Chapter One

Jiangnan and Xin’an (1865-1909): the importance of place

In 1914, at the age of fifty, when Huang Binhong was living in Shanghai, he signed a preface for a friend’s book with the name “Huang Pucun from ancient She” (Gu She Huang Pucun 古歙黃璞存). Whilst it was customary for a scholar to declare his ancestral home in front of his name, thus identifying his place within a geo-historical lineage, Huang Binhong’s choice of the phrase ‘ancient She’ is of particular interest. It betrays a desire to identify not only with his ancestral home in Shexian, a famous mercantile centre during the seventeenth century situated close to the mountains of Huangshan, but also with its history.

Huang Binhong identified with the landscape and artistic traditions of Jiangnan 江南, the lower Yangtze River valley. The geographic and cultural area that exerted a profound influence on his evolution as an artist encompassed the Xin’an 新安 region of southeastern Anhui, also known as Huizhou 徽州, northwest Zhejiang 浙江 and southwest Jiangsu 江蘇. In addition to Shexian it included the cities of Jinhua 金華, Hangzhou 杭州, Nanjing 南京.

1 Xin hua fa (New Techniques in Painting) discussed new painting methods inspired by Japanese techniques published by the artist Chen Shuren (1884-1948). It was originally published in the Shanghai journal Zhenxiang huabao, volumes 1-16 (June 1912 to February 1913). In October 1914 it was published as a book by Shenmei shuguan, Shanghai, with forewords by Huang Binhong and Gao Qifeng. Xin hua fa was based on the Japanese book Kaiga dokushū-shō published by the Tokyo kokumin shoin in March 1909. See Huang Binhong, “Xin hua fa,” in Huang Binhong wenji, shuhua bian, shang, ed., Wang Zhongxiu (Shanghai: Shanghai shuhua chubanshe, 1999), p.88, and Li Weiming, “Yi zhong Riben jindai meishu shigu an de Zhongguo zi lu,” in Haipai huihua yanjiu wenji (Shanghai: Shanghai shuhua chubanshe, 2001), p.275.

2 The area of present day Shexian was made a county seat after the unification of China by the first Qin emperor Qin Shihuang in 221 BCE. In 280 during the Western Jin dynasty the area was known as Xin’an prefecture, and in 621 during the Tang dynasty the prefecture was called She county (Shezhou). During the Northern Song dynasty (1121) the county was renamed Huizhou. Since that time it has been a political, economic and cultural centre. Shexian difangzhi bianzuan weiyuanhui, ed., Shexian zhi (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1995), p.3. Gong Xian (ca. 1619-1689), an artist Huang Binhong admired, occasionally signed his name using the prefix “Gu Wu” meaning “ancient Wu”. According to William Ding Yee Wu, “Wu” most likely referred to Wucheng, near Yangzhou, once an ancient capital of the Wu Kingdom. William Ding Yee Wu, “Kung Hsien (ca. 1619-1689),” PhD thesis (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University Microfilms International, 1978), p.2.

3 This region included the counties of Shexian, Xiuning, Qimen, Yi, Jixi, Taiping, Ningguo and Wuyuan.
and Yangzhou, Yellow Mountain or Huangshan, and the Yangtze and Xin’an Rivers. (Map 1) It was here that Huang Binhong grew up and spent the early years of his life. Historically, it was the cultural heartland of China with a concentration of well-educated scholar-gentry families, who had amassed important collections of books and artworks. In particular the landscape of his ancestral home of Shexian, and Huangshan, captivated Huang’s imagination. Throughout his life he drew intellectual and artistic inspiration from the landscape of southeastern Anhui and the many artists, poets, writers, collectors and connoisseurs in whose footsteps he followed.

In this chapter I examine Huang Binhong’s familial and intellectual relationship to Shexian and consider how his fascination with place related to contemporary intellectual debate and influenced the evolution of his artistic sensibility and style.

Huang Binhong was born in Jinhua, East Zhejiang, in 1865. He was given the name Maozhi at birth (chu ming). Maozhi means “Great and substantial or elemental”. His first name (yi ming) was Yuanji or “Originating luck”, alluding to his birth date, the twenty-seventh of the first month of the lunar calendar, and his status as the first-born son. His father, Huang Dinghua (黃定華, zi Dingsan, hao, 鞠如, 1829-1894), was the third son of a Jinhua merchant family. The family was well-educated and over the years had produced many scholars and artists. Huang Dinghua had left his studies at the age of fourteen and after the death of his father, Huang Dehan (黃德涵, 1793-1846), had no choice but to work. He became a successful textile merchant and owned a pawn shop. In his spare time he enjoyed poetry, painting and seal carving. He married Miss Fang (方氏, ca. 1843-1910) from Jinhua and had a large family of four boys and three girls, of whom Huang Binhong was the eldest. (Figure 1.1)

Huang Binhong spent the first twenty or so years of his life in Jinhua. He visited

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4 Huang Binhong, “She Tandu Huang shi xian de lu,” in Huang Binhong wenji, za zhubian, pp.420-470.
ancestral home in Tandu village (Tandu cun 潭渡村) Shexian for the first time at the age of thirteen.7

The Huang family’s ancestral connection to Tandu village in Shexian was well established.8 At the age of ninety Huang Binhong recalled the circumstances by which his family came to live in Jinhua:

Our ancestral connection is with the provinces in the lower Yangtze River valley. In the early Tang dynasty our ancestors settled in Tandu village in Shexian. Following the Hongyang disturbances [the Taiping wars, 1851-1864] the family sought refuge in Sanbai mountain, fifty li southeast of Jinhua county. My grandmother died and was buried at the foot of the mountain. After two years things settled down and the family moved to the prefectural city of Tieling. They later moved to the neighbourhood of Zunxian. At that time life was harsh. I was in my infancy, but I recall hearing my father talk often about this difficult period.9

In 1860 fighting between the Taiping rebels and the Manchu-Qing army devastated Shexian, causing people to flee their homes. Many lost their lives. In the foreword to the Reprinted Tanbin Gazette (Chongding Tanbin zazhi 重訂潭濱雜志), published in 1876, Huang Binhong’s relative Huang Cisun (黃次孫 zì Chongxing 崇惺, d. 1883) described the widespread destruction caused by fires that burnt for seven days and seven nights.10 The stories told to Huang by his father and evidence of the destruction that was still visible years later helped to form a memory of cultural loss. The impact of the Taiping wars contributed to the young Binhong’s desire to reclaim the past from oblivion.

Shexian: environment, history and culture

7 During an interview with Huang Yingjia, Huang Binhong’s youngest daughter, she emphasised that at no time did the family regard itself as being from Jinhua. Conversation with Huang Yingjia, Hangzhou, 10 December 2001.
8 Huang Binhong’s ancestor Huang Ji (zi Yuan Ji) was posted to Xin’an as an official during the Eastern Jin (317-322). During the Tang dynasty his twenty-first ancestor Huang Zhang (zi Zhongyi) first settled in Tandu village in Shexian, which marks the beginning of the family association with Tandu village. Huang Binhong, “She Tandu Huang shi xian de lu,” in Huang Binhong wenji, zazhu bian, pp.421-422.
9 Huang Binhong, “Jiushi za shi, zhi er,” in Huang Binhong wenji, za zhu bian, p.574.
10 Huang Binhong, “She Tandu Huang shi xian de lu,” in Huang Binhong wenji zazhu bian, pp.462-463. See also Bao Yilai,“Huang Binhong yu Huizhou gongyi,” unpublished manuscript, p.9.
Shexian is renowned for its great concentration of mountains and waterways. It is defined by Huangshan to the northwest, Tianmushan 天目山 to the Northeast and Baijishan 白際山 to the Southwest. Four rivers, the Fengle 樂豐河, Fuzi 富資河, Bushe 布射河 and Yangzhi 揚之河 merge with the Lian River 練江 at Shexian. The Lian River, together with the Jian and Heng Rivers, flow into the Xin’an River, a tributary of the Yangtze and the largest waterway in Anhui, and continues its course eastward through Zhejiang, to Hangzhou and the sea. (Figure 1.2) Until 1933 there were few major roads and the primary mode of transport for both people and goods was by boat.\(^\text{11}\)

Tandu village is located nine 里 to the west of the county centre of Shexian, inland from the rich agricultural provinces of Zhejiang and Jiangsu. On a clear day it is possible to see the peaks of Huangshan to the north. (Figure 1.3)

During the Ming and Qing dynasties, Shexian became a great mercantile centre, owing to its strategic location at the confluence of numerous waterways that linked Anhui with Zhejiang and Jiangsu. Local products such as tea, timber, bamboo, raw lacquer, mushrooms, wood fungus and the “Four Treasures of a Scholar’s Studio” (\textit{Wenfang sibao} 文房四寶), ink, paper, brushes and ink stones, were traded and shipped, as well as salt, porcelain clay, rice, silk and cotton, and soy sauce.\(^\text{12}\)

