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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Scenic Views of Administrative Units in Ming China

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Designating a set of eight or ten scenic views for a place was widespread in late imperial China. The subjects of this practice, however, had expanded from famous sites to almost all localities by the early twentieth century. This article examines the proliferation of one type of scenic view—those of prefectures, subprefectures, and counties—during the Ming. Focusing on a dataset of scenic views of 503 local administrative units generated through the Local Gazetteer Research Tools (LoGaRT), the article analyses images of scenic views in local gazetteers, traces the development of scenic views across the Ming empire, and probes the mechanism of their production. I argue that although non-official forces controlled and expanded the genre of scenic views in the Ming, local administrators manipulated this genre to their own advantage and made the celebration of administrative-unit scenic views their own space. Scenic views of administrative units were largely symbols of political authority.

擬定一地之景致（如八景、十景）是宋明以來之風尚。然而時至二十世紀初，景致之主體已漸次由名勝轉而各地之府州縣。本文即探討府州縣景致在明代之繁盛過程。筆者聚焦於用“地方志研究工具集”獲取的 503 套明代府州縣景致，探討該類景致在各地的發展過程和生產機制，並著重分析地方志中的景致圖像。本文認為，儘管明代非官方力量支配並拓展了生產景致的空間，地方官仍然掌控了生產官方版本地方景致的權威。府州縣冠名的景致基本是政治權威的象徵。

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**Keywords:** Ming Dynasty, local gazetteers, scenic views, prefects and magistrates, educational officials

**關鍵詞：** 明代，地方志，景致，府州縣官，學官

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Scholars have examined the widespread practice of designating a set of eight or ten views (*bajing* 八景 or *shijing* 十景) for a site or a locality in late imperial China, with each view featuring a poetic title linking to corresponding poems or paintings. Recent studies have traced the history of this practice to at least the Northern Song dynasty, when literati and politicians created scenic views for famous sites such as West Lake (Murck 1996, 113–140; Huang 2014, 60; Duan 2020, 156–181). The subjects of this genre, however, expanded from famous sites to all types of places, especially administrative units, in the Ming and Qing. By the early twentieth century, scenic views of administrative units had become so widespread that the modern writer Lu Xun 鲁迅 characterised this phenomenon as an “eight views syndrome” or a “ten views syndrome” that had befallen many Chinese people (Duan 2020, 60). Previous scholars have conducted fascinating case studies on the views of single sites, such as the ten views of West Lake (*Xihu shijing* 西湖十景), as well as those of administrative units, but it remains unclear how designating view sets developed from a site-specific practice in the Song to a “syndrome” that affected almost all localities in the later years of late imperial China.<sup>1</sup>

The geographic expansion of scenic views in late imperial China corresponded to the development of local gazetteers during the Ming. Editors of the 1784 gazetteer of Hangzhou, a prefecture renowned for its “Ten Views of West Lake”, traced the origin of scenic views to the eight views of Xiao-Xiang 瀟湘 in the Song era, but they also emphasised the role of Ming-era gazetteers in documenting scenic views. From the omnipresent records of scenic views in Ming-era gazetteers, they concluded that almost every sub-prefecture and county started to have eight views by the end of the Ming (*Hangzhou fuzhi* 1784, 27.1a). Gazetteers seem to have become one of the major media for recording scenic views.

By analysing scenic views recorded in local gazetteers, this article examines the proliferation of one type of scenic views—those of administrative units—in the Ming. With LoGaRT (Local Gazetteers Research Tools), I gathered 694 sets of scenic views from over 500 Ming-era gazetteers in the database.<sup>2</sup> Focusing on the 503 sets associated with administrative units, which cover the two metropolitan areas, the thirteen provinces, and Liaodong, this article examines images of scenic views in Ming-era gazetteers, traces the development of scenic views of administrative units during the Ming, and analyses the production of scenic views. While earlier research has demonstrated how, in individual cases, scenic-view production on the locality level was part of political transformations (such as conquest, civilising, and development), I show that this mechanism was in fact a systematic, empire-wide phenomenon. Creating and celebrating local landscapes gradually became a commonplace strategy in local officials’ repertoire.

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<sup>1</sup> Kathlyn Liscomb, Lo-fen I, and Fei Huang have examined the production of scenic views in specific local contexts, but their works do not reveal the larger picture of the genre across the empire. See Liscomb 1988–1989, 127–152; I 2003, 33–70; Huang 2014.

<sup>2</sup> This material is based upon research conducted while affiliated with the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science, and sources were made available during this affiliation via Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin’s CrossAsia portal.

## Images of Scenic Views

Representing scenic views usually involved multiple media (Duan 2020, 163–165). A gathering to celebrate scenic views often produced poetry collections, painting albums, and printed books. But in most cases only textual representations were incorporated into gazetteers. According to the statistics generated through the PWI functionality of the LoGaRT database, only ten of over five hundred surviving Ming-era gazetteers contain images of administrative-unit scenic views.<sup>3</sup> A survey of the images, though extremely limited in scope, is in order.

Gazetteer	Images' Date of Creation	Size	format
吳江志 (Wujiang gazetteer, 1488, Southern Metropolitan Area)	1488	8 views; 1 image; 4 half-folio pages	Images in the illustration
普安州志 (Puan Subprefectural gazetteer, 1522, Guizhou)	1522	10 views; 1 image; 2 half-folio pages	
太康縣志 (Taikang County gazetteer, 1524, Henan)	1524	8 views; 8 images; 4 half-folio pages	
固始縣志 (Gushi County gazetteer, 1542, Henan)	1542	8 views; 1 image; 2 half-folio pages	
興濟縣志 (Xingji County gazetteer, 1566, Northern Metropolitan Area)	Unknown	8 views; 1 image; 2 half-folio pages	
豐潤縣志 (Fengrun County gazetteer, 1570, Northern Metropolitan Area)	Unknown	8 views; 8 images; 8 half-folio pages	Images attached to related texts in “Mountains and Rivers”; images facing texts
滌陽志 (Chuyang gazetteer, 1614, Southern Metropolitan Area)	Unknown	10 views; 10 images; 20 half-folio pages	
平陽府志 (Pingyang Prefectural gazetteer, 1615, Shanxi)	Unknown	8 views; 8 images; 16 half-folio pages	
來安縣志 (Lai'an County gazetteer, 1620, Southern Metropolitan Area)	Unknown	10 views; 10 images; 20 half-folio pages	Images in the illustration section
鉅野縣志 (Juye County gazetteer, 1620, Shandong)	1620	8 views; 8 images; 8 half-folio pages	Images in the illustration section; texts incorporated in images

Table 1: Images of views in Ming-era gazetteers.

<sup>3</sup> Thanks to the PWI functionality, I was able to identify the ten sets of images by quickly leafing through all the images in Ming-era gazetteers.

The first observation is that images of scenic views in the pre-1570 and the post-1570 gazetteers differ in size, format, and style. Table 1 lists the date of creation, size, and format of each set of scenic-view images. The images in the pre-1570 gazetteers are located in the illustration sections at the beginning of the gazetteers; the number of images in each gazetteer is small; the eight or ten views are usually aggregated into the same image. In the post-1570 gazetteers, each view has a separate image, and the images are physically closer to related texts. The changes might have to do with the flourishing of illustrated books in the Wanli 萬曆 era (1572-1620), especially the proliferation of images in print form and the ubiquity of images at that time (Duan 2020, 172; Lin 2018, 378).<sup>4</sup> But since most of these gazetteer illustrations were not from Jiangnan or Fujian, the places renowned for publishing illustrated books, there might be other reasons for the changes.<sup>5</sup>



Fig. 1: Geographic distribution of the 103 gazetteers that contain section names indicating images of scenic views. Made with LoGaRT and CH Map.

