

A Land of Prominent Lineages

In 1551, about half a century after Cheng Minzheng passed away, a monumental text came out that demarcated Huizhou from other places in Ming China. That text was *Prominent Lineages in Xin'an* (Xin'an mingzu zhi), a unique product of Ming dynasty genealogical literature that further enriched the regional consciousness of Huizhou. If Cheng Minzheng's *Anthology of Xin'an Documents* best represented the rise of Huizhou consciousness in terms of its historical roots, *Prominent Lineages* best defined the identity of Huizhou, while at the same time also capturing its emerging social characteristics over the half century following Cheng's death. The projection of Huizhou's self-identification looks straightforward, but it is also multilayered, reflecting the concerns local kinship communities developed amid accelerating commercialization.

Cheng Minzheng has never received any credit for the making of *Prominent Lineages in Xin'an*. Instead, it was another Xiuning native noted for upholding Zhu Xi's learning during the Mongol period, Chen Dingyu, who was believed to have compiled its forerunner, the similarly titled *Great Lineages in Xin'an* (Xin'an dazhi). Placing *Prominent Lineages* in the context of its textual history and the social and cultural changes of mid-Ming Huizhou, this chapter makes three interrelated observations.

First, Cheng Minzheng made significant contributions, albeit indirectly, to the production of the special genealogical genre of *Prominent Lineages*. Cheng Minzheng's *Composite Genealogy of the Xin'an Chengs*, the first of its kind, was over the course of the sixteenth century followed by other leading Huizhou lineages in the process of compiling, publishing, and distributing *Prominent Lineages in Xin'an*, suggesting the collective embrace of Cheng Minzheng's vision by gentry representatives of local elite lineages.

Second, *Prominent Lineages* publicly defined Huizhou as a land of prominent lineages composed of numerous great families with deep historical roots (real or claimed), but it also covered many not-so-famous kinship settlements, likely a sign

of moral leveling in Cheng Minzheng's thinking, and now also resonating with popular Wang Yangmingism.

Third, and most importantly, many of these recorded lineages celebrated not just family pedigree (including both eminent ancestral origins and political-scholarly success) but also Confucian commoners, especially righteous merchants and devoted women, marking the emergence of Huizhou mercantile lineage culture. *Prominent Lineages*, more accurately, served as an accelerator to the emerging social trend of mercantile lineage culture rather than as its trigger.

To be sure, what I describe as mercantile lineage discourse is decidedly not how Huizhou elite lineages spoke of their own identity. They identified, as is evident in this massive text, as a land of prominent lineages. The substance of that stable outward projection was increasingly shaped, however, by mercantile interests. And this regional culture was at once locally concentrated and constituted of empire-wide outreach and appeal. Although partially a product of power-jostling among regional lineages over symbolic resources, *Prominent Lineages* celebrated an accepted ordering of the major local surnames, thereby facilitating their cooperation on various fronts (including elite intermarriage) that contributed to Huizhou's enormous success in both examination placement and commercial competition, which in turn further enhanced Huizhou mercantile lineage culture.

CHENG MINZHENG AND COMPOSITE GENEALOGICAL GAZETTEERS

In Ming China, Huizhou was the only region that produced prefecture- or district-wide composite genealogical gazetteers covering all of the recognized or participating lineages and their branches of various regional surnames, the most notable of which was *Prominent Lineages in Xin'an*. They were all privately compiled for a local gentry-led society, different from the pre-Song registers of empire-wide surnames that were officially assembled for an aristocratic polity and class marriage.¹ *Xin'an mingzu zhi* literally means "gazetteer of prominent lineages in Xin'an," but I will simply call it *Prominent Lineages*.² The text under scrutiny is based on the 1551 edition of *Xin'an mingzu zhi*; it also includes additional data that the modern editors have gleaned from other editions published during the Jiajing reign (1522–1566). It encompasses ninety surnames in total, covering all of their known kinship settlements in Huizhou's six counties; entries on kinship settlements were structured around the surname-county-village sequence.³ For most of the covered kinship settlements or lineage-villages, there is a brief entry for each, covering the noteworthy figures in its ancestry and concurrent generation. The focus on local lineages (and their branches) and the brevity of each entry made it different from the genre of the local gazetteer (*fangzhi*, which was officially sponsored), and its composite coverage of all the recognized (or participating) elite lineages of different surnames made it different from the genre of the single-surname genealogy.⁴

The composite genealogical gazetteer was not just unique but also massive in scale; its modern edition totals 770 pages. Embodied in such a monumental work, quite naturally, is the distinctiveness of Huizhou society and culture. Still, a strong catalyst must have been needed to bring it about. In mid-Ming Huizhou, one apt catalyst for this venture may well have been Cheng Minzheng, a well-positioned and widely connected scholar-official whose love of his ancestral place was unprecedentedly strong and whose Huizhou- and Cheng-focused work was pathbreaking in terms of the making of regional consciousness and the promotion of the Cheng pedigree. As I will try to demonstrate, Cheng Minzheng played a significant role in the making of Huizhou's first prefecture-wide composite genealogical gazetteer. In the end, Cheng Minzheng may well have prepared the necessary condition for this unique Huizhou document, which was not printed until the mid-sixteenth century. In other words, to fully understand the backdrop of the *Prominent Lineages*, we need to contextualize the text both historically and socially.

When Cheng Minzheng first traveled to Huizhou, he encountered a region filled with great families, distinguished by ancient ancestries and remarkable achievements on the political, military, and intellectual fronts, as claimed in their individual genealogies. Most of these families, according to their genealogies, were descended from those who migrated to Xin'an from the north in the medieval period, especially during the Huang Chao rebellion of the late Tang (874–884 CE).⁵ But as Joseph McDermott has shown, by Song times Huizhou was still a society composed mostly of recent migrants.⁶ Many genealogical claims to ancient notables by Huizhou lineages were largely mythical, and not supported by neat ancestral trees. That said, myth could play a powerful role in discourse, especially when it was interspersed with seemingly truthful facts. By the mid-Ming, in particular, the mythical character of these claims did not matter much, as they had been repeated so many times in numerous editions of various single-surnamed genealogies that they were treated as historical fact.⁷ Moreover, by mid-Ming times, many of these great families had truly grown into prosperous, populous lineages, with numerous branches spread throughout Huizhou's six counties.

A testament to the strength of the Cheng descent line, the number of branches from whom Cheng Minzheng solicited documents for his lineage-wide composite genealogy reached forty-four, representing in total more than ten thousand kinsmen. Most of the Cheng branches, like those of many other major surnames, were engaged in their own home lineage building in the mid-Ming. The Xiuning Shuaikou Cheng branch genealogy (1570), a revised "sequel" edition, for instance, incorporated numerous prefaces written for the earlier versions of the branch genealogy, as well as for the earlier Cheng composite genealogies (including Cheng Minzheng's preface to his *Composite Genealogy*).⁸ Cheng Minzheng, while perfecting lineage institutions for his kinspeople in Peiguo, wrote a commemorative record for each of three Cheng settlements in Chakou, Shandou, and Shuaikou on the occasions of their expansion of Shizhong branch shrines honoring Cheng

Lingxi. In addition to the free-standing ancestral halls honoring their popular apical ancestor, noted Minzheng, the three Xiuning settlements had all set up corporate land to cover sacrifice expenses for ritual gatherings of more than six hundred kinsmen in Shuaikou, four hundred in Shandou, and several hundred in Chakou.⁹ More than half a century later, according to *Prominent Lineages*, the Shuaikou Chengs boasted about three thousand kinsmen.¹⁰

Still, in Huizhou the Chengs were not as populous as the Wangs. Already in Song times, in the words of a local aphorism quoted in the 1175 *Gazetteer of Xin'an*, "nine out of ten are surnamed Wang, all descended from Wang Hua."¹¹ By the late sixteenth century, one main descent line of the Shexian Wangs alone boasted sixteen branches of more than ten thousand kinsmen.¹² If this piece of evidence seems a bit late for our concern here, Zhu Xi, in a foreword he wrote in 1188 for a Xin'an Wang genealogy, commented that "No other lineage could possibly match the Xin'an Wangs for their prestige and prosperity."¹³ Even Cheng Minzheng acknowledged their numerical superiority in a preface he wrote for a local Wang genealogy.¹⁴ Both before and during Minzheng's time, the Huizhou Wangs had compiled numerous independent branch genealogies. For instance, the 1487 version of a Xiuning Wang genealogy carries a foreword by Chen Dingyu, written in 1331 for its earlier, still "revised" edition, which follows Cheng Minzheng's 1487 foreword to the genealogy.¹⁵ In the Yuan dynasty, local gentryman Wang Songtao compiled *Ancestral Records of the Wangs* (Wangshi yuanyuan lu), a ten-volume genealogy that traced the Xin'an Wangs back to the Yingchuan Wangs of Duke Cheng of Lu (directly descended from the Duke of Zhou and the Yellow Emperor).¹⁶

Wang Hua had long emerged as the leading patron deity of Huizhou, as acknowledged in Luo Yuan's *Gazetteer of Xin'an*. The prefecture's first official gazetteer devotes an entire section, "Shrines and Temples" (Cimiao), in the first volume, to the God of Xin'an (Xin'an Zhi Shen).¹⁷ A key element of the Wang lineage institution, the cult of Wang Hua vastly overshadowed Cheng Lingxi in local popular worship in Cheng Minzheng's time (and throughout late imperial times). Cheng Minzheng, nevertheless, led the Huizhou kinship society in producing the first massive composite genealogy for a single Huizhou surname, a practice that was later followed by the Wangs and other surnamed prominent lineages.¹⁸

The concentration of many great surnames, and especially their rapid demographic and social expansion (including the development of lineage institutions), nurtured the unique genre of composite genealogical gazetteer that encompassed all of the recognized and participating prominent lineages of the great surnames. It is curious that other regions with a similar concentration of prominent lineages did not produce a similar composite genealogical gazetteer in the Ming. Although I have no direct evidence of Cheng Minzheng's involvement with this unique Huizhou genre, the composite genealogical gazetteer is rife with the traces of his concerns: lineage rank and pedigree. Such a work would have been a natural extension of his *Composite Genealogy of the Xin'an Chengs*. But according to

TABLE 1. Surname order in three composite genealogical gazetteers

A. <i>Great Lineages in Xin'an</i> (reprint 1667)			
B. <i>Prominent Lineages in Xin'an</i> (1551)			
C. <i>Prominent Lineages in Xiuning</i> (1626)			
	A.	B.	C.
Cheng	1	1	1
Bao	2	2	—
Fang	3	3	2
Yu ^a	4	5	3
Yu	5	6	4
Huang	6	7	5
Wang	7	8	6
Xie	8	11	10
Zhan	9	12	13
Hu	10	13	14
Wu	11	14	18
Zhang	12	15	15
Chen	13	16	16
Li	14	17	17
Ye	15	18	19
Zhu	16	19	21
Zheng	17	20	22
Dai	18	21	23
Ren	19	9	8
Min	20	10	9

SOURCE: Table 1 is based on the three editions stored in Anhui Provincial Library, reprinted in Yu Chenghua et al., comp., *Huizhou Mingzu zhi*, 2 vols.

