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Scales of Change and Diagnostic Contradictions: Shifting Relations Between an Emigrant Community and Its Diaspora

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The issue of placing the study of social and cultural change at the heart of the inquiry rather than relegating it to a separate chapter is an old one in anthropology, and in social science at large, as illuminated in this volume's introduction. Because change is of interest and significance only if there is a substantial and therefore noteworthy non-locally contingent departure from a previous situation, it mostly occurs on spatial and temporal scales that exceed the *hic et nunc* of the field study. The specific question this chapter addresses is how to account ethnographically for change that unfolds on such larger scales. While the revisiting of a field site by the same (Colson 1971; Firth 1959) or successive ethnographers has often been considered an answer to this challenge, another solution is the extended case (Gluckman 1961, 10; Mitchell 1956; Van Velsen 1967). This method was created to seek explanations for the complexity

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and contradictions of a local social situation within larger scale historical processes.

However, the issue of scale has remained a point of contention among its practitioners ever since. By its very principle, the extended case method rests on the distinction between a local social situation and the global forces that shape it. Such a separation has been maintained in more recent dealings with globalization, which offer a causal explanation of “local socio-cultural processes” by “global historical forces” (Burawoy 1998; Comaroff and Comaroff 1999, 283). Others have voiced critique of the ways this separation tends to neglect the microprocesses at play in a case study (Barth 1966, 1967; Handelmann 2005), or to locate causal determinations on a scale so large that it is difficult to prove its connection to local sequences of events (Falk Moore 1999). In their reply to Falk Moore’s critique, the Comaroffs suggest practicing ethnography on an “awkward scale” (2003) as a way out of this conundrum. I rather take the view that it is possible to account for change framed by longer/larger scales without opposing the micro domain of interactions with a macro domain construed as external to these interactions, resulting in a substantialization of “the global.”

Since 2011, I have been conducting fieldwork in Pine Mansion, one of the villages of origin of the French Polynesian Chinese that I studied as part of my doctoral research.¹ For over a century, from the 1880s to the early 1990s, Pine Mansion had been a village of emigration, as were almost all the villages in the Pearl River Delta region. Pine Mansioners migrated to French Polynesia but also to Southeast Asia, North and Central America, and more recently to Europe. In selecting Pine Mansion as a new field site, my idea was to conduct a micro-historical and anthropological study of the diasporic reconnections that followed the establishment of the Shenzhen Special Economic Zone and Shenzhen city, of which the village has become an urban neighborhood.² The Shenzhen Special Economic Zone was established in 1980 as part of China’s “Reform and Opening Up” (*gaige kaifang*)—the reopening of

¹This overseas diasporic community is composed of the descendants of migrants who settled in Tahiti and the other islands of this French colony in the Southern Pacific, mainly during 1880–1930. They originated from Pine Mansion and other villages in the same area.

²Pine Mansion is located in the north of Shenzhen.

China and the launch of its economic reforms. This reopening occurred along with reconnections between the localities of origin (*qiaoxiang*) and the diaspora. Indeed, while connections had been severed during the Mao period, during the reopening, overseas relatives were encouraged by the Chinese authorities to visit their villages of origin and to contribute financially to their development. However, as a result of the reform-and-opening policy and the encouragement of diasporic reconnections and overseas kin donations, the village was radically transformed and became a neighborhood of the newly created city of Shenzhen.

My research engages a processual approach which examines the effects of these reconnections on local transformations, but also the effects of these transformations on local residents' relations with the diaspora. The object of study is thus the changing relation between the inhabitants of this former village and their kin in Tahiti and other parts of the world: I show how, in this context of accelerated mutations, the relationship between the members of the emigrant community and the diaspora has changed. Studying this relationship required both retracing a system of relations—the organization and practical modalities of the locals' connections with their overseas kin—and capturing a set of representations of this relation—the perceptions of the diaspora's position and role toward the community, and attitudes toward emigration.

The issue of scale figures centrally in this research project and is tied to the question of change in two ways. First, the community's relation with the diaspora is in itself driven by a tension between continuity—the maintenance of links and the celebration of roots—and change, with the loosening of ties produced by the passage of time and genealogical distancing, as well as by the estrangement generated by the severing of relations during the Mao period. Second, for over a century the village has been the recipient of financial flows (remittances and donations from the diaspora) that have been instrumental in tempering its misery—during the anti-Japanese and civil wars (1937–1949) and Mao period (1949–1976)—and ensuring its prosperity—from the 1880s to the early 1930s, and in the two decades (1980s and 1990s) that followed the reopening of China. As late as the 1990s, donations from the diaspora have played a crucial role in maintaining its main institutions and sites that constitute the symbolic markers and cultural foci of its identity as

a lineage-village community, but which were threatened by urbanization plans. At the same time, during that same decade, the villagers became much less dependent on financial support from the diaspora. Shenzhen's newfound prosperity diminishes their financial dependency on overseas relatives—this dependency has now come to an end. It also lessens the desire for emigration, since the new urbanites estimate that the best potential for a good life is now to be found locally, in China, rather than abroad.