Spatially, most (eight out of ten) administrative units that had images of scenic views in their Ming-era gazetteers were in Northern China (defined as north of the Qinling-Huaihe 秦嶺-淮河 line). This pattern seems true also for Qing-era gazetteers. Fig. 1 depicts the geographic distribution of the 103 gazetteers in the LoGaRT database (including one Ming, ninety-three Qing, and nine Republican gazetteers) that feature a section or subsection for images of scenic views. Localities belonging to the Ming-era Southern Metropolitan Area, Zhejiang, Jiangxi, and Fujian, where the literati elite was more powerful, have few images of scenic views in gazetteers. This might suggest that the production of administrative-unit scenic views belonged to an arena dominated by other forces than literati; the other forces, as this study shows, were sojourning officials.

<sup>4</sup> On Wanli-era book illustrations, see Hsiao 2007.

<sup>5</sup> Scholarship on the publishing industry in Ming-era Jiangnan and Fujian abounds. See, for example, Chow 2004; Chia 2002.

Visual analysis of the scenic-view images in the pre-1570 gazetteers suggests their emphasis on the connections among individual scenic views. Unlike editors of later gazetteers, editors of the Wujiang, Gushi, and Puan gazetteers put all the scenic views into the same image. For example, Fig. 2, part of “Image of the Eight Views of Wujiang” (*Wujiang bajing tu* 吳江八景圖), presents the five views labelled with textual cartouches together, highlighting their relationships with the water body; Figs. 3 and 4 position the scenic sites of Gushi and Puan around the administrative seats. All three images provide guidance about location and thus resemble mapping, a practice that, according to Julia Orell, “emphasizes the location of isolated features within a conceptual rather than optical construction of space” (Orell 2011, 211).

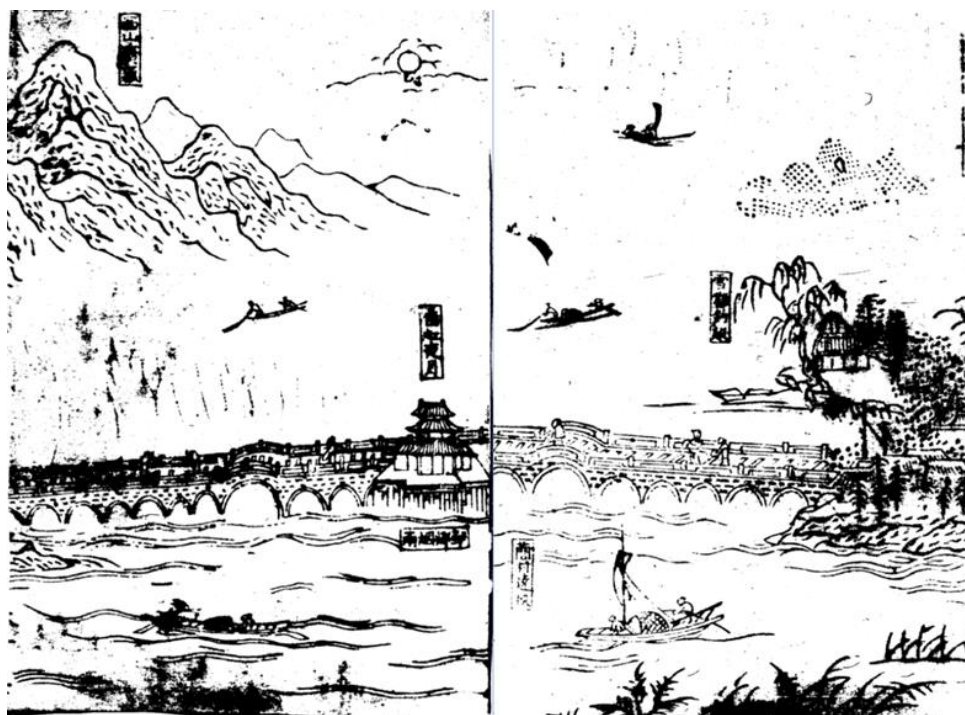


Fig. 2: Part of “Eight Views of Wujiang.” The rectangular cartouches indicate the locations of the views. *Wujiang zhi* 1488, *juan* 1. Image credit: Zhongguo Fangzhi Ku.

Despite serving the same function of guidance, different gazetteer illustrations drew upon different visual traditions. Fig. 2 mimics the format of a handscroll, focuses on the bridge at the centre, and guides viewers to move along the bridge. This continuous composition alludes to a tradition of printed illustrations modelled on handscrolls, which we also see in other works such as Wang Tingna’s *Garden Views of Encircling Jade Hall* and the Kangxi Emperor’s *Imperial Poems* (Whiteman 2020, 208–224). This image also reminds us of the Yandang scroll examined by Elizabeth Kindall in that both serve as itineraries (Kindall 2021, 423). In contrast, the compositional focus of Figs. 3 and 4 is on the county/prefectural seat at the centre of the images. This makes the images more akin to standard gazetteer maps, which became an essential component of gazetteers from the Southern Song onward (Lin 2017, 13). These images might thus have functioned similarly to those gazetteer maps, serving as indices to gazetteer texts (Lin 2014, 215–216).

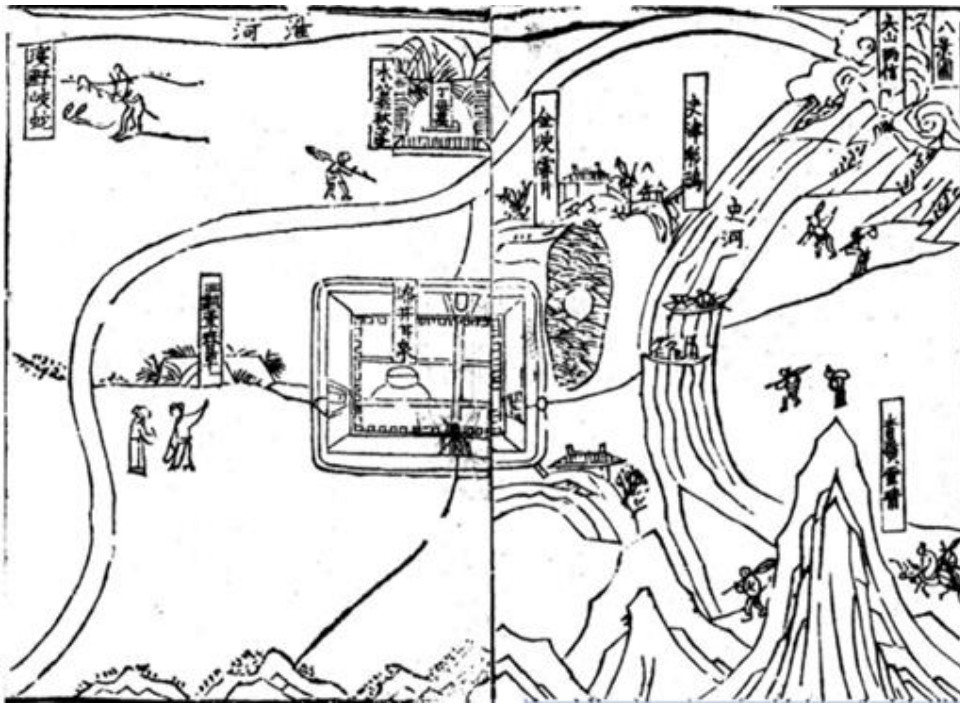


Fig. 3: Eight views of Gushi County. Note that the textual cartouches indicate the locations of the views in relation to the county seat at the centre. *Gushi xianzhi* 1542, 1. *bajing*. Image credit: Zhongguo Fangzhi Ku.