^a The surname Yu ranked fourth and fifth in the first column refers to two different characters.

later evidence, an “ur-version” of sorts seems to have already existed in the Yuan dynasty. The renowned Yuan dynasty Confucian Chen Dingyu was believed to have compiled *Great Lineages in Xin'an*. This first Huizhou-wide genealogical gazetteer appears to have set a pattern for two subsequent versions: *Prominent Lineages in Xin'an* and *Prominent Lineages in Xiuning*. The two later genealogical gazetteers, although greatly enriched and with different focuses, largely followed *Great Lineages* in one key respect: the ordered placement of local prominent surnames headed by the Chengs (see table 1).

Why were the Chengs at the top of the surname sequence? How might the actual compilers have set the sequence and justified it to the local audience, especially given the social landscape of Huizhou in which the majority of elite surnames claimed in their single-surname genealogies to have celebrated ancestral pedigree and produced significant numbers of higher examination degree holders?

That the Chengs managed to secure the top position within the surname sequence in all of these prefecture- and district-wide composite genealogical gazetteers is highly suggestive of just the sort of maneuvering for prestige that so pre-occupied Cheng Minzheng. It is possible that the mid- and late-Ming genealogical gazetteers simply followed the precedent established in the supposed original version, and yet since the claimed original edition is little more than a list of the recognized elite lineages and their local branches, it lacks sufficient explanatory matter to provide answers.¹⁹ Looking to later sources for explanation, we see the third entry in the *fanli* (guidelines) of *Prominent Lineages in Xin'an*, finalized by Cheng Minzheng's kinsman from Shexian, Cheng Shangkuan, in 1551: "the ordered placement of various surnames listed here is based on the first arriving times of their ancestors in Xin'an."²⁰ As shown in chapter 1, however, the Chengs did not settle in Xin'an earlier than other prominent lineages, such as the Wangs and Huangs.²¹ In fact, the "Surnames" section in the 1175 *Gazetteer of Xin'an* did not even mention the surname Cheng, listing instead Jian, Yu, Wang, Yang, Nie, Cha, Lü, Yu, Qian—nine in total, some of which were probably Xin'an aborigines.²²

A more important gauge of social power—and potentially a key factor determining the surname sequence in the composite genealogies—could have been the number of metropolitan *jinshi* degree holders various lineages had produced. In this respect, the Chengs, though enormously successful, still came up short, as the Wangs were most dominant from the Song through the Ming-Qing periods: The Huizhou Wangs produced eighty degree holders in the Ming and seventy-eight in the Qing, whereas the Chengs produced fifty degree holders in the Ming and fifty-six in the Qing.²³

Arguably, an even more decisive factor may have been the quality, rather than quantity, of the scholar-officials the local prominent lineages had produced. The two most prolific and influential scholar-officials from Ming Huizhou came from, not accidentally, the two most powerful regional lineages. These scholars were Cheng Minzheng and Wang Daokun (*jinshi* 1547). Here, the luck of seniority gave the upper hand to the former. By the time Wang Daokun came of age, the issue of genealogical order among local elite lineages had already been resolved and the precedent-setting mid-Ming genealogical gazetteer already printed. Yet, for all its traces of Cheng favoritism, it surely would have been indelicate for the mid-sixteenth-century compilers of *Prominent Lineages* (and, especially, Cheng Shangkuan) to have openly boasted about either the reputation of Cheng Minzheng or the prodigious Cheng *jinshi* production. This may explain, too, why these compilers needed to invoke the eminent Chen Dingyu to help justify their ordered placement of elite surnames. The first guideline entry reads: "*Prominent Lineages*

is based on, and further expanded from, the old text [*jiuben*] by the Yuan scholar Chen Dingyu."²⁴

Chen Dingyu was a leading figure in the neo-Confucian lineage of Huizhou, widely praised for having preserved and transmitted the authentic tradition of Zhu Xi's moral philosophy during the troubled Yuan era.²⁵ Like so many neo-Confucians, Chen Dingyu understood the social and moral functions of genealogy, having compiled one for his own kin and written numerous forewords or post-faces for the genealogies of other important Huizhou surnames.²⁶ In the process, conceivably, he must have collected information on many local prominent descent groups, thereby leading to the compilation of a composite genealogical gazetteer, similar to the *Great Lineages in Xin'an*. The problem, however, is that we simply do not have the original text of Chen Dingyu's *Great Lineages*, formerly assumed to be printed in the Yuan.²⁷ Indeed, had it been printed and circulated in the Yuan, Cheng Minzheng would surely have seized upon it to further boost the pedigree of Huizhou as well as of its Cheng descent line. His enormous erudition and passion for Huizhou's history and genealogies notwithstanding, Minzheng never mentioned *Great Lineages in Xin'an*, not even in the writings he wrote or compiled that paid high tribute to Chen Dingyu.²⁸

Since no solid evidence exists to support the assertion that *Great Lineages in Xin'an* was printed in the Yuan, its authorship and the date of its first printing have become the subject of recent debate.²⁹ The most persuasive explanation to date now suggests that Chen Dingyu did compile something that eventually led to *Great Lineages in Xin'an*, but he did not have it cut.³⁰ Indeed, the primary sources support this assessment. The first guideline entry to another mid-sixteenth-century edition of *Prominent Lineages in Xin'an* clearly states that Chen's *Great Lineages in Xin'an* "was regrettably not cut and not printed. Occasionally, his manuscript [*chaoben*] can be seen; it is rather thin and offhand."³¹

The finalizer Cheng Shangkuan provides more details in his 1551 foreword to *Prominent Lineages*:

Xin'an is surely a prominent prefecture under heaven. *Gazetteer of Prominent Lineages* is to clarify the mixed [lines] and elucidate the hidden [meanings]; it stems from [natural] emotions and begins with righteousness. The Yuan dynasty Confucian, Chen [Dingyu], had once compiled *Great Lineages in Xin'an*, which, regrettably, was not widely spread [*wei shengxing zhe*]. Sir Zheng Shuangxi [*jinsi* 1530] and Sir Hong Jueshan [*jinsi* 1532], as his original compilation had been expanded, [endorsed] its printing. How substantially we can see the flourishing of Xin'an's cultural achievements; how summarily [this composite genealogical gazetteer] captures the key to success in this world! Amazing indeed! As for the data compilation [for the expanded version of *Gazetteer of Great Lineages*], the process started with Ye Benjing of Qimen, and continued with Dai Tingming of Xiuning, and so on, who had diligently worked on collecting [genealogical data] for over ten years. And yet, searching for the famed families, [we find that] many are still missing. . . . I have sincerely consulted prominent figures and compatriots of the six counties. I thereby further

expanded this [genealogical gazetteer] based on the earlier editions, examining the surnames and successive migrations to fix it, proofreading to correct its errors, and monitoring the discrepancies [between various editions] to return to what is commonly accepted.

From the primary sources we can infer the following points. First, Chen Dingyu did compile a manuscript on prominent local lineages, which was nevertheless not cut in his lifetime. Second, it was Zheng Shuangxi and Hong Jueshan who, after seeing its expansion, had it first cut. It is not clear whether this first Huizhou composite genealogical gazetteer was titled *Great Lineages in Xin'an* or *Prominent Lineages in Xin'an*, but we can be sure that the first Huizhou composite genealogical gazetteer, presumably titled *Great Lineages in Xin'an*, cannot have been printed before the 1530s or 1540s. Third, the first edition of *Prominent Lineages in Xin'an*, or the expanded version of *Great Lineages in Xin'an*, took more than ten years of diligent data collection and compilation by Ye Benjing and, especially, Dai Tingming. And fourth, as the first edition was still considered incomplete, with many notable lineages or their branches “still missing,” Cheng Shangkuan added additional data to it, and published the new edition in 1551, which is the earliest extant version of the genealogical gazetteer and the core text for the modern punctuated version of *Prominent Lineages*.

