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The Merging of Shi and Shang in Travel: The Production of Knowledge for Travel in Late Ming Book

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Abstract  Spaces and their boundaries—geographical and otherwise—are socially constructed. Travel is a major means for the engendering of geographical spaces. Humans travel for a great variety of reasons, producing different types of spaces, and corresponding knowledge. Particular spatial organizations embody the specific reasons for and the manner in which sojourners undertake travel. This paper examines the role of long distance travel in the production of specific knowledge of the Chinese empire for two different groups during the late Ming period—the shi (literati-officials) and the shang (merchants). As reflected in the merging of publications for merchants and literati, the act of travel and the very need for it brought these two groups closer together socially. The shi in late Ming China traveled great distances for three major reasons: to take civil service exams, to assume official duties, and to take up teaching or writing jobs. Merchants traveled for business reasons: to acquire materials and products, to sell goods, to negotiate contracts, and to operate shops. But increasingly, these two groups crossed paths with greater intensity and frequency. The travel they undertook brought them into closer social interaction. The knowledge they needed converged so much that commercial publishers found it logical to publish travel guides for both constituencies under one cover. This new genre of publications also provided ethical prescriptions and practical information that both merchants and literati needed. The different levels of literacy among literati and merchant communities prompted publishers to adopt a writing style that mixed the classical style of the literati and a simple plain style easily comprehensible to the merchants. The increase in the use of the term shishang in book titles that included travel guides and other types of knowledge attested to the subtle shift in
the production of geographical knowledge, which was no longer organized
primarily by imperial interests.

Keywords publishing, book history, merchant, commerce, knowledge
production, travel, literary style, social stratification, Ming China

Introduction

Recent studies of social, economic, and cultural history of Ming Qing China have
increasingly reached a consensus regarding the loosening of official grips on the
structure of social stratification. The shi (literati-official) and shang (merchant)
strata interacted with greater intensity and frequency to the extent that they
interpenetrated and merged into each other. Defense and justification of the
propriety and importance of trade and the career of the merchant began to
circulate among literati during the mid-Ming.1 While there is no scholarly
disagreement regarding the progressive merging of these two strata, relatively
little effort has been expended on analyzing the process and outcome of this
intermixing. Did the fusion of these strata give rise to new practices that both
strata shared? If so, what social practices became increasing common to both
strata? This article seeks to document one novel practice that evolved out of the
merging of the shi and shang—the production of geographical knowledge and its
medium—travel guides.

Spaces and their boundaries—geographical and otherwise—are socially
constructed. Travel is a major means for the engendering of geographical spaces.
Humans travel for a great variety of reasons, producing different types of spaces
and corresponding systems of knowledge. Particular spatial organizations
embody the specific reasons for and the manner in which sojourners undertake
travel. Of the various types of social actions the shi and shang undertook,
long-distance travel was among the most important in the production of

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1 As early as the 1980s scholars began to take note of the strong interests of Huizhou
merchants in training their family members in literary culture. Zhang Haipeng and Tang Lixing,
“Lun Huishang ‘Gu’er hao ru’ de tese” [On the Anhui merchants’ character of being fond of
Ying-shih, Zhongguo jinshi zongjiao yu shangren lunli [Religion and merchant ethics in early
modern China] (Taipei: Lianjing chuban shiye gongsi, 1987). Chen Xuewen, Zhongguo
fengjian wanqi de shangpin jingji [Commodity economy of late feudal China] (Hunan renmin
[The policy environment of the inter-infiltration of the elites and the merchants after the
mid-Ming], Zhongguo jingji shi yanjiu [Researches in Chinese Economic History], no. 4
(2005), 130–9. Wu Anren, Ming-Qing Jiangnan wanguo yu shehui jingji wenhua [Eminent
families in the Jiangnan region and the economy, culture, and society of Ming Qing China]
(Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 2001).
geographical knowledge. In late imperial China there were six major groups of travelers—officials, examinees and mid-range and long-distance merchants, clergy, entertainers, and pilgrims. But not all were frequent itinerant or sojourners. The groups that were most mobile and frequently peripatetic were officials, the literati (the examinee), and merchants. How did long distance travel contribute to the production of specific knowledge of the Chinese empire for these two different status groups in late Ming China—the shi and the shang? There are three points I would like to make.

First, I argue that the very need and act of travel brought the two groups closer as it was reflected in the publications of travel guidebooks for merchants and literati. The shi in late Ming China traveled great distances for three major reasons: to take examinations, to assume duties as officials and secretaries (muyou), and to take up teaching or writing jobs. In conducting business, merchants engaged in long-distance trade traveled for various reasons: to acquire materials and products, to sell goods, to negotiate contracts, to manage credits and debts, as well as to operate shops. Since the sixteenth century, these two groups increasingly crossed paths with greater intensity and frequency.

The travel merchants and shi undertook brought them closer together in print. The knowledge they needed converged so much so that commercial publishers found it “logical” to publish manuals with information for the two different groups under one cover. Shi and merchants also found that publications initially published for the other group useful due to their inclusion of important information that helped one plan a more economical, safe, and well-organized journey.

Second, since long-distance travel was a major and frequent activity of both literati and merchants, this type of manuals often includes description of routes and travel information. These publications attested to the fact that both merchants and literati were the most mobile social groups. Presented in these guidebooks were two approaches to mapping spatial relations: one focuses on the imperial system of administration and the other on the national market of trade. Both approaches were present in many travel guides signaling the interdependence of the two systems: the geo-political structure and the geography of the market.

