

Enlightenment Through Reading: The Impact of Miscellaneous Books in Folk Education in Huizhou, China

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Abstract: The evolution of folk education in ancient China was inextricably linked with advancing pedagogical methods and educational resources. The introduction of folk enlightenment reading materials, serving as pivotal tools for literacy and vocational training, significantly influenced the landscape of popular education. This transformation was characterized by three main developments: an expansion of the educational demographic, a shift from traditional Confucian curricula to practical, life-oriented content, and the integration of common vocational knowledge, laying the groundwork for professional expertise. The textbook *Four Words in Miscellaneous Characters* (《四言杂字》), a prominent example from the Ming and Qing Dynasties in Huizhou, epitomizes this shift. It reflects the local values of prioritizing agriculture and commerce and the reverence for literacy and culture while documenting essential local practices in marriage, dowry, and medicinal herbs. This text serves as a valuable lens through which to examine the linguistic and cultural norms of the Huizhou region.

Keywords: Folk Education; Enlightenment Literature; Huizhou Texts; "Four Words in Miscellaneous Characters"

1. Introduction

Enlightenment reading materials are various textbooks written by people in ancient China to educate children to be literate and understand common knowledge of life. Generally speaking, they can be divided into governmental and private enlightenment readings. Chinese educational development history profoundly influences the distinction between official and private schools. Before the Spring and Autumn period and the Warring States period, China's school education is still in its infancy; the children's enlightenment education is "integrated into the social production of life in the undifferentiated education, social indoctrination or education in the family." Between the Warring States period and the Song dynasty, children of feudal aristocratic families were baptized with knowledge of ethics, morality, and propriety in the classics such as *The Analects of Confucius*, *The Great Learning*, *The Medieval Times*, and *Mencius* in the school. At the same time, commoners' education level could not be guaranteed. However, at this time, the content of education had already been changed in the direction of practical skills for daily life. For example, the earliest surviving literacy textbook in China is the Western Han Dynasty Shi You *The Book of Haste*, which is divided into chapters according to names, food and drink, clothes and utensils, animals and plants, and official duties and laws, and combines three-, four-, and seven-character rhymes, which make the contents very practical.

After the Song Dynasty, folk enlightenment education developed into the mainstream, and the target audience was no longer limited to children. However, it was expanded to include adults who needed to be educated in life knowledge and skills. The materials used in teaching were no longer limited to the Four Books and Five Classics (Daoism, Confucianism, Buddhism), and the education content was more oriented towards practical life applications. Officially recognized literacy textbooks, such as the *Three Character Classic*, are generally believed to have been written by Mr. Wang Bohou, a Confucian scholar of the Song Dynasty, to teach children to read and write, to know the world, and to understand the rites of the sages. The Hundred Surnames, written by a Confucian scholar from Qiantang in the Northern Song Dynasty, was designed to help children learn the culture of Chinese family names. The "other way of literacy teaching materials," which is not officially recognized, are collectively called "miscellaneous characters." This way of teaching materials solved the problem of the children of the lower and middle classes (including the upper classes who only

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wanted to be landed property owners and did not care much about prestige) learning to read and write in a short period. This is the real solution to the problem that the children of the lower and middle classes (including the upper classes who only wanted to be landlords and did not want to be successful) had to learn to read and write in a short period to cope with daily needs. This type of primer is a textual material compiled by ordinary folk for literacy and learning various skills in life, with the characteristics of popularity, practicality, and obvious regional colour, and the number and scale of its documents are far greater than people's imagination. Zheng A Cai points out: "The two tracks of monastic education and formal schooling ran parallel, and the learning purpose of the monastic education target was mainly reading, writing and calculating, so the literacy books compiled for this purpose were most prevalent in the Miscellaneous Characters series."¹ The "Mengshu" here, or private school enlightenment readings, is equivalent to the "folk enlightenment readings" proposed in this paper. This kind of reading material upholds the characteristic of "practicality," the contents are written according to the time and place, covering almost every aspect of life. From the Western Han Dynasty to the late Qing Dynasty and the Republic of China, an endless stream of such books has nourished thousands of people and significantly reduced illiteracy.

Huizhou Miscellaneous Books is a literacy and educational resource that has been widely popular in the Huizhou region of Anhui Province from the Song Dynasty to the Republic of China. Huizhou, now belonging to Huangshan in Anhui Province, has six counties under its jurisdiction: Shexian, Huining, Wuyuan, Jixi, Manxian, and Qimen. The research results about Huizhou's miscellaneous books appeared mainly in the country. Among the specialized papers, Wang Zhenzhong "Emergency Miscellaneous Characters - Introduction of a Newly Discovered Book of Huizhou Enlightenment Readings" (2000), "A Commercial Monograph Compiled by the Huizhou People - The Transcript of <RiPingChang> (日平常)" (2002), and Sun Chengping, "A Supplementary Study of the Huizhou Commercial Enlightenment Book <RiPingChang> (日平常)." They began to engage in the specialized study of Huizhou miscellaneous books earlier, but what they discussed lacked systematicity. In 2012, Dai Yuanzhi of Huangshan College explored the comprehensive value of Huizhou miscellaneous books from the aspects of women's education, girl's tutor, law, folklore, reasons of prevalence, commercial enlightenment, and ethical indoctrination. These research results have objectively shown the comprehensive value of Huizhou miscellaneous books to scholars. These research results objectively show the academic and applied value of Huizhou miscellaneous books to the academic world, prompting a group of scholars to pay attention to the miscellaneous character literature around them. However, "although Huizhou miscellaneous books have attracted people's attention, the current research on Huizhou miscellaneous books is not extensive and systematic, while the thematic research on Huizhou miscellaneous books is even more lacking."

