

Article

Prohibited Mountains and Forests in Late Imperial China

Vincent Goossaert

Ecole Pratique des Hautes Études (EPHE)—PSL, 75014 Paris, France; vincent.goossaert@ephe.psl.eu

Abstract: This essay explores the various types of spaces, primarily montane forested areas, where human access was restricted, either conditionally or entirely, during late imperial times. The range of restrictions always included felling trees, but often also encompassed other forms of extraction from local ecosystems. Based on the motivations for setting up and regulating such zones, it proposes a typology that includes imperial parks and graves, sacred sites, military exclusion zones, and certain forested commons. Based on some commonalities between these types, it concludes by reflecting on the place of notions of sacrality in local policies that directly impacted forested areas.

Keywords: Chinese religion; Daoism; Buddhism; forests; land use

1. Introduction

Even though the trail is a steep climb, it is well maintained. Also, we hardly see any (stumps) from felled trees. I enquired about this of a monk, who told me: this is a prohibited mountain.

路雖攀緣上，然修整。又林木鮮伐。掘問僧曰禁山也。¹

This remark was penned by a traveler in early sixteenth-century China walking the paths of the sacred mountain Lushan 廬山 (northern Jiangxi province), home to both Daoist and Buddhist gods and clerics. It suggests that in an age of accelerating deforestation and human pressure on ecosystems throughout the Chinese world, places called *jinshan* 禁山—lit. “montane land in which it is prohibited (to trespass)” (or cognate terms)—were zones of special protection where specific rules applied, with direct consequences for flora and fauna. The objects of these rules were primarily montane flora (first and foremost, but not exclusively, trees) and secondarily fauna and soil. This article aims at providing a preliminary exploration of this and related concepts, their history, their range of meanings and applications. I understand them as a specific subset of regulations on the use of montane forests; many such regulations existed, and I only consider those using the term *jinshan* or including bans on cutting trees for any reason and restricting human access.

I cannot attempt here to address the essential but highly complex question of the effect of *jinshan* zones in the evolution of biodiversity in China in historical times, a question that will hopefully be taken up by other scholars. I wish here to look in particular at the place of “religion” in the wider sense (interactions with invisible beings) with particular interest in Daoist ideas regarding the definition and uses of *jinshan* regulations in late imperial times (here referring to Ming (1368–1644) and Qing (1644–1911) dynasties) throughout the ever-evolving territorial reach of these two empires. I argue that the shared language of *jinshan* regulations covers a large array of situations, some in which “religious” interventions played a major role, some in which they were present but in a secondary role, and yet others in which they were hardly visible. For this reason, we must be aware of these religious interventions when exploring the history of Chinese wildlands and never



Academic Editors: Jihyun Kim and Daniel Burton-Rose

Received: 20 October 2024

Revised: 5 January 2025

Accepted: 7 January 2025

Published: 11 January 2025

Citation: Goossaert, Vincent. 2025. Prohibited Mountains and Forests in Late Imperial China. *Religions* 16: 71. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel16010071>

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assume that they were the main or only drivers of attempts at wildland protection. For this reason, this essay is built around a typology of *jinshan* zones that does not assume anything about their “religious” nature or lack thereof but is based instead on objective criteria of land ownership, use, and power to enforce regulations. It is on this basis that we will be able to get a sense of the variety of *jinshan* zones and regulations, and, in a second stage of the analysis, discuss the role of “religion” as one possible analytical lens, among others, to make sense of the variety of types of wildland management. Before we embark on the description of these various types, however, let me briefly clarify what I mean by “religion” here.

2. Definitions

For the present purposes, I distinguish four levels of religious intervention in land and forest management: (1) religious institutions (Daoist and Buddhist monasteries, Confucian academies, local temples) through their regulations and land use; (2) moral norms about good and bad behavior and their consequences (often revealed by gods and published as morality books, *shanshu* 善書); (3) the notion of sacredness, i.e., the presence of spirits and gods (*ling* 靈) as non-humans having agency and often personhood who dwell in certain sites and objects, have a stake in it, and will deliver blessings or harm depending on human behavior towards such sites; and (4) fengshui (or geomancy) as a common language used to describe the potency of sites and how to manipulate it. By this I do not mean whether fengshui is religious or not, which is a moot question. Instead, I mean that it is a language that can be used, among other things, to evoke agentive divine presence. These four levels are in practice often in interaction but are nonetheless independent; religious institutions produce discourse on norms, sacredness, and fengshui management but have no monopoly over them. Also, various types of sources (official, local, ritual, etc.) emphasize different levels. In this article, I will mostly deal with levels 3 and 4 and draw attention to the importance of Daoist notions of “grotto-heavens and blessed lands” and of divine presence there (level 3).

As we will see, some sources place *jinshan* zones in the context of sacred sites managed by religious institutions or otherwise prohibited by the gods while others do not, discussing only the need for preserving resources, in particular water courses, for the benefit of human communities living nearby (especially downslope). It is this continuum of motivations for designating prohibited *jinshan* areas that make this topic a fruitful site for interactions between religious studies, environmental studies, and the social, political, and economic history of China.

Jinshan is a legal term in Ming and Qing China; it is mentioned in the code in relation to thieves who abscond and hide in *jinshan* zones.² However, it is not defined, and no statute or precedent explains who can decree a prohibited zone or what its consequences entail. It is also a rather common term in descriptions in local gazetteers, inscriptions, and other sources to qualify a particular site, as for instance in an early nineteenth-century gazetteer from Hunan province: “Guanjingshan (lit. landscape-viewing mount) faces the southeastern side of the prefectural town; it is a brush-shaped eminence, extending lengthwise like a screen. Every year, during the second and third months, flowers and wild plants bloom gloriously; to create the most beautiful scenery of the whole prefecture. Officials have forbidden gathering firewood and plants, and the site is also known as the state-managed prohibited mountain”. 觀景山面廳東南，為文峯，橫且如屏。每二三月山花野草燦爛盈眸，實一廳之大觀也。官為之禁樵採，又名官禁山。³ This suggests that the notion was widely known, even though, when one looks at specific regulations, the precise contents of the prohibition could vary very significantly. I chose to translate it as “prohibited” here to indicate that the term conferred a certain sacred or “reserved” nature, an injunction to hu-

mans to keep away, without much precision; “restricted mountain” is a more common translation, and in certain cases, “tabooed” would be an appropriate rendition.

