

Landscapes and Environmental Change:

Famous Views of Linfen

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ABSTRACT

This paper is the second part of an exploration into the history and meaning of landscapes, based on a case study of the “must-see” scenic spots or Eight Views (*bajing* 八景) of Linfen County in the south of China’s Shanxi province. While the first part focused on the value of these iconic landscapes as sources of identity, here I will show how their aesthetic appreciation is intrinsically linked to their productive power. I argue that it was largely the idea of productivity that made these landscapes amenable for aesthetic consumption and viable as sources of identity and meaning. It was the inherent instability of these productive aspects that made their aesthetic appreciation even more significant, as it ultimately depended on the precarious balance between the two.

Keywords: Eight Views (*bajing*), Linfen (China), Cultural Landscapes, Man-Land Relations, Productivity, Aesthetic Appreciation

INTRODUCTION

As the first part of this study has shown, the sites that made it into a set of famous views were by no means fancy literary inventions but real places that people visited for various reasons.¹ Zhang Tingyin mentions that they often include scenes of production and daily life (2003, p.37). It is not least for this reason that these views of famous landscapes provide a valuable opportunity to study man-land relations and trace changes in the natural environment.

The idea of the Eight Views as a genre of poetry and painting representing landscapes for their aesthetic and cultural value with only a faint connection to the actual physical environment appears to pay little attention to its material underpinning. In their outline of the history of the genre, Li Kairan et al. argue that through the representation in poetry and paintings the Eight Views gradually turned into imagined scenes and that the actual landscapes appeared no longer relevant. Still, they see them as representations of real landscapes (as opposed to imagined “views”) in need of protection and observe that often those that survived in modern times did so because they became part of one of China’s national parks established from the 1980s. In their analysis of 100 sets of Eight Views they find that the majority were representing “nature” (60.5%), “religion” (51.1%), and “history” (30.5%), while only very few (8.7%) were showing “work settings, such as farmland during harvest” (Li et al., 2010), which would seem to undermine the idea of productivity as the basis of their appreciation. However, the Linfen case study at least seems to tell a different story. Even though the visual and poetic representations of Linfen’s Views primarily convey

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a sense of their aesthetic value, they also provide a glimpse of the actual physical features and practical uses of the places they relate to.

Serving as a source of the people's livelihood to some extent jeopardizes the idea of an unchanging landscape. At the same time this idea of unchanging mountains and rivers providing a sense of civilizational continuity also reflects an awareness of the existential dependence on the physical environment. I would like to argue that it was precisely the fact that these views represented productive landscapes that made them not only valuable in a material sense, but also aesthetically attractive. It was largely their productive potential that created the condition for an aesthetic appreciation of these landscapes in the first place and that made the views valuable as sources of identity and meaning. They were to be enjoyed and consumed by man. Packaged in sets of scenic views, productive landscapes were created for aesthetic consumption mainly by literati travelers.

LITERATI OUTINGS AND THE AESTHETIC OF PRODUCTIVE LANDSCAPES

Judging by the density of the available documentation, Linfen's most popular destination for spring outings was the Dragon Son Temple marking the site of the Dragon Son Springs at the foot of Mount Ping, a foothill of the Guye Mountains – a celebrated water resource, feeder of a large irrigation system, and efficient site for rain prayers. The earliest extant description of the place is by Mao Hui 毛麾 (*jinshi* 1176). He describes how in Song times (960-1279) the spring waters irrigated several hundred *qing* [1 *qing* roughly equals 6.67 ha] of land, powered more than one hundred mills, and formed Lake Ping further down east (Xing, ed., 1696, j.9:11b-12b). Playful outings to the temple area as well as to Lake Ping were commemorated in countless poems. In one poem visitors from the capital are mentioned who in their praise of the site went as far as comparing it favorably to Hangzhou's famous West Lake (Xing, ed.,

1696, j.9:68a). But the Dragon Son Springs area was by far not only a place for the occasional elite visitor. Much more important was its extraordinary fertility that was such that it was described as a place where “the farmers enjoyed the gods” (Xing, ed., 1696, j.9:69a). Thanks to the springs that were hot springs (maintaining an average temperature of 18 degrees Celsius even in winter), cucumbers, bamboo shoots and a couple of other crops ripened earlier than elsewhere, and garlic shoots (茱芽) were a special produce of the area (Liu, ed., 1933, j.2:43a).