In addition to Huizhou miscellaneous books, in recent years, the research on miscellaneous characters in the academic community is more representative of the field, mainly focusing on Shanxi miscellaneous characters, Lingnan miscellaneous characters, Guangxi miscellaneous characters in three areas: the perspective of the research from the phonetics, vocabulary, text, documentation, language education, and other beginnings. For example, Xin Ruilong and Xie Junhua, "Document Identification and Ancient Book Arrangement of Shanxi Miscellaneous Characters" (2022), Song Dandan, "Study of the Characters Used in the Literature of Lingnan Miscellaneous Characters from the Qing Dynasty to the Republic of China" (2022), and Huang Wenhao, "Guangxi Miscellaneous Characters and Common Characters in Guangxi: Five Rules for Examining and Verifying the Characters" (2022). Xin Ruilong, "The Interpretation and Arrangement of 'Must Miscellaneous Characters' - An Essay on the Documentary Linguistic Value of Shanxi Miscellaneous Characters" (2020).

Compared with the official enlightenment readings, the educational objects of folk enlightenment readings have been expanded from children to adults, and the educational materials and contents have been expanded from the Four Books and Five Classics to the aspects of life such as commerce, food, agriculture, and marriage. Based on the current status of research, this paper focuses on the influence of folk initiation readings on educational objects, educational materials, and educational contents in Chinese folk education from the perspective of folklore, taking the first-hand document "Four Words and Miscellaneous Characters", a miscellany of characters from Huizhou, as an example.

2. Transformation of the Object of Civic Education

Folk education in ancient China underwent a process of development from scratch, referring specifically to educational activities undertaken by educational institutions or individuals not established by the official government. The target group of education experienced a shift from the princes and nobles of the feudal dynasty to the ordinary people of the country, and the age of the target group shifted from minors to all people.

During the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods, along with the decline of kingship, traditional society entered a period of ritual collapse, the rise of the scholarly class, the downward shift of academics, and the gradual rise of folk education. In the context of influencing this shift, its crucial figure was Confucius in the pre-Qin period, who pioneered private education for the folk and provided an essential foundation for the development of folk education. During the Song Dynasty, changes in the political and economic environment and the transformation of the political and economic environment gave birth to many family academies. The object of folk education continued along the direction of the official school's development, and ordinary people's children had more opportunities to come into contact with excellent intellectual knowledge. By the Qing Dynasty, the folk people's demand for knowledge and skills prompted the educational objects of folk enlightenment reading materials to present a dual-track parallelism between children's and adults' enlightenment education. During this period, miscellaneous books were widely popular, and miscellaneous books with local characteristics appeared in almost every region of the country, such as the Huizhou miscellaneous books used in this paper, which were popular enlightenment reading materials in Huizhou during the Ming and Qing dynasties. Based on the content of the miscellaneous characters, the target of education is more inclined to adults.

During the Han Dynasty, children as young as six were taught numbers and the names of directions, such as southeast, northwest, and north. In the Book of Han, the Records of the Arts and Letters:

古者八岁入小学，故周官保氏掌养国子，教之六书，谓象形、象事、象意、象声、转注、假借，造字之本也。

Reading elementary school at the age of eight, Bao, a Zhou Dynasty official in charge of educating the royal heirs, first taught the six structural types of writing, which are pictograms, hieroglyphs, hieroglyphs, hieroglyphs, hieroglyphic sounds, transcription, and pseudoglyphs, and which are the laws of Chinese character creation.

A more detailed account can be found in the Book of Han - Food and Foodstuffs Zhi:

古者八岁入小学，学六甲、五方、书计之事，始知室家长幼之节。十五岁入大学，学先圣礼乐，而知朝廷君臣之礼。

At the age of eight, children in ancient times went to elementary school, where they were taught how to count the years, the 60th year, the five directions, the east, the west, the south, the north, the north, and the center, writing and calculating, and they began to understand the etiquette of the family and the young and the old. At the age of fifteen, they entered the university to learn the knowledge of rituals and music of the sages and thus mastered the etiquette of the courtiers and ministers.

In official education, children of the nobility began at age six to learn about writing, counting years, directions, writing, and arithmetic, with literacy as the priority, followed by knowledge of family and etiquette, such as seniority and inferiority. At the age of fifteen, one enters the "Big School (大学)", which begins with the study of the sages' knowledge of rituals and music, and then moves on to the cultivation of one's body and family, and ends with the study of politics, which is the study of the world and its application to adults. The content of the whole study is the knowledge of nature and the system of rituals and music, and the core purpose is to pass the imperial examinations and enter the bureaucracy of the feudal society to realize the ultimate ideal of ruling the country and leveling the world. Influenced by the official school's education, the private sector's education advanced in this direction, and the education target was also mainly children.

