

Chapter 2: The *Shi* of Huizhou Merchants and Craftsmen around 1800 A.D.

In this chapter, the Huizhou culture is briefly explored to establish the context for the later discussions of *shi* manifested in different house doors. Two groups of Huizhou people-the Huizhou craftsmen and merchants-are discussed in particular because they comprised the main forces that shaped the character of the Huizhou houses.

Today the profession of being a craftsman is greatly different from that of the merchant. But in ancient China, both professions were treated as minor occupations in relation to the human activities. Xun Zi advocates the decrease of craftsmen and merchants to encourage the masses to get engaged in agriculture production.¹⁰² Han Fei holds a similar point of view toward the crafts and mercantile activities, claiming the quantity of traveling done by artisans and merchants should be curbed because they neither alleviate starvation nor promote intellectual development.¹⁰³ Even Guan Zi, from the 7th century BC, while recognizing both commerce and crafts as the foundation for the economic and social development of the society, still places the artisan and merchants at the very bottom of the social ladder. The four classes of people identified by Guan Zi are: the gentry, the peasant, the artisan and the merchant.¹⁰⁴ The virtues of the gentry and the agricultural skills of the peasants are the essentials (*ben*,

¹⁰² Ye Shichang, Yao Jiahua, *Zhongguo gu dai jing ji guan li si xiang*, (Shanghai, 1990), p. 119.

<<荀子。君道篇>> 省工贾，众农夫。

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, <<韩非子。五蠹篇>> 使其商工游食之民少。

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 119. <<管子。小匡>> 士农工商四民者，国之石民也。

本) for the nourishment of the human being and society like the indispensable role of the root to a tree. On the contrary, the vocation of trading and craftsmanship is considered inconsequential for the well being of human kind, resembling the tree branches in relation to the life of a tree (*me*, 末). Despite the diminished appreciation of the Chinese artisans and the merchants, these occupations developed as the mainstream modes of livelihood from the 16th through the 19th centuries and molded the unique culture of the Huizhou people.

The Geographical and Demographical Features of Huizhou Region

The most pronounced geographic feature of the Huizhou region is its extensive meandering mountains that isolate Huizhou from the outside, connected only by a complex river system (see Figure 2.1). The mountainous districts occupy nearly 80 percent of the land, with approximately 90 percent of these mountains towering over 100 meters in height.¹⁰⁵ Although limited in arable land, it was adequate for residents to sustain themselves in earlier times. Because the segregation of the mountains provided natural barriers against the encroachment of war, Huizhou endured the constant settlement of immigrants from other regions in China seeking peace in this small and remote area.

¹⁰⁵ Li Zhongmou, *Huizhou wen hua zong lan*, (Hefei shi, 2004), p. 11.

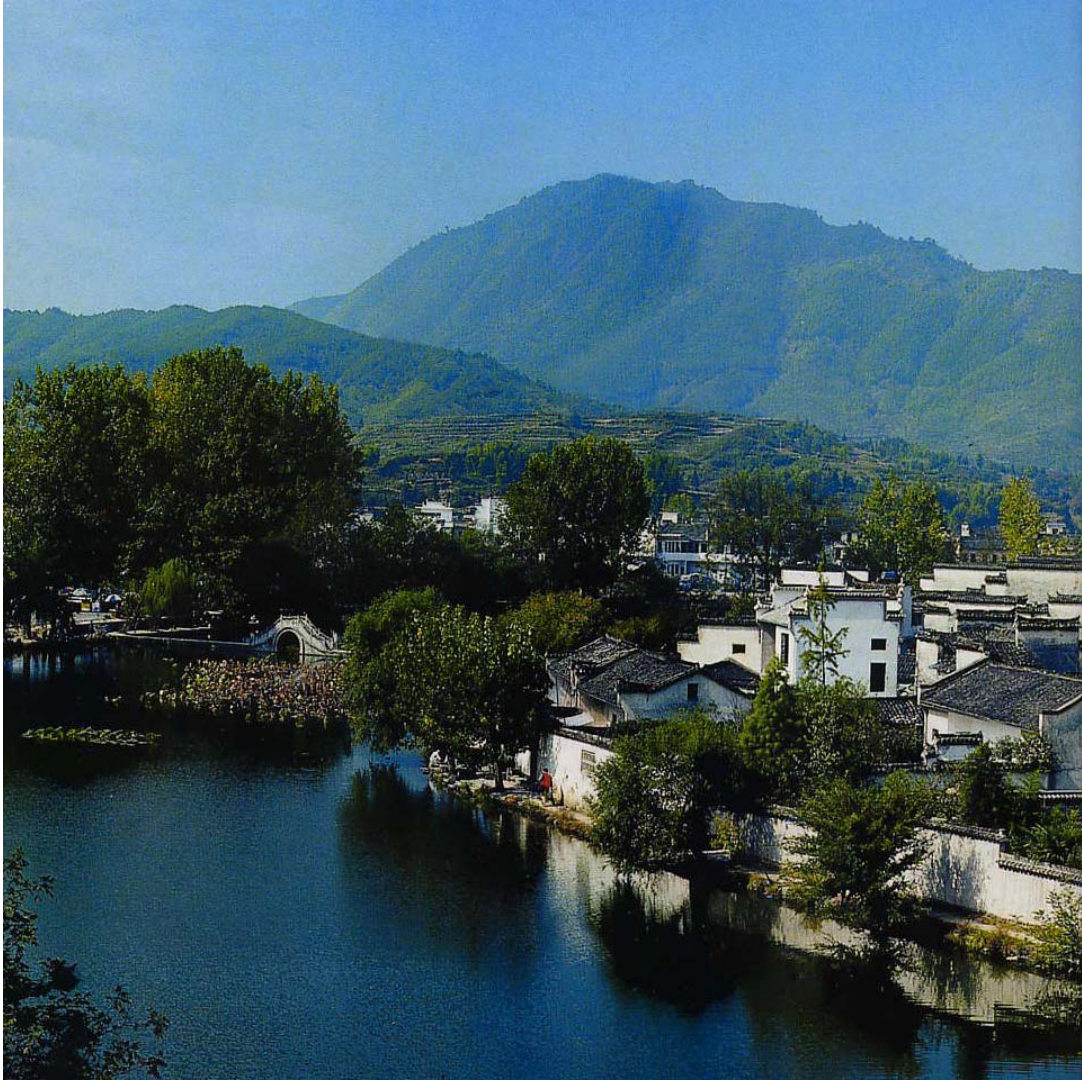


Figure 2.1. Huizhou geography, Zhu Yongchun, *Huizhou jianzhu*, 2005.

