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Conclusion

Landscapes such as mountains, rivers, springs, and caves; man-made structures such as roads and walled cities – these seemingly innocent material environments and entities, which researchers usually treat as part of the backdrop to larger historical events, have played an important role in my study of Southwest China in the pre-modern period. As one of the last areas officially brought into the territory of the Chinese empire, Southwest China with its complicated geography constituted a huge obstacle for the imperial outsiders. Many faraway areas of the Southwest, and the indigenous peoples who lived there, had been unreachable, yet had existed in the imagination of the central state for a very long time. Instead of examining the imperial institutional and administrative system in the frontier areas and the long-term transformations within the indigenous system from the indigenous perspective, as Herman and Wen have done in their studies\(^1\), I have shown how different central and local governments spatially imagined, gazed at, and understood the Southwest, and how this spatial knowledge and imagination affected the state's strategies and its military, political and economic development in the Southwest in a broad geographical sense. My study is about the way the central state dealt with the ‘other’, the unfamiliar borderlands that could be either real or imagined through hearsay and stories.

The authority of the central state in the frontier areas was not established all at once, but over time through an ongoing unifying process of state-building. In the long term, the indigenous communities of Dongchuan and other areas of northeastern Yunnan were closely connected to each other and were gradually incorporated into the imperial territory at roughly the same pace. During this process, this territory was gradually transformed from outer, foreign land to ‘normal administrative area’ and then to the inner ‘new territories’ of the empire. In the process of adding the Southwest piece by piece to the imperial territory, transport routes exploited by the central state played

\(^1\) Herman, *Amid the Clouds and Mist*; Wen Chunlai, *Cong ‘yiyu’ dao ‘jiujiang’*.
an important role as one of the few ways to connect the Southwest to the rest of the empire. These transport routes should not be treated simply as a physical way to reach the Southwest, but also as an important ‘path’ for the state, in the centre, to observe and consider the Southwest. As the state gained more secure control over the areas along the transport routes in the Southwest, Dongchuan and other parts of northeastern Yunnan remained as the leftover areas that were ‘blank’ in the eyes of the central state, inhabited by indigenous people inside the empire’s southwest border.

The turning point in this process was when the Qing empire removed indigenous chieftains and conquered the area by military force in the first half of the eighteenth century. Later, transport routes inside northeastern Yunnan were exploited and connected to the main routes in the Southwest in order to enable copper transport from Dongchuan to the capital Beijing. Northeastern Yunnan, located on the south side of the Jinsha River, became more familiar and better controlled by the Qing. Meanwhile, thousands of new immigrants poured in, chasing after the benefits of copper production and its related markets. Even so, the north side of the Jinsha River stayed under the control of powerful indigenous groups. In the eighteenth century Dongchuan was gradually transformed from a hinterland town into an important city. It was crucial to the Qing government both economically in terms of the flourishing copper business, and politically because of its strategic value as a stronghold against the unconquered indigenous communities along the north side of the Jinsha River.

Landscape practices and representations played an important role in this enormous transformation of the Southwest during state expansion in the eighteenth century. After the overthrow of indigenous rulers, the Qing government and Han immigrants started to impose their own landscape in the southwest borderlands. The indigenous landscape gradually vanished. In establishing its authority in local society, the Qing not only transformed the actual landscape by creating a new cityscape through various material building projects, but also created a new ideological image of this landscape in the middle of the eighteenth century through representation in paintings, maps, and literature by local officials and scholars in local gazetteers.

One of the most important features of this new ideological landscape was ‘civilization’. Between 1730 and 1760, the idea of civilization had been promoted through new buildings in the way their location was determined, as well as their layout and building materials, and in the orientation of the walled city, government offices, and
various religious and ritual buildings, such as the Confucius Temple, City God Temple, Zhenwu Shrine and Wenchang Temple. This strategy is apparent in the official narrative, which contributed to the image of these buildings in a bid to dominate the understanding of the local landscape. It is clearly stated by local officials and scholars that they believed that these buildings would not just benefit local elites, but would also help encourage education and promote civilization to the local population, bringing long-term peace and prosperity to the city. In the case of the ten best views of Dongchuan, especially the hot spring and Creeper Sea, local officials and scholars emphasized that these had been transformed into ‘civilized’ sites and ‘fertile’ farmlands from their original ‘barbarian’ status. By adapting existing literary conventions, local officials presented the landscape of Dongchuan in a familiar and attractive manner that helped local people grow accustomed to the more ‘civilized’ parts of the Qing state.