Shexian traders, or Huizhou merchants (\textit{Huishang} 徽商) as they were better known, were extremely successful and operated throughout China, but in particular in the lower Yangtze valley. From the mid-Ming dynasty onwards salt was the commodity through which their wealth was primarily generated.\(^\text{13}\) The Lianghuai 淮淮 region, north and south of the Huai River in Anhui, was the greatest producer of salt. During the Qing dynasty, four of the eight

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\(^{11}\) Mountain ranges account for some 43 percent of the county, craggy terrain for 51 percent and the remaining 5 percent constitute waterways. See \textit{Shexian zhi} (1995), pp.3-4; Wu Lixia, \textit{Zoujin Huizhou} (Beijing: Huaxia chubanshe, 2003), pp.8, 16.


major salt traders were from Shexian, and Huang Binhong’s ancestors were among those who were part of the lucrative trade.\(^\text{14}\)

While many local merchants left Shexian to make their money, they generally remained loyal to their ancestral home. Wealth was invested back into the county in the form of finely decorated residences, ancestral shrines, memorial archways, bridges, roads and public works.\(^\text{15}\) Many merchants also aspired to improve their social status through education. They supported family members in studying literature and the classics so that they could sit for the civil service examinations in the hope of gaining government office. With government office came political influence. According to examination records dating back to the Tang dynasty, Shexian produced 770 second or intermediate degree holders (*juren 舉人* literally “elevated man”), and ten scholars who came first in the highest imperial examination, the majority of whom achieved success during the Ming and Qing dynasties when Shexian was in its heyday.\(^\text{16}\) In Shexian there is a saying that refers to three locals who achieved the title of *Zhuangyuan 状元*, designating the top successful candidate in the civil service examinations, within a period of five years, and four who became Imperial Academy or *Hanlin 翰林* scholars in 1871. Of the four Imperial Academy scholars, one was Huang Binhong’s ancestor Huang Cisun, and another was Wang Yunlun 汪 運綸, the forebear of Huang Binhong’s teacher Wang Zhongyi 汪 仲伊.\(^\text{17}\) Wang Zhongyi himself became an Advanced Scholar (*jinshi 進士*) in 1880, bringing further glory to his family, which had achieved the rare feat of producing two ‘advanced scholars’ within a generation.


\(^{15}\) For an inspiring account of the history of a house from Huangcun in Xiuning county, which has been transported to the Peabody Essex Museum in Salem, Massachusetts, see Nancy Berliner, *Yin Yu Tang*.


\(^{17}\) The phrase was “*Lian ke san dian zhuan, shi li si Hanlin*”. All of the successful candidates came from a ten li area close to the Fengle River, which encompassed Yanzhen, Zhengcun, Xixi and Tandu. See Xu Chengyao, *She shi xian tan* (Hefei: Huangshan shushe, 2001), volume 1, pp.255-256.
In Shexian, social barriers that in other places separated the scholar from the businessman were more permeable. Many merchants involved themselves in literary and artistic activities. Indeed, there was a symbiotic relationship between the wealth of the merchants and the development of Shexian as an artistic and cultural centre. The Shexian Gazette credits the beauty of the natural environment, together with the tenacity and ingenuity of the local people, for the creation of merchant wealth and the nurturing of many fine scholars and artists.\(^{18}\) Shexian was a place of austere beauty where business, education and art were inextricably linked.

The manufacture of the tools and materials used by scholars to write and paint, quality goods that also appealed to court officials and local scribes, drew on the local resources of the area—pine trees, bamboo, clean water and high quality stone. Historical records indicate that high quality ink made from pine soot (songyan mo 松煙墨), inkstones and paper, had been produced in Shexian since the Tang dynasty.\(^{19}\)

In 1890, Huang Binhong himself gained first-hand experience in making ink, when he helped his father manufacture ink as part of a business venture that the family developed in response to poor quality imports and out of a desire to revive the local industry.\(^{20}\) The business was abandoned following his father’s death in 1894, but Huang retained a highly developed appreciation of fine ink.\(^{21}\)

The presence of abundant supplies of timber attracted skilled carvers and contributed to the growth of high-quality wood carving workshops in Shexian. Local timber was used to make wood blocks for printing books and carved wooden moulds for ink sticks that were both practical and prized by collectors. Creative collaborations between scholars, artists, artisans and entrepreneurs produced high quality illustrated books. Examples of such works include *Encountering Sorrow (Lisao tu 離騷圖, 1645)* and *Lan&dscapes of Taiping Prefecture (Taiping Shexian zhi (1995), pp.503-505, 577-579.
\(^{18}\) For a discussion of the production of the ‘Four Treasures of the Scholar’s Studio’ see Berliner, Yin Yu Tang, pp.11-12.
\(^{21}\) Huang Binhong published a detailed essay on the history of ink making “Xu zao mo” in the Shanghai journal Guocui xuebao in 1908, vols. 42, 44, which drew on this experience and subsequent research. *Huang Binhong wenji, zazhu bian*, pp.13-20.
shanshui tu (太平山水圖, 1648), the designs for which were produced by the Xin’an painter Xiao Yuncong (蕭雲從, 1596-1674).22 (Figure 1.4)

During the late 1500s and early 1600s master carvers from the Huang clan made Shexian an important centre for the production of wood-block printed books. Notable among the books that emerged from Huang workshops were the Fang Family Ink-cake Album (Fang shi mopu 方氏墨譜, 1588), and the Cheng Family Garden of Ink-cakes (Cheng shi mo yuan 程氏墨園, 1606), produced for the famous ink makers Fang Yulu 方于魯 and Cheng Dayue 程大約 and based on designs by the Xin’an artist Ding Yunpeng (丁云騰, ca. 1547-1621).23 (Figure 1.5) Artisans from the Huang clan added their names to the carved designs, which marked a departure from the tradition of artisan anonymity that had prevailed up to that time. In his writings about the artistic achievements of his own family members, Huang Binhong would remark that Huang Zhu (黃柱, hao Bifeng 碧峰) and Huang Mingbang 黃明邦 were also good woodcarvers.24 In a conversation with Huang Gaoyu 黃高羽, Huang Binhong’s great-niece, she mentioned that her grandfather, Huang Zhongfang 黃仲方, Huang Binhong’s younger brother, was an accomplished wood carver, indicating a link between his own family and this craft tradition that continued into the nineteenth century.25

Shexian was also home to extensive private art collections, built on the wealth of local merchants.26 During the seventeenth century in particular collecting became a significant pasttime. The recollections of the Shexian art dealer Wu Qizhen (吳其貞, active 1635-1677) highlight the extent of the antique trade in Shexian and the importance of antiques as symbols of learning and refinement. He alludes to the treasures that were once concentrated there:

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23 Berliner, Yin Yu Tang, p.12.
24 Huang Binhong wenji, za zhu bian, p. 438.
26 In a short essay written in a supplement to Shenzhou ribao and published sometime between 1913 and 1914, Huang Binhong provided information about some of the major collectors in Shexian from the Ming dynasty through to the present day. See Huang Binhong wenji, zazh bian, p.67.
I remember the past splendors of the collections in our Huizhou area—there was no place that could compare with Xiuning and Shexian. Moreover, the difference between refinement and vulgarity [of a person] was thought to depend on whether or not he owns antiquities. Accordingly people fought to acquire things, without concern for price. The antique dealers all rushed to the area. Those who were doing business outside the area collected antiques eagerly and brought them home. Thus extensive collections came into being.  

Among the many art works prized by merchant collectors were paintings by the Yuan artist Ni Zan (倪 矟, 1301-1374) whose austere, monochrome style embodied the quintessence of scholarly cultivation to which the merchants aspired. These paintings in turn influenced the practice of local Xin’an artists, whose works were inspired by the fantastic mountains of Huangshan and the surrounding area.  

(Paintings of Huangshan and the work of Xin’an artists will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Two). In the Taiping wars of the mid-nineteenth century, however, many works were taken out of the area or destroyed. Huang Binhong makes repeated mention of the cultural losses in Shexian, while also acknowledging the treasures that did remain, including those in his own family’s collection.  

At a young age Huang Binhong discovered this rich cultural world, of family and locality, embracing a narrative that brought together history, scholarship, connoisseurship, painting and the natural environment. In Shexian Huang began his life’s work of recording family and local achievement and bringing long-forgotten histories to the attention of the contemporary public in his published writings. His own life was a vital part of the story, providing a device he could use to fuse the past with the present in a cultural continuum and to establish his own identity as a native of Shexian, a Shexian ren歙 縣 人. His interest in defining a personal identity, articulated in his writings and his art, must also be considered within the larger context of anti Manchu-Qing nationalism and the quest by many intellectuals at the time to find a spiritual ground on which to forge a new national unity.  

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27 Quoted in Cahill, ed., Shadows of Mount Huang, p.22.
28 Berliner, Yin Yu Tang, p.15.
29 Huang Binhong wenji, shuhua, xia, p.225.
artists, including family members, whose lives formed an integral part of his personal history, Huang Binhong developed his sense of self and the foundation of his artistic style.

