Rice Intimacies

Reflections on the "House" in Upland Sulawesi and South China

Gonçalo D. Santos and Aurora Donzelli

In this article we intend to discuss "the house" both as an anthropological category and as a material reality from a comparative perspective. The study of human dwellings across cultures has always occupied the minds of social scientists. However, it was only a few decades ago that social scientists started to look at "houses" not just as constructions endowed with historical meanings and symbolic values, but also as a distinctive type of social formation. To these concerns we want to add a focus on "houses" as spaces of intimacy.

Intimacy is a form of relatedness entailing material or virtual proximity, implying the sharing of spaces, things, or experiences and resulting in bonding between individuals. Unlike common sense understanding that relates the notion of intimacy to a hidden private sphere, opposed to more public and overt dimensions of social life, we will highlight how intimacy is a fundamental dimension of moral and political economy.

The concept of "house societies" (*sociétés à maisons*) developed by the French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss (1979, 1983, 1984, 1987, 1991) was a first step in this direction. Initially derived from ethnographic accounts of Northwest American Native peoples (the Kwakwaka'wakw, also known as Kwakiutl) and from historical

Gonçalo D. Santos is an LSE Fellow in the Department of Anthropology at the London School of Economics. His work on South China centers on questions of kinship, family, sociality, technology, and environment. He is the editor of *Chinese Kinship. Contemporary Anthropological Perspectives* (with S. Brandtstädter; London 2009: Routledge).
E-mail: G.D.Santos@lse.ac.uk
Aurora Donzelli is a Postdoctoral Fellow at the Endangered Languages Academic Programme at SOAS, in London and an Associate Researcher at ILTEC (Institute of Theoretical and Computational Linguistics), in Lisbon. Since 1997 she has been doing fieldwork in Insular Southeast Asia, focusing in particular on the Toraja region. Her main areas of research are linguistic anthropology, political oratory and ritual speech, vernacular practical philosophies, aesthetics of verbal performance, and evangelization and ritual change.
E-mail: audonzel@tin.it
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descriptions of medieval "noble houses" in Europe and the Far East (Japan), the term "house societies" refers not only to societies in which the architecture and symbolism of houses is particularly valued, but also to societies in which the "house" (as a metaphor, a materiality, or both) constitutes an important focal point of social organization at least amongst some social strata. To Lévi-Strauss, the "house" is a "total social phenomenon" capable of accommodating multiple – at times contradictory – kinship principles (e.g., descent and alliance, consanguinity and affinity) and of linking the forms of life usually thought to unfold under a common roof with the surrounding material and politico-economic environment.

Lévi-Strauss never provided an extended account of his notion of the "house," but he thought it could be usefully applied to many parts of the world: either in the more restricted sense of a distinct type of social organization, or in the broader sense of an heuristic tool to look at the "house" in conjunction with the wider social and natural environment. He suggested for example that regions like Island Southeast Asia – which had long puzzled anthropologists because of the fluidity of people's kinship formations – would be much better understood in the light of his notion of the "house." This insight had a considerable impact among Island Southeast Asia specialists (see, e.g., MacDonald 1987, Waterson 1990, 1995, Fox 1993, Carsten and Hugh-Jones 1995a, Joyce and Gillespie 2000). Much of this recent work showed that the Lévi-Straussian notion of the "house" – for all its problems and inadequacies (see Carsten and Hugh-Jones 1995b and Waterson 1995 for a review) – can help us bring to light the strong commonalities between many different Southeast Asian societies (see, e.g., Sellato 1987, Fox 1993, Bloch 1995, Waterson 1990, 1995, Carsten and Hugh-Jones 1995a, 1995b, Schrauwers 2004).

Moving away from these regional debates, our purpose in this article is to make use of first-hand ethnographic material to compare a classic Southeast Asian/Indonesian instance of a "house society" with a context that is not usually associated with this mode of kinship and social organization: China. The Indonesian case comes from the Toraja highlands in the island of Sulawesi; the Chinese case comes from the northern "hilly regions" of the Southern Chinese province of Guangdong. These are the two contexts where we have been doing separate on-going field research in relatively remote rural areas since the late 1990s (see map below). Partly inspired by recent anthropological scholarship on the "house" (e.g., Carsten and Hugh Jones 1995a, Carsten 2004: chapter 2), our comparative endeavor aims at developing a new approach to the relation between kinship, intimacy, and architecture by looking at this relation in the context of its wider human and non-human environment.

The idea of engaging in this comparative enterprise emerged during a joint field trip to the Toraja highlands in late 2006. During this visit, we started to suspect that there was a startling interplay of commonalities between our two field sites. We were of course well aware that they are very different in many respects. Besides being situated in different climatic zones (Toraja is tropical, Northern Guangdong sub-tropical), they are integrated in different wider political, economic, ethnic, religious, linguistic, and cultural environments. For example, while one is located in a young post-colonial archipelagic state that was founded less than one century ago, the other is located in an old continental state with a unified history of more than 2,000 years.

Yet, despite these highly significant macro-level differences, to which we would have to add micro-level regional specificities, it was also clear to us that there were important similarities between our two field sites. How could we explain this intuition? We think that the key to this question lies in the landscape and its relation to people's houses. Both places are marked by the eye-catching presence of odd-shaped limestone mountains and they both feature a never-ending chessboard of paddy fields that reminds us of a shared long-term historical association with the practice of wet-rice

Fig. 1 Map of field locations. Prepared by João Segurado.

farming. In both places too, it was only during the twentieth century that the local rice farming families and communities started to abandon the fields and became more directly involved in the dynamics of industrialization, global capitalism, and modern state formation. Today, this involvement still remains peripheral in some respects: Toraja being a predominantly rural and marginal mountainous area in the island of Sulawesi and Northern Guangdong being a markedly rural hilly area still somewhat apart from the highly urbanized core of the province's fast-growing economy.

As discussed in more detail in the next sections, what we find striking is that the similarities cross-cutting these two areas have been overlooked by anthropologists. In our view, an important factor leading to this "great divergence" at the core of the Asian scholarly tradition derives from the way in which the "traditional" kinship systems of these two regions have been portrayed in the anthropological literature. In both regions, kinship is seen to have a prominent organizational role in the wider society, but whereas kinship in upland Sulawesi is associated with a "house-focused" system of social organization, kinship in rural South China is associated with a "lineage-centered" one. We think that this contrast is overdrawn. And we believe that the broad analytical spirit of Lévi-Strauss' notion of the house, understood as an hybrid social formation that

comprises both the life under a common roof (what we call the "house") and its relation to the wider systems of material and social reproduction (including the "House," as a social institution), can help us shed new light on some of the commonalities between the two regions.[1] The heuristic and theoretical value of this linkage cannot be overstated, as it is often neglected by social scientists.

Rice *oikonomias* of Intimacy

Our comparative attempt to link these two micro-macro levels of analysis was particularly inspired in the classic notion of *oikonomia*, as formulated by Aristotle in several passages of his *Politics* I, II, IV and in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, VIII (see Aristotle 1992, 2004).[2] This notion refers to a practical and managerial form of knowledge strongly connected to the ancient Greek "household" (the *oikos*), which, as the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben (2005) has insightfully pointed out in a recent interview, "was a complex organism with different intertwined relations, stretching from family ties in the strictest sense to master-slave relations and the management of agricultural enterprises of often large dimensions." The German philosopher Kurt Singer (1958: 30) would add here that the term *oikonomia* "denotes activities of management, or administration, applied to persons and goods belonging to an *oikos*, a term whose meaning varies from house to family household, dwelling place or region, homeland, as well as to property in general." He goes on to say that "in early times [the term] may well have designated the whole region over which a *genus* held sway. Much later it became the word for ruling dynasty" (Singer 1958: 30).

We believe that the power of this ancient Aristotelian formulation is that of seeing the *oikos* and its related form of practical knowledge (the *oikonomia*) as an arena of socio-ecological interaction that goes well beyond the immediate family, hence connecting the "houses" (with the small 'h') with the surrounding environment. This linkage would be lost with the later tendency to introduce a sharp break between the *oikos* and the *polis* – a rupture that echoes the modern opposition between the private and the public. However, this dichotomy was not so marked in the time of Aristotle, as the *oikos* was also seen to have important functions in the public realm.

