

Social, Cultural and Local Memory: A View of Huizhou Society in Song Dynasty from "Xin'an Zhi"

Wenbin Hu

College of Culture and Communication, West Anhui University, Lu'an, Anhui, 237012, China

Keywords: Historical geography; Xin'an Zhi; Song Dynasty Huizhou; Social memory

Abstract: Authored by Luo Yuan, "Xin'an Zhi" stands as one of the few surviving Song Dynasty local chronicles and is the first significant record focused on the Huizhou area. This work holds profound importance in the history of Chinese local chronicle compilation. Spanning ten volumes, it offers a comprehensive portrayal of the administrative evolution, geographical features, natural resources, customs, and notable figures of Huizhou and its six counties during the Song Dynasty and earlier periods. This paper, centered on "Xin'an Zhi," explores the construction of social memory and ethnographic records of Song Dynasty Huizhou through the lenses of historical-political geography, economic geography, and cultural geography.

1. Introduction

All events in human history unfold within specific temporal and spatial contexts. Local chronicles, as comprehensive ethnographic records of a region, play a critical role in constructing local social memory and crafting historical narratives. "Xin'an Zhi" is a vital resource for investigating the historical culture of the Huizhou region during the Song Dynasty, offering a spatial-temporal framework for understanding local social memory.^[1] Luo Yuan's "Xin'an Zhi," the only surviving Song Dynasty local chronicle from Huizhou and even Anhui province, is highly regarded and comparable to the works of renowned historians like Sima Qian and Ban Gu.^[2] Reinterpreting "Xin'an Zhi" from a regional historical-geographical perspective is essential for comprehending the overall social development of Song Dynasty Huizhou and deconstructing its social and historical memory.

2. The Historical-Political Geography of Song Dynasty Huizhou

The historical-political geographical perspective primarily examines the interplay between historical political changes and the evolution of administrative geography. It explores how political factors influenced local administrative boundaries and regional development, and it addresses the multifaceted impact of historical politics on administrative divisions and the development of local political and social structures. Luo Yuan's preface to "Xin'an Zhi" provides insights into these themes: "The purpose of recording mountains and rivers is not merely to show their vastness... but also to document the evolution of administrative boundaries, the successes and failures of governance, the subtleties of local customs, and the abundance or scarcity of talent all of which hold

significant meaning." ^[3]Volume one of "Xin'an Zhi" records the evolution of prefectural boundaries, divisions, and territories, while volumes three, four, and five respectively detail the historical evolution, local administration, and geographical and cultural features of the six counties under Huizhou's jurisdiction SheSian, XiuNing, QiMen, WuYuan, YiXian, and JiXi. These sections mainly describe the local administrative geography of Song Dynasty Huizhou, with significant portions dedicated to the political landscape and geographical features of the region.

The chronicle's value lies in two primary aspects: First, it systematically and comprehensively traces the evolution of administrative divisions, providing a clear lineage of the terms "Xin'an" and "Huizhou." This detailed account of administrative changes offers crucial historical material for future research into the evolution of Huizhou's administrative divisions. Before the Song Dynasty, local chronicles often emphasized both geographical descriptions and maps, with a preference for maps. For example, in the Tang Dynasty's "Yuanhe County Atlas" by Li Jifu, only the textual descriptions survive after the loss of the original maps, which is why it is also known as the "Yuanhe County Chronicle." This work meticulously details the administrative divisions of the Yangzhou region, tracing changes from the time of the "Yugong" (Tribute of Yu) down to the end of the Northern Song Dynasty when Shezhou was renamed Huizhou. Such detailed records of administrative geography, including the integration and division of counties, the positioning of boundaries, and the relationship between counties and prefectures, are critical for understanding the operation of grassroots society in Song Dynasty Huizhou. In the sections introducing the administrative evolution of the six counties under its jurisdiction, the chronicle not only records the relationships between counties and prefectures and the changes in county boundaries and locations but also includes sub-sections such as "Population" and "Villages," which describe local county-level administrative divisions and geographical aspects in detail.

