

Wang Daokun and the Promotion of Mercantile Lineage Culture

Wang Daokun (1525–1593), only briefly identified in *Prominent Lineages in Xin'an* for having passed the metropolitan examination in 1547, would go on to become a top scholar-official and a literary luminary throughout the empire. He also made a major contribution to the development of Huizhou mercantile lineage culture. Although “mercantile lineage” is a modern concept, it was becoming increasingly essential to the land of “prominent lineages” during Wang Daokun’s time. If *Prominent Lineages in Xin'an* delineates for the first time the new Huizhou identity, featuring the added elements of Confucian values for merchants and kinswomen, Wang Daokun substantiated it in several significant ways to greatly enrich a mercantile lineage discourse, both describing and prescribing the social development over the late sixteenth century and beyond.

Wang Daokun’s contributions lay in three interrelated dimensions of Huizhou mercantile lineage culture. He promoted lineage institutions, compiling an innovative genealogy for his own lineage and supporting the compilation of genealogies and construction of ancestral halls for others; he became the leading champion for Huizhou merchants, crafting a large number of merchant biographies or epitaphs honoring their vocation, encoding their new mercantile ethics, complimenting their business acumen and devotion to home lineages, and advocating their social advancement strategy of alternating between learning and trade; and he honored the practice of female chastity, compiling a new *Biographies of Exemplary Women* (Lienü zhuan) and recording a large number of local chastity martyrs and devoted women, thereby helping to promote the cult of female chastity in late Ming Huizhou.

As with the case of Cheng Minzheng, Wang Daokun’s empire-wide standing and accomplishments enhanced his work and achievements at home. He represents another instance of Confucian scholar-official engagement in local matters,

especially during the last eighteen years of his life, which he spent living at home in retirement. Wang Daokun was the most influential and productive scholar-official from and for late Ming Huizhou, as Cheng Minzheng had been in his time, even though neither Wang nor Cheng were the highest-ranked officials that the prefecture produced during the second half of the Ming dynasty.¹ These two eminent figures, perhaps not incidentally, were linked to the two most prestigious and populous lineages of the region; they left behind an enormous amount of writings from which we can learn a great deal about Huizhou culture and its transformation from the mid- to the late Ming. Roughly three generations apart, the two were faced with different issues and, not surprisingly, had different responses. Cheng Minzheng spent his entire life in the mid-Ming when farming and study still constituted the dominant way of life, even as the seeds of commercialization were being nurtured, whereas Wang Daokun spent his entire adult life in the commercialized sixteenth century. The top priorities for Cheng Minzheng were to establish the primacy of his Cheng descent line in Huizhou (along with his Xin'an roots) and the importance of Huizhou within the entire realm; for Wang Daokun, they were to remold mercantile lineage culture and Confucian womanhood. Cheng Minzheng's philosophical musings presaged the coming of Wang Yangming, whereas Wang Daokun firmly belonged in the camp of the School of the Mind, as was reflected in the inclusivity of coverage in his genealogy and his merchant biographies. Cheng Minzheng was noted for his scholarly erudition, always serving at the court, whereas Wang Daokun enjoyed an empire-wide reputation as a man of letters while serving at various regional posts before reaching the center.

Relatively speaking, Wang Daokun has received more scholarly attention than Cheng Minzheng, in large part because of his literary reputation and many records of Huizhou merchants. These studies of Wang Daokun, however, have not attempted to examine all of his writings in light of his fashioning of Huizhou mercantile lineage culture. Nor has anyone explicitly examined his genealogy or his accounts of women, including his *Biographies of Exemplary Women*.² A full understanding of Wang Daokun's contribution to Huizhou social history in the late sixteenth century requires a balanced inquiry into all of his writings, his merchant biographies, and, especially, his lineage documents (including the compilation of his unique home genealogy) and records of devoted women. A balanced analysis will also help illuminate his differences from Cheng Minzheng and the development of Huizhou society over the course of the sixteenth century: from a land of prominent lineages to one increasingly shaped by mercantile lineages and their interests.

I begin with a brief biographical sketch of Wang Daokun to pave the way for illustrating the Huizhou mercantile lineage culture of which he was both product and producer.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

In many ways, Wang Daokun personified the mercantile lineage culture of Huizhou; he was also emblematic of late Ming literati life. He was born into a wealthy merchant family descended from Wang Hua, and his family had intermarried for generations with the prominent mercantile lineages of the Wus, Chengs, Huangs, and Fangs. His Song dynasty ancestor had moved back to Huizhou from Zhejiang, settling in Songmingshan, Shexian. The Wangs of Songmingshan had engaged in farming until his grandfather, Wang Shouyi (1468–1548), first ventured out of Huizhou to engage in trade in the late fifteenth century. Notably, Shouyi's commercial endeavors were initially encouraged and financially supported by his wife, the daughter of a merchant from the Xi'nán Wu lineage, in Shexian, that dominated the highly profitable salt trade in the Ming. Following his father-in-law, Shouyi soon established himself in business. Shouyi was also well educated, and he began teaching poems to Daokun, his eldest grandson, when he was just three years old. Thanks to his education and righteous character, Shouyi succeeded in the salt business in Zhejiang (his secondary ancestral place where he had important kinship ties), being eventually promoted to the position of *jijiu* (the forerunner of the position of salt “head merchant” or *zongshang* under the Qing) who coordinated salt trade (the biggest state monopoly) between merchants and the official salt bureau. He passed away in 1548, one year after his grandson earned the metropolitan *jinshi* degree and was appointed as a magistrate in Zhejiang. On his death bed, the eighty-year-old man spoke to Daokun's father, saying: “Liangbin, I, your father, will soon be gone. Your younger brother Liangzhi engages in trade and your son serves as an official. Please kindly remind them not to disregard the unfinished accomplishments of their forefathers; now I can close my eyes.” The “unfinished accomplishments,” in this context, were to glorify the ancestors by succeeding in producing both “prominent scholars” and “good merchants.” This deathbed injunction implied that Daokun as an official should help out his merchant uncle. Shouyi's exhortation clearly carried enormous weight for Wang Daokun, as he used it to conclude his biography for his grandfather.³

Also influential on the growth of Wang Daokun was his father, Wang Liangbin (1504–1581), who, along with more than ten of his cousins and nephews, followed his father east to the coast to engage in commerce, helping to chart the Huizhou model of family business. Liangbin had only one expectation for his eldest son—to pass the civil service exams. In his youth, Wang Daokun was, according to the biographies prepared by his own son and grandson, particularly fond of historical romances and vernacular literature, but his father banned him from reading anything that was deemed useless. At night he would hide and read for pleasure by the light of fireflies. Once he even composed a *chuanqi* play out of an unofficial historical account, but his father found it and burned it, crying, “If you do not work for your proper calling, how can you make progress?”⁴ Yet Daokun's curiosity

about popular literature had already been planted in his heart. Wang Daokun was remarkably gifted, good at both the classics and other genres, including history and belles lettres. And he was the first in his descent line to become an established scholar-official.⁵ At twenty, his father took him to Hangzhou to study the classical learning of the rites with a famous scholar, and two years later, in 1547, he succeeded in passing the metropolitan exam and earned the *jinshi* degree. Among the class of students who passed the 1547 metropolitan exam were future Grand Secretariat Zhang Juzheng (1525–1582) and the literary luminary Wang Shizhen (1526–1590).

Unlike Wang Shizhen, who had earned his literary fame before climbing the official ladder, Wang Daokun had a successful career in officialdom before earning literary recognition. Known for his administrative talent and pragmatism, he rose quickly from county magistrate to prefect, governor, and eventually vice minister of war. In the end, however, due to disagreement with some of Zhang Juzheng's personnel policies, he was forced to retire in 1575. He moved back to his beloved home region, living in his villa Taihan, located about four hundred meters from the Shexian County yamen, for the final eighteen years of his life.⁶

His long retirement gave Wang Daokun firsthand access to local matters as well as the time to reflect upon changes in local society. Most of his Huizhou-related writings were crafted during this period, including two innovative genealogies of his home lineage and a large number of biographies or epitaphs of Huizhou merchants and devoted women. While most of his prose and poetry are included in his massive *Taihan Collection* (Taihan ji), a number of his biographies of merchants and women were initially written for genealogies, including those of the Wangs of Songmingshan and their kinswomen, which are printed in the genealogy he compiled for his home descent line, *The Genealogy of the Sixteen Branches of the Lingshanyuan Wangs* (Lingshanyuan Wangshi shiliu zu pu; 1592). In his retirement, he also organized several literati clubs, including the Baiyu Society in 1580 (named after a hill in Shexian). The Baiyu Society marked his emerging leadership in intellectual circles; its members included several celebrated literati and scholar-officials, including Tu Long (1543–1605), Hu Yinglin (1551–1602), Pan Zhiheng (1556–1622), Xie Bi (compiler of the 1609 *Gazetteer of Shexian*), and Li Weizhen (1546–1626). By now, Wang Daokun enjoyed a literary reputation equal to that of Wang Shizhen, and these two leading lights were hailed as the “Two Simas.”⁷

Among Ming literati, Wang Daokun's prose was some of the most difficult to understand. He practiced the so-called restored style of ancient prose (*fugu*) that was in vogue at the time, and he was eventually recognized as a leader of the *fugu* movement together with Li Panlong (1514–1570) and Wang Shizhen. The prose styles Wang Daokun admired and imitated all came from the pre-Tang period, and one style that particularly appealed to him was that of Sima Qian's *Records of the Grand Historian*, especially its *jizhuan* (annals and biography) format.