The sources for exploring the conditions of prohibited, preserved forested mountains are abundant, varied, and scattered. I have made use of imperial laws, jurisprudence, and other administrative documentation; local histories and gazetteers; gazetteers of sacred mountains and religious institutions; and local regulations, notably as preserved as stele inscriptions.⁴

This essay proceeds by describing situations of prohibited mountains according to a hybrid typology I have built based on my reading of the above sources. The typology is hybrid because it considers the following: who decreed the *jinsshan* bans (the central imperial state, local officials, local communities, religious institutions, or gods); the stated reason or reasons for the ban (which naturally do not preclude unstated implicit reasons as well); and the scale to which it applies (from large regions to tiny groves). What it does not take into account is the extent of the ban; *jinsshan* regulations can range from strict interdiction for humans to enter the prohibited zone under any circumstance to mere bans on cutting down certain species of trees. Naturally, like any typology, it is to some extent arbitrary, and merely aims to bring order and legibility to a vast array of specific local situations. The order in which these various types are introduced does not suggest any chronological or other relation between them. In the conclusion, I will attempt to draw together these various types and identify common elements that can be considered as the shared concept of a *jinsshan* zone of mountain forest protection as used in late imperial China.

Before looking into my five types (imperial parks, sacred sites, military exclusion zones, fengshui forests, and regulated commons) of prohibited montane forests, however, it is necessary to briefly introduce the main key terms and legal categories of land ownership in late imperial China because these were the primary factors in determining land use and the possibility of enacting interdictions such as *jinsshan* regulations. First, the very term *shan*, translated above as montane land, means different things in different contexts. It can obviously refer to any elevation, from a low hill to a peak, but it can more generally refer to any wildland; when the context is timber or more generally flora extraction, it refers more specifically to forested mountains or even simply forests (Miller 2020, pp. 7–8). It also has specific geomantic meanings. In order to maintain and better observe continuity in the uses of the term, I have chosen to keep it untranslated as *shan* land, while occasionally adding a gloss that takes the context into account.

Regarding land ownership, I base my summary on Meng Zhang’s recent and thorough discussion (Zhang 2021, pp. 83–91). Private ownership was the dominant situation in the empire for cultivated and inhabited land (quite often in complex systems of multiple ownership). Large tracts of forests, the large majority of them montane forests, were held as private property; owners were often called “*shan* owner” (*shanzhu* 山主) in documents. The imperial state upheld private *shan* land titles, which allowed for the development of private plantations and a thriving timber business from the Song (960–1279) dynasty onward, especially in southern China (Miller 2020; Miller et al. 2022). As a consequence, most of the forests in late imperial times were cultivated, often in monoculture, and little previous primary forest remained. Monoculture was often of China firs and other conifers, as broadleaf trees, which grow more slowly than conifers, were generally less favored by silviculturists as an investment, with some exceptions such as tung [*tong* 桐; *Vernicia fordii*] cultivated for oil; bamboo was also largely planted for the paper industry, with even more radical consequences for ecosystems. The religious institutions (Daoist and Buddhist monasteries and local temples) that settled and developed on mountains often owned large tracts of wildland; they were for all practical purposes private owners, except that they were not

allowed to sell the land, which was entrusted to them in perpetuity (such sales nonetheless occurred fraudulently and gave rise to countless lawsuits).

There were also commonly held *shan* lands (*gongshan* 公山), managed by local communities, essentially villages and lineages, in which case they could be called lineage *shan* lands (*zushan* 族山) or ancestral *shan* lands (*zushan* 祖山); the term *gongshan* could, however, also apply to *shan* land privately owned by a corporate body of multiple owners. Finally, state-controlled *shan* lands (*guanshan* 官山) were not effectively claimed as private or communal property and were under the direct authority of local officials. The latter could choose to restrict access to them, keep them as open access, or open them for private acquisition. It happened that officials bought lands from private owners in order to turn them into protected state-controlled zones. As we will see, regulations on prohibiting *shan* forests could apply, in different ways, to any of these three categories (private, commons, or official).

3. Type 1: Imperial Parks

The earliest use of the term *jin* to refer to natural resources is linked to enclosures set up by the Qin (221–207 BCE) and Han (206 BCE–220 CE) dynasties, banning ordinary people from accessing spaces reserved for the court, in particular hunting parks.⁵ This is the context in which the term *jinshan* appears in Han sources, but such restricted parks existed before the imperial era.⁶ Such usage continued for two millennia, into the Qing. The size of imperial parks and type of interest successive dynasties had in them changed constantly through time; Inner Asian so-called dynasties of conquest had more interest in hunting and large parks. This was the case of the Yuan (1271–1368) and then the Qing, which established and maintained large hunting parks off-limits to commoners in Manchuria, notably near their summer retreat in Chengde, and also banned foraging by non-authorized agents in most of Manchuria. These parks were seen less as places for entertainment than military training, and the size of ungulate populations was a matter of political concern (Bello 2010). As shown by David Bello, however, the imperial state's own massive extractions of timber for their monumental building projects ruined the hunting reserves by the early nineteenth century (Bello 2022). In terms of aggregate surface of *jinshan* lands for the whole Qing empire, this type (which Bello conflates with the following type, especially imperial tombs) was a major component of restricted-access lands, but one that was found only in highly specific areas.

4. Type 2: Sacred Sites: Graves and Temples

A second type of prohibited *shan* lands was sacred sites, designated as such because imperial ancestors, cultural heroes, or other divinized humans were buried there, or because they were considered as inhabited by high gods. I define sacred site here as any natural site that is reputed to be the home of gods and spirits and regularly attracts worshippers, either members of the local community or pilgrims. Such sacredness was a widely shared notion, drawing on various cosmologies, especially but not exclusively Daoism, and expressed by the presence of many temples and shrines to “mountain gods”, “river gods”, etc., some of them having official status.⁷ Many of these sites were mountains where Buddhist or Daoist monasteries and various temples and shrines were built, and clerics played a key role in the management of the site, including enacting regulations. Protection of soil, flora, and fauna at sacred sites was desired on general principles and for local reasons articulated by various actors, clerical or not. But it was confronted with all sorts of extractive and destructive activities, some of them initiated by the monastic institutions, which these actors hoped to curtail with regulations.

In medieval and Tang (618–907) times, such regulations were mostly documented through imperial edicts—in several cases, they are extant as stele inscriptions. Such edicts, often using the language of *jinshan* (or *shanjin* 山禁, “*shan* prohibition”, referring to the interdiction itself rather than the space where it applied) were granted to sites of particular importance, and often to a cleric honored by the court. Such edicts were, to a significant extent, acts of granting sweeping, monopolistic powers over a given site to a powerful religious leader. The contents of the specific interdictions are typically vague, possibly leaving it to clerical leaders to flesh them out. These kinds of documents raise the thorny issue of the ultimate impact of the state which was both extractive—such as felling trees for its own purposes—and protective of certain spaces to which it chose to restrict access, to varying degrees, from imperial parks (primarily designed for monopolistic extraction) and sacred mountains (primarily targeted for blanket prohibition). The right of ordinary people to access such imperially protected sacred mountains (in contrast to more local lower-order sacred sites) remains a muddled issue because of vague regulation, patchy enforcement, and all sorts of pragmatic compromises.

