

# Research Using Local Gazetteers

Slide 【1】

Ming Sun Poon

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am Ming Sun Poon 潘铭燊, Chinese Studies Specialist of the Asian Division, Library of Congress. Together with my colleagues, I manage the largest Chinese collection outside of China, in 1.1 million volumes. We pride ourselves for the most prestigious holding of Chinese local gazetteers in the Western world.

Slides 【2】 【3】

**Both local gazetteers (old) and dynastic histories placed emphasis on biographical information**

The topic of my presentation this evening is < Research Using Local Gazetteers >. I am going to share with you some cases of research in which local gazetteers provide the major source, if not the only source, of information. You will have a peek at the extensive and diversified areas where local gazetteers hem in to support research.

In the study of local gazetteers my own emphasis is on the traditional ones. But other members of the panel suggested that I should not leave out the new local gazetteers. So I added 2 cases in which new local gazetteers were involved.

First of all, I want to point out that local gazetteers follow the pattern of dynastic histories in their treatment of biographies. Chinese people tend to believe that history was made by men. Most historical compilations, therefore, contains many biographies.

I picked < Guangdong tong zhi 广东通志 > compiled in the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of Daoguang 道光 reign as a random example. As you can see from these 2 slides, the 334 chapters were divided into 19 sections. Which is the most lengthy section? Correct, Lie Zhuan 列传, Biographies! Actually, its preceeding 2 sections, Huan Ji Lu 宦绩录 (Eminent officials) and Zhai Huan Lu 摘宦录 (Exiled officials), also contain biographical information. Together these 3 sections comprise of 100 chapters, almost 1/3 the length of the book.

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Many biographees in local gazetteers not found in dynastic histories –  
Example of Lun Wenxu

Understandably, most eminent Chinese did not find a place in dynastic histories. It was much easier to achieve local esteem than to become famous nationally.

Here I take Lun Wenxu 伦文叙 as an example. He was a literary legend in Guangdong. A series of stories were attributed to the “devilish talent” of Lun Wenxu 伦文叙. But I consulted the < Index to biographies in 25 dynastic histories > compiled by Kaiming Shuju 开明书局 in Shanghai and was returned 0 result.

Then through an index I compiled, < Index to biographies in Guangdong local gazetteers 广东地方志人物索引 >, I found his biography in chapter 276 of < Daoguang Guangdong tong zhi 道光广东通志 >:

“Lun Wenxu 伦文叙, with alternate names Bochou 伯畴 and Yugang 迂冈, was a native of Nanhai 南海. He was tall-built, looked like a tree made of jade, and with a very large head measuring about 2 chi 尺. From his childhood, Lun was identified as having well-chiselled features and self-showing talents. A fortune-teller once predicted that he would become the nation's number one successful candidate. The fortune-teller was correct. Lun became the Zhuangyuan 状元 champion in his first sitting of the civil service examination. Among his official appointments were Lecturer to the Emperor on classical studies and Administrator of Examination for Yingtian 应天 Prefecture. Unfortunately, he died of disease after administering that examination, at the early age of 47.”

The inability of Lun Wenxu 伦文叙 to enter into the national history of Ming Dynasty might be due to his untimely death. Cases like his were abundant in Chinese history. Without the extensive coverage in Local Gazetteers, many eminent people in Chinese history would have gone unnoticed by future generations.

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## The native place of Bi Sheng

Bi Sheng 毕升 is a famous name in the history of Chinese printing. The encyclopedic scholar Shen Kuo 沈括 in his work < Mengxi bi tan 梦溪笔谈 > mentioned him as the inventor of clay movable types, fully 400 years before Gutenberg.

Despite his historical importance, very little was known about Bi Sheng 毕升. We don't even know from which part of the country he moved to Hangzhou. Until 1989, when the compilers of < Yingshan xian zhi 英山县志 > conducted a survey of cultural relics in the county's vicinity. They found Bi Sheng 毕升's tombstone in Wangyan Cun 王焱村 of Caopan Zhen 草盘镇. This was followed by the discovery, in neighboring villages, of the burial grounds and tombstones of Bi Sheng's son and grandson.

Shen Kuo 沈括 mentioned Bi Sheng 毕升 as “buyi 布衣,” person in coarse cotton cloth, meaning that he was a commoner, person of humble social status. But the oral tradition of Caopan Zhen 草盘镇 had it that the Bi family there was a distinguished and wealthy one – this was probably true because otherwise Bi Sheng 毕升 would not have the means to experiment on movable type.

Of course, local gazetteers go far beyond providing biographical information. They are useful in a variety of ways.

### Slide 【6】

## Value of local gazetteers according to Zhang Xuecheng and Gu Jiegang

In this slide, I quote 2 authorities who testified to the value of local gazetteers.

Zhang Xuecheng 章学诚 said local gazetteers can:

- supplement historical writings when they are deficient,
- amend historical writings when they err,
- elaborate historical writings when they are brief,
- add to historical writings when they are void.