In the Wei, Jin, and North-South Dynasties period, frequent regime changes and the spread of Buddhism and Taoism prompted a quiet change in the content of folk education, and the change in the

content of education prompted the object of education no longer limited to children. During this period, the *Enlightenment Essentials* (《开蒙要训》) formally appeared as a goblet of folk miscellaneous enlightenment reading materials. It is one of China's ancient monumental books, written by Ma Renshou in the Six Dynasties period, popular in the Sui, Tang, and Five Dynasties periods. This book to the Tang and Five Dynasties was circulated in Dunhuang, and later by the impact of war, in the Song Dynasty in the Central Plains, until the Qing Dynasty Guangxu twenty-five years (1899) people only in Dunhuang Cangjing Cave in the preservation of the literature found in some of the Tang and Five Dynasties of the writing, from then on, the annihilation of nearly 1,000 years of the *Book of Meng* to be able to re-emerge in the human world.

The book focuses on literacy education, categorizing and organizing miscellaneous words, knowledge, and skills for daily use, covering nature, society, clothes, body, artifacts, cooking, and farming, and emphasizing practicality and regionality.

The Huizhou miscellaneous books on which this paper is based were produced in the Huizhou region of Anhui Province and are an essential witness to folk education in the Ming and Qing dynasties. These miscellaneous characters are either four-word sentences, six-word sentences, or seven-word sentences, with occasional miscellaneous phrases. They are divided into paragraphs according to the types of events, including dynasties, family names, buying and selling transactions, daily utensils, flowers, trees, aquatic animals, house construction, food and medicinal herbs, animals, borrowing and lending, artisans' utensils, treasures, and human resources, which are very complicated. Why is the knowledge involved in miscellaneous characters so complex? Huizhou's miscellaneous book "eye-opening scripture" has an explanation:

日课所读之书,或三行,或两行,甚而一句一读,动经百数,犹有不能成诵者,安能使之过目不忘,因此识彼乎?是以懵然罔觉之子,一旦而命其登账籍、读家书,无怪乎其提笔问字入目盲然也!……余向甚为怪之久,欲立一医眼单方,遍传村塾。无奈秀才亦不识之乎者也,无补日用之资,而子曰诗云又非急救之药。于是不辞旬日之劳,检阅《通考》《群珠》之眼前紧要者,纂集付梓,……书指其点画,示其应用。将见敏者月计,钝者岁计,不期年间而天地飞潜、动植之物、人事日用、服食之常,日熟于童蒙手口之下,即随事随物自能寓目而识其字,随字而知其音,读家书、登账籍裕如也。

Sometimes, three lines, sometimes two lines, sometimes even a paragraph, sometimes a sentence, are read hundreds of times in the classroom every day, and still, some of them cannot be memorized. How can the learner not forget and learn by heart? Therefore, for some of the learners of hindsight, once they register the books and read the family book, no wonder there will be a pen to forget the words, read the letter like a blind man's situation! I have perceived this strange phenomenon for a long time and wanted to prescribe a remedy for the eyes that would be widely used in the village schools. However, the "Zhi Hu Zhe Ye (之乎者也)" learned by Xiu Cai was of little help for daily use, and classic texts such as "What the Son Said and What the Poet Said (子曰诗云)" could not be used as first-aid medicine and so spent dozens of days, from the "Tongkao (通考)" "group of pearl (群珠开蒙要训)" to collect some immediate use of the word, compiled together into a printed book. They pointed out the strokes of the words and showed their application. So intelligent people learn by month, stupid by year to learn. Without a year, flying in the sky, swimming in the water, animals and plants, personnel relations, clothing, and food will gradually be familiar with the children to grasp and encounter things naturally in the eyes, recognize the words that represent them, according to the words and then know the pronunciation, and after that to read the family book, the registration of the books of accounts naturally at ease.

From the content of this complex knowledge and skills education, it is easy to see that much of the content is no longer only applicable to children's literacy and enlightenment, such as knowledge of palace architecture, artisans' implements, farming, trade, and commerce. Some of the miscellaneous character literature, from the name of the name, is no longer applicable to children's enlightenment, such as "Zhuangnong miscellaneous characters," "Shanxi miscellaneous characters," "dialect miscellaneous characters," "Tuyin miscellaneous characters," "Tianjin geography of the sale of miscellaneous characters" and so on. In his preface to Gao Weiguo's *Miscellaneous Characters*, Lai Xinxia (1995) notes, "Its [*Miscellaneous Characters*] readers are of all ages and statuses, and both men and women, young and old, can choose this path to literacy."² Gu Yueqin (2013) said, "Many miscellaneous characters were popular

textbooks for the general public, comprehensive textbooks for uneducated or less-educated adults in towns and villages to receive an education, and in addition to the children of farmers, there were also emerging social strata such as marketplace merchants and craft apprentices, and there were even miscellaneous character books written exclusively for women.”³ The research of these scholars proves once again that the emergence of miscellaneous characters changed the object of Chinese folk education, prompting it to develop in the direction of popularization, and the constraints of age, occupation, and status were broken.