Such edicts on protecting sacred sites appeared in significant numbers during the Tang period, as studied by Bai Zhaojie (Bai 2020). Bai makes the important point that edicts protecting sites and banning any kind of extraction—gathering firewood and plants (*qiaocai* 樵采/採) as well as grazing livestock (*mu* 牧)—began with tombs of emperors and their kin and other state-honored figures (the size of the protected perimeter around the tomb varied according to the status of the occupant).⁸ They then progressively included Daoist sites by the mid-Tang, in relation to the adoption of Daoist rituals for court rituals. A law in the *Tang liudian* 唐六典 (Tang Code in Six Categories) extends this to all mountains where gods were present:

Given that the Five Sacred Peaks and the famed mountains can harbor spirits, create miracles, give rise to clouds, and produce rain, they are that which is beneficial to humans. Collecting wood is banned on all of them.

凡五嶽及名山能蘊靈產異興雲致雨，有利于人者，皆禁其樵采。⁹

The Tang period was also the time when lists of “grotto-heavens and blessed lands” (*dongtian fudi* 洞天福地) were compiled by court Daoists, and official sacrifices were conducted there; something that would not happen again on such a scale under later dynasties. Beyond the already impressive numbers of empire-wide lists—10 major *dongtian*, 36 secondary *dongtian*, and 72 *fudi*, most of them mountains—there were many more local sacred sites that were considered in the same category as places where gods live and special rules apply.

In later periods, imperial codes maintained the bans on harvesting and planting around imperial tombs but no longer included other sacred sites. For instance, the Qing code (*Daqing lüli* 大清律例) protects imperial tombs:

(Near imperial tombs), the *shan* lands in front and back have a prohibited enclosure: if anyone illicitly fells trees inside (the enclosure), according to the number of trees felled, this person will be punished following the statute on stealing objects belonging to gods of the great sacrifice level.

凡山前山後各有禁限，若有盜砍樹株者，驗實樁植，比照盜大祀神御物比照。¹⁰

Note here that trees are treated as divine property. The same precedent, however, allows the gathering of dead wood as well as digging (for graves or houses) up to one *zhang* 丈 (3 m) deep on state-owned *shan* land (官山界限) outside the enclosure (marked by red posts). In fact, as studied by David Bello, the two largest Qing imperial tomb complexes (Dongling 東陵 and Xiling 西陵) were divided into several color-coded concentric

circles where different levels of prohibition were applied, with frequent changes and compromises, and where various forms of fengshui landscaping were developed.¹¹

To return to Tang-period edicts protecting sacred sites, one early example is an edict granted by emperor Ruizong 睿宗 (r. 684–690, 710–712) to Wangwushan 王屋山, a major Daoist mountain (and the number one major *dongtian* in most lists from the Tang times onwards) in what is now northern Henan—the stele inscription is unfortunately lacunary.¹² Another well-documented and major example is Maoshan 茅山 (in the contemporary Jiangsu province), for which we have several gazetteers of the Yuan and Ming periods.¹³ They document successive official edicts of protection, including the term *jinshan* in their titles (dated 833, 952, 1009, and 1106), on the initiative of Daoists close to the court. These edicts banned harvesting of any kind, trapping, fishing, and hunting; one adds that meat-eaters were not allowed to enter the mountain.¹⁴ Here, rules on land use are combined with notions of pollution (*wuhui* 污穢), which in regulations on local sites can mean both physical pollutions (throwing unclean matter in rivers) and spiritual ones, that is, sacrilege, and desecration (*xiedu shenming* 褻瀆神明). These documents were also linked to clear boundary marking, with steles erected to show where exactly these rules applied. In some documents, *jinshan* specifically refers to the delimited space covered by the protection edict and clearly delineated therein.¹⁵ A Ming mention of a Tang ban called the area thus protected an ever-living forest (*changshenglin* 長生林).¹⁶ Yet another sacred mountain, Tiantaishan 天台山 (Zhejiang province) received an imperial decree in 711 creating a prohibited zone of ca. 20 km across, where no foraging was allowed so that “animals and plants could be ever-living”.¹⁷

Declaring an imperially-promoted sacred site as *jinshan* had major effects locally on humans as well as other living creatures, some negative. A fifteenth-century traveler to Wudangshan 武當山, the sacred mountain of the god Xuantian shangdi 玄天上帝 who was the divine protector of the Ming dynasty, recounts meeting people in tears because they were expelled from their homes located in a zone newly declared *jinshan* (this extension of the prohibited zone was without doubt a sign of respect for the god).¹⁸ The history of the process of decreeing *jinshan* zones at such sites and their manifold consequences remain to be studied.

Early cases (from Tang to Song) of edicts granting *jinshan* status to a sacred site are often imperial favors given to a specific religious institution—the ban being typically given at the same time as tax exemptions and gifts. I am unsure whether the Ming and Qing emperors still issued such edicts, and I have not found one so far. By contrast, we have a much larger corpus of decisions by local officials of the Ming and Qing periods, which were frequently mentioned in mountain and temple gazetteers and were also carved on steles. The late imperial local proclamations cover a large range of concerns, from protecting sacred sites as such to taking measures against flooding and landslides through afforestation at such sites.

Late Imperial Religious Institutions

The recent literature on the history of forests in China pays little attention to *shan* forests managed by religious estates, with a few exceptions.¹⁹ Yet, the late imperial gazetteers for sacred sites (*shanzhi* 山志) and religious institutions (*siguanzhi* 寺觀志) provide rich information on the management of local resources; they appeared in early modern times, and multiplied from the fifteenth century onward, so that there are now hundreds of such titles, and new ones—sometimes thick with new information—keep being published. Monasteries and temples managed their *shan* lands as private properties in ways very similar to other corporate entities such as villages and lineages; indeed the latter often used the community temple to deliberate on decisions, take the gods as witnesses,

and have offenders pay fines (if they had, for instance, cut a tree) to the temple, in cash or with an offering (such as paying for an opera dedicated to the gods or for a sacrificial animal). Monastic and temple gazetteers however provide more sustained use of the language of sacredness: documents found therein often claim that their *shan* forests and other resources must be protected because despoiling them is an offense to the gods.

One of the most detailed examples of a regulation on natural resources issued by a religious institution and recorded in a mountain gazetteer that I have identified so far is in the 1935 *Qiyanshan zhi* 七岩山志 (this mountain is located in Xinzhou, Shanxi province 山西省忻州市). It records a regulation established in the Kangxi period (1662–1723) because of woodcutters who were illegally cutting down the trees on land owned by the Buddhist monastery that was the most important institution at that site. The regulation was proclaimed to the gods but also to the pilgrims who came for the yearly festival:

The regulation to strictly prohibit trespassing into the *shan* forest was first established during the Kangxi reign, because people were gathering wood, grazing their livestock, illegally felling trees, and trampling in our woodlands. It was decreed that culprits would be fined one hundred pounds of oil to be paid to our temple. The order to prohibit trespassing into the *shan* land was proclaimed in front of the gods and carved onto a stele during the Qianlong reign (1736–1795); the stele was inserted in the southern wall of the Heavenly King temple in Liuhui village. Every year, on the festival of the first day of the seventh month, the villagers hand-copy this regulation (on paper) and paste it on the screen wall of the gate leading to Qiyanshan, to make it known (to all pilgrims and visitors).

