Introduction

Over the past half-century the lineage has rightly come to occupy a central place in standard accounts of the social history of late imperial China. Indeed, during the Ming and Qing dynasties it received more attention and praise than any other social institution bar the family. Tens of thousands of genealogies now in our libraries recount these lineages' common progress on the path to expansion, ascendance, and stability with a remarkable degree of regularity. In their master narrative the lineage is founded by a great ancestor, expanded by later generations in the face of major adversities, and successful in the establishment of a social equilibrium for the increasing ranks of its membership. These descendants, acknowledging their descent from this common ancestor, acted as a corporate group in collective acts of ancestral worship and often had property and income in common. By uniting all male kinsmen into a single corporate body the lineage was thought capable of providing ballast to an otherwise unstable world.

Judged "ubiquitous," the lineage as an institution was flexible enough to allow for considerable regional variation – it tended to be more important in south China than in north China – and to tolerate a wide variety of constitutional arrangements. Whereas some lineages might possess merely a sense of social solidarity expressed through a genealogy and collective performances of ancestral worship, others might also occupy several villages and own sizeable landholdings as a single large kinship group with numerous branches. In short, the lineage's presence in village life during relatively recent centuries was "constant," even as its importance and complexity varied greatly from region to region and even within regions.[1] In some parts of the country its provision of benefits like education, funerals, and memorial services

[1] Arthur P. Wolf, "The Origins and Explanation of Variations in the Chinese Kinship System," in Li Kuang-chou, et al., *Anthropological Studies of the Taiwan Area: Accomplishments and Prospects* (Taipei: Department of Anthropology, National Taiwan University, 1989), 241–60.

made some Chinese consider the lineage natural, and as essential for the social order as the Chinese bureaucracy itself.

Over the past few decades, as historians have responded to the challenge from anthropologists like Maurice Freedman and James Watson to write the history of the Chinese lineage,[2] the naturalness and inevitability of the lineage's pre-eminence have come into question. Initially, some, like Patricia Ebrey, as they studied the neo-Confucian intellectual roots of the discourse of lineage, unraveled some of the complexities and contradictions in the concepts and terms of kinship organization. More recently, social historians have examined the formation of the lineage and its social roles, and not surprisingly they have found it far less regulated and uniform than previously thought. Indeed, while David Faure has shown the role of the lineage in negotiating the state's penetration of local society in the Pearl River delta, he has also stressed the role of other village institutions in the development of the lineage. Buddhist temples, village worship associations (*she* 社), and other religious associations have entered scholars' discussion of lineage history, as their field of research interest has broadened from the lineage to the village, from kinship to settlement, and from just one institution to several competing within the same social space. Hence Kenneth Dean and Zheng Zhenman have, in a series of important publications, sought to place the lineage within a wider institutional context, one that for recent centuries stresses the diminishing power of the lineage relative to popular religious cults in the Putian area of Fujian.[3] Also, Michael Szonyi has focused his study of lineages in another area of coastal Fujian, that of Fuzhou, to highlight the impact of historical contingencies on the character and functions of lineages there. He shows how the concept and practices of lineage formation and organization "emerged out of a vast number of individual and group strategies," which "were shaped by widely shared ideas about kinship as well as immediate local contexts." Just as lineages came into formation at different times in different ways, so they acquired different functions in response to the wishes and needs of

[2] Maurice Freedman, *Lineage Organization in Southeastern China* (London: Athlone Press, 1958); Freedman, *Chinese Lineage and Society: Fukien and Kwangtung* (London: Athlone, 1966); and James L. Watson, "Chinese Kinship Reconsidered: Anthropological Perspectives on Historical Research," *China Quarterly* **92** (Dec. 1982), 589–622.