But even in Mao Hui’s time, he had reason to delve in melancholic thoughts about a more prosperous past. He recalls the rich vegetation and extraordinary scenery for which the site was famous in the past. People used to go there to harvest lotus flowers and catch fish. In spring the governor as well as the common people from near and far came to visit – the temple fair, one assumes.² Then it became a busy place, “filled with the sound of flutes and drums, where carriages and horses met each other.” However, by the time Mao Hui was writing war had devastated the place. For more than forty years people had hoped to restore the site to its former glory, but nobody had the means to do so – until an outstanding official remedied the situation. A certain magistrate Huang had not only the temple rebuilt, but also added a fish pond in front of it, a promenade, and the Qingyin or Pure Sound Pavilion (Xing, ed., 1696, j.9:11b-12b). The latter was a frequent topic of poems in the Ming (1368-1644) and later. This setting came pretty close to the idyllic water-rich place in the midst of a dry

² The temple fair was (and recently is again) held for three days starting on the 14th day of the 4th month of the Chinese calendar. It is locally known as the “forks and brooms fair” (杈把扫帚会), as this originally was where goods such as wooden forks, brooms, wooden shovels, straw hats and braids, sickles etc. were traded (Xin, 2009, p.35).

environment shown in one of the Eight Views (see figure 3 in part one of this study) – and it offers a striking contrast to the photos shot by Japanese researchers in 1941 (Figure 1).

[Add Figure 1 here]

[Figure 1: The Pure Sound Pavilion with the gate to the Dragon Son Temple in the background, Mizuno & Hibino, 1956.]

The fact that Lake Ping is the first of the Eight Views depicted in the late Ming handscroll (see part one of this study) suggests that the site was still intact by the early seventeenth century. The latest poem to mention Lake Ping seems to be “An Outing to Lake Ping on the Shangsi Festival” (上巳日遊平湖) by the Ming scholar Zhang Yu 張宇 (Xing, ed., 1696, j.9:71a-b). The area of what is today Bozhuang 泊莊 or “swamp estate” village to the west of the city of Linfen is deemed to have been the site of the lake (see figure 5 in part one of this study). Sometime during the Qing dynasty, however, the lake had ceased to exist, suggesting how threatening and potentially conflictual the scarcity of water had become (Janku, 2007, p.285). It is also a reminder of the vulnerability of Shanxi’s fragile, arid environment. Not only the temple needed to be continuously rebuilt and maintained, but also the water resources and the infrastructure that made them usable needed protection. Ping River was not a natural body of water, but part of an artificial canal system fed by a stream originating from the Golden Dragon Pond (金龍池) and various springs (Xing, ed., 196, j.3:1a-b). Major dredging works were carried out and recorded for 1484 after a famine (Liu,

ed., 1933, j.5:61b-62b),³ in the Jiajing period of the Ming (1522-1567), and again in the Yongzheng period (1723-1736) of the Qing dynasty (Liu, ed., 1933, j.5:66a-67b and j.5:78b-80a). The fortunes of the place depended very much on the efforts made to maintain it. The major enemies were siltation, earthquakes and wars. Zou Shicong 鄒士聰, writing in the late seventeenth century, four hundred years after Mao Hui, recalled the past splendor of the place during an outing that included boating on the Fen River, views of the Guye Mountains, possibly from the Zhonglou (see below), and a visit to the Dragon Son Temple and its Pure Sound Pavilion. His text commemorates the restoration of the temple that had been destroyed by an earthquake, in a move to acknowledge the god's positive response to the governor's rain prayers (Xu, ed., 1730, j.7:55a-56b). It seems that thereafter the site was quite well preserved. Even in the 1860s Wang Xilun 王錫綸, who served as a sub-director of studies in Linfen, commemorating an outing to the Golden Dragon Pond described the site as a place of riches. Following an invitation by one of his students living at the foot of Ping Mountain in 1862 he set off for the long coveted trip. He explored the legends – among them the legend about a snake or “little dragon” explaining the origin of the springs (see Janku, 2007, pp.280-281) – as well as the environment of the Dragon Springs, famous for its lotus roots, fish, and paddy fields, and admired the fresh late spring green and plants he had never seen before. Still, he was cautious with his judgement. In the same rational way in which he dismissed the snake legend as an explanation of the origin of the Dragon Springs – as the *Classic of the*

³ In this stele inscription documenting the reconstruction of various hydraulic systems (重建行水碑記) the author Lü Nan 呂柟 also mentions a big Fen River irrigation scheme that was first built in the early 1260s, irrigating 40,000 *mu* [2668 ha] of land in Linfen and its neighboring counties of Hongtong and Zhaocheng, Hongtong and Linfen, and improving the value of the land tenfold. This canal system was later destroyed by an earthquake.

Rivers and Mountains, which was much older than the alleged snake story already mentioned the Ping River he found that there was no need “to snake and dragon it” – he realistically acknowledged that despite the splendor of the place, its water resources were not as great as those of Jinci (晉祠) and the Dragon Son Temple was far from reaching the splendor of Jinci, but, he admitted that “here, it is still a rare sight.” Jinci is one of Shanxi’s most famous temple complexes, equally located at the site of rich water sources, the Jin Springs, south of the provincial capital of Taiyuan (Miller, 2007). Wang was happy with the eels on his plate (unmatched by those of Jinci) and the garlic shoots grown on the area’s “hollow fields” (空心田) – fields irrigated by an underground canal system, a method still in use today (Figure 2) (Liu, ed., 1933, j.5:88a-89a).

