Muddy Waters

Political Tensions and Identity in the Writings of Xu Wei (1521-1593)

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Abstract

The late Ming artist and poet Xu Wei 徐渭 (1521-1593) is most well known for his self-representation as a cultured "mountain hermit" and "eccentric", pursuing the literary ideals of originality, simple language and direct emotional expression. His wild ink-brush paintings, mental instability, numerous suicide attempts and the murder of this third wife all helped to consolidate Xu's image as China's Van Gogh. However, later hagiographies of Xu as the "patron saint of eccentrics" have led to a one dimensional view of Xu.

This thesis presents Xu as someone who explored and wrestled with different and sometimes contradictory self-representations against a thorny political and social backdrop. It moves away from Xu's "eccentric" persona, instead examining his writings within the political context of the 16th century.

Against the backdrop of Mongol and pirate invasions, Xu's close friend Shen Lian was executed by the Chief Grand Secretary Yan Song and his clique. Yet only a month after his friend's execution, Xu switched sides and worked as a ghost-writer for Hu Zongxian, a protégé of Yan Song. Yet with the fall of Yan Song in 1562 and the arrest of Hu Zongxian, this became an embarrassment for Xu. Fearing that he would be implicated with the Yan

Song clique, Xu distanced himself from his flattering ghost-written poems. Overwhelmed by feelings of guilt, he explored the complexities of loyalty and identity in his poetry.

Xu's career is representative of many Ming scholars who were frustrated by examination failure and the inability to find an official post. His literary ideals contradicted with lived reality. Xu is unique among Ming literati in voicing these contradictions.

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Xu Wei's China

Legend

- ○ Important Ming Administrative Cities
- ● Xu Wei's Important Postings or Visits

Introduction

"They called me mad, and I called them mad, and damn them, they outvoted me."

Nathanial Lee

The 16th century artist and writer Xu Wei 徐渭 (1521-1593) once remarked on his own portrait:

> At birth I was fat. When I was twenty, I was so skinny that my clothes overwhelmed me. By the time I was thirty, I had gradually fattened up again. Now we have this silly fellow pictured here. I was not aware of the years passing. Now how can we know that this silly fellow today will not become skinny again, just like the mountain marshes that dry up? Trying to grasp me through this picture would be like notching the side of your boat [where the sword is dropped], or watching the tree stump [for another hare to dash against it]. Is he a dragon? A pig? Is he a crane? A duck? Is he a flitting butterfly? Is he a weighty Zhuang Zhou? Who can know his beginnings?
>
> 吾生而肥，弱冠而羸不勝衣，既立而復漸以肥，乃至於若斯圖之癡癡也。蓋年以歷於知非，然則今日之癡癡，安知其不復羸羸，以庶幾於山澤之癯耶？而人又安得執斯圖以刻舟而守株？噫，龍耶豬耶？鶴耶鳧耶？蝶栩栩耶？周蘧蘧耶？疇知其初耶？[1]

This comment can be used as a point of departure to introduce the issues of perception, persona and historical representations of Xu. From this quote, we can see that Xu was conscious of the differences between the representations of him by others and his own self-representation.

Scholars have argued that Xu was mad, eccentric, bohemian and intensely individualistic. Yuan Hongdao 袁宏道 (1568-1610), in his biography of Xu Wei, cited Mei Guozhen 梅國楨 (1542-1605) as saying:[2]

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[1] Xu Wei 徐渭, *Xu Wei Ji* 徐渭集 (hereafter abbreviated as XWJ), (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983), p. 585.

[2] Yuan Hongdao 袁宏道 (1568-1610), *zi* Zhonglang 中郎, *hao* Shigong 石公, *jinshi* 1592, was leader of the Gong'an school of literature 公安派, which was founded by his elder brother Yuan Zongdao 袁宗道 (1560-1600). It advocated the expression of authentic emotion and vernacular language. They opposed the imitation of classical models. See Goodrich, L. Carrington and Fang Zhaoying, *Dictionary of Ming Biography, 1368-1644* (Hereafter abbreviated as DMB), (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), pp 1635-38. Mei

> His sickness was stranger than his personality; his personality was stranger than his poetry; his poetry stranger than his characters [i.e calligraphy]; his characters stranger than his prose; his prose stranger than his painting.
>
> 病奇於人，人奇於詩，詩奇於字，字奇於文，文奇於畫。[3]

Since then, studies of Xu have tended to emphasise his eccentricity and individuality. Moreover, this representation of Xu as the "patron-saint of the unbridled eccentric" fits in with the larger picture of the late Ming as a "perfect breeding ground for eccentrics."[4] Shiamin Kwa, for example, wrote that "in a historical period replete with exceptional figures and iconoclasts, Xu Wei stood out among them all." [5]

In this thesis, I will show a different aspect of Xu Wei and move away from the image of him as the anti-institutional, non-conformist painter whose works are characterised by spontaneous expression (*xieyi* 寫意). This is not to say that Xu Wei did not project the persona of the unbridled eccentric and anti-institutional mountain hermit. Xu's artistic pseudonyms and sobriquets such as "Mountain Hermit of the Green Vines" (Qingteng shanren 青藤山人), "Mountain Hermit of the Heavenly Pool" (Tianchi shanren 天池山人), and "Field Water Moon" (Tianshuiyue 田水月: composites of his name Wei 渭), all reflect a level of cultural pretense and carried a strong eremitic charge. Such sobriquets, in fact, began to be used widely from the early 16th century onward as a badge of honour and as an elegant reference to unrecognised talent.[6] But they conflicted with Xu's other

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Guozhen 梅國楨 (1542-1605), *zi* Kesheng 克生, *hao* Hengxiang 衡湘, *jinshi* 1583, was a military strategist and skilled writer. In 1581 he became acquainted with Xu Wei.

[3] XWJ, p. 1344.

[4] Wu, Nelson, "The Toleration of Eccentrics", *Art News* 57, no. 3 (May 1956), p. 28.

[5] Kwa, Shiamin, *Strange Eventful Histories: Identity, Performance, and Xu Wei's Four Cries of Gibbon* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), p. 2.

[6] Park, J.P, *Art by the Book: Painting Manuals and the Leisure Life in Late Ming China* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2012), pp. 22-24. Park cites the official Xue Gang (b. 1561) and his complaint about how everyone began calling themselves a mountain hermit and the trend had got out of

representations. In the prime of his life and career, Xu called himself Scholar of the Realm (Guoshi 國士), Unofficial Historian (Waishi 外史), Stipendiary Scholar (Linshan shengyuan 廩膳生員), Xu Wei of the *zhusheng* degree (Zhusheng Xu Wei 諸生徐渭) and Master Xu (Xuzi 徐子) etc, terms of address with strong institutional and Confucian associations.[7] This thesis will contribute towards creating an image of Xu that is less one-dimensional. It moves away from the archetype of the "clever rascal" that, in popular folklore, has become associated with Xu.[8] It will also help to re-evaluate our understanding of how a writer contructed his own literary artifice in Ming China.

i) Representations of Xu Wei from the 16th Century to the 21st Century

Xu's earliest biographer, Yuan Hongdao, created the now-standard interpretation of Xu as the "unbridled patron-saint of eccentrics". Few scholars, even to this day, have escaped this. Yuan's biography of Xu emphasised his mental illness, eccentricity, individuality and "strangeness" (*qi* 奇). Yuan also emphasised Xu's refreshing originality and described his writings as "at once sweeping away the weeds of contemporary practices. 一掃近代蕪穢之習".[9] In Yuan's biography of Xu, the concepts of eccentricity and originality went together hand in hand.[10]

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control: "Nowadays those debauchees with no rank in Chang'an, regardless of their talent, all refer to themselves as mountain hermits. The people, moreover, have no clue, so they follow the custom".

[7] XWJ, p. 449; Fu Qiong 付瓊, *Xu Wei sanwen yanjiu* 徐渭散文研究 (A Study of Xu Wei's Prose) (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2007), p. 18.

[8] Kwa, *Strange Eventful Histories,* p. 2. See also Faurot, J.L., "Hsu Wen-Ch'ang: An Archetypal Clever Rascal in Chinese Popular Culture," *Asian Folklore Studies* 36.2 (1977), pp. 65-74. See also Levy, Howard S., *China's Dirtiest Trickster: Folklore About Hsu Wen-ch'ang (1521-1593)* (Arlington VA: Warm-Soft Village Press, 1974). See also Denton, Kirk A. and Hockx, Michel, *Literary Societies of Republican China* (Lanham MD: Lexington Books, 2008), p. 175.

[9] See Yuan Hongdao's biography of Xu in the XWJ, pp. 1342-1344. A full translation of the biography is provided in Appendix A.

[10] Katharine Burnett in her thorough examinations of the term *qi* 奇 (strange, original, eccentric) argues convincingly that within art and literary circles, *qi* should be best understood to mean "original" rather than "eccentric". See Burnett, Katharine, P, "A Discourse of Originality in Late Ming Chinese Painting Criticism,"

Yet, when Yuan Hongdao was reading Xu's work for the first time and before he knew of the man or his biography, it is interesting that Yuan could not tell if he was reading an ancient or modern writer. He even thought Xu was a Yuan dynasty playwright:

> Once when I was young in a market, I saw a northern drama called 'Four Cries of a Gibbon', its character was heroic and unrestrained, compared with other contemporary writers' legends it was strange and different. On it was inscribed: "Master Heavenly Pool", I suspected that it was the work of *someone in the Yuan dynasty* [emphasis mine]…
>
> I randomly pulled out something from the bookshelves and found it to be a portfolio of several volumes of poetry titled *A Collection of Scraps*…after reading a few poems, I jumped up in surprise and cried out to Zhou Wang [Tao Wangling] "Who is the author of this *Collection of Scraps*? Is he *contemporary? Or ancient?* [emphasis mine]"
>
> 余少時過里肆中，見北雜劇有《四聲猿》，意氣豪達，與近時書生所演傳奇絕異，題曰"天池生"，疑爲元人作….
>
> 随意抽架上書，得《闕編》詩一帙…讀未數首，不覺驚躍，急呼周望：
> "《闕編》何人作者？今耶？古耶？"[11]

This is significant. When he flipped through Xu's poetry, Yuan could not tell if he was reading the work of someone "contemporary? Or ancient?" It shows that when the work was detached from the man, even in Yuan Hongdao's eyes, Xu's work could be interpreted as following literary tradition and convention. Clearly, even in Yuan's biography, there was a discrepancy between the work (that could be ancient and traditional) and the man (whose eccentricity broke conventions). But because Yuan Hongdao was trying to create the trope of the eccentric Xu, this was what he emphasised

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in *Art History,* vol. 23, no. 4 (2000), p. 530. I argue, however, that *qi* in the context used by Yuan Hongdao to specifically describe Xu's illness, multiple suicide attempts and the murder of his wife should best be translated as "strange" or "eccentric". Burnett's scholarship is discussed in greater detail below in the conclusion.

[11]XWJ, p. 1342.

in his biography, not the Xu who was in fact part of wider literary and artistic conventions established since the Han, Tang and Song dynasties.

Yuan's biography of Xu Wei was never meant to be an accurate representation in any case. Yuan chose to emphasise the strange aspects of Xu so that he could appropriate Xu's unconventionality and legitimise his own Gong'an School of literature. This school advocated direct expression and vernacular language as opposed to the prevelant trends in Ming literature of archaism, imitation and the following of rigid poetic patterns. The Gong'an school was thus perceived as eccentric at the time and did not live past the death of the Yuan brothers, although similar literary ideals arose sporadically in the future.[12]

In his quest to find legitimisation for his fledgling school of direct expression, Yuan Hongdao devoted an overwhelming amount of attention to one of Xu's prefaces to a friend's book of poetry:

> There are people who imitate the language of the birds; their voices are then like that of a bird. However, their nature is still that of a human. There are birds who imitate the language of men, their sounds are therefore those of men, but their nature is still that of a bird. This can be used as a criterion to distinguish a man from a bird. What is the difference between this and the people who write poetry today? It is not derived from what they truly know; they simply pilfer what people have already said. They say: 'Some piece is in some style or some piece is not, and a certain sentence resembles that of a certain person, and another does not.' Although these writings are extremely refined, they are merely imitations. They do not escape from being like a bird that tries to imitate human language.
>
> 人有學為鳥言者，其音則鳥也，而性則人也。鳥有學為人言者，其音則人也，其性則鳥也。此可以定人與鳥之衡哉。今之為詩者，何以異於是，不

[12] Chou Chih-p'ing. *Yuan Hung-tao and the Kung-an School* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1988), p. 19.

> 出於己之所自得，而徒竊於人之所嘗言，曰某篇是某體， 某篇則否， 其句似某人， 其句則否，此雖極工逼肖，而已不免於鳥之為人言矣。[13]

The passage shows that Xu considered it futile to imitate others' works. No matter how closely one might try to do so, the likeness does not change the true colours or *bense* 本色 of the writer. However, this was the only theory of Xu's which Yuan latched onto and expounded upon.

In other words, by selectively presenting aspects of Xu's life, Yuan hoped to further his own agenda by creating a hagiography rather than an accurate biography.[14] Yuan's contemporary Jiang Yingke 江盈科 (1553-1605), also of the Gong'an school, argued that "all those that talk of being mad, are not really mad 凡爲狂言者，非真有狂".[15] Even within the Gong'an school, therefore, there were doubts about Yuan Hongdao's presentation of Xu's madness for his own ends. Moreover, the notion of artistic madness and eccentricity was already something of a cliché by the late Ming period.

Yuan himself acknowledged the lack of accuracy of his biography of Xu. In a letter to Tao Wangling 陶望齡 (1562-1609), he wrote: [16]

> Although the biography of Xu Wenchang is not a deep examination, it has however, sufficiently unburdened Wenchang's resentment.
>
> 徐文長傳雖不甚核， 然大足爲文長吐氣。[17]

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[13] XWJ, p. 519

[14] See Liang Rongruo 梁荣若, "Yuan Hongdao Xu Wenchang zhuan zhengwu," 袁宏道徐文長傳正誤 (Mistakes and Corrections in Yuan Hongdao's Biography of Xu Wenchang) *Wentan*, no. 123 (1970), pp. 6-7.

[15] Jiang Yingke 江盈科 (1553-1605), *zi* Jinzhi 進之*, hao* Luluo 逯蘿*,* was a member of the Gong'an circle of literature but has been overshadowed completely by the Yuan brothers. He wrote a book of anecdotes called the *Xuetao xiaoshuo* 雪濤小説 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2000). See his section on "Mad Scholars 狂士", p. 105.

[16] Tao Wangling 陶望齡 (1562-1609), *zi* Zhouwang 周望*, hao* Shikui 石簣 was from Xu's hometown of Shaoxing and a Hanlin scholar. It was in his library that Yuan Hongdao discovered Xu Wei's book of poetry. Tao Wangling also wrote his own biography of Xu Wei. See DMB, pp. 272, 1636.

Yuan seems to have felt that he was avenging Xu by making him the well-known artist he felt Xu deserved to be. In another letter that Yuan wrote to Mei Guozhen in 1598, he confirmed his own limited knowledge of Xu:

> Xu Wenchang, the illness and the man, my humble self cannot know. I only know that his poetry is that of a contemporary master.
>
> 徐文長病與人， 僕不能知， 獨知其詩為近代高手。[18]

We can see, therefore, that a historically accurate account of Xu Wei's life was never Yuan's major purpose. His purpose in writing the biography was to re-evaluate Xu's achievements so that he could mould Xu into a figure that appeared to champion his own cause of unbridled expression, associated with the trope of the eccentric mountain hermit. Xu was, in a sense, hijacked by Yuan Hongdao and his Gong'an school. The Gong'an school came into existence long after Xu's death. Yet, as we shall see, he became associated with its advocacy of vernacular and direct language.

The image of Xu as the "patron saint of the unbridled eccentric" that Yuan fashioned in his hagiography was an extremely powerful and resilient one. Yuan Hongdao's biography of Xu Wei was even included in the *Guwen Guanzhi* 古文觀止, a prose anthology compiled during the Kangxi reign (1662-1722) that was widely used as a classical primer for several centuries.[19] The poet and scholar Qian Qianyi 錢謙益 (1582-1664) was correct when he wrote that "without Zhonglang [Yuan Hongdao], how would the world again know there

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[17] Yuan Hongdao, *Yuan Hongdao Ji jianjiao* (hereafter abbreviated as YHDJJ), (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2008), p. 779.
[18] YHDJJ, p. 739.
[19] *Guwen Guanzhi* 古文觀止 (Xi'an: Santai chubanshe, 2009). pp. 385-387.

was a [Xu] Wenchang? 微中郎，世豈復知有文長!”[20] This comment reveals how important Yuan Hongdao was in championing and promoting Xu Wei. The late Ming thinker Wang Fuzhi 王夫之 (1619-1692), influenced by Yuan's depiction of Xu as the champion of unrestrained emotion, deliberately refused to read Xu's history poetry as history poetry.[21] At the end of one of Xu's history poems, Wang commented:

> One cannot do poetry and see it as history; it is full of interesting insights [into emotion]
>
> 不可作詩史看，饒有興觀。[22]

Even modern scholars of Chinese literature such as Ann-Marie Hsiung described Xu Wei in terms reminiscent of Yuan's hagiography and combined the trope of eccentric behaviour with artistic creativity:

> [Xu Wei] often went his own way, regardless of social conventions. In his later years, for instance, he rejected the company of illustrious officials and the rich, but would go to a wine shop and invite lower-class people to drink with him. His keen sense of self and non-conformist character could in part have stimulated his unique creativity in literature and the arts.[23]

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[20] Qian Qianyi 錢謙益 (1582-1664), *zi* Shouzhi 受之, *hao* Muzhai 牧齋, Mengsou 蒙叟 etc, from Suzhou, was a scholar and poet. For a detailed study in English of Qian Qianyi, see McDowall, Stephen, *Qian Qianyi's Reflections on Yellow Mountain: Traces of a Late Ming Hatchet and Chisel* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2009). See also his "Xu Ji Shi Wei," in *Lie chao shiji xiao zhuan* 列朝詩集小傳 (Brief Biographies for the Poetic Anthologies from the Great Dynasty) (Shanghai: Guji chubanshe, 1959), pp. 548-560.

[21] Wang Fuzhi 王夫之 (1619-1692), *zi* Ernong 而農, *hao* Jiangzhai 姜齋 and *Xitang* 夕堂, was a Ming loyalist scholar born in Hunan. When the Manchus conquered China he fled to Chuanshan Mountain where he stayed, devoted to scholarship, for the rest of his life. His treatises on poetry placed emphasis on emotion or *qing* 情. He considered the mixing of the classically defined concepts of "history" and "poetry" to be anathema, and strongly blamed the Tang poet Du Fu 杜甫 (712-770) for doing so. See Wang Fuzhi 王夫之, *Ming shi pingxuan* 明詩評選 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2011).

[22] Wang Fuzhi, *Ming shi pingxuan,* p. 357.

[23] Hsiung, Ann-Marie, "A Feminist Re-Vision of Xu Wei's Ci Mulan and Nu Zhuangyan," in *China in a Polycentric World: Essays in Chinese Comparative Literature*, edited by Zhang Yingjing (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1998), pp. 73-90.

Hsiung took this directly from Yuan Hongdao's biography of Xu, in which it is also written that he refused to meet with the rich and noble, and drank among the lower classes. More importantly, like Yuan Hongdao, Hsiung linked Xu's creative output with his eccentricity. To both Yuan and Hsiung, the link between eccentricity and artistic creativity was inseparable. Even Xu's literary theory of *bense*, as we have seen above, was interpreted as a literary manifestation of Xu's unconventional behaviour. Hsiung wrote:

> Xu Wei's literary views rebelled against the canon of his time, which emphasised an imitation and revival of the ancients… He placed importance on a writer's ability to break from traditional bondage and to create a new style of expressing the self (*bense*). Xu Wei's literary creation appears to exemplify his own theory.[24]

Hsiung and Yuan Hongdao both saw Xu's rebellious anti-institutional behaviour as feeding into his art. They did not separate the image of Xu the eccentric from his work. Neither did they see Xu as part of any literary tradition or place him within a larger historical and political context.

It was not just Yuan Hongdao who championed Xu as the great master of spontaneous, unbridled and eccentric behaviour and art. As Shiamin Kwa wrote, Xu was:

> Upheld as a sort of patron saint of the unbridled eccentric in the late imperial period, he asserted a near-supernatural anxiety of influence on successive generations of Chinese would-be iconoclasts.[25]

This is an image which has persisted since the late Ming. Many scholars and artists of the time, who participated in what is now called the "cult of *qing*" or emotion, including Tang Xianzu 湯顯祖 (1550-1616), Chen Hongshou 陳洪綬 (1598-1652) and Zhang Dai 張岱

[24] Hsiung, "A Feminist Re-vision of Xu Wei's Ci Mulan and Nu Zhuangyan," p. 85.
[25] Kwa, *Strange Eventful Histories*, p. 2.

(1597-1684), upheld Xu as their "patron saint".[26] The famous artist Chen Hongshou, famous for his "strange" paintings of elongated figures and forms, even moved into what is still claimed to be Xu's former residence in Shaoxing. In his youth, Zhang Dai admired Xu so much that he later burned those of his poems that he thought were too similar to Xu's, lest his emulation be seen as imitation. Zhang Dai's friend even had a dream where Xu Wei appeared to him to say that Zhang Dai was Xu Wei's reincarnation. [27]

By the Qing dynasty (1644-1911), the reputation of the late Ming for "strangeness" was consolidated, and by extension Xu's own reputation for eccentricity and unbridled artistic expression. The Qing dynasty, established with the Manchu conquest of China after the collapse of the Ming dynasty, justified their mandate to rule in part by arguing that the late Ming was a period of morally degenerate decadence which had manifested itself in eccentric, non-conformist behaviour and ideas.[28]

Viewing Xu as part of the late Ming trend of morally corrupt eccentricity, the Qing editors of the largest collection of books in Chinese history, the *Siku quanshu* 四庫全書, described some of Xu's poetry, notably his Buddhist gathas, as "vulgar, obscene and trivial 鄙俚猥雜".[29] The Qing dynasty playwright and author of the *Peach Blossom Fan,* Kong Shangren 孔尚任 (1648-1718) described Xu Wei's poetry as having an "unrestrained and

[26] For a general introduction to the cult of qing see Huang, Martin W., "Sentiments of Desire: Thoughts on the Cult of Qing in Ming-Qing Literature" in *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews* 20 (1998), pp. 153-184.

[27] See note 20 of Duncan Campbell's, "Flawed Jade: Zhang Dai's Family Biographies," *Ming Studies* 62 (2010), pp. 25-55. For a full length English language study of Zhang Dai, see also Spence, Jonathan, *Return to Dragon Mountain: Memories of a Late Ming Man* (New York: Viking, 2007).

[28] Mote, Frederick W., *Imperial China 900-1800* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), pp. 926-928. Mote wrote that "the Qianlong emperor was very sensitive to comparisons between the Ming and the Qing. It was important to characterise the Ming as degenerate and doomed to collapse before the Manchus invaded, to show that the Mandate had in fact had been legitimately transferred to the Qing and had not been seized by force."

[29] Li Deren 李德仁, *Xu Wei* 徐渭 (Changchun: Jilin meishu chubanshe, 1996), p. 433.

strange air 奔放有奇氣".[30] The famous bibliophile and poet Zhu Yizun 朱彝尊 (1629-1709) was more accurate in his critique of Xu's poetry, saying that his "poetry and prose all cannot avoid being verbose, and is not as good as his painting 詩與文皆未免繁蕪，不若畫品."[31] Thereafter, Xu's poetry, as well as the poetry of the Ming in general, fell into obscurity.

In the 20th century, attention was focused on the scandalousness of Xu's reputation. In the 1920s, following the folklore movement in Beijing University, scholars collected folk ballads, popular songs and folk tales. Against this backdrop, the writer Zhou Zuoren 周作人 (1885-1967) published his controversial essay, *Story of Xu Wenchang*. Folk tales about Xu contained risqué elements, which Zhou incorporated into his story. Unfortunately, the story transgressed so many taboos that the editor of the *Supplement,* in which it was published, was forced to resign.[32] This helped to consolidate Xu's image as the "clever rascal" and "China's dirtiest trickster".[33]

In 1942, the famous translator and orientalist Arthur Waley (1889-1966) advocated that Xu Wei was the most likely author of the scandalous Ming novel *Jin Ping Mei* or the *Plum in the Golden Vase.* He argued that similarities could be found between his poetry and the erotic novel, but provided no further evidence. Based on Zhou Zuoren's risqué folk stories surrounding Xu Wei, as well as Yuan Hongdao's hagiography, Waley associated Xu with

[30] Ibid., p. 429.
[31] Ibid., p. 429.
[32] Denton and Hockx, *Literary Societies of Republican China,* p. 175.
[33] Levy, *China's Dirtiest Trickster.*

sexual liberty as well as the Gong'an school and its theory of unbridled emotion, which may explain his claim. [34]

Later admirers of Xu also consolidated his image of weirdness. Xu's paintings were openly admired and promoted by would-be iconoclasts. The famous reclusive artist Bada Shanren 八大山人 (1626-1705) admired Xu's strange and unique style. Moreover, Xu's expressive and "eccentric" paintings were celebrated by the so called "Eight Eccentrics of Yangzhou 揚州八怪". Zheng Xie 鄭燮 (1693-1765), in particular, admired Xu's paintings and even carved a seal calling himself "Zheng Xie, Green Vines' [i.e. Xu Wei] running dog 青藤門下牛馬走鄭燮".[35] The famous artist Qi Baishi 齊白石 (1864-1957) was another admirer of Xu's paintings and "regretted I had not been born three hundred years earlier so I could grind ink and sort paper for these gentlemen [including Xu Wei] 恨不生前三百年，或爲諸君磨墨理紙".[36] This did as much to strengthen Xu's image of weirdness as much as his detractors.

Xu's reputation for eccentriticty allowed him to be used in many ways for various modernist agendas. In the 1960s in the West, against the backdrop of the Cultural Revolution in China, a movement arose in academia to search for the roots of Chinese liberalism. "Eccentrics", in particular Xu Wei and Li Zhi 李贄 (1527-1602), were interpreted as modernisers and anachronistically imbued with modern concepts such as self-empowerment, existential crises and individualism.[37] In the case of Xu Wei, art

[34] See the introduction in Miall, Bernard, trans., *Chin P'ing Mei: The Adventurous History of Hsi Men and his Six Wives* (London: John Lane, 1942).
[35] Li Deren, *Xu Wei,* p. 431.
[36] Li Deren, *Xu Wei,* p. 434.
[37] Li Zhi 李贄 (1527-1601), *zi* Hongfu 宏甫, *hao* Zhuowu 卓吾, is perhaps one of the most controversial intellectuals in the late Ming. Regarded as a heretic by traditional Confucians for his unorthodox views and female students, he was eventually arrested and in 1602 slashed his throat in prison. See De Bary, William Theodore, "Individualism and Humanitariansim in Late Ming Thought", in *Self and Society in Ming Thought,*

historians focusing on his "modern psychology" argued that his paintings were simply an outpouring of this enlightened "modern consciousness", for example the rejection of feudal institutions.

The modern literati artist Tseng Yu-ho, also known as Betty Ecke, wrote a long biographical article on Xu Wei in 1963. Her aim was to "investigate his character in detail and to define him as a poor, sick and suffering man rather than a common criminal" for the murder of his third wife.[38] She concluded that "his is an ecstasy long preceding that of 20th century artists, an ecstasy with the true stamp of authenticity".[39] Once again, the man and his madness could not be separated from his artistic work.

In 1980s China, still somewhat under the influence of Marxism, Xu's paintings and writings were interpreted as representing veiled class struggle and a protest against the restrictive and inevitably decaying "feudal" society and its hierarchies.[40] For example, the modern scholar and biographer of Xu Wei, Luo Yuming, wrote:

> One can say that perhaps both Tang Yin and Xu Wei, as well the later leader of the Gong'an school of literature Yuan Hongdao, all assumed the roles of destroyers of tradition in Chinese classical poetry. But to destroy is to liberate; that is, to search for a new direction. Regardless of how successful or not they were, when an old societal system is quickly deteriorating, this breaking of tradition in culture is unavoidable.
>
> 可以說，唐寅也好，徐渭也好，還有後來的"公安派"領袖袁宏道，都是對中國古典詩歌的傳統起了某種破壞作用的人。但破壞就是解放，就是尋

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edited by De Bary, William Theodore (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1970). See also De Bary, William Theodore and Bloom, Irene eds., *Sources of Chinese Tradition: From the earliest times to 1600* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), pp. 841-924. Chan Hok-Lam, *Li Chih 1527-1602 in Contemporary Chinese Historiography: New Light on his Life and Works* (ME Sharpe, 1980).

[38] Tseng Yu-Ho, "A Study on Hsu Wei" in *Ars Orientalis,* vol. 5 (1963), p. 243.

[39] Tseng, "A Study on Hsu Wei", p. 253.

[40] For example, one scholar, Yu Hui, toed the commonly accepted line of argument that it was a trend in the late Ming to rebel against the traditional order. Along with Xu Wei, he lists Li Zhi and Yuan Hongdao as examples of heterodox scholars, artists and poets. See Yu Hui 余輝, "Xu Wei" 徐渭, in *Ming dai huihua* 明代繪畫, edited by Zhou Linsheng 周林生, (Shijiazhuang: Hebei jiaoyu chubanshe, 2004), p. 174.

> 找新的方向。不管他們成功的程度如何，在一個古老的社會制度快要解體的時候，這種文化傳統上的破壞是不可避免的。[41]

In many Chinese studies of Xu Wei, his art and critique of society are seen as inseparable. Xu's famously wild and expressive paintings, which were seen as breaking with convention, naturally lent themselves to the view that Xu was politically against the old society and even the emperor. This trend has resonated with contemporary Chinese scholars. Yu Hui, senior curator and director of the Research Institute at the Beijing Palace Museum, for example, turned Xu into a moderniser and reformer:

> [Xu Wei] fully expressed his strong dissatisfaction with the reality of his time and fully followed with interest the administration and economy within his hometown, advocating many reforms for maladministration in his *Kuaiji County Gazetteer.* Limited by the corrupt government of the late Ming, his many glorious ideals all became visionary hopes.
>
> 充滿表達了他對當時現實的强烈不滿，他十分關注故裏的政治、經濟，在他編寫的《會稽縣志》裏提出了許多改革弊政的主張。限於明末腐敗的政治，他的許多美好理想都化作泡影。[42]

Yang Xin, former deputy curator at the Beijing Palace Museum, interpreted one of Xu's poems as:

> An insinuation directed against the entire feudal regime. Initially dissatisfied, Xu Wei was now full of indignation. He cursed not only the evil ministers but the emperor himself.[43]

The received wisdom of Xu Wei as a romantic and eccentric artist is, in many ways, a microcosm of the study of late Ming culture, which is seen as a window to strangeness.

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[41] See, Qian Zhonglian 錢仲聯, ed., *Yuan Ming Qing shi jianshang cidian* 元明清詩鑒賞辭典 (Shanghai: Shanghai cishu chubanshe, 1996), p. 591.
[42] Yu Hui, "Xu Wei", p. 172.
[43] Yang Xin; Barnhart, Richard M.; Nie Chongzhen; Cahill, James; Lang Shaojun and Wu Hung, *Three Thousand Years of Chinese Painting* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997), p. 232.

Nelson Wu described Ming China as a "perfect breeding ground for eccentrics".[44] Lenny Hu characterised the late 16th century as the triumph of iconoclasm over "stagnant" Neo-Confucianism.[45] De Bary, in his study of Ming intellectual history, wrote of a "tide of individualistic thought" in the late Ming, culminating in the philosophy of Li Zhi the "arch individualist".[46] In his historical work on the Wanli reign, Ray Huang skirted dangerously close to having a pluralistic view of Ming intellectual trends, arguing that, as an adherent of the Wang Yangming school, Li Zhi claimed that there was no objective standard of right or wrong.[47] The scholar of calligraphy Huang Dun wrote that:

> China underwent tumultuous social changes in the late Ming period with the rise of capitalism and the related emergence of bourgeoisie ideas tinged with democratic principles.[48]

Hence literati such as Li Zhi and Xu Wei have become associated with the ideas of liberalism, democracy and capitalism as well as Marxism, anti-feudalism and even feminism.[49]

ii) The Problem with interpreting Art through Hagiography

There is a fundamental assumption embedded in traditional Chinese connoisseurship and critical theory, and reflected in much modern Western scholarship, that they key to

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[44] Wu, "The Toleration of Eccentrics", p. 28.
[45] Hu, Lenny, *Erotic Stories from Ling Mengchu's 'Two Slaps': In the Inner Quarters* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2003), p. 26.
[46] De Bary and Bloom, eds., *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, p. 865.
[47] Ray Huang takes a particularly relativistic view of Wang Yangming's philosophy as adopted by Li Zhi, claiming that "unless perceived by the mind, 'grass, trees, tiles, and stones ceased to be grass, trees, tiles, and stones.' In other words, there is no such thing as objective reality." Huang also implies that Li Zhi had no standard of right and wrong. See Huang, Ray, *1587: A Year of No Significance* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1981), p. 206.
[48] Huang Dun, "From Domination of the Chancellery Style to Liberation of the Self: Calligraphy of the Ming Dynasty" in *Chinese Calligraphy,* edited by Ouyang Zhongshi (London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), p. 328.
[49] See Hsiung, "A Feminist Re-vision of Xu Wei's Ci Mulan and Nu Zhuangyan".

understanding a painting or poem by a literatus is to understand the life and biography of the individual who created it. This methodology, however, runs the risk of being very simplistic. The equation is straightforward: if an artist is crazy, his work must unequivocally be crazy as well. This is how many have looked at Xu Wei as well as countless other artists throughout Chinese art history.

The traditional Chinese focus of examining the moral character or biography of the poet before examining the text itself has much to do with what was first written in the "Great Preface" to the Book of Odes:

> The poem is that to which what is intently on the mind goes. In the mind, it is "being intent"; coming out in language, it is a poem.[50]

This passage, as Stephen Owen wrote, has become "the canonical definition for all subsequent poetry".[51] Poetry is seen as the true and authentic expression of what is in the heart and mind of the poet. In traditional Chinese literary criticism, the poem is a direct window onto the character of the poet. Traditional studies of poetry, therefore, tend not to separate the person from his art, neither is there any room for the notion that a poet may be constructing a persona in his work.

The same concept applies to art in general, including calligraphy. For example, the Song dynasty literatus Su Dongpo 蘇東坡 (1037-1101) raised questions regarding the relationship between art and the character of a person. Su wrote:

> If from examining a person's calligraphy one can tell what kind of man he is, then the character of the superior men and the mean-minded men must both be reflected in their calligraphy. This would appear to be incorrect. To select

[50]Owen, Stephen, *Readings in Chinese Literary Thought* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Asia Centre: 1992), p. 40.
[51] Owen, *Readings in Chinese Literary Thought,* p. 40.

> people on the basis of their face is considered improper – how much worse, then, to do so on the basis of their calligraphy! Whenever I look at Master Yan [Zhenqing's] calligraphy, I invariably think of his manner and bearing. It's not that I merely learn what kind of man he was. It's is as if I see him – so awe-inspiring! – berating Lu Qi and denouncing Xilie. Why? The principle is no different from Han Fei's argument about the man who "stole the axe".
>
> 觀其書，有以得其為人，則君子小人必見于書。是殆不然。以貌取人，且猶不可，而況書乎？吾觀顏公書，未嘗不想見其風采，非徒得其為人而已，凜乎若見其誚盧杞而叱希烈，何也？其理與韓非竊斧之說無異。

Su referred to a story about a man who lost his axe and suspected that the boy next door had stolen it. He observed the boy, and saw in everything about him – his gait, his speech, his facial expressions – signs that he was the thief. Soon afterwards, the man discovered the axe in his own garden. Thereafter, he observed the boy again and found that nothing in his behaviour would suggest that he was a thief.[52] And yet, Su Dongpo still suggested that we admire Yan Zhenqing's calligraphy because his moral conduct is immediately apparent in it, affirming the idea that "calligraphy resembles one's character 書如其人".

The moral character and biography of a person overshadows their art. Reversing the example, Chinese scholars have exercised traditional value judgements when examining the calligraphy of so called "evil ministers 奸臣" such as Cai Jing 蔡京 (1047-1126) or Qin Hui 秦檜 (1090-1155). In doing so, they ignore such calligraphy or consider it inferior, even if it is almost indistinguishable from the calligraphy of the highly regarded Mi Fu 米芾 (1051-1107).[53]

Traditional interpretations of Xu's poetry and art are arguably like this. Many have simply imposed their preconceptions of Xu, such as that constructed by Yuan Hongdao, onto Xu's

[52] Egan, Ronald C., *Word, Image and Deed in the Life of Su Shi* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 1994), pp. 267-268.
[53] See, for example, Liu Zhengcheng 劉正成, *Shufa yishu gailun* 書法藝術概論 (Beijing: Shangwu yinshu guan, 2014), pp. 285-311.

work. In line with the eccentric image of Xu, breaking boundaries and rebelling against tradition and convention, many ascribe to his poetry the qualities of direct expression and startling innovation. Biography precedes art and the tail wags the dog. Traditional critics selectively read Xu and then take him too literally.

iii) New Methods and Interpretations

However, there is now a growing recognition that this is not the full picture of Xu Wei, and that there was more to him than just an iconoclast or eccentric mountain hermit. This is based on a new approach which recontextaulises Xu Wei's biography and returns to his original texts. So far, however, these new views have been confined mostly to his paintings and drama.

Richard I-Cheng Liang wrote one of the earliest books on Xu Wei that encompassed his painting, drama, poetry and prose. In his *Xu Wei de wenxue yu yishu* (The Literature and Art of Xu Wei), published in Taipei in 1977, he took no account of the anecdotes regarding Xu's eccentric life.[54] Instead, he attempted to present an image of Xu Wei based solely on the historical facts available, Xu's own texts and how Xu represented himself. Such an approach, however, was criticised in a review by Tu Kuo-ch'ing from the University of California. It is worth quoting her criticism at length as it highlights how Xu's eccentricity and paintings overshadowed any objective interpretation of Xu's work and his poetry in particular:

> Either Hsu Wei's marked individuality or the symbolic value of the traditional characterization of him seems to have been lost in this study. The book aims to show Hsu Wei's unpainted face; realistic and objective as it may be, the image does not breathe…

[54] Liang Yicheng 梁一成 , *Xu Wei de wenxue yu yishu* 徐渭的文學與藝術 (Taipei: Yi wen yin shu guan, 1977).

> *Although the Confucian didactic view of poetry is reiterated as a basic idea underlining all of Hsu Wei's works, in light of his expressionist approach to painting, emphasizing spontaneity and individuality, it seems unlikely that the dominant philosophy would be didactic Confucianism* [emphasis mine]. It seems to me that Hsu Wei is more of a Taoist nonconformist or a person much influenced by ch'an in his works and in his attitudes toward life, especially as a frustrated literary man who failed eight times at the civil service examinations and served six years in a prison for the murder of his wife. A mind shadowed by such an unusually tragic life must have been reflected in his works, surely a matter worthy of attention. Part of the author's intention seems to be to purge Hsu Wei's image of almost every hint of darkness, madness or gloom.[55]

The Confucian reading of Xu, as emphasised by Liang, was completely overlooked by Tu. Tu could not escape from the "non-conformist" image of Xu that was first produced by Yuan Hongdao. Hence, Tu criticised Liang's interpretation because it did not fit the received "eccentric" archetype, despite the evidence of Confucian didacticism in Xu's work.

In 1988, the art historian James Cahill signalled a turning point in studies of Xu Wei's paintings and it is worth quoting him at length. Cahill wrote that psychological interpretations of Xu's work are:

> Seriously undermined when we observe that the affinities between Hsu and other artists who painted in similar styles are affinities in social role and economic status, and in the images of themselves that they chose to project, rather than any similarities in psychological states. To say this is not to deny altogether the factor of individual expression, of art as a revelation of personality, in Hsu Wei's or any artist's paintings. But recognizing that even eccentricity was signified by established conventions saves us from leaping too precipitously to biographical examinations of Hsu Wei's art, and allows us to see the evolution of a personal style with deeper poignancy as partly accepting, partly straining against, a system of conventions.[56]

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[55] Tu Kuo-ch'ing, "Hsu Wei ti wen hsueh yu yi hsu (The Literature and Art of Hsu Wei, 1521-1593) by Richard I –cheng Liang" in *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol 101, no. 4 (1981), p. 428.

[56] Cahill, James, *The Franklin D. Murphy Lectures IX: Three Alternative Histories of Chinese Painting* (Spencer Museum of Art: University of Kansas, 1988), p. 94.

Cahill's argument, that the hagiography of Xu the eccentric is undermined by the economic and social context of Xu's painting, was taken further by Kathleen Ryor in her doctoral thesis. By closely examining the poems which Xu inscribed on his paintings, and ignoring Yuan Hongdao's representation of Xu as the mad eccentric, she showed how the hagiography of Xu Wei and his madness overshadowed interpretations of his work. Ryor argues that scholars have privileged Xu's expressive elements over his concerns for the demands of the art market.[57] She has also highlighted the close relationship between civil and military culture in the late Ming and linked it to Xu's construction of the persona of the knight-errant or *xia* 俠 in his paintings.[58] In sum, Ryor has shown a more image-conscious Xu Wei, which this thesis also stresses.

Shiamin Kwa also ignored the myth of Xu Wei and returned to the text. Her *Strange Eventful Histories: Identity, Performance, And Xu Wei's Four Cries of a Gibbon,* published in 2012, provides detailed literary analysis and annotated translation of Xu's dramas. She goes beyond Xu's historical circumstances when exploring his plays and addresses the texts directly to show a playwright who creatively explored complex issues.

Another scholar who has returned to the texts themselves is Fu Qiong from Beijing Normal University. In his *Xu Wei sanwen yanjiu* (A Study of Xu Wei's Prose) published in 2007, Fu separated Xu Wei from Yuan Hongdao's Gong'an School of literature and proved Xu to have written essays with strong archaic and classical influences.[59] In a recent article, Yuming He, from the University of California, has also shown that Xu Wei wrote in an

[57] See Ryor, Kathleen, "Bright Pearls Hanging in the Marketplace: Self-expression and Commodification in the Painting of Xu Wei" (PhD diss.: New York University, 1998).
[58] Ryor, Kathleen, "Wen and Wu in Elite Cultural Practices during the Late Ming," in *Military Culture in Imperial China,* edited by Di Cosmo, Nicola (Cambridge Ma: Harvard University Press, 2009), pp. 219- 242.
[59] See Fu, *Xu Wei sanwen yanjiu*.

affected style that was purposely difficult, verbose, and elitist.[60] A new monograph on Xu Wei, written by Xu Jianrong and published in China, argued Xu to be more self-interested in his criticisms of society:

> The society that [Xu Wei] cursed was truly an unfair and decaying society, which lent his mentality and moral conduct a certain righteousness, regardless of whether he was a reformer of a decaying society, or out of a desire for personal motives…We can only see that he showed contempt for the powerful and wealthy, representing the corrupt and powerful elite of society. In fact, his ideals of opposition to the decay of society did not come out of the notion that "all under heaven is for the public"; rather, it came from his own personal desires. Therefore, in actuality so long as he could benefit, regardless if they were an evil minister or loyal official, he would bend over and flatter them. So long as his ambitions were hindered, regardless if they were an evil mister or loyal official, he would rebel and show his contempt for them.
>
> 他所詛咒的這個社會又是一個真正不公的腐朽社會，更使他的心態和品行取得了某種正義性，無論對於社會腐朽的改革者，還是個性人欲的訴求者…我們衹看到他的蔑視權貴，而以權貴代表了社會的腐朽力量。而其實，他并非出於‘天下爲公’的理想而反抗社會的腐朽，而是出於個人訴求的欲望而反抗社會。所以，實際上，衹要有利於其個人訴求的實現，無論這個權貴是奸臣還是忠臣，他都不惜屈膝而阿諛之；衹要妨礙了其個人訴求的實現，無論這個權貴是奸臣還是忠臣，他又都桀驁不馴地蔑視之。[61]

These works have all moved away from the image of eccentricity and the biography of madness, and contributed to a new understanding of Xu Wei's literary and artistic works. However, with the exception of Liang in the 70s, most of these scholars have only focused on his drama and paintings. Ryor has looked at Xu's poems in detail, but they are poems inscribed on his paintings, which in my opinion belong largely to the one theme of flowers. Little attention has been paid to Xu's ghost-writings, history poetry, or his poems celebrating the imperium.

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[60] He, Yuming, "Difficulties of Performance: The Musical Career of Xu Wei's: 'The Mad Drummer'" in *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies,* vol 68, no 2 (2008), pp. 77-144.

[61] Xu Jianrong 徐建融, ed., *Xu Wei shuhua quanji* 徐渭書畫全集 (Tianjin: Tianjin renmin meishu chubanshe, 2014), pp.2-3.

Scholars of Xu Wei are beginning to show a new understanding of his literary artifice, and that his literary persona is more complex and multi-dimensional. Zooming out from Xu specifically, scholars of late imperial Chinese culture, such as Katharine Burnett, have closely analysed texts and the artistic discourse surrounding the term *qi* 奇 (strange, eccentric, original). Unconstrained by traditional historiography or hagiographies of "weird" or "eccentric" artists, she has shown that within the discourse of painting or literary criticism, *qi* should be understood as "original" rather than "eccentric". This has changed our understanding of aesthetic "eccentricity" in Chinese art history and shown the term to be inadequate when categorising artists such as Xu Wei.[62] This thesis also stresses this, but from a different methodological angle.

In the same vein as Liang and Ryor, this thesis is based on the methods of recontextualising Xu's biography, namely, going into details of his networks and relationships with men such as Shen Lian and Hu Zongxian and situating him within the broader political and historical background. Ignoring the hagiography of eccentricity, or even originality, as described by later commentators, this thesis also returns to the text and analyses previously neglected areas in Xu's writings such as his poems on the themes of history and the imperium. A sensitive reading of his prose and poetry, looking at his use of historical allusions and metaphors shows that Xu worked largely within convention, not against it.

This thesis presents a reading of Xu as a complex writer wrestling with different self-representations. There is the representation of himself as an artistic and cultured

[62] See Burnett, "A Discourse of Originality in Late Ming Chinese Painting Criticism." See also by the same author, *Dimensions of Originality: Essays on Seventeenth-century Chinese Art Theory and Criticism* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2013). Burnett's scholarship is discussed more fully with regards to Xu Wei below in the conclusion.

mountain hermit and recluse, but at the same time he pursued an official career most of his life and was enmeshed in networks of power. He was deeply conscious of manipulating his image. Xu stands out as one of the few writers to reflect the complexities of his time, recognising and creatively exploring his tense interactions with a messy social and polticial world.

One example of this tension is in Xu's relationship with the theory of *bense.* He recognised that pursuing the artistic ideal of *bense* contradicted with pursuing a career as an official or earning a living as a ghost-writer. In the realm of literature, Xu advocated the ideal of *bense*, or direct expression of individual emotion. In his preface to the "Romance of the Western Chamber" (西厢紀),[63] he expounded on *bense* and argued against imitation, which he believed could never successfully be accomplished:

> There is nothing in the world that does not have an 'original nature' (*bense*), or an 'apparent nature' (*xiangse*). Original nature refers to what is popularly called one's true self; whereas 'apparent nature' is to take on another self. Those who try to take on another self, is what critics call "the slave girl acting as the Mistress feels embarrassed after all". Those that are like slave girls that pretend to be the Mistress, want to smother themselves in makeup and deck themselves in accessories to become a lady; in fact this means they are covering up their [attractive] simplicity. For this reason, in this book I view [the sections with] 'apparent nature' with disdain, but I value [the sections with] 'true nature'. Those things that the public sneers at are the things I warm to. How can this be for playwrights alone? Every writer is like this. Alas! With whom can I say these words! What the public ignores, I alone pay attention to, what the public worships, I alone despise. Alas! With whom can I say these words!
>
> 世事莫不有本色，有相色。本色，猶俗言正身也；相色，替身也。替身者，即書評中婢作夫人終覚羞涩之謂也。婢作夫人者，欲塗抹成主母而多插帶，反掩其素之謂也。故余于此本中賤相色，貴本色，眾人嘖嘖者我煦煦也。豈惟剧者，凡作者莫不如此。嗟哉，吾誰與語！眾人所忽余獨詳，眾人所旨余獨唾。嗟哉，吾誰與語！[64]

[63] See XWJ, p. 1089; see also West, Stephen H. and Idema, Wilt L., eds., *The Story of the Western Wing* (Berkley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1995).
[64] XWJ, p. 1089

In one poem about a painting of bamboo, Xu explained that since art was the result of direct expression of emotion, it cannot be replicated:

此竹是予昔所作，	This bamboo I painted a long time ago.
即欲再作今不能。	Now you want me to do another? – impossible!
雀老既成海蛤，	When the sparrow grows old it becomes a clam in the sea.
轉**教**為雀可飛騰？	You ask it to turn back into a sparrow, but how can it fly again? [65]

Xu believed that every piece of work was a unique reflection of *bense*, not just of the artist or writer themselves, but of the moment of creation. The freshness and spontaneity of a piece of work thus could not be copied or even duplicated.

In order to preserve the writer's *bense,* Xu theoretically opposed the use and imitation of archaic expressions in contemporary writings. Chih-P'ing Chou argues that Xu "especially decried writing drama in the [highly formulaic and stylised] *ba gu wen* (eight-legged essay) style."[66] In a pamphlet entitled "*Naci xulu*" (南詞敍錄), Xu wrote:

> Now, the appeal of an aria lies in its ability to move the heart: an aria may be said to live up to its name only when it can be understood by all the slaves, children, women, and girls when sung. *Discussions of the classics and the philosophers, these one cannot even use in poetry* [emphasis mine], let alone things like this. Frankly when one is short on talent and feeling, one tends to pad a piece of work. The way I look at it is this: rather than making an aria literary and obscure, why not leave it crude even if it runs the risk of being despised for being too easy to understand? [Translation by K. C. Leung][67]

[65] According to the *Monthly Ordinances* (Yue Ling) of the classic *Book of Rites*, "in the last month of autumn, the sparrow enters the great ocean to become a clam". Translation and notes taken from Chaves, Jonathan, *Columbia Anthology of Later Chinese Poetry: Yuan, Ming and Ch'ing Dynasties 1279-1911* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), p. 317. See also XWJ, p. 391.
[66] Chou, *Yuan Hung-Tao,* p. 20.
[67] Leung, K.C., *Hsu Wei as Drama Critic: An Annotated Translation of the Nan-tz'u hsu-lu* (University of Oregon, 1988), p. 72.

> 夫曲本取於感發人心，歌之使奴，童，婦，女皆喻，乃為得體；經，子之談，以之為詩且不可， 況此等耶？直以才情欠少，未免輳補成篇。吾意：與其文而晦，曷若俗而鄙之易曉也？[68]

Xu argued that poetry and arias should be in simple and unadorned language, easy to understand even by slaves and children. In his postscript to the drama *Kunlun nu* 崑崙奴, Xu claimed that the usage of affected vulgar speech represented authenticity and *bense* uncorrupted by the demands of convoluted style:

> The more vulgar the more domestic and common, and the more rousing; this is like a good water mill, that doesn't mix even one husk with the rice; this is authentic *bense*.
>
> 越俗越家常，越警醒，此纔是好水碓，不雜一毫糠衣，真本色。[69]

If we apply the method of contextualising Xu's life and work and return to the text, we can see that this is only part of the picture. Those people who held Xu as a champion of *bense* and self expression have allowed hagiography to overshadow a more complex picture of Xu.

Despite Xu's theories on *bense,* simple language, originality and the expression of direct emotion, Xu could not abandon convention altogether, lest he would run the "risk of being despised for being too easy to understand 若俗而鄙之易曉也", as he wrote himself. If we pay closer attention to the context in which Xu was working, we can see that he was enmeshed in networks of highly cultured men. He was conscious of his artistic reputation among his fellow literati, not wanting to drop in their estimation. Thus,

[68] Leung, *Hsu Wei as Drama Critic*, p. 219.
[69] XWJ, p. 1093.

he continued to follow their conventions by writing extremely verbose poems, peppered with obscure classical references.

When Xu visited various historical sites, for example, he took up the challenge of composing poems in emulation of past great poets – just as every literati who claimed to be a poet had done. When Xu was passing through Xuzhou and wanted to write a poem about Sporting Horse Terrace, he wrote:

> Since the Six Dynasties onward many have used this for poetic material, I for this reason especially wanted to again narrate it in poetic form.
>
> 六朝以後多取為詩料，余故特再詠焉。[70]

Xu was an extremely self-conscious writer attempting to place himself firmly within a larger poetic tradition and establish himself as belonging in the hall of literary fame. If a number of great poets wrote about a certain place, he had to as well. He was not entirely opposed to convention as some have argued.

In fact Xu greatly admired the ancient masters, in particular Han Yu 韓愈 (768-824), Li He 李賀 (790-816) and Su Dongpo, all of whom influenced Xu's writing style greatly. Far from rejecting this heritage, he acknowledged it in the following:

> The writing of Master of Fields [Xu Wei] is somewhat a blend of the Six Classics, the various sages from before the Qin, especially Meng Sou [Zhuangzi], and Jia Changsha [Jia Yi]. As for more recent models, he uses the marrow of Chang Li [Han Yu] and the Great Su [Dongpo], simply discarding their skin [making only superficial changes].
>
> 田生之文，稍融會六經， 及先秦諸子諸史尤契者蒙叟， 賈長沙也。姑為近格，乃兼并昌黎， 大蘇， 亦用其髓， 棄其皮耳。[71]

[70] XWJ, p. 784.
[71] XWJ, p. 976.

In sum, this indicates just how difficult it is to establish a simple dichotomy of stuffy orthodoxy and convention versus eccentric individualism and *bense* in Xu's poetry. And despite Xu's manifesto of originality, Ryor has clearly demonstrated that Xu repeated poems and paintings to sell on the market.[72]

Moreover, if we turn to some of Xu's texts, it becomes clear that most of the poems he wrote were for social functions and fell short of his theories. Xu's poems written to his superior Hu Zongxian 胡宗憲 (1512-1565),[73] for example, follow conventions and are extremely classical and verbose. Xu's poems written on behalf of Hu Zongxian, such as those written to the Grand Chief Secretary are also similarly verbose and obscure.