**Huang Binhong’s early years**

Huang Binhong’s early education imbued him with a strong appreciation of Chinese literature, history and art. He grew up in an environment of art and books, delighting in observing his father paint. At the time there were no public art museums and the only art works that people could enjoy or study were those held in private hands. The Huang family collections are said to have included paintings by important artists such as Dong Yuan (董 遠, ca. 900-962), Wang Meng (王 蒙, ca. 1308-1385), Shen Zhou (沈 周, 1427-1509), Shitao (石 濤, 1642-1707), Zha Shibiao (查 士 標, 1615-1698) and Hongren (弘 仁, 1610-1664).

Looking back on his life at the age of eighty, Huang described his early years thus:

> The family hired village teachers to instruct me. Outside of class I looked at paintings and studied them very closely. My father loved books, calligraphy and paintings, both ancient and contemporary. I often stood by my father’s side and listened to what he had

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31 Huang Binhong wrote numerous autobiographical essays and sketches, mostly when he was in his eighties and nineties. They provide a fascinating distillation of his life experience and document what, in retrospect, he considered to be the most important aspects of his life deserving to be recorded for posterity. In the pages that follow I use these autobiographical sketches to focus on what it was Huang Binhong believed, or wanted us to believe, were the people and events of particular significance in the early years of his life. For example “Perceptions at the Age of Eighty” (*Ba shi ganyan*) and “Autobiographical Preface” (*Zi Xu*), which were published in the catalogue produced to commemorate Huang Binhong’s eightieth birthday. “An account of Miscellaneous Events at the Age of Ninety, part one” (*Jiushi za shu, zhi yi*) and “An Account of Miscellaneous Events at the Age of Ninety, part two” (*Jiushi za shu, zhi er*) were collated by Wang Cong after Huang’s death, from Huang’s existing manuscripts. *Jiushi za shu, zhi yi* and *Jiushi za shu, zhi er* are unfinished manuscripts. They were written in sections, as they appear in the *Huang Binhong wenji*. See also “A Draft Account of my Life” (*Zi shu gao*) and “A Fragment from an Autobiographical Chronology” (*Zi ba nianpu gao pian duan*). The reminiscences do not always link events with dates and often events follow on from one another, even though in reality they were separated by considerable periods of time. The events are not always ordered chronologically, and in some cases there is a considerable overlap in content. See *Huang Binhong wenji, zazhu bian*, pp.560-562, 570-580, 599-600, 602-603.

32 The Huang family had produced artists over successive generations, as well as wealthy merchant-collectors who had assembled considerable art collections. Huang Xi (Zenmin) had a large and very fine art collection. He is said to have painted landscapes in the style of the Xin’an artist Ding Yumpeng and was also skilled at painting horses, pine trees and rocks. Huang Xiangcheng, whose art collection was housed in his home Chengde tang, included a landscape painting by the Yuan dynasty artist Wang Shuming, a painting of bamboo by Su Dongpo and calligraphy by Huang Shangu. The Wang Shuming painting was bought as a gift to present to the Qianlong Emperor on his southern tour. There is an imperial poem that alludes to the gardens and the Huang summer retreat in Yangzhou, “Si qiao yan yu”. The Huang Garden was renamed Qu Garden at the time of the imperial tour. See “Choulu huatan” in *Huang Binhong wenji, shuhua bian, shang*, pp.140-141, 446. See also *Huang Binhong wenji, zazhu bian*, p.67.
to say, taking it all in with my eyes and heart. I would attempt to emulate what he had told me. Whenever I met people who could paint or write calligraphy I would insist on visiting them to study their technique. At the time Ni Binglie of Xiaoshan was a good painter … Sometimes I would look at some of the paintings in the family collection for my own amusement. There was also a landscape album by Baishi Weng [Shen Zhou]. All of the brush strokes were so clear. I studied that album for many years.\(^{33}\)

The appreciation of historical works of art was an essential aspect of an artist’s cultivation. Like his predecessors, Huang Binhong followed the traditional practice of learning by copying paintings and thereby imbuing the spirit and technique to be found therein.

In a small undated work, Huang employs the standard elements of Chinese landscape painting inspired by the natural environment of southern China—a pavilion with a thatched roof by the water’s edge, partly shielded by a thicket of trees, and a bridge that beckons us across the water toward a lone fisherman in a skiff. (Figure 1.6) The motifs are executed with clear and calligraphic brushstrokes. Huang inscribes the painting “Emulating Old man Baishi’s [Shen Zhou] ideas, though my untrammelled spirit is even greater”.\(^{34}\) In this modest, but accomplished painting, inspired by looking at leaves in the album of landscape paintings by Shen Zhou in the family collection, we can see his youthful confidence and his desire not only to emulate the ancients, but to surpass them.

Schooled by his father and a variety of tutors, Huang Binhong had a conventional Confucian education aimed at preparing him for success in the civil service examinations.\(^{35}\) An important early role model was Huang Cisun, a relative who attained the Advanced Scholar degree in 1871 and was later appointed a scholar of the Imperial Academy and a magistrate in Fujian. In the year of his examination success, Huang Cisun visited the Huang family in Jinhua and introduced Huang Dinghua to Cheng Jianxing, a teacher of classical literature.

\(^{33}\) “Ba shi zi shi” in Huang Binhong shuhua zhanlanhui choubei chu, ed. *Huang Binhong shuhua zhanlanhui tekan* (Shanghai, 1943). See also Huang Binhong wenji, za zhu bian, pp.560-561.

\(^{34}\) Huang Binhong *shanshui ce*, one of six leaves in an album in the Collection of the Zhejiang Provincial Museum (ZPM24397). The other leaves show Huang Binhong emulating paintings by Gong Xian, Cheng Jiasui, Wang Yuanqi, Zhao Mengfu and Shitao.

\(^{35}\) Huang Binhong’s early tutors included Shao Fuqing, Cheng Jianxing, Zhao Jingtian, Yang Zhibin, Li Yongtang, Li Shaoxian. See Pikyee Kotewall, “Huang Binhong (1865-1955) and his Re-definition of the Chinese Painting Tradition in the Twentieth Century”, p.48.
from Shexian for his sons. Huang Cisun published numerous scholarly books that were concerned with the history of Shexian, notably a detailed account of the Taiping rebel assault on Shexian (Feng shan biji 凤山筆記) and Frivolous Annals of Tanbin (Tan bin suo zhi 潭濱琐志), which he presented to the young Huang Binhong during one of his family visits. Huang Cisun also reprinted Miscellaneous Annals of Tandu (Tandu zazhi 譚渡雜志) written by their ancestor Huang Lü 黃呂, which brought information about the family’s historical connection with Shexian into circulation once again. Through the writings of Huang Cisun Huang Binhong deepened his awareness of his family’s long-standing association with Shexian. He would write his own history of the clan much later in life.

The first time Huang travelled to the county seat of Shexian was in 1876 to sit an examination. His memory of the visit included viewing fine works of art from local collections.

When I was thirteen I returned to Shexian to sit for an examination. It was after the period of hardship [following the civil war of the Taiping rebellion]. Some old families had managed to save their antiques and I was able to see some authentic paintings and fine works of art. I particularly loved paintings by Dong Xuancai [Yuan] and Zha Erzhan [Shibiao] which I copied for many years.

In speaking of travelling to Shexian for the first time Huang Binhong used the word fan 返 which means “to return”. When using fan it is implied that you are returning to a place that you are familiar with and have visited before. Whilst Huang Binhong had never been to Shexian he was writing about himself as a member of his family who was “returning” to his homeland. Through such visits he came to learn about the writings and paintings of family members whose lives formed an integral part of the cultural history of Shexian, strongly associated with scholarship, art and Ming loyalism.

37 Huang Cisun also wrote Verbose Words on the Exhortation to Study Hard (Quanxue zhu yan), Ji xu zhai collection of fu poems (Ji xu zhai fu cun), Collected writings (Wen cun), The Two Rivers Thatched Hut Collection of Poems (Er jiang caotang shi ji) and the Caoxinlou Collection of Poems on Paintings (Caoxin lou du hua shi). See Huang Binhong wenji, zazhu bian, pp.459, 603.
38 Huang Binhong, “Zi xu,” in Zhanlanhui tekan, 1943. See also Huang Binhong wenji, za zhu bian, p.561.
A portrait of the Huang family at this time by the Anhui artist Chen Chunfan (陳春帆) is executed in the detailed or fine line style (gongbi hua 畫). (Figure 1.7) Huang Binhong’s father, Huang Dinghua, is shown seated on a rock beside a large pond outside the family home. He holds a book in one hand and a fan in the other. Behind him there is a covered porcelain teacup, a calligraphy brush and a stand of bamboo, symbolic of his refinement and his upright moral character. Standing next to him is his eldest son Binhong who, together with his younger brother, holds a small hanging scroll. Prophetically, Huang Binhong points to the painting, as if he is in the middle of a conversation with his father. (Figure 1.7a) The scroll is blank, awaiting the inscription of meaning which comes with age and life experience. Two other younger brothers emerge from the house with books in their hands, walking towards their father. To the left, counter-balancing the male members of the family, is Dinghua’s wife Madam Fang, flanked by her two daughters. They peer from a moon-shaped circular window, protected within the masonry of the home. The older girl holds a disc in her hand, and gestures to her mother, perhaps indicating the short life of the first born girl who had died in 1873. Through another window, a view into Huang Dinghua’s study shows a book open on a table, a boxed set of string-bound books and an incense burner. Such objects also refer to a cultivated and scholarly life. The family members are arrayed in one plane and, with the exception of the youngest child, they all look straight out at us, allowing us to engage with them individually even though the clear planar structure of the painting reinforces the distance that separates us in time and place. At the time the portrait was painted, Huang Dinghua was a successful businessman in Jinhua. The commissioned painting, executed in a style that is associated with the professional artist rather than the literati, conveyed Huang Dinghua’s complex family lineage which, like so many Huizhou merchants, combined business and scholarly interests.

