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The Upriver Reach of a Delta Town: Jiujiang Migrants in the West River Basin, Sixteenth—Nineteenth Centuries

Abstract This article situates the Pearl River delta market town of Jiujiang within a system of market towns and cities along the West River and its tributaries in southern China. Exploring the history of this town as an emigrant community, this article follows the upstream movement of officials, civil service examinees, merchants, and permanent settlers along the West River basin between the sixteenth century and the nineteenth century. The trajectory of migration from this market town was shaped by the geographical factors of the West River system. At the same time, migration, which was related both to strategies that Jiujiang families embraced for socioeconomic advancement and to policies that the Ming and Qing states adopted for controlling the southwestern frontier, played an important role in the historical construction of a unified region linked by economic ties and personal networks.

Keywords market town, migration, region, Ming, Qing, West River, Pearl River delta

The 1883 gazetteer of Jiujiang, a market town in the Pearl River delta county of Nanhai, relates a strange tale about two native sons who encountered one another while traveling in opposite directions upstream along the West River basin. One of the men, a fish merchant surnamed Cen, was on his way back from Guangxi when he came across fellow Jiujiang townsman and lineage member, the 1723 *juren* Cen Shifa. The fish merchant asked Shifa where he was headed. Shifa, dressed in formal cap and gown, replied that he was on his way to the river bank to take a boat. The fish merchant saw the boat waiting for Shifa and flying banners that read “Sicheng Prefecture City God” (*Sicheng fu chenghuang*). Turning away briefly, when the fish merchant looked back, Cen Shifa and the boat had vanished. After arriving home in Jiujiang, fish merchant Cen learned that Cen Shifa had died on the very day of their encounter.¹

¹ *Jiujiang Rulin xiang zhi*, 14:6b–7a.

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This ghost story reveals a culture of migration along a riverine network. Cen Shifa travels upstream along the West River, which flows from Guangxi into the Pearl River delta. His formal cap and gown suggest official service, and perhaps an ancestral portrait. It so happens that the old native chieftain (*tusi*) family in the far western Guangxi prefecture of Sicheng, only recently converted to direct state control, was surnamed Cen.² Cen was also a major surname in Jiujiang, but most Jiujiang lineages ascribed to a common legend of migration from the Central Plains via northern Guangdong during the Song; the Jiujiang Cens would not have gained prestige by claiming genealogical links with a family of former native chieftains on the southwestern frontier.³ More telling is the mundane travel of fish merchant Cen's downstream trip. Though unstressed in the story, and presumably accepted as a frequent occurrence by a Jiujiang audience, it hints at the widely dispersed economic interests that sustained the Jiujiang economy. Through their journeys in both directions, the Cens and other Jiujiang men linked upriver and downriver communities.

Located on the bank of the West River as it flowed through the broad and prosperous Pearl River delta, Jiujiang was well placed to send migrants upstream. By the seventeenth century, this market town boasted a highly commercialized economy, profiting from silk production, the marketing of West River fish fry (hatched fish that have not yet developed scales), and the import of rice from Guangxi.⁴ Jiujiang and the rest of the delta were separated from the upper reaches of the West River basin by Lingyang Gorge below Zhaoqing. Beyond the gorge, the drainage system of the West River and its tributaries included Zhaoqing prefecture and Luoding Department in western Guangdong, over four-fifths of the neighboring province of Guangxi (aside from parts of Guilin prefecture lying in the Xiang River basin and far southeastern Guangxi, where the Nanliu River flows directly into the sea), and far northern Vietnam.⁵

In an earlier study, I emphasized the insular, enclosed nature of Jiujiang in

² Like many native chieftains in Guangxi, the Cens of Sicheng claimed descent from Han Chinese ancestors from the Central Plains who had participated in Di Qing's (1008–61) campaign to suppress the Nong Zhigao (1025–55) rebellion. "Sicheng Censhi jiapu xu," 8:3b–4a. On Nong Zhigao, see Anderson, *The Rebel Den of Nung Tri Cao*. Sicheng had been transferred from native chieftain rule to regular administration (*gaitu guiliu*) in the fifth year of the Yongzheng reign (1727). *Qing shi gao*, 14297.

³ *Nanhai shizu*, 2: Zhubusi:5b; *Nanhai Jiujiang xiang zhi*, 2:5b. On claims of descent proffered by Pearl River delta lineages, see David Faure, "The Lineage as a Cultural Invention," 8–14.

⁴ Chen Chunsheng, *Shichang jizhi yu shehui bianqian*, 22; David Faure, *Emperor and Ancestor*, 207–14; Robert B. Marks, *Tigers, Rice, Silk, and Silt*, 191.

⁵ The West River basin also includes far southern Guizhou and far eastern Yunnan, which are not discussed in this article. Bin Changchu, "Guangxi jindai xuzhen de zonghe kaocha," 3; Liu Wenjun, "Nongye yu Guangxi jindai xuzhen," 107.

contrast to a more cosmopolitan Guangzhou city, emphasizing protective measures that members of the nineteenth-century Jiujiang elite took to continue the town's prosperity and their place in it.⁶ Here, by situating Jiujiang in the larger West River basin, I highlight a different character of the market town and its component villages, as an emigrant community whose members were active far beyond the delta, upstream along the West River and its tributaries. Although no statistics are available, biographical accounts and other sources show that either short-term or long-term migration formed an important life experience for a significant portion of the male population of Jiujiang. As with emigrant communities that sent Chinese migrants overseas in the modern era, many Jiujiang families embraced male migration as a strategy for socioeconomic advancement.⁷ Likewise, Jiujiang is representative of many towns and villages in the Pearl River delta that sent migrants upstream along the West River basin from the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries. As such, it serves as a particularly good example of a much larger Cantonese diasporic trajectory along the West River basin between the 1570 and 1900. In addition, a study of Jiujiang illustrates the ways in which market towns in an early modern river basin were linked together through migration.

The trajectory of emigration from Jiujiang before the late nineteenth century was largely shaped by geographical factors, in particular riverine transport routes. Men who left Jiujiang typically headed for riverside county seats and market towns along the West River and its tributaries in western Guangdong, in Guangxi, and even further upstream. That is, due to the low cost and reduced “friction of distance” provided by water transport, the West River basin and the mountains that divided it from other drainage systems formed a coherent region that channeled migration.⁸ In turn, physical mobility—the upstream and downstream movement of people—also constructed the region. Migration, which was related both to strategies that Jiujiang families embraced for socioeconomic advancement and to policies that the Ming and Qing states adopted for controlling the southwestern frontier, played an important role in the historical construction of a unified region linked by economic ties and personal networks.⁹

⁶ Steven B. Miles, *The Sea of Learning*, 44–45, 239–43.

⁷ Chen Yong, “The Internal Origins of Chinese Emigration to California Reconsidered,” 522, 546; Adam McKeown, *Chinese Migrant Networks and Cultural Change*, 66; Michael Szonyi, “Mothers, Sons and Lovers,” 60; Philip A. Kuhn, *Chinese among Others*, 15.