Secondly, "Xin'an Zhi" offers detailed descriptions of the region's topography, natural resources, and their distribution, thereby enriching the cultural narrative of Huizhou. For instance, the description of Wuliaoshan in Shexian County is far more detailed than the brief mention in the Tang Dynasty's "YuanHe JunXian TuZhi," which provides only a few sentences. In "Xin'an Zhi," Wuliaoshan is described as "350 steps northwest of the county, 28 zhang tall, with a circumference of 8 zhang." ^[4]The text further elaborates on its historical significance, noting its association with the Jian'an Rebellion during the Han Dynasty, the establishment of Xindu Prefecture here, the rebellion of the Duke of Yue at the end of the Sui Dynasty, and the relocation of the Duke of Yue's temple to this site during the Tang Dynasty. This comprehensive account of historical events and cultural content related to Wuliaoshan expands and surpasses traditional geographical records and maps, adding content on the impact of political history on geographical conditions.

This shift in focus, from primarily geographical descriptions to a balanced treatment of geographical and historical narratives, reflects the evolution of local chronicles towards becoming more like local histories. This development would later contribute to the standardization of local chronicles during the Ming and Qing Dynasties.

3. The Historical-Economic Geography of Song Dynasty Huizhou

Historical-economic geography combines Western geographical and economic theories with traditional Chinese scholarship in historical geography. Volume two of "Xin'an Zhi" focuses on local products and tributes, offering a comprehensive overview of Huizhou's social and economic development. This volume establishes a specialized section on economic geography within the local chronicle, enhancing the practical utility of the work for future generations. The "Siku Quanshu Zongmu Tiyaoyao" (General Catalogue of the Complete Library in the Four Branches of Literature) praises "Xin'an Zhi" for its thorough documentation of local products, noting that "its section on

local products is especially well-documented, with references that are particularly thorough. The recorded tributes, such as sprout tea and fine cloth, are not found in other historical records."^[5] "Xin'an Zhi" not only lists the names of products but also describes their cultivation, uses, and the history of introducing foreign species. For example, in the section on grains, it is noted that "champion rice originally came from the Champa Kingdom, and it is suitable for early planting. In the fifth year of the Dazhong Xiangfu reign (1012), an imperial edict was issued to send envoys to Fujian to obtain 30,000 hu of champion rice and distribute the seeds along with cultivation methods. Since then, it has been widely grown in the Jianghuai region, also known as early rice."^[6] The section on tributes compares the tax revenues and grain prices of Wuyuan County with those of Leping and Poyang counties. The chronicle underscores the importance of linking the description of local products with governance: "The way of life lies in using things to nourish life; when resources are abundant, people are well-nourished, and when people are well-nourished, they live happily; when they live happily, they are inclined to do good; when they are inclined to do good, they are less likely to break the law; when they respect the law, they follow education; when they follow education, the upper class enjoys stability." This perspective on observing consumption and waste, and aligning with the people's interests, laid the foundation for the establishment of specialized sections on local products and tributes in later local chronicles.

"Xin'an Zhi" stands out for its insightful approach to historical-economic geography, particularly in its accurate understanding of the status and role of local products, as well as its specialized research into the natural characteristics and social functions of these resources.^[7] Before the Song Dynasty, the treatment of local products and tax revenues in local chronicles and historical records was often brief and general. However, "Xin'an Zhi" provides detailed and specialized research on the various sectors of the economy under economic geography. For instance, in the sections on local products and tributes, the text is further subdivided into specific categories such as grains, vegetables, medicinal herbs, fruits, aquatic products, animals, and goods and materials. The section on grains, for example, records a wide variety of types, with rice being called "gu," and further categorized into "xian" (non-glutinous rice) and "hang" (glutinous rice), corresponding to millet and rice, respectively. This record is likely the earliest and most comprehensive documentation of rice varieties in Xin'an. Other sections on local products are similarly detailed. The chronicle does not merely list the names of products; it also describes their growth patterns, habits, and interactions with the local geographical environment. Given the challenging natural geographical conditions in the Huizhou region—characterized by mountainous terrain, limited arable land, poor soil, and fast-flowing rivers unsuitable for large-scale farming—this detailed record provides a valuable reference for understanding the social and economic development of the region.

The diversity and richness of local products in Song Dynasty Xin'an reflect the practical governance and economic thought behind "Xin'an Zhi." The chronicle provides detailed historical material and insights into the social and economic development of Huizhou during the Song Dynasty, offering a valuable resource for future research.

