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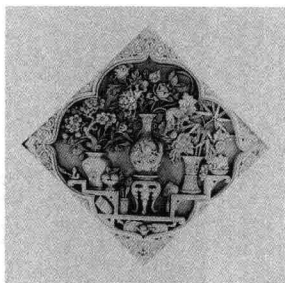
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John Lagerwey & Wang Zhenzhong

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劳格文 王振忠

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# **Ethnographic Introduction**

John Lagerwey

On May 30, 2009, Xu Ji took us on a day-long tour of his home village. It was a memorable day, with visits to most of the fifteen “national treasures” of Xucun, interviews with village elders like Xu Kaitai, then 80 years old, and Xu Wanzi, 86, and an excellent lunch in Xu Ji’s home. Then, over the next two years, principally during his summer and spring festival vacations, Xu Ji did the in-depth investigations that led to this book, with its extraordinary wealth of local documents, especially account books, and oral descriptions of local festivals.

## **Historical sketch**

Xucun, which is situated 21 kilometers to the northwest of the She county seat — and hence of the imperial era prefectural center of Huizhou — is said to have been first settled by the retired prefect Ren Fang in the early sixth century. The village that grew up was named after him, Fangyuan, and he even came to be worshiped as the village earth god in the temple of the great earth god Fusheng (Wealth Ascendant), if we are to trust a 1264 stele preserved in a local genealogy. Written by Xu Wenwei, this stele claims the worship of Ren Fang dated back to 536, and Ren Fang was represented by a portrait. The temple had been repaired often since then, the last time in 1219, and it was now in such a state of disrepair that it was like worshipping in the open air. The new temple kept the original orientation, but now had a tile instead of a straw roof, brick instead of mud walls, and a modified portrait with the

god holding a court tablet. Until 1837, when a massive flood destroyed it, this was the only earth god house (*shewu*) in Xucun.

The first Xu to arrive in what would by the end of the Song be called Xu Village (Xucun), is said to be the second son of Xu Ru, a high official who, like so many Huizhou founding ancestors, is said to have taken refuge from the Huang Chao rebellion in Huangdun. His four sons then fanned out, to villages in Wuyuan, Raozhou, Xiuning, and Shexian. The earliest reference to this story is in a Xu genealogy preface dated 1056 and attributed to the prime minister Wang Anshi. Xu Ji, however, considers this text to be of dubious authenticity, pushing the earliest reference forward to a preface of 1261 attributed to the *jinshi* Xu Lin.

But if this account of origins is clearly standard Huizhou myth history, by the time the Xu Ru tale was first mentioned, at the end of the Southern Song, the Xus were already well anchored in both local and national history, for in the 245 years between their first *jinshi* in the year 1012, Xu Yu (generation 5), and that of Xu Youxue in 1257, the Xus had produced the astounding number of nineteen *jinshi*<sup>①</sup>. In the Southern Song, when the whole of Huizhou produced 101 *jinshi*, Xucun could claim twelve of them, with five in the Chunyou reign period alone (1241 – 1252). While the number declined to four in the Ming and none in the Qing, the number of *juren* soared (seven in the Ming, of which four in the period 1617 – 39; thirteen in the Qing, of which five were military). Throughout the four dynasties, Xucun produced an even larger number of officials according to Xu Ji's count: 29 in the Song-Yuan and 112 in the Ming-Qing. Of the many local authors Xu Ji lists, one, Xu Lun, had the signal honor of having his collected works included in the *Yongle dadian*. The investment in education continued into the

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① It should be noted, however, that four of these, in generations five and six, are said by Xu Ji to have “moved to places unknown”.

twentieth century, with the first modern school being set up in the main lineage hall in 1907. Four of the 32 new-style schools in Republican-era Shexian were in Xucun. The most famous of these was founded by the salt merchant Xu Jiase in 1927. Five of Jiase's six sons studied there and went on to study abroad and obtain PhD degrees. Many of the school's graduates between 1927 and 1949 became university-level teachers, and one, Xu Genjun, even became an academician in the Central Academy of Sciences. Clearly, the local saying about the four powerful lineages of Shexian — “the Xus in the north, the Wus in the south, the Yes in the east, the Zhengs in the west” — was legitimately applied to the Xus.