According to the Shexian Gazette, there were several immigration peaks. One was in the later years of the West Jin Dynasty (265-420 AD), the others were in the late Tang (around 10th century), the late Northern Song (13th century), and the Yuan (early to mid 14th century) dynasties.¹⁰⁶ Commoners, including the skilled craftsmen, as well as many powerful and renowned families, were among the flow of immigrants who settled into Huizhou to avoid the plague of war during

¹⁰⁶ Gao Shouxian, *Huizhou wen hua*, (Shenyang shi, 1993), pp. 4-9. Also see Yao Bangzao, *Huizhou xue gai lun*, (Beijing, 2000), vol. 2, pp. 50-52.

the dynasty changes.¹⁰⁷ The settlement of prestigious families and their steady expansion into the Huizhou area advanced the progressive central Chinese culture in Huizhou, including the introduction of various crafts and the formation of markets for these crafts.

Therefore, prior to the Ming and Qing dynasty, Huizhou steadily became renowned for its elegant and skillfully-crafted handiwork. Yet despite the reputation and dexterity in making various local handicrafts, most of the Huizhou people were peasants who diligently cultivated the limited arable land, which represented only around 0.6 percent of the entire land of Huizhou.¹⁰⁸ With the influx of the immigrants and the expansion of the Huizhou population, locally cultivated rice and other everyday produce could no longer meet the increasing demand of this growing population. The *Xinan Gazette* compiled by Luo Yuan (罗愿) in 1175 of the Southern Song dynasty mentioned the gradually intensified conflicts between the enlarged populations in the Huizhou region for the limited regional food supply. The 1502 local gazette, *Huizhou fu zhi*, recorded that many common people were severely starved because of the lack of food supplies.¹⁰⁹ Under these conditions, since the early 16th century, some Huizhou people resorted to learning crafts for a living in order to purchase imported food.¹¹⁰ Others ventured outside becoming traveling merchants bringing in food supplies and goods into Huizhou. Both groups of people showed great capacity for strategic adaptation. The Huizhou craftsmen fully leveraged both the rich local

¹⁰⁷ Tang Lixing, *Huizhou zong zu she hui*, p. 7.

¹⁰⁸ Li Jun, *Huizhou gu min ju tan you*, (Shanghai, 2003), p. 9.

¹⁰⁹ Gao Shouxian, *Huizhou wen hua*, pp. 15-20.

¹¹⁰ Bao Yilai, *Huizhou Gong Yi*, (Hefei shi, 2005), p. 26.

natural resources and the foreign innovations to create and sustain a unique versatile Huizhou craftsmanship culture. Similarly, the Huizhou merchants adapted to the changing social landscape, new administrative policies, and the developing markets to attain significant financial success from the 16th century to the 19th century. Together both groups of people contributed towards building a unique, prosperous culture in the Huizhou region in the later Imperial China through their wisdom, dexterity, and strategies.

The Strategic Adaptations of the Huizhou Craftsmen

As a result of the immigration culture, Huizhou artisans and carpenters adapted house construction technologies brought in from the outside culture centers into their indigenous circumstances erecting high quality houses. As mentioned above, one immigration peak occurred in the end of the northern Song dynasty that likely created an influx in construction technology in the Huizhou region. In the 12th century, not long before the decline of the northern Song dynasty, a building manual, *Ying zao fa shi*, was published by the Imperial Court. Prestigious families or government officials from central China immigrating into Huizhou familiar with official architectural styles and *Ying zao fa shi*, would erect similar houses in Huizhou incorporating architectural styles they had known before.¹¹¹ In fact, architectural elements recorded in *Ying zao fa shi*, such as the entasis of the columns and the moon-shaped beams, can still be seen in many of the well preserved Huizhou houses of the Ming and Qing dynasties (see Figure

¹¹¹ Cheng Jiyue & Cheng Shuo, *Huizhou gu jian zhu*, (Huangshan Shu shi, 2000), pp. 18-19; also see Bao Yilai, *Huizhou Gong Yi*, p. 99 & p. 113.

2.2). However, the style of the official buildings recorded in *Ying zao fa shi* was not imposed on the local building practice. Instead, the outside influences challenged home owners and local craftsmen to strategically adapt these imported technologies to create unique architectural edifices that are further examined below.

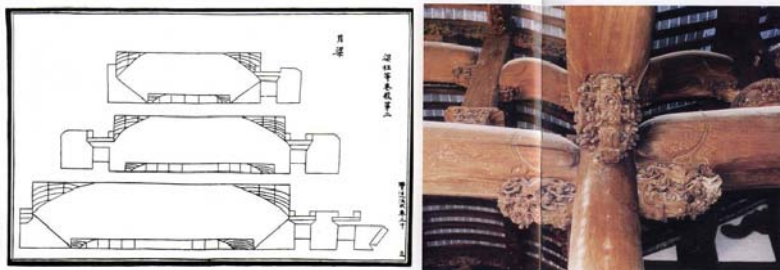


Figure 2.2. Left: beam construction, Li Jie (1035-1110), *Ying zao fa shi*, *Liang Sicheng quan ji*, vol. 6. Right: Dong gua beam in a Huizhou offering hall, *Wen Hua Huizhou*, 2002.

The official central architecture primarily used the *tailiang* (column-beam-and-strut system) structure (see left-most figure on Figure 2.3).¹¹² This construction was technically challenging requiring sparser but larger timber columns. Once planted on the ground, the larger structural frame achieved wider and longer spatial spans. The local Huizhou building structure of the 13th century was mostly of the *chuandou* (column-and-tie system) type with smaller columns and denser spacing to support the structural load.¹¹³ Although less imposing, the houses in the *chuandou* style were relatively simpler to construct with smaller building elements and flexible structures to suit the mountainous site. The Huizhou buildings in the Ming and Qing dynasties were a mix of the *tailiang* and the *chuandou* styles. The grand space of the ritual hall within the Huizhou house

¹¹² Fu Xinian, "Survey: Chinese Traditional Architecture," *Chinese Traditional Architecture*, (New York City, 1984), p. 11.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

was normally built with the official structural *tai liang* system to articulate the solemnity of the sacred spot, while the intimate living quarters were built economically with the local *chuandou* style (see right-most figure on Figure 2.3).¹¹⁴ Also because of the geography of Huizhou, many housing complexes were built on irregularly shaped land and were irregular in layout. The combination of *chuandou* and *tai liang* structural systems flexibly suited the irregular sites, thus maximizing the use of the existing terrain.¹¹⁵