This understanding of the textual history can still hardly lead to an answer to the question as to why the list of elite surnames was ordered the way it was in *Prominent Lineages*, and especially why it was led by the Chengs. In fact, we still have no clue on exactly when Chen Dingyu's *Great Lineages in Xin'an* was first printed, which was the alleged origin of the ordered sequence of elite surnames that the later compilers of *Prominent Lineages* followed. Chen's “manuscript,” “thin and offhand,” may have been little more than a collection of hand-drafted notes of local lineages, not necessarily arranged in a sequential or hierarchical order. Even if they had been ordered, the unpublished manuscript was still a private document, and had yet to pass the test of acceptance from those local pedigree-sensitive lineages. All of this suggests that Chen's much vaunted “original” had never been printed, until, that is, it was needed for lineage development and local power politics in the mid-Ming. Rather than read Chen's *Great Lineages in Xin'an* as an ur-text that naturally explains the ordering of the surnames, then, it is likely that this list of prominent lineages was a product of the mid-Ming. It was opportunely brought into circulation (and then expanded with the ordered surnames) at the very time when Huizhou gentrymen were turning to the genealogical gazetteer to shore up prestige in the local arena and to promote their home prefecture to an empire-wide audience. This reading requires that we move from the manifest aspects of textual history to the hidden dimensions of social history to figure out the question as to when *Great Lineages in Xin'an* was first published or first readied for publication, with an eye to how that might have set the order of Huizhou elite surnames as now seen in *Prominent Lineages*.

When discussing the historical and social context of the unique Huizhou genre of genealogical gazetteers, we need to take Cheng Minzheng into account. Arguably the most influential and articulate scholar-official of mid-Ming Huizhou, he played a key role in building kinship institutions at the critical juncture of lineage development, including his innovative compilation of the composite and single-surnamed genealogies. He substantiated the blood links between Xin'an and the two Cheng brothers, which elevated the pedigree of both the Chengs in Huizhou and Huizhou in the entire realm. He also helped shape the regional consciousness that laid at the heart of *Prominent Lineages*. Intriguingly, there is textual evidence that, when properly contextualized, might reveal traces of Cheng Minzheng's possible involvement with the publication of *Great Lineages in Xin'an*.

Largely ignored is a preface that a certain Peng Ze (1459–1530) wrote, in late autumn of 1498, which endorsed the printing (not reprinting) of Chen Dingyu's *Great Lineages in Xin'an*. Peng Ze's preface is included in the expanded edition of the Huizhou composite genealogical gazetteer, published in 1667 by another Huizhou Cheng gentryman, Cheng Yitong.³² Peng Ze was to become Huizhou prefect in 1500, and eventually minister of war, two official titles that were used to undersign his 1498 preface. This discrepancy between the dating of the preface and the official titles used is sometimes taken as evidence to question the authenticity of Peng's preface.³³ My assessment is exactly the opposite, because a forger would have had to have been particularly careful to avoid this kind of obvious dating mistake. In other words, the "mistake" should be read as an indication that the preface may have been truly written by Peng Ze in 1498, with his official titles added later at the time of printing or reprinting. After all, by 1667, Cheng Yitong no longer needed to manufacture any reasons to justify the reprinting of *Great Lineages in Xin'an*, since the previous editions of the composite genealogical gazetteers had already firmly established the Cheng-led placement of the local prominent surnames.

More importantly, this seeming detour to the preface by Peng Ze leads back to Cheng Minzheng. It also sheds new light on Huizhou lineage politics around 1498, the heyday of Cheng Minzheng's engagement in Huizhou matters. The printing of both *Genealogy of My Peiguo Cheng Branch in Xiuning* and *Anthology of Xin'an Documents* in 1497 marks the completion of Cheng Minzheng's tangible accomplishments in his Huizhou endeavor, and this energetic and widely connected Huizhou enthusiast surely was ready to embark on new ones to boost Cheng prestige as well as that of the entire Huizhou region. There is also reason to believe that Cheng Minzheng mobilized empire-wide official networks to achieve this goal. Although no tangible sources have been uncovered to suggest that Cheng Minzheng was behind Peng Ze's 1498 preface, a close examination of the preface itself and its intangible social embeddedness may provide clues about Cheng Minzheng's influence on, and even possible involvement in, its production.

Turning to the intangible social connections first, Peng Ze (*jinsi* 1490), a native of northwestern Lanzhou, was entwined in Minzheng's network of official friends and protégés. He earned the provincial *juren* degree in 1486, the same year in which Cheng Minzheng presided over the southern Yingtian exam, and in which Minzheng's close friend and colleague, Imperial Academician Li Dongyang, supervised the northern Shuntian exam where Peng Ze was registered.³⁴ Although a northerner, Peng Ze's ancestral place was Changsha, not far from Li Dongyang's native home. In 1512, at the request of Peng Ze, Li Dongyang wrote a foreword for a genealogy of Peng Ze's ancestral lineage in Hunan, in which he indicated that Peng Ze was "from my Changsha."³⁵ Going further back, the Changsha Pengs came from Ji'an in Jiangxi Province, and were related to the nearby powerful Anfu Pengs.³⁶ The first person Peng Ze contacted for support when planning the compilation of a Huizhou gazetteer was Peng Li (*jinsi* 1472), his kinsman from Anfu, who became the governor of Jiangnan Province (with jurisdiction over Huizhou) in 1498, roughly two years before Peng Ze's appointment as Huizhou prefect.³⁷ Peng Li's elder brother was none other than Peng Hua, who authored a commemorative record on the shrine to Cheng Minzheng's father as well as the essay "On Bamboo Mound."³⁸ What is more, the two Peng brothers' close cousin from Anfu was Peng Shi, the grand secretariat who, as already noted, had a high regard for the precocious Minzheng, the future son-in-law of his colleague Li Xian. It was Peng Shi, too, who authored the "epitaph" for Minzheng's parents while they were still alive.³⁹ Minzheng reciprocated by expending his own brush-and-ink capital for Peng Shi, writing two heart-felt verses and one memorial essay upon the latter's death.⁴⁰

Likewise, Peng Ze would later pay his respects to his senior Minzheng through the occasional essay.⁴¹ In a 1528 foreword he wrote for the aforementioned Shuaikou Cheng genealogy, Peng Ze piled the accolades on Minzheng, calling him "Minister of Rites Lord Bamboo Mound" (Da Zongbo Huangdun Gong), an "ultimate Confucian of the prosperous age" (*shengdai ruzong*), and best among all the top scholars the Huizhou Chengs had ever produced. For such a prolific scholar, quite revealingly, Peng Ze mentioned no specific works by Cheng Minzheng other than his *Composite Genealogy of the Xin'an Chengs*, while at the same time recognizing Minzheng's most cherished blood tie to Cheng Hao and Cheng Yi.⁴² Given all of these ties, it seems plausible that Peng's 1498 preface endorsing the printing of *Great Lineages in Xin'an* might have been influenced by Minzheng. After all, Minzheng was a master in mobilizing his empire-wide official contacts to boost local Cheng prestige.

Peng Ze's 1498 preface further suggests Huizhou lineage politics at play in the *Great Lineages* project. The preface is short, conventional in content, and cautious in tone, especially when compared to the animated forewords he later wrote for the Shuaikou Cheng and his ancestral Changsha Peng genealogies. The preface opens with a general statement that a genealogy is intended to record the family

pedigree and scholarly notables within a given ancestry. It goes on to identify two defining characteristics of “great lineages,” both of which would have been readily acceptable to Huizhou kinship society and Cheng Minzheng. The first distinguishing characteristic is an objective one, concerning the ancient depth of ancestry, and it largely accords with the third guideline entry of *Prominent Lineages*. The second is relatively subjective, and it depends on the glory of ancestors, specifically those noted for having practiced or illuminated the Way, having fulfilled “loyalty and righteousness” or “filial devotion and friendship,” or having made “remarkable accomplishments” in military campaigns, intellectual writings, or civil politics. “Short of these two” qualifications, declared Peng Ze, “there could be no great families.” This was why, he explained, “the great Confucian, Sir Chen [Dingyu], traced the origins, and highlighted [the accomplishments], of those established families.” As with many other genealogical prefaces, Peng Ze did not neglect the moral functions of a composite genealogy, briefly indicating that it would encourage kinspeople to revere ancestors and honor lineages and would purify local customs. All of this, concluded Peng Ze, distinguished great families from others, which was exactly what had been on the mind of Sir Chen when compiling *Great Lineages in Xin'an*.⁴³

The cautious tone of the preface may further reflect the complicated web of social connections that lay behind it. Peng Ze, while enjoying various ties with Cheng Minzheng, was also a close friend of Wang Shunmin (*jinsi* 1478), a luminary of the Huizhou Wangs, although much less influential than Cheng Minzheng was. Peng Ze had been a colleague of Wang Shunmin in Yunnan prior to his Huizhou tenure. When planning his edition of the *Huizhou Gazetteer*, Peng Ze invited Wang Shunmin to preside over its compilation.⁴⁴ Peng had even taken a concubine from Wang Shunmin’s lineage. This affinal relation, as a Wang document reasoned, partially explained why the new Prefect Peng so readily launched an investigation after a local Wang Hua temple suffered a terrible conflagration in 1501. After the inspection, Peng Ze immediately called upon all of the Huizhou Wangs to contribute to its reconstruction, in gratitude for which his portrait was to be placed in that temple, enjoying sacrifices along with Wang Hua.⁴⁵

It seems, perhaps, not too far a stretch to read his ties with both the Wangs and Chengs into the terse balance Peng Ze tried to maintain between ancestral depth and ancestors’ achievements when defining “great lineages” in his preface. The preface sensitively avoided the mention of any illustrious surnames (not even the glorious tie to the two Cheng brothers that he would later publicly acknowledge), let alone the ordered placement led by either of the two most populous and powerful surnames in mid-Ming Huizhou.

Peng Ze’s cautious tone may also reflect a subtle difference between a manuscript and its printed version. Chen Dingyu’s “old text” may have been little more than a hand-drafted list of local lineages, not necessarily arranged in a hierarchical order. Even if they had been ordered, the unpublished manuscript was still a

private document, which had yet to pass the test of acceptance from those local pedigree-sensitive lineages. To get the genealogy cut, in other words, it would have to be ready for publication in accord with both textual and social norms. Textually, an ordered placement of all of the included elite surnames would have been a prerequisite for the cutting. Socially, an approval of such a placement from the majority of local kinship communities would have been necessary for it to be turned into a public text. Neither was an easy task to accomplish. It took decades, for example, for Dai Tingming and his associates to collect the information needed for the later *Prominent Lineages in Xin'an*. To reach consensus from local lineages on the list of ordered surnames could be an even more daunting challenge, for this would have required not just dedication or passion but also social skills and influence. In mid-Ming Huizhou, Cheng Minzheng, the most powerful advocate for both the Chengs and the entire prefecture and the most passionate about Huizhou lineage matters, would have been particularly suited to finesse the social engineering needed to complete this task.

