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A Stowaway from Sacred Metaphor to Everyday Life: Pujing Folk Religious Landscape in the Historic City of Quanzhou

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Abstract

This paper draws on fieldwork research conducted in the historic city of Quanzhou, to explore pujing folk religious landscape as witness to the entwinement of sacred metaphor and everyday life. Pujing is a kind of folk religion related to specified communities. Each community has its own sacred territory on which temple is sited and divinity is manifested, leading to a ritual unity in ancient Quanzhou. As pujing tradition originates in ancient China and is still represented in modern Quanzhou, it reveals both the cosmology of traditional cities and the absorption of heterogeneous urbanism. I would like to look in how the spatial pattern came into being, which is based on interpretation of heritage, concerning the ways of understanding architecture and space in a traditional cultural context; and how the system functions today, which is based on recognition of heritage. The juxtaposition of different types of pujing temples acts as a notion of 'modern archaeological finds' that reveals the traces of a spatial concept that essentially has interaction with people for long but is newly exposed to transmutation in a modernized urban context, in order to delve deeper into the memory and thus discover different mental and sensual spaces through time.

Keywords: Religious Landscape, Architectural Heritage, Sacred Place, Pujing Folk Religion, Place Identity

1. Introduction

Pujing (literally meaning wards and boundaries, pu refers to municipal area and jing refers to religious territory) is a kind of folk religion related to specified communities in the historic city of Quanzhou, China. Each community has its own sacred territory on which temple is sited and divinity is manifested, leading to a ritual unity in ancient Quanzhou. Pujing folk religion is deviated from the official religious doctrines and practices. Real historical figures or literary fictional characters as worshipped by the communities as identified local spirits. In the past century, pujing had been undergoing ideological fights under different backgrounds leading to its decay as a vestige of pre-modern Chinese culture, which was to be discarded through the painstaking modernizing process. Despite its being abolished in the past century, pujing has

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survived and enjoyed a partial revival in recent decades. The temples, either maintained or rebuilt, show great abundance in typology because of the heterogeneous scenes of undergoing modernization process in urbanism. They become entities reflecting comprehensive views on the past, acting as self-consistent narratives on the divinities and identities.

As pujiing exemplifies a tradition originates in ancient China but is still living in modern China, this research will focus on the bond between people and place, which is formed and transformed continuously. I would like to look in how this people-place relationship came into being, which is based on interpretation of pujiing folk religious landscape in history, concerning the ways of understanding architecture and space in a traditional Chinese context; and how this people-place relationship functions today, which is based on recognition of pujiing folk religious landscape today.

This paper involves investigation into grass-rooted practices and local knowledge, as pujiing religion is out of the narratives of the official history writing. Some clues can be found from the local chronicles written in China's Ming and Qing Dynasty, ambiguous though. By comparing them with what is left and memorized today a broad picture can be framed. My research starts from collecting lots of information from fieldwork and oral history, including architectural and spatial presence, traditional geomancy knowledge shared by local craftsmen, rituals, legends and mythologies, etc. Such fieldwork research was made possible because the reconstruction of the temple is kept as an autonomous process in Quanzhou, sometimes even independent from the strategies of the government.

2. History and Geography of Pujiing Folk Religion

According to the book *Past Prosperity* written by anthropologist and Quanzhou local Mingming Wang, "pujiing" was practiced in the city of Quanzhou throughout China's late imperial period (1368-1911). It was imposed as an instrument of urban administrative control and a means of symbolizing the structured social space of the imperial state (M. Wang, 1999). Apart from that, the pujiing temples also host popular cults especially for those associated with gods of locality (genius loci).

No clear record can be tracked showing how this municipal system was applied to religious system in Quanzhou. M. Wang(1999) collects evidence to show that ordinary inhabitants responded to the imposition of this spatial order through ceremonial appropriations and story-telling. In this process the system was adapted into a variety of different practices and conceptions recognized as a systematic pujiing religion. The original temple buildings were the community halls of the imperial pujiing, which were the places in which local political and social affairs were dealt with. These community halls had been turned into sites where festivals were held. However, by reading into the steles of some temples, especially the temple of Yuesuo Jing, Sanjiao Pu dated to 1614, I found that the relationship between the official regime and religious system is in fact more complicated. Some long-established local temples were transformed to spaces for management and discussion of local public issues on the later founding of pujiing municipal system. By using the temples, it is possible to merge divine deterrence and social supervision into one.