嚴禁山林規例，始立於清康熙年間，原因樵牧盜伐，踐踏林場。規定違犯者，罰油一百斤，充歸本廟。神前用禁山告示文辭，刻石於清乾隆年間，石在留輝村天王廟南壁上嵌納。每逢七月初一會期由該村照抄張貼七岩山門外照壁上，以昭規約。²⁰

More common in mountain and temple gazetteers are records of lawsuits and official protection for temple lands against encroachment. A good example is provided by the 1878 edition of the gazetteer of the Xiaoyaoshan Wanshougong 逍遙山萬壽宮 (the place is commonly known as Xishan 西山), near Nanchang 南昌 (Jiangxi province), a center of the Jingming dao 淨明道 Daoist tradition and a temple to the local saint Xu Xun 許遜, which is still very active today. A section of the gazetteer provides documents protecting plants and animals within the temple's lands, which are mostly on the plain but surrounded by hills listed as a grotto-heaven sacred site.²¹ It begins with alluding to Song imperial edicts of protection (whose text it does not provide) but essentially provides decisions by successive local magistrates between 1625 and 1739. In them, we read that temple clerics required official help against people who did not respect the temple boundaries and encroached on its land, cutting trees and fishing in the temple ponds. This, claimed the Daoists, amounted to sacrilege (*xiedu shenming* 褻瀆神明)—a key notion which we also find in both the imperial code and morality books—and provoked the wrath of the gods. Trees are essential for providing shade to the resident gods (*yinhu shanling* 蔭護山靈), they added. We will see below that this line of argument about sacrilege is also found in local communal regulations.²² Similar language is also found in local regulations that ban felling trees and opening mines in order to protect the divine *qi* of the local temple.²³

Some gazetteers document the way monastic communities at sacred sites managed the woodlands and other sites under their control.²⁴ There certainly existed several models; the full-fledged prohibition of any human intervention (no harvesting and planting at all) was one, but not the most common. Some gazetteers document monastic estates practicing careful tree harvesting for their own needs (timber for building and firewood) while maintaining the forest.²⁵ Nicholas Menzies mentions the case of a Buddhist monastery in Ningbo 寧波 (Zhejiang) that carefully managed their forest with limited extraction, with

state blessing, until 1555, when officials suddenly ordered the felling of the entire forest to harvest timber needed for military ship building.²⁶ In many cases throughout the second millennium, Buddhist and Daoist clerics embarked on large afforestation projects at largely deforested sacred sites; it seems that their silviculture model was largely monocrop plantation similar to what other private owners practiced. The evidence in the inscriptions and regulations I have seen so far mostly mention China firs (*shan/sha* 杉) and pines (*song* 松), sometimes along with cypresses, which suggests that managers of sacred sites were as much engaged in monoculture as the businesspeople planting for profit.²⁷

Sacred sites and mountains and hills in general, were managed partly as commons (*gongshan*) by local communities and partly as exclusive space by clerical institutions. Sometimes the two were in tension over their different needs and practices; for instance, whether or not the digging of new graves should be allowed. Negotiations and contracts were signed, engaging both parties. Whether commons or cleric-managed, access to some places was restricted, and some sacred sites were “closed” (*fengshan* 封山) outside a pilgrimage season. Some sacred mountains—such as Lushan, mentioned in the quotation opening this essay—remained open, but travelers on pilgrimage paths crossed prohibited *shan* forests and were presumably to remain on the path and not stray into the woods.

I would like here to add that the notion of a prohibited (or tabooed, restricted, or reserved) zone around monasteries and temples is in no way a uniquely Han Chinese notion, and was known in other Buddhist and local traditions, with major effect in zones of contact at the peripheries of the empire. Ming subjects were already in contact with land-owning Tibeto-Mongol Buddhist monasteries both in Han-minority and Han-majority areas, and the vast territorial expansion of the Qing and that dynastic house’s own non-Han ethnicity created many more sites and opportunities for such encounters. Tibetan Buddhist notions of monastic land as sacred was commonly known and respected, which created problems with Han settlers encroaching on what Tibetan monks considered prohibited land.²⁸ A comparable (but not identical) notion was also widely known and enforced in the Mongol world. The Mongol concept of *qoriγ* (*khorig*) referred to tabooed (or prohibited) land, usually for religious reasons (sacred sites, imperial tombs) but occasionally because a nobleman reserved it for himself; with its deep ritual connotations, this concept is readily comparable to Chinese *jin* (Serruys 1974). Surely, the Ming and even more so the Qing expansion on all sides of the empire created encounters with different local notions of prohibited lands, many of which have not been studied yet.

5. Type 3: Military Exclusion Zones (Or Security Zones)

During the Ming and Qing periods, several zones, some of them quite sizeable, were declared *jinshan*, or more often, *fengjinshan* 封禁山 (a term often but not exclusively referring to military contexts), for reasons of maintaining order against external or internal enemies.²⁹ Such zones in border areas were designated as buffer zones, clearly separating subjects of the empire from dangerous neighbors (such as Mongols during the Ming) as well as maintaining dense, impenetrable forests that would serve as natural barriers to any invasion, especially ones based on cavalry. One example is Wutaishan 五臺山 (Shanxi province); this whole expansive mountain range as well as adjoining zones were for centuries declared *jinshan* land (access was allowed to pilgrims, but no tree cutting was permissible), on account of its being one of the most sacred places in the Ming and Qing empires and a frontier area between Han and Mongols.³⁰

The same logic applied to the exclusion zone along the coastline during the early Qing when the Manchus were fighting against the Taiwan-based Koxinga regime. Between 1661 and 1669 (and in some places again between 1679 and 1683), the coast of most central and southern China, up to from 30 to 50 *li* (ca. 15 to 25 km) inland from the coastline, was

vacated of all inhabitants and entry was punishable by death. This exclusion zone was part of the larger and longer-term maritime control policies (*haijin* 海禁, a term appearing in the sixteenth century), even though *haijin* did not usually involve exclusion zones. No one has, to my knowledge, explored the impact on the environment of this policy vacating thousands of square kilometers of any human presence.