As the eldest son Huang Binhong became custodian of this family portrait. The painting accompanied him throughout his life, surviving wars and natural disasters as well as his

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39 The painting was made in 1879. An inscription by Huang Binhong on the outside of scroll says that it was painted when his father was 49 years old. Huang Binhong inscribed the painting in 1942. See Huang Binhong nianpu, pp.13, 438-439
40 Zhao Zhijun, Huajia Huang Binhong nianpu (Beijing: Renmin meishu chubanshe, 1990), p.50.
relocation to Shanghai, Beiping and Hangzhou. Writing at the age of ninety, Huang Binhong would recall:

My father invited the seventy-year old painter Chen Chunfan from Yiwu 義烏 to our home. He painted a family portrait comprising my father and mother, four boys and two girls. He achieved a very good likeness using a purely outline-brush technique. The colours are thickly applied and it was mounted as a horizontal scroll. Even with all the moving that I have done [in my lifetime] it has survived and looks as good as when it was first painted. After close to seventy years, it is as bright and clean as new. Each year I hang the painting [and give it an airing].

Commissioned portraits like these were common in aspirational and well-to-do families and functioned in much the same way a photograph does today. Depicting individuals surrounded by the accoutrements of refined leisure, they were an important part of the cultural currency of local gentry. It is difficult to know if the painting was intended to mark an occasion, such as the early educational success of his two eldest sons who, in 1877, had both passed their respective rounds of examinations with very good grades, or more simply Huang Dinghua’s desire to leave an image of family success and contentment for posterity.

Paradoxically, the painting was made the year before the collapse of Dinghua’s business in 1880.

In that year [1880], my father’s business, the Chengchang pawnshop 成昌錢號, was undermined and our fabric business was also forced to close. My brothers who were learning the trade lost their jobs. I attended classes at the academy and … we moved to Sanyuan district to the east of the city, where I studied essay composition [for the civil service examination] with Huang Yunge 黃蕓閣. The family finances were irregular and insufficient and we had to be frugal in all things.

The precipitous change in the family fortune came as a great shock and marked an early turning point in Huang Binhong’s life. In the year of the financial collapse Huang Binhong had passed a county level examination, which seems to have strengthened his resolve to continue studying.

But at the same time it also placed the heavy burden of familial expectation on his shoulders, for it was hoped that through success in the civil service examinations he could restore the family’s

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41 Huang Binhong, “Jiushi zashu zhi er,” part seven, in Huang Binhong wenji, zazhu bian, p.574.
social and financial position. It was the end of a stable childhood and signalled the beginning of a long period of economic hardship in pursuit of learning.

Huang Binhong continued his studies in Jinhua and in 1883 returned to Shexian to sit for another examination. It was during this visit that his marriage was arranged and he made his first trip to Huangshan. In the years that followed Huang travelled to Nanjing and Yangzhou, where family members also lived, to further his education.

In 1886, at the age of twenty-three, Huang sat for the civil service examination in Shexian and attained the status of linsheng廪生. Following the examination, he purchased a Tribute Student degree (gongsheng貢生), which he was entitled to as a senior, first degree holder (shengyuan生員) who received a government stipend (bu lingongsheng補廪貢生). As Ping-Ti Ho has shown, the Tribute Student degree was significant because it drew a line between potential officials and commoners. Ho argued that irregular or purchased Tribute Student degree holders were not regarded as being inferior in status to regular holders of the degree, and that in the late nineteenth century, when the number of sold degrees was so great, many local officials, in fact, entered government service by buying their way in.  

At this time Huang changed his name from Huang Maozhi to Huang Zhi黃質. (Figure 1.8) In 1886, the year of his examination success, Huang Binhong married Hong Siguo洪四果 who was from a well educated family in Hongkeng洪坑, a village not far from Shexian. Her father Hong Jinchen洪藎臣 was a descendent of the Qing dynasty scholar Hong Liangji洪亮吉, Qianlong jinshi). (Figure 1.9)

This period of Huang Binhong’s life is not well documented. He led a peripatetic existence in search of employment and learning, spending time in Nanjing, where many of his father’s relatives resided, and in Yangzhou and Hangzhou where he came into contact with some inspiring scholars and artists. In the year after his marriage, Huang Binhong worked as a clerk for the Liangjiang [Zhejiang and Jiangsu] Salt Transport Office in Yangzhou (1887). He

44 Wang Zhongxiu, Huang Binhong nianpu, p. 18.
45 Zhongguo renming da cidian (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshu guan), p.670. See Huang Binhong’s obituary for his wife “Hong ru furen xingzhuan lueshu,” in Huang Binhong wenji, zazhu bian, pp.526-527.
continued with his studies and helped his father establish an ink-making business in Shexian (1889-1891) and worked as a teacher in Nanjing (1892). Among artistic influences at this time were Chen Chongguang (陳崇光 hao Ruomu 若木, 1839-1896) and Zheng Shan (鄭珊 hao Xuehu 雪湖, 1809-1897). Chen Chongguang was a wood carver who then studied painting with Yu Chan (虞蟾) and had spent some time in Anhui. At the peak of his artistic career he was renowned for his landscape paintings, and flower paintings using the outline method (shuang gou 雙構). Huang Binhong came across Chen’s paintings on a trip to Yangzhou in the 1880s when Chen was already in his fifties and affected by madness. In his admiration for Chen’s paintings, Huang demonstrated an independence of mind and a desire to reach beyond the rigid artistic canon of the period defined by the orthodoxy of Qing dynasty art dominated by the paintings of the “Four Wangs, Wu and Yun”. Chen continued to paint despite his illness and his later years are regarded as his period of greatest achievement. (Figure 1.10) Huang retained an affection for Chen Zhao throughout his life and his use of the outline technique in his flower paintings may be attributed to Chen’s influence.

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46 See “Zi xu,” in Huang Binhong wenji, za zhu bian, pp.560-561, 573-580 and Wang Zhongxiu, Huang Binhong nianpu, pp.18-27. During this time, in Nanjing, Huang met the classical scholars Gan Yuanhuan, who attained the Elevated Scholar degree (juren) in 1876, Yang Changnian (1811-1893) and the Buddhist scholar Yang Renshan (1837-1911). Whilst it is hard to establish the extent of Huang Binhong’s contact with each of these men, and their precise influence on his intellectual and artistic development, it is notable that they were all elderly men of learning who were not only classical scholars but independent thinkers. Gan Yuanhuan and Yang Changnian had obtained the juren degree. Yang Renshan was from Shidai (present day Shitai) in Anhui. He was a classical scholar but was also trained in mathematics, astronomy and philosophy. In 1878 and 1886 he made study tours to Britain and France. See Huang Binhong, “Jiushi zashi yi,” in Huang Binhong wenji, za zhu bian, pp.570-571, and Wang Zhongxiu, Huang Binhong nianpu, p.22.

Huang Binhong’s father’s business collapsed again in 1889, after which time the family returned to live in Shexian. Huang Jingwu, “Huang Binhong zai Huizhou,” in Jianghuai wen shi 1 (2003), pp.120, 127.