⁸ G. William Skinner, “Mobility Strategies in Late Imperial China,” 328; Skinner, *The City in Late Imperial China*, 212, 216, 282; Li Ting, “Jiaotong yu Guangxi jindai xuzhen,” 342–44; James C. Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed*, 45.

⁹ Marks, *Tigers, Rice, Silk, and Silt*, 14. Despite his emphasis on physiographic constraints, in some places Skinner points to the role of migration in regional integration. Skinner, “Mobility Strategies in Late Imperial China,” 360.

This article follows people, mostly men, from the emigrant community of Jiujiang as they traveled to upriver destinations between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries. Through this physical mobility, they linked their native market town into a chain of river ports stretching hundreds of miles upstream. Tracing their movement reveals not a nested hierarchy of administrative or economic centers, but rather a network of river ports connecting a delta town, which operated as a kind of metropole, with upriver ports ranging in size from market towns to county and prefectural seats.¹⁰ My research thus supports the vision articulated by Chen Chunsheng and Robert Marks, following the work of Luo Yixing, of a dendritic pattern of places along the West River basin in which upriver, “peripheral” places were economically subordinated to downriver centers.¹¹ In this article, I view this system from the perspective of Jiujiang, tracing how its members used upstream resources and opportunities, and settled upstream places. Following the movement of people, I survey three kinds of activities that drew Jiujiang men upstream—official service, sitting for the civil examinations, and commerce—and then look at migration legends of some people who settled upriver and claimed Jiujiang origins. Each type of migrant—officials, examinees, and merchants—followed a separate logic patterned by family strategy and state policy, but their spheres of activity shared a geographic concentration on the riverscape through which the West River and its tributaries flowed.¹²

Officials

The tale of Cen Shifa, in which a Jiujiang native in the afterlife, is assigned to the Guangxi prefecture of Sicheng, might have carried weight with a Jiujiang audience because there was a legacy of civil service upriver.¹³ Certainly, as a form of migration, the circulation of officials in the field administration was one in which migrants had very little control in choosing a destination. Nevertheless, when the imperial state followed a pattern of assigning Cantonese to posts in Guangxi, these official appointments placed elite Jiujiang men within a realm

¹⁰ The nested hierarchy of economic central places described by Skinner is reflected in the work of Bin Changchu, who sees fundamental markets and central markets as bridges connecting villages to cities. Bin, “Guangxi jindai xuzhen de zonghe kaohe,” 59–60, 79.

¹¹ Chen, *Shichang jizhi yu shehui bianqian*, 39; Marks, *Tigers, Rice, Silk, and Silt*, 190–92, 264.

¹² S. M. Haslam, *The Riverscape and the River*, 7, 53–54.

¹³ In his study of the formation of this cult in Tang and Song times, David Johnson notes three main types of city gods, with reference to origins. Two of these resonate with the Cen Shifa legend: some city gods were former beloved officials, while others had opened regions to settlement and had become regional strongmen. David Johnson, “The City-God Cults in T’ang and Sung China,” 424.

that overlapped with the budding upstream sphere of Jiujiang economic interests. While few Jiujiang men were assigned to Guangxi in the eighteenth century, a large number of Jiujiang gazetteer biographies of Ming-era men include accounts of service in Guangxi. For example, aside from one man who served on the Ming principedom staff at Guilin, twelve of forty-four Ming-era Jiujiang men for whom the *juren* degree was their highest civil-examination attainment served at least part of their careers in Guangxi posts.¹⁴

Records of official service among members of two intermarried Jiujiang lineages, the Zhu and the Zeng, illustrate the prevalence of Guangxi postings in the town's collective memory. In 1531, Zhu Wenjin (c. 1478–1531) died in office as acting magistrate of Yining county in Guilin prefecture, after having served as school director and acting magistrate of two other Guilin counties.¹⁵ Zhu Wenjin's daughter had accompanied him to office and she escorted his coffin downriver back to Jiujiang. She would marry a scion of the Zeng lineage, Zeng Yinggui (1543 *juren*).¹⁶ Jiujiang biographers praise Yinggui for his filial piety, using income that he earned as a teacher in Jiujiang to support his father, a retired official named Zeng Jun (1507 *juren*).¹⁷ In the process, biographers highlight the father's honesty as an official. Zeng Jun had in the early Jiajing reign (1522–66) been appointed magistrate of Rong 融 county in northern Guangxi. Zeng is remembered in the delta for his refusal to follow his predecessors' example of siphoning off funds from Rong county's cattle tax.¹⁸ One of Zeng Jun's younger brothers, Zeng Chu (1516 *juren*), was in 1533/34 transferred from a department magistracy in Huguang to Hengzhou Department, downstream from Nanning.¹⁹ Zeng Chu's granddaughter married into the Zhu lineage; her husband's nephew, Zhu Guangzu (1612 *juren*), was also an official in Guangxi.²⁰ His first assignment was as Rong county magistrate, and Jiujiang biographers were keen to note that this was the same post that Zeng Jun had held a century before.²¹

¹⁴ *Nanhai Jiujiang xiang zhi*, 3:4b–13b. Prominent examples of Ming-era Jiujiang natives appointed to Guangxi posts include a 1457 *jinshi* who served as Assistant Surveillance Commissioner and Education Intendant; his son, a 1497 annual tribute student appointed school director of Beiliu county; a 1522 *juren* as Quanzhou Magistrate; a 1534 *juren* who was transferred from a county magistracy in Nan Zhili to Xuanhua county, seat of Nanning prefecture; and a 1600 *juren* whose appointments included Yongning Department magistracy. *Nanhai Jiujiang xiang zhi*, 3:1a, 6b, 7a, 11a, 14b; *Guan Shudetang jiapu*, 20:16b–17a.

¹⁵ *Nanhai Jiujiang Zhushi jiapu*, 6:4a, 48a, 11:9b–10a.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 11:105a–b.

¹⁷ *Jiujiang Rulin xiang zhi*, 12:9a.

¹⁸ Guo Fei, *Yue da ji*, 605.

¹⁹ *Hengzhou zhi*, 9:20a; *Nanhai Jiujiang xiang zhi*, 3:6b, 4:3b–4a.

²⁰ *Nanhai Jiujiang Zhushi jiapu*, 4:35b–36a; *Nanhai Jiujiang xiang zhi*, 5:17b.

²¹ *Nanhai Jiujiang Zhushi jiapu*, 6:51b, 11:48a–b; *Nanhai Jiujiang xiang zhi*, 4:19a–b. In the 1800 Guangxi provincial gazetteer, Zhu is listed under the Wanli reign (1573–1620). *Guangxi tong zhi*, 32:24b.