We want to recover this old Aristotelian sense of the word *oikos* and bring to light the *oikonomic* metaphors of the micro- and macro-kinship formations of our two field sites. Our comparative adventure will involve – in the spirit of most articles in this special issue – a description of people's "houses" as "living artifacts" of daily individual and familial livelihoods shaped by the surrounding material, spiritual, and social environments. This will lead us to draw attention to the central role played by "rice" (as both a material substance and as a symbol) in the *oikonomic* structures and idioms of intimacy of our two field sites and to suggest that the long-term practice of wet-rice farming in the two regions has produced enduring socio-cultural similarities. Our use

[1] Please, note that our "House"/"house" contrast is different from the one introduced by Bernard Sellato (1987: 196). In contrast to ours, which draws a distinction between the realm of the "life under a common roof" and the wider "House" as institution of social organization, Sellato's distinction concerns differences in status, prestige, wealth, and ritual power among "House" institutions in Southeast Asian societies: "Je propose [...] de restreindre le terme de 'maison' aux unités domestiques ordinaires, et d'utilizer le terme 'Maison' pour les familles dominantes de sociétés de type féodal. [...]. Ainsi les Iban ont des 'maisons' mais pas de 'Maison', et les sultanats des Philippines, comme l'Europe féodale, ont des 'Maisons' mais pas de 'maisons'."

[2] An earlier formulation of the term can be found in the fourth century works of Plato and Xenophon, but Aristotle is generally recognized as the major ancient Greek theorist of the "science" of *oikonomia*. Indeed, the economic anthropologist Karl Polanyi (1957: 66) once wrote that Aristotle attacked "the problem of man's livelihood with a radicalism of which no later writer on the subject was capable – none has ever penetrated deeper into the material organization of man's life."

of the term "rice intimacies" seeks to capture these similarities and refers to all micro-macro structures and idioms of intimacy that were historically shaped by the phenomenon of widespread production and consumption of rice.

Retrieving our broad understanding of intimacy, defined at the beginning of the article, as a dimension that crisscrosses large-scale features of the political economy and micro-dynamics of familiar relations, we will highlight the combination of equality and difference, attachment and distance, attraction and repulsion underlying the production, consumption, and redistribution of rice. As we will see, both in South China and in upland Sulawesi, "rice" is both a key staple food and a central socio-cultural metaphor, being at the same time a powerful operator of distinction and an essential mediator of human recognition. In this sense, our use of the category of intimacy highlights the inherent paradoxes and ambiguities underlying the various types of social relations that partake in rice-centered moral and political economies. Rice is at the same time reproducing hierarchy and social jealousy and constructing solidarity and ideologies of social equality.[3] Of course, nothing of this will make any sense to you before we submit our ethnographic data to your consideration.

Two Field Sites, Two Traditions of Ethnographic Writing

The task of introducing two contexts like the Toraja highlands of Sulawesi and the region of Northern Guangdong in South China is also one of introducing two different "regional traditions of ethnographic writing," to use Richard Fardon's (1990) expression. Given that these writing traditions have largely evolved separately, it is hardly surprising that their juxtaposition reveals a strong contrast. Take the example of the kinship literature. While the Chinese kinship tradition has been obsessed with patrilineal descent and with lineages (see, e.g., Stafford 2000a, Santos 2006b), the Island Southeast Asian tradition has instead emphasized the fluidity of people's kinship formations often linking this fluidity to the prevalence in the region of either cognatic or weak unilineal systems of descent (see, e.g., Errington 1987, Waterson 1995, Carsten and Hugh-Jones 1995b).[4]

That kinship in China came to be strongly associated with lineages and with lineage theory is largely due to the phenomenon of "lineage-village organization" in rural South China. Writing about the pre-Communist era, the late Maurice Freedman (1958, 1966) famously described this phenomenon as a "traditional" form of politico-ritual organization that differed from other similar phenomena found for example in small-scale African societies like the Nuer because it was compatible with class stratification and state organization. Freedman's work triggered a vast amount of studies of "lineage-villages" in South China (mostly in rural Hong Kong and Taiwan) that would become a powerful ethnographic inspiration for what is today known as the "classic" lineage model of Chinese kinship (J. Watson 1982, Cohen 2005).

Take the example of Harmony Cave, a pseudonym for the South Chinese "single-lineage village" in which Santos has been doing field research since 1999. Like most villages in the area, this village constitutes a compact local unit and its resident families share a common surname and continue to claim, despite several decades of socialist and post-socialist modernizing reforms (see below), that they descend from a common

[3] The social and emotional ambiguities participating in these structures of intimacy are evocative of Michael Herzfeld's (1997) use of the notion of cultural intimacy.

[4] We should not forget the Dutch structuralist school and the so-called "original prescriptive alliance" hypothesis (see e.g. van Wouden 1968, Blust 1980). In contrast to the bilateral and fluid hypothesis, this school advocates the view that Austronesian social organization was based on highly prescriptive marital alliances.

patrilineal ancestor, the founding family of the village.[5] In addition to this claim of shared local descent, the village families still practice patrilocal exogamy at the group level: while daughters are expected to marry out and move into the families and villages of their husbands, sons are expected to marry in and work for the well-being and continuity of the patriline of their parents' family and village.

This kind of data has led anthropologists to argue or at least imply that descent is the key local gendered operator of kinship and relatedness. If one is a male, one's identity is significantly determined by birth (or adoption) and largely overlaps with that of one's father and the founding village ancestor; if one is a female, one's identity is significantly defined by marriage and largely overlaps with that of one's husband and his village ancestors (even though women retain the surname of their father). Spatially speaking, these kinship rules and strategies produce seemingly rigid and clear-cut descent groups that also constitute discrete village communities. These localized lineage communities are capable of establishing patrilineal relations with one another and they reproduce themselves within the wider political, ritual, and economic structures.

In the Toraja highlands, the former "petty chiefdom" in the Indonesian island of Sulawesi where Donzelli has been undertaking extensive field research since 1997, kinship also plays a major role in grassroots social organization and is also embedded in the wider political, ritual, and economic structures. However, like in many other parts of Indonesia and of Island Southeast Asia, the region is well known for the fluidity of its kinship formations. This fluidity is often explained by the fact that: (1) descent principles are *not* unilineal but cognatic, (2) villages are not compact but dispersed, and (3) people can be members of multiple coexisting kinship groupings (see, e.g., Waterson 1984, 1986, 1995).

The implication here is that "group boundaries and individual commitments are not precisely defined" (Waterson 1995: 194) during a person's lifetime. Individuals (male or female) may claim to be connected to multiple kin groups, often identified with the "houses" where their close relatives were born, and often engage in ritual activities to justify their claims. This same point has been made for example by James Fox (1987) for other parts of Island Southeast Asia, where it is also clear that one's identity as a person is not determined at birth/adoption (or at marriage), but undergoes constant transformations during one's lifetime and is only fixed after death through burial.

In Toraja, individuals are believed to participate in a somewhat indefinite number of "origin houses" (*tongkonan*). Anyone can claim to belong to many different *tongkonan*: at least to six (those of one's parents and of one's paternal and maternal grandparents). Each *tongkonan* is paired with a collective tomb (*liang*), where its members will be placed after death. Pak Batara, a Toraja nobleman, once conveyed to Donzelli the sense of people's mobility concerning the *tongkonan* where to affiliate and the *liang* where to be buried by quoting the title of an Italian novel she had once given to him as a present: "Va dove ti porta il cuore" ("Follow your Heart").[6]

As we noted earlier, the Lévi-Straussian concept of "house societies" provided an elegant way to deal with this structural fuzziness, but it also opened the way for the

[5] Most villages in the Harmony Cave region are "single-lineage villages", but there are also a few villages with two or even three separate lineage compounds. "Multi-surname villages" can also be found in South China but this much more "mixed" type of village is more strongly associated with North China. The only localities in the Harmony Cave region that look "mixed" in this later sense are market towns.

[6] This emphasis on fluidity is partially rhetorical. It has often been noted that the need to fulfill ritual obligations poses limits to individual membership in *tongkonan*, generally restricting one's affiliations to one or two origin houses. The same holds true for the freedom in choosing one's burial site, as this is often at the centre of powerful disputes between different groups (see also Fox 1987, Waterson 1995).

emergence of a stark ethnographic contrast between Island Southeast Asia and neighboring regions like South China. We think that this contrast is exaggerated and results from the fact that the comparison between these two regions has relied too much on variations in the descent system and has focused too narrowly on the politico-ritual dimensions of kinship. What we want to do instead is to focus on the more practical and economic side of kinship – the one that is more strictly related to what we call the *oikonomic* following the "humanistic" (Polanyi 1957) vision of the relation between economy and society of the ancient Greeks. This focus on the *oikonomic* will also allow us to recover and shed new light on the strong linkage between the micro-level of the "house" and higher-level kin formations such as the "lineages" studied by Maurice Freedman or the "Houses" studied by Lévi-Strauss. But let us explain better what we mean by plunging into an initial comparative analysis of the current metamorphoses of the House/lineage in Toraja and Guangdong.