Gu Jiegang 顾颉刚 related the sections of local gazetteers to the disciplines they belong,

including:

- Geography
- Political conditions
- Economic conditions
- Social conditions
- Archives

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**Based on local gazetteers many source books can be compiled**

As extensive repositories of source information, local gazetteers provide endless data for source book compilation. Based on local gazetteers, researchers compiled source books on:

- mines and mining
- products
- climate changes
- droughts, floods and waterlogging
- earthquakes
- celestial phenomena
- historical data on agriculture

This list is not meant to be exhaustive, but from it we get some ideas of the extent of data coverage.

Slide 【9】

**The ability to use local gazetteers is the basic skill of historians**

In Premodern China, Gu Yanwu 顾炎武 was the scholar known to be most diligent in reading local gazetteers. In 2 decades he skimmed through more than 1,000 local gazetteers of different administrative levels. He combined these book knowledge with on-site observations and compiled 2 famous books < Zhao yu zhi 肇域志 > and < Tian xia jun guo li bing shu 天下郡国利病书 >.

Among our contemporaries, He Bingdi 何炳棣 was the role model of historians. His historical writings were built on solid historical evidences, mostly from local gazetteers. In 1960's he spent 3 summers in the Library of Congress, Harvard and Columbia to leaf through 3,000 local gazetteers (print version) and 300-400 local gazetteers on

microfilms. All these painstaking work he did by himself, without research assistant.

#### Slide 【10】

### He Bingdi's scope of research broadened by the use of local gazetteers

In his own words –

“[Without local gazetteers, he said] my discussion on the evolution of the connotation of 'ding 丁' (male adult) and 'mu 畝' (a land unit) cannot be persuasive enough. Nor can I be fully confident in conducting the dialog on the breeding of early maturing rice and the introduction of crops from North America. Both clusters of events led to the agricultural revolution in China.”

#### Slide 【11】

### How Chen Zhengxiang solved the problem of geographical distribution of locust famines by using local gazetteers

A striking example of successful application of knowledge from local gazetteers by non-historians is the legacy of Chen Zhengxiang 陈正祥. Chen was a chair professor of Geography, very active in serving national and international needs professionally. Once he was commissioned by the United Nations to provide a map of geographical distribution of locust famines in China.

He went through 3,000 local gazetteers, identified places where temples related to locusts were found (including Bala Temple 八蜡庙, Temple of the Insect King 虫王庙 and Temple of General Liu Meng 刘猛将军庙). One by one he marked these places on a China map. Altogether he used 8 months to complete a < Distribution map of locust-related temples in China >. Then he utilized the records of locust famines found in local gazetteers to calculate the frequency of such famines and finished a fully documented history of locust famines in North China during the Ming Dynasty. In this way, Chen accomplished with flying colors a thorough study of locust famines both geographically and chronologically.

More than any statistical or literary records can depict, a < Distribution map of locust-related temples > has unparalleled visual impact and synthetic value. This map reveals the historical fact that locust famines were more densely scattered in the lower reaches of the Yellow River, especially in the provinces of Hebei, Shandong and Henan. Their occurrences decreased gradually when going south from Central China until their

appearance came to a standstill in the provinces of Fujian, Taiwan, Guangdong and Guangxi.

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### How Chen Zhengxiang solved the problem of geographical distribution of locust famines by using local gazetteers

The truth was, as Chen indicated, the southern limit of the distribution of locust-related temples corresponded with the isopleth (isoline) of the 80% yearly-average relative humidity. This southern limit was also in keeping with the isohyet (isoline) of the 1200-millimeter annual rainfall. Such observations also explained why locust famines occurred in Yunnan. Although lying out-of-way in the southwest Yunnan, because of its high-altitude plateau features, is very similar to the Taihu 太湖 basin area in terms of humidity and rainfall.

Linking local gazetteers data on locust famines to information on crops, we can also say for sure that the crop most vulnerable to locust famines is rice.

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### Tan Qixiang found the origin of Hunan people through local gazetteers

Tan Qixiang 谭其骧 the eminent scholar in Historical Geography has an important article on the origin of Hunan people, published in his book < Chang shui ji 长水集 >. This is an article on immigration within China.

He traced the origin of Hunan people first by telling the story of Xu Xun 许逊. Xu was a Daoist priest who contributed tremendously to the welfare of Nanchang 南昌 residents by putting an end to the invasion of snakes to the city, thus was consecrated as the guardian god of Nanchang 南昌. Tan found, incidentally, many records of temples worshipping Xu Xun 许逊, including “Xu Zu xing gong 许祖行宫” (Temporary Palace of Arch-priest Xu), “Xu Zhenjun miao 许真君庙” (Temple of Arch-priest Xu) and “Wan shou gong 万寿宫” (Longevity Hall, another name for the temple worshipping Xu Xun) in different county gazetteers of Hunan (e.g. Liuyang 浏阳, Pingyang 平阳, Longshan 龙

山).