### **Lineage construction**

From the ninth generation Ancestor Bin, the Xu lineage split into what would become its two main components, the Eastern (elder son) and Western (younger son) segments. In the early Ming, the rich merchant Xu Hongshou's six grandsons (generation 20) became the source of the Eastern segment's division into six: two died out, one left Xucun, and the remaining three gave rise to ten sub-segments called “gates” (*men*). The table of these gates provided by Xu Ji shows that they all trace back to generations 19–22. The largest, Bangbomen, now with 397 men, women, and children, further divided into four lineage branches, each with its own ancestor hall, in generations 21–25. Eastern segment Xus now live in the natural villages of Dongsheng, Qianxi, and Gaoyang, with a total population of 1101. In generations 12–19 the Western segment divided into ten gates, the present population of which is 1264 persons living primarily in Huanquan, Jincun, and Xucun xuexiao. At present, the Xus represent 47.7% of the population of Xucun administrative village; in the Republican era that figure was 67.8%. The next largest lineage group at that time was the Wus, with 4.5%. On the basis of his careful analysis of land-holding



figures found in the Shexian county archives, Xu Ji concludes that the other lineage groups in Xucun were basically tenants working on Xu-owned lands.

On the basis of the Bangbomen genealogy, Xu Ji shows its population went from one male in generation 21 to 122 in generation 26; in generation 27, the male population collapsed to 18, due, suggests Xu Ji, to a major flood in 1607. In generation 33, the Bangbomen segment population peaked again, at 125 males, held steady through three generations, then dropped dramatically again in generation 37 to 38 males. The largest Western gate, that of Huanlimen, which began in generation 12, also peaked in generation 26, at 437 males, but only dropped off to 312 males in generation 27. After a brief spurt in generations 28 and 29, however, it went into a long decline, going from 350 in generation 29 to 238 in generation 32, and 92 in generation 35.

Before 1536, says Xu Ji, the only way to worship distant ancestors was as gods, in temples. One of Xucun's oldest temples, Xiezhong, built in 1343, was dedicated to the two mid-Tang heroes of the fight against An Lushan in Suiyang, Zhang Xun and Xu Yuan. The local Xus considered Xu Yuan, who died in 758, to be an ancestor five generations removed from the Huizhou founding ancestor Xu Ru. A table of major lineage halls says the "Old House" (Laowu) of Huanlimen was founded in the early Ming, that of Bangbomen in the Jiajing era (1522 - 1566). The "old house" was understood to be that of Xu Zhizhou, Xu Ru's son and founding ancestor of the Xus of Xucun. It was the site of sacrifices to the Huanlimen segment founder, generation 12 Xu Rentang. For its hall, Bangbomen used the house of its segment founder, Xu Dufu (1357 - 1431), eldest son of Xu Bosheng (1332 - 1383). At the end of the Yuan, Bosheng, scion of a line of wealthy merchants stretching back to his great-great grandfather, Xu Zhu, had used his wealth to organize a local militia to protect Xucun during the

dynastic transition. At the beginning of the Ming, he was then appointed prefect of Tingzhou, where he died in office in 1383. Thus both of these segments were in fact adjusting the ancient practice of converting homes into “merit halls” (*gongde tang*). What had changed was that the sacrifices in these home-halls were no longer done by Buddhist monks.

Restored in 1897, the Huanlimen hall is now a cowpen. The Bangbomen hall underwent a major overhaul in the years 1918–1924 and was declared an important national protected site in 2006. It was restored in the year 2009 for the staggering cost of 1,200,000 RMB.