Xu's almost völkisch appeal for "real" and unforced language, one that could be easily understood even by peasants, fell short of the poems he wrote in praise of the imperium. To provide just one example of such a poem:

Respectful Fu on Imperial Procession from Yue, Reviewing Troops on the Thoroughfare

駕歸自閱群望於衢恭賦

桃李晴曛禁苑煙，On the peaches and plums a beam of light falls through the imperial garden's mist,
鑾輿新幸北郊旋。the carriages with their horse-bells tour anew returning north.
團花靺鞨蒐春日，rounded embroidered [designs on armour] and ruby-red stockings assemble on this spring day for war,
細柳旌旗拊髀年，banners and flags at Slender Willow Camp, a year of thigh-slapping!
一道甲光将雪借，Side by side shining armour reflects from the snow;
千群馬色截雲鮮。a thousand horses appear to cut through the fresh clouds.
誰兼将帥為天子，　Who combines generalship with being Emperor?
共喜文皇九葉玄。[74] Let us all take joy in our Cultured Emperor's nine leaves of mystery!

[72] Ryor, "Bright Pearls Hanging in the Marketplace".
[73] Hu Zongxian is discussed in greater detail in Chapters 1 and 2.
[74] XWJ, p. 245. This poem is discussed further in Chapter 3.

The poem describes an imperial procession in the style of a Han dynasty court poem. The language used is purposely difficult to reflect the magnificence of the imperium. Nothing could be further from the ideal of the vulgar, domestic or startlingly original that Xu supposedly advocated.

Hence, there is a tension between Xu's various self-representations. Xu wished to pursue the literary ideal of *bense,* but at the same time he earned a living as a professional writer capable of composing archaic, classical, and difficult to understand poems. Without due consideration for Xu's social context and without a sensitive reading of his poems, some scholars have tended to take Xu's theory of *bense* too literally, without realising that much of his poetic practice fell short of his espoused ideals.

This examination of Xu's complicated treatment of *bense* is a microcosm of a wider appreciation of the tensions in his work. Xu was an extremely self-conscious writer, who was pulled in different directions by various political and social factions. To fit the occasion, he created the literary personas of engaged Confucian scholar, didactic historian, loyal friend, loyal imperial subject and tortured hero.

Through poetry, Xu negotiated his image and the way he represented himself. This thesis moves away from the traditional Chinese notion that poetry reflected his innermost being. Instead, it was a deliberate attempt to construct a literary persona. Against a complicated and messy political backdrop, Xu constructed an identity through his poetry that was shaped by larger notions of history, Confucian didacticism and loyalty. In one poem Xu wrote:

In these silent poems a thousand autumns are eulogised

無聲詩裏頌千秋[75]

From Xu's comment above, we can understand that much of Xu's history poetry was not just about the expression of raw emotion and eccentricity, but also part of his image as a didactic poet-historian, eulogising heroes both ancient and contemporary.

In this thesis, I will present a very different Xu Wei from the mad, "Van-Gogh" like artist who attempted suicide nine times and murdered his third wife in a fit of rage. Instead, I examine his writings within the political context of the 16th century, and show how Xu creatively explored his anxiety surrounding the treacherous court politics of the time.

Against the backdrop of Mongol and pirate invasions, Xu's close friend Shen Lian 沈鍊 (1507-1557) was executed by the Chief Grand Secretary Yan Song 嚴嵩 (1481-1568) and his clique.[76] Yet only a month after his friend's execution, Xu switched sides and worked for Hu Zongxian, a protégé of Yan Song. As a ghost writer for Hu Zongxian, Xu wrote obsequious birthday poems to Yan Song, yet was grateful for the money he received, openly naming his new large house, "Hall for the Remuneration of Words 酬字堂". Yet with the fall of Yan Song in 1562 and the arrest of Hu Zongxian, this became an embarrassment for Xu. Fearing that he would be implicated with the Yan Song clique, Xu did not defend Hu Zongxian, unlike many of his contemporaries, and instead distanced himself from his flattering ghost-written poems and memorials and took a defensive tone.

I will show that Xu Wei, overwhelmed by feelings of guilt, would continue to find justifications for his actions and explore the complexities of loyalty in his history poetry.

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[75] Zhang Rongdong 張榮東, *You gu zhong sheng: Zhongguo huajia shihua* 幽谷鐘聲：中國畫家詩話 (Jinan: Shandong huabao chubanshe, 2010), p. 162.

[76] Shen Lian and Yan Song are explored in greater detail in chapters one and two.

History and contemporary political events formed a vital element in Xu's writings. Xu's passion for history is clear:

> Ah! alas alas! Every time I read history, I read it three times over!
>
> 意, 嗟嗟！每當讀史為三覆![77]

It is not surprising, therefore, that when scholars such as Xu wrote poetry, they frequently invoked historical events, situations and personalities to discuss the present. It has been said that one cannot imagine Du Fu without the An Lushan rebellion, or Su Dongpo without the reform movement of Wang Anshi. So, too, one cannot conceive of Xu Wei without the rise and fall of Grand Secretary Yan Song and Governor General Hu Zongxian. The political experiences of the 1550s and 60s spilled out into Xu's poetry. When writing about the Han dynasty general Han Xin 韓信 (died 196 BCE), Xu could have been describing his own ambiguous circumstances:

暗中朱碧知誰是， Amidst the darkness who can tell between the vermillion and the azure
濁水渾魚每相似。[78] In the muddy waters fish all look alike.

Caught between a rock and a hard place, Xu Wei – the artist and poet seen by many as the champion of unrestrained personal expression – said apologetically, "writings of the hand are of the kind that do not come from the heart 書於手者，類不出於其心"[79] and "people cannot fault me! 人不能病余！"[80]

[77]XWJ, p. 719.
[78] XWJ, p. 133.
[79]XWJ, p. 518.
[80] XWJ, p. 536.

In employing this method, I do not intend to discard biography completely. However, as I have mentioned above, I am arguing against a very linear and simplistic view of the relationship between biography and art. It is important to contextualise the work carefully. In so doing, I am arguing for a more nuanced use of biography. For example, Kathleen Ryor is one scholar of Xu Wei who used biography in such a way. Ryor examined the events of Xu's life by comparing his two autobiographies, the "Self-written Epitaph" and his self-written life chronology known as the "Record of Odds and Ends", with their contrasting presentations of the self and then sets these two accounts against the large body of contemporary records of Xu's activities and relationships. Ryor wrote:

> By contrasting the lives presented by Xu himself at age forty-five and age seventy-three with the life that emerges from texts in which self presentation is not systematic, the image of the iconoclastic madman mythologized by later admirers is recontextualized. I have chosen to rely exclusively on Xu's writings and the accounts of contemporaries who knew him rather than later biographers for this reason."[81]

This approach sought to demonstrate the complex tensions that shaped Xu's life, which were then self-consciously transformed in his paintings. In a similar vein, this thesis seeks to demonstrate the complex political tensions that shaped Xu's life, which were then self-consciously transformed in his poetry and writings.

By specifically highlighting one period of Xu's biography, situating him within the networks and factional court politics of the 1550s and 60s, we can see how historical incidents influenced his creative choices. In turn, this resulted in a very different persona of Xu as didactic historian, close loyal friend to Shen Lian of the anti-Yan Song clique, loyal secretary to Hu Zongxian of the Yan Song clique, and loyal subject of the emperor. From this one can see that Xu was not confined to any one self image.

[81] Ryor, "Bright Pearls Hanging in the Marketplace", pp. 9-10.

At this point, it is necessary to discuss the sources which have been used as the basis for this thesis. The principal source for this thesis is the *Xu Wei Ji* 徐渭集, Xu Wei's collected writings, first published by Zhonghua shuju 中華書局 in 1983. The *Xu Wei Ji* is comprised of the *Xu Wenchang sanji* 徐文長三集 published in 1598, the *Xu Wenchang yigao* 徐文長佚稿 published in 1623 by Zhang Dai, and the *Xu Wenchang yicao* 徐文長佚草 which are a collection of unearthed archival texts discovered by Chinese scholars in 1925.

It is neccessary to provide some historical background to the individual components of the *Xu Wenchang sanji.* after Xu died in 1593, the famous Ming literatus Yuan Hongdao re-discovered his literary works and, in 1598, oversaw the publication of the *Xu Wenchang sanji*, for which he and Tao Wangling wrote prefaces. The *Sanji* was compiled by Xu's disciples and was a composite of the *Xu Wenchang chuji* 徐文長初集, *Quebian* 闕編, and *Yingtao guan shi* 櫻桃館詩, which were published separately while Xu was alive. Unfortunately, none of them exist as independent volumes today. Most of the poems, prefaces and essays analysed in this thesis are from the *Sanji* specifically, meaning these works were published while Xu was still active. Works that had not been previously published in the *Sanji* were collected in the *Xu Wenchang yigao* 徐文長佚稿 in 1623 by Zhang Dai.

Hence the *Xu Wei Ji* is the most complete collection of Xu's works to date, but there is much which does not emerge from this source. For example, it does not contain all of Xu's texts including his treatise on drama, the *Nanci xulu,* or his commentary to the poetry of Li He 李賀 (790-816). However, these sources can be accessed elsewhere.[82]

[82] For an excellent annotated English translation of the *Nanci xulu,* see Leung, *Hsu Wei as Drama Critic.* For Xu's poetry talks and commentary on the poetry of Li He and Du Fu etc, see Wu Wenzhi 吳文治, ed., *Ming*

There are also problems with our picture of Xu Wei in general. For example, although we know that Xu participated in the writing of his local gazetteer, we do not know why his name was not listed as a contributor, even though he was mentioned in the preface by a well-known scholar. In addition to this, many of Xu's poems are not dated and there are many instances where it is unclear for whom or which audience Xu was writing to, or why.

This thesis is divided into three chapters. The first chapter outlines the social, economic, intellectual and political background to Xu Wei. It reconstructs Xu's world and the problems facing it, such as piracy, Mongol raids and venal court politics. It examines them from Xu's perspective and analyses his response to them in his poems and essays. It demonstrates that Xu created a persona that was engaged with many of the problems of the empire, not a disengaged mountain hermit. The chapter also analyses new material, the *Kuaiji County Gazetteer,* on the society and economy of the mid to late Ming from Xu's perspective. The gazetteer has hitherto been neglected by general historians of the Ming.

The second chapter focuses more closely on Xu's career as a professional writer and examines how he wrote of his anxiety surrounding the venal court politics that trickled all the way down from Beijing. In particular, this section will look at the fall and death of Xu's close friend, Shen Lian, and how Xu wrote eulogies turning him into a paragon of virtue. This is then juxtaposed against Xu's later actions, in which he worked for the very clique that had killed Shen Lian. This caused Xu much anxiety, even more so when Xu's superior was, in turn, imprisoned and eventually died. Xu was torn between praising his patrons and friends as paragons of virtue, while at the same time distancing himself and his writings for fear of being implicated. Most of the poems and essays have been translated

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Shihua Quanbian 明詩話全編 (Complete Collection of Ming Dynasty Poetic Treaties) (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1997).

into English for the first time here, and show Xu in a completely different light from that of the hermit artist.

The third chapter explores Xu's attitude to the emperor and imperium. In the previous chapter, I will have shown that many of Xu's friends and patrons were killed by venal court politics, which then triggered an internal crisis in Xu. This led him to question a system that allowed good men to die. Contrary to many scholars, such as Ray Huang, who have implied that Ming literati were against "feudal society" and the emperor and demanded greater liberalism, I will show that Xu actually desired a stronger emperor, not a weaker one. I examine Xu's poems venerating emperors from history and demonstrate his yearning for a return to a political strongman such as the Ming founder Zhu Yuanzhang. This contrasts with many of Xu's contemporaries, such as Chen Jiru 陳繼儒 (1558-1639), who distanced themselves from society and their social failures by attacking Zhu Yuanzhang in writing. [83] The situation is therefore more complex than what readers of Ming history have so far described.

Finally, the thesis will conclude by discussing the implications of Xu's conflicting self-representations. I will argue that Xu's so-called "eccentricity" constituted an alternate orthodoxy rather than a true heterodoxy. I will also discuss the further implications of the issues of persona and identity for Ming cultural history in general.

Although this study is principally a work for sinological historians of the Ming dynasty, it is intended as well for those who study Chinese art and literature in general. Apart from being of interest to those specifically in the small field of Xu Wei studies, scholars of China,

[83]Chen Jiru 陳繼儒 (1558-1639), *zi* Zhongchun 仲醇*, hao* Migong 糜公 and Meigong 眉公, was a famous painter, calligrapher and writer. See Greenbaum, Jamie, *Chen Jiru (1558-1639): The Background to, Development and Subsequent Uses of Literary Personae,* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), pp. 28-29; 172.

I hope, will take interest in how this thesis demonstrates that the battle lines and network groups between pro and anti-Yan Song cliques was blurred. There is no “good guy” or “bad guy” in this thesis, and it does much to get rid of the “praise and blame” history (*Baobian* 褒貶) of traditional Chinese historiography. Xu Wei certainly compared Chief Grand Secretary Yan Song to the infamous personages of history, but he also wrote scathingly of Yan’s nemesis, the next Chief Grand Secretary Xu Jie, traditionally seen as the “good guy” or antithesis to Yan Song.

More importantly, this thesis demonstrates how the lables of “eccentric” or “mad” are inadequate for describing the poetry and prose of Xu Wei, despite his famed illness, multiple suicide attempts and the murder of his wife. It challenges the traditional view that a hagiography of eccentricity and madness is simplistically reflected in that artist’s work. By questioning this traditional approach and putting historical context front and centre, it argues for a nuanced examination of the relationship between an artist’s biography and work. It demands that historians of Chinese art and literature take the issue of literary artifice and artistic choice seriously.

Chapter 1: Songs of Today

Xu Wei's Engagement with a Dysfunctional World

This chapter provides the historical, political, intellectual and social backdrop to the artist and poet Xu Wei. It will not simply regurgitate a broad overview of late Ming history, which can already be found in works such as the *Cambridge History of China.* Instead, this chapter will consider Xu's individual historical and socio-political context based on how he constructed it through poems, essays and the local county gazetteer which he wrote.

Through Xu's works, we will see another aspect of him. Far from belittling worldly affairs as a "mountain hermit" (*shanren* 山人),[84] for most of his adult life he participated in networks of power and was entirely engaged with issues of public benefit as a self proclaimed "scholar of the realm" (*guoshi* 國士).[85] This more official and professional representation, along with his other artistic representations, manifested itself in his poetry and prose as well. This is not to deny or negate his artistic and cultural persona of the "mountain hermit" or "Daoist of the Green Vine Studio", sobriquets which were carved onto his seals on many of his paintings and calligraphy.[86] Rather, it is to set this lofty, Daoist, reclusive aspect of Xu alongside his other Confucian, "participatory" aspect as a "scholar of the realm". This puts his artistic persona into perspective and we get a more rounded, complex and less one-dimensional view of Xu.

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[84]Park, *Art by the Book*, p. 22. See also Clunas, Craig, *Fruitful Sites: Garden Culture in Ming Dynasty China* (London: Reaktion, 1996), p. 91. Clunas wrote that "Ming writers employed a term, first coined in the Southern Song, which contained within itself the oxymoron of simultaneous withdrawal and social engagement, the term *shi yin,* 'city recluse' [市隱]."

[85]XWJ, p. 449. See also, Fu, *Xu Wei sanwen yanjiu*, p. 18.

[86] For some of the seals, see Liu Zhengcheng 劉正成, *Zhongguo shufa quanji: Xu Wei* 中國書法全集：徐渭 (Beijing: Rongbaozhai chubanshe, 2010), pp. 4, 30.

Intellectual Currents

The intellectual currents of Xu's time bound him towards public service and action on behalf of society. The early Ming emperors aligned their statecraft with a Neo-Confucian logic that prioritised longevity and stability. Longevity would be assured by assigning subjects with fixed responsibilities and obligations as determined by constellations of familial and occupational relationships. Service to the emperor and the people constituted an ethical mandate, a norm which specifically excluded eccentricity and mountain hermits. By emphasising public benefit, this model eliminated all ambiguity surrounding forms of anti-social non-conformity, which hereafter would be equated with moral corruption. For example, the first emperor of the Ming, Zhu Yuanzhang 朱元璋 (1328-1398), instituted severe punishments for any officials who refused the call to serve the government and the public good.[87] However, the threat which that injunction carried weakened by the time of the late Ming.

By the mid to late Ming, changes took place within Confucian philosophy. Some intellectual histories of the late Ming view this period as a time of mountain hermits, eccentricity and individualism and trace this to Wang Yangming 王陽明 (1472-1529) and his philosophy. Wang argued that sagehood dwelt not in dogma but within the individual, something which made moral cultivation both a private affair and a social obligation.[88] He

[87]Zhang Tingyu 張廷玉, ed., *Ming shi* 明史 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974), p. 7623.

[88] Wang Yangming was an inheritor of the Song dynasty philosopher Lu Jiuyuan's 陸九淵(1139-1192) School of the Mind, which can be summarised by two of his famous sayings that "the universe is my mind, and my mind is the universe 宇宙便是吾心，吾心即是宇宙", and "the mind is the principle 心即理". Lu Jiuyuan disagreed with his contemporary, the philosopher Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130-1200), who argued that one needed to study the external world to investigate the principle of things and understand the ultimate principle of the universe. A well known story illustrates Wang Yangming's dissatisfaction with Zhu Xi and his curriculum. He once tried to put Zhu Xi's philosophy of investigating things to attain their inherent principle into practice by meditating and focusing on a bamboo for several days. However, he fell ill and became disillusioned after he still did not understand the inherent principle of bamboo or the universe. Therefore, Wang Yangming

also asserted that while standards of goodness were universal, they were ultimately apprehended individually, meaning that personal convictions did not necessarily conflict with universal moral knowledge. This innate knowledge of the good was to be actualised through action.

Wang Yangming's thought, as de Bary once wrote, "dynamised the conception of the self, sagehood and the individual as nothing had before and came to dominate the intellectual scene during the sixteenth century as if they represented a new orthodoxy."[89] Brecher argued that Wang Yangming's philosophy justified eccentricity and non-conformist behaviour by lending moral legitimacy to individual emotion.[90] Indeed, Wang Yangming's ideas were interpreted in this way by some of his disciples.

However, we must be careful not to exaggerate Wang Yangming's philosophy as a justification for eremitism and non-conformist behaviour. In fact, Wang Yangming's philosophy emphasised practical engagement with society, not disengagement. Wang Yangming's philosophy argued for the unity of knowing and acting. He argued that action was the natural expression of an impulse toward benefiting society. This kept the individual well within the bounds of Confucian reciprocity and social responsibility. He

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turned inward and came to the realisation that the principle or knowledge of good should not be sought "out there" but rather in the mind itself, since the "principle" is not external to the thinking subject. Wang Yangming advocated the theory that "there is nothing outside of the heart-and-mind, no principle outside of the heart-and-mind 心外無物，心外無理", as well as "innate knowledge of the good 致良知". See Wang Yangming's *Instructions for Practical Living* 傳習录, in *Wang Yangming Quanji* 王陽明全集 (Beijing: Zhongyang bianyi chubanshe, 2014), p. 40. For a biography of Wang Yangming as well as translations of his philosophical works, see also Henke, Frederick Goodrich, *The Philosophy of Wang Yang-Ming* (New York: Paragon Book Reprint Corp, 1964); Ching, Julia, *To Acquire Wisdom: The Way of Wang Yang-ming* (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1976); De Bary and Bloom eds., *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, p. 842.

[89] De Bary and Bloom eds., *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, p. 842.

[90] Brecher, W., *The Aesthetics of Strangeness: Eccentricity and Madness in Early Modern Japan* (Honolulu: Uinversity of Hawaii Press, 2013), p. 36.

argued against scholars who were pedantic bookworms that studied ethics without living up to its ideals.

Xu also advocated some aspects of Wang Yangming's ideas. He learned of Wang Yangming-ism directly from Wang Yangming's disciples. Many of them, including Ji Ben 季本 (1485-1563) and Wang Ji 王畿 (1498-1583), were from Shaoxing, Xu's hometown, where they had set up their own schools.[91] Xu himself wrote that "when I was twenty seven or eight, I treated Mr Ji [Ben] with the respect due to a teacher, and felt more awakened and advanced, the past twenty years before this were void; I regret I could not catch up to him [in age] 廿八七歲，始師事季先生，稍覺有進，前此過空二十年，悔無及矣。"[92] Ji Ben also thought highly of Xu:

> With regards to [Xu] Wei, I sympathised with his aspirations, and instructed him, as well as pitied that he had the right principles but did not succeed [in finding] if there had been anyone to use his talent. The various scholars have also made mention of [Xu] Wei's endearing character; this is something I also know rather a bit.
>
> "先生於渭，憫其志，啓其蒙，而悲其直道而不遇，若有取其人者。而諸子又謂渭之爲人，頗亦爲先生所知也。"[93]

Moreover, as a proponent of Wang Yangming's ideas, Xu did not reject practical action and social engagement. This was reflected in Xu Wei's writings:

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[91] Ji Ben 季本 (1485-1563), *zi* Mingde 明德, *hao* Pengshan 彭山 was a disciple of Wang Yangming and native of Shanyin together with Wang Ji 王畿 (1498-1583), *zi* Ruzhong 汝中, *hao* Longxi 龍溪, who established the Tianzhen Academy outside Hangzhou. Wang eventually rose to several high-ranking positions in the Ministry of War in Nanjing. As a result of an unfavourable review by Xue Yingqi, the man who had awarded Xu Wei the *zhusheng* degree, Wang Ji retired to travel and lecture widely in 1542. Wang Ji was the son of Wang Li, Assistant Comissioner of the Military Defence Circuit of Yunnan. Wang Li was the cousin of Xu Wei's father Xu Cong. Wang Ji was thus Xu Wei's second cousin. DMB, pp. 1351-1355. See also Li Deren, *Xu Wei*, p. 17-19; 274.

[92] XWJ, p. 1332.

[93] XWJ, p. 650.

> The farmers farm and the merchants do business, they see the beam made of wood. Today those who are confused in learning are of the kind that see the beam but not the wood. For this reason they oppress the common people yet study the learning of emperors and kings, thinking that they fully are the beam of emperors and kings.
>
> 農其農而商其商，視其木以梁。今之亂學者類以梁而不視其木者也， 故強齊民而學帝與王之學，以爲盡帝與王之梁。[94]

What Xu meant by seeing the "wood" from the "beams" is that farmers know how to farm, and merchants know how to do business. They know the tools of their trade and exercise their knowledge in a practical way through their occupations. Scholars, however, study ethics and the ways of kings and emperors, yet do not really know what the kingly way is or how to put this into practice. They only end up oppressing the people while deluding themselves that they possess the learning of kings and emperors. Wang Yangming's philosophy of the unity between knowledge and action, to which Xu subscribed, was a remedy for the misguided, bookish pedantry of scholars who did not perform the good actions that they read about. Wang Yangming's career as a successful official and military general, who quelled rebellions and rebuilt societies for the benefit of society, was the example that Xu extolled.[95]

Xu's respect for Wang Yangming is obvious in his writings. Xu wrote, "My Mr Yangming advocated the learning of the sages in the south east. 我陽明先生之以聖學倡東南也。"[96] Xu even wrote a "Memorial Requesting [Wang Yangming] be again Posthumously Enfeoffed as Earl of Xinjian 爲請復新建伯封爵疏".[97] This was after Wang's title, which

[94] XWJ, p. 490.
[95]For a detailed study of Wang Yangming's political career and military campaigns, see Israel, George L, *Doing Good and Ridding Evil in Ming China: The Political Career of Wang Yangming* (Leiden: Brill, 2014)
[96]XWJ, p. 531.
[97] XWJ, pp. 440-442.

had been earned for suppressing a rebellion, was repealed for his perceived heterodoxy in rejecting Zhu Xi and his curriculum. Xu admired Wang's social conscience and his ceaseless practical action as a sort of sage-saviour.

Confucian philosophy, however, was not the only intellectual current to have an impact on Xu Wei. The philosophical syncretism of Buddhism and Daoism with Confucianism was a notable feature of late Ming culture. Xu himself recognised this. He once wrote "Who are the three lords? Confucius, Laozi and the Buddha… I see them as the head, spine and tail. 三公伊何？宣尼，聃，曇…以予觀之，如首，脊，尾。"[98] To Xu, they were all parts of the same body, and Buddhism merely complemented Confucianism like the germ and husk of a grain:

> Roughly speaking, there is the germ of Buddhism, which some who study Buddhism do not understand, but my Confucianism does. Likewise there is the husk of my Confucianism, which in and of itself cannot be complete, but those that study Buddhism in return complete it.
>
> 大約佛之精，有學佛者所不知，而吾儒知之；吾儒之粗，有吾儒自不能全，而學佛者反全之者。[99]

Xu was close to the monk Yuzhi 玉芝 (1492-1563), who combined Chan Buddhism with Wang Yangming thought. Xu even wrote Yuzhi's biography when he passed away.[100] Associating with Buddhist monks was a way in which "elite status could be cast in high-cultural terms that did not rely on definitions handed down by the state".[101]

Another key influence on Xu's personal philosophy also combined Chan Buddhism with Wang Yangming's ideas: Wang Ji, who has been mentioned above. We have seen how Xu

[98] XWJ, p. 583.
[99] XWJ, p. 490.
[100] Li Deren, *Xu Wei,* pp. 21-23.
[101] Brook, Timothy, *Praying for Power: Buddhism and the Formation of Gentry Society in Late-Ming China* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Asia Centre, 1993), p.316.

had a close relationship with Ji Ben. However, intellectually speaking, Xu's greatest influence came from Wang Ji, who was a more radical disciple of Wang Yangming and also Xu's teacher and second cousin.

Wang Ji differed from some of Wang Yangming's other students such as Qian Dehong 錢德洪 (1496-1574) who argued that although the mind was good, it quickly became dominated by habit and lost its original clarity. In the famous "Colloquy at the Tianquan Bridge", Qian Dehong argued that the only way to maintain the original state of goodness was through strenuous moral cultivation. Wang Ji countered, however, that certain gifted minds could achieve sudden, spontaneous and intuitive enlightenment without strenuous effort.[102] The strong influence of Chan Buddhism is obvious, and Xu exchanged Chan Buddhist gathas or poems with Wang Ji.[103]

Influenced by Chan Buddhist ideas of meditation and spontaneous enlightenment, Wang Ji "emphasised the transcendental freedom of innate knowing and its spontaneous exercise."[104] In this way, his philosophy was a point of departure for Wang Gen 王艮 (1483-1541) and the Taizhou school who extended his ideas in the direction of egalitarianism and the common man as sage. The intellectual historian Huang Zongxi 黃宗羲 (1610-1695) said that owing to the activities of Wang Gen and Wang Ji, the teachings of Wang Yangming "spread like the wind over all the land".[105]

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[102]Epstein, Maram, *Competing Discourses: Orthodoxy, Authenticity, and Engendered Meanings in Late Imperial Chinese Fiction* (Cambridge MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2001), p. 72. For a translation of the debate between Qian Dehong and Wang Ji, see De Bary and Bloom, *Sources of Chinese Tradition,* pp. 850-1.
[103] Li Deren, *Xu Wei,* pp. 21-22.
[104] De Bary and Bloom, *Sources of Chinese Tradition,* p. 857.
[105] De Bary and Bloom, *Sources of Chinese Tradition,* p. 857.

The idea that even "ignorant men and women"[106] could understand and partake of the holy and sagely influenced Xu Wei. In his words, however, this idea became a call for further social engagement. In one essay, Xu wrote:

> Since ancient antiquity to the present, there have been no few sages; there must be many. From the supreme ruler of the four seas, master of the million millions, down to the master of trifling arts and skills: all those who benefit man, are sages. 'The Way' as said by Zhuangzi is in rubble and excrement; how his insight has made us realise this! For this reason, the doctors of horses, makers of sauce, and those starting to master a foot long club and small arms, all are sages.
>
> 自上古以至今，聖人者不少矣，必多矣，自君四海，主億兆，瑣至治一曲之藝，凡利人者，皆聖人也。周所謂道在瓦礫，在屎溺，意豈引且觸於斯耶。故馬醫，醬師，治尺棰，灑寸鐵而初之者，皆聖人也。[107]

Xu argued that one need only be of benefit to mankind to be a sage, whether one was a king or humble artisan. Though their status in society might vary, they all had the potential within themselves to bring practical benefits to society and hence become sages. Xu quoted Zhuangzi, who explained that "the Way" was to be found everywhere, even in rubble and excrement. Xu's words thus implied a certain egalitarianism, that none were excluded from attaining the Way since it could be found literally everywhere.

Xu was not a political revolutionary who argued for the sweeping away of society's hierarchies. This belief in the possibility of moral regeneration for all humanity did not translate into a desire for greater participation of the common people in a new political process. But that everyone could be a sage by doing small things and benefiting society was something Xu subscribed to. Two key strands of Xu's thought – Wang Yangming's brand of Confucianism and Chan Buddhism – became, in Xu's philosophy, a call to

[106] De Bary and Bloom, *Sources of Chinese Tradition,* p. 857.
[107] XWJ, pp. 489-490.

concrete action. His participation in local projects such as the County gazetteer reflected this.

Xu Wei's Participation in the *Kuaiji County Gazetteer*

Xu was enmeshed in various networks. Although Xu had friends among those supposedly furthest from the mundane world – philosophers, Buddhists and Daoists – he also made friends with representatives of the political world, namely the local elite. One such figure was Zhang Yuanbian 張元忭 (1538-1588).[108] Zhang Yuanbian was a *zhuangyuan,* the title given to the candidate who scored the highest in the highest level of the imperial examinations. Zhang played a critical role in using his political influence to secure the release of Xu Wei from prison in 1573. After Xu's release from prison, Zhang persuaded Xu to help in the compilation of the local *Kuaiji County Gazetteer* (*Kuaiji xianzhi* 會稽縣志) of 1575. Jamie Greenbaum has written on the significance of participating in such a project:

> A local gazetteer was of significant importance to a community and the compiling of it was usually only given to those of substantive literary ability as it was an activity that involved considerable political, social, and literary judgment in the selection and editing of material. Local gazetteers were one way for the local elite to demarcate themselves, assuming responsibility for the recording and interpretation of the local environment, as well as the promotion of the locale. The material in these gazetteers was irrevocably tied to local politics.[109]

In undertaking this project, Xu was positioned as an eminent local figure, responsible for decisions that could have direct political implications. Xu was clearly regarded as someone suitable to record public affairs in his local area. Zhang Yuanbian wrote in the preface to

[108] Zhang Yuanbian 張元忭 (1538-1588), *zi* Zige 子蓋, *hao* Yanghe 陽和, *jinshi* 1571, came top in the highest imperial exams and was an important member of the elite in Shaoxing, his hometown. His family and descendents maintained a close relationship with Xu Wei. He was the great-grandfather of the famous historian Zhang Dai 張岱 (1597-1684), who was also a great admirer of Xu Wei's art. See DMB, pp. 324-337.
[109] Greenbaum, *Chen Jiru (1558-1639)*, p. 46.

the gazetteer that "among those scholars of literature that excel in history today, there are none that compare to Mr Xu Wei. 今之文學士憂於史無如徐生渭者." [110] High praise indeed from a *zhuangyuan.*

Xu took his role and responsibility seriously and his contributions to the gazetteer provide invaluable insight into the local economy and society of Shaoxing and Kuaiji County. In one preface, Xu expounded on the purposes and uses of the gazetteer:

> The honourable County gazetteer, is not especially for those ordered to learn from the example of old governors or gauge men of superior capacity, or assist in the managing of one or two things and that's all. Rather, it is for examining the beauty and ugliness of local mores, investigating the richness and weakness of the produce, inspecting the harvest and expenditure of the people's reaping and sowing, weighing the lightness or heaviness of corvée and taxes as well as the reason for floods and droughts in the mountains and rivers, and the coming and going of fortune and misfortune, and make a timely prescription to regulate the tightness and looseness [of controls].
>
> 邑之貴志，非特爲令者取舊政之可師與賢才之可表，于以佐化理于一二而遂已也；蓋將察風俗之美惡，稽物產之沃瘠，驗戶口稼穡之登耗，約徭賦之重輕與山川水旱之所由，以出利而入弊，時調劑而張弛之.[111]

Xu's involvement in local projects such as this one openly demonstrated his status within the elite, and he undertook the project with all its political implications. Sometimes, in his writings for the gazetteer, it seemed as if Xu saw himself as a medical doctor, diagnosing social ills and prescribing solutions. Through the gazetteer, we can reconstruct Xu's world and socio-economic context.

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[110] Zhang Yuanbian 張元忭, *Kuaiji xian zhi* 會稽縣志 (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian, 1990). Although Zhang included Xu's name in the preface to the gazetteer, it is strangely not contained in the list of contributors. However, in his textual analysis of the *Xu Wei ji,* Professor Fu Qiong has shown that Xu was indeed the author of the various section prefaces to the gazetteer. See Fu Qiong, *Xu Wenchang wenji yu Xu Wenchang sanji de duzhe zhi zheng ji qi banben wenti* 徐文長文集與徐文長三集的讀者之爭及其版本問題 in *Guji zhengli yanjiu xuekan,* no.3 (2004), pp. 37-42.

[111] XWJ, pp. 1087-8.

a) Xu Wei on the Population and Tax System

Sinologists still debate the population of Ming China. Some have estimated the population in the late 14th century to have been around 65 million.[112] By 1600, standard estimates speculate that the population was approaching 150 million.[113] There were several reasons for the dramatic increase in population, including the introduction of New World crops by the Spanish and Portuguese such as sweet potatoes, corn and peanuts. These foods helped sustain the growing population and further commercialised agriculture and trade in foodstuffs.[114] Xu Wei certainly felt that the potato was exotic and interesting enough to write a poem about it.[115]

Xu mentioned the population boom and its strain on the economy in the gazetteer. He noted the pressure on the land to feed the people and also the widening gap between those who owned land and those who did not. He also noted that the population of Kuaiji County was probably three times larger than the official tax figure, and highlights key flaws in the Ming economy:

> When population and employment are in balance, there will be no fault in feeding the people. If you can feed the people without fault, then the subjects may be expected to be submissive. Now, according to the census registry, there are sixty thousand plus people. Those who are not adults and those who have not been registered must number three times more than that. Now the cultivated land of the whole district is only four hundred thousand plus *mu*.[116] The wealthy often own up to thousands of *mu* and then there are those who own tens and hundreds. Among owners like these, only several thousand families could divide up this four hundred thousand plus *mu* of cultivated land. In total barely a hundred thousand people can stave off hunger from living off the cultivated land and other preoccupations. But those who do not own an

[112] Ho Ping-ti, *Studies on the Population of China, 1368-1953* (Cambridge Ma: Harvard University Press, 1959) pp. 261-264.
[113] Ho Ping-ti, *Studies on the Population of China,* pp. 261-264.
[114] Meskill, John, *Gentlemanly Interests and Wealth on the Yangtze Delta* (New York: AAS, 1994), p.2.
[115] See Xu's poem "Potato" (土豆) in XWJ, p. 190.
[116] One *mu* is equal to one fifteenth of a hectare.

> inch of land still number more than one hundred thousand. Provided that they will not live off the rich, even to distribute the land equally among all the people, will still not do. How can people say that there is no difficulty in feeding the people?
>
> 夫口與業相停，而養始不病，養不病而後可以責民之馴。今按於藉口六萬二千有奇， 不丁不藉者系啻三倍之，而邑之田，僅四十餘萬畝，富人往往累千至百十等其類而分之，止須數千家而盡有四十餘萬之田矣。合計依田而食與依他業別產而食者，僅可令十萬人不飢而，此外則沾寸土者，尚十餘萬人也，然即令不占於富，而开分之土亦不足矣，烏在其為不病於養哉？[117]

Xu's contribution to the gazetteer helps us see the effects of the population increase from ground level. If Xu's observations are correct, half the population owned no land. Xu compared the situation to Su Dongpo's time and quoted his saying that "Wu and Shu [Southern Jiangsu and northern Zhejiang and Sichuan] have people to work the land, but no land of their own; Jing and Xiang [Hubei and Hunan] have land to be worked on, but no people 吳蜀有可耕之人，而無其地；荊襄有可耕之地，而無其人。"[118] To Xu, who metaphorically stated that the "fields are stomachs 畝者胃也"[119], it was clear that with less land and a growing population, feeding the common people was becoming ever more difficult.[120] It was these conditions that would contribute to the growth of piracy, as many left the land to engage in more profitable illegal trade.

Xu also understood that a larger population meant a greater pressure on natural resources and the environment to the extent that it could cause manmade natural disasters. Timothy Brook has shown that with the need to feed a greater population,

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[117] XWJ, p. 501-2.
[118] XWJ, p. 501-2.
[119] XWJ, p. 501-2.
[120] Timothy Brook shows that in the early Ming period, Zhu Yuanzhang stipulated that every farming family should have 100 *mu* of land (6.5 hectares), which was considered necessary to support a large family in the north. By the 16th century, this had been cut to 50 *mu* in north China. Brook argues that, in southern China, "Many households scraped by on as little as 20 to 30 *mu*." See Brook, Timothy, *The Troubled Empire: China in the Yuan and Ming Dynasties* (Cambridge, Ma: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2010), p. 108.

farmers created polders by walling in and draining the margins of lakes and rivers. This, however, raised water levels and increased the danger of flooding.[121] To Xu, natural disasters were closely linked to the population:

> Now, just as irrigation is related to the fields, then so by extension is the population; how are unusual disasters related to the population? Now, the six factors in nature [wind, cold, summer heat, humidity, dryness and fire] shift, when the elements are gentle then the year's grains multiply and the population increases, but if the year is fierce and foodstuffs squandered, premature deaths rise; thus natural disasters are related to the population, even more so than irrigation. To focus in detail on the earth, and leave out heaven; how could this be? It is said that those that can see [the patterns of] natural disasters in heaven, are the same for the county, and the provinces which are all under heaven. If one looks [only] at the earth, then you [only] see everything in the town; for this reason I pay special attention to it. Alas, the cause of disasters, is the way to stop disasters, thus each has their own responsibility.
>
> 夫水利關於畝，則列之戶可也，災異於戶曷關哉？夫六氣調，風雨和，則年穀物繁而齒育，不則年凶物耗，而夭札興，故災異之關於戶，彌甚於水利也。然詳於地而略於天，又何哉？曰災之見於天者，郡則同也，省於天下則同也，若其見乎地，則於邑尤切矣，余故特詳焉。噫，致災之由，弭災之道，固有任其責 者矣。[122]

Xu was arguing that one cannot leave the interpretation of natural disasters unattended, and that those who seek to understand natural disasters only by looking at the earth (their immediate surroundings of their own environment) are more limited in scope than those who look to heaven, who can then see the "bigger picture" and the patterns of nature that affect entire provinces and counties. Timothy Brook explains that there was also a moral element to understanding natural disasters:

> The good order of the world was understood to depend on the balance among the Three Powers of Heaven, Earth, and Humankind. Everyone from the emperor to the lowliest person in the realm understood that bad weather meant more than bad weather. It signalled that the Three Powers were out of

[121] Brook, *The Troubled Empire,* p. 129.
[122] XWJ, p. 502.

> harmony. There were two ways to interpret this disharmony, one of which endowed Humankind with an active role in its relationship with Heaven and Earth, the other, a passive role. The active interpretation held that anomalies in Heaven and Earth were due to bad behaviour by Humankind.[123]

The passive interpretation, however, was that disharmony among the Three Powers was periodic and that there would always be natural disasters regardless of the morality of the emperor or the people. All one could do was to put up with this until the period of trouble passed. Brook goes on to say that "there was only really one technique available to ordinary humans to deal with the periodicity of mayhem, and that was divination. If you couldn't transform Heaven's disasters, you could at least anticipate their arrival and prepare yourself for them."[124] Xu's statement that "each has their own responsibility" to not ignore the heavens, is a reference to anticipating natural disasters by observing the patterns of nature as they inevitably shift.

The increase in population also highlighted the need to reform the tax system. Since the 1530s, the so called "Single Whip" tax reforms (*yi tiao bianfa* 一條鞭法) were introduced and made national in 1581 under Grand Secretary Zhang Juzheng 張居正 (1525-1582), who consolidated all the various taxes and mandated that they be collected only in silver. This stimulated greater use of money and further mobilised China's thriving economy.[125] But the price of silver skyrocketed as everyone now had to buy it to pay their taxes, causing an even greater wealth gap between the rich and poor.

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[123] Brook, *The Troubled Empire,* pp. 73-76.
[124] Brook, *The Troubled Empire*, p.75.
[125] Rawski, Evelyn, "Economic and Social Foundations of Late Imperial Culture" in *Popular Culture in Late Imperial China,* edited by Johnson, David; Nathan, Andrew J.; Rawski, Evelyn S. (Berkley: University of California Press, 1985) pp. 3-5. See also Huang, Ray, *Taxation and Governmental Finance in Sixteenth-century Ming China* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1974), pp. 118-122.

Xu mentioned the taxation reforms with great detail in the *Kuaiji County Gazetteer*. Xu wrote on the single whip tax reforms' gradual introduction in Zhejiang in 1570s before they were introduced nationally in 1581. Xu's comments reveal a general approval of the single whip system, but a certain amount of trepidation as well:

> I heard all the elders say that the methods of corvée labour and land taxes were probably not as good as the present single whip [tax system], but they worry it won't achieve its ends. In general the intention behind it is said to be uniform implementation; all those officials below the county official can decide for themselves. However, those above the county official follow frugality, as they have no choice and so cannot bear to allow themselves to be the only one suspected of extravagance; those who are under suspicion of being extravagant are fired in retribution. Nowadays, with every initiative, maybe a requisition from above, [the officials] are always anxious out of concern for their possessions [i.e. money] and are on tenterhooks, and those officials with means and their additional purchasers look at each other with worry. The process of employing corvée has become complicated and bitter, such as those who are transferred to granaries but often do not go to work, and do not respond to recruitment. That is why the elders said this to me. Indeed, if an additional several hundred taels of money were sent to the town, it would be no more than a small fraction of the cost of one mu of land; if they don't, then they will see that one thousand one hundred years of great profit will change, why? Those trying to avoid poll tax on able-bodied men will take advantage and implicitly harm [the infrastructure]. In the beginning of the Zhengtong reign [r. 1435-1449], the Imperial Censor Zhu Ying came up with the proposal of one service every ten years.[126] At the time it was convenient, today only one hundred years later, it is even easier to change it. Those who keep in mind the hardships of the people, will not begrudge a bit from their land, allowing those trying to avoid the poll tax to take advantage of it, and change this good law. We can only hope [the single whip system will achieve its ends], hope indeed.
>
> 余聞諸長老云，徭賦之法，蓋莫善於今之一條鞭矣，第慮其不終耳。其意大略謂均平之始行也，下諸縣長吏自爲議，縣長吏以上方從儉，奈何令己獨冒奢之嫌，乃忍取其疑於奢者，一切裁罷以報。而今者每一舉動，或承上片檄，則往往顧橐匣而局脊，掌橐之吏與輔肆之人且愁見及矣。至於顧役之繁且苦，若倉傳者，亦往往值不稱勞，莫肯應募，故長老相與言曰，誠使更派數百金於縣邑，不過畝費一毫釐，不然，行且見千百年之大利坐變矣，何者，圖蠲丁者將乘其隙而陰壞之也。始正統間，御

[126] For details of this system known as the *Jun yao* (equitable service) system, initiated in 1443, see Huang, Ray, "The Ming Fiscal Administration", in Twitchett, Denis C. and Mote, Frederick W., eds. *The Cambridge History of China, Ming Dynasty 1368-1644, Vol. 8, part 2* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 136-137.

> 史朱英創為十年一役議，當時便之，今僅百餘年，乃更之如反掌，志民瘼者，慎毋為畝惜一毫釐，使圖蠲者得乘之，以變此良法，則幸甚矣，則幸甚矣。[127]

Xu generally supported this "good law" (the single whip reforms), but realised that it did have some shortcomings and perhaps needed some adjustment. Now that taxes were paid in silver, official expenses became more transparent. Hence, many officials became more frugal lest they lose their jobs. Those beneath the county official were given freedom to deal with the local economy as every county's circumstances were different. The problem however, was that the land tax accounts were too small, and the service levy accounts were too large; thus it was difficult to turn the service levy even partially into a surtax on the land. The assessment of able bodied men or *ding* (丁) was also not uniform, and many evaded tax: "In no district did the total number of listed able-bodied men truly comprise the entire taxable male adult population."[128] The shortfall from the poll tax was made up for by the land tax, but this might let many on corvée duty off the hook, and thus people worried that the roads, walls and dams etc, would not be built. It is difficult to say whether Xu was simply reflecting what the elders had said to him, or whether this was merely a literary device to express his own views of the problems of the tax system. Nevertheless, despite the problems on the ground mentioned by Xu regarding the single whip system; it did help to adjust an old agrarian system to a commercial model that laid the foundation for a modern economy. It is fair to say that Xu lived in a period of great economic flux.

[127] XWJ, p. 501.
[128] Huang, "The Ming Fiscal Administration", p. 157.

b) Xu Wei on the Social Outcasts

Along with economic instability, there were social issues as well. In the *Kuaiji County Gazetteer*, Xu made mention of Zhejiang's social outcasts and untouchables, known as the "fallen people" (*duo min* 墮民), who were not included in the "four classes" of scholars, farmers, artisans and merchants. Xu likened the "fallen people" to a tumour, literally a disease of society. His inclusion of them in his description of society suggests that Xu tried to take as objective a view as possible of the society in which he lived:

> Now, just as the human body has tumours, so our mores also have tumours. The tumours of our mores are beggars, and are registered as beggar households. We do not know from where they began, but there is a legend that says they are the descendents of Song dynasty prisoners, for this reason they are excluded, and called the 'fallen people'. They commonly both inside and outside [their homes] are habitually base and despicable, and cannot live or work with the common people. Their occupations are also those which the common people dare not do. They cannot be registered with the common people, and the common people too cannot be registered with them or enter their ranks. What the common people often wear, they too cannot wear.
>
> 夫人之身有瘤也，俗亦有瘤。俗之瘤則有丐，口丐以戶稱，不知其所始，相傳爲宋罪俘之遺，故擯之，名墮民。 其内外率習汙賤無賴，四民中居業不得占，彼所業，民亦絕不冒之。四民中所籍，彼不得籍，彼所籍，民亦絕不入。四民中即所常服，彼亦不得服。[129]

Xu continued to accuse them of theft, lying and causing the breakdown of families. The "fallen people" mostly lived in Xu's area of Shaoxing, and were not allowed to engage in the same trades and professions as ordinary people.[130] Although Xu's description of them as a tumour may sound unsympathetic today, Xu, in medical fashion, prescribed Confucian morality as medicine. He quoted Confucius to argue that they should be treated a little more civilly:

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[129] XWJ, p. 497.

[130] See also Hansson, Anders, *Chinese Outcasts: Discrimination and Emancipation in Late Imperial China* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), pp. 76-94.

> Although a tumour is different from normal skin, and it is proper that one should get rid of it, if someone with a tumour is willing to take it upon himself to say "I will take medicine today and work to restore it to normal skin", why should he be judged because of the tumour? Does it not say in the classics that "The man who is not virtuous, when you carry your dislike of him to an extreme, will proceed to chaos".
>
> 雖然，瘤卒自外於常膚，則瘤之也宜，苟瘤者肯自咎曰，我今且受藥，且圖自化爲常膚，烏必瘤而決之哉？經不云乎 "人而不仁，疾之已甚，亂也"。[131]

Xu understood that marginalising a people would cause more problems, as it would only force them to continue engaging in illegal activities to survive on the fringes of society. He also clearly saw the potential for good within all people. Here, he follows the teachings of Wang Yangming, as propagated by the thinker Wang Gen. As we have seen, Wang Gen preached that even the most common person had the potential to achieve sagehood.

The "fallen people" were legally discriminated against and barred from taking part in the examinations. This effectively barred them from social mobility, even if they became wealthy. In the 1520s, an extremely wealthy family among the "fallen people" had a very beautiful daughter who wished to marry a commoner. But even the poorest commoner would not marry her.[132] Xu highlighted that society did not have an entirely "fluid and flexible status system, free of legal barriers to status mobility"[133] that J.P. Park, for example, described.

However, the economic flux did allow many to make money and improve their lot. As noted above, even some "fallen people" could become wealthy. With the exception of the "fallen people", as well as those completely barred from social mobility – such as

[131] XWJ, p. 498.
[132] Hansson, *Chinese Outcasts,* p. 93.
[133] Park, *Art by the Book*, p. 9.

prostitutes, slaves, former slaves and entertainers – other formerly low-status groups did improve their lot. Merchants and artisans who, along with peasants and scholar-officials, were accepted as belonging to the "four classes", climbed the social ladder through the examination system and the help of private fortunes.[134] For the nouveau riche who wished to acquire cultural, social and political capital, passing the exams and becoming a scholar-official was the only truly legitimate path. But as the population and economy boomed with more and more candidates hoping to become officials, the chances of success became more difficult.

c) Xu on the System of Selecting and Establishing Officials

The most prestigious route to upward mobility was the hugely competitive imperial examinations, which were open to almost all males in society. There were three levels of exams, starting with the local county level *shengyuan* degree, then the provincial *juren* degree, and finally the most coveted metropolitan *jinshi* degree, which automatically led to a position in the middle strata of the Ming bureaucracy.[135] However, one could also be "recommended" to a position in the lower strata of the bureaucracy without passing the exams. In the gazetteer, Xu described the process known as *xuanju* (選舉):

> In recommendations they do not ask as to the character of the person, they just look at the reputation and then the letter [of recommendation], the same as officials. They examine all his credentials, the same as examining the names of those who are on the list of successful candidates, and look for the few

[134] Although the Ming originally continued the Yuan practice of registering certain households for services, such as producing salt or serving as soldiers or artisans, this system was replaced in the 1570s by one based on monetary payments. Instead of corvée labour, taxes were collected in the form of money, which loosened official hierarchy. The government retreated from direct participation in the economy. This increased social mobility. See Ho Ping-ti, *Ladder of Success in Imperial China: Aspects of Social Mobility, 1368-1911* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1962), p.65. Park also notes that many prominent scholars and officials of the late Ming were sons of merchants, such as Li Zhi (1527-1602), Gao Panlong (1562-1626) and Xu Guangqi (1562-1633) etc. See Park, *Art by the Book,* p. 9.

[135] See Miyazaki, Ichisada, *China's Examination Hell: The Civil Service Examinations of Imperial China* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1976).

> words it says under his name, which also says the same thing as an official memorial, for this reason I don't discuss it further.
>
> 選舉不問其人之何如，遇名則書，與官師同，取諸科錄以考，與考於題名記者同，間有書數語於名之下，其例與書數語於官師表之下亦同，故不別論。[136]

Xu highlighted the fact that the moral character of the candidate was not considered in recommending him to the bureaucracy. Traditionally, a person's education was regarded as a reflection of his moral cultivation as well. Those who had studied the Confucian classics for years and took the exams to become officials were supposed to be more morally cultivated than the average person. Xu, however, complained how this counted for very little.

Xu Wei obtained his *shengyuan* degree when he was twenty years old in 1540, entitling him to a very modest government stipend and exemption from corvée duty and corporal punishment. However, by this time, Xu's status as a *shengyuan* degree holder no longer guaranteed him a career as an official as the number of degree holders had increased dramatically. For example, in the middle of the 15th century, the number of *shengyuan* degree holders was around 30,000; but this had increased to 500,000 by Xu's time.[137]

The inflated number of candidates created a huge glut at the higher level exams, and Xu Wei competed with 400 candidates for the one *juren* degree. However, the state did not abandon its old quota, as it needed to maintain control over the size of the bureaucracy.[138] Xu would fail to progress to the next level for a successive eight times, until he finally gave up at the age of 41. The pain this caused to him and many others

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[136] XWJ, pp. 503-504.
[137] Liu Zhiqin 劉志琴, *Wan Ming shilun: Chongxin renshi moshi shuaibian* 晚明史論：重新認識末世衰變 (Nanchang: Jiangxi gaoxiao chubanshe, 2004), p.140.
[138] Ho Ping-ti, *Ladder of Success in Imperial China,* p. 182.

throughout history was indescribable. To quote a Tang poet: "Failure after failure: Painful as a sword wound".[139]

Yet despite Xu's repeated failures in the exams and his recognition of its flaws, he still stuck to the meritocratic ideal, the ideal through which most political elites became elites. In a section of the gazetteer describing the establishment of officialdom, Xu defended the status-quo of the *junxian* (郡縣) system.[140] He opposed the introduction of any more hereditary elements or *fengjian* (封建) in the bureaucracy.[141] Xu was ultimately concerned with his own desire to pass the exams and become an official. He wrote how a system of officials who had inherited their titles would not only prevent worthy new scholars from rising, it would also be difficult to get rid of bad officials who got their positions by accident of birth:

On the Establishment of Officialdom

> I read Liu Zongyuan's *Enfeoffment* (*Fengjian*), which is roughly a narration of high antiquity; when things first arose, if there was strife one was put to death, but then punishments and government gradually came into being. This is why there were village clerks, and then later there were county

[139] Miyazaki, *China's Examination Hell,* p. 122.

[140] *Junxian* 郡縣 can be translated as the "provincial system" or system of "prefectures and counties". It refers to a system where the empire is divided into artificial administrative jurisdictions such as prefectures and counties and governed by centrally appointed, salaried and rotated professional officials. See Rowe, William T., *China's Last Empire: The Great Qing* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University press, 2010), p.60.

[141] *Fengjian* 封建. In Xu's time, the modern Chinese word for "feudal" had none of the specific and negative connotations that it has in Western historiography or Marxist theory. To Xu Wei and other Chinese scholars of his time, *fengjian* referred to the Zhou dynasty (c 1050-221 BCE), where there had been no centralised state and the Zhou King distributed hereditary fiefdoms to his kinsmen in areas where he was not strong enough to assert personal control. To Xu, injecting *fengjian* into officialdom meant leaving the locality in the hands of hereditary elites. See Clunas, Craig, *Screen of Kings: Royal Art and Power in Ming China* (London: Reaktion Books, 2013), p. 8; Levenson, Joseph R. and Schurmann, Franz, *China: An Interpretative History. From Beginnings to the Fall of the Han* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), pp. 34-40. For more detail on the relationship between Zhou and European feudalism, see Li, Feng, "'Feudalism' and Western Zhou China: A Criticism," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 63, no. 1 (2003): 115-44. Li argues that the Western Zhou began as a far more politically centralised state than the term "feudalism" suggests. See also Fukuyama, Francis, *The Origins of Political Order: From Prehuman times to the French Revolution* (London: Profile Books, 2012), p. 105. For a major critique of the uses of the concept of feudalism, see Brown, Elizabeth A. R., "The Tyranny of a Construct: Feudalism and Historians of Medieval Europe," *American Historical Review* 79, no. 4 (1974): 1063-88.

officials, then after the county officials came Dukes and Lords, and after the Dukes and Lords there came an Emperor. From the Emperor to the minor clerk, all had virtue. At death, they inevitably wanted to enfeoff their sons; this is the origin of the *fengjian* [system].

