomantic cases studied thus far concerned the disputes of commoners over the geomancy of houses, tombs, or local communities (such as a market town). But the broader cultural geography of Nanbu was also understood by local elites, such as gentry scholars, as part of a much wider network of fortune that connected the wealth and examination success of the county with the entire Qing Empire. Simply put, general understandings of Earthly Principles 地理 in the Qing held that, all Dragon Veins 龍脈 across the *tianxia* 天下 (“All Under Heaven;” Denoting “China”) were linked through mountain veins back to the Kunlun Mountains 崑崙山, located in Central Asia.\(^504\) In Nanbu County, it was understood that the county’s mountains held a cosmological connection to the Kunlun Mountains through the Wuzi Mountain in Baoning Prefecture’s Jian Sub-Prefecture 劍州, located just on Sichuan’s border with Gansu Province, down through the Coiled Dragon Mountain to the north of Baoning’s walled town, and then down into Nanbu. The differentiation between Dragon Vein 龍脈 and Literary Wind 文風 in Zhang’s petition was intentional: Dragon Veins connected Nanbu to the

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\(^{502}\) Towns, just like graves and houses, were conceived of as *xue* 穴 that existed along Dragon Veins. *Jiexue* 结穴 refers to a place where a vein ends and *qi* congeals.

\(^{503}\) Mount Wuzi, also known as Mount Wuzhi 五指山, is a culturally significant mountain located in present day Guangyuan City 广元市 (Jian’ge 劍閣). The mountain is called the “Five Fingered Mountain” because of its shape, resembling a human hand.

\(^{504}\) For a discussion of these cultural geographies in late imperial China, see: David A. Bello, *Across Forest, Steppe, and Mountain: Environment, Identity, and Empire in Qing China’s Borderlands* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 29-30.
greater empire through mountain ranges, while the Literary Wind, which in the magistrate’s ruling below was exchanged for Wind Vein 風脈, referred to the appropriate environmental conditions for good examination results and literary achievements.

As seen in the case here with Zhang, county level gentry were known to be particularly sensitive to issues surrounding the imperial examinations, and as we have seen in tussles over the county’s academy and Confucian Temple, magistrates expressed a range of sympathy to skepticism over such claims depending on the immediate circumstances. Regardless of how the magistrate ruled for a specific case, the fostering of auspicious geomantic conditions for the examination could, in some cases, be construed to give gentry some influence over broad surfaces of the county’s internal terrain. This was certainly true outside of the courts, but as this example attests to, gentry at times tried to project this influence within the courts.

Following the trial in which all sides presented their testimonies, the magistrate gave his ruling:

堂諭：訊得武生張占鰲、監生敬熙與嚴仕虞們並非比鄰, 但張占鰲們既係功名, 不應干預事非軌藉; 嚴仕虞建立石碑高大, 稱有碍縣域風脈, 且距一百八十里遙; 又云房書得銀二十四兩, 無有過證。至嚴仕虞, 鄉間農民不應僭修。二比均屬不合, 姑從寬免…張占鰲們具不應妄控, 及房書未得銀情事。各安守分, 不致滋事, 而嚴仕虞具以僭修違禁。各結完案。此判。

The court rules: we have learned that wusheng Zhang Zhan’ao and the jiansheng Jing Xi are not neighbors with Yan Shiyu et al at all; Zhang Zhan’ao et al are men of official [gentry] rank, thus he should not be meddling in such affairs (presenting litigation) as it is not correct [behavior]. Yan Shiyu erected a stone stele that was tall and large, and [Zhang] claims that it obstructs the Wind Vein of the county, even though [its location] is 180 li from the county town! Furthermore, [Zhang] says that the yamen clerk received money amounting to twenty-four taels of silver, even though he presented no evidence [for this]. As for Yan Shiyu, farmers of the countryside should not overstep their authority (i.e. status and rank) in construction. The two sides here are both in the wrong, [but] for the most we will pardon this offense…Zhang Zhan’ao et al should not have presented rash lawsuits; and the yamen clerk has not received any money. They should all act properly per their status and not cause further conflict. As for Yan Shiyu, my

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505 Nanbu County Qing Archive: 10.657.04.
judgment is that he overstepped his authority in construction and violated the forbidden. Everything is finished, the case is over, this is the ruling.

The magistrate’s ruling here provides a fitting contrast to the judgment regarding the merchant’s oil shop in Chapter Four. In that case, because the residents of a local market town had some concerns about the geomantic implications of the oil press shop, the official was inclined to support that claim to put an end to local rumors of inauspiciousness. In this ruling, the magistrate challenged Zhang’s authority to make a complaint in the first place. First, Baocheng Temple Market Town was located 180 li away from the walled county town: the sheer distance between the two made it unlikely that the Wind Vein of the county at-large could have been affected by the erection of a commoner’s lavish bridge and inscription, though we should not overlook the fact that the yamen was nonetheless willing to spend significant amount of time and resources investigating the merits of precisely that accusation. The magistrate also alerted the court audience to the important fact that Zhang and Yan were not even neighbors, which made it so that Zhang could not even claim that Yan’s inscription infringed on or affected his land. Second, the

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506 There is a logic to the magistrate’s ruling about the distance between the county town and the alleged infringement. There was an official consensus on which sites affected the Wind Vein 風脈 of the walled town. They included local academies, prominent graves, the city wall, local shrines and temples, and pagodas located within the general vicinity of the town (~fifteen li) appears to have been a consensus around Sichuan). Consider the following inscription from the Prefect of Baoning, Li Xuejin 黎學錦, dated JQ11 (1806):

> 保寧府為川北巨區，歷代人文蔚起，以功名相繼於時者，盛甲他郡…～憲府及郡人士整飭而變易之，爰為相其山形勝，隨時培補。先捐廉添置書院膏火，並修理城南及中天樓諸勝跡，以復舊觀。更建張烈文侯祠，司馬溫公捧硯亭，並添修雲屏書院。凡所施設，無非培風脈，育人才之意。

Baoning Prefecture occupies an important area of Northern Sichuan; it has always produced literary talents across the generations and those obtaining official ranks have continued over time, exceeding that of other prefectures…(explains how in recent decade the number of people passing the examinations from the area has declined). I urgently considered with the notables of the town to put in order and repair its sites and to transform them; thereupon in line with the favorable topographical conditions of the relevant mountains, [we] repaired them at the due time. First, we donated yanglianyin (“silver to nourish honesty;” allowances paid to government officials in the Qing beyond the official salary) for additions to the academy to cover the costs of study for students and then we repaired the famous sites at the southern part of the prefectural wall and the Tower of the Heavens to restore them to their former appearances. We rebuilt the Shrine of Zhang Fei and the Inkstone Carrying Pavillon of Sima Guang and we created the Yunping Academy. Everything we have done, it was for nothing but to foster the Wind Vein 風脈, with the intention of cultivating talented people.

Liu, Gongyuan chunqiu, 191.
magistrate ruled that Yan’s inscription and its adornments did exceed official limitations for non-gentry, and therefore Yan was compelled to modify the structure or take it down. On that level, Zhang’s petition was successful.

In concluding this section, we might observe that geomantic analyses could be extended far beyond a house, grave, or temple, but it appears that the ability to present a claim based on the cosmology of the entire county was limited to members of the gentry (broadly defined), who in Nanbu County appear to have regularly utilized this privilege. Cosmology worked two ways in the imperial legal system: on the one hand, the poorer members of a lineage could appeal to cosmology in court to block an illicit sale of common resources by wealthier agnates, who often kept the lineage’s copies of genealogies and household division registers in their close possession. For those whose sole claim to land may have been the grave of a father or mother, cosmology could offer a “last-chance” appeal to the state against abuse and exploitation for matters even beyond the grave. The state’s willingness to consider these claims — and the ability of magistrates to read between the lines of a plaint — expanded access to the legal system across socio-economic classes in Nanbu. On the other hand, those with social standing in a community, such as gentry — who in Nanbu often constituted purchased degree-holders — had the ability to provide broad interpretations of village, town, or county landscapes with great implications for local development, building, and resource sales.507 As there are numerous such instances in Nanbu’s legal archive, that power was likely significant outside of the courts and should not be underestimated.

507 Although Nanbu County did not have a large base of elite gentry, there is a pervasive appearance of “gentry” (particularly purchased jiansheng 监生 degree-holders) across Nanbu’s legal archive. Rather than conceiving of the region as lacking a gentry base, it is more accurate to say, in Esherick’s terms, the region had a lack of elite degree-holders. There was a very prominent and large class of people in Nanbu who self-identified as gentry. Esherick, The Origins of the Boxer Uprising. Liang Yong has discussed how, in Ba County’s immigrant patchwork of communities, local leaders such as baozhang, jiazhang, tuanzhang, and xiangyue held significant power in rural society and often took on roles traditionally reserved for gentry. Liang, Yimin, guojia yu difang quanshi, 177.
VI. Chapter Conclusion: Nanbu in Empire and Cosmos

This chapter has extended the scope of analysis of geomantic practices to the community level in both its social and territorial dimensions and thus has created a window into how geomantic information was produced in Nanbu’s rural society and acted on by local communities. These findings can be put in conversation with contemporary research on lineages. David Faure has discussed how geomantic narratives were employed to explain the rise and fall of lineages in the New Territories. That observation was applicable to Nanbu, where the fluid body of situated landed information produced by lineages, rural associations, and county gentry was important for far more than simply the trees around a gravesite or the boundary of a temple. While geomantic discourses could be applied, as Faure notes, to account for long-term trends, they were also used for immediate aims, with implications for property acquisition, resource access, intra-lineage inequality, border demarcation, and status-making. Through the archival cases presented in this chapter, we have seen some of those moments in historical action.

In nineteenth century Nanbu, lineages petitioned the yamen to issue orders of protection of their fengshui to shield themselves from local bullies. They fined individuals for harming fengshui when donations for public works did not see results. Qingming Associations fostered fengshui by extending loans and holding common property to provide agnates with a basic safety net. Temple associations fostered fengshui through the trees surrounding religious institutions that local communities looked to for similar wealth storage. The same communities took the places of these religious institutions, the locations of which were often selected with regard to geomantic

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508 See the following from David Faure:

A wide range of legends that go into the circumstances of settlement relates the foundation of the village to its fung-shui (that is, ‘geomancy’). These legends are concerned with the discovery of the propitious location at which the village was founded, how the ancestors were involved in the process, and how the fung-shui affected the fortune of the villagers….it can hardly be doubted that, because fung-shui is invoked to explain the rise and decline of lineages and villages, these legends are records of lineage and village fortune.

considerations, to mark the places they belonged to — hence their evident role in the demarcation of the county’s borders. Gentry were not afraid to draw upon the cosmology of Nanbu County to make bold claims in the magistrate’s court.

The fact that these lineages, associations, and elite status groups were able to do these things, and the fact that the Qing state recognized their ability to do so, indicates that land in imperial Nanbu had a cosmology that informed its values, dimensions, and territoriality. The imperial state did not necessarily have to agree with a certain interpretation deriving from that cosmology in court, but it had to constantly participate in the act of interpretation. This interpretive space is where the negotiation of landed power between the state, lineages, and rural elites occurred daily in Nanbu. For the nature of this interpretive space, Michael Szonyi’s insight is most helpful:

Orthodoxy, adherence to the universal principles made manifest in the canonical texts, permits no strategizing. Strategies that involve creating the appearance of conformity to orthodoxy necessarily conceal their own effects.\(^{509}\)

_Yinyang_ cosmology was unambiguously a state orthodoxy of the Qing, as were Confucian rituals for ancestors, which involved selecting auspicious burial sites for parents. Lineages rhetorically appealed to these orthodoxies in court (i.e. “the earth vein [of my ancestral grave] has been broken”) while they strategically enacted _fengshui_ outside of court. Magistrates were aware of the “concealed” intentions of these practices, but nonetheless engaged with their discourses because so much was at stake for members of a lineage or community. The implications of this engagement are significant. Because the state consistently deferred to the lineage, much information in Nanbu’s land market and rural geography was open to a remarkable degree of strategic reinterpretation through these kinship practices.

\(^{509}\) Szonyi, _Practicing Kinship_, 204-205.
Scholars have long noted that cities in China possessed a cosmology. My extension of that proposition to rural landscapes, where the state had less control to dictate the terms of that cosmology, is based on the applications of discursive interpretations for Nanbu’s spaces found throughout the county’s archive. But one does not even have to look that far. Picking up Nanbu’s County gazetteer and opening to the first juan ("tianwen" 天文 followed by “dili” 地理 or “yudi” 輿地) readers are confronted by the astrological placement of Nanbu County within the cosmos that constituted heaven and earth. Every county in the Great Qing Empire had a “constellation” of its own in the night sky; locals likely knew this and the gentry certainly did. By laying out Nanbu’s position within the field allocation system (fenye 分野) as devised in the Han Dynasty, local yinyang masters would be able to identify auspicious and inauspicious portents related to the county. Here, Nanbu County is introduced in the following terms:

玉衡定保郡為井、鬼；南部偏隅，接壤里差，自無弗同。  
The Star of the Jade Observation Tube fixes the Prefecture of Baoning (Baoning Prefecture) into the jing and gui lodges. Nanbu is [located at] a peripheral place at an extreme corner, but the astrological measurements at its borders [contained within the jing and gui lodges] are naturally not different [from those of Baoning Prefecture].

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511 The prefecture determined a county’s astrological placement. Hence, all the counties under Baoning Prefecture had the same astrological constellation.


513 Yuheng 五衡 refers to the brightest star of the constellation of Ursa Major; it was also sometimes called “the Fifth Star of the Northern Dipper” (北斗五 beidowu). Both jing and gui are southern “Vermillion Sparrow” lodges.
Nanbu’s position in the heavenly cosmos mirrored its position on the earth. Its place within the greater constellation of Baoning — and the known world — was “peripheral” and located on a southwestern frontier. The text above and its corresponding diagram of Nanbu’s place in the cosmos were not inherited glosses from Chinese antiquity. They date from 1870, the year the county’s gazetteer was re-issued. The corresponding diagram was created by the county’s yinyang masters, who continued to work for the county government well into the twentieth century. Such images were produced in Sichuan’s local gazetteers through 1905, when the Civil Service Examinations were ended. When lineages, communities, and gentry presented geomantic claims in court, they did so not as self-professed “creators” of cosmological information, but with an understanding that they were drawing upon a cosmology that was already present in the soil and skies of the county.

From the opening pages of the county gazetteer, Nanbu had a recognized place in the cosmos. Beyond the names of mountains, rivers, walled fortresses, and endowed bridges found within the county’s gazetteer was a county where places and borders on the ground were interpreted through lineage alliances, genealogical records, local history, religious affiliations, and communal consensus. Graves, ancestral halls, and temples managed by lineages, associations, and gentry held much of the situated knowledge through which these places were imagined. These geographies were written into contracts, composed into genealogies, or etched into stone, but they were *seldom set in stone*. They were, to borrow a phrase from Raymond Craib, “places created and recreated through the prisms of memory, practical wisdom, use, and collective decision making, rather than the lens of instrumentation.” Yet as demands on governance grew and the tools of measurement changed, the *status quo* in Nanbu County was indubitably challenged. As Philip Kuhn said of the following Republican Period, when “a village now needed a well-defined boundary to demarcate taxable fields within its control,” the state would have to fix county boundaries and register many unaccounted lands in places like Nanbu. But as the following section will reveal, the lasting power of situated knowledge knotted deep into the county’s earth was evident right up to 1949.

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Part Three (Introduction): Cosmology After Empire: Negotiating Situated Knowledge of Landed Property in Early Twentieth Century China

In 1942, GMD land surveyors in Northern Sichuan sent an urgent message to the acting Langzhong governor, which was forwarded to Nanbu County. The surveyors had come upon a community at a place named Gaoguan Temple 高觀寺, where the locals — all surnamed Zhao 趙 — claimed to live in Nanbu County, even though the newly fixed border with Nanbu was located several kilometers away from the temple. Entering the settlement’s namesake temple, the surveyors quickly found a manifestation of the problem: an inscribed official order from the Nanbu County magistrate, dated 1857, to protect the fengshui of Gaoguan Temple in perpetuity. The GMD governor of Nanbu responded that the county would cooperate with efforts to transfer the community to the jurisdiction of Langzhong County. The surveyors were dispatched to measure and record the lands around Gaoguan Temple. By the mid-1940s, Gaoguan Temple was officially transferred to Langzhong County.

In the twentieth century, Chinese states tried to extract “structured knowledge” (meters, feet, hectares; reproducible information objectively comprehensible to a non-local) of land to “fix” land boundaries and register wide swaths of previously unaccounted for land. Previous research on these efforts have focused on well-known topics in studies of Chinese land, such disparities between “red” 紅契 (officially stamped) land contracts and “white” 白契 (unstamped contracts) land deeds, or the general problem of significant “unregistered” (“black land” heidi 黑地) land in the wake of meager county land cadasters filled with the names of long-deceased ancestors.

517 SUCSBRC [Nanbu Collection]: 462.681.81. The notice read: 南部縣高觀寺: 该地插入阆中境内，应划归阆中管辖以便治理 “Gaoguan Temple of Nanbu County: this place juts into Langzhong County, it should be drawn into the jurisdiction of Langzhong to facilitate governance.”
In this section, I want to explore a common yet hitherto understudied problem that surveyors and legal courts often encountered in processing land claims: situated knowledge of land. That is, information in contracts and other documentation that was intelligible only to locals of a settlement or members of a lineage. This knowledge included vernacular place-names, localized land boundaries, and cosmological dimensions of landed property. This section suggests that this situated knowledge was a central arena for the negotiation of property rights and resource access in China along an evolving legal, economic, and administrative landscape in the early twentieth century. This negotiation was hardly the product of a hegemonic state enacting its will on the passive residents of Nanbu. Throughout much of the Republican period in Nanbu, officials continued to engage cosmological claims over land and push for the protection of common lands. Land surveyors were forced to engage locals to interpret the highly-situated knowledge that informed resource access, property boundaries, and settlement territoriality.

As the previous sections of this study have shown, the Qing state regularly heard geomantic lawsuits and addressed geomantic concerns in rulings. This continued in Sichuan Province well into the twentieth century. As an upland county in a peripheral corner of Sichuan province, Nanbu County did not see a “new-style” local court 地方法院 established until 1937 — the Qing yamen continued operating in the county until then, and even after 1937, imperial precedents were still evident. Hence, we have cases and rulings such as the following one. In 1922, a dispute broke out between the neighboring Song 宋 and Zhang 張 lineages over a property boundary marked by fengshui trees. The Songs were accused in court of forging contracts to manipulate the property boundary to fell the trees, which the Zhangs said were connected to the fengshui of their ancestral graves. Following in the tradition of their Qing counterparts, the Republican county magistrate of
Nanbu often ordered yamen runners to map the contested site in question. Upon analyzing the map, which has been preserved in the county archive, the magistrate issued the following ruling — addressing the geomantic concerns while vaguely incorporating some new legal language:

堂諭：訊得宋炳祥因爭地界樹株與張其吉等具訴一案，據派員查勘繪圖稟覆各情，核之，則其界於兩姓間大柏樹一株，應認該地址之天然界畔。張姓合族既稱有關其祖墳風水之說，自應極力禁護，以期滋生榮茂，不得由該族人等處分。而宋晏祥住宅又與該樹為比鄰，當亦無自由毁傷之權。憑案判作公有之森林物，則更足以杜永久之爭執。查訊宋炳祥等因與團局上關柴，致砍伐冬青樹一株，准由炳祥等認出賠償錢四串，以敷損害，即行繳案飭領。所有立坡，即亂石坡界址，應由宋、張兩姓各依固有之地界，回復原狀，不得故為爭持，致啟訟端。宋炳祥退與張姓之廢約一紙附卷，著各遵結。此判。

The Court rules: it has been learned that, Song Bingxiang, because of a property boundary dispute with Zhang Qiji and others, has presented a lawsuit. Based on the illustration composed by the runner returned to the yamen with all the details, [we observed that] the border between the two surnames is marked by a large cypress tree, and thus we should acknowledge that this spot marks the “natural border” between the properties. Since the Zhang lineage claims that the tree is connected to the fengshui of their ancestral graves 有關其祖墳風水之說, they certainly should spare no effort to protect the tree, in the hope of growing it and making it prosper; thus, it is not permissible for the members of this lineage to dispose of it. As for the residence of Song Yanxiang (brother of Song Bingxiang), it is located next to this tree. He does not have the right to freely injure it. On the basis of this case, I rule that the tree is to be taken as a “common” forested property 公有之森林物, and this status should be sufficient for preventing an on-going conflict. It has been learned that Song Bingxiang has, with a local militia group, felled a “common” Wintergreen Tree for firewood; it is appropriate that Bingxiang acknowledges that he must pay four chuan in compensation for this loss. In processing this case I order that, in every place where there is a slope, take stones to be the property boundary — the Songs and the Zhangs should both follow the previously marked boundary, restore it to the former state, do not dispute further on this account and produce more litigation. The defunct contract that Song Bingxiang returned to the Zhang lineage is attached here on file. Everyone follows these terms; this is the ruling.

