

The Local Religious Order

Thus far, we have established the localist turn represented by Cheng Minzheng's impulses in promoting Huizhou and the Huizhou Chengs, the formation of Huizhou identity as embodied in *Prominent Lineages in Xin'an*, the deepening of Huizhou identity in the relationships between home lineages and sojourning traders and between the gentry and merchants, as well as the gender dynamics particular to mercantile lineage culture. All of these facets of Huizhou identity were manifested in the symbolic realm of ritual performance. In fact, no other dimension of Huizhou culture more saliently featured the Ming localist turn than its religious order, as best embodied in the patterned assembly of deities headed by Wang Hua.

Wang Hua was the leading patron deity of the region from the Song dynasty onward, and around the mid-Ming, this deified seventh-century hero emerged as the de facto head of the Huizhou pantheon. This was a result of the localized transformation of the Ming state religious system, as Wang Hua emerged as the local proxy of the official City God. In the process, a large number of popular and locally worshipped gods and spirits, as well as some powerful deities from the institutionalized religions of Buddhism and Daoism, were incorporated to make the regional pantheon. This was the religious expression of Huizhou consciousness and Huizhou identity.

By looking at the local pantheon, this chapter also develops a new perspective from which to analyze popular religion, at least for the Huizhou region. Examining the seemingly “messy” landscape of popular cults from the perspective of the local pantheon, rather than focusing on one specific deity or demon, has the advantage of better contextualizing and historicizing local cults. This enables us to make better sense of the various issues surrounding Chinese popular religion, such as the interaction between high and low cultures—as well as between empire-wide and local cultures—and exchange between cultural representations and social practices. The materials discussed here suggest a substantive integration

of the local religious landscape; this cultural integration was not imposed by the state, but rather was orchestrated, or negotiated, by local lineage elites. Ultimately, my observations on local ritual performance speak to the concerns of social historians: this chapter deciphers the meanings of the local pantheon in light of both changing state-society relations and Huizhou mercantile lineage culture.

Merchants and kinswomen were some of the key members of kin groupings, and their relations with the larger lineage (as well as with each other) were expressed and negotiated via the Huizhou religious order. The Wang Hua pantheon was hierarchically structured and served to control the power of many popular deities that were incorporated into its symbolic network, including the collective God of Wealth, the Wuchang pentad spirit. The pantheon channeled the spirit's power—the symbolic representation of merchant money—to good use while averting its potential harmful impacts. This patron deity of Huizhou merchants also acquired a gendered role, helping to police kinswomen's sexuality and assure their well-being in childbirth, both critically important for sojourning merchants and their home mercantile lineages. Furthermore, as Wang Hua was also worshipped as the apical ancestor of all the Huizhou Wangs, this tutelary deity of the region was turned into the generic patron deity of all the Huizhou lineages. In this sense, the Wang Hua pantheon was an extension of Confucian ancestral worship. Indeed, the making of the Huizhou pantheon marked the rise of regional consciousness and reflected the dynamics of mercantile lineage culture in the ritual realm.

MODEL PRAYERS TO THE DEITIES AND THE MAKING OF THE HUIZHOU PANTHEON

The best source material on the Huizhou pantheon in Ming times is the newly uncovered rare book *Model Prayers to the Deities* (Qishen zouge). This is a vast ritual guidebook, comprised of six volumes, that contains encyclopedic data about Huizhou's local cults. Its most notable feature is the depiction of the regional pantheon, which was headed by the official City God and the "God of Xin'an," Wang Hua. *Model Prayers to the Deities* is undated, but internal evidence suggests it was a mid- to late Ming text.¹ Quite intriguingly, the original compilation of the handbook is attributed to Cheng Minzheng. This religious handbook was, most likely, first printed in the sixteenth century, after Cheng Minzheng had passed away (whether or not the attribution of authorship to Cheng is correct will be discussed later); it was frequently reprinted in Ming and Qing times and probably revised or "updated" in the process until it was finalized in the Ming version now available. It covers all kinds of prayers used in local popular communal and family rituals. It also reflects the triumph of the Huizhou printing industry, itself a key artifact of local mercantile lineage culture, in publishing the scripted versions of local prayers.

TABLE 5. The Wang Hua pantheon

Upper Register	Lower Register
City God	Attendants on the Left and Right
Wang Hua	Wang Hua's ninth son
Wuxian (Five Manifestations)	Bodhisattva Huaguang
Guan Dadi (Great Thearch Guan)	The Wen-Xiao Emperors
Great Thearchs Zhang and Li	Ministers Yang and Yao
Eastern Peak (Dongyue)	Our Lady Venerable Mother of Infinite Fortune (Shengmu Qianjin Furen)
Divine Emperors of the Four Peaks	Wenchang (Patron Deity of Letters)
Immortal Zhang who controlled childbirth	
Immortal Zhang	Third Prince (Zhang Xun)
Three Kings and Marquis	King Xuanling of the Zhou
Cheng Lingxi	Cheng Lingxi's son
Yue Fei's Deputy Marshals Gao and Du	Marshals Cheng and Ren
Generals Qian and Yuan	Secretary Yang San
Secretaries of Security and Fortune	Secretaries of Gentleness and Kindness
Guards of all local temples	Marshals Tang, Ge, and Zhou
Great Marshal Zhao	
The Five Furies (Wuchang)	The Hehe Deities of Fortune
Gods of Communities and Grains	Earth God (Tudi)
Earth God of the Eastern Districts	Earth God of the Postal Services
Bridge Agent	Communication Agents

Of utmost relevance here is the local pantheon featured in many of the prayers. Representative is one prayer in the first volume entitled "Offering Thanks to the Many Deities on New Year's Eve" (Chuye xie zhongshen), used on one of the most important annual ritual occasions. The prayer reveals a hierarchically arranged pantheon of deities led by the official City God and his Huizhou proxy, Wang Hua, called here "Imperially Conferred Lord Wang the Great Thearch of Yueguo" (Chifeng Yueguo Wanggong Dadi). Since Wang Hua was the de facto head of the hierarchically arranged list of gods, I call this the Wang Hua pantheon or, alternatively, the Huizhou pantheon (and not the City God pantheon). Table 5 lists the deities who made up the Huizhou pantheon invoked on New Year's Eve.² The pages of the text are split into upper and lower registers. Another prayer, invoking basically the same pantheon, is characteristically called the "Ritual Code of Xin'an" (Xin'an zhi sidian), which echoes the designation of Wang Hua as the God of Xin'an.³

Looking at table 5, we see that the top deity apparently was not Wang Hua, but the City God, which raises the question of why this should be called the Wang Hua pantheon and not the City God pantheon. The generic City God began as a nature deity, and was later recruited into the Daoist pantheon. In Tang-Song times, this regional tutelary deity was often embodied by famous historical figures, which varied by region; that is, the initially generic nature deity of the City God underwent an anthropomorphic transformation into a regional hero.⁴ Then, in the late fourteenth century, the first Ming emperor enacted a thorough reform

of the regional tutelary deities to unify the worshipping system within the new empire. As a result, a shrine to the Earth God was set up in each local community, while at higher administrative levels, from the county through the prefecture to the capital, a City God temple was built or rebuilt. The City God cult was placed in a hierarchical chain of authority mirroring the political order in this world, which ran from the emperor in the capital through the descending levels of principedom, prefecture, county, and, in this case, even down to the subcounty and village (in the form of the Earth God). The City God was subordinate to the Eastern Peak, who was in turn subordinate to the God on High (Shangdi), an official counterpart of the Daoist and popular Jade Emperor. The first Ming emperor also ordered the destruction of statues of the gods in the City God temples, which were to be replaced by wooden spirit tablets. This reform thoroughly unified the City God cult that had once had strong localized traditions.

These imperial policies appear to have been strictly carried out in the early Ming. For Huizhou, according to the 1502 prefectural gazetteer, the sacrifices to all local or popular deities except Wang Hua and Cheng Lingxi were abandoned after Zhu Yuanzhang's "massive rectification of the ritual code" (*dazheng cidian*) to unify the territorial deities (the City God and Earth God).⁵ After several decades, however, the old localizing traditions began to resurface. One key development in the history of Chinese popular religion is the mid-Ming metamorphosis of the official City God within local society, through a strategy of "borrowing [official titles] to name [locally worshipped deities]" (*jie er mingzhi*). This change was partially inherent to the early Ming reform of the City God cult. As part of that reform, the City Gods acquired the authority of the *mingguan* (officials in charge of the dark realm), who presided over exorcisms conducted at the official *litan* (ghost altar).

