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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# “This Belt of River”: Visual Representation of the Yellow River as Local Expression in Early Qing Local Gazetteers

Qin YANG

University of Nottingham, UK  
[qin.yang@nottingham.ac.uk](mailto:qin.yang@nottingham.ac.uk)

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The differing presence of the Yellow River across different regions in north China has shaped how local communities perceived and represented the river. This study uses local gazetteers produced in the early decades of the Qing to explore how people’s life experiences of the river affected its visual representations. In local gazetteers, whereas textual accounts usually conform to rules of compilation, such as following a universal format, common categories, and use of classical knowledge, visual representations provide a more direct and effective way of presenting the uniqueness of a place. In early Qing local gazetteers, perceptions of the Yellow River varied significantly at the local level and were manifest in different visual strategies to portray the river. The conscious selection of visual styles not only reveals diverse local experiences, but also lends visual force to the stories told in the text.

黃河在中國北方的不同地域有著不同的存在形態。它們影響和塑造了地方社會對黃河的不同看法和呈現方式。本文從清初的地方志出發，討論不同地方的生活經驗如何造就了方志中對黃河的不同視覺呈現。地方志中，文本往往受到編修體例的諸多限制，如需要符合統一格式，特定門類，援用經典。而視覺呈現一圖一則能以更直接、有效的方式揭示一個地方的特殊性。清初地方志中，（沿岸）各地對黃河的看法存在巨大的地域差異。這些差異體現在描繪黃河的不同視覺技巧中。繪圖方式的選擇不僅揭示了不同的地方體驗，也為地方志文本中講述的故事增加了視覺說服力。

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**Keywords:** Yellow River, local gazetteers, early Qing, visual representation, local experience

**關鍵詞：** 黃河，地方志，清初，圖，地方經驗

The Yellow River has been a shared ecological and socio-economic element across different regions in north China.<sup>1</sup> Despite being an iconic river from a state point of view, its differing presence along the long river course has shaped how local communities perceived and represented it. For people living in counties or prefectures located close to the river, their experiences of it can be either tangible, regarding transport or flood prevention, or more symbolic, taking it as a local landmark or a cultural symbol. The experience and perception of the Yellow River has formed part of the daily life of a place and has been shared across the social strata. This study aims to explore how different life experiences of the Yellow River affected its visual representation in local gazetteers.

Rich records of the Yellow River, both in text and in images, are preserved in the vast collection of local gazetteers produced since the Southern Song. With the Local Gazetteers Research Tools database, I was able to locate about 160 records of visual representations of the Yellow River in extant local gazetteers produced mainly from the late Ming to the late Qing.<sup>2</sup> The geographical distribution of these sources shows that images of the Yellow River mainly involve prefectures and counties along the middle and lower reaches of its river course, especially in present-day Henan 河南, Shandong 山東, and Jiangsu 江蘇 provinces (Figure 1). With these images, it was then possible to further select those local gazetteers where textual accounts tell compelling stories of the Yellow River with supporting images.

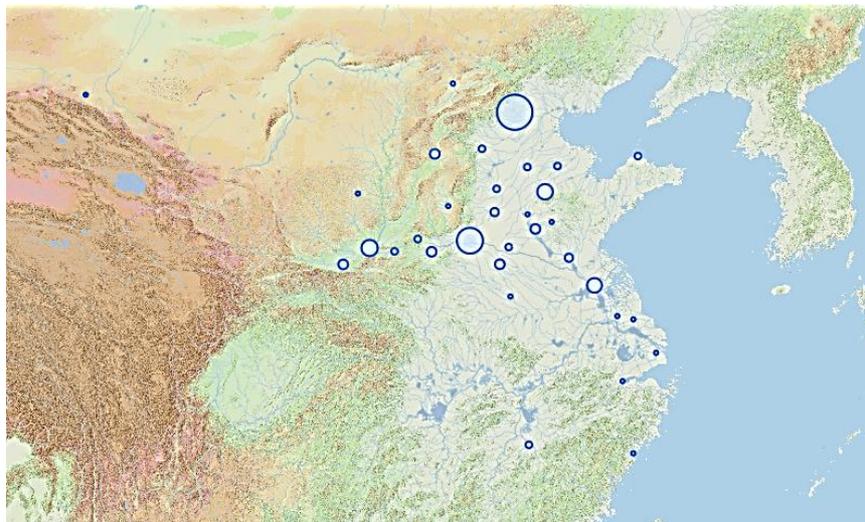


Figure 1: Distribution of depictions of the Yellow River in local gazetteers from Ming to Qing dynasties (image created with LGMaP in LoGaRT).

<sup>1</sup> My thanks go to the participants of the 2021 Max Planck Institute Workshop on “Visual Materials in Local Gazetteers”, to two anonymous readers and Alexis Lycas of *JEACS* for their comments on previous drafts. Thanks also to Nathan Woolley for discussing my translation of sources.

<sup>2</sup> Local Gazetteers Research Tools (LoGaRT) was developed by the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science for the purpose of searching, analysing, and collecting data from digitised Chinese local gazetteers. For a useful overview, see Chen et al. 2020, 544–558. It is a researcher’s responsibility to exercise caution during the searching and selection processes. On the one hand, not all results with the search term show a direct or close relationship with the Yellow River. For example, regions far away from the course of the Yellow River could still mention it as a broader geographical reference. On the other hand, some images that include the Yellow River as a landmark might not mark its name clearly and would go undetected in a search. To improve the quality of search results, the database has enabled textual searches from adjacent pages to the image in question. From a user’s point of view, however, a safer search methodology would be to use “Pages with Images” searches together with close reading of the textual parts on specific themes.

Within the limit of available data of local gazetteers including images of the Yellow River, those compiled during the first decades of the Qing period especially provide information about the river in a specific historical context. In the 1680s, the Qing central authority commissioned local governments to compile local gazetteers in preparation for a comprehensive record of the state. The materials produced from that period provide an opportunity to examine how unique local stories of the Yellow River were presented within a universal format of gazetteer compilation.<sup>3</sup>

Before turning to the various instances of depicting the Yellow River, I will first contextualise the discussion with a few questions: What did local writing mean for the compilers and readers of local gazetteers? How can we understand the uniqueness of a local record against the standard format of gazetteer compilation? How was local experience represented visually to contribute to the uniqueness of a place?

### Local gazetteers and local expression

Chinese local gazetteers were often compiled by a group of local elites.<sup>4</sup> To what extent can we treat them as a collective expression of local people's experience and observation? James Hargett has noted that a new human orientation in local gazetteers had emerged by the twelfth century, with the main focus of each section changing to human affairs. In other words, local gazetteers were no longer texts that simply provided administrative information and periodically needed to be updated; instead, they were compiled for local consumption and served scholarly purposes and local interests (Hargett 1996, 405-442).

Compilers of local gazetteers usually needed to present their local history under certain constraints of genre. Since Song times, the compilation of local gazetteers had largely thrived on the basis of state compilation of universal gazetteers. As Sue Takashi has observed, local gazetteers became increasingly prevalent in the late Northern Song due to the central authority's effort to gather detailed local information for the implementation of New Policy reforms (Sue 2021, 27-38). Therefore, local gazetteers, from the very beginning, inherited some of the main characteristics of a state gazetteer.<sup>5</sup> Two main factors may have functioned to dilute the uniqueness of a local gazetteer: the shared knowledge of antiquity and conformity to a universal format.

First, to add to their authority, compilers of local gazetteers tended to gather and incorporate classical knowledge of the locality. It was especially common for them to draw on the classics to begin sections such as "terrestrial patterns" (*dili* 地理), "regions of the land" (*fangyu* 方輿), and "borders and territories" (*jiangyu* 疆域), to name just a few. In the 1662 gazetteer of Sishui 泗水, a county in Shandong, its "Records of regions of the land" (*Fangyu zhi* 方輿志) starts with a statement that Sishui belonged to Xu 徐, one of

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<sup>3</sup> Although fewer local gazetteers are extant from earlier periods, there had also been initiatives from the Yuan and Ming central governments to compile comprehensive gazetteers, and for that purpose, to issue rules of compilation to local authorities. For a discussion of government initiatives prior to the Qing, see Dennis 2015, 35-48; and Hargett 1996, 410.

<sup>4</sup> For discussions of elites' increasing activity on the local level from the Southern Song, see Hymes 1986, 124-135; Bol 2001, 37-76; and Gerritsen 2007, 9-13, 47-63.

<sup>5</sup> On the relationship between state and local gazetteers before the Song, see Chittick 2003, 63-67.

the ancient Nine Provinces (*jiuzhou* 九州) specified in the “Tribute of Yu” (*Yugong* 禹貢), which is the earliest extant geographical treatise from the canonical *Shang shu* 尚書 (*Book of Documents*).<sup>6</sup> The prefaces of the 1660 *Henan tongzhi* 河南通志 (*Comprehensive Gazetteer of Henan*) also claimed that it “continued the heritage” of the “Tribute of Yu” and “Administering the regions” (*Zhifang* 職方), another major geographical chapter in *Zhou li* 周禮 (*Rituals of Zhou*).<sup>7</sup> Compilers of the early Qing county gazetteer *Qixian zhi* 淇縣志 (*Records of Qi County*) also commented that, “to record mountains and rivers, they followed the ‘Tribute of Yu’; to give a detailed account of products, they followed *Shanhai jing* 山海經 (*The Classic of Mountains and Seas*)” (載山川則倣禹貢，詳物產則倣山海).<sup>8</sup> The reliance on the classics for authority resulted in a common narrative strategy in most local gazetteers, which, to some extent, reduces the ability of textual accounts to represent the unique features of a place.

Second, a local gazetteer’s mission to record the unique local situation may stand in contrast to the universal format imposed on it as a state-commissioned project. The categories in a local gazetteer may follow a universal style; yet what makes a place unique are its culture and history. As Dagmar Schäfer has pointed out, local gazetteers as working documents created or recognised what was locally known: they are supposed to be an intellectual stance on local knowledge (Schäfer et al. 2020, 391–429). But local gazetteers were closely tied to central government administrative practices: for imperially initiated gazetteer projects, central government officials determined the categories of required content by issuing “rules of compilation” (*fanli* 凡例) (Dennis 2015, 22–51). From late 1672 to 1673, for example, the Kangxi Emperor 康熙 (r. 1662–1722) commissioned local authorities to prepare local gazetteers to be included in a single unified gazetteer (*yitong zhi* 一統志) of the empire. Prior to this edict, the authorities of Henan and Shaanxi 陝西 had already compiled their provincial gazetteers. The central authority then designated their gazetteers as an exemplary style (*kuanshi* 款式) for other places to follow.<sup>9</sup> In the case of the 1672 *Ziyang xianzhi* 滋陽縣志 (*Records of Ziyang County*), its compilation was among many projects which were forced upon local authorities through political pressure.<sup>10</sup> As shown in the 1690 *Suizhou zhi* 睢州志 (*Records of Sui Prefecture*), the central authority had issued “rules and procedures” (*guicheng* 規程) as an “established format” (*dingge* 定格) for local compilers to follow, regarding what to include and what to record in detail.<sup>11</sup> Under the state edict, compilers of local gazetteers needed to “eliminate all local folklore and strange tales” (一切方言隱怪悉汰除).<sup>12</sup> The designated selection criteria of source materials put further limits on how local gazetteers could express local experiences.

<sup>6</sup> *Sishui xianzhi* 泗水縣志 (1662), 1.1b.

<sup>7</sup> *Henan tongzhi* 河南通志 (1660), Li Cuiran preface, 5a.

<sup>8</sup> *Qixian zhi* 淇縣志 (1660), Wang Qianji preface, 1.1a.

<sup>9</sup> *Caoxian zhi* 曹縣志 (1685), “Xian wen” 憲文, 1b.

<sup>10</sup> *Ziyang xianzhi* 滋陽縣志 (1672), “Yanzhou fu tiewen” 兗州府貼文, 2a–2b.

<sup>11</sup> *Suizhou zhi* 睢州志 (1693), “Yuanxi” 院檄, 2a, 3a.

<sup>12</sup> *Yan’an fuzhi* 延安府志 (1679), Wu Cunli preface, 3a.

From the readers' point of view, local gazetteers or "local records" (*dizhi* 地志 or *fangzhi* 方志) were comparable to ancient "state histories" (*guoshi* 國史). This analogy was first brought up by the early Southern Song scholar Zheng Xingyi 鄭興裔 (1126-1199) in his preface to the local gazetteer of present-day Yangzhou, *Guangling zhi* 廣陵志 (*Records of Guangling*).<sup>13</sup> Since then, recording the local past had become the main aim of local gazetteers, an aim which was lauded by their mostly elite readers. In the early Qing, for example, the local gazetteer of Datong prefecture, *Yunzhong jun zhi* 雲中郡志 (*Records of Yunzhong Prefecture*, 1652), has two prefaces referring to this analogy. One commented that "In the past, each state recorded the mountains, rivers, scenery, customs, and products in its own domain to explain its culture and offer tribute to the kingdom. These records are equivalent to today's prefectural gazetteers" (古者各國紀域內山川景物習俗土宜，以闡風化而貢王國，即今之郡志也).<sup>14</sup> The other simply takes "prefectural gazetteers nowadays as equivalent to the histories of various states of antiquity" (今之郡志，古之列國史).<sup>15</sup> A preface to the 1656 *Heyin xianzhi* 河陰縣志 (*Records of Heyin County*) expressed the idea that a county should have a gazetteer, just like a household having a genealogy and an ancient state having an official history.<sup>16</sup> The renowned mid-Qing scholar Zhang Xuecheng 章學誠 (1738-1801), who studied local gazetteers as a type of historiography and was the compiler of the 1779 *Yongqing xianzhi* 永清縣志 (*Records of Yongqing County*), held the same opinion (Chang Shu-fen 1935, 24).

