CREATING ZHU “JIUJIANG”: LOCALISM IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY GUANGDONG

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In the fall of 1881, the aged and ailing Cantonese scholar Zhu Ciqi 朱次琦 (1807-1882) cut off contact with everyone but his closest family members, and devoted himself towards putting his manuscripts in order for publication. Two months later, realizing that he could never finish the work, he burned them. Titles of the lost manuscripts reveal the once ambitious designs of the author: Guochao mingchen yanying lu 國朝名臣言行錄 (Record of Words and Deeds of Famous Officials of the Dynasty), Guochao yimin zhuan 國朝遺民傳 (Biographies of Former [Ming] Subjects in the Present Dynasty), Xingxue yuanliu 性學源流 (The Origins and Development of the Learning of “Nature”), and Wushi shizheng lu 五史實徵錄, a collection of historical events from the Song, Liao, Jin, Yuan, and Ming dynasties for current consultation. After Zhu died in February 1882, his most devoted students scurried to piece together what writings had been missed by their teacher and printed them together under the title Fenyu ji 焚餘集 (Collection Remaining from the Fire).

The act of burning his manuscripts is prominently featured in accounts of Zhu Ciqi, one of the most influential Cantonese literati in the nineteenth century. The recording of this and other acts signifies that Zhu embraced a certain style of scholarship and personal con-

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duct. After retiring from government service in 1855, he had become a popular teacher, drawing most of his students from the countryside surrounding his native Jiujiang 九江堡 (Jiujiang township) in the southern part of Nanhai 南海 county. As can be gleaned from the titles of some of his lost manuscripts, Zhu Ciqi emphasized the need for moral exemplars and promoted what can broadly be categorized as a Neo-Confucian agenda. Advocates and critics alike in the nineteenth century often referred to Neo-Confucian scholarship as “Song Learning” because it was most closely identified with the great Song-dynasty Neo-Confucians Cheng Yi 程頤 (1033-1107) and Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130-1200). Although in one of his lost manuscripts Zhu Ciqi presumably elaborated on the important Neo-Confucian concept of “nature,” from his extant writings it appears that he was like many of his contemporaries in that he was less concerned with philosophical reflection than with the moral rigor and local activism that Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucianism inspired.

For many Chinese literati during the nineteenth century, embracing Neo-Confucian praxis entailed a critique of its alternative: kaozheng 考證 (evidential research). In the Pearl River delta, this type of learning was closely identified with the Xuehaitang 學海堂 academy in the delta’s metropolis, Guangzhou. The academy was founded by Ruan Yuan 阮元 (1764-1849) when he served as governor-general in Guangzhou during the 1820s. Ruan saw the academy as a means of propagating kaozheng scholarship and pre-Tang literary ideals, popular in his native Jiangnan region, in what he saw as a cultural periphery. From the writings his students preserved and from biographical accounts and anecdotes that they produced, it can be seen that Zhu Ciqi clearly contrasted his approach to the Xuehaitang model. We learn that he twice rejected offers to study and teach at the Xuehaitang, and refused to meet with its most important official patron in the 1860s. Likewise, Zhu’s burning of his own manuscripts may be read as a critique of the proliferation of printed texts in nineteenth-century Guangzhou. This stance was common among scholars with a Neo-Confucian bent in the nineteenth century. In Guangzhou, such criticisms were aimed at urban scholars associated with the Xuehaitang academy, who dominated printing projects catering to an elite audience.

Ironically, despite his stance against the proliferation of printed texts, Zhu Ciqi was particularly active in compiling and printing three large works that he later refrained from, or was constrained