While geographical knowledge in these manuals continued to embrace the imperial system, its focus is on the market. Knowledge for the travelers extended beyond the official communication system to include information on local conditions important to sojourning merchants. The market approach to the organization of geographical space came to be represented and circulated

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alongside the political system of spatial organization. The appearance of books using the term *shishang* in the title attested to the subtle shift in the production of geographical knowledge, which was no longer organized primarily by imperial interests such as administrative importance and fiscal concerns. Economic knowledge and information on private travel had become essential to a body of geographical knowledge produced from a dual perspective: the political and the economic, or that of the imperium and of the market.

Third, these manuals printed specifically for merchants and the literati encouraged the circulation of a print culture that was commonly shared by the two groups. This shared culture can be discerned in the texts’ ethical musings and in their vernacular prose, which evolved as a negotiation between the different writing styles of the literati and the merchant. This vernacular style was primarily Classical in its form: terse, stylistic characteristics of the “elegant” Classical style used by literati-officials but blended freely with dialectal expressions from different regions, slang and colloquial expressions of various social status groups.

### Fusion of Careers of Shi and Shang

It is common knowledge that in the late Ming the gentry’s intense involvement in commercial agriculture, manufacturing, and financial management often rendered them indistinguishable from the merchant. Usually, increasing involvement of the gentry in trade, commerce, and industry had rendered the two social status groups indistinguishable, both at the personal and the family level. Gui Youguang had observed that: “in ancient times, the four types of subject—literati, farmer, artisan, and merchants—had different occupations; but in later times their occupations were often mixed.”

The fusion of *shi* and *shang* careers could take several forms and can be discerned at three levels: personal, family within three generations, and extended family or lineage. Of these three levels, the mixing of careers of literati and merchants was the most conspicuous and unprecedented since the mid-Ming. A person could undertake commercial or industrial operations while seeking to pass the civil examination at a higher level. The difficulty of graduating at the metropolitan level had forced many to turn to trade as an alternative career or as a supplementary career. Given the expenses involved in pursuing success at higher levels of examination, many had to take up income-generating jobs.

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outside tutoring and writing. Many editors and critics of eight-legged essays in the 1590s through the end of the Ming worked for commercial publishers while struggling to pass the provincial and the metropolitan examination. Chen Renxi and Feng Menglong, for example, operated publishing houses to sustain their efforts at obtaining a higher degree. An essay by Gui Youguang’s descendant, Gui Zhuang, referred to a man in the Taihu area as engaged in a “mixture of careers in trade and studies.” Gui then noted that his great grandfather Gui Youguang had once made reference to the combination of careers for many literati.

Even if there was a distinction at the level of the individual’s career, the fact remained that it was not uncommon to find officials and merchants in the same family within three generations. As an individual, one could seek to pass the examination for some years and then took up trade for a period of time. Even when he was engaged in trade, he might have a father, a son, or a brother, who was a degree holder or an official.

Perhaps no local elites were more consistent in pursuing a dual career than those in Huizhou. The long tradition of pursuing a dual career for family members in Huizhou found advocacy and presentation in the fast expanding print culture of the late Ming. The process was reflected in the publication of guidebooks targeted at both groups under the same cover.

Expansion of Commercial Publishing and Niche Markets

The flourishing of commercial publishing since the sixteenth century contributed the general expansion of the book market in early modern China. Both the market for general readers and specialized readers expanded. Even though the largest reading public remained the one constituted of degree-holders and officials, the proliferation of books that appealed to diverse readership came to create a larger general reading public. For this general reading public, books of practical use and entertainment dominated the purposes of book consumption, and hence the strategies of commercial publishers. Books were read for its practical utility in providing information and entertainment. Books targeting the general reader tended to be inclusive in their contents written in simple and

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5 For a discussion of the expenses of taking examination and the need for examinees to sell their literary labor to any patrons, including publishers, see Chow, *Printing*, Chapter Three.
7 Yu Ying-shih, 354–5.
8 For the Huizhou merchants’ strong interest in pursuing official careers for their family members, see Zhang Haipeng and Tang Lixing, “Lun Huishang ‘Gu’er hao ru’ de tese.”
vernacular in its writing style. Books for general practical uses and entertainment, such as practical encyclopedia, practical manuals, specific crafts and trades, travel guides, fictions, as well as short-stories, can be considered as books published for a general reading public.

There was a conspicuous increase in the publication of encyclopedic manuals that included a variety of practical information for different social groups. One type was called “Complete book of myriad treasures” (Wanbao quanshu). For example, Yu Xiangdou’s New Edition of the Formal Complete Treasury for Universal Use (Xinke tianxia simin bianlan santai wanyong zhengzong), in 43 juan, printed in 1599, included information regarding official ranks, military affairs, law, music, calligraphy, painting, games, merchants and travel, calculations, medical knowledge, divination, architecture, husbandry, agriculture, Buddhism, and Daoism, etc.10 There were many different publishers producing similar “practical encyclopedia” for general readers. Liu Shuangsong’s publishing house Anzhengtang published in 1612 a New Edition of Complete Treasury for Universal Use (Xinban quanbu tianxia shiyong wenlin miaojin wanbao quanshu) that included a wide range of similar topics.11 New Edition of Complete Treasury for All Subjects (Xinke tianxia simin bianlan wanbao quanshu) published by the Wanjuanlou of Zhou Wenhuan and Zhou Wenwei in the Wanli period, and Xu Bidong xiansheng jingzuan wanbao quanshu (1614).12 Similar encyclopedia included a 35 juan book printed by Chen Huaixuan’s Cunrentang in 1628 entitled, Newly Printed Complete Treasury by the Pavilion of Heavenly Stipend of Mr. Ai (Xinke Ai xiansheng Tianluge huibian caijing bianlan wanbao quanshu).13