If these words can be believed, then the establishment of the county officials, in the beginning were not yet subordinate to the Emperor. Rather, the people themselves sought those with virtue and obeyed his rule. Afterwards there was an Emperor, and then the Emperor began to seek all those with virtue, delegating his rule over the people. However, apart from seeking those [officials] in the beginning, their children and grandchildren inherited their ancestors' [positions] as rulers, but those that did not resemble their ancestors [in virtue or talent] were many.

Yet those that talk about the present system often promote the *fengjian* system and disparage the *junxian* system of establishing officialdom. Alas, those officials that have been established through the present system are all of the category where the Emperor sought those with virtue, delegating his rule over the people, and also resembles antiquity in the beginning when the people sought those with virtue to obey his rule from.[142] But as for those with limited virtue, do they not resemble what happened after the beginning of high antiquity, those sons inheriting [the position] as rulers, and not necessarily resembling their ancestors? If it is like this, then as for those with limited virtue, it is clear that this is the fault of the official in his position not the fault of establishing officials. Those that talk of the current system, how can they promote the *fengjian* system and disparage the *junxian* system?

設官論

余讀柳子封建，大約謂上古之時，起於有爭而就質，於是刑政漸以生焉，是故有里胥而後有縣大夫，有縣大夫而後有諸侯，有諸侯而後有天子，自天子至於里胥，皆有德者也，死必求其子而封之，此封建之所由始也。信斯言也，則縣大夫之設，其初且未屬於天子，而民自求有德者以聽其治。 其後既有天子，則天子始求諸有德者，責其治以加於民。然而自始求之外，子孫嗣其祖以爲治，未必肖之者亦多矣。而今之言制者，每每進封建而退郡縣之設官。噫，今所設之官，類皆天子求諸有德，責其治以加於民，亦猶古初民自求諸有德以聽其治之類也。 即有鮮德者，亦不猶古初之後，其子孫嗣以爲治，未必肖其祖之類耶？如此則凡鮮德者，其為官之責而非設官之責也亦明矣，言制者又烏得進封建而退郡縣之官耶？[143]

[142] The reference to the "people seeking those with virtue to obey" refers to the examination system, where fellow scholars, not princes or feudal lords, select those who will become administrators. During the Ming dynasty, the emperor was also technically the chief examiner and presided over the highest level of exams in the palace. This is what Xu meant when he said that the current system was a mixture of both.

[143] XWJ, p. 499-500.

Despite his own failure to climb the official ladder through the well-established *junxian* system, Xu knew it at least offered him a better chance than a system of hereditary officials. There were scholars, however, who argued that there should be more elements of the hereditary *fengjian* system at a local level. Those scholars who were against *junxian* were rallying against the proliferation of parasitic clerks and runners, and the lack of initiative and genuine concern for their jurisdiction displayed by careerist, outsider officials. Some argued against the excessive cost of a large central administration exercising undue regulatory oversight, as well as revenues from wealthier localities being extracted and given to poorer areas. [144]

These issues do not come up in Xu's essay. He was more concerned with the accessibility to officialdom through the examination system, and worthy scholars being able rise up. Xu wrote in support of the *junxian* system which allowed men of virtue to be chosen by the people (i.e. by examiners and officials not of royal blood) and by the emperor, who then appointed them to govern his realm. The hereditary *fengjian* system would mean that local officials would take office by accident of birth, regardless of whether they had virtue or not. Under the *junxian* system, at least bad officials could be replaced. Such views reveal Xu's concern for his own cherished ideal of becoming an official close to the

[144] After the collapse of Zhou dynasty *fengjian,* the Qin Empire centralised control under the *junxian* system. Within this system, regions were ruled by local officials as agents of the centre, as opposed to by hereditary lords. There was a theoretical debate over which was the better political system. This was the background to Xu's discussion on how best to select local officials: Either enfeoff them with hereditary titles, invoking the golden age of the Zhou, or select officials through an examination and make them direct agents of the centralised emperor. Gu Yanwu 顧炎武 (1613- 1682) was one scholar well known for his idea of injecting a dose of feudalism into the prefectural system. In the essay *On the Junxian System* 郡縣論, written around 1660, Gu argued that the prefectural system concentrated too much power on the emperor and could lead to the tyranny seen in the legalist Qin dynasty. In addition to this, close control over local government was dysfunctional, he argued. See Yang Lien-Sheng, "Local Administration", in Hucker, Charles O. and Grimm, Tilemann, *Chinese Government in Ming Times: Seven Studies* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1969), p. 4. See also Rowe, *China's Last Empire,* pp. 60-62.

imperium, and represented his alignment with the established system despite his own failures within it.

Foreign Invasions, Court Politics and the Military

Moving away from Xu's work on the *Kuaiji County Gazetteer*, we can see how he repeatedly sought to involve himself in political affairs and seek official recognition. Xu's multiple exam failures forced him to search for an alternate career path. The military seemed to be an attractive alternative to Xu, as well as to many other literati during this time. They could follow the example of the philosopher-general Wang Yangming and his ideal of combining knowledge with action. There developed a trend among late Ming literati and generals of trying to combine *wen* 文 (culture; the arts) and *wu* 武 (the martial arts). Xu looked back to antiquity to justify how the combination of the two was once entirely acceptable:

> When they spoke of generals in ancient times, a scholar and a general were one [and the same person]. Since a general and a scholar were one [and the same person], regulating the *qi* [physical energy] and the *xin* [mind] were one. When they speak of generals today, generals and scholars are two [different types of people]. Since generals and scholars are two [different types of people], in regulating the *qi* and the *xin*, those who rouse it up and are resolute are generals, and those who do not rouse it up and are not resolute are scholars.
>
> 古之言將者，儒與將一也。儒與將一，故治氣與治心一也。今之言將者，儒與將二也。儒與將二也，故治氣與治心，鼓且決者以屬之將，而不鼓且決者以屬之儒也。[145]

Much work has been done recently on the rising importance of the military among the literati and the various important military campaigns in which the Ming was engaged.

[145] XWJ, p. 893.

Scholars such as Kathleen Ryor, Kenneth Swope and David Robinson have shown that, during the 16th century, contrary to perceptions of weakness and Ming disinterest in the military, "the military really did matter".[146] Ryor, in particular, has paid much attention to Xu Wei, his military career and patrons, as well as the martial cult of the hero or "knight-errant" (*xia* 俠) in late Ming culture. [147]

The rising interest in all things military among some literati was precipitated by Mongol raids along the northern frontier and pirate attacks along the south-east coast that caused enormous suffering and destruction. In 1550, the Ming dynasty suffered humiliating defeats by the Mongols and pirates. It was during this particularly bad year, that Xu began contemplating a career in the military.

a) The Mongols and Court Politics

On October 1, 1550, from his palace in West Park in Beijing, Emperor Jiajing 嘉靖 (1507-1567) could see fire and smoke rising from the outskirts of his capital.[148] Under Altan Khan 俺答 (1507-1582), the Tümed Mongols had effortlessly crossed the Great Wall and besieged Beijing, the capital of the Middle Kingdom.[149] There should have been 140,000 men on military duty to protect the capital, but roughly only 90,000 were on duty; the

[146] See Ryor, "Wen and Wu in Elite Cultural Practices", p. 220.

[147] Ryor shows, for example, how Xu was closely connected to other high ranking hereditary military figures such as Li Rusong 李如松 (1549-1598). For details of Xu's military patrons and the relationship between his artistic activities and the military, see Ryor, "Regulating the Qi and the Xin: Xu Wei and his Military Patrons" in *Archives of Asian Art,* vol. 54, (2004), pp. 23-33.

[148] After the failure of the palace ladies' attempt to strangle Emperor Jiajing in 1542, he vacated the Forbidden City permanently and moved to West Park, a palace complex west of Taiye pond in the Imperial City. All major decisions of government were made there by the emperor and his Grand Secretaries until Jiajing's death in 1567. For a brief description of the residences, see Dardess, John W., *A Political Life in Ming China: A grand Secretary and his Times* (Lanham and Plymouth: Rowman and Littlefield, 2013), pp. 19-21.

[149] The raid of 1550 is well covered in Waldron, Arthur, *The Great Wall of China: From History to Myth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 159-160. See also Geiss, James, "The Chia-ching reign, 1522-1566", in Mote and Twitchett, eds., *The Cambridge History of China, Ming Dynasty 1368-1644, Vol. 7 part 1* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 475-476.

rest were assigned to construction projects elsewhere.[150] The troops that could be mustered to defend the city simply refused to fight and fell apart. To make matters worse, the reinforcements that did arrive were starving and unfit. Shaken ministers and remorseful generals hesitated over how to act.

On October 2, the situation was so dire that the emperor held an audience with the court, the first time he had done so since 1539.[151] He refused to address his ministers personally, however, and had a message read out at the Wu Gate of the Forbidden City stating that all of the civil and military officials were irresponsible and derelict in their duties; that was all.[152] The Minister for War Ding Rukui 丁汝夔 (1521-1550), could only wait for the Mongols to turn back. Under the advice of the powerful Chief Grand Secretary Yan Song 嚴嵩 (1480-1565),[153] the Minister for War did not even pursue the withdrawing Mongol forces. A possible military defeat near the capital could not be covered up so easily, Yan argued.[154] And so, several days later, the Mongols retreated without a fight, their spoils of war intact. It was a humiliating blow to the Ming and to Xu, who wrote this poem in response:

Two Songs of Today

This year the ruffians raided Gubeikou, entering near the capital.

No.2

> In the Ordos the great chieftain is called Altan, hunting at night, he personally drove and trained 50,000 horses, without raiding Yulin he treads east. The three garrisons on the eastern flank of the capital, he gets past in one manoeuvre, and he commands to descend straight upon old north pass, what

[150]Geiss, James, "The Chia-ching reign, 1522-1566", pp. 475-476.
[151]Geiss, James, "The Chia-ching reign, 1522-1566", pp. 475-476.
[152]Geiss, James, "The Chia-ching reign, 1522-1566", pp. 475-476.
[153] Yan Song 嚴嵩 (1480-1565), *zi* Weizhong 惟中, *hao* Jiexi 介溪 and Fenyi 分宜, *jinshi* 1532, was Grand Secretary from 1542-1562. DMB, pp. 1586-1591. See Chapter 2 for further discussions on Yan Song.
[154] Geiss, James, "The Chia-ching reign, 1522-1566", pp. 475-476. See also Dardess, *A Political Life in Ming China*, pp. 35-89.

good are the gifts of successive reigns? He deploys several hundred mounted brigades, beating the drum and burning cities as if its child's play, what significance did it do for the son of heaven to review military parades; his eyes watching barbarian slaves twirl and dance. [The suburbs of] Miyun and Shunyi suffered mightily; on their horses they carry young girls' two thighs in an armful, those captured alive and killed cannot be counted, the general ordered gaps in the wall to be filled. When the time came to pounce we took the defensive, what use is it to raise so many soldiers [to stand] like trees, yet order the inspector to recruit those willing to die, one man and one horse is worth forty taels. The imperial order spreads now, I do not know if these words are true or false, but if the order to recruit is true, I too would receive cash and ride a horse. Year after year I embraced my books without abandon, night after night I read until the candle became a stub; the fruits of my labours poured out, how can I support my widowed mother? Her husband was originally a general; now I too wish to depend on the military. To depend too, on honesty and impulse; please see Lord Xinling [d.243 BC], who commanded at the frontier; in those days one supported oneself by avoiding the military, nowadays contrarily it is from the military that one supports oneself.

今日歌二首

是年虜寇古北口，入薄都城。

二

套中大酉號俺答，夜獵時時索靴靸，親驅教馬五萬羣，不寇榆林向東踏。
三衛京師之左肘，酉也過之一麾手，卻令直下古北口，累朝賞賜亦何有？
分兵各出數百騎，鳴鼓燒城似兒戲，何意天子閱軍場，眼看胡奴旋舞技。
密雲順義良亦苦，馬上紅顏抱雙股，擄生殺死不可數，將軍剳壘空城堵。
來時不撲去不禽，何用養士多如林，卻令御史募敢死，一人匹馬四十金。
傳聞敕符即日下，斯言未可知真假，假令真有募士者，吾亦領銀乘匹馬。
年年抱書不會舍，夜夜看書燭成灺，治生作產建瓴瀉，何以將之供母寡？
丈夫本是將軍者，今欲從軍聊亦且。聊亦且，誠孟浪，請看信凌君，下令於境上，當時歸養免從軍，今日從軍翻是養。[155]

Xu responded to the crisis of Mongol invasion by wanting to join the army. His desire to join the army, however, was as much out of self-interest as it was patriotism, as he stated frankly. Xu wrote that if he had heard the call to arms, he would join, but in order to receive money and support his widowed mother. His years of studying and failure in the exams left him little other choice but to search for alternative routes. Xu chose the

[155] XWJ, pp. 121-122.

example of the warring states General Lord Xinling, who was well known for uncovering talent in men and generously providing for his retainers.[156] Xu hoped that he would find his equivalent of Lord Xinling in the military who would appreciate his talents.

Beyond Xu's desire to find an alternative career in the military to support him and his family, however, he was very much indignant at the ineffectiveness of current Ming policy towards the Mongols, as well as the damage that ensued from this policy. Xu mocked the appeasement policy of sending gifts to the Mongols to placate them, as well as the arrogance of court ritual and military parades with token "barbarian" prisoners of war. He continued to oppose the policy of wall-building without going on the offensive, questioning the point of recruiting so many expensive soldiers only to not use them.

The Ming dynasty had been founded and legitimised itself on the defeat of the previous Mongol Yuan dynasty (1271-1368). Amidst the chaotic decline of alien Mongol rule in China, the founder of the Ming – Zhu Yuanzhang – had managed to successfully defeat rival warlords and push the Mongols back to the northern steppe.[157] The strong and vigorous Emperor Zhu Di 朱棣 (1360-1424) continued to project Ming power into inner Asia by moving the capital north to Beijing from Nanjing, and launched no less than five military campaigns deep into Mongol territory.[158] In 1550, it was clear to Xu that when it came to dealing with the Mongols, the current Emperor Jiajing and his government paled in comparison to their illustrious ancestors.

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[156] Durrant, Stephen W., *The Cloudy Mirror of Tension: Tension and Conflict in the Writings of Sima Qian* (New York: SUNY press), p. 117.

[157] There is much available in English on the foundation of the Ming and Emperors Zhu Yuanzhang and Zhu Di. See Brook, *The Troubled Empire*, and also Mote, *Imperial China 900-1800*, pp.549-583.

[158] Mote, *Imperial China 900-1800*, pp 598-654. For more on Zhu Di see Tsai, Shih-Shan Henry, *Perpetual Happiness: The Ming Emperor Yongle* (Washington: University of Washington Press, 2001).

On 6 October 1550, the emperor demanded that the Minister for War be executed for holding back an attack. Although the Minister had been acting on the advice of Yan Song, Yan did not intercede to save his life.[159] As a Grand Secretary, Yan did not have executive power. He was only an advisor and the emperor alone was executive.[160] However, Yan was in charge of an "informal bureaucratic machine that was fuelled by thinly disguised bribery and coercion." Yan had "an eye for effectiveness, and…usually got Jiajing to go along."[161] Yan preferred to delegate responsibility so that blame could be deflected if anything went wrong, even if others had acted under his advice.[162]

Yan Song's shirking of responsibility was the latest in a long series of controversies, not the least of which was his seemingly complacent response to the Mongol siege of Beijing. Yan Song had said the raiders were merely starving bandits looking for food and not worth worrying about. Furthermore, as for a letter of demands that the Mongols had sent, it was for the Ministry of Rites to discuss.[163] He was partly right, they were starving. Yan Song was for the opening of horse markets along the frontier for trade with the Mongols, while also building defensive walls. In this way, he believed peace could be ensured. Indeed, Altan Khan needed to ensure the livelihood of his subjects to secure his political position. Famine and epidemics had forced Altan Khan to raid Beijing.[164] With these markets, the Mongols could trade and obtain what they needed without resorting to

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[159] DMB, p. 1589.
[160] Dardess, *A Political Life in Ming China*, p. 35.
[161] Dardess, *A Political Life in Ming China*, p. 35.
[162] Dardess, *A Political Life in Ming China*, p. 35. See also Geiss, James, "The Chia-ching reign, 1522-1566", pp. 484-485.
[163] The Minister of Rites at the time was Xu Jie 徐堦 (1503-1583), who would later become Grand Secretary by toppling Yan Song. Xu Jie won the emperor's approval by proposing to buy more time to build defences against the Mongols. In the meantime, he hid behind protocol and told the Mongols to return with a letter in Mongolian, as the court suspected the authenticity of the original Chinese letter of demands. see Dardess, *A Political Life in Ming China*, p. 25.
[164] Geiss, "The Chia-ching reign, 1522-1566", pp. 485-488.

violence. Therefore, Yan argued that the current Mongol invasion was the result of his hawkish rival and predecessor Xia Yan 夏言 (1482-1548), who had wished to invade and occupy the Ordos region,[165] but was toppled by Yan Song and executed in 1548.[166]

Yan Song's perceived weak response to the Mongols was based on a sober calculation of the Ming Empire's finances. An aggressive policy of military campaigns and occupation of the Ordos would have cost roughly 9 million ounces of silver per year according to one estimate. However, in 1553, the imperial treasuries held less than 2 million ounces.[167] In the 1550s, the wealthy provinces of the south-east were also hit by piracy and natural disasters, so extra taxes could not be levied. There was a deficit every year during this period.[168] In the wake of serious flooding and drought, thousands had come to Beijing in search of food. The price of rice doubled and starvation and pestilence soon engulfed the city in the spring of 1554.[169] In 1556, the deadliest earthquake in world recorded history struck Shaanxi, killing over 800,000 people in the Wei river valley alone.[170] The area could not be taxed for years. It was clear to Yan Song that an *expensive* and ineffective military campaign was simply impossible.

To many critics, however, it seemed that Yan Song was merely weak and even treacherous. He was compared to the vilified Southern Song Chancellor Qin Hui 秦檜 (1090-1155), who refused to wage war on the Jurchen conquerors.[171] Many vehement

[165] The Ordos area is surrounded by the Yellow river bend in the west, north and east. It is in the southern part of Inner Mongolia, as well as Ningxia, Shaanxi and Gansu provinces.
[166] Geiss, "The Chia-ching reign, 1522-1566", pp. 482-484.
[167] Geiss, "The Chia-ching reign, 1522-1566", pp. 474, 478.
[168] Geiss, "The Chia-ching reign, 1522-1566", p. 487.
[169] Geiss, "The Chia-ching reign, 1522-1566", pp. 472-478.
[170] Geiss, "The Chia-ching reign, 1522-1566", pp. 472-478.
[171] Recently, scholars in China and the West have begun to re-evaluate Yan Song as the archetypal "evil minister". Yin Xuanbo of Renmin University has shown that others, such as Grand Secretary Xu Jie – who has traditionally been seen as the antithesis of Yan Song – adopted similar positions to Yan Song. Like Yan Song, they accommodated Emperor Jiajing's Daoist interests and used their positions to create networks of

critics of Yan Song, such as Xu's close friend Shen Lian 沈鍊 (1507-1557)[172] and Yang Jisheng 楊繼盛(1516-1555), argued against the opening of horse markets to trade with the Mongols, saying that it was degrading that the Celestial Empire could trade with those barbarians that had pillaged and raped.[173] Moreover, critics said the Mongols would probably only sell their weaker horses, while keeping the strong horses to themselves to wage war against the Ming sooner or later. The Mongols were deemed untrustworthy and thieving.[174] Another factor raised at the time was that Altan Khan's domain had many Chinese advisors, deserters, runaways and religious sectarians. Any trade with them would only strengthen the Mongols and their Chinese collaborators. It would make defection an attractive option for struggling Chinese on the border.[175] Many of these critics, most notably Shen Lian (who will be dealt with later in the chapter), were easily silenced by Yan Song.

More difficult for Yan Song's policy of opening markets to Mongols, however, was the emperor himself, who blocked all compromise. Emperor Jiajing had an almost pathological hatred for the Mongols. He had already decreed that the character for

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patronage. According to Yin, history was written by the victors. In this case it was Xu Jie who edited the veritable records. Liang Xizhi and Wang Jian of Jilin University have also studied Yan Song in the context of political struggle, instead of relying on moral arguments. See Yin Xuanbo 尹選波, "Yan Song, Xu Jie bijiao yanjiu" 嚴嵩徐介比較研究 in *Zhongguo renmin daxue xuebao,* (1996), pp. 90-96; Liang Xizhe 梁希哲 and Wang Jian 王劍, "Guanyu Yan Song pingjia de shiliao wenti" 關於嚴嵩評價的史料問題， in *Shixue jikan* 4, (1996). The studies of Kenneth Hammond and John Dardess, which trace in detail the lives of Yang Jisheng and Xu Jie respectively, have contributed to our understanding of the complexities and practical dimensions of Ming political life. In so doing, they go beyond the moral reductionism fostered by Wang Shizhen 王世貞 (1526-1590) and Xu Jie.

[172] Shen Lian 沈鍊 (1507-1557), *zi* Chunfu 純甫, *hao* Qingxia 青霞, *jinshi* 1538, was a native of Kuaiji 會稽 (modern Shaoxing). He was particularly angered by the government's mishandling of Altan Khan's siege of Beijing in 1550, and asked to lead a large force against them but was ignored. In 1551, Shen Lian attempted to impeach Yan Song by demonstrating that he was leading the empire to ruin. Yan Song had Shen arrested, flogged and sent into exile at Bao'an, near Xuanfu, where he soon was executed. See DMB, pp. 1182-1185. See also Appendix B for Xu's biography of Shen Lian. Shen is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2.

[173]Hammond, Kenneth J., *Pepper Mountain: The Life, Death and Posthumous Career of Yang Jisheng* (London, New York and Bahrain: Kegan Paul, 2007), pp. 20-23. Yang Jisheng was a harsh critic of Yan Song and sent memorials impeaching Yan for gross misconduct and corruption.

[174] Hammond, *Pepper Mountain,* pp. 20-23.

[175] Dardess, *A Political Life in Ming China,* p.42.

"barbarian" be written as small as possible on all edicts. The emperor saw no reason to allow trade with the Mongols and opposed the idea in principle. Indeed, it was not until the emperor's death in 1567 that markets could become properly established and the Mongol raids subsequently stopped.[176] In the meantime, however, Yan Song, who was in power by grace of the emperor, was thwarted.

Another controversy surrounding Yan Song was his perceived usurpation of power from the Imperial throne. The Jiajing Emperor had withdrawn publicly from handling affairs of state since 1539, and devoted himself to Daoist practices such as the elixir of immortality, and sexual intercourse with young virgins in the hope of prolonging his life. Since adolescence, Jiajing battled with his ministers over the "Great Rites Controversy" following his enthronement in 1524;[177] since then, he had learned to be distrustful of officials, whom he considered all self serving. As such, the emperor was content to let the bureaucracy run itself and Yan Song naturally filled the vacuum. This was not to say that the emperor was entirely passive, however. He was aware of Yan's growing influence and so, in order to counter that, he recalled Yan's political enemies and rivals such as Xia Yen

[176] After the death of Emperor Jiajing in 1567 and stormy discussions at court on how to deal with the Mongols and the northern frontier, the vigorous Grand Secretary Zhang Juzheng in 1570 put together a settlement based on licensed trade, wall-building and the return of Ming deserters. The region then saw peace, stability and economic growth. Xu wrote that "the newly opened horse markets bring joy to the homes 馬市新開喜到家". See XWJ, p. 361. It was during this peaceful time that Xu served in the garrison at Xuanfu in 1576-7, under the invitation of assistant minister of War Wu Dui. See "Song of Xuanfu Barracks", XWJ, p. 360; and "Twenty Six Poems of the Frontier", XWJ, pp. 361-6, of which poems eight and thirteen show a fascination for Mongolian women, which no doubt inspired Xu to compare them to the legendary Mulan. For a detailed annotated translation of Xu's play on Mulan, see Kwa, *Strange Eventful Histories*. See also Di Cosmo, ed. *Military Culture in Imperial China*, p. 321.

[177] The great rites controversy (大禮議) began in 1524 after the Zhengde Emperor died without an heir. His cousin was chosen to become Emperor Jiajing. However, custom dictated that to maintain an unbroken line, Jiajing had to be formally adopted as Zhengde's son. Going against his Chief Grand Secretary Yang Tinghe and much of the bureaucracy, Jiajing wanted to elevate his own parents to an honorary imperial rank, equal to Zhengde's. This caused much debate and led to the dissemination of Wang Yangming's school of thought. Wang Yangming came out in support of the Jiajing Emperor, arguing that rituals to his adopted parents would be meaningless without sincere filial piety towards his real parents. Jiajing eventually won and had hundreds of officials beaten, imprisoned and banished. See Dardess, *A Political Life in Ming China*, p. 4. See Geiss, "The Chia-ching reign, 1522-1566", pp. 443-450.

and Xu Jie to the Secretariat as a counter balance.[178] The emperor knew how to play his grand secretaries against each other.

To the outsider, however, it looked as if Yan Song was usurping the power of the throne for himself. Following the foiling of a plot by his Prime Minister, the founder of the Ming – Zhu Yuanzhang – decreed that from 1380, there would be no office of Prime Minister in the Ming Dynasty.[179] Zhu Yuanzhang wanted to behead the civil bureaucracy and centralise power with the Emperor. However, Grand Secretaries effectively continued to take on the roles of Prime Ministers.[180] Yan was but the latest in a series of powerful Grand Secretaries. Nevertheless, his enemies at court considered his "usurpation" of power from the emperor to be one of Yan's crimes. [181]

Furthermore, Yan was also criticised for establishing a vast network of corruption. To secure his power, Yan Song and his son Shifan 世番 (1513-1565) planted their followers in important official posts while getting rid of those who were unfriendly and critical.[182] For example, when the Mongols invaded in June 1550, Qiu Luan 仇鸞 (1505-1552), a commandant in Datong, bribed the Mongols to pass him by and carry on to the capital.

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[178] Dardess, *A Political Life in Ming China*, p. 35.

[179] Hu Weiyong 胡惟庸 (?- 1380) was prime minister under Zhu Yuanzhang from 1373 until his execution in 1380, when the emperor suspected him of plotting a rebellion. For more on the Hu Weiyong purge, see Brook, *The Troubled Empire,* pp. 89-91.

[180] Although the Ming Grand Secretaries had held a low civil-service rank (5A), they usually possessed concurrent titles and duties that greatly enhanced their prestige and authority. Many Grand Secretaries rose from the Hanlin Academy, another honour indicating that they had been specially selected from the crème de la crème of *jinshi* degree holders. The main reasons, however, for the Grand Secretariat's power and influence was their supervisory responsibility for communications and their large outer-court staff. By the end of the Ming dynasty, their power had swelled to the point where the Ming official history, ignoring the role of some powerful eunuchs, declared with some exaggeration that all government had been delegated to the Grand Secretariat. See Bartlett, Beatrice S, *Monarchs and Ministers: The Grand Council in Mid-Ch'ing China, 1723-1820* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), p. 33. For a brief summary of the dualistic relationship between powerful Eunuchs and powerful Grand Secretaries, see also Tsai, Shih-shan Henry, *The Eunuchs in the Ming Dynasty* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1996), pp. 225-227.

[181] Hammond, *Pepper Mountain*, pp. 41-42.

[182] DMB*,* pp. 1586-1591.

Yet it was Qiu who was entrusted to protect the capital on 2 October.[183] On 6 October, Qiu engaged the Mongols, lost thousands of men and almost his own life. Nevertheless, it was reported as a victory and he was promoted to commander of all the garrisons around Beijing. The path to promotion had been smoothed by Yan Song, who was grateful to Qiu for his testimony in bringing down Yan's political rival, the Grand Secretary Xia Yan in 1548.[184] This naturally provided strong ammunition for Yan's critics.

Yan's son Shifan also drew much criticism. Shifan did not take the civil service examinations and gained office through the "yin" privilege.[185] As his father became older, he was depended upon more and more to read and write his father's letters. Yan Song was so dependent on his son that when his wife died in 1561, he refused to let his son return home to accompany his mother's coffin. Many criticised his lack of scholarship and ostentatious consumption of fine antiques and paintings. He was even accused of collaborating with Japanese pirates.[186] Father and son were both accused of enriching themselves and of cronyism.

Xu voiced his views on court corruption and military ineffectiveness with a poem on "Two Running Horses". The symbol of the horse was chosen due to its military importance. Similarly, it illustrated the difference between rich officials and poor scholars such as Xu himself:

[183] Geiss, "The Chia-ching reign, 1522-1566", p. 476.
[184] Geiss, "The Chia-ching reign, 1522-1566", p. 476.
[185] DMB, pp. 1588-1591.
[186] DMB, pp. 1588-1591.

Two Running Horses

In whose house do two house slaves ride two piebald horses? Who is their master they say is surnamed Zong?[187] From morning to evening they gallop on the tree-lined road, passing through smoke and mist they resemble flying dragons. I ask how the horses got to be like this? They eat soybeans from Huai'an, and drink pure spring water. Their two hills of flesh that make their chests and abdomen make it hard to tie the bellyband; their [thick] spherical tails swing back and forth arrogantly reckless. In the third month of spring the poplars and willows flitter; few see who ride the horses. A broad leather strap inlaid with silver studded plum blossom, in the capital they wear high hats and fine clothes. The full horses impress all with their might, coming in and out they look around emitting sparkling light. Last autumn in guarding Gubeikou, the passing wind blew all the horses backwards. The opposing armies [were poised for battle] day and night without taking off the saddle, the fodder for several days did not even fill one *dou* [1 decilitre]. The generals looked on passively as the brigands pillaged and left, beating their saddles [in frustration] while acting powerfully by shouting at the leaving thieves. The soldiers long knew this game, to give chase and counter-attack was only an arrow's distance away. In cold weather the bewildered horses have empty stomachs, on the road for several miles the sinews and stomachs cry and rumble. They do not know that at this place [the capital] they [the horses that carry the nobles and high officials] are treading on fragrant mud, walking in the spring breeze and sitting on fine silk [worn by nobles].

二馬行

誰家兩奴騎兩驄，誰是主人云姓宗？朝來暮去夾街樹，經過煙霧如游龍。
問馬何由得如此？淮安大豆清泉水。胸排兩岳橫難羈，尾撒圓球驕欲死。
陽春三月楊柳飛，騎者何人看者稀。梅花銀釘革帶肥，京城高帽細褶衣。
馬厭豢養人有威，出入顧盼生光輝。去年防秋古北口，勁風吹馬馬逆走。
對壘終宵不解鞍，食粟連朝不盈斗。將軍見虜飽掠歸，據鞍作勢呼賊走。
士卒久已知此意，打馬追奔僅得彀。天寒馬毛腹無矢，飢腸霍霍鳴數里。
不知此處踏香泥，一路春風坐羅綺。[188]

In this poem, Xu criticised the extravagance of the court and the ineffectiveness of the generals. Even the house servants of rich officials can ride corpulent horses that are fed so well that the servants can barely strap the saddles on. Xu compared the fat horses of the officials on parade with the weak and emaciated military horses on the border that

[187] One scholar has suggested that *zong* (宗) is similar to *song* (嵩), and a secret reference to Yan Song. See Fu Jie 傅杰, *Xu Wei shiwen xuanyi* 徐渭詩文選譯 (Nanjing: Fenghuang chubanshe, 2011), p. 004.
[188] XWJ, pp. 123-4.

proved useless against the Mongols. While the horses on the border, i.e the common soldiers, starved, the horses in the capital, i.e. the officials, are kept well fed and clothed.

Yan Song was well aware of these criticisms and attempted to have his opponents, including Shen Lian, silenced. Although these events were taking place at court in Beijing, they profoundly affected Xu Wei. This was because Shen Lian was also from Shaoxing. Furthermore, though the sources are unclear, some Chinese scholars such as Wang Gang and Fu Jie have argued that Shen Lian was a relative of Xu's. It is certainly known that Shen Lian's wife was née Xu (徐).[189] In Xu's self-written chronology of his life, he addressed Shen Lian as "Shen the elder 沈丈"[190], *zhang* (丈) being a kinship term for those married to a paternal aunt or brother-in-law. The term, however, could also simply indicate the close friendship between the two men, and the respect that Xu had for Shen Lian. Nevertheless, the relationship between Xu and Shen was indeed close despite the gap in age.[191]

Shen Lian and Yang Jisheng were two of the most vocal critics of Yan Song.[192] Shen Lian was so incensed by the Mongol raid of Beijing that he submitted a memorial asking for the authority to lead his own large force to go on the offensive.[193] The memorial was acknowledged but pigeonholed. Xu wrote in his biography of Shen Lian:

> In the winter of the Gengxu year [1550], the enemy entered the Old North Pass [gubei kou], the mounted ruffians reached the capital walls, greatly killing and pillaging. The late Emperor [Jiajing] hurriedly gathered his ministers to court, and the grand officials proposed tens of hundreds of plans, the

[189]For the name of Shen's wife see DMB, p, 1184. Supporting the theory that Shen was married to Xu's sister is Wang Gang 王鋼, *Xu Wei* 徐渭 (Taipei: Zhi shufang chuban jituan), p 54.
[190] XWJ, p, 1334.
[191] See Xu's poem "On Peach Blossom Embankment with [Shen Lian] watching Beauties Riding Horses" in XWJ, p. 169.
[192] Hammond, *Pepper Mountain.*
[193]See Shen Lian's Biography in XWJ, pp, 624-625. See also DMB, pp, 1182-1185. See also Appendix B at the end of this thesis.

> commanders were hesitant and dared not speak a word. [Shen] alone with superintendant Zhao Zhenji (1507-1576) stepped up resisting hands [trying to stop them] and together advocated harmony, fervently discussing the matters of the day. The Yan clique in charge blocked them; [Shen] thereupon defied the clamour and reproached Grand Secretary Yan Song. In addition to this, [Shen] submitted a memorial to the emperor requesting ten thousand soldiers, desiring to go west of Liang and Zhuo [Hebei] to protect the emperor's mausoleum, and block the mounted ruffians causing them to go no further, and thereupon open the capital gates, so they [the Mongols] could not pass with ease. But there was no reply.
>
> 庚戌冬，虜入古北口，抄騎至都城，大殺掠。時先帝倉卒集群臣議於廷，大官以百十計，率嫆婀不敢出一語。君獨與司業趙公貞吉，歷階抵掌相倡和，慷慨論時事。嚴氏黨執格之，君遂坑聲詆嚴氏父子。又上疏請兵萬人，欲出良涿以西護陵寢，遮虜騎使不得前，因得開都門，通有無便。不報。[194]

After a year in which there was no reply to his memorial, Shen took the daring step of impeaching Yan Song, accusing him of ten unforgivable crimes which were leading the empire to ruin. These crimes included developing a network of corrupt officials, of interfering in personnel matters [of the emperor], disrupting the normal path of official consultation, and using imperial resources to enrich himself and his family. Shen wrote in the memorial:

> Last year, when Altan Khan attacked the capital region, Your Majesty aroused the civil and military [officials]…But now the grand secretary Yan Song's greed penetrates the vitals of the court like a sickness, and his stupid and vulgar mind is obstinate like stone or metal. Now, when the anxious officials are disheartened, not only does he put off seeking out the worthy and martial to consult about strategy, he relies solely on the advice of his son Shifan in making his plans. Loyal [officials] who offer advice are repeatedly thwarted, while those who flatter and fawn find their views being adopted. He sells appointments for bribes, and deals in imperial favours for his cronies. If the emperor rewards someone, he says 'This reward is because of me.' If the emperor punishes someone, he says, 'this punishment is because of me.' Everyone tries to figure out what the Yans like and dislike, and pay no attention to the emperor's preferences. One can barely endure saying this. Yet I must speak out about the greatest of his crimes.[195]

[194] XWJ, pp, 624-625. See also Appendix B, where Shen Lian's biography is translated in full.
[195] Hammond , *Pepper Mountain*, pp. 43-44. For the biography of Shen Lian and Yang Jisheng in the official history of the Ming, see also, Zhang Tingyu, ed., *Ming shi,* p. 5533-5535.

Shen's memorial went far beyond the concerns of border policy and attacked Yan Song as the mastermind of a vast network of corruption. Yang Jisheng later argued that Shen's memorial was altered illegally by Yan Song's son Shifan and his cronies Li Ben and Zhao Wenhua, who tried to soften the blow. Nevertheless, the portion of the text as reproduced in the *Mingshi* is quite harsh and explicit in its attacks on Yan Song.[196]

It provoked a strong reaction. The emperor was disturbed by the memorial but Jiajing's Daoist adept at court, Tao Zhongwen, stepped in on behalf of Yan Song. Playing on Jiajing's distrust of officials, he said they were written only because of partisan conflicts.[197] Jiajing was ambiguous about how to deal with Shen Lian, but Yan Song was bent on destroying him. Shen Lian was arrested, tortured, and exiled beyond the Great Wall to Bao'an near Xuanfu. In Xu Wei's biography of Shen Lian, he wrote:

> [Shen Lian] again submitted a memorial to the emperor directly admonishing Yan [Song] and his 'ten crimes'. There was then a decree for [Shen] to be flogged with the big stick fifty times, stripping him of office, and sending him to Bao'an as a common scholar [without official robes], his simplicity was considered remarkable. In those times, the days with which [Shen] harboured

[196] Zhang Tingyu, ed., *Ming shi,* p. 5533-5535.

[197] Daoism was particularly pervasive in Jiajing's court, where Yan Song and others wrote Daosit prayers to Jiajing to gain his favour. Jiajing even made his ministers wear Daoist robes in court. In this climate, Tao Zhongwen became a close adviser to the Jiajing Emperor and effectively head of the entire Daoist establishment. His role as Jiajing's "guru" was to perform rites to produce rain, snow, imperial progeny, cosmic harmony and so on. See ter Haar, Barend, "Tao Zhongwen," in *The Encyclopaedia of Taoism,* ed. Fabrizio Pregadio (London: Routledge, 2008), vol. 2: pp. 971-72. Also see DMB*,* pp. 1266-68. McDermott wrote that "court records tell of at least thirty occaisions when [Daoist rituals] were performed at court – for as long as a week – during [Jiajing's] forty-five-year reign. In fact, he would seem to have been more besotted by these rituals than any other emperor in Chinese history." See McDermott, Joseph P., *State and Court Ritual in China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 349. Several other Ming emperors were ardent practitioners of Daoist self-cultivation techniques and promoted Daoist rituals at court. The Ming Yongle Emperor, for example, sponsored the compilation of the *Ming Daoist Canon* under the supervision of the forty-second Celestial Master, Zhang Yuqing. The Wanli Emperor also sponsored the publication of the *Xu Daozang* (*Supplement to the Daoist Canon*). See Ashiwa, Yoshiko and Wank, David L, *Making Religion, Making the State: The Politics of Religion in Modern China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), pp. 186-187. For more on the interaction between Ming Imperial Princes and Daoism, see also Wang, Richard G, *The Ming Prince and Daoism: Institutional Patronage of an Elite* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

> anger in his bosom were many, and his loyalty was not entrusted to the sovereign. He then whittled wood to resemble the Song Chancellor Qin Hui [1090-1155], and there was not a day when he did not strike and lash at it. Recalling those events that struck a chord with him he composed poems and essays: there was not one which did not cry out on current events, curse and scold debauchery and flattery, and keep in mind loyalty to the sovereign.
>
> 又上疏直詆嚴氏十罪。有詔廷杖君五十，削官，徙保安為布衣，以戇奇。當是時，君懷憤之日久，而忠不信於主上。乃削木為宋丞相檜象，旦莫射捶之，隨事觸景為詩賦文章，無一不慨時事，罵訶奸諛，懷忠主上也。

While in exile in Bao'an with his wife, Shen did not remain quiet and continued to criticise those linked to the Yan Song clique and sent letters to the court. When Yan Song learned that Shen had made effigies of him for archery practice, together with the local commander and censor, he had Shen falsely implicated for rebellious activities and executed him and his sons in 1557. Only Shen Xiang, another close friend of Xu Wei, managed to avoid death. Xu's biography narrated the events:

> In those days, the people on the frontier suffered from the ransacking and plundering of the enemy, and Yang Shun had just grasped the tally [of command] of Xuanda [also known as Xuanfu]. The enemy killed the people like grass, but Shun did not dare fire a single arrow. The enemy withdrew then thinned the Han ranks, the enemy chief was considered successful. [Shen] quickly wrote to the magistrate's office, listing Shun's crimes. Shun was hurt and feared [Shen], and receiving Yan's orders, day and night they implicated [Shen]. In the jiayin year (1554), the enemy returned invading Datong and the guards of the west. Shun planned and did not come out and the vanguard withdrew. [Shen] quickly wrote [to the magistrate] with increasing urgency.
>
> [Shen] had been on the border for a long time, and with friends once thought of how to destroy the enemy, perhaps by distributing money to recruit the bold and unconstrained native people to guard the city. [The people of] Bao'an starved, so [Shen] spent money buying grain from afar, [serving] congee in the monk's dwellings, over ten thousand people survived. Shun said these matters were not the proper concern for an exiled official, and used it to implicate Shen as a rebel, thereupon with the imperial censor of Xuanda, Lujie, they got together and submitted a memorial accusing [Shen] of rebellion. Grand Secretary Yan Song from this decreed that the exiled [Shen] in Xuanfu, and five others in connection to him were to be executed. Then [Yan Song] quickly arrested [Shen's] eldest son Xiang. In shackles [Shen] arrived in Xuanfu to be flogged with a stick; worn out, he then died.

當是時，邊人苦虜殘掠，而楊順者方握符鎮宣大，虜殺人如麻，順不敢發一矢，虜退則削漢級，以虜首功上。君飛書入轅門，數順罪。順痛忌之，承嚴氏旨，日夜奇構君。及甲寅，虜複寇大同右衛，順計不出前轍，君飛書益急。而君在邊久，嘗思結客以破虜，或散金募土人豪宕者為城守。保安飢，又散金市遠粟，粥僧舍，活萬餘人。順謂諸事非放逐所臣宜為，可以叛構君，遂與御史巡宣大者路楷會疏入告君叛狀。嚴氏父子從中下其，事棄君宣府市，連坐死者五人。既又馳捕其長子襄，械抵宣府杖繫，糜且死。

Soon after Shen Lian's death, however, Yan Song was beginning to lose his grip on power, and memorials came impeaching his cronies. Shen Lian's surviving son, Shen Xiang, was released from prison. Following the fall of Yan Song and the death of Emperor Jiajing and the ascension in 1568 of the new Emperor Longqing – who, in a spirit of rebellion, went against his father – Shen Lian's good name was restored. Xu could write frankly in this biography of the events that took place:

In a meeting Master Wu Shilai [his last name ironically means timely arriving] submitted a memorial, and a decree was sent to arrest [Yang] Shun and [Lu]jie, and Xiang was pardoned in the autumn of the dingyi year (1557). The late emperor [Jiajing] began again to listen to remonstrating officials such as Zou Yinglong (jinshi 1556) and Lin Run; [suddenly] aware of Yan's past treacherous deceit, he beheaded Shifan [Yan Song's son] in the western market, stripped Yan of his office, and confiscated his property. In the year [Jiajing] passed away (1567) there was a testamentary edict that stated among those found guilty for speaking [out] since the Jiajing reign; [Shen] will receive the honorary title of Honourable Grand Master, protecting his son also. Now in over a year, Xiang again has submitted a memorial to avenge his father, Shun and Jie are waiting to be executed. His highness moved by [Shen's] simplicity, made a euology, and ordered the provinces officials to worship at his tomb.

會給事中吳公時來疏上，有詔逮順楷，襄得免戍，時丁巳秋月也。先帝始再聽諫臣鄒公應龍 林公閏等說，悟向者嚴氏姦罔，斬世蕃西市，奪嵩官，籍其家。再逾年而先帝崩，遺詔錄嘉靖以來以言事得罪者，君得贈光祿寺少卿，蔭子一人。今上立一年，襄複疏父冤，順 偕坐死。上感君戇，為制文，命省臣祭其墓。

Due to the biographies of Shen Lian by Xu Wei and Wang Shizhen 王世貞 (1526-1590), [198] Shen became a well-known martyr. Through these works, Shen's story can be found in the famous collection of Ming short stories *Marvellous Spectacles Ancient and Modern* (今古奇觀), under the title of "Shen Xiaoxia sends a Memorial to Lead Troops to Battle" (沈小霞相會出師表).[199] In addition to these popular works in vernacular, Shen Lian's martyrdom was also narrated by Mao Kun 茅坤 (1512-1601)[200] in a preface to Shen's poetry, which was included in the *Anthology of Incomparably Good Classical Prose* (古文觀止), a textbook of classical Chinese prose compiled during the Kangxi reign.[201] The story of Shen Lian thus became well known, together with the perceived tyranny and evil of Yan Song.

b) Pirate Raids and Court Politics Continued

The same issues of national security that came with the Mongols were repeated on China's sea coast. Thanks to the Jiajing Emperor's ban on foreign trade in 1523, not only did the Mongols take what they needed by force, but piracy along the coast also reached

[198] Wang Shizhen **王世貞** (1560-1590), *zi* Yuanmei **元美**, *hao* Fengzhou 鳳洲 and *Yanzhou shanren* 弇州山人, *jinshi* 1547, from Suzhou, was perhaps the greatest cultural arbiter of his day and a member of the powerful "Latter Seven Masters" (七後子), who were considered champions of classical archaism in poetry and prose. For reviews of the literary theories of the "former and latter seven masters" see Guo Shaoyu 郭紹虞, *Zhongguo Wenxue Piping shi* 中國文學批評史 (Shanghai: Xin wenyi, 1955), pp. 333, 343-46; Zhu Dongrun 朱東潤, *Zhongguo Wenxue Piping shi dagang* 中國文學批評史大綱 (Shanghai: Gudian wenxue, 1957), pp.224-52; Qian Jibo 錢基博, *Ming dai wenxue* 明代文學 (Shanghai: Shangwu, 1939), pp. 17-51; Song Peiwei 宋佩韋, *Ming wenxue shi* 明文學史 (Shanghai: Shangwu, 1934), pp. 89-100, 125-48. The "latter masters" include Wang Shizhen, Li Panlong 李攀龍 (1514-70), Xie Zhen 謝榛 (1495-1575), Zong Chen 宗臣 (1525-60), Liang Youyu 梁有譽 (1522-66), Xu Zhongxing 徐中行 (1517-78), and Wu Guolun 吳國倫 (1524-93). Wang Shizhen's father was executed by Yan Song for his failure in the defence of Beijing during the Mongol raid of 1550. Wang was therefore a bitter enemy of Yan Song and praised Yan's enemies as martyrs and heroes; his literary fame helped ensure his view of history.

[199] Bao Weng Laoren 抱甕老人 , *Jin gu qiguan* 今古奇觀 (Beijing: Baowen tang shudian, 1955).

[200] Mao Kun 茅坤 (1512-1601), *zi* Shunfu 順甫, *hao* Lumen 鹿門, was from Gui'an in Zhejiang province. He earned his *Jinshi* degree in 1538, having been in the same class as Shen Lian and Hu Zongxian. In 1554, after dismissal from government, he joined Hu Zongxian as his secretary and wrote strong defences of Hu while he was in prison. He was also closely associated with Tang Shunzhi and his Tang-Song School of classical literature. See DMB, pp. 1042-1047. He is discussed again in Chapter 2.

[201] *Guwen guanzhi*, pp. 381-382.

its height in the 16th century. As we have seen above, Jiajing blocked compromise with the Mongols, as well as south-eastern traders until his death in 1567.

There is a measure of debate as to exactly who these pirates were. The scholar So Kwan-wai argued that the so called wokou (倭寇) "dwarf [i.e., Japanese] pirates" were mainly Chinese merchants and farmers along the south-east coast in Zhejiang and Fujian, who traded in defiance of official restrictions.[202] Peter Perdue argued that some Daimyo or feudal lords in southern Japan supported these armed traders, but most of the leadership, as well as the weapons were Chinese.[203] Ray Huang, however, argued that "within the fighting element, the role played by the [Chinese] natives could not have been more than auxiliary. The invasion was based in Japan; the Japanese furnished all the military skill and military equipment." [204] Whoever the pirates were ethnically, in his poetry, Xu nevertheless described them as Japanese:

夷女愁妖身畫丹，Japanese women fearing evil spirits tattoo their bodies with cinnabar;
夫行親接不縫衫。personally giving seamless clothes to their leaving husbands [as good luck charms].
今朝死向中華地，This morning he died in the land of China,
猶上阿蘇望海帆。But she still stands on Mount Aso looking out to sea for the sails [to return]. [205]

These armed pirates frequently took control of the border garrisons and un-walled market towns along the coast, but by 1552 the wokou became so bold that they even

[202] So, Kwan-wai, *Japanese Piracy in Ming China During the 16th Century* (Michigan: Michigan State University Press, 1975), pp. 15-41.
[203] So, Kwan-wai, *Japanese Piracy in Ming China During the 16th Century*, pp. 15-41. See also Peter Perdue, "Coercion and Commerce on Two Chinese Frontiers" in *Military Culture in Imperial China*, p. 322.
[204] Huang, *1587 A Year of No Significance*, p. 163.
[205] XWJ, p. 340. Xu noted that the pirates came from southern Japan, notably Kyushu, and that "Mount Aso is the highest mountain in his land 其地阿蘇山最高。" Some scholars however, have taken this to think that Xu was referring to Mountt Fuji instead of Mount Aso in Kyushu. See Fu Jie, *Xu Wei shiwen xuanyi,* p. 69.

launched attacks on the cities of Suzhou and Hangzhou.[206] Ray Huang noted that a band of merely fifty or seventy pirates encircled Nanjing with a garrison on paper of 120,000 men.[207] Xu wrote several poems criticising the government and military for its ineffectiveness against the destructive pirate raids:

海上曲五首 Five Poems on the Sea

三 Three

暇日棄籌策，	In times of leisure all abandon strategy and planning,
卒卒相束手。	Soldiers have their hands in a bind.
四疆險何限，	There are countless troubles on the four corners,
但阻孤城守。	but they only know to defend the city.
曠野獨非民，	Are those in the wilderness not people?
棄之如棄草。	Yet they abandon them like grass.
城市有一夫，	If only there was one man in the city,
誰不如木偶？	who isn't like a wooden puppet?
長立睥睨間，	Standing long on the ramparts,
盡日不得溲。	they can't take a piss all day.
朝餐雪沒脛，	At breakfast snow submerges the shins;
夜臥風吹肘。	at night the wind blows on the elbows.
彼亦何人斯，	What person is this,
炙肉方進酒！	roasting meat and drinking fine wine![208]

Xu was indignant at the lack of preparation against the pirates except for retreating behind the city walls, leaving those in the countryside to fend for themselves. Xu also criticised the officers and generals who ate roast meat and drank fine wine while their soldiers stood all day in the cold, controlled like puppets on strings.

The court had sent officials such as Zhu Wan 朱紈 (1494-1550), who was made governor-general of Fujian and Zhejiang in 1547, to strengthen coastal defences.[209] However, he found that the local powerful gentry were also involved in the illegal trade

[206] So Kwan-wai, *Japanese Piracy in Ming China During the 16th Century,* p 7.
[207] Huang, *1587 A Year of No Significance,* p. 159.
[208] XWJ, pp. 59-60.
[209] XWJ, pp. 19, 41-72.

with pirates, even marrying into pirate families. Zhu Wan zealously attacked traders and officials who defied the ban on trade, but by 1549 he was impeached by the Fujian literati whose commercial interests he threatened. After his dismissal from office, Zhu committed suicide in 1550.[210]

Once again, the Chief Grand Secretary Yan Song, so often vilified as a traitor (his son was even accused of being a collaborator with the wokou) advocated a more liberal policy on trade. Yan Song and his protégé Zhao Wenhua proposed to restore legal trade, pardon chief smugglers in order to use them against their confederates, and improve the welfare of the local population so as to remove incentives for them to engage in crime. As the historian Perdue wrote:

> Despite the biases of the *Mingshi* and other sources, we can see that Zhao and Yan had a sophisticated understanding of the underlying causes of the pirate raids and a practical policy to prevent them.[211]

If trade were restored then, like the Mongols, the pirates would simply cease to be a problem.

In the winter of 1555, the pirate attacks intensified. They surrounded and threatened Xu's hometown of Kuaiji. The official dynastic *History of the Ming* (明史) records that "over three hundred pirates raided Kuaiji, and were driven out by government troops to Mount Kan. 倭三百餘劫會稽，爲官軍所逐，走登龕山。"[212] It was during this period that Xu

[210] So Kwan-wai, *Japanese Piracy in Ming China During the 16th Century*, p. 41-72.
[211] Perdue, "Coercion and Commerce on Two Chinese Frontiers", p. 322.
[212] See "The Biography of Wu Chengqi" (吳成器傳), in Zhang Tingyu, ed., *Ming shi,* p. 5418.

volunteered in the local militia under the famed General Yu Daoyou 俞大猷 (1503-1579) and wrote bloodthirsty battle songs:

龕山凱歌 Songs of Triumph on Mount Kan

一 One

短劍隨槍暮合圍， With short swords and spears at dusk the enemy is encircled,
寒風吹血着人飛； The cold wind blows blood splattering on the men;
朝來道上看歸騎， In the morning mounted troops return on the road to see,
一片紅冰冷鐵衣。[213] Red ice on cold armour.

二 Two

無首有身只自猜，The headless corpses leave the ghosts to guess for themselves,
左啼魂魄右啼骸。the ghosts and skeletons left and right can only cry respectively.
憑將老譯傳番語；I rely on an old translator to spread my words in the barbarian tongue;
此地他生敢再來？[214] will you in your next life dare to come again?

The reference to "barbarian" language shows that Xu identified the pirates as foreigners, not Chinese. The violent language is testament to how roused Xu felt about the marauders. In 1555, Xu wrote memorials such as "Draft Plan Submitted to the Government" (擬上府書)[215] to the local government offering strategic advice, reporting that "most of the enemy come from the seashore and enter several hundred miles inland to a fatal position, without food, and so they profit on speedy wars, not on protracted wars. 衆以爲賊自海邊，經數百里來入死地，無積食，利於速戰，不利於持久。"[216] The annals of the Ming record that:

> The enemy came from Gaobu in Shaoxing and spread pillaging Hangzhou, Yan, Anhui, Ningbo, Taiping, and encircled the Southern Capital. Sixty or Seventy Men crossed several thousand miles, killing and injuring four to five thousand people, only after eighty days did they begin to diminish.

