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A Historical Model of the Formation of Chinese Regional Wushu Culture: A Study on the Origin and Inherited Characteristic of Huizhou Wushu in the Ming and Qing Dynasties

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Abstract:

Based on expounding the concept of Huizhou Wushu, this article probes into the crucial reasons for the rise of Huizhou Wushu in the Ming and Qing Dynasties. The research holds that Huizhou has a strong atmosphere of clan culture since ancient times. During the Ming and Qing Dynasties, the frequent power struggles among clans and the advocation of resorting to force to resolve disputes led martial arts training become the prevailing practice in Huizhou. In addition, Huizhou merchants became active during that period, and the urgent demand for personal and property safety in their business activities also stimulated the development of Huizhou Wushu. As a typical regional Wushu culture, the origin and inheritance of Huizhou Wushu in the Ming and Qing Dynasties showed unique regional cultural characteristics. First of all, it emphasizes both the practical rationality and the artistic aesthetics; second, it takes the ethics of Neo-Confucianism as the moral standards; furthermore, it attaches great importance to foreign exchanges while valuing the inheritance of clans' blood ties. All in all, the inheritance and development of Huizhou Wushu in the Ming and Qing Dynasties had an important historical impact on the development pattern of later Chinese Wushu.

Keywords: Regional Wushu culture, Huizhou Wushu, The Ming and Qing Dynasties, Huizhou merchants, Patriarchal society.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The Chinese Wushu had blossomed into maturity during the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1912) Dynasties. Since then, the Chinese Wushu had officially broke away from the military uses, and had generally been transformed into folk martial arts characterized by distinct schools, varied equipment, diverse styles and complicated theories, thus laying the foundation for today's Chinese Wushu [1]. During the transformation period, Wushu was often influenced by the geographical conditions and cultural traditions of the inherited regions, and, in turn, it presented the regional features correspondingly. Academics usually refer to the Wushu culture with obvious historical imprints in a particular historic district as the regional Wushu culture [2]. Huizhou Wushu is a representative of regional Wushu culture. It has a fairly early origin, and has basically taken shape during the late Ming and early Qing Dynasties, with unique regional characteristics and far-reaching impacts. By taking Huizhou Wushu as a typical example, this thesis not only can clearly show a historical overview of the formation of Chinese regional Wushu culture, but also can help readers to understand the rich historical and cultural connotations it contains.

II. ABOUT HUIZHOU AND ITS WUSHU CULTURE

Huizhou, now known as 'Huangshan City', located in the southern part of Anhui Province in East China. However, in history, Huizhou was not only a geographical concept, but a cultural concept. Ancient Huizhou, alias Xin'an, Shezhou. There are six counties under its jurisdiction, namely, Shexian County, Yixian County, Xiuning County, Qimen County, Jixi County and Wuyuan County. The government office was situated in a place where now called Huicheng in Shexian County. At the same time, 'Huizhou' in a broad sense also refers to the so-called 'Sub-Huizhou' cultural areas such as Chun'an County and Jiande County, and even those areas related to Huizhou merchants' business activities [3]. The astonishing cultural achievements in Huizhou's clan, Neo-Confucianism, business, education, science and technology, and art made its culture 'rich, splendid, unique, typical and national', and made it outstanding in Chinese regional culture [4]. Therefore, Huizhou Studies, Dunhuang Studies and Tibetology are called 'The Three Major Schools' of Chinese regional culture.

Influenced by the social environment and cultural factors in Huizhou, the contents and forms of martial arts in this area were tinted with its peculiar cultural characteristics, thus forming a concept—Huizhou Wushu, which means a kind of martial arts that originated and spread in Huizhou. And then, another word derived from the former—Huizhou Wushu Culture, that is, in Huizhou, represented by martial arts, all the material and spiritual products related to Huizhou Wushu under the influence of its culture, including the equipment used, the customs

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and institutions inherited, and the cultural connotations contained therein [5]. There existed various activities related to martial arts in all stages of Huizhou's history. The traditional emphasis on military force made Wushu activities in ancient Huizhou more frequent. Till the Ming and Qing Dynasties, Huizhou Wushu gradually matured into a typical regional Wushu culture.