All of this puts in perspective his efforts at forming direct links with the two Cheng brothers (to add the utmost intellectual luster to the Chengs). Here we see some echoes between Cheng Minzheng's maneuverings and Peng Ze's definition of "great lineages." This Cheng-Peng resonance notwithstanding, Peng Ze's endorsement did not lead to the instant printing of Huizhou's first composite genealogy. The deferral of the publication of *Great Lineages in Xin'an* actually lends additional support to my speculation that Cheng Minzheng was behind Peng's 1498 preface. Within months of the inking of the preface, in early 1499, Minzheng was implicated in the deadly exam scandal and died. Why should the cautious Peng Ze have pushed his endorsement further after Cheng Minzheng, quite possibly his powerful behind-the-scenes sponsor, had perished in disgrace? With Cheng Minzheng's sudden death, I suspect, gone too was the evidential paper trail linking him to Peng Ze's endorsement of *Great Lineages in Xin'an*. Had Cheng Minzheng not fallen victim to factional infighting in Beijing at the peak of his Huizhou achievements, perhaps he could have brought the composite genealogical gazetteer into being, or, at the least, left behind sufficient evidential traces to suggest that he was behind Peng Ze's endorsement of Chen Dingyu's *Great Lineages in Xin'an*.⁴⁶

In the end, even though Cheng Minzheng's role in Peng Ze's 1498 preface cannot be confirmed, he had nevertheless laid the groundwork for the printing of Huizhou's first, Cheng-led composite genealogy. His remarkable erudition, activism, and stature (including his now established ties with the Cheng brothers) made it possible and acceptable to arrange the elite surnames in a Cheng-led sequence, which thereafter characterized all three district-wide composite genealogies. In fact, this (re)ordering of surnames was so successful that even other-surnamed publishers were loath to tamper with it. The third composite genealogy of Ming Huizhou, *Prominent Lineages in Xiuning*, focusing on one county, was compiled by the Xiuning gentrymen Cao Sixuan and cut by Wang Gaoyuan, and

carried a preface from the cutter's famous Xiuning kinsman, Imperial Academician Wang Hui (*jinshi* 1590). Although in partial charge of publishing the 1626 composite genealogical gazetteer, the Wangs continued to honor the Cheng-led sequence first set down in *Great Lineages in Xin'an*. Cheng Minzheng's local activism made Cheng preeminence palatable to regional great families, most notably by dramatically publicizing his kin ties to the two Cheng brothers. This claimed blood distinction brought prestige to the entire prefecture, as amply evidenced in the late Ming *Gazetteer of Cheng-Zhu's Native Place*.⁴⁷ Cheng Minzheng's strategy of promoting the Chengs and Huizhou at once worked well both in his lifetime and long after his departure.

This regional prestige nevertheless also helped further strengthen the empire-wide appeal of the Confucian family-lineage values embodied in *Prominent Lineages*. The Yixian gentryman Cheng Guangxian, in his 1551 preface to the composite genealogical gazetteer, called Huizhou "the native place of Master Ziyang [Zhu Xi]," and wrote that the aim of the "extended edition of Chen Dingyu's compilation is to spread Ziyang [Zhu Xi] teachings," so that Confucian values would not "end in Xin'an," but would "robustly disperse through the four seas," thereby bringing about "peace all under heaven."⁴⁸ Cheng Guangxian's dialectic concern for localism and "all under heaven" was strikingly similar to Cheng Minzheng's vision. The rise of regional consciousness in Huizhou most notably started with Cheng Minzheng, and now culminated in the publication of *Prominent Lineages*, both of which had empire-wide appeal while at the same time being locally focused.

HUIZHOU IDENTITY AND MERCANTILE LINEAGE CULTURE

The textual history of *Prominent Lineages* was intertwined with the social underpinning of the publication, illustrating not just the deepening of regional consciousness of Huizhou as a land of "prominent lineages" but also the rise of mercantile lineage culture. If Cheng Minzheng provided the vertical context of the composite genealogical gazetteer, the socioeconomic development in the sixteenth century formed a horizontal milieu. If the highlighted tie between the Cheng brothers and Huizhou added luster to the entire region, the upsurge of the Cheng pedigree brought about by the same tie must have also added pressure to other prominent lineages in the region. They must have felt the same drive to distinguish themselves and their home region from other parts of the Ming empire, presumably more so during the vast socioeconomic change of the mid-sixteenth century. More specifically, the immediate backdrop of the *Prominent Lineages* compilation constituted two fronts: Huizhou lineages were flourishing in terms of both demographic-social growth and institutional construction, but at the same time they were also facing challenges in both sociocultural politics and gender relations that rapid commercialization had brought on.

The mid-Ming period (1450–1550) was stable and yet embryonic, laying down the social infrastructure for the rapid changes that accelerated in the late sixteenth century.⁴⁹ In Huizhou, the lineage had come to overshadow other socioreligious institutions (such as village worship associations and Buddhist temples) to become a dominant rural order, most notably by setting up lineage landed trusts and constructing ancestral halls, as well as compiling single-surnamed genealogies.⁵⁰ According to Zhu Wanshu, the editor of the 2004 edition of *Prominent Lineages*, the mid-sixteenth-century compilers collected data from about eight hundred genealogies of individual lineages.⁵¹ The composite genealogical gazetteer culminated a concurrent boom in Huizhou in the compilation of individual lineage genealogies (each with a single surname) as their collective representation. For instance, the 1570 edition of *Genealogy of the Xiuning Gucheng Cheng Lineage* (Xiuning Gucheng Chengshi zongpu) contains a short front section honoring the kinsmen who had compiled the previous genealogies of the Gucheng Cheng lineage and its nearby related branches. For the pre-1570 Ming period, it lists twenty editions, fifteen of which were printed during a short span of forty-five years from 1521 to 1566.⁵²

Also revealing is a comparison of two Ming dynasty versions of the prefectural gazetteer, compiled in 1502 and 1566, respectively. For the large independent lineage temples, or ancestral halls, key to kinship institutions and rituals, the 1502 gazetteer mentions just four *citang* (ancestral halls), three of which were for the Wang lineages, whereas the 1566 version lists over two hundred, all of which were called *zongci*, lineage temples honoring the apical ancestors.⁵³ Indicative of the explosion of building lineage temples around the mid-century, the compilers of the latter gazetteer proudly boasted: “The lineage temples built to conduct ancestral rites and gather kinspeople to inculcate Confucian codes of behavior are only present in our Huizhou while lacking in other prefectures, and therefore we note [the trend] and prepare this ‘Halls and Temples’ Record.”⁵⁴

It is no accident that the 1502 gazetteer depicts an idyllic life of literate men and small cultivators living off the land, interrupted only by the occasional trader, whereas the 1566 account describes a thoroughly commercialized atmosphere: “As the locals lack land, they take trade as the permanent source of wealth. During the spring months, they go out for trade with their savings, in the hope of making 20 percent profit for a year, and will not return until the winter. Some merchants return home only once every couple of years.”⁵⁵ With political support from powerful kinsmen who were scholar-officials at various levels and financial support from home lineages, Huizhou men spread throughout the empire and began to enjoy enormous success in the commercial realm, especially in the middle and lower Yangzi valleys. As the prominent Jiangnan scholar Gui Youguang (1507–1571) noted, “Xin’an is filled with prominent lineages; they settled in a mountainous region, lacking flat fields to provide arable land. So even the families of scholar-officials have all nurtured merchants to go into trade by sojourning

through the four directions.” As a result, merchants who dominated commercial activities “in the metropolitan centers under Heaven” were “mostly Xin’an men.”⁵⁶ Later, the famous scholar-official from a Shexian merchant family named Wang Daokun (1525–1593) reported, “seven or eight out of ten households” engaged in trade in his home region.⁵⁷

The rise and success of Huizhou merchants were rooted in home lineages. In his classic study of Huizhou merchants, Fujii Hiroshi divides Huizhou merchant capital into seven types: joint capital, entrusted capital, marriage capital, supporting capital, bequeathed capital, labor-accumulated capital, and bureaucratic capital, most of which were kinship related in one way or another.⁵⁸ More focally, in a major new study on the socioeconomic history of the Huizhou lineage, Joseph McDermott sketches out in his concluding remarks on the role of ancestral halls in promoting both commercial ventures and lineage rituals:

many Huizhou lineages and their branches used these halls’ construction budgets, maintenance costs, membership fees, and spirit tablets’ admission charges to accumulate considerable funds that their managers could proceed to lend out cheaply to lineage members or more expensively to non-lineage members. The ancestral halls, whose numbers soared over the last half of the Ming, provided financial backing not only to commercial and financial partnerships in Huizhou villages but also to smaller Huizhou merchants’ expansion into the markets and pawnshop operations in the lower Yangzi delta. The profits that these ancestral halls accrued from interest payments helped to pay for the ancestral worship rituals that lineage elders practiced in part to please their ancestors and in part to retain the loyalty of fellow lineage members.