Wang Daokun authored one of the best commentaries on the great Ming novel *Water Margin* (Shuihu zhuan). *Water Margin* is full of stories that both criticize corrupt officials—and even a Song emperor—and praise chivalrous heroes driven by a strong sense of justice and righteousness (*xiayi*). These were the same values he highlighted as central to the ethic of Huizhou merchants. Xu Shuofang believes that the *Water Margin* commentary, three pages in length, is more valuable than any other piece in his *Taihan Collection*.⁸ Xu's appraisal is understandable from the perspective of Chinese literature, but the *Taihan Collection* also contains rich material for making sense of Huizhou social development in the second half of the sixteenth century.

Also notable is Wang Daokun's achievement as a playwright. In 1560, during his tenure as the Xiangyang prefect, Wang Daokun authored four one-act plays collectively titled *Plays of the Great Elegant Hall* (Da yatang zaju). These included *Dream of Gaotang* (Gaotang meng), *Tragedy of the Luo River* (Luoshui bei), *Drawing Eyebrows* (Huamei), and *Recluses on the Lakes* (Wuhu you), all based on stories first narrated in the ancient texts that Daokun so admired: the *Zhaoming Collection of Writings*, the poetry of Song Yu, Ban Gu's *History of the Han Dynasty*, and Sima Qian's *Records of the Grand Historian*, respectively. Wang Daokun was among the first Ming playwrights to attempt to transform the northern *zaju* play into the *nanxi* (southern drama) format.⁹ The four works in *Plays of the Great Elegant Hall* all feature historical figures, but they also reflected the playwright's concerns about the domination of the imperial court by the clique surrounding the corrupt top official Yan Song (1480–1567). The most notable of the four is *Recluses on the Lakes*, which portrays the legendary beauty Xishi in a positive light, in contrast to earlier literature in which she was blamed as a typical femme fatal who brought down the kingdom.¹⁰ The focus on romance within the four plays reflects Wang Daokun's overall theory that drama should be the artistic expression of human feeling or passion: "As for poetry, song, and dance, all three must be based on [feeling or passion of] the heart, thereby giving rise to musical composition."¹¹ With these four romances, Wang Daokun anticipated the popular themes of late Ming drama, which championed the cult of *qing* (passionate love) under the influence of Wang Yangming's School of the Mind, while at the same time emerging as a staunch advocate for female chastity.¹²

Wang Daokun was an enthusiastic follower of Wang Yangming, even though he grew up in a Huizhou cultural atmosphere infused with Zhu Xi's School of Principle. In an essay discussing the Huizhou discourse, Wang Daokun proudly pointed out what Cheng Minzheng had valued most: the region had nurtured Zhu Xi and the two Cheng brothers, while at the same time declaring that in the Ming dynasty it was Wang Yangming who clarified the Confucian Way (*mingdao*).¹³ Wang Yangming provided mid- to late Ming literati with a moral philosophy during a time of unpredictable emperors, who were often surrounded by corrupt and devious

courtiers and eunuch chiefs who were in control of imperial power. By concentrating on one's own mind and remaining indifferent to changes beyond oneself, Confucian literati could maintain their moral integrity, regardless of whether or not they served in office.¹⁴ Even Zhu Xi's ancestral place was swept by the popular tide of Wang Yangming's teaching of innate moral worth, especially after Wang Yangming's disciple, Xiong Shifang, became the Huizhou prefect in 1512. Emphasizing "clarifying ethics and promoting schools" (*minglun jianxue*) in his administrative approach, Xiong rebuilt Huizhou's most important school, the Ziyang Academy, for which his master Wang Yangming authored an essay stating: "There is nothing outside of the heart, no principle outside of the heart [*xinwai wushi, xinwai wuli*]. Erudite scholars study for this; interrogators interrogate about this; deep thinkers think about this; clarifiers clarify this; doers practice this."¹⁵ Virtually all of the leading scholars associated with Wang Yangming toured Huizhou, including Wang Gen, Qian Dehong, Zou Shouyi, Liu Bangcai, Luo Rufang, and Wang Ji (1498–1583); they lectured at Ziyang or other academies on how "the streets are full of sages" and why "people's daily practice is the Way," attracting large numbers of local literati.¹⁶ In several biographic accounts of local literati, Wang Daokun praised how they pursued Wang Yangming's learning with utmost earnestness or followed the lecture tours of Huizhou by the famous Yangming disciples, noting that these Huizhou followers of Wang Yangmingism had "soundly established their names."¹⁷ In late 1575, not long after settling at home in retirement, Wang Daokun hosted Wang Ji on his tour of Huizhou, composing two poems in honor of the visit and noting that Wang Yangming's teaching "has spread throughout the realm."¹⁸ He also befriended the famed scholar Jiao Hong (1541–1620), largely on account of their shared philosophic position with regard to the learning of the mind.¹⁹

For Wang Daokun, Wang Yangming was the greatest hero of the Ming dynasty. He states in his preface to the *Taihan Collection*, "The Great Ming opened up heaven day and night, thoroughly rebuilding the empire. Human talents and literary endeavors peaked during the Hong-Zheng-Jia-Long (1491–1573) era. Wang Yangming quickly rose with force; he asserted that *liangzhi* [good intuitive knowledge] carried on the disrupted learning, directly approaching the [true learning of the] Three Dynasties [Xia-Shang-Zhou] and belittled the Six Classics. As for mastery of the mind, it does not look like the law and yet works like the law."²⁰ In one of Wang Daokun's first official biographies drafted by his friend Xie Bi, he is succinctly identified as firmly belonging to the Yangming camp: "As for literature, his prose followed Zuo and Ma [Zuo Qiuming and Sima Qian] and his poems followed Duling [Du Fu]; as for philosophic learning, he revered Xiangshan [Lu Jiuyuan] from the past and Dongyue [Wang Yangming] more recently."²¹

This explains why Wang Daokun viewed Wang Yangming's School of the Mind as "uniquely stunning learning" [*juexue*].²² For Wang Daokun, a man capable of engaging in both civil and military tasks, no scholar-officials of the

Ming dynasty were as outstanding. As he put it, “Sir Yangming . . . is equipped with both civil and military talents.”²³ This corresponds well with Wang Yangming’s emphasis on the unification of knowledge and action, which also marked Wang Daokun’s daily approach. Unlike Cheng Minzheng, Wang Daokun did not author any formal philosophic treatises to explore the historical transmission of Confucian learning or discourse on human nature. Rather, he conveyed his philosophic leaning through the meanings embodied in both his acts and his nonphilosophic writings about changing social life (especially in his home region) as well as his literary works articulating his philosophical bent. Under the influence of Wang Yangming’s notion of inner moral knowledge, Wang Daokun could largely come to terms with being cast out of politics in his retirement, which further enabled his focus on local matters. Wang Yangming also provided Wang Daokun with a new class calculus: advocating equity in terms of moral integrity (at least within the same lineage), which thereby paved the way for uplifting the social status of merchants and, at the same time, promulgating the new social advancement strategy of alternating between learning and commerce within local lineages.

A ONE-OF-A-KIND GENEALOGY

Wang Daokun shared many views with Cheng Minzheng, but he often moved a step further than his eminent Huizhou predecessor, reflecting the socioeconomic and intellectual changes that had taken place over the sixteenth century. One of those shared views had to do with the relation between the family (local society) and the state. As a good student of the *Great Learning*, Cheng Minzheng stated that “the rule of the family is like the law of the state.” Wang Daokun shared this view, but pushed this belief further by inventing a new, bold genealogy format modeled on official history, in particular the format of his favorite *Records of the Grand Historian*. But whereas Cheng Minzheng exerted significant impact upon later genealogical compilations in Huizhou, Wang Daokun’s stylistic innovations did not have a similar lasting influence. Nevertheless, Wang Daokun’s unique genealogical format was consequential on another front—it had the effect of uplifting the status of merchants within the lineage and promoting women’s virtue, thereby illustrating and promoting mercantile lineage culture. As we will see, the part of his genealogy that did not have a lasting influence was his format linking his descent line to the Zhou royal family. His inclusion of commoner kinspeople, including both merchants and kinswomen, was shared by, or had impact on, many other late Ming Huizhou genealogies.

One highly revealing insight into Wang Daokun’s view of genealogy as history comes from the preface he penned for the genealogy of the Xi’nan Jiangs in Shexian, which also hints at his Wang Yangming–like philosophical positioning. After underscoring the need to “respect the ancestors thereby honoring the

descent line; honor the descent line thereby harmonizing the lineage" (a stock statement, echoing Cheng Minzheng, which he made again in the preface to his genealogy), Wang Daokun stated,

Zhongni [Confucius] authored the *Spring and Autumn*, covering a multitude of states and yet highlighting [the state of] Lu. The rites of Zhou were [best] represented in Lu, because of this it stood out. When Lu is highlighted, all of the other states are presented. In ancient times, each state had its history, so should families [*guo you guoshi jia yi yiran*]. Indeed, genealogy falls into the category of history [*puzhe shi zhi liu ye*]. Thus it is that there are people who treat the county yamen as their own house, who treat heaven as their own ancestor, who treat [the peoples from] the four seas as their own brothers, and who even treat the birds and animals as their same beings—all of these combine into one. Who would disagree with this?²⁴

In addition to his straightforward likening of genealogy with official history, Wang Daokun also reveals that his Wang Yangming-like leanings undergird his innovative genealogical style; he erases state-society and elite-commoner differences. This would have profound implications for his views on not just the lineage but also its merchants and kinswomen.