III. REASONS FOR THE RISE OF HUIZHOU WUSHU IN THE MING AND QING DYNASTIES

3.1 Regional Wushu Style in Huizhou Patriarchal Society in the Ming and Qing Dynasties

Chinese people's concept of patriarchal clan had been formed for a long time. Huizhou patriarchal society, as an epitome of Chinese clan culture, its formation is a long-term historical process which influenced by the interactive changes of immigration, culture and economy under the specific geographical and regional conditions of Huizhou [6].

Influenced by the clan culture, Huizhou people have a strong tradition of lawsuit and fighting. Whether for the indigenous people who lived in Huizhou for a long time or for the immigrants from other places, the original purpose of highlighting the clan culture is to gather their power and ensure the stability of their people's life in turbulent times, thus resulting in a phenomenon— 'a lot of families with common surnames are clustered in a clan' [7]. The formation of the clan has also spawned the development of clan power, making it an important power system that cannot be ignored in traditional Chinese society. As Prasenjit Duara said the characteristics of clan in terms of decrees and regulations, ceremonies and institutions make it a typical structure in the cultural network of power. Especially the clans in the South, they had strong connections with the superior government, considerable common property and contacts beyond village, in addition, their common consciousness were very strong, which made them the source of rural politics and conflicts [8]. Within a limited geographical space, the respective development of the clans will certainly cause conflicts among them due to competing interests. Once the conflicts arise, lawsuit and fighting were the most common solutions. However, although lawsuit was a way to resolve the disputes, under the conditions of inefficient administrative capacity in the feudal society, lawsuits were protracted, and there existed many uncontrollable factors. In the rural areas beyond the control of central government, the function of clan forces in administrative governance was particularly important. In the face of sudden conflicts, it's the most direct and most common solution to resort to arms. So, it's believed that 'Huizhou people are those who lived in the mountains and intended to solve problems through war'. Therefore, in folk, people often clustered to practice martial arts for the interests of their clans, which became an important internal factor for the rise of martial arts in the Ming and

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Qing Dynasties [9].

From the Song Dynasty to the Qing Dynasty, in order to defend the homeland, to consolidate and expand clan forces, and to protect the daily security and property rights of forests and ancestral graves, a lot of prominent clans in Huizhou specially recruited practice servants to learn martial arts, and established 'fighting corps', also known as 'guard family', 'fist family' [10]. Those tenants were just like their masters' private armed forces, and the number of them was quite staggering. There was a command that all young adults must practice martial arts. They were highly skilled in martial arts, and can fight with several people with bare fists, fight with a dozen people with weapons like cudgels and firing folks. The most skilled ones among them were allowed to serve as bodyguards of merchants. This system had been around for a long time and was not abolished until the founding of People's Republic of China. In Chawan Village (a village of Qimen County in Huizhou), there was a saying that 'Chawan Village has 3,000 fighting corps and 800 bodyguards'. In some villages, males aged 16-45 years old were required to participate in the servitude of fistfight, and received a 40-day training of martial arts taught by highly-skilled boxing coaches during the annual winter break [11].