''Origin-house'' Metamorphoses in the Toraja Highlands

Toraja society has been undergoing a considerable process of social change due to its increasing involvement in global capitalist flows and to its participation in the modern Indonesian nation-state. Although wet-rice farming remains a major form of livelihood, important transformations have occurred during the last three or four decades. Conspicuous temporary migration to other Indonesian urban areas and successful participation in the tourist market has produced new capital and with it a new bourgeoisie. This resulted in conflicts between the old-ruling class of landholders and the *nouveau riche* that are apparent in the local debates about the Toraja hereditary ranking system of social stratification. While the old aristocracy emphasizes the importance of inherited rank claiming that one's position is determined by pedigree, the *nouveau riche* highlight the role of achieved status and contend that ability to organize fastuous funerals and wedding ceremonies and to build sumptuous *tongkonan* ("origin houses") is what really matters in determining one's social position. The increasing participation of the new middle and upper-middle class in the local ritual life has resulted in a sort of "ritual inflation" (Volkman 1985), enhancing the visibility and the symbolic value of local customs and traditions.

Tongkonan (Figs. 2, 3) are the items of Toraja material culture that have most attracted the attention of ethnographers – as well as tourists (Adams 2006) –, partly because they constitute "the archetype of the noble House described by Lévi-Strauss" (Schrauwers 2004: 83). The *tongkonan* is an "origin house," a kindred house established by a common ancestor, or most often by a couple whose stable and fertile marriage and alliance it celebrates (cf. Bloch 1995). *Tongkonan* are not just the product of natural relations of kinship but are human appropriations of this idiom of intimacy, they all have names, founding stories, and founding ancestors, but they are always retrospectively instituted. As in other so-called "house societies" (Macdonald 1987, Keane 1995), the *tongkonan* is a conceptual and material device functioning as a "link between ancestors and descendants" (Morrell 2001: 7). However, as we noted before, there is a clear-cut contrast between the living and the ancestral sides of any *tongkonan*. The ancestral part looks fixed and rigid; by contrast, the living side looks fuzzy and unclear.

Tongkonan are inhabited by a family, a couple, or a representative of the group of living descendants. However, more than simple dwellings, they are symbols and repositories of the inalienable regalia belonging to the dispersed kindred group (such as sacred Indian cloths, daggers, amulets, and rice-fields). Although *tongkonan* are usually linked to an actual physical structure with the shape of a highly elaborate house endowed with massive bamboo roofs and complex ornamental carvings, they do not need to exist as physical buildings in order to play an important role in people's lives.

(left) Fig. 2 Tongkonan, Toraja highlands.
(above) Fig. 3 Wooden plate attached on the front of a recently refurbished *tongkonan* (named *Sura'*) in Balik. The plate bears the names (and the respective *tongkonans*) of the descendants of Ne' Karapuak (the founder of *tongkonan Sura'*) who participated in the refurbishing enterprise. Photographs: Aurora Donzelli.

In the southern Toraja village where Donzelli did her major fieldwork, only three out of the twelve main village *tongkonan* were actually standing as material buildings, the remaining others were no longer objectified in a building but they were equally present in people's lives and rituals. Aside from being symbolic material objects, *tongkonan* are also said to be living entities that need to be fed during rituals. Part of the meat from the buffaloes slaughtered during funerals is distributed to the *tongkonan* who are described as eating it. Traditionally, these "eating entities" stood at the apex of a kin-framed form of political organization. The already mentioned Pak Batara (23/12/07), discussing the political structure of his village area, said that the twelve main *tongkonan* there were formerly like different governmental departments: one for irrigation, one for justice, one for agriculture, one for defense and so forth. The term *tongkonan* thus should not be applied to all the "traditional looking houses." As the aristocrats in Toraja often emphasize, to look like a *tongkonan* is not the same thing as to be a *tongkonan*. There are important status distinctions to be made: A house with the shape of a *tongkonan* could be just a *batu a'riri* or a *matua ulu*, terms that refer to houses of junior or lesser status.[7]

The aristocrats' standpoint should be understood in the light of the process of liberalization and privatization of the traditional "origin houses." One of the ways through which the recently emerged bourgeoisie seeks to reinforce its symbolic power is precisely through lavish engagements in the local ritual economy. House construction – a growing local industry – is a case in point. It is possible today for a well to do household to build a *tongkonan*-looking house in wood or in cement and to present itself as the focal point of an "origin-house" grouping. This phenomenon cannot be separated from the New Order (Soeharto's authoritarian regime) attempts at undermining the traditional

[7] This more conservative position can be exemplified in the reaction of two noble friends of Donzelli who, upon hearing that she had attended a funeral in the Kesu' district where the person celebrated (a man with ninety years old and four wives) was said to be the founder of the *tongkonan*, were shocked and said that no *tongkonan* could be so young. According to them, a founder of a *tongkonan* has to have lived several generations in the past.

forms of political organization through a domestication of the *tongkonan* and its symbolic reconfiguration into the Toraja "traditional house" (*rumah adat*) (see Adams 2006).

This process also reflects a more general bottom-up transformation that parallels the erosion of the traditional patriarchal collective structures of power. As a younger generation of Toraja migrants and petty capitalists acquire wealth and political influence, the old guard's position is challenged and the immediate family becomes more and more salient. As a result, the *banua*, the actual house where people live and eat their daily "rice" (*bo'bo'*), can no longer be seen as standing in the shadow of the *tongkonan*. A closer look at this largely neglected interplay between *banua* and *tongkonan* – together with a focus on their roles in people's livelihoods – will challenge the tendency to view *tongkonan* as mere theatres of political affiliations and ritual celebrations. However, before that, we will have to make a stopover in China.

"Lineage" Metamorphoses in Rural Guangdong

Harmony Cave is a small Cantonese-speaking "single-lineage village" – the local term is "common surname village" (*tuhng-sing-chuyn*)[8] – located in a rural township in Northern Guangdong we shall refer to as Brightpath. The area is often praised by visiting urbanites for the beauty of its agrarian landscape of paddy fields, figure-shaped limestone mountains and small compact villages still made for the most part of traditional-looking "clay-houses" (*naih-nguk*).

Despite its agrarian appearance, the village area is actually afflicted by a massive wave of "temporary labor migration" to the wealthier Southern urban parts of the province in the Pearl River Delta region. This increasing engagement with modernity, industrialization and global capitalist flows started to occur in the mid-1980s soon after the implementation of the post-Mao reforms, and it has been largely led by the more energetic and educated younger generations (both men and women). From the very beginning, most Brightpathers targeted specific suburban areas in highly industrialized cities like the provincial capital Guangzhou. Here they usually live in huts and work as wage laborers in factories or become self-employed vegetable gardeners selling their products in major distribution markets nearby (see Potter 1968, Aijmer 1980 for a similar phenomenon in the colonial Hong Kong of the 1960s and 1970s).

Faced with widespread urban scorn and enduring official restrictions on rural-to-urban migration, these labor migrants remain strongly tied to their native township and it is there that they have been investing their savings in various kinds of enterprises. These include personal family projects like new modern houses or "mansions" (*lauh*) made of bricks, cement, and glass windows, as well as collective village projects like the reconstruction of old "ancestral halls" (*jou-tohng*) and "temples" (*miuh*) previously destroyed or abandoned during the Maoist cultural revolution.

This widespread investment in pre-Communist forms of symbolic capital was only possible due to the government's new *laissez-faire* attitude towards religious expression. Moreover, it is not specific to the Brightpath area, but is symptomatic of a wider process of public revival of "old" ritual traditions that is occurring in much of the province and through which a newly emerged elite of successful entrepreneurs (quite often descendants of the old pre-Communist gentry) is seeking to reinforce its recently acquired power position (see Potter and Potter 1990, Ku 2003, Aijmer and Ho 2000). As in the Toraja case, this public revival of "old" ritual traditions has entailed a double process of monetarization and inflation that has enhanced the visibility and the symbolic value of "traditional" things.

[8] All Chinese expressions quoted in the text refer to the Cantonese language as spoken in the Harmony Cave region. Cantonese is transcribed with the Yale System of Romanization.

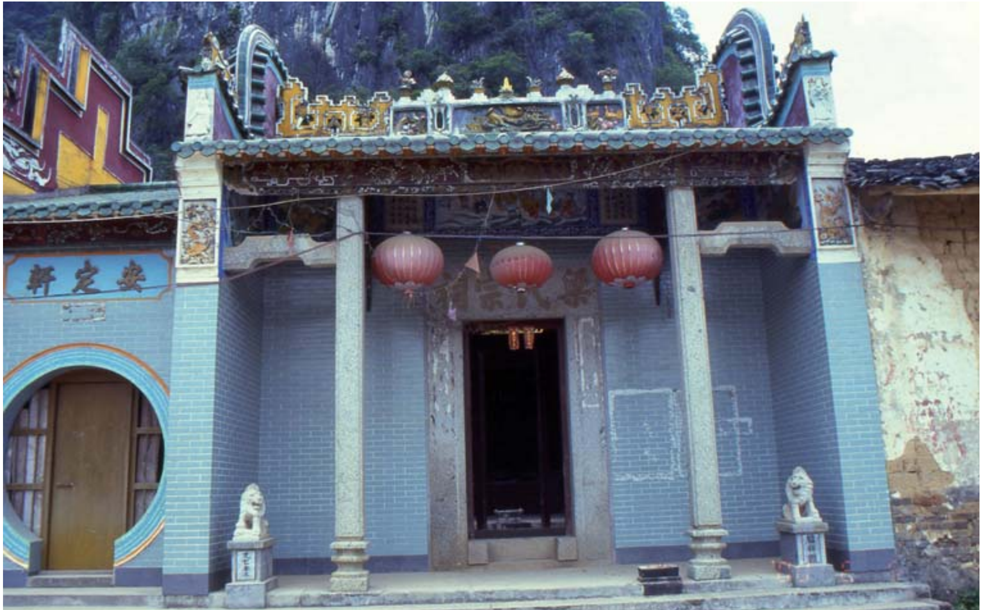


Fig. 4 Village Ancestral Hall reconstructed in the 1990s, Northern Guangdong. Photograph: Gonçalo D. Santos.

