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An examination of the status of Huizhou as a book-printing center during the Ming and Qing dynasties and the reasons for its formation

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Abstract. Ancient Chinese book-printing centers can be understood in both a narrow and a broad sense. Huizhou has traditionally been regarded as a book-printing center in the broad sense, namely, a national center of book printing, and was listed alongside Nanjing, Jianyang, and other regions as one of the four major book-printing centers during the Ming and Qing dynasties. However, a review of historical records and an examination of historical facts reveal that the local commercial publishing industry in Huizhou was not well developed, and its printing scale and efficiency were limited, falling far behind those of Nanjing, Jianyang, and other regions. Therefore, Huizhou cannot be regarded as a book-printing center in the broad sense. The prosperity of book printing in Huizhou during the Ming and Qing dynasties was primarily reflected in privately commissioned family printing rather than commercial publishing. The formation of this distinctive publishing structure can be attributed, on the one hand, to the close relationship between Huizhou's clan-based society and the power of Huizhou merchants, which led local book printers to favor family printing over commercial publishing; and, on the other hand, to the inhibiting effect of the Jiangnan region on the centralization and industrialization of Huizhou's book-printing industry.

Keywords: Huizhou book printing, book-printing centers, clan-based society, Huizhou merchants, Jiangnan region

1. Introduction

During the Ming and Qing dynasties, Huizhou book printing occupied an important position in the history of Chinese printing, owing to its refined techniques and other distinctive features. Previous studies have generally regarded Huizhou as one of the four major book-printing centers in China during the Ming and Qing dynasties in the broad sense, equivalent to a national publishing center in the modern understanding of the term [1]. However, some scholars have expressed reservations about the extent of its influence, indicating that no consensus has yet been reached regarding the historical status of Huizhou book printing. By re-examining the historical status of Huizhou book printing during the Ming and Qing dynasties, this study seeks to clarify the sources of disagreement among different scholarly perspectives and analyze the factors underlying the formation of Huizhou's position in the history of book printing during this period.

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2. Re-examining the status of Huizhou book printing during the Ming and Qing dynasties

A prerequisite for re-examining the status of Huizhou book printing during the Ming and Qing dynasties is to distinguish among the concepts of "publishing", "publishing center", "book printing", and "book-printing center". Publishing refers to the activity of processing and reproducing knowledge, ideas, or other information products on physical media and disseminating them to the public. A complete publishing process comprises three stages: compilation and authorship, processing and reproduction, and widespread dissemination [2]. A publishing center should refer to a core region whose capabilities in compilation and authorship, processing and reproduction, and distribution and dissemination are significantly superior to those of other regions within a given temporal and spatial context. Its evaluation criteria are scale and efficiency. However, in ancient China, the capacity to compile and produce books was not necessarily coordinated with the capacities for processing, reproduction, and distribution. Therefore, the ability to compile and produce books is a necessary but insufficient condition for determining whether a region qualifies as a publishing center. A region possessing only one of these capabilities, whether production or distribution, cannot be considered a publishing center. For instance, a region with substantial book circulation but inadequate processing and reproduction capacity should instead be classified as a book distribution center.

Following the invention of woodblock printing, the term "book printing" technically came to refer to the entire process of book production using woodblock or movable-type printing as its principal technological means, corresponding to the "processing and reproduction" stage of publishing. However, ancient Chinese writers frequently used the term "book printing" in a broader sense to refer to the entire publishing process. These two distinct meanings can therefore be differentiated as the narrow and broad senses of book printing. Accordingly, book-printing centers can also be divided into narrow and broad categories. A book-printing center in the narrow sense specifically refers to a region whose capabilities in book processing and reproduction are significantly superior to those of other regions, with particular emphasis on printing techniques, efficiency, and scale. A book-printing center in the broad sense, by contrast, is entirely equivalent to a publishing center. Scholars generally identify Huizhou, together with Nanjing, Suzhou, Hangzhou, and Jianyang, as one of China's national book-printing centers. Among these regions, Nanjing and the others possessed both substantial book-processing and distribution capabilities and thus qualified as book-printing centers in the broad sense. For Huizhou to be placed on an equal footing with them, its status must likewise be evaluated in terms of its capacity as a publishing center. The defining characteristic of a national publishing center lies in its possession of book-processing and distribution capabilities far exceeding those of other regions, enabling it to integrate technology, capital, labor, distribution channels, and markets to a high degree and exert considerable influence and a strong radiating effect on the national publishing landscape.