Within the expanding currents of commercial publishing in the sixteenth century, there was a seemingly opposite and yet complementary trend. More books were printed for an increasing diversified reading public. In addition to books targeting the general reader, there were books published exclusively for specific social groups. The boom in commercial publishing enabled the creation of niche markets for special groups and uses.14 Beginning in the Wanli period,

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10 Chen Xuewen, Ming Qing shiqi shangye shu ji shangren shu zhi yanjiu [A study of commercial books and merchant books] (Taipei: Hongye wenhua, 1997), 55–6.
11 Liu Shuangsong, comp., Xinban quanbu tianxia shiyong wenlin miaojin wanbao quanshu [New edition of complete treasury for universal use], 38 juan, 1612 edition.
12 Chen Xuewen, 240–1.
13 This copy is in the Osaka City Library. See Chen Xuewen, 241. But in the Harvard Yen-ching Library, there is another encyclopedia published by Chen Huaixuan in the same year entitled Xinke Meigong Chen xiansheng bianji zhushu beicai wanjuan shouqi quanshu. See Shen Jin, Meiguo Hafu daxue Hafu yanjing tushuguan zhongwen shanban shuzhi [Record of the best edition of Chinese books in Harvard Yen-chin library, Harvard University] (Shanghai: Shanghai cishu chubanshe, 1999), 467.
14 Robert E. Hegel, Reading Illustrated Fiction in Late Imperial China (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997).
examination aids proliferated greatly in terms of number, genre, and format. Commentaries on the Four Books and anthologies of examination essays, in particular, were published in great numbers. Continuing with a long tradition, commercial publishers in the late Ming also published manuals for officials. The most common ones were the Complete Companion for the Gentry (Jinshen quanshu), the New Edition of the Essential Companion for the Gentry (Xinbian zanying biyong hanyuan xinshu), and the New Edition of the Bureaucracy of the Ming Empire (Xinqie huayi yitong da Ming guanzhi).

In addition to literati-officials, merchants perhaps constituted the second largest social status group who were literate and could easily afford to buy books. The closing decades of the Ming dynasty witnessed the proliferation of books published specifically for merchants. Huang Bian’s New Edition of An Easy Guide to the Routes in the Empire (Xinke shuilu lucheng bianlan, 1569), Easy Guide to Commercial Routes (Shangcheng yilan, Wanli edition), Zhang Yingyu’s New Guide to Stop Schemes (Dupian xinshu, 1617), Cheng Chunyu’s Classified Essentials for the Literati and Merchants (Shishang leiyao, 1626), Danyizi’s Newly Printed Guide to Routes on Land and along Waterways (Xinke shishang yaolan tianxia shuilu xingcheng tu, 1626), An Easy Guide to Awakening Traveling Merchants (Keshang yilan xingmi, 1635). These types of books targeted explicitly merchants and can be fittingly called, echoing the eminent scholar Chen Xuewen, “Books for Merchants.”

While commercial publishers in the late Ming were targeting both general and specialized readers, they sought to publish books that were general enough to attract a relatively large reading public, while at the same time specialized enough to target specific readership. One such type of book was manuals targeted at both the literati and the merchant. Such books are worthy of attention because they helped to document and unravel a major social formation that had become conspicuous in Chinese society in the early modern period.

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**Travel, Social Perspectives, and Knowledge Production**

Books with information on travel multiplied as the demand for travel directions and information on routes increased with the growth of trans-regional commerce and regional diversification of production. By the late sixteenth century, there were at least three types of books that contained information useful to travelers: 1. Encyclopedia, 2. route books, and 3. a new type of guidebooks targeting the literati and merchants. Encyclopedias called *Complete Book of Myriad Treasures*.

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16 See Shen Jin, 246.
(Wanbao quanshu) included information for the major social status groups: literati (shi), farmer (nong), craftsmen (gong), merchants (shang). The encyclopedias published by Yu Xiangdou, Liu Shuangsong, and Chen Huaixuan mentioned above all contained information on travel and routes. In Yu’s book, a section in Chapter Two entitled “Diyu” listed “Routes in the empire” (tianxia lucheng). In Chapter Two of the encyclopedia printed by the publishing house Cunrentang, there was a section on “Land and maritime routes in the empire” (Tianxia shuilu lucheng). In Chen Huaixian’s encyclopedia there was also a section on “Land and maritime routes of the empire.”

The second type of books containing information on travel are free-standing route books, such as Huang Bian’s Description and Map of the Routes in the Unified Empire (Yitong lucheng tuji, 1570), Shang Jun’s Land and Maritime Routes (Shuilu lucheng) in 8 juan (1617), A Guide to Routes in the Empire (Tianxia lucheng tuyin, 1626) by Danyizi, and Land and Maritime Routes in the Empire (Tianxi shuilu lucheng). Those included in the Complete Book of Myriad Treasures encyclopedia might have originated as free-standing route books and later incorporated into larger encyclopedic works. An examination of how these route books were combined with other types of information in new genres of publications sheds light on the increasing sophisticated publishing strategies pursued by commercial publishers and the larger social process in which the literati and the merchant were merging together to form a shishang group. The process of that fusion can be discerned in the production of books on travel.