In Illustrated Cases of Real Shaolin Cudgelplay, a book written in the Ming Dynasty, Hou Anguo (the magistrate of Xiuning County during that time) mentioned in the preface that 'More than 10 males of Cheng's family went to the field with weapons such as sharp swords and halberds, heavy lashes and maces. At first, they practiced alone, then two of them fought hand to hand, and all of them practiced together at last. Their movements were skillful and the scene was impressive [12]. They were later recommended by Magistrate Hou to Tianjin to participate in the fight against Japanese pirates and were praised by the court. Thus, it can be seen that the martial arts of Cheng's clan in Chakou Village of Xiuning County was flourishing. At the same time, Cheng's clan in Yanzhen Town of Shexian County had its own armed forces. They drilled regularly and were responsible for the local security [13]. During the reign of Emperor Kangxi to Emperor Qianlong in the Qing Dynasty, a large number of immigrants from Jiangxi Province moved to Huizhou to make a living. Those immigrants occupied the hilly area to build sheds for settlement, so they were called 'the shed people (peng min)' by Huizhou locals. Later, a long-running scramble for living resources had broken out between Huizhou locals and 'the shed people'. In the end, the tradition of practicing martial arts in clans made Huizhou people win a decisive victory in the scramble [14].

3.2 The Promoting Effect of Huizhou Merchants' Business Activities on Huizhou Wushu in the Ming and Qing Dynasties

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Huizhou Merchants' business activities can be dated back to the Southern and Northern Dynasties (420-589). Huizhou was originally a mountainous area with low concentration of land. However, the population grew day by day with the social changes; so, Huizhou was gradually falling into the severe environmental pressure of insufficient living space. Poverty gave rise to the desire for change, so, going out to make a living by doing business became the tradition of Huizhou people. Although Huizhou was located in the mountainous area, but rich in products with competitiveness such as bamboo, wood, tea, and stationery accessories. Moreover, the inconvenience of land transportation was compensated by its developed river system. Xin'anjiang River and its tributaries made it very convenient for Huizhou's shipping. Since the Song Dynasty made Nanjing its capital, the national economic center had shifted southwards. The economic situation went smoothly in the southern area of Yangtze River. By giving full play to the natural advantages of its property and logistics, utilizing the human resources of the surplus labor force, Huizhou people made themselves the richest in the southern area of Yangtze River and monopolized the town business with the spirit of daring to the first and being practical-minded [15].

During the Ming and Qing Dynasties, Huizhou merchants had left their footprints all over the country. Their business activities covered a wide range of areas such as Beijing, Shanghai, Suzhou, Hangzhou these metropolis and Hubei Province, Hunan Province, Sichuan Province, Xizang autonomous region, Fujian Province, Zhejiang Province, Jiangxi Province, Guangdong Province, etc. [16]. When those merchants were doing business, they combined clans and their ideology with business activities so that they expanded a huge geographical business network covering most of China on the basis of kinship network. Innumerable Huizhou merchants who had left their hometowns engaged in trade activities in this commercial network which was based on blood relationships and geography, constituting a spectacle in the Chinese commercial world at that time.

While, under traditional security of society, this road for such business was not smooth like 'money comes from danger'. First of all, there were thieves and bandits making trouble along water route and land route. However, Huizhou merchants, in Ming Dynasty, had many routes to run business. At that time, a business man called Huang Bian wrote his eight-volume *A Series of Road Maps*, which clearly listed 144 water routes [17]. Among them, 29 routes posed a threat to Huizhou merchants [18]. And thieves and highwaymen in this part were so rampant that merchants had endured great loss in both lives and property. Besides, markets and wharves where business was located were not so tranquil. Many officious and swashbuckling spalpeens blackmailed and imposed exaction on non-indigineous merchants. This illegal activity was rampant so that local governments of Suzhou, Wuxian County in Qing Dynasty had to carve legal provisions on stele to ban and warn them [19]. Now, from the strongest terms carved in

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stele, we could see that the behaviors of thieves and bandits to the Huizhou merchants were so wild that it made a bad effect on their normal business. It was recorded in detail by people in Qing dynasty that Huizhou merchants had encountered threats and obstinacy in Jingdezhen City, Jiangxi Province. However, it was difficult for local government to offer protection against bullies under such a circumstance [20].

