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Scenic Depictions of Huizhou in Ming–Qing Literature

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Abstract

In the Ming through the Qing Dynasties, literary works captured Huizhou through scenic depictions of its mountains and rivers, villages, wealth, literary families, and portrayals of the local people. In these works, Huizhou men are described as virtuous, literary, and gallant while Huizhou women are often seen as knowledgeable, worldly, and industrious characters upholding the values of feudal society. By exploring such depictions of Huizhou, this article considers the way in which literary depictions correspond to historical reality, how scenes depicted in literature accord with the specific and various characteristics of a region, and the inextricable ties between scenic depictions in literature (*wenxue tujing* 文學圖景) and regional literature (*diyù wenxue* 地域文學).

Keywords

Ming–Qing literature – regional literature depictions – historical reality

In 1121, Shezhou (歙州) was renamed Huizhou (徽州) and charged with administering the six counties of Shexian (歙縣), Xiuning (休寧), Yixian (黟縣), Jixi (績溪), Wuyuan (婺源), and Qimen (祁門) as a newly formed prefecture. This geopolitical formation, which at the time was referred to by locals as “one prefecture, six counties,” would last until the Republican era (1912-1949). Huizhou was more a land of scenic mountains than it was of fields, and the quality of its soil was ill-suited to agriculture. In the Ming (1368-1644)

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through Qing (1644-1911) Dynasties, the population of Huizhou grew at a rate that surpassed its land's capacity for food production, forcing the people there to turn to trade beyond their borders in order to subsist. Beginning in the mid-Ming Dynasty, Huizhou people began to exhibit promise in trading, developing a merchant group on par with the widely recognized Shanxi merchants (Jinshang 晉商). As book learning was traditionally emphasized and valued in Huizhou, it was said of Huizhou merchants that "while they were compelled by circumstances to take up trade, they all retain the air of scholars."¹ Huizhou merchants were educated from a young age and actively sought interactions with literati and scholar-officials while conducting business. They thus brought the charms of their hometown to the attention of literary men, who drew on scenes from Huizhou in their writings.

Like Huangshan (黃山 Yellow Mountains), located within its borders, Huizhou's unique topography and its long-lasting importance in traditional Chinese culture has attracted much academic attention in the past century, giving rise to a field known as Hui studies (*Hui xue* 徽學). Historical research has already made remarkable strides in the study of Huizhou; however, the same cannot be said of studies conducted from a literary perspective.² This article seeks to fill a gap in scholarship by exploring how scenic depictions of Huizhou in Ming–Qing literature comprise a literary enrichment of Hui studies but also offer a way of understanding regional culture through scenic literary depictions.

Scenes of Huizhou's Landscape

Huizhou is located in the southern part of present-day Anhui Province and thus was considered part of China's Jiangnan ("south of the Yangtze River" 江南) region. The mountainous prefecture is home to both Huangshan and Mount Qiyun (齊雲山), a mountain of Daoist importance. It also contains the source of the Xin'an River, which, flowing first through Qiandao Lake before joining the Fuchun River, served as an important waterway connecting Huizhou with the outside world. Huizhou was thus geographically remote without

1 Daizhen 戴震, "Dai jiefu jiazhuan 戴節婦家傳," in *Dai Zhen wenji* 戴震文集 (*The Collected Works of Dai Zhen*) (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1980), 205.

2 At present, the only published studies of Huizhou literature are Han Jiegen 韓結根, *Mingdai Huizhou wenxue yanjiu* 明代徽州文學研究 (Shanghai: Fudan University Press, 2006); and Zhu Wanshu 朱萬曙, *Huizhou xiqu* 徽州戲曲 (Hefei: Anhui People's Publishing House, 2005). There are also portions of some articles on the topic.

being isolated, so it had the serenity of a celestial garden with the elegance of Jiangnan. These characteristics inspired men of letters to stop, linger, and depict it in literary imagery.³ When the Southern Dynasty literary figure Ren Fang (任昉, 460-508) “became prefect of Xin’an (新安), he went on a spring inspection tour of the area and became captivated by the bountiful resources and beauty of its landscape. He decided to reside there. Later, his home was named Fangcunxi (昉村溪).”⁴ The Northern Song poet Su Shunqin (蘇舜欽, 1008-1048) composed the following poem: “The road along the Xin’an is full of scenic beauty/as the mountain dusks, clouds dim and evening rain slants/with such sights before me I am reluctant to dismount/my heart leaps forward first to follow the waters home.”⁵ This poem not only captures Huizhou’s beauty in words but also expresses that the poet regards Huizhou as his heart’s abode.

Huizhou’s beautiful landscape was relatively unknown prior to the Song Dynasty (960-1279), but its reputation spread in the Ming through Qing dynasties as Huizhou’s merchants traded and interacted with literati outside the prefecture, inspiring them to visit its scenic mountains and rivers. In an article titled “Wang Hezhou zhuren you She”, the late Qing Huizhou figure Xu Chengyao (許承堯) writes of how literary men and officials such as Shen Shixing (申時行), Xu Wei (徐渭), and Wang Shizhen (王世貞) had all once traveled to Huizhou. When Xu Wei visited, he “ascended Mount Qiyun and returned to Zhejiang without having written a single poem. He thus composed a verse to reproach himself: Tethering my horse to a plum tree, I seek drink/a shop banner wavering between mountain and stream/with such praiseworthy scenes in sight/how could I fail to commit words to poetry?”⁶ In *Xu Wenchang san ji* (徐文長三集), this poem appears under the title “Since setting out from Zhejiang to Xin’an, climbing Mount Qiyun, encountering such fantastic sites on the way, all without writing a single word; a poem composed at an

3 During the reign of Emperor Jiajing (1522-1566), Huizhou native and *jinshi* (presented scholar) Cheng Minzheng 程敏政 edited and compiled *Xin’an wenxian zhi* 新安文獻志, which included 1,087 articles and 1,034 poems mostly covering the themes of Huizhou’s landscape and scenery, including works by native Huizhou men of letters.