[3] Kenneth Dean and Zheng Zhenman, *Ritual Alliances of the Putian Plain, v. 1, Historical Introduction to the Return of the Gods* (Leiden: Brill, 2010).

those who formed and ran them. "The spread of the lineage was not simply the inevitable permeation of a fixed repertoire of lineage activities that had first appeared in the Song throughout local society but also a long-term negotiation and contestation over meaning" in local society. The lineage's history thus was tied up with that of other institutions in its locale in numerous ways not recognized in normative Confucian texts.[4]

In pursuing new questions and exploring new approaches to the history of the Chinese lineage, these authors have often taken advantage of rare primary sources, usually stone inscriptions and private family records, that they gathered in the course of their fieldwork. In place of the genealogies' standard narrative of descent-lineage adumbration and advance, these newly collected sources have tended to privilege the local and rural, so that previously understudied social groups and practices of village daily life have come to the fore. Irrigation networks, festival organizations, land tenure arrangements, and popular religious organizations have all been analyzed in detail, and both the richness and variety of Chinese rural life have become self-evident. In fact, as some twenty significant collections of primary documents, most of them concerned with rural life, have been discovered in provincial China since the 1950s, it is clear that the history of the Chinese lineage called for by Freedman and Watson can now be written with a richness of detail and breadth of perspective previously unimaginable.[5] Over the next generation these new sources on local history will enable social historians to write more inclusive and probing accounts of how China, indeed village China and its lineages, underwent dramatic social and economic change during the past millennium.

Foremost among these new local records – foremost in their number, coverage, detail, time span, and import – are the documents, manuscripts, and rare imprints known as "the Huizhou sources" (*Huizhou wenshu* 徽州文書) in honor of their place of origin.[6] Located in the mountains of southern Anhui province, the prefecture of Huizhou 徽州 was long cut off from the Yangzi Valley lowlands by poor transport facilities and thus appears in the historical record with regularity only

[4] Michael Szonyi, *Practicing Kinship: Lineage and Descent in Late Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), esp. 204, 206.
[5] Yang Guozhen, *Ming Qing tudi qiyue wenshu yanjiu* (Beijing: Renmin, 1988).
[6] This broadly inclusive term has won wider usage than the more narrow bibliographical term *Huizhou wenxian* 徽州文献, which usually refers only to unprinted sources.

from the latter half of the Tang dynasty. From that time to the present, however, it produced a historical record, in print as well as in manuscript, that few, if any, prefectures in China can match. In one very rough estimate, its imprint production figure accounted for as much as three-quarters of all of Anhui province's extant imprint titles and, more astonishingly, more than a tenth of the empire's.[7] Nonetheless, in recent years it is Huizhou's newly discovered "primary sources" that have rightly attracted most attention.

These Huizhou sources, including both private and government records, span from the early thirteenth century to the early 1950s,[8] and presently appear to number more than 500,000 items.[9] The government archives are rich and varied, including census registers, land surveys, tax records, legal judgments, and numerous government notices. But it is the private records of Huizhou's families and lineages that have most excited scholars. These records range from land sale and mortgage contracts, family and lineage account books, relief records, wills, and family division records to tenancy and servitude contracts, law case files, religious associations' and ancestral halls' registers, village and lineage pacts, gravesite management agreements, merchant accounts and record books, and village gazetteers. Huizhou

[7] Xu Xuelin, *Huizhou keshu* (Hefei: Anhui renmin, 2005), 30. This estimate can easily seem exaggerated, as it tends to include the publications of all Huizhou-born authors, even if their books were printed elsewhere. Yet this over-inclusiveness is roughly balanced out by the author's acknowledged omission from his estimate of the more than a thousand Ming and Qing editions of Huizhou genealogies. Overall, the author's claim that Huizhou authors and publishers made a major, disproportionate contribution to the surviving printed record from these dynasties strikes me as undeniable.

[8] The earliest surviving Huizhou document is said to be a 1215 contract for a mountain land sale in Qimen county, but the oldest extant original Huizhou document is another mountain and field land sale contract, dated 1242 (Zhou Shaoquan, "Huizhou wenshu yu Huixue," *Lishi yanjiu* 2000.1, 55). But Wang Zhenzhong, *Qianshan xiyang: Wang Zhenzhong lun Ming Qing shehui yu wenhua* (Guilin: Guangxi shifan daxue, 2009), 35–36, offers a different view: the oldest extant original Huizhou document is a 1215 mountain land sale contract from Yi county, while the oldest extant document, including later copies of earlier texts, would seem to be an unprinted copy of a 1201 family sacrifice record.