Facing their threats and dangers, the crowd of Huizhou merchants naturally made use of force to safeguard their own interests. Therefore, ever since the Ming Dynasty, Huizhou merchants showed love for Wushu (Chinese Kungfu) more than ever. The martial artist, Cheng Zongyou, was born in family of Huizhou merchants. At the age of about 20, he went to Shaolin Temple to learn Kungfu and then 10 years later, he came back. Then he began to go into business with his father and became famous because of fighting with bullies. At that time, once he run into dangers, he would use spear to fight with bandits. On hearing his name, the bandits would escape immediately. What fame he is [21]! It was clear that dangers encountered by Huizhou merchants were affirmed to be true and skillful Kungfu was the favorable method of ensuring financial security. Actually, there were a lot of business people like Cheng Zongyou to learn martial arts in Ming Dynasty. And they were with very strong fighting strength.

In addition, Huizhou people in the Ming and Qing dynasties were famous for their business ability throughout the country. With good fortune, they also engaged in trade while at the same time were fond of literary pursuits and drama as entertainment. Driven by Huizhou merchants, Huizhou opera also flourished for a while. Fighting and martial arts were more common in Huizhou opera repertoires, the strongest action of which was martial arts: the traditional skill of artists of Hui Combo (abbreviation of a group of Huizhou Opera). At the same time, Huizhou Wushu, in this process, had enough merits to show charming on performance stage, obtaining a platform for display, communication and exchange, and increasing the chance to the outward exchange of Huizhou martial arts [22].

IV. THE CULTURAL CHARACTERISTICS OF HUIZHOU WUSHU IN MING AND QING DYNASTIES

4.1 Emphasis on Pragmatic Rationality of Content As Well as Artistic Aesthetics of Form

The culture of Huizhou was characterized with pragmatic rationality. Huizhou Wushu was produced and inherited in a peculiar cultural atmosphere, forming a pragmatic characteristic.

In terms of the technique of Huizhou Wushu in Ming and Qing Dynasties, it paid more attention on actual combat, which was totally different with showy and not substantial folk

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martial arts that was very popular but criticized by Qi Jiguang at that time [23]. Huizhou was a mountainous place, and people could only rely on their fists in terms of close combat. On a rugged hilly area, both feet should be flexible but not convenient to vacate high kicks. Therefore, more attention was placed on footwork and standing stake exercise (Zhan zhuang practicing) among the popular martial arts techniques, with particular emphasis on leg strength and movement exercises. Wu Shu, the martial artist in the late Ming and early Qing Dynasty, once partially claimed Cheng Zongyou's spearplay focused on strength without a master's mind, just like bull struggle [24]. But in fact, like other weapons, Cheng's was learned from Shaolin Temple, the sacred place of martial arts. With simple and pragmatic movement, it had the essence of military marksmanship, which had been verified on the battlefield against robbers, civil conflicts and even Anti-Wo war.

The practical rationality of the use of artifacts embodied in Huizhou Wushu followed from the Ming and Qing Dynasties to this day. In Huizhou martial arts, there were not only weapons commonly used such as knives, guns, swords, and sticks, but ordinary production tools were perfectly applied to the fight of martial arts. The local people would use bamboo to produce bamboo guns, bamboo knives and bamboo swords as their martial arts apparatus, which was easy to make and attack. They also improve the shoulder pole of picking goods for daily use into a kind of razor-sharp weapon. Meanwhile, the bench in homes had become a martial arts apparatus in Huizhou, and even the towel hung on peasant's neck was also transformed into a weapon [25].

During the Ming and Qing dynasties, Huizhou Wushu did not abandon the aesthetic taste of martial arts while advocating practical and rational trends. For example, because of beautiful and changeable technical movements, the martial artist Cheng Zhenru's spearplay was regarded as masterpiece by Wu Shu, a marksmanship master [26]. However, the appearance of Huizhou Wushu on the stage was better reflected its pursuit for beauty in form. In the works of the litterateur, Zhang Dai in Ming Dynasty, he described an amazing performance of the Huizhou actors in detail in the drama *Mu Lian* [27]. These beautiful martial arts movements were certainly not said like Chinese proverbs 'cooking without rice', all of which certainly came from the tradition of Huizhou Wushu. Traditional drama and martial arts played a significant role in promoting the artistry of later martial arts. Huizhou Opera, as an important source of Peking Opera, had always attached importance to martial arts and played an important role in this process [28].