Other gate segments that Xu Ji refers to often — the Eastern Bangxianmen, Xianglimen, and Junbomen, and the Western Dazhaimen — founded their halls, respectively, in the mid-Ming, early Ming, late Ming, and 1605. The Bangxianmen hall, also called Big Grave Hall (Damuci), was established for Xu Bosheng’s third son, Meizu. It was rebuilt in 1695 by generation 29 Xu Sanyong. The Xianglimen, called Inspector’s House (Guanchadi), was established for Bosheng’s fourth younger brother, Xu Zhou, who died of illness at a young age. His wife, who was pregnant, never again left the house, devoting herself to raising her fatherless son, Tianxiang, who later became an inspector. The hall was restored in 1812. The Junbomen, also called Zhongfuting, was founded for Bosheng’s fourth son, Zetong. Built in the early Ming and rebuilt in the Guangxu era (1875–1907), it was torn down in 1983. The Dazhai hall, called Yunxitang, honored the Western segment’s generation 13 Xu Chengxin. The name Dazhai (Big House) is said to have been granted by Qinzong (r.1126), in recognition of the contribution of the merchant Xu Kefu to the war against the Jin. It underwent a major restoration in the Qing, but much of it collapsed in 1997. What remained of this and the Bangxianmen halls — both of which had survived because they served as agricultural work team

warehouses up to the 1980s — was also recognized in 2006 as national protected treasures.

A third major segment, called Chengdong (“east of the prefecture”), was founded by a 17<sup>th</sup>-generation Western segment individual who moved near the prefectural seat. It had its own hall, first built in the Zhengde era (1506 – 1522), then rebuilt at the end of the Ming with a separate room for Xu Guo, the highest official the Xus ever produced (*erpin*). The room for Xu Guo contained an imperial plaque of praise written for him by the Wanli emperor. This hall underwent extensive rebuilding in the years 1725 – 1740. Among the changes was the addition of a “charitable granary” and rooms for the Literati Association and for a “charitable school” for lineage children who could not afford education. The special room for Xu Guo, directly attached to the hall, now became the Gaoyang earth god house.

But most interesting is the joint hall of East and West: first founded in the Jiajing era by the generation 26 son of the wealthy merchant Xu Shiji of Bangbomen, it fell into disrepair in the Wanli era. At first, the Xus tried to move the sacrifices to their founding ancestor to the hall of Ren Fang, but this led to a court case with the other surname groups in the village, among them the Rens. The Xus won, but the other surnames did not accept the judgment, and the Xus eventually decided to build anew elsewhere. The reconstruction involved not just local lineage segments, but also other nearby groups who claimed descent from Xu Ru. Finally, in 1691, all accepted the suggestion of Xu Zhining of the Chengdong segment to build on the site of his grandfather Xu Guo’s school, the Four Mountain Pavilion (Sishanlou). This was an excellent geomantic site, wrote Zhining, “with the Literary Peak embracing it before and the Military Hill securing its rear”. When the Taiping rebels burnt down the central room of the triple-room hall in the 1850s, the back room continued to house the ancestor tablets. It became

the site of the first new-style school in the year 1907.

The function of ancestor halls, like that of the merit halls that preceded them, was to carry on regular worship of the ancestors. Such worship was impossible without the regular compilation of genealogies that kept track of lineage members dead and alive. The former had tablets in the halls and graves to be swept; the latter had the right and the obligation to participate in worship in halls and on the graves, and to share in the distribution of pork meat thereafter. That is why, very often, construction or reconstruction of halls happened at the same time as genealogy compilation or updating. According to Xu Ji, the first genealogies were compiled in 1056 and 1261 by the *jinshi* Xu Yuan and Xu Lin. The second he identifies as “the first compilation of the Eastern segment”. The next was done in 1373 by Xu Bosheng, and the first printed version in the Jiajing era by Xu Tian’en. A first East/West joint edition is attributed to Xu Shaozu in the Jingtai era (1450 – 1456). But the first still extant version is the printed, joint edition of 1569 by Fang Taoshan, also the author of a 1562 edition of the prefectural monograph. The next joint edition is dated 1645, then one from 1695, by Xu Zhining. All other genealogies listed by Xu Ji were segment genealogies, some printed, some manuscript. The only Western segment edition, printed, dates to 1789. The Eastern segment had a second printed edition in 1569 and only manuscript editions thereafter, some by sub-segments. The last genealogy listed by Xu Ji was a manuscript edition of the Western Huanlimen sub-segment dated 1950. Finally, the Chengdong segment is said to have revised its genealogy twelve times between 1056 and 1737.