According to the identity of the publishing entities, ancient Chinese book-printing institutions were generally classified into three categories: official printing, private family printing, and commercial printing by bookshops. Neither private family printing nor official printing was capable of, or had any need to undertake, the extensive mobilization and effective integration of regional publishing resources, including technology, capital, labor, distribution channels, and markets. Consequently, neither can serve as a criterion for evaluating whether a region qualifies as a publishing center. Commercial printing by bookshops, in contrast, was fundamentally driven by the pursuit of profit. Its production emphasized speed and volume, placing considerable importance on the efficiency with which books entered the market and on the availability of distribution channels. It also required close coordination among upstream and downstream sectors of the industrial chain, thereby necessitating the extensive integration and effective mobilization of various industrial

resources. Furthermore, regions where commercial book printing flourished were generally economically prosperous and culturally advanced, and other forms of printing, such as private family printing, were correspondingly well developed. Thus, although the prosperity of private family printing reflects a region's economic conditions, cultural landscape, and printing techniques, it is the development of commercial printing by bookshops that ultimately determines whether the region possesses strong book-production and distribution capabilities and can therefore qualify as a national publishing center. Commercial printing represents the tangible manifestation of the ancient publishing industry and reflects the upper limit of a region's publishing capacity, whereas private family printing reflects its lower limit. In summary, using the number of commercial bookshops as an indicator of whether a region can be classified as a national publishing center is a relatively reasonable and feasible approach. The following discussion examines commercial book printing in Huizhou during the Ming and Qing dynasties from two perspectives: documentary records and historical verification.

With regard to documentary records, references to book printing in Huizhou as a whole during the Ming and Qing dynasties are relatively scarce and primarily focus on praising the excellence of its printing techniques. Hu Yinglin, Xie Zhaozhe, Shen Defu, and other scholars evaluated the printing practices of different regions mainly in terms of the refinement of their printed books. Their assessments essentially concerned printing techniques rather than the processing and distribution capabilities required of a book-printing center [3-5]. The claim that "Huizhou printing was exceptionally refined" was repeatedly emphasized, whereas references to its printing being "exceptionally fast" or "exceptionally prolific" were almost entirely absent. Yet the latter two characteristics are precisely the key indicators for evaluating the status of a book-printing center. This contrast indirectly reveals Huizhou's relative deficiencies in book-processing and distribution capabilities. Meanwhile, literati during the Ming and Qing dynasties already had a relatively clear understanding of the geographical distribution of major book-printing centers. Nanjing, Suzhou, and other regions possessed both strong processing and distribution capabilities, whereas Hangzhou and Beijing essentially depended on books imported from elsewhere and could therefore only be classified as book distribution centers. Interestingly, literati of the period made very few references to commercial bookshop activities in Huizhou, suggesting that these activities had attracted little widespread attention and that their scale was far smaller than that of Nanjing and other major centers. In summary, historical records predominantly praise Huizhou for its printing techniques, focusing exclusively on the technical dimension of "processing and reproduction" without extending to the broader aspects of compilation, processing, and distribution. This indirectly suggests that Huizhou lacked sufficient local book-processing and distribution capabilities. Moreover, in the eyes of numerous contemporaries during the Ming and Qing dynasties, Jianyang, Suzhou, and Nanjing were the true national publishing centers, while Huizhou was never regarded as one.

Traditional studies of Huizhou's printing history maintain that, from the late Ming dynasty onward, the local book-printing industry, particularly commercial printing, was exceptionally well developed, and consequently conclude that Huizhou was a national book-printing center. Such arguments generally rely either on lists of prominent commercial publishers, such as Wu Mianxue, and their printed works, or on statistical accounts of the number and scale of Huizhou bookshops. However, both approaches suffer from the problem of "misattributing the place of printing" [6]. When studying book-printing activities within a particular geographical region, the scope of investigation should be restricted to books actually printed in that region. Traditional studies, however, have failed to make a strict distinction between books printed locally in Huizhou and those printed by individuals of Huizhou origin. As a result, books printed by Huizhou natives elsewhere, and even those printed by their descendants after relocating to other regions, have been indiscriminately classified as Huizhou publications. Consequently, the term "Huizhou book printing" actually encompasses two distinct meanings: first, book-printing activities carried out within Huizhou itself; and second, book-printing