4. The Historical-Cultural Geography of Song Dynasty Huizhou

Research on historical-cultural geography from the perspective of regional social history involves two primary approaches: first, exploring cultural differences between Huizhou and other regions; and second, analyzing cultural variations within Huizhou itself. Folk customs and religious beliefs are significant components of social culture, and "Xin'an Zhi" offers valuable insights into these aspects by capturing the everyday lives and values of the people in Huizhou during the Song Dynasty.

Traditional customs, deeply rooted in an agricultural society, were closely tied to seasonal

changes and local farming practices. For instance, the "Land Deity Festival" on the second day of the second lunar month involved the worship of the Earth Bodhisattva, and the Dragon Boat Festival on the fifth day of the fifth lunar month featured dragon boat races. These festivals were integral to local culture. Additionally, mystical beliefs and religious practices were deeply embedded in Huizhou society during the Song Dynasty, as reflected in "Xin'an Zhi": "Xin'an has many beautiful mountains and rivers, and the region is rich in the legacy of Xun and Nie, resulting in a strong tradition of people aspiring to immortality."^[8]The convergence of various factors led to a vibrant and diverse range of folk religious beliefs in Song Dynasty Huizhou, including ancestor worship, the veneration of heroic figures, and the worship of natural deities. Among the most influential figures were Cheng Lingxi from the Southern Dynasties and Wang Hua from the Sui Dynasty.

During the Song Dynasty, Huizhou saw the establishment of numerous Buddhist temples, Taoist temples, and other religious sites, as well as the emergence of large numbers of professional monks and Taoists. The beliefs and behaviors of the general populace were deeply influenced by these religious practices. Volumes eight ("Immortals and Monks") and ten ("Deities and Spirits") of "Xin'an Zhi" are dedicated to the biographies of famous Buddhist and Taoist figures in Huizhou, preserving records of their activities. For instance, Nie Shaoyuan "was fond of literature and particularly proficient in metaphysics... He wrote 'Treatise on the Nature of the Sect' and 'The Secret of Cultivating Truth.'" Apart from religious practitioners, ordinary people also engaged in religious practices. Volume eight's "Righteous People" section recounts the story of a woman from the Ye family in Shexian County who "was devoted to Buddhist teachings and recited scriptures daily." After her death, her family "cremated her according to Buddhist rituals, and her tongue remained intact, with numerous bones and relics."^[9] The widespread devotion to Buddhism and Taoism among the people of Huizhou contributed to the flourishing of local religious beliefs during the Song Dynasty.

Cheng Lingxi, a native of Shexian County, became a revered local figure after organizing villagers to defend the area during the Hou Jing Rebellion in the Southern Dynasties. His achievements earned him official recognition and titles from the imperial court, and he was later deified as the local protector deity of Huizhou. During the Song Dynasty, it was said that "in life, he was a man of Huangdun; in death, he became the god of Huangdun. When prayers for rain or sunshine were offered, they were granted. When people prayed for relief from plagues and illnesses, their prayers were answered."^[10] Every year, from summer to autumn, large-scale sacrificial ceremonies were held at his tomb, and over eighty villages would participate in praying for favorable weather and peace.

Wang Hua, a native of Jixi County in Xin'an, led an uprising during the Sui Dynasty's Daxing period to prevent the destruction of Wuyuan, earning the respect and reverence of the local population. During the Tang Dynasty, he was posthumously honored as the Duke of Yue. Volume one of "Xin'an Zhi" states: "His deeds were in accordance with the will of heaven, and he was revered by the people, both in life and in death, as a divine protector."^[11] In recognition of his contributions, the people of Huizhou established a shrine in his honor and later moved his tomb to Wuliaoshan, where he was worshipped as the "God of the Duke of Yue." Alongside Cheng Lingxi and Wang Hua, other local deities, such as the Xiao King of Shexian County and the venerated Confucian scholar Kong Yu, also held significant places in local religious practice. As the Song Dynasty scholar Fang Wushan observed: "According to the rites, those who benefit the people should be worshipped; those who protect against calamities should be worshipped; these are the loyal officials and martyrs."^[12] The reverence for these figures in Huizhou stemmed from their alignment with the people's expectations and the government's need to educate the populace. Additionally, the Song Dynasty's policy of officially recognizing local deities contributed to the

flourishing of local religious practices in Huizhou.