Perhaps most interesting with regard to lineage construction are the disagreements between cooperating segments over early history. Thus the Chengdong genealogy lists only two persons between Xu Yuan and Xu Ru, while the Eastern and Western segments agree

there were four. Far more damaging was the dispute between Eastern and Western segments over their own Northern Song lineage history. It first came to the fore in the Xu Shaozu edition, that is, when the two segments first tried to produce a joint genealogy. Shaozu was from the Western segment, which at that time vastly outnumbered the Eastern, and he followed the Western account which lowered the Eastern version of generational precedence by four generations. Disillusioned that Fang Taoshan followed Shaozu's version, the Eastern segment decided in 1569 to edit its own genealogy. What was the problem? — the Eastern segment traced itself back to generation 2 Xu Zhizhou, the Western segment back to generation 5 Xu Hui, with the result that the Western segment had much higher generation numbers (*beifen*) — and the concomitant lineage prestige and status — than their Eastern contemporaries. In 1872, this still unsettled dispute led to a court case in which the Western segment attacked the Eastern. A new magistrate decided in the West's favor, and in early 1873 they then attempted to set up a stele with this judgment in the Bangbomen hall but were prevented from doing so by a band of men with weapons who "swarmed into the hall". In the end, the West had to content itself with setting up the stele in the joint hall. The stele was destroyed during the Cultural Revolution.

Xu Ji carefully describes how genealogies, by their choice of vocabulary and rules, helped to create and express the ideology which underlies lineage construction. One general rule was to "record the good, not the bad". The Eastern segment 1569 edition says explicitly that, "When someone is adopted in from another surname, this disorders the lineage and is not recorded, so as to distinguish jade from stone". When the fact of a marriage was mentioned without providing the wife's surname, this was because she had remarried after her husband's death. Not to record the fact her husband took a wife would "make it difficult to be her son", but

by not recording her surname, “the good is broadcast and the evil hidden”. Of someone who had become a Buddhist or Daoist monk and therefore had no sons, it should be written that “he brought his line to an end”. But if he was still alive, in the hope he might still return to lay life, a character was added to make the phrase read, “Is about to bring his line to an end”. To prevent “immoral descendants from taking bribes and wantonly selling” the genealogy, each copy was paginated and the number of pages marked at the back. To receive a copy, people had to register well in advance, and when all copies had been distributed, some groups had the original blocks destroyed. Some lineages required that copies be brought back to the ancestral hall for verification every third year. If there were any smudges, or if any changes or additions had been made, the copy was confiscated and given to someone else.

Using archival sources and local account books, Xu Ji shows how ideology and rules for membership and ritual behavior together consolidated the functioning of the lineage as at once a local government and a business corporation whose linchpin was the regular sacrifices to the ancestors. Tabulating records from the 1950 land reform, he finds that 73 *mu* of land were registered under the joint East/West hall Yibentang (Hall of the Single Origin) in Huanquan, providing rent of 4345 *jin* of rice. The Bangbomen group had the most land of any segment hall, with 55 *mu* and 3345 *jin* of rent. Next was the Junbomen hall, with 54.5 *mu* and 3738 *jin*. An account book from 1929 details the resources available to Bangbomen for the repair of its hall. They included money from rent, donations, sub-segment halls’ contributions, a head tax, purchase of permanent tablets for placement in the hall, and income from sale of property. Nearly 60% of the total came from rent. Management of lineage property was invariably by rotation among its component parts. According to an 1848 certificate of tablet admission, before the tablet of a deceased family member could be

placed in the joint hall, an investigation had to be undertaken to ensure the candidate had been a moral person not only but also that he was indeed a member of the claimed lineage segment. Then, in exchange for a hefty fee, the hall issued the certificate. The money was used to purchase land for the sacrifices. A tablet meant to be kept in the hall forever cost far more than one that was temporary — 71 times more, according to Xu Ji. Certain categories — degree holders, widows who did not remarry, models of filial piety recognized by the court — did not have to pay. The highest honor, reserved for those of high prestige or other signal contributions to the lineage, was to have one's portrait hung in a room on the right side of the central part of the hall. The tablets were arrayed in the rear room. Every thirty to fifty years — the same amount of time, normally, between genealogy compilations — the tablets had to be reordered. The tablets in the center were permanent, but the names on those to the left and right could be combined by sub-segment onto collective tablets and the original, individual tablets buried in the relevant cemetery. This was followed by “dragging a pig to welcome the dragon”: a pig was killed on top of the “arriving dragon” hill (*lailong*) and then dragged bleeding on a rough rice straw mat down to the hall, to each door, so that each threshold was bloodied. The pig was then placed in scalding water and its bristles removed before stretching it out on a wooden frame on the left side of the hall, across from a goat on the right. A Daoist now recited scriptures while standing in the main gate of the hall. He then threw “dragon eggs” (chicken eggs) to the lineage members standing outside. The trick was to catch them without breaking them or letting them fall to the ground. Then, at last, the ritual of “lighting” the new tablets could be performed. That evening, there was a banquet and, if possible, opera.