Scale as Scope and Valence

In one of his later writings, Barth (1978) offers a heuristic device for integrating scale more directly within an ethnographic account. He argues that scale must not arise as an artifact of analysis, but must rather be dealt with as an empirical property of the things we study. Once we conceptualize scale as a characteristic of the context of social interaction, we can proceed to discover the scalar properties of the contexts in which the interaction takes place. Indeed, “an exchange between neighbors may well require the context of a world market to be understandable” (ibid., 256). We must therefore make a distinction between the *size* of the unit of observation (the neighborhood in Barth's example, and usually any micro unit in ethnographically grounded studies) and the *scope* of the context of social interaction (the world market in Barth's example) that is being accounted for.³ This distinction between scale as size and as scope helps to liberate the extended case from the micro/macro methodological dichotomy and is a first step toward a processual ethnography that does not treat large-scale global phenomena in time and space as exterior to situations observed in the field, but weaves them into the ethnographic description and analysis.

The second move is to take into account how scales are at stake in social interactions and inform scalar strategies. A substantial body

³My approach is only loosely inspired by Barth, as I also draw from critical realism. I depart from Barth's focus on aggregated behavior, typical of methodological individualism, and from his focus on the size of social systems. Lack of space does not allow me to detail this point.

of geographical scholarship has emphasized the social construction of scale as an outcome of processes of capitalist production (Smith 1984, 2008; Brenner 1999), social and political struggle (Herod 1997; Delaney and Leitner 1997; Jones and Mac Leod 2004) and social reproduction (Marston 2000). This prompts us to introduce a more intentional dimension of scale than what Barth had in mind: scale as it is valued by social actors in “scalar projects” (Tsing 2000), i.e., how social actors take action according to the spatial and/or temporal scale that they consider important and appropriate. The value that the actors give to these scales is their valence. Valence is defined as “the degree of attractiveness an individual, activity, or thing possesses as a behavioral goal” (Merriam Webster 2019). Valence is about potentiality—the capacity to generate value—and desirability—the moral dimension of values. As will become clear in the next sections, what is at stake in the case studied here is both the relative capacity of different scales to be sources of value creation, and the desirability of different scales in moral terms.

Marston et al. (2005) have called for jettisoning the concept of scale because of its enduring connotation of “nesting,” in spite of the more social constructivist approaches to scale that I have referred to above. They advocate adopting a “flat ontology” that does away with the local/global distinction. I side with the argument that scale is too often bound up with (fixed) “size” and “level,” however, I do not follow their call to eliminate the concept of scale but attempt instead to overhaul it. First of all, I follow geographer Richard Howitt’s (1998, 56) proposal for recognizing scale as *relation*, a “factor in itself” in the construction of spatialities, rather than simply as a given. I also draw inspiration from anthropologist Marilyn Strathern’s (1999) distinction between scales as *magnitude* and as *orders of knowledge*. In scale as magnitude, what is measured is independent of the measuring tool; the metric, e.g., the mile, or the Richter scale, is fixed; the scale is that against which the scope of the action can be measured (the scope of an earthquake, or of social networks). In the second kind of operation, part of the measurement is also what is being measured, and “what is held constant is not the values on the scale but a relation between values,” e.g., a ratio such as

purchasing power (Strathern 1999, 205).⁴ I propose an analytical distinction between two relational dimensions of scale in which social action can be considered: scale as the scope of social systems or chains of interdependence that extend to a greater or lesser degree in space and time and in which actions and interactions take place, and scale as valence, i.e., the desirability of scale defined relative to other scales, generating strategies to maintain the significance of one scale rather than another, or to replace one (for instance local) scale by another (more global) scale.

In what follows, scale as level is subsumed under the more relational notion of scope. The focus is on action (processes of scaling and rescaling, cf. Brenner 2001) rather than on the size of entities or preexisting levels; on how the Chinese state and Shenzhen city reorder spatial hierarchies by creating the Special Economic Zone and eradicating the former villages within it.⁵ Scale as scope is the temporary stabilized “product” of social action and interaction, but it is relational in so far as far-reaching spatial or temporal extension is measured relatively to lesser extension. Valence is an evaluation of scope, and “actioning” one particular scale rather than another is related to the potentiality and moral desirability of this scale. Furthermore, anthropologists, as much as the people they work with, contrast the “local” and the “global” (sometimes using these terms, sometimes resorting to equivalents). As “concept-metaphors [the local and the global] act as framing devices, and as such they are perspectival” (Moore 2004, 75). They are polarities, or incommensurables, “which cannot be systematised through constructs such as levels and domains and other conventional demarcation devices” (Strathern 1995, 153). In this sense, by framing the distinctions that are being made between phenomena in terms of their relative scope and valence, they fulfill precisely the task that Marston, Jones and Woodward accuse scale as size and level of failing to perform. Finally, beyond debates among geographers and their concerns with spatialities, scales as scope and valence apply to space (action is meaningful in regard to a space of interaction that is, for instance,

⁴Valence is such a relation between values; it refers to the value that can be generated by something that is valued.