The *litan* liturgy at local levels was staged three times a year on the fifth day of the third month, the fifteenth day of the seventh month, and the first day of the tenth month. These three dates were later popularly called the three "ghost festivals." The ghost altar was always located outside the city wall, while the City God temple was within. This meant that a City God replica needed to be paraded from its temple to the ghost altar to preside at the exorcising rituals. But the first Ming emperor had ordered the destruction of the City God statues, and their spirit tablets—lacking spectacle and awe—were hardly worthy of a procession. Gradually, over the course of the fifteenth century, as revealed in various sources, the locals restored the City God statues, thereby bringing back the anthropomorphic retransformation of the generic regional tutelary deities into regional heroes.⁶ In Huizhou, it was Wang Hua who emerged as the City God's substitute or local proxy, which is directly verified by *Model Prayers to the Deities*. And their temples, along with the temple to the Eastern Peak, were constructed in the same complex on Fu Hill, as illustrated in one Huizhou Wang genealogy (fig. 4).

The same process, conceivably, coincided with the construction of the Wang Hua pantheon, as it was partially inherent in the early Ming reform policy

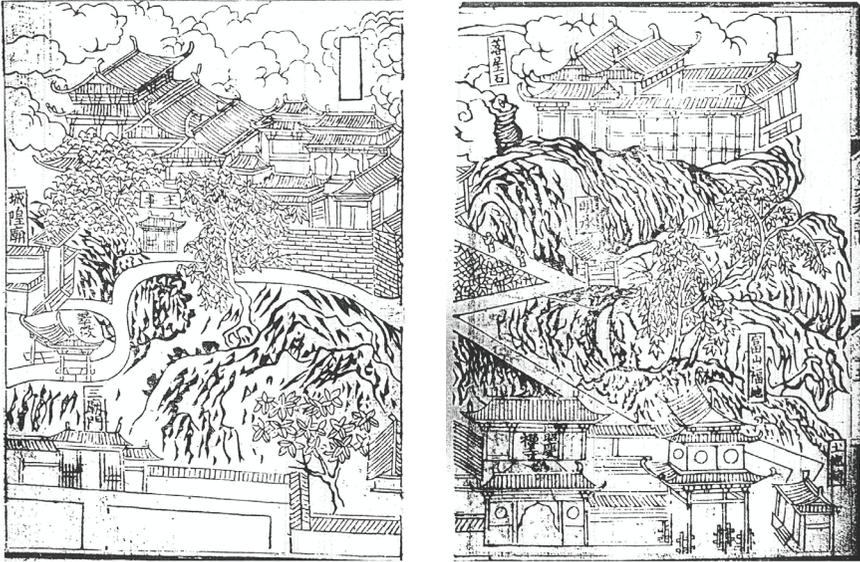


FIGURE 4. *Three Temples on Fu Hill*, left and right panels. Temple to the City God (far left), Temple of Loyalty and Integrity (Wang Hua; top left), and Temple to the Eastern Peak (top right). Wang Nanxuan, *Chongbian Xin'an Zhonglie miao shen jishi* (1460), illustration *juan*, 15b–16a.

assigning the City God to preside over the *litan* liturgy, thereby leading to the popular processions on the three “ghost festivals.” Huizhou locals staged large-scale parades on these ritual occasions, and often held many other processions, including for temple festivals on deities’ birthdays. Sources show that residents carried divine statues from local temples in these processions. Through the ordering of the deities in the procession, these deities were visibly structured into a pantheon.⁷ This partially explains how the temples to the deities listed in the 1502 Huizhou prefectural gazetteer were linked to make the Wang Hua pantheon. Additional evidence for the making of the Wang Hua pantheon include two wings for Wang Hua’s attendants already built into the Wang Hua mausoleum, along with a small Earth God hall built in front of the Wang Hua Branch Shrine no later than the 1460s.⁸

By the mid-Ming, a distinctive local pantheon headed by Wang Hua had emerged in Huizhou (naturally, there was a process of accretion and coming-into-being before the regional pantheon incorporating all of these deities became finalized as scripted in the *Model Prayers to the Deities*). We might also say that the Huizhou pantheon was two-headed, both symbolically in the form of the City God, who represented the presence of the state in local worship, and substantially in the form of Wang Hua, who represented the divine interest of local society. Still, this was a distinctive Huizhou religious order, and thus should be identified as the Wang Hua pantheon.

A RELIGIOUS PRAXIS

Was the Huizhou pantheon scripted in *Model Prayers to the Deities* truly worshipped in local ritual practices? There are three kinds of sources that suggest the pantheon is a faithful representation of local religious practice. First, most leading deities included in this Huizhou pantheon had their own individual temples in the local community. The main temples at the prefectural seat listed in order in the 1502 edition of the Huizhou prefectural gazetteer include:

- Temple to the City God
- Temple of Loyalty and Integrity (Wang Hua)
- Temple of Everlasting Loyalty (Cheng Lingxi)
- Shrine to Prefect Lord Sun
- Temple to General Lan
- Temple to the King of Righteous Bravery and Martial Security (Guandi)
- Temple to the Eastern Peak
- Temple to the Five Manifestations (Wuxian)
- Tongzhen Temple (Zhang Xun)
- Temple of the Black Altar (Marshal Zhao).⁹

There is no fundamental difference between the *Model Prayers* list and the gazetteer list in terms of the major deities and their ordered sequence (“subordinate” deities like Wuchang had altars, but not temples, and the structure holding the Earth God was often a small hall or altar as well).¹⁰ Virtually every county and prefecture in late imperial China compiled its own gazetteer, and each gazetteer included a section on local temples and rituals. But we have yet to learn how to make sense of the temple lists in these official gazetteers from the perspective of forming a pantheon in local ritual practices. This correlation between the ritual handbook and the gazetteer sources suggests that local temples were listed in a certain order in the local histories for a reason and that the worship of these local temples was interconnected.

Official documents, of course, do not tell the whole story. Notably missing in the gazetteer list is the Wuchang pentad spirit, but this popular deity is missing in virtually all kinds of late imperial formal writings. Often, a complete picture can be reached only after piecing together various kinds of sources. For example, one map from the 1693 county gazetteer of Xiuning illustrates the locations of some key temples in Xiuning city, including those to the City God, Wang Hua, and Eastern Peak. It also marks popular Zhi Hill within the city wall. Hidden in Zhi Hill, not marked in the official gazetteer illustration but revealed in other sources, is a magnificent Wuxian Temple that includes a Wuchang Hall—that is, a shrine dedicated to the worship of the Five-Fury spirits. From other sources, too, we learn that the main temple to Wang Hua at the prefectural seat also hosted a shrine to Marshal Zhao, who, as shown in numerous liturgies contained in the *Daoist Canon*, had commanded the Wuchang furious soldiers since the Yuan dynasty.¹¹

Nonofficial materials cover the pantheon list more completely than official ones. One such source confirming the practice of local pantheons comes from popular ritual opera performance, which in Huizhou also matured during the sixteenth century. An early twentieth-century handwritten liturgy from the remote Huizhou village of Limu, handed down from late imperial times, shows another pantheon invoked in a ritual staged before the performance of *Mulian*, arguably the most popular and down-to-earth ritual opera for Huizhou kinship society. The featured local pantheon, invoked in the *Mulian* ritual opera, is divided into five rows:¹²

First row of deities

Local Lord (Tuzhu, which in this case refers not to Limu's Earth God but the proxy of the Earth God, Wang Hua)
 The Three Saintly Thearchs of Wang (Wang Hua and his eighth and ninth sons)
 The Wen-Xiao Emperors (of the Ming dynasty)
 Wuxian (The Great Thearchs and Divine Agents of Five Manifestations)
 The Fifth Saint Thearch Zhang (Zhang Xun)
 The Cardinal Master of Red Mountain, the Cardinal Master of Long Hair, and the Cardinal Master of Bringing Rains

Second row

Guandi (The Saint Emperor Guan)
 Generals Zhou Cang and Guan Ping (Guandi's attendants)

Third row

Marshal Ma, Marshal Zhao, Marshal Yin, and Marshal Liu (the Four Great Martial Attendants of the Buddha)
 Miss Golden Flower, Lady Plum Blossom, and Madame Snowflake
 The Divine Agents of Hehe and Lishi (popular variants of the God of Wealth)

Fourth row

Boy of Opening Pure Voice (a Huizhou variant of an attendant to the tutelary deity of the theater, Master Laolang)
 Qu Yuan (the leading deity worshipped in the Dragon Boat Festival)

Fifth row

Wuchang (Five Furies)

This Wang Hua pantheon includes virtually all of the leading deities we find in *Model Prayers*.¹³ As for the *Mulian* ritual opera for which this liturgy was staged, we know that these performances lasted up until the early twentieth century, suggesting the longevity of the Wang Hua pantheon within Huizhou society.