activities undertaken by people of Huizhou origin, including both local printing and printing by Huizhou natives living elsewhere. Any investigation into the status of Huizhou book printing must therefore exclude the activities of Huizhou natives operating outside the region and focus exclusively on the actual conditions of local book printing. According to the author's statistics, there were 68 commercial printing workshops in Huizhou during the Ming dynasty and 40 during the Qing dynasty. By comparison, Jianyang, Nanjing, and Suzhou had 229, 152, and more than 160 such workshops, respectively, during the corresponding periods. Furthermore, many of the 68 Huizhou workshops recorded for the Ming dynasty engaged in cross-regional printing rather than operating exclusively within Huizhou. Among the known local bookshops in Huizhou, the vast majority have fewer than five surviving titles to their names, while a considerable proportion produced books comprising fewer than ten juan (fascicles). These workshops primarily published popular reading materials, including novels, plays, primers, and collections of formulaic expressions, which were relatively inexpensive to produce and targeted at the local urban population [7]. This evidence indicates that most genuinely local bookshops in Huizhou operated on a relatively small scale and were likely small-scale workshops serving the local market. Their book-processing and distribution capabilities were consequently limited, and the overall scale of publishing in Huizhou must have been substantially smaller than that in Jianyang, Nanjing, and other major centers.

In fact, private family printing, rather than commercial printing by bookshops, constituted the principal force behind Huizhou's book-printing industry. The fact that private family printing was far more developed than commercial printing in Huizhou led Michel to argue that, unlike Jianyang and Sibao, Huizhou was characterized by a non-professional approach to book printing [8]. The implication is that investors, technology, labor, and markets in Huizhou's printing industry were not closely integrated, and that its book economy, or publishing industry, was not particularly strong. Zhou Shaoming likewise maintains that even Huizhou publishers in the late Ming dynasty had not achieved the level of activity in book production that would have been expected during that period [9]. Although book printing flourished in Huizhou, it never developed into a national publishing center comparable to Nanjing or Jianyang. This can be attributed to two principal factors. First, the integration of local commercial forces with Huizhou's clan-based society meant that book printing was regarded primarily as a means of accumulating cultural and social capital rather than economic capital, thereby reinforcing the tradition of private family printing at the expense of commercial printing. Second, the powerful radiating influence of the publishing industry in the Jiangnan region impeded the development of Huizhou's publishing industry toward greater centralization and industrialization. These two factors will be examined separately below.

3. Huizhou merchants and the tradition of book printing

Although the book-printing industry in Huizhou flourished during the Ming and Qing dynasties, private family printing, rather than commercial printing by bookshops, constituted its principal form. This was largely associated with the development of Huizhou's regional society. Throughout the Ming and Qing dynasties, the geographical distribution of book printing in Huizhou remained centered on Shexian and Xiuning counties, followed by Wuyuan County, while Yixian, Jixi, and Qimen counties occupied peripheral positions. An examination of the social development of Huizhou's six counties reveals that Huizhou merchants first emerged in Shexian, Xiuning, and Wuyuan. Primarily engaged in the salt, pawnshop, timber, and tea trades, they developed the greatest commercial influence. By contrast, Huizhou merchants in Yixian, Jixi, and Qimen were relatively weak and emerged at a later date. Furthermore, within Shexian, Xiuning, and Wuyuan, book printers were concentrated primarily in western Shexian, eastern Xiuning, and northeastern Wuyuan. In addition to

having a strong merchant presence, these areas also had highly developed clan organizations. In other words, the interaction between Huizhou's clan-based society and its merchant power had two specific effects on book-printing activities. On the one hand, it meant that during the late Ming dynasty, Huizhou merchants showed little interest in commercial book printing, which offered relatively low profit margins. On the other hand, it enabled them to provide substantial financial support for private family printing in Huizhou. Their willingness to sponsor such activities stemmed from the fact that Huizhou was a typical clan-based society. From the mid-Ming onward, competition among Huizhou clans intensified, and book printing became a favored means of competing with other clans beyond the local community. During the late Ming dynasty, Huizhou merchants were precisely the major force supporting the construction and development of local clan institutions. Influenced by strong family loyalties, they sponsored book-printing projects to help their own clans gain an advantage in these competitions. At the same time, book printing enabled merchants to convert their accumulated economic capital into cultural and social capital.