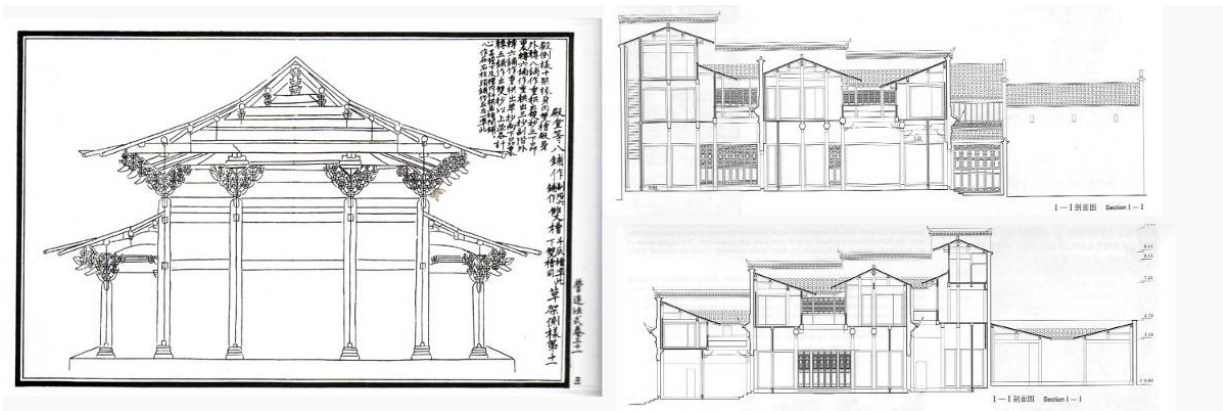


Figure 2.3. Left: Tai liang structure Li Jie (1035-1110), *Ying zao fa shi*, *Liang Sicheng quan ji*, vol. 6. Right: Section drawing of a Huizhou house, Gong Kai, *Xiao Qi Village*, 2001.

Furthermore, the official building style brought in from the central culture normally demarcated the façade into three parts: platform, colonnade facade and the massive roof. This was also re-addressed according to the local context with its limited land for building houses necessary to accommodate the population growth during the Ming and Qing dynasties. The Huizhou locals and artisans strategically adapted the official style into compact double-storied houses. This was a significant departure from the rhythmic pattern evident in official-styled

¹¹⁴ Zhu Yongchun, *Huizhou jian zhu*, (Hefei shi, 2005), pp. 104–106.

¹¹⁵ Hu Shiyong, *Hui pai gu min ju*, (Wuhan shi, 2003), p. 1.

building elevations. The exterior walls of the double storied houses separating one house from the other were further developed into the characteristic high enclosing walls (see Figure 2.4). These high enclosing walls in the Huizhou region were termed as the “horse-head wall” extending 3-4 feet above the roof line. These were effective “firewalls,” an adaptive utilization of the wall to prevent the spread of fire between houses. In the late Ming and early Qing dynasties, the houses in the Huizhou region were so densely arranged that once one house caught on fire, the neighboring houses might easily be consumed by the fire. In 1513, local gazettes reported that Xiuning County in Huizhou had experienced frequent fire disasters. In 1515, a fire in Xiuning burned a couple of towers, the administration building, and about three hundred residences. In 1518, Xiuning



Figure 2.4. The Huizhou horse head walls, Li Jun, *Huizhou gu min ju tan you*, 2003.

County reported even more fire catastrophes.¹¹⁶ In 1506, De Zheng Stele (德政碑), records that a Huizhou government official, He Xin (何歆), observed that the spread of fire dramatically slowed when it encountered masonry end

walls, and issued a decree that all houses should have end walls

extending three to four feet above their roof lines.¹¹⁷ The solid end walls function like today’s firewall. He Xin also strategically zoned the local residences with five

¹¹⁶ Li Jun, *Huizhou gu min ju tan you*, (Shanghai, 2003), p. 237.

¹¹⁷ The Horse-head-wall of the Yin Yu Tang house in Huizhou is about 4 feet above the roof.

families next to each other as a unit that must communally build firewalls between each unit. This protected the rich as well as the poor families from fire disaster.¹¹⁸ Local artisans artistically responded to the strategies and built these characteristic “horse-head walls.” The “horse-head wall” resembles the ancient

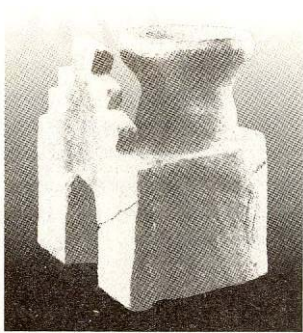


Figure 2.5. A pottery stove in the Zhou dynasty, *You yi shan fang zhu ren, Cong tu xiang kan yi jing*, 2004.

mountain-shaped fireproof kitchen cooking stoves (see Figure 2.5). This distinctive design on the wall is now regarded as the style characteristic of the Huizhou traditional dwellings.

From the above examples, the capacity of the Huizhou artisans to maximize the potential of imported techniques and local resources to create unique products to fit the local circumstances complemented an emerging wave of “*Hui*” craftsmanship.

The Strategic Adaptations of the Huizhou Merchants

Since the 12th century, with the increase of the local population and the constant arrival of immigrants, the limited arable land could no longer sustain the locals with rice and other everyday food supplies as every inch of arable land was used. The terrace cultivation on some of the hilly lands was utilized to produce rice and alleviate the shortage of food. Still, the resources for everyday supplies were not enough, and years of cultivation completely depleted some land and yielded very low production.¹¹⁹ For survival between the 12th through

¹¹⁸ Li Jun, *Huizhou gu min ju tan you*, p. 14.

¹¹⁹ Li Zhongmou, *Huizhou wen hua zong lan*, p. 19.

the 16th centuries, many Huizhou residents adapted exchanging the rich local natural resources, such as timber and tea, as well as the locally available and widely renowned handicrafts, for rice and other basic necessities.¹²⁰

Although completely surrounded by mountains, trading with the outside was still possible as the influx of immigrants over the centuries opened a road from the outside into Huizhou.¹²¹ The recorded trading activities with the outside areas by the Huizhou merchants can be traced back to the early 8th century. However, the Huizhou merchants who developed their business into large scale enterprises succeeded during the Ming dynasty, and reached its apex in the early 19th century.¹²² The Huizhou merchants during these periods displayed remarkable capacity for strategic adaptations in different levels resulting in substantial financial prosperity.

Huizhou Merchants' Manipulation of Government Policies

The first strategic adaptation by the Huizhou merchants was to leverage administrative policies and amend their business plans accordingly. Many favorable policies on commerce were announced by the Ming government resulting in wealthy gains by the Huizhou merchants.¹²³

SALT

¹²⁰ Yao Bangzao, *Huizhou xue gai lun*, (Beijing, 2000), vol. 2, pp. 76-77.

¹²¹ Gao Shouxian, *Huizhou wen hua*, p. 80.

¹²² Li Zhongmou, *Huizhou wen hua zong lan*, p. 41.