Model Prayers constitutes the third kind of source that points to the popularity of the Wang Hua pantheon. This is a "how-to" primer for local prayers, designed

for easy use. A supplicant (often leading his family or relatives) just needed to fill in his name and communal location and the date of prayer in the marked blank spaces and then chant the prayers. As an example, we can turn to the prayer invoking the multitude of the deities on New Year's Eve, which starts:

We prostrate as the light of precious candles shines down from on high to illuminate the plum blossom nighttime festival and wine overflows the cups, imbuing the First Spring with the fragrance of bamboo leaves. This ritual concludes the whole year, paying our respect and requital to the ten temples. Now, I _____ [name], a believer worshipping the deities, hailing from _____ [location], accompanied by my family and dependents, in _____ [year] during the last month on the night of New Year's Eve, reverently prepare pure wine and a feast of meats and vegetables. I first petition his lordship deity the Earth God to ask the divine runners on duty to respectfully convey our prayers to [the City God and Wang Hua and all other deities in the Huizhou pantheon].

Adding to the easy format of the prayers is their catchall nature. There are prayers designed for various seasonal festivals, deities, and different kinds of supplicants, including students, merchants, shopkeepers, farmers, travelers wishing security, elders wishing for good health, and women wishing for sons or safe childbirth. The ritual handbook also includes rites resembling simplified or popularized versions of the four family rituals stipulated by Zhu Xi (cappings, weddings, funerals, and ancestral rites), but each prayer still ends procedurally with the "thrice-toast" (*sandian*) routinized in Zhu Xi's *Family Rituals*.

In terms of the book structure, volume 1 of *Model Prayers to the Deities* contains prayers on seasonal festivals, starting from New Year through Spring Request and Fall Requital to New Year's Eve (including "Invoking the Sages and Worthies on the Opening Day of School" for students). Volume 2 contains the individual prayer to each main deity in the Huizhou pantheon invoked in "Offering Thanks to the Many Deities on New Year's Eve." The remaining four volumes cover all other prayers. Whereas all prayers would have been useful for the local people, the most important part of the handbook clearly lay in the first two volumes, invoking the local pantheon and its various deities, with the individual prayers to each of the main deities also working to substantiate and enhance the pantheon. In most of the prayers covered in the handbook, it was with these divine beings, now firmly structured in a pantheon, that local supplicants communicated.

Most importantly, perhaps, this pantheon was now scripted, printed, and readily accessible to locals. The late Ming witnessed a publishing boom (from the 1570s to 1630s), and Huizhou was a center of the printing industry.¹⁴ One genre of such printing was *leishu* (encyclopedias), to which *Model Prayers to the Deities* belongs. The encyclopedia-like ritual handbook was repeatedly printed; two other versions of *Model Prayers* are known to be extant.¹⁵ There seems to have been remarkable stability in the printed prayers, as the two Ming and Qing versions of the handbook are virtually identical, which further suggests its

usefulness and popularity. Although the scripted prayers are identical, the Ming imprint is of much higher quality than the Qing version. Most likely, the latter was hastily cut to meet the ritual needs of local people, which also suggests a growing local market for it by Qing times. And the frequency of its printing indicates that it likely sold for a profit. The preface that is included in a different version of *Model Prayers* is revealing. It reads: “the old texts [of *Model Prayers*] are full of unruly elements; they can hardly present the model prayers to the deities. This publishing house has made revisions in ways unlike the other versions. . . . Buyers should take a note of this.”¹⁶ Here we see the marks of local commercial interests, or rather the interests of local mercantile lineages. Indeed, frequent reprinting with assurances of the authenticity of its contents, as well as relying upon Cheng Minzheng’s reputation to “sell” the religious handbook, was consonant with other merchant practices in Huizhou. Local mercantile lineage culture was characterized by a melding of Confucian values with business prowess and popular religious worship, the latter of which was best embodied in the Wang Hua pantheon.

The multiple sources discussed thus far suggest that the Wang Hua pantheon invoked in these model prayers represented the actual religious praxis of Huizhou people. As will be shown, it was constructed by local elites, but shared by all kinspeople. It was a constant, stable, long-term construction, a product not just of religious piety but also of Huizhou mercantile lineage culture.

THE WANG HUA PANTHEON AND MERCANTILE LINEAGE CULTURE

The Huizhou pantheon was defined by its de facto head. As noted in chapter 1, by the time of the Song dynasty, Wang Hua was worshipped as the God of Xin’an—that is, the single powerful patron deity of the entire prefecture. We can identify three dimensions of character combining in his persona. In addition to being a patron deity of the region, Wang Hua was a potent symbol linking the imperial state and local society, eventually also emerging as the apical ancestor of the Huizhou Wangs. A regional warlord during the Sui-Tang transition, Wang Hua turned over the six prefectures he controlled—including his native prefecture, Xin’an, and the part of Zhejiang known as Yue—to the Tang empire. In return, the Tang made him a top general in command of the military and political affairs of the six prefectures. For his loyalty, Wang Hua was further awarded two imperial jade tablets from emperors Gaozu (r. 618–627) and Taizong (r. 627–649) granting him the title of Duke of Yueguo (Yueguo Gong Gui). The Huizhou genealogists loved to include these testaments to honor and loyalty in the Wang genealogies.¹⁷ The subsequent dynasties, the Song and the Yuan, granted him, his wives, his sons, and his grandsons many more honorable titles, both divine and secular, making him all the more powerful.¹⁸ All of these were further authenticated in the

subsequent Ming dynasty, being materialized in the steles erected on the two sides of the main temple to Wang Hua.¹⁹

The Ming dynasty appears to have treated Wang Hua particularly well, largely because, according to local legend, his spirit had protected Zhu Yuanzhang and his troops when they engaged in fierce fighting in Huizhou before the founding of the Ming dynasty. Acknowledging his efficacy, and to protect his main temple, Zhu Yuanzhang issued a dynastic public notice (*guochao bangwen*) in the seventh lunar month of the fourth year of the Hongwu reign (1371):

Emperor's Edict to the Provincial Governors of Jiangnan and Other Places: The Local Lord [Tuzhu] of Huizhou, King Wang, has been recorded in the Ritual Code for his protection of the regional society. When the grand [Ming] army conquered the cities of the [Jiangnan] province, the divine soldiers repeatedly assisted in the process, efficaciously abetting powerful and notable accomplishments; [King Wang] deserves to be honored and worshipped. [I hereby order that] the spiritual tablet [of King Wang] be set up in the Tianxing Adjacent Shrine outside of the Main Temple [to Wang Hua] to enjoy sacrifices.