Knowledge is produced for an audience by an author operating from a specific perspective. This is particularly true of geography—knowledge of places. The type of knowledge needed for a traveler to safely and successfully reach his destination overland is different from that required for venturing through seas and oceans. The type of knowledge needed for the traveler to accomplish the objectives of the excursion would also become an integral part of the “professional knowledge” or symbolic capital he needed to acquire. Geographical knowledge therefore is not just knowledge about the physical

17 Timothy Brook, Geographical Sources of Ming Qing History (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan, 1988).
18 Chen Xuewen, 243.
19 Tianxia lucheng tu yin [Introduction to routes under the realm with map], in Tianxia shuilu lucheng [Overland and maritime routes of the empire] comp. Yang Zhengtai (Taiyuan: Shanxi renming chubanshe, 1992), 2.
20 Tianxi shuilu lucheng was combined with another book of maxims for merchants entitled Keshang yilan xingmi. See Li Jinde, Keshang yilan xingmi tianxi shuilu lucheng [An easy guide to awakening the traveling merchant with land and maritime routes of the empire], in Tianxi shuilu lucheng. See Chen Xuewen, 248–9.
terrain of places; it presupposes a specific social perspective in which this body
of knowledge is organized and produced.

Travelers take to the road for a great variety of reasons. Different social groups
would have divergent perspectives on how space came to be organized. There is
no abstract traveler. Different types of travelers have different needs and desire
different types of knowledge about the places they traversed and stayed. By an
examination of the third type of travel guides for the shishang, we can gain some
insight into the role of commercial publishing in the production of knowledge in
early modern China. Commercial publishing played an important role in
blending the symbolic capital of the two major groups of travelers—the shi
(literati) and the shang (merchants) and presented them as a body of knowledge
essential to both social groups at both the personal and family levels. The
knowledge included in these guidebooks attests to the merging of the careers of
these two groups.

Movement across expansive and unfamiliar terrains can be undertaken with or
without textual guides. But long-distance travel was a risk-ridden adventure.
Access to reliable human local guides renders dependence on textual instructions
on travel directions unnecessary. But to ensure the trustworthiness of local guides
is beyond the control of the traveler. Chinese travelers in the sixteenth and
seventeenth century depended increasingly on publications produced by
non-officials and for a diverse readership. These guides provide a wide range of
information pertaining to travel for the readers. An examination of their contents
will reveal some patterns of practices pointing to profound transformation of
social formation in this period—the merging of the careers of the shi and the
shang.

The growing need for travel guidebooks contributed to the expansion of
commercial publishing in late Ming China. There were five major groups of
travelers in late imperial China—officials, examinees, and mid-range and
long-distance merchants, clergy, entertainers, and pilgrims. Examinees were
required to travel frequently to study at government schools, to annual and
triennial examinations in county seats, prefectural seats, provincial capitals and
Nanjing and Beijing, the two capitals. Those fortunate enough to finally graduate
at the metropolitan level would be required to go on the road to take up position
in far away government offices.

Merchants engaged in long-distance and mid-range trade needed knowledge of
the places they roamed. They also needed knowledge crucial to the successful
conduct of business—knowledge that is not exclusively pertaining to directions
to destinations. Information on travel safety, expenses, and product of
commercial value was essential to merchants.

Clergy such as Buddhist monks and Daoist priests also traveled frequently and
extensively in the late Ming. In fact, their travel was so frequent that they became an important part of the communication system in the late Ming. They constituted what has been called “monk mail” (*sengyou*). Entertainers, theatrical troupes, craftsmen, itinerant laborers, migrant workers also traveled. But the groups that were required to make long-distance trips remained the literati and the merchant.

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**Knowledge for Dual Careers: The Structure of Classified Information for the Shishang**

In 1570 a publisher in Nanjing, Wenlinge of Tang Jinchi produced a guidebook entitled *Classified Essentials for the Literati and Merchants*. It was based on an earlier Huizhou edition of the same title. The author Cheng Chunyu was a merchant from Huizhou. The *Classified Information for the Shishang* he compiled is significant in several ways. First, the title identifies the readers as literati (*shi*) and merchants (*shang*), suggesting that the author and publisher were targeting only two of the four main social status groups in Ming China. Unlike encyclopedias, which targeted all four main social status groups, Cheng’s guidebook does not include specific information on agricultural methods, husbandry, gambling, games, music, chess, or sericulture techniques.

The book has four chapters divided into 4 volumes. The first two chapters listed 100 routes. Prior to detailed descriptions of the routes, there are three treatises on imperial geography. The three treatises “On Geography with Map” (*Yudi tushuo*), “On the Nine Districts with Map” (*Jiuzhou tushuo*), “On the Nine Frontiers with Map” (*Jiubian tushuo*) introduce a spatial and historical scheme in which the routes will be described. It began with a general account of the terms used in ancient times, through Qin, Han, Sui, Tang and the Ming dynasty. It glorified the enormity of the territories of the Ming Empire. The author then offered a historical account of changes in place names. One significant point the treatise made concerns the blurring of boundary of local cultures through history and the integration of expansive territories. “Ever since the Tang and Song times, the inhabitants of the south-east lands of culture were nothing but barbarian; those uncultured peoples in the north-west villages had become the cities of past emperors.”

The reader was presented not only practical information on how to travel but also lessons of history and most important a sense of historical time.