Fengjinshan areas were also used as a policy tool to control unruly inland areas, typically found in the mountainous ranges bordering several counties and provinces, where sparse population and difficulty of access were compounded by uncertainty about jurisdiction between the law-enforcement agents of different administrative units, making these zones ideal refuges for bandits, fugitives, and rebels. For instance, a large mountainous area around the boundaries of Zhejiang, Jiangxi, and Fujian provinces was declared a no-go *fengjinshan* during the Ming and remained so until the end of the Qing. People were forbidden to settle within the demarcated zone (apparently, collecting firewood along the outer periphery was tolerated for local residents); locally posted military units were tasked with regular patrols (routinely mentioned in the various administrative documents discussing the exclusion zones). The history of these zones is also awaiting future scholars to take an interest.

Local written documentation about these security zones exists. For instance, a long and very detailed report by an eighteenth-century local official posted in northeastern Jiangxi reacted negatively to an earlier proposal that argued that if the ban was lifted, the area could be fruitfully opened to agriculture. This official remonstrated that allowing people to settle in the zone would only create trouble and bring no substantial benefit. Nowhere does his detailed argument say a word about the impact of policies on flora and fauna or the sacredness of the site.³¹ Yet, one can only assume that, if reasonably well respected as seems to have been the case, such a policy must have resulted in a thriving biotope, and one considerably larger than most documented “sacred forests”.

6. Type 4: Sacred Groves and Fengshui Forests

Ethnographic work on sacred groves maintained by villages has only recently begun to appear. By contrast to large, imperially sanctioned prohibited zones or local regulations carved on stone, this type of prohibited forest is little documented in the published historical sources (and thus it is unclear whether they were historically referred to as *jinshan*, but their regulations were clearly in a continuum with our other types of *jinshan*). The work of Chris Coggins and his colleagues on fengshui forests (*fengshuilin* 風水林), especially in southern China, has done much to bring them to a wider scholarly attention; it reveals how local communities strove to maintain their own groves that have often managed to survive into the contemporary period in spite of adverse pressure. Interestingly, he notes that villages that abandoned their prohibited groves and forests often did so after a collective conversion to Christianity (Coggins 2002, chap. 8; Chen et al. 2018).

Coggins has worked in Hakka villages in upland Fujian and has documented the presence of fengshui groves in these villages at various locations (often three or four per village), some within the inhabited core around the temples and earth god shrines, some above the village, and crucially at the geomantic points called “water gates” (*shuikou* 水口), where streams enter and leave the village.³² Some such groves are also designed to block winds from blowing through the village and the paddies. They might be composed of various species; Coggins’ own observations in highland Fujian noted a preference for *Cryptomeria*, or Japanese cedars (*liushan* 柳杉, a coniferous tree). The rules observed in these groves vary; some collection (dead wood, roots, mushrooms, etc.) and even cultivation may be allowed in some of them, but no tree cutting. Coggins also notes that the very strongly-felt devotion to maintaining fengshui groves among Hakka villagers is not an effect of a

larger sentiment that trees and other montane flora should be preserved on principle; the same villagers routinely engaged in forest burning on a large scale.³³ Fengshui groves are small-scale sacred sites managed as commons quite differently from major mountains managed by clerics and protected by the state, but this was certainly a continuum rather than a dichotomy.

Contrary to the three previous types, where prohibiting specific tracts of *shan* forests (and other wildlands) was justified by exclusive rights over soil, fauna, and flora claimed by emperors, gods, or ancestors, in the case of the sacred or fengshui groves, as the emic name indicates, this was and is done in the name of protecting the geomantic qualities of a place, i.e., its ability to concentrate and retain *qi*. Recent scholarship on Chinese environmental history has repeatedly noted how certain regulations on land use were made in the name of geomancy, but not all authors seem to feel comfortable with the religious dimensions of this language.³⁴ Yet, understanding how the language of fengshui is used, by whom, and for what purposes, is essential for making sense of local regulations, written or oral, on land use.

The discourse of geomancy or fengshui (to use the most common of several Chinese terms) is ancient but had, by late imperial times, come to be an essential legitimate language for making claims about use of and rights over land, water bodies, and plants. As the recent authoritative study by Tristan Brown shows, this language describes and prescribes the whole environment of any given place as a map of circulating energies (*qi* 氣), which can be canalized to one's individual or collective benefit or detriment (Brown 2023). The aim was always explicitly human welfare (*minsheng* 民生); all parties (officials, local elders, clerics, etc.) used the language of geomancy to argue what sort of intervention or non-intervention on the landscape would produce the best outcome for local residents. Westerners bringing building projects to China (mines, railways, telegraphs, etc.) have famously faced resistance from Chinese locals protesting such land use as destroying their fengshui and therefore treated it as "superstition".

One important dimension of fengshui for our concerns is the location of graves in non-cultivated areas, including many local hills that were also sacred sites—even though the digging of graves was often forbidden on the sacred mountains. In many local regulations, we see that existing graves should be maintained and respected but digging new graves was forbidden within the boundaries of the areas targeted for protection. Trees were planted around graves—indeed there was a codified tradition, already found in Dunhuang manuscripts dated from the Tang, of auspicious tree-planting around graves and houses that specified numbers and tree species (Jia 2021). Felling trees around graves—and thus harming the ancestors' access to *qi*—was a heinous crime, yet apparently quite often perpetrated either by competing lineages and families or by renegade family (or clerical lineage) members, as discussed at length in both historical documents (including lawsuits) and fiction, such as novels. A Ming gazetteer for a Buddhist monastery in Hangzhou discusses lawsuits between the monks and gentry families around a site claimed by both, used as a monastic land or as a grave site, with each party accusing the other of felling the trees there.³⁵

But the language of fengshui was not exclusively used regarding graves; by Ming and Qing times, temples defended the integrity of their *shan* lands and trees, saying they were essential for their fengshui. Magistrates had to decide whether to allow or ban mining, kilns, quarries, charcoal making, and other activities on local hills, balancing between different interests (local economic development, job opportunities, taxation, stakes of local gentry in temples and graves, activities of the temples found on the hills, etc.). Each of the parties involved used the language of fengshui to frame their case, and officials took this language very seriously. Local officials were charged with evaluating the dragon veins

(*longmai* 龍脈) of the site as well as ancient graves before allowing the opening of a mine or quarry.³⁶ The parties involved could take different roles; sometimes Buddhist or Daoists appealed to the magistrate against tree-felling and mine-opening at the site they lived in, but in other cases, resident monks opened mining and logging businesses and local gentry fought against them in the name of protecting the sacredness of the site, and even the pilgrimage.³⁷

What all these sources using the language of fengshui reveal, it seems to me, is competing claims to access to natural resources (most crucially *qi* and water)—in contrast to universal claims, such as the need to protect places where gods dwell. While not necessarily thought of as a zero-sum game, such access, when couched in the language of fengshui, is fundamentally competitive as untouched, forested land used for one lineage's graves was not available for another, or one auspicious hill that fostered the fortunes (in examinations, child-bearing, and business) of one village and gave it an advantage over neighboring villages. Of course, the fengshui language (as found in many local regulations) of the local landscape as a living body and describing mining or felling trees as grievously harming this body did not mention competition, but it was nonetheless particularistic—emphasizing local interests rather than general principles. Of course, local interests could be conceived at different scales, all the way from individuals to whole provinces. The deteriorating environmental situation culminating in the nineteenth century, with ever-growing population and pressure on land and water, exacerbated such competition and saw increasing production of regulations using the language of fengshui, as we will see in the next section. Yet, the fact that the language of fengshui was about competing particular interests did not prevent it from inadvertently enhancing effective preservation practices in some places.