[213] XWJ, p. 340.
[214] XWJ, p. 340.
[215] XWJ, pp. 461-466.
[216] XWJ, pp. 461-466.

賊自紹興高埠流劫杭，嚴，徽，寧，太平，犯南都。六七十人經行數千里，殺傷無慮四五千人，曆八十餘日始滅."[217]

In 1554, the situation was considered so dire that the decision was made to appoint a supreme commander with the unprecedented authority to "act at convenience" from Shandong all the way down to Fujian and Guangdong.[218] Zhang Jing 張經 (1492-1555) was appointed to the post. As an ally of Grand Secretary Xu Jie,[219] who was Yan Song's rival at court, Zhang Jing's appointment represented Xu Jie's chance to oversee the war against the pirates.

At a war council, Zhang Jing promised to send troops to Zhejiang, but a day later changed his mind after he heard pirates were approaching Suzhou, and so kept them there.[220] His extremely cautious nature and reluctance to fight prompted Chief Grand Secretary Yan Song and his protégés Zhao Wenhua and Regional Inspector Hu Zongxian 胡宗憲 (1512-1565) to impeach Zhang Jing for ignoring the needs of the people of Zhejiang, as well as acts of incompetence. [221]

However, Zhang Jing managed to secure victory with his troops east of Suzhou, and on northern Zhejiang. When Zhao Wenhua learned of the victory it was too late to recall his impeachment of Zhang. Hence, he submitted another memorial to the throne asserting

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[217]Gu Yingtai 谷應泰. *Ming shi jishi benmo* 明史紀事本末 (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshu guan, 1936), juan 55. Eighth month of the thirty-fourth year [of the reign of Jiajing].

[218] Dardess, *A Political Life In Ming China,* p. 104.

[219]Xu Jie 徐堦 (1503-1583) would later become Grand Secretary by toppling Yan Song. For a new and thorough critical biography of him see Dardess, *A Political Life in Ming China*. As Yan Song came to be characterised in history and popular culture as the archetypal 'evil minister' or *jianchen* (奸臣), Xu Jie came to be seen as the antithesis and an exemplar of good governance. However, recent scholarship has questioned this simple good and evil interpretation of court politics. See footnote 161 and 171 above for more information.

[220] DMB, pp. 631-638.

[221]Hu Zongxian 胡宗憲 (1512-1565), *zi* Ruzhen 汝貞, *hao* Meilin 梅林, *jinshi* 1538. In 1556 Hu was appointed as Supreme Commander of Nan Zhili, Zhejiang, and Fujian to combat piracy along the coast. DMB, pp. 631-638. See also Zhang Tingyu, ed., *Ming shi,* p. 5410.

that the victory was really Hu Zongxian's. Yan Song also misinformed the emperor by saying that Hu Zongxian had gone into battle with armour (Hu was actually in Hangzhou and learned of the victory after the battle was over). Hu went along with Yan Song and Zhao, however, and received awards and promotion. Zhang Jing was dismissed and eventually executed.[222]

In 1556, Hu Zongxian was promoted to supreme commander of Nan-Zhili, Zhejiang and Fujian, a position which he used effectively until the demise of Yan Song, and his own impeachment and arrest on corruption charges in 1562.[223] Dardess notes that "for all the corruption and high living associated with their network, Yan Song and Zhao Wenhua did demand effectiveness, and they finally found the right man in…Hu Zongxian."[224] A turning point was the capture and execution of the pirate leader Xu Hai 徐海 in 1556. In 1557 Hu persuaded one of the most wanted pirate leaders, the Huizhou merchant Wang Zhi 汪直, to surrender on the promise that he would be pardoned:

> [The pirate leader] Xu Hai and others had died, Wang Zhi again called to arms over three thousand to go to Cenggang in Ningbo, where they pillaged the four corners. Wang Zhi was from Anhui. Hu Zongxian was also from Anhui, and used money and silk to heavily bribe and entice him, saying: if you surrender, I as supreme commander, stationed by the coast, will let you pass to the city [for a pardon]. He then invited Wang Zhi's mother to Hangzhou to console [Wang Zhi]… but Minister Wang Guozhen strongly disagreed. He sent a memorial arguing that Wang was fundamentally terrible and should not be pardoned. Hu Zongxian then secretly asked the official censor to take Wang Zhi and others to behead them.
>
> 徐海等即死，汪直復糾衆三千餘入寧波岑港，大掠四境。王直，徽人也。宗憲亦徽人，乃以金帛厚賂誘之，云：若降，吾以若爲總督，置海上，通互市。乃迎直母與其子入杭厚撫之。… 科臣王國楨力持不可。疏入，上謂直元凶不可赦。宗憲乃密檄按察使收直等斬之.[225]

[222] DMB, pp. 631-638.
[223] Dardess, *A Political Life in Ming China,* p. 95.
[224] Dardess, *A Political Life in Ming China*, p. 128.
[225] Gu Yingtai, *Ming shi jishi benmo*, juan 55. Eleventh month of the thirty-sixth year [of the reign of Jiajing].

However, Hu's superiors overrode his promises of a pardon and the pirate leader was beheaded. Later biographers Qian Qianyi and Yuan Hongdao both argued that Xu Wei was connected to the secret plan to have the pirate leaders killed.[226] For several years, Hu had been inviting Xu Wei to join his staff, but it was not until 1558 that Xu finally accepted. Xu became Hu's secretary and ghost writer, writing not only memorials and military strategies, but also birthday notes and poems for Hu and his patrons. His activities as a ghost writer show that he was not only trusted by his superiors as a fine writer of classical Chinese, but also as a knowledgeable source of information on contemporary events. In this, Xu was representative of a certain stratum of Ming literati, who were well-informed of the empire's events and engaged in political life.

Xu's involvement with the secret plan to kill the pirate leaders dashed the hopes of the pirates that the damage they caused would force the government to open trade, or even grant army and naval commissions. After this affair, Ray Huang argued that "subsequent waves of invasion from Japan gradually developed into a senseless affair, serving no purpose other than to satisfy the predatory urges of the warriors."[227]The pirate raids continued into the 1560s but by then, the ventures were no longer profitable and the pirates found richer pickings further south in Guangdong. Moreover, a stronger central government in Japan under Oda Nobunaga (1534-1582) and then Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1536-1598) helped slow the pirate raids from Japan. The remaining native pirates could be dealt with as internal insurgents.

[226] See Yuan Hongdao's biography of Xu Wei which is provided in Appendix A.
[227] Huang, *1581 A Year of No Significance,* p. 164.

The protégé of Hu Zongxian, General Qi Jiguang 戚繼光 (1528-1588) became commander in chief in Fujian in 1563 and achieved great victories establishing himself as a brilliant general, helping the Ming achieve its military objectives without a formal declaration of victory. In 1564, Xu Wei sent a congratulatory poem to General Qi Jiguang for winning the war against the pirates:

凱哥二首贈參將戚公 Two Victory Songs Given to General Qi

戰罷親看海日晞，	The war is over, gazing at the sun over the sea;
大酋流血濕龍衣。	The enemy leader's blood splattered on his dragon robe.[228]
軍中殺氣橫千丈，	A murderous look spans across a thousand men in the army;
并作秋風一道歸。[229]	They return with the autumn wind.

By 1562, with piracy more or less under control, the main architects of the wokou suppression on the coast, Chief Grand Secretary Yan Song, Zhao Wenhua and Hu Zongxian were impeached, leaving Xu Wei in a dangerously vulnerable situation. Yan Song's rival and successor Xu Jie had once tried to win Hu Zongxian to his side, but eventually felt that Hu was closer to Yan Song's network and so never communicated with Hu again.[230] Xu's relationship with Hu Zongxian and, by extension, the Yan Song clique, would now greatly affect him and his mental health.

The Fall of Yan Song

By 1562, the Chief Grand Secretary Yan Song was extremely fragile physically. His eyesight was failing and he could not read the emperor's handwriting, so he sent memorials to be drafted by his son, who was in mourning in Jiangxi. The process of sending memorials south and waiting for replies was costly and time consuming, and Yan Song was losing his

[228] According to the *History of the Ming,* "General Qi Jiguang with his own hands killed the enemy leader 繼光手殲魁." See "The Biography of Qi Jiguang" (戚繼光傳) in Zhang Tingyu, ed., *Ming shi,* p. 5610.
[229] XWJ, p. 342.
[230] For more details on Xu Jie and his relationship with Hu Zongxian, see Dardess, *A Political Life in Ming China,* p. 96.

usefulness to the emperor.[231] A new Daoist diviner at court also went against Yan Song.[232] The final straw came when the emperor's palace burned down and Yan Song baulked at the cost of rebuilding it. The rival Grand Secretary Xu Jie saw his long awaited opportunity and gained the emperor's favour by supporting the palace's reconstruction.[233] After two decades, Yan was finally driven out of office following the impeachment of censor Zou Yinglong, and Yan's son sent to exile in Guangdong.[234] Yan Song died in 1565 alone and penniless.

Xu Jie could now purge the court of the Yan clique. In December 1562, Supervising Secretary Lu Fengyi impeached Hu Zongxian for befriending pirate leaders Wang Zhi and his gang, squandering revenue and other improper conduct. Hu was arrested and brought to the capital for investigation. Because of his service, however, the emperor refused to have him punished and sent him home.[235]

While the enemies of Yan Song began impeaching Hu Zongxian, they also tried to woo Hu's staff to their side. A close political ally of the Grand Secretary Xu Jie, the Minister of Rites Li Chunfang 李春芳 (1512-1585),[236] was passing through Hangzhou on business. Li had heard of Xu's talent, asked to meet him and offered Xu a position on his staff. The Minister of Rites was the position held by Xu Jie before he became a Grand Secretary and

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[231] DMB, pp. 1586-1591

[232] DMB, pp. 1586-1591. See also Dardess, *A Political Life in Ming China*, p. 141.

[233] DMB, pp. 1586-1591.

[234] Lin Run warned the court that Yan Shifan did not proceed to his place of exile, but instead went to Jiangxi, plotting rebellion. It was at this point in 1564 that the court ordered him back to Beijing under arrest. It was still not until 1565, after another impeachment and trial, that Yan Shifan was executed. DMB, pp. 1586-1591.

[235] DMB, pp. 631-638.

[236] Li Chunfang 李春芳 (1511-1585) *zi* Zishi 子實, *hao* Shilu 石麓, was number one *jinshi* degree winner in 1547, an ally of Xu Jie and opponent of Yan Song. He entered the Grand Secretariat in 1565 and became Chief Grand Secretary from 1568-1571. When Xu Wei was employed unhappily in his office, he was Minister of Rites. During his political career, Li was most concerned with relations with the Mongols and supported the military's proposal to construct watchtowers along the line of defence in the northeast. See DMB, pp. 818-819. See also Dardess, *A Political Life in Ming China*, p. 151.

Li Chunfang would also eventually become Grand Secretary for a short while. An offer to work with the Ministry of Rites in Beijing was an offer that could not be refused and so, in the winter of 1563, Xu went to Beijing to work as Li's secretary. [237]

Once in the capital, Xu realised he was working now for the political enemies of Yan Song and therefore the enemeies of Hu Zongxian. Xu was extremely dissatisfied and disappointed with working for Minister Li Chunfang. In 1564, after only a few months, he petitioned for a leave of absence to return south to take the exams. Xu narrated at length the dispute:

> In the winter, I answered a summons from Li Chunfang and went to the capital. In the second month, I resigned from Mr Li's [service] and returned home. In the autumn, Li strongly pressured me to re enter his service. I [tried to] return all of the money that accompanied his invitation, but his refusal to accept it put me in a difficult position. Now, the gift was in the amount of sixty taels of silver, which came from Li's disciple, a Mr Zha in Hangzhou. When I first received notice of Li's threatening attitude, I took [the money] back to Zha, but Zha would not accept it. So I sent the money back to Li, but Li would not accept it either, which is why I say it caused me difficulty. In this, the jiazi year, I was supposed to take the examination, but because of this business I was robbed of the chance. Later I finally abandoned the examination path. When I say in the text above, "a long farewell," it is a reference to this.
>
> 冬，赴李氏招入京。仲春，辭李氏歸。秋，李聲怖我復入。盡歸其聘，不内以苦之。盖聘之銀爲两，满六十，出李之門人杭查氏。予始聞怖，持以内查，查不内，故持以此歸李，李復不内，故曰苦之。是岁甲子，當科，而以是故奪。後竟廢考，上文曰长别者是也。[238]

Xu tried to return the money that accompanied his original invitation but Minister Li refused to accept it. Xu then appealed to a Mr Zha, one of Li's disciples who had introduced him, but Zha also refused to take back the money and advised him to stay in Beijing. Xu stayed in Beijing but he was still dissatisfied. In his "Letter to Minister Li", he

[237] On his journey north, Xu wrote several poems. See "Sending off Ding Xiaofu at Tiger Hill" in XWJ, p. 818; "Entering the Capital" in XWJ, p. 179; and "Presented to Minister Li on his Birthday", in XWJ, p. 227.
[238] XWJ, p. 1329.

explained his grievances at length.[239] Xu eventually returned home to Shaoxing in the winter of 1564. Ryor argued that Xu's "concerted attempt to stress his honourable intentions in the messy affair with Li Chunfang may be intended to create an impression of persecution by powerful and influential men."[240]

After the fall of Yan Song from power, Xu Jie was more eager to crush Hu, a potential rival. In 1565, a golden opportunity came to Xu Jie when a protégé of Hu Zongxian and confident of Yan Shifan, Luo Longwen 羅龍文, was executed and his estate confiscated.[241] Among his possessions was a letter from Hu Zongxian asking Luo to present a bribe to Yan Shifan. The evidence was an opportunity to reopen the case against Hu for his connection to the Yan clique, and Hu was once more on trial in Beijing. However, Hu died in prison awaiting trial, under unclear circumstances.[242] Some say he committed suicide by taking poison; others say he was poisoned by his enemies.

When Hu was on trial, Mao Kun and Shen Mingchen 沈明臣 (1518-1596), both members of Hu's staff, wrote strong pleas on his behalf.[243] Xu remained conspicuously silent, as was the case with Shen Lian. Hu had ushered in Xu's most successful period in his life, offering Xu not just money but social connections and prestige. How could Xu remain silent when his greatest patron was under attack? As we can see from the example of Hu's other protégé Luo Longwen above, it was a dangerous time to be connected with Hu and the Yan clique.

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[239] XWJ, p. 1020.
[240] Ryor, "Bright Pearls Hanging in the Marketplace", p. 41.
[241] DMB, pp. 1042-1047.
[242] DMB, pp. 1042-1047.
[243] Shen Mingchen 沈明臣 (1518-1596), *zi* Jiaze 嘉則, established a reputation as a poet. Like Xu Wei, he was only a holder of the *zhusheng* degree and served as a private secretary to Hu Zongxian.

Despite Xu's inaction during Hu's trial, he was deeply disturbed by the news of Hu's death. Xu feared that he too would be implicated in the downfall of Yan Song through his connection with Hu, just as Luo Longwen had been. At this point, hoping to avoid the purge, Xu feigned madness, but nevertheless became fixated on suicide.[244] In 1565, Xu wrote his own epitaph (自為墓誌銘).[245] Xu's epitaph has been studied by other scholars elsewhere[246], but there are some passages which reveal Xu's fear of implication and show his interconnectedness with political networks.

Yet despite the fear of arrest and implication with the Yan clique, no men came knocking on Xu's door. Furthermore, Xu did not follow his master in death and continued to live. Nevertheless, Xu did become mentally unhinged in 1565. Xu wrote that he was "sick with *yi* madness.[247] Stabbed ear with an awl; but somewhat better in the winter. 病易。丁剸其耳，冬稍瘳。"[248]In 1566, however, he notes that "the *yi* returned, and I killed wife Zhang; went to prison. 易復，殺張下獄。"[249] Xu was extremely paranoid and suspected his wife of cheating on him. An argument ensued in which he beat her to death and was immediately imprisoned. [250] It is commonly said that Xu later smashed his testicles with a

[244] In Xu's self-written epitaph, he wrote: "Afraid of drowning yet jumping in early, scoff at [Xu] Wei; his head already shaved yet murdered late, pity [Kong] Rong; Like Confucius concealed in disguise, or Jizi feigning madness. 畏溺而投早嗤渭， 既髡而刺遲憐融。 孔微服，箕佯狂" in XWJ, p. 640. Many scholars, including Yuan Hongdao, have taken this to suggest that at first Xu Wei was 'feigning madness' 佯狂. See Chapter 2 for more details.

[245] The essay itself is one of the great essays of the Ming. It would have a profound influence, in particular on Zhang Dai (1596- 1679), who also wrote his own epitaph.

[246] Ryor, "Bright Pearls Hanging in the Marketplace", pp. 14-78.

[247] Ryor wrote that "I have been unable to identify this particular type of insanity. It does appear in the medical classic, the *Huangdi neijing,* but the symptoms that Xu describes of this illness throughout his life point to a type of *kuang* insanity, which is characterised by an excess of heat that manifests itself in violent behaviour." See Ryor, "Bright Pearls Hanging in the Marketplace", p.34. n.30.

[248] XWJ, p. 1329.

[249] XWJ, p. 1329.

[250] See "Written for the Seaman Mr Hua" XWJ, p.555. For Xu's own account of the murder of his wife see "New Years Day, 1566", XWJ, pp. 236-7; "Yang Daoren visited me in prison", XWJ, p. 238.

mallet, but there is no proof of this in Xu's own writings. However, we do know that a seaman named Hua helped heal him and prevented him from dying.

Xu was not released from prison until 1572, after Emperor Wanli had ascended the throne and a general amnesty was declared.[251] Xu roamed the country and found work here and there, but would never again find himself caught in factional politics in Beijing. As Fu Qiong has shown, Xu would no longer refer to himself as a "scholar of the realm", but as "mountain man", or "down and out fellow" etc.[252] By then, Xu had completely given up on passing the examinations and getting an official career, and began painting and writing calligraphy for various military patrons. Since his post-prison years were his most active with regards to painting, it is mainly on this period that art historians such as Kathleen Ryor have focused.[253]

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As we have seen, Xu Wei's life spanned both the spring and summer of the Ming: a time of flourishing intellectual enquiry, increased population, rapid urbanisation and economic growth, but also venal court politics, Mongol raids and destructive pirate incursions. Xu's world was a dangerous one. Both the Mongols and the pirates caused much devastation in the 1550s and 60s, yet those at the top in court seemed corrupt, ineffective and complacent.

The court politics that were taking place in the palaces of Beijing trickled down to the provinces and affected Xu Wei greatly. When Xu's close friend Shen Lian spoke out

[251] Xu was released on New Year's eve in 1572 and after a night of drinking and partying, he paid a visit to Zhang Tianfu to thank him for his friendship and assistance, see XWJ, p. 723.
[252] Fu, *Xu Wei sanwen yanjiu*, p. 18.
[253] Ryor, "Regulating the Qi and the Xin: Xu Wei and his Military Patrons".

against the failings of Yan Song and his clique in preventing the Mongol attacks, he was exiled and killed. Xu was greatly troubled by this, especially with his sense of duty and engagement as a loyal servant of the emperor.

Only a few years after the death of Shen Lian by the Yan Song clique, however, Xu would be employed by Yan Song's network as a ghostwriter and advisor to Hu Zongxian, fighting Japanese pirates along the coast. Hu Zongxian ushered in a period of success in Xu's life, but also much moral ambiguity, as Xu had to write notes and birthday wishes to Yan Song.

In a twist of fate, however, Hu Zongxian and Xu Wei fell with Yan Song. Xu's connection to Hu Zongxian and his writings for Hu made him a suspect member of the now-fallen Yan clique, and he tried to distance himself from the clique in prefaces to his ghost writings. Xu's engagement and belief that "benefitting people 利人" was equal to the path of sagehood ended in disillusionment and frustration. The complexity of Xu's frustrated loyalty, linked to the aforementioned political decay, will be explored in further detail in the next chapter.

Chapter 2: Muddy Waters

Xu Wei's Predicament of Loyalty

> "*Loyalty is a word which has worked vast harm; for it has been made to trick men into being 'loyal' to a thousand iniquities, whereas true loyalty should have been to themselves."*
>
> *Mark Twain*[254]

In this chapter, I will show a very different Xu Wei from the one-dimensional, disengaged hermit-artist concerned solely with literary theories of authenticity. I will show how Xu Wei, the professional writer, used his writing as a tool to construct a persona that was politically engaged. Xu deliberately explored themes surrounding his conflicting personal loyalties in the complex political landscape dominated by the infamous Chief Grand Secretary Yan Song. As Xu was constructing the persona of a loyal and tormented friend, he made sure that his reader sympathised with his actions and anxiety. He depicted himself as anguishing over where to position himself morally, after the political sands shifted time and again. As a playwright, Xu was consciously aware that the role of the loyal friend was a script he was writing rather than a script he was living. Xu once wrote how we were all actors on one big stage:

帳頭戲偶已非真, The puppets performing before the curtains are already an illusion.
畫偶如鄰复隔鄰。 A painting of a puppet moves still further from reality.
想到天為羅帳處 But just consider that the sky is also a vast curtain:
何人不是戲場人。[255] Then which of us is not an actor on this stage? [Trans. Chaves][256]

In Xu Wei's playbook of loyalty, three individuals stood out strongly on the political stage: his close friend Shen Lian and his commander and patron Hu Zongxian, with the infamous

[254] Paine, Albert, ed., *Mark Twain's Notebook* (New York: Harper, 1935), p. 199.
[255] XWJ, p. 384.
[256] Chaves, *The Columbia Book of Later Chinese Poetry*, p. 316.

domineering Chief Grand Secretary Yan Song looming in the background but connected throughout. Xu moved between the Yan Song clique and the anti-Yan Song clique: from publically mourning for Shen Lian, who had been killed by Yan Song's cronies, to writing birthday notes to Yan Song on behalf of Yan's protégé Hu Zongxian;[257] from exchanging poems with Yan Song's agent Tang Shunzhi 唐順之 (1507-1560)[258] to writing briefly for Yan Song's political rival Li Chunfang. Noting Xu's political versatility, So Kwan-sai wrote that "it is interesting to note that Hsu [Wei] once served on the staff of Hu Tsung-Hsien but that Hsu was very resentful toward Yen Sung."[259] We may take So's observation further and see that Xu's career choices as a professional writer raised moral tensions regarding personal loyalty, which he explored in poetry, essays and prefaces.

This was not particularly uncommon in 16th century China, but it may still strike the reader as odd that Xu chose to engage with the issue in his writing so openly, publicly and confessionally. Xu's contemporary and colleague Mao Kun shared many of the same friends and patrons in Xu's circle, yet he did not put his anguish over these conflicting loyalties in writing. Indeed, Mao Kun was bound by a closer kinship to both Shen Lian and

[257]The scholar Fu Qiong has calculated that during Xu's five years of service to Hu Zongxian, he wrote no less than 122 articles! See Fu Qiong, *Xu Wei sanwen yanjiu*, p. 3.

[258]Tang Shunzhi 唐順之 (1507-1560) *zi* Yingde 應德, *hao* Jingchuan 荊川, *jinshi* 1529 as top of the metropolitan list, was leader of the Tang-Song School of literature that advocated a return to the classical prose style of that age. Tang Shunzhi's ideas regarding authenticity in literature via one's "original nature" (*bense* 本色) had an enormous influence on Xu. He was a talented literatus who, like Xu, also devoted himself to military affairs and joined Hu Zongxian's staff. When he came to Shaoxing to discuss military affairs with Hu Zongxian, he met with Xu Wei on a boat and discussed literature. Tang was a polymath interested in literature, mathematics, astronomy and military affairs. He dallied for a time in the Wang Yangming School, followed Li Dongyang 李東陽 (1441-1516) and the Early Seven Masters, but found it too constraining. In 1529, he became enamoured with the evangelist ideas of Wang Ji. He was first attached to the Hanlin Academy but, according to Dardess, was too "self-willed, eccentric, and ascetic to be content patiently to climb the bureaucratic ladder." In 1538, he was forced to retire by Chief Grand Secretary Zhang Fujing 張孚敬 (1475-1539). However, when Zhang died, he returned to Beijing in 1539 as a tutor to the heir apparent, along with Luo Hongxian 羅洪先 (1504-1564) and Zou Shouyi 鄒守益 (1491-1562). In 1558, on a whim, he volunteered to join the staff of Hu Zongxian fighting piracy. See DMB, pp 1435-38; XWJ, p. 66 and 766. See also Dardess, John, *Ming China 1368-1644: A Concise History of Resilient Empire* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 2012), p. 105. See also Zhang Tingyu, ed., *Ming shi,* p. 5422.

[259] So Kwan-sai, *Japanese Piracy in Ming China during the 16th Century*, p. 141, n 5.

Hu Zongxian as year-mates, since they had all passed the metropolitan examinations in the same year of 1538. Like Xu, Mao was also caught in the political crossfire. Mao sent money to the exiled Shen Lian, a bitter enemy of Yan Song. Yet conversely, Mao was close to Tang Shunzhi, an agent of Yan Song. Following the downfall of the powerful Chief Grand Secretary Yan Song in 1562, Commander Hu Zongxian was arrested in 1565. Mao also wrote a strong defence of Hu Zongxian, who was a protégé of Yan Song. In fact, Mao and Shen Mingchen went further than Xu. They defended Hu Zongxian, something which Xu neglected to do.

And yet, Mao did not write so openly or defensively about his own personal conflicts of loyalty. But Xu did. For instance, in 1565, after Hu's death, Xu wrote his "Self-written Epitaph" (自爲墓志銘) before committing several gruesome suicide attempts. In this epitaph, Xu played up his moral integrity. In addition to the epitaph, he wrote defensive prefaces to his collection of fawning ghostwritten materials, which had been penned on Hu's behalf. Responding to some of the ghostwritings that might have implicated him in factional politics, Xu wrote "people cannot fault me! 人不能病余!"[260] and "writings of the hand are of the kind that does not come from the heart 書於手者，類不出於其心".[261] This shows a much more complex and conflicted Xu Wei from the one in his other writings and from what most other scholars have shown. Xu is more than the advocate of literary authenticity and rugged artistic individualism as encapsulated in his theory of *bense*.

Xu distanced himself from his ghostwritten works. However, in the eulogies and poems written for Shen Lian and Hu Zongxian, his friends who had died unreasonably in the

[260] XWJ, p. 536.
[261] XWJ, p. 518.

political crossfire, Xu responded by following the paradigm set by the Han dynasty historian Sima Qian 司馬遷 (145 or 135 – 86 BCE) and by calling himself "The Unofficial Historian Xu Wei 外史徐渭".[262] This was an attempt to clothe himself in the moral legitimacy of a didactic historian. In doing so, he appealed to didactic Confucian ideas regarding the moral universe, as well as Sima Qian's own position as a key symbol of this didactic historical tradition.

Xu's history poetry reflected the political maelstrom of his own age. In one poem on the unfairly treated Han dynasty General Han Xin 韓信 (died 196 BCE), for example, Xu wrote the following couplet:

暗中朱碧知誰是，Amidst the darkness who can tell between the vermillion and the azure
濁水渾魚每相似。[263] In the muddy waters fish all look alike.

In the dark political days of Emperor Jiajing's reign, moral positions were naturally ambiguous. "Vermillion" could not be told apart from "azure" and it was impossible to tell where moral authority lay, if it did indeed lie with anyone. In the "muddy waters" of court politics, any faction or clique seemed as good as another.

In Xu's writings, a dichotomy emerges. On the one hand, Xu the didactic poet-historian wrote eulogies and poems of Shen Lian and Hu Zongxian that turned them into paragons of virtue, comparable to tragic heroes from history. On the other hand, Xu also wrote poems and prefaces expressing how ancient ideals of virtue could no longer be lived out in his age. A transition is thus visible in Xu's work as he became more despondent and

[262] XWJ, p. 624.
[263] XWJ, p. 133.

frustrated at the realisation of his own failure to live up to the impossible moral standards he wrote about as a poet-historian. Through his writings, Xu shows us the complexity and anxiety surrounding personal loyalty in 16th century China.

Shen Lian: The Construction of a Martyr

As a member of the prestigious Embroidered Guard,[264] Shen Lian was once held in great esteem. Nevertheless, he fell out of favour with Yan Song and the Emperor after submitting his memorial criticising Yan Song.[265] Xu Wei wrote that after Shen Lian had been demoted, many abandoned him and dared not be associated with him:

> When Master Shen was at the height of his life, carriages and those on horses [i.e. officials of rank] gathered at his gate like flowing water, but when disaster arose, you could catch sparrows at the door with a net [i.e completely deserted],[266] among those who did not abandon him were Zhang Yongjia and Hu Zhaochen from Sunye. However, these two in the end because of this met with disaster, how tragic!
>
> 沈大夫盛時，車騎集門如流水，及禍起，門可張雀羅，所不去者永嘉張尚寶遜業鄉人胡通政朝臣耳。然兩公者卒以此得禍，悲夫！[267]

[264] The *Jinyiwei* 錦衣衛, literally "brocade-clad guard", was the Imperial military secret police that served as personal bodyguards of the emperor. Founded in 1368 by Zhu Yuanzhang, they were bound to the emperor alone and authorised to overrule judicial proceedings in prosecutions, with full autonomy granted to arrest, interrogate and punish anyone without due process, including nobles and the emperor's relatives. See Hucker, Charles O., "Governmental Organization of the Ming Dynasty", in *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* vol 21 (Dec., 1958), p. 60. See also Hucker, Charles O. "Ming Government", in Mote and Twitchett, eds., *The Cambridge History of China: Volume 8*, pp. 100-101.

[265] Shen Lian was angered by the incompetence of the officials who were responsible for guarding the capital during the Mongol incursion of 1550. In his pamphlet "Ten Big Crimes", he later attempted to impeach Yan Song by demonstrating how Yan was leading the empire to ruin. For this, Shen Lian was arrested, flogged and sent into exile. See the Chapter 1 for more details.

[266] "Catch sparrows at the door with a net" is a stock phrase used to signify someone who has lost political favour and become isolated. It was even used by the warlord Wu Peifu 吳佩孚 (1874-1939), in a poem he wrote in 1928. See "A Tuchun's Lament", *Times* (London), Nov. 20, 1928.

[267] XWJ, p. 624.

However, where was Xu Wei during this time? Had Xu also abandoned Shen during his crisis? As Xu confesses in his later writings, it would seem so. Shen Lian's friend Mao Kun wrote, "Since his death, the scholars from the court, however, dare not bring his case forward. 既沒而中朝之士雖不敢訟言其事". [268] Despite writing Shen's biography and numerous poems after Shen's death, Xu wrote no public defence of Shen while he was alive and certainly nothing was written about Shen's wife, lady Xu, whom some argue was related to Xu Wei.[269] If Shen Lian's widow was indeed related to Xu, then Xu's silence is even more difficult to explain. In stark contrast, Xu's contemporary Mao Kun (who would later work with Xu under Hu Zongxian and defend the latter), sent money to Shen Lian when he was exiled.[270] Mao Kun was clearly unfazed by any potentional accusations of pro- or anti-Yan Song sympathies. In any case, he survived the political turmoil.

For his part Xu confessed that he did not stand up for Shen. At the end of Xu Wei's biography of Shen, he expressed remorse and regret that he did not do more for him:

> Song Yu was Qu Yuan's disciple, when Qu Yuan died; Song Yu wrote some things summoning Qu Yuan's soul. I am not [Shen's] disciple, but this is simply because I met him too late. When [Shen] moved to live on the frontier, I sent him directly only one group of sorrowful poems[271]; [I] pale in comparison to Song Yu!

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[268] Xu Lun 徐侖, *Xu Wenchang* 徐文長 (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1962), p. 101. Cited from Mao Kun 茅坤, *Shen Qingxia ji* 沈青霞集.

[269] Xu referred to Shen Lian as "Shen the elder" or "brother-in-law Shen" (沈丈) in XWJ, p. 1334. For the name of Shen's wife see DMB, p, 1184. Supporting the theory that Shen Lian was married to Xu's sister or cousin is Wang Gang, ed. *Xu Wei*, pp. 53-54.

[270] Xu Lun, *Xu Wenchang*, p. 100.

[271] In the eleventh month of 1555, Yang Jisheng 楊繼盛 (1516-1555) *jinshi* 1547, another upright official who criticised Yan Song, was executed. Xu wrote poems titled "Ten Poems on Rain and Snow" (*Yu xue shi shou* 雨雪十首), which expressed his feelings about the injustice and sent them to Shen Lian along with some poems by Ji Ben. For Yang Jisheng, see DMB, pp. 1503-1504. See also the previous chapter and Hammond, *Pepper Mountain*. For the poems see XWJ, pp. 861-863. In particular, see poem seven on page 863: "Taking advantage of the snow to explore the plum blossoms he enters the distance out of sight, deep in the mountain's extremity a dragon is enclosed. Without telling how many thousands of feet in the deep night, with the snakes and worms he stays numb in the pit. (This year Yang Jisheng died). 趁雪探梅入杳茫，深山端合有龙藏。莫教一夜深千尺，却與蛇蟲共冗僵 （是年杨继盛死）。"

> 宋玉為屈原弟子，原死，玉作些招原魂。余於君非弟子，然晚交耳。君徒居塞垣時，余直寄所愴詩一篇，愧宋玉矣！[272]

Xu distanced himself slightly from Shen Lian when he wrote "I am not [Shen's] disciple, but this is simply because I met him too late" and confessed his short comings towards the friend he had once written intimate poems with.[273] In other words, Xu was constructing the persona of a loyal and tormented friend, while manipulating the reader and making sure that the reader sympathised with his actions.

After Shen's execution in the tenth month of 1557, Xu made up for his absence and wrote many piously hagiographic biographies, poems and eulogies for Shen. This was while he was under the employ of Hu Zongxian and by extension the Yan Song clique. During this time, he tried to explore the complexities of loyalty and duty and, by extension, his own difficulties with regards to these issues. He dressed the predicaments of loyalty in classical motifs, and indeed modelled himself on the famous Han historian Sima Qian. At the end of his biography of Shen Lian he wrote:

> The unofficial historian Xu Wei remarks: I read "Encountering Sorrow" and [Shen's] "collection of small talks from a whistling sword" and frontier poems etc; wringing my wrists and with tears falling I cried: Indeed, our master [Shen Lian] is like Qu Yuan[274]!
>
> 外史徐渭曰:余讀離騷，及閱青霞君塞下所著鳴劍小言集籌邊賦，扼腕流涕而嘆曰：“甚矣,君之似屈原也![275]

[272] XWJ, p. 624.
[273] XWJ, p. 169.
[274] Qu Yuan 屈原 (c. 339 BC–unknown; alt. c. 340–278 BC), was a poet and statesman from the State of Chu during the Warring States period. He committed suicide by drowning in the Miluo River when he lost favour with the King. The poems attributed to him and anthologised in the "Songs of the South" (*Chu ci* 楚辭) glorified the loyal minister who prefers death over compromising his integrity. See Qu Yuan and Hawkes, David, trans., *The Songs of the South: An Ancient Chinese Anthology of Poems by Qu Yuan and other Poets* (London: Penguin, 2012).
[275] XWJ, p. 624.

A quick comparison with Sima Qian's remarks at the end of the biography of Qu Yuan 屈原 (C. 343-278? BCE) demonstrates how closely Xu was reading and emulating Sima Qian's work:

> The Grand Historian remarks: At first when I read "Encountering Sorrow", "Heavenly Questions", "Summons of the Soul" and "Grieving for Ying", I was moved to pity by his determination.
>
> 太史公曰：余讀離騷 天問 招魂 哀郢，悲其志。[276]

Xu's historiographical models and ideals of "praise and blame" (*Baobian* 褒貶) were in keeping with a tradition crystallised by Sima Qian. Xu, therefore, took on Sima Qian's mode of judgement when writing about Shen Lian, which immediately cast both Shen and himself in the same light as tragic heroes from history. Xu not only appealed to didactic Confucian ideas of history, he also appealed to Sima Qian's own position as a key symbol of this didactic historical tradition. Indeed, the late Ming bibliophile Zhong Renjie 鐘人傑 (active c. 1634) argued that Xu's work was an outpouring of resentment and ranked Xu's plays together with "the historical biographies of the castrated historian [Sima Qian] 腐史之列傳".[277]

After Shen Lian's body was brought back to Shaoxing in 1565, Xu wrote a eulogy for him in front of Wang Ji, Zhang Tianfu 張天復 (1513-1573), Wu Dui 吳兌 (1525-1596) and another twenty or so people. The eulogy turned Shen Lian into a paragon of virtue:[278]

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[276] Sima Qian and Watson, Burton, trans., *Records of the Grand Historian: Han Dynasty 2* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), p. 435.

[277] XWJ, p. 1356.

[278] Wang Ji was the disciple of Wang Yangming and a famous philosopher in his own right. He was also a cousin of Xu Wei. See Chapter 1 for more details. Zhang Tianfu 張天復 (1513-1573) *zi* Fuheng 复亨, *hao* Neishan 内山, *jinshi* 1547, was an important member of the local Shaoxing elite, sponsor of Xu Wei and the ancestor of Zhang Dai. Wu Dui 吳兌 (1525-1596) *zi* Junze 君泽, *hao* Huanchuan 环洲, was a school

Eulogy for Shen Lian's Memorial Ceremony with all the Scholars and Friends

Alas! My lord's unusual marvellousness surpassed the extraordinary, [your conduct was] virtuous and clean, open and upright; of all the ancients, who could compare to you? In youth you were broadly learned, [your talent] travelled further than Jia Yi [Han dynasty poet and statesman, 200-169 BCE][279]; you requested to bind the enemy as prisoners, matching Zhong Jun [Western Han statesman, 133-112 BCE][280]; taking the sword you executed treacherous officials, upright and defiant like Zhu Yun [Western Han official] [281]. Only these several masters, can I use to compare with my lord's life.

As for my lord's death, you unceasingly scolded severely the powerful and treacherous court officials, leading them to achieve their end [of killing you] through the instrumental use of others. Does this not greatly resemble the impassioned and vehement naked Mi Heng beating the triple drum roll [criticising Cao Cao]?[282] These several masters' natures differed; do they dare gaze up to my lord's pure excellence?

What's more, just when there is peace, complying with the radiance of the sun and moon [i.e. a prosperous livelihood], then to unexpectedly meet with disaster and death, is it enough to rely on the heavenly way? Can it be that heaven desired to shorten my lord's life, so as to perpetuate my lord's name? Alas! The souls of treacherous officials are forever lost, but loyal souls do not die! Among the green grass of the severed frontier, which is my lord's tomb? Your son is a brave man, prostrating before the imperial palace recounting those past events, he returned my lord's remains to find a proper burial by the ancestors.

Which era did not have those [officials] that by means of loyalty meet with humiliation? [Fortunately] it is reliable that after the coffin has been closed; a definitive [fair] judgement will be made on their affairs forever after. [Fei Wu]ji [died 515 BCE] defamed [Wu] She as a hostage, Wu Yuan [Zixu] ran away, Wu

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classmate of Xu Wei and became an important military commander in the north. See Xu Lun, *Xu Wenchang*, p. 113.

[279]Fu Jie, *Xu Wei shiwen xuanyi*, p. 171.

[280]General Zhong Jun 終軍 (133- 112 BCE) requested to fight the Xiongnu and Nanyue. Xu compared him to Shen Lian and his request to fight the Mongols. Fu Jie, *Xu Wei shiwen xuanyi*, p. 171.

[281] The Emperor Yuan of Han 漢元帝 (75-33 BCE) was so enraged by Zhu Yun's 朱雲 (c. 44 BCE) memorial asking for his court favourite to be beheaded that he ordered Zhu Yun to be executed, but as the guards tried to take him away Zhu Yun held on to the balustrades of the palace so tightly that they broke. His life was eventually spared due to officials who argued on his behalf. See, West, Stephen H., and Idema, Wilt L., eds., *Monks, Bandits, Lovers and Immortals: Eleven Early Chinese Plays* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2010), p.176, n.26.

[282] Mi Heng 禰衡 (173-200 CE) was a minor figure during the Three Kingdoms period who was recommended by Kong Rong 孔融 (153-208 CE) to the warlord Cao Cao 曹操 (155-220 CE) for his talent. Cao Cao asked Mi Heng to join the government, but he refused several times. Mi Heng is famous for having stripped naked in front of Cao Cao after he refused to wear a required uniform when he was requested to play the drums at a banquet. The triple drum roll refers to the name of a drum song. According to the *Book of Later Han* (*Hou Han shu* 後漢書), after Mi Heng stripped naked, Cao Cao apparently laughed and said: "I meant to shame Heng, but instead he shamed me. 本欲辱衡，衡反辱孤". See *Hou Hanshu* 後漢書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1965), p. 2652. See also, Kwa, *Strange Eventful Histories*, p. 117, n. 1.

> Shang became a prisoner; nowadays the emperor is an enlightened sage, and released your son [Shen Xiang] to receive [you]. [Qin] Hui [Southern Song chancellor; 1090-1155] fabricated [Yue] Fei's crime, waiting till Yue Ke redressed the past; nowadays the emperor is an enlightened sage, and the injustice done to you has been earnestly righted. The benevolent monarch and upright minister, loyal fathers and filial sons, are all bound by the three cardinal guides[283], not just honour. Everyone in the village cries for you, reading aloud with deep sorrow their prose and verse, arousing the weak, this is not just mourning the dead!

與諸士友祭沈君文

> 嗟乎哉！公之奇瑰超卓，芳鮮而磊落也，将古之人，疇可以擬之耶？英年茂學，高蹈賈生；請纓係虜，齊軌終軍；借劍斬佞，抗蹤朱雲。惟斯數子，吾方以擬公於生。而公之死也，詆權奸而不已，致假手於他人，豈非激裸罵於三弄，大有類於撾鼓之禰衡耶？彼數子之駁矣，敢望公之醇精？矧遭時之方泰，依日月之盛明，乃遽罹於慘辟，胡天道之足憑？豈蒼蒼者将以短公之世，而欲以永公之名？嗟哉！奸魄永淪，忠魂不死！絕塞草青，掩公何壘？令子壯士，伏闕陳情，返公之骼，以妥先塋。以忠見僇，何代不有？所賴盖棺，事定於久。忌讒奢質，員走尚囚；今也聖明，釋拏於收。檜構飛罪，待珂始原；今也聖明，亟洗其冤。主仁臣直，父忠子孝，所係綱常，豈直光曜。聚哭傾里，朗誦哀章，将以激懦，匪以悼亡！[284]

The eulogy was a public statement of personal loyalty to Shen Lian in front of the leading men of letters in Shaoxing, and before the spirit of Shen Lian himself. In the eulogy of Shen Lian, Xu Wei made a survey of historical figures who had suffered unjustly for their integrity or loyalty and compared Shen Lian to them. The tragic heroes from history included the Han dynasty poet and statesman Jia Yi 賈誼 (200-169 BCE), who in turn wrote many poems comparing himself to the famous poet Qu Yuan. Qu committed suicide by drowning in a river after losing favour at court despite his talents, thereafter becoming a popular metaphor for the tragic loyal minister. Xu also compared Shen Lian to Qu Yuan as we have seen above.

[283]The "Three cardinal guides" refer to the relationship between ruler-subject, father-son and husband-wife.
[284] XWJ, pp. 1050-1.

Xu did highlight one major difference, however, between Qu Yuan and Shen Lian through his definition of a martyr. According to Xu, although both Qu Yuan and Shen Lian died in anger, Xu argued that Shen was executed by political opponents for his loyalty, whereas Qu Yuan committed suicide on his own accord. Thus, Qu Yuan could not be commemorated for his loyalty:

> Qu Yuan by means of resentment and Shen by means of indignation died equally, with coercion and non-coercion differentiating them. Although, to die without coercion is to have no means to commemorate staunch loyalty.
>
> 屈原以怨而君以憤等死耳，而酷不酷異焉。雖然，死不酷，無以表烈忠。[285]

Xu's criticism of Qu Yuan's suicide had a long pedigree dating back to the Han dynasty poet Yang Xiong 楊雄 (53 BCE-18 CE) and the neo Confucian philosopher Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130-1200), who argued that Qu Yuan's actions had strayed too far beyond the "golden mean".[286] As Schneider wrote:

> There were evolving in Chu Hsi's time strong new notions of loyalty and new models for them. It should not be assumed that Chu Hsi's judgement on Ch'u Yuan reflected any equivocation about giving up one's life as an act of political loyalty. He had said that "to die after having done everything according to the right way is the proper [political] fate." And he shared a common Southern Sung reverence for that age's leading hero, Yue Fei, the general who was executed by the Southern Sung court. Although Yue had been a staunch defender of the South against the northern nomads, he had questioned the court's foreign policy and as a result was silenced with a false charge of insubordination and suspected treason. Chu Hsi respected him not simply because Yue had died for the state, but rather *because the general was willing to oppose a policy he felt was not in the state's interest, and then accept the consequences of that opposition* [Italics mine].[287]

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[285] XWJ, p. 624.
[286] Schneider, Laurence A., *A Madman of Ch'u: The Chinese Myth of Loyalty and Dissent* (Berkley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1980), p. 76.
[287] Schneider, *A Madman of Ch'u*, p. 77.

Xu Wei's view on Qu Yuan's suicide was similar to Zhu Xi's. Xu admired Shen Lian more than Qu Yuan because he was willing to oppose the court's policy towards the Mongols, which he felt were not in the empire's interests, and accepted the consequences of that action. In another eulogy to Shen Lian, Xu compared Shen to the mythical bird Jingwei 精衛, reincarnation of the legendary Emperor Yan's 炎帝 drowned daughter Nüwa 女娃, who had the dogged determination to seek revenge against the sea by filling the ocean with stones and twigs.[288] Xu admired Shen Lian for fighting against the court despite knowing the consequences of his actions. In this way, Xu firmly resolved a long-standing tension in the notion of political loyalty. He concluded that it was better to be loyal to the interests of the empire rather than the interests of the court. Xu argued that Shen had displayed upright loyalty by submitting a remonstrating memorial against Minister Yan Song and dying for his actions in service to the Ming Empire.

On top of comparing Shen Lian with Qu Yuan and Jia Yi, Xu also listed the historical heroes Zhong Jun, Zhu Yun and Mi Heng. Zhong Jun, like Shen Lian, requested to fight invaders. Zhu Yun remonstrated with the emperor. Mi Heng humiliated the powerful statesman Cao Cao when he refused to wear a uniform when Cao Cao requested him to play the drums at a banquet. Instead, Mi Heng stripped naked.[289] Even though Cao Cao was secretly enraged by Mi Heng's flaunting of propriety he did not wish to show his anger, but sent Mi Heng off to Commander Huang Zu who eventually killed him. Xu argued that this resembled Shen Lian's dismissal by Yan Song, who sent Shen off to the frontier to be killed later by someone in the Yan Song clique.

[288] XWJ, p. 659.
[289] See note 282 above.

The comparison of Shen Lian to Mi Heng recurred frequently in Xu's poetry and was explored further by Xu in his play *The Mad Drummer Plays the Yuyang Triple Rolls* (狂鼓史漁陽三弄).[290] Xu also wrote the "Poem to General Shen" (沈將軍詩),[291] in which he stated that "Shen used the drums to arouse the ranks 沈以鼓吹起行間" and "Among the generals who compared with Master Shen, who studied books, studied swords and studied the Yuyang [drum roll] 將軍者誰沈家郎，學書學劍學漁陽".[292] Xu used Mi Heng's angry drum-playing as a metaphor for Shen Lian's open anger against Yan Song. In another poem, the comparison between Mi Heng and Shen Lian continued:

沈參軍 青霞 Colonel Shen (styled Qingxia)

參軍青雲士，	Colonel 'Clouds in the Blue Sky'[293] our gentleman,
直節凌邃古，	His moral righteousness like remote antiquity,
伏闕兩上書，	He humbly submitted two memorials;
裸裳三弄鼓。	Stripping off his clothes he drummed the 'triple roll'.
萬乘急宵衣，	The emperor hurriedly dressed at dawn,
當廷策强虜，	Holding court to deal with the powerful caitiffs.
借劍師傅驚，	With sword he [Shen Lian] shocked generals and officials,[294]
罵座丞相怒。	Cursing the assembled the Prime Minister became furious.
遺幗辱帥臣，	Sending him a [woman's] shawl

[290] XWJ, pp. 1177-1186. Shiamin Kwa wrote that the "bulk of the play consists of Mi Heng's thirteen songs of accusation, sung in northern style and accompanied on the drum with 'Yuyang' triple roll drumbeats. This is interrupted briefly by an absurd doggerel duet insulting Cao Cao, performed as a song (*ci* 詞) by two of his own singing girls. Finally, Mi Heng is summoned to serve the Jade Emperor, and a pair of messengers performs a duet to southern tunes praising Mi Heng. After asking for leniency for Cao Cao, Mi Heng sings a parting duet with the judge. The play ends with the judge remarking how satisfied he is often to have witnessed Mi Heng's performance, emphasizing again how it redresses the imbalance of justice that he suffered in his lifetime." See Kwa, *Strange Eventful Histories*, pp. 17-18.

[291] XWJ, p. 161.

[292] The late Ming official Zhang Zhong 章重, *jinshi* 1637, wrote that, in Xu's poem, Shen was originally referred to as "young chap (小郎)" but "[for] Shen [who] used the drums to arouse the ranks, everyone considered that calling him young chap was disrespectful language… so in the printed edition it was changed to 'Among the generals who compared with Master Shen' 沈以鼓吹起行間，世呼爲小郎，褻語也…刻本改爲'將軍者誰沈家郎'". Zhang argued that this ruined the flavour of the poem. See XWJ, p. 1345.

[293] The term "Clouds in the Blue [Sky](*qing yun* 青雲)" can mean someone who advances through the ranks quickly, but it is also a play on Shen Lian's style, which can be literally translated as "Rosy Clouds in the Blue [Sky](*Qingxia* 青霞)".

[294] The term "borrowed sword" is a reference to the proverb "borrowing a sword to kill someone 借劍殺人", which means to attack your enemies under another pretext.

he insulted the generals and ministers,[295]
籌邊著詞賦， [He was exiled] to plan border affairs at the frontier
and compose poems,
截身東市頭， His head dismembered in the eastern market,
名成死誰顧。[296] Your name establihed, who will care to look back at your death?

The poem refers to Shen's two memorials: the first volunteering to lead an army against Altan Khan's Mongols, the second impeaching Yan Song. The comparison to Mi Heng is made explicit with the line "stripping off his clothes he drummed the triple roll". Xu has once again used the example of Mi Heng's drumming against Cao Cao as a comparison to Shen Lian's anger against Yan Song.[297] Xu cheekily refers to Yan Song as the "Prime Minister", an office which had been strictly forbidden by the founder of the Ming. Clearly it seemed to Xu that Yan Song was again playing the role of evil minister usurping power. If Yan Song played the role of the conniving, power-grabbing Cao Cao, Shen Lian played the upstart maverick Mi Heng who tactlessly thwarted him. Following the Confucian didactic tradition of history, therefore, Xu categorised Shen Lian as good while Yan Song was categorised as evil. By casting Shen Lian as a paragon, Xu was also representing himself as a historian comparable to Sima Qian.

Like Sima Qian, Xu held the view that one lived in a moral universe where the good generally prospered and the evil eventually suffered. Yet, Xu understood that bad things happened to good people, as in the case of Shen Lian. History, according to Xu as well as Sima Qian, however, was balanced out by the universe. Given enough time, the universe would adequately demonstrate true moral principles. This depended on the efforts of

[295]This is a reference to Zhuge Liang 諸葛亮 (181-234) of the Three Kingdoms period, who sent women's clothing to Sima Yi 司馬懿 (179-251) in order to provoke an attack, since it suggested that Sima Yi was a cowardly woman. Sima Yi's generals were enraged, but Sima Yi remained calm, biding his time.
[296] XWJ, p. 67.
[297] Kwa, *Strange Eventful Histories*, pp. 18-26.

wise historians, such as Sima Qian and Xu Wei. Grant Hardy explained Sima Qian's views regarding the injustices done to the virtuous:

> Although individual justice is often impossible within a person's lifetime, the hardships a virtuous man must endure enables the sages of later generations to recognize him and justify his life through history, thus rescuing him from obscurity or an underserved evil reputation (this is the same process to which Sima entrusted his own reputation).[298]

This view was shared by Xu as well. It is also interesting to note that like Sima Qian, Xu also entrusted his own reputation to the same process of didactic history by writing his own autobiographical notes. Xu pointed out in *Eulogy for Shen Lian* that sons avenged their fathers or ancestors and validated the moral universe and the way of heaven. In this regard, Xu was talking about Shen Lian's son Shen Xiang, who had brought his father's remains back to Shaoxing.[299] Xu drew examples from Yue Ke 岳珂 (1183-1240), the grandson of the Southern Song general Yue Fei 岳飛 (1103-1142), who had been killed in prison by order of the chancellor Qin Hui.[300] Yue Ke's biography of his grandfather exaggerated many aspects of his life but consolidated him as a folk hero.[301] Xu was

[298]Hardy, Grant, *Worlds of Bronze and Bamboo: Sima Qian's Conquest of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), p. 126.

[299]Shen Xiang 沈襄, *zi* Xiaoxia 小霞, *hao* Shucheng 叔成. After the death of his father Shen Lian, Shen Xiang went to Beijing to clear his father's name. Along with other famous men from Shaoxing, he wrote letters asking for assistance. See XWJ, p. 560 and XWJ, p. 304. With the new Longqing Emperor ascending the throne in 1567, Shen Lian's name was cleared and Shen Xiang became a Secretary in the Ministry of Justice. Shen Xiang was also a painter of plum blossoms and a patron of Xu Wei, giving him a Japanese sword. See XWJ, p. 126, and XWJ, p. 131. According to Jiang Yingke 江盈科 (1553-1605), there was a joke at the time that while Shen Xiang was in prison, he managed to survive by only eating plums. See Jiang Yingke, *Xuetao xiaoshuo*, p. 241.

[300] Yue Ke 岳珂 (1183-1240) was a scholar official who devoted much of his life to restoring his grandfather's place in history after Yue Fei was executed by Qin Hui and the Emperor for effectively being a loose cannon in the war against the Jurchens. Sixty years after the death of Yue Fei, Yue Ke had gathered the documents relating to his grandfather's career as well as any writings attributed to him, and published them together with a life of his grandfather that was "piously hagiographic". According to Mote, "Yue Fei had acquired very large symbolic importance as a loyal and upright military leader who had suffered unjustly, it now was said, at the hands of a corrupt and evil Chief Councillor." See Mote, *Imperial China 900-1800*, p. 304.