Another Jiujiang Zeng, Zeng Chenshi (b. ca. 1575), was in 1642 assigned as magistrate of Xinning Department, upstream from Nanning on the Left River. Two large stones in the Zeng family compound reminded Chenshi's descendants of his service in Xinning. Lore surrounding the stones related that because his luggage was empty when he left office—that is, he was too honest of an official to have made any money—these two stones had to be used as ballast for the otherwise dangerously underweight boat taking him from his Xinning post to his Jiujiang retirement. Chenshi ordered his sons and grandsons to preserve the stones as symbols of his virtue.²²

Readers of such accounts in the 1657 and 1883 Jiujiang gazetteers, and likely many more Jiujiang residents who heard stories about kin and neighbors or heard stories, became aware of a shared experience of official service in Guangxi. Tales meant to highlight the integrity of Jiujiang men also drew attention to profits to be made upstream, from trade to the extraction of natural resources. For such an audience, it made sense that Cen Shifa would be assigned as a city god in Sicheng, as opposed to a similar post in some other river basin. From the perspective of Jiujiang, the various Guangxi *yamen* in which native sons once served were located in commercial centers, identifiable as particular ports of call along the waterways of the West River system.

Examinees

Several Jiujiang men who served as officials in Guangxi were assigned to posts that at least potentially gave them the opportunity to aid their provincial compatriots in the process of the civil service examinations. The Rong county magistrate, Zhu Guangzu, for example, also served as an associate examiner for the 1630 Guangxi provincial examination.²³ Previously, Jiujiang native Chen Liangzhen (1549 *juren*) was an associate examiner for the Guangxi provincial examination of 1567.²⁴ Another Jiujiang native, Guan Pei (1579 *juren*), was an associate examiner for Guangxi in 1591, and in the following year appointed as magistrate of Rong 容 county in Wuzhou prefecture.²⁵

Gatekeepers who administered examinations at lower levels included the provincial education intendant and directors of government schools in the prefectures, departments, and counties of Guangxi. Guan Ji (1604 *jinshi*) was in

²² *Nanhai Jiujiang xiang zhi*, 3:13b, 4:23–24b; *Xinning zhou zhi*, 262; *Jiujiang Rulin xiang zhi*, 21:10a–b.

²³ *Nanhai Jiujiang Zhushi jiapu*, 6:51b; *Nanhai Jiujiang xiang zhi*, 4:19a.

²⁴ *Nanhai Jiujiang xiang zhi*, 3:7b–8a.

²⁵ Guan Pei did not take up the Rong county post due to mourning. *Guan Shudetang jiapu*, 6:14a, 20:12b; *Nanhai Jiujiang xiang zhi*, 3:9b, 4:11a.

1622 appointed as Guangxi Surveillance Vice Commissioner and Education Intendant.²⁶ A stele biography composed in the late Ming stresses that, at the time of his appointment, since Guangdong and Guangxi shared a border, many of Guan's compatriots (*xiang renshi* 乡人士) had acquired residency in Guangxi; local connections notwithstanding, Guan steadfastly removed them from the registers. Those who passed the Guangxi provincial examinations in 1624 and 1627 were all students whose talents Guan Ji had once recognized.²⁷ That some of the migrant examinees whom Guan Ji expelled might have included compatriots from Jiujiang is suggested by the fact that at least two Jiujiang men earned provincial degrees via separate counties of Guangxi's Wuzhou prefecture during the Ming: Wu Xuegui, in 1576 as a registered resident of Rong 容 county, and Huang Maoxian, in 1642 via the neighboring county of Cenxi. The fact that Huang was registered for examinations under the surname "Li" 李 implies that some degree of subversion of state policy was at play.²⁸ Just as praising the honesty of magistrates like Zeng Jun and Zeng Chenshi inadvertently drew attention to profits to be made upriver, so depicting as noteworthy Guan Ji's refusal to favor Cantonese in Guangxi examinations hints at the opportunities available for migrant students under less punctilious examiners.

Despite the investment in time and money required to shift one's official residence from a delta county to an upriver county, beginning in the sixteenth century a large number of Jiujiang and other Cantonese men migrated to upriver locales as a means of forging a shortcut through the civil service examinations. Take one branch of the Jiujiang Zhu lineage for example. The brothers Zhu Gao and Zhu Mo (c. 1516–80) both were *shengyuan* via the county school of Shuangshui (modern-day Luoding), in western Guangdong south of the West River and near the Guangxi border. At 17 *sui* (approximately in 1532), Zhu Mo became a stipend student via Shuangshui, and in 1541 a tribute student.²⁹ In the 1570s, the Ming state conducted a military campaign against an unregistered population classified in Ming texts as "Yao" in the mountainous region—known as Luopang—that stretched from Shuangshui north to the West River. When it was over in early 1577, the Ming sought to assert greater administrative control over the area and encouraged Chinese settlers to clear the land. Out of the Luopang area, two new counties were established, including Xining (modern-day

²⁶ *Ming Xizong shilu*, 23:10a; *Nanhai Jiujiang xiang zhi*, 3:2b–3a.

²⁷ Since the author of the tomb inscription was a native of Boluo county on the eastern edge of the Pearl River delta, I am inclined to take "*xiang ren shi*" somewhat broadly as referring to what we might call "Cantonese," rather than as natives of Jiujiang township. *Jiujiang Rulin xiang zhi*, 7:21a–24a.

²⁸ *Wuzhou fu zhi*, 13:12b; *Guangxi tong zhi*, 72:20a; *Nanhai Jiujiang xiang zhi*, 3:9b, 14a; *Jiujiang Rulin xiang zhi*, 10:25b.

²⁹ *Nanhai Jiujiang Zhushi jiapu*, 6:63a, 11:15b. A second cousin, Zhu Xuezhong, was also a student in the Shuangshui county school. *Nanhai Jiujiang Zhushi jiapu*, 4:5b–7a, 6:63b.

Yu'nan) on the Guangxi border.³⁰ Over the next few decades, a total of fourteen members of this branch of the Zhu lineage won credentials through the civil examinations as registered residents of Xining. Most of them, including one of Zhu Mo's grandsons, only achieved *shengyuan* status, though a couple became tribute students.³¹ The author of an epitaph for one of these migrant students explains that, after pacifying the Luopang Yao, officials "summoned scholars from Nanhai in our Guangzhou to bring glory to the school" (*zheng wo Guang Nanhai renshi wei xiangxu guang* 征我广南海人士为庠序光).³² Based on existing evidence, none of these sojourning students permanently settled upriver in Xining, though some remote kin did.³³

This pattern of Jiujiang families taking advantage of state efforts to open the southwestern frontier continued in the first century of Qing rule. Xining was still a destination in the early Qing, with a Jiujiang Zeng winning the *juren* degree in 1717 as a registered resident of the upriver county.³⁴ Further upstream, in 1732 Feng Binggang won the Guangxi provincial degree as a student in Taiping prefecture, on the Left River above Xinning department.³⁵ A less successful, if more revealing, example is Chen Fen, a Jiujiang native who was educated under a respected teacher in the delta town. At some point around the year 1720, Chen Fen acquired residency in Xilin county, in the highlands of far northwestern Guangxi, due west of the destination of Cen Shifa's ghost, Sicheng prefecture. A few years later, Chen Fen became a *shengyuan* in Xilin, placing first in the county examinations. This allowed him to sit for the Guangxi provincial examinations in 1726; his paper was forwarded by the associate examiner assigned to his area of specialization, but Chen was not among the final fifty to pass that year. Undeterred, Chen placed first in prefectural-level licensing and qualifying examinations in 1727 and 1728. According to his Jiujiang biographers, however, due to his growing literary reputation Chen incurred the jealousy of his competitors and as a result was not allowed to enter the examination grounds for

³⁰ On the classification of Yao and other groups in nearby Guangxi during the Ming, see Leo k. Shin, *The Making of the Chinese State*, esp. 140–57. Miles, "Imperial Discourse."