7. Type 5: Local Regulations on the Use of Commons

The late imperial times was a period of intense production of local regulations, negotiated, promulgated, and enforced by a variety of social institutions including lineages, territorial communities, ritual alliances of temples (that often managed hydraulic and other infrastructure), and “community compacts” (*xiangyue* 鄉約). Kenneth Dean has analyzed the way such local institutions in the Quanzhou region (coastal Fujian) took ever more control over local resources, including water and land, between the late Ming and the early twentieth century (Dean 2009). This is primarily documented through stone inscriptions that carry and publicize such regulations. A minority of them were promulgated and set up by officials; Dean calls them prohibition steles (*jinbei* 禁碑) and shows they correspond to cases when tensions were so intense that no local compromise was found, and officials had to step in. Many were produced without an active role of the state. The local regulations have, according to Dean, three main objects: natural resources (the examples he mentions concern irrigation systems and groves around gravesites), ritual responsibilities, and social order.

This phenomenon is by no means unique to coastal Fujian, and comparable documents can be found in many parts of the Chinese world. We are now very lucky to have a collection of stele inscriptions devoted to protecting trees and forests—Ni Genjin 倪根金, comp., *Zhongguo gudai hulin beike jicun* 中國古代護林碑刻輯存 (collection of extant stele inscriptions on forest protection in premodern China)—which provides well-edited, abundant source material for exploring our research question.³⁸ It includes 668 inscriptions, the vast majority of which are from the Qing period and from southern China. Some of them are records of efforts to replant and protect various sites; others are formal regulations, in comparable numbers from local officials and from communities (community compacts,

village regulations, lineage regulations, etc.); some are the product of joint efforts by local leaders and officials.

These regulations vary in their comprehensiveness and can aim at specific practices, such as gathering dead wood, harvesting bamboo shoots, tea, fruits, and other products in the wild, producing charcoal, and opening kilns or mines. A very common interdiction found in these regulations is starting fires for clearing land—banned for the risks incurred by uncontrolled fires extending to planted forests or habitations, but also because these fires killed vast numbers of little creatures (*chong* 蟲; a common concern in morality books of that period). Other regulations address a much larger set of issues of community welfare and order (banning mendicancy, gambling, feuds, theft, etc.) in which control over crops and trees are included. They can be very specific about what exactly can be gathered or not (one regulation allows for collecting pine needles on the ground but not dead wood).³⁹ They also occasionally provide extremely detailed inventories of trees, with exact numbers species by species. In some cases, beyond the use of plants, regulations also ban the removal of stones and soil and the digging of the soil to uproot plants or modify the flow of streams. By contrast, I also note the near-complete absence of regulations on hunting even in prohibited *shan* land, in contrast to early rules on sacred mountains where killing any wildlife was explicit banned.

Securing freshwater was a prominent concern behind all local regulations. Descriptions abound of springs running dry when the tree cover over them had gone. Indeed, in the corpus of 668 inscriptions introduced above, it is one of the most frequent themes; springs and streams must be protected and no digging, cutting, or planting is allowed around them (in some cases, animals must not be allowed to approach them). Hills identified as sources of freshwater are often closed off, with no new graves and tea cultivation allowed, and this is in some cases argued in the explicit language of water purity.

While the majority of the local regulations on land use do not use *jinshan* or cognate terms, some, which ban entering certain *shan* forests for any reasons for all or part of the year, do explicitly use it, and it is on these *jinshan*-related regulations that I focus here. I have made a rough count based on a sample of 109 inscriptions in the *Zhongguo gudai hulin beike jicun* (dated from 1701 to 1843): 15 of them use *jinshan* or cognate terms (*jindi* 禁地, *fengshan*, *fengjinjie* 封禁界, *jinshu* 禁樹, “prohibited trees”, *jinzhi rushan* 禁止入山, “prohibition to enter woodland”, etc.).

Many regulations prescribe seasons for specific sorts of harvesting (tea, bamboo shoots, mushrooms, or herbs), or entering *shan* lands (*rushan*) in general (often for a couple of months around the New Year), any access being forbidden at other times. They also describe patrols to enforce these rules, sometimes manned by people paid for this out of community funds. The season when access is allowed is often termed “opening the *shan*” (*kaishan* 開山), which also means the pilgrimage season at a sacred site. One 1847 inscription from Guizhou province concerns a site for a community festival, where people were banned from accessing at any time outside of the yearly festival.⁴⁰ Access was also denied to domestic animals: many regulations mention grazing (especially by cattle) as a major cause for wildland degradation—a logical fact in a situation where there was basically no pasture land in most of the empire. At least one regulation mentions animals polluting streams with their feces (*fang ma wuhui* 放馬污穢).⁴¹

Most local regulations do not refer to the restricted zones as sacred sites, but regulate the use of private plots, commons, and public land; different rules applied to different types of land, but often even on private land, cutting trees was banned. However, the commons were often managed from the local community temple, and fines for cutting trees were paid to it. Furthermore, a sizeable minority of the regulations do use the language of sacredness (the active presence of spirits and gods, and prayers made to them): I counted

at least 18 in the sample corpus of 109 inscriptions introduced above. One 1808 inscription from Shandong province refers to the local mountain under regulation as the local “blessed land”.⁴² Some of these regulations are related to temples and sites explicitly described as inhabited by gods and used for prayers. A number of regulations argue that depending on how resources are managed, the land will remain, or cease to be “numinous”, or “divine” (*ling* 靈).⁴³ In those cases, we sometimes read that gods are furious when humans desecrate their land by cutting trees, digging up the soil, or killing animals.⁴⁴ In other words, by the late imperial period, religious institutions, including village temples, demarcated the boundaries of their hills and wildland and restrained access to it much as private owners and communities managing commons did, but they added to their bans the powerful element of the fear of the gods. In one regulation (for a mountain in Anhui, dated 1760), cutting trees is banned, “especially around temples”.⁴⁵ This combines the language of fengshui (bad consequences will naturally happen if one damages neuralgic spots) and that of sacredness (gods will willfully punish trespassers into their domain); the former is more frequent in local regulations, but its articulation with the latter should be borne in mind.