This 1922 ruling captures several overlapping trends seen in Nanbu during this period. The Republican county magistrate recognized the “theory of fengshui” 風水之說 as postulated by the Zhang lineage and endorsed its legitimacy. This “fengshui” tree was in fact located at some

518 SUCSBRC [Nanbu Collection]: 466.1533.83.
519 SUCSBRC [Nanbu Collection]: 466.1533.91.
distance from the Zhang ancestral cemetery and was geographically closer to the Song’s house.

But the runner’s identification of the tree as a cypress (a common type of fengshui tree in Nanbu) galvanized Nanbu’s court to err on the side of caution. At the same time, aware of legal discourses surrounding a new term for property rights (diquan 地權) to land, the magistrate had to explicitly extrapolate what rights a geomantic interpretation of territory provided. Doing so brought geomantic territoriality into a new, evolving framework for land claims in the county. In the wake of the allegation regarding a forged contract in this case, the illustration (not shown here) revealing the “natural boundary” formed a basis around which the presiding magistrate could craft a resolution.

By the 1930s, however, Sichuan’s superior courts were regularly facing legal challenges that put situated and cosmological claims to land in tension with new national laws and legal standards. In 1932 for instance, a case from Sichuan’s Bishan County 璧山縣 involved the effects of a newly installed waterwheel on a tributary of the Yangtze River. The plaintiffs, who

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had a contract from the Qianlong Reign (1736-1795) stipulating the need to preserve the river’s *fengshui*, accused their neighbor of violating that contract through installing a waterwheel on the river. According to the court testimony from the case file, in DG29 (1849), the ancestors of He Baorong 何保榮, the plaintiff, purchased lands from the Wang 王 lineage located to the right of Zhu Family Bridge 祝家橋, which arched over a tributary of the Yangtze River. This parcel of land aligned with Zhang Jiankun’s 張鑑昆 ancestral lands without issue for the better part of a century. Then, in 1931, drought struck the region. He Baorong proceeded to install a waterwheel (*tianche 天車*) below the Zhu Family Bridge to irrigate his fields. Protesting this action, Zhang presented a contract from the Qianlong Reign that contained the following terms:

[合約內註] 祝家橋橋梁石灘係璧邑風水所關，二家子孫不得開鑿石厥車口等語。521

[The contract read:] the stone planks and embankment around Zhu Family Bridge are connected to the *fengshui* of Bishan County; the descendants of the two families (Zhang and He) are not permitted to quarry openings for vessels [in the] stone embankment.522

The channel — evidently quite important for irrigating the immediate region — was seen not just as connected to the *fengshui* of the two families, but as linked to the *fengshui* of the entire county.

This precise claim had been litigated in GX29 (1903), when ancestors of the Zhang and He lineages fought over the installation of beams across the channel. The magistrate at that time ruled in favor of the Zhangs, who opposed the installation; the magistrate concluded that, based on the language of the contract, the irrigation system under Zhu Family Bridge was connected to the *fengshui* of Bishan County at large. Going even further, the magistrate in 1903 observed that the

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521 SUCSBRC [Bishan Collection]: 12.3-4.4830.

522 *Shijue 石厥* are stone edifices erected in front of tombs or ancestral halls that are commonly found in Sichuan and Hubei.
water system was connected to the ancestral graves of the lineages, and hence should not be disturbed.\textsuperscript{523}

For these reasons, the Zhangs had reason to be confident. The local court of Bishan County had earlier that year upheld most of their claims and they had a contractual and legislative record tracing back for many decades. In line with traditional legal practice that often saw the mapping of geomantic claims, the waterwheel was ordered mapped, with the resulting illustration presented before the Chongqing Superior Court’s judge.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{figure44.png}
\caption{Superior Court’s Illustration of the \textit{Fengshui} of a Tributary of the Yangtze River (1932) \textsuperscript{524}}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{523}SUCSBRC [Bishan Collection]: 12.3-4.4770.

[張鑑昆] 且提出光緒二十九年張東林與何保國因該地石樑漕口爭執具控，該縣詞稿敘明民業內有祝家橋一座，石橋過江，原係璧邑風水，兼民祖墳…此據為所有權之證明。

[Zhang Jiankun] has presented a case record from GX29 (1903), when Zhang Donglin and He Baorong, because of a conflict over the stone beams in this place at the grain-transport area [of the river]; this case file details that in Zhang’s property there is a Zhu Family Bridge. The Stone Bridge that crosses the river is connected to the \textit{fengshui} of Bishan County, as well as the ancestral graves of the Zhang lineage…this is used to testify to the [Zhang’s] expression of property rights [to this area].

\textsuperscript{524} SUCSBRC [Bishan Collection]: 12.3-4.4810.
The illustration captured the dynamics of the dispute: the Zhangs owned the land along the river to the right of the bridge (pictured above). The Hes owned the land to the left of the bridge, including Guanyin Temple and its prominent *fengshui* tree. The waterwheel installed by the Hes was located on the He side of the riverbank. Aware of this fact, the Zhangs framed their claim based on the idea that the waterwheel disturbed the *fengshui* of the river itself — a claim that had been previously proven effective, based on the general understanding of how the river was traditionally managed as a common water resource. Upon reviewing the illustration and the details of the claim, the urban Chongqing court came to see matters differently. Refuting the original resolution, the judge claimed that Zhang was “deluded by the theories of *yinyang* and *fengshui*.” Stressing a break with tradition, the judge added that “additional, as for those things now strictly banned under the law, this type of false accusation for the contestation of property rights is the leading example [of what is now banned].”

In rejecting Zhang’s claim, the Chongqing judge was following the latest legal regulations of the Republic of China’s Civil Code which banned “superstitious” activities. But such a move implicitly evoked another jurisprudential quandary: the Zhangs possessed a contract, with signatories from the Zhang and neighboring families, that demanded the protection of the river’s *fengshui* and which had been previously upheld by local courts. While some frictions over interpretation had been felt in the past, there was a general understanding for over a century what

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525 SUCSBRC [Bishan Collection]: 12.3-4.4817.

判令係爭之地為上訴人所有, 原審認定石梁等處地區權屬於被上訴人等, 其見解解不通錯誤, 再查上訴人攻擊被上訴人損毀天車一層, 勿論是否真實, 均屬刑事範圍, 應免置議。

The court rules that the land in contention belongs to the plaintiff. The previous ruling recognized that the stone channel area [around the waterwheel] belonged to the defendant. Examining the terms, its reasoning is not without errors. Now examining the matter of the plaintiff accusing the defendant of damaging the waterwheel, [for now] do not discuss whether this is true or not as it constitutes the realm of criminal law, and thus we will avoid comment.
that stipulation meant. The Hes, faced with a drought year, took drastic action by installing the waterwheel in violation of the received understanding of that contract; in 1932, in the presence of one of the most “urban” courts of Sichuan province, they won their case. Nonetheless, following longstanding precedent, the court mapped the site and evaluated the claims carefully.

Critical to stress here is that this rejection of this cosmological claim came from one of the province’s superior courts. Local courts across Sichuan can be seen retaining older practices and engaging such claims in the everyday practice of law. For instance, back in Nanbu County, also in 1932, a certain Li Kaixuan 李開選 presented a series of fengshui lawsuits against the Deng 鄧 lineage for illegally occupying an unused building on their property by claiming it was their ancestral hall and ruining his lineage’s fengshui. Li contested this claim by saying the building belonged to his lineage and presenting the following evidence: 此房有“金萱永秀”四字壽匾一道，並無台階拜石，實非宗祠模樣 “this building has the four characters ‘Golden Lilies Forever Elegant’ inscribed on a longevity panel [at its front] and it does not have a staircase or a praying stone; it is truly not like an ancestral hall!”526 Even with a lack of contractual evidence presented, the Nanbu yamen sent a runner to inspect the fengshui and ordered the area mapped.527 This case, one of many like it in the Nanbu Archive from the 1930s, is a telling reminder that new standards enacted in superior courts remained quite distant from the everyday handling of legal affairs in local county courts. Even in “core” regions of the province, such as Bishan or Ba Counties, archival

526 SUCSBRC [Nanbu Collection]: 466.1829.92.

527 SUCSBRC [Nanbu Collection]: 466.1829.106. The notice to the runner read: 查勘李家宅後族塋內禁蓄柏大風水樹林有無被鄧八愷等砍伐 “Check and investigate whether the forbidden cypress fengshui trees in the Li Ancestral Cemetery located behind the Li Family Homestead have been felled by Deng Bakai et al.”
records suggest that the extent to which new strict standards on evidence and claims were achieved on the county level by the 1940s is debatable.\textsuperscript{528}

The need to increase revenue for the central government and lessen the commonplace presentation of lawsuits over obscure land boundaries led the GMD to enact a province-wide land surveying campaign following the move of the national capital to Chongqing in 1937. In 1938, when the province-wide Land Surveying Campaign was launched in Sichuan province, teams headed out into the field to register locals’ lands. When this happened, surveyors frequently encountered highly localized language in the contracts presented to them that they were uncertain

\begin{quotation}
\textsuperscript{528} Consider the following GMD interrogation transcript from a legal case in Bishan 壁山 County from 1947. In it, the defendant Chuan Senrong 傅森荣 buried his mother on the property of the Wangs, where the Chuans claimed they had ancestral graves. In the Q & A with the GMD judge, notice the evidence the judge asks for in this “core” area of Sichuan Province. Neither inscriptions nor genealogies were by 1947 valid legal evidence; of course, in the Qing they were technically not valid as evidence either. SUCSBRC [Bishan Collection]: 12-17-431-432.3451.

問：你與上訴人(王丙輝)什麼關係？Q: What relationship do you have with the plaintiff (Wang)?
答：我與他沒有什麼關係。A: I have no relationship with him.
問：葉家岩，他有王姓的墳沒有？Q: Speaking of the Ye Family Cliff, are there Wang family graves there?
答：沒有王姓的墳，只有傳家的人。A: There are no Wang family graves, there are only Chuan family graves.
問：老墳有碑沒有？Q: Do the old graves have inscriptions?
答：沒有碑石。A: There are no inscriptions.
問：為什麼將媽媽葬那？Q: Why did you bury your mom there?
答：上訴人的地方，我們原有祖墳在那裡，今年二月間我們去上墳，看見葬有上訴人的墳在我們祖墳內裡，去稄保甲，他說是上訴人的祖墳，問他是男墳是女墳，他不曉得。A: The plaintiff’s (living) place, our (Chuan) family originally had graves there. In the second month of this year, we went to see the graves [of that area], and we saw that the plaintiff had added graves in our cemetery. We went to find the baojia and he said it is Chuan’s ancestral grave. We asked him if it was the grave of a man or a woman. He didn’t know.
問：(王丙輝)你們的家譜呢？Q: (Asking the Plaintiff, Wang): How about your family genealogy?
答：我們沒有家譜 A: Our family does not have a genealogy.

Or the following case, from 1940, which saw a discussion of the geomantic placement of a grave and an analysis of a map. By that time, local elites were mapping the graves in the presence of rural baozhang 保長. SUCSBRC [Bishan Collection]: 12.20.629.6905.

問：古墳是不是由北坐南呢？Q: Is the ancient grave facing north from the south?
答：由北坐南。A: Yes, it is facing north from the south.
問：你們是卜了兩個窨堆嗎？Q: Did your [geomancer] divine two grave spots?
答：我們卜一個，是二十六年卜的。A: We divined one, it was done in MG26 (1937).
問：兩個穴一堆，是不是在原告的業內卜的？Q: The mound of the two geomantic caverns, did you divine them on the plaintiff’s property?
答：不是在他們家內卜的，是在古墳尾上卜的。A: It was not in his property, it was divined at the foot of the ancient grave.
問：(To the plaintiff)繪圖之時保甲長站在場嗎？Q: When you illustrated the map, was the baojia present?
答：都在場。A: Everyone was present.
\end{quotation}
how to translate. They encountered vernacular place names, localized border demarcations, as well as value denotations that were difficult to fit neatly into a statistical spreadsheet. So pervasive was this problem that one surveyor in 1938 provided the following example of a “typical” contract for a property sale to highlight the situation against the “new style” contractual form mandated by the GMD government.

Figure 45. Sichuan Province New Style Contractual Form (1938)

(Above)
Example Old Style Contract Cited as a Typical Example to Illustrate the Difficulty of Registering Land
(Below)\(^{529}\)

\(^{529}\) Li Zhenghong 李錚虹, *Sichuan nongye jinrong yu diquan yidong zhi guanxi* 《四川農業金融與地權異動之關係》 [*The Finances of Sichuan’s Agricultural and Its Relationship to Shifts in Property Rights*] (Taipei: Chengwen chubanshe, 1977), 47316.
“Old Style Contract”

Sun Guilin establishes a contract for the sale of a house, a foundation, farmland, bamboo and trees, stone tools, old instruments, yinyang and fengshui, the foundation of a forest grove, and firewood and thatched grass. Because of severe debts that he has no way to pay, Guilin et al have conferred, husband and wife, to take an ancestral plot of land that they received [through household division], named the foundation of Lixiao Bend’s Old House, and sell all their shares [in it]. Its borders are… [Not Included in Archival Case Example]

Now we invite the witnesses to this contract to point out and trace clearly without error the four boundaries. The borders are all to be managed as above and [transaction] permitted with the following terms. He [Sun Guilin] personally asked a middleman to ask all members of his lineage [to purchase the property]. After no one intended to buy [the property], he asked the middleman to mediate with Sun Quande and sell his property to him. Sun will purchase it as his property with a grain tax liability of two hao. In the presence of the middleman, it was agreed that the real price of the property in copper will be exactly 320 chuan (conversion in 1938 was 60 yuan). The price for signing the contract, the transfer of the property, and the ritual before the ancestral tablets are all included in this number. Thereupon we take the money and the contract with the transaction between the two sides; there are no debts or losses, and there is no money owed in the future. The house, the foundation, the yinyang and fengshui, the stone tools, the mountain plot, the woodland, and the farmland — these things born of heaven and earth or made by human effort — these things have been clearly sold and nothing has been retained. Once sold, this transaction will never be regretted; following the sale, regarding the buyer’s payment of tax or contribution for grain from the estate, the seller’s kinsmen may not instigate pestering. If there is a such a situation, it is the seller’s sole responsible to resolve the situation, and the buyer needs not to be involved. [The transaction] is done voluntarily between these two families, and there is no coercion, taking by force, or cheating. Fearing that an oral agreement with no witness [would not suffice], we specifically write this down onto a contract with the buyer’s sons and grandsons and this will forever serve as evidence.

Kinsmen: Sun Guishun; Relative: Zhou Xunzhong; Middleman: Su Dingyuan and Sun Fu’an. Year, Month, Day. Sun Guilin and His Wife, Lady Liu.
The two sample contracts above juxtapose the standards GMD surveyors in Northern Sichuan were trying to impress upon the legal system and what they were encountering in the field. In the standard form contract issued by the province in 1938, the dimensions of the four boundaries of a parcel of land were to be filled in first. Then, the size of the plot was to be given separately, followed by its estimated grain yields and its tax liability. Ideally, anyone reading the first contract would be able to immediately ascertain its proportions and size. These changes were meant to address issues found in the representative second contract — an example taken in 1938 from a surveyor’s field site in rural Sichuan of a white contract composed amongst kin of the Sun lineage. This contract follows standard conventions seen across China in the late imperial period. It is important to consider that, as a Qing legal document, there is nothing inherently deficient in the second contract. As Myron Cohen and Madeleine Zelin have argued, contract writing evolved out of popular practices in local communities and later spread across the Chinese cultural area; by the time the imperial state in fact wrote contracts into the law code in 1767, these documents had already been in use across the empire for centuries. In line with the expectations of a functional Qing contract, the second contract, “contained detailed delineations of the actions to be triggered by the agreement.” It also began by proving the reason the property was being sold, thus reflecting tropes about the reluctance to relinquish land generally as well as providing concrete reasons (i.e. debt) the transaction was occurring in the first place. A ritual following the writing of the contract that saw the transfer of the property from one Sun agnate to another was performed in front of the Sun lineage’s ancestral tablets. In the property culture of the late imperial period, it was a typical contract and it was effective for the transfer of property rights.

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What was problematic about the second contract by 1938 and what was to be gained by moving to the new-style contractual forms issued by the Republican government? First, let us consider that, nowhere in the “Old Style” contract is there any mention of where this property is; the location and place-names of the area were assumed as common knowledge to the buyer and seller. Second, what was exactly for sale? In the contract, we learn that Sun Guilin is selling a house, a foundation, farmland, bamboo and trees, stone tools, old instruments, yinyang and fengshui, the foundation of a forest grove, and firewood and thatched grass. But what were the precise dimensions of these things, how many trees were exactly to be sold, what were the old instruments precisely on offer, and what exactly was the valuable yinyang and fengshui being handed over? In Sichuan vernacular, it is likely that this reference — as we have seen before in legal cases — referred to the trees (“fengshui”) around the yinzhai (grave) and the yangzhai (house), or at least Sun Guilin’s shares in them. Because the borders of the property for sale were so localized (i.e. “west to the border of the Sun Family Bridge” 西至孫家橋為界), they were not even recorded by the surveyors. This example “Old Style” contract, provided by GMD land surveyors working in Sichuan Province in the late 1930s, captures what was a common occurrence in registering unaccounted for land and processing contracts: situated knowledge was essential for

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531 For a nearly identical contract to this one, see: Nanbu County Qing Archive: 2.60.03. For a contract ordering a lineage to protect a Wind Vein 風脈, see: Nanbu County Qing Archive: 4.144.02.

532 For an example of a household division register presented during land registration efforts in Northern Sichuan in 1943, see: SUCSBRC [Santai Collection]: 10.10.12.2710. The writing of the register was urged by the judge of the county’s court to end a conflict over common land in 1940 地方法院院長袁勸諭和解回家當憑家族成立分關. One line read: 田地山場，以上管下；寬窄不一，以寬補窄；肥瘦不均，以瘦搭肥。陰陽風水，井口道路，不得阻滯 “As for the fields and mountain plots, the former [fields] will be managed [like] the latter [mountain plots]; their widths are different, so we use the wider [plots] to supplement the narrow ones; their fertility is unequal, so we use the fertile ones to supplement the infertile ones. As for yinyang and fengshui and the wells and roads, it is not permissible to block them.” Surveyors in the 1940s had to assign statistical values to documents such as this.
understanding the document’s intended meaning. This knowledge determined who had access to a site as well as the territorial bounds of the site. For places once or presently (commonly) owned by a lineage, such knowledge could naturally be contested on site.

533 Contracts containing highly situated information of land, including geomantic information, were prevalent in Nanbu through the Republic (1912-1949). A number were created at the Nanbu yamen. For instance, see the following contract from 1925 composed at the county yamen to resolve a dispute with the county magistrate as a witness:

Sun Fuchun and Sun Fachun compose a contract with the court as a witness to end a conflict and to forever protect fengshui. This year they took trees from their ancestral cemetery and sold them to Ma Chunwu. Who knew that both sides could not agree on a resolution on the spot; as for the date of the selling of the trees, the entire Sun lineage was not present to deal with the matter. When the Mas came to personally fell the trees in this place, the Sun lineage saw this and stopped them. The Sun lineage inquired as to what was going on and [found that] Sun Fuchun and Sun Fachun had begot [the scheme]. [The Sun lineage] did not permit [the felling] and invited everyone to gather and deliberate the matter. Who knew that the Mas would protest this, and the entire lineage found it hard to appease [the Mas] and thus submitted a plaint at the county yamen. The court permitted [the matter] but a trial was not held. The relatives and friends of the Sun lineage could not bear to stand idly by as the lineage tears itself apart and gathered [at the court] to urge mediation to solve the matter and reach a state of harmony. Now, we [the Suns] state clearly, from now on, the trees of the ancestral cemetery are not permitted by any lineageagnates — young or old — to privately sell and fell, this will forever be set as a lineage rule to protect and foster fengshui. If, later, any kinsman does not follow this principle and presumptuously acts to destroy the trees to privately sell them, it is permissible for the clan to take this contract and issue an impartial punishment. This time the legal fees will be born by both sides. Additionally, the payments from the Mas to buy the trees will be returned by ones [i.e., Fuchun and Fachun] who sold the trees — The ones who are present from both sides should urge their own kinmen to withdraw, and should not implicate other members of the two lineages. This is the case where both parties do this willingly and happily; no one present is being admonished or wronged. From now on, there will be harmony.

If there is anyone who does not agree with the terms of this paper, there is a copy at the yamen that they can investigate. Now, fearing that human emotions are hard to control, we especially compose two copies of this contract to end the conflict with the court as a witness to forever protect the fengshui. In addition to the copy stored with the lineage, we particularly copied another version, which we beseech to be stored at the yamen for future reference; [this will] serve to prevent future offenses.