4.2 The Moral Rule of Huizhou Wushu in Ming and Qing Dynasties—Based on Neo-Confucianism Ethnics as a Standard

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Huizhou was known for its reputation as the hometown of the representatives of the Neo-Confucianism in Song and Ming dynasties such as Cheng Yi, Cheng Hao, and Zhu Xi. Since Song Dynasty, Huizhou, with academies standing here, had a strong academic atmosphere and was known as 'even if there are only ten small villages, people can hear their reading aloud.'[29]. After Huizhou merchants gained a lot of wealth in the Ming and Qing dynasties, the local people paid more attention to culture and education than ever before. The ethics of Confucianism emphasized cultural traditions such as courtesy, filial piety, respect for Confucianism, emphasis on literature, and self-cultivation, etc, all of which became the standards of people in Huizhou at that time, and also affected Huizhou people's cognition for martial arts.

Although the social conflicts in Huizhou in the Ming and Qing Dynasties were relatively common, the concept of Huizhou people firstly emphasized the ethics of courtesy and filial piety. 'Not for hurt, but for self-protection' was considered as their own basic principle by the majority of martial artists [30]. From the current review of Huizhou documents in the Ming and Qing Dynasties, a large number of contract documents used by the school known as 'Quanguan' were discovered, the contents of which were mainly about vows when taking someone as his teacher [31] 'Quanguan' embodied the strong sense of self-discipline and the general conception of self-protection. Most of 'Quanguan' made it clear that their common cognition was to defend the body—to every hair and bit of skin—from harm by practicing martial arts and observe filial piety [32].

Because Huizhou people attached importance to education, the overall cultural quality of Huizhou martial artists in the Ming and Qing dynasties was pretty higher, compared with the martial artists in the same period. And, influenced by the Confucian idea of 'to set virtue, merits, idea in writing', Huizhou martial artists were keen to write books. It was precisely during the Ming and Qing dynasties book-engraving business in Huizhou that was relatively developed, and meanwhile the printing and publishing of martial arts books went smoothly [33]. In the current martial arts books with prominent status in the history of Chinese martial arts, Huizhou Wushu has occupied an important position during the Ming and Qing Dynasties. For example, in Ming Dynasty, Cheng Zongyou's martial arts book Geng Yu Sheng Ji (Four Books of Chinese Martial Arts) included 'Illustrated Cases of Real Shaolin Cudgelplay', 'Long-gun Selection' 'Short-hilted Broadsword Selection' and 'Crossbow Force', and described four martial arts skills in detail: Shaolin cudgelplay, Ba Mu Spear, Japanese swordsmanship, and crossbow. In addition, Cheng Zhenru's *Emei Spear* and Cheng Ziyi's *Military Strategies* in the Ming Dynasty were also important documents that couldn't be ignored by current scholars to study martial arts. In Qing Dynasty, Collection of the Training of Boxing and Footwork, written by Zhang Kongzhao of Huizhou and supplemented by Cao Huandou, was the most classic

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theoretical book of Chinese boxing in the early Qing Dynasty [34]. The emergence of these phenomena is not accidental, but the result of advocating culture and education and advocating both culture and martial arts under the influence of the ethics of the Ming Dynasty.