[Add Figure 2 here]

[Figure 2: “Hollow fields” (*kongxintian* 空心田), 2009. Photo by author.]

While it is hard to tell from these subjective accounts to what extent the environment of the area had actually suffered, the appreciation of the beauty of these productive landscapes clearly reached its height in the Ming. The first evidence of a consciously created set of views goes back to Zhang Chang 張昌, a late Yuan *jinshi* from Linfen, who had a career as an educator in the Hongwu era (1368-1399) of the Ming, first as director of the Jinshan Academy in Linfen and later as a teacher and examiner at the National Academy under the Board of Rites. He is associated with the Zhonglou 中樓 or Central Tower in Linfen that served as a look-out (Xing, ed., 1696, j.6: 9b-10a, j.2:3b). Zhang described Four Views, the most famous of which was the one of the Fen River and the Mountains to its west,

in a series of poems.⁴ By his time most of the preserved poems were about the Pavilion of Pure Sound, the Dragon Son Temple and its Pond, the Guye Mountains and its caves, and indeed the Fen River (“Evening crossing of the Fen River” 晚渡汾河). The two Views related to the Lao River included in the late Ming handscroll indicate that by this time the Lao, a tributary of the Fen, had become another important site for leisurely outings. As indicated earlier, it was magistrate Xing Yunlu 邢雲鹿 whose hydraulic projects emphasized an entirely different layer of meaning.

Xing Yunlu came to Linfen in 1586, in the middle of a deadly famine. One of the measures to fight the famine was the development of the Lao River. Originally the main purpose of the Lao River hydraulic system was to provide the city with freshwater, next to irrigating 60 *qing* of land and feeding the city moat. The scheme was first started in the Hongwu era, repaired in the Chenghua era (1465-1488), and repaired again in the Jiajing era (1522-1567). Then it had again fallen into neglect until finally in 1591 Xing Yunlu restored it again – with similar long-term results. In addition to the canal system three different look-outs were built in the same year (Xing, ed., 1696, j.2:4b-5a). In his record of the project Yang Qiyuan 楊起元, a high official native of Linfen and a close friend of Xing Yunlu, emphasized that the entire scheme was built in response to the drought. The purpose of the Guanlanlou 觀瀾亭 or Pavilion for the Observation of the Swelling Waters was to measure the flow of the river (水勢) and investigate portents of disaster (禳祥). It was all about

⁴ The other three views Zhang describes in his poems on the drum tower (譙樓) point to rather remote places, such as the “cloudy sky” in the south (雲天咫尺), the “strategic strongholds in Zhongzhou” (中州雄鎮) in the north, and the scenic Taihang Mountains (太行形勝) in the southeast. The “view of the river and mountains” (河山一覽) to the west was far more graspable in comparison (Xing, ed., 1696, j.9:70a-b).

promoting the profitable (興利) for the benefit of the people and increasing the productivity of the land as defense for future bad years (Xing, ed., 1696, j.9:34a-37a). Xing also explained his interest himself in a prose poem on the Lao Canal: he hoped to use the look-outs to observe the features of the mountains and rivers and watch out for omens. But in addition one could also enjoy the flowers and fruit trees covering the land, and listen to the songs emanating from the fields and huts (Xing, ed., 1696, j.9:52a-59a). The view of the Lao River included in the 1730 edition of the local history clearly represents the site as it was created by Xing Yunlu (Figure 3). It is a celebration of the aesthetics of hydraulic works: it includes the weir (千金堰) adorned with two stone lions and turtles and guarded by two marble pillars (華表), four huge sluices, diverting the water via the Liugaodong 流膏洞 (“an arch allowing the flow of moisture”) into the artificial Moon Pond (月池), complete with fish and lotus inside and hundreds of peach and willow trees planted alternately around it. In spring and autumn when the Lao River Temple (滌水神祠) fair was held everybody came to enjoy this place (Xing, ed., 1696, j.3:3a-b, j.2:8a). We can imagine Xing Yunlu contemplating the beauty of the productive landscape he had created from one of his look-outs. Poems commemorate his spring outing with Yang Qiyuan to the Laohe Canal and its temples. Not only could Xing Yunlu easily be imagined as the promoter of Linfen’s famous Views, he also created a new set of Ten Views of the Laohe Canal.⁵ This is not only about contemplating a landscape as if it were a picture, but also very much about finding the picturesque in a heavily engineered

