



NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE

Humanities

DIVISION OF RESEARCH PROGRAMS

Narrative Section of a Successful Application

The attached document contains the grant narrative and selected portions of a previously funded grant application. It is not intended to serve as a model, but to give you a sense of how a successful application may be crafted. Every successful application is different, and each applicant is urged to prepare a proposal that reflects its unique project and aspirations. Prospective applicants should consult the Research Programs application guidelines at <https://www.neh.gov/grants/research/fellowships> for instructions. Applicants are also strongly encouraged to consult with the NEH Division of Research Programs staff well before a grant deadline.

Note: The attachment only contains the grant narrative and selected portions, not the entire funded application. In addition, certain portions may have been redacted to protect the privacy interests of an individual and/or to protect confidential commercial and financial information and/or to protect copyrighted materials.

Project Title: Upright Journeys: Diaspora and Empire in Southern China, 1570-1850

Institution: Washington University in St. Louis

Project Director: Steven B. Miles

Grant Program: Fellowships

In the late 1830s, two brothers from the Pearl River delta in southern China's Guangdong province died as migrant merchants in a remote corner of the neighboring province, Guangxi. When the boat delivering their bodies home broke apart near the provincial border, the boatmen retrieved from the river the dozen or so coffins bound for the delta, placed them on an embankment, and fled. The brothers' uncle, an elderly literatus named Zhao Jiansheng, somehow got news of the incident and personally traveled upriver to collect his nephews' coffins. He also made sure that the other bodies were properly returned to their delta families. That Zhao's nephews perished in remote Guangxi and that Zhao managed to acquire news of the whereabouts of their coffins reveal the far reach of Cantonese commercial and migrant networks upstream from the delta along the West River basin into Guangxi and beyond.

Incorporating stories such as that of Zhao Jiansheng and his unfortunate nephews, I propose to write a history of the Cantonese diaspora along the West River basin between the late Ming (1368-1644) and late Qing (1644-1911) dynasties. In this book, I will analyze a set of activities - what I call diasporic practices - that Cantonese lowlanders from the Pearl River delta pursued upstream into the highlands along the West River basin, primarily in Guangxi, but also in western Guangdong just below Guangxi and in areas further upstream from Guangxi along various tributaries of the West River in far southern Guizhou, far eastern Yunnan, and the Caobang region in northern Vietnam. These practices included serving as officials in Guangxi, registering as students in upstream schools in order to sit for less competitive civil service examinations there, conducting trade, settling agricultural lands, and even touring and mapping. In different ways, these practices served the interests of both diaspora and empire. Although the interests of Cantonese migrants and merchants and those of the Ming and Qing states were not the same, both parties ultimately benefitted from consolidation of the southwestern frontier. My analytical perspective of viewing the frontier through the lens of the West River system sheds light on the ways in which a diasporic elite turned the imperial project of expansion to its own ends, enhancing the socioeconomic status of Cantonese families.

I draw attention to the shifting relationship between the Cantonese diasporic project along the West River basin and the Ming and Qing imperial project of expansion and consolidation on the southwestern frontier. By centering my analysis on one regional cohort, as opposed to focusing on the state, and by using a river system rather than provincial boundaries as my geographical scope, I bring a new perspective to the recent historical scholarship on the frontier in Ming and especially Qing times. My work also adds to recent scholarship on translocal linkages in late imperial China. Rather than exploring how the local was incorporated with the center, I show how one diasporic elite in pursuing its own socioeconomic interests, though often in the name of the state, linked local places horizontally. I also show the extent to which such institutions as the "localized" lineage were dependent upon migrant strategies. In addition, my analysis of Cantonese translocal practice along the West River basin both has been inspired by recent scholarship on overseas Chinese in the modern era and seeks to contribute to that scholarship. Many diasporic practices that scholars of overseas Chinese identify for the modern era resonate with the practices that I find among Cantonese West River migrants in the preceding three centuries. While specific tactics changed, family strategies combining migration and the manipulation of state policies were readily adaptable to new circumstances.

The notion of "diasporic practices" is meant to convey the translocal, mobile nature of Cantonese who were active across spaces containing locales that were hundreds of miles apart. I use "diaspora" in

the sense of a “scattering” of people who shared native-place and kinship ties, and maintained links to both emigrant and host communities. My project entails multi-sited research designed to show how downstream connections facilitated upstream interests, and upstream activities enhanced downstream status. I highlight the relationship between diaspora and empire. Members of this diaspora were not so much refugees seeking to return to a lost homeland, as they were entrepreneurial migrants, benefiting from an imperial project of frontier expansion while manipulating this project for their own ends. In contrast to recent studies (in particular, Scott 2009) that emphasize the highlands of southwest China and Mainland Southeast Asia as a refuge for people fleeing the state, I show how states or empires can also attract people, and how at least one regional/diasporic cohort used the state. My book will therefore appeal not only to Sinologists but also to scholars interested in diaspora, transnational practice, and the comparative study of early modern states and frontiers.