From the mid-Ming on, McDermott continues, Huizhou lineages resolved some of the threats that rampant commercialization posed to their collective property and ultimately their own survival, turning the “cause of their troubles into their solution” by making the ancestral hall serve “as a credit association.”⁵⁹ In addition, Huizhou merchants tapped kinsmen for organizational support, drawing upon kinship ties for their practice of trade (including partnerships) and for the construction of their trading networks, thereby building a home-linked or kinship-bound infrastructure of market access channels out of the region.⁶⁰

Socioeconomic facets aside, the home lineage gentry and gazetteer compilers also helped fashion a new code of mercantile ethics emphasizing honesty, righteousness, and generosity, key to Huizhou merchants’ long-term success. The same 1566 prefectural gazetteer begins to include biographic sketches of contemporary merchants that celebrate their moral integrity while noting their Confucian deeds of making contributions to rebuilding county academies, repairing local waterways, and especially setting up lineage corporate estates or ritual land endowed for maintaining ancestral halls.⁶¹ The inclusion of righteous merchants in the officially compiled gazetteer marked their improved status as well as local officials’ efforts at moral inculcation to set examples for traders amid rapid commercialization.

And yet, this was a lagging reflection of what had already been attempted in the privately compiled Huizhou genealogies. Virtuous merchants are already featured in the *Anthology of Xin'an Documents*, mostly taken from local genealogies, with an emphasis on their care for and contributions to home lineages.⁶² For another example, the 1501 edition of the composite genealogy of the Xin'an Huangs contained an epitaph praising a fellow merchant named Huang Zhongrong, notably referred to as a *chushi* (untitled gentryman, or scholar-turned-merchant), for his genteel lifestyle and for his generosity and righteousness in assisting other kinsmen.⁶³ More biographies of righteous merchants active in the first half of the sixteenth century, and even earlier, and mostly drafted before the mid-century, are included in the 1570 edition of the Shuaikou Cheng genealogy.

Most notably, as a collective representation of nearly eight hundred individual genealogies, the publicly available *Prominent Lineages* begins to note virtuous merchants. As will be demonstrated in chapter 5, the genealogical gazetteer was partially a product of power jockeying for symbolic capital among regional elite lineages. And yet local gentry compilers obviously agreed on one thing: this collective genealogical gazetteer, like the individual genealogies, was intended to maintain patrilineal kinship order by promoting Confucian social ethics. One guideline reads: "The real stories of each lineage, regarding *zhongxiao* [loyalty and filial devotion], *jieyi* [male integrity, female chastity, and righteousness], *xunye* [illustrious accomplishments in the political and military realms], *wenzhang* [publications], whatever [the accomplishments] that are relevant to [the promotion of] moral teaching, are all recorded, whether they are hidden or noted, still alive or long departed."⁶⁴ On the basis of this guideline, *Prominent Lineages* included in many lineage entries "righteous" merchants, as well as other male and female Confucian exemplars. According to a study by Huizhou specialist Zhao Huaifu, just forty entries of village lineages in the genealogical gazetteer cover the following five groups of noteworthy men and women:

- (1) 933 officials and exam degree winners;
- (2) 61 filial sons and devoted grandsons;
- (3) 96 devoted widows and martyred women;
- (4) 415 scholars with significant publications;
- (5) 258 kinsmen noted for virtue and righteous deeds, many of whom were merchants or landlords.⁶⁵

Additional records of righteous merchants not covered in Zhao's list also exist. A short account for the Cheng lineage in the Xuanmingfang village, in Shexian, identifies four merchants, two of whom traded salt in the Lianghuai and Zhejiang areas (two of the most important salt business regions of the later empire), noting their integrity, generosity, and gentry comportment.⁶⁶ A rather lengthy entry on the Cheng branch in Wenchangfang, in Xiuning County, for whose genealogy Cheng Minzhang had written a preface (see chapter 1), mentions three righteous

merchants. One student at the prefectural school, named Huan, upon the death of his father, quit Confucian learning for trade to support the family and became rich. While sojourning in Huguang, he built “righteous” graves (*yizhong*) to bury a large number of famine victims; he also donated grain in response to the call of the central government. Another named Zu preferred righteousness over profits. A third named En was noted in the Yangzhou salt trade for preferring kin over wealth.⁶⁷ A more detailed account of a righteous merchant concerns a certain Huang Zhengyuan of Ruiye Huangcun, in Shexian, who was orphaned at thirteen. Growing up, Huang traveled on business between Wu and Yue (Jiangsu and Zhejiang). He “traded fairly, supported the poor, and so elders and youth, men and women all called him ‘Sir Huang.’” Local officials (in the places where he traveled and settled) all admired his virtue, and even offered him the official gentry status of the cap and sashes (*guandai*). In his home community he built a village worship association, promoted ancestral rites, set up ritual land, initiated the bimonthly village compact, honored local gentry, ordered strict family-lineage instructions, mediated local disputes and lawsuits, supported orphans and weak people, and hence was called a “pure gentryman” (*yiqing chushi*).⁶⁸

With the image of merchants improved and elevated, we begin to see certain accounts that equalize trade with learning or merchants with scholars. An entry for a certain Huang lineage, in Shexian, notes that three brothers “either focus on Confucian learning or pursue trade, and their achievements are genteelly notable.”⁶⁹ In another instance, in a short entry on the Yichuan Yus in Wuyuan, not one of the most commercialized counties of the prefecture, we see the identification of a certain Yu Fuhua, who, “excelling in trade, started a [great] undertaking glorifying his ancestors” (*shan gangu, chuanye guangqian*).⁷⁰ To my knowledge, this is one of the first instances in Ming China that celebrated a kinsman’s business endeavor, like examination success, as the outstanding achievement that could glorify his ancestors, the highest praise for kinsmen in this stronghold of lineage settlements. Many single-lineage genealogies compiled in the late Ming (1550–1644) contained far more detailed biographies of righteous merchants with similar honors.⁷¹ But as a collective gazetteer of all of the acknowledged regional elite lineages, and a unique Huizhou product in Ming times, *Prominent Lineages* not only marked the self-identification of Huizhou, but also represented the emergence of what can be termed “mercantile lineage culture” in the region, a culture that was kinship constituted and Confucian oriented, gentry led and merchant based, while containing sufficient space for incorporating local popular culture.

In all these accounts, it was the virtue, not the wealth, of Huizhou merchants that was highlighted. The coverage was not evenly represented in all lineage entries. Consider the two aforementioned Cheng settlements in Taitang and Shuaikou. Both lineages, located in Cheng Minzheng’s ancestral county, were heavily engaged in commercial adventure in the Ming, even before 1500.⁷² But the entries for these two mercantile lineages in *Prominent Lineages* do not touch upon

merchants, focusing instead on the notable kinsmen in the ancestry with illustrious accomplishments in other areas, mostly in the civil service realm, even though neither the Chengs of Taitang nor of Shuaikou produced any higher exam degree holders prior to 1551.

Consider one case from Shuaikou. Cheng Wenjie (1459–1533), according to the epitaph contained in his home genealogy, was particularly good at literary studies in his youth, but upon orders from his father he turned to trade, traveling for business widely through Jiangnan, Hunan, Shandong, and Shanxi. The epitaph nevertheless emphasized his literary learning, gentility, and generosity. Even famed literati went to him for instructions. He was characteristically defined as “a merchant in name and scholarly gentryman in practice” (*shangming er shixing*).⁷³ Yet the *Prominent Lineages* used just four characters to identify him: *yishi haoming* (famed for his poems), not even mentioning his commercial career.⁷⁴

In the Taitang case, whose remarkably short entry consisted of just five lines, the lack of mention of other Confucian men and women might be due to the lack of data, as their first genealogy had just been compiled in 1545, and it contained little else besides a descent line.⁷⁵ In contrast, the Shuaikou Chengs had compiled and expanded their genealogy numerous times in the Ming before the mid-sixteenth century, although only the 1570 edition is now extant, which contains many biographies or epitaphs on virtuous merchants. As a whole, however, the Shuaikou Cheng genealogy (even the merchant accounts) still emphasizes the lineage's scholarly tradition. One postscript to an earlier edition of the Shuaikou Cheng genealogy even quotes a still earlier statement that had since become a local idiom in Huizhou: “If a lineage does not compile a genealogy for three generations, does not produce an official for three generations, does not engage in learning for three generations, then [its kinsmen] will fall into [the category] of petty men [*xiaoren*].”⁷⁶ The *Prominent Lineages*, too, ends the entry with an emphasis on the scholarly tradition of the Shuaikou Chengs: “There were eminent Confucians and kinsmen with remarkable virtue in the past for each generation. Now, nearly three thousand kinspeople live together within the lineage, they love and practice the ancient way of life, reading books and honoring propriety; kinsmen who have studied for the civil service exam and excelled in the government schools succeed one after another with remarkable achievements.”⁷⁷

Here we see an apparent contradiction between reality and representation: some heavily commercial lineages were actually presented in a way that emphasized their scholarly practice even if these same lineages did not achieve great success in the exam hall. This contradiction points to the discrepancy between the projected identity of Huizhou and the actual working of mercantile lineages. The contradiction seems also to reveal a certain concern about their perceived status: the merchant-dominated lineages often acted in a way that made them look more Confucian than the scholar-gentry. As already noted, just as Huizhou merchants relied on home lineages for commercial ventures and success, they

in return also made significant contributions to fashioning home lineage building in mid-Ming Huizhou. Cheng Nai (1438–1490), a commercial landlord and respected leader of the Cheng lineage of Shuaikou, urged his sons—including the eldest, Cheng Wenjie—to engage in trade while simultaneously supporting his own father’s initiatives to revise the Cheng genealogy and repair the branch temple to Cheng Lingxi (which served as the Shuaikou Chengs’ ancestral hall).⁷⁸ The merchant Cheng Wenjie, based on his father’s work, started the compilation of the first printed version of the Shuaikou Cheng genealogy in the early 1500s. Cheng Minzheng, in a note added to Cao Jing’s epitaph on the merchant Cheng Xinyu of Shuaikou (discussed in chapter 1), commended Cheng Xinyu’s branch in building ancestral halls, compiling ritual covenants, and applying Zhu Xi’s *Family Rituals* to the performance of the ancestral rites. The Shuaikou Cheng community, Minzheng concluded, led all the Huizhou Chengs in “honoring the descent line and harmonizing the lineage” (*jingzong muzu*).⁷⁹

The Chengs of Shuaikou and Taitang are represented in *Prominent Lineages* in such a way that suggests that the compilers of the composite genealogical gazetteer most likely took whatever data the participating lineages provided them. The scholarly emphasis on gentility over commerce, however, certainly did not contradict their own overall compiling guidelines, even though they also took the latter into account whenever appropriate or available. Indeed, a similar consideration may have been at work in the collective mentality of Huizhou “prominent” lineages in the mid-sixteenth century and of the compilers and endorsers of the *Prominent Lineages*, and therefore may have played a significant role in the production of the unique genealogical genre in the first place.