The "modern" lineage is often seen as a local expression of Song neo-Confucianism.²⁵ Whether or how Wang Yangmingism was factored into the upsurge of genealogy compilation in the sixteenth century is still an open question, but we can certainly see the influence of Cheng Minzheng's thinking on moral leveling in this practice. Here, I shall go into great detail of the genealogy Wang Daokun compiled for his home lineage and its directly related branches in Shexian, *The Genealogy of the Sixteen Branches of the Lingshanyuan Wangs*, partially to illustrate the philosophical premise of his work. In his first preface to the genealogy, Wang Daokun clearly states that he was following Sima Qian in terms of format.²⁶ *The Lingshanyuan Wangs* falls into the genre of *jizhuan* (chronological tables and biographies), first invented by the Grand Historian Sima Qian. It is composed of ten volumes:

1. "The Abbreviated Basic Annals of the Zhou" (Zhou benji lue)
2. "The Abbreviated Hereditary House of the Lu" (Lu shijia lue)
3. "The Hereditary House of Yueguo" (Yueguo shijia)
4. "The Hereditary Chronological Table from Longxiang Onward" (Longxiang yixia shibiao)
5. "The Hereditary Chronological Table of the Home Branch" (Benzhi shibiao)
6. "The Hereditary Chronological Table of Affiliate Branches" (Fenzhi shibiao)
7. "Brief Biographies of the Hereditary Descent Line" (Shixi xiaozhuan)
8. "Collective Biographies" (Liezhuan)
9. "Records of Ancestral Tombs" (Qiumu zhi)
10. "Gazetteer of Lineage Documents" (Dianji zhi)

Many of these volume subtitles are directly borrowed from Sima Qian's *Records of the Grand Historian*, including "Basic Annals," "Hereditary House," "Hereditary Chronological Table," and "Collective Biographies."²⁷ Most strikingly, indeed virtually unprecedented, the genealogist dared to adopt the title of "Basic Annals" that Sima Qian (and all later historians of official histories) used exclusively to apply to accounts of kings or emperors for biographies of those within his (assumed) apical ancestry dating back to the Zhou dynasty. Wang Daokun's "Basic Annals," already revealed in the subtitle, is an abbreviated version of Sima Qian's "Basic Annals of the Zhou." Similarly, his "Hereditary House of the Lu" is an abbreviated version of Sima Qian's "Hereditary House of Lu's Duke of Zhou" (Lu Zhougong shijia). This genealogical arrangement dramatically elevated the pedigree of the Huizhou Wangs, further justifying their descent from the ancient royal family (which had been claimed by other Wang notables). Also notable is the elevation of Yueguo (Wang Hua) to "Hereditary House," a subtitle Sima Qian used to cover the prime minister or other top state officials. Yueguo was placed in the third volume, immediately following the first two volumes covering the Zhou "Basic Annals" and the Lu "Hereditary House," whereas his Han dynasty ancestor, General Longxiang (Wang Wenhe), was placed in volume 4 to lead the first ancestral tree (Hereditary Chronological Table) of the Huizhou Wangs. This placement clearly indicates that Wang Hua was treated as the apical ancestor of the Shexian (and Huizhou) Wangs, even though his thirteenth-generational ancestor Wang Wenhe was the first to cross the Yangzi River in the Later Han, honored as "the apical ancestor of Jiangnan" (Jiangnan shizu).²⁸ Wang Hua was given greater priority than Wang Wenhe also because, as explained in Wang Daokun's own preface, "Yueguo was a lord of righteousness while alive and turned into an enlightened deity upon death. Throughout the Tang-Song-Yuan-Ming, he was consistently conferred with titles of nobility and [worshipped with] sacrifices, therefore he is more than qualified [to be covered in] 'Hereditary House.'"²⁹

To further enhance the credibility of the deep ancestry, as well as to demonstrate the honoring of the ancestors, Wang Daokun details the ancestral tombs in Huizhou in volume 9, tracing back as far as Lord Wang of Lu, the marquis of Yingchuan, who was first given the surname of Wang and whose tomb "is located thirty-eight *li* south of the seat [of Shexian]." Two more notable examples concern Wang Wenhe and Wang Hua: (1) "Lord Wenhe: his tomb is located nine *li* west of the prefectural capital . . . numbered 1346910; the tax on its mountain field was initially placed under the two households headed by Wang Ruchu and Wang Tiequan. In the twenty-first year of the Wanli reign [1592–1593] when the tax was newly calculated, [all ritual land] was listed under the household of Wang Longxiang, numbered 1"; and (2) "Lord Hua: Lord Yueguo long lived in the town of Huayang; he died on the third day of the third month of the twenty-third year in Chang'an, aged sixty-four. His sons carried his coffin back home, which was buried in the Yunlan Mountain of Shexian. His successive wives, née Qian, Ji, and Zhang, were

buried together there. His mausoleum has enjoyed godly sacrifice, and its ritual land is exempted from taxation.”³⁰ As Wang Daokun notes in his second preface regarding the ancestral tombs of the Huizhou Wangs, “from the end of the Han to the Tang, seven or eight out of ten are permanently attended to. From the first migrant ancestor, Lord Sili, onward, there have been *shimuhu* (permanent tenant houses) assigned to take care of their ancestral tombs generation after generation.”³¹ Wang Sili, the eleventh generational descendant from Wang Hua, active toward the end of the Tang dynasty, married into a Cheng family in Shexian’s Tangmo, and his descendants blossomed into the sixteen branches recorded in volumes 5 and 6.

In terms of contents, if not the innovation of format and its symbolic implications, the last volume on lineage documents (Dianji zhi) is the most important and also the richest. Constituting more than two-thirds of the entire genealogy, it is further divided into twelve sections: 1. “Edicts or Imperial Proclamations” (Gao); 2. “Memorials” (Biaoshu); 3. “Biographies” (Zhuan); 4. “Records” (Ji); 5. “Prefaces” (Xu); 6. “Covenants” (Yue); 7. “Life Descriptions” (Zhuang or Xingzhuang); 8. “Epitaphs and Inscriptions” (Zhiming); 9. “Tomb Inscriptions” (Mubei or/and Mubiao); 10. “Prayers” (Jiwen); 11. “Eulogies” (Zanlei); 12. “Verses” (Shi).

Notably, some of the most revealing biographies of Wang merchants and kinswomen are covered in this volume, in addition to nearly fifty other biographic accounts. The substantial biographies included here are virtually all about commoners of recent times (mostly penned by Wang Daokun himself), different from the brief ones on selected figures in the ancestry that are covered in volumes 7 and 8. This arrangement ensured that the symbolic uplifting of the Wang pedigree in the first two to three volumes extended to the commoners covered in volume 10, as they were all purportedly descended from the Duke of Zhou and hence related to the Zhou royal family. Other lineage-related documents in the last volume include imperial edicts highlighting Wang Hua, memorials or policy recommendations by ancestral kinsmen, and records, prefaces, local lineage contracts (on ritual performances), prayers, and poems. Many of these documents were authored by famous or powerful local figures, including Zhu Xi, Qiu Jun, Cheng Minzheng, Zheng Yu (1298–1358), Wang Shunmin, Bao Xiangxian (1496–1568, *jinshi* 1529), Zhang Juzheng, Fang Liangshu (*jinshi* 1553), Wang Shizhen, and Tao Chengxue (Huizhou prefect from 1556 to 1560, *jinshi* 1547).³² Zhu Xi starts his 1188 preface to an old Wang genealogy justifying the illustrious ancestry of the Huizhou Wangs and the powerful rewards reaped by the remarkable virtue of their apical ancestors: “The Xin’an Wangs are so prominent and prosperous that no other lineages can match [their nobility and prosperity]. Looking into the reason, it is largely because Duke Cheng of Lu had accumulated vast virtue and had been further supported by his benevolent, filial, and kind wife née Si. Thus, it is that their benevolence and grace have been cast down among the people. Heaven has rewarded [the Wangs], specially demonstrating its distinguished efficacy.”³³

Wang Daokun secured a preface for the genealogy from his friend Li Weizhen, a rising star in both official and literary circles. In the preface, this future minister

of rites likened Wang's genealogy to the Five Classics and provided detailed reasoning for his analogy.³⁴ Setting aside whether his reasoning was justified or not, the effect of his preface was achieved. It honored, and by extension, authorized and authenticated, both the content and format of the genealogy, which was handsomely cut and printed.