4 Dai Tingming 戴廷明 et al., eds., *Xin’an mingzu zhi* 新安名族志 (Hefei: Huangshan Publishing House, 2005), 1: 252.

5 The original reads: 新安道中物色佳，山昏雲淡晚雨斜。眼看好景懶下馬，心隨流水先還家。

6 Xu Chengyao 許承堯, *Sheshi xiantan* 歙事閑談 (Hefei: Huangshan Publishing House, 2001), 20: 413. The original reads: 系馬梅花索酒時，溪山遙映酒家旗。如何每到堪題處，不解吟成一字詩？

intersection to mock myself.”⁷ In 1641, Qian Qianyi (錢謙益, 1582-1664) traveled to Huizhou and composed thirty poems about it.⁸ Many more literary figures have set foot in Huizhou and made it the subject of their poetry, propagating the image of Huizhou as a sanctuary of mountains and rivers through literary depiction.

Perhaps no image is more exemplary of Huizhou’s landscape than the Huangshan mountain range. The Ming Dynasty traveler Xu Xiake (徐霞客, 1586-1641) has written a travelogue based on the two times he climbed Huangshan, in 1616 and 1618. In 1616, the Huizhou scholar Pan Zhiheng (潘之恒, 1566-1622) published *Yellow Sea (Huang hai 黃海)*, a compilation including a historical narrative of Huangshan’s grandeur along with collected writings by contemporary literary figures commemorating their travels to Huangshan. The literary works are arranged such that prose is followed by poetry. In addition to local Huizhou writers, *Yellow Sea* also includes works by writers who have traveled to Huizhou, such as Xie Zhaozhe, Feng Mengzhen, and Huang Ruheng. Huang Ruheng’s *Record of Huangshan Travels (You Huangshan ji 游黃山記)*, recently selected to be included in the *Dictionary for Appreciation of Chinese Travel Writing (Zhongguo youji jianshang cidian)*,⁹ documents a journey from the base of the mountain to the Baiyun Hermitage (Baiyun’an 白雲庵) the Santian Gates (*Santianmen* 三天門), and Guangming Summit (*Guangmingding* 光明頂). Huang writes,

Setting foot on Guangming Summit, one can see the Sanhai Gate. The utter silence stretches tens and thousands of *ren* (仞), as peaks pierce through the sky from below. Tiandu Peak (天都峰) sits even with my shoulders, while Dantai Peak (丹台峰) comes only to my heels. Within the majestic and obscurity between thirty-six peaks are the Chu River (楚江) and Mount Lu (廬岳). For all this boundless wonder to exist within my sight—what a magnificent view! It truly gives a feeling of being a solitary figure in another realm.¹⁰

7 Xu Wenchang 徐文長, *Xu Wenchang san ji*, vol. 11, in *Xu Wei ji* 徐渭集 (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1983), 2: 351.

8 Qian Qianyi 錢謙益, *Chuxue ji* 初學集, vol. 19, in *Dongshan shiji* 東山詩集 (Shanghai: Shanghai Chinese Classics Publishing House, 1985), 2: 641.

9 Zang Weixi 臧維熙, ed., *Zhongguo youji jianshang cidian* 中國游記鑒賞辭典 (*Dictionary for Appreciation of Chinese Travel Writing*) (Qingdao: Qingdao Press, 1991), 404.

10 Pan Zhiheng 潘之恒, *Huang hai* 黃海, travelogue 4 of 18, in *Siku quanshu cunmu congshu, ji bu* 四庫全書存目叢書·集部 (Jinan: Qilu Publishing House, 1997). A poems that follow are from this source.

Guangming Peak remains a popular tourist destination for visitors to Huangshan. Due to its high altitude and openness, which allows climbers a downward-facing view of the surrounding mountains, Huang's description "a solitary figure in another realm" aptly describes the feeling of standing there even today.

During the Qing Dynasty, writers continued to travel to Huangshan, adding their various stylistic flair to literary depictions of its scenery. In 1641, Qian Qianyi traveled to Huangshan and wrote a travelogue in nine volumes.¹¹ In the "Qian muzhai Huangshan ji" section of his *Sheshi xiantan* (歙事閑談), Xu Chengyao cites a portion of Qian's text and offers the following commentary: "This feels very authentically written. One could say it is the highest praise of our home region. As someone who was born and raised here, I take so much for granted that I could not, in fact, speak of it as intimately."¹² In 1783, Yuan Mei (袁枚, 1716-1797) climbed both Huangshan and Qiyunshan during a visit to Huizhou and composed more than thirty poems, including one titled "On the way to the monastery, gazing upon the Tiandu and Lianhua (蓮花) Peaks, half-obstructed by clouds. Upon our arrival, the clouds lessened, so the peaks fully revealed themselves for the first time." The poem reads, "The mountains are like a bride too shy to meet my eye/so she veils half her face making use of cloud veils/Only after sitting a while does she remove this screen/the gods playing me in a round of hide-and-seek."¹³ Yuan's likening of this scene of a mist and fog-covered Huangshan to a blushing bride is quite charming.

The writers depicting Huizhou's landscape discussed above are all famous literary figures of the Ming–Qing period. Others have also contributed their unique style and perspectives to the regional depictions of Huizhou. For instance, Yuan Mei's travels to Huizhou seem related to his encounter with the poetry of the Yangzhou merchant Jiang Chun (江春). Jiang, a native of Shezhou County in Huizhou, wrote "Huang hai youlü (黃海遊錄)," a poem cycle of thirty poems about his hometown.¹⁴ Yuan Mei's offers rather high appraisal of this poem cycle in *Suiyuan shihua* 隨園詩話. He writes,

11 In the chapter "Qian Muzhai huangshan ji 錢牧齋黃山記" in *Sheshi xiantan*, Xu Chengyao writes that Qian traveled to Huangshan in the fifteenth year of reign of Emperor Chongzhen, or 1642. However, Qian's thirty poems in *Chuxue ji* (see note 8) are dated "from the third month of the *xin yi* year to the first month." Therefore, Qian's travels must have taken place in year before, 1641.

12 Xu, *Sheshi xiantan*, 435.

13 Yuan Mei 袁枚, *Xiaocang shanfang shiji*, vol. 29, in *Yuan Mei quanji* (Nanjing: Jiangsu Chinese Classics Publishing House, 1997), 1: 656. The original reads: 山如新婦羞相見, 故使雲為半面妝。坐待片時才卻扇, 天公教我捉迷藏。

14 Jiang Chun's 江春 extant works are collected with those of his brother, Jiang Fang 江昉, in *Xin'an er jiang xiansheng ji* 新安二江先生集, which is held by the National Library of China as well as Anhui Province Library.