49 Wang Shimin (1592-1680), his friend Wang Jian (1598-1677), their student Wang Hui (1632-1717) and Wang Shimin’s grandson Wang Yuanqi (1642-1715), Wu Li (1632-1718) and Yun Shouping (1633-1690).
Zheng Shan was from Huaining in Anhui and according to Huang Binhong they met at Wangong Mountain in 1891. Huang Binhong remembers him advising that “the solid areas of a painting are easy, it is the areas of void that are the most difficult” (shi chu yi, xu chu nan 實處易, 虛處難). It was a maxim that Huang Binhong worked to understand and interpret for the rest of his life. (Figure 1.11)

Encouraged by his father, Binhong studied with the classical scholar Wang Zhongyi (汪仲伊 zì Zongyi 宗沂, 1837-1906) from 1889 to 1891. Wang Zhongyi was a visionary teacher, and man of independent thought. He advocated the cultivation of the mind and the body through national studies, and martial arts. He took an interest in music, Daoism, Chinese medicine and traditional modes of mathematical and scientific enquiry including fortune telling (shu shu 術數). Wang Zhongyi was from Xixi 西溪, not far from Tandu village in Shexian, and had obtained the jinshi degree in 1880. For a short time, before his return to Anhui, he had worked for Zeng Guofan (曾國藩, 1811-1872) and Li Hongzhang (李鴻章, 1823-1901), who were involved in the Self-Strengthening movement (1865-1895), a campaign among intellectuals to improve China’s standing through the importation of western learning and technology. Wang taught at a number of schools including the Jingfu Academy in Anqing (Jingfu shuyuan 敬敷書院) and the Ziyang Academy in Shexian (Ziyang shuyuan 紫陽書院), before opening up his own classics academy. In his own household he abolished the practice of footbinding for women and invited martial arts practitioners to teach female members of the family to use the sword and ride horses. In Xixi he was often seen going off to fish, wearing a peasant hat (douli 斗笠) and reed rain cape, carrying a fishing rod and a sword. He always carried loose change which he gave to the poor and was known around town as the “mad scholar” (fengdian jinshi 瘋顛進士).53

52 Li Hongzhang was from Hefei in Anhui.
53 Huang Binhong, “Wang Zhongyi xiansheng xiao zhuan,” in Huang Binhong wenji, zazhu bian, pp.500-
Huang Binhong had met Wang Zhongyi’s son Wang Fuxi (汪 福 熙, hao 吉 修) while sitting for an examination in Shexian 1876. Both Huang Binhong and Wang Fuxi did well in the 1877 exams and in the process became firm friends. While studying with Wang Zhongyi, Huang also became good friends with Wang Zhongyi’s two other sons, Wang Juyou (汪 鞠 友, hao Lüben 律 本, 1867-1931) and Wang Xingshu (汪 行 恕, hao Zhipu 植 圃) who later travelled to Japan to pursue their studies. Both became involved with Sun Yat-sen and the Revolutionary Party (Tongmeng Hui 同 盟 會). Huang Binhong, who was later to become involved in anti-Qing activities and nationalistic projects, was very much influenced by his early association with Wang Zhongyi and his sons, all of whom were like-minded, independent thinkers.

Return to Shexian

In China there is a saying, taken from the Confucian Analects, that when a person reaches the age of thirty they take their stand, which implies that they are established in their personal and professional lives (sanshi er li 三十 而 立). In 1893, Huang Binhong’s thirtieth year, he declared that he would give away the idea of pursuing his luck further in the civil service examinations. The following year his father died, underlining the reality of his coming of age. At the time he was working in Yangzhou and hurried home to Shexian for the funeral. Writing at the age of ninety, Huang Binhong recalled the precarious financial position that he found himself in as the eldest son:

55 In their youth Huang Binhong and the Wang sons often painted together and are known to have created a number of collaborative paintings. Wang Juyou became principal of the Liangjiang shifan xuebao in Nanjing and Wang Zhipu principal of an infantry hospital school, both of which had links with the Tongmenghui. In later years Huang Binhong taught classics to Wang Fuxi’s son Wang Caibai (1887-1940) who went on to become a well-regarded artist. See Bao Yilai, “Huang Binhonghe Huizhou,” p.41, and Bao Yilai, “Huang Binhong, Wang Juyou, Xu Chengyao jiaoyi kaoshu,” in Mohai qingshan: Huang Binhong yanjiu lunwenji (Jinan: Shandong jiaoyu chubanshe, 1988), pp.134-138. See also Shexian zhi (1995), p.689.
57 Huang Binhong, “Jiushi zashu, er” section ten, in Huang Binhong wenji, za zhu bian, p.575.
58 Huang Binhong, “Jiushi zashu, yi” section one, in Huang Binhong wenji, zazhu bian, p.570.
After the [funeral] ceremonies I was informed by the clan elders that the bamboo basket was empty. I had no job from which to draw a living.  

As with the collapse of his father’s businesses in 1880 and in 1889, the death of his father marked a turning point in Huang’s life. From a personal point of view it was a time of mourning and loss. Politically, with the country on the eve of the Sino-Japanese War, it was a time of great unrest. Huang recalled:

After 1894 there were disturbances both within and without which had an impact on one another in quick succession … large numbers of young people were looking for answers and going overseas to study.

But despite the looming maelstrom within China, Huang stayed at home. The death of his father required him to observe a three-year period of mourning. Added to this was his growing commitment to Chinese studies and a resurgent Han Chinese ethos which an increasing number of people believed was the only way to achieve lasting reform and modernization for the nation.

After the death of his father, Huang Binhong began actively to seek out historical information about his family and clan land. He commented, “I made enquiries about our branch of the family but there was no information available”. Compiling historical references was a slow and painstaking process. Over the course of many years he located crucial documents and leads, which formed the basis of his research and later writings. While this project may be understood as an act of filial piety, it must also be seen as part of his desire to salvage the family history and shore up a sense of personal identity.

In 1898, Huang Binhong moved into The Hall of Virtue Embraced (Huaide Tang, 萬德堂), an ancestral home in Tandu village. (Figure 1.12) It was, in fact, the house the Huang family had lived in when they returned to Shexian in 1880, following the collapse of his father’s

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59 Ibid.
60 Huang Binhong, “Jiushi zashu, er” section nine, in Huang Binhong wenji, za zhu bian, p.575. Bao Yilai suggests that close friends of Huang’s were going overseas and wanted him to go too, but Huang was not permitted. For example Wang Luben and Wang Zhipu went to Japan. See Bao Yilai, “Huang Binhong, Wang Juyou, Xu Chengyao jiaoyi kaoshu”, p. 135, and Bao Yilai, “Huang Binhong he Huizhou”, p.41.
61 Huang Binhong wenji, zazhu bian, p.476.
62 For example “She Tandu Huang shi xiande lu”, “Rendezhuang yitian jiwen” and “Ren geng gan yan”. See Huang Binhong wenji, zazhu bian, pp.420-470, 471-475, 476-490.
business. It had been built in 1718 by their relative Huang Xiwen. Binhong lived there periodically until he relocated to Shanghai in 1909. What remains of the The Hall of Virtue Embraced is today the museum of Huang Binhong’s former residence (Huang Binhong guju 黃賓虹故居). (Figure 1.12a)

One of Huang Binhong’s early, published writings is an essay entitled “Village Living” (Xu cun ju 敘村居). In it he speaks of the close relationship between the Huang family and Tandu village in Shexian. Tandu takes its name from the place where a deep pond (tan 藹) must be crossed (du tan 渡潭); in the Tang dynasty the Huang family moved to Huang tun 黃屯, which was nine li west of Shexian, just north of the point where where the pond is crossed. (Figure 1.13)

In the essay Huang lists the mountains that surround the ancestral village and the rivers, streams, lakes and deep ponds. He makes particular mention of the Feng stream (豐溪), which passed in front of the village, Tan Lake (Tan hu 潭湖) at the rear, a riverlet which flowed into the Jian River (Jianjiang 漸江), and a deep pond known as Huang pond (Huang tan 黃潭), which was spanned by a substantial stone and wooden bridge known as Tandu Bridge (Tandu qiao 潭渡橋). (Figure 1.13a) He also describes the “Pavilion of the Rainbow at the Water’s Edge” (Binhong ting 濱虹亭) on the northern bank of the stream, as one of the most beautiful spots in Tandu; from where he would derive his artist name, Binhong 濱虹. (Figure 1.14)

In the essay Huang Binhong takes the reader on a tour of the streets of Tandu village identifying the houses, shrines and architectural remains of earlier buildings that related to

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63 See Huang Jingwu, “Huang Binhong zai Huizhou,” p.127. Huang Yingwu states the house belonged to the widow of fellow clansman Huang Fuzhi.
64 Wang Zhongxiu, Huang Binhong nianpu, p.32.
65 The essay was originally published in Guocui xuebao (Journal of the National Essence), 1908, vols. 42, 43. See Huang Binhong wenji, zazhu bian, pp.7-12.
66 See Huang Binhong wenji, za zhu bian, p.422.
67 The mountains surrounding Tanducun are cited as Taishou shan and Xie shan to the northwest, Feng shan, Jing tang shan to the south, Ling, Jinlan, Huang luo and Tianma shan to the west and the famous Huangshan or Yellow Mountain to the north. See “Xu cun ju,” in Huang Binhong wenji, zazhu bian, p.7.
68 Huang Binhong wenji, za zhu bian, p.8.
family members. At the time Huang was writing many of the historic structures that he refers to most probably no longer existed. The landscape he evokes, part real, part imagined, draws on an idea of the past, that is inspired by literary remnants, family lore and natural and architectural features that survived the vicissitudes of time.

Huang refers to the Hall of Virtue Embraced, where he lived, and in so doing inscribes himself within the landscape of Tandu village. From his position in the present he seeks to revive historical memory and reassert the significance of the family narrative within the continuum of history.