Today, people's communal ancestral halls and popular religious temples are once again the most impressive items of the local material culture (Fig. 4). The ancestral halls in particular are amongst the artifacts that most attracted the attention of students of Southern Chinese "lineage-villages" (e.g., Baker 1968). These buildings constitute important focal symbolic points of these villages, which are usually defined as bounded corporate groups characterized by a strong (albeit highly hierarchical) communal spirit linked to a shared claim of patrilineal descent as well as to shared duties of ancestor worship, shared rights of territorial settlement, and sometimes shared ownership of land and/or other economic resources (J. Watson 1982, Faure 1986). Note that this definition is less a fixed model than an idealized empirical continuum from A to Z comprising all sorts of lineage communities from weak to strong, from less corporate to more corporate (Freedman 1958: 131–132).

The oldest local "lineage-villages" were founded some 200 to 300 years ago, but the elites of these villages are often in possession of written genealogies – as well as of other ritual regalia like village flags – showing that their patrilineal pedigree goes back to the founding period of the Chinese empire, more than 2.000 years ago. To be sure, these lineage communities are not just the product of the growth of natural (albeit patrilineal) relations of kinship but are human appropriations of this idiom of relatedness. Like *tongkonan*, lineages have names, founding stories, and founding ancestors, and they are always retrospectively instituted and consolidated. They are, in short, a powerful conceptual device linking past and present, ancestors and descendants (R. Watson 1982, 1985). Unlike the Toraja case however, group boundaries and individual commitments are precisely defined *both* among the living and the dead: Just as everyone is born or is adopted into a patrilineage, so everyone remains linked to a patrilineage after death. There are however important gender variations in the way people's affiliations are fixed after death: while men usually become ancestors of the very lineage into which they were born or adopted (the lineage of their father), women retain the surname of the lineage into which they were born (the lineage of their

father) but can only become ancestors of the lineage into which they married patrilocally (the lineage of their husband or the father of their male children).

Historically, the coming into being of this lineage system of social, ritual, and political organization in South China occurred during the late imperial period as a part of the complex process through which this former frontier region was culturally, politically, and commercially absorbed into the Chinese imperial polity (Faure 2007). It was also during this period that emerged the basic structure of the present architectural shape of the local ancestral halls, which was clearly inspired by the mansions and palaces of emperors and prominent administrative officials – a phenomenon of mimesis whose historical resilience has led many scholars to talk of an overarching "imperial metaphor" (Feuchtwang 2001) in Chinese kinship and society (see also J. Watson 1991, Santos 2006a).

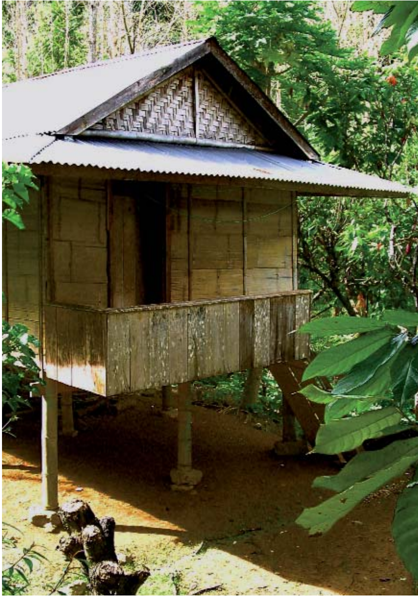
These ancestral halls are said to be the communal houses or the bureaucratic offices of the ancestors – their other houses being the tombs in which their bones or their ashes are buried. Much of the ritual activity that takes place in these halls is about feeding the ancestors through food offerings and, above all, through the burning of incense, which is placed in metallic incense burners said to have the same function as the cooking stoves of the livings. Today still, these offerings are performed quite regularly in accord with the local ritual calendar and also during major ritual occasions such as births, marriages, funerals, and lineage anniversaries.

Although people's "lineages" are often represented through these house-like buildings, they are not normal dwellings and are only inhabited by a guardian, if inhabited at all. Much less glamorous and exotic than these ancestral halls, people live in more ordinary forms of construction that are generally called *nguk*. These "houses," as noted above, are increasingly taking two different shapes: the more traditional looking "clay-houses" and the more modern looking "mansions." Ancestral halls and temples are still the most spectacular buildings, but the architectural contrast between them and people's ordinary dwellings is no longer as stark as in the past. People's houses are growing in size and autonomy, and in some cases are even appropriating the shape of the ancestral halls. In addition, some people are installing private family ancestral halls in their new "mansions" and local elders like Bright Image, one of Santos' hosts in Harmony Cave, say that these altars are challenging the authority of the communal altars in village ancestral halls. However, more than eradicating the local contrast between "houses" and "ancestral halls," these increasingly self-contained "mansions" are only transforming this contrast. Now as in the pre-Communist era, it is still in the "ancestral halls" that people feast and celebrate their communal identity, and it is still in "houses" that people live, sleep and "eat rice" (*kai faahn*).

Rice *oikonomia* in the Toraja Highlands

As it should be apparent from the above description of ancestral halls in Northern Guangdong, despite the strong colonial and postcolonial attempts to present *tongkonan* as the quintessential Toraja "traditional houses,"[9] they should be thought of more as "Houses" or buildings celebrating and embodying higher-level kinship formations.

[9] For different reasons, the Dutch, the New Order, and the Toraja middle class all attempted to reduce the *tongkonan* to a folkloric artifact. *Tongkonan* represents the Toraja "traditional house" at *Taman Mini*, the thematic park built by Soeharto's wife to display all the traditional houses of the archipelago. But the assimilation of *tongkonan* to traditional houses is a process that started in the colonial era already. Writing from the field to his Mission headquarters in the Netherlands in 1917, the Dutch linguist-missionary van der Veen reports: "We think that we will order to construct our house in the *Toraja style*, that is, in the *typical shape* of a boat with a long roof protruding in the front and in the back. [...]. We have chosen a house with this shape because we think that this shape is beautiful and *typical of this region* [...]" (van der Veen cited in van den End 1994: 113, emphasis added, translation by Donzelli).



(left) Fig. 5- *Banua pattung* (Toraja vernacular house) with short bamboo pillars.
(above) Fig. 6 *Banua pattung* without pillars.
Photographs: Aurora Donzelli.

In Toraja, actual "houses" (*banua*) are quite a different affair. As we will show in the following account of rice production, redistribution, and consumption, the *banua* and the *tongkonan* are mutually related in what we call a rice *oikonomia*. While the *tongkonan* traditionally functioned as organizing centers of agricultural labor, the *banua* used to play a crucial role in rice cultivation. This relation underwent important transformations in colonial and postcolonial times, but its basic structure is still essential to understand contemporary Toraja.

The term *banua* is locally used to refer to a multiplicity of architectural types. The most typical building style (by no means the most common one) is the *banua pattung* (Figs. 5, 6). Endowed with walls made of woven bamboo, these rather simple constructions can either stand on short bamboo pillars or be built directly on the ground. From the late 1960s, Toraja started to adopt building techniques from their Buginese neighbors. The distinctive feature of Buginese-style houses, locally termed *banua bugi'*, is that they stand on long and solid wooden pillars. Buginese-style houses have absorbed many indigenous traits including *tongkonan* motifs (such as the concave-shaped roof) originating a wide range of hybrid patterns: from the less expensive to the most spacious, elaborated, and solid ones (Adams 2006: 87–88). Today, many families in Toraja are choosing to build cement houses, but the wooden Buginese house remains the most popular in rural Toraja because of its higher degree of functionality. This preference is best illustrated by the fact that even *tongkonan* dwellers are increasingly building Buginese-style houses next to their *tongkonan* in what constitutes an important architectural rearrangement of the *tongkonan* symbolic and practical functions (Figs. 7, 8).