When I traveled to Huangshan, I brought with me books of poetry by Cao Zhenhen and Jiang Heting for reference. At first, I set aside Jiang's poetry, the work of a great merchant, in favor of Cao's, the work of a scholar. But I was not satisfied reading Cao's poems, so I picked up Jiang's poems, instead, and was very impressed by them . . . the spirit and boldness of his writing are extraordinary.¹⁵

Here, Yuan praises Jiang Chun's poetic talents and gives us a glimpse of the diversity of those who visited Huangshan and immortalized its scenic mountains and rivers through writing. This culture of travel to Huizhou popularized literary depictions of its landscape scenery.

Scenes of Huizhou Villages

In addition to being a haven of beautiful mountains and rivers, Huizhou was also a land of villages nestled in valleys. For native Huizhou writers of the Ming–Qing period, the rhythm of life in Huizhou alternated between reading and tilling the soil. While sharing an appreciation of Huizhou's scenic beauty with literary men who visited from afar, they were also immersed in the rustic, tranquil charm of village life. Huizhou's literary men, both long-term residents and merchants who left to trade, express familiarity and intimacy with this aspect of Huizhou life in their writings. This section focuses on the works of native Huizhou writers in order to explore scenic depictions of Huizhou's villages.

Jiang Guan (江瓘, 1503-1565) was a mid-sixteenth-century Huizhou writer from Shexian County. He once “demonstrated an exceptional will towards literary writing; but, due to an illness, had to leave school.”¹⁶ He researched medicine in hopes of treating his illness, collecting exemplary medical texts and documents from across the ages in the twelve-volume work *Mingyi lei'an* (名醫類案). *The Complete Catalogue of the Four Branches of Books* (*Siku quanshu zongmu* 四庫全書總目) has deemed the “many corrections and clarifications” in this work “precise and fitting.” At the same time, Jiang never gave up his earlier dream of writing and continued to compose poems, which have been collected in the seven-volume anthology *Jiang shanren ji* (江山人集). Because Jiang spent most of his life in Huizhou, his poetry centers on local life

15 Yuan Mei, *Suiyuan shihua*, vol. 13, in *Yuan Mei quanji*, 3: 439.

16 Wang Daokun 汪道昆, “Lingshi shanren zhuan, 靈石山人傳” in Jiang Guan 江瓘, *Jiang shanren ji* 江山人集, in *Siku quanshu cunmu congshu, ji bu* 143: 390.

in Huizhou.¹⁷ His poem “Fu dong yuan (賦東園)” expresses Jiang’s close relationship with his hometown in scenes that highlight the unique qualities of Huizhou village life. The lines “open window overlooks faraway peaks/magnificent trees line clear ponds” (開窗瞰遠峰，佳樹臨清池) highlight the mountain scenery that dominates Huizhou’s natural landscape. Then “in time, a light rain falls/and with it comes the valley wind” (微雨因時來，谷風與之隨) emphasize the feeling of spatial openness in the rural area. “Taking up hoes, we till unused land/the fields yield a plentiful harvest” (提鋤理荒穢，畦蔬有余滋) captures the wonder and satisfaction of cultivating one’s own vegetables. The image of these vegetables laid out with warm food and delicious wine in the lines “the harvested taro fill our plates with delicacies/we imbibe warm wine and rejoice in our self-sustenance” (採菖充盤饜，酒熟歡自持) brings the authentic flavor of agricultural life to the readers.

In terms of depictions of Huizhou village life, the works of Wang Zihu (汪子祐), a Huizhou native who lived in the late Ming and early Qing period, are even more exemplary. Chen Xichang (陳希昌), Wang’s junior from his home county of Qimen, provides the following biographical summary of Wang’s life in “Shixi xiansheng zhuan (石西先生傳)”:

(Wang Zihu) Courtesy name Aifu. Alias: Shixi. He spent his life in Qiximen. His father, Deyu, worked in the granary and died young. His mother, whose maiden name was Fang, became a widow and vowed to raise him on her own. From a young age, Wang was quick-witted and a prodigious reader. He most loved to read poetry. Mr. Wang used to say: To master the *ya* (雅) and *song* (頌) poetry (from the *Book of Songs*) by fifteen, and, by twenty, surpass Sima Xiangru (司馬相如, 179? BCE–118 BCE) in composing *fu* (賦)—such would be a fulfilling life. He was generous and free-spirited. He hated learning for the purpose of exam preparations, a process he cared little to engage.¹⁸

This biography describes a talented person with character, unsuited to the path of civil service examinations. From a young age, he desired only to write and find joy in writing poetry.

17 The volumes of the extant version of *Jiang shanren ji* are divided thematically as follows: 卷一至卷三為《林棲集》(實即以徽州本土生活為內容), 卷四為《毗陵集》、《池陽集》、《吳越稿》、《楚中稿》, 卷五為《白下稿》、《西游稿》、《郡齋雜詠》, 卷六為書、序, 卷七為記, 其中《郡齋雜詠》亦以徽州生活為主要內容。

18 Chen Xichang 陳希昌, “Shixi xiansheng zhuan 石西先生傳,” in Wang Zihu 汪子祐, *Shixi ji* 石西集 (*A Collection of Mr. Shixi*), in *Siku quanshu cunmu congshu, ji bu*, 146: 542.

Fortunately, Wang Zihu's poetry anthology, *A Collection of Mr. Shixi (Shixi ji 石西集)*, survives. This work gives us insight into Wang's character, way of thinking, and his talent for depicting rural Huizhou through intricate, expressive imagery. As someone who abandoned the path of the scholar-official, Wang spent most of his days in Huizhou. His familiarity with his home region enriches his descriptions of Huizhou villages with a vivid and animated quality.