SUCSBR [Nanbu Collection]: 466.2329. For examples of Sichuan contracts and household division registers from the Republic containing geomantic dimensions of property, see: Hu and Su, eds., Chengdu longquanyi bainian qiuye wenshu, 250-265; 371-399. Note that, of all the contracts contained in this collection from the Republic, not a single contract manifests the new style GMD contractual form; all are “white” contracts written in the “old style.” This is also the case for all contracts predating 1949 I have seen in Nanbu’s Archive.
New work in Latin American Studies has provided some frames for thinking about these issues. Raymond Craib has recounted how land surveyors in Mexico worked in the late nineteenth century to create a consistent and standardized topography of the country with the aim of registering many previously unaccounted lands. In their attempts to produce structured knowledge of the land, Craib argues these surveyors came across deeply embedded situated knowledge, which under the lens of new scientific classificatory schema became, in his words, “fugitive landscapes”:

…state fixations all too often ended up as state frustrations. On the ground, fantasies of fixity ran aground. Regional officials, surveyors, and military mapmakers did not encounter (nor did they expect to) the blank spaces so typical of the imperial imagination. They encountered the kinds of places their own work was designed to both reconcile and supersede. They confronted what I will call fugitive landscapes. In their traverse and property surveys, they frequently found themselves in lands characters by multiple political jurisdictions and use rights, indeterminate borders and inconsistent place-names, and highly contextualized systems of tenure and property. Yet to suggest that such landscapes foiled the dream of universal fixity sought by the liberal state — one which would make property rights, laws, and identities in any given place precisely like those in any other and thus, like the market, utterly placeless — is not to argue that villagers had little to no sense of fixity in their own right. They proffered their own fixations regarding property, territory, identity, and history…The spatial creation of Mexico was a much more ambivalent and dialectical process than one of some state juggernaut imposing its vision upon an either quiescent or intransient countryside.534

Craib’s study of surveying Mexican lands in the creation of Mexico are relevant to the history of early twentieth century Nanbu. Nanbu was not a blank county filled with unregistered “black land.”535 Nanbu locals long had many state-sanctioned cultural strategies to draw upon to express property rights, to claim and share natural resources, project status, and to create histories of their rootedness in a place that allowed them to influence local development. Land surveyors in Nanbu encountered a series of grave sites, temples, shrines, old stamped contracts, new unstamped

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534 Craib, Cartographic Mexico: A History of State Fixations and Fugitive Landscapes, 11-12.

535 “Black Land” (heidi 黑地) a term popularized in Hebei for “unregistered lands,” there specifically denoted old Banner Land that had been privatized to local tillers but never registered. It was thus natural that surveyors did not find “black land” and I use this term to denote its other common usage for “unregistered land” broadly. Huaiyin Li has done important, extensive research on this phenomenon. Li, Village Governance in North China, 1875-1936.
contracts, forged contracts, family genealogies, and cosmological claims — that is, a collection of situated knowledge for which the expression of property rights had been successful in the context of the imperial legal system and (in Nanbu) the county’s Republican legal system, but one from which structured knowledge would be challenging to extract as the state’s motives changed in the 1940s.

As scholars like Rebecca Nedostup have suggested in their studies of religion and the state in the early twentieth century, campaigns to eradicate popular practices — even in urban Nanjing — were highly negotiated affairs.\(^{536}\) In the following chapter, I attempt to apply such a perspective to the property system of Nanbu in the early twentieth century. Here, the state struggled to resolve legal questions and register unaccounted for lands not simply by applying a neat statistical regime to counties filled with “black land,” but through negotiating the layers of highly situated information that much of the legal evidence possessed by locals contained. Whether a contract possessed a stamp was often secondary to what the contract’s contents said. In the case of Nanbu, by 1942, it had become clear to land surveyors the county lacked fixed borders; the borders it had, during the Qing (as well as the boundaries for much landed property), were often marked by temples, mountains, and prominent trees — sites of somewhat standing permanence but ones that were nonetheless also highly interpretable and re-interpretable to locals. One obvious example of this was of course Gaoguan Temple, located “somewhere” along the highly mobile border between Nanbu and Langzhong Counties. In the mountains of Sichuan, where the sky was high and the emperor had always been far away, it is unsurprising that post-imperial courts — and states — were forced to come to terms with the landed legacies of cosmology after empire.

Chapter Six: Nanbu Between Empire and Nation — The County’s Fortunes in Republican China, 1912-1942

I. Chapter Introduction: Inauspicious Horizons in the Late Qing

This chapter covers a span of time that could well have its own study. As such, it consciously limits the scope of inquiry to case studies that involved contestations over the interpretation of rural landscapes in Nanbu — beginning in 1888 and extending into the Republican Period — with three key points. First, geomantic claims were used by locals in Nanbu County to protest administrative changes, privatization, and confiscation throughout this period. Second, the Nanbu government’s responses to these protests generally followed imperial precedent, though there was a noticeable shift in the legal language of “common,” “private,” and “public” land by 1930. Finally, situated knowledge of the land remained important for both locals and the state during the registration efforts of the 1940s, when “flying lands” — areas once defined by voluntary temple affiliations now drawn into fixed units of governance — appeared across Nanbu. The drawing of these jurisdictions and widespread protests against specific units frequently looked to “customary” ways of interpreting land that readers of this study will readily recognize.

In GX14 (1888), anxiety over a range of administrative changes was gripping Nanbu. Nanbu’s yamen declared that the county’s Salt Bureau (yanju 盐局) would be moved to the building of the county’s Aofeng Academy, which had been purchased for such purpose. This move coincided with changes across Sichuan with the rise of the “Self-Strengthening Movement” and the implementation of the Guanyun 官運 (“official transport and merchant sale”) for the province’s salt administration. The large building of the old academy, located in the county town, would
provide enough space to allow for the Salt Bureau to implement the new regulations.\footnote{Madeleine Zelin discusses this extensively in terms of “signs of decline” for the large salt conglomerates in Zigong in the 1880s. Zelin, The Merchants of Zigong: Industrial Entrepreneurship in Early Modern China, 186-187.} Plans were drawn up to move the academy to Cloud Soaring Peak 凌雲峰, located outside of the county town.

On GX14.5.8, a dozen county gentry, led by the local juren Feng Binglin 馮炳林, presented a petition at the yamen claiming that this move “forgot righteousness at the sight of profit” (jianli wangyi 見利忘義) and harmed the Wind Vein of Nanbu.\footnote{Nanbu County Qing Archive: 14.00423.01.} This was precisely the charge made by the gentry of Nanbu (in GX16; 1890) against the Yan lineage’s constructed bridge in the previous chapter. The object of the gentry’s wrath this time was a staff member of the Salt Bureau, Zhao Huicheng 趙會城, who had orchestrated the purchase. The new site was said to be not appropriate for the academy for its inauspicious geomantic features. In the pages of the gentry’s petition, the fengshui of Nanbu was intricately analyzed. One short excerpt from the petition’s extensive analysis, which continues for several pages, reads as follows:

其院名鼇峰者, 原縣城主山。凌雲大洞, 病龍出脈里許, 結成若大乳氣。縣署在乳左, 文廟在乳右, 中間三皇城隍等祠排列, 書院文星閣在隍祠文廟之間, 位置極其妥當。奈對面逼近壓來一高峰, 夙名狗頭山, 與衙門文廟等恰在對頭。地師云: 此峰不合太高, 高恐不利於官紳。當年乃削平尖峰, 改狗頭名曰鼇峰。\footnote{Nanbu County Qing Archive: 14.00423.02.}

The name of the institution was Aofeng [Academy]; [Mount Aofeng] was formerly the central mountain of the county town. The Great Cave of Cloud Soaring Peak — its vein emerges from the Sick Dragon and stretches for over a mile, forming quite a big geomantic node of qi. The county yamen was to the left of the mass, and the Confucian Temple was to the right of the mass. In between were arranged the shrines of the Three Emperors and the City God; the Academy’s Pavilion of the Literary Star was located between the City God Shrine and the Confucian Temple, its location was in an extremely suitable position. But too bad opposite [the Pavilion] was a tall peak that pressed upon it. Its old name was Dog Head Mountain and it was located exactly opposite to the yamen and the Confucian Temple. The geomancer said this mountain should not be too high. If it is too high, it will bring harm to the officials and the gentry. Thus, that year [the county’s notables] proceeded to level the summit of the mountain and changed its name from “Dog Head” to “Aofeng.”
This was the received history of Mount Aofeng, which gave its name to the county’s academy. As related above, the creation of Aofeng Academy was linked to the “taming” of Dog Head Mountain and the amelioration of the innately poor geomantic conditions of Cloud Soaring Peak. The analysis in fact further explained that the academy had “[by means of] the legendary turtle (formation) vanquished the dog (formation)” (yi ao fu gou 以龘伏狗). For the gentry, moving the academy would relinquish that heritage and place the academy on the “sick” Dragon of Cloud Soaring Peak. While there is little reason to doubt the sincerity of their request, Nanbu’s gentry were heavily drawn from families involved in the salt trade, which was the most profitable business in the county. It is possible that the gentry had several motives for protesting the move.

The magistrate forwarded the petition to the education censor for review. Following the review, a report was sent back to the magistrate. The censor reported that Aofeng Academy, which was built in 1778, was in poor condition and falling apart. The new location was more suburban, which made it ideal in the eyes of some for reconstructing an academy. The costs to do so, however, were estimated at 2,400 taels, which would require the selling of the academy’s fields and the previous academy’s building to the Salt Bureau. As the educational censor did not object to the move, the project was approved by the serving magistrate and construction continued.

In recognition of the increasing peripheralization of the county with the rise of Chongqing and Chengdu as urban centers, late Qing inscriptions preserved in Nanbu’s Confucian Temple reflect a consensus that the earth veins of the county had not been nourished. The county’s

540 Nanbu County Qing Archive: 14.00423.03.

541 Around this time (1887), the Prefect of Baoning conveyed an order from the capital issuing strict penalties for grave robberies, which were increasing across the country 发人墳塚案件層出不窮. Nanbu County Qing Archive: 9.716.01. For the inscription, see: Nanbu County Gazetteer (Tongzhi Edition) (2014: 430). The phrase mingjing 明經 in the transcribed inscription below was a respectful term for a gongsheng (“tribute student”) during the Qing:

余維南隆，昔以前未免荒陋，至唐而鮮于仲通，叔明俱列儒林之傳。宋則陳堯叟兄弟以廷試第一顯，而蒲卣、馬涓諸公亦以文章名世。自元及明，代有聞人。我朝李允登父子，處為儒者，出為純臣，得祀
GX32 (1906) gazetteer, composed almost twenty years after the notorious move, captures understandings of these transformations from the final years of the Qing:

Aofeng Academy was originally in front of the Confucian Temple and yamen; it was built in Qianlong wuxu (1778) by the county magistrate Li Yuanfen. From that point on, the literary achievements of the county splendidly rose, the gentry and the commoners valued it. There were erected tablets and altars honoring the prior worthies of the county. Then, in the dinghai year of Guangxu, [the academy] was met with disaster when weiyuan Zhao Huicheng, together with the officials from the Salt Bureau, transformed it into the Salt Bureau! [The academy] was moved to the foot of Cloud Soaring Peak, where they leveled a cemetery to create a foundation; the qi of this place was abominable, and the literati denounced [this place].

Such an understanding of the academy’s, and the county’s fortune, persisted amongst Nanbu’s local gentry even though one county magistrate repaired the Aofeng Pagoda to improve perceptions of the county’s fengshui in 1895. Concerns over Nanbu’s fengshui and the academy

542 Nanbuxian xiangtuzhi, 393.
persisted well into the twentieth century, and in 1925, a Daoist of the abbey of Cloud Soaring Peak 凌雲洞道士 presented a petition at the yamen for the erection of an inscription to ban armies and merchants from destroying the area’s natural vegetation, so as to protect the Literary Wind (wenfeng 文風) of the county.543

The prolonged fight over the move of the county’s academy in 1888 began an extended period of change and protest in Nanbu County.544 Central to these changes were disputes over properties that were traditionally unregistered with the state but effectively claimed through cosmological interpretations of land formed by kinship and community bonds. These sites were significant for the maintenance of good fortune, the storage of wealth in the event of communal need, and border demarcation. For state campaigns related to new schools and road building, the county yamen indirectly — and later directly — encouraged the exploitation of common resources as revenue sources. At the same time, the county government generally continued lending support for the protection to the fengshui of local communities through most, if not all, of the Republican

543 The petition read: 立案堅碑以垂不朽并出示嚴禁，軍商學界不准糟踐山林竹木，神人均感 “I place on file [a petition for permission] to erect a stone inscription that will stand forever and [petition for the court to] issue a notice that it is strictly forbidden for the army, merchants, or scholars (from the school) to trample on the bamboo and trees of the mountain; [for this the] gods and humans will both be grateful.” SUCSBRC [Nanbu Collection]: 466.4609.02. The magistrate directed the Daoist to form an agreement with the soldiers and merchants involved.

544 Protests against churches also occurred during this time. In 1888, a Muslim 回民 of Baoning named Sa Yitui 薩一腿 led a group of locals in burning the prefecture’s French church, built in 1882 with the purchase of land in the walled town next to the Prefecture’s Examination Hall. The official narrative found in Maoist-era histories for this destruction was said to have been the unequal treaty signed following the Sino-French War (1883-1885). Local scholars have now acknowledged that more immediate anxieties and rumors over conditions for the examinations were likely the culprit. The church was rebuilt with reparations on three hundred mu of land outside the town on a site strategically chosen to avoid such rumors. Following the French Catholic Church’s example, in 1888, the British missionary William Cassels (1858-1925) constructed a Protestant church outside of the walled town. Muslims in the region were targeted for conversion by missionaries in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. One local Muslim family, the Gus, sold a room in their homestead to the West China Mission, which later became the region’s most prominent evangelical church under Cassells. One local Muslim of the Baoning community, Gu Heling 古鶴齡 (1876-1970) converted to Christianity and became a prominent minister in Sichuan. Tensions within the Muslim community locally over these actions are as relevant in understanding the story above. For more on Gu Heling, see: Qiu Yan 祁炎, “(Sichuan) Gu Heling and Ma Jifa, (Christian) Pioneers from the Islamic Faith”, Tongwenbao: Yesujiao jiating xinwen 《通聞報: 耶穌教家庭新聞》1437 (1931): 11. For the history of Sa Yitui, see: Yang, Langzhong mingsheng guji kaoshi, 40.
Period. The GMD regime that followed the communist occupation of parts of the county had to negotiate highly vernacular legal documentation in the county in its land registration efforts.

II. An Age of Wild Ghosts: The Qing New Policies in Nanbu County

By 1907, when Nanbu’s last imperial gazetteer spoke of the decline of the county’s fortune in the years following the move of the county’s premier academy, the county was facing disorienting change. The Civil Service Examinations, which had, since at least the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368) required the official hiring of yinyang masters and incentivized the selection of appropriate locations for temples, schools, shrines, and graves around the town, were disbanded in 1905. In 1903, the Qing had promulgated the “Guimao School System” (Guimao xuezhi 癸卯學制) for the establishment of new schools across the county. While Nanbu did have some schools open as early as 1905, the number did not break 100 until 1907-1908, when sixty-nine of the county’s market towns were divided into nine educational districts.545 It is important to not overestimate the degree of penetration that accompanied these changes, as Nanbu had around 140 market towns by this time.

During the “using temple estates to establish schools” (miaochan xingxue 廟產興學) movement in Sichuan, poor counties like Nanbu County lacked the tax base and capital to create them.546 In places like Nanbu, that meant that trees had to be felled and sold to support the schools. Newly appointed headmasters, who under official regulations were supposed to be drawn from degree-holders, swiftly moved to cut down trees for their own gains. Nanbu had few unpurchased

545 Nanbu County Qing Archive: 18.539.01. Note that even with these efforts, only sixty-nine of the market towns were given orders to establish schools. These were the county’s biggest market towns. Many smaller or uncharted market towns were evidently not even contacted.

degree-holders and thus the program was not carried out under the central government’s ideals in the county.\textsuperscript{547}

The examples for this section will emphasize locals’ and the state’s responses to the resultant upswing in geomantic petitions during this time, particularly concerning trees. As we have previously seen, terming a tree a “fengshui tree” did not mean it could never be felled. Communities traditionally could collectively agree to sell these trees because doing so was, in extenuating circumstances, taken as necessary. As with geomantic matters in general, interpretations were negotiable and Nanbu’s court was willing to hear and mediate a range of opinions. The New Policies certainly opened the door for great abuse. Reactions to this abuse were often expressed in geomantic terms.\textsuperscript{548}

One such example of this phenomenon can be seen in the following case. In GX33 (1907) four patron lineages of Chunyang Mountain Temple 純陽山寺 presented a petition at the Nanbu yamen against the newly appointed headmaster of the primary school. In their petition, the litigants wished for the maintenance of the area’s earth vein and the banning of further tree felling:

具禀者王立言、滿吏王方谷、保正王體元、甲長王炳才、山主王大春、王倫元、王蔭槐、王鼎槐、王盛元、王義元、王宗元、余文星、余元年、趙元田、趙元和、李

\textsuperscript{547} Liang Yong has found that many unqualified locals took up the position of headmaster in Ba County, which had more degree-holders than Nanbu. Liang, \textit{Yimin, guojia yu difang quanshi}, 254-255.

\textsuperscript{548} I thank Xu Yue 徐躍 of Sichuan University for directing me to these sources and explaining their significance in the Nanbu Archive. The case below, Nanbu County Qing Archive: 18.00463.01, is also discussed in his article on the topic. As Xu Yue explains:

In economically advantageous and relatively highly commercialized regions (of Sichuan), like Ba County and Xinjin County, the quantity of felled trees was relatively small, and the practice of making profits by selling trees to collect educational funds was not common or widespread. Meanwhile, in economically disadvantageous regions which had difficulty raising education funds, like Nanbu County and Xuyong County, temple trees had been massively felled and sold to secure the funds…At that time, common people and gentry generally believed that fengshui 風水 and dimai 地脉 (“earth veins”) bore an organic relationship with social harmony and stability. The massive felling of temple trees not only concerned material interests, but also conflicted with local customs, giving rise to numerous lawsuits. It is, therefore, considered to be one of the causes of social disorder in the late Qing Dynasty. Xu Yue, “Sichuan’s Promotion of Education and Activities of Felling Temple Trees in the Late Qing Dynasty,” \textit{Frontiers of History in China} 3.3 (2008): 428.
The petitioners, Wang Liyan, clerk Wang Fanggu, baozheng Wang Tiyuan, jiazhang Wang Bingcai, shanzhu Wang Dachun, Wang Lunyuan, Wang Yinhui, Wang Dinghuai, Wang Shengyuan, Wang Yiyuan, Wang Zongyuan, Yu Wenxiong, Yu Yuannian, Zhao Yuantian, Zhao Yuanhe, and Li Guangzong petition [the county magistrate] on the matter of planting trees to reconnect the earth vein and entreat a ban on the further felling of trees. Chunyang Mountain Temple was originally established by the ancestors of the Wang, Yu, Zhao, and Li surnames; they donated their land and fields to create the monastic estate for the gods to pray for peace and fortune in the area. The natural features of the mountain are strong, and [they] nurture good magical efficacy; we called upon a monk to nourish and reap [this power], and for several hundred years, no one damaged [the temple]. Now there is a quarrel because Dayan Embankment Market Town opened Mengyang School, and its headmaster, Lu Shangxuan petitioned to fell the “god trees” to financially support the school’s funding. We collectively petitioned for the temple’s association to donate fourteen chuan of copper cash and prohibit the felling of these trees. The headmaster then added more than seven chuan of copper cash to pay for the needs of extra fees, equipment, and books. This is recorded on the case file processed by Magistrate Wang from GX31.5.1 (1905) and can be checked. In the twelfth month of the previous year, the school headmaster again petitioned to fell the trees on Chunyang Mountain. We all know that these trees have grown for over a hundred years; upwards they are connected to our fengshui, downwards they lie along the earth vein — the gods and sages obtain their shade, and the natural features rely on them so [the mountain] does not collapse. The veins of qi encircle [the mountain], and prosperity is brought forth. For those facing this mountain, the flowers bloom and examination candidates are brought forth; the people celebrate with added vigor — they cannot bear to fell or harm these trees, for [such actions] will be the source of disaster. For this reason, we sincerely beseech [you] to issue, on record, an order to prohibit the felling; together we are touched [by your] profound merit and we will not forget your kindness.