³¹ These Xining *shengyuan* included the two brothers Zhu Chun and Zhu Run (1602 *suigong*); the latter would compile the first Xining gazetteer, printed in 1592. Two of their nephews also achieved *shengyuan* status via the new Xining county school. *Nanhai Jiujiang Zhushi jiapu*, 6:63b–67a.

³² *Nanhai Jiujiang Zhushi jiapu*, 8:85b. Other Jiujiang natives who won examination credentials via Xining include three *suigong*: Guan Yao (1608 or 1609), Cen Xiangfeng (1624 or 1625), and Huang Guoying (1634 or 1637). There are discrepancies in dates recorded by the Xining (former) and Jiujiang (latter) gazetteers. *Nanhai Jiujiang xiang zhi*, 3:16a–b; *Xining xian zhi*, 9:3b–4a.

³³ For example, see *Nanhai Jiujiang Zhushi jiapu*, 6:65a; *Nanhai Jiujiang xiang zhi*, 2:12b; *Jiujiang Rulin xiang zhi*, 13:16a–b, 17:2a–b.

³⁴ *Xining xian zhi*, 9:6a.

³⁵ *Jiujiang Rulin xiang zhi*, 10:39b–40a.

the 1729 provincial examination. In 1731 his residency was transferred back to Nanhai, and he managed to gain entrance into his home county school.³⁶

In the second half of Qing rule, Jiujiang natives who registered for examinations in locales along the West River basin tended to do so not in newly opened frontier areas, but rather in eastern Guangxi locales where the delta town maintained a heavier commercial presence. For example, in 1839, two Jiujiang men—Ming Zhigang and Zhu Wenbin—won Guangxi provincial degrees as registered residents of Cangwu county. Zhigang's son, Ming Zuandao, repeated this feat in 1861, as a resident of the Cangwu county seat.³⁷ Like the Zhus in Xining and Chen Fen in Xilin, these nineteenth-century sojourners tended to shift focus back to Jiujiang after winning their degrees.³⁸ Other Jiujiang natives who won degrees via Guangxi residency include an 1861 *juren* via Teng county, an 1862 *juren* via Mapping county (seat of Liuzhou prefecture), an 1864 *juren* via Guiping (seat of Xunzhou prefecture), and an 1867 *juren* via Wuzhou.³⁹ A less eminent example appears in a genealogy of one of the six Guan lineages in Jiujiang. Members of the twenty-first generation of this lineage were active in the nineteenth century. One member of this generation—Guan Cuiqi—is listed in the genealogy as a Cangwu county school student. The genealogical tables indicate that his grandfather was buried in Guangxi.⁴⁰ Guan Shizong (1859–1904), the son of a merchant and member of another Jiujiang Guan lineage, achieved *shengyuan* status through the government school in Wuxuan county in Xunzhou prefecture in 1896.⁴¹

The pursuit of examination degrees was for these Jiujiang men, as for many Cantonese, a process that entailed a great deal of physical mobility. The administrative hierarchy onto which the civil service examination system was grafted shaped patterns of migration associated with the examinations, but not always in the ways that state administrators intended.⁴² Rather than directly

³⁶ Xilin did not have a county school as of 1718, when a gazetteer was compiled. In that year, the first Xilin *shengyuan* was assigned to the prefectural school above it, at that time, Sien prefecture. *Jiujiang Rulin xiang zhi*, 14:10a; *Xilin xian zhi*, prefatory material.

³⁷ *Cangwu xian zhi*, 1874, 4:35a, 38a.

³⁸ Ming Zhigang and Zhu Wenbin were buried in Jiujiang. *Jiujiang Rulin xiang zhi*, 6:26b, 27b.

³⁹ The 1861 Teng county *juren*, Li Xijue, is listed in the Teng gazetteer as a native of Shunde county, downstream from Jiujiang. *Jiujiang Rulin xiang zhi*, 10:55b–57b; *Liuzhou xian zhi*, 7:23; *Teng xian zhi*, 487; *Guiping xian zhi*, 42:10b; *Tongzhi liu nian juxing dingmao ke Guangxi xiangshi timing lu*, 2b.

⁴⁰ *Guan Shudetang jiapu*, 9:92a, 11:37a, 14:6a.

⁴¹ [Nanhai Jiujiang Guanshi] *Shixi lu*, 74–79.

⁴² Benjamin A. Elman, *A Cultural History of Civil Examinations*, 168–69; Wang Rigen and Zhang Xueli, “Qingdai kechang maoji yu tu-ke chongtu,” 71; Mio Kishimoto, “Maojuan maokao susong yu Qingdai difang shehui,” 145–73.

ascending the administrative hierarchy from county or department to prefecture to province, sojourning examinees from Jiujiang moved laterally, seeking weak points in the system, where a less competitive environment allowed migrants to win civil-examination credentials more easily than would have been possible in Nanhai and other counties of the Pearl River delta. As with the pattern of official appointments in the Ming, the distribution of upstream counties and departments in which Jiujiang migrants acquired registration and sat for examinations overlapped with the sphere of the town's economic interests upstream. To a greater degree than was allowed by state appointment of officials, however, aspiring degree-winners from Jiujiang had leeway in selecting destinations. Choices were shaped by the administrative hierarchy, but also by transport and commercial networks. Jiujiang literati hoping to take advantage of less competitive examinations upriver traveled riverine routes forged by Jiujiang merchants. Often, as seen in the case of Guan Shizong above, Jiujiang literati registered in upriver locales where their relatives conducted commerce. As with the migration of merchants and permanent settlers, to be described below, so the movement of Jiujiang examinees horizontally linked together a number of locales that were peripheral points in a Jiujiang-based network—places that were hierarchical in the state administration.

Merchants

The 1631 gazetteer of Wuzhou, the major entrepôt of West River trade, portrays merchants from Nanhai and other Pearl River delta counties as dominating Wuzhou's commerce in salt and timber.⁴³ The author of the first draft of this gazetteer, Chen Xishao, had Jiujiang connections. Xishao was a native of a village just west of Guangzhou city; he compiled the draft gazetteer after his appointment as vice prefect of Wuzhou in 1619/20. His brother, Chen Xichang (1616 *jinshi*), married the daughter of a prominent Zhu lineage member and settled in Jiujiang. A female cousin of Xishao and Xichang also married into Jiujiang; her husband, a Zeng, was a great-grandson of Rong 融 county magistrate Zeng Jun and Yining county acting magistrate Zhu Wenjin.⁴⁴

More so than most other officials appointed to Guangxi in the late Ming, Chen Xishao would certainly have been familiar with Jiujiang merchants in Wuzhou. From the sixteenth century onward, merchants from Jiujiang and other places in the delta increasingly projected economic interests upstream along the West

⁴³ *Wuzhou fu zhi*, 1631, 2:33b.