To summarize, the emergence of folk enlightenment reading materials in ancient China contributed to the fact that the target of folk education was no longer limited to minors but instead developed in the direction of the entire population from all walks of life.

3. Transformation of Folk Education Materials

The materials of folk education in ancient China have gone through a course of development from the Hundred Schools of Thought doctrine to Confucianism and then to the practical literature of life.

During the Spring and Autumn and Warring States Periods, Confucius, Laozi, Zhuangzi, Mencius, Xunzi, Hanfeizi, Mozi, and other famous thinkers, a hundred schools of thought contend, accomplishing a hundred flowers blossomed in the ideological heyday. In the late Spring and Autumn Periods, Confucius, the famous educator known as the “Most Sage Teacher,” led his disciples to travel around various countries, teaching and spreading his Confucian thinking and culture. His words and deeds were recorded by his disciples and compiled into the book *The Analects of Confucius*, which is still in use today and has become a representative work of Confucian thinking and culture. The Qin Dynasty destroyed the six states and honored the Legalist ideology, but unfortunately, failed to rule for a long time. The Han Dynasty first honored the ideas of Daoism (Chinese system of beliefs). It rested with the people, and then when Emperor Wu of the Han Dynasty, Dong Zhongshu systematically put forward the ideas of “induction of heaven and man (天人感应),” “great unification (大一统)” and “dismissing all schools of thought and respecting only Confucianism” (罢黜百家, 独尊儒术) based on the patriarchal thinking of Confucianism, which the rulers adopted.” The rulers adopted these ideas. From then on, Confucianism became the orthodox thought of feudal China, and its influence lasted for more than 2,000 years. Under this ideology’s influence, many excellent ancient Chinese texts were derived, representing, for example, the Thirteen Classics. These excellent texts naturally became the primary materials used in folk education.

In response to the folk enlightenment, Wang Guowei’s “Examination of the Doctorate of the Han and Wei Dynasties” states that:

汉时教初学之所名曰书馆，其师名曰书师，其书用《仓颉》《凡将》《急就》《元尚》诸篇，其旨在使学童识字习字。⁴

During the Han Dynasty, the place where elementary school knowledge was taught was called Shuguan, and the teacher was called Shushi, and the books used were *Cang Jie* (《仓颉》), *Fan Jiang* (《凡将》), *Ji Jiu* (《急就》), *Yuan Shang* (《元尚》), to enable children to learn to read and write.

The *Cangjie*, the *Fanjiang*, and the *Yuanshang* are all lost today, but only *Shi You* and *Ji Jiu* have been handed down to the present day. Gu Yanwu of the Qing Dynasty said in his *Record of Daily Knowledge* that all children read *Shi You*’s *Jijiu* after the Han and Wei Dynasties. This book has been in circulation for a long time. The book is roughly categorized according to names, clothes, food, and utensils and organized into rhyming sentences, most of which are seven-word sentences, with the first two words “*Jijiu* (急就)” taken as the title. Its purpose was to teach children to read and write. However, the scope of knowledge involved was no longer limited to Confucian writings, and the focus was no longer limited to ideological and cultural knowledge but shifted to practical knowledge and skills. The form and content of the *Jijiu* greatly influenced later enlightenment reading materials. In the Eastern Han Dynasty, Guo Xianqing wrote a book called *Miscellaneous Characters* (《杂字指》). In the Sui Dynasty, Wang Shao wrote a book called *Miscellaneous Characters of Common Words* (《俗语杂字》), which was named “Miscellaneous Characters,” but unfortunately, both of them are lost today. The surviving Six Dynasties period of *Enlightenment Essentials* (《开蒙要训》) continued this writing feature, integrating the two functions of

literacy and education with concise language and familiar words, which became a model of miscellaneous literature for the later generations.

According to Zhang Zhigong, miscellaneous character-based literature officially became the primary teaching material for folk education in the Song Dynasty.⁵ Lu You said in his commentary below the poem “Autumn Dwelling in the Countryside - Part III” that:

农家十月，乃遣子弟入学，谓之‘冬学’。所读杂字《百家姓》之类，谓之村书。

Farmers, in October, sent children enrolled in school, who were who were called the “winter study.” The reading of miscellaneous characters, *Hundred Surnames* (《百家姓》) and the like, called the village book.

This proves that *Miscellaneous Characters* and *Hundred Surnames* are similar to the Song dynasty folk people’s winter school period, a period of necessary enlightenment reading materials. During this period, for the academic community known as the *Thousands of Characters* (《千字文》), *Hundreds of Surnames* (《百家姓》), *Three Character Classic* (《三字经》) has become a series of reading materials for the enlightenment of the folk official school. Moreover, since the Ming and Qing dynasties, “the development of the commodity economy, the change of values, the formation of the civic class, the people’s literacy needs are increasingly strong, the daily life knowledge transfer becomes urgent, miscellaneous characters due to the popularity of easy to understand, simple and practical, close to the life of the Ming and Qing dynasties in the civil society widely circulated,” a large number of miscellaneous textbooks have appeared in various places. This situation continued until nearly forty years after the founding of New China; for example, in 1956, Zhang Xuean wrote *Miscellaneous Characters for Spoken Languages* (《口语杂字》); in 1964, Jiangxi Education Press wrote *New Four Words Miscellaneous Characters* (《新编四言杂字》); in 1965, Shanghai Education Press wrote *Commonly Used Miscellaneous Characters in Rural Areas* (《农村常用杂字》); in 1982, Hunan People’s Publishing House wrote *Practical Miscellaneous Characters in Rural Areas* (《农村实用杂字》); and in 1985, Miao Fuling and Qiao Suigen wrote *Miscellaneous Characters for Agricultural Purposes* (《农用杂字》), and so on.