His poem, "The First of Eight Poems on a Mountain Village in Autumn (Qiuri shancun bashou [zhi yi] 秋日山村八首 [之一])," depicts the remoteness of a village nestled between mountains. Uneven roads laid with mountain stone weave beneath a veil of fog and clouds. An elusive bird occasionally appears. The chain of mountain peaks is hard to distinguish from a painting. Fields on stone foundations rest along the slopes. Tombs settle beside thatched houses. In this scene of total tranquility, where no human voice can be heard, a lone chicken cage faces the breaking dawn.¹⁹

Literary history has tended to discuss "fields and gardens" poetry (*tianyuan shi* 田園詩) with regard to works up through the Song Dynasty; little attention is paid to how the tradition continues to persist in the Ming through Qing Dynasties. Wang Zihu's poetry, which depicts fields and gardens both as scenic imagery and a way of life, could certainly be considered "fields and gardens" poetry. His work is filled with images of panicles, chickens, and bird coops; there are fields and desolate graves, misty dawns and tillage. There is bamboo cut into pipes for irrigation and homes built before steep cliffs. There is also the rustic warmth of mountain folk who "are most delighted to have guests, for whom plates of food are endlessly refreshed" (最喜能留客, 盤餐復進鮮). Other lines from his poetry, such as "toiling to plow disused land/tilling for countless years" (力耕無棄土, 耕鑿不知年), indicate that life in these villages has its pressures and hardships. At the same time, it is not without its joys, as the line "warm bedding sufficient for deep slumber" (穩朴足高眠) implies. This joy is reflected in literary depictions of not only the breathtaking natural scenery but also the warmth of human interactions, which serve to counteract the weariness associated with the pursuit of wealth and status.

19 See Wang, *Shixi ji*, in *Siku quanshu cunmu congshu, ji bu*, vol. 146. The original reads: 山村絕隱僻, 曲蹬入層雲。怪鳥時常見, 幽嵐畫未分。石田盤古麓, 茆屋帶荒墳。竟日無人語, 雞埘對夕曛。

Scenes of Wealth in Huizhou

Huizhou became a rich and prosperous part of China during the Ming–Qing period due largely to its enterprising merchants, who have been well studied by historians.²⁰ A poem that is frequently cited by researchers of Huizhou to illustrate its prosperity is Tang Xianzu's (湯顯祖, 1550–1616) "Pitying My Lack of Material Wealth, Wu Xu (吳序) Urges Me to Go to the Land of Mt. Huang (黃山) and Mt. Bai (白岳); But I Did Not." It reads: "To experience a land so rich it reeks of precious metals/many set off toward Mt. Huang and Mt. Bai/All my life, I have been fond of interesting places/but have no dreams of visiting Huizhou."²¹ Contemporary enthusiasts of Huizhou habitually cite these verses to express their fondness for the region; however, the poem offers neither a particular endorsement nor a denouncement of Huizhou. It is simply a reflection of the poet's personal feelings. Shen Jifei (沈際飛), the editor of *Yuming Tang xuanji* (玉茗堂選集), has remarked about this poem, "Wu Xu is a clever person. He hears that there are many scheming to take part in the selection of officials in the 'gold county' of Xiuning, as well as those who go there hoping to get rich by associating with them. But this one poem of Linchuan's (Tang Xianzu) is a salve that cools his eagerness."²² Shen's comment can be taken as a reflection of how during this period Huizhou attracted many social climbers and officials who sought to benefit from its wealth. He implies that it was precisely because Tang had no desire to be such an opportunist that he responds to Wu Xu's pleas for him to visit Huizhou by saying he has "no dreams of visiting Huizhou."

The most direct depictions of Huizhou wealth can be found in stories modeled after the "three words, two slaps" (*San yan er pai* 三言二拍) vernacular fiction collection. The stories in this collection tend to focus on the events of ordinary townsfolk. By "consummately replicating the diversity of social attitudes and human emotions, and by fully describing the intricacies of comedy, tragedy, meetings, and partings,"²³ this body of work vividly conveys a sense of

20 See Fujī Hiroshi's essay series "Shinan shōnin no kenkyū," *Tōyō Gakuhō* 36 (1953–54); and Zhang Haipeng and Wang Tingyuan, eds., *Huishang yanjiu* (Hefei: Anhui People's Publishing House, 1995).

21 Tang Xianzu 湯顯祖, *Tang xianzu quanji* 湯顯祖全集 (*The Complete Works of Tang Xianzu*), vol. 18 (Beijing: Beijing Classics Publishing House, 1999), 2: 782. The original reads: 欲識金銀氣，多從黃白游。一生痴絕處，無夢到徽州。

22 Ibid.

23 Baoweng Laoren 抱瓮老人, "Preface" to *Jinggu qiguan* 今古奇觀 (Shanghai: Shanghai Classics Publishing House, 1992).

society in the mid- to late Ming period. Huizhou merchants are frequently featured in the stories that concern merchants. In a survey of about fifteen collections of short novels (*huaben* 話本) from the period, passages associated with Huizhou merchants and their activities appear in forty or so chapter titles.

The thirty-seventh story in the Ming Dynasty short fiction anthology *Slapping the Table in Amazement, Second Collection* (*Erke pai'an jingqi* 二刻拍案驚奇) recounts a mysterious incident concerning a Huizhou merchant named Cheng Zai, begins with a description of how Huizhou people respected those engaging in trade.

The custom in Huizhou is such that being a merchant is considered the best career option, whereas the path to officialdom is second. . . . Huizhou people especially value those who engage in trade. Whenever merchants return, whether one's clansmen and friends, or one's wives, children, and other family members—everyone judges how to treat you based on your earnings. Those who earn a lot are received with love, respect, and ingratiation. Those who earn little are taken lightly and ridiculed.²⁴

Such a scene detailing how merchants are seen is rather exceptional in literary depictions of Huizhou. As success of the Huizhou merchants brought prosperity to the region, representations of Huizhou's wealth began to appear more frequently in literary works.

Whereas the materiality of Huizhou's wealth is well documented in historical sources and studies, its presence in literary works is more subtly related to certain recurring themes and images, such as descriptions of landscape gardens. Building landscape gardens hardly seem necessary for a region as blessed with natural beauty as Huizhou was. It became a trend among wealthy Huizhou merchants and their heirs in the Ming through Qing Dynasties.

A figure whose life and work well illustrate the relationship between garden culture and literature in Huizhou is Wu Wenkui (吳文奎) of the Wanli era (1572-1620). Wu not only built his own gardens but also wrote about them in great detail. *Suntang ji* (蓀堂集), a ten-volume compilation of writings by Wu Wenkui, gives us some insight into the circumstances surrounding his life and literary output. A native of Shexian County, Wu was born into a wealthy merchant family. His family circumstances dictated that he study from a young age in order to pursue a position in government, but his efforts went unrewarded.