Early Qing scholars also placed great value on local records, seeing them as of equal if not greater importance to the state's history. They regarded local histories as crucial to the provision of primary materials to be assembled into a state's history. In his preface to the 1673 *Caoxian zhi* 曹縣志 (*Records of Cao County*), County Magistrate Men Kerong 門可榮 claimed that "Although a county gazetteer is a document about one place, its significance equals that of a state history" (縣志雖一方之書，允與國史等重也).<sup>17</sup> Another preface written in 1685 by Liu Fengjia 劉逢甲, an Instructor in the Cao County School, emphasised local records as components of the state history: "A county has its record just as a state has its history. Those records are histories. Gathering thousands of county records and storing them in the Shiqu Imperial Library would form the entirety of a state history" (邑有志、國有史，志即史也。彙數千志而藏之石渠，即國史之全書也).<sup>18</sup> Similarly, Zhong Hongdao 仲弘道, the County Magistrate of Ziyang, commented in his preface to the 1672 *Ziyang xianzhi* that, "what were called [local] records are one part of history. In the past when Zheng Qiao composed *Tongzhi* 通志 (*Comprehensive Records*), he gathered

<sup>13</sup> While *guoshi* can also refer to state histories, in the analogy with local records, *guo* refers to the various pre-Qin states in the sense that it was limited to one specific area. James Hargett seems to have misread *guo* in this analogy as "national" and *guoshi* as "full-scale histories of individual emperors' reigns" in his nevertheless informative study of the history of local gazetteers. See Hargett 1996, 426.

<sup>14</sup> *Yunzhong junzhi* 雲中郡志 (1652), "Yunzhong jun zhi xu" 雲中郡志序, 1a.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., "Yunzhong jun xin zhi xu" 雲中郡新志序, 1a.

<sup>16</sup> *Heyin xianzhi* 河陰縣志 (1656 [1691]), Fan Weixian preface, 1a.

<sup>17</sup> *Caoxian zhi*, "Chongxiu Caoxian zhi yuanxu" 重修曹縣志原叙, 2a-b. Here the analogy is between the importance of local gazetteers and state histories, rather than saying their contents are the same.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., "Chongxiu Caoxian zhi houxu" 重修曹縣志後序, 1a.

the records of each prefecture and county and assembled them into a (single) work” (志以名志者，史之一端也。昔鄭樵作通志，即取各郡邑之志而彙以成書).<sup>19</sup>

## Visual representation of local uniqueness

The inclusion of visual materials in local gazetteers had been a widespread practice since Song times. It emerged in a larger context where visual representations (*tu* 圖) played an increasing role in the communication of knowledge (Bray 2007, 1–73). Compilers of local gazetteers might include a variety of visual materials to display the uniqueness of a locality. One of the many types of visual representation was the domain map (*jūngtu* 境圖).<sup>20</sup> Such maps conveyed to readers a first visual message about the place. They were usually placed in front of the main text in local gazetteers, providing an overview of the landscape and sites of human activities. They also designated the authority of governance by clearly marking out prefectural or county governments. For local officials in particular, maps in local gazetteers served as a visual aid to motivate them to achieve better governance. Luo Jun 羅濬 (fl. 1220s), who in 1228 finished the compilation of the *Siming zhi* 四明志 (*Records of Siming*), commented on how images in local gazetteers worked together with texts to encourage local elites to observe and contribute to local affairs. For them, reading a local gazetteer involved not only reading the text but also examining the illustrations. These two cognitive processes were nicely captured in the action of ‘observing’ (*guan* 觀):

Observing the rise and fall of customs, one would think of being cautious and taking the lead. Observing the flow of rivers and weight of mountains, one would think of profiting the people. Observing everything brings benefit to everything.

觀風俗之盛衰，則思謹身率先；觀山川之流峙，則思為民興利。事事觀之，事事有益。<sup>21</sup>

Like textual materials, images in local gazetteers could also be susceptible to the constraints of style and format. Craig Clunas has pointed out the tension in Ming local gazetteers between regularity and specificity in visualising a place. He noted that the equal, regular, governmental spatiality as shown in administrative units coincided with an awareness of the geographically specific—the customs of the country, the lay of the local land, and the special products of the local markets (Clunas 2007, 38). On domain maps, therefore, local special features sometimes co-exist with more universal ones.

On these maps, mountains and rivers are invariably the major landmarks and demarcations. This can be traced back to the canonical “Tribute of Yu”, in which geographical records were organised mainly by terrestrial features, especially rivers. Perceived as reference points for locations, mountains and rivers (*shanchuan* 山川) had become an important section in local gazetteers. In the state-level gazetteer of the

<sup>19</sup> *Ziyang xianzhi*, “Ziyang xianzhi jilüe” 滋陽縣志紀略, 3a.

<sup>20</sup> The modern term “map” works here as a convenient generic term for *tu* in the sense that it marks out orientation and natural features of the land. For discussions of the use of traditional maps, see Yee 1994, 96–127; and de Weerd 2009, 145–167.

<sup>21</sup> *Baoqing Siming zhi* 寶慶四明志 (1228), Luo Jun preface, 1b–2a.

Ming empire compiled around the year 1460, a “Map of the one unified great Ming” represents Ming territory through great mountains and rivers. It presents the iconic “Five great mountains and four great rivers” (*wuyue sidu* 五嶽四瀆) of the empire (Figure 2). The four great rivers were the Yangtze 江, the Yellow River 河, the Huai 淮, and the Han 漢. By placing the Yellow River as one of the most outstanding natural features, the map emphasised its entirety and sole identity as a great landmark of the empire.

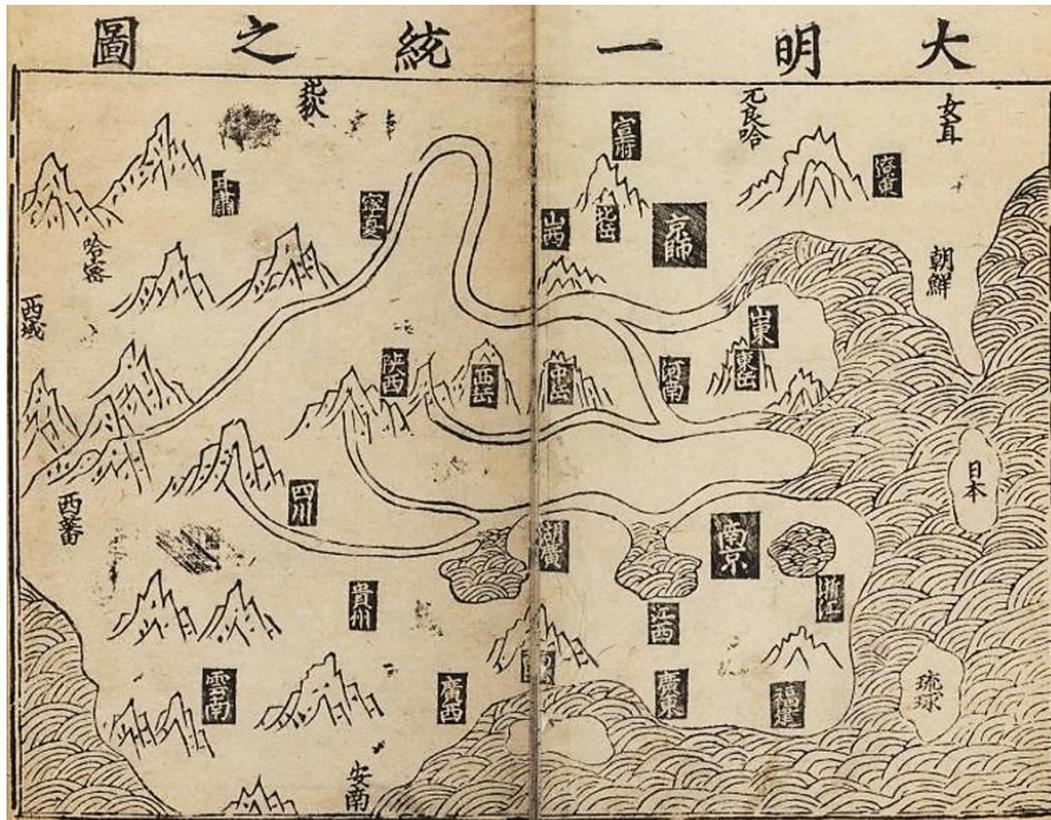


Figure 2: Map of the one unified great Ming 大明一統之圖, *Da Ming yitong zhi* 大明一統志 (1461), “Diyu tu” 地輿圖, 1a-1b. Image source: Harvard Yenching Library (persistent link: <https://nrs.lib.harvard.edu/urn-3:fhcl:4739767?n=33>)

Compared to central-level or provincial gazetteers, prefectural and county-level gazetteers provide greater details of a place, thus exhibiting more fully the local environment in which people lived. As a representation of local administrative units, domain maps usually cover two levels: the larger units of prefectures (*fu* 府) or subprefectures (*zhou* 州) and the smaller ones of counties (*xian* 縣). This dual structure reflects continuity from earlier state-led geographical compilations. In the case of the Yellow River, a local gazetteer depicts only a section of it alongside local features of administration, cultural and religious sites, and civil engineering projects. In the 1741 *Tongzhou fuzhi* 同州府志 (*Prefectural Records of Tongzhou*), at the prefectural level, the “Domain map of the prefecture” (*fujing tu* 府境圖) represents its ten counties as scattered between the Yellow River and its two tributaries—Rivers Luo 洛 and Wei 渭 (Figure 3). Zooming in to the county level, the “Domain map of Chaoyi county” (*Chaoyi xianjing tu* 朝邑縣境圖) provides a close-up image of the prefectural map on its southeast corner (Figure 4). While the county map includes details such as villages and temples, its dominant frames of reference remain the three major rivers.

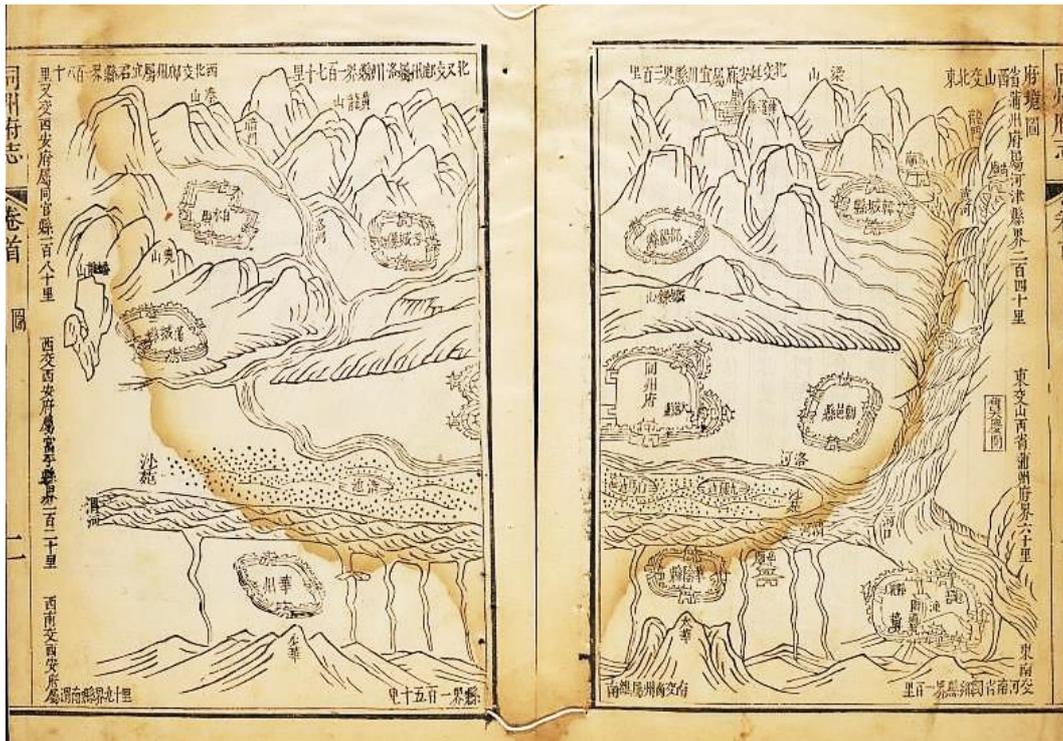


Figure 3: Domain map of the prefecture 府境圖, *Tongzhou fuzhi* 同州府志 (1741), “Tu” 圖, 1b-2a. Image source: Harvard Yenching Library (persistent link: <https://nrs.lib.harvard.edu/urn-3:fhcl:13012868?n=42>)

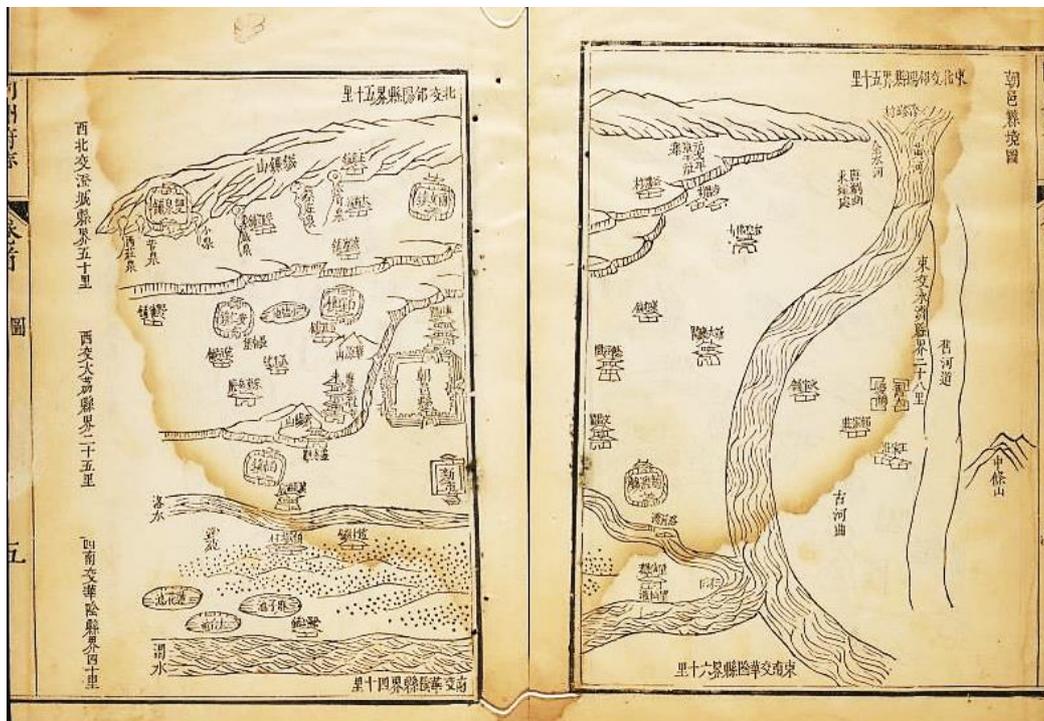


Figure 4: Domain map of Chaoyi county 朝邑縣境圖, *Tongzhou fuzhi*, “Tu”, 4b-5a. Harvard Yenching Library (persistent link: <https://nrs.lib.harvard.edu/urn-3:fhcl:13012868?n=45>)