Combined with my collection of miscellaneous characters in recent years, a wealth of miscellaneous character literature of the Ming and Qing dynasties is scattered throughout the country. Only the number of miscellaneous character documents we have purchased so far has reached 336, including Anhui, Shaanxi, Shaanxi, Henan, Gansu, Ningxia, Hubei, Hunan, Yunnan, Hebei, Shandong, and the length of the longest one has reached more than one hundred pages. After the Song Dynasty, the application of miscellaneous character-based enlightenment reading materials in folk education became very common, and it is the main force of folk enlightenment education. The rich and colorful materials of miscellaneous characters have significant academic value for understanding a particular place’s language, culture, folklore, and social development history at a specific time, which deserves to be treated correctly and, carefully explored and protected.

4. Transformation of the Content of Folk Education

China has practiced Confucian culture for a long time since the Han Dynasty, and “Confucian culture is characterized by humanism. From the pre-Qin period onwards, Confucianism has formed a value orientation in the content of education that emphasizes humanistic governmental affairs, belittles physical nature, and depreciates production techniques.”⁶ According to the *Book of Rites and Records of Learning*:

古之教者，……比年入学，中年考校。一年视离经辨志，三年视敬业乐群，五年视博习亲师，七年视论学取友，谓之小成。九年知类通达，强立而不反，谓之大成。⁷

In ancient times, new students were enrolled every year, and there was an examination every other year. The first year of schooling examined the ability to break sentences and identify aspirations; the third year of schooling examined whether they were dedicated to their studies and whether they were willing to discuss problems with their classmates; the fifth year of schooling examined whether they honored their teachers; and the seventh year of schooling examined their insights into their studies and their choice of friends. It is called a “small accomplishment” if one passes the examination. In the ninth year, it is called “Great Success.” If one’s knowledge is unobstructed, one’s understanding is universal, and one can encounter things without confusion or disobedience to one’s teacher’s teachings.

In the nine years of enlightenment education, the ancients emphasized cultivating learners’ humanistic

cultivation, focusing on the content of the study and the learners for literacy and moral integrity, ignoring the education of practical vocational skills of life.

The development of the commodity economy and the formation of the civic class since the Song Dynasty has led to an unprecedented increase in the demand for skills such as farming production, commodity trade, house construction, and clothing techniques, and the content of folk education has shifted from the Confucian classics, which focus on literacy, ideology, and cultural education, to the education of vocational and life skills, as a representative of such enlightenment reading materials, the miscellaneous characters were born in response to this time. In the following, we take Four words miscellaneous characters in Huizhou miscellaneous books as an example to discuss the content of folk education in Huizhou in the Ming and Qing dynasties.

4.1 Literacy Education

Literacy education has been the primary content of enlightenment reading materials through the ages and the foundation of other vocational education. Beginning with the Han Dynasty's *Ji Jiu*, to the Wei, Jin, and North and South Dynasties's *Thousand Character Texts* (《千字文》) and *Enlightenment Essentials* (《开蒙要训》), the Song Dynasty's *Three Character Classic* (《三字经》) and *Hundred Surnames* (《百家姓》), and various miscellaneous writings in the Ming and Qing Dynasties, all of which are first and foremost concerned with literacy. Huizhou miscellaneous books are naturally no exception.

Since the Song Dynasty, many literati came to Huizhou after the royal family's southward crossing. Since then, it has created a flourishing literary style among the Huizhou folk. Especially in the Ming and Qing Dynasties, "from the wells and fields to the distant mountains and valleys to the homes of the people, there are schools, teachers, and collections of books and history (自井邑田野, 以至远山深谷、民居之处, 莫不有学、有师、有书史之藏)." In such an environment that attaches great importance to education, folk education has also reached unprecedented prosperity, and the formation of Huizhou is still the culture of education and respect for words and paper customs. There is a proverb that says, "Three generations of non-readers are like a pig in a poke (三代不读书, 好比一窠猪)," which refers to the importance of education in the minds of the people. In the local area, there is also a throughout the city and countryside, a unique building - the word furnace (惜字炉), used to burn books and paper with words. In people's minds, words are sacred things written with the words of the same sacred paper and are not to be discarded at will. Because there is such a learning culture, the Huizhou region has preserved many miscellaneous Ming and Qing dynasty characters.