The variety of deities worshipped by the people of Huizhou during the Song Dynasty reflects a complex blend of influences, including Buddhism, Taoism, local hero worship, and the veneration of natural deities. The unique natural and cultural geography of the Huizhou region shaped this distinctive cultural landscape, which in turn influenced the functioning of grassroots society and the formation of social culture. The interaction between these elements created a distinctive historical and cultural geographical landscape in Song Dynasty Huizhou.

5. Conclusion

In "Xin'an Zhi," Luo Yuan employed a variety of methods, including geographical descriptions, annals, biographies, and other scholarly approaches, to compile a comprehensive record of the Huizhou region. The work's rich content and meticulous structure are closely tied to Luo Yuan's political views and his ideas on chronicle compilation. "Xin'an Zhi" meticulously records the mountains, rivers, population, land, tributes, products, customs, and culture of Huizhou, not merely for the sake of documentation, but with the aim of building and stabilizing Huizhou's social order, guiding social customs, educating the populace, and reconstructing social memory, ultimately creating a unique ethnography for the region. The Qing Dynasty scholar Zhang Xuecheng remarked, "Fan Chengda's 'Wu Jun Zhi' and Luo Yuan's 'Xin'an Zhi' are exemplary works."^[13] Overall, "Xin'an Zhi" is characterized by its appropriate structure, comprehensive content, and natural coherence, representing the maturity of Chinese local chronicles.

"Xin'an Zhi" preserves a wealth of information on the political, economic, and cultural aspects of Song Dynasty Huizhou. Luo Yuan's thorough selection of materials ensures that the chronicle captures all necessary details and exhausts all available information, enriching the cultural and social documentation of the region. This extensive and carefully sourced material base allows "Xin'an Zhi" to provide accurate assessments and interpretations, making it a reflection of Huizhou's deep historical and cultural roots and a veritable encyclopedia of Huizhou's history and culture. The chronicle offers a panoramic view of social life in Song Dynasty Huizhou and provides a comprehensive record of the social, ethnic, and local memory of the region.

Acknowledgements

2024 Key Project of Philosophy and Social Sciences, Chengdu University of Technology: The diplomatic etiquette of Song Dynasty and the communication of the Chinese nation in Song Dynasty (ID: YJ2024-ZD010).

References

- [1] Zhang Guogan. "Ancient China Local records", Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1962. P 236.
- [2] Xiao Jianxin, Yang Guoyi. "Xin'an Zhi Sorting and research", Hefei: Mount Huangshan Bookstore, 2008, P389.
- [3] (Song Dynasty) Luo Yuan. "Xi'an Zhi (Preface -Preface) ", Song Yuan FangZhi CongKanBen, Volume 8, Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1990. P 7600.
- [4] (Song Dynasty) Luo Yuan. "Xin'an Zhi (Volume 3: Shan Fu · WuLiao Shan) ", Song YuanFangZhiCongKanBen, Volume8, Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1990. P 7635
- [5] Xiao Jianxin, Yang Guoyi. "Xin'an Zhi Sorting and research", Hefei: Mount Huangshan Bookstore, 2008, P367.
- [6] (Song Dynasty) Luo Yuan. "Xin'an Zhi (Volume 2: Things) ", Song Yuan FangZhi CongKanBen, Volume 8, Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1990. P 7615.
- [7] Xiao Jianxin. "The research value of regional history and culture of Xin'an Zhi", Journal of Historiography, Volume 3, P105-P113, 2008.
- [8] (Song Dynasty) Luo Yuan, "Xin'an Zhi (Volume 10: The Story) ", Song Yuan FangZhi CongKanBen, Volume 8, Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1990. P 7770.

- [9] (Song Dynasty) Luo Yuan. "Xin'an Zhi (Volume 8 The Righteous People) ", Song YuanFangZhiCongKanBen, Volume 8, Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1990. P 7722.
- [10] Cheng Minzheng. "XinAnWenXianZhi", Volume 61, XingShi, Hefei: MountHuangshan Bookstore, 2004.
- [11] (Song Dynasty) LuoYuan. "Xin'an Zhi (Wangwang Temple) ", SongYuan FangZhi CongKanBen, Volume 8, Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1990. P 7773.
- [12] Cheng Minzheng. "XinAnWenXianZhi", Volume44, Hefei: Mount Huangshan Bookstore, 2004.
- [13] Zhang Shizai. "ZhangShiYishu", Volume 14 FangZhiLue, Beijing: Cultural Relics Publishing House, 1985.