The urban form demonstrated on historic map of Quanzhou City gives indications on the spatial meaning from historical aspect, as the idea in the forming of traditional city is different from the modern paradigms that we are familiar with today. The deformed city bore some resemblance to the emperor's capital and formed a cosmological legitimacy of imperial dominance. Each territory of the pujiing system, after having been systematized, was joined with the imperial ceremonial spaces and became lower level of symbolic order in the walled city. Popular conceptions of place were based on territorial cults and their temples. The influence of this idea was so profound that today citizens still recognize themselves to be attached with certain territory of pujiing, together with the religious practices specific to that place.



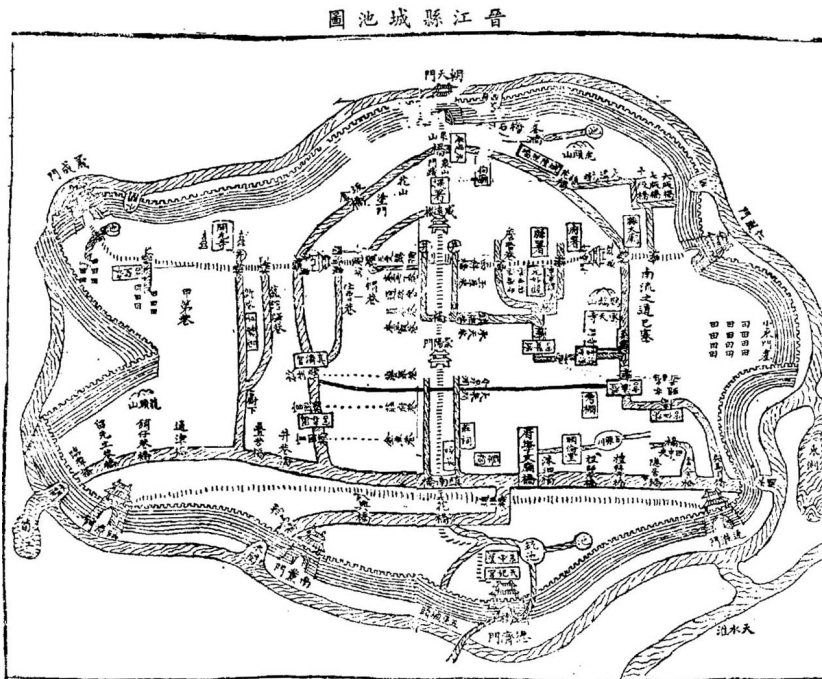


Fig.1. Quanzhou city map. Each pujing has a local patron deity, together with the city's higher-level places, they form a symbolic organization of space. Source: History of Jinjiang Xian in Daoguang 10th Year Qing Dynasty, 1830

3. Sacred Metaphor: Territory, Divinity, Ceremony and Community

Pujing, as a system of places, was modeled on a politico-cosmology and was based upon a semi-geomantic interpretation of spatial relations. The walled city of Quanzhou was divided into four yu, sixteen tu, thirty-six pu, and seventy-two jing, which were obviously prescribed in such a way to fit into the symbolic logic of numbers in Taoism. As the base of the imperial hierarchy, the interiority of pujing had the task of maintaining a full degree of harmony, whereas its exteriority served to embody a unified higher dominating order.