Dai Yuanzhi of Huangshan College specializes in Huizhou miscellaneous books and, as of 2017, has collected and purchased nearly 200 books with more than 60 types of Huizhou miscellaneous books.⁸ From the content of these miscellaneous characters and the time of the inscription, it can be determined that most of them were written in the Ming and Qing dynasties, and most miscellaneous documents were compiled and copied in the Qing dynasty. For example, the preface to the Eye Opening Sutra is inscribed, "In Kang Xi Geng Yin year Puyue Shanghuan Wei Tangfu order of arrangement at Xin'anzhai (康熙庚寅岁蒲月上浣唯堂父编次 新安斋)," Kang Xi Geng Yin year is the 49th year of the Kang Xi reign (1710). Puyue refers to the beginning of the fifth month of the lunar calendar, named after the custom of hanging calamus on doors and windows in this month. Shanghuan is the first third of a month. Since the Tang Dynasty, government officials have had a system of nine days on and one day off and often wash clothes on the day off. A month can be divided into Shanghuan, Zhonghuan, and Xiahuan. Wei Tangfu is the author of the "Eye-opening Sutra," and "Xin'anzhai" is the name of the editor's study hall. Among the miscellaneous characters I have collected, 27 books from the Huizhou region contain 13 kinds of miscellaneous characters. According to our experience in collecting miscellaneous characters, the number of miscellaneous characters in Huizhou is far more than these two hundred books, and a large amount of miscellaneous character literature is waiting to be discovered.

Four Words Miscellaneous Characters in Huizhou miscellaneous books, for example, the entire book of four words a sentence, a total of 374 sentences, 1496 characters, 1437 character types, beginning with "Zhang Chi Jin Liang (丈尺斤两)," and finally "Xiu Ru Hua Zhan (绣褥花毡)." The endpaper " 咸丰戊午年孟冬月协庵洪氏校正 " indicates that the book was proofread and published by Hong of Xie'an in the winter of 1858 AD.

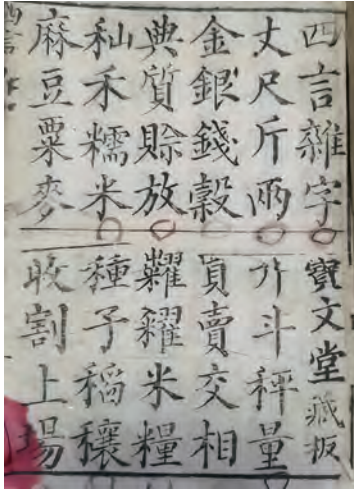


Figure 1 The Initial Page of *Four Words Miscellaneous Characters, Cataloging Insights into Commerce and Agricultural Practices*

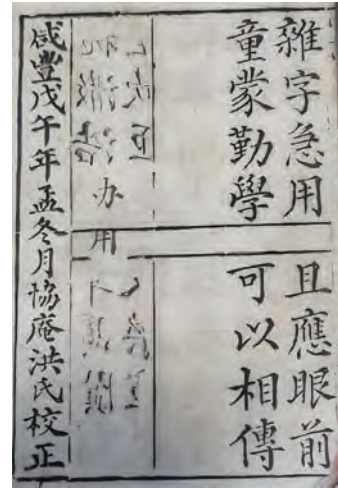


Figure 2 The Concluding Page of *Four Words Miscellaneous Characters Details the Publication Data of The Book*

These 1,437 characters are all taken from the scenes commonly used in the daily life of Huizhou, such as buying and selling, household utensils, relatives' titles, clothing and food, traditional Chinese medicines and flowers, farming and animal husbandry, marriage, and marriage, paying taxes and food. They cover a wide range of topics. From the perspective of modern Chinese character frequency statistics, although these 1,437 characters are not all high-frequency characters in general standardized Chinese characters, from the perspective of usage, these characters are indeed high-frequency and commonly used by ordinary people. About 95% of the Four words' miscellaneous characters are nouns, such as umbrella, hat, home, sugar, melon, pea, and machete; the rest are mainly verbs and contain a few quantifiers and adjectives, such as measure, buy up, sell up, harvest, carry, zhang, ft, jin, tael, red, and fresh new.

Psychologically speaking, nouns are one of the most easily acquired word classes in Head Start. Zhu Manshu summarized the pattern of learners' literacy in Head Start as four stages: the first stage is the most straightforward proper nouns, such as daddy and mommy; the second stage is common nouns, such as table and chair; the third stage is pairs of adjectives, such as big and small, long and short; and the fourth stage is the complex relative words, such as this and that.⁹ Li Yuming further explains, "The nominal words acquired by children in early childhood are words with specific meanings, and these words denote people and things common in children's lives."¹⁰ In literacy education, the compilation of miscellaneous characters conforms to the psychological law of literacy of learners in enlightenment reading materials. In the choice of words, most nouns indicate actual things, which are more focused on practical life than the official enlightenment reading materials.