[301] Mote, *Imperial China 900-1800*, pp. 303-305.

implying that Shen Xiang was the Yue Ke to his father Shen Lian. Xu was therefore openly praising Shen Xiang, with whom he sought to show that he was on intimate terms. At the same time, Xu demonstrated that he was an active participant of the same moral endeavour as Sima Qian and Confucius did: rewarding the virtuous, such as Shen Lian, by preserving their historical memory, and thus validating the way of heaven. In another eulogy that Xu wrote for Shen Lian, he said that Shen's name would live on after death:

> People all have pity on our gentleman [Shen Lian] how he could not extend his years a little bit, to witness personally that affair [the fall of Yan Song and Yan Shifan]. But they do not know that our gentleman's soul is conscious underground, taking delight that the two brutes [Yan Song and Yan Shifan] have already been removed, [saying] 'although I have died, I have not died' [i.e. my good name lives on after my death]. Alas our gentleman, your loyal blood has transformed into green jade,[302] your upright spirit formed into a star, bequeathed to the ten thousand generations becoming even brighter...
>
> 人皆惜先生之不得以少延其年，親見其事，而不知先生之靈有知於地下也，將欣欣然以爲苟二兇之已除，吾雖死而不死。嗟嗟先生，忠血化碧，直氣凝星，垂萬世而愈朗[303]

By 1567, the Emperor Jiajing had died, and the new Emperor Longqing ascended the throne. Longqing set about overturning many of his father's edicts when he realised that his father's long reign had caused much disarray. Many formerly banished officials were offered an amnesty or reemployed. Those that had died were posthumously honoured, including Shen Lian. At around this time, Shen Xiang was gathering support and funds for a trip to Beijing to submit a memorial, restore his father's name and find employ in the new

[302]This is a reference to Chang Hong 萇弘 (582-492 BCE?), who was killed by the Zhou after political infighting, but whose blood was preserved for three years by the people of Shu after he had been killed, whereupon it was discovered that his blood had turned to jade. He was seen as a paragon of loyalty. See Palmer, Martin, *The Book of Chuang Tzu* (London: Penguin, 2006), p. 77.
[303]XWJ, pp. 658-659.

government. Xu Wei was in prison for the murder of his third wife.[304] Unlike Xu Wei, Shen Lian's friend Mao Kun lent money to Shen Xiang for his trip north. Mao Kun wrote in "Preface to Sending off Shen's Eldest Son to the Frontier to Cart his Father's Remains back for Burial" (送沈伯子赴塞上輦其父參軍遺骼返葬序):

> My Lord's son Jingjiu [Shen Xiang] remained anonymous and fled to the mountain valleys, whereupon he called on his father's friends, disciples and old official acquaintances everywhere, and planned to draw a plan to bring his father's remains back home for a [suitable] burial. I thereupon gave him money from my pocket, and told him: Qu Yuan was loyal to Chu, for this reason he threw his body in the Miluo river without regret; Wu [Zi]xu was loyal to Wu, for this reason his body was made into a leather bag and floated down the river and did not transform[305]…[Shen Xiang] heard this and wept, and I wept too. I then gave him my sword from my belt and hung it on his left elbow.[306]
>
> 公之子敬久，匿名姓竄山谷,始服衰出,因以遍謁公之友及其門人故吏,將謀所以輦君之骼而歸葬之也,予於是解囊中金以投之,而告之言曰:屈原忠於楚，故以其身投汨羅而不悔；伍胥忠於吳，故以其身為鴟夷浮之江而不化。...於是敬聞之泣，予亦泣。因解所佩劍以挂之左肘.[307]

[304]See XWJ, p. 1329. Xu's third wife was named Zhang 張, and had given birth to Xu's youngest son Xu Zhi 徐枳. Xu's second wife was called Wang 王 and they were divorced after only a few months. Xu's first wife was Pan Si 潘似 (married in 1540), who had given birth to Xu's first son Xu Mei 徐枚. Pan Si was the daughter of Pan Kejing 潘克敬 from Kuaiji, who was deputy magistrate and student of law. When Pan Kejing became assistant magistrate of Yangjiang in Guangdong, he took Xu Wei with him. See XWJ, pp. 636-637. Unfortunately Pan Si died at the age of 18 on the 8th day of the 10th month 1546. Xu wrote, "My wife has been dead for ten years; her family took a son-in-law in, she wore her mother's clothes, a red luzhou gown, neck perspiration still fresh; I weep silent tears over these few lines when the night sky is filled with rain and snow.内子亡十年，其家以甥在，稍還母所服，潞州红衫，頸汗尚泚，余爲泣數行下，時夜天大雨雪" [Translation by Kathleen Ryor]. See, Ryor, "Bright Pearls Hanging in the Marketplace", p. 46, n.50. XWJ, p. 342.

[305]One legend states that Wu Zixu's body was hollowed out and made into a leather satchel, which was floated down the river. He became worshiped as a river God, and the annual Qiantang tidal bore was seen as the spirit of Wu Zixu in anger. See Durrant, *The Cloudy Mirror*, p. 82.

[306]Kathleen Ryor has written extensively on the craze for sword collecting and the exchange of swords as gifts. In two poems composed for Shen Xiang, Xu described foreign swords. "The first poem narrates Shen's purchase of a foreign sword in order to protect himself as he went north to avenge his father. Concerned for Xu Wei's safety, Shen Xiang later gave him this sword for Xu's journey home to Shaoxing from the capital." For the poems see XWJ, p. 149. The quote comes from Ryor in *Military Culture in Imperial China,* pp. 240-1.

[307]Xu Lun, *Xu Wenchang*, p. 100-1, cited from Mao Kun, *Mao Lumen ji.*

From this, we can see that Xu Wei was not alone in comparing Shen Lian's loyalty or his son's filial piety to Qu Yuan and Wu Zixu. Indeed, Xu was representing sentiments that were widespread. Even the most famous man of letters and arbiter of taste, Wang Shizhen, wrote a hagiography of Shen Lian.[308] Shen Xiang had mustered much support from the literati in Shaoxing. He used poetry and prefaces by famous men of letters, such as Mao Kun and Xu Wei, which he then compiled into the *Collected Works of Shen Qingxia* (沈青霞集). This was published in 1567 following the ascension of the new Emperor Longqing, in order to spread popular support for his cause to "canonise" his father.[309] Xu Wei was very much part of this "propaganda machine". In turn, it contributed to his own role as a loyal follower and didactic Confucian scholar.

Around the same time, with money and written statements from famous literati supporting him, Shen Xiang went to Beijing to clear his father's name. Xu Wei, along with many other such as Mao Kun, sent him poems, including this one by Xu:

送沈叔成[310] Sending off Shen Shucheng

> Shen [Shucheng] submitted a memorial to the emperor avenging his father, for this reason I used the affair of Sun Ce to compare him with.[311]

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[308] See "Tomb Inscription for the Honourable Lord Shen of the Ming Embroidered Guard who Presented his View" (明故錦衣衛經歷贈奉議大夫光祿寺少卿青霞沈公墓志銘) in Dizhi wenhua chuban 迪志文化出版, "Wen Yuange Siku Quanshu nei lian wang ban 文淵閣四庫全書内聯網版," Accessed August 14, 2015. http://www.sikuquanshu.com.

[309] Xu Wei also wrote a poem: "While Drunk I wrote this Poem for the Collected Works of Shen Qingxia. In bygone days a scholar of the realm was treated with favour; in the present we have the writings of the little lamb officer. Even though I'm down and out holding [women's] red sleeves for support, unconsciously I sing a tragic song for the fallen white cloud. 校沈青霞先生集, 醉中作此 曩昔曾蒙國士待，今朝奉校先生文。縱令潦到扶紅袖，不覺悲歌崩白雲。" XWJ, pp. 872-3.

[310] XWJ, p. 304.

[311] Sun Ce 孫策 (175-200 CE) was the eldest among five sons and one daughter of Sun Jian 孫堅 (155-191), a military general loyal to the emperor of the Han Dynasty. In 190, a year after Emperor Ling 漢靈帝 (r. 168-189) died, Dong Zhuo 董卓 (died 192) usurped power, placing a puppet emperor on the throne. Regional warlords in eastern China then launched a campaign against Dong Zhuo. Sun Jian rendered his service to Yuan Shu 袁術 (died 199), one of the leaders of the coalition. The attempt to oust Dong Zhuo soon failed and the region slid into a series of massive civil wars. In the next year, Sun Jian was sent by Yuan Shu to attack Liu Biao 劉表 (142-208), governor of Jing Province, but he was killed in an ambush. Sun Ce

沈上疏請復父仇，故以孫策事比之

稽山鏡水秀堪餐，	Ji Mountain and Mirror water are [beautiful enough] to be feasted on,
孝子忠臣古所難，	To become a filial son and loyal minister has been difficult since ancient times.
冰雪十年身尚在，	Through ice and snow for ten years you [Shen Xiang] are still here,
風塵一劍事俱完。	The wind and dust with one blow of the sword is settled.
青騾春蹀梅花暖，	Black donkey treads on the warm spring plum blossoms,
紅雨朝揮柏樹寒。	Red petals sweep across the cold cypress trees.
欲借伯符三尺手，	Borrowing Sun Ce's three foot sword,
高翻銀漢洗人間。	[He will] turn over the Milky Way and cleanse the realm of men.

Before the death of Emperor Jiajing in 1567, and even more so before the fall of Yan Song in 1562, Shen Xiang had to remain out of the public eye for many years while he mustered support and waited for the right time. With the new Longqing Emperor ascending the throne, Shen Lian's name was restored. The last line "turn over the Milky Way to cleanse the realm of men" refers to how Shen Xiang validated the moral universe and righted the wrongs committed against his father. Mao Kun was not the only one to compare Shen Xiang with Wu Zixu. In Xu Wei's poem on Wu Zixu, the issues of personal loyalty and filial piety came up again:

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brought his father's body to Qu'a for burial and found a home for his mother before heading for Danyang, where his uncle Wu Jing was the governor. There, he raised a small militia a few hundred in strength. This small force was far from sufficient for him to establish his own power, so in 194 Sun Ce went to Yuan Shu. Yuan Shu was very impressed with Sun Ce and often lamented that he had no son like him. He also returned Sun Jian's former division of troops to Sun Ce. Sun Ce eventually broke away from his father's overlord, Yuan Shu, and headed to south-eastern China to establish his own power base there. With the help of several others, Sun Ce managed to lay down the foundation of the state of Eastern Wu during the Three Kingdoms period. The *Records of the Three Kingdoms* (三國志) describes Sun Ce as a handsome man who was full of laughter. He was also a generous and receptive man who employed people according to their abilities. As such, his subjects were willing to risk their lives for him. See also Xiong, Victor Cunrui, *Historical Dictionary of Medieval China* (Plymouth and Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2009), p. 482.

伍公祠[312] Lord Wu's Shrine

吳山東畔伍公祠，	On mount Wu's eastern slope is Lord Wu's shrine;[313]
野史評多無定時，	Unofficial histories' comments are many,
	Without a specific time [when the shrine was built];
舉族何辜同刈草，	For what crime was his whole clan cut like weeds?[314]
後人卻苦論鞭尸。	Yet later generations discuss with bitterness
	his whipping the corpse.[315]
退耕始覺投吳早，	Retiring from farming he realised he sought
	refuge in Wu too early;
雪恨終嫌入郢遲，	Seeking revenge in the end he entered
	Ying with resentment that he was too late.
事到此公真不幸，	Events caught up with our gentleman here,
	how unfortunate;
鐲鏤依舊遇夫差。	To meet still with Fu Chai's[316] [sword] Zhuoluo.[317]

[312] XWJ, p. 285.

[313] Mount Wu is in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province. Fu Jie, *Xu Wei shiwen xuanyi*, p. 36.

[314] Wu Zixu's father, Wu She 伍奢, was a tutor to the Crown Prince of Chu. Fei Wuji 費無極 or 費無忌 (? - 515 BCE) was a corrupt official who was sent to the state of Qin to select a bride for the prince. However, the King of Chu decided to keep her for himself upon seeing her beauty. Having gained favour from the King, Fei Wuji convinced him that Wu She and the crown prince would start a rebellion, on the basis that the crown prince had been deprived of his bride. Fei persuaded the king to execute them all. Before his death, however, Wu She was forced to send a letter to his sons, Wu Shang and Wu Zixu, which asked them to join him in the capital. Although they both realised that this was a trap, Wu Shang still decided to go to the capital to die with his father. Wu Zixu's family was decimated and he alone fled to the state of Wu. When he arrived, he became a trusted advisor of King Helü 闔閭王 (r. 514- 496 BCE). The state of Wu then went to war with Chu and invaded the capital. For an extremely thorough and detailed account and analysis of these events, see Milburn, Olivia, *The Glory of Yue: An Annotated Translation of the Yuejue Shu* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), pp. 79-90.

[315] Wu Zixu had to flee the state of Chu, which was ruled by King Ping 楚平王 (died 516 BCE). According to the *Shiji,* when Wu Zixu returned with an invading army, he exhumed the corpse of King Ping, which was buried at the capital in Ying, and gave it three hundred lashes to exact vengeance (506 BCE). See Sima Qian, *Shiji* 66.217183. See also Milburn, *The Glory of Yue*, pp. 79-90.

[316] Wu Zixu had disagreed with King Fuchai of Wu 吳王夫差 (r. 495-473 BCE) over the matter of conquering the rival kingdom of Yue. Wu predicted that this rash action would lead to Yue's eventual triumph. Because of this, Fuchai ordered him to commit suicide. The story goes that Wu insisted that his eyes be gouged out and hung on the gates of the state of Wu, so that he could see his prediction come true and look at the invading Yue army. See Durrant, *The Cloudy Mirror*, p. 81. True to his prediction, Yue conquered Wu, and King Fuchai was killed (whether by execution or suicide is uncertain). According to the *Guoyu* 國語 (Discourses of the States) King Fuchai was reputed to have said: "If the dead have no awareness, then it is all over. If they have consciousness, then how will I face [Wu Zixu]? 使死者無知， 則已矣。若其有知，吾何面目以見員也？" See Milburn, *The Glory of Yue*, p. 18.

[317] In 484 BCE, this sword was given to Wu Zixu by King Fuchai with which to commit suicide. See Fu Jie, *Xu Wei shiwen xuanyi*, p. 36.

Xu's poem on Wu Zixu was more than just a narration of past events or even a comparison between Shen Lian and his son Shen Xiang. It was not written in an exchange with Shen Xiang. Neither was it meant as a preface for Shen Lian poems. What makes this poem so interesting is that, as a personal poem, it is a multi-layered exploration into the complexity of loyalty and authenticity, revealing Xu's own frustrations and inner conflicts. The scholar Fu Jie wrote:

> Later generations reproached Wu [Zixu] for his excessive behaviour that violated the way of the subject. The first four lines of this poem raise criticisms directed at the successive generations that reproached Wu Yuan, while the latter four lines condense the tragic events of Wu Zixu's experience, expressing sympathy with him. Narrating history in poetic form is in fact narrating the present, and Xu Wei, who endured a lifetime of frustrations, was here expressing the pain of never finding a sympathetic soul.
>
> 後代有責備伍員行爲過分、違反臣道者。本詩前四句針對歷代對伍員的責難提出非議，后四句則概括伍員歷遇的憾事，表出對伍員的同情。詠史其實是詠現實，一生坎坷的徐渭，在這裏寫盡了那種生前不得知已、身後不得知音的痛苦。[318]

Xu's poem on Wu Zixu has nothing to do with loyalty to the bureaucratic structure. All that matters is the corpse of his father's enemy: authentic feelings of filial piety spur Wu Zixu to whip the corpse of the man who allowed his father to die. This, according to Xu Wei, is authentic loyalty.

Wu Zixu, unlike his brother Wu Shang, bore the shame of not dying loyally with his father and clan. Instead, he continued to live in order to pursue his greater objective of revenge, and thus his position at the time was morally ambiguous. To Xu, Wu Zixu represented someone who had rejected a "small" principle to complete a larger goal, namely avenging his father. Xu was agonising here over his own moral position with Shen Lian. On one level, this poem could be read as a reference to Shen Xiang, who had to stay alive and not

[318] Fu Jie, *Xu Wei shiwen xuanyi*, p. 35.

die with Shen Lian so that he could clear his father's name. But the poem could also be read as Xu's own predicament of personal loyalty, to Shen Lian (or perhaps Hu Zongxian), insofar as Xu also did not die with either Shen Lian or Hu Zongxian, but lived on to write and restore their names posthumously in history.

In the end, Wu Zixu was unjustly executed by his King Fuchai for offering his sound advice out of loyalty. The last couplet states "how unfortunate" Wu Zixu was. Xu sympathised with Wu Zixu and how he was caught up in the difficulty of the times, and he no doubt felt that the story of Wu Zixu had resonance for him the 1550s and 60s, when loyalties to friends and factions were conflicting.

Xu wrote that he disagreed with historiography and could not understand why later generations had criticised Wu Zixu for whipping the corpse of the King who had ordered his family's destruction. As someone who accepted the didactic Confucian tradition of history – the main function of which was the teaching of moral principles – history without morals, or history that was false to moral reality, did not make sense to Xu. Xu argued that critics must feel that Wu's anger and his desire to punish a dead king was justified. His whole clan had been wiped out. Why, then, should history criticise Wu for following his natural loyal and filial emotions? Like Sima Qian before him, Xu took on the role of the sage-historian. He saw it as his duty to rescue Wu Zixu from historical oblivion and like "Confucius, set the lives of the benevolent, sagely, and virtuous people of ancient times in their proper order, as in his categorisation and explication of Duke Taibo of Wu and Bo Yi."[319] Xu's history poetry thus aimed to validate the way of heaven and make Xu himself an arbiter of morality.

[319]Sima Qian, *Shiji* 61.2121. Cited in Hardy, *Worlds of Bronze and Bamboo,* p. 126.

Years later, long after the death of Shen Lian, Xu was still trying to make sense of the injustice and establish his own loyalty. In the period between 1576 and 1577, Xu Wei served at the border garrison town of Xuanfu in Ming China's northern frontier.[320] Nearby was the village of Bao'an where Shen Lian had been exiled and martyred, and where a shrine to him now stood. The dangerous political storms of the 1550s and 60s belonged to the past, and Shen Lian's name had been cleared. Xu made a pilgrimage to the shrine, where he wrote this couplet and placed it on the gates:

公道自然明日月；　The public way is naturally bright like the sun and moon;
忠臣何意祀春秋[321]　How could a loyal Minister think
of being offered spring and autumn sacrifices?

Xu argued that a true and authentically loyal minister was not motivated by a desire for posthumous veneration. Rather, a loyal minister simply acts out of the public good because it is his nature, like the moon shining bright. The strong influence of Wang Yangming thought is clear. Xu argued that justice, along with other virtues, was not studied or cultivated, but was inherent. One must stay true to the authentic self to be a moral person, just as Wu Zixu stayed true to himself by naturally venting his filial piety in whipping the corpse of the King.

Hu Zongxian and the Yan Song Clique

While Xu was writing piously hagiographic eulogies and poems for Shen Lian and Shen Xiang, he simultaneously maintained relationships with scholars and officials closely linked to the Yan clique. One such man was the senior official in the Ministry of War Tang

[320] Xu was invited to Xuanfu by Wu Dui 吳兌 (1525-1596) *zi* Junze 君泽, *hao* Huanzhou 环洲, *jinshi* 1558, a native of Shaoxing and classmate of Xu Wei's. He was governor of Xuanfu in the 1570s. In 1576 Xu became Wu Dui's secretary and, through him, met many other military patrons. See XWJ, p. 729. See Ryor, "Bright Pearls Hanging in the Marketplace", p. 36, n. 34.
[321] XWJ, p. 1060.

Shunzhi, whom he first met in 1552 in Shaoxing. Xu had been introduced to Tang Shunzhi by Xue Yingqi 薛應旂 (1500- ca 1573),[322] and they boated together in Shaoxing discussing literature, where no doubt Tang's theory of *bense* was passed to Xu Wei.[323] When Tang departed, Xu escorted him as far as Keting, in the south-eastern suburbs of Shaoxing. Xu even recorded their meeting in a poem.[324] Not only was Tang Shunzhi a member of the Yan clique, he was also Yan Song's agent and wrote flattering prefaces to Yan's collection of poetry.[325]

Tang's relationship with Yan Song went deeper than just fawning literary works, though. In 1558, Tang Shunzhi wrote a report denouncing Wang Yu 王忬 (1507-1560). The Wang family were some of Yan's foremost opponents and Tang's report criticised Wang Yu for lack of preparation in the northern defences.[326] In 1559, Wang Yu was condemned to

[322]Xue Yingqi 薛應旂 (1500- ca 1573) was an official, teacher and historian. He was surveillance vice commissioner in charge of education in Zhejiang from 1551-1553, and oversaw the military and civil examinations of 1552, when he made Xu Wei top of the list for the *zhusheng* degree. He took an interest in the defence of the coast against pirates and wrote the 1561 gazetteer of Zhejiang province. See DMB, pp. 619-622.

[323]Tang Shunzhi defined "bense" (本色) in "Letter in reply to County Magistrate Mao Lumen" in *Jingchuan xiansheng wenji* (Jiangsu: Jiangsu Shudian, 1549). pp. 126-7. Tang wrote: "Now there are two people: one has a transcendent mind, the so called person with great insight. He has never set brush to paper nor read aloud in order to learn how to write a composition, but relies simply on his own feelings, and writes with uninhibited hand, as if he were writing a family letter. His works might be crude and unadorned but they definitely do not contain affections or stale clichés and hackneyed expressions. This is, after all, the best writing in the world. The second person is but an ordinary man, who concentrates on learning literary writing, and complies perfectly with rules and formal structure. However, what we find in his writings is nothing but bromides and truisms. We vainly seek in his writing any authentic spirit and eternal, imperishable insights. Even though his writings are perfectly composed, they cannot avoid being considered 'low grade'. This [explains the concept of] *bense* in literature." Xu Wei later developed the idea of *bense* in "Preface to Romance of the Western Chamber" XWJ, p. 1089. See Shiamin Kwa, *Strange Eventful Histories,* p.10 for an excellent English translation.

[324] See XWJ, p. 66. Xu obviously had a very friendly relationship with Tang. According to Tao Wangling, Tang was greatly impressed by Xu's achievements in literature and spoke highly of him. XWJ, p. 1339. Xu in turn regarded Tang as the only person who truly knew and understood him; forty years after Tang's death, Xu Wei, then aged 73, was still grateful for Tang's encouragement and assistance, see XWJ, p. 1333.

[325] Fu Qiong, *Xu Wei Sanwen Yanjiu*, p. iii.

[326]Wang Yu 王忬 (1507-1560), *zi* Minying 民應, *hao* Sizhi 思質, *jinshi* 1540, was a native of Taicang in the southern metropolitan province. He won favour from the emperor for his service in fighting piracy along the

death for military incompetence after a Mongol raid and executed in 1560.[327] After the death of Wang Yu, his son Wang Shizhen was one of the staunchest critics of Yan Song. He wrote the hagiography of another Yan Song critic, Yang Jisheng, constructing him as a martyr killed by the evil minister Yan. As the most influential man of letters of his day, Wang Shizhen's role as biographer was hugely influential in condemning Yan Song in history.[328] Caught in the tussle, Xu was torn in two directions. On the anti-Yan front, he felt sympathy for Yang Jisheng and was bound by his own friendship with Shen Lian. But at the same time, he was also friends with Tang Shunzhi, doyen of the Yan clique.

Xu also had a literary feud with Wang Shizhen, which made him less than sympathetic to Wang's anti-Yan camp. This comes across in Xu's writings. Wang Shizhen was leader of the latter Seven Masters, a group that advocated imitating Han and Tang models of literature, at least theoretically, if not maybe in practice. Naturally, he stood in opposition to Xu's theories of literary authenticity and expressing the self without copying or slavishly imitating the ancients. When Wang Shizhen harshly criticised the poetry of Xie Zhen, another member of the latter Seven Masters as "ugly, vulgar, childish and dull 丑俗

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coast in the 1550s. In 1554 he was transferred to deal with the Mongols in the north and made Grand Coordinator of the Datong region and Military Superintendant. He was later promoted to Vice Minister in the Board of War. He advocated strong military measures against the Mongols, placing him in the opposite camp to Yan Song. Yan Song was determined to reduce his power and in 1556, Wang Yu began to be criticised for military problems on the northern frontier. In 1558, he was denounced again by the regional censor of Shandong, as well as Tang Shunzhi. He was executed in 1560 on charges of military incompetence. See Hammond, *Pepper Mountain,* p. 102. His son, Wang Shizhen, was the greatest arbiter of taste and culture of his age, and was leader of the Latter Seven Masters literary circle which revered the Tang and Han, but rejected the Song models of literature. In 1555, Wang Shizhen went to great lengths in defending his year-mate Yang Jisheng for his harsh criticism of Yan Song, and assisted Yang's widow in the funeral after he was executed. Wang and his brother went to great lengths as well to save Wang Yu from execution. See Dardess, *Ming China 1368-1644: A Concise History of a Resilient Empire,* p. 107.

[327] Hammond, *Pepper Mountain,* pp. 102-3.

[328] Hammond, *Pepper Mountain,* pp. 102-3.

稚鈍”，[329] Xu Wei wrote an indignant poem attacking Wang Shizhen.[330] The attack was not related to court politics, however, and Xu Wei even shared some of the same friends with Wang Shizhen, such as Shen Mingchen. Shen Mingchen was also working for Hu Zongxian and thus indirectly connected to the Yan Song clique, but this did not stop Wang Shizhen from writing prefaces to Shen Mingchen's poetry.[331] The division of camps between anti-Yan Song and pro-Yan Song cliques was not always so clear cut.

It was in this environment of complex networks that in 1557, only a month after the death of Shen Lian, Xu began to work for Commander Hu Zongxian, a protégé of Yan Song, as his ghostwriter and advisor. Xu's talent as a writer was greatly appreciated by Hu, and in the 3rd day of the first month of 1558 Xu was called to write a memorial on the capture of two white deer.[332] The memorials were presented to the throne and the Daoist Emperor Jiajing was greatly pleased by the auspicious omens. The memorial not only pleased the emperor as a sign of good government, but it kept Hu in good favour, especially after his heavy losses to the pirates on Zhoushan Island.[333] Xu Wei was thus very useful and important to Hu Zongxian as a ghostwriter and secretary. As a ghostwriter to Hu, however, Xu also had to write fawning poems to Yan Song himself, the man who

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[329] Wang Shizhen, *Yiyuan zhiyan* 藝園卮言, in Dizhi wenhua chuban **迪志文化出版**, "Wen Yuange Siku Quanshu nei lian wang ban 文淵閣四庫全書內聯網版," Accessed July 28, 2015. http://www.sikuquanshu.com.

[330] See "Snow on the Twenty-eighth Day" in XWJ, p. 143. In the poem, Xu wrote: "Xie Zhen was his friend, why curse him in poetry? 謝榛既與爲友朋，何事詩中顯相罵？"

[331] Wang Shizhen, along with Tu Long 屠隆 (1542-1605), wrote prefaces to Shen Mingchen's collected poetry, *Selection of Poems from the Fengdui Tower* (*Fengdui lou shixuan* 豐對樓詩選). Dizhi wenhua chuban **迪志文化出版**, "Wen Yuange Siku Quanshu nei lian wang ban 文淵閣四庫全書內聯網版," Accessed July 28, 2015. http://www.sikuquanshu.com.

[332] XWJ, pp. 430-432.

[333] DMB, p. 635. Geiss, "The Chia-ching reign, 1522-1566", p. 503.

had ordered the death of his friend Shen Lian. This would create great anxiety for Xu regarding personal loyalty.

Hu Zongxian would usher in a golden age in Xu Wei's life, showering him with prestige, gifts and money. Chow Kai-wing records that Chen Jiru was paid ten taels of silver for writing a preface to a work by Wang Shizhen, one of the most famous men of letters of the day:[334] Xu Wei, by contrast, was paid 20 times more than that for one ghostwritten essay! With the 220 taels of silver he earned from his essay *Record of the Zhenhai Tower*,[335] Xu bought ten *mu* of land in the south-eastern part of the city of Shaoxing and built a large house. In 1563, he moved in to his newly constructed Hall for Remuneration of Words (酬字堂) when he was 43 *sui*, after years of rented dwellings.[336] The Hall for Remuneration of Words not only demonstrates how financially rewarding this period was for Xu, it shows how Xu publically announced that he was getting paid for his ghostwriting without any sense of shame. At this stage, being a ghostwriter was nothing he felt ashamed of. This would contrast greatly with Xu's later writings, full of anxiety after the fall of Hu Zongxian, when he was pushed into the defensive for his fawning ghostwritings for Hu.

The year 1563 was a bad one for Xu to openly declare that he was in the pocket of Hu Zongxian. In the same year that he moved into the Hall for Remuneration of Words, Hu Zongxian was arrested and taken to Beijing for trial, following the downfall of Yan Song in 1562 after his impeachment by Censors Zou Yinglong 鄒應龍 (dates unknown) and Lin

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[334] See Greenbaum, *Chen Jiru (1558-1639)*, p. 72, n. 55.
[335] XWJ, pp. 611-612.
[336] XWJ, p. 612. In 1550, a lawsuit with the Mao family almost pauperised Xu Wei when he lost his family's home and inheritance. The details of the lawsuit are unclear. From then on he had to take lodgings in temples or with friends. See DMB, p. 609. See also "Preface presented to my father-in-law" XWJ, p. 546.

Run 林潤 (1530-1569).[337] The attack against the Yan Song clique was slow but steady. There were still many partisans supporting Yan Song. Although Hu Zongxian was arrested in 1563, in light of his services against the pirates, the Emperor Jiajing dismissed the case but relieved him of his duties. Xu looked back on this period later, writing that he thought he was in danger just as he moved into the Hall for Remuneration of Words. In his *Self-written Epitaph* Xu wrote:

> [Xu Wei] stayed for two terms [in service to Hu Zongxian], and was conferred with silver by the hundreds, ate fish and housed in a cottage. People then argued he [Xu Wei] was prosperous and secure, but he felt himself deeply in danger.
> 留者蓋兩期，贈金以數百計，食魚而居廬，人爭榮機而安之，而己深以為危. [338]

Hu Zongxian survived for the moment, but was stripped of his power. Xu's position as Hu's ghostwriter was now tenuous and causing him some anxiety. As the anti-Yan Song clique gained steam in 1563, many officials who had been dismissed by Yan Song, such as Wang Shizhen, were coming back to power. It was precisely during this time that Shen Xiang was petitioning Xu Wei and Mao Kun, as well as other literati, to show support for his father Shen Lian.[339] Nevertheless, although Xu Wei was hostile towards Yan Song, he was friends with Tang Shunzhi, not Wang Shizhen. Hence, Xu did not oppose Hu Zongxian. The fallout of Yan Song's collapse would bring Xu Wei's predicament of loyalty to a crescendo.

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[337]Yan Song had been impeached numerous times before, but none of them successfully removed him from power. This was because Yan Song was always able to convince the Emperor Jiajing that the attacks against him were partisan and covert attacks on the emperor himself. However, Zou Yinglong did not attack Yan Song directly. Instead, he impeached Yan Shifan first for gross corruption. Yan Song had to step down and Xu Jie became the new Chief Grand Secretary. See Dardess, *A Political Life in Ming China,* pp. 140-144.

[338] XWJ, pp. 638-640.

[339]Mao Kun's preface to Shen Lian's collected works is dated to "The 15th day of the first month of spring of the guihai year 癸亥孟春望日". The guihai year corresponds to 1563. See Xu Lun, *Xu Wenchang*, p. 101.

In 1563, as the storm clouds were gathering around Hu Zongxian and those who were part of the Yan Song clique, Xu Wei was offered a job as a secretary in Beijing by the then Minister of Rites Li Chunfang.[340] Some have speculated that Xu agreed to work in the capital because this was exactly the same time that Shen Xiang was also in the capital and Xu wanted to help Shen.[341] However, it is more likely that after Hu Zongxian was relieved of his duties, Xu effectively lost his employment and needed a new source of income.

Xu proved to be very unhappy working as a secretary for Li Chunfang, who was an ally of Xu Jie, in the anti-Yan camp and trying to trap Hu Zongxian. John Dardess described Li Chunfang as "deferential in manner, slow to speak, fair-minded, never harsh or overbearing, and a bit lacking in talent and forcefulness."[342] Yet, some have argued that Xu's dissatisfaction with Li stemmed from his being treated like a servant.[343] In any case, Xu felt he was being treated unjustly and expressed his desire to leave Li Chunfang and tried to return the money that was first given to him.[344] Another reason why Xu wanted to leave Li Chunfang was because Li was in the clique that wanted to destroy Hu Zongxian. As the late Ming scholar Zhang Rulin 張汝霖 (1558?-1625),[345] a family friend of Xu's, wrote retrospectively:

> At the time his highness was engaged with lofty prayer, and [everyone] was eager to write *qingci*.[346] Those in power came to ask for [Xu] to work for them,

[340] See Chapter 1 for more details.
[341] Xu Lun, *Xu Wenchang*, p. 104.
[342] Dardess, *A Political Life in Ming China,* p. 151.
[343] Xu Lun, *Xu Wenchang*, p. 103.
[344] In his "Letter to Minister Li", he explained his grievances at length. XWJ, p. 1020. See also XWJ, p. 1329. See Chapter 1 for more details.
[345] Zhang Rulin 張汝霖 (1558?-1625), *zi* Yuruo 雨若, *jinshi* 1595, native of Shaoxing, was Zhang Dai's grandfather and the son of Zhang Yuanbian, a close friend of Xu Wei. As a child, Zhang Rulin was taken to see Xu Wei in prison. See Spence, *Return to Dragon Mountain,* p. 53.
[346] *"Qing ci* 青詞*"* are Daoist prayers that Emperor Jiajing was very fond of receiving. Many (including Yan Song and Xu Jie) who wished to gain the emperor's favour vied to send him these prayers. Li Chunfang sent so many that he acquired the nickname as a "*Qing ci* Minister" (青詞宰臣). Xu Lun, *Xu Wenchang*, p. 103.

> but Xu knew they [i.e. Li Chunfang and the anti-Yan clique] had a rift with Junior Guardian [Hu Zongxian] and so did not respond.
>
> 時上方崇禱事，急青詞，柄政者來聘，而文長知少保與有郤，不應。[347]

Li Chunfang eventually allowed Xu to return home from Beijing for good in 1565. However, in the same year, Hu Zongxian was arrested a second time following confiscation of Luo Longwen's property and the discovery of a letter from Hu to Luo. Luo was Yan Shifan's former security guard and had gone into hiding in Shexian after Yan Shifan was impeached and sent into exile (Shexian was home to both Hu Zongxian and the executed pirate chief Wang Zhi). The historian John Dardess has described what happened next:

> Against his father's advice, Shifan decided to use his great wealth and join Luo, who had connections with the bandit and ex-Wokou underworld of fighters and raiders. Allegedly, they further decided to gather forces to stage a rebellion. Whether these allegations rested on solid evidence is open to question.[348]

In any case, Yan and Luo were arrested in late 1564 and their properties confiscated. The new Chief Grand Secretary Xu Jie indicted Yan Shifan and Luo Longwen of organising a vast conspiracy against the emperor. On April 24, 1564, both were publicly executed. Hu was implicated when the letter to Luo Longwen was discovered. Hu had allegedly drafted an imperial directive exonerating him from all charges and Luo was supposed to pass this on to Yan Song's son Yan Shifan for submission to Emperor Jiajing. This was enough for Hu to be imprisoned again. Hu Zongxian then died on November 25, 1565, of "illness" in prison.[349]

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[347] XWJ, p. 1348.

[348] Dardess, *A Political Life in Ming China,* p. 142.

[349] Xia Xie 夏燮, *Ming tongjian* 明通鑒 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1980), p. 2471. See also Hu Guiqi 胡桂奇, *Hu gong xingshi* 胡公行實 (Jinan: Qilu shushe, 1997) p. 501.

When Xu Wei heard the news that Hu Zongxian had died in prison, he was living with his pupil Ma Cezhi and at night wrote "Ten White Rhapsody Prose Poems" (十白賦).[350] In the preface, he wrote:

> My Lord died at the hands of [Xu Jie][351], and I am living in Ma's house. While drinking, the candle has gone down an inch. In that time I wrote ten pieces, indeed not in criticism, but just in grief.
>
> 公死于華亭氏，余寄居馬家。飲中燭蝕一寸。尚成十章，諷固無由，且悲之矣。[352]

Xu Wei even wrote a poem on a painting he did of snowy bamboo, in which he used the *hao* of Xu Jie and Hu Zongxian to portray Xu Jie as a hunter of the sparrow, Hu Zongxian.[353] Soon after, Xu also wrote sacrificial papers mourning Hu Zongxian:

> Alas the pain! [When one thinks of] My Lord's self restraint, then one ought to reflect on their own mistakes. When people avoided havoc then one should think of My Lord's successes. Now though, no one thinks of these two things and so you have fallen into disaster. Alas the pain! When you were alive, In the beginning I dared not raise your self control, now that you are dead, how again can I dare to think of your successes and look at you in the end? It came to this probably because I am small and insignificant, holding these two things but with nothing I could do. I am just grateful that you noticed me, hiding my tears I cry in the rushes.

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[350]XWJ, pp. 47-49.

[351]Xu Jie's lineage was from Huating, in Songjiang prefecture, now Jiangsu province. See Dardess, *A Political Life in Ming China,* p. 1.

[352] XWJ, p. 47.

[353]See "Snowy Bamboo", poem two. "Lofty among the clouds the luxuriant old cypress tree, concealing falcons and hounds beneath on western embankment. With rapid heart hunting the sparrow in the plum forest, it perches on the wild and open snowy bamboo branch.萬丈雲間老檜萋，下藏鷹犬在塘西。快心獵盡梅林雀，野竹空空雪一枝。" in XWJ, p. 844. "Among the clouds" or *Yunjian* 雲間 was the *hao* for Xu Jie, and the old cypress tree is a reference to the southern Song Prime Minister Qin Hui who killed Yue Fei. "Plum forest" 梅林 was the *hao* of Hu Zongxian. The sparrow of the plum blossoms chased by hounds and falcons represents Hu Zongxian being hunted by Xu Jie and his gang. The political undercurrent of this poem was recognised by Zhang Rulin, who wrote: "In madness he painted snow pressing down on plum blossoms and bamboo, and wrote a poem that said 'Among the clouds the old cypress is level in the sky, the snow spirit Tengliu with impressive cold raises one hand; for what reason does he snap the bamboo and snap the plum blossoms, not leaving one leaf with the mountains and brook.' It shows his intense emotion. 狂中畫雪壓梅竹，而題云：'雲間老檜與天齊，滕六寒威一手提，折竹折梅因底事？不留一葉與山溪！'其感慨激烈之意." XWJ, p. 1348. The poem is slightly different, but the references to Xu Jie as the snow spirit, breaking Hu Zongxian as the plum blossom, are the same, as is the comparison of Xu Jie to Qin Hui.

祭少保公文

> 於乎痛哉！公之律己也則當思己之過，而人之免亂也則當思公之功，今而兩不思也遂以於凶。於乎痛哉！公之生也，渭既不敢以律己者而奉公於始，今其歿也，渭又安敢以思功者而望人於終？蓋其微且賤之若此，是以兩抱志而無從。惟感恩於一盼，潛掩涕於蒿蓬。[354]

Hu was attacked because of the fear that, as commander of a large force fighting the Japanese, his power was unlimited and he could have represented a great military threat to the empire. Therefore, Xu defended Hu by claiming, first of all, that Hu had great self-restraint. Although Hu made mistakes, one should not forget his achievements in suppressing piracy along the coast. Xu wrote that Hu fell from favour because people had forgotten this.

More importantly, Xu publicly highlighted his own feelings of guilt, which stemmed from his personal loyalty to Hu Zongxian. When Hu was alive and the investigation against him was just beginning, Xu did not dare to write pleas for Hu mentioning his good deeds. Xu berated himself for not having spoken earlier.

The dilemma of Xu's personal loyalty to Hu Zongxian was also explored through the filter of historical military generals such as Han Xin (died 196 BCE) or Fan Zeng (277-204 BCE) in poetry. Han Xin, the Marquis of Huaiyin, was a general fighting for Liu Bang during the Chu-Han contention, but once the realm was united under Han control, he was accused of plotting a rebellion and executed. Xu no doubt saw the similarity with Hu Zongxian, who was kept alive so long as he proved useful against the pirates; once the pirates were defeated, Hu Zongxian was arrested. In Xu Wei's poem on the temple to Han Xin, he expressed the dangerous ambiguity of political allegiances and the predicament of loyalty:

[354] XWJ, p. 658.

淮陰侯祠[355] Marquis of Huaiyin's Shrine

荒祠幾樹垂枯枣，　Bleak and desolate shrine beside some trees with withered jujubes,
黃泥落盡朱旗蠹。　Yellow mud encrusts the vermillion flag.
花桐漆粉綴鬚眉，　The paulownia lacquer[356] embellishes you,
　　the statue's eyebrows and beard;
猶是登壇人未老。　It is as if you, the man who ascended the altar, has not aged. [357]
半生作計在魚邊，　Half your life you made a living beside the fishes,
纔得河隄老婦憐。　Until you finally obtained the pity of an old lady
　　by the river bank.[358]
誰知一卷長竿去，　Who knew you would wrap up your fishing pole and go,
唾取真王只五年。　In only five years you easily became a real king.[359]
暗中朱碧知誰是，　Amidst the darkness who can tell
　　between the vermillion and the azure,
濁水渾魚每相似。　In the muddy waters fish all look alike.

當時密語向陈豨，　In those times you spoke on the quiet with Chen Xi,
更誰傳向他人耳。　Who passed this to others ears? [360]
丈夫勳業何足有，　What use is there in having the merits and achievements of

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[355] XWJ, p. 133.

[356] This refers to a reddish lacquer made from a species of paulownias tree. See Fu Jie, *Xu Wei shiwen xuanyi,* p.9. n.2.

[357] "The man who ascended the altar 登壇人" refers to Han Xin. When Han Xin was a great general, Liu Bang had built an altar to him.

[358] Before Han Xin became a prominent general, he made a poor living by fishing on the banks of the Huai River, "where some old women were washing coarse silk to bleach it. One of the old women noticed that Han Xin was nearly starved and she fed him, and continued to do for the twenty or thirty days until the bleaching was finished. Han Xin was very grateful and said to the old woman, 'Some day I will pay you back handsomely without fail!' But the old woman was offended and replied, 'I could tell you had no way of getting food for yourself, young gentleman, and so I felt sorry for you and gave you something to eat. What makes you think I was looking for any reward?'" See "Shiji 92: The Biography of the Marquis of Huaiyin (Han Xin)" in Sima Qian and Watson, Burton, trans., *Records of the Grand Historian: Han Dynasty 1* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), p. 163.

[359]According to the Biography of the Marquis of Huaiyin in the *Shiji,* it says: "In the fourth year of Han, having completed the conquest and pacification of Qi, Han Xin dispatched an envoy to report to the King of Han, saying… 'For the sake of convenience I ask to be made an acting king'. The King of Han replied, 'When one of my men overcomes a feudal lord I make him nothing less than a real king. Why should I make him only an 'acting' king?'" Han Xin was thus enfeoffed as King of Qi in 203 BCE, five years after he joined Xiang Liang's army in 208 BCE. See Sima Qian and Watson, trans., *Records of the Grand Historian: Han Dynasty 1*, pp. 174-175.

[360] In Han Xin's biography in the *Shiji* it says: "When Chen Xi was appointed governor of Julu, he went to take his leave of Han Xin. Han Xin grasped his hand and, dismissing his attendants, walked with him into the courtyard. Gazing up at the sky and sighing, he said, 'I wonder if you are the sort I can talk with… I have something I would like to say to you.' Han Xin schemed with Chen Xi to take over the empire. In the tenth year of Han, Chen Xi did revolt, but Han Xin did not join. He sent a man in secret to the place where Chen Xi was, saying, 'Just raise your troops! I will help you from here'. Han Xin then plotted with his ministers and in the middle of the night forged an edict pardoning all the convict labourers…intending to dispatch them in an attack on Empress Lü and the heir apparent." However, one of Han Xin's retainers had committed a fault against him and had been imprisoned. "The retainer's young brother reported Han Xin's dissatisfaction to the capital, sending a letter to inform Empress Lu that he was planning to revolt." See Sima Qian and Watson, Burton, trans., *Records of the Grand Historian: Han Dynasty 1*, pp. 181- 182.

	a great man,
爲虜爲王如反手。	When one can easily be made into a prisoner from a king like turning your hand.
提取山河與別人，	Conquering the rivers and mountains for others,
到頭一鑊悲烹狗。	In the end you became a tragic dog boiled in the cauldron![361]

In one line, Xu wrote that "amidst the darkness who can tell between the vermillion and the azure, in the muddy waters fish all look alike". Xu was conveying the idea that during times of instability and danger, it was difficult to tell the difference between right and wrong, or in this case "vermillion" or "azure". Who can know whom we should trust with our political loyalties or allegiances, when all the fish look alike. In one sense, Xu was justifying his own ambiguities.

Earlier, in his writings about Shen Lian and Shen Xiang, Xu made the issues of loyalty and virtue very clear, such as in the case of Wu Zixu's whipping the corpse of the King. In this poem, however, Xu was arguing that the virtue of loyalty was not always clear-cut. This change was due to the fact that this poem was written later, after the case of Hu Zongxian. Whereas before, Xu still held close to the ancient ideals of virtue and loyalty, by now he realised it was much more difficult to put these ideals into practice in 16th century China.

The predicament of loyalty was expressed succinctly by Xu in the line, "What use is there in having the merits and achievements of a great man, when one can easily be made into a prisoner from a king like turning your hand". In other words, how can we strive to be loyal or virtuous like a great man, when one is repaid for it by being arrested and turned

[361] As Han Xin grew more powerful, Han Gaozu grew suspicious of him and had him bound in fetters. "'It is just as men say,' sighed Han Xin. 'When the cunning hares are dead, the good dog is boiled; when the soaring birds are gone, men put away the good bow; when the enemy states have been defeated, the ministers who plotted their downfall are doomed. The world is now at peace, and so it is fitting that I be boiled!'" Han Gaozu absolved him, however, and demoted him to marquis of Huaiyin. See Sima Qian and Watson, Burton, trans., *Records of the Grand Historian: Han Dynasty 1*, p. 181.

into a prisoner. This could be a reference to Hu Zongxian, whose service to the empire in fighting pirates was repaid by imprisonment. At the same time, it could also have a second layer of meaning, reflecting Xu's own tensions and conflicts. One day Xu was advisor to a great commander, moving into a new large hall; the next moment, through no fault of his own, he lost his job and benefactor.

In another poem, this time on Fan Zeng, Xu Wei expressed similar sentiments. Fan Zeng of Juchao was Xiang Yu's 項羽 (233-202 BCE) closest advisor, so much so that Xiang Yu called him his "second father", hence Fan Zeng's nickname of *Yafu* 亞夫 (literally, "second father"). Xiang Yu was defeated during the Chu-Han contention against Liu Bang. Xu Wei pitied him because, like Fan Zeng, Xu saw himself as an advisor to the losing general in history (Hu Zongxian). Moreover, he was on the wrong side purely by chance, despite being a loyal and good advisor:

亞夫墓[362][Zeng] Yafu's Tomb

The tomb [I visited] is in Chao County; this also is a false legend.

墓在巢縣，此亦虛傳也。

王者從來云不死，	Those that rule have always been said to not die;
共疑隆準及重瞳，	Everyone suspects they have a prominent nose and double pupils.[363]
已占龍氣成天子，	Those already possessing the air of a dragon become the son of heaven;
卻幸鴻門敗乃公。	Fortunately at Hongmen your master [Xiang Yu] was defeated.[364]

[362] XWJ, p. 257.

[363]In the *Shiji* "the Grand Historian remarks: I have heard Master Zhou say that Emperor Shun had eyes with double pupils. I have also heard that Xiang Yu, too, had eyes with double pupils. Could it be that Xiang Yu was a descendent of Emperor Shun?" Sima Qian also wrote that "Gaozu had a prominent nose and dragon-like face, with beautiful whiskers on his chin and cheeks." See Watson, Burton, trans., Sima Qian, *Records of the Grand Historian: Han Dynasty 1,* p. 51.

[364]At Hongmen, Xiang Yu held a banquest and invited Han Gaozu, then known as the governor of Pei. Fan Zeng wanted to use this opportunity to kill Han Gaozu. He counselled Xiang Yu, saying, "When the governor of Pei was living east of the mountains he was greedy for possessions and delighted in beautiful girls. But now that he has entered the pass he has not taken a single thing, nor has he dallied with any of the wives or

一牧乳羊遮墓白，	A herd of suckling sheep cover the tomb in white;
幾株寒棗覆碑紅，	Several stumps of winter dates cover the stele red.
憐儂疽發不欲活，	Pity you,[365] your ulcer did not let you live;[366]
豈為人間少鄧通?	Surely in this world we don't lack for Deng Tongs?[367]

The poem's historical background is the defeat of Xiang Yu by Liu Bang in the Chu-Han contention. Xiang Yu did not take his advisor Fan Zeng's advice, and did not kill Liu Bang at the banquet at Hongmen when he had the chance. Hence, he missed the opportunity to prevent Liu Bang from taking over his empire. In the final struggle between Xiang Yu and Liu Bang, Xiang Yu was encircled and composed a song with the words: "My strength plucked up the hills/My might shadowed the world/But the times were against me". With a handful of followers, Xiang Yu burst through Liu Bang's lines before committing

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maidens. This proves that his mind is not set upon minor joys. I have sent men to observe the sky over the place where he is encamped, and they all found it full of shapes like dragons and tigers and coloured with five colours. These are the signs of a Son of Heaven. You must attack him at once and not lose this chance!" Sima Qian and Watson, Burton, trans., *Records of the Grand Historian: Han Dynasty 1*, p. 28. Sima Qian continued to describe the banquet at Hongmen: "On the same day Xiang Yu invited the governor of Pei to remain and drink with him. Xiang Yu and Xiang Bo as hosts sat facing east. Fan Zeng, whom Xiang Yu honoured as a father, took the place of honour facing south, while the governor of Pei sat facing north… Fan Zeng from time to time eyed Xiang Yu and three times lifted up the jade pendant in the form of a broken ring which he wore and showed it to Yu, hinting that he should 'break' once and for all with the governor, but Xiang Yu sat silent and did not respond. Fan Zeng then rose and left the tent and, summoning Xiang Yu's cousin, Xiang Zhuang, said to him 'Our lord is too kind-hearted a man. Go back in and ask to propose a toast, and when the toast is finished, request to be allowed to perform a sword dance. Then attack the governor of Pei and kill him where he sits. If you don't, you and all of us will end up as his prisoners!'" See Sima Qian and Watson, Burton, trans., *Records of the Grand Historian: Han Dynasty 1*, p. 30.

[365] In this unusual instance, Xu employed colloquial Shaoxing dialect where "*nong* 儂" means "you".

[366] According to the *Shiji*: "Xiang Yu began to suspect that Fan Zeng had made a secret alliance with Han and was trying gradually to usurp his own authority. Fan Zeng deeply angered, announced, 'The affairs of the world have been largely settled. My lord must now manage things for himself. For my part, I beg to be relieved of my duties and returned to the ranks of a common soldier.' Xiang Yu granted his request and Fan Zeng departed, but before he had gone as far as Pengcheng an ulcerous sore broke out on his back and he died." See Sima Qian and Watson, Burton, trans., Sima Qian, *Records of the Grand Historian: Han Dynasty 1,* p. 39.

[367] Deng Tong was an official of the Han dynasty. He lacked any real talent or merit but was famous for his good looks. He was a favourite of Emperor Wen (r. 180-157 BCE), and he was promoted and regularly presented with precious gifts until he was eventually granted the right to mint his own coins that circulated through the Han empire. Under Emperor Jing (r. 157-141 BCE), he lost favour and all his assets and revenue were confiscated by the state. He died a poor man. See Hinsch, Bret, *Passions of the Cut Sleeve: The Male Homosexual Tradition in China* (Berkley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990), pp. 38-41.

suicide.[368] Curiously, Xu did not highlight the similarity between Xiang Yu's defeat and death and Hu Zongxian's. Instead, Xu focused on the tension between the ruler Xiang Yu and his advisor Fan Zeng.

The focus of the poem is not on Xiang Yu, but rather on his advisor Fan Zeng. Fan Zeng offered ruthless yet true advice, but Xiang Yu could not bring himself to follow it and kill Liu Bang during the banquet. Fan Zeng thereupon resigned. The poem touches upon the tug-of-war between ruler and minister, and the predicament of loyalty. The historian Timothy Brook explained the predicament of loyalty in the Ming:

> Most everyone understood the loyalty clause in autocracy's deal between ruler and minister: only the minister can be at fault. Whether the ruler acts well or badly is of no account, because he is essential to the system, the foundation of the nation, and the only sure guarantee of the survival of his dynasty. Loyalty produced a situation that was a predicament both for the ruler who wished to override the real constraints on his power but could not figure out how to do so, and for the official who believed that there were constitutional principles higher than the obligation to serve the emperor but who could not hold to the one without suffering for breaching the other.[369]

In the poem, however, Xu demonstrated how the ruler, or Xiang Yu, was wrong. Xiang Yu's minister Fan Zeng offered advice that might have changed the course of history and brought victory to his lord, but Xiang Yu did not take it, and so he lost. Contrary to Timothy Brook, Xu was writing that the ruler acted poorly and was accountable for the decline of his empire. In the tug-of-war between ruler and minister, Xu pitied the cunning minister Fan Zeng who retired and died en route to his hometown. In the last line, Xu compared the wasted talents of Fan Zeng with the useless and talentless Deng Tong, who only by merit of his handsome appearance became a favourite of the Han Emperor Wen.

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[368] *Shiji* 7.333-36; trans. B. Watson in Birch, C., *Anthology of Chinese Literature* Vol. 1 (New York: Grove Press, 1994), pp. 119-22.
[369] Brook, *The Troubled Empire,* p. 103.

Clearly, this was the fault and doing of the ruler, loyalty to whom could prove unrewarding in the end.