The edict goes on to forbid soldiers from staying in the Wang Hua Temple, cutting down trees, and stationing their horses on the grounds so as to avoid profaning against the divine spirit.²⁰

From the Tang through the Ming, honoring Wang Hua was one method the imperial state used to appease the people of Huizhou. And the Huizhou Wangs clearly felt honored, evident in their recording of Wang Hua's imperially granted titles in lineage documents. Such honors were used by the center to enhance its symbolic presence in local society, but the Wang lineage also mobilized them to express loyalty and claim closeness to the center, which further legitimated their local power. The central state treated Wang Hua as a local leader turned regional patron deity, while the locals identified him as a Huizhou hero with ties to the dynastic center. Wang Hua thus became a symbol for the Huizhou people to proclaim the legitimacy of their local power. This might account for the shared nature of the Wang Hua cult in Huizhou. Huizhou dignitaries not affiliated with the Wang lineage also readily paid tribute. For instance, Cheng Minzheng penned verses celebrating him in addition to other commemorative pieces, such as the one recording the reconstruction of the lineage temple worshipping Wang Hua by the Wangs of Yanshan, Xiuning.²¹ Bao Xiangxian (*jinshi* 1529) of Tangyue, Shexian, also paid tribute to him when commemorating the building of the Zhonglie (Wang Hua) Shrine in Tangmo.²²

Well into the Ming dynasty, Wang Hua was universally recognized as the apical ancestor of the Huizhou Wangs. This, combined with his roles as the patron deity of the region and the symbolic link with the imperial state, completed his three-part persona. Wang Songtao's Yuan dynasty genealogy, which highlighted Wang Hua's glorious contributions, is the earliest extant lineage-related source marking the beginning of this evolution, but from the Song through the Yuan, Wang Hua



FIGURE 5. Wang Lineage Temple in Hongcun, front gate. The two couplets read: “The Tang dynasty enfeoffed Yueguo three thousand households strong” (*Tangfeng Yueguo sanqian hu*). “The Song dynasty granted this family the distinction of being number one in all of Jiangnan” (*Songci Jiangnan diyi jia*). Photograph by author, November 2018.

was primarily still seen as the patron deity of the region.²³ In the early Ming, an independent, large-scale lineage temple was built in Hongcun, Yixian, perhaps the first marker of Wang Hua as the apical ancestor of the Hongcun Wangs (fig. 5).

In the main hall of the Wang Lineage Temple, however, are three portraits of three different representative “apical” ancestors: in the middle is Marquis of Yingchuan, the first to gain the surname of Wang; to the left is Wang Hua and to the right is the first migrant ancestor to Hongcun, Wang Yanji (1085–1151).²⁴ Given the internal arrangements, and in spite of the front-gate couplets, it is still not clear as to whether the lineage temple was constructed to honor Wang Hua as the apical ancestor of the Hongcun Wangs. In any event, the construction of a lineage temple worshipping the apical ancestor was still rare at the time, and would remain so throughout the entire fifteenth century (even taking into account the lineage temple Cheng Minzheng commemorated in 1489). As a comparative reading of the 1502 and 1566 editions of the Huizhou gazetteer shows, the construction of lineage temples, like the compilation of lineage genealogies, did not become widespread until the sixteenth century. By the mid-century, even the remote village of Wuyuan, Fengsha, had built its own Yueguo lineage temple.²⁵

The 1551 *Prominent Lineages in Xin'an* recognized Wang Wenhe as the first migrant ancestor, but Wang Hua stood out as the most glorious figure in the ancestry of the Huizhou Wangs.²⁶ Looking deeper into the Wang settlements listed in

the composite genealogical gazetteer, we see that most of them claimed descent from Wang Hua's eight sons, which suggests that Wang Hua was by then collectively treated as the apical ancestor of the Huizhou Wangs.²⁷ Two decades later, their composite genealogy, *Authentic Lineage of the Composite Wang Descent Line*, compiled in 1571 by Wang Zhonglu and five other kinsmen, identified Wang Hua as their apical ancestor.²⁸ This timing appears to have coincided with the finalization of *Model Prayers to the Deities*—that is, when Wang Hua was formally scripted as the regional proxy of the City God, commanding a patterned assembly of deities that constituted the Huizhou pantheon. At the same time, as the patron god of Huizhou, the apical ancestor of the Huizhou Wangs also became the lineage tutelary deity of other kinspeople. In this way, the Wang Hua cult also became an extension of Confucian ancestral worship.²⁹

That Wang Hua was also worshipped by non-Wang kinspeoples in lineage rituals is clearly borne out by one invaluable type of Huizhou *wenshu* (lineage document), the handwritten *Registers of the Sage-Worshipping Society* (*Zhushenghui bu*) from Xikou, Xiuning, ritual registers running from the late Ming to the early twentieth century. The first of the ritual documents contained in Registers of the Sage-Worshipping Society is a quasi-community covenant signed in 1602 by two lineage leaders of three villages, Wu Tianqing and Wang Zonggong, for all of their kinspeople. It states that the Wus and Wangs of the three villages, including all of the “gentry, farmers, artisans, and merchants” have had a profitable year because “we believe in divine protection.” Three of their tutelary deities are identified: “Duke Wang of Yueguo, the Ninth Lord [Wang Hua's ninth son who was thought to have died young], and Marshal Hu.” The community covenant then announces, “Although the Sage-Worshipping Society has been established to offer sacrifice [to our tutelary deities] for a long time, we have not yet organized the procession rite. Now we have decided to carry the deities in procession for the Spring Requesting Festival. This requires both money and labor.” And thus, it stipulates, “The households of gentry and merchants shall provide money, prepare the carriages, paraphernalia, and so on. The households of farmers and craftsmen shall provide labor. The upper and lower villages shall take care of the emperor's carriage [for Wang Hua] and the lord's carriage [for the Ninth Lord], and the Shangzhuang village shall take care of the marshal sedan [for Marshal Hu].” This lineage document, in addition to verifying that the cult of Wang Hua was shared by the non-Wangs as well as the Wangs, shows that both gentry and merchant lineage elites engaged in worship of Wang Hua and his divine subordinates. It further demonstrates that they clearly recognized the religious hierarchy by preparing different kinds of paraphernalia for the three different deities.³⁰

Wang Hua gained his godly puissance not just by commanding a hierarchically arranged pantheon; he was also Confucianized. As reflected in the name of his main temple, Zhonglie (loyal and righteous), Wang Hua was always a symbol of loyalty and integrity, similar to the most powerful symbol of loyalty and

righteousness, Guandi, who was worshipped throughout the empire. Indeed, there was significant conflation of the two deities, especially given that Guandi was incorporated into the Huizhou pantheon to further empower its de facto leader.

In a portrait of Wang Hua included in a 1480 Wang genealogy, we can see that he was depicted as a warrior-statesman of integrity and courage (fig. 6).³¹ Notably, he was visibly Confucianized: he is shown holding a book, which in this case was almost certainly the *Spring and Autumn Annals*, as the iconography was almost certainly fashioned after the popular image of Guandi holding the same Confucian classic.

This Confucianized head deity defined the character of the entire Huizhou pantheon: localized yet linked to the imperial center, kinship-oriented yet protective of all the lineages within the entire prefecture. Other deities incorporated into the pantheon, however, were also important. The incorporation of these powerful deities greatly boosted the authority of their commander, Wang Hua, but they also gained additional meanings by virtue of their position within the religious order, which was hierarchically structured. This divine system included thearchs, kings, marquises, ministers, marshals, generals, secretaries, agents, guardians, and soldiers, a mirror of the empire's bureaucratic machine. The pantheon was omnipotent, endowed with divine power overseeing virtually all aspects of human life, hidden or manifest, in the functions of the various incorporated deities. It was syncretic in nature, regionally bounded and yet exceeding the boundaries of Huizhou, open to divine influences from the entire realm. It embraced Daoist immortals and Buddhist bodhisattvas, local and national deities, and officially sanctioned gods and spirits of dubious, or even devious, character.

The most intriguing of the divine beings within the pantheon were the fearsome Wuchang Five-Fury Spirits, placed in the lowest rank. (The Hehe twin genii of concord balanced the frightening quality of the Five-Fury Spirits with auspiciousness, and the official Earth God was placed at the end to conclude the pantheon, parallel to the way in which the official City God headed it). The Wuchang pentad spirit was endowed with multiple roles; it acquired new meanings by being conflated with or sheltered under other deities. The Five-Fury Spirits were enormously popular, being the demon bailiffs in charge of the exorcistic rituals staged along with the *Mulian* operatic performance in Huizhou. And yet, unlike other pentad spirits, Wuchang were hardly ever recorded as independent deities in late imperial writings.³² Indeed, the Wuchang pentad spirit never worked alone: in the Daoist tradition, it was subordinated to Marshal Zhao, and in Huizhou local worship, it was also sheltered under other deities, such as Wuxian on Zhi Hill and the fertility deities, and ultimately subsumed within the Wang Hua pantheon.³³

The Wuchang pentad spirit was primarily a symbol of exorcism, and in late Ming Huizhou it emerged as a leading variant of the God of Wealth, partially through a process of cultural and mythological conflations with another diabolical pentad spirit, Wutong. Wutong, believed to be a mountain goblin who brought money to men in exchange for sex with their wives, was enormously popular as a

贊曰
 越國汪王處
 心忠良施偉
 烈而保障六
 州著名譽而
 感慕萬邦噫
 既佐唐朝之
 主復助我
 祖高皇宜其享
 祀無窮以增
 先後之光
 大明宗室
 遼王書



FIGURE 6. Portrait of Wang Hua. The caption reads: "Praising Commentary: Lord Wang of Yueguo was possessed of loyal will. He acted decisively in protecting the six prefectures. His fame attracted gratitude and admiration from all of the regions. O! He not only assisted the Tang emperors, but further protected my ancestor, the First Ming Emperor. He deserves sacrificial rites forever to enhance the glory of the realm. Written by Lord Liao, prince of the royal family of the Great Ming." Wang Daojin, *Wangshi zupu* (1480), *Fulu* (appendixes), 4b. Courtesy of Shanghai Library.

