I heard a weaver for the Directorate for Imperial Apparel say, “The emperor’s undergarments are all made with Songjiang [Jiangsu] fine cotton drill.” This dynasty’s family ways are like this. “For the red ramie and silk lapelled garments, used at the ancestral temple rites, the bottom part is red cotton.” Its class and restraint were further like this. Today, there are irresponsible young men from rich and noble households who use ramie, silk, damask, and satin for their pants. Such extravagance is most egregious! (Shuyuan zaji, hereafter SZ 1.1)

A LOYAL FOLLOWER

When Si Zheng, the Shaanxi regional military commissioner, was a young man, he organized many young men of ill repute into a “righteous brotherhood.” If one member was attacked, they would combine forces and take revenge. Zheng had beaten to death a man at a singing loft in the provincial capital. The owner was powerless to apprehend him, and Zheng escaped. They seized a certain Mr. Liu, who associated with Zheng, and took him to the officials to investigate Zheng’s whereabouts. Liu said, “Actually it was me who killed him. It was not Zheng.” Many people verified that the murderer was Zheng, and Liu grew increasingly insistent in his admission of guilt. The judicial authorities could not change his mind and then condemned him to death. Later, he obtained a reduced sentence and was sent to serve in the army at the Sanwan Garrison in Liaodong [Liaoning]. Zheng regarded him as virtuous and every year sent funds to his military unit.

At the time, Zheng had an old mother, and so Liu falsely confessed and took his place. The knights-errant of ancient times could not surpass him. (SZ 1.5–6)
IDEAS ABOUT MUSLIMS

Muslim teachings are different from those in China. They do not give offerings to the Buddha, do not provide sacrifices to the gods, and do not revere the dead ancestors. What they honor and respect is only the single character, “Heaven.” Outside of Heaven, they most respect the sage Confucius. So they say:

Buddhist monks say that the Buddha resides in the western sky.
Daoists say that Penglai is in the eastern sea.\(^2\)
Only Confucians handle practical matters.
In the here and now, every day is a spring breeze.\(^3\)

When they see Chinese set up vegetarian feasts and conduct jiao offerings, they laugh at them.\(^4\)

When they give birth to a child, they first put cooked mutton fat in the mouth. They do not let the child spit it out or swallow it. After the fat is fully dissolved, then they breastfeed the child. Then the child will be strong and have no illnesses.

Their customs excel in matters of personal care, but they have no special methods. The only thing is that they protect their testicles and do not let them become extremely cold. When they see southerners wearing summer split trousers, they disapprove very strongly and fear that the cold will harm the testicles. It is said, “At night while sleeping, one ought to hold them in the hand to keep them warm,” and they say, “They are the roots of human life; one must protect them.” This explanation makes great sense. (SZ 2.17)

ANCIENT IDEALS

During the time of the Three Dynasties, people received residences of five mu in area and farmland of one hundred mu. It was not like later ages, where rich households had properties that connected immense estates, and poor households did not have enough land to stick an awl in. At the time, no one had yet heard of cases where people had surplus or inadequate farmland or residential property. The men farmed, and the women worked with silk and hemp, in order to feed and clothe themselves. If they lacked adequate possessions, they took what they had to trade for what they did not have. Those who worked at the fundamental occupation [agriculture] did not become poor, and those who pursued secondary occupations [crafts and commerce] did not become
Muslims in the Ming

Islam had been practiced in China since the seventh century, brought there by Arab traders residing mostly in the southeastern cities of present-day Guangzhou and Quanzhou, as well as northern Vietnam. Many more Muslims, mostly merchants from Central Asia, arrived with the Mongols in the thirteenth century. Many of the top financial advisors to Khubilai Khan (r. 1260–1298) were Muslim, and Yuan rulers supported mosque construction and granted Muslims tax exemptions. The architect of the Yuan capital, Dadu (contemporary Beijing), was Muslim, as were many craftsmen who worked on the city's construction. In addition, government bureaus were established to manage Islamic calendars, as well as the medical knowledge and geography of the Muslim world. Muslim wealth and influence at times led to tension with Confucian (and Buddhist) officials and other Han, but Muslims escaped wholesale persecution.1

Although the Ming dynasty sharply restricted foreign trade and rejected Yuan cosmopolitanism, the return to Han rule did not harm the general status of Chinese Muslims. Mosque construction continued in the early Ming, and the Yongle emperor entrusted the command of his seven extraordinary maritime expeditions to the Muslim eunuch Zheng He (1371–ca. 1435). Muslims served in the Ming government but had nowhere near the influence they possessed in the Yuan or even the latter parts of the Southern Song. Islam’s compatibility with Chinese ways received a ringing endorsement from Wang Ao in his 1492 commemoration of two mosques in Nanjing, which began, “The teachings of the western regions are refined and subtle, hidden and deep, encompassing and expansive. From the proper [Confucian] relations between lord and subject, father and son, husband and wife, elder and younger brother, friend and friend, and extending to the techniques of astronomy, medicine, divination, horticulture, and the minor arts, all [of their ways] have a place and all resemble Chinese customs.”2 These similarities and this expertise allowed Muslims to fit readily into Ming society, but Lu’s entry shows that notable distinctions remained.