⁵Not considering levels at all would amount to ignoring how they are shaped by power relations (Leitner and Miller 2007, 119; see also Paasi 2004).

regional rather than local) and to time (in regard to an exchange-circuit that continues, for instance, over several generations rather than one).

Change and Diagnostic Contradictions

Looking at scale as a property of the context within which social action takes places thus involves taking account of spatial and temporal scale as both scope and valence. Once we look at scale in this way, we may reach a fuller understanding not only of how actions at the local level contribute to large-scale change but also of why some actions may counter change or constitute an attempt at circumventing or resisting change imposed from “above.” We may also better grasp the motivations for change and the perceptions of its presence or absence. This implies making room for people’s conceptions of change—how they understand and interpret it—and of continuity. Indeed, what interests us as anthropologists is not just explaining the present by identifying the changes and continuities that generated the situation we discover in the field, but also accounting for how change—as well as continuity—is conceived of and imbued with significance by the subjects of our inquiry (Ferguson 1999, 14).⁶ A deeper comprehension of what change represents for the actors may help explain why they have acted in its direction (by participating in larger scale change) or against the tide. The conceptions of change—or of the absence of change—that I am concerned with here are essential to understanding how social actors position themselves and take action in a configuration of changing relations.

In the field, I quickly realized that if I wanted to understand the changes that characterize the village’s relations with the diaspora in the present period, I would have to reach an understanding of the changes the village has undergone. In order to retrace the village’s past, I consulted the wide literature on villages of the same type in the same region based

⁶This attention to conceptions of change does not need to result in an idealism and relativism that reduces the ethnographer’s activity to the collection of emic representations, sacrificing an epistemology of “distanciation” to an epistemology of “intimacy” (Keane 2003). Subjects’ conceptions are indexed according to a reality that has changed and that must be accounted for.

on field studies led in the 1950s and 1960s in Hong Kong, and in the 1980s and 1990s on the mainland. I also collected histories of the village written by members of the community themselves—for instance, the written genealogy of the Pine Mansion Chens⁷ contains a narrative of the village's history and displays documents from the past—as well as recently produced historical books about the area. However, I relied mainly on the oral histories I collected from the members of the community. Indeed, I started the fieldwork with a very precise thread that I wished to follow: the history of the mausoleum that had been built in 1999 around the founding ancestor's tomb. The Tahiti Chens had told me about this mausoleum because they had made large monetary donations for its construction, but they had only an imprecise idea of the reason behind the decision to build it. By taking this mystery as a starting point and collecting oral histories related to this project, I became interested in similar stories about other projects and was able to retrace the processes through which the people of Pine Mansion had succeeded, with the help of their diaspora, in saving some of their most important landmarks and sites from the scheduled destruction. In addition to this micro-history based on oral sources, I conducted interviews with villagers who had overseas kin; I also drew much of my material from participant observation during the main annual festivals in the village. For two years in a row, I attended several ancestral rites during the spring Equinox festival and the major festival held in autumn on the founding ancestor's birthday, where I was able to observe encounters between overseas kin who had returned to the village for these occasions and the villagers. By combining the data from these different sources, I started to gain a general picture of the different dimensions of the diasporic relation.

In the next sections, I reflect on the contrasts and even contradictions contained in the discursive materials I collected. The contradictions emerged between statements held by persons belonging to the same local community, and at times also between statements held by the same person, from one conversation to another, or even during the same

⁷In Pine Mansion almost all of the native residents bear the surname Chen and form the dominant lineage in the village community. They claim common descent from their founding ancestor, who settled in Pine Mansion in the middle of the eighteenth century.

conversation. Tensions and contradictions in the process of social reproduction are central to Marx's understanding of society as a historical process in which social forms emerge dialectically, and such a reading forms the backbone of my research on the way "local capitalism" (Smart and Lin 2007) has taken shape, at the "critical junction" (Kalb and Tak 2005) of China's insertion in world capitalism and the reconfiguration of the former agricultural collectives in Shenzhen's urbanized villages (Trémon 2015). Here I focus on how contradictions in the field materials collected are telling signs of accelerated change that is generating conflicts of scale. Such an approach already has a long history in anthropological research, from Godfrey and Monica Wilson's (1945) functionalist idea of disequilibrium as unevenness of scale,⁸ to Clifford Geertz's (1957) use of the case of a failed ritual to highlight national religious change rather than local social anomie. I agree with David Berliner that "it is time to bring back ambivalent statements, contradictory attitudes, incompatible values, and emotional internal clashes as research objects" (2016, 5). However, in this chapter, I am less interested in investigating how actors live with and justify their own contradictions, than in taking contradictions as a signal of rapid change and a starting point for understanding how people make sense of change by reconceptualizing the valence of local and global scales. Thus, contradictions in comments on the past and the present play the diagnostic role ascribed to contradictory accounts of "events" by Sally Falk Moore (1987), who sees them as a major tool for processual ethnography.⁹ I use here a broad definition of discourse as consisting of utterances that have meaning within a social context and are understandable within the present situation of enunciation. It can appear in the midst of narrations of the past, but differs from mere historical narration in that it constitutes a comment *from the present* on the events reported (Benvéniste 1971, 209). Such material, along with the more objective data contained in the narrations I collected, is useful