The newly ‘civilized’ landscape was endowed with a moral authority, which in turn helped incorporate indigenous areas into the territory of the central empire. Landscape played an important role in reshaping the empire’s frontier through perceptions of the picturesque and expressions of symbolic meaning. The ideals of landscape and local community were closely tied together in an aesthetic of visual harmony that was presented in geographical terms. The fashion of aesthetics, and moral considerations about landscape, helped establish the iconic presence of the state and offered an imaginative means of state-building in the process of being imagined or constructed. This part of my argument is built on studies of symbolic landscapes. Researchers such as Cosgrove have been especially interested in Europe’s colonial empires and colonization, revealing the particular way elites have viewed landscape and imposed their views. Power was projected onto the landscape as a means of colonizing and controlling new territories and peoples. Much like the concept of colonization used in pre-modern China studies, as emphasized by Herman in his research, ‘civilizing missions’ and the idea of sinicization promoted by the Ming state were only superficial and formalistic in the Southwest. The state’s real goal was to justify the brutal colonization of the Southwest. Civilizing or Confucian ideals could be promoted in various ways such as through language, rituals, and social structures in the frontier area.

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2 Denis E. Cosgrove, Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape; The Iconography of Landscape ed. by Cosgrove and Daniels.
3 Herman, Amid the Clouds and Mist.
and my case study of Dongchuan and other parts of northeastern Yunnan shows that city-planning and landscape practices were also important ways for local officials to promote civilization.

However, the concept of the ‘civilizing mission’ was not directly imposed by the central court, but influenced by the understanding of local agents of the situations they encountered. Building on studies of South China, such as those of Faure, Siu, and Liu4, my research emphasizes the local role in the process of state-building in the Southwest, especially in the case of landscape. This new landscape was not imposed top-down by the central court or by the emperor himself, such as Forêt emphasizes for the imperial landscape in Chengde, following general symbolic patterns or cosmological elements, but was created by those who were actually living in local society.

Therefore my study is not limited to the symbolic meaning of the landscape from the perspective of the central state, but emphasizes personal decisions of individuals in local society. In the case of Dongchuan, local officials and scholars, such as Cui Naiyong and Fang Gui, who believed that they were representing the state, were key figures in the process of state-building through landscape. They were the ones who initially did the material/physical city-planning based on their personal aesthetic preferences and experiences, and, more importantly, in a way they believed represented the state.

For local agents, the ‘civilized’ landscape became important evidence of the local government’s achievements. The first group of officials appointed by the Qing government, as well as other scholars in Dongchuan, had a sense of vocation to educate and civilize the local people, especially in areas such as Dongchuan that used to be known as ‘barbarian nests’. These achievements did not necessarily stem directly from the central government’s orders, but rather local agents used their own tools to plant the state in local society. In the eyes of local officials and scholars, Dongchuan by the middle of the eighteenth century had developed into a ‘metropolis’ that was just like big cities in China’s central plain. In other words, their main purpose was to follow the patterns of the ‘old territories’, which were more developed and ‘civilized’ and had been under the control of the central state for a long time. It was not necessary to directly imitate a particular civilized city in the developed area; rather, local officials and scholars followed their personal preferences and imagination in determining what they believed was the

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proper way to build a landscape in the borderlands. By building a landscape using familiar rhetoric based on memories of their own education, they created a sense of familiarity and belonging. They were trying to show that they had created a bright, peaceful, beautiful and, above all, civilized landscape, and they were proud that they had successfully removed the gloom from the former ‘barbarian’ territory.

In addition, although New Qing history studies emphasize the Manchu characteristics of the Qing; it has to be said that there were not so many differences in the rhetoric of civilization between the Qing and Ming empires in the case of northeastern Yunnan. The situation in the Southwest is different from central Asian areas such as Tibet and Mongolia as described in New Qing history studies. In the Southwest, the Manchu-centred model was not very clearly embodied in local society and the rhetoric of civilization showed continuity from the Ming to the Qing. Both dynasties treated the regions in China’s central plain as the standard model that should be followed. For the Qing’s local agents on the southwest frontier, the areas that were already ‘civilized’ in the Ming dynasty became their example. Descriptions of the local landscape were consciously written to represent the transformation from wild ‘barbarian’ frontier into a ‘civilized’ Han Chinese area. What’s more, in the eyes of local officials, this ‘civilizing mission’ was not only aimed at educating indigenous people, but was also directed at the new Han immigrants who came from Jiangxi, Huguang, Sichuan, and other provinces. Local officials were eager to gain control over this floating population that moved outside of the government’s household system and easily colluded with indigenous peoples in the mountains.