I plan to construct each chapter of my book around one of the diasporic practices that I identify, taking a broad chronological sweep while gradually shifting attention from the late sixteenth century to the late nineteenth. Chapter One will examine Cantonese who were assigned to administrative posts upriver, mostly as county, department, and prefectural officials in Guangxi. A disproportionate number of Cantonese were appointed to such posts during the Ming, a pattern that would change during the first two centuries of Qing rule. One of the major concerns of Cantonese officials assigned to Guangxi was the suppression of uprisings among non-Han Chinese natives against the consolidation of Ming rule on the frontier. I focus on a series of military campaigns in the 1570s that resulted in the creation of new administrative units, places that soon attracted Cantonese merchants and other migrants. Cantonese officials in Guangxi played key roles in these military campaigns and administrative construction; they also wrote texts that facilitated and celebrated the imperial project of frontier expansion, even as their delta kin profited from this.

In Chapter Two, I will describe aspiring Cantonese scholar-officials who registered as residents of upriver counties and departments in order to win positions as students in government-run schools there and to sit for less competitive civil service examinations. A very large proportion (in some cases almost half) of delta natives who won credentials through the civil service examinations between the late sixteenth and early eighteenth centuries did so as registered residents of locales outside their home counties. Although interrupted in the 1640s and 1650s, this pattern continued across the Ming-Qing dynastic transition. Many such students registered in locales along the West River basin into Guangxi, especially the new counties and departments that Cantonese officials had helped to establish. Thus, Cantonese families used state efforts aimed at fostering the growth of indigenous elites on the southwestern frontier to achieve or maintain their own gentry status back in the delta.

Another category of migrants that benefited from the opening of new areas upstream is the subject of Chapter Three: merchants. As the primary component of Cantonese diasporic interests upriver, commerce forms a backdrop to all of the chapters. Here I highlight the kinship and native-place ties between Cantonese merchants and Cantonese “gentry” - both officials and students. I focus on the eighteenth-century proliferation throughout Guangxi of Yuedong *huiguan*, or native-place associations that served guild-like functions in organizing Cantonese commerce upstream. Through such institutions, Cantonese merchants dominated the distribution of salt upriver and the extraction of rice and mountain products for shipment downriver.

In Chapter Four, I explore family dynamics that sustained the male Cantonese migrants described in the preceding three chapters. Many Cantonese migrants in upriver areas acquired native or local women as spouses, typically as secondary wives or concubines. They sometimes brought these spouses back to the delta. Such relationships often facilitated Cantonese commerce upstream, but were also fraught: Cantonese literati writers imagined upstream indigenous women as dangerous wielders of witchcraft capable of detaining migrant men and preventing them from returning, with the wealth that they had extracted upriver, to their delta homes. While relations between Han men and native women in frontier areas has received some scholarly attention in recent years, I will expand my analysis to include the primary wives of migrant Cantonese men, and their role in sustaining diasporic practice as a means of family economic and social advancement.

In Chapter Five, I will focus on Cantonese literati who traveled to Guangxi as tourists and produced scholarship and literature about upriver areas. Cantonese officials had been writing about upriver areas in various genres - including poetry and histories - since the Ming. Only in the nineteenth century, however, did Cantonese literati begin to travel to Guangxi as tourists and to publish texts based on this experience. In the process, Cantonese travelers and writers mapped the gender dynamics of male migration onto the landscape of the West River basin, with primary wives in the delta, native women upstream, and male travelers in between. They also culturally mapped Guangxi and geographically mapped its rivers, claiming as Cantonese a privileged knowledge of this part of the empire's southwestern frontier.

Finally, in Chapter Six, I examine the reassertion of Cantonese interests upriver following the Taiping Rebellion and other mid nineteenth-century crises. Rebels and bandits had targeted Cantonese economic interests as well as the state. As a result, the infrastructure that supported Cantonese trade upstream was largely destroyed. Despite this, and even while Cantonese families increasingly broadened their migrant strategies to include destinations in Southeast Asia and North America, these same families still devoted resources toward reconstructing their diasporic interests upriver. Sons of elite families from the delta led militias in recovering upriver locales, a large number of Cantonese once again were assigned as officials in Guangxi for the first time since the Ming, a growing number of students sought degrees in Guangxi, and merchants invested a great deal of money in reconstructing *huiguan*, temples, bridges, and other components of the commercial infrastructure.

I propose to use an NEH fellowship between June, 2012, and May, 2013, to finish research and to write this book. I have completed most of my library research and fieldwork in Guangdong and Guangxi, as well as in eastern Yunnan and Hanoi. During the summer of 2011, aside from additional library work and fieldwork in Guangxi, I will conduct fieldwork in southern Guizhou and northern Vietnam. I therefore propose to use most of the time in 2012-2013 to process materials collected from fieldwork (mainly digital photographs of stone inscriptions and manuscript genealogies) and to write my chapters. I propose to spend three months during the summer of 2012 in Beijing, working at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and the Number One Archives. My main focus during these research trips will be central government sources, primarily edicts and routine and palace memorials, but also such sources as Guangxi provincial examination lists (I have already collected a significant number of these for the nineteenth century.). I will then spend the bulk of the 2012-2013 academic year writing my book manuscript. With the support of an NEH fellowship, I can have a book manuscript ready for submission to a major university press by the end of August, 2013. My goal is to publish with Harvard, Stanford, or the University of Washington.

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