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22 *Shishang leiyaow* [Classified essentials for the literati and merchants], in Yang Zhengtai, *Mingdai yizhan kao* [A study of postal stations in the Ming dynasty] (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1994), 242.
that endow the terrains he traveled with meaning. The same historical world unfolded to the traveling merchants and literati as they integrated historical time into the unfamiliar terrains they traversed. The route book offers the reader with not only a mental tool for mapping space and finding orientations but also a signifying scheme that explained how those spaces came to be integrated and organized.

The routes were clearly based on the travel experience and itineraries of travelers starting from Huizhou. There had been route books before the publication of Cheng Chunyu’s *Classified Information for the Shishang*. The above mentioned free-standing route books such as Huang Bian’s *Routes of the Unified Empire with Map* (*Yitong lucheng tuji*), Shang Jun’s *Routes Overland and along Waterways* (*Shuilu lucheng*), and Danyizi’s *Introduction to Routes under the Realm with Map* (*Tianxia lucheng tuyin*) were exclusively designed for supplying travel directions, place names and distance between postal stations. They were not published for Huizhou merchants.

What is noteworthy is that the geographical point of reference in *Classified Information for the Shishang* is Huizhou, not Beijing. And the first 24 routes radiated from three major commercial cities in the Jiangnan region: Huizhou, Hangzhou, and Suzhou. This spatial organization unequivocally bespeaks the centrality of Huizhou, Hangzhou, and Suzhou to traveling merchants, especially those natives of Huizhou. These three sets of routes were organized according to their commercial value relative to the Huizhou merchants. These routes represented an approach to a spatial organization based on local needs of the Huizhou merchants.

The first set of eight routes extended from Huizhou. The first one route is “Land route from Huizhou prefecture, to Beijing via Xuzhou prefecture.” A few points can be noted in the listing of this route. First, it gives priority to Huizhou and Beijing—the former being the home to the most influential and prominent Huizhou merchants and the latter the political center of the empire and a place of centrality to the literati. Whether Beijing was the most frequently visited destination for Huizhou merchants is not important. Of signal significance is the fact that the political center of the Ming Empire was subsumed under the economic perspective of the Huizhou merchants. Even though Beijing is still included as the first destination of natives from Huizhou, it was but one of many destinations Huizhou merchants visited. Nonetheless, the listing of Beijing as the destination of the first route out of Huizhou did underscore the importance of the political center in the spatial consciousness of the author. The symbolic importance of Huizhou and Beijing corresponded to the dual approach to career

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23 Danyizi’s *Tianxia lucheng tuyin* also made Huizhou the origin of the routes. Chen Xuewen, 138.
pursued by most elite families from Huizhou, i.e. the career of merchants (shang) and that of officials (shì).

Even though Huizhou was a hub of routes extending throughout the empire, it did not constitute a disparate system of spatial system. The first eight routes represent the eight directions in which natives of Huizhou began their journey and most of the routes followed the postal system of the imperial government. Despite the fact that most of these routes overlapped with those of the government postal system, guides did not present them according to state designations; rather, manuals re-organized them with explanation in accordance with the flow of goods and services—the dynamics of the economic system.

The Classified Information for the Shishang included more than routes and directions for travel. It provided different types of information for the traveler or reader. Chapter Two in fact features a number of treatises in the latter part following the 100 routes. There are nine topics offering advice for merchants in matters of safety, protection of one’s goods and wealth, and unraveling of tricks. The “Essential Rules for Sojourning Merchants” (Keshang guilüe) treatise offers some general principles for traveling merchants concerning legal procedures like getting an official pass, finding a right partner, caring of goods, vigilance against deceptive schemes, choosing storage places, and the nuts and bolts of buying and selling.24 Other treatises include “On Various Grains” (Zaliang zonglun), “On Hiring Porters” (Chuanjiao zonglun), “On Buying and Selling” (Maimai jiguan).25

While the first two chapters may seem to address the need of merchants, Chapter Three provides information on administrative units and the staffs of local governments in the thirteen provinces and the two capital regions. Entered after the descriptions of administrative staffs are various topics relevant to officials and examinees. However, they could be useful to merchants as well. Topics include: “The Number of Ships for Transporting Grain” (Yunliang chuan shu), “Stipends and Official Appointments of Princes and Their Children” (Qinwang junwang zisan shoushou guanzhi fenglu), “Names of Foreign Countries” (Zhuyi guoming), “Diagram of the Surnames and the Capitals of Kings and Emperors” (Lidai diwang xingshi jiandu tu), “The Lineages of Kings and Emperors” (Diwang yuanliu), “Calendars of Various Dynasties” (Lidai lishu ge), “Poem of Dynastic Titles” (Lidai guohao shi), “Song in Praise of the Twelve Officials Installed in the Imperial Temple” (Guochao peixiang gongchen shier ren ge), “Uniforms of Civil Officials” (Wenguan fuse), “Uniforms of Military Officials” (Wuguan fuse), “The Rules and Models of the Civil Service Examination” (Keju

24 Shishang leiyao, 292–3.
25 Ibid., 293–300.
chengshi).

These topics were essential knowledge officials and examinees had studied or at least sought to master. Some were useful to merchants as well. For merchants engaged in long distance trade in grain, the number of ships for transporting grain would be useful information. The uniforms of civil and military officials would be handy in dealing with officials. Knowledge of names of foreign countries was necessary for merchants trading in frontier regions. All other topics would also be useful for merchants who sought to cultivate relationship with officials in order to obtain protection or as a means of networking.