4.2 Business Education

Anhui Huizhou region is blessed with beautiful landscapes, rich history and culture, and the much-talked-about culture of Huizhou merchants. Historically, the northern central plains experienced three important population migrations to the south. In particular, the third population migration at the turn of the two Song dynasties led to a dramatic population expansion in the Huizhou area. Due to the pressure of the population, some people in Huizhou chose to go out to do business. There is a folk proverb in the Huizhou area that can reflect this status quo: "Lack of cultivation in the last lifetime, born in Huizhou, thirteen or fourteen years old, thrown out (前世不修, 生在徽州, 十三四岁, 往外一丢)." During the Ming and Qing Dynasties, these merchants developed into the famous Huizhou merchant gang, operating in the fields of salt, canon, tea, grain, and cloth, with a period of nearly 600 years and hundreds of generations, which shaped the culture of Huizhou merchants. One of the most critical factors that made the Huizhou merchants successful was the business education engraved in their bones.

Influenced by the business culture, folk people also attach great importance to business education in

their daily education. Before going out to do business, they usually receive private education. This education can be divided into two types: one-to-one or one-to-many education; this kind of education mainly occurs within the merchant family or store, has secrecy, involves the scope is very limited; one is for the general public of the general commercial education, this kind of education does not involve the core technology of specific industries, has the general knowledge characteristic, uses the wide range, the representative work is all kinds of miscellaneous characters.

The first paragraph of *Four Words Miscellaneous Characters*:

丈尺斤两，升斗称量。金银钱谷，买卖交相。典质賒放，粟黍米粮。

Liters, buckets, and scales must measure the pounds. Gold, silver, coins, and grain could be bought and sold to each other—pawns, mortgages, credit, lending, buying and selling rice and grain.

Zhang, chi, jin, liang, sheng, and dou are the units of measurement used in commodity trading, scales are the measuring tool, and *liang* is the action of measuring. Gold, silver, and money are the currencies used in commodity exchanges, and buying and selling are the two basic behaviors of commodity exchanges. Pawn is a pawn, mortgage, credit is credit, put money. *Tiao* (粜) is to sell grain, *Di* (籴) is to buy up grain, and rice and grain are the commodities traded. It is about the related knowledge of commercial transactions and shows the critical position of commercial education in the folk education of the Huizhou area.

In this chapter:

催索债负，批领契书。交业典贴，加减增除。堪会毗畔，邻保分疏。牙人检踏，古跡新居。

Debt collection requires a deed in advance. A business license is required to operate a trading and pawning business and to master addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division. The “*Lin Bao* (邻保),” a grass-roots local administrator, is required to clarify the connections and boundaries of the negotiated fields. An intermediary, the “*otome*,” must conduct an on-site inspection to buy or sell an old building or a new house.

The passage describes four types of sale and purchase transactions and the precautions to be taken:

- (1) For money lending transactions, a contractual instrument should be signed.
- (2) One should know how to use addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division for pawn transactions.
- (3) For land transactions, the scope of the land should be clarified by the relevant official authorities.
- (4) For housing transactions, third-party personnel should arrange on-site inspections.

These precautions may seem simple but are an essential foundation for the transactions. Take, for example, the contractual instrument to be signed in money lending, which is a crucial document proving the existence of a debt relationship between the borrower and the lender, by which the creditor can claim the principal and interest and the agreed interest from the debtor at the right time by the provisions of the contract.

From the above, miscellaneous characters recorded in the content of commercial knowledge can be seen in the Huizhou region of folklore education in the importance of commercial education a spot.

4.3 Agricultural Education

Agriculture is the foundation and lifeblood of a country’s development, which is always true. In ancient China, there was a general understanding among the people that “the scholar, the farmer, the industrialist and the businessman (士 农 工 商),” apart from studying and working as an official, the most critical occupation was that of a farmer. During the Ming and Qing dynasties, despite the prosperous development of Huizhou merchants, the most crucial matter for the general people was still agricultural production. Therefore, agricultural education occupied a considerable proportion of the folk education in the Huizhou area.

Huizhou is located in the mountainous area of southern Anhui Province, with a subtropical monsoon humid climate, sufficient sunshine time, and abundant rainfall, forming many rivers and wetlands.

Influenced by the alluvial impact of large and small rivers in the upper reaches of Xin'anjiang River, Huizhou has formed many small and extensive plains. These small plains have become a vital land base for agricultural production in Huizhou, in addition to some hills and low mountains. The unique climate and landscape determine Huizhou's crops, flora, and fauna, as well as the main content of agricultural education.

The four words' miscellaneous characters record the main food crops, fruits and vegetables, animals, and herbs produced in the Huizhou area. For food crops such as “秈禾糯米、麻豆粟麦,” “秈” refers to a kind of rice with slender grains, “禾” refers to corn, “麻豆” refers to hemp and bean crops, and “粟麦” refers to millet and wheat. Fruits and vegetables are “Yangmei, peach and plum, yam and wild kudzu, melon and pea, papaya and water chestnut, endive and amaranth, radish and konjac,” of which wild kudzu refers to wild kudzu plants, water chestnut refers to water chestnut, endive refers to a kind of bitter vegetable foraged by the Huizhou folk. Konjac refers to konjac, and people in Huizhou use lime powder to make konjac tofu, which has a unique taste. Animals such as “chickens, pigs, ducks, cows, horses, pigs, sheep, donkeys, mules, colts and calves,” of which 狍 is a variant of 豚, referring to pigs in general. Chinese herbs include “long brain musk, tip or root of Common Monkshood,” and so on.