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Xu's predicament of loyalty reached a crescendo in 1565 after Hu Zongxian died in prison. Now that Xu's own Xiang Yu had fallen, he wrote on his own anxiety and mental instability. This seems to have been a time of crisis for Xu. Xu himself wrote, "I was agitated by the times, and the sickness worsened, as if supported by a spirit.予有激於時事，病瘧甚，若鬼神憑之者"[370]. Yang Ye wrote, "After Hu was arrested and died in prison, Hsü began to live in fear of being implicated, and made several attempts to kill himself."[371] Jonathan Chaves wrote, "Hsü happens to have been a most unstable individual; having attempted suicide by smashing his testicles in 1565 (he was pretending insanity at the time)."[372] Xu's biographer, the Ming scholar Yuan Hongdao, described gruesome scenes of Xu having "cracked open his own head with a hatchet; blood dripped all over his face. His broken skull creaked when his head was being rubbed. On another occasion he jabbed both his ears with a sharp awl, which penetrated about an inch and half. But he survived."[373] The family friend Zhang Rulin wrote how the fall of Hu Zongxian shaped Xu's writings and poetry thereafter:

> Junior Guardian [Hu Zongxian] was taken prisoner, and [Xu] Wenchang feared he would be implicated and so feigned madness, which sought thereupon to

[370]XWJ, p. 555.
[371] Yang Ye, *A Hsiao-p'in Anthology: Vignettes from the Late Ming* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1999), p. 18.
[372] Chaves, ed., *The Columbia Book of Later Chinese Poetry*, p. 310. Yuan Hongdao and Chaves have claimed that Xu was "feigning" madness at first, but the madness then became real. However, this is unlikely. Xu became mentally unstable when Hu Zongxian's power was diminishing in the 38th year of the reign of Emperor Jiajing. When he was 41 *sui*, in Xu's self-written chronology, he wrote how "from this moment a spirit became slowly more prominent 自此祟漸赫赫". This became full-blown four years later, when he was 45 *sui* and jabbed his ear with a nail. See XWJ, p. 1328-9. Therefore, it seems likely that his illness had been developing slowly instead of being feigned when Hu Zongxian died in 1565.
[373] Yuan Hongdao, "A Biography of Hsü Wenchang", translated by Yang Ye in *A Hsiao-p'in Anthology*, p. 55. See also Appendix A.

> become real. The established resented the Junior Guardian's achievements and slandered him causing his death, [Xu's] anger at this injustice was endless, but he did not have the power to respond, this more often than not shaped his poems.
>
> 少保以緹騎收，文長恐連，遂佯狂，尋迺即真。居常痛少保功而讒死，冤憤不已，而力不能報，往往形之詩篇。[374]

The anxiety caused by the fall of Hu Zongxian led Xu to contemplate suicide, or at least write that he was contemplating suicide for fear of being implicated with the fallen Yan Song clique. In 1565, at 45 *sui,* Xu wrote in his *Self-written Epitaph*[375] that his actions were based on his own sense of morality and integrity:

> One morning Junior Guardian Hu [Zongxian] employed [Xu Wei] at his headquarters to compose essays. He went several times and several times resigned, throwing down his brush and walking out the door. When a missive was sent to summon him, he would not rise from his repose. People argued he was foolhardy and in danger, but he felt himself very secure. After this, the Honourable [Hu Zongxian] further humbled himself, equalling himself to a commoner; [Xu Wei] stayed for two terms, and was conferred with silver by the hundreds, ate fish and housed in a cottage. People then argued he [Xu Wei] was prosperous and secure, but he felt himself deeply in danger. At this point, he suddenly sought death.
>
> People said that [Xu] Wei was a literary scholar whose conduct was pure, so it was possible for him not to die. They do not know that among the ancient literary scholars like him who entered the tent [of a military commander] and whose conduct was pure, there were many who died. So [I] died for himself, why should I die for someone else? When Wei's righteousness was evaluated by others and was not called into question, he was unceremonious and careless, not bound by Confucian [propriety], as soon as his moral conduct was denied, implicated in shame, lying between corrupt and incorrupt, even if you cut his head off, you can't take away from him this [his steadfastness]. This is the reason for his death.
>
> 一旦為少保胡公羅致幕府，典文章，數赴而數辭，投筆出門。使折簡以招，臥不起，人爭愚而危之，而己深以為安。其後公愈折節，等布衣，留者蓋兩期，贈金以數百計，食魚而居廬，人爭榮機而安之，而己深以為危，至是，忽自覓死。人謂渭文士，且操潔，可無死。不知古文士以人幕操潔而

[374]XWJ, p. 1348.
[375] XWJ, pp. 638-640.

> 死者眾矣，乃渭則自死，孰與人死之。渭爲人度於義無所關時，輒疏縱不為儒縛，一涉義所否，干耻詬，介穢廉，雖斷頭不可奪。故其死也。[376]

Xu Wei explained that when he resigned and walked out of Hu Zongxian's headquarters, people thought he was in danger. Paradoxically, however, that was when he felt himself most safe. Furthermore, when he was at the height of his success under Hu Zongxian, he felt himself most in danger. Xu's seemingly contradictory responses must be understood within the wider context of court politics dominated by the Yan Song clique from 1542 to 1562. It is in this context of loyalty to his friend that we must understand Xu's paranoia and uneasiness with his success in connection to the Yan clique and their network.

According to the epitaph, Xu considered suicide when his integrity and virtue was being questioned. Echoing his eulogy for Shen Lian, Xu compared and contrasted his own circumstances with the predicament of ancient scholars who, though pure in conduct, were nonetheless implicated in wrongdoing and killed. Like Sima Qian, Xu was entrusting his reputation to the process of didactic history. By writing his own autobiography, he hoped that those later historians would judge him in the end to be moral and just. Nevertheless, Xu differentiates himself from the past scholars who were executed. Writing in the third person, Xu wrote:

> [Xu] Wei died for himself, why die for someone else?
> 渭則自死，孰與人死之。[377]

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[376] XWJ, pp. 639-640.

[377] XWJ, p. 639. This particular phrase has been translated in various confusing ways. Ryor translated it as: "But Wei died for himself; why would he be killed by others?" See Kathleen Ryor, "Bright Pearls Hanging in the Marketplace", p. 16. The Chinese scholar Fu Jie translated it into modern Mandarin as: "至於徐渭則是自己尋死，比起被人殺死來又如何呢？", which may be translated as: "With regards to Xu Wei, he sought himself to die, how does this compare to being killed by others?" See Fu Jie, *Xu Wei shiwen xuanyi*, p. 165. Grammatically speaking, however, it would be more accurate to translate it as: "Wei died for himself, who would die for others", or "why let others die for him", or "why die for someone else?", or "why die on someone else's account?" My thanks go to Dr Robert Chard for his explanation and the Classical Reading Group at Oxford University.

Xu aimed to present to the reader his anxiety surrounding the predicament of loyalty and elaborately tried to convince the reader that he wished to commit suicide for lofty moral and ethical reasons. Xu denied any romanticised loyalty to Hu Zongxian. Rather, he was dying for himself and his own honour and integrity. The outlook Xu presented was, by his own admission, complex and difficult to understand. Xu wrote that his "friends cannot explain it [his actions] 友莫解焉."[378]

Until the death of Hu Zongxian, however, Xu wrote that he had managed to avoid becoming entangled by the predicament of loyalty played out in court politics: "Up until now, he was able to travel exhaustively to famous mountains, to rise from prostration, and avoid things from the outside, and now it is over. 得盡遊名山，起僵僕，逃外物，而今已矣。" The "things from the outside (*wai wu* 外物)" is the title of the twenty-sixth chapter of the *Zhuangzi* and refers to wealth, honour and rank. In the *Zhuangzi* it details the risks of relying upon such things:

> It is not possible to determine what will affect us from outside us. For example, Lung Feng was executed, Pi Kan was sentenced to death, Prince Chi pretended to be mad, E Lai was murdered and Chieh and Chou both perished. All rulers want their ministers to be loyal, but such loyalty may not always be sincere…All parents want their children to be filial, but filial sons are not necessarily so from love.[379]

The *Zhuangzi* used examples of ministers and officials who had to feign madness or were executed as a result of the downfall of their lords. Xu Wei was intimately familiar with the *Zhuangzi*, and this particular reference related directly to his own circumstances of having

[378]XWJ, p. 639.
[379] Palmer and Breuilly, *The Book of Chuang Tzu*, p. 236.

been entangled by “things from the outside”. The ensuing frustrated loyalty was going to drive him to suicide.

Echoing the dense historical allusions in the *Zhuangzi,* Xu also used cases from history to highlight the complexities and ambiguities of his own state. In his poetry and prose, Xu frequently employed the example of figures from history such as Qu Yuan, Yue Fei, Han Xin, Kong Rong, Wu Zixu, Mi Heng and Fan Zeng, who died either as a result of their own personal sense of honour or from unjust persecution by a higher power. At the end of his *Self-written Epitaph* Xu wrote:

> Zhu kept whole Ying,[380] Ji kept intact Liang;[381] they were able not to die, death harms understanding. Jing tied Gu,[382] Yun stopped Yong;[383] they were able to

[380] Cui Zhu 催杼 (? – 546 BCE) and Yan Ying 晏嬰, better known as Yanzi (c. 580-510 BCE), were both important ministers in the state of Qi during the Spring and Autumn period. Duke Zhuang of Qi was killed by Cui Zhu after it emerged that he had had an affair with Cui’s second wife Tang Jiang. One day, the viscount of the minor state of Ju came to pay tribute to Qi. Cui pretended to be ill and did not attend the banquet for the Viscount of Ju. The next day, Duke Zhuang visited Cui’s home and attempted to have a tryst with his wife. Cui had his men block the Duke's guards outside and surround Duke Zhuang in the courtyard. Duke Zhuang tried to escape by climbing a wall, but was shot by an arrow and killed. Cui Zhu subsequently installed Duke Zhuang's younger half brother Chujiu on the throne as Duke Jing of Qi. Yanzi lay prostrate by the corpse of Duke Zhuang and cried. People thought that he would now be killed by Cui Zhu, but in an attempt to win over the people, Cui Zhu decided not to have him killed. See Fu Jie, *Xu Wei shiwen xuanyi,* p. 163. However, Kathleen Ryor has a different interpretation of this sentence. She writes: “Cheng Ying lived during the Spring and Autumn period in the state of Jin. He was a friend of Zhao Shuo, but one day, a powerful man named Tu Anjia killed Zhao Shuo and exterminated his family. Zhao’s wife had given birth to a son after his death and Zhao’s retainer Gongsun Zhujiu made a plan with Cheng Ying. They took someone else’s son and hid him in the mountains. Cheng Ying then departed and reported the location of the mountain hideaway. They attacked and killed the boy and Zhujiu. Cheng thereupon took charge of the true orphan of the Zhao family and hid him in a mountain retreat. Sometime later, Duke Jing of Jin was informed of his existence. He established the Zhao son, whose name was Zhao Wu, as heir. As a consequence, Zhao Wu attacked Tu Anjia and killed him. After this, Zhao Wu was then capped. Cheng Ying then announced, ‘Today it is fitting that I pay back the great deed of Zhujiu.’ He then committed suicide.” See Ryor, “Bright Pearls Hanging in the Marketplace”, p. 18. n. 10.

[381] This refers to Xin Qiji 幸棄疾 (1140-1207), the Southern Song Poet, General and Statesman, as well as the Southern Song philosopher Chen Liang 陳亮 (1143-1193), whose servant had committed murder. Chen was implicated in the murder and sent to prison. Xin Qiji greatly appreciated Chen Liang’s scholarship and talent, however, and helped him get out of prison. See Fu Jie, *Xu Wei shiwen xuanyi,* p. 163. I argue that Kathleen Ryor is mistaken in her interpretation of this sentence. Ryor translated this sentence as “Sickness was brought to an end by Liang”. She wrote: “Sou Liang, styled Yuangui, was the older brother of Empress Mingmu of the Jin dynasty and the nephew of Sou Gun (who lived during the reigns of Yuandi 317-325 and Mingdi 323-326). His character was lofty and righteous, and his actions came from the rules of propriety. When he was starting out, he was first conferred with the rank of Vice Director of the Secretariat and Expositor-in-Waiting to the Heir Apparent. At that time, the emperor had just put a criminal code into effect. He was briefly appointed the Secretariat Supervisor and the additional title of General of the Left Guard was

> not live, how can life be depended upon? Afraid of drowning yet jumping in early, scoff at [Xu] Wei; his head already shaved yet murdered late, pity [Kong] Rong.[384] Confucius concealed in disguise, Jizi feigned madness.[385] Thrice returning to the words of the *Zhengmin*; shamed by his intelligence.[386]
>
> 杼全嬰，疾完亮，可以無死，死傷諒。兢系固，允收邕，可以無生，生何憑。畏溺而投早嗤渭， 既髡而刺遲憐融。 孔微服，箕佯狂。三複《蒸民》，愧彼既明。[387]

In a relatively short epitaph, Xu listed a breathtaking number of dense historical allusions, such as the stories of Yanzi, Xin Qiji, Chen Liang, Ban Gu, Cai Yong, Kong Rong and Jizi. Xu

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given to him by Emperor Mingdi. Due to his achievements, he was enfeoffed as the Duke of Yongchang. Emperor Chengdi at first transferred him to the position of Secretariat Director to Su Junping. Sou Liang subdued the city of Wuhu and led an army of 20,000 to crush the rebellion of Guo Mo. He was then made military governor of the six provinces of Jiang, Jing, Yu, Yi, Liang and Yong. When he was in Wuchang, all of his assistants and a great number of his disciples went together one autumn evening to climb the southern tower. Liang arrived at the top. He was about to go into retirement. Liang said with dignity, 'All of you seldom stop. For an old man, it is not easy to begin to return from here.' Then he occupied a rocking chair, chatting and singing, he peacefully died in the manner." See Ryor, "Bright Pearls Hanging in the Marketplace", p. 18. n. 11.

[382] This refers to Zhong Jing 種兢 and Ban Gu 班固 (32-92 CE) of the Eastern Han. Ban Gu was one of the authors of the *Han shu.* He was assigned to General Dou Xian 窦宪 (died 92 CE), who attacked the Xiongnu, as Army Supervisor. After defeat by the Xiongnu, Zhong Jing, the magistrate of Luoyang, arrested Ban Gu as a result of his association with General Dou and had him imprisoned. He then died in prison. See Fu Jie, *Xu Wei shiwen xuanyi,* p. 163.

[383] This refers to Wang Yun 王允 (137-192) and Cai Yong 蔡邕 (133-192 CE) of the Eastern Han dynasty. Wang Yun was Minister of the Interior under Emperors Shao and Xian, while Cai Yong was Privy Counsellor. Wang Yun devised a plot which succeeded in deposing the evil usurper Dong Zhuo. When Dong was in power, he forced Cai Yong to serve his court and promoted him three times because of his talent. After Dong was executed, Cai shed a tear for him. Wang Yun accused Cai Yong of treason, since Cai had served the Han and dared to mourn a traitor. Cai said that while he opposed Dong's treason and unrestrained power, Dong had nonetheless shown him respect and favour and this caused him to feel a little grief for the man. Wang Yun ordered Cai Yong to be executed, even though all the high ministers advised against it. See Fu Jie, *Xu Wei shiwen xuanyi,* p. 163.

[384] Kong Rong 孔融 (153-208 CE) was a descendent of Confucius and opponent of Cao Cao at the Han court. He had recommended the noted scholar Mi Heng to Cao Cao. Mi Heng was so virtuous that he dared to criticise and mock Cao Cao to his face. Eventually, he was put to death. For this story, see Luo Guanzhong, Roberts, Moss, trans., *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), Chapter 23. To shave the head was a punishment in Han times. Later on, Kong Rong was falsely accused and put to death by Cao Cao, who also had his wife and children killed. See Fu Jie, *Xu Wei shiwen xuanyi,* p. 163.

[385] After Confucius left the states of Lu and Wei, he went to the state of Song where Sima Huan 司馬桓 attempted to intercept and kill him. Confucius thus had to travel through Song in disguise. See Lau, D.C., *Mencius* (London: Penguin Classics, 2004), p. 109. Jizi 箕子 feigned madness in order to avoid being murdered by the evil King Zhou of the Shang dynasty 商紂王. See Fu Jie, *Xu Wei shiwen xuanyi,* p. 163.

[386] This is an allusion to a line from the poem "Zheng min" (The multitudes of people), in the *Da ya* 大雅 of the *Shijing*: "Intelligent is he and wise, protecting his own person. 即明且哲，以保其身." This poem concerns the virtue of the minister Zhong Shanfu 仲山甫, who was a model official and faithful servant of the king. See Fu Jie, *Xu Wei shiwen xuanyi,* p. 164.

[387] XWJ, p. 640.

used the example of Yanzi to illustrate how despite his open mourning for his Lord and the danger he exposing himself to, Yanzi did not get killed. Xu then referred to the story of General Xin Qiji saving the Southern Song scholar Chen Liang from prison. These were noble, positive examples for Xu of what he perhaps should have done for Hu Zongxian in prison. By appealing to the examples of Yanzi and Xin Qiji, Xu rationalised that mourning for Hu's death would not have involved him in the purge of the Yan clique. These were historical examples of moral scholars who did not suffer an unjust death.

Xu, however, juxtaposed the examples of scholars who survived with scholars who died unjustly. Xu could believe in the Confucian principle, namely that one lived in a moral universe, but at the same time he could also show that bad things did happen to good people in history. Xu continued to show the complexity of loyalty by providing historical examples of scholars such as Ban Gu and Cai Yong, who died unjustly for their connections or loyalty to someone else. This was in complete contrast to Yanzi or Xin Qiji, who survived despite their virtues of loyalty and moral clarity. Cai Yong, who cried for Dong Zhuo and was killed by Wang Yun for doing so, could be related to the situations of either Xu Wei or Hu Zongxian. It could be Xu Wei crying for Hu Zongxian, or Hu Zongxian crying for Yan Song. In either case, the point in this example is the complex sense of gratitude towards one's superior, even if one disagreed with the superior's actions or suffered by association with that superior. Moreover, the famous Han historian Ban Gu, who was arrested for his association with the defeated General Dou, also mirrored both Xu's and Hu's positions after the downfall of the Yan clique. Xu was clearly tortured by his predicament of loyalty.

Xu also highlighted that it was not just a sense of loyalty that would bring him to suicide, but also fear of being accused of complicity with the Yan clique and its wrongdoings. Xu wrote, “Afraid of drowning yet jumping in early, scoff at [Xu] Wei.” Xu’s fear of drowning was a reference to his fear of being executed like a criminal. He felt that suicide would be the only way for him to leave the world with his dignity and honour intact – Xu made clear that this, at least, could not be taken away from him. Although one could “scoff” at Xu for jumping ship early, he contrasted this with the fate of Kong Rong. Kong Rong was initially humiliated by having his head shaved, but he continued to live, only to be destroyed together with his family. Xu seems to suggest that it is better to die without shame and “drown early” rather than be “murdered late”.

Xu then continued to refer to Confucius, who disguised himself as a commoner to escape the state of Song, and Jizi, who feigned madness to avoid execution. Perhaps Xu was implying that he, too, was feigning madness at first to escape the purge of Hu Zongxian and the Yan clique. The complexities of his loyalty to Hu Zongxian, with his associations to the Yan clique led to an inner conflict. He could not be like Yanzi and mourn over Hu Zongxian with impunity. Therefore, it was better to commit suicide than to be killed like Ban Gu or Cai Yong in prison. In the last line of the epitaph, Xu was ashamed that he did not have the moral clarity of the legendary official Zhong Shanfu mentioned in the *Shijing* who, while being loyal, still managed to “protect his own person”.[388]

[388] Zhong Shanfu 仲山甫, was a legendary official during the reign of King Xuan of the Zhou dynasty 周宣王 (r. 827-782 BCE). He was described in the *Shijing* as having a noble demeanour, being enlightened, wise, cautious and composed, not taking advantage of the weak or poor, and was charged by the King as being a model for all officials. In the *Shijing* poem titled *Zhengmin* 烝民, or “Multitudes”, it says: “When the fabric of the royal robe has a hole/ Zhong Shanfu alone can mend it.” For the translation see Sanders, Graham Martin, *Words Well Put: Visions of Poetic Competence in the Chinese Tradition* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2006), pp. 63-65. See also Raphals, Lisa Ann, *Knowing Words: Wisdom and Cunning in the Classical Traditions of China and Greece* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), p.13.

Though paranoid that he would be arrested and die in prison like Hu Zongxian, Xu was not detained. Xu did not successfully commit suicide after writing his own epitaph, and he did not follow his master in death. In any case, he did become unhinged and, in a fit of rage, murdered his third wife Zhang, whereupon he ended up in prison. Xu, however, continued to be plagued by the predicament of loyalty and this emerged in his poetry and prose.

In the summer of 1578, at the invitation of his old colleague and friend Shen Mingchen, Xu Wei travelled to Huizhou to mourn at the grave of Hu Zongxian. Xu was 58 *sui* by the time and plagued with physical infirmity, but he was determined to pay his respects. In his self written life chronology or *jipu* (畸譜), however, he wrote cryptically that "in the spring, a certain thing arose. 春，某者起"[389] This alludes to his mental illness that became full-blown several months later. Xu wrote: "In the first month of summer, I intended to go to Huizhou to mourn the Commander [Hu Zongxian], when I got to Yanzhou [on the border with Anhui province], an evil spirit arose, and I returned whereupon I was again sick with *yi.* 孟夏，擬至徽弔幕，至嚴，祟見，歸復病易。"[390]

Xu was writing almost melodramatically about his sadness and guilt, conveying to us that the closer Xu physically got to the deceased Hu Zongxian, the more the evil spirits of guilt plagued him again, forcing him to abort his journey.

An Unwilling Ghostwriter?

Xu was in prison for seven years until an amnesty was declared by the new Emperor Wanli in 1573. In the meantime, Xu had a lot of freedom to write and think. While in

[389]XWJ, p. 1330.
[390]XWJ, p. 1330.

prison, long after the death of Hu Zongxian, Xu Wei was still retrospectively trying to deal with the issues surrounding the complex landscape of personal loyalty. During this time, he drafted and organised his ghostwritings for Hu Zongxian with the intent of publishing them, and wrote prefaces to them explaining or justifying himself, uncovering the veil of his profession as a ghostwriter.[391]

Xu's prefaces to his ghostwritings offer an interesting yet conflicting contrast to his works on authenticity and *bense*. Furthermore, they reveal the complicated landscape of politics. For Xu, caution after the fall of the Yan Song clique shaded into prudence, and prudence into more self-serving emotions and motives. He searched for a safe and effective medium of expression and looked back to history for precedents. One can recall Quintilian in his *Institutes*:

> You can speak as openly as you like against…tyrants, as long as you can be understood differently, because you are not trying to avoid giving offense, only its dangerous repercussions. If danger can be avoided by some ambiguity of expression, everyone will admire its cunning.[392]

In Xu's prefaces to his ghostwriting, he did not mention the name of Yan Song. However, Xu took a defensive stance, saying he had to write poems and notes to the fallen Yan clique only on behalf of Hu Zongxian. Xu knew that these poems and letters to Yan Song might implicate him, so the prefaces take an almost confessional approach to justify himself and his actions. In one of these prefaces, Xu explained how ghostwriting emerged as a profession and why he became one:

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[391]Wang Jiacheng argued that these prefaces were done whilst Xu was in prison. See Wang Jiacheng 王家誠, *Xu Wei zhuan* 徐渭传 (Tianjin: Baihua literature and art publishing house, 2008), p. 178. This is also argued by Xu Shuofang 徐朔方 in *Xu Wei nianpu* 徐渭年譜 (Hangzhou: Zhejiang guji chubanshe, 1993), p. 140.
[392]Patterson, Annabel M., *Censorship and Interpretation: The Conditions of Writing and Reading in Early Modern England* (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984), p.15.

> Among the ancients who composed prose, few had ghost writers; those capable of writing prose if they were not illustrious, then they were reclusive. Those that are illustrious, are elite, one can seek them but not access them, let alone ask them to ghost-write. Those that are reclusive are lofty, and there is no means by which to access them, so how can you also ask them to ghost-write. With regards to writing I am unfortunate like a horse ploughing a field, and am placed somewhere between illustrious and reclusive. For this reason people can access me and make me ghost write for them. With regards to me, I also cannot avoid ghost writing for them. Furthermore, the current examination system uses discussion on current affairs, so of those who rise to become officials, there are those who cannot write classical diction, and those who can. However, those things which an official has to send like rituals of sending notes and congratulations have increased 100 times since ancient times. The situation is that he cannot help but rely on a ghost writer. The ghost writer must be a scholar who is unobtrusive yet not reclusive. For this reason, as a ghost writer, one can observe people, and examine the age.
>
> 古人為文章，鮮有代人者，蓋能文者非顯則隱，顯者貴，求之不得，況令其代，隱者高，得之無由，亦安能使之代。渭於文不幸若馬耕耳，而處於不顯不隱之間，故人得而代之。在渭亦不能避其代。又今制用時義，以故業舉得官者，類不為古文詞，即有為之者，而其所送贈賀啓之禮，乃百倍於古，其勢不得不去諸代，而代者必士之微而非隱者也。故於代可以觀人，可以考世。[393]

According to Xu, he became a ghostwriter because he was not as lofty and removed as a hermit, or as prominent and expensive as a famous minister or writer. Rather, he was somewhere in between. As a mid-level scholar, Xu had to find an income by ghostwriting to supplement his meagre stipend. Stuck between a rock and a hard place, Xu became a ghostwriter for Hu Zongxian.

Writing for Hu Zongxian, however, came with its rewards. Most notably, it was because of his ghostwriting that Xu could move into a large house, as we have seen earlier. Xu clearly did not see his activities as shameful until the fall of the Yan clique. After the fall of Hu Zongxian and the Yan clique, Xu's ghostwritings could have been viewed as evidence of his complicit support for the Yan clique. Examples of embarrassing pieces of ghostwriting

[393] XWJ, p. 536.

would include Xu's obsequious birthday letters to Yan Song on the occasion of his 80th birthday.[394]

Xu defended himself, however, by distancing himself from his ghostwritings. As we have seen, in complete contrast to his work on authenticity and *bense,* Xu wrote, "Writings of the hand are of the kind that do not come from the heart 書於手者，類不出於其心"[395] and "the writings of a wordsmith is to delight people 爲詞家文以悅人"[396]. Xu is better known for his idea that "emotion is the essence of a literary work".[397] But Xu made a distinction between writings from his heart and "writings from the hand" i.e. his ghostwritings. Xu explained that some of his writings, especially those that he had to do on behalf of other people, came not from his heart and was not his true voice. His ghostwritings, like that of a speechwriter, were a literary feature of the political negotiations he had to make. Xu empahsised that his works were not always his real voice:

> I followed Hu [Zongxian] in charge of writing articles, in all for five years, jotting down about one hundred pieces, today of which only half still exist. As for the rest, if they cannot be faulted for either being overly fawning, then they must be unskilled. Alas! The ones that exist are also fawning and unskilled, but speaking of the existing ones, I cannot fault my Lord [Hu Zongxian], and people also cannot fault me. Among those who are wise, they will tacitly understand it and that's all. But still some in the end will tut because of this. The wise of course are not like this… I wrote notes and memorials for my Lord, among which there are many taboos I broke; in the beginning I was probably unaware. Perhaps it was heavens intention to punish me? If not, how could I be so confused to have reached here! Han Yu wrote for the Prime Minister "A Memorial on a White Turtle", which was also extremely obsequious, and his

[394] See "On behalf of [Hu Zongxian] Congratulating Lord Yan [Song] on his Birthday. This year he is 80, after the 15th day of the first month", in XWJ, pp. 444-448, and "On behalf [of Hu Zongxian] Congratulating Grand Secretary Yan on his Birthday", in XWJ, p. 883. In the latter poem, Xu Wei wrote: "Long bestowing his favour, [he] extends the realm's life blood, accumulating deep virtue the will of heaven is joyful. By three reigns he was over sixty years old, a great man of our time, towering like a mountain peak, standing lean like a crane 施澤久而國脈延，積德深而天心悅。三朝耆舊，一代偉人，屹矣山凝，癯然鶴立。"
[395] XWJ, p. 518.
[396] XWJ, p. 961.
[397] Chou Chih-P'ing, *Yuan Hung-Tao and the Kung-An School*, p. 19.

remonstration on welcoming the Buddha bone was direct; people cannot fault me, considering what he did!

予從少保胡公典文章，凡五載，記文可百篇，今存者半耳。其他非病於大諛，則必大不工者也。噫！存者亦諛且不工矣，然有說存焉，余不能病公，人亦或不能病余也，此在智者默而得之耳。然卒以是咄咄，智者固不如是也，以此見病，其庶乎？… 余為公表啓，中數犯忌諱，初蓋不覺也，意者天其有意於禍予乎？不然，何迷且 一至此！韓昌黎為宰相作賀白龜表，亦涉諛，其諫迎佛骨則直，人不能病余，其以此也夫![398]

Xu admitted to writing "fawning" works, but defended himself against the accusation that this might represent any true sympathy for Yan Song or his clique. In order to do so, he compared himself to Han Yu (768-824), the famous Tang Dynasty official and writer of prose, famous for his sharp remonstrance of the emperor for welcoming a Buddhist relic. Xu tried to persuade us that even Han Yu, who was famed for his integrity and beliefs, also had to write flattering, obsequious pieces at times. Xu compared himself to Han Yu in other prefaces as well. [399]

Xu argued that those who were "wise" and understood the political situation he was cornered into, would know that he had to negotiate his position many times to maintain a living. They would know that the work he produced to make a living was not necessarily his true voice. Xu concluded defensively by saying that people should not blame him for selling out, considering that even the famous Han Yu also had to compromise at times. This directly contradicts Xu's earlier writings on his paragons of virtue Shen Lian, Qu Yuan and Wu Zixu etc, whom he praised for sticking to their principles and accepting their fate for doing so.

[398] XWJ, p. 536.
[399] XWJ, p. 537.

Xu took a very honest and even confessional approach in his prefaces to his ghostwritings. Why compile a portfolio of "fawning" or "unskilled" ghostwritings that included embarrassing poems to Yan Song, and then distance himself from them in the preface? Xu was still proud enough of his ghostwriting to not abandon it. In another preface, where he also repeats his defensive statement and compares himself to Han Yu, Xu also stated that just as some birds haughtily admire and love their own plumage and resent it when people pluck their feathers, so too did Xu take pride in his own work.[400] By writing confessional prefaces, Xu at least tried to show us that he had nothing to hide.

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Xu Wei was an extremely expressive and prolific writer of the period, masterfully engaged in the construction of his own identity or persona against the backdrop of a complicated political landscape where personal loyalties came into conflict and created anxiety.

In Xu's political world, the infamous Chief Grand Secretary Yan Song ordered the flogging, exile and eventual death of Xu's friend Shen Lian in 1557. Yet in the same year, only a month after his friend's death, Xu became tacitly part of Yan Song's political machine as a ghostwriter to Yan's protégé Hu Zongxian. Hu Zongxian nevertheless ushered in a golden period in Xu's life. As a ghostwriter, Xu gained wealth and connections but had to compromise his literary ideals of authenticity and write obsequious poems to Yan Song. When the Yan clique fell from power and was purged from 1562 onwards, however, Xu did not defend his patron Hu Zongxian. Instead, Xu went to work, albeit briefly and unhappily, for Hu's rival Li Chunfang in 1563. The fall of Hu Zongxian and the anxiety surrounding frustrated loyalty and guilt precipitated Xu's mental instability and nine

[400]XWJ, p. 537.

suicide attempts in 1565. Loyalty and the anxiety surrounding his lack of it was not an abstract value for Xu.

Up until now, the historiography of Xu Wei has been perhaps naïve in not considering how he represented himself. In the grand scheme of things Xu was a petty ghostwriter, but in his assessment of his own work, he wrote as if the moral weight of the empire rested on him. Scholars have mostly been engaged with Xu's rugged artistic individualism, but have ignored the complex circumstances which he not just passively experienced, but also wrote about intensely. Neither have they questioned the image of himself that Xu wished to portray. What kind of persona did Xu construct in his writings when faced with the complex landscape of personal loyalty in 16th century China?

Xu chose to agonise over his moral position in prefaces, poems and essays, taking an almost confessional approach to his internal struggles. This was deliberate on Xu's part. His contemporary Mao Kun chose to remain silent, whereas Xu played up his anxiety surrounding personal loyalty.

When writing eulogies to his friend Shen Lian, Xu cloaked himself in the trappings of Confucian didacticism and the moral legitimacy of the Han dynasty historian Sima Qian. Just as Sima Qian took on the persona of Confucius to cast praise and blame on the heroes of history, as well as sometimes expressing his own anguish, so too did Xu Wei. By using Sima Qian as a symbol, Xu could claim to be part of the historian's tradition of Confucian moral instruction, effectively absolving himself of the anxiety surrounding his frustrated loyalty. As a poet, he could put his own ambiguities to one side and write with a certain moral clarity. Shen Lian or Shen Xiang were, in his eyes, a contemporary paragon of virtue comparable to Qu Yuan or Wu Zixu.

Nevertheless, these ambiguities could not be banished for long. It seems that in his later works, Xu expressed doubts about clear-cut definitions of virtue and loyalty. As we can see in "Marquis of Huaiyin's Shrine" and "Zeng Yafu's Tomb," Xu lamented that the question of loyalty was far murkier.

The crescendo of Xu's anxiety surrounding his position came in 1565 with the death of Hu Zongxian in prison. Xu's *Self-written Epitaph* demonstrates that the political situation was so bad that he felt that to keep his moral integrity intact, he had to commit suicide. Xu saw himself as a latter-day Sima Qian. In a letter to his friend Ren An, the castrated historian Sima Qian justified why he chose to live "dwelling in vileness and disgrace" rather than commit suicide. He did so in order to complete his great project. In the same vein, Xu was extremely conscious of how his *Self-written Epitaph* would construct his legacy in history.

The careers of Shen Lian and Hu Zongxian as officials profoundly affected Xu, and their respective downfalls prompted a crisis in his mindset with regards to the so-called virtue of loyalty towards the imperium. What emperor or imperium could allow loyal ministers such as Shen Lian or Hu Zongxian to die? This will be explored in the next chapter.

Chapter 3: Like Fish in Water

Xu Wei and the Emperor

> "The people under heaven are all his [the emperor's] people. However tyrannically he may use them, they have to bear it all the same."[401]
>
> - Li Zhi

This chapter is concerned with how Xu Wei represented himself in his writings with regard to his idealised relationship to an idealised emperor and the imperium. In the previous chapter we saw how Xu wrote about being caught in between conflicting loyalties and how he responded ambiguously. Xu sometimes represented himself in his writings as the didactic historian, following a paradigm set by Sima Qian. Through history poetry and historical figures, Xu could creatively explore and give vent to the tensions of conflicted loyalty. Now, we will see how the imperium shaped an important part of the identity of the "Scholar of the Realm" that he constructed.

Xu's vision of the emperor and imperium were inextricably linked to the politics of his day. When Xu encountered failure in the examinations and in social advancement, he looked back in admiration to emperors of humble origins such as Liu Bang 劉邦 (256 or 247 -195 BCE), Liu Yu 劉裕 (363-422) and Zhu Yuanzhang. He elevated himself in poetry by engaging with the emperor in his imagination. When pirates and Mongols raided the coast and frontier, Xu yearned in his poetry for a strong and martial emperor, in particular for the founder of his dynasty Zhu Yuanzhang. When his friends and patrons were swept away by venal court politics, Xu longed for a relationship between officials and the court that was more familial, natural and authentic in emotion, like that between Emperor Liu Xiu 劉秀 (5 BCE-57 CE) and Yan Guang 嚴光 (dates unknown) or Liu Bei 劉備 (161-223)

[401] Li Zhi 李贄, *Fenshu* 焚書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2009), p. 73.

and Zhuge Liang 諸葛亮 (181-234). In one poem simply titled "Loyalty" 忠, Xu commented on the relationship in general between emperor and subject:

The sovereign and ministers interact like fish and water

君臣相得魚水[402]

In the literature on statecraft from the Warring States onwards, which H.G. Creel called the "propaganda from the official class",[403] there appears to be a mutual dependence between the sovereign who requires the virtue of the scholar, and the scholar who requires the recognition of the sovereign. Loyalty is the instrument keeping emperor and scholar-official together. The above line from Xu's poem on loyalty demonstrates that he also partook in this ideal of the imperium, which was invented by the literati. The emperor, and how Xu wrote about him, was an important part of his identity as a member of the elite literati.

It should not be a surprise therefore, that Xu's writings on the emperor shared many of the same historical anecdotes and precedents with the writings of prominent literati at court, such as the Chief Grand Secretary Zhang Juzheng 張居正 (1525-1582).[404] In 1573, as tutor to the young Emperor Wanli 萬曆 (r. 1573-1620), Zhang presented him with the didactic and instructional book *The Emperor's Mirror, Illustrated and Discussed* (帝鑒圖

[402] XWJ, pp. 842-843.
[403] Creel, Herrlee G., *Shen Pu-hai: A Chinese Political Philosopher of the Fourth Century BC* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), pp. 84-85.
[404] Zhang Juzheng 張居正 (1525-1582), *zi* Shuda 叔大, *hao* Taiyue 太岳, *jinshi* 1547, served as Grand Secretary during the reigns of Jiajing, Longqing and Wanli. He is most famous for instituting the 'single whip reforms' that meant taxes would be paid only in silver. He was also a strict and domineering tutor to the young Emperor Wanli. See Huang, *1587: A Year of No Significance*, pp. 1-75. See also Zhang Tingyu, ed., *Ming shi,* p. 5643.

說).[405] Wanli was not yet nine years old when he ascended to the throne, and the book was intended by Zhang to encourage the young boy to become a sage ruler. It contained cautionary tales about rulers from antiquity to the late Northern Song dynasty. "One volume presented eighty-one models to emulate, and the other contained thirty-six examples to avoid."[406] Both Xu and Zhang praised Emperor Liu Yu for his humble frugality, Liu Bei and Zhuge Liang for their mutual respect and loyalty, and Emperor Liu Xiu for his magnanimous treatment of the hermit Yan Guang, and so on. It is striking that both Xu Wei and Zhang Juzheng - supposedly at opposite ends of the scholar-official spectrum - drew on the same historical models and stories when discussing the emperor and imperium.

There were slight differences, however, between Xu and Zhang's respective viewpoints on those same stories. As a tutor to the emperor, Zhang tended to focus his moral of the stories more on the emperor himself and his character; whereas Xu, as a hopeful candidate for officialdom, focused more on the officials or subjects of the emperor and the nature of their relationship to him. Unlike Zhang, Xu was not a high official or minister and he never personally met with any emperor. Nevertheless, by participating in a discourse about the emperor and the imperium that was shared with prominent men at court, Xu was trying to bypass examination failure and represented himself in poetry and prose as a scholar who not only had a bond of loyalty to the emperor, but also shared the same concerns over the imperium.

[405] Murray, Julia K., *Mirror of Morality: Chinese Narrative Illustration and Confucian Ideology* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2007), p. 91.
[406] Murray, *Mirror of Morality*, p. 104.

During Xu's lifetime, the relationship between emperor and official reached its nadir. The emperors Jiajing 嘉靖 (1507-1567) and Wanli 萬曆 (1573-1620) were, according to David Tod Roy, "the most irresponsible rulers in the history of irresponsibility".[407] This interpretation draws an incomplete picture of these emperors and obscures the institutional causes of political decline and decay, but the perception of imperial negligence and ineptitude was already widespread in Xu's time. However, unlike the famous literatus Chen Jiru, who responded to the political dysfunction by burning his official robes and attacking in writing the Ming founder Zhu Yuanzhang,[408] Xu wrote of how he greatly admired this martial emperor in the poem "Respectfully Paying Homage at Xiao Mausoleum in Proper Rhyme" 恭謁孝陵正韻. Moreover, when Xu witnessed the young Emperor Wanli on parade, he wrote a Han dynasty court style *fu* 賦 celebrating the power and splendour of the imperium.[409]

Indeed, Xu's enthusiasm for the imperium and Zhu Yuanzhang was so strongly presented, that he was even falsely ascribed, as far away as Tokugawa Japan, as the author of the 16th century novel *The Romance of the Ming Dynasty Heroes* (英烈傳).[410] This novel, also

[407] Roy, David Tod, trans., *The Plum in the Golden Vase Or, Chin P'ing Mei: Volume One: The Gathering* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. xxx.
[408] See Greenbaum, *Chen Jiru (1558-1639),* pp. 28-29, 172.
[409] These poems will be examined below.
[410] Xu Wei achieved some limited fame in Tokugawa Japan due to the translation of the *Yunhe qizong* by Okajima Kanzan (1675-1728), titled *Tsuzoku koumin eiretsuden* 通俗皇明英烈伝 (Biographies of Heroes of the August Ming Dynasty in Japanese Translation). This translation made an impression during a time when Chikamatsu Monzaemon's puppet plays about the battles of the Ming loyalist Coxinga were popular. See, Oba Osamu, *Edo jidai no ni-chu hiwa* 江戸時代の日中秘話 (Sino-Japanese Relations in the Edo Period) (Tokyo: Toho Shoten, 1980), p. 54. In addition to this, Yamamoto Hokuzan 山本北山 (1752-1812) wrote essays on the poems of Yuan Hongdao and Xu Wei. Hokuzan greatly admired Xu's literary and artistic ideal of *bense* and was strongly influenced by him when he initiated the "Fresh Spirit" (*seishin*) school in kanshi poetry. Hokuzan noted that Xu's fame as a poet in Japan was "dazzling 眩" and "indeed even [Ogyu] Sorai selected his poems 是亦徂徠ガ詩ヲ選ス". Hokuzan used Xu's artistic ideals of direct expression over classical forms and rules to overcome rigid social boundaries within Tokugawa society. It is interesting that even the philosopher Ogyu Sorai 荻生徂徠 (1666-1728), leader of the Ancient Rhetoric (*kobunji*) school also included Xu's poetry in his anthology. See Yamamoto Hokuzan's *Thoughts on Composing Poetry* (*Sakushi shiko*) in *Kinsei bungaku ronshu* 近世文學論集 (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1966), pp. 321-322. See also Haruo

known as *Marvellous Vestiges amid the Clouds* (雲合奇蹤), recounted the myths and legends surrounding Zhu Yuanzhang.[411] Although Xu was not the author, the false ascription shows the effect of how Xu presented himself: as an enthusiastic admirer of Zhu.

Xu's literary engagement with emperors, both historic and contemporary, is important in our understanding of Xu. It is also important because the narrative of the anti-institutional mountain hermit that has overshadowed studies of Xu since the 16th century has ignored this aspect of him completely. Scholars from the mainland such as Yang Xin, Yu Huai and Luo Yuming have interpreted Xu almost as a proto-Marxist, someone who opposed "feudalism" and class hierarchy but could do nothing about it and retreated to the studio to paint and express his indignation in wild *xieyi* paintings. [412] As we have seen, former deputy curator of the Beijing Palace Museum Yang Xin wrote that Xu "cursed not only the evil ministers but the emperor himself" in a colophon to a painting.[413] At the same time, Xu's poetry on emperors and the imperium is submerged deep within his voluminous collected works, and has been neglected by scholars who focus on Xu's more famous colophons on paintings or on his dramas.

This chapter will bring to light how the emperor was an important part of the literati identity that Xu created to compensate for his examination failure. Far from "cursing" the emperor, Xu looked to the same pro-imperial models as Zhang Juzheng. Xu laid out the

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Shirane ed, *Early Modern Japanese Literature: An Anthology, 1600-1900* (New York: Columbia University press, 2002), pp. 910-911.

[411] See Qian Zhonglian, ed., *Yuan Ming Qing shi jianshang cidin*, p. 602. See also Huang, Martin W., "Sage, Hero and Bandit: Zhu Yuanzhang's Image in the Sixteenth-Century Novel Yinglie zhuan" in *Long Live the Emperor! Uses of the Ming Founder across Six Centuries of East Asian History*, edited by Schneewind, Sarah, (Minneapolis: Society of Ming Studies, 2008), pp. 137-148.

[412] Zhou Linsheng, ed., *Ming dai huihua*, p. 174.

[413] See Yang, Barnhart, Nie, Cahill, Lang and Wu, *Three Thousand Years of Chinese Painting*, p. 232. I argue later in this chapter that Yang Xin's interpretation is based on a questionable reading of the poem.

qualities of his idealised sage emperor and his idealised personal relationship with him in his poetry. These writings may have been self-serving at times, representing strategic attempts to control his self-image in the eyes of his fellow literati, but they are also an important part of his self-perception.

Close Encounters with a Prince and the Emperor

The narrative of Xu the eccentric mountain hermit – woven by Yuan Hongdao and perpetuated by countless other scholars since -- would have us believe that Xu had nothing to do with princes and emperors. In Yuan Hongdao's biography of Xu, for example, it is written that after Xu left prison "those of prominence that came to [Xu's] door were all refused. 顯者至門，皆距不納".[414] But this was not entirely true.

Men of prominence did come to Xu's door, and he did receive them with jubilation. One of the most prominent included the Ming Prince Zhu Zaixi 朱載璽 of Xinle in Shandong (enfeoffed in 1557, d. 1593).[415] Prince Zhu Zaixi was a connoisseur of calligraphy and published compilations of poems such as the *Qihe xiuyang ji* 綺合綉揚集.[416] The prince had perhaps seen Xu's work in the *Sheng Ming bai jia shi* 盛明百家詩.[417] In any case, Prince Zhu Zaixi was so impressed by Xu that he sent him a gift of a fine *tuoji* stone, used

[414] In what is believed to be the earliest extant version of Yuan Hongdao's 'Biography of Xu Wenchang' which is kept in the library of Huadong Normal University, the line reads 皆据不納. However, in the XWJ published in 1983, it is written as '皆距不納'. Here, I use the XWJ version as they both have a similar meaning. See Fu Qiong, *Xu Wei Sanwen Yanjiu*, p. 9 n. 1.

[415] Emperor Hongwu had deliberately tried to invoke the aura of the golden age of the Zhou dynasty, and in 1370 enfeoffed nine of his sons as kings or princes in various strategic regions. In doing so, he set up a nominal *fengjian* system as a superstructure over the base of *junxian.* See Clunas, *Screen of Kings*, p.8.

[416] The poet and writer Li Kaixian (1502-1568) wrote: "The wise prince of Xinle principality advocates literary arts and takes joy in things of quality. He is among the most outstanding figures in the royal clan. 新樂賢王，尚文樂善，宗藩中之出色者也。" See Tan, Tian Yuan, *Songs of Contentment and Transgression* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), p. 190.

[417] Wang Gang, *Xu Wei,* p. 299.

for grinding ink. Xu was more than happy to accept it and reciprocated with a grateful poem:

> The Prince of Xinle sent a Tuoji Stone, with a Poem I Composed this in Reply in proper rhyme.
>
> 新樂王寄鼉磯石，副以詩，賦答 用正韻
>
> 繡詞錦字來天上， Embroidered words and brocaded writings come from heaven;
> 雪浪金星出海中， Snowy waves and golden stars emerge from the sea,
> 遠道幾為貧士寶 Such a long a journey for poor scholar's treasure
> 是兩生寄來， referring to the two who delivered [the stone]
> 曲臺曾泛大王風。 Through winding terraces the air of the great prince spreads out.
> 人驚蜃氣移何所， People startle at mirages from nowhere,
> 夢入瑯琊見幾峰， I dream of entering Mt Langya to see a few of the peaks,
> 分付蓬窗好收護 Instructing them to put it by the overgrown window, storing it well,
> 有時風雨下蛟龍。[418] Sometimes the wind and rain bear down krakens and dragons.

Xu was flattered and surprised by the prince's appreciation of his poetry. To Xu it was as if the heavens themselves had opened and bestowed favour on him. The reference to mirages and dreams reinforces his almost dreamlike state of amazement that the prince would send him a stone all the way from Shandong because of a few "embroidered words" of poetry. Although the poem follows conventions of politeness when receiving gifts, Xu was obviously delighted with the stone from the prince, so much so that he wrote another two poems on the subject.[419] Xu's brush with Prince Zhu Zaixi and the imperium was evidently something he considered important and wanted everyone to know about. That Xu was singled out among his contemporaries by the prince for his poetry was enough to raise Xu's honour and status as an artist and poet.

[418] XWJ, p. 222. See also Jerome Kerlouegan "Printing for Prestige? Publishing and Publications by Ming Princes part 2" in *East Asian Publishing and Society* 1 (2011), p. 133, n. 169.

[419] See "Two Poetic Inscriptions on the Tuoji Stone" 鼉磯研銘二首 XWJ, p. 592.

Xu's relationship and cordial behaviour with the prince, as well as his poems about his gift, are significant because it contradicts the narrative of his biographers Yuan Hongdao and Tao Wangling, which paint Xu as reclusive and anti-social. Xu's poems telling us of his friendly relationship with Prince Zhu Zaixi show us a different Xu Wei: a man who desired to be closer to the imperium and the court of princes.

Indeed, this was not Xu's only brush with the imperium. In another instance, we can see how Xu offered a poem to the court in a competition of sorts, after the Qianqing palace had been rebuilt in the Forbidden City in Beijing. The *Veritable Records* state that in the fifth month of the fifth year of the reign of Emperor Wanli (1557), when the Emperor was around 15 *sui*:

> His highness repaired the Qianqing palace and presented it respectfully to the Empress Dowager to live there. The Grand Secretary [Zhang Juzheng] used this as a topic for a poem. His highness read it and was greatly pleased by it, ordering to record the various selected scholars that presented poems for him to read.
>
> 上以重修乾清宮成奉聖母慈駕還御閣臣用為詩題上覽之喜甚命錄所取諸士詩進覽.[420]

Xu happened to be in the capital at the time, and responded to the call for poems from Zhang Juzheng. In a short preface Xu wrote that "when the Grand Secretary [Zhang Juzheng] used this title to pick talented commoners, I was visiting the capital and composed this casually. 輔臣用此題選翰庶時予客京師漫賦" :[421]

The Repaired Qianqing Palace Receives the Empress Dowager

重修乾清宮成迎慈聖再御

[420] Yao Guangxiao **姚廣孝** et al, eds. *Ming Shilu* **明實錄** (Changle: Liang Hongzhi, 1940), vol. 99, p. 1398.
[421] XWJ, p. 268.

閶闔重新紫極熙，The newly restored purple gates of heaven extremely resplendent,
姬姜再御寶軿移。The beautiful woman returns to the palace in her treasured carriage.
慈顏既近趨承易，Her benevolent face now near to tenderly care [for his Majesty] with ease,
聖體猶冲保護宜。The Imperial [Mother's] person, like an important place, should be protected.
鳥換歌筵前日曲，Birds play the role of feast singers with songs from the past,
花緐輦路舊時枝。Abundant flowers planted along the road in times past.
一人奉養兼天下，One man waits upon both his parents and all under heaven,
大孝鴻名萬古垂。His grand name and great filial piety will be passed down through the ages.[422]

The context and content of the poem shows that Xu was a willing participant in the poetics of sovereignty, namely writing poems that celebrated the imperium. In the poem, Xu created an aura of virtuous sovereignty and moral rulership. The poem may have been self-serving. If Xu's poem had been accepted by Zhang Juzheng and Emperor Wanli, he would have gained literary fame, honour and recognition from the establishment. These were the same things that Xu sought but failed to achieve through the examination system. At the same time, however, the poem also laid out an ideal of the moral sovereign which Xu was bound to.

The ideal of the virtuous sovereign was also constructed in another poem by Xu, where he entered into an imaginary relationship with the emperor. On the third day of the eighth month of the eighth year of the reign of Emperor Wanli (1580), Xu was part of a crowd in Beijing watching the young emperor's procession to the Temple of the Moon on West Street.[423] At that time, Emperor Wanli was still a diligent young man and had not yet earned his reputation for lackadaisical behaviour. The poem that Xu wrote to commemorate the event has the flavour of Han dynasty court rhapsodies:

Imperial Procession to the Temple of the Moon on West Street to Offer a Sacrifice

[422] XWJ, p. 268.

[423] Wang Gang, *Xu Wei,* p, 274.

駕幸月壇群望西街

玉露清秋湛碧空，Pure autumn dew and the deep azure sky;
金輿夕月引群工。The golden Imperial palanquin under the evening moon leads the officials.
紅雲自結龍文上，Red clouds interlock like dragon scales;
彩仗如移桂影中。Gilded weapons are shifting like the shadow of moving cassia.
壁畔常儀端捧罍，On the wall's edge the unchanging rites with both hands offering sacrificial wine;
郊西新魄正垂弓。Over the western outskirts the new moon resembles a hanging bow.
布衣久分華山侶，As a commoner I have long identified with my companion on Huashan,
笑向歸驢墮晚風。[424]Returning by donkey I fall off laughing in the evening wind.

Xu celebrated the power of the imperium. He described the grandeur of the Imperial carriage and entourage, with all the symbols of power such as dragons and gilded weapons. At the temple the emperor holds his hands up with a sacrificial goblet of wine. The moon resembling a bow symbolises the emperor's martial power. The imagery Xu used can be found in countless other rhapsodies and poems on imperial processions.

The image of Xu falling off a donkey is a reference to the Daoist hermit Chen Tuan 陳摶 (d.989) who moved to Huashan. The biography of Chen Tuan in the *Biographical Sketches of the Eastern Capital* (東都事略) recounts how Chen Tuan fell of his donkey laughing:

> [Chen Tuan] once rode a white donkey to Kaifeng, on the road there he heard that Song Taizu had ascended the throne, he laughed heartily falling of his donkey saying: 'all under heaven will thus be stable!'
>
> 嘗乘白驢欲入汴，中途聞太祖登極，大笑墮驢，曰：'天下於是定矣!'[425]

Chen Tuan was said to have predicated Song Taizu's ascent to the throne when he was a child. In folklore, Chen Tuan had numerous chance encounters with the future Song

[424] XWJ, p. 283.

[425] Dizhi wenhua chuban 迪志文化出版, "Wen Yuange Siku Quanshu nei lian wang ban 文淵閣四庫全書內聯網版," Accessed July 28, 2015. http://www.sikuquanshu.com.

emperor. When Song Taizu eventually became emperor, Chen Tuan was so surprised at his own accuracy that he fell of his donkey laughing. Though he refused to join the new administration, the Song emperor was said to have visited him and other lofty hermits to seek out sagely advice.[426]

Xu's identification with the sage hermit Chen Tuan, illustrates how he represented himself and the emperor in the poem. Following the paradigm of Han court rhapsodies established by Sima Xiangru 司馬相如 (c. 179-117 BCE),[427] Xu's rhapsodies for Wanli are addressed to the emperor first and foremost. They take the emperor simultaneously as the subject of the poem and its primary audience, so Xu drew himself and the emperor into an imaginary relationship akin to the one between Song Taizu and Chen Tuan.