For each pu and jing territory, the boundary is clearly defined with certain amount of households. When comparing the area of pu territories and the map of Quanzhou in 1922, it is evident that the scale of pu is decided in accordance with the number of households, forming the spatial pattern that smaller areas of pujing appear in the two populated centers of the walled city, one is the crossover point of North-South Central Axis and main East-West Road, and the other is on the south near the old docks alongside the river. Inside each jing territory, the religious and residential space is organized as if the whole territory is against its outsiders. A pujing temple locates at the border of jing territories, usually near rivers or city streets, which are considered auspicious in Chinese geomancy. With an archway facing the out as if defending the purity of territory, the temples keep a distance with the strangers. A stranger who found himself entering the jing territory will have to be inspected through a ceremonial way before accessing the more private parts of the territory, for example, before entering the front door of a temple, two deities of guard depicted on wooden gate would be conveying such symbolic meaning of defense.

Pujing system of territories was manifested in ceremonial events of popular cults. As each jing is defined as a unit for territorial cults with a local patron deity symbolizing its neighborhoods, a religious ritual named xunjing (meaning *guarding* the territory) was conducted each year. This ritual of Xunjing is held on the patron god's birthday, when it is carried on a palanquin with parades from local neighborhoods. This annual

repetition of a patron god touring its territory shows the significance in reconfirming the boundary of a jing. In the imperial plan of the city, boundaries between pu-jing territories had only relative significance. However, the image of boundaries was replaced in popular ceremonial culture by a strong emphasis on local autonomy and solidarity. Territorial cults and pu-jing temples created a sense of identity and thus competition among the territories, which differed greatly from the scene of indiscriminate units serving the imperial administrative purposes.

The most important popular rituals in Quanzhou were territorial festivals. First recorded in 1573 and further described in 1856 in a later edition of the official history, historian Shi Hongbao mentions that territorial divisions played a central role in the late Qing, namely divisions of pu-jing, indicating that the imperial pu-jing system was employed as a model of community division used in grass-roots rituals. Bon Festival was an occasion on which the pu-jing divisions for a time became the defining feature of social activities. Unlike Bon Festival celebrated in other Chinese and Japanese cities, the festival in Quanzhou was a three-month rather than one-day celebration. Each month was a cycle of time and space. During the celebration, the city was divided into thirty units. Each unit took turns holding the celebration for a day, in a monthly cycle that was repeated three times. It displayed a ritual reconstruction of the divisions of the imperial pu-jing system. The rotational expulsion of ghosts was a series of ritual occasions on which different pu-jing sought to purify their territories. They were also occasions for them to mark the uniqueness of their own territorial identities. Each territory had a special date to hoist its own banner in front of the territorial temples, which were a symbol of their identity and a tool of sanctifying its local unity.

Sacred metaphor is as well manifested during the ceremony of celebrating a deity's birthday. The statue of deity is carried out from the territorial temples and people of that jing territory join the religious parade. The parade will reconfirm the border of the territory by following a route covering the street within their domain, and most importantly the borderline of pu-jing. It sometimes leads to disorder and feuds if the parade goes beyond the agreed border. The development of alternative identities and visions is demonstrated in a centrifugal manner to separate every pu and jing away from each other, which is in accordance with anthropologist M. Wang's argument, that popular imitations derived from an attempt to authenticate and disguise unofficial kinds of social spatial conceptions and grass-roots protests. Apart from being religious communicative acts between the gods and the people, the festivals are as well a series of communal contests.