Furthermore, different images convey diverse ideological messages. For example, Fig. 4, “Image of the Ten Views of Puan Subprefecture” (*Puan zhou shijing tu* 普安州十景圖), expresses a starkly different message from Figs. 2 and 3. In the latter two images, human figures are essential. Fig. 2 depicts several boatmen paddling vigorously in different directions, and Fig. 3 portrays travellers riding horses, carrying umbrellas and cloth-wrapped belongings, or conversing along the paths. The strong interactions between human and natural landscapes create an impression that the sites were desirable destinations for tourists.<sup>6</sup> The emphasis on travel experiences is also echoed in the textual descriptions of the eight views of Wujiang. The texts specify the appropriate season, time of day, and weather for each view (*Wujiang zhi* 1488, 5.13b-14b). For example, the description of “moonlight at the Rainbow Bridge” (*chuihong yeyue* 垂虹夜月) advises tourists to visit the site at midnight when the temperature falls and people become quiet (*Ibid.*, 5.14a). The editors of the Gushi gazetteer also explain that the reason for including the image was “to prepare viewers for travelling” (*Gushi xianzhi* 1542, 1.2b).<sup>7</sup> Such specification of season and time, which was popular not only in scenic images in gazetteers but also in “famous-sites” images in general, might serve to invoke viewers’ memories of touring the sites (Kindall 2016, 38). Besides, by populating the scenes with tourists, the two images emphasise the attractiveness of the views. The images afford the viewer what Elizabeth Kindall calls an “experiential encounter,” one that invokes the viewer’s past experience while

<sup>6</sup> For this same effect in other scenic-view images, see Duan 2020, 166.

<sup>7</sup> 揭名勝以備游觀也。

provoking further interest in re-touring (*ibid.*). The figures also serve as “focalizers” that allow armchair tourists to tour the sites imaginatively (Kindall 2021, 428).<sup>8</sup>

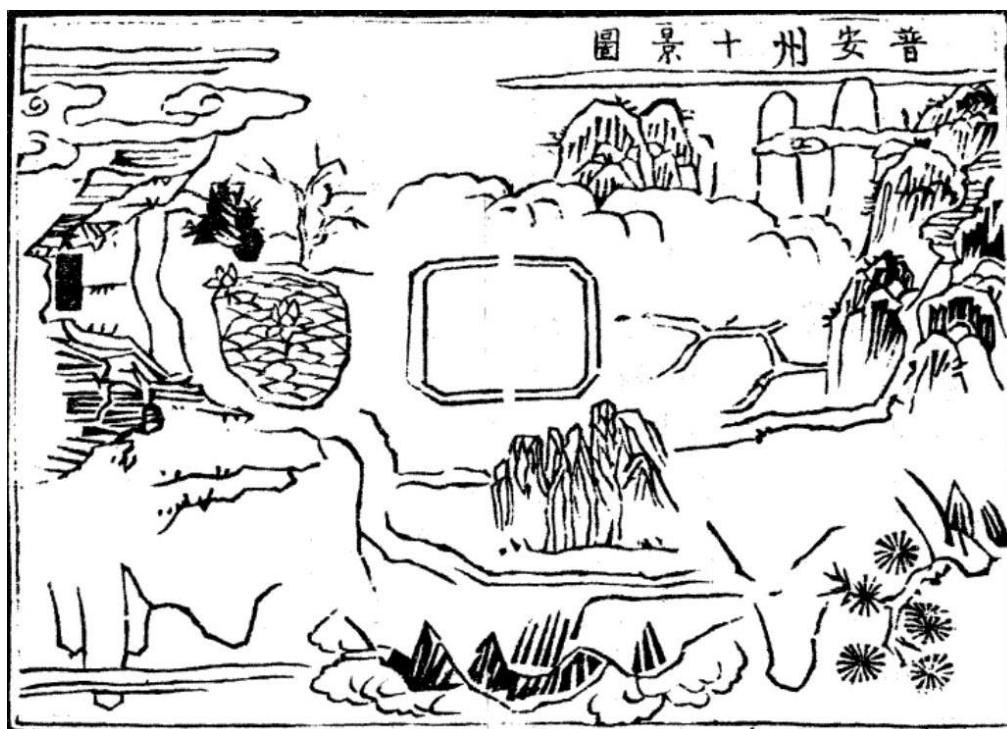


Fig. 4: Ten views of Puan Subprefecture. Note that no textual labels or human figures appear. “Puan zhou shijing tu,” in *Puan zhouzhi* 1522. Image credit: Zhongguo Fangzhi Ku.

In contrast, Fig. 4, an image of a frontier subprefecture in Guizhou, represents another extreme. The image depicts the views in their crudest forms. Some willow trees beside the subprefectural seat—the rectangular structure at the center of the image—signify the view of “green willows at the Spring Embankment” (*chundi cui liu* 春堤翠柳); symbols of shaded mountains at the bottom of the image suggest that the mountains were covered with snow—hence indicating the scene of “sunlit snow on Wan Mountain” (*wanshan qingxue* 萬山晴雪). The image has no hint of human presence. Nor does the gazetteer contain textual descriptions of the ten views except for providing their titles (*Puan zhouzhi* 1522, 1.23a). In general, there were many reasons for the absence of figures in landscapes. In this case, where the creator’s skill seems poor, the creator would have sketched figures even more poorly than landscapes. Also, the inclusion of figures would distract from viewers’ experience of the variable perspective that would require viewers to turn their head to reorient themselves while viewing different parts.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, the lack of figures here would

<sup>8</sup> For the theory of focalisation, see Genette 1980, 189–194; Margolin 2009. For a similar analysis of the function of figures, see Clumas 1997, 85.

<sup>9</sup> For “variable perspective”, see Yee 1996, 68.

also echo the gazetteer editors' stated purpose of "picturing the sites so as to encourage people to improve the landscape"<sup>10</sup> (*Puan zhouzhi* 1522, *tunui*).

This argument could be further corroborated by the lack of textual labels in this image. In "cartographic landscapes," as Julia Orell argues, textual labels could serve as "a reference system" to remind viewers of a larger body of geographical knowledge (Orell 2011, 225-226). Thus, the textual cartouches in Figs. 2 and 3 would remind readers of the abundant textual and poetic accounts of the views in the gazetteer, as well as the many related activities, such as touring and poetry-writing. Conversely, the lack of textual labels in Fig. 4, coupled with the lack of related textual accounts in the gazetteer, could help the gazetteer editors to claim a lack of site-related culture in that locality.