The last chapter listed a number of topics on ancient sages, rites, maxims, taboos, health and nourishment of body, filial devotion, diligence in studying, avoidance of gambling and wine, etc. The last four topics specifically addressed readers who were officials and examinees: “List of Top Graduates at the Metropolitan Examinations” (Lidai kedi), “Staff of Civil Offices” (Wenzhi gongshu), “Staff of Military Offices” (Wuzhi gongshu), “On the Essentials of Government” (Weizheng guimo qieyao lun),26 and “Admonition on Judicial Administration” (Jinke yijie). The second and third topics listed the major offices and their ranks. For example, under “Staff of Civil Offices” are listed the grand secretariat, the Hanlin Academy, the six Ministries, the thirteen circuits of censors (shisan dao), and the Imperial Academy, etc. In the treatise entitled “On the Essentials of Government,” an examinee or an official would find some substantial advice on some general principles in dealing with the code of law and deciding on different types of judicial cases as well as knowledge of customary practice and even procedures of appeal.

Some of this type of information would also be useful to merchants. For example, a merchant would find it useful to have knowledge of the titles and duties of civil and military officials in the metropolitan area: officials such as the “metropolitan police chief” (Wucheng bingma zihui), the responsibility of the “bureau secretary of the Ministry of Finance” (Hubu zhushi) in customs; not to mention officials in local government that merchants had to deal with on a regular basis: custom officials (Keshui dashi), local police chief (Xunjian si), postal station master (Yicheng). Knowledge of the process of appeal might be helpful in case a merchant got into legal trouble.

A Moral Code of the Shishang

The information or knowledge provided in the Classified Information for the

26 Ibid., 376–8.
Shishang can be considered a conscious attempt to select a body of knowledge for the literati and the merchant. The type of information represented a deliberate effort to define a common moral code for both groups, or in fact for the same group—shishang. In another guidebook compiled by Danyizi in 1626, many of the treatises were simply called “Simple Rules for Literati-Merchants” (Shishang guilüe) and “Ten Essentials for Literati-Merchants” (Shishang shiyao).27 The literati and merchants were treated as one single group of readers.

In “A Guide to Awakening the Merchant” (Shanggu xingmi), a part of the Awakening the Traveling Merchant with Land and Maritime Routes of the Empire, the author declared: “Being in the world, one cannot support oneself without wealth; In managing property with steadiness, how can one increase profit without commerce?”28 The affirmation of the importance of wealth and the pursuit of commercial profit reflected the common practice of the gentry in the late Ming. There was a common recognition of the legitimate quest of commercial wealth and the need to avoid squandering it in wasteful ways such as gambling and prostitution.

In Cheng Chunyu’s Classified Essentials for the Literati and Merchants, there were treatises explaining the harmful effects of vices such as gambling and prostitution. The author devoted one treatise and one song on admonition against prostitution: “On Awakening the Befuddled” (Xingmi lun) and “Against Prostitution” (Jiepiao xijiang yue).29 The author went through a number of common tragic experiences resulting from indulgence in prostitution: inflicting sexual diseases, humiliation, abandoning one’s family, violating the law. To avoid prostitution was not just an expression of self-love; it is an act of loving virtue, not to mention saving one’s wealth. Included in the section is a song “Against Prostitution” which serves the same purpose of admonition.

There was a section called “Ten Essentials for Traveling Merchants” (Weike shiyao) following “On Hiring Porters” (Chuanjiao zonglun). They were written especially for those inexperienced young men newly initiated into long-distance trade. “When coming upon gambling, try to keep away. When prostitutes are brought along by others, avoid getting involved.”30

When compared with common encyclopedic works like those published by Chen Huaixuan and Liu Shuangsong, the Classified Essentials for the Literati and Merchants stood out in some aspects. Even though this book targeted both literati and merchants, its selection of information appear to be restrictive. It was common to find instructions on games, chess, and even guides for visiting

27 Chen Xuewen, 247–8.
28 Keshang yilan xingmi, tianxia shuilu lucheng, 270.
29 Shishang leiyou, 302–3.
30 Ibid., 295.
brothels in encyclopedic works. For example, in Liu Shuangsong’s Complete Book of Myriad Treasures (Fengyue men). In the Complete Book of Myriad Treasures published by Chen Huaxuan, there were sections not only on prostitution, but also on aphrodisiacs: “Section on Sexual Matters,” “Section on Chess” (Qipu meng), “Double Six” (Shuanglu), “I-go” (Weiqi), “Cards Game” (Yapai tushi), “Wonderful Prescriptions for Sexual Stimulation” (Chunyi miaofang), “Maxims for Sexual Intercourse” (Dongfang jieyu), “Prescriptions of Aphrodisiac” (Zhuangyang miaodan).31

Unlike commercial encyclopedia that targeted the largest possible readers, the shishang guidebooks appear to be selective in their inclusion of information, and the authors, as merchants with experience, explicitly promoted particular moral codes for merchants and the general reader. For example, in the A Guide to Awakening the Merchant, a long list of maxims and virtues include a set of conventional virtues: diligence, frugality, honesty, charity, loyalty, humility, filial devotion, and congeniality. These moral qualities were applicable to the merchant as much as the literatus.

There were merchant manuals that did not include “literati” in its title. But the targeted readers indisputably still include literati-officials despite occasionally. In 1635 Li Dejin, a Fujian merchant, published a manual entitled New Edition of An Easy Guide to Awakening the Traveling Merchant with Land and Maritime Routes of the Empire (Xinke hebing keshang yilan xingmi tianxia shuilu lucheng), which combined two separate texts into a two-register format book. The Awakening Guest Merchants at A Glance (Keshang yilan xingmi) occupies the upper register and the Overland and Maritime Routes of the Empire (Tianxia shuilu lucheng) was printed in the lower register.