[9] Zhai Tunjian, "Huizhou wenshu de youlai, faxian, shoucang, yu zhengli," *Shanghai shifan daxue xuebao (zhexue shehui kexue yuan)* **35**.1 (Jan. 2006), 110–14, esp. 113. Oddly, this article's breakdown by institutional holder of the 500,000 items ends up with an actual total closer to the previously announced total figure of 300,000-plus items. Future bibliographical research seems destined to shower us with more surprises.

was long known for the antiquity and power of its lineages, and yet the treasure troves of its family and lineage archives reveal the great variety of Chinese social life both inside and outside the lineage to a level of detail previously associated only with anthropological reports. In short, this abundance of documentation allows us to study the extended history of lineages in Huizhou in terms of both their own internal development and their relation to other village institutions (see the Appendix to this Introduction, below, for a full account of the Huizhou sources and their history).

This volume, the first of two concerned with the role of village institutions in the social and economic life of Huizhou from the tenth century to the early eighteenth, deals with three interlinked issues that arise from a recognition of the central place of the lineage in late imperial China's social history: how did the role and place of village institutions change from the Song through the Ming? How did the lineage institution gain its predominance among these village institutions? And how were lineages' practices of governance and property management altered by their increased opportunities for commercial profit in the Ming economy? In starting its discussion of large Chinese kinship groups in the tenth century and in considering the changing role of the lineage in competition with its institutional rivals in Huizhou's villages, this volume seeks to map the lineage's rocky road to a position of predominance in Huizhou's villages by the late Ming.

For such a long-term analysis it is important that we reimagine the relationships between certain key Chinese social and economic institutions. In contrast to their European counterparts, the history of Chinese institutions can seem uneventful and unvaried, enlivened at best by "revivals" of earlier roles and practices and at worst hidden from the historian's view by the scarcity of surviving sources. Economic institutions in particular have suffered from modern scholars' neglect. An older generation of China historians, having looked in vain for information on commercial institutions such as the banks, guilds, companies, stock markets, and commercial partnerships that crowd the history of early modern Europe, often concluded that these institutions and their relevant sources did not exist in abundance or at least lacked the vitality needed in a modernizing economy. More recent historians have rightly observed the brisk commercial activity in many parts of late imperial China, the centrality and near universality of the marketplace in local economies, and the sheer scale of commercial

transport and exchange. Nonetheless, the institutional workings of this Song and Ming trade have escaped detailed study, largely because of the scarcity of relevant sources. And so we have versions of Song and Ming economic history that specialize in the topics of circulation and consumption but reveal strikingly little of the process of production, the levels of production, and especially the institutions responsible for all this economic activity. It is as if in describing and explaining the functioning of a human body we paid attention only to its legs and forgot to discuss in detail its other limbs, its overall framework and structure, and especially its mind.

The reason for this odd state of scholarly affairs, I suggest, is that all too often we have been looking in the wrong place. More attention has been given to the ostensible rather than to the actual operation of certain Chinese institutions – kinship groups, lineages, temples, ancestral halls, and even village worship associations – that are not normally linked to economic life in our understanding of Chinese history. The Huizhou sources, by making us realize that the form and function of these institutions did not necessarily match and certainly did not coincide with our modern Western preconceptions of what certain institutions do, help us escape this illusion and its dilemma. They provide ample evidence that these villagers and their institutions took on economic roles and commercial functions that modern scholarship has all too often presumed they did not have – to cite just two examples that we shall examine in great detail in this and the second volume: the ability of many ordinary Huizhou villagers to engage in "future-options" trading in the timber industry and the critical role of ancestral-hall construction and ritual in the accumulation and distribution of investment capital in the Huizhou countryside during the mid and late Ming. By highlighting the diversity of functions of these institutions and the strategies, choices, and actions undertaken by their members, these two volumes will indicate the central role of these institutions, especially lineage institutions, in the economic development of Huizhou and in the involvement of virtually all social strata in their commercial and eventually financial activities.