Destined for printing rather than copying, images in local gazetteers are generally not depicted in an aesthetic manner. In the case of the Yellow River, its representations in local gazetteers often exhibit a style falling between a technical one, which features topographical details, and a narrative one, which focuses on human activities. An example of the former is the mid-Qing “Comprehensive picture of the Yellow River from origin to the sea” 黃河發源歸海全圖. The section of the river north of Lake Hongze near Huai’an, in present-day Jiangsu, shows the sites of three shrines of river gods and various types of flood control infrastructure, such as dikes, dams, sluices, and channels (Figure 5). An example of the river in narrative paintings is the eighteenth-century “Picture of transport supervision on the Yellow River” 黃河督運圖. In this propagandistic painting, the river flows in peace and grandeur under the watch of officials to create a sense of orderly governance (Figure 6). Unlike either style, the depiction of the Yellow River in local gazetteers usually adopts a hybrid form between the purely technical and the excessively propagandistic.

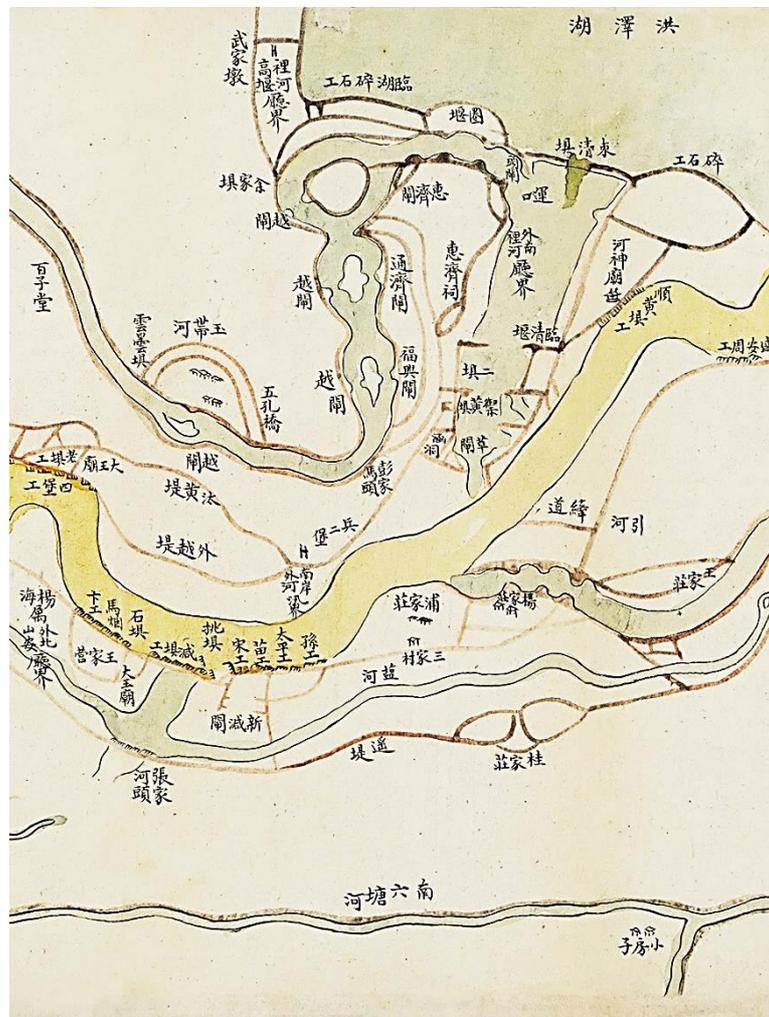


Figure 5: Section of “Comprehensive picture of the Yellow River from origin to the sea” 黃河發源歸海全圖, author unknown, mid-Qing. National Library of China, Beijing.

[http://www.nlc.cn/nmcb/gcjpdz/yt/dwdy/201409/t20140904\\_89402.htm](http://www.nlc.cn/nmcb/gcjpdz/yt/dwdy/201409/t20140904_89402.htm) (last accessed 18 September 2022)

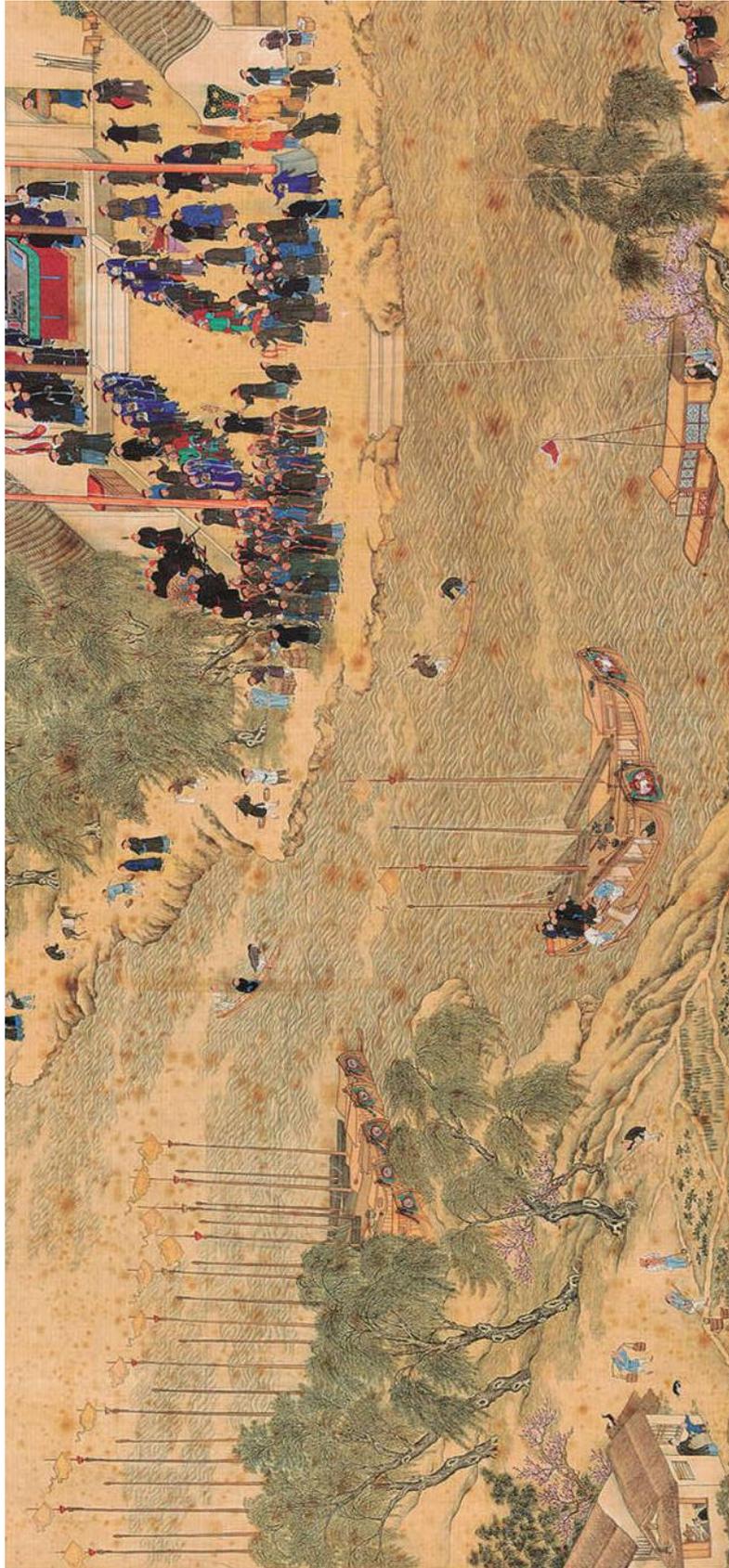


Figure 6: Section of “Picture of transport supervision on the Yellow River” 黃河督運圖, author unknown, Kangxi period. For auction with Mingxuan 明軒 International Auction at Shanghai as of 2016. <http://www.mxpm.net/show.aspx?id=699&cid=33> (last accessed 18 September 2022)

In what follows, I will discuss the distinctive styles of depicting the Yellow River in two levels of local gazetteers: the regional level and the county level. Each case in the two categories shows that visual representations of the Yellow River contributed to the formation of its unique local roles.

## Regional images of the Yellow River

### Yan'an – Regional border and defence

Yan'an 延安 prefecture, bounded by the Yellow River on its eastern border, was located to the south of the River Bend (*hetao* 河套), a vast flood plain enclosed on the north by the Yellow River flowing around the periphery of the Ordos Plateau and stretching to the north of the Great Wall in present-day Shaanxi. Since the mid-Ming, Yan'an had been a military front against the nomads who roamed the River Bend, of which the Ming court had lost control. Towards the end of the Ming and into the early Qing, the River Bend changed from a military frontier to an area of ethnic separation between the Mongol and Han ethnicities divided by the Great Wall (Liu 2004, 22–27; Shu and Liu 2012, 83–88). According to Ruth Mostern, by the seventeenth century, multiple lines of fortified walls ultimately stretched across the grasslands and fragile soils of the River Bend. Ethnic cleansing of the Ordos had made it a region of exclusively Chinese political and cultural dominance that was devoted primarily to agriculture (Mostern 2021, 189–191). Since the conquest of its nomadic Mongol tribes by the Qing in 1635, the area had become part of the Qing territory and been brought under the control of the Qing regime mainly through enfeoffments.

In 1697, the Kangxi emperor commented on his strategy towards the River Bend: "If the Mongols are harnessed properly, even though the River Bend is under their control, how can they do any harm?" (若控馭蒙古有道，則河套雖為所據，安能為患)<sup>22</sup> But the change of the River Bend's status in the early Qing did not affect how Yan'an perceived itself. The 1680 local gazetteer of Yan'an still saw Yan'an as a frontier area with a strong legacy of military defence. To highlight Yan'an's military legacy, compilers of the prefectural gazetteer of Yan'an (*Yan'an fuzhi* 延安府志) surveyed in great detail the history of the River Bend area.<sup>23</sup> They stressed its strategic importance in that "to contend for the River Bend is the way to plan for Yan'an" (爭河套所以籌延安也).<sup>24</sup>

<sup>22</sup> *Da Qing yitong zhi* 大清一統志 (1788), 196.53a–b. For a survey of the strategic status of the River Bend in earlier times, see Chang 1936, 9–24.

<sup>23</sup> *Yan'an fuzhi*, "Hetao" 河套, 1.3a, 1.6a.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, "Hetao", 1.6b.

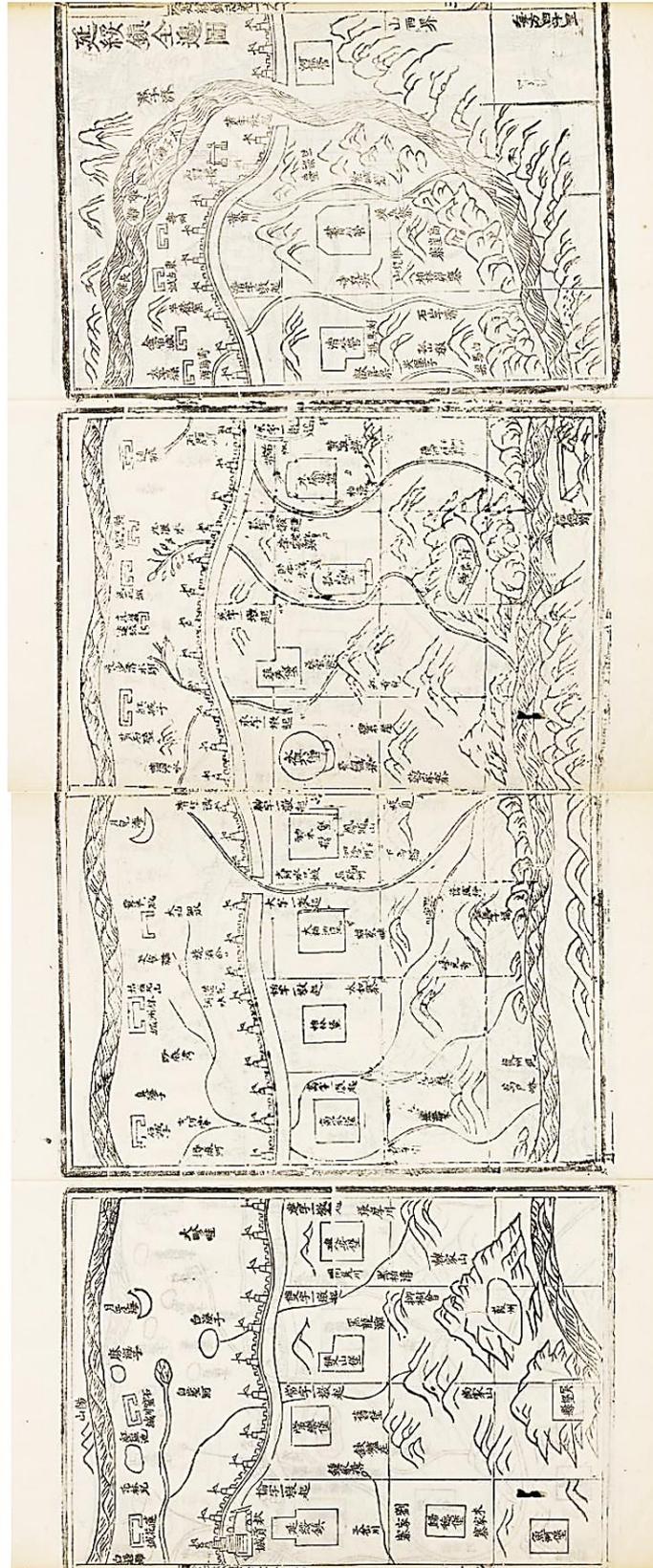


Figure 7a: Map of the complete borders of Yan Sui garrisons 延綏鎮全邊圖 (part I), *Yan Sui zhenzhi* 延綏鎮志, “Tu pu” 圖譜, 3b–5a. Image source: Harvard Yenching Library (persistent link: <https://mrs.lib.harvard.edu/urn-3:fhcl:13411981?n=32&33>)