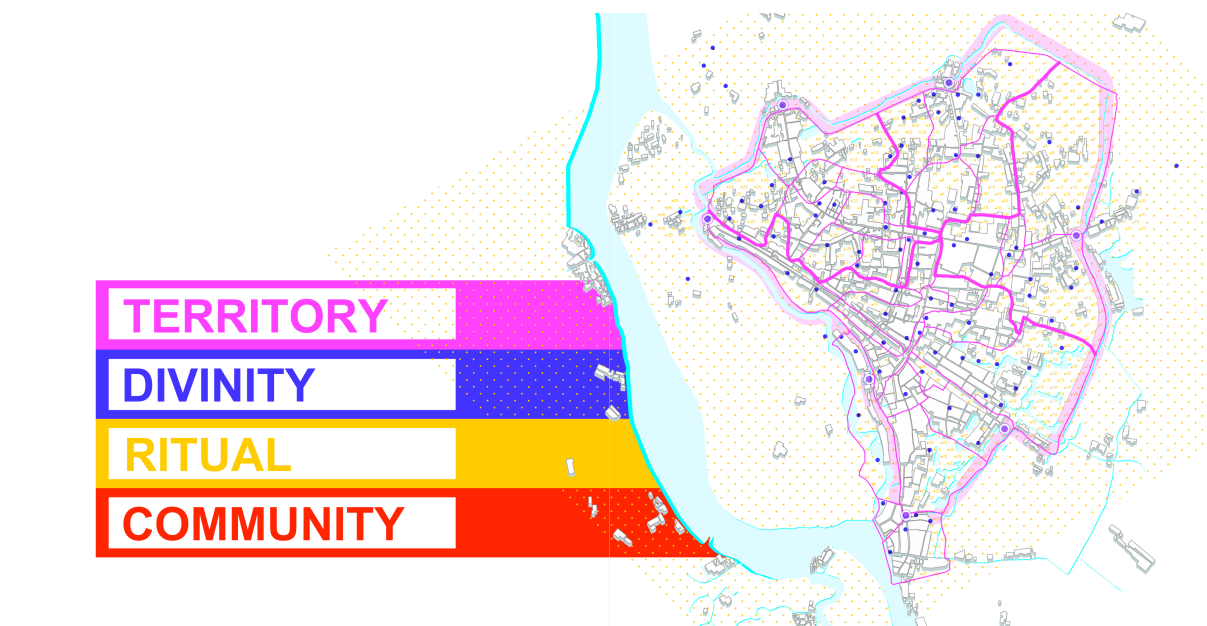


Fig.2. Territory, divinity, ceremony and community. Source: Author.

4. Everyday Life: Pujing Temples in Modernized Urban Context

Pujing worship is never completely abolished and enjoyed a partial revival since 1980s. Among all the pujing temples shown on the historic map of 1922, half of them have been now rebuilt in varied form, most of which remained in the original pujing territory, but some had been assigned a new location, as secular influence inevitably set limits for the choice of site. The power of the secular in defining the location of religious buildings takes the form of 'rational' urban planning principles, including capitalistic principles of land values and change of land property ownership. It is not always easy for the neighborhoods attempting to take the property back for religious purposes - either the original sites have been under quite complicated situation of land property ownership change, or the religious properties were taken by the state government and transformed into public service facilities during the communist era of China. Although the location is a compromise of sacred and secular factors, religious adherents may justify their choice of location by indicating that they have been following the clues given by their god or gods, by introducing geomancy principles in a crafty way to explain the location. As Abramson (2011) observed in Quanzhou, the relocation of temples involves costly and time-consuming rituals, since their sitting and orientation has implications for the efficacy of their gods' power.

Depending on financial and organizational situation of different neighborhoods of pujing, the re-established sacred places fall into two categories: formal sacred places as temples and informal ones as informal shrines and relics. Once there's a new temple rebuilt, there's a need for maintenance and management. Formal sacred places is made possible through consensus of community and government, and also within community itself, which is highly dependent on the effective participation of local residents - integrity of original neighborhood, donation from prominent families and negotiation under urban planning regulations. These conditions are more achievable in the northern and eastern part of the old city, where housing renovation since 1980s helped preserve the original neighborhood. Besides, land and negotiable operation are more acquirable due to relatively loose urban planning regulations. On the contrary, the western part, mostly unchanged and strictly preserved under historic preservation plans, is faced with great challenge of losing its local neighborhoods.

In the West Street Historic Area, locals of Qi Shi Jing still kept the ruins of the old Qi Shi Temple. The original temple was built in Qing Dynasty with an area up to 300 square meters. Facing east to the alley of Qi Shi Xiang is the three-bay main hall hosting the patron goddess Chen Jing Gu (One of the water deities in South Fujian). In front of the main hall stands the worshipping pavilion, with its pavilion-style roof above the alley and four stone pillars, which are relics of Qing Dynasty and possibly from an earlier temple of Hua Shi Jing (an adjacent Jing that belongs to Hua Shi Pu together with Qi Shi Jing). There used to be two side halls: one was for the Bodhisattva of Great Mercy (bronze statue), and the other for the Goddess Mazu (clay statue). Opposite is a rock courtyard used as site for ritual operas during all the ceremonies. In the backyard of the main hall, people used to keep chairs and awnings that provide scaffolding for the operas.