¹²³ Wang Qiang, "Hui shang de xing qi yu shuai luo," *Anhui zong yao li shi shi jian cong shu – jing ji shi zong*, Ouyang Fa, Zhou Mingjie, Shi Liye, eds., (Hefei shi, 1999), pp. 101-105.

The first notable business in Huizhou was the salt trade. Dealing salt was motivated by the Kai Zhong Regulation (开中制) issued by the Ming Dynasty imperial government. In order to attract merchants to transport supplies to the armies at the frontiers, the Kai Zhong Regulation pronounced that in exchange of bringing in army supplies, the government will award the merchants with salt to sell and make profit. During the Chenghua and Hongzhi reign, the Kai Zhong Regulation was abandoned. A new and much looser policy for trading salt, the Kai Zhong Zhe Se Regulation (开中折色), was announced, in which the merchants were allowed to sell salt without having to journey to the northern frontiers.¹²⁴ The Huizhou merchants fully exploited this policy and purchased salt from one of the government owned salt plants about ten miles north of Huizhou with a buying price of 2-3 *wen*. The salt was then transferred to other regions and resold in various areas at a huge margin of profit as high as 60-70 *wen*.¹²⁵ In 1542, the Ming government gave further policy reduction allowing free exchange of salt that was not produced under the government's supervision, which further increased the profit of the salt merchants in the Huizhou area. Although the war resulting during the transition from the Ming to the Qing dynasty brought setback to the Huizhou merchants, they quickly recovered and again prospered once the Qing dynasty was established. The apex for the salt merchant's financial prosperity occurred during in Qianlong reign, when four of the eight biggest salt merchants were from the Huizhou region.¹²⁶

¹²⁴ Ibid., p. 101. Also see Li Zhongmou, *Huizhou wen hua zong lan*, p. 43.

¹²⁵ Ibid., pp. 101-105.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

TIMBER

The timber business in Huizhou was also noteworthy. In the Ming dynasty Wanli reign, the two palaces in the Forbidden City under renovation were in need of a large supply of timber. A Huizhou merchant, Wang Tianjun, realized the opportunities and bribed the officials attempting to sell 16,000 timber pieces as Royal Acquired Timber to avoid paying significant taxes. Although bribing is legally prohibited, many Huizhou merchants used underhanded tricks to reap their profits.¹²⁷

PAWN SHOPS

The favorable policies and opportunities stimulated successful businesses resulting in extra cash in the hands of the Huizhou merchants. The Huizhou merchants began to develop a primitive loan system--the pawn shops. During the Ming dynasty Wanli reign, the government officially legitimized the pawn shops. The favorable policy immediately benefited the Huizhou merchants and many built networks of pawn shops located in Nanjing, Yangzhou, Changshu, Zhenjing, Shanghai, Jiaxing, and north to the capital Beijing. The Huizhou merchant Wang Qi of the late Ming dynasty owned more than a dozen pawn shops in Beijing.¹²⁸ The available resources and opportunities in the pawn shop business were all held tightly in the hands of the Huizhou merchants to increase profit for their mercantile practices.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

Huizhou Merchants and their Construction of the Family Clan Structure

With the rapidly expanding business, the family lineage grew accordingly further enlarging the prosperity of the Huizhou merchants. The family clan likely amassed the initial capital for starting the business. The Chinese Hui culture scholar, Ye Xian'en, in his research on the Ming and Qing dynasty Huizhou society and the land loaning system, noticed how the payments from the tenant-peasant were collected by the family as the investment capital for starting a business. There were also records about using the dowry through wedlock into the family to finance the operations.¹²⁹ The business, once commenced, was also organized on the basis of the family clan. Normally the younger members in the same family became apprentices for the more experienced family member. Bonded by the family relationship, the skillful masters generally had complete trust in the younger ones and accepted the mentoring responsibility to teach the apprentice the related skills of running a business. Once the apprentices gained enough expertise, they could have their own independent business.¹³⁰ It was eventually through the closely knit family structure that the Huizhou merchants steadily grew their wealth and stepped into the emerging gentry groups. Realizing the importance of the family clans in establishing a successful business, the Huizhou merchants in the 16th century needed to effectively manage and strengthen the growing family structure and preserve the family wealth both inwardly and outwardly.

¹²⁹ Gao Shouxian, *Huizhou wen hua*, pp. 81-85.

¹³⁰ Wang Qiang, "Hui shang de xing qi yu shuai luo," *Anhui zong yao li shi shi jian cong shu – jing ji shi zong*, Ouyang Fa, Zhou Mingjie, Shi Liye, eds., p. 101.

The growing members of the family clans inwardly required structure and discipline to manage the family. Socially, the Huizhou merchants discovered that their fate and fortune were intimately linked with the political systems regardless of whether they were upfront or furtive in their mercantile practices. They found their accumulated wealth extremely vulnerable to the whims of administration authorities. To effectively protect the merchant family businesses within the society and regulate the family clan internally, the Huizhou merchants strategically began to advance themselves as “Confucius merchants” by zealously adopting the Neo-Confucian philosopher Zhu Xi’s (1130-1200) teachings. Through this strategy, the Huizhou merchants established an implicit liaison with the government sanctioned moralities aligning with the administrative authorities. Meanwhile they generously invested in educational institutions and tutored candidates to excel in imperial exams to acquire government positions in the imperial bureaus. This provided them with inside connections to form a merchant-bureaucrat nexus to ensure their own protection. Also they keenly practiced the teachings of the Neo-Confucian’s *Family Rituals* to organize and strengthen the internal family structures.

Huizhou Merchants’ Strategic Adaptation of the Neo-Confucian Doctrines to Structure their Family Clans

Zhu Xi (1130-1200 AD), one of the most significant masters of Neo-Confucian philosophy acknowledged his lineage ties with Huizhou by giving himself the literary name, Ziyang, named after the school his father attended in Shexian, Huizhou. Zhu Xi himself went back to Huizhou three times to offer

sacrifices at his ancestor's tomb. Each time he would stay for a couple months to give lectures on his teachings on Neo-Confucianism profoundly influencing the development of the Huizhou's culture.¹³¹

The Confucian philosopher Xun Zi discussed in the earlier chapter advocated the use of a series of ritualistic acts to generate a powerful ritual *shi* to influence the body and mind of a person through habitual performance. Zhu Xi's *Family Rites* is a book that defines the ritual setups and the procedures for conducting these rites, which were later taken as the only orthodox Confucian rites recognized by the imperial government during the Ming dynasty. The four rites codified in Zhu Xi's family rituals and patterned into daily activities are: the capping of the adolescence, the wedding, the funeral and the ancestor worship rites. All were rigorously practiced by most of the Huizhou mercantile families between the 16th-19th centuries. The adoption of these family rites profoundly influenced the houses they built thereafter.