While living in a *banua* it is impossible not to be confronted with the role of rice as a structuring *oikonomic* dimension of people's kinship and social formations. During her long-term residence in a Toraja household, one of Donzelli's responsibilities consisted in cooking for the *banua* regulars and guests. Still not well versed in local culinary traditions, and no doubt influenced by her Italian gastronomic roots, she would strive to use the few Italian ingredients she had brought to the field to initiate her adoptive family members to the Italian cuisine. To the great amusement of her *banua* friends and to her own frustration, she soon discovered that despite her efforts to

Fig. 7 Buginese-style house with wooden pillars and zinc roof. Photograph: Aurora Donzelli.

Fig. 8 Buginese structure combined with Toraja-inspired roof shape. Photograph: Aurora Donzelli.

match the original Italian flavors, people were introducing significant changes in her recipes. Despite her objections, they would accompany her porcini and saffron *pasta* with boiled rice (*bo'bo'*), arguing that even though her food was great, it was not filling enough. Rice is a key part of the Toraja diet and its production still occupies an important role in society (on food and eating practices in Southeast Asia see Janowski and Kerlogue 2007).

The centrality of rice lies both at a symbolic and at a material level. Even in present day Toraja, ownership of irrigated rice-fields (*uma*) is still considered to be an

important marker of status, as it is apparent in the often non-profitable efforts of the Toraja emerging bourgeoisie to acquire rice fields from the nobles. The nobles, on their part, rarely sell their land, often opting for pawning it off (*mentoe'*), a highly convenient arrangement that allows them to cede, in exchange for money or buffaloes, the rights of using the land for a generally undetermined period of time.[10]

The symbolic value of the rice fields appears even more striking in light of the local attitudes towards the dry land (*ladang)*. Despite the possibility of cultivating highly remunerative cash crops in the local gardens, people seem not very interested in exploiting their *ladang*. As the director of a local NGO once put it: "people feel proud if they own paddy fields, but they do not feel proud if they own gardens, no matter how much money they can make out of them!" In the past, slaves and lower-ranking people were expected to cultivate the gardens of their masters and patrons and to receive in exchange rice and betel nut (see van den End 1994: 228). In contemporary Toraja, giving vegetables in exchange for cigarettes, rice meals, or *argent de poche* is still a common pattern of barter exchange characterizing asymmetrical relations between former slaves and their masters.[11]

The Toraja saying *tae' na tokei palanduan* "s/he does not have anything to hang on the *palanduan*" (the firewood storage shelf on top of the stove) vividly conveys the local association of the nobility with the *uma*. In the past, it was customary for land owning families to decorate their *palanduan* with a straw of rice during the harvest period. In reference to this customary practice, the expression was used as a stigmatizing label for lower ranking and landless people. Hence, while discussing land tenure issues with a local noble (23/12/07), Donzelli was jokingly reminded that if she had arrived in Toraja in the 1940s, in order to avoid starvation, she would have to check before settling with a family whether that family's stove had been decorated with a straw of rice (Fig. 9).

On an earlier occasion (30/01/03), a low ranking friend of Donzelli complimented her for having chosen a noble household where to live during fieldwork: "You did not step on buffalo's shit when you came here!" The comment was particularly puzzling for Donzelli because the house where she was living, a simple wooden Buginese-style construction equipped with very basic furniture, seemed quite ordinary and all but fancy. However, as she later understood, her interlocutor was measuring wealth through parameters other than the exterior appearance of the house or its interior décor. What mattered were the rice fields of her host. On another occasion, commenting on the imminent departure of the researcher, this same friend – a regular of the *banua* where Donzelli was living – conveyed a similar perspective asking her why she wanted to go back to Europe when in that noble house she could have rice forever.

As Donzelli came to understand through her eating and cooking experiences in several Toraja families, the possibility of eating rice on a regular basis is incredibly important, constituting a marker of both status and humanity. As her friend Clemens Malliwa once told her recalling his childhood in the early 1960s: "In the past when rice was not a commodity that we could buy at the market, there was a clear cut distinction between those who could eat rice on a daily basis and those who could not." This distinction overlapped with that between big landholders and those who could not guarantee their year-

10 This transaction is quite uneven not only because of the rather exorbitant amount of money asked by the nobles (generally half of the value of the rice-field) to pawn off the land, but also due to the fact that the nobles retain the right to decide when to redeem the land. Even though the size of their land possessions has drastically been reduced after World War II, the nobles continue to speak of their pawned lands as their *uma*, even if the prospect of redeeming them is not even a remote possibility.

11 Aside from these socio-historical and cultural reasons, the local indifference towards cash crops could be explained with other factors such as the instability of prices of the major cash crops and the fragmentation of dry land tenure.

Fig. 9 Straw of rice decorating the *palanduan* of Dahlan Kembong Bangga Padang's stove. Photograph: Aurora Donzelli.

ly rice supply. Before the advent of the green revolution in the 1970s and the opening of Toraja to the tourist market in the 1980s, rice would be harvested once a year only, around the months of March/April. Rice supply would start becoming scarce around the month of August,[12] prompting the less well-to-do households to eat a mixture of rice and corn (*dalle*) or cassava (*duah*), which was particularly shameful, as it was considered typical of the *to mangelo* (poor people who do not have enough rice to eat).

This emphasis on rice is also obvious in the local food hierarchies. People's food categories are based on a distinction between "rice" (*bo'bo'*) and "food toppings" (*pa'kandean*), which are further divided in *pa'kandean bale* (fish), *pa'kandean duku* (meat) and *pa'kandean utan* (vegetables), etc. Although being able to accompany rice with food toppings is considered an important marker of status, people seem much more concerned with having at least two simple meals of rice a day, rather than preparing elaborate food toppings. This is reflected in the relatively scarcely elaborated local culinary tradition, a remarkable fact, especially in the light of the emphasis given, for over three decades, in Toraja public discourse, to local culture and traditions.[13]

Ethnographic descriptions of Toraja food habits seem to have overlooked the local obsession with rice, magnifying instead the role of meat and meat distribution during funerals. Volkman (1985: 82), for example, re-evoking the words of a previous ethnographer (Kennedy 1953), describes the Toraja as "meat-mad." While it is true that meat and meat distribution play an important role in the reproduction of the local

12 People generally refer to this with the term *karorian*. *Karorian* does not correspond to famine, but seems to describe a cyclic period of rice shortage.

13 The frugal eating ideology, based on the principle that "having rice on a daily basis is better than being lucky once and catch a fish in a pond," as once a Toraja interlocutor phrased it, is also apparent in the result of a survey conducted in December 2007. This survey was aimed at mapping the number of restaurants (*warung*) available in the Toraja town of Rantepao for local customers (hence excluding those targeted at a more international clientele). The survey revealed that out of a total of 40 places, only 15 could be labeled as "typical Toraja restaurants" (i.e., run by Toraja and/or serving Toraja local specialties), the remaining 25 being either Javanese (9), Buginese (10), Chinese (5), and Sumatran (1).

social and politico-ritual dynamics, the *oikonomic* primacy of rice should not be forgotten. Rather than being a mere question of eating preferences, this local attachment to rice is a complex and all-encompassing social fact that entails different levels of Toraja social life and *oikonomic* practices, impacting on both collective choices and individual behaviors. The centrality of rice cannot only be perceived through the feeling of emptiness that people claim to experience when they cannot eat *bo'bo'*,[14] or in the social stigma marking those who cannot (or could not) afford to eat it regularly and have to integrate it with corn and cassava, nor can it be reduced to the symbolic value of rice-fields and to the role of rice in the local ritual and religious life. The key function played by rice in the Toraja *oikonomia* should also be analyzed at the level of production and redistribution.

A quick glimpse at the Toraja landscape would immediately reveal the ubiquitous presence of paddy fields. As mentioned before, land tenure in Toraja is still pretty much in the hands of the aristocracy with little state intervention. Despite the strong pressures for a land reform in the 1950s and 1960s (see Bigalke 2005: 236–264 and Donzelli 2004), the attempts made by the BTI (*Indonesian Peasants' Front*) to achieve a more equitable redistribution of the land were never really successful. In former times, only noble people (locally called *puang*, *tana' bulaan*, or *to makaka*, in the northern districts) could own rice fields, commoners and slaves were allowed to own or rent small or second quality lots. According to the historian Bigalke (2005: 232), in the first half of the twentieth century, "landless rates of between 20 and 30 percent characterized Rantepao district [...], while in Sangalla', [...] landlessness was rare, but upwards to 40 per cent of the population held a barely subsistence-level amount of sawah [rice field]."

As a result of the local structure of land tenure in which *uma* are not distributed evenly amongst Toraja households, rice farming involves social units that stretch well beyond the *banua*. Rice cultivation has always been based on sharecropping arrangements (see also Bigalke 2005: 232–236), a system locally referred to as *ma'tesan* or *mendulu* (in the Southern districts). In this system, the basic idea is that the landholder gives access to the land in exchange for a share of the harvest. In the past, the common division was one-third for the tenant (*to ma'tesan*) and two-thirds for the landholder (Bigalke 2005: 232–233), but other arrangements were also possible. In more recent times, the tenant's share has increased to half of the product, in most cases.