A few regulations go further than saying that gods are present in sacred sites in general and claim one cannot fell any tree there because gods inhabit all the trees. We know that certain trees were the home of earth gods, especially camphor trees (*zhang* 樟; *Cinnamomum* sp.) throughout southeastern China (Rols forthcoming); many temples had within their courtyards one or a few old trees that have been protected down to the present. In some specific cases, however, it is all trees on the religious institution’s lands that are granted divine status.⁴⁶ We also know that in Daoist exorcistic ritual, trees and other plants can be the hiding place of all sorts of spirits (not all beneficial and worthy of veneration) (Meulenbeld 2024).

One of the key concerns expressed in the inscriptions is boundary marking, whether for commons, public land, temple land, or private land on hills and mountains. They often provide detailed descriptions of the boundaries (*sizhi* 四至), and steles served as boundary markers (*jiebei* 界碑). I am not aware of any physical records (photographs or rubbings) of such boundary markers (although some inscriptions in the *Zhongguo gudai hulin beike jicun* record texts of boundary stones); however, they must have existed in considerable numbers throughout China, and presumably some are still extant on the ground. Local regulations also repeatedly warn against the destruction of these boundary stones by miscreants, be they petty thieves cutting trees, kiln and foundry operators encroaching on public land for their firewood needs, or feuding lineages and villages.

8. Conclusion: The Place of Religious Interventions in *Jinshan* Zones

The practice of limiting, to widely different extents, the extraction of natural resources on *shan* lands (wildlands), most crucially but not uniquely mature trees, was very common in late imperial China. The term *jinshan*, along with several cognates (*shanjin*, *fengjin*, etc.), was shared by the various actors enacting and enforcing regulations to that effect. Shared vocabulary does not exclude varying rationales and motivations, however, and we have seen that stated, explicit reasons could vary from the “religious” (the interests of land-owning religious institutions, the sacredness of a grave or god-dwelling site, or the fear of hurting dragon veins and therefore bringing misfortune on the community) to the political (protection against bandits or external enemies) to the agronomical (protecting water flows for downhill fields, maintaining sustainable resources in timber, firewood, and other products). In some cases (such as graves and temple lands in Type 2) religious interventions seem dominant, while in others, such as exclusion zones (type 3) they seem absent; that is why, when thinking about the role of religion in wildland protection, it is useful to consider them together within a larger category of *jinshan* zones. Naturally, these etic cat-

egories of religious, politics, and economic are themselves arbitrary and, in late imperial times, deeply intertwined. Nonetheless, I argue based on the above discussion that making more use of local documents (such as regulations on commons), and sources related to religious institutions (such as temple and mountain gazetteers) can help us see a different combination and balance of languages and motivations when discussing prohibition on wildlands than what emerges from studies focused on official documents.

Naturally, policies with far-ranging implications such as limiting people's access to *shan* lands were certainly motivated by a range of reasons, some more explicit than others, rather than a unique rationale. This variety should give us pause when reflecting at a very general level about the "religious" or "rational" dimensions of Chinese (or any other people's) attitudes towards wildlands, however we define these categories; I am suggesting that any explanation entirely focusing on, or on the contrary excluding the "religious" dimension, is likely lopsided.

Aike Rots' work on sacred forests attached to contemporary Japanese Shinto shrines is illuminating in this regard. Shinto environmental activists have taken, since the 1980s, to heralding their tradition as a "religion of nature" and discussing these shrine groves (*chinju no mori* 鎮守の森) as remnants of Japan's primordial forest so loved by their ancestors. This is problematic in many ways, including the fact that most if not all of these forests have been replanted in modern times and are being very carefully curated, which results in their being urban gardens more than natural forests (Rots 2017). Japanese religious institutions, Buddhist monasteries or Shinto shrines, or in most cases, the combination of both, have for as long as historical records existed, attempted to limit access to the forests and montane lands they owned, but often primarily for enjoying monopolistic rights over their timber and other products. Assuming that religious institutions, whatever they are, have an entirely different perspective on natural resources from the society around them would be naive. At the same time, whatever the motives of religious institutions for putting specific regulations on forests they controlled, religious ideas about the need to restrict access to certain resources and divine punishments for any infringement did circulate, and some people took them seriously.

Similarly, in the Chinese case, religious institutions (Daoist and Buddhist monasteries, local temples, lineage halls), which often controlled large tracts of *shan* forests, used the language of sacredness to limit access to them, but curated and exploited them in ways largely similar to local communities who enacted precise regulations on the use of their commons. Yet, that is not to say that ideas of sacredness of certain trees, groves, or montane forests did not exist or were entirely irrelevant to the larger picture of wildland conservation. My own teacher Kristofer Schipper (1934–2021) had such a vision in mind when he developed his project on Chinese "grotto-heavens and blessed lands". In Schipper's vision, these sites were all managed by the local society as nature sanctuaries where no one was allowed to go and cut trees, hunt animals, or cause pollution, so that these places have been fostering biodiversity down to the present day (Schipper 2001). He saw a clear connection between regulations of the early Daoist communities, notably the *Hundred and Eighty Precepts of Laojun* (*Laojun yibaibashi jie* 老君一百八十戒, between second and fourth century CE), which has been transmitted by the Church of the Heavenly Master, Tianshidao 天師道, and modern and contemporary practices at sacred sites. Schipper tragically passed away before he had time to expand upon and publish these hypotheses, but I hope scholars can engage with his insights further.

One of my working hypotheses is that within Han-majority areas (areas of Qing expansion are a different case), because of the massive demographic expansion and intensive anthropization of the land in late imperial times, the notion of restricted-access wildland, *jinshan*, which seems to have in earlier times been closely associated with places inhabited

by spirits and gods (graves, *dongtian fudi*) as well as living emperors, had by late imperial times been applied in local regulations to pretty much any piece of *shan* land that had value for a local community. Of course, there may have been earlier regulations on the use of *shan* lands as commons which have disappeared from the record, but one still cannot escape the sense that such regulations multiplied from the sixteenth century onward (almost all of it in Han-majority areas or in southwestern regions that had been part of the Ming empire). The language of god-dwelling sacred sites was sometimes used when the *shan* land under regulation housed temples, but it was often not used, as the languages of fengshui and protecting agriculture were enough to justify strict regulation on the use of soil, flora, and fauna on hills and mountains and other wildlands, however sacred it was. Indeed, the language of fengshui seems to have partially displaced the language of the unique sacredness of specific mountains, but there remains the idea of supernatural punishments and consequences for those who do not take good care of their natural resources. The idea of gods demanding care for “their” land and trees has remained very common in modern and contemporary Chinese discourse, both normative and narrative (anecdotes, fiction, and oral lore), but the language of fengshui, which can be applied on a much larger scale, seems to have become dominant. Such a process, which I offer as a hypothesis, and its consequences need more historical exploration, which will hopefully be taken up by other scholars.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Data Availability Statement: No new data were created or analyzed in this study. Data sharing is not applicable to this article.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