The poem's fantasy of sovereign power is one that Xu can share and inhabit through the act of writing a poem in this style. Xu took on the rhapsody's persona of Chen Tuan as a way of fulfilling his wish of getting closer to the emperor.

The Han court rhapsody style was even more strongly hinted at in the title of another poem by Xu, which recounts another imperial procession. On the third day of the third month of the ninth year of the reign of Emperor Wanli (1581), a year after the poem above was written, Xu was once again part of the crowd watching the Emperor in a military parade:

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[426] Hon, Tze-ki, *The Yijing and Chinese Politics: Classical Commentary and Literati Activism in the Northern Song Period 960-1127* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2012), p. 64.

[427] Jack Wei Chen has written: "Surviving early examples of Han rhapsody (and proto-rhapsody) are often framed by fictional dialogues between a famous rhetor (such as Song Yu), who would be the rhapsody's speaker, and a king, who served as the audience… This fictional relationship between rhetor and king provided a model for the actual relationship between the rhapsodist and his royal audience. Despite, however, the precedent of Warring States rulers who patronised men with literary and sophisticated talents, the first Han emperors did not show any interest in literary men. It was not until the year 135 BC, when Han Wudi invited the poet Sima Xiangru to Chang'an, that one actually finds the beginnings of an imperial court literary tradition." Chen, Jack Wei, *The Poetics of Sovereignty: On Emperor Taizong of the Tang Dynasty* (Harvard University Press, 2010), p. 268.

Respectful Fu on Imperial Procession from Yue, Reviewing Troops on the Thoroughfare

駕歸自閱群望於衢恭賦

桃李晴曛禁苑煙，On the peaches and plums a beam of light falls through the imperial garden's mist,
鑾輿新幸北郊旋。the carriages with their horse-bells tour anew returning north.
團花靺鞨蒐春日，rounded embroidered [designs on armour] and ruby-red stockings assemple on this spring day for war,
細柳旌旗拊髀年，banners and flags at Slender Willow Camp, a year of thigh-slapping!
一道甲光将雪借，Side by side shining armour reflects from the snow;
千群馬色截雲鮮。a thousand horses appear to cut through the fresh clouds.
誰兼将帥為天子，Who was both a general and the son of heaven?
共喜文皇九葉玄。[428] Let us all take joy in the marvels of the nine generations since the cultured emperor [Yongle]

Once again, Xu was celebrating the power of the imperium. Xu begins the poem in the ornate and archaic Han *fu* style, describing the rays of light falling on the imperial garden and carriages, as well as the ruby-red stockings worn by the soldiers. The imagery of banners and flags fluttering is another set image for imperial processions found in many other court rhapsodies. Using tropes and schemes such as parallelisms and lexical obscurity, he created the illusion of imperial grandeur.

Xu consciously chose to write in the Han court rhapsody style, not only because it evoked the grandeur and glory of the court, but also because Han rhapsody was often framed by a fictional dialogue between the King and the rhapsody's speaker. This paradigm was set by the relationship between the poet Sima Xiangru and Han Emperor Wudi 漢武帝 (156-87 BCE).[429] By choosing to write a *fu* style poem, therefore, Xu could enter into an imaginary relationship with the emperor and be closer to the imperium. This is self-serving in that Xu could elevate his status, but these literary and rhetorical ideals of

[428] XWJ, p. 245.
[429] See also Wu, Fusheng, *Written at Imperial Command: Panegyric Poetry in Early Medieval China* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2009), p. 16. See also Chen, *The Poetics of Sovereignty,* pp. 268-275.

sovereignty were also things which Xu did admire quite often in his poetry, in particular military strength and grandeur.

The "slender willow camp" and "year of thigh-slapping" are references to the military power of the Ming. Slender Willow was the name of the military camp garrisoned by the famous Han dynasty general Zhou Yafu 周亞夫 (died 143 BC), who protected the capital Chang'an from a Xiongnu invasion. The term "thigh-slapping" 拊髀 signifies anxiety.[430] The year of thigh-slapping anxiety could be related to concerns over a 1581 Mongol raid into Liaodong, led by Tuman Khan.[431] Since the Mongol raids of the 1550s, Xu shared an anxiety over frontier security and military strength with many other prominent men at court. In times of threat and danger, it was common to invoke the inspiring martial spirit of historical heroes such as General Zhou Yafu of Slender Willow camp. Xu praised the military establishment and strength of the emperor.

The last line invokes the conventional contrast between cultural power and martial power (*wen* 文 and *wu* 武). Xu asked the rhetorical question: Who combined being emperor with being a military general? One could perhaps say he was referring to Emperor Hongwu, founder of the Ming and vanquisher of the Mongols. In the following line he praised Emperor Wanli as the descendant of Emperor Yongle 永樂 (1360-1424), who was

[430] Kong Zhenyun 孔貞運 (1574-1644) in an epitaph for Yuan Keli 袁可立 (1562-1633), wrote: "Now the waters and seas gush up, the son of heaven slaps his thigh, thinking of his valiant warriors and loyal officials. How can he raise Master [Yuan] from the nine springs? 今海水幾沸，天子拊髀思熊羆不二心之臣，安得起公於九原也！" See *Ming Bingbu Shangshu Jiening Yuan Gong muzhi ming* 明兵部尚書節寧袁公墓誌銘 (Tomb Inscription for Lord Yuan of Jiening Secretary in the Board of War for the Ming) in Dizhi wenhua chuban, "Wen Yuange Siku Quanshu nei lian wang ban," Accessed July 28, 2015. http://www.sikuquanshu.com.

[431] Tuman Zasagat Khan (r. 1558-1592) gathered nine Mongol tribes totalling a hundred thousand men and invaded Liaodong in 1581. In the battle that ensued, Nurhaci's (1559-1626) father (an ally of the Ming) was killed. Nurhaci would later unite the Jurchens, later called Manchus, and laid the groundwork for the invasion of China, establishing the Qing dynasty (1644-1911). See Elverskog, Johan, *Our Great Qing: The Mongols, Buddhism and the State in Late Imperial China* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2006), p. 68.

posthumously called the "Cultured Emperor". Yongle sponsored the compilation of a massive encyclopaedia and was one the most charismatic and powerful emperors of the Ming. He led five campaigns against the Mongols, projected Chinese power into inner Asia by moving the capital to Beijing from Nanjing, conquered Vietnam, sent vast fleets across the Indian Ocean and built the Forbidden City in Beijing.[432] Xu hoped that Wanli would take after his ancestor.

The historian Kenneth Swope has shown how Emperor Wanli, under the tutelage of Zhang Juzheng, developed an interest in military affairs. Contrary to the popular perception that the late Ming military had become weak and dysfunctional, Wanli actually revived the military from 1570 to 1610 as a way of circumventing his frustrations with the cumbersome bureaucracy. Wanli adopted a more aggressive military posture and this was certainly reflected in the above poem by Xu Wei. Swope explains Chief Grand Secretary Zhang Juzheng's concerns and aims:

> Having lived through the terrifying Mongol raids of the 1550s and recognising the still precarious state of affairs upon his ascension to authority in the late 1560s…his purpose was to revive what he considered the spirit of the dynasty's founding emperor and to revitalise the dynasty's vital essence.[433]

Grand Secretary Zhang Juzheng's desire to restore Ming Taizu's martial spirit to the dynasty was shared by Xu Wei. Xu also vividly remembered the Mongol raids of the 1550s. In the poem, "Songs of Today" 今日歌 discussed in Chapter One, for example, we can see that Xu shared in the sense of widespread anxiety after the Mongol invasion. This

[432] For more see Tsai, *Perpetual Happiness.*
[433] Swope, Kenneth, *Dragon's Head and a Serpent's Tail: Ming China and the First Great East Asian War, 1592-1598* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2013), p.23.

prompted a desire for a strong military in Xu and others.[434] Xu was not writing the above poem merely out of self-interest, manipulating his image as an elite literatus. At the same time, he also conveyed his ideal of the *virtuous* and *martial* sovereign that he would return to in his poetry time and again.

Reverence for the "Vastly Martial" Emperor

Among the emperors who embodied Xu's idealised quality of martial prowess, Emperor Hongwu 洪武（"Vastly Martial" Emperor) was the most prominent. Emperor Hongwu began as the orphaned son of a peasant who barely survived famine and pestilence as a child, and went to serve as a novice in a Buddhist monastery. As the Yuan dynasty broke apart, Zhu Yuanzhang became the leader of a band of rebels belonging to the Red Turban uprising, and became a warlord. He grew in power and eventually defeated rival warlords and pushed the Mongols out, becoming emperor of the new Ming dynasty in 1368.[435]

Emperor Hongwu's meteoric rise from poverty to powerful emperor is certainly remarkable. But he also understood that once the empire had been conquered on horseback, it could not be ruled on horseback. Once he became emperor, it was said that in a ten-day period, he responded to 1,600 different official documents dealing with 3,391 separate matters.[436] As emperor, Hongwu ruled with an iron fist and purged his

[434] Historians such as Kathleen Ryor have shown how Xu participated in networks of military power and culture. See Kathleen Ryor, "*Wen* and *Wu* in Elite Cultural Practices during the Late Ming" pp. 219-242. See also by the same author "Regulating the Qi and the Xin: Xu Wei (1521-1593) and his Military Patrons" in *Archives of Asian Art,* vol 54 (2004), pp. 23-33.
[435] Mote, *Imperial China 900-1800,* pp. 517-549.
[436] Hucker, Charles O., "Government Organisation of the Ming Dynasty", in *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 21 (1958), p. 28. See also Hucker, "Ming Government", pp. 104-105.

bureaucracy, killing thousands. He even had the Prime Minister beheaded, abolishing that office forever while taking the reins of power over the bureaucracy.[437]

The lack of publically available historically accurate or verified information regarding the Ming founder at the time did not stop the growing interest and veneration of him. Many people subscribed to popular lore and tales about Hongwu. This included Xu Wei, who saw these fabled stories of heroism as historically accurate. [438] Eventually, something of a cult of personality surrounding Emperor Hongwu emerged. In his poetry and prose, Xu revered the founder of the Ming dynasty for his martial prowess and humble origins.

Emperor Hongwu's humble and rustic origins were tacitly praised in Xu's treatise on southern drama, the *Nanci xulu* 南詞敘錄. In one section, Xu wrote of how Emperor Hongwu appreciated the southern and, by extension, non-northern and non-Mongolian drama *The Story of the Lute* or *Pipa ji* 琵琶記:

> When our High Emperor ascended the throne and heard about Gao's reputation, he sent emissaries to recruit him, but Zecheng feigned madness, refusing to come forward. The High Emperor did not press him further. Soon afterward Gao died. At that time someone presented the emperor with a copy of *Pipa ji*. The High Emperor said smilingly: "The Five Classics and the Four Books amount to cotton, silk, beans and chestnuts – every household has them. But Gao Ming's *Pipa ji* is like exotic delicacies from the mountains and seas – it is indispensible to the wealthy and noble household." Then he added:

[437] Mote, *Imperial China 900-1800,* pp. 549-582.

[438] Much of Xu's historical knowledge of Zhu would have been limited. The first history of Zhu Yuanzhang's reign was published only in 1555, when Xu was 38. The first general history of Taizu's reign was by Chen Jian, a private historian from Guangdong, whose *Records of the Foundation of the Great Ming* (*Huang Ming qiyun lu*) was published in 1555. "Although significant, this work suffered from improvised information and was briefly proscribed, but subsequently enjoyed great popularity as a result of the demand for information". See Chan, Hok-lam and Dennis, Laurie, "Frenzied Fictions: Popular Beliefs and Political Propoganda in the Written History of Ming Taizu" in *Long Live the Emperor!*, p. 27. Zhu's remarkable story and physical attributes inspired many legends and novels published under various titles, such as the 16th century novel *Yinglie zhuan* 英烈傳 (The Romance of the Ming Dynasty Heroes) which is the same as the *Yunhe qizong* 雲合奇蹤 (Marvellous Vestiges amid the Clouds) falsely ascribed to Xu Wei. See Qian Zhonglian, ed., *Yuan Ming Qing shi jianshang cidian*, p. 602. See also Huang, "Sage, Hero and Bandit", pp. 137-148. Oba, *Edo jidai no ni-chu hiwa*, p. 54.

> what a pity, to make shoes out of palace tapestry!" He ordered the actors to perform it at the palace from that day on. [Translation by K. C. Leung][439]
>
> 我高皇帝即位，聞其名，使使徵之，則誠佯狂不出，高皇不復強。亡何，卒。 時有以琵琶記進呈者，高皇笑曰：五經，四書，布，帛，菽、粟也家家皆有；高明琵琶記，如山珍，海錯 ，貴富家不可無。既而曰：惜哉，以宮錦而製鞮也！由是日令優人進演。[440]

Emperor Hongwu lauded the edifying value of the *Story of the Lute,* using the metaphor of nourishing food, and argued that the important themes of loyalty and filial piety, which he derived from the play, would have been better suited to a philosophic work on moral instruction rather than to a drama. K.C. Leung has written that the emperor's enthusiasm for the play may have been partly prompted by the deceptively simple phrase "the completely loyal and completely filial Cai Bojie 全忠全孝蔡伯喈" in the title. This, as well as "the early Ming tendency to assume a moral stance to weed out the 'barbaric'", would "partly explain why Hongwu singled out the play for praise".[441]

Weeding out the "barbaric", refers to the Mongolian and Northern influences in music and drama. In light of the Mongol raids of the 1550s, an emperor who could weed these elements out would have appealed to Xu and many others immensely. K.C. Leung wrote of Xu's puritanical taste in music and drama and explains how he argued that northern music was "fake":

> Hsu's position in music was in a sense that of a conservative-purist, which is that one should not alter the original state of things. You cannot, or at least you ought not, impose model harmony upon 'songs and ballads of the alleys' precisely because (in his view) model harmony did not exist there in the first place. By the same token, you cannot alter the 'barbaric' quality of Northern music simply by getting famous poets to write lyrics for it…Not unnaturally, such prejudice engenders some tension along Hsu's line of argument; after all,

[439] Leung, *Hsu Wei as Drama Critic,* p. 63.
[440] Leung, *Hsu Wei as Drama Critic*, p. 216.
[441] Leung, *Hsu Wei as Drama Critic*, p. 107.

> Northern Music was noted for its modal harmony, and its modal system was 'a relic of the T'ang and Sung' and hence a link to culture. The dilemma was ultimately solved, albeit not very gracefully, by his assertion that Northern music was a 'fake'… Here he might have been goaded by xenophobic inclinations (and one must not forget the Ming bitterness against previous Mongol rule)…If it were possible to have his way, he would probably, like a true Confucian, rather listen to the long lost 'correct music' 正音 of old.[442]

Emperor Hongwu's anti-barbaric or anti-northern stance, as well as his taste for the southern *Story of the Lute,* would have appealed to Xu's concept of "authenticity", which he strongly advocated in literature and art. Xu's admiration for Hongwu and his anti-barbarian stance is clear in a poem he wrote about the emperor's portrait:

高皇帝像[443]	Portrait of The August Emperor [Ming Taizu]
上之岩也，天高以覆耶	His cliff-like prominence above, is heaven high enough to cover him?
下之豐也，地載以厚耶	His bountifulness below, is the Earth thick enough to bear him?
掃孽胡而握漢統，	Having swept away barbarians and grasped Han's reins of command,
維斯之與咮耶	Might this not indicate his participating in the Vermilion Bird Constellation?[444]
眉采耶目河耶	Ah, his eyebrows, scintillating! Ah, his eyes, Heavenly Rivers!
唐與虞之後耶	Ah, the follower of Yao and Shun!
氏以朱耶	Ah, Zhu is indeed his clan!
金天氏之胄耶	Ah, the descendent of Shao Hao!
是為我聖祖高皇帝之面耶	Is this truly the visage of our Sagely Ancestor, the August Emperor,
部耶	or merely a portion thereof?

[442] Leung, *Hsu Wei as Drama Critic*, pp. 23-24.
[443] XWJ, p. 584.
[444] The character *zhou* (咮) means the "beak of a bird" but is made of the character for "vermilion" *zhu* (朱), which is also Zhu Yuanzhang's family name and clan, and "mouth" *kou* (口). It subtly hints at the vermillion bird, one of the four symbolic Chinese constellations associated with the elements and seasons. Xu therefore emphasises Zhu Yuanzhang's connection with the *zhu que* or vermilion bird constellation, and his status as the son of heaven.

Xu gave no details as to where or when he saw this portrait of the emperor, but we can guess what type of portrait it was that he saw. Portraits of Emperor Hongwu have been the subject of much discussion for their variety and strangeness. Usually, they are distinguished between the so called "handsome portraits", made for Imperial ancestral purposes, and "ugly portraits", which were found in printed books and popular paintings for veneration.

Xu had never entered the palace or ancestral halls, and would therefore have probably never seen the official ancestral portrait. Instead, it was far more likely that Xu saw an unofficial portrait in a book or painting in a temple. These popular portraits, showing the emperor with pockmarks and "grotesque" exaggerated features, were much more widespread. According to Dora Ching:

> These "ugly" portraits proliferated during the late Ming and Qing dynasties and far outnumber the handsome portraits. Images of Zhu Yuanzhang also became subject matter in other media. In woodblock prints, Zhu appears either as the "ugly" type as in the print dated 1599 or as a more conventional, bland image that relies on labelling and props such as imperial garments to distinguish him as emperor.[445]

These portraits were probably not officially sanctioned, and the earliest dating of these "ugly portraits" are of prints with inscriptions by Gui E (d. 1531) and Zhang Cong (d. 1539), though there could be earlier paintings that have been lost.[446] Nevertheless, the mid 16th century dating would confirm that Xu had seen either a painting or woodblock print of an "ugly" portrait of the Ming emperor with exaggerated features to embellish his divine status. Indeed, many saw in Zhu's pockmarks the constellations signifying his heavenly

[445] Ching, Dora C. Y., "Visual Images of Zhu Yuanzhang" in *Long Live the Emperor!*, p. 171.
[446] Ching, "Visual Images of Zhu Yuanzhang", p. 183.

birthright. The reference, for example, to the stars and pockmarks is echoed in Xu's poem with the "vermillion bird constellation".

In Xu's poem, the emperor is almost messianic. Xu listed the sage kings and emperors of antiquity and showed Emperor Hongwu to be the next in line: the true inheritor of the mandate of heaven. He commented that Hongwu "swept away barbarians and grasped Han's reins of command", that is, pushed the Mongols out and restored order and native Han Chinese rule over the empire. In writing this poem and praising the emperor for sweeping away "barbarians", Xu – like many others, including Zhang Juzheng – certainly had the Mongol raids of the 1550s in mind. In such an era, when the border was frequently under threat, Hongwu's martial spirit which swept the "barbarians" away was invoked and revived.[447]

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Shortly after Xu's release from prison in 1572, one of the first places Xu visited was Emperor Hongwu's mausoleum in Nanjing. At the mausoleum he composed a poem. In the short preface of this poem, Xu highlighted the humble origins of Hongwu and compared him to the founder of the Han dynasty (206 BCE- 220 CE), Liu Bang, who was also of peasant background. In so doing, Xu stressed the continuity of the Ming with one of China's golden ages, and laid out the ideal of the sage ruler of humble origins and martial prowess:

[447] See Chapter 1 for more on the political situation of Xu's time as well as on the Mongol raid of 1550. Xu's historical verses show a strong interest in military heroes, reflecting the cult that had developed around martial figures during the Ming dynasty. This cult had emerged due to a growing, widespread perception of military threat, for example during the 1550 Mongol incursion. As Mote noted, "Whenever invasion threatened this otherwise civilian-orientated society, military heroes were resuscitated". The lessons of history and the virtues espoused by these historical figures, such as loyalty and duty, were therefore front and centre of the national consciousness. The quote comes from Mote. *Imperial China 900-1800*, p.305; see also pp. 299-307.

Respectfully Paying Homage at Xiao Mausoleum in Proper Rhyme

恭謁孝陵正韻[448]

Han Gaozu [Liu Bang] was like the Imperial Ancestor [Emperor Hongwu], in that they were unlettered to the end of their lives, which is why the fifth line is written thus. That day, the eunuch of the mausoleum briefly outlined those past events.

漢高仿佛皇祖，而以少文終其身，故五云然。是日陵監略陳先事。

二百年來一老生,	Two hundred years later an old chap;
白頭落魄到西京。	White haired and down and out arrived in west capital [Nanjing].
疲驢狹路愁官長，	Tired donkeys on the narrow road, the high officials worry.
破帽青衫拜孝陵。	With worn cap and black gown, I pay my respects at Xiao Mausoleum.
亭長一[輩]終馬上,[449]	The [humble] border-guard till his end on horse-back;
橋山萬歲始龍迎。	At Mount Qiao his Majesty was first welcomed by the dragon.
當時事業難身遇，	The achievements of those times are hard to encounter,
馮仗中官說與聽。	Leaning on a staff, the eunuch speaks with me while I listen.

Xu highlighted the similarities in the humble origins of Liu Bang and Zhu Yuanzhang and he hinted at another link between the Han and Ming dynasties: that of the moving of capitals. Xu wrote that he arrived in “West capital” (西京). The term “west capital” originally meant the capital of the Qin, Han and Tang dynasties: Chang’an, or modern day Xi’an. Chang’an had been the capital at the beginning of the Han Dynasty, but the capital was later moved east to Luoyang, leaving Chang’an to be called the “western capital”. This paralleled a similar shift in the early Ming dynasty, when the capital in modern-day Nanjing was moved to Beijing, leaving Nanjing in a similar situation to Chang’an during

[448] XWJ, p. 241.

[449] In the XWJ, the fourth character was originally written as *bēi* 杯 or “cup”. However within the context of the poem, I strongly believe this to be a mistake and that it should be *bèi* 輩 or “lifetime”. This would also create a better rhyme pattern. Thus, it should be read that both Liu Bang and Zhu Yuanzhang spent most of their lives on horseback fighting in war.

the Eastern Han. "West capital" is therefore a metaphor for Nanjing.[450] In making this link, Xu attempted to bridge the Ming and China's golden age of "native" Han rule, despite the Mongol interlude.

The admiration for the martial and even macho qualities of both Hongwu and Liu Bang is clear in the fifth line, as Xu noted in the short preface to the poem. In the third couplet, Xu refered to Liu Bang, who during the Qin period held the position of a *tingzhang* 亭長, an official akin to a border guard or neighbourhood watchman. Hence, Xu emphasised that Liu Bang began as an official of a rather humble status and position. Xu noted how, despite his low rank and little formal education, Liu Bang spent his life fighting on horseback, as did Zhu Yuanzhang, who rose from a peasant family to become a hero capable of pushing the Mongols out. Xu celebrated both their humble origins and martial prowess.

"The high officials worry" refers to their anxiety as tired donkeys carry them on a narrow road up the mountain.[451] Xu contrasted the heroic, unlettered, martial men on horseback with the educated yet uneasy civilian officials on donkeys. In the sixth line, Xu mentioned Qiao Mountain in Shanxi. This is a reference to the legendary Yellow Emperor who according to myth ascended to heaven here on the back of a dragon. The Han historian Sima Qian wrote in the *Shiji*:

> A dragon with whiskers hanging from its chin came down from the sky to fetch him. The Yellow Emperor mounted on the dragon's back, followed by his ministers and palace ladies, making a company of over seventy persons. When they had all mounted, the dragon rose from the ground and departed.[452]

[450] Qian Zhonglian, ed., *Yuan Ming Qing Shi Jianshang Cidian*, p. 598.
[451] Qian Zhonglian, ed., *Yuan Ming Qing Shi Jianshang Cidian*, p. 598.
[452] Watson, *Records of the Grand Historian I*, p. 52.

Xu used traditional history as well as literary metaphors for sovereignty in order to link Hongwu with Liu Bang, as well as the legendary Yellow Emperor, dragons and so on. In doing so, Xu celebrated Emperor Hongwu as his ideal of the sage sovereign.

In the final couplet Xu talked to the eunuch in charge of the mausoleum. The eunuch, like an old storyteller leaning on his staff, described the great deeds of Emperor Hongwu, while Xu listened admiringly. Xu lamented that the amazing stories of men like Hongwu and Liu Bang, who rose from humble origins to spectacular prominence and achievement, were rare in history.

In the poem, Xu delineated the qualities he admired in sage emperors, namely that they came from humble origins and had martial prowess. Zhang Juzheng's desire to revive "the spirit of the dynasty's founding emperor"[453] – that is, a strong military ethos and good management -- was shared by many, including Xu Wei.

Emperor Liu Yu's Patched Garments

Xu mined Chinese history for the traits that he admired in Sage emperors: humble origins and martial prowess. Besides Emperor Hongwu of the Ming, and Emperor Gaozu of the Han, there was also Emperor Wu of Liu Song. Emperor Wu of Liu Song, personal name Liu Yu 劉裕 (363-422), rose from an extremely poor background to become emperor through military force in 420.[454] Indeed, there was a famous anecdote about Liu Yu's poverty in Zhang Juzheng's *Dijian tushuo*:

> When Liu Yu was lowly, he cut reeds to make a living in Xinzhou. He wore patched garments, mended by Zang, now his empress. When they became noble, he handed it to his eldest daughter, the princess of Kuaiji saying "if

[453] Swope, *Dragon's Head and a Serpent's Tail*, p.23.
[454] For his biography, see Shen Yue 沈約, *Song Shu* 宋書 (The Book of the Song)(Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974), vol 1, pp. 1-62.

> there are those among my descendents who are arrogant and extravagant without moderation, you can show them these clothes to instruct them.
>
> 高祖微時，嘗自於新洲伐荻。有衲布衫襖，臧皇后手所作也。既貴，以付其長女會稽公主，曰：“後世有驕奢不節者，可以此衣示之。[455]

Zhang commented that Liu Yu “personally experienced hardship, and knew the difficulties of food and clothing among the people 亲历艰苦，知民间衣食之难”.[456] What made Liu Yu so praiseworthy was that he never forgot his humble origins, and indeed wanted to admonish his descendants to be frugal. That Liu Yu was admonishing his daughter, the Princess of Kuaiji, is also significant because this was Xu’s hometown. Xu thus had a local bond with this particular royal clan from history and he no doubt would have been extremely familiar with this story of frugality and humble origins.

While travelling along the Grand Canal, Xu passed through the historic city of Xuzhou during the double ninth festival. Xu took the opportunity to explore the historic sites and write poetry. It is clear from the short preface for the poem “Climbing Horse Sporting Terrace”, that Xu was concerned with his image in literary circles. He wrote that “Since the Six Dynasties onward many have used this for poetic material, I for this reason especially wanted to again narrate it in poetic form.” Xu was clearly consciously attempting to place himself firmly within a larger poetic tradition and establish himself as belonging in the hall of literary fame. But while there were self-serving motives, the poem still laid out the trope of Liu Yu’s humble origins and frugality, which was something Xu admired and was drawn to personally:

Climbing Horse Sporting Terrace on the Ninth Day

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[455] Zhang Juzheng **張居正**, *Dijian tushuo* 帝鑒圖説 (Shenyang: Wanjuan chuban gongsi, 2008), p.123.
[456] Zhang Juzheng, *Dijian tushuo,* p. 123.

九日登戲馬臺

The terrace that began with Xiang Yu was once climbed by Emperor Wu of Song (363-422) on the 9th day. Since the Six Dynasties onward many have used this for poetic material, I for this reason especially wanted to again narrate it in poetic form. Emperor Wu of Song's personal name was Liu Yu. When Sun En invaded Kuaiji, he was about to reach Shanyin, Emperor Wu used a long sword to kill dozens. Sun En fled to the sea, and thus Shanyin was preserved in its entirety. For the injured snake, see the annals.

臺始於羽，宋武當九日嘗登臨。六朝以後多取為詩料，余故特再詠焉。宋武，劉裕也。孫恩寇會稽，將及山陰，武以長刀奮殺數十人，恩走海，山陰得全。傷蛇見本紀。

宋武登高酣戲馬，	Emperor Wu of Song climbed high, intoxicated on sporting horse [terrace];
侍臣陪宴話傷蛇。	His attendants and ministers accompanying the party talked of the injured snake.
金釵各帕風吹落，	Golden hairpins of every scarf are blown down by the breeze;
繡帽親宣菊插斜。	Embroidered hats announce themselves with chrysanthemums stuck in sideways.
感慨長刀遮敝邑，	I heave a heavy sigh for the long sword that protected my humble town;
悽涼短褐弔官家。	Cold and miserable in my short hemp gown I pay my respects to this official house.
欲沽一滴澆行在，	I wish to buy some wine to sprinkle on his temporary residence;
掛杖無錢何處賒。[457]	But from my staff hangs no coins to buy wine anywhere.

The miserable condition of Xu in his simple hemp gown echoes the story of Liu Yu when he was once a humble reed cutter wearing patched clothes. Xu was identifying himself to some extent with Liu Yu. That many of the historical events surrounding Liu Yu occurred near Xu's hometown in Kuaiji is also significant. In the short preface to the poem, Xu briefly sketched the story of Liu Yu and how he protected Xu's hometown. Liu fought with a long sword against the sorcerer Sun En, who had rebelled against Jin rule in 399.[458] In

[457] XWJ, p. 784.
[458] Shen Yue, *Song Shu*, pp 1- 62.

401 Liu Yu was made governor of Xuzhou and repelled an attack by Sun En, eventually forcing him to commit suicide by drowning in the sea.[459] In the poem, Xu expressed his gratitude for the saviour of his town.

The first couplet begins with the image of Emperor Wu climbing the terrace on the double ninth festival, intoxicated with chrysanthemum wine, his attendants and ministers telling stories of the injured snake. The story goes that one day Emperor Wu saw a snake and fired an arrow, wounding it; the snake, however, turned out to be a spirit or deity.[460] The story became an example of Emperor Wu's bravery and courage.

The second couplet reminds the reader of the festive atmosphere of the double ninth: throngs of crowds in their finery, ladies with gold hairpins and scarves, men with chrysanthemums nonchalantly placed in their hats and clothes, proudly announcing their splendour. Few of them seem to have taken Liu Yu's lesson of frugality seriously. Amidst the luxury and opulence there is an odd yet distinct sense that the winds have changed direction. Xu can feel the cold. In his miserable state of poverty, he has neither warm clothes to put on nor money to buy even a bit of wine to make libations to sprinkle over the resting place of the hero of his hometown, Liu Yu. Instead, Xu can only heave a heavy sigh. "Climbing Horse Sporting Terrace on the Ninth Day" demonstrates his admiration for a martial emperor of humble origins and his closeness to the imperium.

"Who Could Long Restrain their Feet?": Yan Guang and Liu Xiu

Humble origins and martial prowess were two traits that Xu extolled as his ideal of the sage emperor time and again. But a sage emperor needed to be benevolent as well.

[459] Shen Yue, *Song Shu*, pp 1- 62.
[460] Shen Yue, *Song Shu*, pp 1- 62.

Naturalness and authenticity of emotion, as expressed between the hermit Yan Guang and Emperor Liu Xiu, was another trait that Xu applauded.

Xu, like many others who took the civil service examinations, intensely studied the philosophy of Mencius 孟子 (ca. 371 – 289 BCE). Mencius argued that the ideal relationship between a ruler and minister should be based explicitly on the model of friendship. Mencius thought of government service as a natural and familial act, not an artificially constructed and thus possibly destructible one. This was opposed to Han Feizi's 韓非子 (ca. 280- ca. 233 BCE) view, which advocated separating the interests of friends from the public interests of the state.[461]

The notion of friendship as a model for the relationship between ruler and minister was entirely topical and late Ming intellectuals "wrote about it obsessively".[462] Even the Italian Jesuit Matteo Ricci (1552-1610) felt it important enough to make it the subject of his book "On Friendship" 友論, one of the first books "translated" by a European into Chinese.[463] For the late Ming literati, including Xu Wei, friendship was important because it was seen as helping cultivate the self. Engaging in a relationship of friendship was a dialectical process whereby one's more personal interactions with others led to greater personal reflection and thus a clearer understanding of one's self.[464] It was an ideal that Xu saw as having existed in the past with Yan Guang and Emperor Liu Xiu.

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[461] Zha Changguo 查昌國, "You yu liang Zhou junchen guanxi de yanbian" 友與兩周君臣關係的演變, *Lishi yanjiu* 5 (1998), pp 105-108.

[462] See Ricci, Matteo and Billings, Timothy, trans., *On Friendship: One Hundred Maxims for a Chinese Prince* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), p. 5.

[463] See Ricci, *On Friendship*. See also Laven, Mary, *Mission to China: Matteo Ricci and the Jesuit Encounter with the East* (London: faber and faber, 2011), p. 106.

[464] As Martin Huang has shown, during the late Ming, "friendship appears to have been given an unprecedented legitimacy in the writings of many influential Confucian thinkers and activists." The attractions of friendship and its fluid nature within hierarchy opened up new ways for neo-Confucians like

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While Xu was travelling along the Fuchun River, not far from Hangzhou, he came across the shrine of Yan Guang where Yan was supposed to have fished. Xu composed two poems on the occasion. Yan began life as fisherman hermit to avoid getting entangled in politics during the Wang Mang interregnum.[465] When Yan Guang's old friend Liu Xiu became the Emperor Guangwu 光武 (5 BCE- 57 CE) of the Eastern Han dynasty, Yan was invited to the palace to rejoin the government. The *Hou Hanshu* recounts what happened next:

> Discussion led to their former days. And they conversed with each other for days on end. The Emperor freely asked Guang 'How do We compare with old times?' Guang replied 'Your Highness has put on a bit since the past.' Following that they lay down together, and Guang placed his foot upon the Emperor's belly. The next day the Grand Astrologer memorialised that a comet had transgressed the asterism Imperial Throne with great rapidity, at which the emperor laughed, saying, 'That was only my old friend Yan Ziling sleeping together with me![466]
>
> 論道舊日故，相對累日。帝從容問光曰：朕何如昔時？對曰：陛下差增於往。因共偃卧，光以足加帝腹上。明日，太史奏客星犯御坐甚急。帝笑曰：朕故人嚴子陵共卧耳。

Gu Xiancheng 顧憲成 (1550-1612) and He Xinyin 何心隱 (1517-1579) to criticise and change their social status and political traditions, as well as their relationship with the emperor. Up until then, friendship – the 'Fifth Relationship' in the five cardinal human relationships or *wulun* (五倫) as defined by Confucius – was considered the least essential. The other four relationships as specified by Confucius took priority, namely: ruler/minister, parent/child, elder brother/younger brother, and husband/wife. All except friendship involved the authority of one person over another. Friendship was thus the more fluid relationship in the hierarchy and, because of that, it was sometimes perceived as the most threatening to domestic harmony or a major element in factionalism (*pengdang* 朋黨 literally "friend party") within the court and bureaucracy. Huang, Martin, ed., *Male Friendship in Ming China* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), p.9.

[465] Dates of birth and death are uncertain, though some roughly place him between 40BCE-40CE. See Berkowitz, Alan J., *Patterns of Disengagement: The Practice and Portrayal of Reclusion in Early Medieval China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), p. 104, n. 10 and n. 11 for biographical information and discussion.

[466] Translated by Berkowitz in *Patterns of Disengagement,* p. 105. Originally from the *Hou Han Shu* 83: 2764.

Yan Guang's scandalous sleeping arrangement with the emperor and apparent lèse-majesté conflicted with the protocol of how an emperor should behave with his subjects and vice versa. In the two poems that Xu wrote on Yan Guang and Liu Xiu, the issue of Yan Guang placing his feet on the emperor's belly was central in creatively exploring the tensions between friendship and lèse-majesté.

Luo Yuming argued that Xu used this story in his poetry to bravely show contempt for the old society and the traditional Confucian notion of hierarchy.[467] However, it is important to keep in mind that the story of Yan Guang and the emperor was also included by the Chief Grand Secretary Zhang Juzheng in his moralistic and didactic book *Dijian tushuo* for the young Emperor Wanli as a positive example to learn from.[468] It cannot be said that Zhang Juzheng, the man near the top of the traditional order, was showing contempt for that same Confucian order. The idealised relationship between the emperor and the petty scholar is a meaningful trope all the way down from Zhang Juzheng's level to Xu Wei's. Therefore, it is misleading to ascribe to Xu Wei a modern and Marxist "anti-feudal" consciousness. Instead, Xu shared an idealised notion of the relationship between emperor and official that Zhang himself advocated. In *Dijian tushuo,* Zhang Juzheng wrote a commentary on Yan Guang and the emperor:

> Guangwu was emperor of all under heaven, but Yan Guang was just one among the commoners. Guangwu treated him as a virtuous person, and an old friend, thereby fulfilling three times over the etiquette of engagement. [The emperor] personally bowed with respect due to an emperor; he gave free reign to his wide eyes and harsh words without considering it arrogant; he permitted him to extend his feet over his belly without considering it disgraceful. With solicitous heartfelt feelings, he did didn't think twice of the difference between honouring and despising. What majestic moral character and magnanimity he had! ... Afterwards, for the two hundred years of the

[467] Qian Zhongliang, *Yuan Ming Qing shi jianshang cidian,* p. 598.
[468] Zhang Juzheng, *Di jian tu shuo*, pp, 94-97.

> Eastern Han, human feelings and mores were all lofty in both morals and righteousness. It was Guangwu's virtuous respect for a petty scholar that stirred and inspired it.
>
> 光武既帝天下，則嚴光乃草野中之一民耳，光武只為他是賢士，又是故人，遂加三聘之禮，親屈萬乘之尊，任其張目疾言而不以為傲，容其加足於腹而不以為侮，殷勤款曲，不復知有崇卑之分，此其盛德含容為何如哉！…後來東漢二百年，人心風俗皆以節義相高。是光武之尊賢下士，有以感發而興起之也。[469]

Zhang Juzheng's pedagogical duties as tutor to the emperor meant that the focus of his commentary was obviously centred more on the virtuous behaviour of the emperor. Xu's poem focused more on the lowly hermit Yan Guang. Nevertheless, the amiable relationship between subject and emperor was meaningful to everyone from Zhang at the top, to Xu at the bottom. In his poem, Xu wrote:

嚴先生祠[470] Master Yan's Shrine

碧水映何深，	How deep is the jade waters' reflection,
高蹤那可尋？	Where can his lofty trace be found?
不知天子貴,	He did not recognise the Son of Heaven's nobility;
自是故人心。	Considering himself to be a kindly old friend.
山靄消春雪，	Mountain mist dissipates spring snow;
江風灑暮林。	Wind on the river sprays the dusky woods.
如聞流水引，	Like listening to him strum "the flowing water",[471]
誰識伯牙琴？	Who recognises Bo Ya's zither?

The poem is set around the shrine of the hermit Yan Guang, which is on the banks of the Fuchun River.[472] In the second couplet, Xu goes back into history and engages with the

[469] Zhang Juzheng, *Di jian tu shuo*, pp, 94-97.
[470] XWJ, p 179.
[471] "Flowing water" refers to the title of the songs played by Bo Ya. Wang Fuzhi comments in his anthology of Ming Poetry that the "5th and 6th lines are not scenic language 五六非景語". In other words, Wang argued that Xu was not simply discussing the beautiful scenery. These lines describe the emotions of the musician Bo Ya, whose moods could be as high as the mountains or as low as the rivers. The couplet therefore, reflects the naturalness of Yan's attitude towards the emperor like flowing water or mountain mist. See Wang Fuzhi, *Ming Shi Pingxuan*, p. 219.

story of Yan Guang placing his feet on the emperor's stomach without recognising his nobility, instead "considering himself to be a kindly old friend". While Zhang Juzheng argued the case from the emperor's perspective, Xu emphasised Yan Guang's perspective, that of being an old friend of the emperor. For Xu, Yan's conduct was just as pure and natural as the emperor's. Naturalness and authenticity of emotion - expressed between Yan and the emperor - was a quality that Xu praised often.[473]

The theme of friendship is highlighted in the final couplet of the poem which refers to the musical story of Yu Boya 俞伯牙 and Zhong Ziqi 鍾子期 from the Chunqiu period (770 BC-476 BC).[474] The story goes that when Boya played his *qin* 琴 (seven-string zither) to describe lofty mountains or flowing waters, Ziqi could promptly and accurately grasp his friend's expression. Through music the two developed a lifelong bond, and thus when Ziqi died, Boya broke his *qin* since he argued that no one would understand him as Ziqi did. The story became a symbol of intimate friendship and mutual understanding. The reference in Xu's poem to Boya and Ziqi illustrates the natural, simple and uncomplicated ideal relationship between friends, and between Yan Guang and Emperor Guangwu.

For Xu Wei and Zhang Juzheng, the story of Yan Guang symbolised how things should be between the emperor and his subjects: more sincere, natural and pure, the emperor respecting his subject's wishes and vice versa. In the poem, Xu represented himself as

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[472] The Fuchun River is an estuary of the Qiantang River in Zhejiang, south west of Hangzhou, and the shrine to Yan Guang still exists there today.

[473] In the same vein, Xu's theory of *bense* 本色 or "true nature" in literature and art advocated the expression of unbridled authentic emotion.

[474] See Miao Tianrui 繆田瑞, Ji Liankang 吉聯抗, and Guo Naian 郭乃安, eds., *Zhongguo yinyue cidian* 中國音樂詞典 (Beijing: Renmin yinyue chubanshe, 1985), p. v. For historical descriptions of the legend of Boya and Ziqi, see "Benwei 本味" in Ji Liankang, ed., *lushi chunqiu zhongdi yinyue shiliao* 呂氏春秋中的音樂史料 (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1983), pp. 45-46; and "Boya" and "Zhong Ziqi" in Zhu Changwen 朱長文, *Qinshi* 琴史 (*Siku yishu congshu* ed.; Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1991), pp. 16-17.

someone arguing that government service should be a natural and almost familial act, not a constructed and formalised one. The relationship between Yan Guang and the emperor was seen as a worthy ideal by both Xu and Zhang, but for different purposes. As tutor and Grand Secretary, Zhang wanted the young Emperor Wanli to defer to him in the same way that Liu Xiu deferred to Yan Guang. For Xu, he wanted to be recognised as a talented scholar of use to the realm, like Yan Guang.

In the second poem on Yan Guang, Xu associated himself more closely with the hermit Yan Guang and imagined himself putting his feet on the emperor's belly. This is not an attack on the imperium or the traditional order, as Luo Yuming has argued. Instead, Xu was reconstructing the pure and intimate relationship with the emperor, replacing Yan Guang with himself:

嚴先生祠 Master Yan's Shrine

大澤高蹤不可尋，	In the great marsh his lofty trace cannot be found;
古碑祠木自陰陰。	Ancient stele in the wooden shrine enshrouded.
長江萬里元無盡，	The long river goes on for ten thousand *li* with no end;
白日千年此一臨。	Facing here the white sun for a thousand years.
我已醉中布屨岸，	Already I am drunk and my hat is askew;
誰能夢裏足長禁。	Who in their dreams can long restrain their feet,
一加帝腹渾閒事，	Extending over the emperor's belly is a simple issue of idleness.
何用榜人說到今。[475]	What use is it then of listless people discussing it till now?

Xu argued that putting one's feet over "the emperor's belly is a simple issue of idleness". In other words, Yan Guang was just tired and did not think about it too deeply. Xu was surprised that people would think two friends would act differently just because one was the emperor.

[475] XWJ, p. 765.

In the fifth line, Xu refers specifically to himself and his drunken state. Xu asked the reader if we could restrain our feet while in deep sleep. Here, Xu imagined himself in the same situation as the hermit Yan Guang sleeping beside the emperor. Emphasising the importance of friendship and its intimacy, Xu implied that, like Yan Guang, he too would prop his feet up.

Xu admired the naturalness and authenticity of emotion that characterised the friendship between the emperor and his subject. No doubt, when Shen Lian and Hu Zongxian were executed in the name of the emperor, Xu yearned for this idealistic relationship with the imperium.

Lord and Minister like Fish and Water

On top of the traits of martial prowess and humble origins, Xu looked for idealistic examples in history where the relationship between minister and emperor was like "fish and water". The natural and authentic expression of friendship between Yan Guang and the Emperor Liu Xiu was one example, but another was the relationship between strategist and statesman Zhuge Liang and Liu Bei, King of Shu during the Three Kingdoms period (220-280 CE). Xu wrote:

忠 Loyalty

君臣相得魚水，	The ruler and his ministers interact like fish and water,
荊益稍展風雲。	Jing and Yi [provinces] somewhat unfurled the wind and clouds.[476]
前後出師二表，	Both the former and latter memorials for the case to go to war,
始終鼎足三分。[477]	all along the tripods legs were three [i.e. strength in unity].

[476] "Wind and clouds" refer to an unstable situation. In this case it probably refers to the political turmoil of the Three Kingdoms period.
[477] XWJ, pp. 842-843.

The poem expresses the ideal of loyalty as binding together the subject and sage ruler in an ideal relationship of mutual dependence and respect, like “fish and water”. As noted above in the introduction, this is an old trope that begins in the literature on statecraft from the Warring States onwards. Xu’s poem thus shares much with the view represented by Zhang Juzheng in the *Dijian tushuo.* Zhang wrote in a commentary:

Lord and Minister like Fish and Water

> In the Historical Records of the Three Kingdoms it is recorded that Zhuge Liang at first lived in seclusion in Xiangyang, and had the talent and strategies to make kings powerful, but he wasn’t willing to take an official post, so people called him the crouching dragon. The first lord of Shu, Liu Bei, heard of his name, and in vain drove to see him personally. He went three times until he finally saw him. Zhuge Liang conducted himself with dignity, and wasn’t originally seeking advancement in the official world. When he saw that the first King bowed in respect, and was sincere and earnest like this, his mood was grateful, thereupon he was made a minister. Thereupon Zhuge Liang spoke to the first lord on strategies of how to resist Cao Cao, take Jingzhou, and hold Sichuan. The first lord was very pleased with these strategies, and took his words in, feeling closer to him day by day. At the time, the first lord had two sworn brothers called Guan Yu and Zhang Fei. They went to see the first lord one morning and spoke of his closeness to this Zhuge Liang. They explained how in their hearts they were not pleased. But the first lord urged them explaining: ‘I have Kongming [Zhuge Liang], like a fish has water! A fish without water has no means to live; without Kongming, I will have no way to become emperor. You all agreed to restore the Han royal clan, so you cannot take this man lightly. I hope you will not speak like this again.” Now, the first lord entrusted Kongming, and although he was extremely close to him like with Guan Yu and Zhang Fei, he also didn’t allow a wedge to be driven between them. Thus, Kongming put his talent to good use, and together with Wu they resisted Wei and took Sichuan; a blessing for the Han in a time of decline. They thus had the power of the three legs of a tripod vessel, and his descendents were entrusted with Sichuan as rulers. Looking at his *First and Latter Memorials for the Case to go to War*, through the ages people have read it, and it brought them to tears. His heart was so sincere for the kind treatment by the first lord, he bent himself to the task to do his utmost and did not leave. Later generations said that the close relationship between a lord and his minister should be compared to a fish and water. Probably this is why they all say this.

君臣魚水

三國史上記，諸葛亮初隱居於襄陽之隆中地方，有興王定霸的才略，不肯出仕，人稱他為臥龍。蜀先主劉備聞其名，乃親自枉駕去見他，凡去三次，才得相見。亮以道自重，本不求仕進，見先王屈尊重道，誠意懇切如此，心懷感激，遂委質為臣，因說先主以拒曹操、取荊州、據巴蜀的計策，先主以這計策甚善，深納其言，與他相處，情好日益親密。當時先主有兩個結義的兄弟，叫做關羽、張飛，見先主一旦與亮這等親密，心中不喜，先主勸解說：“孤之有孔明，如魚之有水一般，魚非水，無以遂其生，我非孔明，無以成帝業，諸君既與我同心要興復漢室，不可不親厚此人也。願諸君勿再以為言。”夫先主信任孔明，雖平日極相厚如關、張，亦離間他不得如此，故孔明得展其才，結吳拒魏取蜀，當漢祚衰微之時，成三分鼎立之勢，其後又於白帝託孤輔佐後主。觀其前後出師表，千古讀之，使人垂涕。蓋其心誠感激先主之恩遇，故鞠躬盡瘁而不辭也。後世稱君臣之間相親相信者，必以魚水為比，蓋本諸此云。[478]

Both Xu and Zhang were using similar, if not the same, phrases and references such as “the three legs of a tripod vessel”, “lord and minister like fish and water”, Zhuge Liang’s memorials etc. In 227, Zhuge Liang wrote a memorial titled “Memorial for the Case to Go to War” (出師表）to the Emperor of the Shu Kingdom Liu Shan 劉禪 (207-271) stating his rationale for the provinces of Jing and Yi to unite in a military expedition against the northern Kingdom of Wei. This was referred to the in poem above by Xu. A second memorial of the same title, apparently written in 228, was also ascribed to Zhuge Liang. The memorials have ever since been seen as the highest expression of the loyal minister serving his monarch.

Zhang Juzheng’s commentary is arguably representative of widely held views regarding the ideal relationship between minister and emperor which Xu shared. Zhang, of course, approached the story from the perspective of the ruler, with the aim of moulding the young Wanli Emperor into a sage sovereign. Xu approached it from the perspective of

[478] Zhang Juzheng, *Di jian tushuo*, p. 115.

Zhuge Liang and his service to the sovereign, with the aim of expressing his idealisation of a loyal and mutually respectful relationship between minister and emperor.

Auspicious and Menacing Omens for the Imperium

Xu was not a high minister like Zhang Juzheng, and he could only dream of passing the civil service exams to become an official serving his sovereign with memorials and strategies like Zhuge Liang. However, Xu got his chance when he became Governor General Hu Zongxian's private secretary. As Hu's secretary and ghostwriter, it was Xu's responsibility to not only provide strategies to Hu Zongxian, but also write memorials on his behalf to the emperor. When Hu Zongxian caught a white deer, Xu was asked to write the memorial presenting it to the emperor. For once, despite examination failure, Xu could inhabit the role that an official was called upon to play.

Emperor Jiajing was a devout Daoist and greatly appreciated memorials on auspicious omens and Daoist style elegiac essays. It was precisely the writing of these essays, which helped ministers such as Yan Song and Xue Jie stay in power. Martin Huang wrote that "the emperor enjoyed them so much that he often commented on them and underlined sentences he liked and had them collected in a little book".[479] Xu's services as a writer were extremely valuable to Hu Zongxian precisely because of this. After Hu's failure to capture Zhoushan Island from pirates, he presented to the court an auspicious white deer. The emperor was so pleased that he overlooked Hu's failure and kept him in office. A partial translation of one of Xu's memorials on the capture of the white deer is examined below:[480]

[479] Huang, Martin W., *Negotiating Masculinities in Late Imperial China* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2006), p. 56.
[480] For the memorials on the capture of two white deer, see XWJ, pp. 430-433.

First Memorial on the Presentation of a White Female Deer Written on Behalf [of Hu Zongxian]

> Your earnest subject checked the illustrated records, then the recorded commentaries. Therefore your subject understands that herds of deer have a special celestial quality. After a thousand years it begins to transform into a dark blue, and after a further five hundred years it then becomes white, from past till present, its life is boundless. As for the phenomenon of the chain of spirits prostrating, it is an omen in response to the virtuous harmony of the time, none can in detail relate this, but we sincerely hope to come upon this. Surely we have an enlightened and sagely monarch, who follows the way of personal cultivation and profound mystery, defending harmony and life, in harmony from the outset, later this auspiciousness was achieved and presented. Compliments to his Highness, with rapt attention and profound solemnity, his embracing nature pure and authentic, he does not speak but at times acts, without action the people themselves transform, his virtue strides above Emperor Fu Xi, his years conforming to the length of the heaven and earth.

代初進白牝鹿表

> 臣謹按圖牒，再紀道詮，乃知麋鹿之群，別有神仙之品，歷一千歲始化而蒼，又五百年乃更為白，自茲以往，其壽無疆。至於鏈神伏氣之徵，應德協期之兆，莫能罄述，誠亦希逢。必有明聖之君，躬修玄默之道，保和性命，契合始初，然後斯祥可得而致。恭惟皇上，凝神沕穆，抱性清真，不言而時以行，無為而民自化，德邁羲皇之上，齡齊天地之長。[481]

Xu's memorial to the emperor was clearly self-serving. Not only did he gain materially from Hu Zongxian, but it was a strategic attempt to control his image in the eyes of prominent men in literary circles. In a biography of Xu Wei, Tao Wangling wrote:

> At the time, Tang Shunzhi became in charge of the Ministry for War, and had made his name in classical writings. His Excellency Hu [Zongxian] once took Xu's memorial out of his sleeve, and said misleadingly to Tang Shunzhi: "what does your Excellency think of my writing?" Tang Shunzhi said astonished: "this piece is almost as good as mine!" Later, Hu produced another person's writing, and His Excellency Tang said: "This was not your work all along, so whose is it? I would like to see him at once." His Excellency Hu thus called Xu Wei to join them in drinking. Tang deeply praised him, sighing, and left in high spirits. Vice commissioner Mao Kun from Gui'an was once travelling to his military commandery, he was on very good terms with Tang Shunzhi. Once at a banquet many scholars were gathered, His Excellency Hu again concealed Xu Wei's authorship and said: "does anyone know who wrote this?" Mao Kun, having not even read half of the work, hastily said: "This cannot but be the

[481] XWJ, pp. 430-431.

> work of Jing Chuan [Tang Shunzhi].” His Excellency Hu laughed and said it was by Xu Wei: “Mao Kun, in your kindly thoughts you assumed it was your teacher Tang Shunzhi, you must now acknowledge this man [Xu Wei] to be your teacher.” Mao Kun was irritated and his face turned red, and struggled to finish reading it, and said misleadingly: “It’s a pity that the latter parts do not match up, that’s all.” In this way, [Xu] made a name for himself and gained favour in his generation.
>
> 時都御史武進唐公順之，以古文負重名。胡公嘗袖出渭所代，謬之曰：“公謂予文若何？”唐公驚曰：“此文殆輩吾！”後又出他人文，唐公曰：“向固謂非公作，然其人誰耶？願一見之。”公乃呼渭偕飲，唐公深獎嘆，與結歡而去。歸安茅副使坤時遊於軍府，素重唐公。嘗大酒會，文士畢集，胡公又隱渭文語曰：“能識是為誰筆乎？”茅公讀未半，遽曰：“此非吾荊川必不能。”胡公笑謂渭：“茅公雅意師荊川，今北面於子矣。”茅公慙慍面赤，勉卒讀，謬曰：“惜後不逮耳。”其為名輩所賞服如此。[482]

The above passage clearly illustrates how Xu’s memorial received acclaim. Even the leading man of letters of his day, Tang Shunzhi, thought that it was good enough to be his own writing. Although Xu had much to gain from the memorial, it did convey his ideal of the sage sovereign at the same time. By writing this memorial, Xu was able to successfully play the role of a minister serving his emperor. As Sarah Schneewind wrote:

> Xu’s memorial offers blatant flattery, often part of the relationship between minister and ruler. But these statements were also propaganda in the making, drafts of public relations bulletins that the ruler could use to strengthen his government’s legitimacy.[483]

Xu’s memorial may seem to us extremely sycophantic, full of trite expressions and phrases. Yet to read Xu’s memorial solely in terms of its place (or non-place) in literary history is to miss the point. Xu wrote the memorial not only because of literary or material aspirations, but also because he subscribed to these arguments about the nature and ideology of sovereignty. That Xu could so successfully play the role of a high minister writing a

[482] XWJ, p. 1339.
[483] Schneewind, Sarah, *Tale of Two Melons: Emperor and Subject in Ming China* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2006), p. 7.

memorial to the emperor, to the extent that even the Minister for War, Tang Shunzhi, judged it good enough to be his own, is support of this.