Wage labor is a rather recent and relatively rare practice. In this case workers are recruited to farm the land in exchange of a predetermined wage (nowadays ranging between 20.000 rupiahs [1,3 €] and 25.000 rupiahs [1,7 €] a day). Wage farmers (*to pariu*) are not entitled to a share of the harvest. They are generally hired and paid not by the landholder but by the tenant who is responsible for the management and production of the land he rents.[15] Aside from sharecropping and wage labor, there are several other patterns of occasional labor extraction. Landholders, especially in the past, were entitled to recruit additional manpower through various forms of corvée labor. On the other hand, landless farmers were at times allowed to access the *uma* of landholders without abiding to a *ma'tesan* contract or working as wage laborer. Locally known as *ma'kankan*, this "last minute" arrangement entailed that the landholder would allow people to access his fields at the time of the harvest if they wanted to get some extra rice supply.

[14] Upon her return to Italy after a long fieldwork period, Donzelli retrospectively realized through her own body the centrality of rice in Toraja everyday life. She had got so used to eating three meals of rice every day that she would often feel that her stomach was not full enough.

[15] It is important to note that the position of *to mendulu/to ma'tesan* is considered much more prestigious than that of the wage laborer (*to pariu*) because the former enjoys a long-term arrangement that guarantees his subsistence.

As this brief overview should already indicate, land exploitation is collective without being collectivist. Wider social formations, such as the *tongkonan,* function as higher-level organizing structures of agricultural labor. Although the household plays a crucial role in rice cultivation and the sharecropping arrangements generally involve only one household for every rice field, land is formally owned by bigger social units such as the *tongkonan* or the extended noble families. Prior to the dismantling of their political functions during the colonial and postcolonial times, *tongkonan* played a crucial role in coordinating agricultural labor. Different *tongkonan* were in charge of supervising different chores such as irrigation, field maintenance, harvesting, etc. With the progressive metamorphosis they undertook in colonial and postcolonial times, *tongkonan* lost many of these original functions, which were both ritual and managerial, and were transformed into a celebration of the kindred group or into an iconized representation of the Toraja "traditional house."

Deprived of their former role in rice production, "Houses" still play an important (although undoubtedly idealized) function in rice production and redistribution. As it already emerged from the accounts of Donzelli's low ranking friends, rice is an important mediator of recognition and distinction in the local structures of intimacy. Landholder families and households, like Donzelli's hosts between 2002 and 2004, are expected to provide rice to a network of distantly related lower ranking relatives and clients. As Laso' Sombolinggi', once told, recalling his childhood in the house of his grandfather, the late *puang* Sangalla': "In those times, there would be around 200 people eating daily from his kitchen." Nowadays, in Sombolinggi's house in Madandan, there is an average of 30 people eating everyday out of his kitchen. As he says with pride, "Only certain people can afford feeding the less well-to-do! This is an open access kitchen, we are happy to have guests and we don't even check people coming and going!" His wife, Ibu Denupa, a noble woman from the powerful Rantelayuk family in Nanggala, highlights the villagers' attachment to her family's *tongkonan* recounting how they would often refer to their village with the expression *sang dapo'ki'* ("we are just one kitchen").[16] If these words convey how the power of the ruling class is reproduced through a rice-based "moral economy" (Scott 1976: 3), we should not idealize the redistributive role played by landholders, whose "generosity" has always been open to ambiguity and tensions.[17]

Rice *oikonomia* in Northern Guangdong

The Toraja interplay between *banua* and *tongkonan* has its parallel in northern Guangdong in the long-term historical linkages between "houses" (*nguk*) and "lineages" (*juhk*). Again, the best way to make this comparative point is to start our description from below, that is, from the *nguk* in its current dual phenomenology: the "traditional" clay-house (*naih-nguk*) and the "modern" mansion (*lauh*).

Although most local "clay-houses" look old and are undoubtedly the product of construction techniques dating from the late imperial period, they were erected as recently as the Maoist period (Fig. 10). These "clay-houses" are not autonomous units, but are spatially aggregated to one another, as in the pre-Communist era, in compact

16 An interesting topic is the conflict between new urban trends and traditional patterns of generosity. The traditional redistributive ethos marking the noble household where Donzelli spent much of her fieldwork is currently put in question by the owner's new wife. Coming from an upper but urban background, the woman is annoyed by the villagers' expectations of eating the rice cooked in her household. The new wife's lack of eagerness to share the food from her kitchen and to have her house constantly invaded by intruding villagers is causing a marital crisis.

17 As an enraged slave, referring to the hypocritical generosity of the landholders, once said in 1922 (van den End 1994: 173), "If they are not satisfied with our work, they would shout: 'Vomit out the food that I gave you from your belly, it is mine!'"

Fig. 10 “Clay-house” compound of lineage-village built in the 1970s, Northern Guangdong. Photograph: Gonçalo D. Santos.

residential compounds that may correspond or not to a whole village (see Knapp 1999, Knapp and Lo 2005 for more details on Chinese architectural traditions). The shape of these houses is always the same. Because they are very small in size (about 15–25 m^2), each family tends to occupy several units, one working as a kitchen, another working as a bedroom, another working as a rice granary, and so on (depending on the family’s size and holdings). The term “clay-houses” is the short for “clay-brick houses” (*naih-jyun-nguk*) and derives from the fact that these dwellings are constructed with yellow-colored bricks that are made out of clay extracted from the local rice fields during the dry slack season (*nuhng-haahn*), usually from November until January-February. The same can be said of the tiles covering the roofs of these houses that look darker than the bricks because they have to be burned in a firewood kiln to increase their resistance and impermeability to water.

In the past, most local villages or groups of villages had their own kilns, but the industrial and commercial boom of the post-Mao era has put this traditional industry into crisis because fewer and fewer families want to construct a new house made of clay bricks and tiles. The new trend nowadays is to break away from the old “clay-house” compounds and build new self-contained two-storey “mansions” with a terrace on top that can function as a rice drying ground (Figs. 11, 12). In contrast to the more low-tech “clay-houses,” these complex works of modern engineering have to be undertaken by a professional construction master and a large team of wage laborers quite often recruited amongst friends and relatives. At present, an average two-storey mansion costs about 100.000 RMB (ca. 9.000 €), a very large sum by local standards that represents more than a decade of savings earned by a particularly successful couple of temporary labor migrants. Nonetheless, in 2007, 20 out of more than 100 households in Harmony Cave had already managed to build a “mansion” of their own.

While living for a long period in a village *nguk* or “house,” be it in a “clay-house” or in a “mansion,” it is impossible not to be confronted with the role of rice as a structur-

Fig. 11 New "Mansions" in old "clay-house" compound, Northern Guangdong. Photograph: Gonçalo D. Santos.

Fig. 12 A new village "mansion" (2005), Northern Guangdong. Photograph: Gonçalo D. Santos.

ing *oikonomic* dimension of people's kinship and social formations. Rice is the basic component of people's daily meals, and the kitchen's stove – where the rice is cooked – is one of the key parts of people's houses. Indeed, the "stove" constitutes a major metaphor not just for the house, but also – and above all – for the "family" (*ga*) and its resources. By extension, the "stove" is also a metaphor widely used to refer to other higher-level familial units (including a whole lineage community) and their resources.

This link between the stove and the family (and its resources) becomes obvious the moment one looks at how the process of family partition is locally described as a process of "stove-partition" (*fan-fo*), mostly between agnatic brothers due to the local male-biased rules of inheritance and the practice of village patrilocal exogamy (see Wolf 1968, Cohen 1976, Santos 2008; see also Wakefield 1998 for a long-term historical perspective). Note that this supposedly equalitarian process of "stove-partition" does not necessarily imply that the newly formed "stoves" (*fo-jou*) move to a different house because the parental house can include several "stoves" (see Faure 2005). In the pre-Communist era, the process of "stove partition" only occurred after the parents managed to fulfill their patriarchal duty of arranging the marriage of all their children. Today, by contrast, after several decades of Maoist and post-Maoist modernizing reforms promoting inter-generational and gender equality, sons tend to establish a separate family "stove" immediately after marriage and regardless of parental opinion. These newly formed conjugal "stoves" may construct a separate house of their own, but they may also remain for economic reasons lodged in the house of the parents. In either case, they will become economically independent, but they will still belong at least formally speaking to the larger "family" headed by the parents.

We see that marriage is a key part of the making of a new "stove" unit,[18] but it is not a determining or sufficient factor (for example, confirmed bachelors are also entitled to establish their own "stove"). What makes marriage so important is the fact that everyone has a strong social obligation to marry and have/adopt children (one son at least) in order to assure the continuity of the family line. It is this social obligation that explains why there are so few unmarried adults and childless couples in the village area, or why people tend to look at the few existing "stoves" of confirmed bachelors or of childless couples as somewhat incomplete. Yet, although full personhood only comes with marriage and children, these are not the only factors implicated in the definition of a "stove" unit in general. What primarily defines a "stove" unit is the fact that its members are linked to one another symbolically and materially through the sharing of resources, that is, through the undertaking of what people generally call *wan faahn sihk*, literally "looking for rice to eat" (see Meillasoux 1981 on the "alimentary structures of kinship"). We shall come back to this "looking for rice" business later on. Before that, let us try to understand why people are so interested in "rice" in the first place.