Zhu Xi's Family Rites Reflected in the House Configurations

The house setup is an important consideration in Zhu Xi's *Family Rites*. The ritual *shi* born from a clearly ranked and ordered family structure needed to

¹³¹ Gao Shouxian, *Huizhou wen hua*, p. 123. Zhu Xi had many student followers, even though at that time, his ideas were claimed as heterodoxy by the Reformists who possessed controlling power in the imperial court. It was not until the reign of Song dynasty Lizong that Reformists proclaimed failure and Zhu Xi's teachings were taken as the orthodoxy. During the Ming and Qing dynasties, the government used Zhu Xi's teachings to enforce the social order making it one of the required subjects for the Imperial Civil Examination. Inevitably the imperial support stimulated the enthusiasm about them and their widespread adoption. As a consequence of Zhu Xi's teachings, the newly arising local gentries, due to their growing financial successes, were eager to adopt it to differentiate them from the commoners. Zhu Xi was highly regarded and taken as the supreme pride of the Huizhou society. Huizhou was claimed as the hometown of the Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucianism because of the presence of Zhu Xi, his teachings, his large number of disciples, and his long-lasting influence in Huizhou.

be clearly represented in the hierarchical spatial relationships and the construction of the domestic house. Such a ritually embodied spatial configuration and home layout helped to generate and enforce an intuitive perception and understanding of Zhu Xi's Confucian rites in the minds of the residents, without any need for contemplative reasoning.

Among the house complexes, the room where the ancestor's rites are performed and offerings are given is the most important center of the house. Zhu Xi named this space as the "offering hall." In his *Family Rites* edited in 1168, the opening chapter of *General Principles of Ritual* states:

When a man of virtue plans to build a house, his first task is always to set up an offering hall to the east of the main room of his house.

In setting up the offering hall use a room three bay wide. In front of the altars is the inner door and in front of it the two staircases, each with three steps. The one on the east is called the ceremonial stairs, the one on the west the western stairs. Depending on how much space is available, below the steps should be a covered area, large enough for all the family members to stand in rows. On the east, there should be a closet for books, clothes, and sacrificial vessels inherited from the ancestors, and a spirit pantry. Have the wall go around them and add an outer door which should normally be kept bolted.¹³²

¹³² Chu Hsi (1130-1200), *Chu Hsi's Family Rituals, a twelfth-century Chinese Manual for the Performance of Cappings, Weddings, Funerals, and Ancestral Rites*, Patricia Buckley Ebrey, tr., (Princeton, 1991), p. 5.

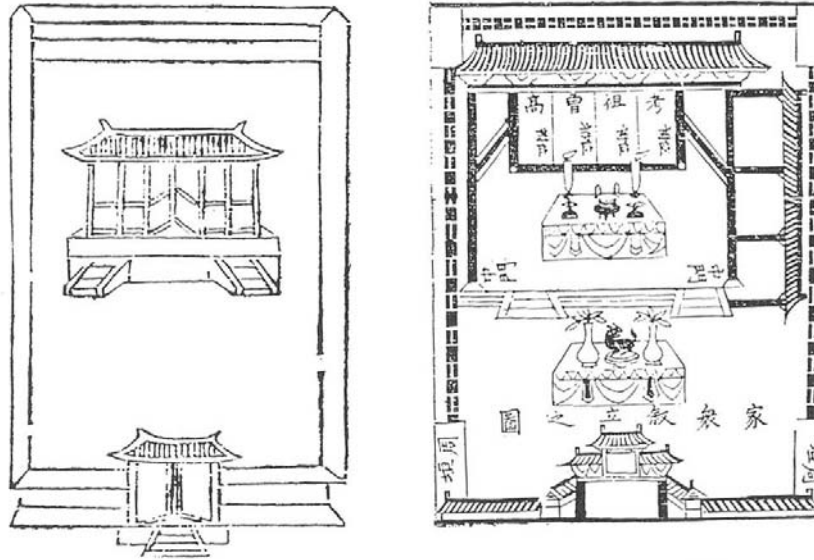


Figure 2.6. Two views of an Offering Hall, Chu Hsi (1130-1200), *Chu Hsi's Family Rituals, a twelfth-century Chinese Manual for the Performance of Cappings, Weddings, Funerals, and Ancestral Rites*, tr., Patricia Buckley Ebrey, 1991.

As the most important center of the house, the offering hall received the highest level of attention. Then the two stairs respectively located on the eastern and western directions of the offering hall were important ways to differentiate ranks, gender, and seniority. The east ceremonial stairs presided over the west stairs in a house layout. The offering hall, as the center of the family, was also the center of all kinds of activities. In troubled times, the offering hall and the items in it were the first to be saved.

“Sacrificial fields should be established and sacrificial utensils prepared. Once the hall is completely, early each morning the master enters the outer gate to pay a visit. All comings and goings are reported there.... Should there be flood, fire, robbers, or bandits, the offering hall is the first thing to be saved. The spirit tablets, inherited manuscripts, and then the sacrificial utensils should be moved; only afterward may the family’s

valuable be taken. As one generation succeeds another, the spirit tablets are re-inscribed and moved to their new place.¹³³

In the above two views of an offering hall (see Figure 2.6), the spatial hierarchies are visualized. Both drawings only portray the main entrance and the enclosing walls with the offering hall in the middle. Raised on platforms, the offering hall was the grandest structure where the descendants had to pay their respects to their ancestors. Just like the crown of the ladder family structure, the offering hall is the principle room of the entire house with all other rooms subordinate in scale and grandness.

Zhu Xi wanted the spatial hierarchies be embodied in the houses for all families including the wealthy and common families with limited resources.¹³⁴ For those families, he provided a series of tactical compromises, stating that although ideally the offering hall should be three bays wide with chests to hold family genealogies and ritual utensils, the poor family can make it a single bay wide as long as it is taken as the “conceptually” most important room. Zhu Xi also made additional practical allowances for other inadequacies, such as the lack of a south-facing main building, “here and throughout this book, in organizing the room, no matter which direction it actually faces, treat the front as south, the rear as north, the left as east and the right as west.”¹³⁵ The importance of emphasizing the “conceptual” orientation in relation to the offering hall and

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Chow Kaiwing, “Ritual, Cosmology, and Ontology: Chang Tsai’s Moral Philosophy and Neo-Confucian Ethics,” *Philosophy East and West*, vol. 43, (1993), pp. 201-228 & p. 202 & n. 11.