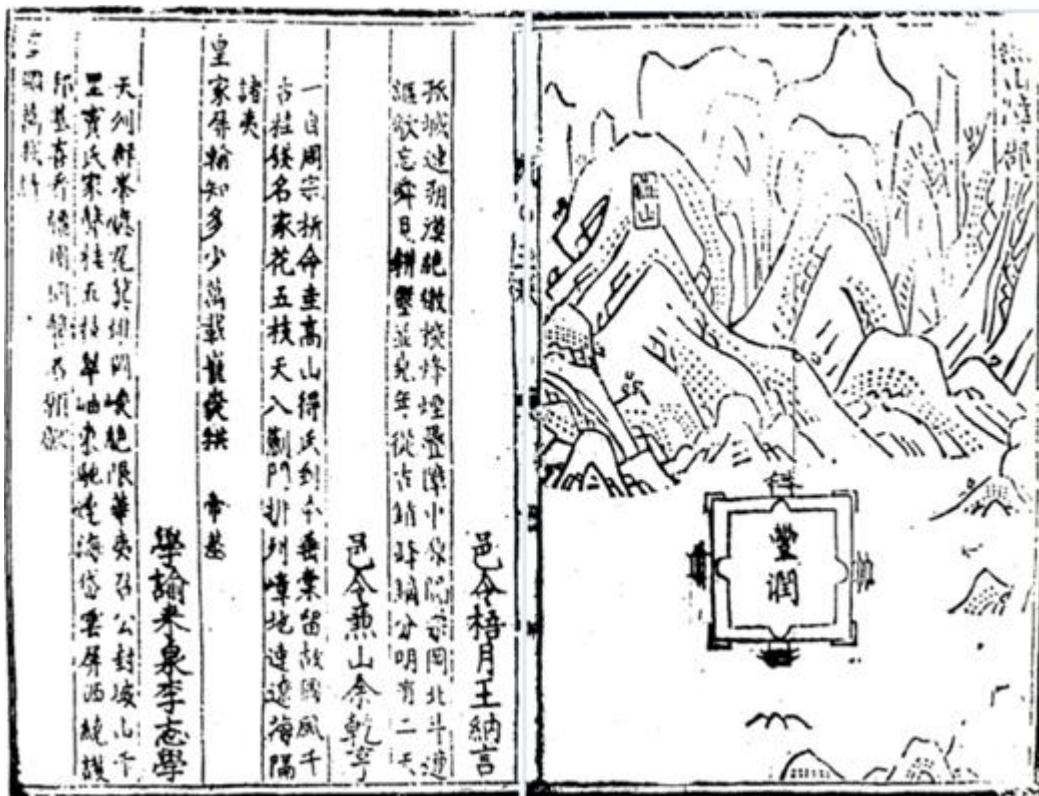


Fig. 5: One of the ten views of Fengrun County. Note that the poems written by sojourning officials are placed on the page facing the image. *Fengrun xianzhi* 1570, 3.7a-b. Image credit: Zhongguo Fangzhi Ku.

The images of scenic views in the post-1570 gazetteers (mostly produced in the Wanli era) have some distinctive features. Each view has a separate image, allowing for the full articulation of its individuality. Moreover, the gazetteer editors attempted to foster text-image interaction by moving images of scenic views from stand-alone illustration sections to the locations of textual descriptions

<sup>10</sup> 繪郡境中山川之絕勝處也，茲特別之以見其當改觀耳。



of the views, or by inserting texts directly into illustrations. The images are thus physically closer to their related texts, creating a more engaged viewing/reading experience. For instance, Fig. 5 shows one of the eight views of Fengrun County with three accompanying poems on the facing page. This layout was not new, as scenic views in other formats had been presented this way before (Liscomb 1988–1989, 130–131; Duan 2020, 173). The introduction of this layout in gazetteers makes the illustrated pages resemble painting albums. In doing so, the gazetteer editors attempted to transfer the experiences of reading painting albums or illustrated poetry collections to the reading of gazetteers. Rather than locating the whereabouts of the views or providing a roadmap for touring, the gazetteer editors might have intended to incorporate more cross-media experiences.

In Fig. 5, by juxtaposing the image and poems, the editors wanted readers to read the image and poems together. The image's depiction of the county seat protected by the Yan Mountains 燕山, combined with the caption, informed readers of the strategic importance of the mountains to the county. The accompanying poems foregrounded this message by explaining that the mountains “will remain majestic for tens of thousands of years to protect the foundation of the empire” 萬載巖嵒拱帝基 (*Fengrun xianzhi* 1570, 3.7b). Readers are reminded of the mountains' significance to both the county and the empire. The text conditions the reading of the image, and the image in turn helps visualise the message conveyed in the text. In another case, the gazetteer editors of Juye County inserted poems directly into images. Fig. 6 shows how the magistrate/chief gazetteer editor Lü Pengyun 呂鵬雲 integrated his own poem into one of the images (*Juye xianzhi* 1620, *bajingtu*.2). Adding his name to the visual-textual composite, he became an important part of the locality's landscape. The combination of images and texts emphasises the magistrate's significance in local landscapes.

The ten sets of images surveyed here point to some patterns. Firstly, although not all the ten gazetteers provided explanations for the inclusion of images of scenic views, the political message conveyed in *Puan zhouzhi* and the officials' names in the 1570 and 1620 gazetteers (Figs. 5 and 6) bespeak the political motivations for producing administrative-unit scenic views, especially on the part of local administrators. Secondly, gazetteer editors increasingly highlighted multi-media representations of scenic views. By moving texts and images closer or by inserting texts into images, they explored ways to reproduce the atmosphere of the original social gathering that produced visual and textual representations in multiple forms. This emphasis on multi-media experience points to a larger mechanism of scenic-view production that involved not only editors of these ten gazetteers but also those of the remaining five hundred gazetteers that included only textual representations of administrative-unit scenic views.



Fig. 6: Hand-drawn reproduction of a printed image in *Juye xianzhi*. Note that the magistrate, Lü Pengyun, integrated his name and poem into the picture. *Juye xianzhi* 1620, *bajingtu*.2. Image credit: Zhongguo Fangzhi Ku.

## Creating Scenic Views for Administrative Units

Scenic views of administrative units are likely to have existed in the Song, but records of such views are overwhelmingly more abundant in Ming-era documents.<sup>11</sup> The proliferation of records of administrative-unit scenic views in existing documents might be connected to their political use in the Ming. Politicians' engagement with scenic views at the local administration level became prominent in the Ming. In 1414,

<sup>11</sup> For earlier records, such as the ten views of Qiantang 錢塘 and the eight views of Jiaying 嘉興, see Duan 2020, 177; *Jiaying xianzhi* 1637, 19.59a-b.

thirteen officials composed 110 poems for the eight views of Beijing, the future capital (Liscomb 1988–1989, 130). In the poems, the poet-officials expressed their gratitude to the Yongle 永樂 emperor and support for the emperor’s plan to establish Beijing as the major capital (Liscomb 1988–1989, 127–130). These poems set up a precedent for later officials to express their political loyalty through writing site-related poems. In the Xuande 宣德 reign (1426–1435), for example, “poet-officials” (*cichen* 詞臣) presented poems on the eight sites of Beijing to the emperor on several festival occasions; this fashion continued until at least the mid-fifteenth century (I 2016, 295). From the start of the Ming, scenic views of administrative units were charged with political meanings.

Although a clear periodisation is impossible to construct, it is likely that local administrators had started to celebrate scenic views within their jurisdiction in the early Ming. In Zhengtong-era 正統 (1436–1449) Daming Prefecture 大名府, the prefect Li Lu 李輅 from Nanjing composed poems for the eight sites of Daming; following in his footsteps, county-level officials also composed poems for their counties (*Daming fuzhi* 1445, 4, *jingwu*; *Daming fuzhi* 1445, 7). It is possible that the sites were not newly created, but this was the first time that scenic views of the prefecture and its counties entered local gazetteers in the form of poetry. Demonstrably, these officials were the major force in revitalising the culture of scenic views in this prefecture. Table 2 lists the poets whose poems were included in the 1445 gazetteer. All of them were officials coming from other provinces, suggesting that the most fervent creators and celebrators of local scenic views might have been a community of diasporic officials, as opposed to native elites. Most of the poets (eight out of ten) came from Jiangnan, suggesting either that most early-Ming Daming officials came from Jiangnan or that Jiangnan officials tended to be more active in celebrating local views than officials from other places. A prefect, a magistrate, and a vice-prefect participated in writing the poems, but all the other seven poets were educational officials. Educational officials enjoyed a high status in the early Ming, but after the Ministry of Rites (*libu* 禮部) restricted the standards for their promotion in 1444, they became less prominent (Chen 2005, 237–239). Even so, they were still significant in local society as they were responsible for training local examinees and cultivating literati culture. Therefore, the dominance of educational officials on the list suggests that producing and reproducing local scenic views belonged to the cultural sector of local administration. It was also very likely that officials from Jiangnan brought the strong scenic-view tradition in Jiangnan to Northern China.