1 For an overview of Muslims during the Song and Yuan eras, see Chaffee, Muslim Merchants. Chaffee’s subjects largely are expatriates, hailing from Southeast Asia, southern India, and the Middle East. The ethnicity and origins of the Muslims referred to by Lu are unclear.
2 “Chi jian Jingjue Libai ersi beiji,” in Qingzhen shiyi buji, 106b; Tianfang zhisheng baolu, 20.10b.
rich. Put simply, no one at that time lacked for wealth. Sons served their fathers, younger brothers served their elder brothers, and the young served the old. As for slaves and servants, only government offices had them. Commoner households did not dare to keep them.

As for the Sons of Heaven, the feudal lords, dukes and ministers, grandees, officers, and commoners, along with the empresses, consorts, secondary consorts, wives, and concubines, each had their own fixed standards. When boys turned twenty years of age, they were capped in coming-of-age ceremonies, and at thirty, they established families. When girls turned fifteen, they received their hairpins in coming-of-age ceremonies, and at twenty, they were married. Each had their regulations. With regard to marriage ages and numbers of wives and concubines, variations were not allowed. “Neither in burying the dead, nor in changing his abode, did a man go beyond the confines of his village.” At that time, how could discussions arise about moving to somewhere else? At forty years of age, the men began to serve in office. At fifty, they were appointed to be grandees, and at seventy, they retired from service. How could discussions arise about the pace of one’s career and the prestige of one’s official position?

We can say that in later ages there was no Way (dao) with which those in high positions could manage affairs and no model for those in low positions to follow. Consequently, minor ways and perverse theories spread. Even intelligent and wise gentlemen were unavoidably confused by them. Why? The mission of transformation through instruction was inadequate to deeply penetrate into people’s minds. The people naturally then were not steadfast in their beliefs, and when they met others, they easily changed their views. (SZ 2.18–19; Guochao diangu, hereafter GD 74.1625)

**RITUAL PRACTICE AND ITS DIFFICULTIES**

“The rules of ceremony do not go down to the common people.” This is not to say that the common people should not practice them. Because of particular circumstances, commoners cannot carry them out.

For example, if one has [been married to] a woman for three months, she is later to present herself at the ancestral temple and meet the [spirits of her] deceased parents-in-law and the living parents-in-law. Only feudal lords and grandees practiced this ritual. In the case of commoners, they mostly would take a wife so that she could take care of the parents. How much more so when the living spaces are not large? The family’s father and sons are in plain sight day and night. How could they wait three months? Furthermore, if inner and
outer do not share a well, they do not share bathing quarters.\textsuperscript{9} If they do not share bathing quarters, then the ritual still could be practiced.

When it comes to drilling wells, the north has the greatest difficulties. Today even the great families in Shandong and at the northern capital drill their own wells. Commoner families even order their wives and daughters to draw water from rivers. Shanxi has few rivers and ditches. Powerful families use small carts to carry ropes for drawing water. They travel several \textit{li} to draw from the wells. Powerless people use vessels to collect rain and snow water, and use it only to drink. How can they regularly have leftover water for bathing?

If we infer from these sorts of cases, the ancients generally said that the rituals ought to be conducted like this. They did not necessarily intend that each family would be able to practice them. (\textit{SZ} 2.20)

\section*{Gossip About the Famous}

Most narratives belonging to the small-talk genre concern the affairs of court nobles and famous gentlemen. For the most part, they are stories obtained and passed on by gossipy busybodies. The stories are not all necessarily true.

For example, the sentence “The old son-in-law becomes the new son-in-law; the elder brother-in-law serves as the younger brother-in-law” is taken to refer to his excellency Ouyang Xiu [1007–1072].\textsuperscript{9} Later ages regarded the expression as spoken truth, evidence of his marriage to his former wife’s younger sister.

I have investigated his excellency’s chronology. His excellency first married Madame Xu. She was the daughter of Yan, the Hanlin academician. Subsequently, he married Madame Yang. She was the daughter of Daya, academician of the Hall of Assembled Worthies and grand master of remonstrance. The third time he married Madame Xue. She was the daughter of Kui, academician at the Hall for Aid in Governance and vice-minister of revenue. The record of conduct (\textit{xingzhuang}) and entombed inscription (\textit{muzhi}) are identical.\textsuperscript{10} This is how we know that this account was made up by gossipy busybodies. This still is not considered to be a pernicious matter.