Huang Binhong concludes his essay on a note of stark realism, observing that over the past few decades the elderly have sunk into despair, that those who wished to engage in business have left the village, while those who have returned no longer plough the fields. During the Taiping Wars large numbers of local people, including members of the Huang family, were killed or injured and farmlands were ransacked and made unproductive. In Huang’s words “the locals were impoverished and without food, people were maltreated and constant sounds of abuse could be heard throughout the laneways”. His essay is a lament.

“Village Living” was written after Huang Binhong had lived in the area for a considerable period of time and was most probably composed while he was living in Shexian. In addition to documenting his family’s close connection with the area, the essay also creates an intimate portrait of the ancestral home that he was in the process of leaving. After moving to Shanghai in 1909 he would never return to live in Shexian. Yet he carried the idea of homeland and its inscribed landscape with him wherever he travelled. The mountains and waterways of Shexian were to remain an important inspiration for his art, poetry and writing for years to come.

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69 Huang notes the remains of Huang Sheng’s (Baishan, 1622-1696) residence Wu lu and the former house of Huang Xiangcheng, Chengde Tang. Huang also mentions his ancestor Huang Tangong (Xun) who, during his lifetime, wrote more than ten essays about old residences in Tandu village which were later republished by Huang Cisun. See Huang Binhong wenji za zhu bian, p.12.

70 Huang Binhong wenji, zazhu bian, pp.11-12.

71 Huang Binhong wenji, za zhu bian, p.12.

72 Huang Binhong travelled to Shanghai in 1907 and 1908 but it was not until 1909 that he relocated to Shanghai to join Huang Jie and Deng Shi in their publishing enterprises. Huang’s last trip to his ancestral home was in 1934.
Huang Binhong’s essay takes on a wider meaning and a more polemical significance if it is considered as part of a genre of writing about historic places and homelands that developed in response to anti Manchu-Qing nationalism, modernisation and westernisation in China during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Magazines such as *Journal of the National Essence*, where Huang Binhong’s essay was published in 1908, gave voice to nationalistic sentiment and the discussion of national spirit (*guohun 国魂*) and Chinese identity in what was seen as an attempt to ward off national collapse (*guo wang 国亡*).  

Huang’s research into family history and the intimate portrait of Tandu village is similar to undertakings conducted in other parts of the world at this time. One interesting example is that of Dinesh Chandra Sen (1866-1939), a Bengali scholar, historian and devotee of Bengali literature, who was a contemporary of Huang Binhong. Sen’s scouring of the East Bengal countryside for old manuscripts and his pioneering publications on the Bengali language and literature have been viewed by historians like Dipesh Chakrabarty as a form of romantic-political activism. For Sen, literature was an expression of identity and the national spirit, and therefore was innately political. His activities were part of what Chakrabarty terms the “romantic anti-colonial nationalism” that flourished in India from around 1890 to 1910. The parallel with Huang Binhong’s activities is striking. Chakrabarty observes that:

For those who, like Sen and others of his generation, had seen literature as quintessentially political, the past was constituted, ultimately, not merely by historical evidence but also by emotional and experiential recollections of the past. The past in that sense could fuse with the present. It was inhabitable in spirit. Sentiments and emotions were thus a part of the method of both constituting and accessing a collective past.  

For Huang Binhong historical documents and the physical remnants of the past were at the core of his interest. They held the keys to understanding history through empirical research. But emotional and experiential recollections constituted an important aspect of the creative artist or

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73 Prior to “Village Living” Huang Binhong had published a number of other essays in *Guocui xuebao*, an essay on seals that was serialised over four issues in 1907-1908 (volumes 30, 33, 38, 39) and another on ink making serialised over two issues, volumes 42 and 44, in 1908.

writer’s connection with the past. It was through emotion and the experience of being in a place that creative and intuitive individuals were able to tap into a consciousness that connected the past with the present. By writing himself into the essay “Village Living”, Huang fused the past with the present, creating a continuum in space and time. For Huang Binhong, like Sen, the evocation of place was an expression of both a personal identity and a nascent national spirit, with a political dimension at a time of tension and change.

An historical impression of Tandu Village is provided to us through an album entitled “Eight Views of Tandu” (Tandu bajing 潭渡八景) painted by Huang Binhong’s ancestor Huang Lü (黃呂 hao Fengliu Shanren 漁六山人) and acquired by Huang in 1928. Huang Lü was the son of Huang Sheng (黃生 hao Baishan 白山, 1622-1696), a literatus and Ming loyalist who was a friend of the artist Hongren (弘仁 hao Jianjiang 漸江, 1610-1664). Huang Lü studied with his father and was skilled in the “four arts” of poetry, painting, seal carving and calligraphy, as well as martial arts. He continued his father’s interest in family history and published Miscellaneous Annals from Tanbin (Tanbin za zhi 潭濱雜志), a book which greatly influenced Huang Binhong’s own interest in family and local history.

The “eight views” depict life in the ancestral village and are painted in a straightforward, somewhat naïve style with pale ink and colour wash. Huang Lü carefully outlines the features of the village and its situation on wide river flats at the confluence of numerous waterways. Each leaf is accompanied by a twenty-eight character poem. The album

75 In 1928, Huang Binhong bought the album Eight Views of Tandu in an antique shop in Guangzhou. At the end of the album Huang Binhong wrote a lengthy inscription recording biographical details of Huang Lü and his variation on the conventional “eight views” and how he had come into possession of the album. It is followed by an inscription by Huang Binhong’s close friend Xu Chengyao, editor of the Shexian Gazette (1937), who was from the nearby village of Tangmo. There is a third inscription by Cai Zhefu, from Guangdong, who records that he was fortunate to see the album in 1932 when Huang Binhong was on his way to Sichuan. The historically acknowledged ‘Eight Views of Tandu’ are Ping Mountain, the Lian River, Beilu, Zhongzhou, Tuling, Tan Lake, Xie Mountain and Houwu. Huang Lü only retained two of the original views preferring to choose his own, such as ‘Winter Fragrance at the Water Temple’ (Shui dian han xiang). The views correspond with those listed in Tanbin za zhi. See Huang Binhong’s inscription on the leaves in Huang Binhong wenji, tiba bian, p.11. It is interesting to note that in 1934 Lu Zishu (1900-1978) made a copy of the Huang Lü album. See Xubaizhai Collection of Painting and Calligraphy, Collection Catalogue Paintings, Albums volume (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Museum of Art, 1995), cat.39. According to the inscriptions on the paintings they were copied over a twenty-one day period from the beginning on the first day of the new year 1934 (Jiaxu nian). See also Chen Huiying, “Huifenglou duhua ji: Huang Fengliu shanren xiang ju Tandu tu,” Xueshu shijie 2, no.5 (1937), pp.76-77.

76 Tanbin was an early name for Tandu.
opens with a painting entitled “Waiting for the moon by the bank of the river”. (Figure 1.15) A pale yellow full moon hangs low in the sky and is reflected in the still water of the river. Dwellings and wintry trees lining the river suggest the village environment of Tandu. (Figure 1.15a) The second leaf depicts rice paddies, a farmer and a water buffalo ploughing fields by the river, and a scholar on horseback followed by a servant carrying a ceremonial umbrella. The presence of the scholar suggests the large number of educated men who lived in the area. In other paintings there are clusters of houses situated along waterways with bridges that provide passage to paddy fields, and carefully observed details such as a stone well, the lattice of a carved wooden window, a waterwheel and a fisherman casting his line.

The works depict quiet scenes of daily life in an idyllic rural community painted in a manner that is in keeping with a documentary or topographic style of painting characteristic of the Xin’an school. Grouped together under the heading “Eight Views of Tandu” they allude to the artistic tradition of recording famous sights. Whilst Tandu village could not be compared to Huangshan, or the West Lake in Hangzhou, for which series of scenic views were also recorded, there seems little doubt that it was Huang Lü’s intention to depict and codify his own choice of vignettes of life in his native village for posterity.

Huang Binhong published Huang Lü’s album of views of Tandu village in a collotype edition in 1929, taking advantage of his position as the head of the art department of the Cathay Art Union (Shenzhou guoguang she 神州國光社) at that time. In a short biographical note about Huang Lü, Huang Binhong praised his predecessor’s artistic achievement and his loyalty to the Ming. By reproducing the paintings and putting them back into circulation some two hundred years after they were painted, Huang Binhong drew attention to Huang Lü’s art. He also asserted his own artistic pedigree through kinship and a connection to Tandu village that was documented for more than one thousand five hundred years.77 The paintings held a particular significance for Huang Binhong who, during an extended period of cultural and political turmoil, was exploring and locating his identity in his homeland and the cultural world of his forebears.