A common theme of the poems was to celebrate the peace of the Ming empire. Phrases like “the august Ming” (*huang Ming* 皇明), “the sagacious virtue of the emperor” (*shengde* 聖德), “the august dynasty” (*huangchao* 皇朝), and “the prosperous age” (*shengshi* 盛世) are prominent in their poems and highlighted through honorific indentations (*Daming fuzhi* 1445, 7). A poem entitled “Sunset at the Beacon Tower” (*Fengtai xizhao* 烽台夕照) contrasts the frequent use of the tower in previous dynasties with its disuse in the Ming, emphasising the peaceful rule of the Ming; a sense of complacency exudes from the final line of the poem: “This prosperous and peaceful age has left the remains of the tower lingering against the sunset” (*ibid.*).<sup>12</sup> For the sojourning officials, the local views mattered mainly because they exemplified the empire’s peace and prosperity.

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<sup>12</sup> 盛世升平無事日，空留遺址夕陽中。

Name	Official Title	Native place
Zhou Yuan 周源	Magistrate	Xiushui 秀水, Zhejiang
Xiong Hua 熊鋏	Instructor of Confucian school	Nanchang 南昌, Jiangxi
Wu Ji 吳驥	Instructor of Confucian school	Suzhou 蘇州, Southern Metropolitan Area
Zhang Yi 張逸	Instructor of Confucian school	Yunjian 雲間, Southern Metropolitan Area
Dong Yun 董雲	Assistant Instructor of Confucian School	Pengcheng 彭城, Southern Metropolitan Area
Dong Zi 董諮	Instructor of Confucian school	Qijun 齊郡, Shandong
Zhu Shufu 朱叔服	Instructor of Confucian School	Fengcheng 豐城, Jiangxi
Xie Bin 謝斌	Instructor of prefectural Confucian school	Kuaiji 會稽, Zhejiang
Gao Qian 高謙	Vice prefect	Fanchang 繁昌, Southern Metropolitan Area
Li Lu 李輅	Prefect	Jinling 金陵, Southern Metropolitan Area

Table 2: Poets who composed poems for scenic views of Daming and its counties.  
Source: *Daming fuzhi* 1445, 7.

By the end of the fifteenth century, celebrating scenic views of localities and recording such celebrations in gazetteers had become widespread in many places. Table 3 shows the number of scenic-view sets in each province extracted from 553 Ming-era local gazetteers in the LoGaRT database. One outstanding province was Shanxi 山西, the buffer zone between the capital and the Mongols. It had the second largest number of view sets in the dataset. Except for a set of four views devoted to a hall built by a magistrate, all the scenic views were created for administrative units, recorded in the format of “the eight views of such-and-such county”, e.g., “the eight views of Taiyuan County” (*Taiyuan bajing* 太原八景). All but one set are documented in a separate section entitled “Views” (*jingzhi* 景致), suggesting their growing significance in the late fifteenth century (*Shanxi tongzhi* 1475, 7.39b–50b). Like the views of Beijing, the views of Shanxi places might also have become important as a result of the early-Ming political atmosphere, as the

1620 gazetteer of the same province deleted the “Views” section and most of the scenic views (*Shanxi tongzhi* 1620, 4.1b, 5.4a, 14.3b). The 1475 gazetteer editors briefly explained the context for creating the section as follows:

Within the scope of the empire, every place, ranging from regions to prefectures and counties, has its scenic views. This dynasty’s poets selected the best sites and created titles for the scenic views. Although the titles vary from place to place, people made pictures or composed poems for each view, in order to manifest the famous sites and make them into great splendours (*Shanxi tongzhi* 1475, 7.39b).

寰宇之內，大而一方，次而一郡一邑，各有景致。近世詞人撫而擬之。其目不一，各形圖詠，蓋表其名勝以為偉觀雲。

The gazetteer editors emphasised that the selection, naming, and celebration of scenic views were a development of “this dynasty.” Thanks to “this dynasty’s poets,” they claimed, obscure local landscapes became “great splendours.” If this mindset also held true for editors of other gazetteers, then the widespread celebration of scenic views across the empire could be seen as a process in which “this dynasty’s poets” helped transform each locality into a place of distinction.

Provinces	Total Number (unit: set)	Scenic views of ad- ministrative units	Scenic views of smaller places
Huguang 湖廣	115	98	17
Southern Metropolitan Area 南直隸	109	49	60
Shanxi 山西	97	96	1
Fujian 福建	73	36	37
Zhejiang 浙江	69	21	48
Northern Metropolitan Area 北直隸	50	50	0
Guangdong 廣東	33	27	6
Henan 河南	30	27	3
Jiangxi 江西	27	16	11
Guizhou 貴州	21	21	0
Shandong 山東	19	16	3
Guangxi 廣西	13	13	0
Sichuan 四川	8	8	0

Shaanxi 陝西	24	22	2
Yunnan 雲南	5	2	3
Liaodong 遼東	1	1	0
Total	694	503	191

Table 3: Sets of scenic views in Ming-era gazetteers.  
Source: LoGaRT.

For this reason, the creation of the “Views” section in the Shanxi gazetteer had political implications. The section has ninety-five entries, all listed in a standard format. For example, the first entry goes as follows:

The eight views of Jinyang	<i>i.e., Taiyuan Prefecture</i>
Flowing water of the Jin River	<i>see the “Rivers” section</i>
Accumulating snow at the Tianmen Pass	<i>a pass; see the “Passes” section</i>
Chilly springs of the Lieshi River	<i>see the “Rivers” section</i>
Eccentric cypresses at Tutang Mountain	<i>a mountain; see the “Mountains” section; a temple was built there, see the “Temples” section</i>
Ancient ferries along the Fen River	<i>see the “Rivers” section</i>
Red leaves at Juwei Mountain	<i>a mountain; see the “Mountains” section; a temple was built there, see the “Temples” section</i>
Sunset over the ancient city-walls	<i>i.e., the remains of the Jinyang city-walls</i>
Moonlight at dawn over Meng Mountain	<i>see the “Mountains” section</i>

(Italics indicate characters in smaller type. See *Shanxi tongzhi* 1475, 7.39b)

晉陽八景	即太原府
晉渠流水	見川
天門積雪	關名，見關
洌石寒泉	見川
土堂怪栢	山名，見山，上建寺，見寺
汾江古渡	見漾
崛圍紅葉	山名，見山，上建寺，見寺
古城夕照	即晉陽城古跡
蒙山曉月	見山

As is typical of the scenic-view genre, the name of each view contains four characters, the first two for the place name and the following two for a feature of the site (Duan 2020, 157-159; Huang 2014, 60). Therefore, for a county with eight views, its entry covers only three vertical lines, one for the name and two lines each having sixteen large characters interspersed with smaller characters. This format places four or five administrative units next to one another on a half-folio page (Fig. 7), making it easy for readers to consult and compare. The gazetteer editors listed the views of about one hundred administrative units altogether under one section, which might help them buttress the claim that most administrative units of Shanxi had created scenic views in their territories. Taken together, by creating a section for scenic views, the editors of the 1475 provincial gazetteer signalled that most Shanxi administrative units had completed the transformation from ordinary places to “great splendours” of the Ming.