The book-printing activities of the Wu clan of Shangshan in Xiuning provide a vivid case for understanding the reasons behind the prosperity of private family printing in Huizhou. The Wu clan of Shangshan traced its ancestry to Wu Shaowei, a censor during the Tang dynasty, and regarded Wu Shaoming as the founding ancestor of the local lineage. After Wu Shaoming settled in Shangshan, the lineage continued to the fourth-generation ancestor, known as Shiwan Gong. His descendants subsequently branched into several sub-lineages, including the Shangshan branch, the Zhongmen branch, the Tangxia branch, and the Xiaojing branch. In the narrower sense, the Wu clan of Shangshan primarily refers to the Shangshan branch descended from Wu Shizheng. This branch, in turn, comprised the Guolu Gong branch and the Wensu Gong branch, descended respectively from Wu Fu and Wu Jing. During the Song and Yuan dynasties, the Wu clan of Shangshan primarily engaged in land management and enjoyed considerable family wealth. On this prosperous economic foundation, the clan developed a strong tradition of scholarship. The seventh-generation ancestor, Wu Jun, insisted that his descendants should regard reading as the foundation of their upbringing. His son, Wu Shunxuan, was particularly accomplished in Neo-Confucian learning, thereby establishing the clan's scholarly tradition in this field. The brothers Wu Fu and Wu Jing both passed the metropolitan examination and became known for their poetry and prose at the Imperial Academy. Their contemporaries praised them with the expression, "The Three Su brothers of Meishan, the Two Wu brothers of Jiangdong". They also maintained close associations with prominent Neo-Confucian scholars, including Zhu Xi, Zhang Shi, and Cheng Dachang. These achievements transformed the Wu clan of Shangshan from a powerful local lineage into an established family of officials and distinguished Neo-Confucian scholars. After Wu Jing's death, he was posthumously granted the honorific title Wensu, which subsequently became a symbol of ancestral prestige that strengthened clan cohesion and served as a valuable social resource.

The destruction caused by warfare during the transition from the Yuan to the Ming dynasty left the Wu clan of Shangshan showing signs of decline, and its development during the early Ming period was relatively sluggish. From the mid-Ming onward, however, increasing numbers of the clan's descendants engaged in commerce, with the pawnshop trade becoming particularly prominent. Wu Wenmo, Wu Shilu, and Wu Shixiang were among its leading merchants. Their commercial success provided the clan with a solid economic foundation for pursuing social and cultural capital. Nevertheless, alongside its commercial prosperity, the Wu clan also experienced problems such as disorder within its branches, widening wealth disparities, weakening clan consciousness, internal disputes, and increasingly frequent external threats. To address these internal and external crises, the Huizhou merchants of the Wu clan of Shangshan undertook extensive efforts to construct ancestral halls, compile genealogies, acquire clan property, and formulate clan regulations, thereby implementing the practice of "honoring the ancestors and consolidating the clan". It was

precisely in this process that private family printing was rediscovered and revived, becoming an important means, supported by Huizhou merchants, of responding to clan competition and strengthening cohesion among clan members.