⁴⁴ “Ming zhongxian daifu Zhenyuan jun hou Lianshui Chenjun pei ruren Tangshi hezang muzhiming”; *Nanhai Jiujiang Zhushi jiapu*, 11:108a; *Nanhai Jiujiang xiang zhi*, 4:27b.

River basin. They dominated the upriver marketing of Guangdong salt and manufactured goods, and the downriver distribution of Guangxi rice, lumber, minerals, peanut and wood oils, and medicinal herbs.⁴⁵ As with other delta towns, Jiujiang's economic prosperity depended upon the physical mobility of its merchants up and down the West River and its tributaries. This is reflected in gazetteer accounts from Jiujiang and points upriver. For example, a description of waterways running from the West River through Jiujiang's interior portrays merchant boats crowding the channels upon their return to Jiujiang at the end of the year.⁴⁶ Biographies of exemplary Jiujiang women include the wife of a merchant who died in Guangxi and a widow who nurtured her father-in-law back to health after being attacked by bandits while trading in Guangxi.⁴⁷ The biography of a nineteenth-century Jiujiang merchant relates that, before selling silk in Macao and opening a shop in Jiujiang, he got his start when he was hired to work in Wuzhou; from there, he sent remittances to support his mother back in Jiujiang.⁴⁸ So many Jiujiang merchants were active in Longzhou, in southwestern Guangxi near the Vietnam border, that a charitable graveyard for Jiujiang men was established just outside the city at the close of the nineteenth century.⁴⁹

What made Jiujiang unique among Pearl River delta towns was its monopoly role in fish farming. As early as 1657, gazetteer editors claim that eighty percent of Jiujiang farmland had been converted to fish ponds. They describe the two most important sources of the market town's wealth as fish farming and sericulture, noting that the embankments surrounding the ponds were planted with mulberry. Fish fry, called "fish sprouts," was harvested using netted baskets suspended from scaffolding erected at bends in the West River. Jiujiang-owned fishing stations were distributed all along the river from the Guangxi border down to Jiujiang. Once harvested, the fry would be deposited in Jiujiang ponds. A portion was raised for a few days and then sold as fingerlings to fish farmers in neighboring delta towns and villages. Another portion would be raised to maturity in Jiujiang ponds and then transported live, using specially-outfitted

⁴⁵ On the delta's increasing reliance on Guangxi grain, see Marks, *Tigers, Rice, Silk, and Silt*, 252–64; Chen Chunsheng, *Shichang jizhi yu shehui bianqian*, 79–82. This economic relationship is reminiscent of a pattern common throughout Southeast Asia of an upriver-downriver exchange in which lowland settlements concentrated on handicrafts and trade while the uplanders focused on agricultural production. On the Mekong River, for example, see Andrew Walker, *The Legend of the Golden Boat*, 39.

⁴⁶ *Nanhai Jiujiang xiang zhi*, 1:21a. Many of these boats carried grain purchased upriver for distribution in the delta. *Nanhai Jiujiang xiang zhi*, 1:29b.

⁴⁷ *Jiujiang Rulin xiang zhi*, 18:15a, 22b.

⁴⁸ Jian Chaoliang, *Dushutang ji*, 7:30a.

⁴⁹ *Longzhou xian zhi*, 384.

boats, and sold throughout Guangdong and beyond. Jiujiang natives asserted a monopoly on the harvest of West River fish fry, a claim that the town's leadership was able to enforce with state support.⁵⁰

Scattered evidence indicates the importance of the fish trade for the Jiujiang elite during the Ming. For example, the Zeng lineage derived a portion of its wealth from control of fish stations. Zeng Xiao, a cousin of the Guangxi officials Zeng Jun and Zeng Chu, was noted for his management of family properties while other Zengs were in the civil service. He acquired a large fishing station (*yu bu* 鱼埠) at Deqing department, on the north bank of the West River near the Guangxi border. Zeng Shishen, one of Zeng Chu's grandsons, helped Zeng Xiao manage this enterprise, which in turn sustained Zeng ancestral sacrifices in Jiujiang.⁵¹

For the Qing, there is much textual evidence of Jiujiang commercial activities upriver. Names associated with Jiujiang are found on stone inscriptions at Guangdong native-place associations, or Yuedong *huiguan* 粤东会馆, in the three most important Guangxi markets in long-distance riverine trade, all of which were towns hierarchically below the county seat.⁵² The earliest Yuedong *huiguan* in Guangxi were founded during the Kangxi reign (1662–1722); by the end of the imperial era, few towns of any commercial importance lacked one. The native-place origins of the merchants served by these institutions varied from town to town, depending upon particular social and economic conditions; however, the largest Yuedong *huiguan* in Guangxi, including the three described here, were dominated by Cantonese merchants from communities in the Pearl River delta, places like Jiujiang. The largest of the three famous Guangxi markets was Rongxu, situated in Cangwu county a few miles upstream from Wuzhou. Rongxu's dominance was largely due to its role as a center in the downstream shipment of Guangxi rice to the delta.⁵³ Jiujiang names appear on stone inscriptions commemorating the 1788 renovation of the Yuedong *huiguan* at Rongxu. These include a 100-tael donation for a sacrificial table contributed by the Jiujiang port (Jiujiang *bu* 九江埠). More modest donations are attributed to several members who are indicated as being Jiujiang men (or firms): three Guans, a Zeng, a Liang, and the Jinhe Shop.⁵⁴ The name "Jiujiang port" also appears as a contributor on a stele commemorating the addition in 1805 of a posterior tower

⁵⁰ "Fengxian jinzhi lanfeng Jiujiang minchuan leshi yongzun"; Steven B. Miles, "From Small Fry to Big Fish," 73–75.

⁵¹ *Nanhai Jiujiang xiang zhi*, 4:54a, 5:1b.

⁵² Bin Changchu, "Guangxi jindai xuzhen de zonghe kaocha," 20, 24–25; Wu Xiaofeng, "Mingdai Guangxi chengshi xushi jianshe yanjiu," 97.

⁵³ Liu Wenjun, "Nongye yu Guangxi jindai xuzhen," 151.