24 Ling Mengchu 凌濛初, *Erke pai'an jingqi* (*Slapping the Table in Amazement, Second Collection*), vol. 37, in *The Complete Works of Ling Mengchu*, ed. An Pingqiu and Wei Tongxian (Nanjing: Phoenix Publishing House, 2010), 3: 906.

Frustrated, Wu immersed himself in the craft of writing, even becoming the pupil of Wu Guolun (吳國倫), one of the Latter Seven Masters of Ming Dynasty literature. Two chapters in the *Suntang Ji* are of special interest because they are written accounts of landscape gardens Wu designed and built himself. “Shiyuan ji” was written in 1528, the year he failed the civil service examinations. In it, he recounts how he built the garden because after “giving up his pursuit of officialdom, (he) longed for a place to unburden himself, but did not have one.”²⁵ Though built on “a small, cracked surface,” Shiyuan had “fine and sturdy” construction. Wu writes: “The east is a study area for the children. Turn to south and take that path into a room. This room is the study where my heart finds company. A pot of tea on the stove gives off a fragrance. I recline, stretching, onto the bedding, with several books open before me.”²⁶ According to “Sunyuan ji,” his other garden, Sunyuan, was much larger in both scale and extravagance. Its attractions included a thatched cottage, a cooling area, a sunflower garden, a pavilion, and grotto. With two private gardens to wander through, Wu Wenkui enjoyed the idyllic life of a rural gentleman. Time spent in his gardens inspired various subjects in this poetry, as is apparent from the title of his two works, “Sitting in Shiyuan on a Moonlit Night” and “Summer Time in Sunyuan.” Writings such as Wu’s not only constitute rich historical materials for the study of Chinese gardens but also offer us an indirect view of how wealth undergirds certain scenic depictions of Huizhou in literature.

Huizhou’s Literary Culture

If the literature discussed in the previous section conveys a sense of Huizhou’s wealth, this section deals with the strong aura of literary culture that can be sensed in depictions of Huizhou. Local scholars and men of letters form the heart of Huizhou’s literary culture. The aristocratic clans that migrated to Huizhou from the central plains traditionally placed great value on ritual propriety and formal education. The economic prosperity that came with mid-Ming developments in trade created even better material conditions for learning.

From historical documents available on Huizhou, it is quite apparent how much the Huizhou clans emphasized education in their households. *Mingzhou Wushi jiadian* (茗州吳氏 [家典], ed. Wu Di), a book of family rules for the

25 Wu Wenkui, “Shiyuan ji,” in *Suntang ji*, in *Siku quanshu cunmu congshu, ji bu*, 189: 172.

26 *Ibid.*, 173, 174.

Wu clan in Xiuning County, details “eighty household articles,” which include such statutes regarding education:

Those children of the clan who have fine deportment and exhibit natural intelligence, but who lack the resources to seek instruction, should be taken in and educated, given a home and a living stipend. Should this result in the cultivation of one or two gentleman who can serve as a model for other clansman, this would fulfill the wishes of the clan, and substantiate the blessings of our ancestors. Its influence should not be underestimated.²⁷

Such books also often stipulate a system of financial assistance and rewards toward study and success in examinations. For instance, the Wang family of Liyang, also in Xiuning County, has a rule that says: “Allot one tael (*liang* 兩) of silver per year for all children in the clan pursuing studies to pay for lamp oil; two taels as reward for those who make it to the county to study at the county level; and one tael to cover testing fees for those taking examinations.”²⁸ This commitment to education has led to the grooming of academic talent from Huizhou from the Song through the Yuan Dynasties. Huizhou clans tend to have an unbroken chain of successful civil service examination candidates, many of whom attain the status of *juren* (舉人 recommended man) or even *jinshi* (進士 presented scholar). This regional tradition of academic excellence helped lend Huizhou a scholarly aura, which likewise became a prominent part of Huizhou’s depictions in Ming–Qing literature.

During the reign of Emperor Qianlong (1736–1796), there was a man named Cheng Mengxing (程夢星) who achieved the rank of *jinshi*, only to relinquish his office and return to settle in Yangzhou. Cheng was originally a Huizhou native from Censhandu in Shexian County. During his youth, his father sent him to his hometown to study in his grandfather’s home, an experience Cheng writes about in the poem “Zhi bai sha cui zhu jiang cun du shu” from the anthology *Jinyoutang shiji* (今有堂詩集).²⁹ The poem recalls his grandfather’s house in Jiangcun, where he would immerse himself in reading. He

27 Wu Di, *Mingzhou wushi jidian* 茗州吳氏家典 (Hefei: Huangshan Publishing House, 2006), 1: 17.

28 “Jizhu tiaokuan 給助條款,” in *Wangshi yuanyuan lu/Wangshi liyang jiafan* 汪氏淵源錄·汪氏黎陽家范; see Zhao Huafu 趙華富, *Huizhou zongzu yanjiu* 徽州宗族研究 (Hefei: Anhui University Press, 2004), 446.

29 Cheng Mengxing 程夢星, *Jinyou Tang shiji: Jiangfeng ji* 今有堂詩集·江峰集, in *Siku quanshu cunmu congshu, bubian* 補編, 42: 4.

remembers watching his uncle and grandfather poring through books in the shade of autumn trees. The poem depicts the tranquility of the village, a moment when the forest and trees are so quiet that one can hear the sounds of the Xin'an River. There are also images of books arranged in orderly fashion and a lute carefully placed on its stone-made stand that imbue the poem with an atmosphere of learning and culture. In fact, this poetic depiction of Cheng's academic environment accords perfectly with the romance of his examination success.

The activities of Huizhou's rural literary societies are also an important part of Huizhou's literary culture. The Ming Dynasty publication *Lübin yinshe lu* (率濱吟社錄) compiled sixty poems written by twenty-six members of Lübin Poetry Society, a Huizhou literary circle consisting of members of the local Cheng clan of Lübin.³⁰ The members of the Cheng clan were common folk; their family registry included no name that was accorded official status or rank. Even so, they participated actively in the literary culture of Huizhou. The sixth volume of the revised Cheng family registry (Cheng Yonglai, *Lüdong chengshi chongxiu jiapu* [率東程氏重修家譜]) includes an account of how one member of the clan, Cheng Qishi 程玘實, could not take the civil service examinations due to poor eyesight. Instead, he immersed himself in the local literary community, often inviting other family members and nearby friends to join him in the composition of poetry.³¹ In addition to works collected in the *Lübin Yinshe Lu*, Cheng Qishi has an anthology of his own poetry, *Zixiao shanren shiji*.