As with Cheng Minzheng, Wang Daokun's commitment to writing a genealogy appears to have dated to his youth, when he assisted his father in compiling a family genealogy and learned from the latter that genealogy was "key to harmonizing the lineage." His busy schedule after passing the metropolitan exam had delayed this passion, although he had never completely forgotten it.³⁵ Later, his Zhejiang kinsman, the posthumously anointed minister of rites Wang Tang (1512–1588), urged Daokun to compile a composite genealogy covering the Wangs from both Huizhou and Zhejiang, which the latter declined. He chose, instead, to fix his attention on the sixteen branches in Shexian descended from Lord Sili.³⁶ His stated reason for rejecting the compilation of a composite genealogy was that by providing his work with a narrow focus, he could guarantee credibility. But might there have been any other unstated reasons? Like Cheng Minzheng (whom he highly respected, as can be seen from his inclusion of seven of Minzheng's writings in the *Lingshanyuan Wangs*), Wang Daokun also wanted to be an innovative genealogist, which, ironically, would prevent him from copying Minzheng by compiling a composite genealogy. After all, there already had been a massive composite genealogy of the Huizhou Wangs printed in 1571.³⁷

More importantly, in reflection of the social changes since Cheng Minzheng's death, namely rapid commercialization and the changes it had wrought on local lineage life (including gender relations), what was urgent for Wang Daokun was not just to further enhance lineage institutions (already well established in Huizhou), but to further build upon the new discourse of Huizhou mercantile lineage culture. In addition to numerous prefaces to Huizhou genealogies and commemorative records on the construction of local ancestral halls, Wang Daokun stood out for his passion for crafting biographic accounts of two commoner subgroups: merchants and kinswomen.³⁸ Some of the best of these narratives are included in the *Lingshanyuan Wangs*. Viewed from this perspective, his decision to focus on the sixteen branches of the Shexian Wangs, as well as his innovative genealogical format, was determined by the twofold related needs of illustrating his illustrious ancestry (claimed or real), and finding the best ways to enhance the social status of the two commoner kin subgroups, as merchants and kinswomen were becoming increasingly important for local lineages in the late sixteenth century. In other words, by the late sixteenth century, the compilation of genealogy per se was no longer the top agenda for Wang Daokun. What the genealogist felt most passionate about (or what he felt most needed elaboration) was the mercantile lineage discourse.³⁹ All of this may explain the innovative format of his genealogy and the narrow focus of the sixteen branches, which at once further authenticated the unmatched pedigree of the entire Wang descent line and covered in great detail

its commoner kinspeople. In its entirety, this format had the effect of shaping the lineage identity with greatly enriched elements of mercantile lineage culture. In this goal, Wang Daokun was successful, even though his innovative format did not have much impact on subsequent compilation of Huizhou genealogies.⁴⁰

Leaving aside the uniqueness of his genealogical style, Wang Daokun appears to have been influenced to a certain degree by the earliest extant Wang genealogy from Huizhou, Wang Songtao's *Origins of the Wangs* (Wangshi yuanyuan lu). This Yuan dynasty genealogy is also composed of ten *juan*, but it differs from Wang Daokun's in terms of format, coverage, and contents.⁴¹ Songtao's genealogy claims that the Wang descent line originated with the Yellow Emperor, distinguished itself from others with Houji, formed its lineage with Ji-Lu (referring to the Duke of Zhou), and gained its surname at Yingchuan, whose lord was the second son of Duke Cheng of Lu. This lord was named Wang, as the lines of his hands looked like the archaic character of Wang; he was later honored as the marquis of Wang after being enfeoffed at Yingchuan, and his descendants thereafter use Wang as their surname.⁴² In addition, Wang Hua is highlighted in virtually every volume except the first one that focuses on the origins of the Wang surname (*Yuanxing*). These shared features noted, the Yuan version does not carry the governing titles for the first two volumes (even though it features subtitles for each section within the two volumes), and it clearly covers the Wangs from the entire prefecture (and even beyond). Variations of format and coverage aside, the contents differ even more sharply between Wang Daokun's and Wang Songtao's versions. We can look to Songtao's sixth volume as a telling example. Titled *Records of Famous (Kinsmen)* (Chuiming ji), it concentrates on recording scholar-officials. Starting with Wang Hua, the volume goes on to cover around two hundred *jinshi* degree holders from the Wang descendants (with a brief biography), mostly from the Song dynasty. The volume preface clearly states that it records only the kinsmen noted for virtuous deeds and accomplishments in both state service and scholarly writings, leaving unrecorded those who quickly succeeded in the various "miscellaneous skills" of sorcery, medicine, technology, and commerce" (*wuyigonggu zaji*).⁴³ In contrast, Wang Daokun's genealogy, in its lengthiest tenth volume, covers many detailed biographies of merchants and kinswomen, from one main descent line.⁴⁴

Arguably, Wang Daokun's adoption of the Grand Historian's "royal" format to illuminate his ancestral pedigree and his narrowed coverage of the directly related sixteen branches in a local area of Shexian bespoke his Wang Yangming-like philosophic positioning of erasing distinctions between the central state and local society, between official history and family genealogy, and between elites and commoners. In the hands of Wang Daokun, Cheng Minzheng's localist approach went even deeper: a kinship community, and in this case, one prominent local mercantile lineage, was directly related to the ancient royal house symbolizing political authority. Here we see an outstanding case (quite exceptional even for a region filled with great families) illustrating that a state-society continuum was

more or less organic in Confucian thinking, and not just in the thinking of Cheng Minzheng, Wang Yangming, and Wang Daokun. The more locally rooted a society was, the more prepared it was to reach up to the center.

The same format and localist coverage, however, also betrays an inherent dilemma. On the one hand, Wang Daokun tended to erase the elite-commoner divide in his writing, but on the other, he still tried to affiliate his lineage with the ancient royal house of Zhou that was beloved by the Confucians and arguably the most esteemed royal family in Chinese history, as if commoners alone were not sufficiently elevated or esteemed. The same contradictory premise, as will be discussed later in this chapter, also is inherent in his approach toward the merchant-gentry (and sojourning men and home lineage) relations. Still, Wang Daokun mostly fixed his attention on local matters, and especially the two commoner groups of merchants and kinswomen, as they constituted two key—and closely related—ingredients of new mercantile lineage society.

MERCHANTS AND MERCANTILE LINEAGE CULTURE

China historians, and especially Huizhou specialists, have claimed that Wang Daokun was “a powerful spokesman” for merchants or, more accurately, Huizhou merchants in late Ming China, as he produced more merchant biographies than any other late Ming literatus.⁴⁵ Reading these biographies thoroughly, and especially in the context of Wang Daokun’s entire corpus of writings and of sixteenth-century Huizhou, I argue that he was more than a spokesman for Huizhou merchants. He was, more accurately, the spokesman for Huizhou mercantile lineage culture. I make this observation based on my reading of his merchant biographies as well as his Huizhou-related writings; this reading has significant implications for properly diagnosing the character of not just Huizhou merchants but of late Ming Huizhou kinship society as a whole: merchants were treated as integral to local prominent lineages.

The late sixteenth century marked the peak of commercialization under the Ming empire, undergirding an era of great social and cultural change. Huizhou was central to this transformative period, and its native son Wang Daokun happened to live at home in retirement where he gathered firsthand information and observation, thereby enabling him to produce most of his Huizhou-related writings. Of these, the most notable are his merchant accounts, including biographies (*zhuan*), life descriptions (*xingzhuang*), and epitaphs (*muzhiming* or *mubiao*). For the sake of convenience, I will simply call them biographies. In total, he penned 112 merchant biographies, seventy-one of which focus on Huizhou merchants (although only forty-five out of seventy-one contain sufficient narrative detail).⁴⁶ Thus far, historians have used these biographies, in addition to other contemporaneous materials, to understand some of the key aspects of the great transformative era of the late Ming, ranging from Huizhou merchant capital formation and types

and the running of their businesses to the rise of merchant status and the new mercantile ethos.⁴⁷ What has not been fully explored is the social embedding of Huizhou merchants, especially in terms of their position within home lineages and family life, central to which was the husband-wife and mother-son relationships. As a whole, it should be noted, Wang Daokun's merchant biographies are particularly detailed in terms of these lineage- and family-related aspects. Integrating these details with previously observed features, we can see the ways in which Wang Daokun's literary production greatly enhanced Huizhou mercantile lineage culture.

To analyze these details such that they illustrate a larger pattern, I have prepared a summary of Wang Daokun's forty-five biographies of Huizhou merchants (see appendix, this volume).⁴⁸ Through these biographies we see Wang Daokun's efforts to raise the social status of Huizhou merchants. This was in accord with Wang Daokun's philosophic leanings, which, partially rooted in Wang Yangming-like belief in popular sagehood, tended to elevate the moral standing and social status of ordinary people. Wang Yangming famously stated, "The four categories of the people differ in vocations but share the same Way, as they all devote their hearts [to their work] the same way." He further rejected the conventional disdain for merchants: "Although engaging in trade all day long, [merchants] are not prevented from becoming sages or worthies."⁴⁹ By the late Ming, the sheer number of merchant biographies by Wang Daokun (and other literati) spoke to the socioeconomic significance Huizhou merchants had earned in local kinship communities.

Perusing these biographical accounts, however, we can read certain mixed messages. To begin with, the titles of these biographies never identify their subjects as merchants (*shanggu*); instead, they are called *chushi* ("untitled gentryman," a scholar without an exam degree), a respectful term that made them comparable to the local gentry who had succeeded in the civil service exams. This term indicates that a large percentage of Huizhou merchants that Wang Daokun recorded were indeed well educated, especially those who had switched from pursuit of the exams to sojourning trade (see appendix, this volume). Specifically, according to Zhu Wanshu, out of the more than seventy biographies that Wang Daokun penned for Huizhou merchants, forty-three had engaged in classical learning in preparation for the exams before switching to trade. Other late Ming records of Huizhou merchants, from literati such as Li Weizhen and Yuan Zhongdao (1570–1623), also indicate they were well educated.⁵⁰

That merchants were frequently called *chushi* instead of *shanggu* suggests that they preferred this appellation, and this preference seems revealing of their self-image. After all, some Huizhou merchants who were recorded in Wang Daokun's accounts, including his own grandfather, still called themselves "mean traders" (*gushu*; see appendix, entry 23).⁵¹ Even in the emerging commercial capital of Huizhou, the merchant stigma continued to linger. Part of the reason for this was that the era was noted for its "craze for money," and there was a critical response

to this trend. As Timothy Brook has shown, late Ming scholar-officials such as the Shexian magistrate Zhang Tao decried the corruption of a transactional age.⁵² Zheng Zhizhen (1518–1595), Wang Daokun's Huizhou contemporary, wrote a satirical song called "Ten Not So Dears" (*Shi buqin*) that captured such sentiments; it was based on a folk-ballad style known as *lianhua lao* (lotus petals fall) and was incorporated into the popular ritual opera *Mulian*.⁵³ The song starts with a complaint about the unfair treatment by "dearest" heaven and earth regarding the rich and poor; it proceeds next to human relations, calling attention to the capriciousness of those "dearest" of kin:

Dearest parents sometimes are not so dear,
 Actually, parents are often not so kind.
 If their kids don't see to their every need,
 They mutter and grumble all the time.
Chorus: Ah, lotus, lotus petals fall.