Above all, *Prominent Lineages* was a genealogical gazetteer, with kinship matters at its core. Its function was to record (or, in some cases, reclaim) the illustrious ancestry of these “prominent” (and, to quote McDermott again, not-so-famous) lineages by highlighting the ancient roots of their pedigree and historical accomplishments in the most endearing Confucian realms of academic-official success and scholarly writing. Zhao Huafu’s data of forty leading lineages, listing far more Confucian scholar-officials than commercial landlords or merchants, confirms the preferred focus. Why, then, the need to compile such a composite genealogical gazetteer to publicly boast their “prominence,” obviously aimed at not just a home audience but also outsiders?

Hong Jueshan, the editor-in-chief (*zongcai*) of *Prominent Lineages*, in his 1550 preface to the genealogical gazetteer, seems to reveal something significant regarding the motivation for the compilation that nevertheless could not be openly broadcast. “This gazetteer,” Hong wrote, “is to preserve the inherited custom and popular trend. Indeed, when kinship rules are established, kinspeople understand where they come from, thereby respecting the ancestors and honoring the descent line; when the sociopolitical institutions are properly erected, with the [dynastic] court being centered and prominent lineages prevailing, the kinspeople feel

protected, obeying kinship order and ancestral power. [All of this] purifies local customs and advances imperial rule." He goes on to state that so long as the compilation of the composite genealogical gazetteer "benefits all under heaven, even if it [signals something that] normally should be avoided, the gentrymen understand that they must certainly do it."⁸⁰

What exactly was that something that "normally should be avoided"? Was it the self-glorifying nature of such a massive genealogical gazetteer, and, more seriously, a collective (rather than an individual) project documenting the elite lineages of the entire prefecture that clearly distinguished Huizhou from other regions? If this was the case, why did the Huizhou gentrymen feel so compelled to create it? Publicly, it could be justified that such a gazetteer could work to both "purify local customs and advance imperial rule." Hong Jueshan was a notable follower of Wang Yangming, and herein he echoes, or resonates with, the latter's idea of erasing differences, whether between the dynastic center and local society or between the elites and ordinary people.⁸¹ His justification for the gazetteer compilation was sincere, and it did fulfill the double role he specified, as will be further discussed later in this chapter. But were there other more mundane or practical concerns other than self-promotion and self-protection behind the publicly stated aims of the project?

The motivation for publishing a gazetteer of prominent lineages of the entire prefecture came from without as well as from within. For the collective community of Huizhou elite lineages, there seemed to exist a certain degree of anxiety over the regional image and its difference from Jiangnan, the economic and cultural heartland of the Ming empire—especially after the turn of the sixteenth century when these lineages produced increasingly large number of sojourning merchants. As Joseph McDermott insightfully suggests, the absence of any commercial wealth in the entries of *Prominent Lineages* and their stress on antiquity of residence (as well as Confucian accomplishments) were likely also meant to show Jiangnan literati that they were not nouveaux riches. Indeed, few Suzhou, Hangzhou, or Songjiang natives could boast such roots in their prefectures, and Huizhou men, often subject to barbs from these tastemakers for being mountain hicks and money-grubbers, were anxious to present themselves as the true living embodiments of earlier aristocratic elite culture.⁸² This hypothesis is not pure speculation, as later, when the leading scholar-official from Jiangnan Wang Shizhen (1526–1590) toured Mount Huang, his Huizhou counterpart Wang Daokun (1525–1593) invited the best of Jiangnan's artists and artisans to engage in a friendly competition with the best of Shexian over the quality of the gentlemanly arts: poetry, calligraphy, chess, and music.⁸³

In the mid-sixteenth century, even more urgent was a concern over the negative perception of these merchants outside of Huizhou. As the Chinese historian Wang Zhenzhong demonstrates, the term *Huishang* (Huizhou merchants) first appeared in the early sixteenth century; by the late sixteenth century it had become fixed in

popular parlance, used by outsiders to refer to the powerful mercantile group.⁸⁴ But this was not the term Huizhou merchants used to identify themselves, and, indeed, it tended to connote negative meanings. A late Ming account from a Songjiang native reveals how merchants from Huizhou snatched away assets from local people: "Toward the end of the Chenghua (r. 1465–1487), a prominent official returned home full of accolades. One elder kept kneeling down at his door. Alarmed, the official asked why. [The elder] responded, 'the wealth of Songjiang people has mostly been taken by the Huishang, but now it's been returned with your homecoming. How could I not express my appreciation?' Upon close examination, as discovered by Wang Zhenzhong, this anecdote was copied verbatim from an earlier sixteenth-century story, except that "Huishang" had been inserted in the place of "government" (*guanfu*).⁸⁵ A satire of a homecoming high official had been instantly turned into a satire of Huizhou merchants.

For outsiders, merchants from Huizhou were not just greedy, they were also profligates. Toward the end of the fifteenth century, a wealthy merchant from Huizhou named Wang Yang became involved in a notorious affair. While sojourning in Guichi, he committed adultery with a widow who attempted to coerce her widowed daughter-in-law, Tang Guimei, into developing an intimate relationship with the merchant, which ended with Tang hanging herself. By the late Ming, this tragedy came to be widely represented in various genres of publications, from literati jottings to popular fiction, and from handbooks of virtuous women to the official *Ming History*.⁸⁶ All of this might have been reason enough for the compilers of *Prominent Lineages*, and indeed for various individual-surnamed genealogies as well, to highlight the virtue and gentility of their fellow merchants.

Outside pressures aside, the genealogical gazetteer was fundamentally a product of Huizhou local society. The burst of compilations of individual-surnamed genealogies, including composite ones following Cheng Minzheng's *Composite Genealogy of the Xin'an Chengs*, had prepared the compilers of the *Prominent Lineages* to claim Huizhou as the sole place where medieval aristocratic culture was still alive and well in the mid-sixteenth century. Aside from collectively recording (or claiming) the ancient roots of these prominent lineages, the genealogical gazetteer set up a reliable reference book for a unique Huizhou institution—allegedly inherited from the medieval aristocracy—the intermarriage of local elite lineages.⁸⁷ Zheng Zuo, one of the two top endorsers of the *Prominent Lineages*, states in his 1549 preface:

The Han and the Sui-Tang dynasties did not mete out fiefs, but emphasized the pedigree of aristocratic families. They set up a court bureau in charge of all genealogies under Heaven and selected erudite scholars to command matters of genealogical compilation. The bureau and its officials were not abolished until the Five Dynasties. Yet in our Xin'an, family status is checked when [selecting a] marriage partner, and genealogies are sought [to clarify] kinship branches, all of which have long become custom without losing the meanings handed down from ancient times. Thus it is

that in the making of kinship settlements, there is the flourishing growth of the one descent line in linked settlements in various counties or one surname settling in multiple villages; in the making of marriage, there is the noted distinction of the poor not marrying the rich and the debased [bondservants or “little surnames”] not pairing with the dignified [*jian bu ou gui*]. [In Xin’an], the surviving tombs of forebears can be traced as far back as the Qi and the Liang [in the fifth and sixth centuries] or as “recent” as those from the Tang and Song onward, not to mention the tombs of ten generations within one hundred years.

Zheng Zuo then proudly states that because of the development of Huizhou lineages and their notable traditions, “Hardly can any other prefecture come close to” Xin’an. He moves on to define the “prominent lineage” with the accomplishments by kinspeople, past and present, in “illuminating the Way as embodied in writings; fulfilling loyal and righteous deeds [in high politics], thereby standing out in historical records; practicing filial piety and friendship, thereby purifying customs and promoting benevolence; living happily in retirement while cultivating virtue and committing to moral rules.”⁸⁸

Zheng Zuo makes several important points in this passage. First, biased or not, no other prefecture could match his native place given the historical roots and unique characteristics of Huizhou kinship society. Second, the prominent lineage was defined in a way that made it possible to include ordinary kinspeople practicing Confucian ethics as well as those with notable accomplishments in politics and scholarship, which, again, resonated with the approach of Wang Yangmingism then in vogue. Such inclusiveness opened the door to incorporate righteous merchants in certain lineage entries, with their achievements in the commercial sector soon to be likened to exam success. Also relevant here is a notable marriage pattern, which paralleled and further substantiated the “aristocratic” tradition that the Huizhou gentry claimed.