⁸What they call unevenness of scale is the discrepancy between economic integration in world-society and the persistence of kinship-based social relations and religious beliefs that are part of a "small-scale system" (1945, 161–2).

⁹Falk Moore focuses on "incidents" whose discursive treatment (the way they are reported and commented upon) has a strong likelihood of exposing information on changing circumstances, especially when it contains a "juxtaposition of competing and contrary ideas" (1987, 735). I focus on the contradiction between statements on change.

for understanding where change is located—what makes the present situation significantly differ from the past, or not—and hence the sense that is made of this change.

In what follows, I examine the ways in which the discursive materials I collected during interviews and observations imply different scales and a series of contrasts and even contradictions concerning the presence or absence of change. I show how the local scale (as valence) of the lineage-village community has been revalorized, and how this is rendered visible by the contradiction between accounts of change and claims of continuity in the local social and economic organization. The maintenance of the local community as a “scalar project” is further salient in the contradiction between the moral and political discourse on the lineage’s eternal global unity and the local purposes for which the diaspora’s loyalty has been instrumentalized, as well as in the contrast between acceptance of change and mobilizations to counter its undesired side effects. Finally, I examine how this “eternity” discourse is contradicted by discourses on the declining need for global diasporic support, and how change is conceived of as the local reestablishment of a just moral order.

Economic Change and Continuity in Social Organization

The mutation of the village is part and parcel of the creation and rise of the Special Economic Zone and city of Shenzhen. The Tahiti Chens had only vague knowledge about their village of origin, and had not told me much apart from the fact that it had changed a lot, starting with its name. Once I started fieldwork in China, I discovered that the village was not even officially a village (*cun*), since it had been legally urbanized in 2004. Along with this administrative recategorization, the former villagers lost their peasant *hukou* (residence permits) and became urban citizens of Shenzhen. To this must be added the demographic explosion that resulted from the inflow of migrant workers from inland China, which caused Pine Mansion’s population to grow from approximately 3000 inhabitants at the end of the 1970s to almost 60,000 today. Among the people I met in the village, all those aged fifty (born in the 1960s)

and above started their lives as peasants and belong to the generation that experienced the radical break from the Mao era. Nowadays, many of the former village's native inhabitants do not have to work for a living. Indeed, they have largely benefited from the economic boom generated by the creation of the Special Economic Zone. They even took an active part in it by creating the infrastructural conditions that made Shenzhen as a manufacturing zone possible. The main actors were the former agricultural collectives which mutated in the second half of the 1980s. The production brigades and cultivation groups were changed into cooperative companies which started building factories on plots of collectively held agricultural land, and rented them out to foreign and Hongkongese companies.

Urbanization and industrialization allowed those who lived in the village to put an end to their agricultural livelihoods a decade before they were categorized as urban citizens in 2004. For the people of Pine Mansion, what really changed with legal urbanization was not so much their characterization as “non-peasants” (*feinong*) in the official terminology, but what this recategorization entailed: their right to welfare benefits—health insurance for all, and pensions for women aged over 50 and men over 60. These are distributed by the cooperative companies in addition to annual dividends derived from the management of real estate. Local membership of the former village community has gained increased importance—valence—in the context of urbanization, because entitlement to dividends and welfare benefits is restricted to “native villagers.” Only they are entitled to a share in the companies.

Legal urbanization actually entailed an important change in the administrative organization. First of all, the village is no longer officially a village—the lowest unit in the rural administrative grid—as it has become a *shequ* (community)—the city's lowest administrative level. The *shequ* is managed by a “community service center” (*shequ fuwu zhongxin*), whose employees are appointed by the higher administrative levels. This bears potentially important consequences because the new unit, in comparison to the former village, enjoys less autonomy in managing its internal affairs. The leaders I talked to insisted on the fact that the former village is presently in a period of transition and reorganization, and it seems indeed that the exact degree of upper-level

interference and the division of tasks between each unit is not yet clear. Actually, the former village organizations are all still in place under new names: the four village committees—a large one at the village level and three smaller ones—have been turned into four corresponding urban resident committees, each associated with two or three small companies. The committees and companies are often headed by the same persons, all native Chen villagers. Therefore, although a few people voiced concern about the future consequences of this new state of affairs, most were confident that things would turn out well and that the former village would continue to benefit from a large degree of autonomy. This is plausible, considering the influence of the shareholding companies due to their economic power.