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It is now time to return to the remarks made by the Palace Museum scholar Yang Xin. We have seen at the beginning of this chapter that Yang interpreted one of Xu's colophons as "cursing the emperor". Yang was specifically referring to a poem which was inscribed on the painting "Flowers and Grasses of the Four Seasons" (四時花卉). Xu wrote:

老夫遊戲墨淋漓，	In my performance the ink is dripping wet,
花草都於雜四時。	the flowers and grasses are confused about the season.
莫怪畫圖差兩筆，	Do not complain that this painting lacks several strokes,
近來*天道*夠差池	for recently the way of heaven is full of misdeeds.

[Translation by Yang Xin][484]

Yang Xin argued that this poem showed Xu's indignation at the emperor and the "feudal" regime. He wrote:

> The way of heaven is not a reference to nature's changing seasons, but an insinuation directed against the entire feudal regime. Initially dissatisfied, Xu Wei was now full of indignation. He cursed not only the evil ministers but the emperor himself.[485]

Yang's conclusion that Xu was cursing the emperor, however, is based on a questionable reading of this poem. The "way of heaven 天道" does mean the spiritual principles or divine order of things, but the term itself is not specifically political, although it could have indirect political implications. If we consider another poem by Xu, titled "Snow in

[484] Yang, Barnhart, Nie, Cahill, Lang and Wu, *Three Thousand Years of Chinese Painting*, p. 232. The same colophon appears on another painting by Xu Wei in the Shanghai Museum, see Zhou Linsheng, ed, *Mingdai huihua,* p. 172. See also Liu Zhengcheng 劉正成 ed, *Zhongguo shufa quanji: Xu Wei* 中國書法全集：徐渭 (Beijing: Rongbaozhai chubanshe, 2010), pp. 36-37.

[485] Yang Xin et al, *Three Thousand Years of Chinese Painting,* p. 232.

Lotuses", we can see that the phrase "way of heaven" should be interpreted very differently:

六月初三大雪飛　For three days early in the sixth month there was a great blizzard,
碧翁卻爲竇娥奇。　The Jade Emperor was astonished by Dou E.
近來天道也私曲，　Recently the way of heaven is selfish and crooked,
莫怪筆底有差池。　No wonder there are mistakes from under my brush.[486]

This poem provides greater context and the "way of heaven" here refers to the unseasonal weather of snow in summer. But is this a curse against the emperor? As the historian Timothy Brook wrote, "Everyone from the emperor to the lowliest person in the realm understood that bad weather meant more than bad weather."[487] Snow falling in summer was indeed a sign or portent from heaven, but as Sarah Schneewind states, "There was no code book for interpreting portents… Even when everyone agreed that a portent was a warning or chastisement, it was not clear who had stimulated it." [488]

Snow in summer was a portent that the cosmos was askew and could imply that the son of heaven, i.e. the emperor, as the mediator between heaven and earth, had not fulfilled his duties of keeping the balance in harmony. But Xu was not referring to an actual event of snow falling in summer. Rather, it was a cultural reference, which we can see from the second line of the poem "Snow in Lotuses". It makes reference to Dou E 竇娥, the female protagonist from the popular Yuan dynasty play *Dou E yuan* 竇娥冤 or *The Injustice to Dou E*, also known as *Snow in Midsummer.*[489]

[486] XWJ, p. 1316.
[487] Brook, *The Troubled Empire: China in the Yuan and Ming Dynasties,* p. 73.
[488] Schneewind, *Tale of Two Melons*, p. xx.
[489] Yuan dynasty play by Guan Hanqing 關漢卿 (c. 1235- c. 1300). See West, Stephen and Idema, Wilt, eds., *Monks, Bandits, Lovers and Immortals: Eleven Early Chinese Plays* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2010), pp. 1-36.

The play offers more clues as to how the metaphor of snow in summer should be interpreted. In *Snow in Midsummer*, the destitute young maiden Dou Duanyun was sold as a child bride and renamed Dou E. After various injustices done to her, she was falsely accused and arrested. She was eventually sentenced to death, but she swore that her innocence would be proven if three things occurred after her death, namely: her blood would not drip onto the ground, *heavy snow would fall in the sixth month* (summer) and there would be drought for three years.[490]

After her death, the Jade Emperor, the monarch of all the deities in heaven, was astonished by the event and fulfilled all her predictions. Her innocence was proven and she was avenged by her father, who had become a senior government official. Xu's reference to snow falling and the way of heaven was therefore a reference to this popular Yuan play, as well as an expression of his own sufferings. Xu had lost his father only one hundred days after he was born and his mother was a concubine who was sold off, like Dou E. To say that Xu was "cursing" the emperor and the entire "feudal" regime with an almost Marxist consciousness is an overstatement. Xu certainly felt injustice, but that did not mean he was opposed to the imperium; in the same way that his numerous encounters with examination failure did not turn him against the examination system in its entirety.

Considering the above, one could view the references to unseasonal weather as a reference to the Yuan dynasty play of Dou E. Alternatively, it could be a playful or ironic commentary on his own painting, which has flowers from various seasons all jumbled

[490] West and Idema, eds., *Monks, Bandits, Lovers and Immortals: Eleven Early Chinese Plays,* p. 25.

together. Therefore, for Yang to conclude from the colophon that Xu was cursing the emperor and entire "feudal" regime is an exaggeration.

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Although Xu did not "curse the emperor", he could be critical of particular emperors. In fact, his criticisms reveal the kind of emperor Xu idealised. In one poem, composed during a visit to the Mausoleums of six Southern Song emperors, Xu highlighted his concern with the military weakness and inability of the last Song emperors to resist foreign invasion.[491] The scholar Fu Jie wrote:

> Although this poem is a work recalling the past, it is in fact an outpouring of emotion regarding the reality of the current political situation
>
> 這首詩雖是懷古之作，其實是現實政治形勢觸發出的意味深長的感慨。[492]

Fu Jie was implying that the poem on the military failure of the Song emperors was really about the situation of the Ming. Again, Xu's distress over the military weakness of the last Song emperors was shared by many, including prominent men at court serving the emperor. Zhang Juzheng, for example, cited the effete Song Huizong 宋徽宗 (1082-1135), who was the last emperor of the Northern Song dynasty, as an example to "fear as if touching boiling water".[493]

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[491] The mausoleums are in the outskirts of Shaoxing, Xu's hometown. Emperor Gaozong, Emperor Xiaozong, Emperor Guangzong, Emperor Ningzong, Emperor Lizong and Emperor Duzong were all buried there. In addition to the six imperial mausoleums, Emperor Huizong of the Northern Song Dynasty, several queens and high-ranking ministers of the Southern Song Dynasty were also buried there. Emperor Hongwu rebuilt the tombs after they had been desecrated by the Mongols, allowing Xu to visit them. See Yim, Lawrence C. H., *The Poet-Historian Qian Qianyi* (Oxford and New York: Routledge 2007), p. 102.

[492] Fu Jie, *Xu Wei shiwen xuanyi*, p. 65.

[493] Murray, *Mirror of Morality,* p. 91.

As we have seen earlier in this chapter, Xu admired a strong and martial emperor who could resist foreign invasion. It was precisely the Song emperor's perceived military weakness that Xu feared:

春日過宋諸陵三首 Three Poems on Passing the Song Mausoleums in Spring

三 Three

落日愁山鬼，	The setting sun causes the mountain spirits worry,
寒泉鎖殯宮，	cold spring stream locks the imperial coffin;
魂猶驚鐵騎，	the spirits still seem frightened at iron strong cavalry,
人自哭遺弓。	People cry of the death of the emperor.[494]
白骨夜半語，	Bleached bones in the middle of the night speak,
諸臣地下逢，	all the ministers in the underworld meet,
如聞穆陵道，	as if listening to the words of Emperor Song Lizong[495]
當日悔和戎。	Regretting the peace with the Barbarian tribes.[496]

In the poem, Xu described a sorrowful scene of worried spirits fearing foreign invasion and mourning the deceased emperor. In the underworld, the Southern Song ministers meet with the deceased Song Emperor Lizong and discuss their regretful military weakness and misguided foreign policy.

In traditional historiography, the reign of Emperor Song Lizong 宋理宗 (1205-1264) was marred by his irresponsibility and delegation of authority to prime ministers. It was also during Lizong's reign that the Southern Song entered into an alliance with the Mongols

[494] *Yi gong* 遺弓 is a Chinese term that literally means lost bow, but is a metaphor for the death of an emperor. According to the *Shiji,* when the legendary Yellow Emperor ascended to heaven on the back of a dragon, he dropped and lost his bow. From then on, it became a common metaphor for the departure of an emperor. See Fu Jie, *Xu Wei shiwen xuanyi*, p. 66.

[495] Song Lizong **宋理宗** (1205-1264), fifth emperor of the Southern Song Dynasty, was uninterested in state affairs. It was said that he frequented brothels and invited prostitutes to the palace. During his reign the Mongols declared war on the Southern Song. His mausoleum was called 'Yong mu ling' 永穆陵 or "Maosoleum of perpetual solemnity". See Fu Jie, *Xu Wei shiwen xuanyi*, p. 66, n.4.

[496] *Rong* 戎 can refer to "military" or "military affairs", but it can also apply to "barbarian tribes" from the west. XWJ, p. 170.

against the Jurchen in the hope of recovering lost territory. After the Jurchen were crushed, however, the Mongols declared war on the Song.[497] This is what Xu meant by "regretting the peace with the Barbarian tribes" in the last line. The Song dynasty was eventually destroyed by the Mongols in 1279 and the imperial mausoleums were desecrated, with Emperor Lizong's skull made into a drinking cup.[498]

The Song mausoleums were a scene of national humiliation, only a few miles from Xu's hometown. Therefore, Xu would have been very conscious of the consequences of a militarily weak and arrogant emperor. Correspondingly, he emphasised the need for a strong martial emperor who was of humble origins and not overconfident. As Timothy Brook explained, the emperor "is essential to the system, the foundation of the nation, and the only sure guarantee of the survival of the dynasty".[499] Xu's fear of military weakness, a trait which he saw in the last Song emperors, was a concern shared by many. It does not mean he was anti-emperor or against the imperial system. After all, In the fourth line of the poem, there are still tears for the death of the emperor despite his faults and failings.

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Contrary to the later narrative of Xu Wei as the anti-institutional, Daoist mountain hermit, Xu laid out a particular vision of the emperor and his relationship to the imperium through his own poetry. To some extent, this vision was self-serving, an attempt to

[497] For a detailed account of the reign of Song Emperor Lizong, see Davis, Richard L., *Wind Against the Mountain: The Crisis of Politics and Culture in Thirteenth Century China* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 1996).
[498] Lizong's skull was eventually taken by a Tibetan lama, who made it his drinking vessel. It was not until the Ming dynasty that the skull was recovered and reburied in its proper place, the Yongmuling. See Yim, *The Poet-Historian Qian Qianyi,* p. 184, n. 77.
[499] Brook, *The Troubled Empire,* p. 103.

project an elevated self-image in the eyes of his fellow literati. In doing so, Xu attempted to circumvent his exam frustration and status anxiety. At the same time, the vision of the sage emperor was also an important part of his identity.

The vision of the sage emperor that Xu described was strong and martial, as well as coming from humble origins. Xu looked for these traits in history and particularly admired the founder of the Ming dynasty Emperor Hongwu, as well as Liu Bang and Liu Yu. Xu also looked to history for examples of a relationship between ruler and subject which was based on the Mencian model of friendship – more familial and authentic in emotion. Xu's encounters with the tomb of Emperor Hongwu and his portraits became vehicles to project his idealised relationship and feelings towards the emperor. These visions were tied to his larger concerns over the imperium such as an anxiety over Mongol or foreign assault and the deteriorating relationship between the Jiajing Emperor and his bureaucracy.

Xu's views were similar to widespread concerns about the imperium. They were not unconventional. In fact, they were shared by prominent men at court, such as the Chief Grand Secretary Zhang Juzheng. To imbue Xu with a modern or Marxist consciousness that rejected "feudal" institutions and the emperor, as Yang Xin does, is mistaken. Xu's self-representation was intertwined with his views of the political order in general and the emperor in particular.

Conclusion

This thesis has shown a very different representation of Xu Wei from the one which others have written about. Moving away from the hagiographies surrounding Xu, this thesis has focused on the constructedness of his literary self-representations, in light of his career and political circumstances.

"Original", "mad", "eccentric", "expressive" are all words we associate with Xu. As we have seen, scholars have thus far focused overwhelmingly on his literary theory of *bense,* as well as his wild ink-brush paintings, mental instability, numerous suicide attempts and the murder of this third wife. But to view him and his work only through the constructed lens of his "eccentricity" and theories of *bense* would be to miss the more complicated aspects of him: the reluctant ghostwriter, frustrated scholar of the realm, faithful subject of the emperor and didactic historian.

This thesis looks at Xu's work against the backdrop of venal court politics and Mongol and pirate invasions, and sees how Xu was pulled in various directions and forced into difficult situations. Xu's close friend Shen Lian, from his hometown Shaoxing, was exiled and executed by the Chief Grand Secretary Yan Song and his clique. Xu wrote mournful eulogies, turning Shen into a contemporary Qu Yuan. Yet only a month after his friend's execution, Xu switched sides and worked as a ghostwriter for Hu Zongxian, a protégé of Yan Song. Xu earned a good living and built a large house called the "Hall for the Remuneration of Words". Yet with the fall of Yan Song in 1562 and the arrest of Hu Zongxian, this became an embarrassment for Xu. Fearing that he would be implicated with the Yan Song clique, Xu distanced himself from his flattering ghostwritten poems. Xu – the champion of unbridled self-expression – wrote: "writings of the hand are of the kind

that does not come from the heart 書於手者，類不出於其心”.[500] Overwhelmed by feelings of guilt, he explored the complexities of loyalty and identity in his writings.

Yuan Hongdao’s hagiography of Xu created a resilient and powerful image of Xu that has lasted into the 21st century: the untrammelled eccentric literatus who did not fit in with conservative artistic and literary circles. Xu’s representation of himself as a “scholar of the realm”, the intricate complexities and tensions surrounding the conflicted loyalties of his day, his ghostwritten poems for the infamous Yan Song, engagement with networks of power, admiration for strong martial emperors and so on, were all edited out by Yuan Hongdao in his hagiography of Xu. Yuan did this in order to create an image of Xu as the anti-institutional, non-conventional hermit artist.

Yet, this thesis has shown that Xu was not entirely unconventional. In adopting the persona of the “scholar of the realm”, didactic poet-historian and loyal subject of the emperor, Xu’s writings accepted many poetic and historiographic conventions. The art historian James Cahill has already written about how Xu manipulated his artistic personality using established artistic conventions:

> [Xu Wei] must use established artistic conventions in projecting it [his artistic expression], twisting these as necessary to his purpose, if he is to communicate his meanings to his audience. To downplay these conventions and treat the creation of the work of art as a matter of direct expression, as though the forms arose anew each time out of the particular personality and situation of each artist, is to produce a false and unmanageable art history.[501]

The same can certainly be said of Xu’s literary activities. Xu’s poetry and prose, especially ghostwritten prose, had to work within long-established conventions. This has prompted

[500] XWJ, p. 518.
[501] Cahill, *The Franklin D. Murphy Lectures IX,* p. 94.

one modern Chinese commentator of Xu's poetry to accurately say, "When reading his poetry and painting, one does not see his madness 讀其詩、畫，不見其狂."[502]

Thus far, anthologies have almost exclusively focused on Xu's "mountain-hermit" persona, eccentricity and theory of *bense.* I have shown that this neglects another aspect of his work, namely his more classical poems, which are verbose and densely packed with historical allusions and stock phrases. In so doing, I have presented a fuller picture of Xu and moved away from the distorting effect of these anthologies.

Even though Xu advocated theories of *bense,* untrammelled self-expression and originality, in order to earn a living, he had to cater to an audience of classically educated scholars and write in a style that was suitable to them. When Xu's friend Shen Lian died, he followed the paradigm of Confucian historians before him and constructed Shen as someone equal to Wu Zixu or Qu Yuan. Moreover, as a ghostwriter to Hu Zongxian, protégé of Yan Song, Xu would not have been able to avoid writing verbose birthday poems to Yan. This thesis has shown that Xu Wei, his personas and his work, was far more complex than previously thought. Depending on the political and social circumstances, Xu could both project an image of himself as the Daoist recluse or engaged Confucian bureaucrat.

This different view of Xu is the result of a methodology which ignores the hagiographies of eccentricity and examines the text, situating it within Xu's historical context and networks of power. In doing so, I am questioning the simplistic traditional literary and artistic view that a mad artist necessarily produces mad work. This traditional view, for

[502] Zhang Rongdong, *Yougu zhong sheng: Zhongguo huajia shihua*, p. 165.

example, does not take into account whether the artist or poet was deliberating over his image and constructing an artifice.

Indeed, contrary to traditional Chinese literary or artistic theories, which argue that by looking at a piece of art, calligraphy or poetry one can literally see into the mind and soul of the artist, this thesis emphasises the constructedness of that self-representation. When reading a poem, one need not necessarily say that this is the poet opening up to us. Rather, the poet may be deliberately constructing an image to suit his audience, his context, or some other motive.

The re-introduction of historical and social context in our reading of Xu's literary work opens up several avenues for exploration.

Firstly, the notion that a writer may tailor his work to different audiences and according to his own social and political circumstances leads us to question an interesting examination of the phenomenon of ghostwriting. This is one area where a writer's work is not necessarily a reflection of the writer's innermost thoughts. The distinction, therefore, between different types of self-representation is particularly stark. Hence, we should be looking more at the rather common phenomenon of ghostwriting among the Ming literati. This would allow us to look at how ghostwriters presented one image in one context and another image in yet another context. Xu is a good example to study because he wrote so much about the experience of being a ghostwriter.

More importantly, this thesis has implications not only for the study of Xu Wei, but also for the study of late Ming cultural history in general. By using the methodology described above, one can illuminate a different picture of Ming cultural history to that which we have aquainted ourselves to over the past few decades. The late Ming period is seen as a

time of flourishing for eccentrics. For example, Nelson Wu described Ming China as the "perfect breeding ground for eccentrics."[503] Scholars and writers pick out people such as Xu Wei, Wang Yangming, Wang Gen, He Xinyin, Feng Menglong, and particularly Li Zhi, to argue that the late Ming was a time of eccentricity and "individualism".[504]

Much of Ming eccentricity is linked to the moral autonomy and so-called "individualism" ascribed to the thought of Wang Yangming. Brecher writes that because Wang posited "emotion as a supreme moral force", this helped reformulate "Confucian ethics to tolerate difference". He continued:

> Wang's theories…were taken in liberal directions, most notably by the radical Taizhou or Realization School. By advancing the individual as the root of all moral knowledge, this populist, grassroots contingent promoted individualism and extreme forms of rationalism among people of all classes. [505]

Pauline Lee wrote that the philosophy of Wang Yangming was:

> Wild (*kuang* 狂) rather than restrained, intuitive and spontaneous rather than synthetic and logical, and some insisted, unorthodox and "Buddhist" rather than truly "Confucian".
>
> Those who identified with this school [i.e. the Taizhou School] were often characterized as "wild Channists" (*kuang Chan* 狂禪), Chan (Japanese: *Zen*),

[503] Wu, "The Toleration of Eccentrics", *Art News* 57, no. 3 (May 1956), p. 28.

[504] The protean term "individualism" carries so much baggage of European and Western history that it is arguably problematic to use it within Ming intellectual history. From its very beginning after the French Revolution, the word "individualism" was used to designate three very dissimilar ideas: first, the idealistic doctrine with equalitarian implications of the rights of man, or what may be called political liberalism; secondly, the anti-statist, utilitarian doctrine of *laissez-faire,* or economic liberalism; thirdly, the aristocratic cult of artistic individuality, or Romantic individualism. See Swart, Koenraad W., "Individualism in the Mid-Ninteenth Century (1826-1860)" in *Jounral of the History of Ideas*, vol. 23, no. 1 (1962), pp. 77-90. See also Lukes, Steven, "The Meanings of 'Individualism'" in *Jounral of the History of Ideas,* vol. 32, no. 1 (1971), pp. 45-66. None of the above three categories fit within the context of Ming intellectual or cultural history and arguably the term "moral autonomy" would be better to describe the philosophy of Wang Yangming rather than "individualism".

[505] Brecher, *The Aesthetics of Strangeness*, pp. 36-37.

> being one of the least tradition-bound schools of Chinese Buddhism who were independent, populist, and eccentric.[506]

The intellectual historian De Bary, looking at Wang Yangming, Wang Gen, He Xinyin and Li Zhi, wrote that:

> A type of individualistic thought with strikingly modern features did arise, in conjunction with larger social and cultural forces, out of a liberal and humanitarian movement within the Wang Yang-ming school in the sixteenth century.[507]

Li Zhi, described by De Bary as the "arch individualist", is seen as being the most representative of late Ming "liberalism", "individualism" and eccentricity for his celebration of human passions.[508] Little has changed since De Bary regarding the scholarship surrounding Li Zhi or "individualism" in the Ming. Li was outspoken about the hypocrisy of society, and argued that "neither wine, women, wealth, nor disposition place any obstacle to following the Bodhisattva path".[509] In particular, his acceptance of female students aroused vicious attacks from his enemies, who accused him of licentiousness.

Li Zhi has become a symbol of late Ming weirdness, rebellion and questioning of long-held values. Dong Guoyan even named the latter half of the 16th century as the "Li Zhi

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[506] See Lee, Pauline C., *Li Zhi, Confucianism and the Virtue of Desire* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012), pp. 5-6.

[507] De Bary, *Self and Society in Ming Thought,* p. 223.

[508] After De Bary, Lee writes, the scholarship on Li Zhi has barely changed. She wrote that "while at present a number of such monographs do exist in Chinese and one in French, almost forty years later, still, no full-length study of this significant Chinese thinker exists in English." See her *Li Zhi, Confucianism and the Virtue of Desire*, p. 9. I would argue further that since De Bary, there has been no full-length study analysing "individualism" in the Ming or thought of Wang Yangming, though some scholars have done so for early China. See for example, Brindley, Erica Fox, *Individualism in Early China: Human Agency and the Self in Thought and Politics* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2010).

[509] Okada Takehiko, "The Zhu Xi and Wang Yang-ming Schools at the End of the Ming and Tokugawa Periods" Trans. Robert J.J. Wargo, in *Philosophy East and West* 23, no 1-2 (1973), p. 141.

period".[510] This period is described by Huang Dun as one of "tumultuous social changes…with the rise of capitalism and the related emergence of bourgeoisie ideas tinged with democratic principles."[511]

However, this is not the complete, or even accurate, picture of Li Zhi or the late Ming. For certain, Li was a far more complex figure and scholar. For example, although Li has been ascribed with modern and liberal values such as equal education for women etc, Ray Huang demonstrated Li's support for autocractic government:

> Perhaps most disturbing to his present-day admirers was Li Chih's total support of absolute monarchy. He declared that if the Wan-li emperor should choose to be oppressive, the imperial subjects had no alternative but to bear it.[512]

This aspect of Li is played down by his admirers, however, who focus on his seemingly more modern ideas such as moral autonomy. Moral autonomy is often confused with the term "individualism" which carries with it notions of political and economic liberalism.

Li Zhi and Xu Wei are closely linked together as a metaphor for Ming liberalism, weirdness and eccentricity. They are seen as symbols of this eccentric age with Xu being used to represent strange, individualistic paintings and poems while Li Zhi represents strange, individualistic intellectual currents. Firstly, we should question the link between them. If we examine Xu's historical context and social networks, we get a different sense of things. Despite Xu often being linked to Li Zhi and his so called "individualism", there is no

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[510] Dong Guoyan 董國炎, *Dangzi, Rouqing, Tongxin: Mingdai Xiaoshuo Sichao* 蕩子，柔情，童心：明代小說思潮 (Libertine, Sentimentality and Child's Mind: The Trend of Fiction in the Ming Dynasty) (Taiyuan: Beiyuan wenyi chubanshe, 1992), p. 78.

[511] Huang Dun, "From Domination of the Chancellery Style to Liberation of the Self: Calligraphy of the Ming dynasty", p. 328.

[512] Huang, *1587: A Year of No Significance* Ibid, p. 208. For the original Chinese, see Li Zhi, *Fenshu,* p. 93. The quote is translated into English above at the beginning of Chapter three.

evidence that Xu knew or read Li's work or was influenced by any of his theories. Li's *Book to be Burned* 焚書, containing his ideas regarding the "child-mind 童心" or education of women, for example, was not published until 1590, three years before Xu's death and long after Xu had formulated and published his own theories.

Furthermore, the Xu Wei that I have shown in this thesis, who tailored his writings to his audience depending on political circumstances and who held conventional aspirations, casts doubt on the image of weirdness in the Ming. Xu Wei is, like Li Zhi, seen as representative of late Ming "individualism" and eccentricity. But as we have seen, Xu is a far more ambiguous figure. By casting doubt over Xu's aesthetic "eccentricity", which has been the most dramatic metaphor for self and individualism, perhaps we can cast doubt on others in Ming cultural history and reconsider the prevailing idea of "individualism" and weirdness in Ming history. This calls into question the concept of *bense* and to what extent artists and poets really adhered to it. It is difficult to argue Xu as simply the champion of *bense* and untrammelled self-expression in light of his career as a ghostwriter, for example.

Bense was part of the mountain hermit image Xu constructed for himself. But how much did he adhere to it when he moved into his large house, "Hall for the Remuneration of Words"? Our view of late Ming cultural history has to take in this view of ambiguity between orthodoxy and heterodoxy. Indeed, artistic and literary eccentricity is as much an alternate orthodoxy as it is a true heterodoxy.

By questioning the theme of late Ming weirdness and eccentricity, my work is part of a larger current of scholarship which is re-examining certain things which we have taken for granted in this period. Most recently, Katharine Burnett in her thorough examinations of

the term *qi* 奇 (strange, original, eccentric) argues that within art and literary circles, *qi* should be best understood to mean "original" rather than "eccentric":

> Though there are many ways to translate *qi* [奇], including eccentric, unbalanced, strange, different, extraordinary and innovative, the intellectual content relating the art criticism to period literary criticism and its emphasis on *zhen* [真], 'authentic', tips the scale in favour of 'originality'. The issue of originality indicated by *qi,* and its correlate, authenticity, *zhen,* is best understood in the context of intellectual trends dominated by the Neo-Confucianist theorists, especially Li Zhi and the Yuan brothers.[513]

Burnett convincingly and correctly argues that "those artists [such as Xu Wei] who have traditionally been characterized, post facto, as 'individualist' or 'eccentric', actually shared a common anxiety over the newness, uniqueness and originality of their work."[514] The argument would imply that our interpration of Yuan Hongdao's description of Xu Wei as "strange", "weird" or "eccentric" is possibly erroneous.

Burnett argues that when we look at the character *qi* today, we read it as the modern Chinese *qiguai* 奇怪 (weird, strange, eccentric). But when literati at the time used it in artistic and literary discourse, they meant "original". I am broadly in agreement with this. But Xu's case forms an interesting way to look at the term *qi*. There are indeed situations where Xu's paintings and calligraphy could best be interpreted as "original".[515] However, there is a strong case to be made that even the term *qi*, as used by Yuan Hongdao in his

[513] Burnett, "A Discourse of Originality in Late Ming Chinese Painting Criticism," p. 530.
[514] Burnett, "A Discourse of Originality in Late Ming Chinese Painting Criticism," p. 522.
[515] In her book, Burnett cites the example of the late Ming aristocrat and scholar Zhu Mouyin (c.1630) evaluating Xu Wei's calligraphy. Zhu Mouyin wrote: "His running and cursive scripts were especially refined and original (*qi*), and extraordinarily outstanding. 於行草尤精奇偉傑." Burnett wrote correctly that "in this passage, Zhu imbues *qi* with a sense of the positive, different, special, and marvellous. Just as Xu Wei was a prodigy who paid scant heed to social formalities, his calligraphy displayed deep knowledge of classical sources yet was not beholden to them. In coupling *qi* with concepts of the refined, bold, and outstanding, Zhu must have intended a strong notion for *qi.* Because Xu's work is widely acknowledged to be extraordinary and outstanding, it is not stretch to claim that Zhu Mouyin would also consider it original." See Burnett, *Dimensions of Originality: Essays on Seventeenth-century Chinese Art Theory and Criticism*, pp. 184-185.

biography of Xu, had more connotations of weird and strange and not just original in a positive sense. If we may revist Yuan's original comment:

> His sickness was stranger than his personality; his personality was stranger than his poetry; his poetry stranger than his characters [i.e calligraphy]; his characters stranger than his prose; his prose stranger than his painting.
>
> 病奇於人，人奇於詩，詩奇於字，字奇於文，文奇於畫。[516]

Arguably, Xu's mental illness, multiple suicide attempts and the murder of his wife would best be understood as "strange" rather than "original" in any positive sense. Instead of focusing on what the word *qi* means here, it would be more useful to balance out the perception of strangeness with the socio-historical context and literary conventions within which Xu was working.

Xu is an interesting case insofar as the term *qi,* when used to describe him is especially ambiguous. *Qi* could refer to the originality of his painting style, the eccentricity of his lifestyle and personal habits or the strangeness of his mental illness. However, if we balance his reputation for eccentricty with his historical and social context, we get a different, more multifaceted portrait of Xu. The methodology employed in this thesis is more historical in approach than in comparison to Burnett's, which is more literary as she deconstructs the meaning of *qi*:

> *Qi* has a wide spectrum of meanings, both positive and negative. And given that wide spectrum, situations exist in which it can connote more than one meaning at a time. I do not claim that *qi* only means 'original', but that strikingly and significantly, late Ming painting critics frequently used the term in this way.[517]

[516] XWJ, p. 1344.
[517] Burnett, "A Discourse of Originality in Late Ming Chinese Painting Criticism," p. 536.

Burnett's linguistic study of the term *qi* and its usage in artistic and literary circles has significantly changed our understanding and conceptions of so-called "eccentricity" in the Ming. The aim in this thesis is the same as Burnett's, which is to question the theme of eccentricity, but from a different methodological angle. Whereas she uses the careful examination of one character, *qi*, I examine the work of one man situating it within the larger historical context.

This thesis has demonstrated the complex political tensions that shaped Xu's life, which were then reflected in his poetry and writings. By recontextualising Xu's biography, ignoring the hagiography of eccentricity, and situating him within the networks and factional court politics of the 1550s and 60s, we can see how historical incidents influenced his creative choices. This resulted in the varying and sometimes contradictory personas of Xu the steadfast friend to Shen Lian of the anti-Yan Song clique, loyal secretary to Hu Zongxian of the Yan Song clique, didactic historian and devoted subject of the emperor. From this, one can see that Xu was not confined to any one poetic self image. Through this, I hope cultural historians of China may gain new insights into the complex relationship between artists and their works. I hope also that this thesis will re-introduce the concept of self-representation into the analysis of Chinese art and literature. This will have implications not only for the study of the late Ming period, but for Chinese cultural history in general.

Appendix A: Yuan Hongdao's Biography of Xu Wenchang[518]

徐文長傳

余少時過里肆中，見北雜劇有《四聲猿》，意氣豪達，與近時書生所演傳奇絕異，題曰“天池生”，疑爲元人作。後適越，見人家單幅上有署“田水月”者，強心鐵骨，與夫一種磊塊不平之氣，字畫之中，宛宛可見。意甚駭之，而不知田水月爲何人。一夕，坐陶編修樓，隨意抽架上書，得《闕編》詩一帙。惡楮毛書，煙煤敗黑，微有字形。稍就燈間讀之，讀未數首，不覺驚躍，忽呼石簣：“《闕編》何人作者？今耶？古耶？”石簣曰：“此余鄉先輩徐天池先生書也。先生名渭，字文長，嘉、隆間人，前五六年方卒。今卷軸題額上有田水月者，即其人也。”余始悟前後所疑，皆即文長一人。又當詩道荒穢之時，獲此奇秘，如魘得醒。兩人躍起，燈影下，讀複叫，叫複讀，僮僕睡者皆驚起。余自是或向人，或作書，皆首稱文長先生。有來看余者，即出詩與之讀。一時名公巨匠，浸浸知嚮慕云。文長爲山陰秀才，大試輒不利，豪蕩不羈。總督胡梅林公知之，聘爲幕客。文長與胡公約：“若欲客某者，當具賓禮，非時輒得出入。”胡公皆許之。文長乃葛衣烏巾，長揖就坐，縱談天下事，旁若無人。胡公大喜。是時公督數邊兵，威振東南，介胄之士，膝語蛇行，不敢舉頭；而文長以部下一諸生傲之，信心而行，恣臆譚謔，了無忌憚。會得白鹿，屬文長代作表。表上，永陵喜甚。公以是益重之，一切疏記，皆出其手。

文長自負才略，好奇計，譚兵多中。凡公所以餌汪、徐諸虜者，皆密相議然後行。嘗飲一酒樓，有數健兒亦飲其下，不肯留錢。文長密以數字馳公，公立命縛健兒至麾下，皆斬之，一軍股慄。有沙門負貲而穢，酒間偶言於公，公後以他事杖殺之。其信任多此類。
胡公既憐文長之才，哀其數困，時方省試，凡入簾者，公密屬曰：“徐子，天下才，若在本房，幸勿脫失。”皆曰：“如命。”一知縣以他羈後至，至期方謁公，偶忘屬，卷適在其房，遂不偶。

文長既已不得志於有司，遂乃放浪麴蘗，恣情山水，走齊、魯、燕、趙之地，窮覽朔漠。其所見山奔海立，沙起雲行，風鳴樹偃，幽谷大都，人物魚鳥，一切可驚可愕之狀，一一皆達之於詩。其胸中又有一段不可磨滅之氣，英雄失路、托足無門之悲，故其爲詩，如嗔如笑，如水鳴峽，如種出土，如寡婦之夜哭，羈人之寒起。當其放意，平疇千里；偶爾幽峭，鬼語秋墳。文長眼空千古，獨立一時。當時所謂達官貴人、騷士墨客，文長皆叱而奴之，恥不與交，故其名不出於越。悲夫！

一日，飲其鄉大夫家。鄉大夫指筵上一小物求賦，陰令童僕續紙丈余進，欲以苦之。文長援筆立成，竟滿其紙，氣韻遒逸，物無遁情，一座大驚。

文長喜作書，筆意奔放如其詩，蒼勁中姿媚躍出。余不能書，而謬謂文長書決當在王雅宜、文徵仲之上。不論書法，而論書神：先生者，誠八法之散聖，字林之俠客也。間以其余，旁溢爲花草竹石，皆超逸有致。

[518] YHDJJ, pp. 715-716.

卒以疑殺其繼室，下獄論死。張陽和力解，乃得出。既出，倔強如初。晚年憤益深，佯狂益甚。顯者至門，皆拒不納。當道官至，求一字不可得。時攜錢至酒肆，呼下隸與飲。或自持斧擊破其頭，血流被面，頭骨皆折，揉之有聲。或槌其囊，或以利錐錐其兩耳，深入寸余，竟不得死。

石簣言：晚歲詩文益奇，無刻本，集藏於家。予所見者，《徐文長集》、《闕編》二種而已。然文長竟以不得志於時，抱憤而卒。

石公曰：先生數奇不已，遂爲狂疾；狂疾不已，遂爲囹圄。古今文人，牢騷困苦，未有若先生者也。雖然，胡公間世豪傑，永陵英主，幕中禮數異等，是胡公知有先生矣；表上，人主悅，是人主知有先生矣。獨身未貴耳。先生詩文崛起，一掃近代蕪穢之習，百世而下，自有定論，胡爲不遇哉？梅客生嘗寄余書曰：“文長吾老友，病奇於人，人奇於詩，詩奇於字，字奇於文，文奇於畫。”余謂文長無之而不奇者也。無之而不奇，斯無之而不奇也哉！悲夫！

The Biography of Xu Wenchang

Once when I was young in a market, I saw a northern drama called ‘Four Cries of a Gibbon’, its character was heroic and unrestrained, compared with other contemporary writers’ legends it was strange and different. On it was inscribed: “Master Heavenly Pool”, I suspected that it was the work of someone in the Yuan dynasty. Later when I went to southern China, I saw a single scroll belonging to someone inscribed with the signature “Field Water Moon”, it had strong heart and iron bones, it had the air of sincerity like a clump of earth, the calligraphy and painting could be seen winding and twisting. I was very much astonished by it, but I didn’t know who this ‘Field Water Moon’ was?

One evening, I was sitting in Tao’s study, randomly pulling books from the shelf, when I obtained a volume of poetry titled “a collection of scraps”. The paper was of poor quality and the calligraphy was slipshod, and soot had dimmed the printing, so the characters were barely legible. I had to get a little closer to read it, but barely before I had read several poems, did I unconsciously leap, and suddenly call out to Shi Kui [Tao Wangling]: “Who is the author of this ‘Collection of Scraps’? Is he contemporary? Or ancient?” Shi Kui replied: “This was written by Xu Tianchi [Xu Wei], an old townsman of mine. His name is Wei and his style is Wenchang, Jia, and Longjianren, he just died five or six years ago. Now on the edge of the book inscribed in the horizontal cartouche is the name Field Water Moon, that’s him [Xu Wei]”. Only then did I realise what I had all this time suspected, that all these things were done by this one person, Wenchang. And at a time when rich verse has gone out of cultivation like a field gone to waste, to catch this strange secret, was like waking from a nightmare. We both lept up, and under the lamplight read and yelled, yelled and read, all the sleeping servant boys started in surprise. From then onwards, whether it was face-to-face, or in letters I wrote, I always praised Wenchang. To those that came and saw me, I then give them his poetry to read. In a short time all those who were famous in the world of culture, gradually came to know and admire him.

Wenchang was a licentiate scholar from Shanyin, [however] when it came to the provincial level exam he always met with ill fortune, and became unruly and heroically unrestrained. Governor-general Hu Zongxian knew about him, and appointed him as a private secretary. Wenchang would arrange to meet Governor Hu saying: “If you wish me

to be your assistant, you should treat me like a guest, I should always be allowed to come and go at any time." Governor Hu every time permitted him. Wenchang would then wearing a gown of hemp cloth and black turban, always greet (by raising the joined hands) and then sit, talking freely about all affairs under heaven, as if there was no one else beside him. Governor Hu was greatly delighted. At that time his Excellency was in command of several divisions of frontier troops, and exercised great authority over the entire South-east, [in front of his Excellency] those in armour and helmet, would talk on their knees and move like snakes [bent over with their faces down] none dared to raise their heads. But Xu Wenchang, though only a government student on his staff, comported himself with dignity, walking in confidence, bantering his thoughts without restraint, without the least bit of fear. Once, when two white deer were captured, Wenchang was commisined to write a memorial. When this memorial was presented to the throne, His majesty Yongling was greatly pleased by it. His Excellency accordingly thought even more highly of him, and all his memorials to the throne came from his hand [i.e. were composed by him].

Wenchang took great pride in his knowledge of the art of war, and loved to come up with stratagems, and when he discussed about the military he often would go right to the heart of the matter. Every time his Excellency tried to devise a strategy to lure the Wang Zhi and Xu Hai bandits into surrender, he would always discuss things closely and diligently with Xu before taking any action. Once, when Wenchang was drinking in a restaurant, there were several strong soldiers also drinking downstairs from him, but they didn't leave money. Wenchang secretly sent the amount to his Excellency. His Excellency immediately ordered that these toughs be tied up and brought to him, he beheaded all of them, and the whole army was in fear. Once there was a monk who, because he was rich, performed abominable deeds. Xu Wei, while drinking, happened to mention him to Governor Hu. Later, Governor Hu found other reasons to have the monk bludgeoned to death. He often trusted Xu in matters such as this. Although Governor Hu admired Xu Wei's talent, he lamented Xu's numerous difficulties, and during the time of the provincial examinations, he would secretly tell all those who managed to pass and become officials: "Xu Wei is one of the most talented people in the world, if he comes to your quarters, please do not forget him." They said: "As you command." There was one country magistrate who had stopped over because of other matters. During that time he visited Governor Hu. Governor Hu happened to forget to entrust him [with the order to help Xu] and the examination papers happened to be distributed in his house, hence he was not successful in the exams.

Wenchang thereinafter stopped his ambition to take charge of affairs [and become an official], thereupon he indulged himself in drinking and enjoying the beauty of nature, travelling to [the regions of] Qi, Lu, Yan, and Zhao, and explored the northern deserts. He saw undulating mountain ridges and hurling sea waves, whirling sands and floating clouds, howling winds and trees prostrate in it, the quiet mountain valley and the metropolis, human beings, fish and birds, and all kinds of events and things that surprised and amazed him- In his poetry he wrote about all these things. Deep down in his heart he always cherished unquenchable ambitions, but he also harboured the kind of sorrow felt by unfortunate heroic figures who have nowhere to turn for help. Accordingly he took turns raging and laughing in his poetry. It is like river water roaring through the gorges, or sprouts bursting forth out of the soil. It is like a widow weeping at night, or a wayfarer

sleepless in the cold. His poetry may be crude and unrefined in terms of structure at times, but, fresh and original; it has a lofty princely manner that is not to be found in the works of those who assume an effeminate attitude waiting upon the delight of others. His prose writing, poised and well organised, shows great perception: its brilliance is unspoiled by imitation, and its eloquence remains unscathed by argumentation, placing its author in the same rank and Han and Zeng. Wenchang never conformed to contemporary modes; rather he rebuked all those who presided over the literary stage of his time and regarded them as inferiors. Hence his reputation did not spread beyond the Yue area. What a pity!

One day, he was drinking in the county magistrate's house. The county magistrate pointed to a small object on the banquet mat and asked Xu to write a poem on that object. He secretly asked a servant boy to join the paper together until it was more than a *zhang* long before giving it to Xu, since he wished to make it more difficult for Xu. Wenchang picked up the pen and immediately finished the poem, which filled the paper, its mood and its rhyme were powerful and elegant, the object was described exactly as it was, and everyone there was awestruck.

Wenchang liked to practice calligraphy, his brush strokes are bold and flowing like his poetry, within its vigour and boldness there beam charm and elegance: it is like what Master Ouyang described as "a ravishing woman who is graceful even at old age." In leisure, his overflowing talent also drove him to try his hand at paintings of birds and flowers, which unassuming and tasteful, are also superb.

Later, he killed his successive wife when she aroused his suspicion. He was thrown into prison and sentenced to death, and was aquitted only after Grand Scribe Yuanbian's strenuous efforts to plead for him. In old age he became even more resentful and tried even harder to feign madness. He sometimes shut his door on visitors of high station. He often took money and went to the tavern, where he would call lowbred attendants to join him for a drink. Once he hit and cracked open his head with a hatchet; blood dripped all over his face. His broken skull creaked when his head was being rubbed. On another occasion he jabbed both his ears with a sharp awl, which penetrated about an inch and a half. But he survived.

Wangling said that his poetry and prose of the later period was even stranger. But, never having been printed, the collection has been kept in his family. All that I have seen are Xu Wenchang's works and A collection of scraps, and that's all. Wenchang in the end never fulfilled his ambitions, he passed away carrying all his rage and regret.

Master of stone observed: "Suffering from an endless series of bad luck, our master became insane. As a result of his insanity, he was thrown behind bars. Of all men of letters past and present that grieved and suffered, none was [as miserable as] our master. And yet his Excellency Hu was a hero of the age, and Yongling [the late emperor] was a brave sovereign. His Excellency, who treated the master in a way different from all the rest of his staff, must have understood him. When the memorial was presented, the sovereign was pleased, so his majesty must have appreciated the master as well. What he missed was only rank and prestige. His poetry and prose, unequalled in his time, have swept away all the foul practice of our age. A hundred generations from now a fair evaluation will come around. So why should he be considered unappreciated and a failure? Mei Guochen once wrote me a letter saying: "Wenchang was an old friend of mine. His

sickness was stranger than his personality; and his personality was stranger than his poetry; his poetry was stranger than his calligraphy; his calligraphy was stranger than his prose; his prose was stranger than his painting." I would rather say that there was nothing about Wenchang that was not strange. And since nothing about him was not strange, he was out of luck wherever he went. How sad!

Appendix B: Xu Wei's Biography of Shen Lian[519]

贈光祿少卿沈公傳

青霞君者, 姓沈, 名煉, 字純甫, 別號青霞君。生而以奇鶩一世。始補府學生，以文奇。汪公文盛以提學副使校浙士，得君文驚絕，謂為異人，拔居第一。嘉靖辛卯，遂舉於鄉，戊戌，成進士。始知溧陽，以政奇。御史憚之，卒得詆，徙茌平，再徙清豐。巳乃擢經歷錦衣衛，以諫奇。庚戌冬，虜入古北口，抄騎至都城，大殺掠。時先帝倉卒集群臣議於廷，大官以百十計，率婷婀不敢出一語。君獨與司業趙公貞吉，歷階抵掌相倡和，慷慨論時事。嚴氏黨執格之，君遂坑聲詆嚴氏父子。又上疏請兵萬人，欲出良涿以西護陵寢，遮虜騎使不得前，因得開都門，通有無便。不報。無何，又上疏直詆嚴氏十罪。有詔廷杖君五十，削官，徙保安為布衣，以戇奇。當是時，君懷憤之日久，而忠不信於主上。乃削木為宋丞相檜象，旦莫射捶之，隨事觸景為詩賦文章，無一不慨時事，罵訶奸諛，懷忠主上也。當是時，邊人苦虜殘掠，而楊順者方握符鎮宣大，虜殺人如麻，順不敢發一矢，虜退則削漢級，以虜首功上。君飛書入轅門，數順罪。順痛忌之，承嚴氏旨，日夜奇構君。及甲寅，虜複寇大同右衛，順計不出前轍，君飛書益急。而君在邊久，嘗思結客以破虜，或散金募土人豪宕者為城守。保安飢，又散金市遠粟，粥僧舍，活萬餘人。順謂諸事非放逐所臣宜為，可以叛構君，遂與御史巡宣大者路楷會疏入告君叛狀。嚴氏父子從中下其，事棄君宣府市，連坐死者五人。既又馳捕其長子襄，械抵宣府杖繫，糜且死。會給事中吳公時來疏上，有詔逮順楷，襄得免戍，時丁巳秋月也。先帝始再聽諫臣鄒公應龍 林公閏等說，悟向者嚴氏姦罔，斬世蕃西市，奪嵩官，籍其家。再逾年而先帝崩，遺詔錄嘉靖以來以言事得罪者，君得贈光祿寺少卿，蔭子一人。今上立一年，襄複疏父冤，順 偕坐死。上感君戇，為制文，命省臣祭其墓。

外史徐渭曰:余讀離騷，及閱青霞君塞下所著鳴劍小言集籌邊賦，扼腕流涕而嘆曰:“甚矣, 君之似屈原也!”然屈原以怨而君以憤, 等死耳, 而酷不酷異焉。雖然，死不酷，無以表烈忠。今夫干將缺且折，其所擊必巨堅也。君結發廬越山，至入仕，至放居塞垣，其特奇行多甚，言之人無不駭心墮膽者。然其要卒歸於孝忠。君少時，君父翁暌其室，走京師，誓終焉。其後君舉於鄉，入京，悉要其鄉人為供具，長跽請歸其父翁，哀痛慟號，路人無不灑泣者。父翁遂感動，亟命駕歸，翁嫗相歡如初。跡君所為孝如此，其忠固有自哉！然余嘗至京師，過君故舍。舍旁人為餘道，沈大夫盛時，車騎集門如流水，及禍起，門張雀羅，所不去者，永嘉 張尚寶遜業鄉人胡通政朝臣耳。然兩公者卒以此得禍，悲夫！宋玉為屈原弟子，原死玉作些招原魂。餘於君非弟子，然晚交耳。君徙居塞垣時，餘直寄所愴詩一篇，愧宋玉矣！

The Biography of the Honorary Glorious Grand Master Shen [Lian]

Qingxia Jun, surname Shen, given name Lian, style Chunfu, alias Qingxia Jun. When he was born he was remarkably nimble his whole life. He began as a student in the official school, his prose was considered remarkable. Master Wang Wensheng as chief examiner

[519] XWJ, pp 624-625.

in Zhe[jiang], received [Shen's] paper and was astonished by its excellence, calling him an extraordinary man; he selected him as the top candidate. In the xinmao year of the Jiajing reign (1531) he thereupon passed the provincial examinations, and in the wuxu year (1538) he became a jinshi ["presented scholar" i.e. the highest level degree akin to a PhD].

He began as an official in Liyang [a city in southwest Jiangsu bordering Anhui]; his administration was considered remarkable. The imperial censor dreaded him [however], and in the end managed to reproach him, causing [Shen] to move to Chiping [Northwest Shandong], and then again to Qingfeng [Henan]. Afterwards he was then promoted to serve in the embroidered guards [i.e. Imperial Guards of the Ming Dynasty]; his admonitions were considered remarkable.

In the winter of the gengxu year (1550), the enemy [i.e. the Mongols under Altan Kahn] entered the 'old north pass' [gu bei kou], the mounted ruffians reached the capital walls, greatly killing and pillaging. The late Emperor [Jiajing] hurriedly gathered his ministers to court, and the grand officials proposed tens of hundreds of plans, the commanders were hesitant and dared not speak a word. [Shen] alone with superintendant Zhao Zhenji (1507-1576) stepped up resisting hands [trying to stop them] and together advocated harmony, fervently discussing the matters of the day.

The Yan clique in charge blocked them; [Shen] thereupon defied the clamour and reproached Grand Secretary Yan Song (1480-1567). In addition to this, [Shen] submitted a memorial to the emperor requesting ten thousand soldiers, desiring to go west of Liang and Zhuo [Hebei] to protect the emperor's mausoleum, and block the mounted ruffians causing them to go no further, and thereupon open the capital gates, so they [the Mongols] could not pass with ease. But there was no reply. Before long, [Shen] again submitted a memorial to the emperor directly admonishing Yan [Song] and his 'ten crimes'.

There was then a decree for [Shen] to be flogged with the big stick fifty times, stripping him of office, and sending him to Bao'an [on the northern frontier, near Xuanfu] as a common scholar [without official robes], his simplicity was considered remarkable. In those times, the days with which [Shen] harboured anger in his bosom were many, and his loyalty was not entrusted to the sovereign. He then whittled wood to resemble the Song Chancellor Qin Hui (1090-1155), and there was not a day when he did not strike and lash at it. Recalling those events that struck a chord with him he composed poems and essays: there was not one which did not cry out on current events, curse and scold debauchery and flattery, and keep in mind loyalty to the sovereign.

In those days, the people on the frontier suffered from the ransacking and plundering of the enemy, and Yang Shun had just grasped the tally [of command] of Xuanda [also known as Xuanfu]. The enemy killed the people like grass, but Shun did not dare fire a single arrow. The enemy withdrew then thinned the Han ranks, the enemy chief was considered successful. [Shen] quickly wrote to the magistrate's office, listing Shun's crimes. Shun was hurt and feared [Shen], and receiving Yan's orders, day and night they implicated [Shen]. In the jiayin year (1554), the enemy returned invading Datong and the guards of the west. Shun planned and did not come out and the vanguard withdrew. [Shen] quickly wrote [to the magistrate] with increasing urgency.

[Shen] had been on the border for a long time, and with friends once thought of how to destroy the enemy, perhaps by distributing money to recruit the bold and unconstrained native people to guard the city. [The people of] Bao'an starved, so [Shen] spent money buying grain from afar, [serving] congee in the monk's dwellings, over ten thousand people survived. Shun said these matters were not the proper concern for an exiled official, and used it to implicate Shen as a rebel, thereupon with the imperial censor of Xuanda, Lujie, they got together and submitted a memorial accusing [Shen] of rebellion. Grand Secretary Yan Song from this decreed that the exiled [Shen] in Xuanfu, and five others in connection to him were to be executed. Then [Yan Song] quickly arrested [Shen's] eldest son Xiang. In shackles [Shen] arrived in Xuanfu to be flogged with a stick; worn out, he then died.

In a meeting Master Wu Shilai [his last name ironically means timely arriving] submitted a memorial, and a decree was sent to arrest [Yang] Shun and [Lu]jie, and Xiang was pardoned in the autumn of the dingyi year (1557).

The late emperor [Jiajing] began again to listen to remonstrating officials such as Zou Yinglong (jinshi 1556) and Lin Run; [suddenly] aware of Yan's past treacherous deceit, he beheaded Shifan [Yan Song's son] in the western market, stripped Yan of his office, and confiscated his property. In the year [Jiajing] passed away (1567) there was a testamentary edict that stated among those found guilty for speaking [out] since the Jiajing reign; [Shen] will receive the honorary title of Honourable Grand Master, protecting his son also.

Now in over a year, Xiang again has submitted a memorial to avenge his father, Shun and Jie are waiting to be executed. His highness moved by [Shen's] simplicity, made a euology, and ordered the province's officials to worship at his tomb.

The unofficial historian Xu Wei remarks: I read "Encountering Sorrow" and [Shen's] "collection of small talks from a whistling sword" and frontier poems etc; wringing my wrists and with tears falling I cried: "Indeed, [Shen] is like Qu Yuan!" in so far as Qu Yuan and [Shen] died in anger and resentment etc. [dying from] oppressive cruelty and [dying] with no oppressive cruelty are different; although one might die, without oppressive cruelty there is no means with which to express selfless loyalty.

When Master Shen was at the height of his life, carriages and those on horses [i.e. officials of rank] gathered at his gate like flowing water, but when disaster arose, you could catch sparrows at the door with a net [i.e completely deserted], among those who did not abandon him were Zhang Yongjia and Hu Zhaochen. However, these two in the end because of this met with disaster, how tragic!

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