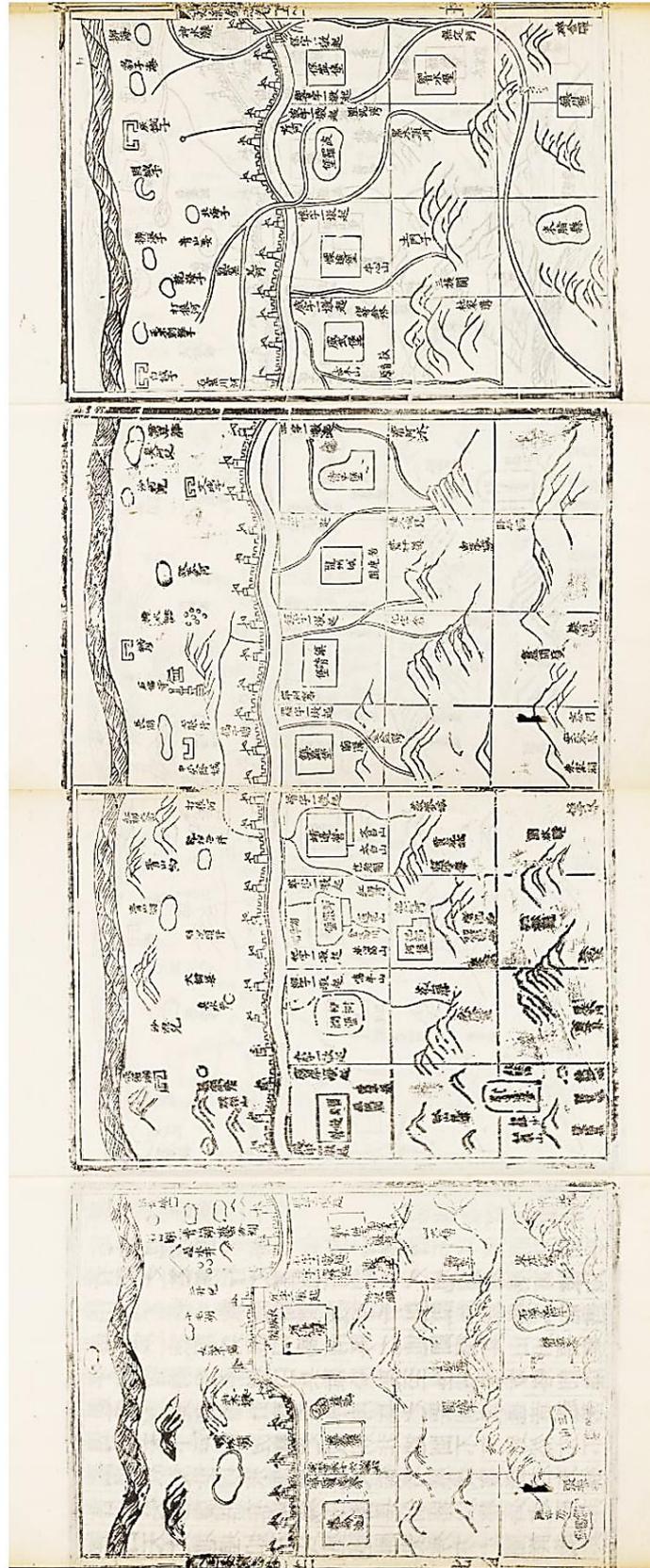


Figure 7b: Map of the complete borders of Yan Sui garrisons 延綏鎮全邊圖 (part II), *Yan Sui zhenzhi* 延綏鎮志, "Tu pu" 圖譜, 5b-7a. Image source: Harvard Yenching Library (persistent link: <https://nrs.lib.harvard.edu/urn-3:fhcl:13411981?n=34&35>)

To express visually how they perceived Yan'an, the compilers of the gazetteer of Yan'an adopted various visual techniques in its maps. The "Map of the complete borders of Yan Sui garrisons" (*Yan Sui zhen quanbian tu* 延綏鎮全邊圖) represented the Yellow River as the border for the whole River Bend area. The vast area, meanwhile, was arranged into a prolonged shape enveloped within the Yellow River. As a result of this peculiar distortion of the area, the Great Wall runs across the Bend horizontally (Figure 7).<sup>25</sup> The horizontal arrangement conveys a stronger visual force of defence from the perspective of those inside the Great Wall as opposed to outside of it. This visual arrangement in the map signals Yan'an's strong local identity as a military front, as shown through the numerous military forts inside the Great Wall. The status of Yan'an during a time of peace in the early Qing, however, was represented through marking out orderly places of civility, such as the various sites of counties (*cheng* 城 or *chengzi* 城子) and temples (*si* 寺), as well as ferries (*ji* 濟), wells (*jing* 井), and channels (*gou* 溝).

The map also shows points of visual contradiction due to the agenda of highlighting one particular aspect of Yan'an. On the one hand, to exhibit the strategic location of Yan'an, the map had to include the Yellow River as well as the whole River Bend. However, it dedicated two thirds of its space to portray in great detail the topography of Yan'an, leaving only the remaining one-third of its space for the River Bend area, whose span was many times broader. On the other hand, this perspective cannot explain the bird's-eye view when it came to representing the Yellow River—it appears in equal width for the reader on both the near end and the far end. Together, the map's visual arrangements suggest the perception of the Yellow River on Yan'an's far north as a strategic presence.

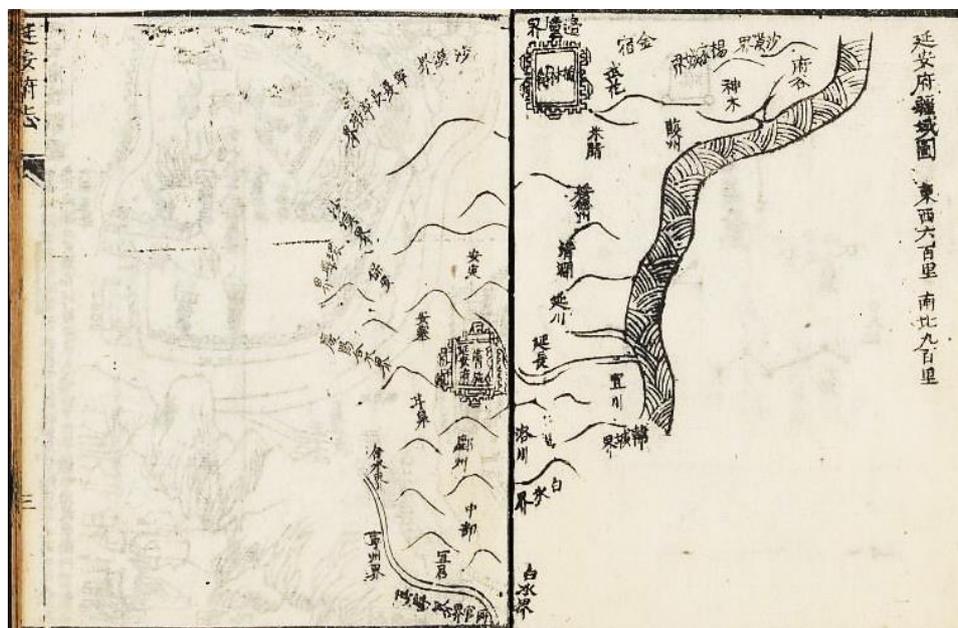


Figure 8: Map of borders and territories of Yan'an prefecture 延安府疆域圖, *Yan'an fuzhi* 延安府志, "Tu" 2b-3a. Image source: Harvard Yenching Library (persistent link: <https://nrs.lib.harvard.edu/urn:3:fhcl:13034892?n=73>)

<sup>25</sup> The map took the spatial perspective from the south-east, looking to the north-west. In contrast, a modern cartographic representation of the River Bend in 1820 shows that the Great Wall runs diagonally. See Tan et al. 1987, 26-27.

In contrast, to the east of Yan'an prefecture, the Yellow River served more as a natural border. The "Map of borders and territories" uses bold brush strokes to represent the powerful presence of the Yellow River, contrasting with the gentle lines used to depict mountains and minor rivers in the area (Figure 8). The Yellow River is represented in such a way as to resemble the backbone of Yan'an, providing a stable structure not only for Yan'an's geographical features but also for its administration.

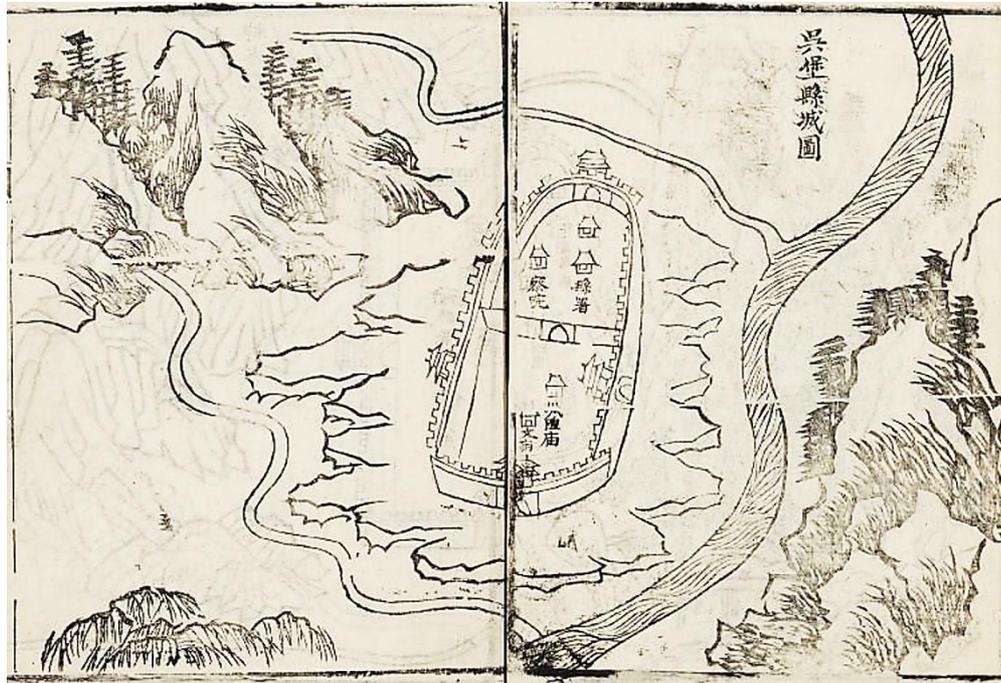


Figure 9a: Map of Wubao county 吳堡縣城圖, *Yan'an fuzhi*, 20b-21a. Image source: Harvard Yenching Library (persistent link: <https://nrs.lib.harvard.edu/urn-3:fhcl:13034892?n=91>)

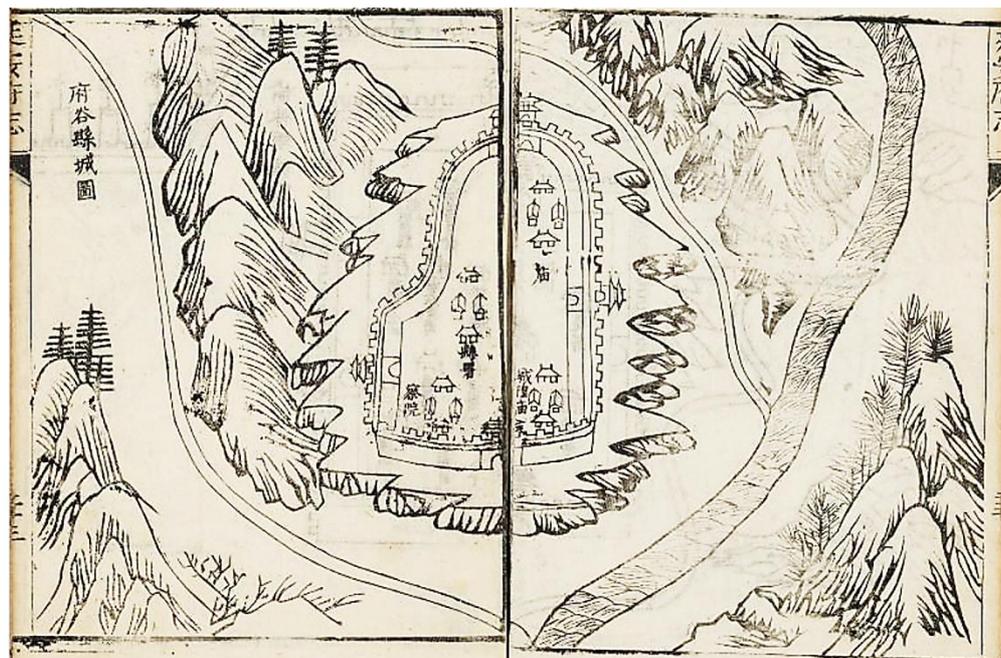


Figure 9b: Map of Fugu county 府谷縣城圖, *Yan'an fuzhi*, 22b-23a. Image source: Harvard Yenching Library (persistent link: <https://nrs.lib.harvard.edu/urn-3:fhcl:13034892?n=93>)

The compilers of *Yan'an fuzhi* also perceived the Yellow River as in peaceful coexistence with the counties of Yan'an. Their depictions of the Yellow River in county maps mostly feature a harmless river. For example, maps of both Wubao 吳堡 and Fugu 府谷 counties employed the same pattern. Both counties are protected by mountains, while minor rivers flow harmlessly past them and join the Yellow River (Figures 9a, 9b). Both are located safely along the west bank of the Yellow River on elevated lands much higher than the water level. Within the county walls, even the same sites were marked out—administrations such as the County Office (*xianshu* 縣署) and the Investigation Bureau (*chayuan* 察院), and religious sites such as the Confucius Temple (*wenmiao* 文廟) and the City God Temple (*chenghuang miao* 城隍廟). Most county maps for Yan'an in the same gazetteer share these patterns in depicting their landscape. The representation of the Yellow River as a major border, either regional or local, points to the common perception of it as part of the geographical and political experience of the local population.