⁵⁴ "Chongjian Yuedong huiguan timing beiji."

to the Lieshenggong 列圣宫 temple at a second famous Guangxi market, Dawu (modern-day Da'an) in Pingnan county. Dawu was a major exporter of cassia bark, shipped from Pingnan along the West River for sale overseas, and the temple was part of a complex that included a Yuedong huiguan.⁵⁵ The third major Guangxi market was at Jiangkou in Guiping county. A 1793 stele commemorating the establishment of the Yuedong huiguan at Jiangkou includes a 144-tael contribution from the boat(s) under the trade name of Jiujiang Wanfu 九江万福.⁵⁶

Successful merchants used some money earned from trade in the West River basin and beyond for the maintenance of lineage and local Jiujiang institutions and infrastructure. A case in point is the legend of Jiujiang native and Qing-era merchant Ming Luhai. He is said to have been in the rice trade in Gui county (modern-day Guigang), as well as the peanut oil trade. One story relates that once on a return trip from Guangxi his boat hit a rock in the river, usually a catastrophic event. But the rock slipped into the hole that it had caused and prevented any water from leaking in, and so Ming made it back safely, a senior member of the Ming lineage today remembers a saying about this: “Ming Luhai of Guangdong, when his boat arrives the stones make way.” (*Guangdong Ming Luhai, chuan dao shitou kai* 广东明禄海，船到石头开).⁵⁷ Another story about Ming Luhai suggests that he was greedy, but the 1883 gazetteer portrays him as a philanthropist: he donated funds to rebuild with stone the base of a bridge in his Jiujiang neighborhood, thereafter referred to as Luhai Bridge.⁵⁸

Another example is Zhu Tinggui (c. 1781–1849), a tenth-generation descendant of the Yining county acting magistrate Zhu Wenjin.⁵⁹ His biography claims that because he was poor and fatherless, at the age of eighteen he gave up his studies and “cast himself into the western frontier” (*tiaoshen xijiao* 跳身西徼), going into business at Longzhou.⁶⁰ After several years, he moved into the salt trade in Hanoi, Vietnam, making annual trips to southeastern Yunnan and southwestern Guangxi.⁶¹ After a long career Tinggui retired to Jiujiang, where

⁵⁵ “Lieshenggong zengjian houlu”; British National Archives, FO682/1977/143; *Pingnan xian zhi*, 1835, 5:11b–12a; *Pingnan xian zhi*, 1884, 7:22a.

⁵⁶ Guangxi Zhuangzu zizhiqu tongzhiguan, *Taiping tianguo geming zai Guangxi diaocha ziliao huibian*, 249–51.

⁵⁷ Fieldnotes, Yongchangli, Shajiao, Jiujiang, Nanhai, June 20, 2008.

⁵⁸ *Jiujiang Rulin xiang zhi*, 4:59a.

⁵⁹ Zhu Tinggui used two names written differently but with the same pronunciation in Mandarin and Cantonese. *Nanhai Jiujiang Zhushi jiapu*, 5:85a.

⁶⁰ Zhu Ciqi, *Zhu Jiujiang (Ciqi) xiansheng ji*, 9:10a.

⁶¹ Tributaries of the West River carried trade between the northern Vietnamese towns of Cao Bang and Lang Son, on the one hand, and Longzhou, on the other. A. P. A. Bouinai, *The Lungchow Region*, 4–7.

he was buried. Tinggui had a wife Zhang 张 in Jiujiang and a concubine Đỗ in Hanoi. His eldest son was born by Zhang, four more sons by concubine Đỗ. Two of the sons by the concubine—Kuiyuan and Fuyuan—are noted for their support of the Zhu lineage in Jiujiang.⁶² They donated large amounts of money, over 1,700 taels to compile and print the 1869 lineage genealogy and another 3,000 taels to increase lineage hall property.⁶³

As the cases of Ming Luhai and Zhu Tinggui demonstrate, through their physical movement through space, the goods that they traded, and the money that they circulated, migrant merchants from Jiujiang linked the delta town to upstream cities and towns along the West River basin. This flow of Jiujiang migrants through the riverscape did not follow the logic of nested hierarchies; rather, Jiujiang became a metropole for “peripheral” places upriver ranging from a fish station in Deqing to county and prefectural seats further upstream, to the capital of a foreign regime beyond the headwaters of the West River system.

Upstream Claims of Jiujiang Descent

In addition to tracing the upriver movement from Jiujiang of native sons as officials, examinees, and merchants, another perspective on migration is provided by exploring upriver claims of descent from Jiujiang. Some scholarship on Chinese migration, whether internal or overseas, draws a sharp contrast between temporary migrants, or “sojourners,” on one hand, and permanent migrants, or “settlers,” on the other hand.⁶⁴ For Jiujiang migrants along the West River basin in Ming and Qing times, at least, this distinction is overdrawn. Upriver claims of Jiujiang descent suggest that permanent settlement grew out of

⁶² Zhu Ciqi, *Zhu Jiujiang (Ciqi) xiansheng ji*, 9:10a–11a. Like most places of any commercial importance in Guangxi, Longzhou had a Yuedong *huiguan*, this one established in 1707 and renovated in 1796 and 1837. *Longzhou xian zhi*, 93, 394. Zhang was a fairly common and quite respectable surname in Jiujiang. *Jiujiang Rulin xiang zhi*, passim; *Nanhai shizu*, 2: Zhubusi:4a–b.

⁶³ *Jiujiang Rulin xiang zhi*, 15:5b–6a. Another Jiujiang merchant active in Guangxi and Vietnam was Guan Liang (1764?–1818?): as a youth he pursued a career as a merchant, once plying his boat between Guangxi and Guangdong; his younger brother, Guan Li (1767?–1842?), sojourned in Vietnam (Annam) as a youth, and retired to Jiujiang in his old age. Guan Li’s eldest son, Guan Shengyuan, must also have traded in Vietnam; while Shengyuan and his wife, Zhang, were buried locally in the delta, Shengyuan’s two concubines, Trần (Chen) and Nguyễn (Ruan)—were buried in Vietnam. *Guan Shudetang jiapu*, 6:53a–54a, 17:36a–37b.

⁶⁴ Wang Gungwu provides the classic statement contrasting sojourners and settlers. Wang, “Sojourning: The Chinese Experience in Southeast Asia,” 1–14. On internal migration, G. William Skinner distinguishes between the permanent emigration and the export of cultivated talent and local products. Skinner, “Mobility Strategies in Late Imperial China,” 335.

the temporary migration that many Jiujiang families pursued as a means for socioeconomic advancement. Likewise, the upstream river ports where Jiujiang officials, examinees, and merchants were active also served as the destinations of permanent settlers from Jiujiang.

Evidence from upriver sources complements the many scattered cases of upriver migration found in local Nanhai and Jiujiang sources.⁶⁵ The Mings 明 provide one among several examples from Cangwu county, which had its prefectural seat in Wuzhou, just across the border from Guangdong. The Mings settled in the town of Dongan (modern-day Shiqiao) in northeastern Cangwu county. They claimed descent from nineteenth-century Jiujiang migrant Ming Yuguang, who first made his money selling sweets in Dongan, while his son expanded into sundries.⁶⁶ Other Mings from Jiujiang had already established themselves in Dongan by the time the merchant Ming Yuguang settled there. The first Jiujiang native to win a provincial degree via Cangwu residency was Ming Maolun, who did so in 1798 as a registered resident of Dongan.⁶⁷

Another Cangwu county destination for Jiujiang migrants was Changzhou, an island in the main river just upstream from Wuzhou and across from the major market of Rongxu on the south bank. Editors of the 1883 Jiujiang gazetteer assert that Changzhou had been a Jiujiang fishing station, and that the people there were all of Jiujiang stock. But now, the editors complain, over many generations working in Changzhou, “they have gone native. While they can all relate the affairs of our township, none of them have any feelings for their old native place. The method of raising fish fry was never before transmitted to outsiders, but now [because of them] many outsiders have mastered it.”⁶⁸ As a result, Jiujiang fish farmers could no longer demand the high prices they had previously enjoyed. In the Jiujiang gazetteer account, town transplants in Changzhou remained anonymous. But the Jiujiang Zhu genealogy contains some names of actual

⁶⁵ Examples of Guangxi migrants from a Zeng genealogy that covers Jiujiang include a man probably in the early Qing who migrated to Lipu county in Pingle prefecture, and, likely in the eighteenth century, five brothers who are noted simply as having moved to Guangxi. *Wucheng Zengshi chongxiu zupu*, Yan'enfang xi:2b, Jiguanfang xi:2a-b.