“devious” God of Wealth in certain Jiangnan areas.³⁴ But in Huizhou, its place of origin, it came to be eclipsed by Wuchang over the course of the sixteenth century.³⁵ Other sources indicate that Huizhou merchants did indeed worship Wuchang, not Wutong, as their God of Wealth. Xu Zhuo, in his *Miscellaneous Matters of Xiuning*, an 1811 collection of anecdotal notes on daily life in Xiuning, includes a late Ming account detailing popular Wuxian/Wuchang worship in sixteenth-century Haiyang—the bustling county seat of Xiuning that emerged in the sixteenth century as a commercial center for the whole prefecture:

On the [Zhi] Hill is the Wuxian King Temple. From the Jia-Long eras [the Jiajing-Longqing reigns, 1522–1566 and 1567–1572] onward, inhabitants from all five directions have made pilgrimages to the temple every year on the first day of the fourth month, offering incense and drawing lots. According to local lore, whoever draws the lot of one of the five deities [the Five Manifestations] will be blessed. Those who do not draw one of these lots dare not vie with each other [for the blessing]; the honor of inviting the deity down from the hill [to be carried in procession] is determined on the basis of the drawn lots. A day is chosen for the procession. [People from] the five directions participate in it in a random way, depending on their time of arrival. On the day of the procession, the paraded banners, weapons, and paraphernalia are as magnificent as those used for the king. Local benefactors provide the [carried] tableau stages [*taixi*]. The tableau stages are decorated with flashy and ornate yellow and white pearls and beads, each prepared to show uniqueness and ingenuity. Should any sector [of the procession] attempt to skimp on the preparations, it is cursed and mocked by all. In this manner, [each contingent] encourages the others in ever more splendid display: this is the so-called competition festival [*saihui* or temple festival of ritual operatic performance]. On the chosen day, colored flags block out the sun, drummed music deafens the heavens, and spectators from near and far gather thick as walls. After the procession, each household from the constituent communities is ordered to prepare a lantern, candle, and torches to escort the deities back up the hill. On this night, the torches light up the sky like daylight. In front of the temple is the Huaguang Tower, alongside which is a Wuchang Shrine. Prayers [to the Wuchang] during all four seasons are always efficaciously answered. At the end of the year, even more livestock and wine are sacrificed there. The deity has enjoyed blood offerings for many years. Legend has it that this is the Ancestral Palace of Zhi Hill.

*Gazetteer of the Mountains and Rivers of Haiyang*³⁶

Xu Zhuo included in his *Miscellaneous Matters* another account of the Wuxian cult associated with Zhi Hill from a different sourcebook called *Random Jottings from the Ren'an Hall*. It notes that “the Huaguang Temple lies in the east of Xiuning City, in which the Wuxian God is worshipped. In the Ming dynasty, the wealthy in the county offered rich sacrifices there. After the fall of the dynasty, the temple gradually fell into disuse.”³⁷ The snippet in *Random Jottings* complements the earlier account, specifying who offered “rich sacrifices” to the Wuxian

Temple and its auxiliary Wuchang shrine. When read together, these two accounts clearly indicate that from the sixteenth century on the people of Haiyang, and especially wealthy merchants or wealthy households from local mercantile lineages, worshipped Wuxian/Wuchang.³⁸

The temple or shrine layout on Zhi Hill also suggests that over the course of the sixteenth century, Wuchang had replaced Wutong as the popular variant of the Wuxian (which had been the official avatar of the sinister Wutong since Song times). There is additional evidence, especially *Model Prayers to the Deities*, to verify this process, which appears to have coincided with the coalescence of the Wang Hua pantheon.

Cheng Minzheng, while compiling the *Supplemented Heart Classic*, includes one statement by Zhu Xi regarding the Wutong cult in Xin'an: "Local customs worship ghosts. Places like Xin'an appear to live day and night in a ghost-dominated den. There are so-called Wutong temples, which are most efficacious."³⁹ And again, in *Xin'an Documents*, Cheng Minzheng includes a passage by Zhu Xi's second generation disciple, the notable Wuyuan native Hu Sheng (*jinshi* 1185), on clarifying some "facts" on Wuxian, wherein he rejects the equation of Wutong and Wusheng (Five Sages).⁴⁰ If in Cheng Minzheng's time, Wutong had already disappeared in Huizhou, or had been replaced by Wuchang in local worship, he most likely would not have bothered to include Zhu Xi's and Hu Sheng's passages on Wutong in his important compilations of historical and philosophical documents.

By Wang Daokun's time, however, we see something different. In one of his merchant biographies, Wang Daokun mentions that a sojourning Huizhou merchant encountered the cult of the Wutong mountain goblin in Jingzhou of Hubei, but once he returned home to Huizhou, he disavowed it.⁴¹ The best source to directly verify the usurpation of Wutong by Wuchang in post-Cheng Minzheng Huizhou is *Model Prayers to the Deities*. The religious handbook does not mention Wutong (except once in passing in a prayer to its official variant, Wuxian), whereas Wuchang is everywhere, suggesting the complete eclipse of Wutong by Wuchang in Huizhou local worship by the late sixteenth century.

This replacement of Wutong, I suggest, reflects the collective—even if unconscious—engineering of local elites, who acted on behalf of the "class" interests of mercantile lineages by "patterning" (*ge* of *Qishen zouge*) local prayers, which were then codified in the late Ming *Model Prayers to the Deities*. Wuchang's replacement of Wutong came to be accepted and then fixed in the religious handbook as well as on Zhi Hill. I base this interpretation of the cultural politics of the Wutong-Wuchang switch on three factors.

First, Wuchang, while demonic like Wutong, were nevertheless controlled within the Wang Hua pantheon. Wuchang were believed to be good ghosts (*haogui*), even if their ghostly nature made them potentially dangerous and threatening. This characterization shadowed that of Huizhou merchants who had been

characterized as good merchants (*lianggu*)—or good but still morally ambiguous merchants, suspect partly on account of their dealings with money.⁴² This symbolic resemblance between Wuchang and *lianggu* is reinforced—if not mirrored—in Huizhou merchants' worship of Wuchang as a God of Wealth. These parallel hierarchies in the spiritual and social realms suggest that Huizhou merchants, collectively as a social group (though not necessarily as individuals), willingly submitted to their home gentry and identified with their home lineages. Similarly, the Wuchang pentad spirit was subordinated to the patron deity of lineages. This had the effect of sanctioning their money-making efforts, so long as they channeled a portion of that profit back home to enhance their ancestral lineages. Central to popular Wuchang imagery was the negotiation in the symbolic realm of gentry-merchant and lineage-sojourner relations.