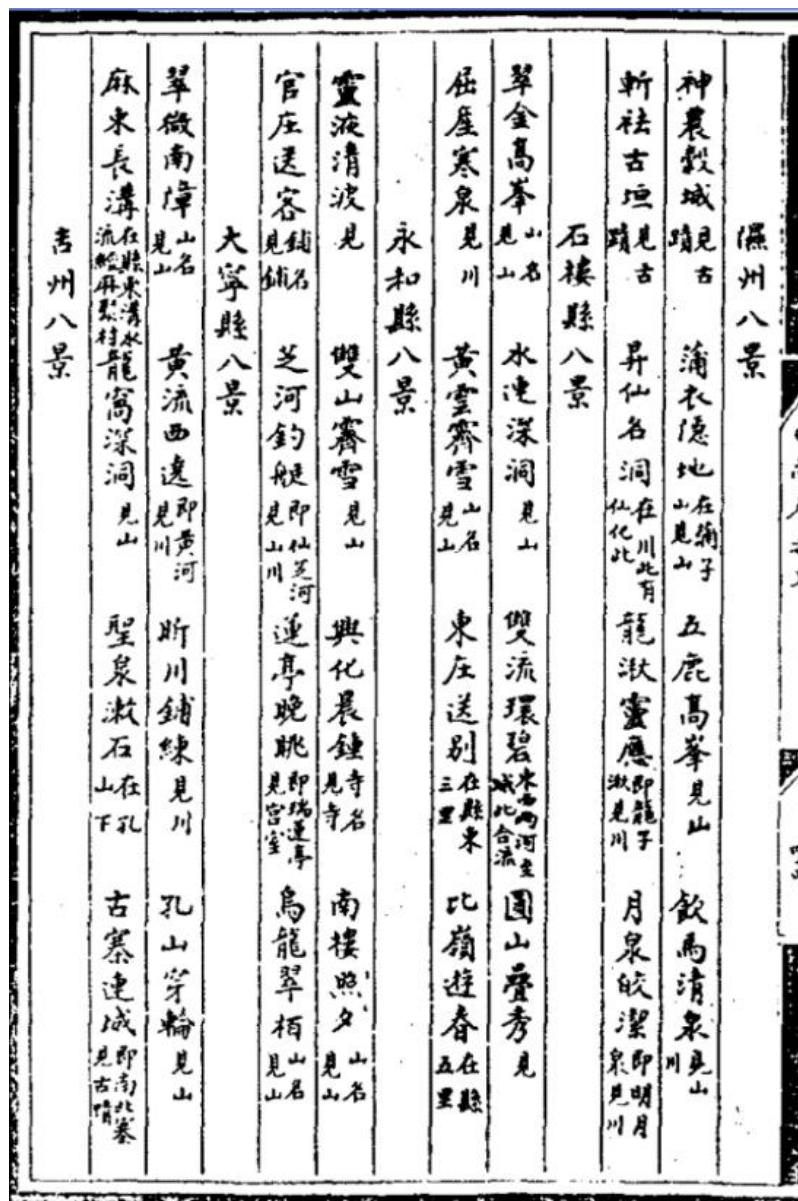


Fig. 7: Five sets of scenic views on a half-folio page. *Shanxi tongzhi* 1475, 7.44b. Image credit: Zhongguo Fangzhi Ku.

This same pattern—demonstrating the transformative power of the Ming rule through local views—seems to have emerged more prominently in northern provinces. Twenty-five Ming-era gazetteers in the LoGaRT database feature a separate “Views” section. Over half of them are gazetteers of Shanxi and Henan; with the exceptions of Huanggang Prefecture 黃岡府, Taoyuan County 桃源縣, and Puan Subprefecture 普安廳, all other places are in Northern China. None of the gazetteers is of the Southern Metropolitan Area, Zhejiang, or Fujian, the provinces that ranked top in the number of views of smaller-scale sites, such as villages, temples, and mountains (see Table 3). This seems to suggest a stark contrast between the production of scenic views of administrative units and of small-scale places (villages, mountains, temples, etc.). I am investigating smaller-scale sites in a more comprehensive study, which argues for the dominance of local literati in the production and reproduction of smaller-scale sites. Here, I propose that the widespread celebration of administrative-unit scenic views in the Ming was a result of appropriation by local officials of a longer tradition of celebrating scenic views that had been underway since at least the Southern Song. Then the concentration of smaller-scale sites in the southeast coast, along with the distribution of administrative-unit views in other places, suggests two different modes of cultural production.

The mode for administrative-unit views was one of heavy political weight. This mode was widespread in Henan, Shanxi, Shandong, and the Northern Metropolitan Area, places that surrounded Beijing and had more strategic importance. This theory is supported by a remark made by Fan Congjian 樊從簡, magistrate of Wenshui County 文水縣, Shanxi, in the 1550s. On Wenshui’s eight views, he commented:

In no case will state founders decline to divulge the geography of a place as a way of demonstrating the conquest of the place! As for the territory of Wenyang, various mountains buttress its beauty, and various rivers disseminate its culture. Furthermore, due to the fertility of the land and the abundance of products and due to its strategic significance, its geography ranks top in southern Shanxi. Being pacified and governed, will it not dominate the region and protect the capital for tens of thousands of years (*Wenshui xianzhi* 1625, 1.6b)?

蓋立國者未始不表其形勝以示一方之鎮也。文陽之境，諸山聳其翠焉，衆水渙其文焉。而又土物之饒、窰砦之險，其形勝甲于冀南。撫而治之，不可以雄視一方而拱衛邦畿於萬禩者歟？

Fan Congjian argued that the capacity of knowing and “divulging” the geography was essential to the full control of a place, a principle that had its origin in pre-Qin textual sources (Yee 1994, 72–73). Investigating the landscape and then creating scenic views to capture its key features were a significant step toward governance.<sup>13</sup> In this framework, the eight views of a place could play an important role, as they exemplified the core features of the geography and bespoke the state’s grasp of it. In the case of Wenshui, the eight

<sup>13</sup> In this sense, scenic views performed a similar role to maps, one that has been emphasised by recent scholarship. See Mostern 2011, 103–165; De Weerd 2009, 148.



views and Fan's explanation of them helped to elucidate the strategic importance of the place, which, if properly managed, would "protect the capital for tens of thousands of years." In cases such as this, the creation of eight views of administrative units served to claim control of these places.

Celebrating scenic views of administrative units seems to have become increasingly significant over the sixteenth century in frontier regions, where the creation of scenic views marked a significant step forward in the civilising process. For example, Xundian Prefecture 尋甸府 was the only administrative unit in Yunnan that recorded scenic views in Ming-era gazetteers, probably because the place was "transformed" more successfully than others.<sup>14</sup> Its 1550 gazetteer contains two sets of views, the eight views of Xunyang 尋陽 (another name for Xundian) and the eight views of Mumi Garrison 木密所, both under the "Geography" (*xingsheng* 形勝) section. The "Literature" (*yiwen* 藝文) section also contains poems devoted to the eight views of Xunyang (*Xundian fuzhi* 1550, *juanshang*.14b-17a, *juanxia*.41a-45b). The gazetteer editors justified the inclusion of the poems by emphasising their role in the literary history of the locality. There had been no literature prior to the Ming rule, and each piece in the literature section served to flesh out how the Ming state had gradually civilised the prefecture. "Albeit marginal, the prefecture has attractive views. We printed poems for the eight views, in order to demonstrate that people in our prefecture should not depreciate ourselves for living in a barbarous region" (*Xundian fuzhi* 1550, *juanxia*.10a).<sup>15</sup> The poems of the eight views served to demonstrate the Ming's success in civilising the prefecture by making elegant the local landscape.

