

**The Bridges of Puyuan: A Look at Bridge-Building and Local Networks
in the Town of Puyuan, Zhejiang, China**

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In a landscape criss-crossed by networks of rivers and streams, bridges are ubiquitous to the Lower Yangzi Delta as part of the landscape and community life. In the market town or *shizhen* of Puyuan, Zhejiang, bridges functioned as conduits facilitating the movement of people and goods within, into and out of the town. Yet they were also markers and representations of how local networks and social relations have changed and developed within the town over time. As a market town specializing in silk production in Late Imperial China, the construction of bridges to facilitate and ease the flow of human and goods traffic was a mark of both philanthropy and local standing. Gazetteer records tell of how bridges were constructed and reconstructed, holding them forth as exemplary contributions of local worthies to the community. Bridges also became more than mere conduits of traffic flows. They served not only as physical reminders of family prestige, and also as sites or gathering places for the local community where jobs were found, goods were exchanged and religious obligations fulfilled. This paper proposes to examine the practical and symbolic functions of bridges in Puyuan and how they could be seen as markers of urban growth and socio-economic change within the town in Late Imperial China.