Second, Wuchang's suppression of Wutong in Huizhou was also entwined with local gender dynamics. Since many young Huizhou merchants left home on business for long stretches of time, they were overly concerned with the chastity of their wives at home. Wutong symbolized both ill-gotten money and men's illicit sex, but local mercantile lineages did not need a sinister God of Wealth that cautioned against male sexual intemperance and characterized merchants as dishonest. Rather, what appealed to them (and their lineage elders) was a God of Wealth who could also police lonely kinswomen; this was precisely the role that Wuchang could perform. As shown in popular *Mulian* performance, the Wuchang demon bailiffs were charged with the heavenly duty to punish disloyal or evil women.⁴³

Third, Wuchang's roles were more extensive than those of Wutong, partially because the pentad spirit was positioned within the Wang Hua pantheon, as fully displayed in *Model Prayers*. In a prayer to the Wuchang spirits, the Five Furies are invoked as such: "May we live well and prosper, may elders and youngsters be of healthy mind and body; may the four seasons remain free of disasters, may the eight festivals be marked with celebration; may those who seek fame rise as high as the clouds [pass the exams]; may those who seek profits succeed in all markets; let the five grains be richly harvested and the six [kinds of] domestic animals thrive; whether by boat or by cart, let those who go to and fro the rivers and roads stay safe and sound."⁴⁴ Here, the Wuchang pentad spirit was not just a God of Wealth, but a divine force protecting the main interests of the leading social groupings living within the mercantile lineages. The pentad spirit was given so much efficacious purview not because it had become a patron deity of the mercantile lineage, but because it was a popular and down-to-earth god, positioned at the bottom of the Wang Hua pantheon, which engendered a sense of closeness among the local people.⁴⁵ The Wuchang prayer further shows that its religious role became conflated with that of other deities within the same pantheon. The individual prayers to Guandi and the Three Kings and Marquis (of Shi, Bian, and Zhou), for instance, display similar broad purviews of efficaciousness that these deities had acquired.⁴⁶

From *Model Prayers to the Deities*, moreover, we see an additional facet of Wuchang in relation to women. The deity served to protect and assist mothers in reproduction. To put it in divine terms, Wuchang were also subordinate to, or the guardians of, the patron deities of childbirth.⁴⁷ The third volume of *Model Prayers* includes at least four prayers concerning childbirth. The opening short prayer of the third volume, titled “Offering Candles to the Deities in Seeking Offspring” (Qisi qingshen zhu), clearly concerns childbirth, although no deities are specified. The next prayer, “Offering Candles to Secure the Deities’ [Blessing]” (Anshen zhu), appeals to the three deities of fertility, including Immortal Zhang who controlled childbirth (*zhangsheng*), Marshal Gao—here called Marshal Gao, Sender of Sons from the Ninth Heaven (Jiutian Songzi Gao Yuanshuai), and Our Lady Venerable Mother of Infinite Fortune from the Eastern Peak. These two prayers, without mentioning Wuchang directly, pave the way for the subsequent two prayers on the same subject, showing how significant this was to locals.⁴⁸ In the next two prayers concerning childbirth, “Invoking Deities for Expeditious Births” (Cui-sheng qingshen) and “Invoking Deities for the Birth of Sons” (Shengzi qingshen), not only are the three deities of fertility (and an unspecified multitude of gods or *zhongshen*, that is, the Huizhou pantheon) invoked, but so are the Wuchang, who serve as the guardians of these deities, as well as the direct protectors of women seeking children (especially sons) or expectant women seeking safe delivery.⁴⁹

Given that the Wuchang were conceived as guardians of childbirth, and especially the birth of sons, it is likely that Huizhou kinspeople, and merchants in particular, would have had little need to continue to worship Wutong as a popular variety of the God of Wealth. Successful childbirth was quite simply the dearest thing for both women and their sojourning husbands, as well as their larger lineages. This was especially important in an age of commercialization, as a large number of young men sojourned out of Huizhou for business immediately after completion of the nuptials.⁵⁰

In general, then, Wuchang were sheltered under a variety of deities with variant roles, including Marshal Zhao, Wuxian, and the popular fertility deities. All of them, along with many other gods with different functions, were ultimately incorporated into the Huizhou pantheon to make its divine rule and role all purposeful and all powerful. This omnipotent regional pantheon was directed by its de facto head, Wang Hua, who channeled the power of all the mighty deities therein incorporated.

I suggest that this pantheon, with Wang Hua on top and Wuchang at the bottom, further represented the collective interests of local mercantile lineages. Both had special Huizhou characteristics. Wang Hua was a deified Huizhou hero, and the Wuchang pentad spirit completely eclipsed the demonic Wutong that had originated in the region. Both were multivocal. Wang Hua was an officially sanctioned deity and, as the local proxy for the City God and tutelary deity of Huizhou, served to link the locality to the state. Moreover, as the most notable apical ancestor of

the Huizhou Wangs, his cult served as a virtual extension of Confucian ancestral worship. Wuchang, originally a symbol of exorcism sheltered under the great Daoist guardian Marshal Zhao, underwent a transformation, partially through mythological conflation with Wutong, to emerge as a patron deity of Huizhou merchants. Most intriguing of all, this popular god of wealth garnered additional powers to both monitor and protect women, represented either as the Five Fury beast-like bailiffs who punished transgressive women or as the guardians of the fertility deities who assisted mothers in reproduction. Symbolically, the role of Wuchang within the Huizhou pantheon mirrored that of merchants within the lineage. Just as merchants as a social group were subordinated within the lineage, so too did the Wuchang come under the surveillance of the tutelary deity of the lineage. Similarly, not unlike the ways in which kinswomen were both policed and protected by the larger lineage, the Wuchang played this dual role of enforcer on a symbolic level. Through subscribing to the multiple powers of the full Huizhou pantheon, the soteriological needs of local mercantile lineages were fulfilled.

Model Prayers to the Deities, by fixing the pantheon in print, greatly facilitated this religious fulfillment. By scripting and printing prayers for all of the ritual occasions, the producers of the religious handbook provided the locals with prepared prayers, which put ritual knowledge into the hands of laymen, thereby snatching ritual authority away from local religious institutions. *Model Prayers to the Deities*, especially its printed pantheon, marked the final triumph of the lineage institution over local religious establishments in the symbolic realm of ritual performance. This completed the historical process of the rise of the lineage in Ming Huizhou that Joseph McDermott has so amply documented.⁵¹ By the time *Model Prayers* was finalized, what was reflected in it was not just the kinship culture, but that of mercantile lineages. Their regional pantheon also marked the completion of the localist turn, a historical process that Cheng Minzheng had initiated in Huizhou.

THE AUTHORSHIP OF *MODEL PRAYERS* AND ITS LARGER MEANINGS

I turn now to the attributed authorship of *Model Prayers* and its larger meanings vis-à-vis Huizhou lineage politics and emerging mercantile lineage culture as a whole. Cheng Minzheng is singled out as the “original compiler” (*yuanbian*) for *Model Prayers to the Deities*, and further identified as “Minister of Rites, Bamboo Mound of Xin’an” (Da Zongbo Xin’an Huangdun), the respectful appellation for him that was used in Huizhou and beyond after his tragic death in 1499. This attribution is suspect, but nevertheless should be understood in light of late sixteenth-century Huizhou. It is unlikely that Lord Bamboo Mound would have been party to a publication that inserted his celebrated ancestor Cheng Lingxi into the Wang Hua pantheon as a subordinate. This attributed authorship was made, quite possibly, to justify the subordination of Cheng Lingxi to Wang Hua, which had the

effect of thereby achieving a power equilibrium among local big-name lineages in the symbolic realm.

Cheng Minzheng's 1478 tour to Huangdun, as noted in chapter 1, had been designed, in part, to promote the godly power of Cheng Lingxi. As a corollary, in the two Cheng genealogies he compiled, he emphasized Cheng Lingxi's status as the traceable apical ancestor of the Huizhou Chengs. In *Records of Bequeathed Glories*, Cheng Minzheng again gave Cheng Lingxi special treatment, reprinting all of the Song-Ming imperial edicts sanctioning local sacrifices to his deified ancestor.⁵² This appeal to lineage preeminence was made in the context of the local religious landscape. Cheng Lingxi had since the Song been emerging as a popular deity in Huizhou, but he was no match for Wang Hua, "the God of Xin'an," who had dominated local communal liturgies during the same period. Cheng Minzheng himself paid visits to the main temple to Wang Hua on Fu Hill, leaving behind two verses acknowledging that "sacrificial incense to [Wang Hua] temples have flourished for a thousand years, [from which we] know that the hero loved his native place."⁵³ He also wrote several commemorative pieces honoring this patron deity of Huizhou, although he often used these as opportunities to sneak in stories about the glory and efficacy of his deified ancestor as well.⁵⁴ Elsewhere, in his essays on local religious beliefs in general, Minzheng always put Cheng Lingxi ahead of Wang Hua, a practice also repeated in their ordered placement in his *Anthology of Xin'an Documents* and *Gazetteer of Xiuning*.⁵⁵

Still, this consideration alone should not justify a complete write-off of Cheng Minzheng's role in the production of the religious handbook. After all, he had interest in the matter of local cults and communal rituals. He authored several essays on domestic and popular cults. One concerns the archaic Wusi—the five rituals to the deities of the stove, the cistern, the gate, the path, and the *li* (the spirits of those who died unnatural deaths)—in which Minzheng argued for the replacement of the path by the stove and of the generic *li* by the "lineage *li*" (another example showing Minzheng's localist focus through honoring kinspeople's spirits).⁵⁶ Another focuses on deified historical figures, listing four of them in the order of Guandi, Cheng Lingxi, Wang Hua, and Zhang Xun.⁵⁷ In yet another, Minzheng links rituals to his father to the Wusi as well as to the four deified historical figures.⁵⁸ In ritual practice, he selected a Buddhist chapel for the site of the shrine honoring his father, where he was to be worshipped along with Guandi, Zhang Xun, and the Buddha (see chapter 1).