### Henan – Cultural symbol and diversified streams

The Yellow River in Henan had long been a cultural symbol since the time of the early classics and historical records. First, its association with ancient sages appears early in the canonical “Attached statements” (Xici 繫辭) in the *Book of Changes* (*Yijing* 易經), which states that ancient sages used as models the auspicious signs from the Yellow River and the Luo River (河出圖，洛出書，聖人則之).<sup>26</sup> There is a long history of apocryphal and commentarial interpretation of this classical statement. But the mainstream interpretation established since the Tang official commentary was the one summarised in the 1660 *Henan tongzhi*. Beside two images of the River Chart (*Hetu* 河圖) and the Luo Writing (*Luoshu* 洛書), it states that, “In high antiquity when the legendary king Fuxi 伏羲 ruled the world, his sagely virtue reached Heaven. Since Heaven did not keep the Way to itself, a dragon-horse carrying the Chart emerged from the Yellow River” (昔者伏羲氏之王天下也，聖德格天。天不愛道，故龍馬負圖而出於河).<sup>27</sup> The tale of Fuxi is paired up with the story of a later sage king, Yu 禹, the founder of the legendary Xia dynasty (c. 2070–c. 1600 BCE). It draws a parallel in that “In high antiquity of the divine Yu, Earth was spread out and Heaven was completed. Since Earth did not keep treasures to itself, a divine tortoise bearing the Writing appeared in the Luo River” (維昔神禹，地平天成。地不愛寶，故神龜戴書而呈於洛).<sup>28</sup>

The two rivers in Henan—the Yellow River and the Luo River—then had a symbolic meaning bestowed on them: it was through the rivers that Heaven delivered messages to sage kings. The two ancient messages come in the form of two schematic diagrams—the River Chart composed of numbers one to ten in dots and the Luo Writing of numbers one to nine in lines.<sup>29</sup> But local gazetteers were written for general readers; therefore the 1660 *Henan tongzhi* added pictorial representations under the more abstract numerological

<sup>26</sup> *Zhouyi zhengyi* 周易正義, 7.29b.

<sup>27</sup> *Henan tongzhi*, “Tu kao” 圖考, 1.13b.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.14b.

<sup>29</sup> The two images obtained their current form mainly in the eleventh-century commentary on the *Book of Changes*—Liu Mu’s 劉牧 *Yishu gouyin tu* 易數鉤隱圖 (*Daozang* edition).

diagrams (Figure 10). Again, these depictions were not new in the early Qing but were copied from illustrated commentaries produced since Song times. These images help to strengthen the roles of the two iconic rivers in Henan as influential cultural symbols.

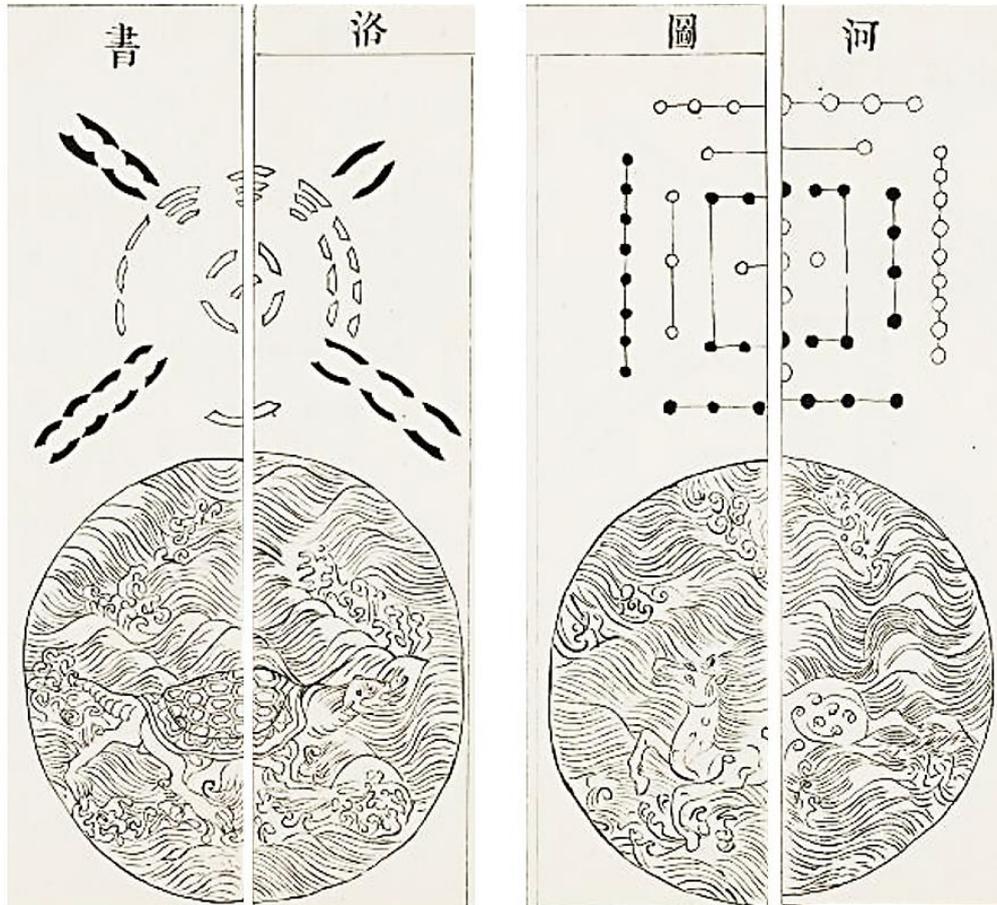


Figure 10: The River Chart 河圖 and the Luo Writing 洛書, *Henan tongzhi* 河南通志, “Tukao” 圖考, 1.13b-15a. Image source: Harvard Yenching Library (persistent link: <https://nrs.lib.harvard.edu/urn-3:fhcl:12326303?n=134&135>)

Furthermore, there was an entrenched notion of Henan as the land of ancient sage kings and the centre of All-under-Heaven. In early classics, both the canonical *Shang shu* and *Shi ji* 史記 (*Records of the Grand Historian*) gave detailed accounts about the construction of the new Zhou capital Luoyi 洛邑, which was regarded as the centre of All-under-Heaven.<sup>30</sup> The 1660 Henan gazetteer included a brief text, alongside a map, telling a reduced version of the story:

King Wu 武王 [1076-1043 BCE] moved the Nine Tripods to Luo and planned to take Luo as the capital. [His younger brother] Duke Zhou 周公 [fl. 11<sup>th</sup> century BCE] accomplished this, building the Royal Capital to accommodate the Nine Tripods and equalising tributes from the four quarters.

<sup>30</sup> *Shangshu zhengyi* 尚書正義, “Luo gao” 洛誥, 15.1a; and *Shi ji* 史記, “Zhou benji” 周本紀, 4.133.

He then built Chengzhou to place the recalcitrant people [of the previous Shang regime] for them to stay close to the imperial clan and to achieve their submission.

武王遷九鼎于洛邑，意欲宅洛。周公成之，建王城以居九鼎，俾四方朝貢均焉。又營成周以處頑民，俾密邇王室，式化厥訓。<sup>31</sup>

The sense of cultural privilege—a deep connection to ancient sages—found expression in the hypothetical “Map of Duke Zhou constructing the capital of Luo yi” 周公營洛邑圖. It features two parts of the planned new capital Luo yi—the Royal Capital 王城 and Chengzhou 成周—in the centre surrounded by three mountain ranges and four rivers (Figure 11). On the map, the Yellow River is arranged on the top and connected to the capitals through the Luo River. The Yellow River is also portrayed as a greater river, like a dragon, compared to the four local streams. While it does not appear in the Zhou story, its inclusion in the map as an outstanding element signals its cultural significance. Symbolically, the Yellow River provides a more distant origin of the legitimacy to rule, as embodied in the bestowal of the River Chart discussed above. The depiction of it on the hypothetical map, therefore, conveys the message that the Yellow River had been crucial to Henan’s cultural heritage of sagely rulership in antiquity.

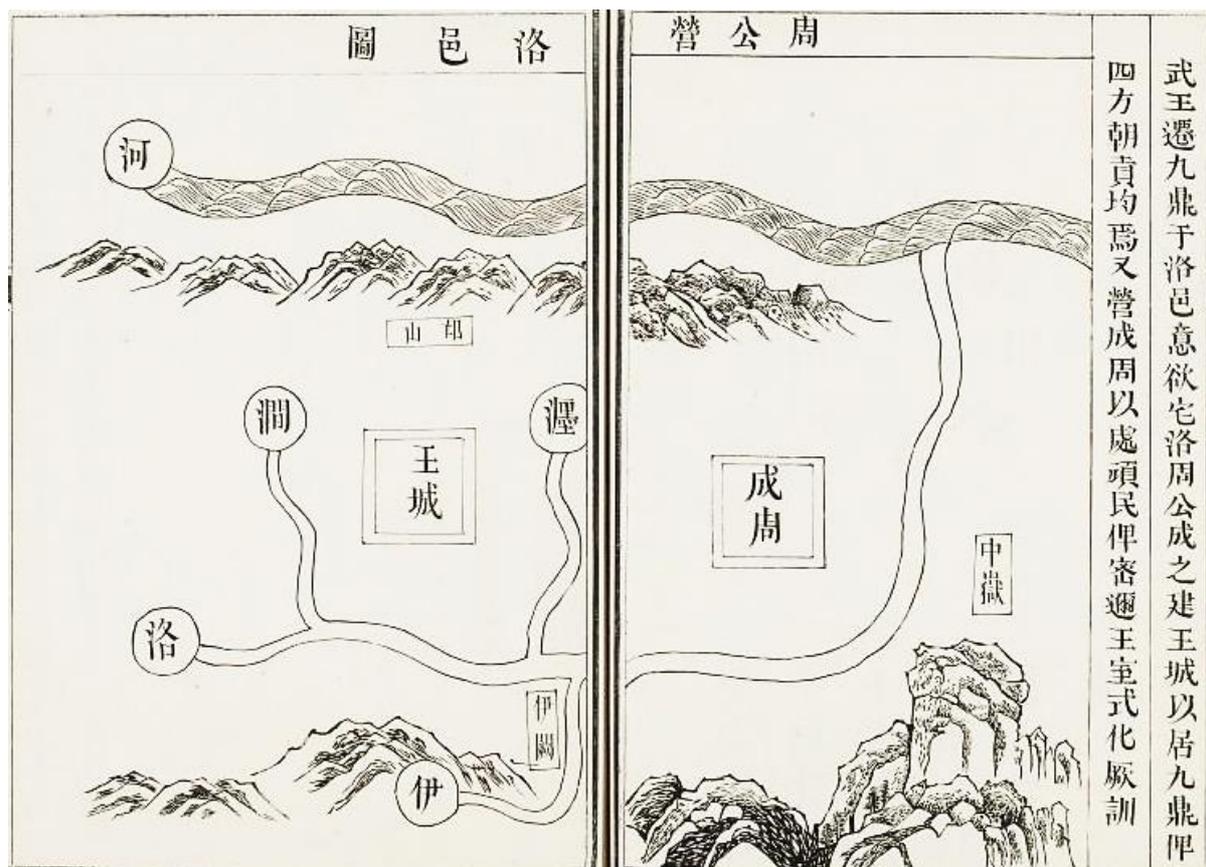


Figure 11: Map of Duke Zhou constructing the capital of Luo yi 周公營洛邑圖, *Henan tongzhi* 河南通志, “Tukao” 圖考, 1.17b-18a. Image source: Harvard Yenching Library (persistent link: <https://nrs.lib.harvard.edu/urn-3:fhcl:12326303?n=138>)

<sup>31</sup> *Henan tongzhi*, “Tu kao” 圖考, 1.17b.

The administrative area of Henan remained largely unchanged from the Ming to the early Qing and so did the perception of Henan's strategic location. The 1660 *Henan tongzhi* exhibits a continued pride in Henan's cultural heritage and strategic significance. Literati officials of the time, who were associated with Henan either by official position or by birth, proudly commented on Henan's distinctiveness in their prefaces to this gazetteer. One wrote that:

Our Great Liang [present-day Kaifeng in Henan] is in fact located in the central area of the world. ... Here, both nature and the human world are grand and resplendent, the greatest of the empire. Emperors and kings made it their capital repeatedly; sages and worthies emerged for generations; its customs and cultivation naturally stood out.