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Notes

- ¹ Li Mengyang 李夢陽 (1472–1529), “You Lushan ji 游廬山記”, *Tianxia mingshan ji*, 4.11a. Li was a major poet, and his travelogue was widely reproduced in local gazetteers and other sources.
- ² *Da Qing lüli*, statute (*lü* 律) 282, precedent (*tiaoli* 條例) 12. Statute 360 precedent 3 mentions people pretending to be imperial family members who encroach on *jinshan* lands. These articles basically carry over articles in the Ming code. (*Daoguang*) *Fenghuang tingzhi*, 3.1b.
- ³ A survey of Chinese religious sources for the history of regulations on natural resources is found in (Goossaert Forthcoming).
- ⁴ Regulations on access to imperial parks were already well developed under the Han and continued to the end of the empire: (Rols 2021, chap. 3).
- ⁵ Notably in the *Guanzi* 管子, a Han compilation of Warring States texts, and the *Yantielun* 鹽鐵論, a first-century BCE treatise of political economy.
- ⁶ For a recent collection of essays on Chinese sacred sites and pilgrimages—which does not address environmental issues—see (Goossaert and Tsuchiya 2022).
- ⁷ Rols (forthcoming) shows that laws protecting certain trees at sacred sites can be traced back to Han times.
- ⁸ *Tang liudian*, 7.13a.
- ⁹ *Da Qing lüli*, statute (*lü* 律) 263, precedent (*tiaoli* 條例) 2.
- ¹⁰ (Bello 2022, pp. 110–15). Bello argues that Dongling was the largest tomb complex in Chinese history, covering some 2500 km² of forested land guarded by thousands of soldiers and curated by state-employed foresters.
- ¹¹ *Ci Baiyun xiansheng shushi bing Jinshan chi bei* 賜白雲先生書詩並禁山敕碑, *Daojia jinshilüe*, pp. 182–83.
- ¹² *Maoshanzhi*.
- ¹³ 又禁山中採捕漁獵，食葷血者不得入。
- ¹⁴ For instance, a record of delimitating the *jinshan* at Lushan 廬山 (Jiangxi) in 1411: 天池禁山之界，永樂辛卯所畫: *Lushanzhi*, 399.
- ¹⁵ *Wulin fanzhi*, 544, about the Daoist monastery Dongxiaogong 洞霄宮。
- ¹⁶ *Tiantaishan zhi*, 8b.
- ¹⁷ “You Taiyue changchoushi xu 遊太嶽倡酬詩序”, *Fenglin xiansheng wenji*, 3.3b-4a.
- ¹⁸

- 19 (Menzies 1994, chapter 4), “Temples and Monastic Forests” (pp. 65–73). On Buddhist monastic engagement in mining and logging in the nineteenth century, see (Chen 2022).
- 20 *Qiyanshan zhi*, pp. 25–26.
- 21 “Jinshan gaoshi 禁山告示”, *Xiaoyaoshan wanshougong zhi*, 20.4b–10a.
- 22 For an inscription where cutting trees is described as “desecrating the gods” 褻神, see *Zhongguo gudai hulin beike jicun*, #47 (1627 inscription from Lingshi, Shanxi province).
- 23 *Zhongguo gudai hulin beike jicun*, #322 (1843 inscription from Shanxi province).
- 24 (Menzies 1994, chap. 4), “Temples and Monastic Forests” (pp. 65–73).
- 25 (Menzies 1994, pp. 67–68), quoting *Panshanzhi* 盤山志.
- 26 (Menzies 1994, p. 72), quoting the *Tiantongsi zhi* 天童寺志.
- 27 On the dominance of business-oriented China fir monoculture in most of the Chinese world since the Song, see (Miller 2020).
- 28 (Chaney 2020, esp. 65–66), discusses conflicts between Han settlers, Tibetan monks and local Tibetan communities in nineteenth-century upland Gansu.
- 29 These exclusion zones seem to have been very little researched, in spite of their importance. They are briefly mentioned in (Zhang 2021, pp. 84–85; Miller 2015, p. 271). Menzies (1992) discusses policies of exclusion on wildlands in general.
- 30 (Han 2012). Han describes the monasteries on the mountains as beneficiaries, rather than instigators, of the *jinshan* policies. For a discussion of *jinshan* as a military strategy on the northern frontier, mentioning specifically Wutaishan, see Lü Kun 呂坤 (1536–1618), *Lü Xinwu xiansheng Quweizhai wenji*, 1.65a–70a.
- 31 Wunuoer 五諾壘 (?–1771), “Fengjinshan yi 封禁山議”, (Tongzhi) *Guangfengxian zhi*, 9–6.3b–9a.
- 32 *Zhongguo gudai hulin beike jicun*, #324 (1844 inscription from Fujian province) is devoted to a *shuikou*-protecting tree; also *Zhongguo gudai hulin beike jicun*, #352 (1850 inscription from Fujian province).
- 33 Such burning is largely banned nowadays: (Coggins 2002, chapter 6).
- 34 Miller and Coggins (2024) which was published as I made final revisions to this essay seems to be the piece of Chinese forest history that deals most consistently with geomancy as a value system.
- 35 *Hangzhou Shang Tianzhu jiangsi zhi*, 335–36.
- 36 Brown (2021) mentions examples of officials allowing mining using the language of fengshui, that is, arguing mining done properly would not harm the fengshui, while improving the people’s livelihood, which was a core concern of fengshui discourses.
- 37 Brown (2021, p. 113) for a case of the latter (gentry suing the monks who had developed a mining business).
- 38 As I write this essay, I have read and analyzed only half of this vast corpus and can only offer preliminary comments on its contents.
- 39 *Zhongguo gudai hulin beike jicun*, #303 (1839 inscription from Yunnan).
- 40 *Zhongguo gudai hulin beike jicun*, #340.
- 41 *Zhongguo gudai hulin beike jicun*, #71 (1688 inscription at Huqiu 虎丘, Suzhou, Jiangsu province).
- 42 *Zhongguo gudai hulin beike jicun*, #197.
- 43 For instance, *Zhongguo gudai hulin beike jicun*, #173 (1796 inscription from Shanxi); #182 (1801 inscription from Zhejiang); #189 (1805 inscription from Yunan); #322 (1843 inscription from Shanxi province).
- 44 See for instance *Zhongguo gudai hulin beike jicun*, #91 (Shanxi, inscription dated 1743), #123 (Guangxi, inscription dated 1774), #137 (Hubei, inscription dated 1780).
- 45 *Zhongguo gudai hulin beike jicun*, #105.
- 46 *Zhongguo gudai hulin beike jicun*, #39 (1608 inscription from Yan’an, Shanxi province); *Zhongguo gudai hulin beike jicun*, #72 (1695 inscription from Linfen, Shanxi province).

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