Chapter 1 puts these insights on the malleability of Huizhou's early village institutions into a broader context by explaining how the lineage in Song and Yuan dynasty Huizhou was neither a relatively important type of village institution nor necessarily a solely male descent group. Admittedly, Song dynasty neo-Confucian texts

propound a model of the lineage as comprising all the male descendants of a male founder. But this model was not universally adopted with rigor. Not only did some Huizhou lineages allow a more central role to women as objects and indeed performers of ancestor worship rituals, but also many lineages served for centuries primarily as village tutelary cults, centered on a putative Prime Ancestor or First Settler who was worshipped for establishing their village and protecting it and its residents from incursion, illness, and poor harvests. This territorial affiliation would be even more evident in popular village alliances that enlisted many different surname groups into the membership and management of religious associations dedicated to the collective worship of deities conventionally considered by powerful lineages as their Prime Ancestor or First Settler. In other words, in Song and Yuan Huizhou a lineage's collective ritual, worship, and identification were often concerned as much with territory as with kinship, with rights of settlement as with claims of descent. Furthermore, the lineage, however understood in Song and Yuan Huizhou, did not then have the power and influence it held in more recent centuries. Kinship ties and especially ancestral worship certainly mattered to individuals and their families in villages, but sizeable kinship groups like the trust-based lineage were few and far between in what was still for most of the Song a largely immigrant society. Instead, village worship associations, Buddhist establishments, and popular religious shrines were far more common and usually held ritual and economic duties only later acquired by most lineages, such as maintenance of ancestral graves, ancestral worship, and moneylending. Hence Buddhist temples, village worship associations, and popular shrines, all rivals among themselves, still had greater power and influence than lineages even in some secular and family matters.

Only in the matter of property holding can it be claimed that large kinship groups held sway over most of their village rivals during the Song and Yuan. Yet, as explained in Chapter 2, even this lineage strongpoint proved illusory. Not only did very few Huizhou kinship groups, then, set up large communal families or lineage landed trusts, but also those few that were set up lasted for just two or three generations. Mountainous Huizhou's perennial shortage of land put enormous pressure on the willingness of lineage members to reserve landed trusts as permanently inalienable property, and the income from such lineage trusts' land endowment usually provided the

members with little more than the supplies for ancestral sacrifices. Additional trust support for the basics of subsistence, as envisaged in earlier Song models for other parts of China, failed to find supporters in Huizhou. Paddy field trusts were not the way for lineages to secure their power in so densely populated and impoverished a prefecture as Song and Yuan Huizhou.

These arrangements for village institutions were seriously disrupted by the military troubles that ripped Huizhou society apart in the 1350s and 1360s. So many of its Song and Yuan families, including elite families, were either killed or forced to flee, that extensive stretches of land were abandoned and opened for occupation by other families. Often boasting military training or experience, this new type of local elite had limited contact with the examination system. As explained in Chapter 3, these men focused their energy on building up their family's and kinship group's resources and thereby a new type of village order. We see them push for the establishment of lineage institutions, such as genealogies and ancestral halls, and in some cases the establishment of landed trusts. More pressing, however, were their efforts to improve their lineage's position in the village against other village institutions, principally the village worship society and Buddhist temples. Through a wide variety of tactics, including forced eviction, individual lineages often succeeded in dominating and controlling their village's worship association. When possible, they proceeded to transform their once multi-surname village into single-lineage settlements where access to political power and, albeit less so, actual settlement became much more exclusive and restricted to members of a single lineage. In addition, the Ming government launched a series of empire-wide campaigns against Buddhist establishments, shutting many of them down, reducing the number of their clergy, and often confiscating much of their land. Within Huizhou the pressure was seen directed mainly at the Buddhist chapels set up by families to run their ancestral sacrifices in the Song and Yuan. But now closed and confiscated by officials for other purposes, these Buddhist buildings in Huizhou were increasingly replaced by lineage ancestral halls for the observance of ancestral rites and other memorial services.