Certain works of poetry criticism record that Sima Guang [1019–1086] secretly patronized an official courtesan and that Wang Anshi [1021–1086] pursued her.\textsuperscript{11} The courtesan climbed over the house wall and ran away. Thereupon Wang wrote the couplet to tease him:

\begin{quote}
Startled, I awake from a dream of roaming with the immortal
To pursue again the fleeing oriole over the wall\textsuperscript{12}
\end{quote}
This greatly soils their virtuous reputations. In fact, Sima did not have the affair in the first place. Wang Anshi was an upright man. He also probably would not have regarded pursuing the courtesan and teasing Sima as things worth doing. It is best to put the affair aside and not believe it. (SZ 3.29–30; GD 75.1638)

**BURYING THE FAMOUS**

Master Song Lian [1310–1381], thanks to his literary learning, came to meet the Hongwu emperor. The court cherished him with special favor. In the fourteenth year of the Hongwu reign [1381], his son Shen committed an offense, and the whole family was to be executed. The emperor could not bear it and gave them special clemency and installed him in Maozhou in Sichuan. Before Song arrived there, he died in Kuifu [eastern Sichuan] and was buried below Lianhua Pond. During the Chenghua reign [1465–1487], the grave fell into disrepair, and the grand coordinator censor, his excellency Sun Ren of Chizhou [Anhui], moved the grave to Chengdu [western Sichuan]. It happened then that Attendant Song Chang, in the Prince of Shu’s household, had made a new tomb outside the east gates of Chengdu.13 His excellency Sun sent people and ordered that it be used to bury the master. Because Song Lian was a famous person with the same surname, the attendant accepted the plan with enthusiasm and then buried him there. He calculated that the cost could be one thousand taels.

Since the beginning of the dynasty, there have been many generals, grand councilors, high officials, and rich and noble men known for their accomplishments, who were powerful and influential in their time. After they died, their families’ fortunes changed, and some could not protect their tombs. If the dynasty did not have compassion, who could have managed their gravesites? The master’s death was over one hundred years ago, but there was this fortunate turn of events. So there increasingly are people who keep in mind to maintain good customs and are fond of virtue. They do not make distinctions over the closeness or distance in the kinship relationship. (SZ 4.50)

**NEW YEAR’S CUSTOMS**

After New Year’s Day in the capital, from the court officials down to the commoners, people stroll back and forth on the streets for days on end. They call this “New Year visits.” When literati and commoners call on their relatives and friends, the visits for the most part are truly from the heart. When court
officials visit each other, it is mostly a vague kindness without any particular affection. The residences of court officials are mostly in the east and west Chang'an districts. Those who go there do not care if the residents know them, but look at the gates and toss in their visiting cards. Some do not get off their horses. Some do not go to the gates and instead order people to deliver the visiting cards. When they meet clever servants answering the door, the latter sometimes refuse and do not take their cards. Sometimes there are servants who keep the door shut and do not receive them.

For capital officials, as soon as they leave the court, they form groups, going every day. When they go into other people’s residences, they get even more drunk and then go home. Three or four days later, they start to have time to visit their parents. I do not understand this custom and also do not know when it started. I heard that matters during the Tianshun reign [1457–1464] had not gotten so out of control. (SZ 5.52)

FANS

One name for “folding fans” is “spreading fans.” It’s that they are folded when put away, and opened and spread when used. Those that call them sha are wrong. Sha are round fans. Round fans can hide the face and thus are called “face-conveniencers.” We can already know this by looking at poems and paintings by people in the past. I heard that they already had them in the Song period [960–1279]. Some say that they began in the Yongle era [1403–1424], because the Chosŏn kingdom [Korea] presented to the throne fans made from pine bark. The emperor delighted at the ease with which they folded and spread, and commanded craftsmen to make them according to the model. Women in the south all used round fans, and only courtesans used folding fans. In recent years, there are women of good families who use spreading fans. From this we can see how customs are getting worse by the day. (SZ 5.52–53)

A DESPISED STUDENT

The student Gu Qing in Qingzhou [Shandong] took advantage of his talent to do as he pleased and bully his village. After he died and was buried, people disinterred his corpse, took it apart limb from limb, and hung the remains up in the trees. The father of Censor-in-Chief Wang Yue [1426–1499] of Jun County [Henan] buried what had been disinterred but lost the head. He looked for it but could not find it. So he made a wooden carving as a substitute and then buried it. Later, as Wang was eating fermented bean paste, when he
got to the bottom of the pot, the head was there. Wang for the rest of his life never ate fermented bean paste. I heard about this from the senior official Zhang Wenjin. (sz 5.57)

MISUNDERSTANDING CHINESE

When the strength of Zhang Xun [709–757] was exhausted, he faced west and bowed twice, saying, “In life I have nothing with which to repay Your Majesty. In death I should be a violent (li厉) ghost and kill bandits.” The sense of the character for “vengeful” is different from the “vengeful” of “Boyou was vengeful.” In tracing the origins of its meaning, it is simply a pledge to be a fierce, vengeful ghost and kill bandits. The congratulatory declaration of Li Han [fl. eighth century] said, “Your subject has heard that those who die a wrongful death become vengeful ghosts and that wandering spirits become unexpected calamities. If they have places to return to, they do not create disasters.” This is exactly the meaning of “vengeful” in “Boyou was vengeful.” Han’s intention in fact was to request to make a tomb to summon Xun’s spirit and have him buried. That is all he said. It was not to explain the meaning of the characters “vengeful ghost.”