The song offers a running commentary on how money has undermined all kinds of "dear" human relationships, including those between parents and children, older and younger brothers, husbands and wives, and in-laws, relatives, and friends. The final verse underlines the corrupting influence of money:

Dearest friends sometimes are not so dear,
 Actually, friends are often not so kind.
 When you're loaded with money and wine,
 Friends flock to you in droves,
 When you're down and out, there's not a soul to be found.
Chorus: Ah, lotus, lotus petals fall.

In this cultural milieu, the preference for the appellation *chushi* (untitled gentrymen) instead of *shanggu* (merchants) makes perfect sense.

The image of Huizhou merchants outside of their home region was even more conflicted, as can be seen in a set of late Ming vernacular short stories. A recent study on Huizhou merchants in Ming-Qing literature notes that in fifteen late Ming short story collections, there are forty tales that feature Huizhou merchants. While some characters are generous and gentrified, the majority are depicted as greedy, stingy, litigious, or lecherous, as well as being subordinate to scholar-officials.⁵⁴ In the rest of the country, these negative images of Huizhou merchants overshadowed the positive ones, as can be seen in these popular stories. All of these collections were printed in the post-Wang Daokun era, but they were based on the popular stories in circulation during Wang's lifetime, an era when Huizhou merchants emerged as a dominant mercantile group. Within this cultural atmosphere, Huizhou merchants and their defenders responded to such sentiments by emphasizing their moral worth through biographic titles such as *chushi*, implicitly referring to their educated or culturally positive characteristics (and by implication also to their links to prominent local lineages).

Wang Daokun did not invent the term *chushi*. It had already appeared in *Prominent Lineages in Xin'an* and even earlier individual genealogies. During the mid-century, however, the official prefectural gazetteer still reserved the term for scholars or literati who were not titled (either because they had failed or had not participated in the exams); it was not used for righteous merchants.⁵⁵ A new and even loftier term was *sufeng*, literally meaning “enfeoffed without a noble title,” which was used to refer to a successful merchant as gentleman-like, yet without a title or an examination degree. The term had first been coined by Sima Qian to refer to successful traders, but had fallen into disuse until, to the best of my knowledge, it reemerged in Huizhou documents during Wang Daokun's time with this new meaning. Fang Yulu, Wang Daokun's junior in-law, was a famous ink merchant and also a poet. One of his poems identifies great enterprise with *sufeng*: “In untitled nobility there is a great enterprise; inscrutable discourse brings out famed figures.”⁵⁶ With the term *sufeng*, Huizhou merchants equated themselves with the local gentry. As the most important token of this change in status, especially given the kinship values in the region, the *sufeng* were now considered as pursuing a vocation that could enable them to “promote our lineages” (appendix, entries 29 and 31), which, along with “glorifying our ancestors,” previously had been reserved only for kinsmen who had earned exam degrees.⁵⁷ Still, merchants in the late Ming were in no position to replace the gentry, which had replaced the aristocratic clans after the Tang-Song transition to become the new leading social class. Instead, it was a mutual penetration between the two social categories that took place in Huizhou.

Out of this mutual penetration emerged what can be called the Huizhou social strategy, alternating among brothers or generations between classical learning (*ru*) and trade (*gu*), which Wang Daokun promoted via his documentation of social practice in his biographies (appendix, entry 37):

The capital of Xin'an, with one scholar for every three merchants, is indeed a land rich in literary traditions. Just as merchants seek handsome profits, scholars strive for high honor. Only after one has exhausted his effort on behalf of Confucian learning with no result does he let go of study and fasten on to trade. Once he has joined those who enjoy high profits, he prefers his descendants, for the sake of their future, to let go of trade and fasten on to study. Letting go and fastening on thus alternates so that one can enjoy either an income of ten thousand bushels of grain or the prestige of a retinue of one thousand horse carriages. This can be likened to the revolution of a wheel, with its spokes pointing to the ground in turn. We Xin'an people are never devoted to commerce alone, but are judicious in choosing our career path.⁵⁸

It was in the context of describing two merchant families who had produced the two highest metropolitan *jinshi* degree holders, including the biographer himself, that Wang Daokun made his famous statement, “In what way is a good merchant inferior to a prominent scholar?!”⁵⁹ Historians have tended to invest much into this statement, seeing in it merchants' decisive climbing of the social

ladder.⁶⁰ Although this assessment probably is not incorrect, it has sometimes been taken out of context. Wang Daokun was clearly speaking of the obviously successful Huizhou social strategy: merchant families strove to join gentry circles while the gentry accommodated to trade. In addition, the adamant tone of Wang's statement is itself revealing. He was massaging the collective ego of merchants, some of whom still viewed themselves as "mean traders," especially amid the late Ming atmosphere of condemning the craze for money. At the same time, he was assuaging those sojourning merchants who needed to engage in trade to support brothers pursuing exam success, or those students-turned-merchants who were homesick and frequently complained about the unfortunate fate of sojourning.⁶¹

Most importantly, the Huizhou social strategy was deeply rooted in the local kinship tradition, as the alternating pursuit of exam and commercial success would not have worked so effectively without local mercantile lineage investment practices. As a local saying put it: "Use [the wealth from] commerce to pursue literary studies, use literary studies to enter officialdom, use official posts to protect commercial adventures."⁶² As seen in the appendix, Wang Daokun took pains to report the family life and kinship-related activities of Huizhou merchants, often with far more detail than business pursuits. Even in those sections of a biography that focus on business, we still learn a good deal about the working of kinship connections, including hiring poor kinsmen as workers (appendix, entry 32), or kinsmen who teamed up to trade outside of Huizhou, or wives who contributed their dowry for business start-up capital (appendix, entry 23). Why, then, was Wang Daokun so concerned with family-lineage aspects of merchant life?

Timothy Brook, in his beautifully crafted history of Ming commerce and culture, perceptively illustrates a convergence of the merchant and gentry by describing the former's mimicry of the latter's cultural gestures, while also briefly quoting Wang Daokun on Huizhou families that alternated between the two vocations.⁶³ The unstated assumption of this perspective of a shifting identity is still class-bound. But in Huizhou, quite simply, merchants and home lineages or mercantile lineages were inseparable. When Wang Daokun wrote about Huizhou merchants, he was reflecting not just merchants as individuals, but also local mercantile lineage culture as a whole; this coverage was both a reflection and reinforcement of the ongoing social practice. In Huizhou, personal identity was kinship defined, especially after the mid-sixteenth-century publication of *Prominent Lineages in Xin'an*. This is one of the reasons why spouse selection highlighted lineage affiliation without regard to wealth. By extension, class distinction was overshadowed by kinship distinction, especially for a prosperous and populous lineage that constituted a socially complicated community itself, including the various social groupings of gentry, merchants, peasants, and artisans (in addition to non-kin tenants or bondservants).⁶⁴ And in Huizhou, the demographic and social domination by those "prominent lineages" was overwhelming.

Here we see another potential reason for why Wang Daokun used the identity-blurring terms *chushi* and *sufeng* to refer to merchants, many of whom had once been examination students. The term *gu* (trade, trader) is only used in the biographic narratives, but more often than not it is used as a verb, indicating not an identity but the activity. At the same time, the biographer was often careful to underscore the previous pursuit of study or the continued love of book reading by these men. In a typical Huizhou expression, they “traded and yet loved being Confucian” (*gu’er haoru*; appendix, entry 45). Based on his own experience, as well as his observation of many local families and lineages, Wang Daokun wrote about merchants in their relations with gentry culture on the one hand and with home lineages on the other. This alternating or shifting gentry-merchant identity was key to the prosperous Huizhou mercantile lineage culture, which in turn shored up the capital for the successful pursuit of learning. Merchant status was indeed elevated, and yet this did not lead to the creation of a distinctive, or independent, merchant culture, due to the dominance of gentry culture or, in Huizhou, the gentrified mercantile lineage culture as a whole.⁶⁵