Yet, as Chapter 3 explains in detail, the victory of the lineage over these rivals was never complete. Lineages commonly accepted the established presence of other smaller surname groups within their villages, and even within their village worship associations, as a

minority group. They also found Buddhist chapels and temples remarkably resistant to lineage pressures to return land grants, ancestral graves, and buildings. Drawing on a wide range of support – including other lineages and government workers – Buddhist monks resorted to force, protracted legal delays, and the forging of alliances with other groups to prolong their control over their property, despite central government restrictions and local lineage attacks. While larger Huizhou lineages were, by the late sixteenth century, often successful at seizing this property and transferring the monks' traditional duties as grave guardians to their own bondservants, they were also aware of much greater differences within their own ranks. By the start of the sixteenth century, differences in wealth and power had grown so great among the branches of large lineages that their members could find themselves on different sides of a dispute about lineage claims to Buddhist property and privileges. In short, the predominance of the lineage in Huizhou's villages over the major rival institutions of the village worship association and the Buddhist establishments remained contested and incomplete in the sixteenth century and had arguably been achieved only after the lineage itself had become a more tightly organized type of kinship group.

Such organization required careful management, especially when land-endowed trusts became the preferred form of shared property among Huizhou's large kinship groups. Chapters 4 and 5 discuss how the management of these lineage trusts – that is, their land, laborers, and membership – became a central concern to Huizhou lineages. Chapter 4 explains how the policies and practices for the management of land trusts evolved from the early Ming to *c.*1530, principally by weaving together much scattered information on agricultural production and the remarkably informative records of one important lineage, the Chengs 程 of Shanhe 善和 in Qimen 祁門 county, and their Doushan 竇山 trust. The first half of the chapter describes the social and economic circumstances in Huizhou at the establishment of the Doushan trust in the early fifteenth century, the various components of its property holdings, its hereditary bondservant labor force, the lineage activities it supported, and its difference from earlier landed trusts (principally its planting and marketing of trees for timber). The second half then analyzes this trust's governance and resource problems from the 1450s to the 1530s. Set up by one man, the Doushan trust was next managed by his grandson, then by

his branch, and eventually by a team of managers from five branches. During the second half of the fifteenth century the trust's first two managers assured that the landed trust worked reasonably well, preserving its paddy field property and providing sufficient grain to meet its promises to its members. Its major problem lay with its mountain land, for while forestry was becoming increasingly important in the local economy at a time of repeated grain harvest failures in the prefecture as a whole, the Doushan trust's management found it increasingly hard to gain full control of its mountain land and especially the revenue from its mountain forests. The early Ming model of a lineage dominating rival village institutions through a commonly owned landed trust had unwittingly spawned a host of challenges to trust and lineage governance, mainly from members disgruntled about their own branch's loss of power to other lineage branches. The traditional model, nonetheless, persisted into the sixteenth century, its leaders aware that the principal threats to its success and survival came from within the trust's and lineage's own ranks and not from rival village institutions.

Chapter 5 investigates how the Shanhe Chengs' leaders sought with difficulty to retain the Doushan trust's landholdings and labor force through the injection of greater revenues from the sale of mountain land timber. Tighter control of members' activity and especially of managers was expected to establish a more reliable income and commercial basis for the lineage trust and its noneconomic activities. Exceptionally, there survives a series of collective agreements, which were drafted by trust members to resolve their points of contention, only to be violated regularly over the next generation by members whose real views and interests diverged sharply according to their branch affiliation. Furthermore, within the most dominant branch of the lineage there had grown up a powerful layer of super-managers, who were authorized by the trust to supervise its other managers and administrators. Although in the end their supervision proved incapable of recovering much of the trust's original mountain landholdings and thus of benefiting from the sale of its mountain timber, this management group undeniably emerged as the trust's and lineage's political elite over the final third of the Ming. Their members' acquisition of an examination degree also shows, as David Faure has argued, how the Ming state and its status qualifications could influence the distribution and manipulation of power within large lineages deep in the south China countryside.