Indeed, the pattern of intermarriage among local elite lineages was well established in Huizhou, as reported in the 1566 edition of the Huizhou gazetteer: “Marriage is arranged on the base of family/lineage pedigree, disregarding the wealth.”⁸⁹ Cheng Minzheng, in a rather casual manner, mentioned numerous cases of elite lineage intermarriage. One reason that he actually maintained good personal relations with certain Wang kinsmen had to do with Cheng-Wang intermarriage, despite the competition between the two leading surnames in the symbolic realms.⁹⁰ In a preface Cheng Minzheng penned for a local Wang genealogy, he noted that certain Wang and Cheng branches in his ancestral county had been linked through marital relations for generations (*shiqi*).⁹¹ In another preface to the genealogy of the Gulin Huangs in Xiuning, he notes that the Huangs intermarried with the “major families of the great surnames” (*dajia juxing*) of the Cheng, Wu, and Wang who “support each other to stand firm and tall” (*xiangfu erli*).⁹²

In the aforementioned note to Cao Jing’s (*jinshi* 1268) epitaph on the merchant Cheng Xinyu of Shuaikou, Cheng Minzheng indicates that the Shuaikou Chengs

and Cao Jing's lineage were linked through intermarriage. This last case is particularly revealing, suggesting that merchant families were readily married into top gentry families so long as they belonged to local prominent lineages. Indeed, by the sixteenth century, merchant assimilation into the scholarly elite strata of their own lineages or of the partnered ones was no longer exceptional. Mercantile families married their sons and daughters into prestigious Huizhou gentry families and supported their sons and grandsons to sit for the civil service examinations. And yet, it was not the wealth of individual families but their lineage affiliation that was the key to making such marriages socially acceptable. In a long "Record of the Lineage Code" (Jiadian ji) of the Mingzhou Wus in Xiuning, penned around 1574, which recalls an earlier ancestral stipulation, there is an item concerning "Careful Selection of a Marriage Partner" (Jin hunpin):

[The selection of a] marriage partner should not be concerned with [individual] wealth but with the commensurate status of the lineage. If one carelessly marries with a person [girl] from a lineage with which [we] have never had marriage ties, without equal social status, he will become the laughing stock of the local neighbors, as he treats himself as a slave, further treating his own son as debased. Our lineage should certainly not affiliate ourselves with him: he must not be allowed to enter the ancestral hall while alive, and his soul tablet must not be allowed to be erected there either.⁹³

This elite-surname marriage institution worked to both maintain social hierarchy based on surname-kinship and promote social mobility regardless of the individual vocation among/between prominent lineages. From this perspective, *Prominent Lineages* offered a who's who handbook for the regional marriage market, and its publication worked favorably for merchant families of the covered prominent lineages, as the locals now had a public reference guide for selecting marriage partners. This function in part explains why at least twelve different versions of *Prominent Lineages* were published around the mid-sixteenth century. Clearly, the local lineages, being transformed into mercantile lineages, were eager to be covered in *Prominent Lineages*. All of this explains why, in part, the rise of Huizhou merchants in the sixteenth century did not destroy the old system of intermarriage among elite lineages (which would prevail up to the twentieth century), but instead further enhanced it through merging scholarly and commercial families as integrated units within mercantile lineages.

Assimilation of merchants into lineage establishment was urgent for lineage elders for other practical concerns in the mid-sixteenth century. One was to turn the wealth earned from commerce to good use. Commercial success raised the social status of Huizhou merchants, and at the same time enabled them to turn their hard-earned money into cultural capital, in particular by helping to strengthen home lineage institutions. Local gentry acknowledged their contributions in home genealogies, local gazetteers, and in *Prominent Lineages*. By way of

example, around the mid-sixteenth century, Jin Deqing sojourned to several provinces and over a decade accumulated ten thousand taels of silver. Upon returning home, he contributed six hundred taels to building the ancestral hall for his home lineage in Qimen, and thus earned a biography in the home genealogy.⁹⁴ There is obviously a connection between accounts of the explosive construction of ancestral halls, the commercial boom, and the biographies of virtuous merchants in the same 1566 gazetteer of Huizhou.

The other side of the story about the strengthening economy was its corrupt effect on moral, or kinship, bonds. As the Huizhou specialist Zhao Huafu suggests, *Prominent Lineages* was compiled at a time when Huizhou lineage institutions flourished, but at the same time were facing challenges from rapid commercialization, the most notable of which was the disruptive power of money.⁹⁵ The concern over moral decay was among the most important reasons why the compilation of individual genealogies was booming (and at the same time was made possible with the support of merchants' wealth). The most radical or critical view of the moral decline that began in the early sixteenth century was presented retrospectively toward the end of the dynasty by the Shexian magistrate Zhang Tao (1554–1618) and Shexian gentryman Xie Bi (1547–1615). This view was made popular in English-language scholarship by Timothy Brook in his *Confusions of Pleasure*:

The dynasty's winter of repose gave way to the bustle of spring. [Around the 1520s] the sedate certainty of agriculture was edged out by the hotter speculative world of commerce: "Those who went out as merchants became numerous and the ownership of land was no longer esteemed. Men matched wits using their assets, and fortunes rose and fell unpredictably." Polarizations of capability and class followed, with some families becoming rich and others impoverished. "The balance between the mighty and the lowly was lost as both competed for trifling amounts." As the prospect of wealth fueled avarice, the moral order that had held society together gave way. "Each exploited the other and everyone publicized himself." In this evil climate, "deception sprouted and litigation arose; purity was sullied and excess overflowed."⁹⁶

Contemporary or slightly later local observers also noted the moral disorder. According to the 1570 preface to the Chen lineage code of Wentang in Qimen County, Wentang's customs used to be "pure and sincere," but "the present is unlike the past, which worries the lineage elders," and so the Chen elders prepared the lineage code to uphold the moral bonds among kinspeople.⁹⁷ Many other lineages did the same thing, even though they did not publish a similar code independently but instead included in their genealogies the lineage rules that had the same function of moral binding power. As early as 1494, Cheng Zengjie (1469–1542), the youngest brother of the merchant Cheng Wenjie, had crafted two sets of admonitions for his highly commercialized lineage (among the earliest commercialized in Huizhou): "Exhortation on Respecting Ancestors and Harmonizing the Lineage" (Zunzu muzhu zhen) and "Exhortation on Establishing Self and Behaving Well"

(Lishen xingji zhen). The first exhortation highlights the significance of rituals held at both the ancestral tombs and ancestral halls, as the ancestors' virtue would enlighten their offspring. Severe violators at the lineage rituals would be "expelled from ancestral hall and removed from the genealogy" (*cipu liangchu*), the most serious punishment for kinspeople in Huizhou lineage culture. It also emphasizes that the prosperous lineage now had one thousand kinsmen who, all descended from the same ancestor, should be treated equally regardless of their status in terms of familial wealth or lack thereof. The strong must avoid being overbearing and the rich must avoid being arrogant. The violators in this regard, too, would be punished. The second exhortation urges the kinspeople to be filially devoted, to practice fraternal love, and to maintain a clear demarcation between men and women. Those who failed in the areas of men's integrity and women's chastity, again, would not be allowed to enter the ancestral hall and would be removed from the genealogy.⁹⁸

The *Prominent Lineages*, as a collective document, could of necessity only use positive images to convey the same message of exhortation at a moment when virtually the entire prefecture was drawn into the commercial tide. Besides featuring Confucian men and women throughout the gazetteer, it carries prefaces by famed scholar-officials and representatives of local gentry. Zheng Zuo emphasized the noble tradition of Huizhou society; Hong Jueshan stressed the significance of kinship laws in purifying local customs and enhancing dynastic rule; Cheng Guangxian promoted "the style of benevolence and self-effacement" (*renrang*) as the essence of Zhu Xi learning; while Wang Feng made a straightforward call to "use the *Gazetteer of Prominent Lineages* to remold Xin'an's customs."⁹⁹ Seemingly presenting different or even contradictory views of local customs at the mid-century, these prefaces convey one message: the genealogical gazetteer was meant to promote Confucian ethics and kinship values.

Also urgent, amid the rapid commercialization of the day, was to keep track of the increasing numbers of sojourning kinsmen so as to create, or further enhance, a sense of personal belonging to the home lineage. One such method of binding sojourning men was to compile or recompile a genealogy, which would generate a consciousness of common identity and prestige, and thus help bind sojourning men to their home lineages. The 1570 edition of the Shuaikou Cheng genealogy stipulates in one of its guidelines that the lateral branches from the previous generations that dwelled elsewhere would be "marked in red."¹⁰⁰ It was not directly concerned with tracking sojourning merchants, but nevertheless reflected the gentry compilers' concern for recording all kinspeople descended from the same apical ancestor or the first migrant ancestor so as to enhance the lineage consciousness or common identity. This lineage consciousness of tradesmen had a strong tradition in Huizhou even before the sixteenth century. We have seen how deeply those merchants featured in Cheng Minzheng's *Anthology of Xin'an Documents* cared about their lineages, and, more specifically, how merchants of the Shuaikou

Chengs contributed to the building of ancestral halls and the compilation of the branch genealogy at home. The first printed version of the Shuaikou Cheng branch genealogy had a good deal to do with the sojourning merchant Cheng Wenjie and his nephew Cheng Zuyuan.¹⁰¹ Wenjie's younger brother, Zengjie, eventually completed the version that Wenjie had begun and had it printed in 1511.¹⁰²

The 1570 edition of the Shuaikou Cheng genealogy, expanded from the 1511 edition, contains a long list of 230 household heads, each of which was assigned a corresponding number of printed copies of the genealogy.¹⁰³ The copy number and the household head who received the copy are also shown on a specifically printed sheet illustrated with a sacred Bell of Treasure and Harmony (Baohe Zhong); its bottom caption reads: "Upon the completion of the revised genealogy, we inform our kinsmen. You are each to treasure it forever and leave it to posterity. Do not be unfilial. If you demean or sell it, your name will be excluded from the ancestral hall and your wrongdoing will be reported to the officials."¹⁰⁴ The private genealogy was considered sacred. It contained all the names of ancestors as well as living kinsmen, illustrated with their glory and dreams, lineage regulations, and often records of ancestral tombs and corporate estates as well. It was a private history of the entire lineage and thus became the central reference point of identity for the lineage, including its sojourning merchants.

The sixteenth-century boom in building kinship identity through the compilation of individual genealogies led to the construction of the collective identity of Huizhou lineages with the publication of *Prominent Lineages*. If an individual genealogy was partially meant to keep track of sojourning men, then the composite genealogical gazetteer was meant to keep track of all the branches of the acknowledged elite surnames of the entire prefecture, which in part explains the multiple editions published in the mid-century. While the individual lineage identity was primarily blood-bound, the collective identity of Huizhou was regionally bound, but was nevertheless based on or comprised of the individual identity of the blood-bound descent lines.