⁵ These ten views are: 水雲樓閣，金堰回澗，月沼風蓮，平臺嘯月，洞口桃花，四山晚翠，堤柳蔭塘，蓮舟競渡，水國龍宮，秋野黃雲 (Xing, ed., 1696, j.9:79b-80b). Xing Yunlu’s pet project pretty much dominates the literature section of his 1591/1696 edition of the local history. Interestingly, the material added to the chapter by the early Qing editor does not include a single piece about the Lao Canal. The Guye Mountains remained the favorite site for outings.

landscape. Interestingly, there is no assumption that the reality backing the imagination was to last. It is the long scroll representing the Laohe Canal that was seen as a guarantee that the Lao would not run dry and Xing Yunlu's name would not die.⁶

[Add Figure 3 here]

[Figure 3: The Lao River View (“Laohe tu” 澇水圖), *Linfen xianzhi*, Xu, ed., 1730. The image shows a village tucked into the mountains in the south in the background, highlights the paddy fields, the Liugaodong, the weir, the observation pavilion, and the River God Temple in the middle, and the Moon Pond in the foreground.]

Today the Lao River valley very much remains a productive landscape. With its main feature being a reservoir it probably takes as much imagination to turn it into a picturesque landscape as it took a Ming visitor to see the site with the weir and the sluices (represented on the Ming map, see figure 4 in the first part of this study) the way it was represented in the image (Figure 4). After all, its basic purpose and the way people use it has remained the same: freshwater supply, irrigation and energy production, and at times even leisurely outings.

[Add Figure 4 here]

[Figure 4: The Lao River Reservoir, 2009. Photo by author.]

⁶ The local history preserves Jin Yinghuai's 晉應槐 preface to a painting of the Lao River Canal (澇河渠圖錄序) by Chang Minsheng 饒民生 (Xing, ed., 1696, j.9:37a-38b).

THE VICISSITUDES OF HISTORY

While during the last century industrial modernity has brought significant change for the worse, at least as far as environmental degradation is concerned, it is certainly not true that the imperial period was a time of well-managed water conservancy works and joyful outings as opposed to a twentieth century dominated by disasters and destruction. The long history of periodic destruction and reconstruction of the temples and irrigation systems encountered so far indicates this to some extent. While there is less information on earlier times, it is clear that warfare and the follies of politics did have an impact on the fate of scenic spots – temples and their natural surroundings as well as hydraulic structures and lookouts –, though these might have been less detrimental overall than earthquakes and periodic neglect. Still, the destructive potential of modern warfare and totalitarian politics in the twentieth century was much higher than anything seen before. This seems to be a case of quantitative change having become so overwhelming that it involved also a qualitative change, as the fate of the Sleeping Tiger Mountain, the Guye Mountains, and the Dragon Son Temple in the twentieth century will show.

A tour to the Sleeping Tiger Mountain, the northern extension of the Fushan range, would normally start from Di Village (翟村) about 20 *li* east of Linfen. Unsurprisingly, the historical significance of the mountain is linked to legends about fighting drought and securing scarce water resources. In the past its Marquis Wuning Temple 無佞侯廟 (labelled Fushan Temple 浮山神廟 in Figure 5) was a famous site for rain prayers (Xing, ed., 1696, j.2:7b). Its popularity as a view cannot compare with the sites west of the Fen, but still there is the occasional travel poem (the earliest from Qing times, see Liu, ed., 1933, j.6: 50a, 51b, 53a), and more recently Qiao Zhongyan, a local party secretary, visited the mountain and left

a record (1995, p.117-137). It is again a site with yet another set of Eight Treasures inside it. Although the original locations of these Treasures are unknown today, the legends have survived. All are related to mountain resources, most importantly water, then timber, minerals, and stone. The most miraculous is about the Golden Ox Cave, in which according to the legend bull shit was turned into gold. Scattered stones were seen as petrified remnants of the ancient miracle, and the recent discovery of gold ore is perhaps a sufficient explanation of the origin of the story (Shanxi sheng Linfen shi zhengxie wenshi ziliao yanjiu weiyuanhui, 1991, pp.41-44). Also very recently during an afforestation campaign in 2003 traces of one of these treasures, the Manshuijing 滿水井 or the Inexhaustible Well, have been discovered, and apparently at least then this well was said to have had good quality water (Wohushan manshuijing, 2008). The only one of these Treasures indicated on the late Ming View (on the bottom left) is the Huanglu or Yellow Stag Spring (黃鹿泉), although the fact that it is written as 黃蘆泉 (Yellow Reed Spring) does not suggest any awareness of, or at least no elite support for the old legend of the yellow stag leading Marquis Wuning to a water source during his futile attempt to save the Tang. In Ming times the importance of this spring was seen in its relation to the oldest water supply system for the city of Linfen. As the city itself did not have any freshwater sources, in Song times water from the Yellow Stag Spring was diverted to Linfen. Lotus flowers were planted in the pond in which the water from the mountains was collected to make it a site not only of practical use but also of enjoyment (遊樂). But already by Jin times (1115-1234), probably during the war of conquest, the scheme had been abandoned, the canals silted up, and only by the beginning of the Ming a new solution was found, using the water of the Fen River (and later the Lao, as explained above) (Xing, ed., 1696, j.1:9b, j.9:16b-18a).