But what struck me most is that Pine Mansioners simply continued to use the former official terminology—the village and the village residents' committee—to refer to the new organizations. This can be explained by the fact that the creation of the “native villager” category fully entitles them to continue to speak of “our village” (*women cun*). The eldest among Pine Mansioners also used the old Maoist term *shengchandu*, production brigade, to refer to the shareholding companies. This is understandable, considering the role they continue to play in the collective economy by organizing production and distribution of the income drawn from the land, albeit now in the form of real estate rents. Their functions are largely the same as in the past. They also play an active role in village daily life and festivals and celebrations by organizing group trips for their shareholders, distributing gifts of money to the young, the old, and the poor, and making donations for ancestral worship. All of this underlines a strong sense of continuity in the social and economic collective organization of the village.

It is not, then, surprising at all that people at once stress the tremendous changes that the reforms have introduced using emphatic expressions such as “heaven and earth turned upside down” (*tianfan difu*) to refer to the betterment of their living conditions and the good life they enjoy at present, while still employing terminology that refers to the village's former administrative structure and social organization. The lasting social and territorial structure of the village and the lineage also

account for the way the villagers perceive themselves as a local collectivity. The village and the lineage are the frames of reference within which people identify and live their lives. This is a structure in the loose sense, as Braudel defines it, “a reality which time uses and abuses over long periods” (1958, 31). It is inscribed on the landscape even though urbanization has radically changed its appearance by covering the fields with concrete. Following the land reform and communalization in the early 1950s, the members of the pre-1949 lineage segments, who formed distinct residential clusters, became the owners of the land they collectively cultivated. In the 1990s, agricultural land was converted into residential land and divided among the households who built new, three to five storeys high, houses on each plot—they live on one or two storeys and rent out the rest to migrant workers. Nowadays, the bumpy and dusty streets in the new neighborhoods are not individually but collectively named—they bear the names of the neighborhoods in the old village center, and these names are also those of the residential committees and shareholding companies. In other words, there has been a kind of centrifugal expansion of the built landscape on the agricultural land that used to surround the old village. Thus, in spite of the change in the nature of economic activities, the village and lineage structures have remained largely the same over time, and are inscribed in the new urbanized landscape of Pine Mansion.

We have here a first contrast between sudden material socio-economic change, and the absence of change in the most meaningful principles of peoples’ lives, sociality and territorial identity—although we would expect the first to induce the second. Being a “native villager” has become more desirable than before as a result of the combination of the continuity in social structure and organization and the reforms leading to industrialization and urbanization that have increased the economic value of the local territory. This contradiction thus explains why there has been a revalorization of the local scale, and brings into relief the increased valence of the lineage-village community scale.

Erasure of the Past and the Eternity of the Lineage

The persistence and revival of lineage as a social entity can account for the next paradox that I witnessed between the unregretful destruction of almost all of the old village's remains and the efforts, verging on illegality, of the members of the lineage-village community to save some of their landmarks. The Tahiti Chinese had warned me that the places they had visited did not match their parents and grandparents' descriptions of rural villages at all. When I first arrived in the village I found the change in the landscape even greater than I had expected, since almost all of the houses that had been built a century earlier had just been destroyed. The people of Pine Mansion had taken an active part in the policy known as *jiucun gaizao* ("renovation of old villages"), willfully supporting the demolition of the houses they once inhabited, and had already left to access more comfortable dwellings. The small tiled-roof houses in the old village center were to be replaced by a block of high-rise luxury flats. Their participation in the urban renovation program takes the direction promoted by the municipal and provincial authorities toward a uniformly modernized urban landscape (Fig. 2.1).

However, while actively transforming their formerly rural village's landscape into an urban one they also collectively mobilized in the past decades, first to revive and then to save some of the landmarks that constitute the basis of their enduring identity as a lineage-village community. Ancestral worship, held biannually at the temple and at the founding ancestor's gravesite, was prohibited from around the second half of the 1950s; it was delocalized in Hong Kong, where it was performed by Chens who had fled the village. The Pine Mansion Chens resumed ancestral worship locally as early as 1981, and they carried out a series of restorative and protective actions. All of these activities were carried out in the 1980s with financial contributions from the Pine Mansion Chens' Hong Kong and overseas relatives. This revival phase was followed in the 1990s by mobilizations against policies linked to state-led urbanization plans that threatened to destroy the founding ancestor's tomb and close down the primary school that had been founded by the lineage in 1914. The purpose of these mobilizations was

Fig. 2.1 Renovated lineage temple surrounded by high-rise buildings (Photo by author)

explicitly expressed as the wish to protect these sites for all eternity—*yongyuan*. In other words, they countered change imposed from above in the name of their own, longer temporality.