Prominent Lineages, it should be emphasized again, was primarily concerned with establishing the pedigree of Huizhou lineages by noting the ancient roots of their aristocratic ancestors and illustrious achievements of their gentry kinsmen in official services, civil exams, and scholarly writings. These historical and social characteristics defined the prominent lineages and formed the Confucian and political foundation of the emerging mercantile lineage culture. While most preface-writers or endorsers of *Prominent Lineages* still chose to be silent on the merchant constituency of local lineages, the scholar-official Hu Xiao (*jinshi* 1544) of Jixi notably took sojourning merchants into account when describing Huizhou prominent lineages in his 1551 preface to the genealogical gazetteer. After noting the remarkable natural environment of Huizhou, and the illustrious ancestry and the social development of the local kinship communities, Hu wrote, "kinspeople live together in the lineage settlement, and sojourning merchants converge

along the pathways.”¹⁰⁵ This paired characterization of Huizhou kinship society succinctly marked the emerging mercantile lineage culture, which would blossom after the mid-century in the late Ming. *Prominent Lineages in Xin'an* signaled the collective identity of Huizhou that was partially predicated upon mercantile lineage culture.

Central to emerging mercantile lineage culture was gender. Unlike *Anthology of Xin'an Documents* that focuses on the glories of statesmen, Confucian literati, and local lineage leaders, *Prominent Lineages* became the first collective document with prefecture-wide coverage that systematically highlighted the trend of devotional widowhood. Zhao Huaфу's study, discussed earlier, lists ninety-six chaste women out of just forty entries of kinship settlements in *Prominent Lineages*. I will enumerate some additional cases, generally not included in Zhao's data, to give a concrete sense of how dear the Confucian core value of female chastity, just like righteousness of merchants, was to the mid-century gentry compilers of the genealogical gazetteer. In the brief Xuanmingfang account covering four “righteous” merchants noted earlier, we see a commendation for a young woman who was “firmly devoted to widowhood.”¹⁰⁶ For another Shexian Cheng lineage dwelling in Censhan, a short account in *Prominent Lineages* lists three living women, née Yin, Zhou, and Wang, who were widowed at the ages of twenty-two, twenty-seven, and twenty-four, respectively, praising them as “all devoted to widowhood, willingly living a deprived life while taking good care of their mothers-in-law and raising their children,” and adding that the “local administration has requested imperial awards for them.”¹⁰⁷

Consider three more cases of devoted widows from other Cheng branches: One from Huaitang in Shexian, née Ling, who committed suicide upon the death of her husband, a student at the county academy, and received the official banner of “chastity martyr.” The second from Chakou in Xiuning, née Sun, who became a widow at twenty-six following the death of her sojourning husband and raised her fatherless son. And the third case from Jinchuan in Xiuning, in which two wives of sojourning merchants were “committed to widowhood and raised the fatherless children.”¹⁰⁸ Entries on other surnamed lineages highlight the same womanly virtue, too. Most notably, a remarkably short entry, three lines in total, on the Hu settlement in Zhongxinfang, in Yixian, lists little else but the names of three devoted widows. It uses the same term, which signified the highest accolade for women: “committed to widowhood and raising fatherless children” (*shoujie fugu*).¹⁰⁹

Similar acknowledgements of Confucian widowhood can be easily located in numerous entries of lineage settlements in *Prominent Lineages in Xin'an*; most of these entries are short, but the compilers hardly ever missed a chance to record the cases of female chastity when available. The genealogical gazetteer, by systematically documenting the rise of the female chastity cult throughout the prefecture, played a role in elevating Huizhou as a center of devoted widowhood. The Huguang scholar-official Li Weizhen (1546–1626) would soon call Shexian (and

Huizhou as a whole) the “Confucian heartland of women” (*nüliu zhi Zou-Lu*).¹¹⁰ This is the story that will be taken up in chapter 4.

CONCLUSION

Huizhou had self-identified as the “Zou-Lu of the southeast” (Zou-Lu refers to the native places of Mencius and Confucius) ever since the famed neo-Confucian Zhao Fang (1319–1369) first coined the term for his native place. This name came about after he observed that, beginning with Zhu Xi, Xin’an had produced an unusually high number of neo-Confucian scholars. The appellation was frequently repeated in local texts, such as the *Anthology of Xin’an Documents* and the 1566 edition of the prefectural gazetteer and 1693 edition of the gazetteer of the Xiuning county.¹¹¹ And yet this geographic term was not exclusive, as other places in south-eastern China, such as Jinhua in Zhejiang, were also labeled thusly.

An equivalent yet uniquely Huizhou identity was “the ancestral place of Cheng-Zhu.” Still, the term is a bit too elite when accounting for the social and demographic makeup of the region. Surely, the ninety different surnamed-lineages recorded in *Prominent Lineages* were not evenly developed in social terms. The Zhus of Zhu Xi, for instance, while illustrious for their intellectual pedigree, were not as socially and demographically developed as the leading surnames or descent lines of Huizhou. The most developed and prominent descent lines included the Chengs, Wangs, Huangs, Fangs, Wus, and Hus; this, in part, accounts for the Zhus relatively lower placement in three Huizhou genealogical gazetteers (placed sixteen, nineteen, and twenty-one, respectively).¹¹²

Taken together, however, these ninety descent lines were clearly dominant within Huizhou. Although demographic data is not available for the region in the mid-sixteenth century, by 1600, Huizhou would have a population of about 1.2 million, and by 1820, the population would surpass 2.4 million.¹¹³ As noted in chapter 1, Cheng Minzheng’s *Composite Genealogy of the Xin’an Chengs* covers over ten thousand kinsmen from forty-four branches. As Harriet Zurndorfer demonstrates in another example, based on the 1600 genealogy of the Xiuning Fans (not a particularly prominent or developed descent line in Huizhou), the number of males born into the lineage during the century from 1475 to 1564, with date of birth available, was 1,160, most of whom appear to have resided in three of nine Xiuning villages (along with 866 first wives identifiable with birth data).¹¹⁴ Clearly, the ninety “famous” and “not-so-famous” descent lines (many of which had numerous settlements throughout the prefecture) recorded in *Prominent Lineages* account for the vast majority of the Huizhou population from the mid-sixteenth century onward.

Indeed, it was the gentrified lineages covering various social categories—including commoner kinspeople, righteous merchants and devoted women in particular—that formed the social fabric of “the Zou-Lu of the southeast” or “the ancestral place of Cheng-Zhu.” With the publication of the *Prominent Lineages*,

Huizhou presented itself to the entire realm as a stronghold of the lineage settlement, the archetypical neo-Confucian social institution. From this perspective, the printing of *Prominent Lineages*, while deepening the Huizhou consciousness regarding local lineages, helped to spread Confucian values to other localities. As Cheng Guangxian, a metropolitan degree holder from Yixian, eloquently put it in his 1551 preface to *Prominent Lineages*:

The Gazetteer of Prominent Lineages is meant to record prominent lineages. What is to be recorded? It is designed to show the virtue of ancestors, in which lies the key to inspiring our offspring. If the key to inspiring our offspring works well, the culture of benevolence and self-effacement [*renrang*] will not die out but endure. If the style of *renrang* spreads to other places, then the pedigree of Xin'an will be further enhanced throughout the realm. Xin'an is the native place of Ziyang [Zhu Xi], and the learning of Master Ziyang lies in using *renrang* to mold [all people] under heaven. Therefore, if one attempts to hold that key to extend its remolding power and widely apply it to promote Zhu Xi's teaching everywhere, this should be the responsibility of everyone born to the native place of Ziyang. Thus, this gazetteer, even though an expanded edition of Chen Dingyu's volume, is more or less also an asset in promoting the teaching of Ziyang [to all under heaven]. Why? Combining all different branches to show the meaning of one single ancestral root is to extend love to relatives [*guang qinqin*]. When one loves one's relatives, one also establishes self-love and shows benevolence. Noting the [local] people and examining their real contributions to society extends promotion of the worthies [*guang xianxian*]. When one promotes the worthies, one also establishes self-respect and practices self-effacement. Who does not have a heart full of "loving relatives and appreciating worthies" [*qinqin xianxian*]? I understand that different regions under heaven are endowed with different mountains and rivers, and their people with different characters of toughness and softness. The customs (of different regions) differ, but the Way of benevolence and self-effacement is rooted in human nature and therefore all the same. This is why [we should] encourage and promote it. Moreover, the state instructs society and guides the customs with codes and regulations, which, if taken from the genuine histories, are all based on people's traditions and habits.

Therefore, Cheng Guangxian continues, with the printing of the composite genealogical gazetteer, the molding power of *qinqin xianxian* will not just "end in Xin'an," but will "move on with divine force to robustly spread to the four seas" and thereby bring about "peace under heaven. Does this not further enhance the pedigree of Xin'an?!"¹¹⁵ Sounding like a disciple of Wang Yangming or, perhaps more apropos, of Cheng Minzheng's idea of the *Oneness of the Way*, Cheng Guangxian saw in *Prominent Lineages* the potential empire-wide impact of the social values it conveyed, which in turn would further elevate the status of Huizhou within the Great Ming.

For Huizhou itself, the Confucian values promoted in *Prominent Lineages* may have contributed to facilitating the workings of local mercantile lineages: encouraging women to be more devoted and merchants to be more home loving, all the

while shielding Huizhou merchants from outside criticism via their affiliation with prominent home lineages. Moreover, the composite genealogical gazetteer celebrated an accepted ordering of the major local surnames. It assured and facilitated their cooperation in important local matters such as elite surname intermarriage, which in turn paved the way for Huizhou to keep producing large numbers of scholar-officials and prominent merchants throughout late imperial times. Indeed, the localist turn of Huizhou gentrymen, from Cheng Minzheng to the producers of *Prominent Lineages*, served the empire well, while at the same time enabling them to maintain and develop their distinctive Huizhou identity.