⁶⁶ Fieldnotes, Shiqiao, Cangwu, June 24, 2010; Cangwu Shiqiao Ming genealogical notes, manuscript. Names of Jiujiang ancestors in this genealogy match those in a manuscript genealogy that I viewed at Yongchang li, Jiujiang. *Guangdong Nanhai Jiujiang Mingshi zupu*. A Republican-era gazetteer confirms that Mings were settled both in the county seat and at Dongan. *Cangwu xian zhi*, 1941, Minshipian:2a.

⁶⁷ *Cangwu xian zhi*, 1874, 4:31a. Another Jiujiang man, Liu Rongguang, became an *engong* as a registered resident of Dongan town in the early 1850s. Cangwu claims 1851, Jiujiang 1852. *Cangwu xian zhi*, 1874, 4:36b; *Jiujiang Rulin xiang zhi*, 10:53b.

⁶⁸ *Jiujiang Rulin xiang zhi*, 5:26b-27a. Editors of the 1874 Cangwu gazetteer note that “fish sprouts” were harvested at stations for several tens of *li* along the shore of the West River at Wuzhou. *Cangwu xian zhi*, 1874, 6:7b.

migrants to Changzhou. Based on the genealogical charts, they are all descendants of Zhu Gao, one of the Jiujiang Zhus who won *shengyuan* status in the Shuangshui county school. If Zhu Gao, a seventh-generation lineage member, flourished in the Ming Jiajing reign, then his migrant descendants, listed as three members of the eleventh generation (plus five of their sons, in the twelfth generation), must have settled in Changzhou during the early Qing.⁶⁹

Changzhou society seems to have been organized around temples, rather than ancestral halls.⁷⁰ One major exception is the Deng lineage, whose members claim that their ancestor migrated from Jiujiang during the Kangxi reign. Echoing the complaint of Jiujiang gazetteer editors, but from an upriver perspective, the Dengs assert that their ancestors at first monopolized the harvesting, rearing, and sale of fish fry on the island, but that then the practice spread to other surnames.⁷¹ A Republican-era gazetteer notes that the fish fry industry had become an important part of a flourishing Changzhou economy in the nineteenth century.⁷²

Another case of technology transfer might have involved the Zhu lineage based upriver in Pingnan county at Wulin. This town lies at the confluence of the main river and the tributary that runs down from the major market of Dawu. The Zhus claim descent from a less prestigious Jiujiang Zhu lineage than the one that sent examinees to Xining and migrants to Changzhou. The Wulin migrant ancestor, Zhu Changchi (1625–88), and his descendants made a living from the fish fry industry after settling in Wulin.⁷³ Some of them prospered: Zhu Fanghui (1853–1916), an 1880 *jinshi* from this Zhu lineage, had enough prestige to be warmly welcomed by the kin that he claimed in Jiujiang.⁷⁴

Other Jiujiang migrants settled across the main river from Wulin at the market town of Danzhu.⁷⁵ As at Dawu nearby, the main temple for this market was the Liesheng gong/miao 列圣宫/庙.⁷⁶ A stone couplet decorating the main gate from

⁶⁹ *Nanhai Jiujiang Zhushi jiapu*, 4:5b, 22a–24a, 74a–b, 77b.

⁷⁰ The historian Mai Sijie was kind enough to introduce me to his informants at the Wutong Temple.

⁷¹ The focal ancestor of the Jiujiang Dengs was Deng “Nanyang.” *Nanhai shizu*, 2:Zhubusi:7a. An informant at the Deng lineage hall claimed that his ancestors migrated from the Jiujiang village of Zhujixiang. This seems to be a conflation of an initial legend of migration from Zhujixiang in northern Guangdong to Jiujiang in the Pearl River delta, and of migration from Jiujiang to Changzhou. Fieldnotes, Changzhou, Wuzhou, May 22, 2008, with Mai Sijie; *Nanyang Dengshi zupu yuanliu kao*, 28.

⁷² *Cangwu xian zhi*, 1941, Minshipian:35a.

⁷³ Fieldnotes, Wulin, Pingnan, June 24, 2007; *Zhushi zupu, Jiujiang-Wulin zhi xi*, 13.

⁷⁴ Zhu Fanghui, *Xijin gong shiwen ji*, 192.

⁷⁵ Both Wulin and Danzhu were important markets as early as the Ming. Wu Xiaofeng, “Mingdai Guangxi chengshi xushi jianshe yanjiu,” 97.

⁷⁶ *Pingnan xian zhi*, 1884, 10:12b.

an 1870 renovation is donated by the Gathering Fortune Hall (Jifutang) of the Oil Guild (*youhang*). One member of this organization must have been a migrant ancestor from Jiujiang. Just outside Danzhu market is the single-surname Guan Manor Village (Guanwucun). These Guans claim descent from one of the six Guan lineages of Jiujiang. The migrant ancestor, Guan Xuejin, first settled as a smalltime merchant in Wulin, before moving across the river to open an oil shop (*youfang*) in Danzhu and settle Guan Manor Village. This was in the early to mid nineteenth century, as Guan Xuejin purchased *jiansheng* status during the Daoguang era (1821–50).⁷⁷

More convoluted claims of descent from Jiujiang proffered by upriver residents hint at the upriver reach of this delta town. One example is another set of Guans, this one based in Gantang Market (Gantang xu), an important salt distribution center that in Ming and Qing times belonged to Yongchun county.⁷⁸ In the Xianfeng-Tongzhi era (1851–74), sojourning merchants in riverine transshipment at Gantang initiated and funded a river works project that facilitated trade on a year-round basis, even in low water during fall and winter. Thereafter, merchants could move salt from the main trunk, running from Nanning to Guiping and hence to Wuzhou, up a tributary to Gantang. From there, trade routes connected to points further north and ultimately Guizhou province. Merchants could also export grain and porcelain down to the main river at the Yongchun county seat and from there either upstream to Nanning and Longzhou, or downstream to Guiping, Wuzhou, and the delta. The Gantang Guans claimed descent from someone who in 1644 migrated from Jiujiang *xiang* 乡 in Sanshui county, Guangdong, to settle in Gubu village, near Lu Market (Luxu) in Yongchun county. One descendant in the late nineteenth century settled just south of Lu Market in Gantang Market. Asserting Jiujiang, Sanshui, origins seems to be a logical “mistake.” There is no Jiujiang in Sanshui county records, nor does “Guan” seem to be a major surname there. But Sanshui is located just upstream on the West River from Jiujiang; any boat from Jiujiang carrying passengers or commodities upstream would pass through Sanshui, in particular the port of Xi’nan, one of the last stops in the delta before piercing the Lingyang Gorge.⁷⁹

A final example is the Cai surname of Fengcun Market (Fengcun xu, modern-day Pingfeng) in the last Guangdong county (Fengchuan, now Fengkai)

⁷⁷ Inscriptions on couplet, signboard, and poles, Liesheng miao, Danzhu, Pingnan; fieldnotes, Danzhu, Pingnan, July 6, 2008; *Guan Wufutang zupu*, 1–3. Guan Xuejin is listed in the 1884 Pingnan gazetteer as a *jiansheng* who won honors via his son, Guan Jingxian. *Pingnan xian zhi*, 1884, 15:18a.