77 Huang Binhong, “Honglu huatan, xiao zhuan,” in Huang Fengliu cunju shanshui (Shanghai: Shenzhou guoguang she, 1929).
Huang Binhong established a base in Tandu village, but given the depressed economic situation, caused by the ongoing effects of the Taiping Wars, he had no option but to seek employment elsewhere. He travelled northwards in search of work but with the outbreak of the Boxer Rebellion in 1900 he was forced to return south.78

After his return to Shexian Huang Binhong learnt of some family land to the east of Shexian, which lay fallow and unproductive. The land belonged to the clan but was leased to others (yitian 義田) and the rent, which was collected in grain, was distributed to clan members in need.79 In 1901, Huang, then aged thirty-eight, managed the repair of stone dykes on the property. His work restored the productivity of the land, and resulted in an improved livelihood for the local community.80

Huang’s contribution to the rejuvenation of the stone dykes at Qingfeng 慶豐 was recorded in the 1937 Shexian Gazette, edited by his friend Xu Chengyao (徐承堯, 1874-1946), for which Huang was one of the compilers. The entry states that a lot of land in the area was held by the Huang clan and that “Huang Zhi from Tandu, a scholar living on a government stipend” was recommended to manage and raise funds for the repair of the dykes.81

For Huang Binhong, the task of restoring the health of clan land offered him a chance of meaningful employment at a time of great political and economic instability. As the eldest son, it was also an opportunity for him to improve the family situation following the death of his father. His status as a scholar on a government stipend gave him the power to raise the necessary funds to carry out the works. This activity may be seen as a continuation of the community work that his father had undertaken, which had included building a clan shrine for ancestral statues, advocating the restoration of the ancestral shrine Chunhui Tang 春輝堂, and

78 Huang Binhong, “Ba shi zi shi,” in Zhanlanhui tekan, 1943. See also Huang Binhong wenji, za zhu bian, pp.560-561.
79 Huang Jingwu, “Huang Binhong zai Huizhou,” p.130.
81 Huang engaged Zheng Wenxue to help manage the project. See Xu Chengyao, ed., Shexian zhi, vol. 2 (Shanghai: Lu Hu tongxianghui, 1937), p.10. Zheng Wenxue (zi Jinshu) was the brother of Huang Binhong’s younger brother Huang Zhongfang’s wife. See Huang Yingwu, “Huang Binhong zai Huizhou,” p.127. Xu Chengyao (1874-1946) from Tangmo near Tandu was one of Wang Zhongyi’s students. Although he and Huang studied with Wang at different times, they became lifelong friends. See Shexian zhi (1995), p.687.
contributing to funds for the construction of a meeting room for people from Shexian in Nanjing (Jinling She guan金陵歙館), where many members of Huang Dinghua’s family resided.  

In an essay written at the age of eighty, Huang Binhong recalls his involvement with the restoration of clan land, suggesting that his wife deserves some of the credit for a job well done.

I retired to till the land in a mountain village in Jiangnan. I spent close to the next decade opening up barren land for farming, creating some thousands of mu of productive land. There were profitable harvests for successive years. I used all of the money I earned to acquire engravings on bronze and stone, calligraphy and paintings, both ancient and contemporary. I put all my energy into research, and my attempts to determine the good from the deficient. This I did every day. In the winter and the summer I stayed indoors and did not have anything to do with regular routines of everyday life. The daily affairs of the family were delegated to my late wife Hong Juren [Hong Siguo], along with property and farming activities. Everything proceeded in a systematic manner, all with the help of my wife.

Following the path of earlier scholars, Huang Binhong had turned to concentrate on the land and cultural pursuits in a time of turmoil.

**Education and political reform**

During the closing years of the nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth century, Huang Binhong, like many members of the country’s educated elite, was drawn into debates about China’s future and the urgent need for political and educational reform. The situation became critical following the defeat in the Sino-Japanese War (1895), and the Boxer Rebellion (1900) and with the abolition of the examination system (1905). In the decade or so prior to the fall of the Manchu-Qing dynasty in 1911, leading thinkers advocated urgent change. Through their efforts a new educational system was established, modelled on those that had empowered Japan and western countries. It was through Huang Binhong’s interest in education and his involvement in teaching that he now came into contact with leading advocates of reform such as

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82 Huang Dinghua had also tried to raise money for the repair of the Tandu Bridge (also known as Sanyuan qiao), which had been destroyed during the Taiping wars, but was unsuccessful. See Huang Binhong nianpu, p.2.

83 Huang Binhong, “Zi xu,” in Huang Binhong shuhua zhan tekan mulu (Shanghai, 1943), p.2. See also Huang Binhong wenji, za zhu bian, pp.560-561.
Huang taught at a number of the educational institutions established to prepare younger scholars for the needs of a rapidly changing society. New schools such as the Liangjiang Teachers’ College in Nanking (Liangjiang shifan) and Anhui Public School in Wuhu (Anhui gongxue) attracted leading intellectuals and became places where revolutionary ideas were formulated. Anhui Public School, established in Wuhu in 1904, was the first school in the area to introduce a modern curriculum and was one of many schools that became a centre of student revolutionary activity. Huang taught there from its inception.

From 1905 he also taught Chinese (guowen) at the Xin’an Secondary School, the first of its kind in Shexian. The school was founded by his friend Xu Chengyao, who in a striking link between old and new, attained the jinshi degree in 1904, one of the last people to do so.

In early 1906 the Qing government instructed provincial governments to establish charitable, half-day schools for children from poor families. Huang Binhong responded to this directive aimed at expanding education, and established the Honest and Sincere Academy (Dunsu xuetang) in that same year. The school was operated from his home in Tandu village and functioned as a private primary school for disadvantaged children. Huang employed graduates from the local teachers’ college run by Xu Chengyao. His family endowed

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84 In 1895 Huang is said to have written a letter to Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao giving his support to their proposed administrative, educational, economic and military reforms as outlined in their memorial presented to the Emperor (Gongche shang shu). Wang Zhongxiu, Huang Binhong nianpu, p.28.
85 Liangjiang is an area covering Jiangsu, Anhui and Jiangxi. Li Ruiqing was one of the principals of the Liangjiang shifan. The school was modelled on a Japanese prototype and employed a Japanese Western-style-art teacher. See Huang Binhong, “Jiushi zashu zhi er,” section one, in Huang Binhong wenji, zazhu bian, p.573.
87 See Huang Binhong, “Jiushi zashu zhi er,” section nine, in Huang Binhong wenji, zazhu bian, p.575.
the school, although students were charged a small tuition fee. As Sally Borthwick has noted in her study of education and social change in modern China, many of the half-day schools were operated by members of the local gentry and combined self-interest and altruism. In her words, the founders generally held the belief that “the livelihood of the people was the best security for the property of the rich”.

That same year Huang Binhong and a group of friends established the Huang Society (Huangshe 黃社) named after Huang Zongxi (黃宗羲, 1610-1695), a Ming patriot and one of the foremost scholars of the early Qing dynasty. Huang Zongyi’s interests spanned classics, history, philosophy, mathematics and literature. He was the author of the first significant history of Chinese philosophy and through the East Zhejiang School (Zhedong xuepai 浙東學派), promoted objective standards in history and philosophy. He also wrote a short treatise “Waiting for the Dawn” (Ming yi dai fang lu 明夷待訪錄, 1662), in which he articulated his ideas about kingship and the obligations of rulers and the rights of the people. This was embraced as revolutionary literature by members of the Huang Society and other leading intellectuals including Liang Qichao (梁啟超, 1873-1929) and Tan Sitong (譚嗣同, 1865-1895).

Identification with a figure like Huang Zongxi within the context of late Qing imperial politics was potentially seditious. The society operated as an underground organization and was part of the groundswell of patriotic anti-Qing organizations operating in the early years of the new century.

Details of Huang Binhong’s involvement in anti-Manchu activities at this time are sketchy. In mid-1907, Huang Binhong fled from Tandu to Shanghai to avoid being arrested for

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89 Huang Binhong, “Jiushi za shu, er,” section one, in Huang Binhong wenji, zazhu bian, p.573. See also Wang Zjongxiu, Huang Binhong nianpu, pp.43-44 which cites the Shexian Gazette from the Republican period.


91 Many members were from Anhui and were associated with the Xin’an Secondary School, including Xu Chengyao, Chen Chubing, and Wang Luben.


93 A good number of the members of Huangshe later became members of the Southern Society (Nanshe). Wang Zhongxiu notes that in a 1906 volume of Shanghai’s Guocui xuebao there is a portrait of Huang Zongxi and that a list of members in the Anhui branch of the society was also published in Guocui xuebao. See Wang Zhongxiu, Huang Binhong nianpu, pp.45-46. In 1909 Huang Zongxi’s name was entered in the Temple of Confucius. See Arthur W. Hummel, Eminent Chinese of the Ch’ing Period (1644-1912) (Washington: Library of Congress, 1943), vol.1, p.353.
his suspected involvement in a plan to mint coins supporting the Revolutionary Party, whose aim it was to oust the Manchu-Qing government.\(^{94}\) Huang’s personal drama was, however, overshadowed by the shooting and killing of the Manchu Governor of Anhui in Anqing on 6 July. Xu Xilin 徐錫麟, a revolutionary activist who had become Director of the Police Academy in Anqing, killed the governor during a graduation ceremony. Xu was arrested and executed.\(^{95}\) After a brief stay in Shanghai, Huang Binhong returned to Anhui and participated in the third annual general meeting of the Anhui Railway Corporation in Wuhu in November of that year, as a representative of Shexian. One of the aims of the meeting was to promote the protection of national interests in railways following the construction of lines by foreign firms encouraged by the Manchu-Qing government.\(^{96}\) This and the above examples confirm Huang’s involvement in social development and anti-Qing activity in Anhui in the years leading up to the 1911 revolution.