[Add Figure 5 here]

[Figure 5: Sleeping Tiger Mt (“Wohushan tu” 臥虎山圖), *Linfen xianzhi*, Xu, ed., 1730. This representation of the view, oriented east, highlights the Huanglu Springs in the bottom left, but otherwise the mountain landscape is dominated by the religious infrastructure: the gate (山門) leading to the Mountain God Temple in the center, with the Earth God Shrine to its left and the Guanyin Temple to its right.]

The worst destruction, however, according to local accounts at least, happened in a more recent war. Qiao Zhongyan, the local party secretary who toured the mountain in 1994, complains that the vegetation cover was all but gone and that it was impossible to track down the locations of the old springs and wells. He also reports that the destruction of the temple was commonly attributed to the Japanese invasion in 1937, although this most likely was but its beginning – if at all. The Fen River valley had become part of the front line of the war (Mizuno & Hibino, 1956). It seems that while the hills to the west of the river were not deemed safe by the Japanese researchers who went there in 1941 (they did not venture further than the Dragon Son Temple), those to the east were considered an ideal base by the Japanese Imperial Army. As the Sleeping Tiger Mountain offered a good overview over the valley to its west as well as the hills further in the east, the hill top was turned into a Japanese military base. Qiao found that the villagers did not recall any fighting and that they attributed the deforestation of the mountain to a fire set by the occupying forces. If true, why then did the temple survive the Japanese occupation, Qiao wonders. What he could confirm is that by the end of the war all the vegetation was gone, but he seems to assume that actually most of that was committed by the local population. The destruction of the temple mainly happened during the “war of liberation” after 1945, when the trees around the temple and the timber

used for its construction were sent to the front line to support the civil war against the Nationalists. The final blow, however, came only in the early 1950s when the remaining bricks were used to build the village school – which Qiao writing four decades later also finds odd: Why destroy a temple to build a school? But obviously at the time the political climate offered little protection for a Marquis Wuning Temple. It seems that Japanese misdeeds provided a convenient excuse for the continuing exploitation, or at least the failure to restore the health of the mountain environment. According to one of the stories Qiao was told the fire set by the Japanese not only destroyed the vegetation cover, but also the *diqu* 地氣 or life power of the earth, making it impossible for the shrubs and trees to ever grow again. On the positive side, the relative deprivation of the mountain area apparently did not encourage population growth, and therefore, according to Qiao, the people were better equipped to cope with the crisis of the early 1960s, experiencing “hardship” but not “famine” (Qiao, 1995, p.125-132).⁷

While the popularity of individual temples in the Guye Mountains waxed and waned – as for example the neglect of the Jade Cliff Temple in the Southern cave area until its restoration in the mid-nineteenth century shows – the first serious disruption of the religious environment in the Guye Mountains also came with the Sino-Japanese war, when the grottos were damaged by advancing Japanese forces as well as by Yan Xishan’s maneuvers (Zhen, 1991, p.9). But while most of the temples in the mountains survived the war materially, spiritually they were neglected in an environment dominated by refugees (many of them probably guerrilla fighters) squatting in the mountains (Shanxi sheng Linfen shi zhengxie

⁷ He gives a figure of 4000 for the population of Di Village and the amount of arable land 16,000 *mu* for the 1990s, and opposes this to 20,000 people in Jindianzhen, a more prosperous township west of the Fen, having to live of roughly the same amount of land.

wenshi ziliao yanjiu weiyuanhui, 1991, p.29). If one is to trust local knowledge however, the worst blow came with the Cultural Revolution. After 1949 the site was labelled a “cultural relic” (文物). Zhang Zhengde 张正德, a former monk who was active in the communist underground, was put in charge of it. But he died before the Cultural Revolution started, and his successors were not able to protect the site against this “adverse current of history” (历史逆流). Zhen Zhuoyu reports that the old cypresses (古柏) were cut down, the Buddhist figures removed, scriptures and images stolen, beams cut with saws, and precious stele and wall paintings destroyed (Zhen, 1991, p.10). According to Qiao’s account the only figure of a saint that survived the Cultural Revolution unscathed was that of poor Deng Banxian, thanks to its marginal existence in a less well accessible location (Qiao, 1995, p.58-9). Later during the “Learning from Dazhai” campaign, roads were built to transport coal, so that heavy trucks moved right through the scenic area.