The *Lübin Yinshe Lu* is not only a collection of poems but also records the specific literary activities of its members. The compilation begins with a list of society rules composed of eight articles.³² These articles stipulate that

30 A Ming block-print edition of *Lübin yinshe lu* is held by the National Library of China.

31 Copies of *Lüdong chengshi chongxiu jiapu*, with revisions and selections by Cheng Tonglai, are held by the National Library of China as well as the special collections of the Anhui Provincial Museum.

32 The eight articles are as follows: 一、社中諸人同出一祖，而利名不以行者，以年有長少、學有先後、入社有早暮爾。今得若干人，後來有志者尚未艾，議許續入，蓋與人為善、無己之心也。一、會期以四仲月朔日卯刻畢集，吟社同試一題，比較進修之功，以盡切磋之益，或命題，或限韻，或聯句，弗之拘。一、作詩每月一首，務宜會日定課，如懈怠者及失旨者，罰呈紙五十張、堅筆四管、京墨二笏入社，以助膳錄。一、至期或有遠游不及赴會者，即抄題附去，若次會未歸，須先期完課寄納，違者罰如前數。一、同社諸人須德業相勸，過失相規，匪徒虛聲文字矣。設有操行不謹，為名教玷者，黜之。一、社中之為前輩者，固當恆存引進之心，而繼來者尤當誠敬聽受。凡遇疑難，各宜虛心鉤索，不可自作聰明，偏執己見，致生猜疑。此求益之道，亦

members must compose at least one poem a month and meet for annual gatherings where they can offer each other critiques and hold poetry competitions, such as by each composing a poem on the same topic or theme. From the activities and publications of these hobbyists, one can see how deeply the Huizhou literary culture permeated the fabric and sensibility of everyday life. Cheng Zhan (程瞻) has a poem, “Bu ju (卜居),” in which the speaker of the poem is someone walking along a chisel-paved path toward the mountainside cottage where he resides. The speaker takes in the sound of birds emanating from rocky flowerbeds and enjoys the serene peace of cloud shadows cast on bamboo shutters. He slows his steps as he enters his home and is greeted with a view of books spread idly over his bed.³³ The poem’s dense imagery contrasts with the speaker’s unrushed pleasure and leisurely pace. It is both the activities of such poets as well as their depictions of a bookish life that best capture the landscape of literary culture in Huizhou.

Depictions of Huizhou People

The previous sections discuss the landscape, villages, wealth, and literary culture of Huizhou, but the heart and soul of Huizhou scenes are the people of Huizhou. Whether in fiction, drama, poetry, or prose, Ming–Qing literature is by no means sparse in its portrayal of Huizhou people. Furthermore, these works consistently represent Huizhou people and their cultural attitudes in accordance with specific local characteristics.

First, the commitment of Huizhou people to traditional Confucian virtues is well documented in the biographies of Huizhou merchants. As the Tongcheng School writer Dai Mingshi (戴名世) has pointed out, “Huizhou people are skilled at making a living; they are able to go from having nothing to becoming officials. Even so, they live amongst family and friends, are largely forgiving and compassionate, while possessing loyalty and virtuousness. Although many

敦睦之意也。一、每人敷紋銀若干，輪流領放生息，以供膳錄之費。務須冬存至公，以圖久遠。一、會日取次一人為首，首家預備小酌，貴在豐約適中，陶寫性情，不可過奢、沉酣喧哄，以致不臧之譏。

- 33 Cheng Zhan, “Bu ju, 卜居” in *Lübin yinshe lu*, a block-print edition from the reign of Emperor Jiajing (1522–1566) held by the National Library of China. The original reads: 鑿石斜通徑，依山小結廬。鳥聲花塢靜，雲影竹窗虛。逸步鬆間杖，閑情榻上書。人非避世者，俗是結繩余。

gave up the way of the gentleman-scholar in order to engage in trade, this is not something that can easily be accomplished even with such titles.”³⁴

The Ming–Qing biographies of Huizhou merchants rarely include descriptions of their commercial activities, but they consistently praise Huizhou merchants for their acts of public virtue and civic philanthropy. According to this praise, Huizhou merchants are known to assist the weak and vulnerable, provide relief in times of disaster and crisis, attend to the repairs of roads and bridges, build academies, and subsidize land for the poor. There is an account of a Huizhou merchant, She Yu (余育), who returned to his hometown of Qianqiu Shan (潜虬山) after completing some business, and spent a fortune “to build Qianqiu Academy in the valley, so that he could host scholars visiting from surrounding areas and the children of his clan would have a place to study. He also built many homes in order to house those clansmen who did not have places to live.”³⁵ When a younger member of his clan asked why he would spend his hard-earned fortune in this way, he replied, “If disbanding is the aesthetic of the sages and gathering the way of petty men, how can I assume that gold and fine silks will suffice to allow descendants to guard this clan?”³⁶

Short stories written in the Ming Dynasty present more even-handed portrayals of Huizhou merchants, but the majority of them still tend to include depictions of their good deeds. The poem “Han shilang bi zuo furen, gu tikong yuanju langshu (韓侍郎婢做夫人，顧提控掾居郎署),” anthologized in the second collection of *Slapping the Table in Amazement*, tells the story of a Huizhou farmer who is arrested for owing an official two taels of silver. In order to pay his debt, his wife sells their only profitable pig, only to be swindled in the process. In a fit of despair, she resolves to drown with her son in her arms, when a Huizhou merchant saves her and pays her husband’s debt. Both fictional and biographical accounts of Huizhou merchants seem to deem virtue a cultural characteristic of Huizhou people.

Another characteristic commonly associated with Huizhou people in both fictional and biographical writings is the importance they place on book learning and being cultured. In “Chengweng Wu’ao’s Epitaph” (程翁吳媪墓志銘), Li Weizhen (李維楨) writes of a Huizhou merchant named Cheng Zibin (程子彬), who spent every spare moment immersed in reading and writing poetry. He was apparently always “murmuring a verse” with little regard for

34 “Yang Yunzheng zhuan 楊允正傳,” in *Dai Mingshi ji* (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1986), 7: 207.