Although the housing arrangements and holdings of each family can vary quite significantly, all local families tend to portray themselves as living under a common roof. They also tend to emphasize that their rice-based meals come from a common stove. They celebrate this on-going practice of commensality in various rituals and festivals. Indeed, much of the local ritual calendar, as elsewhere in rural China (Stafford 2000b), is quite often described as a series of reunion meals, the most important of which even those who are working temporarily out of the village are expected to attend. These are the most elaborate meals of the year in which, to the delight of the young children, there will be lots of delicious "food toppings" (*sung*) like pork or chicken to accompany the more basic "cooked rice" (*faahn*). This opposition between *faahn* and *sung* lies at the heart of the local categories of food and echoes a wider categorical opposition found in much of the Chinese world (Anderson 1988). The term *faahn* literally means "cooked rice" but is also commonly used to refer to a meal or even to food in general. If *faahn* is the basic component of a meal, *sung* is what complements it and gives flavor to it.

Although the local cuisine is not as plentiful as the various varieties of Cantonese high-cuisine found in any major city in the province, the diversity of raw "food top-

[18] In Toraja, too, there is a strong association between "marriage" and "stove/kitchen." The Toraja refer to "getting married" with the term "mendapo'," which is derived from the root "dapo'" or "stove/kitchen."

pings" available in the local markets is very impressive, specially if compared to the Toraja case. There are two basic kinds of "food-toppings" in the area: the less valued vegetarian "food-toppings" including vegetables (*choi*) and bean curd (*dauh-fu*) and the more valued non-vegetarian "food-toppings" including meat (*yuhk*) and fish (*yu*). The first are cheap and easier to obtain, as they can be cultivated – at least in the case of vegetables – in small garden plots. The second, by contrast, are expensive and more difficult to obtain: either people have to buy them in the local market or they have to sacrifice their own animals. This second kind of "food-toppings" is a strong marker of wealth and status and it is against the background of its relative scarcity and high value that the local table etiquette has it that, regardless of the actual food on the table, the host should always ask modestly for his/her guests' forgiveness because the meal he/she was able to offer them did not have any food toppings (*mouh sung*). By contrast, the guests should always politely insist – even if this was not the case – that they got so full that they cannot eat anything more (*kai baau* or *kai biiu*).

In fact, rather than being just a question of etiquette, this prescribed attitude of modesty also reflects the actual limitations of people's daily diet. People's precarious economic situation together with their *extremely* frugal ethics does not allow many of them to get pork, fish or chicken (the local favorite items) more than once every five days. Indeed, many local families do not even manage to get enough rice to eat three daily meals throughout the year and have to supplement or replace this highly desired rice-centered diet with rice-congee or else with other cheaper and less prestigious staple foods like sweet potatoes (*huhng-syuh*) and taro (*wuh-tauh*). This point is important because it reminds us that in here too, like in Toraja, rice is a key marker of status and wealth, even though this role was clearly more salient in the past when the levels of rice production were much lower and the local, regional, and national economies less plentiful.

Old villagers like Golden Sun (by now almost 80 years old) still remember the days before the local green revolution of the 1970s when most people in the region did not have enough rice to eat despite having a double annual harvest. Golden Sun adds that during the pre-Communist era even most landlords and warlords – the local equivalent of the Toraja nobles – were unable to obtain enough rice to eat three daily meals. Today, there are still a few impoverished villages in the northern part of the township and beyond it that do not have enough paddy fields (*tihn-deih*) to cultivate and that, as a result, had either to move into another location or to rent the paddies of those living in more plentiful areas in the township. Their story illustrates quite well the point that rice, besides being a marker of wealth and status, is also a marker of full humanity – the *oikonomia* of every local house and village being basically about getting hold of the necessary amounts of rice to make one's stomach feel filled enough.

Unsurprisingly, when Santos first arrived in this region in the late 1990s, he noticed that people would make a recurrent use of the expression "looking for rice to eat" (*wan faahn sihk*). At the time, what was striking to him about this local "epidemiological representation" (Sperber 1996) was that people would use it quite loosely to refer not just to wet-rice farming, but also to all sorts of agricultural and non-agricultural activities of livelihood including the work of wage-laborers in factories, the work of capitalist entrepreneurs or even the work of officials collecting taxes.[19] People would also use this idiom to come to terms with the dramatic transformations occurred in the local modes of livelihood during the last century. If in the pre-Communist era, "looking for rice" was

[19] The comparison here with early European peasant idioms such as "earning your daily bread" is worth noticing and reminds us of important (albeit often neglected) points of intersection between Chinese and European family systems (see for example Counihan 1997 for the importance of bread-centered idioms in Italy).

mostly about cultivating the local rice fields, during the Maoist period it was still about cultivating the local rice fields, but this activity started to be mediated by state-formed collectives; with the post-Mao reforms, "looking for rice" became increasingly about making money. We thus see that the local "looking for rice" idiom cannot be interpreted in a literal sense, but has to be interpreted more broadly as something like "looking for vital resources" – the nature of these "vital resources" being related to the specific occupation of each individual/family and to the contours of the overall political economy. However, the fact that the form of this idiom is so closely linked to rice requires explanation and reminds us that the centrality of rice in the local rural society is also linked to long-term historical issues of economic production.

For much of the history of the region, most people were not simply "looking for rice" in general, but were actually "toiling the soil to look for rice to eat" (*gaang-tihn wan faahn sihk*). Even today, at a time when it is quite tempting to abandon the fields, most local households remain linked at least partially to the practice of wet-rice farming, and in Harmony Cave at least 30% of all households remain primarily engaged in this practice. It is therefore not surprising that most local people still refer to themselves as "farmers" or "peasants" (*nuhng-mahn*) who need to "toil the soil to look for rice to eat" regardless of their actual economic activities. People also still use the "old" sayings of a bygone agrarian past – stating for example that "just as cows are under the authority of farmers so farmers are under the authority of the government [or of the emperor]" (*nuhng-mahn hah ngauh, jing-fu hah nuhng-mahn*) – to capture their relative position in society. Insightful as these sayings may be, the relative position of "peasants" in China was never as low as it became with the acceleration of the process of industrialization first in the Maoist period and then in the current market-oriented post-Mao era.

However, before this "great transformation," the history of China and its earlier imperial project was indeed quite intimately tied to an important relation of mutual dependence between the peasantry and the state – a kind of social contract that started to take shape during the beginning of the process of unification and state-building more than 2.000 years ago (see, e.g., Deng 2003). The basic idea of this profoundly unequal symbiosis is that the state would work to secure the support of the peasants (e.g., by asking them to pay low taxes, by giving them rights of usage over newly conquered territories) in order to safeguard its own survival and expansion – and vice-versa. Historically, this symbiosis has generated a strong but highly fragmented class of landholding peasants (with more rights of usage than rights of ownership) that played a key role in the expansion of the imperial polity.

In the region of South China – a former frontier region of the Chinese empire –, the coming into being of this landholding peasantry was particularly shaped from the Song dynasty (tenth to thirteenth centuries) onwards not just by the mass spread of elite ritual practices of ancestor worship and the emergence of a "lineage-village" cultural complex (Faure 2007) but also by the proliferation of the practice of wet-rice farming (Bray 1984). As early as the ninth century, the wet-rice farming plains of the subtropical south were already overcoming in terms of production the sorghum, millet and barley dryland plains of the north. However, it was only during the Song dynasty – when many northern Chinese settlers began to move south and the state initiated a series of developmental policies leading to a major agricultural revolution – that the region of South China truly started to become a highly commercialized agrarian "rice economy" (Bray 1986) more firmly incorporated in the imperial polity.

The above-mentioned "lineage-village" complex would play a key role in this process. Historically, the consolidation of this system of ritual, political, and social organization during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries was linked to various factors including the expansion of the imperial bureaucracy, the development of an incorporative Neo-Confucian state ideology based on ritual propriety, filial piety and ancestor worship, the

monetarization and commercialization of the economy, as well as the implementation of a system of household registration tied to landholding that recognized group ownership of property (see especially Faure 2007; see also Freedman 1966, Pasternak 1969, R. Watson 1982, 1985, Faure 1986). One of the consequences of the interaction between these various factors was that people started to justify their settlement rights and territorial borders by reference to descent from ancestors who were said to have acquired these rights directly from the emperor or via other sources. This was when the "lineage-village" emerged: an officially recognized landholding institution strongly shaped by Neo-Confucian ideas that would quickly become both an engine of economic growth and an integrating link between the local society and the imperial polity.