¹³⁵ Chu Hsi (1130-1200), *Chu Hsi’s Family Rituals, a twelfth-century Chinese Manual for the Performance of Cappings, Weddings, Funerals, and Ancestral Rites*, Patricia Buckley Ebrey, tr., p. 8.

differentiating it from the geographical orientation was to solve the dilemma between the Confucian's absolute doctrine of respecting the orientation hierarchy and the practical difficulties in its execution. For example, in Confucian rites, there must be eastern and western steps in front of the offering hall to ascend and descend the family members to and from the holy level where the ancestor's spirits resided. The man ascended and descended only from the eastern steps, while the woman only used the western steps. These rules can not be violated.¹³⁶ However, if the main offering hall is located facing north, then the eastern and western directions in relationship to the offering hall would be the opposite of the compass orientations. Therefore, by positioning the offering hall facing north as the conceptual south, the conflicts could be resolved. Thus the absolute requirements of orientation hierarchy were maneuvered and the outward rigidity was forged and redefined so that the commoner with limited resources can also perform his family rites.

These detailed encodings and suggestions in the *Family Rites* provided the possibility and convenience for the Huizhou merchant families who practiced them since the 16th century. These families might be low in rank and birth, but accumulated a fortune due to their prospering business. Around the 16th century, a big push was seen in the practical execution of Zhu Xi's *Family Rites* by the various newly rising local gentry families in Huizhou and other southern regions of China. They fervently sponsored the Neo-Confucian rites and intentionally used Confucian rites to replace many rituals formerly performed by the Buddhist

¹³⁶ Francesca Bray, "Techniques and Civilization in Late Imperial China," *Osiris*, vol. 12, (1998), pp. 11-33.

monks who chanted sutras over the dead, conducted requiem masses, paraded before the coffin as it was placed into the grave, and so on.¹³⁷ Through these newly projected images, in liaison with the government-supported orthodox, the local gentries of the Huizhou mercantile families strengthened their power, their clan structure as well as distinguished themselves from the other commoners. When the 16th – 19th centuries experienced the boon of the house constructions, the hierarchical order of space defined in the *Family Rites* was built into the houses including the ladder relationships in the orientation and the size of doors. Many of the Huizhou houses followed Zhu Xi's idea of "conceptual orientation" and used the conceptual orientation over the compass orientation in locating the doors (the YYT house is an example which will be detailed in Chapter Four).

The Occult of the Huizhou Merchants and Craftsmen

The prevalence of Zhu Xi's orthodox Neo-Confucian teachings in the Huizhou region after the 16th century did not completely eliminate the existence of the secular beliefs such as the worship and exorcism of demons and other ancient ghostly spirits that pervaded the minds of both the merchants and the craftsmen. Rather these beliefs slowly adapted and were absorbed and modified by Buddhism and Taoism, and eventually transformed into complex local customs that coerced the lives of the Huizhou people and also shaped the architecture of the Huizhou house through the 19th century. The deeply rooted

¹³⁷ Timothy Brook, "Funerary Ritual and the Building of Lineages in Late Imperial China," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, vol. 49, (1989), p. 465.

local beliefs in the various demonic powers of ghostly spirits can be exemplified by reviewing one of the most grand and popular exorcism ritual of invoking the Five Fury Spirits (*Wuchang*, 五猖) to dispel demons, which is still today the most popular parade and celebration in Huizhou.

The origin of the Five Fury Spirits varies. Commonly the Five Fury Spirits were themselves evil. One plausible origin could be through Zhuan Xu (颛琐), one of the five mythical pre-historic emperors. According to legend, Zhuan Xu's three sons died at birth becoming ghosts of pestilence. One resided in the Jiang River, becoming a tyrannical ghost; another made his home in the Luo River as a mountain goblin called *Wangliang* (罔两); and the third haunted people's houses to frighten children.¹³⁸ Another source identified the Five Fury Spirits as the Five Supernatural Powers, or *Wutong* (五通), a one-legged demon that transformed from the "mountain essence."¹³⁹

Historically the Five Fury Spirits' diabolic natures were both feared and worshipped. On one hand, they were mischievous and always ready to play tricks on people; on the other hand, they were believed to shower their followers with riches.¹⁴⁰ *I Jian Zhi* (夷坚志) by Hong Mai (洪迈, 1123-1202), recorded the story of a one-legged being constantly stealing food from the kitchen of an officer's household. The officer considered moving to a different place in order to avoid further harm until he found out that his neighbor worshipped a spirit whose

¹³⁸ Guo Qitao, *Exorcism and Money the Symbolic World of the Five Fury Spirits in Late Imperial China*, (Berkeley, 2003), p. 28.

¹³⁹ Ursula-Angelika Cedzich, *The Cult of Wu-tung / Wu Xian in History and Fiction. Ritual and Scripture in Chinese Popular Religion*, (Berkeley, 1995), pp. 137 – 218.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 166.

picture showed nothing but one huge leg which was identified by an ordained Taoist priest as the spirit of the one-legged *Wutung*. When the *Wutung* was dispelled by the Taoist priest, the mishaps in the kitchen of the officer ended.¹⁴¹

In the Ming dynasty, the evil powers of the demon *Wuchang*, the Five Fury Spirits, were mobilized and aroused in a grand march by the locals in Huizhou to exorcise other evil ghosts, misfortunes or diseases. The exorcism of *Wuchang* in Huizhou in the 19th century became one of the most important community events.¹⁴² It is not just the superstitious belief of the uneducated commoner; rather it was also the belief of many well educated and successful Huizhou merchants. According to the study of Guo Qitao, the persistent worshipping of the Five Fury Spirits by the Huizhou merchants is tightly connected with the Five Fury Spirits' dark powers over money. They were the secret dark patrons for the Huizhou merchants.¹⁴³ Thus, the existence and powers of evil spirits like the *Wutong* or *Wuchang* were believed by the Huizhou merchants as operating in everyday situations both inflicting tragedies and endorsing blessings onto the families living in the homes. To effectively counteract and regulate the influences of their dark powers to one's own advantage, sorceries and amulets were widely used by Huizhou merchants to either embed amulets into the house structure or attach amulets onto the building elements.

This and other dark sorcery powers were also engrained in the minds of the Huizhou carpenters when they designed and built homes. The 15th century

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Guo Qitao, *Exorcism and Money, the Symbolic World of the Five Fury Spirits in Late Imperial China*, p. 2.

¹⁴³ Ibid., p. 134.

Carpenter's Manual, *Lu ban jing*, recorded many of these sorceries and amulets. The presence of the large amount of sorcery and amulets in *Lu ban jing* made it appear as a book of sorcery rather than a building manual. In the 19th century, *Lu ban jing* was considered a magic book by carpenters and that the passages must be treated with great consideration.¹⁴⁴ Both the benign and malicious amulets listed in the carpenter's manual also allowed the carpenters to exercise their power of planting blissful amulets within the house when the clients were fair and revengeful amulets when the clients were unfair.