In the A Guide to Awakening the Merchant, there is a “Song of Exhortation” (Jingshi ge), there are verses targeted at readers who are officials and literati aspiring to become officials. One admonishes that “when you lose your official position and are treated with disdain…it is no surprise as it is the nature of human conditions, one only needs to cultivate oneself in order to prepare for timely occasions.”33 Another maxim in the “Song of Exhortation” counseled “against obsession with profit and official stipend.”34 There is also a verse explaining the importance of giving male children a literary education. “If you desire good sons and grandsons, make sure they study. Give them education regardless of their intelligence; even though they may not become officials, they

31 See Shen Jin, 467.
33 Yang Zhengtai, Tianxia shuilu lucheng, 303.
34 Ibid., 315.
will be different from mediocre people.” The emphasis on the importance of study reflected the local tradition of the Huizhou local elites who pursued dual careers for their family members.

In fact, the majority of the maxims in the “Song of Exhortation” do not target a specific social group. Maxims such as “Parental kindness will bring fortune,” “Violence will bring disaster,” “Continual dispensing benevolence will result in prosperity, constant harboring of grievances will lead to destruction.” The precepts included in these merchant guides do not constitute a morality distinct from that of the literati.

**Shishang Style of Writing: Blending Classical Language with the Vernacular**

Publishing information for literati and merchants presented authors and publishers with the problem of choosing a literary style appropriate to both groups. Literati in general attained a higher level of Classical literacy. In contrast, merchants who had some years of education and even those who had given up study after spending many years preparing for examinations were not able to match the level of literacy of those who devoted decades of their life to perfecting their writing and expanding their knowledge. The writing style in shishang guidebooks, like that of most books targeting general readers, tended to conform to the print form of the Northern vernacular based on the official language (guanhua).

The style of writing in the *Classified Essentials for the Literati and Merchants* combined Classical style with plain speech-like vernacular. The style in general was a simple, concise Classical style without much embellishment or allusions. This type of style can be called “practical Classical style,” which was also used in bureaucratic writing and ordinary polite writing. Except the preface written by Fang Yigui, the style for most narratives is a mixture of practical simple Classical style with vernacular expressions, especially special terms used in various sectors of the economy.

All the treatises included in the *Classified Essentials for the Literati and Merchants* were written in this style. In the treatise on the importance of care in selecting porters in waterway transportation, “On Hiring Porters” (*Chuanjiao zonglun*):

As merchants take up trade, bringing with them large sums of money, safety is of utter importance; those with small capital should manage to reach the destination within the shortest time span. Before embarking on a long trip, one must notify (one’s relatives or partners). When traveling with a companion,
good relationship is critical. If there is unresolved disagreement, there will be trouble. Contentiousness and belligerency will bring harm.35

Except for the first phrase, which has 7 characters, the rest of the text conforms to the formal structure of the “parallel style” (pianti), which requires either 4- or 6-character phrases. Despite this formal similarity, the words used are far familiar and unadorned than the Classical style of the literati. In the same treatise, there are many terms in common usage: “warehouse attendant” (cangkou), “tools or implements” (jiahuo), “porter” (jiaofu), “portage” (jiaojia).36 The nature of the treatises requires the use of terms in common usage among merchants. There are many terms in the merchant’s lexicon that were figured profusely in another treatise “Summary of Rules for the Traveling Merchant” (Keshang guilüe). “Rivers and lakes” (jianghu), “lowering the gangboard” (xiatiao), “loading goods on the animal” (shang’an), “business news” (hangqing), “selling undesirable commodities” (tuoshou). These were essentially terms of speech that had entered the fast expanding print culture of the late Ming as guide and route books for merchants were published in great number.

The writing style used in route books, shishang guidebooks, and practical encyclopedias was meant to be accessible to the largest possible readership. Despite occasional displays of ornate expression, the overall style of these types of publications aimed to communicate to the largest readership without the use of arcane words, allusions and allegories. This style also incorporated freely vernacular expressions and “professional” terminology used in daily conversation as those listed above.

The merging of merchants and literati inevitably created a hybrid literary style in print that was accessible to the highly literate literati and the functionally literate merchants. It was a style that represented a balance between the need to maintain a certain degree of elegance or “difficulty,” phrased alternatively, “remoteness from speech” and the need to communicate using a simple, unadorned, close to speech style.

**Conclusion**

The impact of the expansion of commercial publishing on practice in China in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was profound and extensive. The mapping of its traces in the cultural landscape of early modern China has just begun.37 One area that needs much investigation was how commercial publishing

35 “Keshang guilüe” [Summary of rules for the traveling merchant], in Shishang leiyao, 292.
36 Shishang leiyao, 294.
37 For references to studies of various aspects of print culture, see Chow, Printing, 300, n32.
contributed to the production and dissemination of knowledge. Commercial publishing played an important role in the production of a body of knowledge essential to the two social status groups: the literati and the merchant. This body of knowledge includes information on routes to places organized by both the imperial structure and the market. Peripatetic merchants needed to gain knowledge of major bureaucratic offices in the capital as well as in local governments. To plan a smooth and safe trip, both the literati and the merchant needed to know the distance, routes, expenses, danger, and fundamentals of long-distance travel. To meet the needs of these travelers, commercial publishers produced guided books. The appearance of this type of publications testifies to the production of a new geography from the perspective of merchants. This new spatial organization of the empire according to the flow of goods and economic relations, however, overlapped with the spatial system of the empire which structured the movements of the literati. These two spatial systems printed in the same book unequivocally bespeak the merging of the careers of the shi and shang.