Wang Daokun singled out one ingredient of Huizhou mercantile ethics, *jiexia* (chivalrous righteousness and generosity), to highlight virtually all of his merchant biographies (see appendix). Notably, Wang Daokun even used a failed merchant but a good family man named Shen Wenzhen to emphasize the significance of generous righteousness: no matter how much he had lost in business, Shen upheld the principle of righteousness (*dajie*) by being devoted to his mother and constantly urging his son to pursue Confucian learning (appendix, entry 4).⁶⁶ This emphasis may have been a reflection of Wang Daokun’s personal character and predilections. Perhaps it was for the same reason that he loved the novel *Water Margin*, which features many righteous and generous outlaws. Wang Daokun also appears to have been a person of integrity and righteousness. Despite a dispute with Grand Secretariat Zhang Juzheng, which led to his early retirement, he still included Zhang’s felicitation commemorating the seventieth birthday of Wang’s father in his genealogy. In fact, this was a somewhat risky choice, as Zhang had by then been disgraced by the Wanli emperor.⁶⁷ A more notable example has to do with the different attitudes Wang Daokun and his good friend Wang Shizhen took toward the disgraced Zhang. Both Wangs wrote letters celebrating the seventieth birthday of Zhang’s father. Wang Shizhen first published his letter in a collection of his essays, which became widely known. Six years later, after Zheng Juzheng had been condemned, Wang Shizhen excised the letter from his collection when it was reprinted. When Wang Daokun published his collection of essays toward the end of his life, however, he included his commemorative letter without changing a word.⁶⁸

Personal character aside, Wang Daokun may have highlighted the merchant virtue of righteous generosity because it was not only good for assuring merchants long-term success in the outside commercial realm but also, more importantly, crucial to the fostering of home kinship communities. Wang Daokun occasionally

mentions the righteous deeds of Huizhou merchants in business transactions (appendix, entry 33), but frequently features their righteous generosity in helping kinspeople (appendix, entries 7, 12, 21, 23, 30, 32, 38, 44) and contributions to consolidating home lineage institutions, ranging from setting up ritual land and building ancestral halls to reclaiming ancestral tomb land (appendix, entries 1, 15, 17, 18, 22, 31, 36, 40, 43, 44, 45).

Clearly, merchants' kinship-related activities, along with the alternating pursuit of commerce and exam success, were the central concerns of Wang Daokun's merchant accounts, and they were the main characteristics of Huizhou mercantile lineage culture. Simply put, especially at a time when it was widely claimed that local customs were in decline (appendix, entry 26) and increased numbers of sojourning merchants posed a threat to kinship cohesiveness, nothing was more important for local lineages—financially, at least—than securing support from the vast resources of these sojourning men. That importance could be realized only if they were steeped in the values of righteous generosity and care for their families and lineages. Highlighting and securing the financial contributions of merchants to enhancing home lineages certainly also raised their social status, further blurring the merchant-gentry boundary within the home community. As Joanna Handlin Smith has astutely noted, invoking Lewis Hyne, charity “is a way of negotiating the boundary of class . . . it is the ‘tyranny of gift,’ which uses the bonding power of generosity to manipulate people.”⁶⁹

Writing biographies of merchants thus was itself a part of constructing new mercantile lineage ethics. Moreover, these merchant accounts would most likely end up being reprinted in the genealogies of the profiled merchants' home lineages, again, a key lineage institution. In the late Ming, after all, the genealogy was the best, or most readily available, venue in which to publicize these accounts (in part explaining why merchants were eager to make contributions to home genealogy compilations).⁷⁰ Five of Wang Daokun's biographies on the Wang merchants were included in his own genealogy; eventually these accounts would also be included in his *Taihan Collection*. Wang Daokun, given his reputation as a famed scholar-official in retirement, was solicited as an author of merchant biographies because his name would glorify not just the profiled merchants, but also their home lineages when those biographies were printed in their genealogies.⁷¹

Most of the merchants Wang Daokun profiled dealt in salt, which makes sense given the Huizhou dominance in the salt trade and his own family's deeply involvement in that same trade. A most vivid expression of the relation of Huizhou merchants with their home lineages, again with a focus on salt merchants, is offered in an epitaph Wang Daokun penned in memory of a distant uncle who “traded salt in Huai [Yangzhou] while building an [ancestral] hall at home” (*Yanjia zai Huai, tanggou zai li*).⁷²

Wang Daokun's focus on salt merchants may call into question the reliability or objectivity of his narratives (as does the fact that he only profiled “good,” successful

men). This nevertheless reflects the nature of virtually all literati narratives of social life in late imperial times. Literati always had their own preferred focus in their writings. They selected details and framed their stories to highlight or convey their preferred meanings or discourses. The merchant stories Wang Daokun chose to tell illuminated some key aspects of mercantile lineage culture, including alternating between trade and learning, sojourning men's contributions to home lineages, and ideal mercantile ethics. From other source materials as well as recent studies, however, we can be assured that his narratives reflected the larger pattern of local mercantile lineages as well as the deeds and passions of Huizhou merchants as a collective group (if not as individuals).⁷³ Moreover, they were also endowed with a prescriptive power of further enhancing the larger social pattern, influencing others to follow the suit. Wang Daokun's narratives undoubtedly played a role in contributing to the trends shown in the following numbers and records. His home county in the subsequent Qing dynasty produced five top examination graduates (*zhuangyuan*), 296 metropolitan *jinshi* degree holders, and nearly one thousand provincial *juren* degree holders (including Shexian natives registered at home and elsewhere) between 1664 and 1904.⁷⁴ From 1646 to 1802, during the second boom era of Huizhou merchants (the first one being in Wang Daokun's time), fewer than 250 Lianghuai salt merchant families, many of which were patrilineally linked to mercantile lineages back in Wang Daokun's home county, generated 139 *jinshi* and 208 *juren*.⁷⁵ The "glories" Huizhou mercantile lineages achieved in the post-Wang Daokun era should not be attributed to Wang alone; they had grown out of a strategy established in the late Ming era. In other words, what Wang Daokun promoted was a shared mercantile lineage discourse.

FEMALE CHASTITY AND RECORDING THE OTHER HALF OF MERCANTILE LINEAGE

As notable as Wang Daokun's attention to merchants is his profiling of Huizhou women. This is manifested not just in the sheer number of biographies on the two social groups, but also in his concentration on the social value they shared, with a gendered division key to making mercantile lineages work smoothly. In his *Taihan Collection* alone, we find at least sixty-six records on women, written in various formats including longevity tributes (*shouxu*), biographies (*zhuan*), life descriptions (*xingzhuang*), epitaphs (*muzhiming*), prayers (*jiwen*), and tomb inscriptions (*mubiao*). In addition, there are about thirty more pieces in the format of epitaphs or tomb inscriptions jointly covering both husband and wife. Many of the women profiled were linked to merchants or gentrymen (or scholar-officials) either as their wives, mothers, or daughters, and many were profiled for their role in maintaining harmonious and successful family relations within the larger mercantile lineage. Huizhou merchants' wives played an important role in assisting husbands' commercial careers beyond Huizhou, while they themselves

lived extremely frugal lives back home taking care of parents-in-law and raising children. They also helped sustain the Huizhou social strategy by instructing or supporting sons in alternating between pursuit of examination and commercial success. Wang Daokun's many biographic accounts of Huizhou women deserve attention for their illumination of family life, gender relations, and other aspects of social life, but this section focuses on the biographic accounts of female chastity and integrity (*jielie*), as these female values help illustrate another key ingredient of Huizhou mercantile lineage culture in the late Ming: the formation of the cult of female chastity.

The value underlying *jielie* is firm integrity that calls for righteous and heroic deeds of self-sacrifice, such as lifelong widowhood or suicide upon being widowed, comparable to the *jiexia* Wang Daokun used to characterize good businessmen. Only eight pieces on *jielie* (in the forms of biographies, epitaphs, and prayers) are included in the *Taihan Collection*, one of which nevertheless covers seven chastity martyrs linked to Wang Daokun's own lineage. The limited number of *jielie* pieces included in the *Taihan Collection* does not matter much, given that Wang Daokun also covered many such women in his family genealogy and further compiled his own version of *Biographies of Exemplary Women* (*Lienü zhuan*), indicating his uppermost attention to the matter of female virtue, and *jielie* integrity above all.

Wang Daokun was among the first famous high-ranking scholar-officials to reinvigorate the *Biographies of Exemplary Women* tradition in the late Ming.⁷⁶ It not only expanded the collection to sixteen volumes, but also started the popular late Ming trend of illustrating such books for women. For those exemplars featuring Huizhou women, he added his characteristic comments after the narrative.⁷⁷ Of the sixteen volumes of Wang's expanded version, the last two cover female exemplars, mostly chastity martyrs, from the second half of the Ming (up to Wang's time), more than half of whom are from Huizhou, fourteen in total, including four chaste maidens (*zhenlie* or *zhennü*).⁷⁸

One chastity story concerns a Ms. Fang Xizhang, the daughter of a local (gentry?) man named Fang Haozhi of Wuyuan (which explains, perhaps, the use of her given name; most female exemplars were simply identified by kinship terms). Ms. Fang lost her husband Hu Henghua almost immediately after their wedding. Upon recovering from fainting three times, she decided to use all of her dowry to finance Hu's funeral and also to build an empty tomb for herself, on the right side of Hu's grave. She served her mother-in-law well for a full day before she went to her husband's tomb, kneeling down in the company of her mother-in-law to tell the dead man that she had completed all she needed to do. She then hanged herself upon returning home. After the narrative, Wang Daokun noted that Wuyuan, as "the ancestral place of Zhu Xi," had no lack of exemplars of *zhongxiaojieyi* (loyalty, filial piety, chastity, and righteousness); he acclaimed Ms. Fang for being on a par with any of the ancient chastity martyrs.⁷⁹