吾大梁所隸，寔為大塊之中區... 其間山川人事鉅麗，弁于天下。帝王更都，聖賢代作，風教固殊焉。<sup>32</sup>

There was also a shared identity among these literati officials derived from the central strategic location of Henan. One claimed that "Our land is located at the centre of the empire" (吾邦處天下之中).<sup>33</sup> Another was more specific that "Due to the geography of Yu 豫 [Henan], in the past it was taken as the centre to settle the tripods [i.e. establish a capital] and today it is a strategic site of unparalleled importance" (豫之形勢，昔則宅中定鼎，今則鎖鑰獨急也).<sup>34</sup> Yet another further declared that "Henan is the key to the empire. Order in Henan is the start of order for the empire" (夫河南天下之樞也，河南之治，天下之治之始也).<sup>35</sup> These testimonies to the Henan identity are just a few from the large number of prefaces written for the 1660 gazetteer.

Both perceptions of Henan, as the origin of ancient sages and as the centre of the whole territory, rely on the Yellow River as a major geographical reference. The domain map of Henan shows its nine prefectures, among which six are located along the Yellow River. Their shared cultural association may have contributed to a unique overview of the Yellow River which is not found in other provincial-level gazetteers. On the section of the Yellow River flowing through Henan, compilers of the 1660 *Henan tongzhi* commented that "Among the nine bends of the Yellow River, five are located on Chinese lands; and Henan has two. Now one has been lost" (大河九曲，五在中華。豫得其二，今且失一矣).<sup>36</sup> The first bend of the Yellow River in Henan refers to the south-flowing river turning almost ninety degrees eastward at Tongguan. The second, lost bend refers to the change of the river course in eastern Henan, from heading north-east to south-east. The compilers then gave an assessment of the natural setting of the river:

From Mengjin upstream, the many mountains contain its water so that its strength is restrained. Downstream from [its two tributaries of] the River Xing and the River Si, it exits the highlands into lower ground, starting to broaden out and prone to overflowing dikes.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., Xu Zuomei preface, 1b-2a.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 2a.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., Li Mu preface, 3a.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., Li Cuiran preface, 2a-b.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., "He fang" 河防, 9.1a.

自孟津以上，群山束水，勢不得肆；自滎汜以下，出險就易，始汗漫善決。<sup>37</sup>

Through this overall evaluation of the Yellow River, accompanied by a detailed visual depiction, readers of the gazetteer of Henan were expected to achieve good governance that would spare labour and allocate provincial resources evenly.<sup>38</sup>

The representation of the Yellow River in *Henan tongzhi* has two implications. First, it reflects the river's natural features. On a long scroll, it depicts the section of the Yellow River flowing through Henan with details of the topography on both riverbanks (Figure 12). The upper reach between the Tong Pass 潼關 at the western end of the map and Zhengzhou 鄭州, which is close to the middle, features a mountainous landscape, with the river flowing between the mountain range of Taihang on its north and various mountains on its south. Between Meng county 孟縣 and Zhengzhou, four smaller rivers—Ji 濟, Luo 洛, Si 汜, and Qin 沁—join the Yellow River, gradually increasing its volume of water. It is in this section that flood prevention infrastructure starts to appear on the map to the north of the river. Further downstream, the river flows on to open land and we see flood prevention infrastructure in larger numbers and more diversified types, such as diverging channels, dikes, and dams, mostly on the north bank. These details in depiction exhibit profound local knowledge of, and experience with, the Yellow River as an important part of Henan's natural environment.

Second, the depiction of the Yellow River may be diverse in style. Unlike for Shaanxi and Shanxi 山西, where the Yellow River was mostly a great regional border, for Henan, the river was culturally symbolic and naturally diversified. Its unique presence in Henan is manifested in the three different types of wave patterns on the map. From Tong Pass to Mengjin 孟津, the water waves are shown in a regulated and controlled style, to reflect the fact that they were contained by the mountainous riverbanks (Figure 12a). Then from Mengxian 孟縣 to Chenliu 陳留, the depiction of the river starts to show wilder waves, the width of which is several times that of the previous section (Figure 12b). The last section of the river from Lanyang 蘭陽 to Yongcheng 永城 at the east end of the map shows a wave pattern that is long and smooth, representing the river as tamed and made more civil (Figure 12c).

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., Liang Yuming preface, 4b.

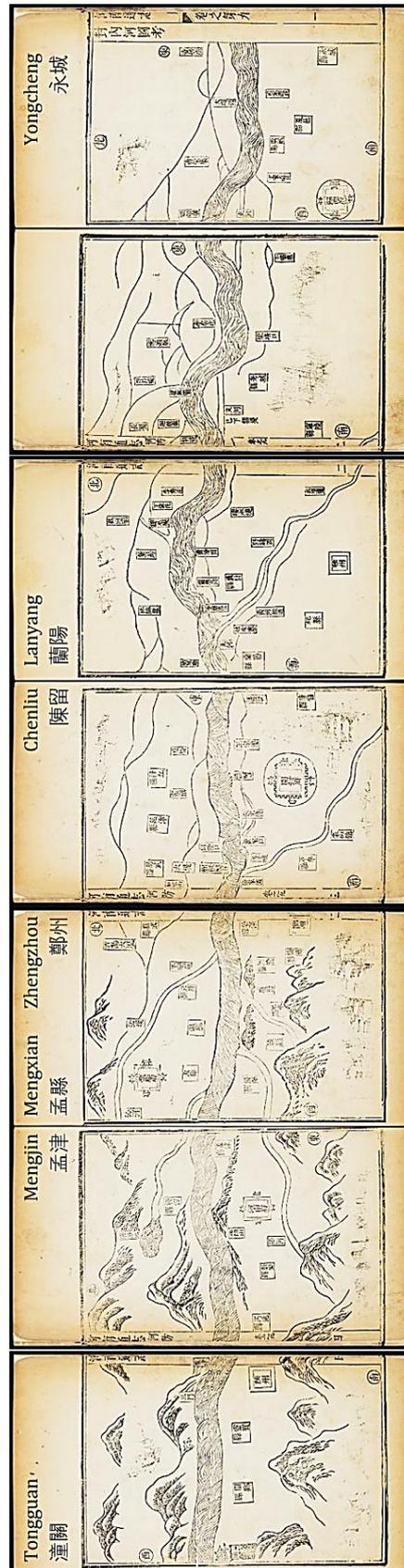


Figure 12: "Map investigating the River within the boundary" 封内河圖考, *Henan tongzhi*, 9.1b-4b. Image source: Harvard Yenching Library (persistent link: <https://nrs.lib.harvard.edu/urn-3:fhcl:12326303?n=363> until 366)

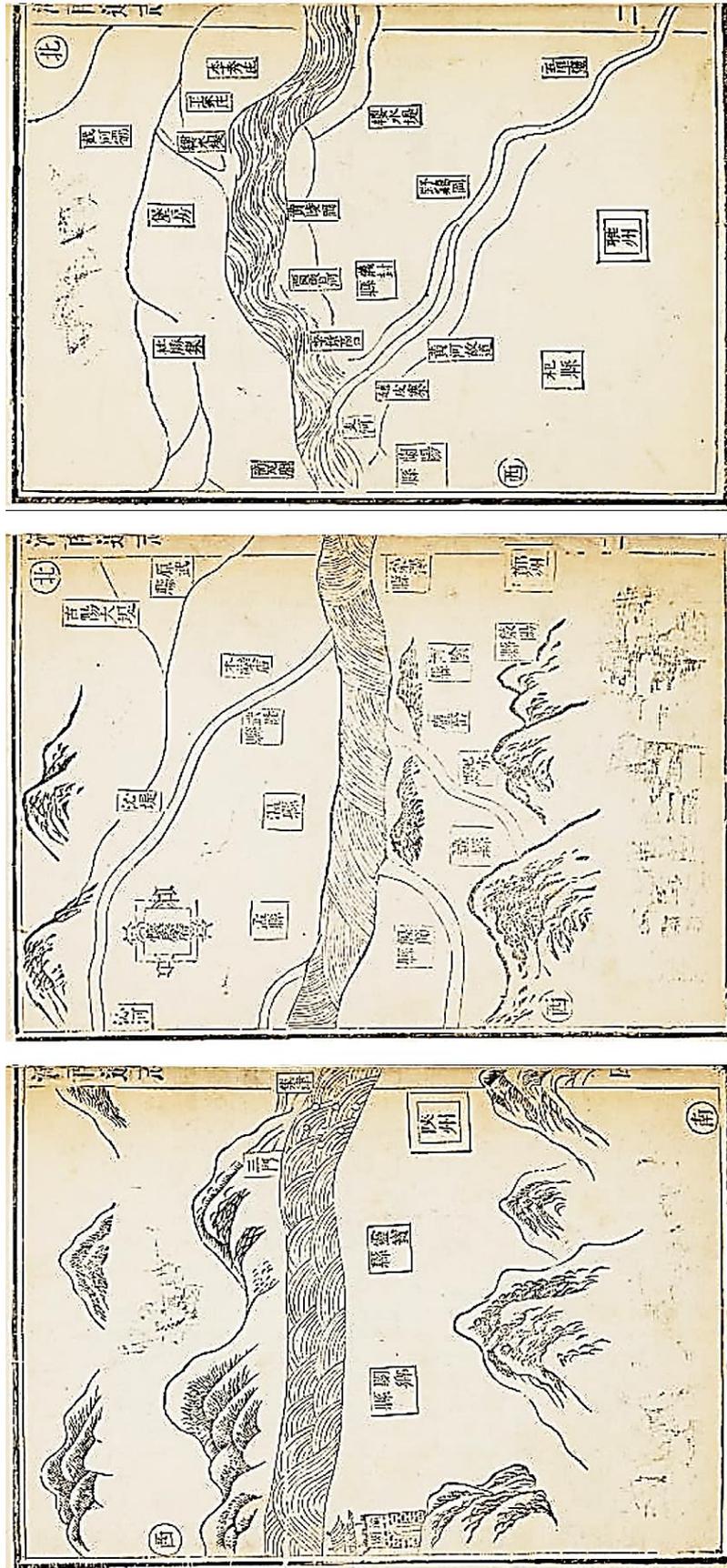


Figure 12a, 12b, 12c: Different wave patterns in the “Map investigating the River within the boundary”.  
Image source: Harvard Yenching Library (persistent link: same as above)

The differentiation of wave patterns within the same map may show a careful evaluation of the water force of the river in different regions. Yet it may also be a visual detail with political significance. Two other maps in the same 1660 gazetteer of Henan, a map of Luoyang in ancient times (Figure 11) and a contemporary domain map, both depict the Yellow River with a single wave pattern. We may explain the homogeneous wave pattern as serving the purpose of portraying the Yellow River as a unitary cultural icon; for that purpose, no local variations are necessary. In contrast, a map dedicated to representing the Yellow River for contemporary purposes needs finer details and regional distinctions. Furthermore, the smooth wave pattern in Figure 12c stands in stark contrast with the wild wave style used in the local gazetteer of another adjacent locality in the lower stream (Figure 14a, discussed below). Here, as an image included in a provincial gazetteer—an official document to some degree—the representation of the Yellow River in its lower reaches needs to reflect the efficacy of the huge amount of effort and resources put into river defence. In that area, with the presence of multiple flood prevention infrastructure, the river was supposed to flow smoothly and under control.

### County-level expressions about flood defence

Towards the east end of the river course, accounts of the river became dominated by flood control and other preventive measures. As the folk saying explained, “In ten *dou* of turbid water from the Yellow River, six are mud. Sufferings are many, benefits are occasional” (濁河一石，其泥六斗。患苦良多，利益時有).<sup>39</sup> Flooding of the Yellow River had especially affected its middle reaches, mainly in present-day Henan. This is in stark contrast to the fact that none of the local gazetteers of the upper to middle-stream region depict sections titled “River defences” (*hefang* 河防). Local gazetteers of the lower reaches, therefore, provided much detailed information about the construction and maintenance of dikes and the division of local responsibilities in this collective enterprise.

Flood management required a huge amount of labour resources, and local authorities might respond to flooding disasters in different ways. Since the Five Dynasties, both central and local authorities had developed a systematised and coordinated procedure to report and record flood disasters (Chang Liao-ch’ieh 1935, 5–19). For central authorities from the Northern Song onwards, the management of the Yellow River had had two major aims: taming or rerouting the river and prioritising the socio-economic well-being of the central plains (Zhang 2016, 141–161). Yet on the local level, a prefect’s levee maintenance simply accelerated the river’s current through his jurisdiction and passed the problem along, exacerbating flooding further downstream.<sup>40</sup>

Separate from fiscal and labour arrangements by the central state, local gazetteer writing reflects people’s experience and attitudes toward flood defence at the county level. For the various local regions which

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<sup>39</sup> *Caoxian zhi*, “Hefang zhi” 河防志, 7.1a. For its earlier source, see *Han shu* 漢書, “Gouxu zhi” 溝洫志, 29.1697.

<sup>40</sup> Ruth Mostern also took the eleventh century as an example. Officials’ career advancement depended in part on what transpired along the river within their jurisdictions. This encouraged local rather than systemic responses, and it fostered inconsistency between one district and the next. A new bureaucratic infrastructure therefore emerged to gather, store, and protect material and mobilise workers. See Mostern 2021, 160.

suffered from regular, sometimes repeated, floodings, not only did they rely on the central state for disaster relief, but they also needed to mobilise their own resources—reserves of food supply, materials, labour, etc.—to overcome these hardships. In the administration of flood or famine relief, images illustrating disaster accounts could act as visual agents to influence policy (Clunas 2007, 12). They add especially to the persuasiveness of the text in calling for immediate political action.