Beyond that, my research shows that the landscape is not quietly waiting to be transformed or manipulated by people. By overemphasizing the symbolic importance of landscape, one runs the risk of ignoring the cultural processes of transformation. Instead of merely deconstructing the official discourse on local landscape, my research has shown that landscape is staying in people’s everyday life while people go on living inside the landscape at the same time. Apart from examining the personal and moral interests and aesthetic appraisal by local agents, I advocate viewing local landscape practices and

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5 Crossley, A Translucent Mirror; Crossley, The Manchu; Rawski, ‘Re-envisioning the Qing’; Elliott, The Manchu Way; Rhoads, Manchus and Han.
representations rather as a continuous process of mutual influence between human agency and landscape, as Ingold and Hirsch have argued.6

In a political and military sense, daily life in Dongchuan reflected and illustrated the larger issues along the empire’s borders. The areas to the northwest of Dongchuan, such as the indigenous villages in the Liang Mountains on the north side of the Jinsha River, were an internal frontier for the Qing. The fearsome rebellious ‘barbarians’ who lived there were considered by Qing officials to be a potential threat. Not only did indigenous groups sporadically harass the new Han immigrant communities, they also came to challenge the authority of the local government. Because of this, the central state viewed Dongchuan as a key defensive position for the protection of areas to the south, such as Kunming, the capital of Yunnan province, and the main transport routes entering into Yunnan.

The copper industry in Dongchuan and copper transports to Beijing, which were essential to the national and international economy in the eighteenth century, was one of the major concerns of local society. These copper transports left Dongchuan from the north, passed through northeastern Yunnan to the Yangzi River, and then went on to the capital Beijing. For Dongchuan itself, the copper mines in Tangdan, Lulu and Daxue, all located in the western part of the prefecture, were of utmost importance to local residents. A large number of local residents, immigrants, travelling merchants, and even local scholars were all deeply involved in the copper business. The connection between the walled city and the copper mines to the west was crucial to local economic and social life, in the sense of copper transport as well as all the related markets for basic life necessities and leisure pursuits.

All of these issues contributed to landscape practice and representation. Local people naturally paid more attention to the mountains, rivers, and roads of nearby landscapes that were critical in terms of politics, military strategy and the economy, both on a local and a national scale. The north and northwest, and the south side of Dongchuan especially drew the attention of local observers; these were the areas that affected the image of the city and the landscape, as can be seen in the layout of the walled city, the location of various landmarks, and the selection of beautiful scenic spots, as well as other geographical descriptions of Dongchuan.

6 Ingold, The Perception of the Environment; The Anthropology of Landscape, ed. by Hirsch and O’Hannon.
Besides, the new landscapes of the Qing empire were necessarily connected to the memories of indigenous headquarters and communities. For instance, during the seventeenth century the villages called Water Capital and Earth Capital, located respectively on the north and west sides of the walled city, were the most important indigenous communities militarily and politically. Other indigenous villages, such as Wani Village and Fish Cave Village, were important scenes of battle in the wars between indigenous communities and the Qing conquerors in the first half of the eighteenth century. In this way, material buildings and physical environments also interacted with people's remembered or imaginary experiences. These places naturally received more attention because they were deeply connected with the memories of the historical relationship between indigenous communities and the Qing state.

Landscape therefore emerged as a stage of a cultural process in the ongoing movement of everyday life. After the indigenous chieftain system collapsed, the new landscape was gradually formed by local officials' design and through interaction with indigenous people in local political, economic and ritual life. Indeed, the Qing seems to have successfully transformed this 'barbarian' area into its own territory by creating a new landscape. The new image of the landscape was emphasized by the local agents of the empire. However, the indigenous people and other local groups also expressed themselves and left their mark on the landscape through their oral history. In their representations, they positioned themselves within the landscape and kept their identity in the history of their own indigenous communities. Therefore, my research reveals the landscape as having multiple interpretations that different people envisioned, shaped, reshaped, and negotiated.