Later people misunderstood this character, which eventually led to twisted conceptions. It came to the point where they took the character “violent” to be the ancient character for “epidemic” (li癘), and they said that Xun would be the one to control the demons that bring epidemics. It became such that at Daoist temples they made images of Xun and gave him the appearance of a blue-faced demon. The world’s absurd misunderstandings are like this. It was precisely because they misunderstood the character. At the temple for the Yulin 羽林 Army in Wu, they mistook the word for Yulin 雨淋 and so did not put a cover on the structure. The Sangu 三孤 Temple was wrongly made into the Sangu 三姑 Temple, and so they made images of three women there. Shanxi has Danzhu Ridge. It was enfeoffed to Yao’s son. But they carved the likeness of a pig (zhu) and painted it red (dan). The transmissions of these mistakes by contemporary customs are pathetic, and there are many like this. (sz 6.67)

RIGHTHEOUSNESS AND ETHNICITY

Foreign groups protect their own people. Their basic natures are all inherently like this, but Muslims are especially so. I heard that during the Jingtai reign [1450–1456], when the Buddhist Dalongfu Temple was finished, the monks
allowed people to enter as they wished and take a look. The monks had just assembled at the basilica when a Muslim carrying an axe suddenly came up to the basilica, killed two monks, and wounded two or three others. He was immediately apprehended and taken to the judicial authorities for interrogation. He said, “The temple had newly constructed a revolving canon.”20 Those below turning the wheel were all carved in the image of the people of my teachings.21 I pitied the suffering of their being turned year after year. I hated the monks and killed them. There was no other reason.” The authorities sent the case to the throne, and it was ordered that he be cut in two at the waist in the market.

I say that this man committed a capital crime, and his motives derived from the utmost ignorance. Yet his action drew from his sense of righteousness, and not even death could make him turn back. As for Chinese people, as soon as they encounter a difficult situation, there are those who will shove their way back into their own kind to save themselves. If we compare them with this man, moved by righteousness but blinded by ignorance, it is a lamentable situation!

(SZ 6.76; GD 78.1690)

**SHAMELESS SOCIAL CLIMBING**

These days rich households that arose from humble origins often attach themselves to famous clans. They wrong other people and their descendants, and do not understand how this practice violates common sense and forgets one’s parents. These mistakes are grievous. This trend is especially severe in Wu.

For example, there was in Taicang [Jiangsu] a man named Kong Yuan, courtesy name Shisheng. He was a fifty-third-generation descendant of Confucius. His ancestor from six generations before, Duanyue, served the Song dynasty and came south with the fall of the Northern Song. Yuan’s father Zhijing served the Yuan dynasty as the Tongzhou [Jiangsu] tax inspector and moved his family to Kunshan. At the beginning of the Yanyou reign [1313], the prefectural seat moved to Taicang. They made a new school, planned mostly by Shisheng. Then he managed the school’s affairs and his title was “Old Man of the Shen Wilds.” His son was Kerang and his grandson Shixue, and both were able to continue the enterprise. Shixue’s family was very poor. A rich family from a certain county in Changzhou Prefecture [Jiangsu] sought to be counted as part of his line because of their common surname, and Shixue firmly rejected them. After he died there were no sons, and his household could not survive on their own. The rich family then exchanged a boatload of rice for the genealogy and left.
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Looking at the matter from this perspective, after the passing of the sages and worthies, there are many cases where petty people baselessly pretend to be their descendants and deceive the world.\(^{22}\) (SZ 7.85–86)

**Imposters and Victims**

In the capital there are women who marry people from outside the capital to become wives and concubines. In the beginning, when matchmakers let others see them, they take the beautiful ones out to greet them. When it comes time for marrying, they are replaced by the ugly ones. The name of this sort is “package switchers” (chuobao’er). There are men who visit people and spend two nights, stealing everything that they can carry off. The name for them is “bringers of calamity” (nayang’er). These are simply local riff-raff.

Then there are boys who impersonate girls. They apply powder to their faces and bind their feet. Their appearance comes close to being authentic. When they come to the groom’s gates, they take advantage of people’s inattention and then run away. During the Chenghua reign \([1465–1487]\), there was one who married a National University student. It happened that there was no chance to run away. When night fell, the groom approached, and the bride turned out to be a male. They took him to the officials and had him punished along with the matchmaker.