The Qi Shi Temple was partly destroyed due to the impact of anti-feudal forces of the Republic of China. In 1929, students and local garrison nearly destroyed its deity statues during a second movement of anti-superstition. During the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), the temple was occupied as a community factory while a Taoist nun named Lagu Chen secretly kept the statues. The main hall was severely damaged, but its front still remains with the original main entrance decoration, wooden columns, stone column bases and stone slab. Officially a new community has replaced Qi Shi Jing. The remaining temple front is now being used as a notification board for public issues of the new community while the building south to the main hall is occupied by the community committee office. On the roof of the worshipping pavilion hangs a

loudspeaker, suggesting that this past sacred place has been completely secularized as a community center. However, if we take a closer look, we can see that there is a stone stele under the pavilion erected in 2006, engraving donators' names from the old neighborhood who contribute to maintain the pavilion as a memorial of Qi Shi Jing. The ritual of this temple is still going on even without a formal sacred place. A new shrine is established inside a house nearby, which is also home of Lagu Chen the nun's foster daughter.

There are many cases in which local neighborhoods cannot take back their land property for temples, so that they have to come to a compromise. In Gao Gui Jing and Gu Rong Jing, a shrine was established on the wall of the old temple site, which is now a private property. Many temples are able to stand between the alleys, which is both a passage and a place for worship, such as in Hou Cheng Jing and in Gui Tan Jing. In Tong Tian Jing, a new community center has replaced the temple with a 6-floor office building, leaving the roof top for the rebuilt Tong Tian Temple.



Fig.3. Temple of Qi Shi Jing and traces from different periods. Source: Author.

These informal sacred sites have developed a new sense of territoriality. For the old neighborhoods, puding temples are part of their sense of identity, and a centre of local community with cultural, social and public welfare activities. The importance of these temples is underscored by the fact that while most of the puding religion adherents have home altars, they would contribute to maintain the local temple, even if it can only be achieved in a symbolic way rather than rebuilding a formal new temple. The unofficial sacred sites recall the old temples in many different ways, resembling the old one in an altered structure. Despite the fact that the old and the new differ in location, scale, type, form and style, the adherents interpret the sacred places in a way of emphasizing the structural similarity and define their referential consistency. The similarity and consistency is assured by the plentitude of all puding temples, whose varied adaptations in modernized urban context show how people bring spirit of place back to their everyday life. In this way, the site or shrine reifies the new sense of community constituted through antagonism, reclaiming and redefining their sacred place.

5. Beyond Everyday Life: From Territory to Network

The structure of local neighborhoods in Quanzhou was reshaped due to waves of immigration especially under the circumstances of resettlement housing of social security policy and enthusiasm into business after Chinese economic reform (Reform and Opening-up Policy). The reconstruction of sacred places corresponded in a way of adapting to this change, thus turning puding from a politics of exclusion, into a politics of exile. Before this change, the sanctity of puding territory used to be preserved by defining boundaries, carving the inside from the outside with the repeating practices of Xun Jing (guarding the territory). Whereas people may not be able to map the precise boundaries of their territory claims, they insist on such precision and separation between each territory and other, which had been providing formulations of