### Cao county – active effort

Cao county 曹縣 in present-day Shandong was an outstanding case in portraying the Yellow River as the cause of natural disasters and regional bickering. Cao county was located to the north of the Yellow River. It had been subject to flooding from the early dynasties, and subsequently these experiences led to specific local knowledge about floods and preventive measures. In 1673, the local authority of Cao county compiled the *Caoxian zhi* in response to the 1672 decree for the central authority's compilation of the *Da Qing yitong zhi* 大清一統志.<sup>41</sup> The Cao county gazetteer included a special section on the definitions and descriptions of seasonal flood waters (*shuihou* 水候) throughout the year. Besides detailed information about measures for building, monitoring, and maintaining the dikes, it also recorded disputes with neighbouring counties regarding local responsibilities for flood prevention.

Cao county's perception of the Yellow River came together with the self-declaration and self-defence of its own status as a critical point in combating floods. On its soil, there had been three major flood control projects, one in the Yuan and two in the Ming.<sup>42</sup> For this reason, Cao county perceived itself as a major contributor, providing more than its obligatory share of effort, to the safety and prosperity of the area. The "Records of river defences" in its gazetteer commented as follows:

No doubt this belt of river, on the upper [state] level, determines the ease of the transportation of grain tax, and on the lower [local] level, affects prefectures and counties along its course. It is not only the people of Cao county who worry about being flooded. Yet when the dikes are breached, the people of Cao are the first victims of the disaster. In repairing the breaches, the people of Cao are tasked with most of the labour. Those who benefit from the completion of this task should remember this.

蓋此一衣帶水，上係漕運之通塞，下關瀕河之州縣，不止曹人有其魚之優也。而衝決之時，曹人首罹其害；堵塞之際，曹人偏職其勞。膺平成之託者，尚其軫念焉。<sup>43</sup>

This attitude portrayed in the local gazetteer of Cao county was probably a response to a dispute two years earlier with the bordering Kaocheng 考城 county in Henan, regarding the division of responsibility for building preventive dikes. In 1683, Kaocheng county, a neighbour of Cao county also on the north

<sup>41</sup> *Caoxian zhi*, Men Kerong preface, 5b.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.1b.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.2a.

riverbank, appealed to the central authority to let it shed its burden of building dikes. The county complained that the project would provide more benefit for Cao county, and hence Cao county should be responsible for the project. Kaocheng argued that:

Building dikes protects only the land in Shandong, whereas maintaining them is only a burden for the people of Henan. ... This has been the case where those relying on them for protection simply enjoyed the benefit of flood control, while those who gained no benefit were in fact burdened with the labour.

築堤專衛山東之地，修防獨累河南之民。... 是資其保障者坐享平成之利，無毫裨益者反受力役之勞。<sup>44</sup>

In disagreement, Cao county raised a counterargument, saying that it had devoted more resources than it should have for the benefit of a broader area: "The dikes in Cao county add up to over 140 *li*. Together they build up a fence for canal transport extending hundreds of *li*, from which protection mostly goes to the land of other counties, whereas there is little benefit to its own" (曹邑之堤，共計一百四十餘里，總為漕運數百里之藩籬，其間捍衛外邑之地多，而專護本縣之地少).<sup>45</sup> In the local gazetteer of Cao county, therefore, the depictions of the Yellow River served not only the purpose of local flood prevention but also of negotiating responsibility, or at least of maintaining the established division of labour in flood control.

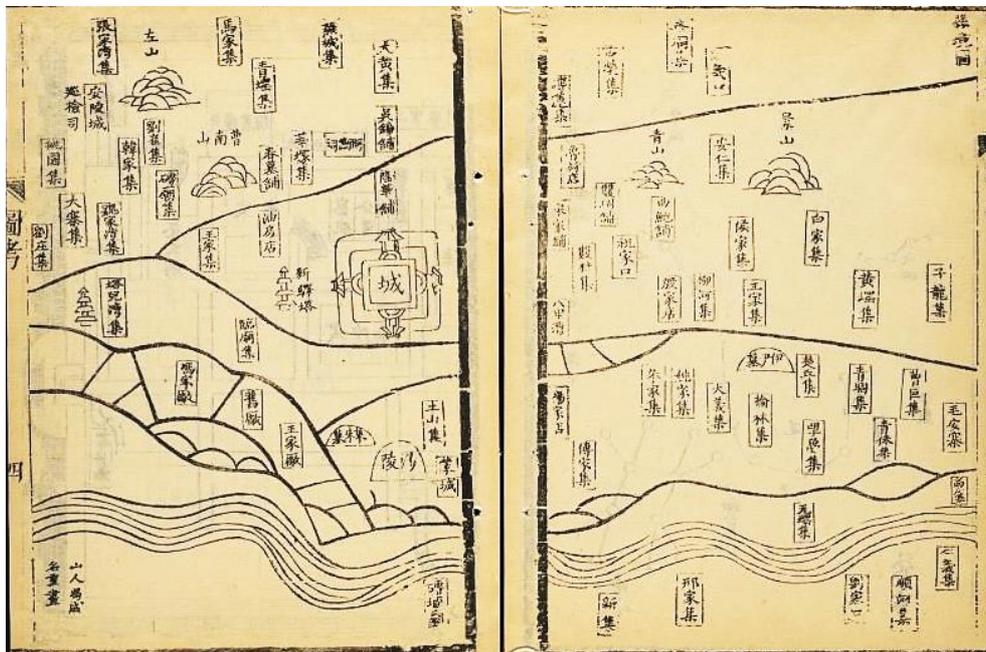


Figure 13: Map of the county domain 縣境圖, *Caoxian zhi* 曹縣志, "Caoxian xingye yudi zhitu" 曹縣星野輿地之圖, 3b-4a. Image source: Harvard Yenching Library (persistent link: <https://nrs.lib.harvard.edu/urn-3:fhcl:12242921?n=50>)

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 7.28a-28b.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 7.30a.

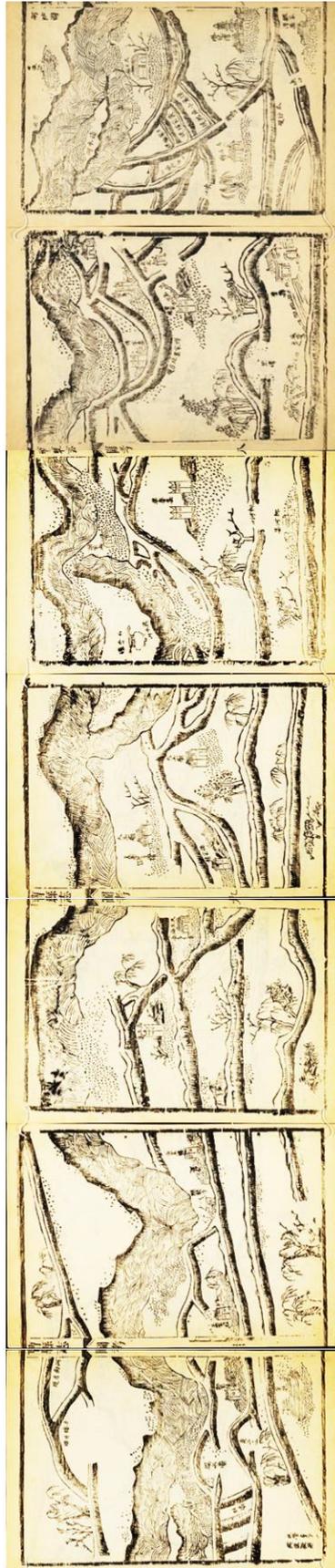


Figure 14: Map of river defences 河防圖, *Caoxian zhi*, “Caoxian xingye yudi zhitu”, 7b-10b. Image source: Harvard Yenching Library (persistent link: <https://nrs.lib.harvard.edu/urn-3:fhcl:12242921?n=54> until 57)

The "Map of the county domain" portrayed the Yellow River in simple sketches and placed it at the bottom, in the south. It also represented the river flow using arrays of simplified long wavy lines. In contrast, the more outstanding element on the map is the elaborate depiction of the dikes in bold lines along the riverbank (Figure 13). The differentiation in portraying the details suggests a focus on what the county had done in terms of flood prevention. A more detailed portrait of the river appears later in the "Map of river defences". It shows in great detail the riverbanks depicted with shading and delicate shorter lines to show the powerful force of the river flow. On the northern riverbank, oriented counter-intuitively at the bottom of the map, there is a bird's-eye view of the various flood prevention dikes. Again, this civilian infrastructure occupies a larger portion of the whole map than does the river itself (Figure 14).

The first section of the "Map of river defences" portrays in great detail the western end of the county's flood prevention projects (Figure 14a). The two major dikes in the domain of the county were the Taihang Dike 太行堤 and the Great Northern Dike 北大堤, measuring about 80 *li* and 62 *li*, respectively. The two longest dikes provided the final safety lines for the county.<sup>46</sup>

The opposite orientations and the placement of the Yellow River in these two maps show how visual style could serve the different purposes of the maps. The Yellow River flowed along the south of Cao county. While the "Map of the county domain" represents the Yellow River as a border line on the south, the "Map of river defences" shows the opposite orientation. It places the river above the county walls, creating an image of an urgent threat which the county has to fight against.

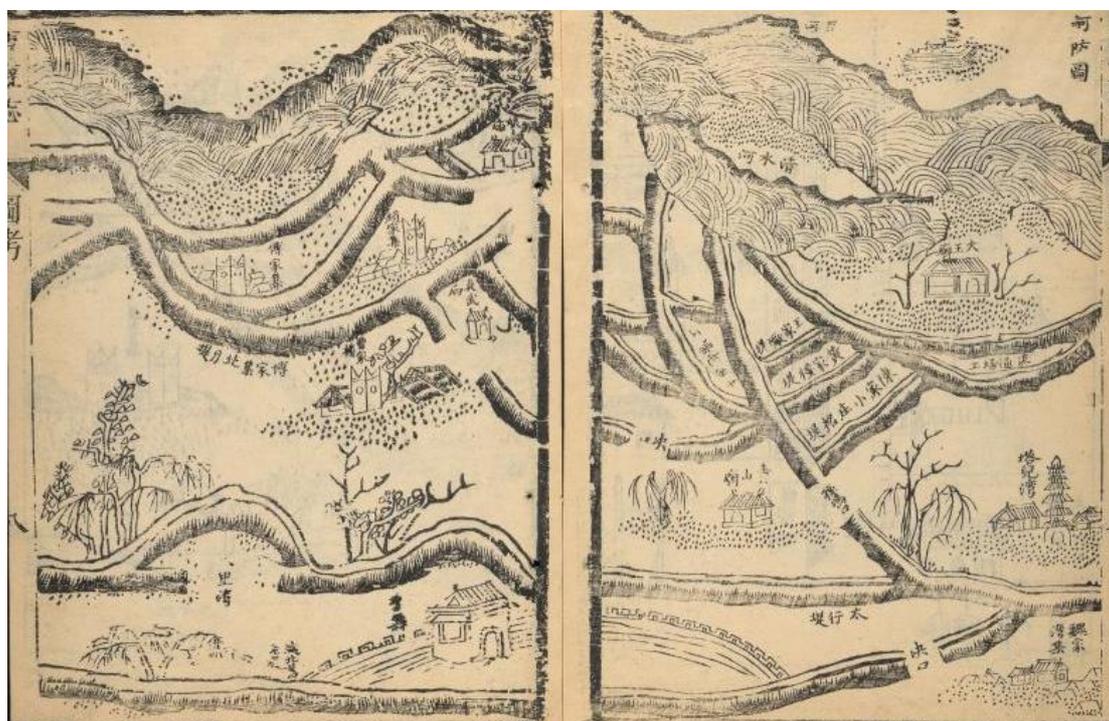


Figure 14a: The first section of the "Map of river defences". Image source: Harvard Yenching Library (persistent link: same as above)

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 7.8b.

## Heyin – disengagement

Unlike the active role played by Cao county, the small county of Heyin 河陰 in central Henan showed a relatively disengaged attitude in regard to flood prevention. The locals perceived Heyin as “a tiny place” (*zui'er zhi qu* 蕞爾之區) in front of Mt. Guangwu, which lay immediately on the south bank of the Yellow River.<sup>47</sup> The compilers of a local gazetteer of Heyin admitted that “On the map of the empire, Heyin is like a grain of millet in a vast sea” (河陰之在輿圖，譬滄海之一粟).<sup>48</sup> In the preface to the domain map in the gazetteer, members of the local gentry further expressed their negative perception: “For this small patch of land, with no strength to draw from, it is not known what could be used to compensate for its weaknesses” (藐茲片壤，無長可絕，不知短於何補哉).<sup>49</sup>

The bitterness in Heyin’s perception of itself might have been a response to the unjustified burden of labour for flood prevention. As the “Record of river defences” claims, the river flowed on the north of Mt. Guangwu, in the arms of which the domain of the county was located. Therefore, it complained that:

The county seat relies on the barrier provided by mountains. There is no need to go to the trouble of building anything. ... During summer and autumn for many years, we have helped other counties by supplying willow branches [as materials for building dikes]. Gaining no benefit from the river, the people were still burdened by it. They laboured for the benefit of others. They could only stifle their sobs in sorrow.

邑治倚山作險，不須煩畚築也。... 連歲夏秋間協濟他邑梢柳，無河之利而民悴於河，爲他人做嫁衣，蓋吞聲祇有憐矣。<sup>50</sup>

Its depiction of the Yellow River reflects this stance. Due to flooding of the river, the county had moved its administration twice, to the south of Mt. Guangwu. Local people of the county believed that the mountain stood beyond the reach of the floods. The “Map of the county domain” marked out the old county (*jiucheng* 舊城) with city walls in a perilous location on the riverbank (Figure 15). The “Map of the four reaches” (*sizhi tu* 四至圖) also portrays the Yellow River as flowing outside the shield of the mountainous areas to the north of the county (Figure 16). As the section on “Mountains and rivers” in its gazetteer describes, Mt. Guangwu is located only five *li* to the north of the county. Externally it defends the county against the great river; internally, it surrounds fertile soil and pacifies the county by the river.<sup>51</sup> Both maps highlight the natural protections for the county and illustrate an argument against the need for preventive labour on its part.