In *Four Words Miscellaneous Characters*, agricultural education content included the most crops, including a variety of food crops and herbs, totaling 320 words, accounting for about 21.4% of the complete text, compared with other things, accounted for the most significant proportion, followed by animal husbandry breeding of various animals and wild animals, totaling 104 words, accounting for about 7% of the full text. It can be seen that land, as the primary means of agricultural production, is still an essential source of livelihood for the people in Huizhou. The names and types of various crops produced from land cultivation are also a top priority in agricultural education, which ensures that people have a basic understanding of the means of production before they formally engage in productive labor.

4.4 Marriage Education

Marriage is an essential event in life, as it was in ancient China. Marriage in Huizhou follows the national standard of “the order of parents and the words of matchmakers.”

The *Four Words Miscellaneous Characters* record:

媒保引领，婚索亲姻。酒礼拜定，书启谢陈。

The matchmaker contacts the two parties to the marriage and brings the two families together through marriage. After completing the marriage rituals, such as drinking a cup of wine, paying homage to heaven and earth and parents, and paying homage to the couple, the couple formally establishes the marriage relationship. Then, they must write a letter or verbally express their gratitude to the matchmaker.

Matchmakers are intermediaries who introduce the two parties to the marriage. Shen Changming, studying the vocabulary and folk culture of the Huizhou dialect, pointed out, “Generally in the south, there is a consensual object, ask the matchmaker to talk about the match, it is necessary to pay a deposit, and when the matter is accomplished, it is also necessary to thank the matchmaker individually, called thanking the matchmaker.”¹¹ Today, the custom of “thanking the matchmaker” still exists in Huizhou, Anhui Province.

On the wedding day, an essential criterion for family and friends to measure the success of this wedding is the specification of the wine and food of the wedding banquet. The types of wine and food served at wedding banquets are recorded in the Four words miscellaneous characters:

咸鱼腊肉，包裹鲜新。乾脯鸡腊，炭焙火熏。酒香饌美，满酌浅斟。

Specially cured salted fish and preserved meat with fresh vegetables and fruits, various kinds of charcoal-grilled and smoked dried meat and preserved chicken, together with rich and fine wines, are placed on the wine table for the guests to savor amid the exchange of cups and glasses.

In Huizhou, the wedding banquet dish specifications have “four bowls of four,” “eight bowls of eight,” and “eight bowls of sixteen.” Four bowls of four refers to four cold dishes and four hot dishes, which is the essential wedding banquet standard. Eight bowls of eight refers to eight cold dishes and eight hot dishes, compared to four bowls of four, an increase of four plates of dessert and four bowls of hot dishes. Eight bowls of sixteen, based on eight bowls of eight to add eight hot dishes, can cover the main local specialties.

Behind these wedding delicacies are also the Huizhou people's customs and habits about food and drink. The people of Huizhou in ancient times had the custom of curing bacon during the New Year, and the cured meats were mainly pork, fish, and chicken, especially cured ham, which became a significant feature of Huizhou cuisine. Generally, pigs are killed before the year, cured, and processed, and the cured meat is dried after the Spring Festival. The cured bacon is brought out to entertain friends and relatives whenever a significant event occurs.

In addition to the above four aspects, Huizhou's miscellaneous books on public ethics, litigation, personnel, astronomy, geography, and so on also have many records. Limited to space, this paper will not expand one by one.

5. Conclusion

In the long history of socio-economic development, the urgent needs of production and life have promoted the development of folk education and, at the same time, given rise to many folk enlightenment reading materials represented by miscellaneous characters. They changed the object, material, and content of traditional folk education. By analyzing the Huizhou miscellaneous book *Four Words Miscellaneous Characters*, we can draw the following conclusions:

Firstly, the downward shift of the right to education has led to the transfer of the target education group from the sons of the feudal nobility to the ordinary people. In the case of folk education, the age of the target group is no longer limited to minors but to all those who need to receive vocational education.

Secondly, the emergence of folk enlightenment reading materials prompted a shift in traditional enlightenment education from writings focusing on literacy, humanities, and ethics to writings focusing on life and vocational skills education. Especially during the Ming and Qing dynasties, intellectuals from the private sector all over the country compiled enlightenment reading materials for all walks of life, which we collectively refer to as miscellaneous characters.

Thirdly, from the Folklore perspective, Huizhou miscellaneous books derive a set of unique educational content systems in literacy education, business education, agricultural education, marriage education, and other aspects. These educational contents not only reflect the local custom of emphasizing education and respecting words and paper but also show the strong business culture of the people. Agricultural cultivation reflects the local dietary characteristics, which are centrally demonstrated in marriage.

Miscellaneous characters, as rare documents scattered in the folklore, provide a window to observe folk education. Through this window, we can see the influence of folk enlightenment reading materials on folk education and peep into the local folk culture. A four-word miscellaneous character, a district of 1496 words, demonstrates the Huizhou region's reverence for education and respect for the word paper customs and habits, which, in the present, still have a guiding significance. This kind of miscellaneous character literature is a living fossil showing a particular place's language and cultural ecology, which is of great value to the inheritance of Chinese excellent traditional culture and deserves to be explored and protected by more people.

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