In retracing these mobilizations and collecting narratives about the history of the lineage, I recurrently encountered this discourse on eternity. It was particularly strongly voiced about the lineage's unity. Freedman (1958) has outlined the historical process whereby the lineage divides into smaller segments for which later ancestors serve as reference points and nodes of identification, and I did observe the tendency for some branches in the lineage to form their own sub-lineages. Migration has largely espoused this logic of branching within the lineage, because those who migrated as part of the first wave were generally groups of siblings who all went to the same destination. And yet I faced a normative discourse condemning "branch identity" (the tendency to think of oneself as belonging to a particular segment instead of to the lineage in its entirety) and even denying its existence—I was told by some leaders that there was no such thing. This counter-tendency to foreground unity is due to a variety of reasons, the main one being the lineage's strong history of emigration. One telling sign is the establishment of the Pine Mansion Chen lineage foundation, named after the founding ancestor, in Hong Kong in the early 1960s. Chens from diverse lineage segments who had migrated to Hong Kong in those years united under the founding ancestor and ensured the continuation of ancestral worship. The subsequent repatriation of the foundation to the village in the 1990s shows a dialectical movement over time between the centripetal tendencies linked to migration and the centrifugal tendencies linked to the recently resumed importance of the native place. The centrality of the founding ancestor seems to be much stronger in village and lineage life today than it was during the Mao period, of course, but also before 1949.

The Chen genealogy traces all of the members of the lineage to the founding ancestor without making any distinctions among them based on where they live, although the overseas Chens are also separately listed by country of residence in the final pages. The lineage is thus presented as both local and global at once: as having its source, or roots, in the village founded by the first ancestor, and as a social body that extends far beyond the village and that is united around a common cause, forming a global

fraternity. The lineage channels kinship networks and retains faraway and genealogically distant kin's allegiance to the place of origin by invoking the moral imperative to contribute to the public good. A discourse celebrates the past and continuing, eternal care of the overseas Chens for the public good, "the unfailing support of our overseas kin" (Pine Mansion Chen Genealogy 2000, 81–82). I never actually heard anybody among the Chen in Tahiti mention the founding ancestor; they referred to the village only by its name. What the villagers value as their "public good" corresponds to what is valued in the diaspora as the "source," or "roots." A normative discourse is spread globally to celebrate and encourage the moral investment of emigrants and their descendants in the village.

It matters most in the space of the village, where social and political unity is at stake, and where calling for the diaspora's loyalty to the roots is a means of preserving the symbols of that unity. This became clear in the course of retracing the process that led to the building of the mausoleum, for which the villagers mobilized the diaspora. This was not a revitalization enterprise but a rescue operation, decided after the funeral reform was announced in Shenzhen in 1997. This nationwide reform was applied drastically and at a very rapid pace in Shenzhen, to free the space occupied by the tombs that were scattered all around the villages and thereby make way for further urbanization. It summoned the villagers to exhume all of their dead's remains and burn them. For reasons of worship and geomancy, the Chens decided to build a mausoleum over the founding ancestor's grave to prevent the destruction of his remains. From the chronology of facts given by the very precise narratives that I collected and triangulated, it was quite clear that the idea for the mausoleum had sprung up locally in response to a local policy, and that the villagers had called on their overseas kin to speedily gather the huge amount of money they needed. In other words, they instrumentalized their global relations to solve what seemed to be a foremost local problem. And yet, what puzzled me was that several people told me that the overseas kin—the *huaqiao*—were the ones who were most worried about the fate of the ancestral tomb. What this indicates, in terms of the ambivalent perceptions of the overseas relatives by local Pine Mansioners, has led me to further examine the changes in their relationship with the diaspora and how they make sense of these changes.

Local Change and the Changing Relationship with the Diaspora

What makes a discourse on change and the diaspora possible is the categorization of *huaqiao*, overseas Chinese, as a phenomenon of the past. This does not mean that the people of Pine Mansion consider that they have no longer any *huaqiao* relatives—quite the contrary—but they associate things of the past with the *huaqiao*. This is partly because emigration, a massive phenomenon in the two peak periods of the 1890s–1910s and the 1960s–1970s, has now dwindled. People like to state that migration is no longer necessary because life in China has become so much better. Company shareholders do not have to work for a living, and the young now have study and employment opportunities in nearby Shenzhen. Inhabitants of Shenzhen categorize relatives in the diaspora as pertaining to a remote past and consider emigration *passé*, favoring practices of transnational mobility such as living abroad for part of the year and in China for the other part (Trémon 2018).