The Dragon Son Temple suffered a similar fate. Qiao Zhongyan, visiting in the early 1990s, found the area very different from what it used to be. In particular the disappearance of the springs of his childhood, which had turned into a field of sand and stones on the foot of the mountain, troubled him. He felt that the View of the past was lost forever. He attributed the destruction of the springs to the water conservancy projects of the 1960s and 1970s. Melancholically, he compared what he witnessed with Wang Xilun’s nineteenth-century account and even with the much older report by Mao Hui. There was no way to compare Linfen’s Dragon Springs with the natural wealth of Jiangnan, as people had dared to do in the past. There were no murmuring streams in front of people’s alleyways, not a single eel or crab in the gaps under the stones (Qiao, 1995, p.141-156). But not only material wealth was lost. While after the wars and earthquakes of the first half of the twentieth century the temple had been repeatedly restored, it seemed that after 1949 the attempts to eradicate

“superstition” and the Cultural Revolution campaign against the Four Olds had finally put an end to its existence. The temple had become the home of the administration of the Irrigation District West of the Fen River (汾西灌区管理机关), new offices were built and the original temple buildings fell into disrepair. But while destruction was quick and thorough, restoration was the same. With the new politics of “reform and opening,” the garlic shoots grown in the “hollow fields” irrigated from below with the warm water from the Dragon Springs were no longer regarded as a “capitalist crop” and could be sold with great profit instead. Since 1989 water from the Dragon Springs, which provided 4 to 8 cubic meters of water per second, has been diverted to Linfen, both for industrial and household use (Shanxi sheng Linfen shi zhengxie wenshi ziliao yanjiu weiyuanhui, 1991, p.58). The cycles of rise and decline, however, seem to become shorter and shorter, as already in the early 1990s Qiao found the springs exhausted and in decline again. He could not find any traces of the Qingyin Pavilion and other temple halls either, not to speak of a temple fair (Qiao, 1995, p.161-162). But then, by the beginning of the new millennium, the site saw again a periodic market (Liang & Li, 2006, p.142), and in July 2009, a new and bigger temple had just been built on the old site, complete with resident monks, sponsored by the Buddhist Association. Today the site is promoted as a tourist destination, complete with its own “three halls and eight views,” though with questionable success so far. Even the springs seem to have recovered and the area remains the most important water source for the city of Linfen. The hollow fields are flourishing, and even crabs can be found under the stones in the pond filled by the bubbling springs. But water remains scarce, and its availability is subject to significant periodic fluctuations. Linfen’s water conservancy authorities are seeking for ways to use the scarce resources more efficiently, and the theme of the temple fair in 2010 was how to save water.

This remains a vulnerable environment, and it does not look very likely that it would be able to cope with large numbers of tourists with their own consumption needs.

EXPLOITATION AND DEVELOPMENT

These examples show that a stable environment is only imaginable as a form of constant adaptation to changing circumstances, and that every adaptation is a form of interference that will again change the circumstances. What is designed as improvement may in the end turn out to be a different, often more efficient and therefore ultimately even more unsustainable form of exploitation. This is by no means a new phenomenon. In Linfen an early documented example for a conscious effort to make better use of natural resources by the import of advanced technology – without sufficient consideration of the particular local conditions – dates back to the Jiajing period of the Ming. In 1554 assistant commissioner Zhao Zuyuan is reported to have “bought” a waterwheel builder from Zhejiang. The magistrate had 21 waterwheels built and 14 canals dug to irrigate 8 *qing* of land. But it all did not last long, as the river, probably due to the reduced water flow, silted up quickly (Xing, ed., 1696, j.1: 9a). In his account of the scheme, which soon became useless and was abandoned, Kang Siqian 亢思謙 – who had his own experiences with drought and famine in Henan – reflects on the wealth of the southeast which he compared to the dearth (凶歉) of the northwest. While one could often hear that this gap was caused by the difference in the productivity of the land (地利), in his opinion the technological advantage of the waterwheel should not be disregarded (Xing, ed., 1696, j.9:28a-29b, j.7:10b-11b). But obviously it was the wrong solution for the dry environment of southern Shanxi.

[Add Figure 6 here]

[Figure 6: The Rushing Springs (“Yunquan tu” 湧泉圖), *Linfen xianzhi*, Xu, ed., 1730. The view shows the spring waters, without the protective wall, with the Temple on the left (east) and Dongkang Village in the background.]