Based on other historical evidences Tan confirmed that 9 out of 10 Kiangsinese who emigrated to Hunan were natives of Luling 庐陵, a district of Nanchang 南昌.

Affiliating the facts that Xu Xun 许逊 was the guardian god of Nanchang 南昌 and that he was also devoutly worshipped in Hunan, it can be deduced that many, if not most, Hunanese came from Nanchang 南昌.

### Slide 【15】

#### How authority of jurisdiction was determined by consulting local gazetteers

Meiguan 梅关 on the border of Jiangxi and Guangdong is widely known as the “First Fortress of Lingnan 岭南第一关.” People of Nanxiong 南雄 County in Guangdong and Dayu 大庾 County of Jiangxi engaged in endless quarrels regarding who had the jurisdiction over Meiling 梅岭 Mountains, where Meiguan 梅关 was situated. Even to the extent of fighting with weapons.

In the year 1984, people of these 2 counties finally sat down to talk. They found historical proofs in < Nan'an fu zhi 南安府志 > compiled in the 7<sup>th</sup> year of Tongzhi 同治 and the 1919 edition of < Dayu xian zhi 大庾县志 >.

The preface of < Dayu xian zhi 大庾县志 > wrote: “The winding and undulating hills of Yuling 庾岭 Mountains form the natural barrier permitting no easy passage. With one man guarding the pass, ten thousand men cannot break it open. Military strategists of the ancient times spoke of it as the doorstep of southern Jiangxi.” At the same time, the territorial maps of both gazetteers also indicated that Meiling Mountains belong to the domain of Jiangxi.

Both parties therefore submitted to the authoritative decision grounded on evidences contained in local gazetteers.

### Slide 【16】

## Local gazetteers confirmed the great-great-grand-father of Jose Rizal, one of the fathers of Filipino Independence, was rooted in China

Jose Protacio Rizal Mercado y Alonso Realondo 黎刹 (1861-1896) was a Filipino nationalist and reformist. He is considered one of the national heroes of the Philippines.

He was a 5<sup>th</sup> generation descendant of Domingo Lam-co 柯仪南 (柯南戈), a Chinese immigrant entrepreneur who sailed to the Philippines from Jinjiang 晋江 in Quanzhou 泉州 in the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century. But the exact native place of Domingo Lam-co 柯仪南 (柯南戈) was not known. Until 1998, Shangguo Village 上郭村 in Luoshan 罗山 Mountain of Jinjiang 晋江 City was confirmed as the land of Jose Rizal's forefathers. The verification process involved close scrutiny of at least 5 local gazetteers and 1 family lineage record. The 5 local gazetteers are < Ba Min tong zhi 八闽通志 >, < Min shu 闽书 >, < Fujian tong zhi 福建通志 >, < Quanzhou fu zhi 泉州府志 > and < Jinjiang xian zhi 晋江县志 >. The family lineage record is < Dongsheng Gong zhang fang pu 东升公长房谱 > (Family record of the Branch of the Eldest Son descended from the Honorable Fore-father Dongsheng).

### Slide 【17】

## How a defective highway was re-routed based on local gazetteers

The Transportation Section 交通志 of < Quanjiao xian zhi 全椒县志 > contains description of an ancient post road of Luzhou 庐州.

Some years ago, a section of He Pu highway 合浦公路 (from Hefei 合肥 to Pukou 浦口) was found defective in supporting traffic. A project was launched to find a new route for this section. Specialists in the County Gazetteers Office 县志办 proposed to follow the route of the ancient post road. Their proposal was accepted and the new section of the highway was built accordingly.

After the reconstruction was completed, the people of Quanjiao was rewarded with a more effective highway shortened by 21 kilometers. The yearly passenger transport cost was cut down by a huge sum, equaled to one-half of the total investment for building the

new road.

Slide 【18】

## Historical facts of Chinese guerrillas rescuing American volunteer pilots fighting Japanese during WWII

On August 17, 1944 a bomber of the American 14<sup>th</sup> Aviation Brigade was hit by Japanese air force. The bomber and its pilot, by the name of Jimmy, were forced to land in the wild of Xingzi 星子 County near Jiujiang 九江 City of Jiangxi Province.

Members of the local Chinese guerrillas came to rescue Jimmy and his comrades, totaling 7 Americans, and carried them to safety.

46 years later, in 1990, Jimmy, then more than 70 years old, visited Xingzi 星子 County with 2 other American pilots for reunion with their rescuers. They were saddened to know members of the rescuing team were all deceased. Officials of Jiujiang 九江 City luckily found the record of the rescue in < Xingzi xian zhi 星子县志 > and presented one copy to each veteran pilot as souvenir and token of thankfulness for their assistance in fighting against invaders during WWII.