In the case of northeastern Yunnan, indigenous religious spaces and landscapes, such as Zhenwu Shrine and the dragon pools on the top of Black Dragon Mountain, were transformed into new ritual spaces for the Qing state. Zhenwu's image dominates the understanding of the landscape, space and the temple itself on Black Dragon Mountain, while the original dragon cults of the indigenous communities in the same space were relatively neglected in the official narrative of the local gazetteers. But all the while, this same space in daily life was used simultaneously by different local worshipping groups for their own purposes, and multiple meanings were created by different groups both from the perspective of Qing policy as well as from the perspective of indigenous and other local groups. Wenchang temples were established as official worship buildings by
local officials, designed to be landmarks in the vicinity of the walled city, and yet, in indigenous oral history, these buildings and the surrounding landscapes are retold as a completely different narrative from an indigenous perspective. Mang Da Shrine, an ancestral hall celebrating the heritage and lineage of ten local families, also contained two different versions of indigenous history, both from the official and the indigenous perspective.

In his research on the towns and villages along the southern Yunnan border, Giersch notes the importance of imperial building projects and the buildings commissioned by Han immigrants in the changing urban landscape. He uses the concept of shared space in the frontier towns to describe the urbanization there. It turns out that in spite of the new buildings, indigenous structures still remained, such as Tai temples and pagodas. In this sense, Giersch portrays a crowded coexistence, a ‘motley throng’ along the frontier. However, the material buildings and landscape of the walled city and its vicinity should be given a deeper significance than Giersch does. Although Giersch does remark on the mosaic of Chinese, Tai, and highlander villages and landscapes, this mosaic should not be read as ‘one message per building’ or ‘one message per landscape’. In fact, one landscape will contain a multitude of messages depending on the various groups that express their own concerns in everyday practices there. In the case of Dongchuan, I have shown that for the same space, building or landscape, no matter who built or inhabited it initially, its meaning could be totally different according to the practices and representations of different groups. The coexistence of groups along the frontier, therefore, is more complex and subtle than in Giersch’s descriptions.

Landscape should not be dismissed as simply an innocent backdrop, as other researchers have done, or only recorded objectively by external observers. Instead, as Barbara Bender notes, it contains multiple layers and should be read as an expression of complex cultural processes. Landscape, then, is transformed through the participation of the people in it, and does not remain untouched and unchanged outside of its physical existence. My study views landscape as part of the relationship between people and landscape, instead of separating the two. The landscape of Dongchuan is a fine example of how community and landscape influence each other, how they overlap and intersect with each other, and how they are formed historically. The study of landscape brings us

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7 Patterson C. Giersch, pp. 127-158.
8 Landscape: Politics and Perspectives, ed. by Barbara Bender.
meaningful insights and is a useful perspective for observing the land and the people that lived there in any given period. Furthermore, my purpose has been not only to apply these diverse interpretations to one and the same space or landscape, but also to follow the process of how diverse interpretations of space and landscape ended up as a single standard and dominant official version, as well as highlight the tension between different discourses.

Although I use a landscape studies approach as an analytical tool in my research, I do not mean to isolate it from other approaches to studying local history of pre-modern China. Building on frontier studies and the work of historians on local societies in pre-modern China, I consider the interaction between different social classes and ethnic groups – between indigenous rulers and the central state, between frontier 'barbarian' society and the 'civilized' society of China's central plain, between Han and non-Han or between 'fake Han' and 'fake barbarians' (intermarriage), between immigrants and natives, between wealthy travelling merchants living in mansions and poor immigrants in the mountains. All of these cultural encounters and contrasts were factors in the political, economic, and cultural transformation of eighteenth-century Southwest China. Landscape studies cannot be undertaken seriously without considering the political, economic and cultural presence of local society. Understanding the meanings of landscapes in the past demands a full examination of local history. Most importantly, to deal with landscape in history means to ask questions about how bridges were formed between the people and the landscape, and how they shifted in different periods, in order to understand this relationship in the long term. It is very important for landscape studies to consciously keep an eye on the historical dimension. Material structures and how they were shaped by subjective attitudes is the analytical foundation of landscape studies, but for a deeper understanding of landscape, one needs to rely on the historical context in a specific time and place. Historical studies of landscape explore the interaction between economic, political and social events, landscapes, and human actions and perceptions. In this sense, landscape carries the traces of history – how people have remembered and tell their stories; and how in their past, present and future they understand and interpret the world through their material surroundings.