Another such biography is about a woman from the Shaxi Baos of Shexian, who was married to Wang Yingsu, a sojourning merchant who worked hard but had no success. Yingsu's family barely scraped by, and she alone took meticulous care of her parents-in-law for ten years until, in 1564, her husband returned home after having fallen terribly ill. Realizing he would soon die, Wang Yingsu suggested to his mother that Ms. Bao, still young and having endured hardships over the past ten years, be remarried to a proper man after his death. Overhearing the conversation, Ms. Bao felt deeply wounded. She first looked around for good physicians, talked to every kinsman for possible support, and prepared all the things needed for her husband's funeral. She then told Yingsu, "I've heard what you said to Mother. My only desire is to follow you in death!" After making all preparations for the funeral for her husband, she took poison and died, sitting with equanimity in the main bedroom, firm in her commitment "to serve her husband in the underworld." Three days later, Wang Yingsu passed away. In a separate comment after the narrative, Wang Daokun praised Ms. Bao for being as outstanding as any chastity martyr of medieval times (*zhonggu zhenlie*).⁸⁰

Wang Daokun's renewed expansion of *Biographies of Exemplary Women* undoubtedly contributed to the rising cult of female chastity, a hallmark of late Ming culture (explored in depth in chapter 4). This female chastity cult was male-centered. It was also kinship-centered in the works of Wang Daokun; often lurking in the background of the stories he told of female martyrs was the patrilineal establishment of local lineages. Highly revealing is the tale of Maiden Fang of Qimen, who was engaged to the exam student Li Zongmin of Xiuning. She was "widowed" at sixteen before the marriage could be held. Devastated but devoted, she insisted on participating in Li's funeral, which would amount to publicly acknowledging her commitment to her dead fiancé. While her parents tried to talk her into selecting another suitable man to marry, Maiden Fang said that even though she had never met her husband, since she was engaged to Li, she would be "the wife of Li while alive and the ghost of Li in death." She refused to eat anything for several days before her parents realized that her commitment would not be altered. They prepared a sizable dowry and sent the chaste maiden to Li's home village. Several hundreds of the Li kinspeople, sad yet pleased, all came out to welcome Maiden Fang. Upon seeing Li's coffin, she threw herself to the ground and wailed. Wailing day and night in rags, she wanted to commit suicide. Her parents-in-law and Li's kinspeople tried in tears to calm her down. When she finally pulled herself together, she said, "my husband is my heaven; with heaven gone, I am dead." Eventually, realizing her duty to serve her fiancé's family, she gave up the plan to kill herself and lived a widowed life, taking good care of her parents-in-law.⁸¹ More extreme than the kneeling, and even, perhaps, the suicide, of Widow Fang (Hu Henghua's wife) was the "widowed" Maiden Fang who performed a lifelong obeisance to her dead fiancé, his parents, and his kinspeople.

This male- and kinship-centered thread in Wang Daokun's *Biographies of Exemplary Women* also permeated the narratives included in his *Taihan Collection*. Characteristically, none of the women are given personal names, except the chaste widow Sun, née Fan, who is listed as having the revealing personal name, Jingui (Golden Inner Quarters), which was given to her by her mother-in-law. Her mother-in-law talked Jingui out of committing suicide upon being widowed and treated her as a daughter; the devoted widow treated her parents-in-law as her own parents. At the beginning of the narrative, Wang Daokun proudly noted that both the Caoshi Suns and Lintang Fans stood out in the booming town of Haiyang as two prominent lineages (actually mercantile lineages, as can be shown from other sources), and they intermarried for generations. Toward the end of the narrative, he further compares the way of being a wife as identical to the way of being an official (*qidao chendao yiye*); both lay in absolute devotion to the patriarch (*zhuanhu baozhu*).⁸²

The most notable account of women exemplars in Wang's collection is "Biographies of the Seven Chastity Martyrs" (Qilie zhuan), which recounts the "heroic" deeds of seven women from his own lineage; these biographies are also covered in his genealogy.⁸³ Instead of supplying comments only at the end of the narrative, Wang Daokun also adds opening comments, which promote the characteristics of his descent line: "My lineage has stood out in our prefecture for a long time. Not only are the men talented; even our virtuous women are always notable. Since my coming of age, seven notable kinswomen among my relatives have martyred themselves to maintain their chastity. These chastity martyrs are either from or married into my lineage, and the martyring took place within the past thirty years." The first among them is the wife (again from the Caoshi Suns) of Wang Yongxi, a poor vendor from the prominent Songmingshan Wangs. As Wang Daokun tells it, Yongxi began to develop a serious disease a few years after marriage. Similar to the story of Wang Yingsu and his wife, Yongxi wanted his wife to remarry after he died, but his wife was committed to serving only one man in her life; she took poison and killed herself ten days before Yongxi died. Perhaps it was no coincidence that both Yingsu and Yongxi were equally unsuccessful in business, and that their wives met a similar fate.

The second of the biographies concerns the daughter of Wang Tianguai, whose husband died while sojourning to Luzhou only several months after their wedding. She fainted three times and wanted to die for her husband. But since her mother-in-law was ill, the woman continued to take care of her. Soon her mother-in-law passed away, however, she sought a moment of privacy during the Lantern Festival in 1553 to commit suicide. She was just twenty years old.

Two years later, a Wang woman threw herself into a river upon the death of her sick husband. Seven years after this, a woman née Cheng, the wife of Wang Yizhong, the deputy governor of Guangxi, committed suicide when Yizhong was

killed by bandits during a local revolt. Upon committing suicide, she was honored with a spirit tablet in her husband's shrine. In 1565, Wang Yingsu's wife committed suicide. This story, also covered in Wang's *Biographies of Exemplary Women*, suggests the importance it signaled to the author, underscoring the kinship-centered values behind the martyred deeds of Wang's wife.

During the first year of the Longqing reign (1567), two more women martyred themselves for chastity. One was the daughter of Fang Wei, who was engaged to Wang Fengshi at two. Fifteen years later Wang died before the marriage could be consummated, so the girl committed suicide on her way to Wang's tomb. She was then buried with her fiancé in the same grave. The same story is also covered in *Biographies of Exemplary Women*, where Wang Daokun proudly notes, "the Wangs and Fangs have intermarried for generations."⁸⁴ The next biography concerns Ms. Li, who at nineteen became the second wife of Wang Yingxuan, who was wealthy but not in good health (and apparently much older than Ms. Li). Upon being widowed at twenty-two, she arranged for all of Wang's wealth and property to be divided among her two step-sons before committing suicide.⁸⁵ In the concluding remarks, Wang Daokun again boasts how outstanding his lineage was in producing virtuous women who maintained lifelong widowhood or martyred themselves for chastity (*qijie yilie*), whether poor or wealthy.

Another case features a second Maiden Fang. But in this case, what is notable is not just Wang Daokun's ultimate concern for his lineage as a whole but also his direct involvement and cold-blooded treatment of the martyred woman. Wang Daokun comments, "To starve to death is a small matter; but to lose one's chastity is a great matter," echoing the infamous statement by the Song dynasty neo-Confucian Cheng Yi. Maiden Fang was betrothed to Daoqi (Daokun's cousin) at age twelve. Five years later, in 1579, just months prior to the planned wedding, Daoqi fell ill and died. Kinspeople all tried to console Ms. Fang. Wang Daokun, too, showed up at Daoqi's house (where Ms. Fang was staying), doing nothing except hear out this not-yet-dead (*weiwangren*) woman on her reasoning for wanting to follow her betrothed in death. Wang Daokun, the most respected and powerful elder in the lineage at the time, signaled his endorsement of her decision through his silence. That night after bathing and dressing in her finest, Ms. Fang hanged herself and, as Wang Daokun notes with macabre delight, "an iridescence from her face illuminated the room." When she was encoffined the next day, "her face looked as if she were alive." Wang Daokun then led the entire lineage in presiding over a funeral for Ms. Fang.⁸⁶

Other chastity martyr narratives included in *Taihan Collection* look largely similar in terms of emphasizing the kinship mooring of the martyrs as well as their determined integrity. Notably, Wang Daokun also included eight *jielie* records in his genealogy, including "Biographies of the Seven Chastity Martyrs." While female virtues included loving mothers or mothers-in-law, devoted daughters or daughters-in-law, and principled wives, it was the value of *jielie* that Wang Daokun's writings highlighted as central to the patrilineal lineage.

This era saw the formation of the female chastity cult, during which Huizhou emerged as a center of *jielie*. It is revealing to compare the region to another center of the female chastity cult, Quanzhou Prefecture in Fujian. From 1522 to 1644, Quanzhou recorded 152 female suicides (131 cases upon the death of the husband and twenty-one upon the death of a betrothed), whereas Shexian County alone generated 191 cases (174 cases upon the death of the husband and seventeen upon the death of a betrothed), as well as 596 lifelong widows.⁸⁷ Turning to sources internal to Huizhou, we see the intensification of chastity practice around the mid-sixteenth century, just at the time when Huizhou mercantile lineage culture took shape. Although the 1502 edition contains accounts of chaste women from the Tang dynasty onward, the 1566 edition expands them by roughly 25 percent, adding mostly devoted widows in the years between the two publications (meaning that Huizhou over the previous sixty-four years had produced about one-fourth of all devoted widows in the region over the past one thousand years).⁸⁸ The compilers of the 1566 gazetteer quoted Zhu Xi as saying that the Xin'an landscape of steep peaks and pure streams had helped nurture women's virtue as well as men's integrity, and then quickly added that local gentry's inculcation had also contributed to this moral molding.⁸⁹

But it was in this stronghold of kinship settlements, as revealed in Wang Daokun's writings, that kinswomen's *jielie* practice reached a cultic level in the late Ming. This specific contextualization appears to shed new light upon the current interpretation of the chastity cult. Thus far, scholarship has tried to locate the impetus for this social trend in various causes from literati activism (or male anxiety in general terms) to changing state policies under the Ming and Qing dynasties, evolving property-status laws, and mounting demographic pressures.⁹⁰ The causal link between lineage institutions and the chastity cult has not been properly accounted for, or at best just assumed in terms of the apparent compatibility between women's virtues and Confucian kinship values. Moreover, scholars have not fully accounted for the reasons for the rise of the female chastity cult at a time when China enjoyed rapid commercialization with profound and wide-ranging impacts upon society and culture.