There are men who impersonate women teachers. Households inside and outside the capital keep them to teach needlepoint. There are many women who are violated, but they cannot speak out on their own behalf. Later, one came to a student’s household in Zhending [Hebei]. The student wanted to take advantage of the situation, but the teacher forcefully refused and would not submit. The student forced his will on the teacher, who turned out to be a male. The student then had the teacher bound and taken to the officials. They sent him in the cangue to the capital judicial offices. Officials denounced his conduct as perverse and memorialized that he be sentenced to death by slicing in the market. All of these are what we call the ultimate monstrosities of the human world. (SZ 7.88–89; GD 79.1706–7)

**A Fortunate Escape**

Censor Dai Yong, whose courtesy name was Tingxian, was a native of Gao’an in Jiangxi. Before he passed the jinshi examinations, he had invited a teacher to his house. The family teacher excelled at writing litigation documents for
other people, and Yong’s father threw him out. It is customary that teachers who have been thrown out by others have no place to go, and so this teacher resented him. He hid in a neighboring commandery and had the family sued in court. The suit said that the teacher had a classical essay degree, was worth such-and-such amount of silver, and that Yong plotted his death. Yong could not endure the torture and interrogation, and so he submitted and incriminated himself. Yong’s family sent out a substantial reward for anyone who could find the teacher’s whereabouts. After over a year, someone suddenly reported his hiding place. The family had him lead the way for the district authorities, and in the end they apprehended the teacher. Only then was the matter clarified. Later Yong passed the jinshi examination in the bingxu year of the Chenghua reign [1466], and his service took him to be Guizhou’s assistant administration commissioner.

If he had been unlucky, would not Yong have become a wronged ghost? Looking at it from this perspective, there are many people who have died because of unjust verdicts. This is why those who pronounce death sentences must be respectful and careful. (SZ 8.97; GD 80.1720)

A RIGHTEOUS BANDIT

A merchant, a Mr. Cai of Suzhou city, once docked his boat at Jingkou [Jiangsu]. He saw a tall traveler with an awe-inspiring appearance. His beard covered his belly, and his mustache extended several inches and concealed his mouth. Cai reckoned that it obstructed his eating and drinking, and so he invited him into a restaurant to watch him. As the traveler looked over his food, he took off his hat, removed two hairpins from his chignon, used them to coil up his mustache, and inserted them into his side whiskers. He took long gulps and ate with big bites, as if there was no one around him. When he finished eating, he took his leave, saying, “I am moved by milord’s generosity. How can I repay you?” Then he ordered that a wooden club be taken from his boat and given to Cai. The traveler said, “When you are sailing, if there are people raiding and bullying others, you should show this to them. Say it is an old bearded official’s club to help people to come to their senses. They certainly will back off and leave.”

Later, while sailing on the river, Cai suddenly encountered violent highwaymen. Cai did as the man had said. As predicted, they did not rob him and left. The same thing happened repeatedly. Only then did Cai understand that he was the bandit leader of the violent highwaymen. He always behaved with
dignity and trustworthiness among people. Cai later died at Jiujiang [Jiangxi]. The guest learned about it and paid for the funeral expenses with gold. He sent people to take care of the coffin as it went to Jingkou, and then they left.

Out of consideration for a single meal, a bandit in this fashion did not forget. His worthiness is far greater than those these days who gorge themselves without feelings for others. (SZ 8.103; GD 80.1727)

**THEFT AND RETRIBUTION**

A shopkeeper family at Chang Gate in Suzhou were Muslims who specialized in selling jade. A Muslim entrusted his wealth to the family, left, and did not return. The household, suspecting that the man had no descendants, used his wealth to manage their business, eventually becoming rich. When the Muslim’s son arrived, the shopkeeper concealed the extent of his father’s wealth. The son did not know if the shopkeeper’s claims were true or not. He wished to ask the officials but had no basis to determine the matter. So the officials measured out travel costs and sent him off.

Later the shopkeeper family had a son. He loved to drink and did not value money. He did everything that might destroy a family. The father could not stop him and tied him up in an empty room. The mother felt sorry for him and peeked at him through a crack in the wall. It was the original Muslim. She hastened to tell her husband, and both peeked at him. The husband sighed, “This is simply Heaven’s plot against us.” They then released him.

Several years later, the family’s wealth was completely gone, and the son also died. I heard this from a student, surnamed Pu. Although the affair verges on the ridiculous, it still can warn those who hide other people’s wealth. (GD 81.1743)

**RETURNING BOOKS**

When collecting books on a large scale, one cannot read them all, but one should not be stingy about others borrowing them to read them. This indeed is one aspect of putting oneself in the place of others. If a certain person has always acted badly, one ought to be careful and thoughtful toward them from start to finish, and not giving them books is permissible.