4.3 Huizhou Wushu's Emphasis on Clan Kinship and Foreign Exchange in the Ming and Qing Dynasties

The political structure of the ancient Chinese society, to a large extent, was based on the clan structure. The influence of clan forces on Chinese culture was profound and far-reaching. While, Huizhou was exactly the representative area of Chinese clan culture, which actually had an effect on the culture of Huizhou Wushu in Ming and Qing dynasties so that it especially paid more attention to family heritage. *Illustrated Cases of Real Shaolin Cudgelplay* clearly recorded that Cheng Zongyou led 80 Cheng's to Tianjin to take participate in the Anti-Wo War [35]. Obviously, these martial arts learned by skillful Cheng's were certainly from within the family. The 'fighting corps' that have been mentioned above were obviously based on family development as their basic unit and meanwhile their martial arts also came from their own family.

However, although the Huizhou in the Ming and Qing Dynasties inherited martial arts mainly from the clan blood relationship, the network of inheritance of Huizhou Wushu was not closed. On the contrary, it has been consciously seeking to communicate with the outside world during the Ming Dynasty. Judging from the source of martial arts, Huizhou martial artist, Wang Qi, once made a special visit to Songshan (a place in Dengfeng, Henan Province) to learn the martial arts from the famous monk Bian Tun (1493-1563) as his teacher [36]. Cheng Zongyou and his family members had studied in Shaolin Temple, while he himself stayed in Temple for ten years. After studying martial arts, he often went to various places to consult and learn famous martial artists. For example, his Japanese swordsmanship was learned from the martial artist Liu Yunfeng in Zhejiang province. Besides, Cheng Zhenru's marksmanship came from the monk Pune who lived in Mount Emei in Sichuan. From the perspective of its transmission, Huizhou Wushu in Ming and Qing dynasties was not conservatively inherited in a special structure like other regional martial arts at the same period. For example, Mind Liuhe Quan in Henan was persistently inherited within family [37]. Meanwhile, Mind Liuhe Quan in Shanxi was also confined to Dai's family and Chen-style Taijiquan in Wen County within Chen's. All of them were unconsciously passed down by blood. As the expansion of Huizhou merchants' business in Ming and Qing dynasties, the development of publishing and printing industry and the influence of the opera in Huizhou, more chances were created for Huizhou Wushu to interact with the outside world. In the late Ming Dynasty, martial arts such as Cheng Zongyou's crudgelplay and spearplay spread to Jiangsu province, meanwhile Cheng Zhengru's spearplay

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also to Zhejiang province. What's more, Huizhou Wushu has been widely circulated in southern China and even had a huge effect throughout the country in the late Ming and Qing dynasties [38]. It can be said that Huizhou became a "transfer station" for martial arts in this specific historical and cultural environment. The martial artists, while adopting the best aspects from different martial arts, also created and improved them and embraced an even more open approach to accelerate the exchange and dissemination of different martial arts. The concept of the dissemination of Huizhou Wushu in the Ming and Qing dynasties, to a large extent, changed the pattern of inheritance of Chinese Wushu, hereafter.

V. CONCLUSION

Huizhou has had the tradition of martial arts since the ancient time. During Ming and Qing Dynasties, Huizhou's clan culture reached a new peak. Force has become an important way to resolve conflicts between clan forces under the traditional social background, thus accelerating the development of martial arts. The successful way of Huizhou merchants in the Ming and Qing dynasties became the objective factor and material basis for the prosperity of Huizhou martial arts. Under the condition of limited public security, it was very common for Huizhou merchants to practice Kungfu for self-protection, hire bodyguards, or support servants who specialized in martial arts as their occupation. Meanwhile, Huizhou Wushu exchanged frequently with the outside world because of the promotion of Huizhou merchants, which had its own special inheritance characteristics, not only emphasizing on pragmatic rationality of content but also artistic aesthetics of form. Huizhou Wushu regarded Neo-Confucianism ethics as its moral rule and learners were gifted in both cultural and military affairs or focused on writing books handed down to the following generations. The inheritance method of Huizhou Wushu was dominated by clan, however, it was also with openness and inclusiveness. The specific society made Huizhou Wushu a typical regional culture of martial arts. And its inheritance characteristics of Huizhou Wushu in the Ming and Qing Dynasties made it a great position in the history of Chinese martial arts.

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