During the Southern Song dynasty, the Wu clan of Shangshan's printing of the works of Wu Fu and Wu Jing focused primarily on Collected Works of Zhuzhou and Miscellaneous Writings of Dihua. These publishing activities were closely coordinated with the clan's efforts to secure a posthumous honorific title for Wu Jing and enhance its overall social standing. The printing of Collected Works of Zhuzhou by the Wu clan of Shangshan began with Wu Zai, the eldest son of Wu Jing. The clan's privately printed edition of Collected Works of Zhuzhou was produced approximately between 1235 and 1238. Shortly after its completion, Wu Zishen presented the collection to the imperial court in the hope that this submission would prompt the authorities to grant Wu Jing a posthumous title. After the initial petition failed, Wu Zishen and others reprinted Collected Works of Zhuzhou during the Chunyou reign period and invited Lü Wu to write a preface. The preface emphasized Wu Jing's filial virtue by recounting an alleged dream, thereby appealing to Emperor Lizong of the Song dynasty's governing philosophy of promoting Neo-Confucianism. In the fourth year of the Baoyou reign period, Wu Zishen once again initiated a petition for a posthumous title. The following year, the Southern Song court granted Wu Jing the posthumous title Wensu. Cheng Minzheng later explicitly stated that "after the Master's death, his great-grandson Zishen was the first to collect his surviving writings into twenty volumes and submit them to the throne, thereby securing the honor of an alternative name". This account demonstrates that the printing of Collected Works of Zhuzhou played an indispensable role in securing the posthumous title Wensu for Wu Jing. Through the successive efforts of Wu Zai, Wu Xuan, and Wu Zishen across three generations to compile and print Collected Works of Zhuzhou, together with their two petitions for a posthumous title, Wu Jing's reputation evolved from recognition among the literati to official endorsement. Consequently, the Wu clan of Shangshan enhanced both its prestige and its local influence. At this stage, the clan was undergoing a transformation from a powerful local lineage into a distinguished Neo-Confucian family. By establishing a tradition of private family printing, Wu Zishen and others successfully converted the cultural capital inherited from Wu Fu and Wu Jing into social capital.

During the mid-to-late Ming dynasty, the Wu clan of Shangshan's printing of the works of Wu Fu and Wu Jing developed into a multigenerational undertaking, characterized by successive contributions and continuous additions, against the backdrop of support from Huizhou merchants and intensified clan competition. The Ming editions of Collected Works of Zhuzhou can be broadly divided into three textual lineages: the edition printed by Wu Leiheng, the edition printed by Wu Ying, and the edition printed by Wu Jiliang. In the sixth year of the Hongzhi reign period, Wu Leiheng reprinted Collected Works of Zhuzhou using a Song-dynasty woodblock edition preserved in the family collection as its base text and invited Cheng Minzheng to write a preface. Cheng Minzheng's active involvement in collating the text, together with the preface he composed, demonstrates that Wu Jing and his collected works continued to exert cultural influence in Huizhou during the Ming dynasty. In the seventh year of the Wanli reign period, Wu Ying printed Collected Works of Lord Wensu Wu. Compared with Wu Leiheng's edition, this version contained additional main-text entries and more supplementary materials. Its title was also changed to one that more prominently emphasized Wu Jing's status. In the thirty-second year of the Wanli reign period, Wu Jij ing reprinted this edition and added further prefaces and postscripts. In the seventeenth year of the Chongzhen reign period, Wu Wenli subsequently produced another reprint based on Wu Jij ing's edition and added a postscript. Wu Jiliang also reprinted the collection during the Wanli reign period, condensing the original nineteen volumes into nine, with the tenth volume containing Miscellaneous Writings of Dihua. Notably, apart from Wu Leiheng and Wu Jizong, whose genealogical affiliation remains unclear, the individuals responsible for printing these works during the mid-to-

late Ming dynasty, including Wu Ying, Wu Jij ing, and Wu Wenli, all belonged to the branch of Wu Zongwen. This branch had a strong tradition of commercial activity, and Wu Ruolin, Wu Ying, Wu Qia, Wu Jiliang, Wu Jimei, and Wu Jizhuo all had experience in commerce.