The detailed logic of the petition is worth considering. Although in this dissertation we have seen “earth vein” used as a term for fengshui, here they are put into parallel juxtaposition, with fengshui referring to the area around the temple (interchangeable with the trees; denoting the dimensions of the estate) and earth veins referring to the corridors of qi that connected the temple to the fortunes

549 Nanbu County Qing Archive: 18.00463.01.
of the patron lineages. The terms “god trees” and *fengshui* trees are used interchangeably in this petition. From this, we might infer that the Wang, Yu, Zhao, and Li lineages wished to stress their ancestral ties to the temple and hence their ability to have a say in the management of the temple’s affairs.

We might also observe that, through 1907, members of this local community were evidently unaware that the Civil Service Examinations had been officially disbanded and still incorporated the logic of fostering auspicious conditions for the examinations into their petition. Chunyang Mountain Temple was located at the far edge of Dayan Embankment (South Road; seventy *li*), which shared a border — marked by temples — with Xichong County. Essential to understanding the petition of the four surnames is the fact that Mengyang Primary School was established in 1905; it was not located in Chunyang Mountain Temple’s estate, but the headmaster nonetheless applied to access resources from that temple to support the school. Upon reading the plaint, the magistrate wrote the following *pici* on the petition of the four surnames:

```chinese
風水乃不經之談，興學為育才之要。盧上選前因大堰壩學堂置器需材，奉請伐樹，本屬化私為公，是以當予照準。茲據禀稱，上年籌辦學堂，該會認抽學款，免伐樹株。既經具奉有案，姑準免其複伐，以示體諒。著即錄批，傳諭學董盧上選遵照可也。
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*Fengshui* is absurd talk, and the “Constructing Schools” policy is the key to cultivating talented people. Lu Shangxuan, because Dayan Embankment’s schools needed the timber resources for necessary items, applied for the felling of trees. This constitutes an action for the whole community and not only for his personal gain, and thereby should have been permitted. Now, according to your petition, last year you planned for the school, and your association consciously provided money for its funding so as to not fell the trees. As this provision is recorded in the case file, I permit an order to avoid the further felling of trees, to show my understanding. Take this record and pass its order to the school manager Lu Shangxuan to follow it.

It appears that the record “in the case file” mentioned by the magistrate above was in fact none other than the claim in the plaintiff’s petition that they had explicitly arranged funding to avoid the

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550 Nanbu County Qing Archive: 18.00463.02.
felling of the trees. The magistrate began his response to their petition with a comment about the absurdity of the geomantic anxiety, stressing that schools — not fengshui — were the key to cultivating local talent, but he still issued an order prohibiting the felling of the trees. In other words, the petition to protect the temple’s earth vein was successful.551

Locals during this time were also proactive in other ways, and in the final years of the Qing another phenomenon can be seen in the Nanbu Archive. While lineages had always routinely petitioned the state for the official protection of the fengshui of graves or temples, in the final years of the Qing, local families began drawing up detailed lists of every tree to which they expressed a cosmological connection. Many then brought them to the county yamen in the hope of securing an official notice of the protection of their fengshui. One example of this dates from GX32.7 (1906), when members of the Ma lineage arrived at the yamen with an extensive list of their fengshui trees. The petition was officially inspected, and an order (tangyu 堂諭) was issued for the protection of a significant collection of trees, which were listed individually, as seen below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Type of Tree</th>
<th>Number of Trees</th>
<th>Size of Tree Trunk in chi尺</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In Front of the</td>
<td>Large Chinese Oak 大青剛樹</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temple (Total: 32</td>
<td>Medium Yellow Neem 中黃楝樹</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trees)</td>
<td>Large Cypress 大柏樹</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Medium Cypress 中柏樹</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Small Cypress 小柏樹</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behind the Temple</td>
<td>Large Cypress 大柏樹</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Medium Cypress 中柏樹</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

551 Compared to the twelve lawsuits pending at the departure of a county magistrate in 1903 (only one of which involved a school), in 1907, there were thirty-six, ten of which involved the felling of fengshui trees. Xu Yue, “Sichuan’s Promotion of Education and Activities of Felling Temple Trees in the Late Qing Dynasty”: 427.

552 Nanbu County Qing Archive: 19.00074.01.
### (Total: 58 Trees)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tree Type</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Circumference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Slightly Smaller Medium Cypress</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small Cypress</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large Cypress</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium Cypress</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slightly Smaller Medium Cypress</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large Yellow Neem</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small Yellow Neem</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese Oak</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small Plum Tree</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small Cypress</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### (Total: 36 Trees)

#### To the Left of the Temple

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tree Type</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Circumference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Large Cypress</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large Cypress</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium Cypress</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### To the Right of the Temple

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tree Type</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Circumference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Large Shatang Tree</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large Cypress</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium Cypress</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

通共柏樹及雜樹一百二十三株, 墓距廟近。

“In total, the number of trees of different types is 123; our ancestral graves are near the temple”

This document also provides insight into how *fengshui* trees were classified by locals at the time.

The power of a tree was measured by its circumference, and as such, this type of information was included in the list above for every tree. When surveying *fengshui*, yamen runners commonly noted the same features in their reports. In the above document, *fengshui* trees were identified by their known species, number, location vis-à-vis a temple, and size. Mulberry or tung oil trees were seldom considered *fengshui* trees because they produced immediate wealth for their owners. The term “*fengshui*” was reserved for trees (particularly Chinese oaks and cypresses in Nanbu) that took decades to grow and needed careful protection by a lineage or temple.\(^{553}\) As such, these trees

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\(^{553}\) For a case that references this point, see: Nanbu County Qing Archive: 9.654. Here, a lineage accused another of felling both their *fengshui* trees and their tung oil trees — cited in the plaint as two distinctive categories of tree. Products produced from *fengshui* trees, such as charcoal, were still seen as the common resources of a lineage. For an example of this principle from a 1923 case, see: SUCSBRC [Nanbu Collection]: 466.10.
represented more than monetary wealth: they were standing embodiments of the fortune (i.e. good health, numerous descendants, social security) for future generations.

With anxiety building in the county during the final years of the Qing Dynasty over the felling of trees related to the New Policies, one might ask whether the county government issued any response to this anxiety. They did indeed. The fact that they did establishes for the reader that this rendering of events in Nanbu is not simply based on my interpretation, but rather from the immediate voices of local officials and elites of the time. In XT3 (1911), the Nanbu County Town’s newly established Deliberative Assembly submitted a petition to the Nanbu county magistrate on this very topic:

近時，多不肖之徒，捏造謠言，煽惑人心，以為建修學堂，募捐樹木，因此廟宇叢林墳塋古樹一概砍伐。查城區買料修堂，何當抽民樹株。實屬造謠賣樹，見利瓜分。經議員公議，請監督諭知農務分會長，常到四鄉，設演說場，禁蓄森林，並息謠傳。555

Recently, many unworthy residents have fabricated rumors and incited the minds of people: for building New Schools, [these rumors claim] that since we solicit funds from [felled trees], we [thereby require] the felling of all ancient trees around graves, monastic estates, and temples. When one inspects the purchased materials for constructing schools in the county town, how does it equal the confiscation of trees from the people? This is truly the case that [these people] fabricated rumors to sell trees themselves for profit and divide the gains. Hence, the members of the assembly agreed to ask the county supervisor to command the head of the Agricultural Branch Bureau [of the county] to frequently attend to the countryside, deliver addresses at the townships that urge the forbidding of felling forests, and silence these rumors.

554 In XT2 (1910) a member of the Department of Works responsible for managing irrigation affairs 京水司 submitted a petition on behalf of a local community composed of five surnames to protect their endangered Wind Vein 風脈 by erecting a stone inscription protecting the area’s fengshui 風水. The request was approved: 准刊碑示禁，此諭. Nanbu County Qing Archive: 21.243.02. Concerns were not only being vocalized in Nanbu County. In Ba County, locals in 1910 petitioned the county magistrate to quickly hire a yinyang master after the post had been left vacant. The petition read: 惡陰陽實為人材衰旺之基，國家富強之本，關係非小，故修造安葬，素或有失，由無監司，再沿日久，遺誤不淺 “(Up until now no one has been appointed.) Yinyang is truly the basis for the decline and flourishing of talent and it is the basis of the wealth and strength of the country. Because yinyang is so important, when constructing [buildings] and burying the dead there are always [points that may] be lost, and not having anyone in the [yinyang] office for a long time will produce significant mistakes and omissions.” Ba County Qing Archive: 6.54.00660.

555 Nanbu County Qing Archive: 22.00186.01. For other such announcements from the yamen, see: Nanbu County Qing Archive: 15.958, 19.74. For a sample of the upswing in cases involving fengshui trees as well as mining across the county from 1905 to 1911, see also: Nanbu County Qing Archive: 17.35, 17.102, 17.910, 19.266, 19.71, 20.213, 20.272, 20.306, 21.220, 21.243, 21.480, 22.177, 22.181, 22.188, 22.191, 22.193, 22.202, and 22.408.
This is evidence to suggest that, from the beginning of the New Policies through the end of the dynasty in 1912, rumors had spread throughout Nanbu County that the trees of graves and temples were being felled, thus harming the fengshui of local communities and lineages.556 Yet the yamen, by its own admission, had consistently issued orders of protection for temples and trees. Bans against tree felling were issued by the county’s Deliberative Assembly in 1911, but these likely had only mild mitigating effects, as similar bans had been issued by the yamen since the start of the New Policies.557

Here, Paul Katz’s nuanced discussion of the enactment of the school reforms in urban and rural areas is important: while urban centers such as Shanghai did in fact see significant temple destruction during the Qing New Policies, the fate of religious centers in rural areas is a very complicated question.558 Magistrates and gentry of peripheral hinterlands such as Nanbu were likely well-aware of the multifaceted roles that temples played (i.e. baojia management, border demarcation, granaries) in these rural areas that likely applied less in urban settings. In Nanbu, even when schools were established in rural temples, the temples often continued religious activities. There is no doubt that the Nanbu yamen encouraged the establishment of schools in the larger market towns of the county and had purchased some temple trees in the county town to establish a secondary school there. Locals in Nanbu interpreted these moves as attacks on local

556 This was also the case in other regions. “Tree cutting on public (“common”) land, for instance, was common in Huang-Yun.” Pomeranz, The Making of a Hinterland: State, Society, and Economy in Inland Northern China, 1853-1937, 25. Pomeranz notes: “Poor transportation, unclear property rights, and general instability intensified Huang-Yun’s ecological crisis and ruled out market solutions. We will begin by looking at why this was the case and at the extent of deforestation, a particularly severe environmental problem created by market failure.” Ibid., 122.

557 In a case file for one of the many grave-related disputes from 1911 (one that includes a yamen illustration of the grave site), there is included the liturgical transcriptions for some of the last litan厉壇 (“ghost”) rituals of Qing Nanbu. This ritual was performed twice a year annually, so its inclusion in the archive at large is not particularly surprising. However, its placement within a case file for a grave-related infringement, amongst other grave-related cases, could be interpreted as more than coincidental.

558 Katz, Religion in China and Its Modern Fate, 41-42.
By 1911, rumors had spread throughout the county that the state had sanctioned the destruction of all grave and temple trees. Considering the county gentry’s concern over the decline of the county’s fengshui during the Self-Strengthening Period, conflicts over the building of churches in the town, and the end of the Civil Service Examinations, one can imagine how such rumors percolated to a climax. Yet, while the Nanbu yamen did order the establishment of schools by using temples, it had never directly advocated the felling of grave trees, nor did it order a broad attack on popular religion. Rumors — not regulations — had gotten out of control in the county.

III. Still Our Dalaoye 大老爺: Geomantic Lawsuits in Republican Nanbu

On November 21, 1911, Nanbu County received an official notification that Sichuan Province had declared independence from the Great Qing Empire. Railways had contributed to the end of over two millennia of imperial rule in China through unrest that began 250 kilometers away from Nanbu County earlier that year, when protests broke out in Chengdu over the nationalization of local railway projects. Though railway surveys began in Sichuan again in 1914 — specifically classifying graves, temples, houses, and trees that ran along the track lines to avoid disturbing local fengshui — it would be decades later, after the founding of the People’s Republic of China, that Sichuan would get its first rail lines.559

Officials in Nanbu County were told that the state founded following the collapse of the Qing was to be called the Great Han Sichuan Military Government 大漢四川軍政府; the date was the 4609th year of the Yellow Emperor 黃帝紀元四千六百九年. In March of 1912, Nanbu’s

559 Railway contracts through the end of the Qing Dynasty, and possibly beyond, contained specific provisions for the protection of local fengshui. “Sanxu ninghu tielu hetong” 三續寗滬鐵路合同 [“A Contract for the Three Extensions of the Shanghai-Nanjing Railway”] Shenbao 《申報》2 (1903.08.06): 10882. For the geomantic surveys in Sichuan, see: Silas Bent, “Opening China’s Inland Empire: I. Richard Wood Randolph’s Survey of the Upper Yangtze,” Asia: Journal of the American Asiatic Association (19) 1919: 736. For one of the many reports to the imperial government on the building of these railways and fengshui from 1901, see: National Palace Museum Palace Memorial and Grand Council Archives: 144368.
yamen was notified that the name of the country was to be changed to the Republic of China 中華民國 and that the two characters “Great Han” 大漢 were no longer to be used. During these first few months, the names of a few official titles were changed: the country magistrate was transformed from zhixian 知縣 to zhishi 知事; the assistant county magistrate and the county security officer were henceforth referred to as “branch magistrates” fenzhishi 分知事. In 1916, the third branch of the Sichuan Superior Court 四川省高等法院第三分廳 opened in Langzhong County. But while certain administrative terms changed during this period, many legal and cultural practices in Nanbu County did not. Locals continued to present their lawsuits to the county’s “Great Master” (Dalaoye 大老爺) at the county’s central and branch yamens.

In the early years of the Republic, some provinces, such as Yunnan, issued appeals to “destroy fengshui” in order to improve regional irrigation systems 民政長訓令各縣知事振興水利破除風水, which intended to allow rivers and streams to be freely dammed without the threat of cosmologically-tinged litigation. Such an appeal was not made in Nanbu and archives reveal that the county’s court continued to regularly hear geomantic cases; other records suggest that efforts to build irrigation dykes in northern Sichuan during the Republic were blocked by gentry

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560 Nanbu County Republican Archive: 24.1431.6173.91-92.

561 There was a major difference between Nanbu’s Republican county magistrates and their Qing predecessors: while Qing magistrates came from outside of the province (“the rule of avoidance”), after 1916 almost all Nanbu’s Republican magistrates were Sichuan natives. Although they were seldom from Nanbu directly, they typically hailed from nearby counties. This gave county magistrates insight into local practice and fluency in the local dialect, but also opened the door for concerns over corruption and the independent authority of the state.

562 Reprint from Governmental Directive, “Benshengling: nongye: minzhengzhang xunling gexian zhishi zhenxing shuili pochu fengshui mixin xinwen” 本省令:農業:民政長訓令各縣知事振興水利破除風水迷信文 [“Yunnan Provincial Directive: Agriculture: A Directive from the Head of the Civil Administration Orders Every County Magistrate to Promote Irrigation and Destroy Fengshui and Superstition”], Yunnan shiye zazhi《雲南實業雜誌》 (2:4) 1914: 55-56. Note that even in Yunnan, the degree such orders were followed at the county level is questionable.
out of concern for local fengshui.\(^{563}\) The following case, from MG6 (1917), illustrates the persistence of the state’s recognition of such claims through the administrative changes of the early Republic.\(^ {564}\) That year, Lady Jing of the Ren lineage 任敬氏 presented a series of lawsuits at the Nanbu yamen against a man named Ren Shun 任順. Ren Shun was the paternal cousin of her husband, Ren Tianxiu 任天秀. In a series of claims presented at the county’s court, Lady Jing described in detail how Ren Shun had felled thirty fengshui trees belonging to her husband’s family, which by destroying their earth vein, had left her husband in a near death state after contracting a cold illness (fenghanbing 風寒病). Ren Shun had allegedly sold the trees to a man named Shu Jingzhai 舒靜齋 without her husband’s consent. She accused Ren Shun of smoking opium and secretly selling off her husband’s inherited fields through fake contracts. In a second plaint, dated MG6.10.13, Lady Jing extrapolated on these claims, saying:

任順前歲伐賣氏業風水柏樹一株，已犯氏家四命，夭亡二子孫。今又霸伐，若是之多，豈不破脈犯命? 565

Ren Shun last year felled and sold one fengshui cypress tree on my property, which has affected the well-being of four members of my family and [resulted in] the premature deaths of two of my grandchildren. Now, he again felled trees by force; as he has felled so many trees like this, how could [these activities] not have broken our earth vein and threatened our lives?

Lady Jing’s plaints were rejected, with the presiding county magistrate urging her husband, Ren Tianxiu, to himself quickly present a plaint to the yamen and for her to cease presenting lawsuits on his behalf. Following the death of her husband, Lady Jing presented more plaints on MG6.11.5

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\(^{563}\) For one such case from Xichong County, see: He Jinyong 何金永, ed., *Xichongxian chengxiang jianshe huanjing baohuzhi* 西充縣城鄉建設環境保護志 [A Record of Environmental Protection in the Construction of the Town and Countryside of Xichong County] (Chengdu: Xinan caijing daxue chubanshe, 1987), 30.

\(^{564}\) SUCSBRC [Nanbu Collection]: 466.499.02.

\(^{565}\) SUCSBRC [Nanbu Collection]: 466.499.32.
and MG6.11.9. To the latter of these two plaints, the magistrate responded that she should first return home to conduct the funeral and then return for a formal inquiry.566

Lady Jing did not give up. She proceeded to make the long journey to the old Prefectural seat of Baoning to submit an appeal to the newly established Third Branch of the Provincial Superior Court. There, she described in detail the death of her husband resulting from the cold illness triggered by the destruction of fengshui. After a trial that involved interviews with both parties, the presiding judge overturned the county magistrate’s ruling (yuanpan chexiao 原判撤销) and issued a new one, which recognized and protected Lady Jing’s claims to her late husband’s fengshui.567 The Superior Court countered that under the law, all agnates had to consent to fell a communally-held (fengshui) tree. Lady Jing’s persistence and her forceful descriptions of cosmological harm, taken all the way to Baoning, were enough to win her a legal victory.

From 1912 through 1937, Nanbu’s yamen was presented with a great number of geomantic lawsuits of similar natures to Lady Jing’s.568 In most instances, officials appear to have relied on

566 状悉。據稱該氏夫任天秀病故，准予歸家將喪事辦畢后，迅速來庭候訊，此批。SUCSBRC [Nanbu Collection]: 466.499.32.

567 The ruling (SUCSBRC [Nanbu Collection]: 466.500.04) was as follows:
    主文: 舒靜齋所買樹株二十四根，應即返還任敬氏，已付價錢三十六串，着自向任順索還，訴訟費用歸任順，舒靜齋負擔。
    Court Verdict: As for the twenty-four trees purchased by Shu Jingzhai, they should be immediately returned to Lady Jing. The price of thirty-six chuan that Shu Jingzhai already paid should be recovered from Ren Shun. The fees for the lawsuits should be shared by Ren Shun and Shu Jingzhai.
    理由: ...第一審判令: 任天秀將任順私自主賣之樹株，勸其義讓，毋較。任天秀既不願意，法律上亦不能強為干涉，應將原判撤銷，由本庭另為判決，如主文。
    Reason: ...the first ruling order that, as for the trees of Ren Tianxiu privately sold by Ren Shun, [the previous court] urged [Tianxiu] to permit the transaction to avoid a conflict. Since Ren Tianxiu did not wish this, by law we cannot interfere and force him to do so. Thus, the original lawsuit should be repealed, and this court issues a new ruling, as written in the court verdict.

568 One such case (SUCSBRC [Nanbu Collection]: 466.1176.17) dates from 1919, when Wu Xiangyuan 吳祥元 presented a plaint against Wu Zhengman 吳正滿. The men belonged to two branches of a lineage, which maintained a common Azure Dragon Corner. Zhengman felled several fengshui trees and then use the reclaimed land as farmland. A common millstone was seized for his personal use. Xiangyuan had sought help from the yamen but was told that no official was serving at that time. Following a trial at the branch yamen, the assistant magistrate issued a final ruling:
resolutions dating from the imperial period to resolve them. In many such cases, Republican officials endorsed geomantic interpretations of land to quell and prevent further disputes.