pujing territories over time by the communities. However, since 1980s a modern loss or nostalgia for the sacred place has taken the form during the re-establishment of the pujing temples. As the territory of a specific of pujing territory and the residing place of religious adherents is no longer overlapping, the effort to distinguish insiders from outsiders has been scarcely paid. Geographical link has been replaced by a network of believers relating to common historic narration shared by individuals and families. The ceremonies are held only when pilgrims come back to the temples by a long distance in a very limited time. Pujing ceremonies can be seen as a part of a new pilgrimage route, where daily the form of individual pray to the gods is replaced by ritual procession. The temple space is also remolded by this change. In July 2015 I observed such pilgrimage in the Temple of Fu Mei Jing, a temple considered first temple of Wang Ye Worship (the most popular folk religion in Taiwan), and the prototype of all the Wang Ye Temples in Taiwan. During a religious celebration known as “group insense offering” participated by homecoming Taiwanese believers, the pilgrimage took place mainly in the space outside of the temple. The pilgrims only consider the worshipping pavilion as part of the pilgrimage procession, leaving all the other parts of the temple unvisited. A strategy of inversion was applied here to make the outside become inside, the peripheral become central. The sacred place extended largely to the spaces of mobility counting from the alleys as pilgrimage route and the highway for the group’s long distance travel. For example, the spot along the highway where pilgrims gather to take bus leaving for the next sacred place has evidently been turned as a stage of this commemorate festival. For those exiles, participation in the sacred place is constantly moving through the symbolic landscapes provoking memories of one’s native land, extending the fluidity of sacred to secular spaces and blurred the boundary between outside and inside. Thus their space recognition, flattened to some iconic images during large-scale pilgrimage event, replaces actual spatial experience inside the temple, as their daily communication with their patron deity is absent. As a result, the separation between sacred and secular is more fluid than rigid, especially in urban contexts where the sacred and secular, or rather, varied expressions of the sacred have no line of demarcation.

Rituals and practices on going in Quanzhou are constantly being revised and reinterpreted to adapt to the context of modern life. In an inherently traditional way the ceremonies of temples and their religious functions are still part of one’s life circle and public life. The re-emergence of sacred is also becoming a dominant factor for the development of non-sacred local space and community development; vice versa it will finally reshape the identity of place. Even the decision of urban development is also becoming part of the divine judge procedure in front of pujing deities. In this way, interfere from outside is minimized and kept off the limit of pujing territory.

6. Conclusion

The juxtaposition of the pujing temples of Quanzhou acts as a notion of ‘modern archeological finds’ that reveals the traces of a space that essentially has interaction with people for long but is newly exposed to transmutation of meanings in a modernized urban context, in order to delve deeper into the memory and thus discover different mental and sensual spaces through time. The temples today is describing the past as well as shaping a simulacrum about the past, which contains differentiated experience. Here I describe this representation of sacred metaphor in everyday life as a stowaway, referring to Runia’s critique of representationism, “as what is absently and unintentionally present on the plane of time... a metaphor for discontinuity or, rather, for the entwinement of continuity and discontinuity.”

Through the examples mentioned above, it is possible to have a glimpse on how the religious landscape conveys cultural significance and symbolic meaning, and how we can find out the structural similarity and deep meaning beyond the appearance. The historic landscape of the juxtaposed temples reflect the transformation of society in this marginalize regional center, where a symbolic sense of order is again strengthened to resist the external threaten. This is knitted into a broader view of the socio-political history in

South Fujian Region as it was also in 1980 that the competing neighboring city Xiamen was assigned as a Special Economic Zone and has replaced Quanzhou to become the South Fujian economic center ever since.

With a sense of history, religious landscape of pujiing emerges as representation of different times through which we can trace the varied spiritual value behind. They can be dated back to the coexistence and contradiction of state and local ever since China's Ming Dynasty to the present. The state government has been making use of spatial policies as control over local society. The residents interpret and reconstruct their own meaning through using urban space in daily life, which will eventually affect the imposition of state spatial policies. National macro economic changes and individual micro demand are intertwined throughout the urban planning process of the historic city and bottom-up rebuilding effort of pujiing temples, making this process a reflection of the overall policy change on national urban development planning and management, as well as the related conflicts and resistance. By studying the temples and their reproduction of place identity a larger picture can be seen. In particular, it is a specific case showing a more general point how a spatial institution could be invented, utilized to govern society, and applied to organize diverse localities into a centralized orthodox, and equally importantly, how the same institution could be remolded into an alternative spatial institution and altered in terms of its function and meaning.

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