A more recent example of devastating exploitation is that of the Rushing Springs (Yunquan), one of Linfen’s Eight Views not yet explored (Figure 6). The site of the Rushing Springs is located in Dongkang Village (東亢村) about 25 *li* southwest of Linfen. It is easily recognizable on the late Ming and also on the 1991 map (1591 and 1991, figures 4 and 5 in the first part of this study), because both indicate the location with a circle representing the protective carved stone wall that still (as of 2009) encircles what once was the springs rising from level ground (Figure 7). (That this wall does not feature in the representation of the site as a View may suggest an earlier origin.) In a recent account that explicitly calls the Rushing Springs one of Linfen’s Eight views, the wall is described as about one meter high, built from more than 150 single stone slabs separated by pillars with carved heads of lions, apes and other divine beasts roaring to the sky (Shanxi sheng Linfen shi zhengxie wenshi ziliao yanjiu weiyuanhui, 1991, p.66). Legend has it that the springs link to Jiyuan 濟源 in Henan, which is why they were also known as Deep Springs (深泉). As a site for literati outings, it was once famous for its lotus flowers, the whirls on the ground of the pond, and the temple (Xing, ed., 1696, j.1: 9b, for poems commemorating outings to the Yunquan, see Liu, ed., 1933, j.6:49b-50a). But again its value had a more practical aspect. In the sixteenth century a canal was used to divert water from the springs to irrigate 200 *mu* of land around Dongkang Village (Xing, ed., 1696, j.3:2b). A Water Goddess (水母娘娘) legend explains the origin of the springs. An opera stage and a temple popularly called Yunquangong were constructed close by, where the Water Goddess, the Smallpox Goddess, the Dragon King of the Eastern Seas,

Guanyin of the Southern Seas, Lord of Fushan, the god of rain (Marquis Wuning of the Tang), and Hua Tuo, the god of medicine were worshipped. The temple is said to have been huge and an efficacious rain prayer site, and the stage was popular both with actors and with audiences, as due to the resonating water the sound quality was very good. The annual rain prayer festival was a bustling event full of noise and excitement (Liang & Li, 2006, p.139). And again, the current decline is not the first time the site fell into neglect. There is evidence for at least one major attempt to restore the springs to their former glory in 1930, when the county head called the Dongkang village gentry to raise funds for that purpose. Lotus flowers were planted along the stone wall, and the water was so clear that one could count the fish (Liu, ed., 1933, j.1:31a). It is not unlikely that the rediscovery of the site was linked to the national project to investigate scenic spots and traces of the past. But today again, not only due to successive wars and waves of destruction, but also due to economic exploitation, none of it is left.

[Add Figure 7 here]

[Figure 7: The Rushing Springs in Dongkang Village, 2009. Photo by author.]

The first challenge that threatened the springs' existence was the struggle for water for agricultural use between Linfen and its southern neighbor Xiangling and the successive expansion of irrigated paddy fields (Shanxi sheng Linfen shi zhengxie wenshi ziliao yanjiu weiyuanhui, 1991, p.66). But more threatening appears to have been the more recent discovery that the spring water's richness in certain micronutrients seemed to make it an excellent mineral water. In the 1980s the Linfen Water Conservancy Bureau (水利局) had a well drilled near the site and opened a factory for the production of the Bichang 碧畅 brand

soft drinks, which was marketed nationally and was even listed as an official provider for the XIth Asian Games in 1990 (Liang & Li, 2006, p.139). Judging from its current condition, it seems that this type of commercial exploitation put the final blow to a once flourishing site. Now not only the temple has disappeared, but also the springs, leaving nothing but a shallow pond with some accumulated rain water. While the stone wall is still there, few people seem to know about the site, and even fewer seem to want to talk about it. One might assume that it was not the villagers who profited from the exploitation of their local treasure – however short term the profit might have been.

On a different note, “progress” and “development” come with multiple sets of aesthetics, which in a way is not so different from earlier ways to see the beauty in what is useful and productive. Even the eremites and the Daoist temples of the Guye Mountains were located in a highly productive landscape. A more straightforward example is the Lao River view. The Fen River Crossing is an example of yet another kind of aesthetics of productivity that is more subtle and more astonishing at the same time. More subtle because the old view does not immediately suggest a focus on the practical uses of the river (Figure 8), and more astonishing because of the most recent development of communication infrastructure that looks a good deal more spectacular than the water reservoir (Figure 9).

[Add Figure 8 here]

[Figure 8: The Fen River View (“Fenhe tu” 汾河圖), *Linfen xianzhi*, Xu, ed., 1730. One could imagine this as the view from the Bell Tower on the city’s West Gate, the busy Fen River crossing, with the River God Temple on the right, and the Guye Mts in the background.]

[Add Figure 9 here]

[Figure 9: The new Fen River bridge]

As a view the Fen River is cherished for its scenic beauty in the first place, which is best enjoyed during sunset, thus the four-character caption “Evening Crossing of the Fen River” (晚渡汾河) (Liu, ed., 1933, j.6:31a-b). At the same time, the importance of the river crossing in people’s daily lives for all kinds of transport is easily seen from the activities of the various groups of people depicted in the illustration. In 2007 the same place became the site of another type of outing, when a group of journalists from across the country was brought to Linfen to admire the project of the new Fen River Bridge, the “new highlight of Linfen’s urban construction and economic and social development.” Gasping when confronted with the “perfect beauty” of the project, the journalists compared the bridge with the flyovers that had been built in other and presumably more developed parts of the country – much in the way earlier writers had remarked that Ping Lake did not have to fear comparison with West Lake (Jizhe canguan Shanxi Linfen gulou xi Fenhe daqiao gongcheng, 2007). In both cases we can be pretty sure that they were rosy idealizations of a reality that could look quite different. Not only does the Fen River today not look as magnificent as the prospect promises (although it had recovered quite considerably by 2016 as compared to 2009, and there are also huge seasonal variations), but how can one know today how the ordinary resident in Ming times perceived the everyday appearance of the river? So we are not simply dealing with the question of how we got from there to here, but also of how the imagination always coexists with a different reality, and how the one affects the other.