Why were these amulet images so powerful? Their influence was tied to their *shi*. The Chinese word for amulet is *fu* (符), which literally means "conform." According to Liu Xiaoming, *fu* was originally derived from *fujie* (符节), an object used to prove identity and legitimacy. One took a *fujie* to go in and out of the city gate, not unlike the function of a passport to enter and exit different countries. On the *fujie*, the basic description of a person, such as his/her age, sex and appearance were inscribed. When the description matched with the one who held it, this person was allowed to enter or leave. According to archeological excavations, the *fujie* from early Han Dynasty was a bamboo slip about 6" long.¹⁴⁵ *Fu* derived from *fujie* was made out of various materials such as jade or gold, and made into various shapes, such as a tiger or a fish shape. The tiger shaped *fu* possessed by the king was given the power of commanding military forces in the Han dynasty. The presence of the tiger shaped *fu* can empower a

¹⁴⁴ Klaas Ruitenbeek, *Carpentry and Building in Late Imperial China - A Study of the Fifteenth-Century Carpenter's Manual Lu Ban Jing*, (Leiden, 1993), pp. 1-2.

¹⁴⁵ Liu Xiaoming, *Zhongguo fu zhou wen hua da guan*, (Nanchang shi, 1999), p. 26.

military officer to assemble the troops from different regions into combat without the need to inform the central government. It has a fearsome power in that with the *fu* amulet an officer can overthrow the existing government. Therefore *fu* is one of the utmost important possessions belonging to the royal families.¹⁴⁶

The power of *fu* as an amulet is likely derived from the quality of *fu* used by the royal families as possessing a symbolic and fierce power. According to the Taoist Canon, *Yu ji qi jian*, the amulets are created by the *shi* of the heavenly constellations.¹⁴⁷ They are mythical and divine. Amulets were always calligraphed in a particular ritualistic way, through which they obtain celestial power to defeat and control the evil spirits.¹⁴⁸ The amulets in *Lu ban jing* were believed by both the Huizhou merchants and the craftsman to possess the power to ward off evil, pestilence, and misfortunes. Some of the amulets listed in *Lu ban jing* are briefly explained below (Figure 2.7).

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 13. 符者，通取云物星辰之势。

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 47. The process for writing an amulet inscription: first, the Taoist priest writes a detailed explanatory article to the relevant god, explicating the motive for writing an amulet, asking gods to descend and embody its power into the amulet. Writing the article itself is thus of great importance. An auspicious day is chosen; specific colored ink and dedicated calligraphy brushes are carefully prepared to suit the purpose. During the process of writing, the Taoist priest remains in complete silence, concentrated in a respectful manner. The written explanatory article must also show an utmost respect, employing a tone as if a government officer makes a request to the emperor. Such a written appeal intends to obtain god's approval, upon which he would come down, mediate into the body of the Taoist priest to sanction the power into the amulets. Second, the Taoist priest would perform his dance on a special Taoist platform (called *Tan*). His dancing paces follow the star patterns of the big dipper to situate his body into the celestial world as that he can interact with the divine spirits and gods and call for their presence and assistance. The incenses are also burned to entice the notice of the gods with the hovering smell. At the peak of the dance, the gods are believed to take possession of the body of the Taoist priest and only at that moment, an amulet was drawn in one breath. Therefore, the amulet can embody a fearsome power of the controlling gods.



Figure 2.7. Amulets in *Lu ban jing*, *Xin bian Lu Ban ying zao zheng shi*, 6 juan, (cun juan 1-3), reprint, 1995.

The left-most amulet in the above illustration represents a black sun. The black sun is a result of the eclipse, a phenomena traditionally regarded as a bad sign. If this black sun amulet is hidden in the lintel above the door, it will cause the family to have diseases and to become incapacitated. The second amulet represents the bowl and chopstick used by a begging monk to ask for food from door to door. If hidden in the door structure, this amulet can cause the family to experience extreme poverty. The third amulet is auspicious and portrays the costume of a government officer which brings forth sons to the family and facilitates them to acquire government positions. The fourth amulet is also auspicious and illustrates two coins. By placing the coins in the left and right side of the main beam, it can bless the entire family with good fortune.¹⁴⁹ These are just few amulets from among many listed in *Lu ban jing*. The beliefs in their dark powers circulated in the Huizhou area giving the houses a unique cultural mysticism.

¹⁴⁹ Li Feng, *Xin juan jing ban gong shi diao zhao zheng shi - Lu ban jing jiang jia jing*, (Haikou, 2003), p. 317-323. Also see Klaas Ruitenbeek, *Carpentry and Building in Late Imperial China - A Study of the Fifteenth-Century Carpenter's Manual Lu Ban Jing*, pp. 299-303.

In recent interviews with older Huizhou masons and carpenters, the accounts of the magical powers of the amulets are still believed. Ling Qizheng, an older mason from Huizhou, learned from his master various devious ways a carpenter or mason could induce discomfort for a despised house owner. For example, if the carpenters are angry at the owner, they could dab a bit of blood from their middle finger onto a beam to cause the owner to feel heaviness on his chest as he sleeps.¹⁵⁰ All these amulets and exorcism rituals exposed the dark occult of the Huizhou craftsmen and merchants which made the house possess a supernatural force.

The Artistic Huizhou Craftsmen and Huizhou Merchants

In addition, it was also widely known that the Huizhou craftsmen and merchants possessed a unique artistic inclination during the 16th to the 19th century. The Huizhou merchants were not only art collectors, they sponsored many artists such as Zhan Jiang (斩江, 1610-1663), a famous monk artist. Many merchants were literati and engaged as amateur artists.¹⁵¹ It is well-known that many artists were formerly craftsmen, as was Zhan Jiang, who used to be a craftsman in a printing shop during his early years. The Huizhou merchants generously sponsored the artists and artisans, while the artists and artisans in return invigorated the enthusiasm of art and culture in the Huizhou merchants. These two groups of people effused their aesthetic appreciation into the construction details of the Huizhou houses built in the later imperial China.

¹⁵⁰ Nancy Berliner, *Yin Yu Tang, the Architecture and Daily Life of a Chinese House*, p. 136.

¹⁵¹ Huang Jian, *Huizhou gu yi shi*, (Shenyang shi, 2004), p. 19.