This process was probably more successful in Guizhou, as the 1597 provincial gazetteer lists views of eighteen administrative units (*Guizhou tongzhi* 1597, 4.3b, 5.2b, 5.19b, 6.12b, 7.3a, 8.12b, 10.22b, 11.19a, 12.19a, 12.3a, 13.25b, 13.43b, 14.3a, 15.4a, 16.3b, 16.26b, 17.29b, 17.4a). However, the celebration of scenic views in Guizhou lagged by a century. This may be explained by John E. Herman's theory about the Ming's different strategies in the northern and the southwestern frontiers after the Tumu Incident in 1449. While the state closed its northern borders after that year, it continued to colonise its southwestern frontier, making scenic views as tools of civilisation continually meaningful in sixteenth-century Guizhou (Herman 2007, 9-10). This civilising vision is prominent in an essay on the ten views of Sinan Prefecture 思南府, a prefecture established in 1413 (*ibid.*, 101). The writer, a minister of the Ministry of Personnel (*libu* 吏部) named Qian Pu 錢溥, from Jiangnan, posits the creation of the views in that prefecture as a natural outcome of Sinan's transformation. His narrative begins with a "prehistory" of Sinan, that is, a history of the barbarians; the turning point was the incorporation of the place into the Ming empire, after which scholars and officials started to emerge in Sinan; this continuous progress culminated in the rise of An Kang 安康 as a vice director of the Ministry of Revenue (*hubu* 戶部), who felt obliged to "celebrate the extraordinary mountains and rivers" (*biaoyi shanchuan* 表異山川) in his hometown and so created ten views for the prefecture (*Sinan fuzhi* 1566, 1.21b-22a).<sup>16</sup> This narrative exemplifies a common pattern

<sup>14</sup> *Yunnan tongzhi* recorded three other sets of views, but all of them were devoted to smaller-scale places: a hall built by Mu Cong 沐琮 (1450-1496) and the famous sites of Diancang Mountain 点苍山 and Erhai Lake 洱海. See *Yunnan tongzhi* 1572, 2.23b, 15.8b, 15.38b.

<sup>15</sup> 郡雖僻而景致攸存，詩刻八景，示不可以夷地自鄙也。

<sup>16</sup> For more on Sinan's incorporation into the Ming, see Herman 2007, 96-101.

whereby emerging Confucian scholars on the southwestern frontier reshaped local conditions to meet the state's expectations (Daniel and Ma 2020, 2).

Scenic views frequently appeared in gazetteers in other places as well. Despite the differences in timing and mode of production, it is clear that the celebration of scenic views for administrative units during the Ming was an empire-wide phenomenon with explicit political implications.

## Local Officials' Engagement with Scenic Views

Given the political connotations of administrative-unit scenic views, officials were understandably the most important players in celebrating and documenting them. Sojourning officials seem to have monopolised the production and reproduction of scenic views of administrative units, as in the above case of Daming. More commonly, however, poems on scenic views were written by a mixture of sojourning officials and native elites, which, for example, is evident in the composition of the poets who wrote poems for the eighty-six sets of scenic views of administrative units included in the 1522 Huguang provincial gazetteer.<sup>17</sup> In other words, most poems were produced on occasions where sojourning officials and native elites socialised with each other. On such occasions, local officials could familiarise themselves with native elites and gain support from the latter. For instance, in a poetry-writing contest held in the Jiajing 嘉靖 period to celebrate the eight views of Yuci County 榆次縣 (Shanxi Province), a magistrate gathered a group of prominent local men, including at least four *jìnshì* 進士 and one *jǔrén* 舉人 (*Yuci xianzhi* 1609, 6.2a–3a, 7.5b, 9.69a–70b; *Yuci xianzhi* 1750, 8.8b).

It is unclear whether the magistrate was at the centre of this gathering, but generally local officials seem frequently to have been in the spotlight. They could decide whether to keep old scenic views or make new ones. In one case, a Jiajing-period magistrate added two views to the eight views that had been previously created by a Hongwu-period 洪武 magistrate (*Changle xianzhi* 1548, 1.22a). In another case, a county school instructor expanded the number of his prefecture's views from eight to fifteen (*Qingyang fuzhi* 1557, 17.15b). In Jingjiang County 靖江縣 (Southern Metropolitan Area), a magistrate wrote an essay to record and justify his changes to that county's scenic views (*Xinxiu Jingjiang xianzhi* 1562, 7.7a). Officials also set up rules for poetry composition, as in Kuizhou Prefecture 夔州府 (Sichuan Province), a prefect decided that every participant in one gathering should write a poem of nine couplets for each view (*Kuizhou fuzhi* 1513, 11.41a). In other cases, participants wrote poems to rhyme with those by officials (*Jianping xianzhi* 1562, 7.11a). Such poetry-writing occasions may have helped local officials confirm their authority in local affairs.

The poems produced on such occasions, if included in gazetteers, would become evidence of local officials' sociability and authority. As such poems accumulated in gazetteers, the names of local officials who had written poems would be placed next to previous officials (see for example Fig. 5). This format facilitated comparisons among officials, as is seen in the continuous accumulation of officials' poems and names

<sup>17</sup> The views are scattered in the *xingsheng* section of each administrative unit. See *Huguang tujing zhishu* 1522.

in the subsection on scenic views.<sup>18</sup> This effect would be amplified as gazetteer compilation became more frequent in the late Ming. Even though not every cohort of local officials was able to print gazetteers, most officials, as Joseph Dennis has demonstrated, continued piling up materials in preparation to update gazetteers (Dennis 2015, 112). Local officials, regardless of whether they would produce new editions or not, frequently consulted gazetteers (Dennis 2015, 189). Those who managed to update gazetteers tended to add their own poems to their gazetteers.<sup>19</sup> It may have been this mechanism of cross-generational competition that fuelled the continuous reproduction of local views.

Local administrators also engaged with local scenic views to demonstrate their mastery of local knowledge. The logic went as follows: if an official knew enough about his locality's scenic views, he must have consulted gazetteers or toured local landscapes, either of which was a sign of good governance. Thus an instructor in the Confucian school of Ruichang County 瑞昌縣 proudly recorded that he was able to respond to inquiries about the county's scenic views with every detail (*Ruichang xianzhi* 1570, 7.17b–19a). The very act of writing poems on landscapes itself was also considered a sign of good governance, as only in times of peace and stability could local officials have the leisure to do so. According to the editors of the 1584 Xiangyang 襄陽 gazetteer, people had two approaches to landscapes: in times of war, warriors and generals relied on mountains and rivers for defence, while in times of peace, poets and writers enjoyed the beauty of local landscapes (*Xiangyang fuzhi* 1584, 7.5a–b). A magistrate named Song Changgu 宋常固 thus concluded his tenure with a poetry-writing gathering, which he thought would prove his efficient governance (*Huizhou fuzhi* 1542, 12.15a–b). As the famous scholar Zeng Qi 曾棨 wrote in a preface recording this gathering, “given that people of this county are content with the policies and do not trouble the magistrate, it is appropriate for him in his leisure to explore the joy of the mountains and rivers” (ibid, 12.15b).<sup>20</sup> Capable officials who had fulfilled their most imperative duties were entitled to relish beautiful scenery.