**The preservation of national culture**

Yet when at the age of eighty, Huang looks back on his involvement in this period of great political and social change, he focuses on his determination to preserve aspects of China’s traditional culture.

At the time of the fall of the Qing, men of learning were talking about new government [xin zheng], establishing newspapers [ban bao] and promoting education [xing xue]. I travelled to Nanjing and Wuhu where a friend had called upon me to help manage the Anhui Public School. In addition I taught at a number of schools. At the time there was a lot of debate about abandoning Chinese characters. I took part in the debate and fought strenuously against it. It was at this time that I resolved to focus on preserving literature and art.\(^{97}\)

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\(^{94}\) See Huang’s recollection in “Jiushi zashu, zhi yi,” section one, in *Huang Binhong wenji zazhu bian*, p.571. Kotewall refers to a recollection by Xu Chengyao, *Huang Binhong*, p.70.


\(^{96}\) Wang Zhongxiu, *Huang Binhong nianpu*, pp.53-54.

\(^{97}\) Huang Binhong, “Ba shi zi shi,” in *Huang Binhong shuhua zhan tekan mulu*, p.3. See *Huang Binhong wenji, zazhu bian*, pp.560-561 After the 1911 revolution a phonetic system (zhu yin zimu) was introduced into government primary and secondary schools to assist with the learning of Chinese characters and the uniformity of pronunciation. See *Reform of the Chinese Written Language* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1958), pp.23-24.
Throughout his life Huang Binhong spent what money he could afford on collecting books, rubbings and seals, as well as calligraphy and painting. Connoisseurship, research, writing and painting were integral to one another and essential aspects of scholarly and artistic endeavour as far as he was concerned.

His earliest acquisitions, apart from the paintings given to him by Huang Cisun, were ancient Chinese seals. Seals made from stone or bronze were official accoutrements used to identify a person or an institution. They could be inscribed with a person’s name, pen name or studio name, a poem or a symbolic image and were believed to embody the spirit of the person they represented. Seals and impressions taken from seals and mounted in books were highly sought after by scholars and historians. They were not only an important source for historical research, they were the embodiment of the individual and of Chinese history and culture.

Huang Binhong’s interest in collecting ancient seals was stimulated by the broader cultural and political debate about the future of the Chinese language in the face of increased westernisation and modernisation. Those promoting full retention of the language argued that Chinese is one of the world’s oldest written languages in continuous use and is fundamental to understanding the development of Chinese culture. The elevation of the written word to an art form and its integral relationship with painting meant that the appreciation of brush and ink painting could not be divorced from its relationship to the written word. Many scholars shared the belief that there was still much to be learned from an analysis of historical objects in circulation, such as ancient seals, as well as objects that were being recovered by archaeologists.98 The discovery of ancient inscribed fragments of tortoise shells and bones at the Shang-Yin 商殷 (late twelfth century BCE or late eleventh century BCE) site near Anyang 安陽 in Henan Province 河南省 in the late 1800s, for example, and the reproduction of many of those objects in magazines in the the early 1900s, renewed intellectual interest in the debate.

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98 In the late eighteenth century calligraphers had begun to take an active interest in carved stone stele dating from the Six Dynasties period (317-589) that were excavated in large numbers. Similarly seal carvers began to take notice of ancient seals dating from the Qin and Han dynasties. See Shan Guolin, “Painting of China’s New Metropolis: The Shanghai School, 1850-1900,” in A Century in Crisis: Modernity and Tradition in the Art of Twentieth Century China, eds., Julia F. Andrews and Shen Kuiyi (New York: Guggenheim Museum Publications, 1998), p.31.
over the antiquity and origin of the Chinese language.\textsuperscript{99} Ancient words, inscribed on bone, cast in metal and incised in stone not only stimulated scholarly research but also exerted a profound aesthetic and spiritual influence on artists including seal carvers, calligraphers and painters.

In 1883, at the age of 20, Huang Binhong was given a Han dynasty general’s seal that originally formed part of a collection assembled by the famous bibliophile and collector of ancient seals Wang Qishu (汪啟淑, 1728-ca. 1799). Wang, also from Shexian, was a good friend of Huang Binhong’s ancestor Huang Lü. He had amassed a large collection of Qin and Han dynasty seals including some one thousand gold and jade seals and an extensive library of related books. Over the course of his life he compiled many books on seals and reproduced the impressions of seals in his collection.\textsuperscript{100} Huang saw many of these books on his first visit to Shexian in 1876 and in 1898 acquired a further six seals that were originally part of Wang Qishu’s collection.\textsuperscript{101} These were among his most prized and important possessions.

Huang Binhong’s interest in learning from the objects he acquired is highlighted in an incomplete and undated autobiographical fragment in which he describes his active interest in collecting and researching the Chinese written word.

Whilst engravings on stone and bronze, calligraphy and painting are known as art they are in fact the mother of all skilled arts. They are second in importance after literature. Military force [\textit{wu}] is used to suppress rebellions, words [\textit{wen}] are used to govern. In former times \textsuperscript{□□} until the Warring States period, civility had collapsed and music was destroyed, every day people were in search of weapons and warfare, people suffered and it was an extreme situation. But scholarship and culture remained as bright and luminous as ever and in the many thousands of years since then there is nothing to compare with it, the strangeness and extraordinary ability to engender a sense of wonder. I have searched for and collected ancient seals, numismatics, words impressed into pottery shards, things never seen before. The examination and recording of these

\textsuperscript{100} For details of Wang Qishu’s life see Hummel, \textit{Eminent Chinese}, vol.2, pp.810-812. Wang’s publications included \textit{Collection of Ancient Bronze Seals from the Han dynasty (Han tong yin cong)} printed in 12 volumes in 1755, and \textit{Qishu’s Collection of Ancient Seals (Qishu ji gu yin cun)} in 16 volumes.
\textsuperscript{101} See Wang Zhongxiu, \textit{Huang Binhong nianpu}, pp.16, 20, 31 and “Jiushi zashu, zhi yi”, section one, in \textit{Huang Binhong wenji zashu bian}, pp.570-571. Impressions of the six seals were included in Wang’s book \textit{Qishu ji gu yin qun}. Huang Binhong wrote about Wang Qishu’s collection of Han dynasty bronze seals in an article “On a collection of ancient seals” (\textit{Xu gu yin tan}), published in \textit{Xueshujie} 1, no.9 (March 1936), p.35.
objects has been gradually increasing. Good and bad calligraphy and painting from the Tang, Song, Yuan and Ming dynasties relate to the fortunes of the dynasties, in particular □□, □□□ is difficult. Scholars have been incited into action and have worked hard, for after destruction something new must be constructed. It is equally important to study and appreciate [ancient] scripts and calligraphy as well as painting. If you learn from the best, then you will still only achieve something lesser. Having travelled far and for a long time, these are the fundamentals of learning. The days and nights pass, but I do not dare to be idle.\textsuperscript{102}

The seals, books, calligraphy and paintings that Huang Binhong acquired were appreciated for their aesthetic dimension but they were also valued as historical artefacts that were profoundly affected by the time in which they were created. Huang Binhong closely examined the objects in his collection in order to understand the histories that they embodied. Collecting was part of the inspiring and unending process of learning and of preserving histories that were in danger of being lost.\textsuperscript{103} After the destruction of the Taiping wars and subsequent political and social upheaval Huang Binhong and many of his like-minded friends believed that it was through the remnants of material culture, including literature, history, epigraphy, calligraphy and painting, that the new could be created.

\textsuperscript{102} Huang Binhong, “Zishugao,” in \textit{Huang Binhong wenji, za zhu bian}, p.600. No date. Missing characters are indicated by □.

\textsuperscript{103} One acquisition that provides a good illustration of Huang Binhong’s attitude to collecting is his purchase of a painting by the little known Xin’an artist Han Yeren. Huang Binhong learnt that a long handscroll by Han Yeren, inscribed with a poem, had come onto the market. Han painted in a style that was similar to the well-known and more sought-after late Ming artist Bada Shanren (1626-1705). The dealer intended to cut off the poem by Han and replace it with an inscription by Bada Shanren, which would make the work more valuable. Huang Binhong decided to purchase the painting to prevent its destruction. When he arrived to purchase the painting it had already been cut in two, but he went ahead with the purchase anyway, content in his knowledge that the painting and poem would be re-united as one integral work by Han Yeren once more. Huang Binhong recounted the story of this acquisition in a short article published in the art supplement to the Shanghai newspaper \textit{Shibao} sometime during the period 1919-1920. See \textit{Huang Binhong wenji, shuhua, shang}, p.108.