At present there is a saying, “To lend books is to be a fool; to return books is to be a fool.” This is a saying of petty people. The original character for “fool” (chi) is “cup” (chi), a vessel to store wine. It says that when one borrows
something, a cup is used as an introduction gift and that when one returns it, one uses a cup as a thank-you gift, and that is all. To lend a book to someone else is a benevolent and worthy act of virtue. To borrow a book and not return it is an act of theft. How can one view it only as foolishness? (SZ 9.116)

COSMETIC IMPROVEMENTS

Lu Zhan [d. 454] dyed his white hair to please his concubine, and Kou Jun [961–1023] sped up the greying of his whiskers to gain the post of grand councilor. Both were mired in their desires and did not follow the natural course of events. Yet The Treatise on Manifold Topics (Bowuzhi) by Zhang Hua [232–300] has a method for dyeing the whiskers white. Tang and Song people have poems about plucking out white hairs. So we know that this custom goes way back. However, today few men do so to please their concubines. For the most part, they are only those awaiting their first official appointments or who wish to hang on to their positions. On the bulletin board in the front of the Ministry of Personnel, there are notices for herbs that can dye hair white and methods for fixing one’s front teeth. One can see them and then know about this. (SZ 9.117)

TOYING WITH THE SKEPTICAL

A traveling gentleman from Jiangxi excelled at wondrous tricks. High officials mostly treated him with ritual deference. Only a certain surveillance vice-commissioner did not believe him. The traveling gentleman wanted to present himself and requested to show his tricks for fun, and the official consented. Then the gentleman cut paper to make two chopping cleavers. He made a show as he played with them. The two cleavers then flew up and danced together in front of him. They gradually came closer to the vice-commissioner, and the vice-commissioner sat straight up and did not move. A while later the cleavers touched his face, and the vice-commissioner brushed them away with his sleeve. The gentleman then put his cleavers away and left. Only then did they see that the vice-commissioner’s eyebrows had been shaved off. He sent people to arrest and punish the gentleman. No one knew where he went. I heard about this from the jinshi Jiang Hengfu [1472], who was sent to Jiangxi. (SZ 10.123)

FASHION TRENDS, 2

Skirts decorated with horsetails (mawei qun) started in Korea and came into the capital. The people of the capital bought and wore them. There was no
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OPERA

Opera, or musical drama, was far and away the most popular form of entertainment in late imperial China. Its origins lay in the Tang-dynasty Music Bureau, a state agency whose performing artists supplied entertainment to the court. In the eleventh and twelfth centuries, as cities grew, disposable income increased, and stringent curfew laws fell away, a separate, private entertainment industry took shape. Consequently, opera appeared not only in the palace but in theaters, wine shops, brothels, markets, and temples, and at occasions such as festivals, weddings, funerals, and banquets. Plots might involve famous historical episodes, romances, supernatural tales, and accounts of crime and punishment, spiced with clever wordplay and slapstick humor. Singing was paramount, props and sets were minimal, and symbolic gestures communicated vital elements of the stories. Over time, the genre’s prestige rose, and literati themselves came to compose opera librettos, as the most important playwright of the early Ming was none other than Zhu Youdun (1379–1439), a grandson of the Ming founder.

If opera won widespread acclaim, its performers did not. Actors ranked at the bottom of the social ladder and formed in the Ming a separate, formal, hereditary occupational category. The state punished female relatives of male convicts and female war prisoners by sentencing them to this despised status. Opera troupes frequently doubled as fronts for prostitution. Although exceptional performers and troupes might find generous patrons, most were often on the road, living from hand to mouth. Ming society was preoccupied with the clear boundaries and hierarchies between generations, genders, social strata, and ethnicities, but opera stood apart, regularly violating these strictures. Performers pretended to be what they were not: officials, outlaws, generals, daughters of elite families, servants, merchants, and clergy. Actors commonly played women characters, and actresses likewise took on male roles. That being said, opera fleshed out the traditional Chinese imagination, and for most Chinese, unable to read, opera performances furnished a vital means for them to learn their heritage and its values.

one yet who knew how to make them. Those who first wore them were only rich merchants, noble princesses, and singing courtesans. Later they were mostly worn by military officials, and the capital began to have people who could weave and sell them. Subsequently, regardless of social status, those who wore them grew more numerous by the day. By the last years of the
Chenghua reign [1465–1487], most court officials wore them. In general, those who wore them left the lower part empty and open, just for looks. The grand secretary, his excellency Wan An [?–1489] never took his off in winter or summer. His excellency Zhou Hongmou [1419–1490] of Zongbo wore two layers. Young marquises, earls, and imperial sons-in-law even had bowstrings threading the hems of their robes. The only high official who did not wear them was Li Chun [jinshi 1450], vice-minister in the Ministry of Personnel. Laws prohibiting cross-dressing began in the Hongzhi reign [1488–1505].