For Cheng Minzheng, obviously, proper rituals to popular cults played an important role in maintaining order within local society. And in Huizhou, the Wang Hua pantheon was an important aspect of lineage institution, supplementing and strengthening ancestral worship. In light of these considerations, it is quite possible that Cheng Minzheng might have composed similar prayers upon which the later editors of *Model Prayers* drew. In fact, he did compose prayers on various ritual occasions. One enlists Cheng Lingxi's protection for the birth of his second

son; a second prays for the peace of his father's spirit in the wake of a fire at home; and a third prays to the Wusi, Guandi, Cheng Lingxi, Wang Hua, and Zhang Xun on the occasion of rebuilding his father's shrine.⁵⁹

It is conceivable that the editors of *Model Prayers* may have borrowed some of Cheng Minzheng's ritual writings in culling together local liturgies for the religious handbook. It should be noted that the six volumes of the handbook are titled by the six characters referring to the six arts that a gentryman was supposed to master in the Confucian tradition: "Rites" (Li), "Music" (Yue), "Mounted Archery (She), "Chariot Driving" (Yu), "Calligraphy" (Shu), and "Math" (Shu). This titling provides a classical luster as well as a Confucian façade to the handbook. More likely, though, the producers of this text were borrowing the fame of Cheng Minzheng to increase the authority of *Model Prayers*. The frontispiece of the Qing version lists, after Cheng Minzheng, five later editors or reprinters, including: Zhu Yishi as authenticator (*jianding*); Dai Tianpei, Dai Wei, and Huang Yuanbi as copyeditors (*jiaozhi*); and Dai Qida as the reprinter (*chongkan*). Except Zhu Yishi, a noted Xiuning gentryman-artist who earned the provincial *juren* degree in 1642, the four others are unidentifiable figures. Given the background of the group leader Zhu Yishi, however, the other four most likely fall into the similar category of local gentry specializing in ritual matters.⁶⁰ Other sources indicate that Zhu Yishi ran away from Huizhou and hid himself in Wuxi (the heartland of Jiangnan) after the Qing conquest in 1644, which suggests that Zhu must have compiled the Ming version of *Model Prayers* before passing the *juren* degree, and the Qing version is a reprint of the former Zhu version by other "ritual specialists" (perhaps by someone like the "reprinter" Dai Qida?) who then replaced veneration of the Ming with the Qing in various prayers.⁶¹

In the late Ming, relying upon Cheng Minzheng's reputation to "sell" this text would surely have been consonant with other practices of Huizhou merchants or mercantile lineages, characterized by a melding of Confucian values with popular religious worship, which was furthered by a booming printing industry as well as ritual and opera performance. In the process, these ritual specialists further promoted the Wang Hua pantheon. In this instance, then, the name "Bamboo Mound" was used in a way that mimicked the strategy Cheng Minzheng had so skillfully employed in rewriting the philological origins of Huangdun in order to boost the prestige of the Huizhou Chengs.

Model Prayers may have been attributed to Cheng Minzheng not only to enhance its market value, but also to reconfirm Wang Hua's ritual authority over Cheng Lingxi, thereby increasing Wang Hua's divine power to balance the genealogical pedigree of the Chengs, which Cheng Minzheng had so skillfully promoted. No one could have worked more effectively than Cheng Minzheng to justify this localized religious order in which Cheng Lingxi is rather far down on the descending list of godly puissance. Looking through the vast inventory of Huizhou lineage-related documents, it is clear that the Wangs, while sharing with other surnames

a strong interest in compiling genealogies, had since the Yuan dynasty developed an intense interest in documenting Wang Hua's religious power (which was built on the identification of the God of Xin'an in the Song by Luo Yuan, a non-Wang compiler of the *Xin'an Gazetteer*). This trend started with the Yuan-era *Wangshi yuanyuan lu* by Wang Songtao and was further enhanced with the reprinting in the 1460s of the expanded *Revised Records of Xin'an's Zhonglie Temple and Its Deities* (Chongbian Xin'an Zhonglie miao shen jishi) by Wang Nanxuan of Shexian's Huaitang. In the subsequent Ming and Qing, the Wangs continued to compile numerous works on the cult of their apical ancestor, including, for instance, the aforementioned *Briefs on the Ancestral Tombs of the Xixi Wang* (Xixi Wangshi xianying bianlan, 1539) and *Records on the Shrine and Tomb of Lord Wang of Yueguo* (Yueguo Wanggong cimuzhi, 1852). One way or another, the Wangs may have exerted influence upon *Model Prayers*.

Still, demonstrating Wang influence (or lack thereof) on this particular handbook is not necessary to establish the likely appropriation of Cheng Minzheng for the purpose of promoting the Wang Hua pantheon.⁶² Concern with subordinating Cheng Lingxi to Wang Hua can be seen in other Huizhou anecdotes—for example, the story titled “Lord Wang Makes a Divine Appearance,” which is recorded in the Xiuning county gazetteer. According to a local myth, when the Qing army entered Huizhou in 1646, General Zhang Tianlu had a dream in which he saw a deity with a red face and full beard, accompanied by two white-faced attendants. The deity admonished Zhang, saying: “You must take heed during this campaign. Do not kill people. Otherwise, I will see to it that you die a terrible death.” Zhang woke up with a fright, figuring that he had seen Guandi. Upon seeing the images in the King Wang temple, he realized the deity in his dream was, in fact, Wang Hua, and he kept his troops disciplined throughout the campaign. One of the Wang attendants in Zhang's dream, the gazetteer account continues, was none other than Cheng Lingxi.⁶³ Thus, local texts and ritual practices are replete with examples of a lesser Cheng deity vis-à-vis the all-powerful Wang Hua.

Some of the fiercest resistance to Cheng Minzheng's self-glorifying endeavors, in fact, came not from the Wangs, but from other surnames, most notably from branches internal to the Chengs and from the Huangs.⁶⁴ In 1483, for instance, not long after the printing of the *Composite Genealogy of the Xin'an Chengs*, Cheng Wenji of the Xiuning Xiguan branch (an offshoot of Minzheng's Peiguobranche) wrote his own *pubian* (genealogical clarification) to refute Minzheng's *pubian*. Wenji complained: “The Academician, a northerner coming to the south to acquaint himself with his ancestral lineage, arbitrarily altered generational sequence and randomly cut off kin branches. This is absurd in the extreme. Therefore, my branch has no desire to be in agreement with him.”⁶⁵

Long after Cheng Minzheng had passed from the scene, his *Composite Genealogy* continued to cause controversy within the local Cheng community. In the mid-sixteenth century, Cheng Xu from Wuyuan County compiled a massive new

Xin'an Cheng composite genealogy, clarifying with detailed notations the authentic Cheng branches and their migration history. It includes eight essays identifying the errors of *Composite Genealogy*. In his 1563 preface, Cheng Xu reprimands Minzheng for having wanted to "be grandfather to others' grandfathers and father to others' fathers," a response to *Composite Genealogy* having raised the seniority of the Peiguo Chengs by adding or excising certain generations from other Cheng branches.⁶⁶

Cheng Chang from Qimen County attacked Cheng Minzheng in the mid-sixteenth century for largely the same reasons. Cheng Chang compiled the massive *Genealogy of the Shanhe Chengs in Qimen*, with its opening guideline declaring that Cheng Minzheng's "*Composite Genealogy* was mostly false." He also prepared a substantive "genealogical clarifications" of his own, accusing Cheng Minzheng of altering the Cheng generational sequence for "self-glorification."⁶⁷ In an additional critique, Cheng Chang even rejected as groundless his famous kinsman's notorious alteration of "Yellow Mound" to "Bamboo Mound."⁶⁸