Such resolutions were often applied to the county’s temple estates during this period. One petition from 1916 by a certain Wang Zimin 王子敏 accused Liao Shijiu 廖仕九 of ignoring a ban on disturbing the fengshui of Ao Mountain 鳳山 through mining, thereby breaking the mountain’s earth vein.\(^{569}\) After an investigation of the mountain and a trial, the magistrate ruled that Liao should be punished for such actions.\(^{570}\) As the trees around temples were felled in some places to make way for poppy plantations, the county yamen continued to issue notices for runners to investigate geomantic conditions, such as the following case, concerning the Wind Vein of Guanyin Temple, allegedly endangered by poppy plantations\(^{571}\):

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斷令：正滿、正福即就已伐柏樹，合力出資，將碾房修好，仍作四房公有，一以罰其刻薄，以促成義舉。又罰銅一串，作為醮墳費用，借慰地下幽魂。以後聞有樹木，無論何房，均不得擅自砍伐，墳坪亦留拜奠餘地。至清明會關業，只收典錢十餘串，僅敷祀墳經費，並無餘款可分。斷令會首每年一易，賬目每年一清，不准一人霸管，亦不准提倡分業。兩造均各遵斷息訟。

I order: [Wu] Zhengman and [Wu] Zhengfu have at present already felled the cypress trees; they must together use this money (from the trees) to repair the common millstone, and place it in the common possession of the four lineage branches. Also, to punish their unkind actions and to bring forth an undertaking for the common interest, I also order a penalty to be paid of one chuan and for you to perform the jiao sacrifice before the grave; this cost will serve to pacify the spirits beneath the earth. From now, the commonly held trees may not be privately felled by any branch. The ground around the grave is to be reserved for performing the sacrifices; the remaining land is to be administered as the common estate of the Qingming Association — it will accrue around ten cash through its mortgaging [annually], which is enough to pay for the grave sacrifices — with no extra funds to divide. I order that [the lineage] leader should every year (at the Qingming Festival) update the account book once; it is not permissible for one person to seize the land, or to advocate the division of this land. The two sides should follow this ruling and cease litigation.

\(^{569}\) Nanbu County Republican Archive: 26.1700.6442.127-128.

\(^{570}\) The ruling (Nanbu County Republican Archive: 26.1700.6442.133) was as follows:

堂諭：訊得廖仕九違令採石，實屬膽大，姑予懲戒。以後如敢再在該處取石，准原稟獲具送案懲辦。此判。

The court rules: it has been learned that, Liao Shijiu violated the order and quarried stones; this is truly a brazen act, we will now reprimand him. Later, if he dares to quarry stones again in this place, it is permissible for the petitioner to capture him and send him [to the yamen] for punishment. This is the ruling.

\(^{571}\) One case from 1916 saw locals protest Liu Yuru 的劉玉如 growing of poppies around Jade Mountain Temple. The investigation revealed local notables’ collusion with the poppy production and resulted in the registration of the temple’s lands. Even with the corruption, the magistrate did not strip the notables of their titles:

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In accordance with all the details of the case regarding Azure Lion Temple’s monk Huixing and Guanyin Temple’s monk Dinglong presenting complaints against each other, go forth with this notice and investigate the matter; with regards to this case, the runner dispatched with this notice should go forward to cooperate with the witnesses Yang Shaobo et al and examine whether the fengshui behind Guanyin Temple, along with the ancestral grave mountain’s ancient trees, stones, and instruments of the building have been felled or destroyed by monk Dinglong.

Similar to the case above, conflicts surrounding the geomantic conditions of temple properties became increasingly frequent in the 1920s, when several of Nanbu’s larger temples became occupied by itinerant warlord armies. In these situations, the yamen had limited options for ameliorating local conditions. For instance, in 1922, Nanbu’s Shrine for Those Who Manifest Loyalty 昭忠祠, built during the Jiaqing Reign (1796-1820) to commemorate those who had perished during the White Lotus Rebellion, was occupied by a warlord’s army. Local gentry,
concerned about the inauspicious effects of this occupation, presented a petition at the county yamen in protest. The presiding magistrate could only respond, “abide by the military [officer’s command], and present [this petition] to him” (zun wu ling cheng 遵武另呈). 573

Like their Qing predecessors, Republican magistrates in Nanbu cautioned against excessive litigation-producing anxiety that locals commonly expressed over geomantic concerns or recommended mediation outside of court. This temporary “skepticism” was often shortly followed by an official judgment that directly or indirectly recognized the geomantic power of the land in question to resolve a dispute and send litigants on their way. 574 The following case, from 1925, involves a dispute between the Zhao 趙, Deng 鄧, and the Li 李 lineages of Old Abbey Market Town 老觀場 (seventy li) over the Wind Vein of the three lineages.

In October of 1925, Deng Damo 鄧大模 presented a lawsuit at the branch yamen of Abundant Village Postal Station with a geomantic portrait of his home settlement. Proclaiming that the area’s Wind Vein was in jeopardy, Deng provided the following description:

原心紅壷嶺脈延長,其氣直接民等合族之祖塋。況民等世居此地,業產包圍金山大半,與趙、李二姓之業接壤。歷來此山為李、鄧、趙三姓之風脈,而此山之樹株歷為三姓之風水。前人建廟於此山,橫樑書名,且堅匾數道。勒碑數硐,皆刻三姓之名義可考。575 Xinhong Pass (where we live), the mountain vein extends (through it), and its qi directly connects to our lineage’s ancestral cemeteries. We have for generations lived on this land. Our properties encircle the greater half of the Metal Mountain, where it borders the ancestral estates of the Zhao and the Li Lineages. From antiquity, this mountain has been [connected] to the Wind Vein of the Li, Deng, Zhao lineages, and the trees on the mountain are [connected] to our three surnames’ fengshui. Our ancestors built a temple on this mountain; on its beam is inscribed their names. Moreover, several stone steles are erected, all with the names of our three lineages on them, which can be examined.

573 Nanbu County Republican Archive: 26.2057.5799.225.

574 For a case from 1925 over a Qingming Association’s broken Wind Vein, see: SUCSBRC [Nanbu Collection]: 466.5558. Here again the magistrate urged mediation outside of the courts. For other cases concerning the fengshui trees and property of Qingming Associations, see: SUCSBRC [Nanbu Collection]: 466.1.9; 466.8.3.

575 SUCSBRC [Nanbu Collection]: 466.142.17.
Damo continued by observing that the Zhaos and the Lis had in recent decades bullied the Dens and illicitly felled trees while becoming addicted to opium. The Zhaos and the Lis allowed the temple to fall into disrepair and had felled many trees around the temple property. These actions, Damo contended, greatly harmed the area’s Wind Vein. The magistrate, upon reviewing the lawsuit, composed the following *pici*:

何謂風脈？又何謂風水？是何形狀？本知事均不認識。所認識者，事理耳，法律耳，毋以迷惑怪誕之詞來淆。著即邀證，隨票投案，聽候訊奪，此批。576

What is this thing you call a “Wind Vein”? What is this thing you call “fengshui”? What form do these things take? This magistrate does not know them. That which I know is no more than reason, no more than the law. Do not come and show disrespect by saying perplexing and strange words. I order that you immediately invite a witness along and present evidence [to the court], but in accordance with the notice to investigate the case, wait for the decision by the authorities. This is the comment.

At first glance, the presiding magistrate appeared to look at Deng Damo’s claim with skepticism. To this end, the magistrate rhetorically expressed that he “did not know” what Deng was talking about in his submitted plaint. But of course, he did. The magistrate’s professed skepticism towards the plaint derived from the fact that Damo had neither presented a witness nor a contract to support his claim. And yet, regardless of this fact, a yamen runner was still dispatched to analyze the mountain and temple in contention. The runner ascertained that the lineages supported a common City God Association 城隍勝會, which raised and protected common funds and resources (“fengshui”) for the local community based around Xinhong Pass’s City God Temple 城隍廟. An inscription, erected by the Zhao and Li lineages, with two Deng signatories, in DG28 (1848) was copied by the runner and included in the case file.577

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576 SUCSBRC [Nanbu Collection]: 466.142.19.

577 The inscription (SUCSBRC [Nanbu Collection]: 466.142.41) read as follows:

趙、李出錢治備酒水，立碑刻石定界，就有樹株數根傳於後代，二以永作風水，不得私行砍伐。

Zhao and Li have paid money and held a banquet, they erected a stele with inscription on it as a border. There are several trees here which will be passed on to the descendants of the two households, and these trees will also forever be our *fengshui*, and it is not permissible to cut them down privately.
During the trial held several days later, the magistrate fully ascertained the roots of conflict. The Zhao and the Li lineages contended that they were the original inhabitants of Xinhong Pass and had created the City God Association along with an inscription erected in 1848 to protect the fengshui of the area. The Zhaos and the Lis had a longstanding marriage alliance, and so it was gradually understood that the lineages became increasingly intertwined and shared a common Wind Vein. The Dengs later came to see themselves as connected to that Wind Vein through their patronage of the temple and their donation of some untaxed lands to the City God Temple. The Zhao and Li lineages in 1925 declared their intent to sell several trees to repair the City God Temple, which galvanized the Dengs to present a lawsuit against them at the branch yamen at Abundant Village Postal Station. The question at hand was, in other words, who possessed the right to use the resources of the village commons.\textsuperscript{578} At court, the Dengs admitted that they were not initially patrons of the City God Association, but through their close inhabitation with Xinhong Pass, had become patrons during the nineteenth century. As seen in cases surveyed in Chapter Five, dow...
the language of “settlement rights” and market town territoriality was often expressed in geomantic terms, for instance, by claiming a connection to an area’s vein. In the final ruling on the case, the magistrate declared that all the trees around the temple were to be common to the three lineages. Even with his initial skepticism concerning the Wind Vein, the magistrate’s ruling in effect endorsed precisely that understanding. Similar rulings were issued well into the 1930s and 1940s.

From 1912 through 1949, Nanbu County’s government continued to often map geomantic-related petitions. Illustrations of grave and temple sites from the Republican Archive uniformly follow Qing practice. During the 1940s, under GMD rule, most court illustrations were produced by local notables, such as gentry, baozhang, and school headmasters. It is not immediately clear why this change occurred in the 1940s, though one possible agent was the transformation of the county yamen — and with it, the yamen runners — into a new-style GMD-controlled county

579 Disaggregated statistics are challenging because the Republican Archive is not catalogued, but it appears that imperial cartographic practices carried on well into the Republic. For such grave, ancestral hall, temple, trees, and general fengshui cases with maps not shown here, see: [Nanbu Collection]: 466.18.20; 466.24.30; 466.24.35; 466.308.17; 466.849; 466.1205; 466.1260; 466.1273.98; 466.1302.18; 466.1506.136; 1533.83; 466.1829.137; 466.2032.23; 466.2512; 466.2651.72; 466.2690.24-25; 466.2692; 466.3051; 466.3070; 466.3262, 466.4094, 466.430.13, 466.5225, 466.10017.25, 466.10904, 466.1056. Of course, not all maps concerned these matters, for instance 466.3333, 466.3354, 466.8800 are illustrations of wet fields; 466.5388.16, 466.5388.17, and 466.5388.18 are maps of tenancy disputes. But, from the 350 land dispute cases I surveyed in the Republican Archives of Nanbu, it appears that grave, temple, tree, and general fengshui disputes remained, by a notable margin, the most commonly illustrated cases through the 1940s. For an example ruling based on one such illustration, see the following ruling (SUCSBRC [Nanbu Collection]: 466.696.13) from 1924:

The court rules...Jing Xianfa has presented a contract to the court including words with his offer of a sale [of the trees]. We also inspect that Chengbi has presented a contract for purchase [of property] that, upon inspecting all of it, only has the characters for “trees,” — this denotes regular property, and its words do not simply point to the trees of the Earth [God] Corner. Because the Earth [God] Corner’s dry field upper boundary is not stated in the contract, this corner’s cypress trees must be taken as the “common” property of the lineage. As for the dry field, which at the end of every year, one can raise a tiao of grain, Jing Xianfa cheated and claimed that this is for the ancestral sacrifices every year — this truly does not conform to principle. The property described in Jing Chengbi’s contract — the aligning cypresses of the dry field, after today they will forever constitute a common [resource] to foster the fengshui of the lineage. No matter who it is, it is not permissible to cut these trees down — [do this] to clear up the situation. Jing Xianfa is very cunning and fond of presenting lawsuits; the court should harshly ascribe responsibility, but considering his age is advanced we will not investigate further...This is the ruling.
government in the late 1930s. The subjects of these illustrations composed in the 1940s notably do not appear to have changed, as the inclination to map tree, grave, and fengshui cases appears to have been deeply rooted in the legal culture of the county. Some examples are found below.

Figure 47. Yamen Runner’s Illustration of the Li Lineage Cemetery (1928; SUCSBRC [Nanbu Collection]: 466.3079a.51.)

Figure 48. Yamen Runner’s Illustration of the Ma Ancestral Graves (1925; SUCSBRC [Nanbu Collection]: 466.608.21.)
Figure 49. Yamen Runner’s Illustration of the House Fengshui Dispute between Li and Lai Lineages (1924; SUCSBRC [Nanbu Collection]: 466.95.22.)

Figure 50. Sichuan Fourth Superior Court (Langzhong, Northern Sichuan) Illustration of Tree Border Dispute between the Yang and Yuan Lineages (1941; Langzhong Municipal Archive: 343.27.03.)
These archives from Republican Nanbu and other Northern Sichuan counties point to some general trends. As Nanbu became transformed through the privatization of common lands as well as increased tree-felling and poppy cultivation, local officials routinely continued sanctioning the protection of *fengshui* and common lands where they could in a legal system that remained heavily rooted in imperial practices. The official at the yamen was, to the locals, still the *Dalaoye* (“Great Master” 大老爺) of the county. This reality was noticed by the Nanjing-based writer and intellectual Huang Zhuyi 黃主一, who observed that in Northern Sichuan 川北的官吏依舊例判斷 “cases were still judged by the old (Qing) precedents.” That county officials still felt the need to engage with and address such claims through the 1940s in Nanbu County reveals the extent to
which such property knowledge and cultural practices remained relevant in rural society. As extraction increased in the late 1920s, the incentives of locals to protest such extraction was accentuated. We might also notice that, as in the Qing, attacks on temple property were not always perceived by locals as attacks on a specific institutional religion; protests concerning temple properties sometimes were voiced in geomantic language. This is further evidenced in the building of the most notorious public works project in Nanbu’s history: the Santai-Baoning Road.

IV. The Road to Nowhere: Building and Protesting Nanbu’s First Highway

If continuity in legal practice was seen in Nanbu through 1927, some subtle changes became evident during the construction of the first road in the county, which coincided with provincial-wide and nation-wide road-building measures. Prior to 1949, the largest public works

580 Huang Zhuyi described locals in the following terms, which bridged religious discourse with property ownership: 他們最聽信因果輪迴之論；地主呢，是祖先積德厚，前生修積好，應該享福；勞農呢，是祖宗德薄，自己前身做了惡，這世應該遭報。
They (locals in Northern Sichuan) listen to theories of karmic transmigration; “landlords” — their ancestors accumulated merit and in past lives had done good things so [now] they should enjoy fortune. Working farmers — their ancestors accumulated poor merit and in the past lives did terrible things, so that in this life, they must be punished.

Locals in the area frequently asked Huang Zhuyi what the name of the ruling emperor was; see the following: “他們高興時，還偏著頭問當今皇帝是誰呢?” Huang Zhuyi 黃主一, “Chuanbei nongmin xiankuang zhiyiban”川北農民現況之辯 [“A Comment on the Current Situation of Northern Sichuan’s Farmers”], Dongfang zazhi《東方雜誌》24.16 (1927): 33-49.

581 Military levies also forced many lineages to destroy their fengshui:

My lineage’s ancestral graves on the Great Grave Mountain date from the Ming Dynasty to the present; from then until now, there are over 2,000 graves there, and there are 10,000 male descendants who have offered sacrifices. For the fengshui cypress trees, for over 200 years, not a branch or a leaf has ever been touched. Now because we are helping members of our lineage pay for the school fees and because the military levies have become higher, the lineage’s baozhang has issued a notice that the households should give in accordance with what they can pay; the gentleman of our family, Deng Eryu has given thought to the members of our lineage who are poor — they are now in bad shape — and thus assembled everyone for a meeting. [They decided] to sell 330 cypress trees from the Great Grave Mountain, with every branch in the lineage receiving money based on the sale. Besides school fees, the rest will go to helping the other poor members pay for the military levies; the entire lineage agreed and we composed a public contract which can be inspected.

Deng’s plaint continues with a story of how another member of the lineage seized this particular opportunity and felled an additional fifty fengshui trees illicitly. SUCBRC [Nanbu Collection]: 466.68.02.
project in Nanbu County was the construction of the Santai (“Tong”)-Baoning (“Bao”) Road 潼保馬路 from 1927 to 1933 under the auspices of the provincial warlord Tian Songyao 田頌堯 (1888-1975). Upon completion, the road was 230 kilometers long and passed through Tongchuan 潼川, Yanting 鹽亭, Nanbu 南部, and Langzhong 閬中 Counties. Fundraising, planning, and construction of the road was an immense endeavor and its cost exceeded 500,000 yuan. Lawsuits regarding the road became so common that the Road Bureau 潼保馬路局 eventually became a functioning courtroom, hearing cases in the traditional magisterial style related to road construction and issuing judgments in the Qing form 路局之判諭. Some lawsuits concerning the road focused on the highway’s adverse effects on local fengshui and on graves that existed in its path. Authorities in neighboring provinces, well-aware of such concerns, issued propaganda for the road-building efforts with phrases such as, 有地捐路基, 有力即修路, 既不惑風水, 早遷當路墓 “if possessing land, donate it for the roadbed, if possessing ability, build the road; since we are not deluded by fengshui, quickly move the graves blocking the road!”582 In Nanbu, where little effort seems to have been made to move any graves, local officials occasionally banned the quarrying of stones from local graves for the purposes of construction or altered the direction of the road. It appears that local geomantic protests were seen against road-building efforts in many parts of the country.583

582 Anonymous, “Henan guangzhuz daolu” 河南廣築道路 [“Widely Constructing Roads in Henan”] Shenbao 《申報》 30 (1928.03.10): 19748.

583 The local road bureau was instructed to offer a price for the land for the property owner to move tombs in the path of the road. Pan Mingfeng 潘鳴風, “Cheng xianzhengfu: wei jianzhu huanshan gonglu you fenmu zhang’ai cheng qing lingchi qianrang you” 呈縣政府: 為建築環山公路有墳墓障礙, 呈請令飭遷讓由 [“Petitioning the County Government: For the Construction of the Road Around the Mountain, (we observe) Graves Blocking (its path), We Apply (to the county) for the Issuance of An Order to Move (them)”] Kunshan jiaoyu 《崑山教育》 (2) 1933: 39. Similar notices were issued across Sichuan Province.
An even greater number of lawsuits protested the common land confiscations that were used to fund the road. Revenue from the land tax, by then collected annually for three or four years into the future, was a major part of the base capital, but it was not enough for the project. Trees around temples, shrines, ancestral halls, and graves formed a massive body of untapped wealth for the state. That these estates were “commonly” (gongyou 公有) owned by local lineages made them easily transformable, on paper, into “public” (gonggong 公共) property.

The Bureau of the Santai-Baoning Road focused its early efforts on confiscating temple properties in the county that lay along on the road’s planned path; later, the order was expanded to many shrines in the county, including ancestral halls. Shangcheng Temple 上乘寺, in Dongba Market Town, was forced to sell its monastic estates in 1927, when its monks were disbanded.\(^{584}\) Local lineages later recorded these events in their genealogies: the Luos 羅 of Kunlun Mountain note for instance how their trees were felled and sold for profit to the Bureau.\(^{585}\) The common references to the tree-related confiscatory actions of the Bureau in local family genealogies and

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\(^{584}\) From the Nanbu County’s Public Library’s record of Shangcheng Temple; image available upon request. For another case involving the Road Bureau and the sale of a temple’s fengshui trees, see: SUCSBRC [Nanbu Collection]: 466.3240.9.


Under the Kunlun Mountain, between the two mountains of Miaozhi Corner and Shipan Corner, there is a brook that meanders from Shujia Peak, from where it arrives. At the head of the grove is there is a stone bridge. Not far from the stone bridge, besides the brook, there is a stone mill and three stone grinders. Nearby there used to exist five green cypresses. At that time, it was Shipan Corner’s two Great Households, Yancai and Yanfu who managed the commonly held forest. In 1929, during the building of the Tong-Bao Road, they were all cut down and sold. That year, the warlord Tian Songyao was collecting funds for the road, they sold off the common temple properties of the entire county and sold the ancient cypresses of the Man Mountain and the Linguan Building’s opera stage. The only thing preserved was a lonely Silk Maiden Temple.

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temple gazetteers today underscores the impact that the Road Bureau had on the residents of the county in the late 1920s and early 1930s.

As the word from the Bureau spread throughout the county that the commonly held trees around temples were to be felled to fund the road construction, conflicts broke out within lineages. A typical scenario was as follows. One or two “bad eggs” (huaidan 壞蛋) in a lineage would seek to sell a lineage’s fengshui to the bureau and keep any profits for themselves. The other members of a lineage would then travel to the Road Bureau and insist that the trees could not be felled because they were connected to their fengshui. For instance, in 1931, members of the Cheng 程 lineage near Abundant Village Postal Station presented a lawsuit to the chief officer at the Bureau with the following description: “the four of us constitute a single lineage and we have not gone beyond the five degrees of mourning; at the Azure Dragon Corner there are sixteen cypress trees of different sizes, they constitute our Earth Vein and fengshui and the four of us privately own them.” The two “bad eggs” of the lineage in this case were Cheng Guojun 程國鈞 and Cheng Guoxun 程國勳, who wished to profit off the felling and selling of the sixteen trees. The four agnates thereby provided an argument to protect their fengshui, claiming that only “public” trees around the county were to be felled: “unless (the trees in question) belong to an official public temple association, they are not allowed to be sold off.” The fengshui of the Chens, in other words, exclusively (siyou 私有) belonged to them.