**OPERA AFICIONADOS**

Jiaxing’s Haiyan County, Shaoxing’s Yuyao County, Ningbo’s Cixi County, Taizhou’s Huangyan County, and Wenzhou’s Yongjia County all have people who practice to become actors. Their name is drama’s disciples (xiwen dizi). Even sons of good families are not ashamed of doing this. They perform chuanqi. Each opera has women, and each one has crying. When people are made to hear them, they become saddened very easily. The arias are mostly the tones of the lost Southern Song dynasty [1127–1279]. I do not know why people from Zhejiang enjoy and esteem them. Those who pretend to be women are named powdered female leads (zhuangdan). They have soft voices and walk slowly. When they perform the ritual double bow, it usually looks like the real thing. Every time I see them, they make me feel embarrassed, and I cannot look directly at them. Yet no-good sorts are often on familiar terms with them, to the point where they have their concubines comb the actors’ hair and arrange their dress. Moreover, the women forget themselves and chat and joke with them. There are cases where the women are secretly violated by them. For literati who wish to run a proper household, it is appropriate that they strictly forbid this practice and completely cut it off. (SZ 10.124–25; GD 82.1757)

**TATTOOS**

When I was young, I went into a god’s shrine and saw the images of the attending spirit guards. There were naked ones, whose arms and legs were all painted in black shapes of flowers, birds, clouds, and dragons. At first I did not understand why.

Recently in Wenzhou and Taizhou [Zhejiang], and other places, I saw that at beginning of the dynasty, there were people sentenced to the frontier for
being “carved in black.” I asked how “carved in black” got its name. An elder said, “This is a name for ‘needling floral embroidery.’ It is simply what the ancients called ‘patterned bodies’ (wenshen, i.e., tattooed bodies). During the Yuan, followers of knights-errant all wanted to do this. They all had tattooed dragons, phoenixes, and flowers on their arms and legs. The complicated, finely detailed ones were regarded as the best. During the Hongwu reign [1368–1398], the prohibitions were very strict, and from then on no one dared to violate the rules.”

Then I suddenly realized what I had seen when I was young. They were images of tattooed bodies. I learned that tattooed bodies in ancient times started with foreigners from the islands. For the most part, these people often went into the water to make a living. They tattooed their bodies to keep away strange things in the water, and that was all. Commoners who have been touched by classical teachings compete to do the right thing. But if they harm their bodies’ skin, how would they differ from island foreigners? To prohibit such things truly is correct.

Looking at the matter from this perspective, if the authorities’ laws and commands are strict and enlightened, then there is nothing that cannot be changed when it comes to bad customs. In all cases, it is slipshod government to believe we should follow popular customs, or prioritize official policy as most urgent but then not follow through. (SZ 10.127)

**GRAVE GOODS**

Censor Zhang said, “During the Chenghua reign [1465–1487], bandits opened the tomb of Han Qi [1008–1075]. They got many articles of gold and silver, and thirty-six golden belts, and so the extent of his wealth can be known.” I believe that these belts certainly were bestowed on him by rulers. If he had bought them, then the mistake lies in his not being frugal. If he received them from others, then the mistake lies in his lacking integrity. Such burials with grave goods not only bring no benefit, but instead they harm the person. At the time, Han Qi in his majesty was admired by many. It must have been the ignorance of his sons and grandsons that led to this, and that is all.

Looking at this matter, we then understand why *Master Zhu’s Family Rituals* (Zhuzi jiali), in the matter of grave goods and jewels to be placed in the deceased’s mouth, prohibits the use of pearls and jade, and gold and silver. Moreover, the rules make relatives and friends assemble and observe in order to understand this. Zhu Xi’s worries were profound and his thinking farsighted, and truly are a warning and reminder for later generations.
According to the query of Ye Sheng [1420–1474] to the Yongning granary officials, they said that his excellency’s grave was less than twenty li from the Zhangde County seat [Henan]. The stele’s carved rams and tigers were completely cut away and melted down for construction of the residence of Prince Zhao.

Several years earlier, the tomb also had been opened by bandits. This entry ought to have been written when his excellency Ye, as Shanxi administration vice-commissioner, was repairing the eight walls in Xuanfu [Shanxi]. So his excellency Han’s tomb had been opened for a long time. This one probably belonged to another person surnamed Han. (SZ 11.139; GD 83.1774)

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A BURIAL APPRAISAL BY YE SHENG

“If buried in less than three feet of earth, it will be difficult to keep the body intact for a hundred years. If buried in more than three feet of earth, it will be difficult to keep the tomb intact for a hundred years.” I do not know whose words these are, but the essential point makes great sense.