It is notable that this gathering produced a set of material objects (ibid, 12.15a). It was common for local officials to amass the poems composed during poetry gatherings and make painting albums to pair with them. For instance, a magistrate of Yixing County 宜興縣 commissioned an album of the county's scenic views based on records in previous gazetteers, and organised a similar poetry-writing gathering thirty years later (*Changzhou fuzhi* 1618, 16.55a–b). A prefectural judge (*tuiguan* 推官) of Jiaxing Prefecture 嘉興府 left the album he commissioned to be circulated in Jiaxing after his tenure ended, in hopes that local residents would remember his contributions (*Jiaxing xianzhi* 1637, 21.12b–13a). In Jurong County 句容縣 (Southern Metropolitan Area), upon the departure of a magistrate, his colleagues, his successor, and local elites organised a poetry-writing gathering to honour his contributions (*Jurong xianzhi* 1496, 12.14b). They used the ten views as metaphors for his virtues. For instance, they used the view of “the erupting springs of Jianghu” (*jianghu quanyong* 絳湖泉湧) to signify the magistrate's unbounded learning (ibid.). They then commissioned a painting album and published it to “broadcast for ever the good governance

<sup>18</sup> For example, see *Huguang tujing zhishu* 1522, 6.33a–34b, 11.11a–15a.

<sup>19</sup> For instance, see the magistrate Wu Xing 伍性 in *Huazhou zhi* 1572, 2.19a.

<sup>20</sup> 夫邑民既安，政務弗煩，則為令者視篆之餘而寄興於山水之樂亦宜其然也。

of the magistrate” (*Jurong xianzhi* 1496, 12.18b).<sup>21</sup> The paintings belong to what Elizabeth Kindall terms “honorific paintings” that were produced to commemorate officials’ contributions when they left their posts, or what Mette Siggestedt terms “occasional art” for the same reason (Kindall 2009, 141; Siggestedt 2001, 247). With the printed album, the magistrate could prove that he had garnered support from his people. This achievement would be remembered by future generations as parts of the album entered the county’s gazetteer (*Jurong xianzhi* 1496, 8.26a–29b).

Engagement with local landscapes thus helped local officials distinguish themselves. Dai Hao 戴浩, a native of Zhejiang and magistrate of Yongzhou Prefecture 永州府 in the 1440s, wrote an introduction to Yongzhou’s eight views. He recorded how shocked he had been upon his arrival when he found no record of scenic views in its gazetteer. The lack of eight views not only “causes mountains to be ashamed and valleys to be ridiculed” but also “makes officials like us embarrassed for our prefecture” (*Yongzhou fuzhi* 1494, 7.50a–b).<sup>22</sup> His embarrassment implies his assumption that each prefecture should have a set of scenic views; the lack thereof in Yongzhou thus indicated its backwardness. Thus he created the eight views. In doing so, he also attempted to change the prefecture from a barbarous place to a proper one. As this piece entered the gazetteer, it helped establish the prefect as a civiliser, whose major contribution was recorded as pacifying the “Miao barbarians” 苗寇 (*ibid.*, 3.17b).

All in all, local officials could use local landscapes to establish authority, display achievement, and cultivate reputation. It seems that the creation and celebration of local views were a low-stakes technique for officials to gain political capital. But local officials were certainly not the only makers of scenic views. For instance, in Nan’an Prefecture 南安府, Jiangxi, a local scholar named Deng Dewen 鄧德溫 was able to organise a gathering to celebrate the prefecture’s scenic views. Yet this did not bring him the type of political capital that many local officials could garner by organising similar events. The related texts included in Nan’an gazetteers emphasised that he was not the first to write poems for local views (*Nan’an fuzhi* 1536, 25.16b–20a). The reproduction of administrative-unit views by local literati could not have the same political effect as was usually associated with sojourning officials. Although local elites may have dominated the production of scenic views of smaller-scale sites, local officials controlled the production and reproduction of administrative-unit scenic views.<sup>23</sup>

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the Ming era witnessed the continuous production and reproduction of scenic views of administrative units. Sojourning administrators actively participated in the making of local scenic views, as such activities could help them establish authority, garner local support, and cultivate a good reputation. Visual representations of scenic views started to appear sporadically in gazetteers but did not gain wide

<sup>21</sup> 播侯善政於悠久。

<sup>22</sup> 惟此八景未備，是使山靈懷慚、林壑聳譁，亦吾官是郡者之所耻也。

<sup>23</sup> For instance, all the seven sets of scenic views recorded in the 1491 *Xiuning xianzhi* were views of lineage residences. Although external scholar-officials wrote poems and essays for the views, it was lineage members—mostly local scholars—who created the views and commissioned the writings. See *Xiuning xianzhi* 1491, 19.22b–24a, 19.26a–28a, 19.35a–36b, 36.30b, 37.8b–9b, 37.15a, 37.12b–13a.

popularity. By the early Qing, almost every administrative unit in China had its own sets of scenic views. The essence of this development was that local officials appropriated the genre of scenic views, which was originally associated with literati culture, to the celebration of scenic views in their jurisdiction. While literati in the most affluent regions continued to engage actively with scenic views, sojourning officials across China manipulated this genre and created an arena that they could dominate.

Although later gazetteer editors criticised or even ridiculed the celebration of scenic views throughout Ming localities (*Ninghua xianzhi* 1669, *fanli*), no complaints about this practice appear in extant Ming-era gazetteers. It is possible that the Ming mechanism for producing scenic views of administrative units was unique. I argue that although different actors—sojourning officials, local gentry, and other forces—attached diverse meanings to scenic views of administrative units, their political meanings were the major reason for their spread across the Ming empire.

The increasing popularity of scenic views of administrative units was part of the late-Ming “ascendance of *jing*” or scenic sites. The proliferation of writings on geographic information, according to Si-yen Fei, embodied a new mindset whereby people could “articulate their lived experiences through the representations of places;” it also shifted “viewers’ gazes away from the symbols of political authority” to “famous sites known for their natural beauty or historical associations” (Fei 2010, 150). The changes in images of scenic views in local gazetteers, as I have shown, confirm Fei’s observation that the appeal of scenic views themselves, rather than their political meanings, became more capitalised on. This emphasis on the individuality of famous sites, however, does not mean the demise of their political meanings. While writers, painters, poets, and publishers created more literary space for engaging with landscapes, sojourning officials—mostly prefects, magistrates, and educational officials—came to dominate the production and reproduction of “official” versions of scenic views of the locality. In this sense, gazetteers were an important space for such officials to assert their authority in regulating local landscapes. Native literati’s growing power in defining local landscapes did not diminish sojourning officials’ authority in the production of administrative-unit scenic views.

In fact, in some cases, sojourning officials’ authority in this respect may have increased during the late Ming. As Thomas Nimick has aptly demonstrated, such officials had gained “an extraordinary amount of responsibility and authority” by the early sixteenth century and became responsible for “everything that happened within their jurisdiction” (Nimick 2008, 97). Their expanding duties increased their vulnerability and caused them to prioritise the duties emphasised by their superiors and supervisors and to ignore the common people’s needs; this became a social problem and incurred criticism from officials such as Hai Rui 海瑞 (Nimick 2008, 98, 102–103). In this context, doing things less imperative than fulfilling tax quotas would help local officials distinguish themselves from the stereotype and stand on the moral high ground. Touring and documenting local landscapes was a low-stakes investment of this type. If other tasks qualified local officials as competent administrators, then engaging with the scenic views of their governed localities would help them cultivate an image as benevolent “father and mother officials”.

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### Abbreviation

FZK Airusheng zhongguo fangzhi ku 愛如生中國方志庫 (Airusheng database of Chinese gazetteers) edition.

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*Changzhou fuzhi* 常州府志 (Changzhou Prefectural gazetteer). 1618. FZK.

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