The activity of art collection became very popular during the 16th to 19th



Figure 2.8. Painting of Zhan Jiang, Huang Jian, *Huizhou gu yi shi*, 2004.

century, the peak time of the Huizhou merchants. According to the research of Huang Jian, the Song dynasty artist Li Tang's painting (now in the New York Metropolitan Museum of Art), the Yang dynasty artist Zhao Mengfu's (1254-1322) painting, *A Village near Water* (now cherished in the Palace Museum in Beijing), and many other treasures, all went through

the hands of Huizhou merchants.¹⁵² Many local Huizhou artists benefited from these merchants, such as Master Zhan Jiang, who was generously sponsored by the Huizhou merchant Wu family gaining exposure to many early master artworks during his formative years.¹⁵³

As art lovers, the Huizhou merchant's aesthetic sophistication elevated with the prominence of the local artist works. In Zhan Jiang's painting, the landscape is barren, tranquil without artificial decorations, depicting bare yet awe-inspiring nature (see Figure 2.8).¹⁵⁴ Zhan Jiang and his fellow artists

¹⁵² Ibid., p. 18.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 53. Zhan Jiang, as an exemplified representative of the Xin'an style of painting, initially improved his skills by copying the artwork of the previous masters collected by the Huizhou wealthy merchants. Yet at his mature stage of creation, he was more inspired by the true teacher—the landscape of his hometown—and became a monk living in Mountain Huang in Huizhou. He focused his artwork on painting the various scenes of Mountain Huang and the inspiring and distinguished marvel of nature.

aroused many Huizhou merchants' appreciation of the raw, simple and solemn natural landscapes without artificialities.

Nurtured by the cultured and artistic environment, some merchants and their descendants became distinguished artists. One famous artist was Zha Shibiao (查士标), one of the four most important Xin'an style artists. He was born in a rich mercantile family in Xiuning County and was renowned for his laziness. Without ever making an effort to achieve a goal, much like the lifestyle endorsed by Taoist philosopher Zhuang Zi of the 3rd century BC, Zha Shibiao's painting is economic in his use of ink yet with heavy brush strokes to effuse a primitive splendor (see Figure 2.9).¹⁵⁵



Figure 2.9.
Painting of Zha Shibiao, Huang Jian, Huizhou gu yi shi, 2004.



Figure 2.10. View of the Xi yuan garden, Hong Zhenqiu, *Huizhou gu yuan li*, 2004.

The discriminating and aesthetically sophisticated Huizhou merchants constructed the gardens of their houses as if they were extensions of nature's creation devoid of any man-made artificiality. The image shown in Figure 2.10 is a garden built in the Huizhou Xidi village belonging to the Hu Family. The stone paved path, the plants and trees, and the lights and blurred view of the other side of the wall, all have a simple yet tranquil beauty. The enclosing wall formed a

boundary where the bounded space invites one to linger and to forget one's own

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 65.

body, uniting one with the nature manifested within the small space.¹⁵⁶ Borrowing from Zhu Liangzhi's views on the aesthetics of traditional Chinese gardens, this moving experience is not just a visual delight or simply a harmonious sound to the ears or the elegant textures to the touch, rather it is a composite experience like taste that lingers in the mouth, unspeakable and un-representable.¹⁵⁷ The aesthetic experiences of nature highly praised by the Huizhou merchants also inspired the Huizhou craftsmen in their efforts to transcend their skills. First, various carvings are elegant yet do not appear artificial due to the ingenuity in its operations. For example, the *queti* (雀替) element in



Figure 2.11. Detailed image of the *queti*, Wen hua Huizhou bian wei hui, Wen hua Huizhou, 2002.



Figure 2.12. *Queti* in a Huizhou house, Wen hua Huizhou bian wei hui, Wen hua Huizhou, 2002.

spread the load from the beam to column. During the Ming and Qing dynasties, the structural function was weakened but its metaphysical function continued its development and became a focus for the wood carving craftsmen. The two illustrated carvings from the Huizhou region serve as examples (see Figure 2.11 and Figure 2.12). One comes from the Ritual Hall of the Pan Family, shaped like the head of an animal with the horns naturally inscribed into the beams to denote its continuity with the beam structure. The other

belonging to house of an unknown family is carved as a praying monk with his

¹⁵⁶ Zhu Liangzhi, *Zhongguo mei xue shi wu jiang*, (Beijing, 2006), p. 261.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 298.

hand connecting the beams of the roof eave and his foot joining the column of the structure. This is likely the most appropriate and natural position for a family to have a statue of a monk to pray for their well-being. The Huizhou craftsmen also considered the dynamic aspect of nature, such as placing the house in harmonious relationship with rain through its architectural setup of the inner courtyard terrace as shown in Figure 2.13. The narrow sky well is not only a place to receive the sun but also to funnel the rain. The changes in nature draw the viewer into an aesthetic realm of the “self-so-doing” *shi* that permeates within the Huizhou houses. Today this transcendent beauty is a main attraction for locals and visitors from all over the world who visit the Huizhou area to immerse in such simple and ancient splendor.



Figure 2.13. View of the courtyard in the rain, Wen hua Huizhou bian wei hui, Wen hua Huizhou, 2002.

A Brief History of the Yin Yu Tang House

The Yin Yu Tang house was first built around 1800 in Huangcun village in Xiuning County located in the Huizhou region as the seventh son Qi Fang of the 27th generation of the Huang Family decided to branch out from the main family and start a new household for himself and his descendants.¹⁵⁸ Qi Fang of the Yin Yu Tang house might have prospered in the pawn shop business during the late Qianlong reign of the Qing dynasty accumulating the funds to construct the house. Reflected in their genealogy, the Huang family was a typical Huizhou merchant family practicing Confucian learning and faithfully following the Neo-

¹⁵⁸ Nancy Berliner, *Yin Yu Tang, the Architecture and Daily Life of a Chinese House*, p. 45.

Confucian doctrines.¹⁵⁹ Meanwhile the owner of the YYT house also deeply believed in the powers of the sorceries and amulets. In 1997, purchased by Peabody Essex Museum, the house was completely disassembled, and the pieces were numbered and shipped to Salem, Massachusetts. A group of Chinese carpenters, along with the American carpenters, refurbished and reassembled the pieces together, the process of which disclosed many hidden amulets. For example, different coins were slipped into various notches of the house dating back to the Han dynasty to the Qianlong reign of the Qing dynasty. In Huizhou, the local custom of placing coins beneath the columns is called *cai jin qian* (stepping on the money) implying that like standing on a lizard, “stepping on money” will prevent fortunes from running away.¹⁶⁰ Also, chopsticks were found carefully placed in the YYT house rafters.¹⁶¹ The chopsticks indicate prospects for future male births, as the Chinese word for chopsticks, *kuai zi*, sounds like the Chinese word for quickly having male babies born into the family.¹⁶² During the following two hundred years, this house has seen many cultural changes and was constantly renovated, neglected and even abandoned during cultural upheavals. YYT house is one of the most important case studies about *shi* in architecture conducted in the following analysis. As revealed below, the constructions of the various house doors in the YYT house exhibit the construction dexterity, the influences of the Confucian doctrines, the efficacies of

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 136.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., a pair of chopsticks were found on both the east and west sides of the upper reception hall between the top of the central ridge columns and the purlin.

¹⁶² Ibid.

the local Fengshui practices, and the aesthetic sophistication of the Huizhou merchants at that time.