For Huizhou, how did the rise of local merchants in the late Ming factor in these concurrent trends? In other words, how was female chastity related to mercantile lineage culture? Wang Daokun does not explicitly comment on this question, although he authored several accounts of exemplary wives of merchants. Nevertheless, a parallel preoccupation with merchants and women clearly surfaces in his biographic writings. Was there an underlying cause for this joint emphasis? I will examine this question in the following chapter.

CONCLUSION

Wang Daokun is best known for having profiled a large number of Huizhou merchants, and these accounts have been used to explore Huizhou men's economic behavior and literary value. In my recounting of these merchant biographies, I

have instead highlighted their social life. This reading exhibits new meanings, especially when observed in combination with Wang Daokun's genealogy on the one hand and his accounts of chaste women on the other. Out of this approach emerges a greatly enriched account of the mercantile lineage discourse first delineated in *Prominent Lineages in Xin'an*.

Wang Daokun's special format of genealogy in *The Genealogy of the Sixteen Branches of the Lingshanyuan Wangs* is almost unique, but this may be a case of the exception proving the rule in terms of Huizhou genealogies all aspiring to trace back to prominent historical figures. It claimed the utmost pedigree for the Huizhou Wangs as being descended from the Duke of Zhou, while at the same time covering and thereby elevating the commoner kinspeople. Here we see the close link between the symbolic center and local settlement of the lineage. This was certainly not in conflict with the moral-leveling in the thinking of Cheng Minzheng, which was now more notably embodied in the populist school of Wang Yangming, the greatest Ming dynasty hero for Wang Daokun.

In his biographies, Wang Daokun justified commercial activities while at the same time prescribing a Confucian mode of mercantile ethics through his descriptions of the righteous deeds of good merchants. He appeased Huizhou merchants by equating them with gentry, even as some Huizhou merchants, including his own successful grandfather, still referred to themselves as "mean traders." While highlighting the righteous conduct of Huizhou merchants, Wang Daokun also appears to have employed the tactic used in *Prominent Lineages in Xin'an* to ward off outside criticism, which had intensified in the late sixteenth century. The virtue of righteousness is highlighted in virtually every merchant biography Wang Daokun wrote, as it was key to keeping sojourning merchants bound to their home lineages during a time of rapid commercialization, which had the potential to erode the home bonds of sojourners.⁹¹ All of this helps to explain why lineage identity, instead of class or vocational belonging, was critically important for Huizhou merchants. They were mostly *chushi*, untitled but educated gentrymen. More importantly, they were members of mercantile lineages, which had long been established as "prominent," with ancestral roots purportedly going back to medieval or older aristocratic families from the orthodox Confucian heartland of north China, and with their Xin'an ancestry further glorified by examination success and literati accomplishments. In the process of writing about merchants, Wang Daokun not only raised their status, he also eloquently described the practices among Huizhou mercantile lineages—that is, their strategy of alternating between the two most important vocations of learning and trade. Because of the staying power of higher gentry culture, or gentrified mercantile lineage culture, Huizhou merchants did not forge their own independent identity. Indeed, Wang Daokun never described a merchant who had disavowed the Huizhou social strategy of alternating between learning and trade or disassociated himself from his home lineage.

Huizhou women, of course, were also attached to their own or their husbands' lineages, and this, too, was reflected in Wang Daokun's biographies of women. He

highlighted women's *jielie*, which paired with men's *jiexia*. This set of characteristics not only reflected but also helped to shape the emerging cult of chastity in the late Ming. As we shall see in the next chapter, this gender discourse so central to Huizhou kinship society was intimately intertwined with the material realities of mercantile lineages in a time of expanding commercialization.

In the post-Wang Daokun era, the narrative of worthy merchants and chaste women from Huizhou reached a new level. The official gazetteer of the Lianghuai salt region, compiled in the late seventeenth century, at which time a new commercial surge began to propel Huizhou merchants to even more remarkable financial success, features a large number of "good" merchants (mostly from the late Ming and contemporary Huizhou) in four lengthy *juan* chapters: "Filial and Friendly" (Xiaoyou), "Cultivated Behavior" (Zhixing), "Honest Behavior" (Duxing), and "Espousing Righteousness" (Shangyi). Concurring with (if not directly following) Wang Daokun's narratives, these chapters detail the righteous and trustworthy deeds of Huizhou merchants not just in business transactions but, especially, in their generous contributions to enhancing home lineage institutions and other public welfare endeavors.⁹²

In a separate "Merchant Customs" (Shangsu) section, we find an entire paragraph paying tribute to Huizhou merchants. It glorifies their family backgrounds and the tradition of learning: "Salt dealers from Huizhou are mostly descendants from prominent lineages, with pure and glorious kinship and with a family life marked by ritual comity. [They] are versed in the classical books from the ancient sages that dwell on benevolence and righteousness, having long been immersed in the teachings of the Literary Master [Zhu Xi]." The passage goes on to note how "people from near and afar heartily" admired Huizhou merchants for their "forthrightness and integrity," "ingenuity and resolve," and "experience and acumen." Most importantly, they were "chivalrously righteous and generous" (*renxia kang-kai*), especially when it came to making donations to set up schools and charities.⁹³

Here we again see the essence of Huizhou mercantile lineage tradition, first conveyed, even if vaguely, through *Prominent Lineages in Xin'an* and further enhanced in the hands of Wang Daokun. Huizhou merchants were under pressure to act righteously as they came from local prominent lineages that were steeped in family traditions of studying the classics. Similar to Wang Daokun's own family practice, dating from the time prior to his grandfather, the family strategy was to alternate between farming and learning (*gengdu*); farming then turned into trade as commercialization accelerated in the sixteenth century. The causal relation between the righteousness of merchants and their prominent learned family backgrounds is not specified, but nevertheless is taken as a given.

It turns out that a leading compiler of and a chief financial contributor to the Lianghuai gazetteer was none other than a top salt merchant named Cheng Jun (1638–1704), who, now permanently settled in Yangzhou, was himself from a prominent mercantile lineage in Shexian, known as the Censhan Chengs.⁹⁴ Although a lower-exam degree holder (another *chushi* student-turned-merchant),

he was widely respected as “thoroughly immersed in the salt dealing rules in combination with the learning of his family tradition,” wrote the Lianghuai top administrator Cui Hua in his preface to the gazetteer. Cui Hua also commended Cheng Jun’s inclusion of stories about the ordinary (degreeless) people covered in the gazetteer.⁹⁵ This editorship of the gazetteer, like Wang Daokun reporting on local Huizhou men in trade, calls attention to two new points.

First, it suggests the dual nature of the recording. On the one hand, Cheng Jun was an insider, having access to information about Huizhou merchants. But on the other, on account of his insider status, his insight was inherently biased or skewed. However, while the gazetteer narratives should not be taken at face value, the sheer number of good merchants recorded is still revealing. If we treat Huizhou merchants as a collective group, and as a group closely linked to their home lineages, and if we believe that their espoused business code of righteousness and honesty enhanced merchants’ long-term profits, then the success of Huizhou merchants suggests that collectively they acted righteously. Their good deeds in other respects, such as contributions to enhancing home lineage institutions, are much easier to verify. What is recorded in the Lianghuai gazetteer, as well as by Wang Daokun, was not just prescriptive, but also descriptive, “describing” not only the individual deeds but also the collective behavior through the telling of individual stories. Indeed, in this case, the credibility of any individual story matters little if it reveals a larger historical pattern.

Second, Cheng Jun went one step further than Wang Daokun. By compiling the gazetteer of the Lianghuai salt region, he officially codified Huizhou mercantile lineage culture and promoted it to the entire realm (different from merchant accounts printed in the *Taihan Collection* or in local genealogies, both of which were privately produced documents). Here we see another case for the potential of the local culture to have an impact well beyond the home locale. The mercantile lineage culture that Wang Daokun promoted was deeply rooted in Huizhou, but it spread to Yangzhou and beyond. It produced a large number of higher-exam degree holders and merchants who were placed in official posts or succeeded in markets throughout the realm.

For the Lianghuai gazetteer, Cheng Jun also compiled a lengthy volume on virtuous women, most of whom came from his ancestral prefecture, placed immediately after the four volumes covering worthy mercantile figures.⁹⁶ This attentive, voluminous pairing of virtuous women with righteous merchants, the two key demographic groupings within Huizhou mercantile lineages, most notably started with Wang Daokun in the late Ming. Its full meaning will become apparent only after looking deeply into how commercialization altered local lineage-family structure so as to propel Huizhou into the center of the female chastity cult. Like Cheng Minzheng, who best represented his age by marking the rise of Huizhou consciousness, Wang Daokun best represented his age by promoting Huizhou mercantile lineage culture.