<sup>47</sup> *Heyin xianzhi*, Shen Qicai preface, 1a.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, “Tian wen” 天文, 1.2a.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, “Zong tu” 總圖, 1a.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, “He fang” 河防, 2.1a.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, “Shan chuan” 山川, 2.1a-1b.

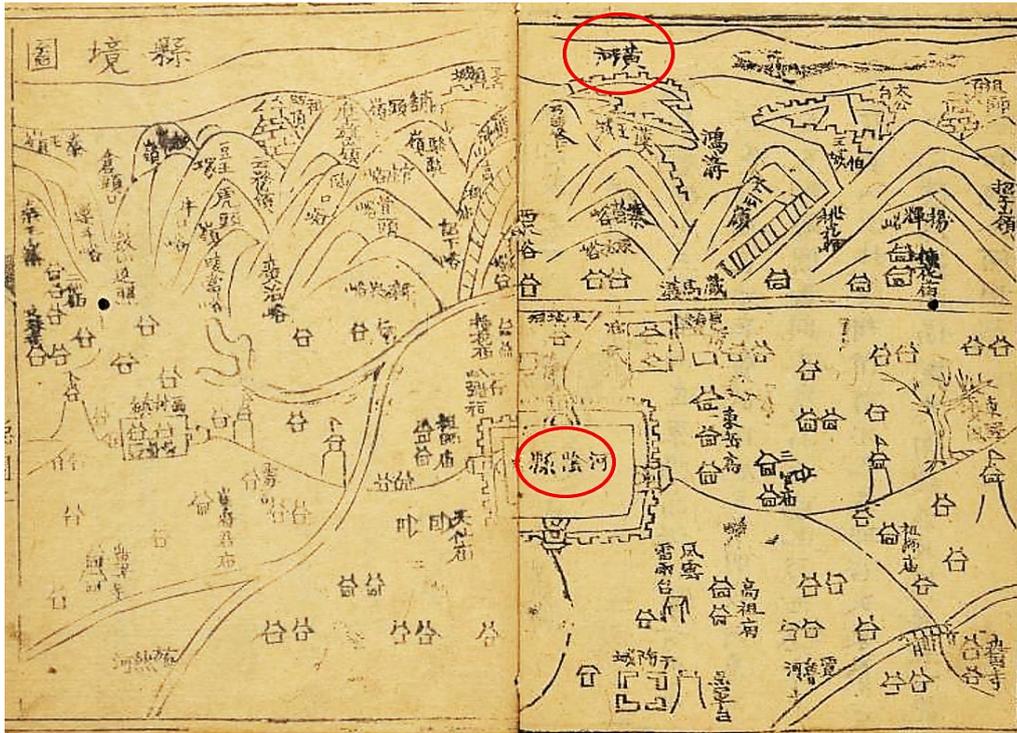


Figure 15: Map of the county domain 縣境圖, *Heyin xianzhi* 河陰縣志, “Zong tu” 總圖, 1.1b-2a. Image source: Harvard Yenching Library (persistent link: <https://nrs.lib.harvard.edu/urn-3:fhcl:12419794?n=27>)

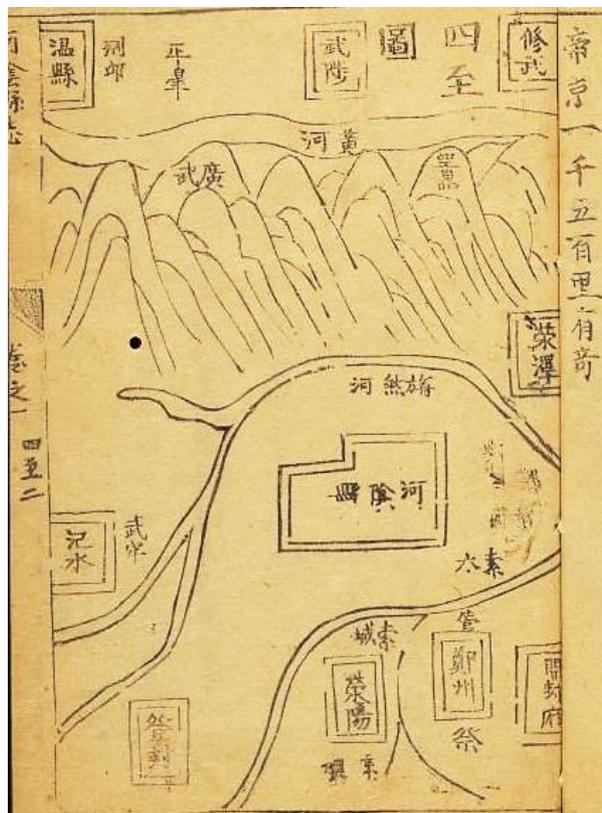


Figure 16: Map of the four reaches 四至圖, *Heyin xianzhi*, “Si zhi” 四至, 1.2a. Image source: Harvard Yenching Library (persistent link: <https://nrs.lib.harvard.edu/urn-3:fhcl:12419794?n=41>)

### Suizhou – altruistic sacrifice

Suizhou 睢州, a prefecture located in eastern Henan, provides yet another type of perception of the Yellow River. With vast stretches of land but no natural defence from great mountains and rivers,<sup>52</sup> Suizhou constantly fell victim to river flooding. Its gazetteer attributed the unpredictable and repeated flooding to the structural reasons of flat land and soft soil. Therefore, from Xingze 滎澤 to Yifeng 儀封, ranging over three hundred *li* across the whole distance, whenever there was a breach, Suizhou would always face a head-on confrontation with the flood.<sup>53</sup> Historically, there were times when Suizhou escaped flooding—when the Yellow River shifted to its northern course towards Shandong, instead of south towards Jiangsu. But then the flooding in the north would still affect the county indirectly. As the compilers commented in the section on river defences: “If the River breaches its bank towards the south, then the River causes harm; if the River flows in its old course, then corvée labour causes harm.” (河決而南則河為害，河行故道則役為害)<sup>54</sup>

The compilers, however, then turned the discourse about the infliction of suffering from the river flooding (*hehuan* 河患) into one about the county’s willingness to sacrifice its local benefit for the public good. The sections on river defences in both the 1658 and 1690 editions of the gazetteer of Suizhou include a quotation from a former Ming official in charge of the Yellow River course, who praised an official from Suizhou for wishing that the river would shift south to protect the Grand Canal as a part of the state infrastructure. The gazetteer of Suizhou reconstructed and retold the story as follows:

Cai Shigang remarked, “If the Yellow River shifts southward, it would be a blessing for the state and a benefit to the Grand Canal. It would be worth it as long as prefectures and counties directly confronting the flood have built dikes so that their city walls will not be damaged; and as long as soldiers and commoners impacted by the flood are made exempt from taxes and corvée so that they will not end up displaced.” Shigang was a Sui local. Sui suffered severely from the river, yet his remarks as such demonstrated an impartial concern for the whole of the empire.

蔡石岡云：“黃河南徙，國家之福，運道之利也。當衝郡邑作堤障之不壞城郭已矣。被災軍民免其租役不至流徙已矣。”石岡，睢人也，睢河患為甚，而其言若此，公天下為心矣。

<sup>55</sup>

The “Map of the prefectural domain” represents the Yellow River as two divergent branches surrounding the city of Suizhou (Figure 17). In contrast to the several-layered city walls, the dikes immediately surrounding the city, and the many channels radiating out from the city, the map diminished the role of the Yellow River into a relatively weak presence. Despite not having any natural defence like that of Heyin, and despite the image of Suizhou as a location confronting the flow of the river, the domain map also

<sup>52</sup> *Suizhou zhi*, “Shan chuan” 山川, 1.11a.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.5a.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, “Hefang zhi” 河防志 1.5b.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.4a; also *Suizhou zhi*, “Hefang zhi” 1.6b.

conveyed a visual message that Suizhou nevertheless did not perceive the Yellow River as a threat, and it remained prepared for any flooding that might arise.

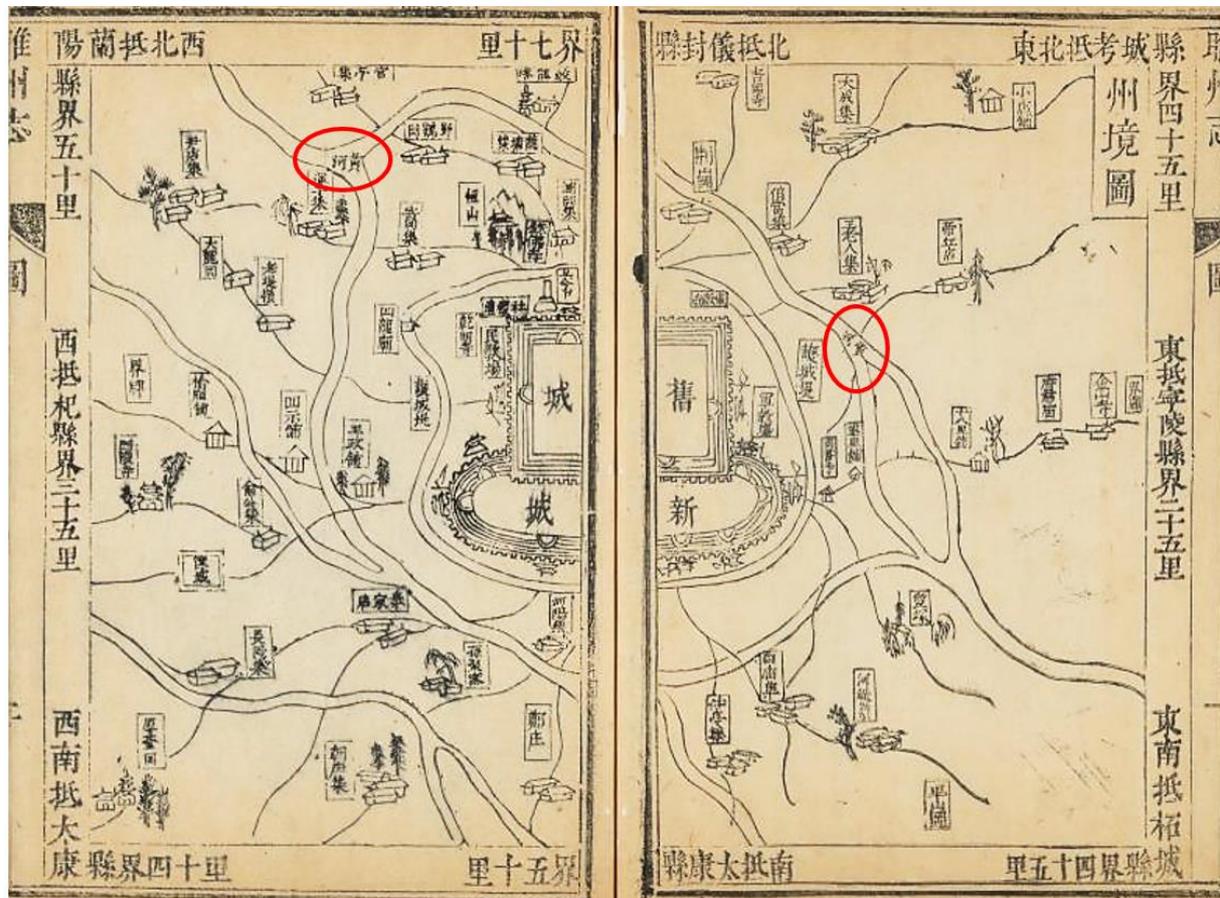


Figure 17: Map of the prefectural domain 州境圖, *Suizhou zhi* 睢州志, “Tu” 圖, 1b-2a. Image source: Harvard Yenching Library (persistent link: <https://nrs.lib.harvard.edu/urn-3:fhcl:12540376?n=22>)

## Conclusion

Local gazetteers compiled under the early Qing regime possess dual features: expressing unique local experiences and being compiled under a universal format. While it is possible to copy and share a format or style, it is ultimately the local people’s experience of the place that makes a local gazetteer distinguishable from those of other places. In this sense, the experience of a local landscape, and the subsequent perception of it, form a large part in the production of a unique local gazetteer. Yet in the production of local gazetteers, factors such as a universal format, common categories, and similar use of classical knowledge can place limits on how a local gazetteer presents the unique localness. The tension between standardised knowledge and life experiences may also shape how local gazetteers tell local stories.

This is where visual materials come to play a role in creating a sense of place. In the various early Qing cases examined above, the Yellow River constitutes a unique presence in local life. It provides a point of comparison among depictions of its different sections. We see that perceptions of the Yellow River

showed significant variations at the local level and corresponded to different visual strategies in its representation. While there are common structural factors in its depiction—such as its superior width, the unparalleled force of its current, and its close relationship with its surroundings, we can still detect thematic and stylistic variations in representation which reflect local perceptions of the river. The conscious selection of style in representing the Yellow River, either in pictorial details, such as the patterns of its water waves, or in the overall arrangement of its spatial composition, reveals diverse local perceptions. The various visual techniques, in turn, lend visual force to the stories told in the text.

The study of visual materials in local gazetteers also poses challenging questions. At face value, the relationship between visual materials and gazetteer text may appear complementary. Yet the two components of a local gazetteer can stand independently from each other. For example, do images just illustrate what is written in gazetteer text, or do they present a story in their own way? What if what is expressed visually cannot be found in the text? In other words, how should we process information that is embedded in the images but not talked about in the text? With no direct textual evidence, will visual evidence still be convincing? This paper has attempted to address some of these methodological issues using the case of the Yellow River in early Qing local gazetteers. Yet more work needs to be done through close examination of both images and textual records to hear more clearly local voices in local gazetteers.

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