If the Huangdun episode added additional fuel to Cheng Chang's rejection of Lord Bamboo Mound's arrogance and phony philology, the renaming surely would have been considered an insult among the Huizhou Huangs. Although no concurrent evidence for Huang umbrage has been uncovered, later sources may shed light back upon mid-Ming tension over Minzheng's arbitrary reinterpretation of the meaning of Huangdun. Both the editorial board of the *Complete Writings of the Four Treasuries* and Xu Chengyao criticized Minzheng's renaming, characterizing it as a "fabrication" and a sign of his "clan chauvinism."⁶⁹

Even more powerful criticism has been preserved in earlier sources from a Shexian Huang gentryman. In the early seventeenth century, Huang Guan wrote two essays entitled "Clarifying Yellow Mound," his beloved ancestral settlement. To counter Minzheng's debranding of Huangdun as the Huangs' original settlement, the two pieces emphasize that the Huangs moved to Huangdun first and that "even women and kids also know Huangdun was the original settlement of the Huangs." The second clarification also notes criticism of Minzheng's Huangdun claim by his contemporaries and unwillingness on the part of Lord Bamboo Mound to take heed of it. Using Huang genealogical evidence to show Minzheng's mistaken history of Huangdun, Huang Guan calls his "bamboo-yellow-bamboo" renaming nothing but "fabricated nonsense."⁷⁰

The rebukes of Cheng Minzheng from both within and without signaled the intensity of power jockeying over local symbolic resources among status-sensitive lineages. As intralineage disputes among the Chengs suggest, even various branches could be involved in these competitions for local prestige. All of this may very well suggest that Cheng Minzheng's name was used to justify the subordination of Cheng Lingxi to Wang Hua within the Huizhou pantheon, so as to offset the elite genealogical preeminence that Cheng Minzheng had worked so hard to build.⁷¹ In effect, a power equilibrium in the symbolic realm was reached between

Huizhou's two most populous and prominent lineages, which at the same time could also comfort other kin groups with the assurance that no one single surname would achieve complete dominance in the local symbolic landscape. After all, Huizhou was a land with a multitude of prominent lineages. By the time the extant late Ming version of *Model Prayers* was finalized and printed, of course, these kinship communities had long turned into mercantile lineages, with fully developed concerns over merchants' virtue and kinswomen's fidelity. This development is clearly embodied in the local religious order as scripted in *Model Prayers to the Deities*. This religious representation also suggests that Cheng Minzheng himself could not have been the compiler of *Model Prayers to the Deities*, and yet at the same time the identification of him as its "original" compiler made perfect sense given the new mercantile lineage culture in the sixteenth century.

CONCLUSION

It is fitting to conclude the last chapter of this book by returning to the figure with whom we started this journey into exploring regional consciousness and local identity. Cheng Minzheng was publicly attributed as the author of *Model Prayers to the Deities*. Arguably, the appropriation of the name of Cheng Minzheng, who was himself masterful in using appropriation to promote his lineage, was in part to legitimate a localized religious order. This order fixed his eminent ancestor Cheng Lingxi as an attendant to Wang Hua in order to achieve a balance of the symbolic power shared by local prominent lineages. Wang Hua's divine power was used to offset the prominence of Cheng's genealogical pedigree as fixed in Huizhou composite genealogical gazetteers. This power jockeying in the local arena enriches the concept of the Ming "localist turn." First, there was competition for prominence among local lineages. Second, this competition ultimately reached a power balance, thereby paving the way for cooperation between elite lineages so as to assure their continuous generation of scholar-officials and top merchants. Third, in the end, the local religious order scripted in *Model Prayers to the Deities* complemented *Prominent Lineages in Huizhou* to enrich the local identity of Huizhou.

The making of the Wang Hua pantheon, however, was itself also part of the larger social and religious changes that were taking place empire-wide from the mid-fifteenth to the mid-sixteenth centuries. It was a historical process, coinciding with the rise of regional consciousness on the one hand and with the localized transformation of the official City God cult on the other. This process was likely not finalized until the late Ming, as reflected in the extant version of *Model Prayers to the Deities*. Cheng Minzheng may have had some impact on the ritual handbook, but the patterning of a local religious order was a collective product of local elites in response to changing state-society relations and the ritual needs of local people living under mercantile lineages.

Here we begin to see the theoretical implications of focusing on the regional pantheon. It was local elites, not the state, who were responsible for the “patterning” of local cults, and their integration into the Huizhou pantheon was remarkably stable, prevailing from the sixteenth century down through the early decades of the twentieth century.⁷² The mid-Ming era was marked by the retreat of the state from society and increased activism by local gentry. The best embodiment of the historical process of the “localist turn” was located in the symbolic realm of ritual performance, especially evident in the making of the Huizhou pantheon. And yet, the state was still present in local worship, in the City God’s symbolic heading of the pantheon. Even the pantheon’s de facto head, Wang Hua, was a symbol of loyalty and righteousness that, while representing local interests, helped the dynastic center penetrate local society in Huizhou.

Once again, the Huizhou local pantheon embodied a mode of state-society relations that was not zero-sum, but mutually enhancing. This is not to say that tension did not exist, but that the tension was embodied in the rise of the Huizhou pantheon, with Wang Hua fulfilling the authority of the territory deity on behalf of the official City God. Moreover, the Wang Hua pantheon was a local variant of the official pantheon and the pantheons of the institutional religions, even though it was not as neatly constructed. It was a religious mirror of the imperial system, including an emperor, ministers, marshals, secretaries, agents, and soldiers in its hierarchy. It combined bureaucratic and personal modes of worship into one. For example, Wang Hua was also worshipped as the apical ancestor of the Huizhou Wangs and Our Lady Venerable Mother of Infinite Fortune as the fertility goddess.⁷³ The perspective and practicing of the local pantheon helps to illuminate some key issues in the study of Chinese religious history, ranging from the relationship between state and society to the interaction between highbrow and lowbrow interests in the making of cultural integration and diversity.

The concept of the local pantheon, furthermore, enables us to genuinely study religious culture as history. Ethnographic historians of Chinese popular religion seem to always find it difficult to develop a historical perspective while focusing on one particular deity, especially the popular ones, such as Wuchang. This is partly due to a scarcity of sources. When studied within a pantheon, Wuchang, for instance, can be traced historically; in this way, its religious and social meanings can be more fully illuminated. In addition, the local pantheon sheds new light upon the positioning of the various deities within a nested religious hierarchy. We are simply unable to make full sense of local deities in isolation, especially the seemingly demonic or “unruly” ones, as they acquired new meanings from their positioning within the local pantheon and from their relations to other deities through conflation or replacement. As such, the Wang Hua pantheon demonstrates a dialectical process of interaction between local and extra-regional (and secular and ideological) forces in shaping local rituals. *Model Prayers to the Deities* exhibits this pattern of integration and diversity. In other words, the process of

“patterning,” or integration, also allowed for the perseverance of cultural diversity embodied in the co-opted sinister spirits.⁷⁴ Only when contextualized in terms of their relationships within a larger network of deities can we properly understand how the locals made use of them. And in Huizhou, only then can we weave the symbolic meanings of various local deities, as well as the Wang Hua pantheon, into the social history of mercantile lineage culture.

Through studying the making of the Huizhou pantheon, we see not only how history transformed the symbolic order of local worship, but also how history itself was symbolically ordered and reordered. As the Wang Hua pantheon was hierarchically structured, it served to control the power of many popular deities that were incorporated into its symbolic network, including the dubious God of Wealth, Wuchang, channeling its power to good use while averting its potential harmful impacts. Wuchang as a “good ghost” as positioned with the Huizhou pantheon was the best symbolic analogy of Huishang as “good merchants” as positioned in the social order of local prominent lineages. Moreover, this Huizhou variant of the God of Wealth also played a role in shaping gender dynamics in local society, helping to police kinswomen’s sexuality and protect them in childbirth, both key concerns for sojourning merchants and their home lineages. The *de facto* leader of the Huizhou pantheon, Wang Hua, while personifying the official City God, was also worshipped as the apical ancestor of all of the Huizhou Wangs. This tutelary deity of the region was thus turned into a generic patron deity of all of the Huizhou lineages, thereby extending and empowering Confucian ancestral worship. Indeed, the Wang Hua pantheon not only marked the rise of regional consciousness, but also became the religious representation of Huizhou mercantile lineage culture.