CONCLUSION

Qiao Zhongyan was certainly not mistaken when he assumed that it is the human impact that decides over the fate of our environment. Using a famous literary trope, he expressed his concern about the man-nature relationship: “It is absolutely true to say that if man is outstanding the land will be efficacious. But if it were put the other way round then this statement would certainly be less accurate” (Qiao, 1995, p.63). But rather than seeing the mountains and rivers as unchanging and a source of civilizational continuity, his verdict on contemplating the decline of the Dragon Temple Springs is absolutely unambiguous: “There is no comparison between the past and the present. The face of the Dragon Temple Springs has not been what it used to be for a long time already. What about the people the spring water has brought up? It is the same with them” (Qiao, 1995, p.168). It seems, however, that while the environment keeps changing, the people have not changed that much after all. Their aspirations, though different in appearance, are quite similar in spirit. People’s behavior is as volatile as ever, caught in competitive contexts and ever new struggles between diverging interests, while everyone is trying to make the most of the conditions they find themselves in. The environment as we know it needs people to protect it while it changes with them in an ongoing interactive process. Protection then means constant and ever more conscious mutual adaptation.

The historical experience suggests that maintaining the precarious ecological balance of the environments people live in, of which they are a part, is not an easy task. It is worth noting that one of the figures linked closely to the shaping of Linfen’s famous Views was Xing Yunlu, the magistrate who assumed his post in 1586 at the height of a protracted drought leading to serious famine and epidemics, and that the most recent attempts to restore Linfen’s cultural landscape and scenic views originated in the severe destruction of both the natural and the cultural environment brought about by Maoist policies and the subsequent high-speed economic development and its detrimental impact on the environment (most

notably on Linfen's water resources and air quality). The underlying rationale is the never-ending quest for a sustainable balance between production and consumption, because ultimately humans need to consume stuff, spiritual and material stuff, in order to stay alive.

Every protection scheme has its utilitarian aspects. An “insatiable appetite’ to seek out new sources and novel ways of consuming nature’s prodigious bounty” is not a prerogative of Western industrial capitalism (Bankoff & Boomgaard, 2007, p.2). Neither does it seem that any essentialized notion of culture can explain Elvin’s observation that the “thoroughness of environmental exploitation” in China was distinctive in the pre-modern world (Elvin, 2004, p. xxiv). There is nothing particularly Western or Chinese in the basic fact that people use and exploit the physical environment that sustains them. This happens to different degrees and in various ways. The case study of Linfen’s Eight Views shows that this included various development schemes, from hydraulic infrastructure projects with a long documented history to the unprecedented expansion of coal mining in the 1990s, but also the production of scenic views for aesthetic consumption, intended for a small number of elite travelers in the past, but increasingly catering to the needs of mass consumption, be it for local recreational use or the intended development of the tourist industry. The difference is one of scale, the kind and sophistication of the techniques that are employed to make the most of the available resources, and also the extent to which different stakeholders are involved in the decision-making processes. I would therefore agree with Francesca Bray, when she supports Elvin’s view, but adds that this distinctiveness should be seen in the context of a dynamic “interplay between government, commercial networks, and local economies,” rather than as a process ending in deadlock (Bray, 2007, p.222). I would just add the environment itself as a powerful force in this interplay, both in its resilience and its vulnerability, on which the history of Linfen’s Eight Views has shed some light.

Landscapes can serve as mirrors one can look into as representations of one's own world views. Thus, time and again, the not so nice consequences of all the forms of consumption to which people subject their environment, unmercifully show themselves. People might have different opinions about the grandiose construction of the Yao tomb and the touristic development of the Guye Mountains (see part one of this study), but regardless of what we might identify as the true meaning of these places, both certainly represent how the locality wants to be seen, and the fact that they are opened up for consumption also enables the continuing maintenance of these places. The relationship between reality and appearance (representation) will always be in a process of negotiation. This is probably preferable to the way in which the sites of the Earthen Steps, the Rushing Springs, and even the Sleeping Tiger Mountains have been neglected and forgotten, even by those living right next to them. Ultimately it is true that “[w]e affect and are affected by the landscapes we move through. We return home, but not to the same place” (Bender & Winer, eds, 2001, p.15).

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