The local villagers hold a contradictory discourse about the diaspora's financial support for the village. While their celebration of the unrelenting involvement and continuing loyalty of the overseas Chens constitutes a continuing moral injunction, they also stress the reduced need for overseas contributions, thereby underlining their decreased dependence on financial aid from the diaspora. Not only has migration become less of an option than in the past, but also much less overseas money is needed. The relocation of the lineage foundation from Hong Kong to Pine Mansion in the early 1990s illustrates this change in relations. As mentioned earlier, the foundation was established in Hong Kong to ensure the continuation of ancestral worship during the prohibition period. In Hong Kong it had no territorial source of income and operated based on financial donations alone. In the village today, the foundation mainly receives rental income from buildings that were originally built using overseas donations. Several leaders in Pine Mansion stressed that money from overseas is no longer necessary, since the Foundation now has a stable income from these rentals. The overseas contributions that were raised globally in the two decades following

China's reopening have thus created local financial autonomy in the ritual and overall economy.

The meaning that people in Pine Mansion confer on this change in the relationship with the diaspora, in the sense of their reduced dependency, can be grasped further through the discourses they hold on issues of *fengshui* (geomancy), the influence that the ancestor exerts on his descendants' destinies through the combination of his bodily remains and the features of the environment where he is buried. For a long time (the origins are left vague in people's accounts) the *fengshui* of his grave was said to most benefit people who left the village—that is, migrants and women who out-married, often to migrants. Indeed, *fengshui* generally functions as a mode of explanation for differences in fortune between individuals, families, and lineage segments (Naquin and Rawski 1987, 179). In this case, it was of course an explanation of the differing fates of individuals who left to go overseas and of those who remained in the village.

My questions about *fengshui* provoked debate among the people present. Some strongly adhered to the idea that it is pure nonsense and a backward superstition; others justified its existence in the name of common sense or tradition. Many people rejected it as a past belief held by peasants who hoped to reap good harvests, and thus associated it with Pine Mansion's past, when it was still a peasant society. Several insisted that it was a belief clung to by Hong Kong and overseas Chinese in justification of the mobilization to protect the founding ancestor's tomb. Some *huaqiao*, especially Hongkongers, worried greatly about the tomb and the negative consequences that its destruction might bring about. However, the *fengshui* of the gravesite was also alluded to in conversations with villagers about the mausoleum, without any reference to the *huaqiao*. My interpretation is that imputing the attachment to *fengshui* to the *huaqiao* was used as an alibi in two respects: as a way of justifying asking them for money for the mausoleum, and a way of justifying the imperative to save the tomb for reasons that are officially considered "superstitious" in China.

Indeed, many people paradoxically made concessions to the idea that *fengshui* might exist, by stating that it has changed. For instance, one person who had earlier rejected *fengshui* as nonsensical balderdash that

only Hongkongers believe in told me that “houses are better than hills,” referring to the factory that now faces the founding ancestor’s grave. This suggests that the *fengshui* had improved thanks to the change in the built environment. This of course constitutes a way of expressing and possibly explaining the improvement in the livelihoods of those who inhabit the village. The inversion or rebalancing in their relationship with the diaspora thus also finds expression in these declarations.

The contradictory statements that *fengshui* no longer exists (and is a peasant belief), followed by the assertion that it has changed, are expressions of doubt within a context where such beliefs are condemned as “superstitious” by the Chinese state. But they also reveal ambivalent feelings. On the one hand, declaring one’s disbelief in *fengshui* and imputing such views to diasporic relatives, who supposedly cling to old beliefs, amounts to claiming that the people of Pine Mansion are now no longer superstitious peasants, but modern citizens who participate in economic growth and modernization, in contrast to conservative overseas relatives often living in places that now lag behind China. On the other hand, suggesting that *fengshui* has changed, or that the benefits of *fengshui* have become more equally distributed or that its action has been reoriented locally, might also be a way of stressing the resolution of a moral problem that was raised by the manner in which it operated in the past, when leaving the village often led to higher economic rewards than staying (Trémon 2018).

But today, those aged over fifty who have remained in the village tend to stress, in a posteriori rationalization, that they made a judicious choice not to leave at a time when everybody wished to leave; although they suffered difficulties and poverty during the Mao period, their choice was somehow rewarded by their present prosperity. Native villagers reaping the fruits of the native village’s economic development is seen as a reward; indeed, when they established the shareholding companies, those who had never left the village paid a much lower price per share than those who had left temporarily and then returned. The morality they have demonstrated by remaining in the village and the hardships they have endured have been compensated for by the good life that they now enjoy in their native village. Therefore, the wish to be a modern Chinese urban citizen of Shenzhen, one who does not believe in *fengshui*, is at odds

with the wish to point out the return of truth and morality, a kind of restoration of a right order of things.