Historians often point out that the history of South China is best summed up as a history of dealings among lineages, and between them and the government, in their quest for settlement rights and other resources (e.g. Faure 1986, 2007). What is often forgotten however, to come back to the "looking for rice" business described above, is that one of the primary resources of the late imperial period was wet-rice – a staple food that was also favoured by the government because it tied people to land and made taxation easier. This means that the history of South China is also a history of wet-rice cultivation, that is, a history of wet-rice paddy building/farming and a history of fights over rice paddies and irrigation networks. Because the areas with plains (especially those close to rivers) are much more fertile than the areas with rugged mountains, the powerfuls tend to get the plains and to leave the mountains to the subalterns. This is true for the whole of South China – as it probably is for much of Southeast Asia.

This point is important because it reminds us that, from the very beginning, the "lineage-villages" of South China were not just landholding institutions but were also agrarian *oikonomic* institutions whose main goal was to get hold of enough rice to "nourish the people" (Will and Wong 1991), and thus assure the sustenance of people's ancestors and the growth of their progeny. In other words, the wider social formation we call lineage was not only an institution devised to register, legitimate, and safeguard people's territorial claims, but was also a higher-level organizing structure of agricultural labor that played an important role in the coordination of key chores such as irrigation, field maintenance, harvesting, etc.

People's lower-level households – the *nguk* described above – retained significant managerial autonomy in agriculture and indeed played the most important role in the actual work of rice cultivation. However, contrary to what the communal spirit of the lineage ideology of shared descent would lead us to expect, the land was largely in the hands of lineage landlords and warlords – the official taxpayers – who granted land usage rights to locals (and sometimes to outsiders) in exchange for rents, protection fees and/or corvée services. This means, in short, that the lineage mode of resource exploitation – like the one at the heart of the *tongkonan* in Toraja – was collective without being collectivist.

When the "Communist Liberation" army arrived in the Harmony Cave region in 1949–1950, the land was of course in the hands of the local lineage gentry, but its ultimate owner still was the imperial state. What happened in the following years of profound Maoist reforms was that the Communist Party overthrew the authority of these local elites, banned all lineage activities and redistributed the land more equally among the local farming population. At the same time, the Party also implemented a series of new collective organizations of production and taxation (production-teams, brigades, communes) that sought to eradicate and replace the political, ritual, and economic functions of the "lineage." It was thus during this period that the most collectivist form of organization of agricultural labor was put to practice. In the past, the small household was largely in control of the productive process as long as it paid the fees or taxes to do so. This was not true in the height of the Maoist period when agri-

cultural labor was truly planned and undertaken in collectivist terms. In this sense, although these newly formed Maoist collectives did not dissolve former lineage loyalties and were largely built upon already existing lineage structures (Potter and Potter 1990), they were also organizations of a very different kind.

The public revival of the lineage in the post-Mao era has introduced yet another twist in this on-going historical metamorphosis. As lineage ritual, economic and political activities re-emerge in a new market-oriented context of fast industrialization and global capitalism flows, lineages are becoming more and more like shareholding corporations that constitute a source of traditional and local identity as well as a source of social capital and, at times, of other forms of capital too. Today, land still remains in the hands of village (or lineage) collectives and is still supposed to be redistributed in egalitarian terms, but rice cultivation is no longer at the heart of the economy. Although it is quite unlikely that the "lineage-village" complex will disappear, it is also clear that this patriarchal institution has lost much of its pre-Communist material power not just to the rising Communist state, but also to the rising younger generations and their "modern" individualistic aspirations. In the current era of increased spatial and economic mobility, there are no doubts that the lower level "stove" units we have called *nguk* or "houses" here are no longer in the shadow of higher-level "stove" units like the lineage and its ancestral halls.

Asian Rice Intimacies

In a wide-ranging account of the history of wet-rice farming in the macro-region of East and Southeast Asia, Francesca Bray (1986) argues that the long-term historical centrality of rice in this vast and highly diverse region has produced important commonalities. Trying to move beyond widespread ethnocentric concerns over Asia's so-called failure to develop, Bray draws attention to the close relation between culture, technology, ecology and economy, and she argues that Asian societies "work in different ways from those of Europe" (1986: xv). Her work shows that the Asian practice of wet-rice farming with small-scale irrigation has produced one of the most land- and labor-intensive farming systems in the world – one whose capacity to feed, absorb and sustain human capital is probably unprecedented in the pre-modern era.

According to Bray (1986: 26, 134), one of the distinctive features of Asian wet-rice cultivation in general is the fact that most developments are scale-neutral and tend to be achieved not through capital investment or the introduction of machinery, but through increasing inputs of skilled manual labor supplied by the family and the community involved in the process of production. She calls this mode of agricultural development "skill-oriented" and opposes it to the "mechanical" (or "capitalist") mode of agricultural development usually associated with Northern Europe. One of the specificities of this Asian "skill-oriented" mode of agricultural development is the fact that, once a certain level of intensification is reached, the small family farm tends to predominate as the basic unit of production (*not* necessarily of land ownership). Moreover, the relations between family farms tend to remain characterized by a strong spirit of communality (quite often very hierarchical) linked to the need of regulating access to labor and irrigation water (Bray 1986: 170, 196). Bray's point is that this tension between the individualistic spirit of the small family farm and the communal spirit of collective organizations like irrigation networks is characteristic of all Asian rice societies including China and Indonesia.

Our article converges with Bray's insights in that it, too, draws attention to the close relation between culture, technology, ecology, and economy. However, we want to expand her reflections into the realm of kinship and intimacy and its relation to architecture. Our suggestion here is that the best way to do this analytical operation is to

recover the ancient Greek notions of *oikos* and *oikonomia* and link them to the holistic spirit of Lévi-Strauss' ideas about the "house." This new analytical perspective has allowed us to look at people's "houses" (with a small 'h') in the Toraja highlands and in Northern Guangdong as highly hybrid and diverse architectural structures in constant interaction with the surrounding ecological, technological, socio-cultural and politico-economic environments. Armed with this broader comparative framework of analysis, we were able to show that the long-term historical centrality of wet-rice farming in these two very different contexts has produced important commonalities in their *oikonomic* structures of intimacy both within and beyond the immediate family or household.

We are not only suggesting that "rice" in the Toraja highlands and in Northern Guangdong has infiltrated into the local modes of representing the process of intimacy and relatedness (see also Luquin this volume). We are also suggesting that the *oikonomic* arrangements and institutions of these two regions have been shaped (without being determined) by the technical logic of development of this staple crop. This is what explains the strong on-going tension found in the two contexts between the individualistic spirit of the small family farm and the communal spirit of wider collective kin-framed organizations (i.e., lineage and *tongkonan)*. While the power of larger *oikonomic* institutions like the lineage in South China or the *tongkonan* in the Toraja highlands reflects the more communal dimensions of wet-rice cultivation, the power of smaller *oikonomic* organizations like the "clay-house"/"mansion" dyad in Northern Guangdong and the *banua* in the Toraja highlands evokes its more individualistic dimensions.

Our ethnographic accounts of the contemporary changes occurring in Toraja and Northern Guangdong converged in highlighting the growing importance of smaller kinship formations and dwelling structures. The energy invested by Cantonese villagers in building modern-looking brick "mansions" and the efforts made by the new Toraja middle class to appropriate the traditional "origin-houses" by building for themselves *tongkonan* looking residences (i.e., the *tongkonan*ification of the *banua*) constitute clear signs of the creeping process of bourgeoisification of the local society. However, by connecting these processes to the long-term historical tension highlighted by Bray, we want to emphasize the fact that the growing salience of the *banua* in Toraja and of the "mansion" in Northern Guangdong is not a mere by-product of industrialization and global capitalism flows. In all likelihood, these small rice-centered social units have long played an important structuring role in these two regions. Amongst the factors making these seemingly powerless social units so resilient historically are the facts that they are characterized by significant managerial autonomy and that they dovetail very neatly with petty commodity production, which requires very little capital and absorbs surplus labor without depriving the family farm of workers at times of peak demand (mostly transplanting and harvesting).

Hence we argue that not only the process of commercialization and commodification of the "house" started to unfold many centuries ago (even though it was much stronger and much more closely linked to a strong civilizing state in South China than in Sulawesi), but also that wider kinship formations like the "House" and the lineage still play important roles in the more recent process of privatization and liberalization of the local *oikonomias*. Rather than spooks haunting a new bourgeoisified social world, the *tongkonan* and the lineage remain a fundamental aspect of social structure in Toraja and in Northern Guangdong respectively. Moreover, as the practice of building village-like ancestral halls inside private "mansions" or of building private houses in the shape of *tongkonan* suggests, the tension between smaller and wider social formations still constitutes an essential dimension of the rice *oikonomias* of these two regions. Of course, their more recent direct confrontation with industrialization, capitalism and globalization raises the question of what will happen to this tension as "money" seems to be replacing "rice" in people's *oikonomias* of intimacy.

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