35 Li Mengyang, “Qianqiu shanren ji 潜虬山人記,” in *Kongtong ji 空同集*, vol. 48, in the Wen Yuan Ge edition of the *Siku quanshu*.

36 Ibid.

the “snickering” of others.³⁷ It is said he even spent the days before his death composing poems.

Fictional depictions of Huizhou merchants during the Ming Dynasty likewise emphasize their fondness for book learning. In these stories, merchants are often portrayed as former students and scholars. The two main characters in the short story “Cao shishan caoshu jinzhang, li shiwan enshan yihai (曹十三草鼠金章, 李十萬恩山義海),” collected in *Shengxiao jian* (生銷剪) are avid students of the classics and history who become merchants due to their humble family backgrounds. Ming Dynasty fiction also often characterized Huizhou merchants as placing great emphasis on their children’s education. “Bing songyun lienü liufang, tu lizhi chi’er shouhuo (秉松筠烈女流芳, 圖麗質癡兒受禍), a story collected in Donglu Gu Kuangsheng’s *Zuixing shi* (醉醒石), features a merchant Cheng Weng who, “while himself possessing little understanding of literature, greatly admired and loved those who did.” In addition to “putting sons and daughters under private instruction from an early age,” he also “sought well-read women and learned young men as spouses for his children.”³⁸

A third characteristic of Huizhou people is their spirit of gallantry. In *Scholarly Developments during the Ming–Qing Enlightenment (Ming Qing qimeng xueshu liubian 明清啓蒙學術流變)*, Xiao Shafu and Xu Sumin discuss how the idea of the “heroic spirit” (*haojie jingshen 豪傑精神*) corresponds to the late Ming economic boom and subsequent rise in discourses of individualism.³⁹ Associating gallantry with the people of Huizhou thus aligns them with this cultural trend in history. Qian Qianyi once wrote of the poet Zheng Zuo:

(Zheng) Zuo, courtesy name Yishu. Native of She. Studied north of Fangshan and so referred to himself as Fangshan *zi* (child of Fangshan). He ended his studies, leaving to take up trade. He moved between Liang (梁) and Song (宋), constantly living the life of a gallant youth. Taking up a light bow and fine horse, he would hunt in the marshes of Daliang (大梁). Having bagged a bird or rabbit, he would strike up a stone fire and

37 Li Weizhen, *Dabi Shanfang ji* 大泌山房集 vol. 97, in *Siku quanshu cummu congshu, ji bu* 152: 743.

38 Donglu Gu Kuangsheng 東魯古狂生 et al., *Zuixing shi* 醉醒石 *Shi diantou* 石點頭 (Beijing: Huaxia Publishing House, 2013), 37.

39 Xiao Shafu 蕭蕙父 and Xu Sumin 許蘇民, *Ming-Qing qimeng xueshu liubian* 明清啓蒙學術流變 (Shenyang: Liaoning Education Press, 1995).

roast off the stink of animal fat. Then he would sing out his grief, drinking heavily, before taking off with his whip lolling at his side.⁴⁰

From this description, it is clear that Qian Qianyi saw Zheng Zuo as an accomplished poet. He later adds that Zheng, “was especially quick-witted when it came to poetic composition. He could compose ten poems in a single breath.”⁴¹ Yet Zheng is not one to apply his talents toward success in the civil service examinations or pursuing a higher social position as a government official. Nor is he the type to while away in the company of books. As he reads and composes poetry, he also engages in trade, never straying far from his true character and nature. In this way, Zheng embodies one sense of the spirit of gallantry.

In addition to the three characteristics discussed above, portrayals specific to Huizhou women also occupy a good portion of the literary depictions of Huizhou people.

Huizhou women are portrayed as well read and worldly. Pan Zhiheng (潘之恒), a drama theorist who has received much scholarly attention in the past twenty years, was a well-traveled and accomplished Huizhou native who was deeply influenced by his mother. In “Pan mu Wururen xingzhuang (潘母吳孺人行狀),” Fang Hongjing (方弘靜, 1536-1621) honors Pan’s mother for the kindness she showed her sons’ friends. He writes that she never expressed weariness or irritation at their presence and even welcomed them warmly to her dinner table. He also notes that she began teaching Pan to read from the *Book of Songs* when he was five or six. When he was old enough to take the civil service examinations, she awaited results with the anticipation of any proud parent, but also took the open-minded attitude that “talent will receive its just recognition, even if it takes time.”⁴² It is certainly possible to credit Pan’s mother with Pan’s own generosity toward his friends and his zest for life as a cultured man.

Huizhou women are also portrayed as industrious. Wang Daokun’s *Taihan ji* (太函集) records the life stories of several Huizhou women. In his accounts of women born into wealthy families, he emphasizes their virtuousness and frugality. His accounts of women born to poverty highlight their hard work and perseverance. One such account, “Zeng’anren jiangmu zhengshi xingzhuang,” (贈安人江母鄭氏行狀), features a Mrs. Zheng who married into a humble situation and had to take up knitting in order to supplement the

40 Qian Qianyi, *Liechao shiji xiaozhuan* 列朝詩集小傳 (Shanghai: Shanghai Chinese Classics Publishing House, 1983), 322.

41 Ibid.

42 Fang Hongjing 方弘靜, *Suyuan cuncao* 素園存稿, vol. 20, in *Siku quanshu cunmu congshu, ji bu*, 121: 206.

family income. Whenever her mother-in-law saw her knitting late at night, she would plead with her not to toil at the expense of her own health. It was said that, in those situations, Zheng would always help her mother-in-law back to bed before continuing to knit.⁴³

Finally, Huizhou women were known for their exemplary virtue according to the feudal mores. The saying “there is no other region with more virtuous women than Huizhou” persists in popular culture even to this day. This characterization of Huizhou women is unfortunately also associated with many tragic situations. An apt illustration of this can be found in the story and context for the poem “Ji sui zhu (紀歲珠),” written by Wang Hongdu (汪洪度), a *xiuca* (秀才 cultivated talent) from Shexian County.⁴⁴ The poet prefaces his poem with the following commentary:

A certain villager left home to trade within a month of marrying his wife. In his absence, his wife took up embroidery in order to feed herself. Each year, she would purchase a single pearl with the extra money earned from her embroidery and wrap it in silk. When the husband returned, it was already three years after his wife's passing. He finds the pearls in a small chest. There were twenty in all.⁴⁵

It was quite common in Huizhou for newlywed women to be abandoned by their husbands, who left to engage in trade. Not only were they unable to find happiness in marriage, but, more often than not, they sacrificed their youth and, in some cases, their lives, in order to adhere to the virtue of remaining loyal to their absent husbands. This occurred when women, instead of being widows, chose to follow their husbands into death. Such stories involving Huizhou women are surprisingly common.⁴⁶

At the same time, there were occasionally fictional imaginings of Huizhou women who pushed against the mores of feudal society. In the second story in the second volume of Ling Mengchu's *Slapping the Table in Amazement*,

43 Wang Daokun 汪道昆, *Taihan ji* 太函集 (Hefei: Huangshan Press, 2004), 41: 885.

44 Shen Tingqian, *Qingshi biecai ji* (Hangzhou: Zhejiang Chinese Classics Publishing House, 1998), 5: 481. The original reads: 鴛鴦鸚鵡鳧雁鵠，柔荑慣繡雙雙逐。幾度拋針背人哭，一歲眼淚成一珠。莫愛珠多眼易枯，小時繡得合歡被。線斷重緣結未解，珠壘壘，天涯歸未歸。

45 Ibid.

46 There are many examples in Wang's *Taihan ji*, such as “Rao mu wanjie zhuan 饒母完節傳” (vol. 27), “Zheng qi qi luoshi zhenjie zhuan 鄭麒妻羅氏貞節傳” (vol. 29), “Sun Jiefu fanshi zhuan 孫節婦范氏傳” and “Jidi daishi lienü fangshi zhuan 季弟待室烈女方氏傳” (vol. 32), and “Wang Lienü zhuan 汪烈女傳” (vol. 33).

Yao Dizhu is a Huizhou woman who is abandoned by her merchant husband. Unable to bear the wrath of her in-laws, she leaves home and takes up residence with someone else. The story makes special note of Yao's background as a Huizhou woman and, according to textual evidence, is a retelling of an actual incident recorded in the "Yan bu, Liang Dizhu (艷部, 兩滴珠) chapter in the *waiji* (外紀) section of Pan Zhiheng's *Eternal History* (*Gen shi* 亘史).⁴⁷ This stands as evidence that, whether in fiction or reality, even in Huizhou, where feudal virtues of womanhood were deeply internalized by society, there will always be some women who audaciously pursue their own happiness.

Conclusion: The Significance of Literary Depictions of Huizhou

Regional depictions in literature (*difang wenxue tujing* 地方文學圖景) differ conceptually from regional literature (*diyu wenxue* 地域文學) in that the former refers to how literature captures images of regional landscape, culture, and people through language whereas the latter refers to literature by writers of a certain region. By considering these five categories as ways to understand scenic depictions of Huizhou, I propose a rough outline of regional depictions in literature as a theoretical category of study. In doing so, I have in this essay drawn on only a small portion of the abundant examples of Huizhou scenes depicted in Ming–Qing literature.

While this article focuses on depictions of Huizhou as a case study, the intention is to consider larger methodological and thematic issues in the studies of regions and literature. Huizhou is but one of the many vast and varied regions of China, and its scenes are but a fraction of multitudinous ways in which Chinese literature depicts regional scenery. Based on this article's close examination of Huizhou's literary depictions, I offer the following three points for further consideration.

First, this study demonstrates the way in which literary depictions correspond to historical reality. Although it is not uncommon to hear that literature generally draws on lived reality and a writer's involvement in life, in the case of regional depictions in Ming–Qing literature this tendency is even more pronounced, because the landscape, villages, wealth, literary culture, and people being represented all have a concrete basis in concrete history. It is possible to find corroboration for all the scenes discussed here—from the beauty of a particular mountain or a person who once resided there to cultural attitudes and

47 See "Genshi yu 'Liang Pai': 'Liang Pai' Lanben Kao Zhiyi 《亘史》与“两拍”——“两拍”蓝本考之一” in the appendix of Han Jiegen, *Mingdai Huizhou wenxue yanjiu*.

impressions—in historical records. In fact, the literary works discussed here constitute important source materials in the study of Huizhou history and culture; unfortunately, they have received little attention from both historians and scholars in Hui studies. This speaks to the need for a more interdisciplinary approach to research in contemporary scholarship.

Second, the study of regional depictions in Ming–Qing literature requires special attentiveness toward the relationship between literary production and the specificity of a region. During the Ming–Qing period, visual technology was limited, and preservation of everyday life scenes relied heavily on the written word. Yet the quality of the resulting scenes depended not only on the writer's background, life experience, and artistic style but, more importantly, on the specific characteristics of the region being depicted. I have chosen to look at Huizhou through the scenic categories of landscape, villages, wealth, and literary culture because these are the most prominent scenes to emerge in a survey of Huizhou's literary depictions. These categories might shift and change depending on the region. Additionally, they overlap with larger trends in Chinese literary imagery of the period. Because scenic depictions express literary conventions as well as regional specificity, it is important to pay attention to the nuances and shifts that occur depending on the region or body of literature in question.

Finally, this study seeks to unpack the deeply intertwined relationship between literary representation and regional literature. It is perhaps inevitable that factors such as the background of writers or the life paths they take influence the style and feel of their works. In this study of regional literary depictions, I have considered, on the one hand, writers who traveled to the region for a temporary stay and, on the other, writers who were native to the region or resided there for most of their lives. Li Weizhen, Qian Qianyi, and Yuan Mei fall into the former category while Wang Daokun, Pan Zhiheng, Wu Wenkui, and Wang Zihu fall into the latter. In the case of the former, their literary representations are limited by the number of their observations and experiences. At the same time, the quality of their literature is high and so is the imagery they contribute by elevating the artistry of regional depictions. For the native writers, who have a deeper level of passion for their hometown, their literary representations are rich, precise, and detailed. Whether a blade of grass or a scrap of wood, a mound of dirt or a hidden gully, the most unassuming person or event—nothing escapes their eyes. The Huizhou that emerges from their pens is much more dynamic and full of vitality. Thus, their works contribute to the content and themes of regional literature.

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