The hall was not just a place for storing tablets and doing annual sacrifices. It was also a courtroom and a place to pray for and

celebrate lineage continuity. When a family acquired a new wife, a special 1.5 meter tall and 1.2 meter wide, highly decorated red lantern was hung in the central room of the family house and a banquet was held. The next day, the lantern was ritually hung from the central beam of the lineage hall and lantern covers hung there earlier by lantern-returners brought home and hung in the central room. In the place thus vacated, a red rope was strung up with a wooden, gourd-shaped “longevity peach seal” attached. This represented the newlyweds’ wish to be the first to “seize a place”, that is, have a son and return a lantern to this place. Once a son had been born, on the ninth day of the following New Year, the family purchased a new lantern and threw a banquet. Early the next morning all segment males under the age of 15 came to congratulate the family, after which a prestigious and fortunate elder took down the lantern and carried it to the hall to hang in the place of the seal. That evening, all families with newborn first sons paid for a banquet of all lineage males over the age of 15. But the food was only half-cooked and was meant not to be eaten but ritually distributed and taken home to eat. The next evening all lineage members gathered in the hall to drink glutinous rice wine and eat stir-fried noodles. The men sat down for this repast; the women stood up. When it was done, the lineage head led all in burning incense and paper money before the ancestor tablets. All kowtowed, and the head informed the ancestors of the sons who had been born, asking their protection so that the sons would grow up healthy. Then the lanterns were taken down, leaving the covers, and the head led a parade with percussion to the relevant earth god house, where the lanterns would remain lit until the 18<sup>th</sup>. On the 19<sup>th</sup>, they were taken down and burned.

Minor offenses occasioned a verbal warning, a whipping, or a fine. But when crimes against “lineage ethics” had occurred, the hall had to be solemnly opened and a trial held. The offender might



be obliged to parade publicly, beating a gong and announcing his crime to one and all while a man beat him from behind with bamboo branches, all the way to the water exit. If a complaint was lodged by the family of a wife who had been molested by her husband's father, the lineage could allow the wife to strike the family threshold with a cleaver. An addicted gambler who had brought severe harm to his family could be attached to a hall column, his upper shirt removed, and his chest smeared with and mouth stuffed full of cow dung.

### **The economy**

Using the 1950 land reform archives, Xu Ji produces a table of individual landholdings in Xucun: 400 Xu households (598 males, 694 females) owned 81 water buffalo, farmed 569.79 *mu* of land, rented out 1308.14, and were tenants on 1233.32. All other lineages together numbered 254 households, possessed 54.5 buffalo, farmed 354.83 *mu* of their own land, rented out 409.41, and were tenants on 1233.385. One of these other lineages, the Wus, second largest after the Xus, numbered but 40 households, had no buffalo, farmed 76.82 *mu*, rented out 24.8, and were tenants on 186.11. Of the 1308 *mu* of land rented out by the Xus, 93 belonged to one "big landlord", Xu Zhongxiu, who was also the richest Xucun merchant in the 1930s. Another landlord, Xu Zihua, had over 200 *mu* of land, but only 18 in Xucun. Tenants represented 16.47% of the active population, renters 19.75%, and people combining their own and rented land 36.74%.

The main crops grown were rice, millet, wheat, rapeseed, beans, peanuts, corn, sorghum, and sweet potatoes. Transplanting of the rice was done in the late fifth, early sixth month. The main summer fertilizer was lime, which at once counteracted the acidity of the earth and killed insects. In the early fall, after first thoroughly draining, drying, and then reflooding the fields, lime