Conclusion

The local scale of the lineage-village community has become revalorized along with the changes caused by China's reopening and reform, which fostered industrialization and urbanization and thereby heightened the value of local territory, increased the inhabitants' income, and led to the creation of a native category of landlords. The valence of the former village scale is increased in the sense of the locality's power of attraction and value-generating potential. The valence of the local scale also refers to its desirability: the former village's prosperity is interpreted as a return of order, and a more just order, after the disorder of the Mao period. More generally, the resumption of worship in Pine Mansion from the early 1980s, the reimporting of the Foundation established in Hong Kong to the village, and the ways in which the members of the lineage community have managed to protect several lineage landmarks and ritual sites against urbanization plans in the 1990s, can all be analyzed as a process of recentering on the village-lineage community. Investment from overseas and donations to the ritual economy have not only led to increased prosperity but also set the conditions for the increased financial autonomy of the village-lineage economy and reduced dependence on the diaspora. At the same time, they aimed to sustain, restore, and protect the local village as the center from which the community expands globally: without its focal sites where its source is ritually remembered the lineage-village would disappear altogether, and if the change had been such that these landmarks had disappeared there would be no basis for the relationship with the diaspora to continue.

This process and its outcome thus explain the contradiction I have outlined between, on the one hand, "eternitary" discourses that insist on the lineage's global unity, account for mobilizations with the necessity of forever protecting its ritual sites, and celebrate the enduring commitment of the diaspora; and on the other hand, discourses on change that stress

the cultural differences with overseas relatives, thereby locating modernization in the village rather than overseas, proudly emphasizing the end of dependence on the diaspora, and pointing to the betterment of life in the village as evidence of the advent of a just moral order. It is a general ethnographic principle that the presence of contradictions and paradoxes in the data scaffolds the move from “how” to “why,” from description to explanation (Katz 2001). Building on Sally Falk Moore’s notion of “diagnostic events” as a central heuristic principle in processual ethnography, I have used “diagnostic contradictions”: contrasts, ambiguities, and paradoxes in discourses on change and non-change. By weaving together the contradictions in the discourses that emerged from narratives and interactional situations, I have been able to begin to grasp an understanding of this complex relationship, which involves processes and shifts in relations at different scales. The main contradiction between eternity and change is the most significant for understanding the tension, within the diasporic relationship, between the local and global scales in space and time, while also shedding light on how people in Pine Mansion are caught within this tension.

I have also argued for paying attention to how social actors take action according to the scale they consider important and appropriate, in order to reach a fuller understanding of how change occurs on larger spatial and temporal scales, and how it is experienced and interpreted. We can then produce knowledge about historically changing configurations that imply different scales of action and interaction, rather than just accounting for local situations by the impact of “global forces” that are out of the reach of people on the ground—and the ethnographer. A truly processual extended case may then be reached by taking into account, first, the scalar properties of social forms, and second, how scales are at stake in people’s actions and inform scalar strategies—actions taken according to the scale that is viewed as desirable and appropriate. I have proposed an analytical distinction between two dimensions of scale within which social action can be considered: scale as the scope—the extension in space and time—of chains of interdependence within which actions take place, and scale as valence, i.e., the attractiveness and desirability of one scale in relation to other scales, resulting in evaluations and actions to ensure that this scale prevails.

That the valence of scale is not necessarily a function of scale as scope is clear when considering the local scale, but perhaps less so with regard to the global scale. The global extension of flows in space and time, and the interactions and transactions across the locales linked by these flows, seem to bear unequivocally positive valence: spatial and temporal extensions provide resources for value-generating action. Pine Mansioners have made strategic use of the global scalar properties of their lineage, whose extension in space enhanced the potential for fundraising from the most successful overseas relatives. The value of the diasporic donations is acknowledged on the donation plaques and in the genealogy, which recalls how overseas relatives have participated in the public good. Not only have spatially extended kinship networks provided financial resources but their temporal extension has also provided a political resource in terms of the local community's relationship with the state (Trémon, 2022). However, while the global scope of the Pine Mansion lineage is valued positively by the local members of the emigrant community, it also bears negative valence. This is visible in the categorization of emigration as a phenomenon of the past, and of diasporic kin as superstitious conservatives, which members of the local community conspicuously pit against their own and China's modernity. This *ambivalence* in the diasporic relationship—the mixed feelings and contradictory ideas held by the community's inhabitants about their overseas relatives—can thus be analyzed in scalar terms.¹⁰

While analytically differentiating these two dimensions, scale as scope and scale as valence, is fruitful, it is equally important to examine the interplay between them. The strategies of the actors involved for defending or promoting a particular scale of action depend on the scope of the resources available to them, while spatial and temporal extensions provide resources for value-generating action. The temporal and spatial extension of the lineage as a social entity provided local members with both economic and symbolic resources that played a substantial part in the transformations referred to in this chapter: the making of Shenzhen and the opening up of China, but also the cunning resistance to the state's

¹⁰For a more in-depth analysis of this precise point and the valence of scales more generally, see Trémon (2022).

attempt to dissolve the former lineage villages, opposing the valence of their local scale to that of the Chinese state's project. This preferred scale is to some extent global—the local members value their lineage's global scope in space and time and draw legitimacy and prestige from it. It is, however, increasingly aligned with the state's scalar projects, aimed at placing the local and national scales center stage.

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