⁷⁸ Bin Changchu, “Guangxi jindai xuzhen de zonghe kaocha,” 42. The portion of the old Yongchun county that included Gantang has now been incorporated into Binyang county.

⁷⁹ *Guanshi zongzhi liedai quantu*; fieldnotes, Gantang, Binyang, July 26, 2008; *Yongchun xian zhi*, ce 1, 38a–b; “Qinjia junminfu xian bushou Yongchun xian zhengtang jia wuji jilu wuci Jiang wei xiaoyu yongyuan gechu choushou lougui er an shanglü shi.”

on the West River before reaching Guangxi. Though the Cais no longer have a written genealogy, a lineage member in 2007 was still able to write down from memory a rough genealogical sketch of his ancestors. He indicated his seventh-generation ancestor, Cai Sixian, as an ancestor who had migrated from Jiujiang, Nanhai. A large genealogy, printed in 1875, of the Cai lineage based at Shencun, just outside Foshan, lists a Cai Sixian as an emigrant who left Shencun for Fengcun. Over a century later, the Cais of Fengcun have developed a legend of migration from Jiujiang, rather than from Shencun. This Fengcun Cai genealogical memory might indicate a desire to be affiliated with the influence that Jiujiang enjoyed upstream along the West River basin.⁸⁰

In each of the cases described here, Jiujiang migrants settled either in market towns or in places that fit into a particular economic niche cornered by Jiujiang merchants. As illustrated by the upriver transfer of fish fry technology to Changzhou and Wulin, even as upriver ports were brought into the economic orbit of Jiujiang, the town risked losing its control over economic resources due to the very movement of its native sons that had spread the town's influence in the first place.

Conclusion

Historical sources cited in this study demonstrate that, from the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries, Jiujiang men who left the Pearl River delta tended to aim for destinations upstream along the West River and its tributaries. Whether as temporary sojourners—officials assigned to Guangxi, literati who registered as residents of upstream locales to take civil examinations, or merchants traveling upriver to trade—or as permanent settlers, Jiujiang migrants traveled the span of the West River basin, reaching as far upstream as Xilin, Sicheng, and Longzhou. Greater numbers of Jiujiang migrants concentrated in areas slightly closer to home, from Xining county in western Guangdong to Cangwu and Pingnan counties in eastern Guangxi. This concentration in the middle reaches of the West River can be explained not only by the factor of distance but also by the higher density and specialization of markets here than in areas further upstream.⁸¹

To the extent that the West River and its tributaries, from Jiujiang and the delta to places as far upstream as Longzhou and Xilin, formed a coherent regional system, that region was in a sense created through the movement of people like the Jiujiang migrants considered here. Prior to the sixteenth century, the main link between Guangxi and other parts of China was via Guilin and the Yangzi River basin; by the Qing, a more important link was via Wuzhou and the West

⁸⁰ Fieldnotes, Pingfeng, June 15, 2007; *Nanhai Shencun Caishi jiapu*, 7:4b–5a, 9b–10b, 22a–24a, 9:55b.

⁸¹ Bin Changchu, “Guangxi jindai xuzhen de zonghe kaocha,” 6–7, 48.

River basin.⁸² This geographical reorientation was to a large extent the result of migration from Jiujiang and other towns in the Pearl River delta. Through their upstream activities, migrants brought upriver locales within a Jiujiang orbit. Likewise, this movement was shaped by geographic features, by state policies, and by family strategies for socioeconomic advancement. The trajectory of Jiujiang migration offers a new pattern by which places were linked together. The assumption that market towns should be linked in a hierarchy centered on the county seat in each county is still prevalent in scholarship on the economic history of southern China.⁸³ But this does not take into account the possibility, explained by the dendritic pattern, that two widely separated river ports may share more in common with each other than either of them does with other settlements in their own counties. Furthermore, migrants from the town of Jiujiang moved towards central places that were both higher and lower in administrative and economic hierarchies. In other words, the export of Jiujiang men did not necessarily flow from less urbanized to more urbanized places, or vice versa. The range of destinations was clearly shaped by the riverscape, but particular places became more or less connected to Jiujiang through the movement of the delta town's native sons (and in some cases daughters). In this sense the West River basin was a constructed region.⁸⁴

Finally, whether we conceive of Jiujiang as an emigrant community, as a diasporic homeland, or as a colonizing delta metropole in relation to an upriver periphery, the history of migration examined here highlights the limitations of writing a purely local history of this particular town, and perhaps of other riverine market towns. Understanding Jiujiang requires attention to movement along the river basin in which it was situated. Tracing flows along this riverscape, encapsulated in the ghostly legend of Cen Shifa and his kinsman the fish merchant, calls for a translocal history of this town, the diasporic networks it generated, and the upstream locales incorporated into this network.⁸⁵

⁸² Huang Bin, "Guangdong shangren yu Guangxi jindai xuzhen," 359–61, 377.

⁸³ For example, e.g., the various authors in Zhong, *Guangxi jindai xuzhen yanjiu*, 59–60, 342–50.

⁸⁴ In his study of towns in the Mississippi River basin, for example, Timothy R. Mahoney views "urban places not as units in a rigidly organized functional hierarchy but, rather, as particular places constantly interacting with the system around them." Mahoney, "Urban History in a Regional Context: River Towns on the Upper Mississippi, 1840–1860," 319.

⁸⁵ Historians of overseas Chinese migration during the modern era have effectively demonstrated the fuller understanding that can be derived from multi-sited research on "transnational" practice. Madeline Y. Hsu, *Dreaming of Gold, Dreaming of Home*; Adam McKeown, *Chinese Migrant Networks and Cultural Change*. For a recent example of a translocal history, see Du Yongtao, "Translocal Lineage and the Romance of Homeland Attachment." As Peter Bol reminds us, even while they celebrated particular local places, local histories in late imperial China cast a locale within a larger imperial realm of other local places. Bol, "The Rise of Local History," 75.

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Appendix



Fig. 1 Map of the West River Basin, 1820

Source: Adapted from Tan Qixiang, *Zhongguo lishi tituji* (The historical atlas of China), Shanghai: Ditu chubanshe, 1987, vol. 8, 44–47.

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