Meanwhile, this branch also played a leading role in the efforts to "honor the ancestors and consolidate the clan" within Wu Jing's lineage. Wu Zongwen himself was deeply committed to clan affairs, while his descendants, including Wu Ruolin, Wu Yuqiong, Wu Ying, and Wu Jiliang, made substantial contributions to the construction of ancestral halls. Wu Lun, meanwhile, was responsible for the first genealogical compilation and printing undertaken by the Wu clan of Shangshan during the Longqing reign period. When printing Collected Works of Lord Wensu Wu, Wu Ying and others continuously supplemented the collection with texts omitted by earlier editors, as well as materials documenting Wu Jing's life and achievements. In this way, they assembled a body of documentary materials spanning the Southern Song to the Ming dynasty, produced by individuals from different regions and social backgrounds. The change in the collection's title further served to highlight the cultural standing of the Wu clan of Shangshan. In addition, Wu Ying and his collaborators deliberately removed passages from Wu Jing's collected works that might damage his reputation, demonstrating their efforts to construct a more idealized image of Wu Jing in response to contemporary pressures. The intervals between successive reprints by Wu Ying, Wu Jij ing, Wu Jiliang, and Wu Wenli became considerably shorter, with these activities concentrated after the beginning of the Wanli reign period. This pattern, resembling Wu Zishen's reprinting of Collected Works of Zhuzhou during the Chunyou reign period of the Southern Song dynasty, reflects the Wu clan of Shangshan's increasingly urgent demand for printed editions of its ancestral writings. Overall, the clan's private family printing activities during the mid-to-late Ming dynasty represented a rediscovery of an existing family printing tradition following the active involvement of Huizhou merchants in clan competition. Internally, these activities strengthened Wu Jing's role as an ancestral symbol and reinforced clan consciousness and cohesion. Externally, they publicized the historical standing of the Wu clan of Shangshan, sought the support of literati, and demonstrated the continued vitality of its Neo-Confucian tradition. From Wu Lun's printing of the clan genealogy during the Longqing reign period to the construction of ancestral halls, restoration of ancestral tombs, compilation of genealogies, and printing of collected works, all these measures were interconnected practical strategies for "honoring the ancestors and consolidating the clan".

The case of the Wu clan of Shangshan demonstrates that, under the influence of Huizhou's clan-based society and merchant power during the Ming and Qing dynasties, the primary objective of Huizhou book printers was to secure social and cultural capital for their families and themselves rather than to accumulate economic capital. This orientation determined why private family printing, rather than commercial printing by bookshops, predominated in Huizhou. Certainly, a considerable number of Huizhou merchants also engaged in commercial book printing. However, they were drawn to the Jiangnan region, which was another important reason for the underdevelopment of commercial book printing within Huizhou itself.

4. The attraction of the Jiangnan region for Huizhou's commercial book-printing industry

Compared with Jianyang and other regions where commercial book printing had already developed during the Song dynasty, Huizhou's commercial book-printing industry was relatively late to mature. Although the history of book printing in Huizhou can be traced back to the Song dynasties, the trend toward large-scale development of its publishing industry did not become apparent until the mid-to-late Wanli reign period of the Ming dynasty. Its development largely proceeded in parallel with that of the Jiangnan publishing industry.

Moreover, compared with the relationship between Jianyang and Jiangnan, the connections between Huizhou and Jiangnan were considerably closer. The two regions were geographically adjacent and connected by natural waterways, making transportation extremely convenient. Historically, Huizhou and Jiangnan maintained frequent interactions in terms of administrative jurisdiction, population migration, economic exchanges, and cultural communication. The rise of Huizhou's book-printing industry was largely stimulated by developments in Jiangnan. Consequently, during the late Ming dynasty, Huizhou's printing industry remained under the strong influence of the Jiangnan region. Because Huizhou's publishing industry matured relatively late, it had to confront the powerful attraction and market penetration of Jiangnan's printing industry before establishing a mature publishing system of its own. This considerably impeded the process of centralization of the publishing industry in Huizhou. Furthermore, as discussed in the previous section, unlike the endogenous development of book printing in Jianyang, Huizhou's printing industry, although also providing a livelihood for local engravers, was not indispensable to the livelihoods of Huizhou residents. On the one hand, Huizhou residents had access to a wider range of livelihood opportunities; on the other, local engravers could also migrate to Jiangnan in search of employment. Therefore, from its inception, book printing was never the primary means of livelihood for the local population in Huizhou. The failure of the local publishing industry to develop into a centralized industrial hub was consequently not a major concern for the region, and there was little reason to deliberately prevent this outcome.