The head of the Bureau endorsed that interpretation and the trees were not felled.

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586 SUCSBRC [Nanbu Collection]: 466.1504.155. Wufu here denotes a mourning group of agnates descended from a paternal great, great grandfather. The invocation of this term expressed the solidarity of the group and their legal claim to the fengshui.
Policies undertaken by county’s Road Bureau appear to have shaped the discourses in which geomantic claims were employed by locals. Prior to 1927, when the county’s Road Bureau was established, *fengshui* was often projected as a claim to “common” property and magistrates often protected *fengshui* as a “common” claim made by a local community 公有之物産 (non-exclusive private ownership). But as the state increasingly took “common” property as “public property” 公共之物産 (state ownership) — hence justifying confiscation of such estates — lineages, like the Cheng’s above, increasingly had to conceive of their *fengshui* in exclusive, private claims.

Similar cases quickly accumulated. Wang Kaishou 王開壽 in 1930 accused a man claiming to be a civil servant from the Road Bureau of demanding to fell the Wang lineage’s *fengshui* trees. The civil servant was accompanied by a group of ten men who said that felling the trees was necessary for the road effort. Kaishou conveyed that it was understood in the market town that the state was after the property of temples, and not the trees of the rural villages 此次辦理廟宇常產，並未提抽鄉村樹木 and that the government had earlier promulgated an order forbidding the felling of trees 政府早有頒令禁止毁伐, though it is unclear which governmental order he meant. In his petition, Kaishou explained that he traveled 120 li to the county yamen because the Bureau representatives were attempting to fell “private” (siyou 私有) trees in the market town: 希圖漁利，飽囊營私，串敗風水，情理不合，法律奚容 “with the intention of profit, they desire personal gain from the destruction of *fengshui* — this does not confirm to reason

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587 One order from the Road Bureau explicitly read: 潼保馬路總局令飭提賣共有廟會樹株以作築路經費 “the Head Office of the Tong-Bao Road Bureau has ordered that sale of “public” 共有 trees belonging to temple associations to be used for the construction of the road fees.” SUCSBRC [Nanbu Collection]: 466.6552. For another see: SUCSBRC [Nanbu Collection]: 466.3590.
— how can the law permit this?” The magistrate responded to the lawsuit saying that the Bureau does not have a policy of felling “privately-owned” trees and that he should return home to seek protection from his lineage and local tuanlian unit to prevent further felling.

Transcripts from court cases presented to the Road Bureau show that some lineages and well-known associations could not easily claim that their trees were privately owned because of the existence of many agnatic shareholders. The problem was further compounded by the fact that many communal properties were never registered under a living individual’s name within a lineage. It only took one shareholder in a Qingming Association to seize the opportunity to sell the “common” trees to the government to create havoc within local communities. One example of this is found in the 1932 case of the Deng Ancestral Hall of Du Family Well. The Dengs had a large lineage of eighty male members. Their ancestral hall was surrounded by over 100 fengshui trees, which a representative from the Road Bureau ordered confiscated in 1931. Such confiscation was conducted by having one member of the lineage — in this case, Deng Guangzhao — purchase the trees “from” the Road Bureau. The lineage would be forced to cut the trees down to “pay” the Road Bureau. In the case of the Dengs, conflicts erupted from Guangzhao’s confiscation of the money from the felled trees. In line with Qing precedent, a runner investigated and mapped the site in question (found below). The following court transcript describes the resulting Deng lineage conflict:

問：據鄧光宇、鄧光烈、鄧光左、鄧光玉、鄧光清仝供，小的們因前人建修宗祠一座，原積有人倫會一局，並祠四圍及上下墳塋，共蓄有柏樹壹百零九根。因去歲築馬路需款，提賣官共樹株。有尹復查來地，抽提六十四根，勒令鄧光彩、鄧光釗承買，價洋八十元，均無異議。迨光彩們砍伐四十九根，突有鄧光弟們出頭把持，就

588 SUCSBRC [Nanbu Collection]: 466.1829.162.
589 SUCSBRC [Nanbu Collection]: 466.1192.
來具控。鈞府派員查勘，覆批註銷。伊等報路局，訊加價洋三十元，又提柴錢二百釧，並令未斫之樹照數砍伐，其餘之樹永作風水。訊後伊等歸家，不但不遵路局判諭，反將其餘樹株竟行上圖號，意欲變賣瓜吞。 590

Inquiry: according to the collective testimony of Deng Guangyu, Deng Guanglie, Deng Guangzuo, Deng Guangyu, and Deng Guangqing — because our ancestors constructed an ancestral shrine, we have a kinship association and around the four sides of the shrine, between our ancestral graves, grew 109 cypresses. Last year, because the Road Bureau needed funds, these “public” trees were to be sold, and a representative from the Road Bureau came to inspect our estate and confiscated sixty-four trees. He ordered Deng Guangcai and Deng Guangzhao to buy the trees at a price of eighty yuan. There was no discord. Then, when Guangcai et al cut down forty-nine trees, suddenly Deng Guangdi et al showed up on the scene and presented a lawsuit. The government then dispatched someone to investigate the matter, and subsequently rejected the lawsuit. Guangzhao et al then reported it to the Road Bureau. After the inquiry, [the Road Bureau] added another thirty yuan to the price, plus the 200 chuan for the firewood, and ordered trees not yet felled to be felled according to the agreed upon number (i.e. sixty-four). The remainder of the trees were to be forever protected as fengshui. After this, Guangzhao et al returned home and not only did not follow the ruling of the Road Bureau, but they also took the remaining trees and prepared to fell them for profit, with the intention of pocketing all the money for themselves.

Figure 52. Yamen Runner’s Illustration of Ancestral Hall, Earth God Temple, and Fengshui Trees of the Deng Lineage (1932) 591

From the above testimony, we cannot conclude that geomantic petitions were always used to oppose the activities of the Road Bureau. It is more accurate to say that properties confiscated by

590 SUCSBRC [Nanbu Collection]: 466.1192.92.

591 SUCSBRC [Nanbu Collection]: 466.1192.118-119.
the Road Bureau often held geomantic significance for locals. Locals naturally responded to these confiscations in different ways depending on the circumstances. Because directly opposing the activities of the Road Bureau was an obviously risky strategy, locals, in their lawsuits, tended to cast blame on the corrupt activities of a non-governmental local person, such as Deng Guangzhao in this case. The yamen runner’s illustration of the scene revealed that, as Guangzhao’s farmland aligned the border of the fengshui trees surrounding the Earth God Temple and the Ancestral Hall, he evidently had tried to privately seize some of the land and resources.592

The Road Bureau in Nanbu oversaw some notable changes in the property regime. By 1930, much traditionally held “common” property officially became a liability in the county in the wake of the state’s drive to finish an unpopular public works project.593 Geomantic claims remained

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592 The ruling for the Deng case above (466.1192.89) was as follows:

The court rules: as for the trees of the Deng Lineage Ancestral Hall, previously with the agreement of the lineage some of them were felled. Deng Guangzhao controlled all the profit, but he did not give the money [from the felled trees] to the lineage. Later, it was found out that he was supposed to sell forty-nine trees, yet Guangzhao got paid eighty yuan to sell them, and it turns out that he felled sixty-four trees. Because of this Deng Guanglun brought a lawsuit against him, and up until now, peace has not been achieved. Now, through interrogation, it is apparent that Guangzhao really did cut down an extra fifteen trees; for the firewood he cut down, although it counts as a lineage action, Guangzhao took all the profit. Even by his own admission [the payments are] still deficient by over 400 chuan — additionally, there is a fine levied by the lineage for violating human morals in the amount of sixty yuan. Guangzhao claimed that he had donated that money to the ancestral hall, but there is no evidence of it. Also, the commonly owned wasteland was reclaimed and taken by Guangzhao. Things like these do not conform to principle. [Deng Guangzhao] should give back the 30 yuan that the Road Bureau added on later, as well as the 200 chuan. The remaining 200 plus chuan as well as the 60 yuan in [Guangzhao’s] possession — should also be confiscated and be appropriated as official funds by the local government. As for the infringement on the common land, the borders should be [measured] in accordance with the previous boundary marked by the stone. A penalty free of forty yuan will be charged [to Guangzhao] as well as the litigation fee — these are a warning to him. As for the remaining 40 plus trees, they are to be forever protected to maintain the area’s forestry. This is the ruling.

593 For space, I have not included several geomantic cases surrounding the road. For examples, see: SUCSBRC [Nanbu Collection]: 466.1246, 466.1260, 466.1261, 466.6552. These are a small fraction of the geomantic cases that exist.
common in the county’s courtroom, which by this time had been functionally extended to the office of the Road Bureau. This is not to say that common lands disappeared completely: tree confiscations appear to have mainly occurred along the route of the planned road or else in communities close to the county town. Nonetheless, local rumors about the state’s sanctioning of tree felling circulated by “bad eggs” likely penetrated widely, even beyond the reach of the state’s apparatus. Graham Peck observed this “deforestation problem” during his stay in Northern Sichuan in the early 1940s.

V. The Luck of a Landlord: Situated Knowledge of Land after the Sichuan Soviet

Between the years 1932 to 1949, parts of Nanbu County were controlled by regional warlords, the Communist Fourth Route Army, and the GMD. This section and the following one will show that, in Nanbu County during this time, struggles over land registration and property claims often saw the situated knowledge that informed the land claims of locals come into prolonged negotiation with the state. The GMD in Nanbu faced a daunting challenge: major changes in the property market from 1905 onwards had not seen a significant transformation in the types of evidence composed and valued by locals in their rural communities. This made collecting statistical data, registering land, and fixing jurisdictions challenging in the county.

The arrival of the communists to the region in 1932 did not help. In the winter of 1932, several thousand Nanbu farmers violently protested the confiscations of Tian Songyao’s Santai-Baoning Road Bureau in Shengzhong Market Town (later known as “the Shengzhong Temple

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594 “Common land” property cases over resources such as trees still proliferated through the late 1930s and 1940s. See for instance: SUCSBRC [Santai Collection]: 9.3.620.12; [Nanjiang Collecticon]: 2.1.27.4.

The next month, Zhang Guotao’s Fourth Route Red Army entered Northern Sichuan, greeted by locals who — in Zhang’s own words — had never heard of the Japanese, Marxism, or the GMD. Locals openly postulated the communists’ arrival in Northern Sichuan was linked to the good *fengshui* of the region. As the history of the Northern Sichuan Soviet deserves a study on its own, I will not dwell on it much here other than to make a few points. During their time in Northern Sichuan, the communists destroyed land deeds, removed border markers, and targeted government buildings for destruction. The effects of these efforts should not be underestimated: during the communist incursions into Nanbu County, the entire yamen records of New Town Embankment, where one of the county’s branch government offices was located, were destroyed. The Red Army redistributed farmland (for the dietary sustenance of local people), woodlands (for necessary living resources), houses (for living), and livestock (for farming). Communist records reveal a nuanced engagement with popular religion and cultural practices, including *fengshui*, which they viewed as flourishing in the highland region. Though Christianity was condemned, local Muslims were given protection and *yinyang* masters and other ritual specialists were invited to participate in Land Reform. Cadres were instructed

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596 In his study of rural unrest, Lucien Bianco has questioned the relevance of categories of class struggle to “peasant” uprisings in rural China in the early twentieth century. Several of Bianco’s key examples of rural revolts were related to *fengshui*, such as the destruction of a village’s *fengshui* through the felling of a prominent tree in Shanxi Province, which spurred a punitive revolt by 1,000 local farmers. Lucien Bianco, *Wretched Rebels: Rural Disturbances on the Eve of the Chinese Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2009), 144.

597 The original Chinese quote is: “…一般人覺得通南巴出了一個‘真命天子’，這與通南巴的風水和人命運大有關係 “…the local people felt that in Tong-nan-ba (Northern Sichuan) there appeared a Truly Mandated ‘Son of Heaven’ (implying an emperor in the figure of Zhang Guotao) and that this had a significant connection with the *fengshui* of Tong-nan-ba as well as the fates of its people.” Chang Kuo-t’ao, *The Rise of the Chinese Communist Party, 1928-1938, Volume Two* (Lawrence: The University of Kansas Press, 1972), 346.

598 忽遭紅匪入境，焚燬署內各項案卷 “Suddenly the Red Bandits entered [Nanbu County] and burned the branch yamen’s documents from each collection.” SUCSBRC [Nanbu Collection]: 466.1208. This branch yamen, following Qing precedent, had been hearing cases in Nanbu through the mid-1930s, when it was destroyed by the communists.

599 During the Soviet, Muslims were recognized as a protected minority group and in March of 1935 were allowed to establish their own Soviet government in Langzhong, which was one of the first in the country. The GMD inherited this distinction locally and later grouped the Coiled Dragon Mountain’s Pavilion of
to be particularly careful concerning graves, ancestral halls, and lands belonging to Earth God Associations 土地會, Guanyin Associations 觀音會, and Ox King Associations 牛王會. The existence of these orders suggests that these rural associations remained locally powerful well after the fall of the Qing Dynasty. Some guidelines explicitly forbade the destruction of graves and ancestral halls, which would hamper the “revolutionary spirit” of the people. 600

Such records reveal the extent to which traditional practices had persisted in Nanbu through the 1930s. Upon the dispersal of the Soviet and facing a situation in the late 1930s in which so little was known about the region, the GMD called for any drafts of local gazetteers created in recent decades to be sent to government offices for perusal by authorities. 601 In 1936, government

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600 Sichuansheng dang’anguan 四川省檔案館, ed., Chuanshaan suqü baokan ziliao xuanbian《川陝蘇區報刊資料選編》[A Selection of Sources from the Newspapers of the Sichuan-Shaanxi Soviet Area] (Chengdu: Sichuansheng shehui kexue chubanshe, 1989), 160.

601 SUCSBRC [Bazhong Collection]: 1.137.34.
surveyors discovered that Northern Sichuan’s Confucian Temples were still offering the bi-annual imperial Spring and Autumn Sacrifices.602

Materials from local GMD courts after the Soviet reveal how local notables, following the collapse of the Soviet and the destruction of many land deeds, went forth to reclaim their confiscated properties. One example of this from 1937 was the Liu 刘 lineage. During the communist occupation of Northern Sichuan, parts of the Liu lineage’s property were confiscated by the “red bandits” (chifei 赤匪). During this time, Nanbu County and Northern Sichuan experienced a refugee crisis, with many families fleeing into neighboring counties to the south.603 The Lius were one such lineage. Potentially indicative of trends during that time, the redistribution of the Liu’s lands by the communists was done by awarding certain buildings and plots to those who had joined the communists. In 1937, the Lius presented a large portrait of their homestead to the local court along with several household division registers, genealogical materials, and notes from the communist occupation documenting the harming of their property’s fengshui.

In the summer of 1937, the Liu lineage gathered a collection of local notables at their homestead. From a copy of their family genealogy (presented to the court that year), which dated from GX33 (1907), we learn that the Lius — beginning with an ancestor named Liu Zhongying

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602 SUCSBRC [Bazhong Collection]: 1.137.70. See the following observation:

春秋兩季由縣府同地方機關、法團、學校大祀。

During the two seasons of Spring and Autumn, the county and prefectural government’s local organizations, the legal council, and the schools perform the Great Sacrifices

The GMD also sent teams into the counties affected to examine whether Confucian Temples and ancient tombs had been unearthed by the communists (they were not). SUCSBRC [Bazhong Collection]: 1.137.68. 查各地孔廟陵寢及發掘古墓實況. If the GMD later intended to implement an anti-superstition campaign in the county, it was not strictly enforced: in 1945, representatives from rural townships applied to the Nanbu government for permission to conduct rainmaking rituals, which was met with an official response ordering the construction of rainmaking altars safely 设壇祈雨安全的訓令. SUCSBRC [Nanbu Collection]: 466.4145.13.

劉中英 — had migrated to Sichuan from Hubei province and had lived on the Nanbu-Cangxi border for five generations. The Lius subsequently accumulated enough wealth to construct a homestead and ancestral hall — located at the rear of the house, where the lineage’s ancestral tablets were kept. In the presence of local notables, Liu Bingzhi 劉炳智 drew up a genealogical chart with the names of his kinsmen and denoted the lands lost during the communist occupation. A transcription of the 1937 manuscript edition of the genealogy, composed from the 1907 edition, is found below.

![Figure 53. Visual Depiction of Liu Genealogy and Properties Confiscated by the Communists (1937)](image-url)

全封匪產出賣於馬姓
*These properties were taken as (“Red”) Bandit Property and then sold to the Ma Lineage*

斑竹塚被封匪產
*The Mottled Bamboo Tomb has been taken as (“Red”) Bandit Property*
With the following genealogical chart and annotation, the motivation behind the Liu’s gathering of the notables and their subsequent trip to the county’s court becomes clear. After the GMD reestablished power in Northern Sichuan, some fields and plots that had been confiscated by the Red Army were then confiscated by the county government. Some of these lands were later sold to the Mas. For reclaiming the first property, “the Mottled Bamboo Tomb” 斑竹塚, initially inherited by Liu Zegui and Liu Zekun — the Lius presented their genealogical materials, ancestral tablets, household division registers, and facsimiles of their tomb inscriptions directly to the government; the government recognized these materials and released their property. The second batch of properties, originally owned by Liu Zejun, Liu Zemu, Liu Zhongwu, Liu Zhongyue, Liu Zhongyi, Liu Zhongli, Liu Zhongren, was more problematic, as it had been sold to the Mas by the county government through a new contractual agreement.604

The property belonging to the children of Liu Bingzhi 刘炳智 was partially occupied by the Mas, who purchased it from the newly established government in 1936. When the Lius returned to Hexi, they discovered a strange person, Ma Shaoliang, living in a room in their homestead. Ma insisted that he had a newly stamped contract for the purchase of the property, which had confiscated the house as “rebel property” in 1935. The Lius, evidently aware that their household division registers from the Qing were not enough, countered this claim with a cosmological discussion of their yangzhai and yinzhai. In the presence of a group of local notables, which included the baozhang 保长, the jubaobaozhang 副保长, the headmaster of the local school 校長, and two jiazhangs 甲长 (both surnamed Liu), the Lius commissioned a painting of their house (shown

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604 In a new contract concerning land acquired by the Mas, a contractual middleman wrote: "Because the original contract was lost when the Red Bandits came to Hexi, now, in accordance with the orders from our superiors and in careful accordance with the rules and regulations, we invited the baojia and neighbors of the lineage as witnesses and created another official contract as evidence." Langzhong Municipal Archive: 343.25.02.
below), with a description of the Mas’ misdeeds. The original image has been preserved, along with this case, in the local archive. The caption to the illustration reads as follows:

Explanation: through the investigation of the gentry of the two bao areas and the baojia it has become clear that, the large stone that Ma Shaoliang has quarried truly comes from within the cemetery of the Liu lineage. In the Liu Ancestral Hall, the rear walls, the shrine for ancestral tablets, the portraits of the ancestors, and the horizontally inscribed boards have all been destroyed by the brothers of Ma Shaoliang and scattered across the floor; this causes one to be aggrieved at the heart — and together we [present this] to clarify these matters.

Additionally, the coffin for a wife of the Liu Household named Lady Yang was placed beyond the small brook that ran by the front of the house. This coffin had been kept in the Ancestral Hall at the rear of the house in preparation for an auspicious day to lay her to rest.606

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605 Langzhong Municipal Archive: 343.25.05.

606 The note next to the coffin reads: 祠內寄存劉楊氏棺木，棄置於此 “The stored coffin for Lady Yang previously placed in the Ancestral Hall has been thrown here.”
Figure 54. Commissioned Portrait of the Liu Lineage’s *Yinzhai* and *Yangzhai* (1937); Rain Well 天井 in the Center, Ancestral Shrine 祠 in the Rear, Ma Shaowu’s 马紹良 room on the right, Graves and *Fengshui* Tree Prominent in Rear of the House.
Of interest is the fact that the communists and other observers had frequently commented on claims of this nature made by elites to preclude Land Reform — here, we see such a claim in action in the legal archive. This 1937 illustration of the Liu homestead shares some of the features with the yangzhai fengshui case concerning the inauspicious kitchen mapped by the Nanbu yamen runner in Chapter Four. Important to recall is the fact that, in Pre-1949 Nanbu, courtyard homes were seldom owned by a single familial unit. Lineages or joint-families could own courtyard homes and “divide” the individual rooms among their descendants. In the case of the Liu Homestead, when Liu Zeqian, the owner of the room on the left of the courtyard house pictured above, returned to Hexi following the return of the GMD, the Lius discovered that Ma Shaoliang...

607 Similar strategies to this were noted by the communists during their tenure in Northern Sichuan:

巴中漁溪鄉唐月芳的孩子到樹林裡打松果, 地主說“碰”了他的祖墳, 動了風水, 罰他們全家去後山修大路, 還罰了十斗穀子, 八塊銀元, 才算了事。


巴中漁溪鄉唐月芳的孩子到樹林裡打松果, 地主說“碰”了他的祖墳, 動了風水, 罰他們全家去後山修大路, 還罰了十斗穀子, 八塊銀元, 才算了事。

利用宗教迷信說：“窮人要講點良心”，“把發財人整狠了喪德”，“土地本是發財人命運八字好, 祖墳葬得好, 祖先積德行善來的”, “窮人窮是命孬”。

利用家族觀念, “這一姓的田地不分給二一姓”。

利用地域觀念, “這一村的田地, 不分給二一村”。

Sichuan University, ed., Chuanshaan geming genjudi lishi wenxian xuanbian, xia [A Selection of Historical Documents from the Sichuan-Shaanxi Revolutionary Base Area, Volume Two] (Chengdu: Sichuan renmin chubanshe, 1981), 515-516.