The guide books designed to target two social groups with different levels of literacy also negotiated the writing style, fashioning or adopting a simple classical style crossbred with the vernacular. The commercial publishers played an important role in bringing together the literary horizons of the two social groups by presenting to their readers a style that neither group found completely pleasant and fully competent to read.

The maxims and moral advice offered to merchants in guidebooks also reveal that merchant ethics were not radically different from those of the literati. Readers with merchant and literati background would likely have found admonitions against vices such as gambling and prostitution, as well as the promotion of virtues such as parental kindness, humility, and investment in education to be orthodox and agreeable. It was in response to the merging of the careers of the literati and the merchant that commercial publishers in the sixteenth century began to produce route books targeting officials, examinees, and merchants.

**Glossary**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Anzhengtang 安正堂</th>
<th>Cunrentang 存仁堂</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>cangkou</em> 仓口</td>
<td>Danyizi 慈漪子</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chen Huaixuan 陈怀轩</td>
<td>Diwang yuanliu 帝王源流</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cheng Chunyu 程春宇</td>
<td>diyu 地舆</td>
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<td><em>Chuanjiao zonglun</em> 船脚总论</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chunyi miaofang 春意妙方</td>
<td><em>Dupian xinshu</em> 杜骗新书</td>
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</table>
Fang Yiguei 方一桂
Fengyue men 风月门
gu er hao ru 贾而好儒
Guochao peixiang gongchen shi'er ren ge 国朝配享功臣十二人歌
hangqing 行情
Huang Bian 黄汴
Hubu zhushi 户部主事
jiahuo 家伙
jianghu 江湖
Jiepiao xijiang yue 戒嫖西江月
Jingshi ge 警世歌
Jinke yijie 金科一戒
Jinshen quanshu 绍绅全书
Jiubian tushuo 九边图说
Jiuzhou tushuo 九州图说
jiaofu 脚夫
jiaojia 脚价
Keju chengshi 科举成式
Keshang guilüe 士商规略
Keshang yilan xingmi 客商一览醒迷
Keshuai dashi 课税大使
Li Dejin 李德晋
Lidai diwang xingshi jian du tu 历代帝王姓氏建都图
Lidai guohao shi 历代国号诗
Lidai kedi 历代科第
Lidai lishu ge 历代历数歌
Liu Shuangsong 刘双松
Maimai jiguan 买卖机关
muyou 幕友
pianti 骈体
Qinwang junwang zisun shoushou guanzhi fenglu 亲王郡王子孙授受官职俸禄
Qipu meng 棋谱门
Jirong leishu 日用类书
sengyou 僧邰
Shang Jun 商浚
shang'an 上鞍
Shangcheng yilan 商程一览
Shanggu xingmi 商贾醒迷
Shangshu 商书
shisan dao 十三道
Shishang guilüe 士商规略
Shishang leiyao 士商类要
Shishang shiyao 士商士要
Shishang xiangza 士商相杂
shishi 士绅
shizi 士子
Shuanglu 双陆
Shuiyu lucheng 水陆路程
Tang Jinchi 唐锦池
Tianxia lucheng tuyin 天下路程图引
Tianxia lucheng 天下路程
Tianxia shuiyu lucheng 天下水陆路程
tongshou 通手
tuoshou 脱手
Wanbao quanshu 万宝全书
Wanjuanlou 卷楼
Weike shiyao 为客十要
Weiqi 围棋
Weizheng guimo qieyao lun 为政规模切要论
Wenlinge 文林阁
Wenzhi gongshu 文职公署
Wucheng bingma zhihui 五城兵马指挥
Wuguan fuse 武官服色
Wuyu lilu 勿虞利禄
Wuzhi gongshu 武职公署
xiatiao 下跳
Xinhua quanshu tianxia shiyong wenlin miaojin wanbao quanshu 新板全补天下使用文林妙锦万宝全书
Xinhua zanying biyong hanyuan xinshu 新编管理必用翰苑新书
Xingci lun 醒迷论
Xinke Ai xiansheng Tianluge huibian caijing bianlan wanbao quanshu 新刻艾先生天禄阁汇编采精便览万宝全书
Xinke hebing keshang yilan xingmi
tianxia shuilu lucheng 新刻合并客商一览醒迷天下水陆路程
Xinke shishang yaolan tianxia shuilu
xingcheng tu 新刻士商要览天下水陆行程图
Xinke shuilu lucheng bianlan 新刻水陆路程便览
Xinke tianxia simin bianlan santai
wanyong zhengzong 新刻天下四民便览三台万用正宗
Xinke tianxia simin bianlan wanbao
quanshu 新刻天下四民便览万宝全书
Xinqie huayi yitong da Ming guanzhi
新镌华夷一统大明官制

Xu Bidong xiansheng jingzuan
wanbao quanshu 徐笔洞先生精纂万宝全书
Xunjian si 巡检司
Yapai tushi 牙牌图式
Yicheng 驿丞
Yitong lucheng tuji 一统路程图记
Yu Xiangdou 余象斗
Yudi tushuo 舆地图说
Yunliang chuan shu 运粮船只
Zaliang zonglun 杂粮总论
Zhang Yingyu 张应俞
Zhou Wenhan 周文焕
Zhou Wenwei 周文炜
Zhuangyang miaodan 壮阳妙丹
Zhuyi guoming 诸夷国名

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