Li Bozhong's research indicates that the publishing industry in Jiangnan during the late Ming dynasty exhibited a pronounced trend toward "external orientation": the raw materials required by the market were primarily sourced from outside the region, while the products manufactured were also dependent on external markets. This essentially reflected the high degree of maturity of the Jiangnan publishing market [10]. According to statistics, there were approximately more than 30 commercial printing workshops established by people from Huizhou in the Jiangnan region during the late Ming dynasty. Among them were several particularly renowned establishments, including Wang Tingne's Huancuitang, Hu Zhengyan's Shizhuzhai, Wang Yingpeng's Wanhuxuan, Zheng Siming's Kuibitang, and Hu Wenhui's Wenhuitang. These workshops were renowned for the exquisite quality and substantial volume of their printed works. The migration of large numbers of Huizhou residents to Jiangnan to establish printing workshops undoubtedly resulted in a considerable outflow of investment capital from Huizhou. In terms of labor, members of the renowned Huang family of engravers in Huizhou had largely migrated to Jiangnan in search of livelihoods by the late Ming dynasty. For example, Huang Yibin and his son Huang Jianzhong resided in Hangzhou; the brothers Huang Yingfeng and Huang Yingluan, together with Huang Dechong, resided in Suzhou; and Huang Yizhong and Huang Mingzhong resided in Nanjing. These cases suggest that Huizhou engravers were highly active in cities such as Hangzhou [11]. Regarding raw materials, the Jiangnan book-printing industry imposed high standards on paper and ink. Consequently, considerable quantities of paper, ink, and other raw materials were purchased from Huizhou, and Huizhou paper merchants wielded considerable influence in Jiangnan. Furthermore, Huizhou and Jiangnan had highly overlapping publishing markets in terms of both the types of books printed and their market orientations. Competition between the two regions was therefore more intense than that between Jianyang and Jiangnan. Given Jiangnan's overwhelming cultural dominance during the late Ming dynasty, books produced there could readily enter markets in Huizhou and other regions. As a result, a hierarchical publishing network emerged, with Jiangnan serving as the center of printing and distribution, while peripheral regions functioned as suppliers of raw materials and markets for the disposal of finished products. Huizhou occupied a peripheral position within this network.

In summary, the close connections between Huizhou and Jiangnan in numerous respects during the late Ming dynasty, combined with the relatively late maturation of Huizhou's printing industry, meant that

Huizhou's publishing sector was unable to respond effectively to the Jiangnan publishing industry, which rose at approximately the same time but developed more rapidly and exerted a stronger radiating influence. Unlike Jianyang, Huizhou could not rely on an established publishing system and timely strategic adjustments to cope with this competition. Under the powerful influence of Jiangnan's publishing industry, substantial amounts of production resources from Huizhou, including capital, labor, technology, and raw materials, flowed into Jiangnan, while books produced in Jiangnan were distributed back into Huizhou, further squeezing the development space available to the local publishing industry. In other words, the strong influence of the Jiangnan region on Huizhou's publishing industry considerably constrained the expansion and centralization of local publishing activities. Consequently, Huizhou failed to develop into an independent national publishing center comparable to Jianyang and instead became, to a certain extent, a peripheral dependency of the Jiangnan publishing industry.

5. Conclusion

In the context of ancient China, the concept of a book-printing center had both narrow and broad meanings. When scholars classify Huizhou alongside Nanjing, Jianyang, and other regions as one of the four major book-printing centers during the Ming and Qing dynasties, they are clearly employing the concept in its broad sense, thereby regarding Huizhou as a national publishing center of the period. Based on a review of documentary records and an examination of historical facts, this study argues that Huizhou's commercial book-printing industry during the Ming and Qing dynasties was far less developed than those of Nanjing, Jianyang, and other regions. Huizhou therefore did not qualify as a national publishing center and should not be classified alongside Nanjing and other regions as one of the four major book-printing centers of the Ming and Qing dynasties. Although book printing in Huizhou was highly developed during this period, its predominant form was private family printing rather than commercial printing by bookshops. Two principal factors account for this phenomenon. First, the interaction between the clan-based social structure and the power of Huizhou merchants meant that local book printers during the Ming and Qing dynasties primarily regarded book printing as a means of acquiring social and cultural capital, rather than as a commercial undertaking aimed at accumulating economic capital. Second, the Jiangnan region, as an economic and cultural center, exerted a powerful radiating influence on Huizhou. This attracted large numbers of Huizhou merchants and engravers to Jiangnan, thereby impeding the centralization and industrialization of the book-printing industry in Huizhou.

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