had acquired a deed to the room on the right of the home from the newly established county government. In their claims against Ma, the Lius contended that by quarrying the stone in their ancestral cemetery, Ma had harmed the well-being of the Liu homestead, in addition to the damage done to the Liu’s ancestral hall and the inappropriate placement of Lady Yang’s coffin. Upon the presentation of the illustration of the homestead alongside other genealogical and sepulchral materials to the court, Ma was ordered to either pay damages to the Lius or vacate the property. One suspects that in the “anti-Red” environment that pervaded Nanbu following the disbanding of the Soviet, the pressure on Ma to leave the room he acquired in the wake of that conflict was immense.

VI. The “Customs” of “Topography”: Situated Knowledge, Mountain Veins, and Fugitive Landscapes

Following the move of the national capital to Chongqing in 1937, the GMD launched a Land Registration Campaign in Sichuan province the following year. The breakdown of the counties to be surveyed closely mirrors what William Skinner identified as “core” and “peripheral” regions of the province. The first counties to be surveyed were in the “core” regions, as these could yield more revenue for the Chongqing government, which was fighting the war with Japan. Nanbu County was surveyed in the fourth period and the work there started on May 1st, 1941.

Similar to the findings of Tong Lam in his research on a growing “culture of fact” through the rise of rural surveys in the first half of the twentieth century, land surveying was a highly

608 Sophisticated studies of this project, which was the largest of its kind in the Republican Period, have now appeared in Chinese. According to Liu Yimin, by 1946, only 467 shimu 市畝 of land had been scientifically recorded in Nanbu. Liu Yimin 劉一民, Guomin zhengfu diji zhengli: yi kangzhanshiqi Sichuan wei zhongxin de yanjiu 《國民政府地籍整理: 以抗戰時期四川為中心的研究》[The Guomindang Government’s Cadastral Campaign: Research Based on Sichuan During the Sino-Japanese War] (Shanghai: Shanghai sanlian shudian, 2011), 379.
laborious process in Nanbu. Violence, brawling, and litigation following a “reading” of land by a surveyor were not unknown, while other land surveyors evidently accepted bribes and banquets in attempts to sway analyses. Conflicting systems of measurement and the high number of circulating currencies in the province made efforts all the more difficult. But to effectively ease unequal tax burdens, all lands — including grave and temple lands — had to be registered.

Preliminary survey teams were sent to begin mapping the county in 1939, though the formal land registration campaign did not begin in Nanbu until 1941. That year, the county government was alerted to several discoveries. New market towns across the county were identified and officially registered — increasing by a third to 140 by 1948. In mapping out township jurisdictions and county boundaries, which was necessary for measuring the lands and tax allotments within them, surveyors attempted to hone as close to imperial precedent as possible.
to avoid unnecessary confrontations with locals. This included being inclusive, when possible, of local “customs” (*fengsu* 風俗) concerning “topography” (*dixing* 地形).\(^{612}\) This essentially meant having surveyors strongly consider the situated knowledge of locals and community preference.

In Northern Sichuan, these jurisdictions were to be drawn along “mountain veins” (*shanmai* 山脈) to preserve “natural boundaries” (*tianranjie* 天然界). Such renderings could include, for instance, 將元潭截入巴中，於涼水井以上，依陰靈山山脈自然為界 “Take Yuantan and put it into [Bazhong] County, above Cold Water Well, and in accordance with the mountain vein of the Dark Spirit Mountain [take it] naturally as the boundary.”\(^{613}\) At Nanbu’s Nianya 碾埡 Market town, surveyors applied similar standards to trace the mountain vein separating Nanbu from Xichong County 西充縣, along which existed a string of shrines and temples.\(^{614}\) One surveying chairman, upon arriving at a site for mapping, presented offerings at local temples “day and night” for the work to be successful 此主席等所以日夜馨香禱祝而蕲其造予實現者也.\(^{615}\) But even with these gestures, the work routinely did not go smoothly, as surveyors frequented upon dozens of “flying lands” (*feidi* 飛地; literally, “enclaves”), where communities expressed affiliations with counties that did not match the ones into which they were drawn.

\(^{612}\)新縣制法令副鄉尚以天然形勢及風土習慣為原則 “The making of new county [boundaries] decree by the Assistant Township Director values natural topography and local customs as principles (for this work).” SUCSBRC [Bazhong Collection]: 1.281.41.

\(^{613}\) SUCSBRC [Bazhong Collection]: 1.283.111.

\(^{614}\) SUCSBRC [Nanbu Collection]: 466.7800.

\(^{615}\) SUCSBRC [Bazhong Collection]: 1.281.41.
By December of 1941, just a few months following commencement of the surveying campaign, eleven of these “flying lands” had been identified across Nanbu County. In two places, fights had broken over Nanbu’s border with Peng’an County. The aforementioned Gaoguan Temple was discovered the following year deep within Langzhong County. Six other areas saw struggles over Nanbu’s border with Langzhong. In two other places, struggles broke out at the border of Yanting and Xichong County.

This process required significant coordination and cooperation between counties. Langzhong County spent several months mapping the temples of Eighth Temple Market Town, which was composed of “flying lands” on the border with Nanbu. This was followed by maps of Guanyin Temple and Pu Family River. At Twin Cypress Pass, which had a population of around 3,000, local representatives of the Zhang lineage petitioned the Nanbu county government to relinquish the territory to Langzhong. They interpreted the town’s “mountain veins” (shanmai) and the “river flows” (heliu) and determined that the territory belonged to Langzhong — though it was not said how they arrived at such a conclusion.

Representatives from Twin Cypress Pass from the Nanbu side, including a school headmaster surnamed Wang, quickly struck back. He claimed that Twin Cypress Pass had

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616 Fourteen market towns were proposed for relocation from Tongjiang County to Nanjiang County by the end of 1941. SUCSBRC [Bazhong Collection]: 1.283.146.

617 SUCSBRC [Nanbu Collection]: 462.681.203.

618 SUCSBRC [Nanbu Collection]: 462.681.205.

619 SUCSBRC [Nanbu Collection]: 462.488.33:

竊本縣第四區所屬雙柏埡，立場迄今二百餘年，場權行權，均屬南部，百數十年，皆無爭執。至清宣統二年，因場市繁榮，行息暢旺，閬人欲染指，遂發生場權爭執。迄至本年止，先後共爭七次，每次均經兩縣政府會勘解決，場權屬於南部，所有解決案件，兩縣政府，均有卷可查。惟自二十年以前之卷，因赤匪陷縣，損失不全。
been a market town belonging to Nanbu for over 200 years. Headmaster Wang was quick to admit that many of the area’s records had been lost when the communists entered the county. Accompanying Wang was a local representative, Zhang Like 張里珂 (not to be confused with the pro-Langzhong Zhangs above), who presented the government with the history and an analysis of the “Earthly Principles” 地理 and the history of Twin Cypress Pass. Zhang claimed that the Nanbu County Gazetteer possessed a record of the market town as being located in Nanbu County from the Qin-Han Period (221 BCE-220 CE) 查雙柏埡一帶地段，考諸縣志，遠自秦漢即為南邑管轄. 620 Notable is the fact that the two men’s history of Twin Cypress Pass was in evident contradiction (200 years of existence versus 2,000 years). Naturally, the county gazetteer contains no record of Twin Cypress Pass, and Nanbu itself did not become a county for centuries after the Qin-Han period; therefore, Zhang’s contention is not historical, though as we have seen, locals had long referenced gazetteers, genealogies, and contracts to make specific claims even when they had never read or could not read their contents. Claims of ancestral residence in the area dating back 1,000 to 2,000 years were commonly expressed to surveyors during this process. 621

Some of the pro-Langzhong residents of Twin Cypress Pass posed an interpretation of their market town that identified the fact that it bore a bottle gourd resemblance (hugua xingshi 瓠

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620 SUCSBRC [Nanbu Collection]: 462.681.100.

621 SUCSBRC [Bazhong Collection]: 1.281.8.
瓜形式) with Langzhong’s walled town to argue that it was only natural for the town to belong to Langzhong. The document does not directly mention the origin of this claim, but it appears that a geomancer provided this interpretation. The Nanbu side had their own interpretation, which determined that the market town was connected to the mountain veins of Nanbu [雙柏埡與]南土山脈仍相連繫 and had been governed by Nanbu for “thousands of years” 間數千餘年. Not dissimilar from the 1920s mapping of the Dragon Vein of the Coiled Dragon Mountain at the end of Chapter One, these “mountain veins” commonly cited by GMD surveyors and locals likely did not only refer to geological formations but rather channels of connectivity that formed links between locals and a specific place. This is evidenced by the fact that locals and surveyors throughout this process provided different interpretations of the significance of these veins for the residents of these areas. Locals put forward such arguments because they wanted to be in an administrative and tax unit in which they personally knew the baozhang or tax head. Lineages traditionally registered lands with the local jia unit with which they felt most comfortable, and sometimes — as we have seen — they did so with multiple jurisdictions. Legal jurisdictions and newly assigned tax liabilities could greatly dictate critical terms for resource access to “common” lands such as mountains and rivers.

Another case that stretched from 1939 to 1949 concerned the troubled lands of Chentianwo 陳天窩, where contested readings over genealogical literature were fought for years. 623

622 SUCSBRC [Nanbu Collection]: 462.681.100.


This jiazheng Ren Zhongshan...he colluded up with Ren Liansan, the baozhang of the neighboring [area] in Cangxi County, and made a scheme to destroy the county border marked by the ancient Qinglin Abbey. Furthermore, they instigated the people of this jia to bring their land along and be subsumed into Cangxi [County], to oppose the officials responsible for the illustration [of lands] from the Nanbu County to enter [their county], and to oppose the regulation of the Nanbu baojia.
Chentianwo was located on Nanbu’s border with Cangxi County, where a marriage alliance had formed over the centuries between the Deng 鄧 lineage and the Ren 任 lineage. One early battle in the decade-long struggle occurred when Deng Guoqiong 鄧國瓊, a baozhang from Nanbu, accused Ren Zhongshan 任忠善, a baozhang from Cangxi County, of intentionally destroying a border temple (jiemiao 界廟), Qinglin Abbey 青林觀, that once existed between the two counties. Locals now scrambled to demarcate where the boundary was to be located. When land surveyors from Nanbu arrived to measure the land of Chentianwo, the Rens physically fought with them. Producing grave inscriptions, genealogies, and fragmentary tax records, the Rens contended the region had historically been part of Cangxi.

Some of the Cangxi Rens contended that at the beginning of the Qing Dynasty, several of their ancestors had changed their surnames to Chen 陳, probably because the area was said to have some of the ancient tombs of the Song Dynasty Chen brothers. In admitting that some Rens had strategically changed their surname to Chen, the Cangxi Rens were making a claim that the lands of Chentianwo belonged to Cangxi as well as revealing that portions of the Song Dynasty Chen 陳 lineage had been truly part of Cangxi County. Even though at the very beginning, the Deng lineage of Nanbu and the Ren lineage of Cangxi formed a marriage alliance, and [as part of the dowry] the Deng lineage offered [to the Ren lineage] a piece of a wet field to left of the Cypress Peak which was abutting the Cangxi County. This piece of land is small but is taxed heavily. Through the years of the Republican Period, following the collection of the grain tax, now who knows where the liability lays? ... 1. Chentianwo’s topography on both sides counts as Cangxi’s Xialin Small Brook — only the adjacent plot on the right-side counts as Nanbu. 2. According to these persons’ testimony, at the end of the Ming and the beginning of the Qing, the Ren lineage changed its surname to Chen, and for years the area was taken as Cangxi without dispute. 3. The plot of land is recorded to be taxed for a little more than eight qian in this county but is recorded to be taxed for a little over four qian in Nanbu county. This piece of land is truly part of a dowry, and the land is meager and the taxes are heavy.

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624 SUCSBRC [Nanbu Collection]: 462.341.113.
lineage of Nanbu had more modest origins then they famously claimed. Land surveyors were dispatched to uncover the location of the destroyed temple and its surrounding trees.

![Figure 55. Land Surveyor’s Illustration of Destroyed “Border Temple” of Chentianwo along the Dividing Mountain Vein (1939)](image)

In another locality, the border between Langzhong, Nanbu, and Cangxi Counties at Fangdou Mountain’s 方斗山 Gold Ridge 黃金嶺 was contested for years. Its Nanbu-affiliated baozhang 保長 was a man named Chen Linpu 陳林蒲, a scion of the great Song Dynasty Chen lineage of the county. The continued presence of the “famous surnames” of Nanbu, such as Chen, in elite positions of rural administration through the 1940s indicates that some imperial-era elites had survived through this time. Chen Linpu proceeded to present the government with

625 SUCSBRC [Nanbu Collection]: 462.341.118.

626 SUCSBRC [Nanbu Collection]: 462.681.147.

627 After 1949, the communists themselves noticed this fact. An extensive collection of Nanbu’s “statements of confession” (tanbaishu 坦白書) and “statements of repentance” (huiguoshu 悔過書) dating from 1950-1951 have been preserved in the local archive. Many temple associations were still functioning at the time of the revolution, typically under the auspices of secret societies. Familiar surnames of elite lineages who admitted decades of service in posts such as rural baozhang are found throughout the collection; one branch of the Lis — perhaps Li Zaitang’s
information from a genealogy they likely knew well. Chen claimed that the Gold Ridge had existed for over a thousand years in Nanbu county (historically unlikely). This area had evaded mention in Magistrate Zhu’s geographic handbook from the 1850s or any local gazetteers, but here, in its last known visual depiction in print, the yangzhai and the yinzhai of the Chen lineage flowingly stretched without hindrance across three counties.

Figure 56. “Houses of the Dead” and “Houses of the Living” of the Chen Lineage on Fangdou Mountain along the Territory of Three Counties (1858)

In the illustration above, it is noted that the Chen lineage branch on Fangdou Mountain paid taxes to three counties 閬蒼南三縣承糧連界, while the unitary Chen vein moved freely
descendants — still dominated rural posts at Pig’s Trough Pass through 1949. SUCSBRC [Nanbu Collection]: 466.1840.

628 Langzhong Municipal Library, Local Rare Books Collection, Shubei chenshi zupu, 2:26-27.
among them. When genealogies and interpretations of land like this were invoked during land registration, they underscored a problem for the surveyors rather than a solution — even as surveyors readily admitted they needed genealogical materials for their work. In the presentation of territorial understandings through the 1940s, situated knowledge still informed the ways in which many rural elites, and presumably non-elites, interpreted the land. The government’s actions were less hegemonic in action than partisan in effect: it had to pick one interpretation, one set of winners, or else rely on rural intermediaries such as baozhang to make such decisions. In this respect, jurisdictional reforms and border demarcation would have hardly seemed impartial to many locals. With every analysis of a land deed, every survey of the untaxed land, or every scrutiny of a border, the state attempted to render the administrative maps of the state independent of the fluid and dynamic interpretations of local lineages, buried ancestors, and enshrined divinities. The process, beginning in Nanbu in 1942, was highly cumbersome, thoroughly mediated, and routinely approximated.

In the last known (1947) statistical analysis of Nanbu by the GMD government, the section “distribution of property rights” (diquan fenpei 地權分配), with a list of specific categories for the amounts and values of lands owned by locals, was left completely blank. One word, “undetermined” (weixiang 未詳), was written across the chart. The data had never been collected.629

VII. Chapter Conclusion: A Nanbu with No Emperor

The struggles over interpretations of land that became frequent in Nanbu County in the 1940s had not always been present. They were formed from many factors, including the state’s attempts to structure highly situated knowledge of the land following decades of market

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629 Nanbu County Republican Archive: Nanbuxian zhengfu jianyao tongji shouce 《南部縣政府簡要統計手冊》[A Handbook of Concise Statistics of the Nanbu County Government], 1947, 3-4.
privatization and landed commercialization. These were accompanied by deforestation with accompanying land devaluation, information loss, and border destruction — the latter two phenomena made more acute by the communists’ brief tenure in the region.

And yet, the Nanbu Archive warns us against overestimating institutional and cultural change in the county prior to 1949: the legacies of the imperial past were strong in Nanbu, as were the symbols, cults, and cultural practices that went with it. Situated knowledge of land survived in the county through an era of extraction and confiscation, precisely because there were few efforts to truly undermine or structure locally embedded knowledge of land until the mid-1940s.

This chapter began in the late Qing, when the gentry of Nanbu expressed outrage at the move of the county’s Salt Bureau to the county’s Confucian Academy. To many, this change saw the academy moved to an inauspicious location and harmed the county’s examination chances. Though Nanbu produced few candidates for office during the Qing, the goal of degree-holding and the need to create the most auspicious conditions for that success thoroughly suffused the county for centuries. A variety of changes in the late Qing — reforms in the salt administration associated with the Self-Strengthening Movement, the building of new churches, and the construction of school buildings — tapped into deep insecurities in the county and provoked swift reactions from local people, who demanded that officials protect their auspicious conditions. By 1911, rumors had pervaded the county that the government had sanctioned the felling of trees around temples, ancestral halls, and graves. Local opportunists indeed took advantage of a chaotic situation and did such actions, but the state, which had ordered for the establishment of new schools, had never condoned the wanton destruction of fengshui and repeatedly condemned such rumors. Moreover, Nanbu magistrates consistently continued to hear and protect cosmological claims to common land through the end of the Qing Dynasty, while the government broadly continued with its rainmaking
performances, *litan* 廟壇 rituals for hungry ghosts, and patronage to some local religious institutions.

Republican magistrates in the county followed suit.⁶³⁰ Cases over the felling of trees and the contestation of common lineage lands piled up and magistrates continued to engage situated knowledge of land and the cosmology that often went with it. Qing cartographic practices for illustrating land continued with little change into the Republic. Construction of the Santai-Baoning Road brought a wave of new lawsuits over common land. The communists arrived in the county precisely as these struggles were being contested in Nanbu’s old yamen court and anger against the road project neared a crescendo (Nanbu’s “Shengzhong Temple Uprising”). By the time the GMD fully established control over the county from provincial warlords and the communists, thousands of land deeds and governmental records in the county had been destroyed and the new government had to work with the pieces of information that were left. More than a simple matter of extracting easy information from locals’ land deeds to fix boundaries and set borders, surveyors encountered rural spaces where many locals presented claims and documentation that required on-site interpretation and contextualization.

The cosmology of place, memory, and ancestry evokes power and the imagined past. In Nanbu County, cosmology expressed the power of a lineage and the situated knowledge of land. The Qing recognized this knowledge and protected this power through the ritual performance of its own cosmology: the symbols, sacrifices, examinations, and local administration — including

⁶³⁰ While there is no doubt that some Buddhist temples and Daoist abbeys had lands confiscated and sold between 1912 and 1932, the county government’s position on this was nuanced. Through 1920 the government was still supporting some “xianghui” 香會 (“incense fairs”) and temple festivals around the county. Nanbu County Republican Archive: 22.961.3586. Another relevant history from the county involves the GMD’s successful inoculation campaign in Northern Sichuan, which from 1939 onward sent doctors to rural temple fairs to inoculate locals on market days. Numerous reports were done on these campaigns. Anonymous, “Chuanbei miaohui fangyi chengxiao baogao” 川北廟會防疫成效報告 [“A Report on the Results of the Temple Fair Epidemic Prevention Campaign in Northern Sichuan”] Chuannongsuo jianbao 《川農所簡報》24.25 (1940): 7-8.
the legal administration — of the state. Officials of the post-imperial era, facing fragile legitimacy, did not run away from that role, even as the power of some lineages declined.631 Through the rapid privatization of the first four decades of the twentieth century, the fengshui of the county’s commons was gradually chipped away, but for the over 700,000 residents of Nanbu who still had parents to bury, children to marry, houses to build, temples to construct, and ancestors to remember, landed interpretations of territorial agency and patrimonial merit did not go away.632 It may well be that those capable of projecting great geomantic authority over land in these decades narrowed to a smaller rural elite; in Northern Sichuan, both communist and GMD party members noticed this worrying trend. In such a context, land claims of variable natures and varying degrees of legal validity abounded inside the county’s court and in the field. For these reasons, among many more not explored here, when Nanbu’s government began to register the land and fix the county’s borders, state fixations became state frustrations as lineage or else religious landscapes became “fugitive landscapes.” The problem in Nanbu was never simply the difference between “red” or “white” contracts or “registered” and “unregistered” land. The problem was the situated dimensions of property and with it, the power of place, the embedded meanings of rural space, the entrenchment of the local elites, the everyday knowledge of locals in a settlement, and the connections to the land that could not be reduced to a simple statistic.

631 Isabel Crook made similar observations from her time in Bishan County in the early 1940s. For instance, “…in many cases the Qingming association ownership of the land existed in name only, while in fact the land was in the hands of better-off and more influential families.” Isabel Brown Crook, Christina Gilmartin, and Yu Xiji, eds., Prosperity’s Predicament: Identity, Reform, and Resistance in Rural Wartime China (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2013), 98.

632 For an example of this continuity in an urban — let alone a rural — setting related to irrigation and the Dragon King from Hubei province, see: Chris Courtney, “The Dragon King and the 1931 Wuhan Flood: Religious Rumors and Environmental Disasters in Republican China,” Twentieth-Century China 40.2 (2015): 83-104.
Dissertation Conclusion

Nanbu is one county located on the old “hard road to Shu” that happens to have a good archive. The story told in this dissertation about how people in an upland county spoke about their connections to the land is one story from the Nanbu collection, but it will not be the only one.

In the 1880 epigraph at the beginning of this study, the Zongli Yamen contended that fengshui had been written into the 1858 Treaty of Tianjin, yet foreign nations had neither understood this point nor the cosmology behind it. As the Qing government indicated in its response, despite the fact that fengshui burdened local officials across the empire with lawsuits, geomantic practices were intimately connected with how the Chinese people understood their family homes and ancestral graves. Fengshui was a critical discourse through which the land was interpreted, property was owned, resources were shared, lineages developed, and life was explained. In Nanbu County, that discourse was often law.

By the final decades of the Qing Dynasty, capital officials were confronted with an unenviable choice: build the railroads, roads, and schools needed to compete with imperialist powers and in doing so, radically challenge people’s sense of property and disrupt their ties to the land — or resist those changes in attempting to preserve the status quo. The Nanbu Archive shows us that the profound implications of this debate can be seen in a poor county on the western periphery of the Great Qing Empire.

In Nanbu County, situated knowledge of the land was not the only relevant body of knowledge for land, law, and local administration, but it was nonetheless an important and highly dynamic body of information. This fluid information cannot be studied without local context.

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633 This “status quo” was not static: the effects of increasing commercialization across the Qing were evident by the late eighteenth century. At the same time, changes advocated by Self-Strengthening reformers such as Li Hongzhang 李鴻章 (1823-1901) were radical precisely because they envisioned the state as an agent of penetrative change well beyond its traditional role of mediating the gradual effects of market-based commercialization.
because it saturated places marked by a wide and fluid web of human connections — connections among kin, ancestors, descendants, neighbors, and indeed all residents of the county and prefecture. Throughout these chapters, I have attempted to show this web in Nanbu County as it shaped processes of place-making, and by extension, the expression of claims over land, resources, and status. I now conclude this study with a brief overview of the historical arguments presented in the three sections of this dissertation while considering some greater implications for Chinese history.

First, this study introduced Nanbu County. Following the devastation brought by the Ming-Qing transition in the seventeenth century, people from across China arrived in Sichuan to make new homes for themselves and their children. Even if these families came to find homes for their families (yangzhai 陽宅), after they arrived they also found homes for their ancestors (yinzhai 陰宅).634 Even though these lineages were new and highly diverse, they created new geographies and lineage landscapes with extraordinary speed. Localizing meant grave creation. During these years,

634 Ancestral narratives invoking Hubei’s Macheng, the rebellion of Zhang Xianzhong, and the creation of grave land were common. Lineages claiming residence in Sichuan from the early Qing frequently referenced the cemetery that was created upon their ancestor’s arrival and the persistence of fengshui since that time. For instance, on GX3.10.13 (1877), Yang Tianfu 杨天甫 used the following terms in a petition to the yamen:

民等…七房人支有關共祖塋，係先祖來川禁樹，永培風水，已歷二百餘年，莫敢敗伐。嗣榮章倖進，科費不濟。民等議賣塋樹作資，榮章甄以塋樹風脈攸關，阻賣永禁無異。

Our lineage…is composed of seven branches and maintains a common cemetery, which since our ancestor came to Sichuan and forbid [felling] the trees, has forever cultivated fengshui — it has already been over 200 years — and no one dared to cut them down. (Yang) Rongzhang, a heir of our lineage, has been given the honor to enter the imperial examinations, but he is unable to afford the testing fee. Our lineage decided to sell some of the trees to support him, but Rongzhang considers the Wind Vein of the ancestral cemetery as greatly important, and blocked the sale to forever protect the trees without exception.

Note that here, the lineage was willing to fell the trees for the chance of having a relative pass the examinations — but the young filial scholar, knowing the importance of fengmai for producing scholarly talent, refused. The lawsuit proceeds to describe how a couple of greedy relations used this opportunity to try to sell the trees. Nanbu County Qing Archive: 7.316.02. In what was likely a uniquely Sichuan spin on this discourse, some transplanted lineages traced the Dragon Veins of their new county-bases back to origin counties in Hubei. For instance, 天龍山發源於湖北之來鳳縣，奇峰挺拔，天矮凌空，其穿雲攫霧之奇，極磅礡鬱積之盛 “the Heavenly Dragon Mountain (of today’s Chongqing’s Youyang County 酉陽縣) arises from Hubei Province’s Laifeng County 來鳳縣, the astonishing peaks are tall and straight, the Heavens seem close as the peaks tower in the sky, and the [mountain’s vein manifests] the splendor of stretching across the clouds and grabbing the mists, and the majestic storing up of boundless abundance.”

Long and Huang, eds., Ba-Shu daojiao beiwen jicheng, 432-433. Liang Yong has discussed how the first generation of Sichuan immigrants often returned to hometowns in Hubei to bury their parents, as the desire to retain links to older ancestral gravesites was substantial. Liang, Yimin, guojia yu difang quanshi, 75.
land was bought and sold in a competitive market, middlemen were summoned, marriage alliances were formed, lawsuits were heard, and geomancers amongst other ritual specialists were hired. Some new understandings were woven into the fabric of Sichuan’s ancient landscapes — including a compact formed between a group of Qadiri Sufis and local gentry to protect the fortunes of Nanbu’s Baoning Prefecture through the guarding of its Dragon Vein. This understanding proved lasting, durable, and recognized by magistrates, prefects, and even a few capital Manchus. For the first two centuries of Qing rule, landed registration was paltry and state control was limited: Nanbu was a frontier county located in a frontier province. Massive immigration over two centuries brought new, disorienting pressures. The region, long known for sorcerers, bandits, rebels, and later, a few communists, erupted into chaos for many reasons explored elsewhere during the White Lotus Rebellion (1796-1806), which took a decade for the Qing to placate.635

Second, there was the historical context of the mid-nineteenth century. Faced with crisis elsewhere in the empire, a string of highly adept Qing magistrates, working in conjunction with the county’s notables, brought Nanbu back from the margins of China’s history. A mysterious genealogy was discovered by one notable lineage and a gazetteer — Nanbu’s only surviving gazetteer from its over 1,500-yearlong existence in Chinese empire — was quickly published. These works exhibited noteworthy similarities. Ancient graves of distant ancestors were recognized and protected by the state without much questioning of their origins or pedigrees. Even as profitable revenue extraction remained a distant goal for the state in such a periphery, basic geographic knowledge was necessary to administer and keep order in the county. As news of the Taiping Rebellion reached Nanbu, one magistrate, Zhu Fengyun 朱鳳橒 commissioned a handbook to illustrate the geography of the county (踏勘風水，清理地界，稽查保甲 “make an

635 Wang, White Lotus Rebels and South China Pirates, 2014.
on the spot survey of the *fengshui*, clear up the land boundaries, check the *baojia*’). When twelve gentlemen were sent down the north, south, east, and west roads of the county, locals provided information likely known to them from childhood. Prominent temples, Azure Dragon Corners, Dragon Vein Bridges, and powerful ancient trees entered the magistrate’s handbook. When the people of the county walked the long roads to reach the yamen, the magistrate would now be able to see where they were coming from.

With this context in mind, this study put forward the following argument. One of the common reasons Nanbu locals travelled to the county yamen was to contest and project their rights of property. The Qing state, through its published law code, had strict standards on how property rights were supposed to be recognized (i.e. “red contracts;” tax receipts). Some people, such as merchants engaged in capital-intensive trade, could likely meet these requirements (they needed the security of the official stamp). But in county-level legal practice as seen through local cases throughout the nineteenth century, a significant portion of the local population evidently struggled to meet those standards while expressing the claims of landed property they wished to make in court. Hence, in Nanbu, the state consistently engaged with contextual legal information and customary practice. Magistrates regularly recognized and enforced the property claims of locals that were made outside the guidelines of official regulation while referencing a wide array of available information in doing so.

Nanbu’s subjects presented property rights that were formulated and valued in their own communities. White contracts replete with highly situated place names and localized land boundaries were submitted to the yamen with expectation that they would be interpreted and upheld. Allegations of contractual forgeries were common. Graves, real and fake, were routinely created. Ancient graves often found new descendants. Genealogies recorded divination schema
and traced Dragon Veins that projected influence over a wide area. Claims rooted in cosmology were commonly presented to the court without much or any documentation at all. The ways to claim land, resources, and status were many. In Nanbu, officials routinely engaged this range of claims in court.

The state’s engagement with this gray area of contextualized legal information worked in Nanbu County, as situated knowledge of the land formed an incalculable yet essential part of the everyday functions of the rural property regime. Ownership of land in Qing Nanbu could entail great anxiety but it did not entail great uncertainty, as the rules of the system, complex as they were, were clear to everyone.636 One customary rule was that ritual specialists, such as yinyang masters or Daoist priests, needed to be present at the construction of a mine, well, grave, bridge, or house — not necessarily for directing building plans (though some likely did) — but for social insurance to prevent potential litigation in a society where law, ritual, and religion operated within a common “cultural nexus.”637

When disputing property in these arenas, locals brought whatever evidence they could muster (red contracts, tax receipts, white contracts, genealogies, inscriptions, ancestral portraits, divination records, medical symptoms, feelings of discomfort, calligraphic gifts, school diplomas) to the magistrate, and often the Dalaoye 大老爺 made due with what was presented. Evidence for jointly-held lineage or temple properties were particularly challenging, as many of Nanbu’s woodlands, mountains, and rivers were maintained as community commons. This meant that they were often not only connected to the fengshui of a lineage, village, or town, but could even be connected to the fengshui of the entire county or prefecture. The Qing state, embodied by the

636 Bokenkamp, Ancestors and Anxiety: Daoism and the Birth of Rebirth in China.

637 Duara, Culture, Power, and The State: Rural North China, 1900-1942.
county magistrate, acknowledged the discursive use of cosmological terminology as applied to communal properties and protected a range of claims presented to the court that arose from these cultural practices.

In the fragile social environment of Northern Sichuan, which had been scarred by rebellion and war, lineages were modest compared with those of Jiangnan — but their health was essential to the social order over which the Qing presided. One suspects that magistrates knew this. And thus, when a troubled spouse walked fifty miles to speak of her husband dying from a cold illness triggered by an infringed grave, magistrates interpreted the veins of the earth. They did so by instructing runners to map the houses, graves, trees, and temples of the common people. They did so by composing genealogies in court for lineages that lacked any means to produce their own. They did so by endorsing lineage regulations that tacitly advocated the composition of white contracts and the hiding of taxable land in an era of increasing state extraction. They did so by consistently pardoning black sheep who illicitly buried their mothers on the private lands of powerful brethren because they had no other choice. They did so by rigorously asking questions at court: when exactly did the mining occur, when exactly did your child fall ill, where exactly is the kitchen located, what exact relationship do you have with the people buried next to that tree?

Even with occasional rhetoric that bemoaned excessive geomantic anxiety or “false accusations,” through consistent engagement on the ground with the situated knowledge present therein, the imperial state legitimized the ancestral myths, the unstamped contracts, the unbelievable claims, the last-chance lawsuits, the flexible borders, the moveable boundaries, and the very correlative system — inherited from the scholars of the Han Dynasty — that gave Nanbu County a small meaningful corner within the great Chinese cosmos.  

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638 Michael J. Puett, To Become a God: Cosmology, Sacrifice, and Self-Divinization in Early China (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2002).
But in the early twentieth century, the very limited structured knowledge the imperial state had over land in Nanbu became evident, as the distribution of resources changed even as discourses of landed patrimony and ancestral merit did not.\textsuperscript{639} In line with what Prasenjit Duara observed in North China, in the early twentieth century, when the state needed revenue, it sporadically tapped into (“confiscated”) commonly held lineage and temple properties, injecting significant uncertainty into the county’s property market which weakened investment potential.\textsuperscript{640} Yet, these actions did not result in a decline of the “cultural nexus of power” in Nanbu (the “nexus” was now controlled by secret societies and their connections in the county government) or of much religious practice in the county. These actions did produce numerous property disputes over common resources, which often resorted to claims of cosmological bonds and ancestral privilege.

During the first three decades of the twentieth century, Nanbu’s yamen continued to process legal cases in similar manner to what it had done in the Qing, but there was a subtle shift prior to 1930. The county’s governing policies became increasingly based on the concept that land was either exclusively owned by families or owned by the state as “public” land; many transactions in the county from this time were done with questionable legality and Nanbu experienced noticeable deforestation.\textsuperscript{641} This contraction hurt the most vulnerable people in Nanbu’s society, who had previously worked “common” lineage-held fields for extra income and accessed much-needed timber and fair loans from their lineage associations — based symbolically around the ancestral gravesite and through the vein of the lineage (zumai 族脈). Tenancy rates did not change

\textsuperscript{639} Marks, “Commercialization without Capitalism: Processes of Environmental Change in South China, 1550-1850.”

\textsuperscript{640} Duara, \textit{Culture, Power, and The State: Rural North China, 1900-1942}.

\textsuperscript{641} Zhang Peiguo 張佩國, in his study of grave mountains and fengshui in Anhui, has observed the similar privatization of mountain lands there during this time. Zhang, \textit{Linquan, fenshan yu miaochan} 林權、墳山與廟產. Though numbers are challenging to provide, the number of fengshui-tree felling cases that exist in Nanbu’s archive from the Republican period is not unsubstantial.
much in the county because the cost of owning a small piece of infertile mountain land remained relatively low, but as temple forests were felled to plant poppies and mountains sold off for unchecked mineral extraction, the distribution of resources shifted to a smaller elite.

These important changes should not mask an equally critical part of Nanbu’s story, which suggests not a linear progression towards a “modern” system of property, but rather a thoroughly ambivalent and highly charged negotiation between the state and local elites over how property could be interpreted and owned. This is manifested in the pronounced similarities between the cartographic and legal practices of Nanbu’s court through the 1940s and its Qing predecessor. With greater flexibility than their superior court counterparts, Republican magistrates in Nanbu pushed for the protection of fengshui wherever they could to resist changes that were significantly disrupting the county’s social order. The same county government looked to vestiges of the imperial state’s practices in ritual, religion, and law to sustain some sense of legitimacy in a context where few governing alternatives were offered until the arrival of the communists in 1932. The GMD, arriving in full strength for the first time in the mountainous hinterland only in the late 1930s, found the imperial Spring and Autumn Sacrifices still being biannually performed throughout the region. With little progress in the way of irrigation plans, GMD officials sanctioned rainmaking rituals in the county through the 1940s. During their decade in the county, the government launched a land registration program to ease tax burdens, increase state revenue, and decrease land disputes.

It was never going to be easy. With the beginning of the campaign in 1941, surveyors were sent out to register all the county’s lands. Plagued by a lack of resources and numerous conflicts of interests, these surveyors found challenges that hitherto have not been discussed much in secondary literature. In analyzing contracts, the surveyors found peculiar borders, unfamiliar
place-names, and highly situated knowledge. Embedded vernacular information of the land, the names of long-deceased ancestors, and cosmological dimensions of property pervaded these documents. The surveyors themselves needed translators (local people), to tell them what they meant, which properties they referred to, and who presently owned them. Naturally, conflicts over interpretation, memory, and place ensued. Efforts to construct new jurisdictions and fix borders were welcomed by some notables who could profit from the new lines and opposed by others who would be harmed by them. Land surveyors, armed with national regulations professing “scientific modernity,” regularly found themselves scanning genealogies to trace rural mountain “veins,” which were never just about plate tectonics; here again prolonged contestations over “Earthly Principles” played out for years in the field and in the courts. Gaoguan Temple 高觀寺, where in 1857 a geomantic battle was fought over an interpretation of the temple’s location and county affiliation that saw its jurisdiction given to Nanbu, was in the 1940s discovered to be deep within Langzhong County. Surveyors in Nanbu had not found a county with blank space ready to be filled in with clean statistics and hard facts, but rather a county of “fugitive landscapes” — where time, resources, penetration, and negotiation were essential, even as they were in short supply — with the central government occupied fighting the Second World War and later the Chinese Civil War.

In traditional textbook overviews of China’s modern history, Nanbu County was not an important place with famous people. For many locals of Nanbu, I suspect “May Fourth” was not a movement to radically transform their culture as much as a date on a solar calendar that was hardly ever used. As this work has been limited in scope, it remains to be seen how representative Nanbu’s case may be. But one must wonder: why in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries did scores of people across China echo markedly similar concerns over the geomantic health of their properties and their communities? Such claims were used against railways,
telegraph lines, roads, churches, foreign concessions, and a litany of other developments, transformations, and abuses in Guangdong, Shanghai, Beijing, and even Nanbu County. As the Yongzheng Emperor’s rescript at the beginning of this study revealed, emperors were concerned with rumor-producing geomantic anxiety, and by 1880, even the Zongli Yamen had to make a statement on behalf of the nation. The Nanbu Archive might show us that the people far up in Northern Sichuan may have been expressing something felt under their feet to their “parent-officials” that was also felt deeply across the nation — in some places earlier than others. As knowledge regimes, the examination system, legal regulations, and economic incentives changed, was there not also a change in the cosmology of the land and peoples’ connections to it?

This dissertation encourages future research to consider historical implications beyond those of Nanbu County’s local history. As Madeleine Zelin has pointed out, what began with the Ming’s Single-Whip Tax Reform was no less than a state retreat from the imperial local.642 As Michael Szonyi and David Faure have suggested, the languages and strategies of the lineage filled in the resultant gap.643 In the twentieth century, the state struck back on terms born out of a reaction to a century of imperialism, drives towards scientific precision, and the needs of socialist industrialization. As much as twentieth century campaigns to reform and collectivize land were related to economic production and poverty alleviation, they were likely also related to state control over landed information and transforming the ways land could be interpreted.

But this transformation may not have been permanent in the absolute. Today, in the old Hu Family Homestead of Nianpan Township — where this study began — the young have moved to the cities seeking new opportunities, leaving the old behind to tend to ancient courtyard homes.

642 Zelin, The Magistrate’s Tael: Rationalizing Fiscal Reform in Eighteenth Century Ch’ing China.

643 Faure, Emperor and Ancestor: State and Lineage in South China; Szonyi, Practicing Kinship: Lineage and Descent in Late Imperial China.
among patches of forest and the Jialing River’s rolling hills. Wooden gates welcome the past New Year with couplets on crimson slips said to have been composed by a granddaughter visiting from the provincial capital. Through the gates, red slogans of revolutions long past remain etched on the walls of inner chambers. No one seems in a rush for new coats of paint. While the urban middle class frets that their residential property claims might last only seventy years under current regulations, an air of something that might be called certitude lingers in Nanbu, where history sometimes manages to feel closer than in Chengdu. Here, seats around a table are selected by the directions of fortune when games of mahjong (majiang 麻將) are played outside deep into summer nights. Some distant television, always on but seldom watched, mingles with the call of cicadas, pierced only by the cries of joy that accompany a winning hand. With the night torches lit, the setting comes into full focus. Shrouding in stone and shade an overpass said to have once carried the Red Army to safety, graves have again outnumbered the living in the Village of Dry Arched Bridge.
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