There was a recent granary official at Yongning. He was a native of Anyang County in Zhangde [Henan] and had been a National University student. I asked him about the descendants of Han Qi. He said, “His descendants are known to be in Zhezhong [Zhejiang]. There are none of his people at all in Anyang. Although there was a magistrate Han Pan, he is not from their clan. In the city there is a temple dedicated to his excellency Han, and the authorities make offerings to it once a year. ’The Record of the Morning Brocade Hall’ is inside, and Cai Xiang [1012–1067] did the calligraphy.”

“The tomb is less than twenty li from the county seat. None of the stone rams and tigers from the stone steles remain. Most were used in recent years when they constructed Prince Zhao’s residence, cut them away, and smelted them completely. Several years before, bandits had opened it. At present it is only an abandoned, overgrown spot.” Hearing him stirred my feelings, and I am increasingly moved by his words.

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1 “The Record of the Morning Brocade Hall,” written by the scholar-official Ouyang Xiu (1007–1072), celebrated Han’s gravitas and concern for the public interest. The scholar-official Cai Xiang was famous for his calligraphy in Ye, Shuidong riji, 33.328

2 Ye, Shuidong riji, 33.328.
CHAPTER ONE

LITERATI AND BAD COMPANY

After the first-place jinshi examination student Luo Lun [1431–1478] returned to his official position, he announced that he would go back to his home district due to illness. Many people there associated with him, and then he set up a group with its own covenant. If there was anyone who committed a misdeed, the group would not pay attention to him. In cases of great misdeeds, they would expel him from the group.

There were among the group one or two headstrong, violent men. Both were seized and thrown into the river to drown. The local people felt it was unfair and pressed charges with the officials. Luo Lun, however, had already died of his illness. Over ten of his followers were punished for plotting murder, on the grounds that they were followers of Luo Lun. If Luo had already not died, the authorities would have executed him, and no one would have objected. Luo was fortunate not to be executed and exposed in public. However, his reputation for killing people besmirched official documents, and the affair was transmitted by word of mouth. Didn’t clerks in the law offices slander and laugh at him?

If Luo had been of humble origins, then he would have never studied the law. Yet to be an official is to do good and majestic things. It is not be a teacher of gentlemen on the one hand but kill people on the other. The classics and the commentaries all have enlightened instructions, but his followers acted wantonly like this. Why?

When I first heard this, I did not believe it. Recently, I examined it with Liu Shiyong. Only then did I know it truly was the case and have always deeply lamented it. (SZ 11.140)

MONUMENTS TO VIRTUE AND SUCCESS

At present the court recognizes and commends filial sons, loyal wives, jinshi degree holders, and provincial graduates. The authorities install memorial archways at the gates of their homes to inform and inspire others. It is simply the intention passed down from the ancients to commend officials who retired to their villages.

I have heard that at the beginning of the dynasty there were memorial archways only for filial sons and virtuous women. In the Xuande [1426–1435] and Zhengtong [1436–1449] reigns, the government began to have them erected for jinshi degree holders and provincial graduates. There were also archways for those who had passed the first level of the examinations. When
their service took them to prominent positions, then the archways were gone. Since the Tianshun reign [1457–1464], each site has begun to have titles, such as minister of state, minister of education, and censor-in-chief. These all derive from the authorities’ intentions.

In recent years, the households of powerful ministers treat these archways as landmarks, and there are households with three or four of them. These are still felt to be inadequate, and there are those who further build arches that straddle the house gates. In addition, many request the authorities to erect them. Moreover, the language on them is very unrefined, such as Shouguang’s “Pillar of the Dynasty and Chancellor of the Nation” (Zhuguo Xiangfu) and Jiaxing’s “Minister for Generations to the August Ming” (Huangming shichen). These indeed are gross exaggerations.

Recently I obtained Records of Things Heard in Central Wu (Zhongwu jiwen) and read it. I saw that Vice-Minister Jiang Xilu [980–1054] during the Song dynasty was not willing to have a memorial archway. I sighed deeply because what the ancients nurtured is what contemporary people cannot approach. Zheng Jie’an from my Kunshan in his later years had the jinshi memorial archway at his home removed. He said that he did not want to leave behind what people later would laugh at. (SZ 12.145–46; GD 68.1519)

VAINGLORY

The gentlemen of ancient times would have regarded accepting rewards for their military accomplishments as shameful. Yet in recent times, with grand coordinator civil officials at every frontier, as soon as they have a victory, they use them to deceptively and excessively promote and reward their followers and sons-in-law. When important gentlemen deceive Heaven, such shamelessness is extraordinary.

Among high ministers that I have met, the only ones who did not use military accomplishments to personally aid their followers were only the two excellencies, Bai Gongmin [1419–1475] and Yu Sumin [1429–1489]. After Bai died, his son Ji made a request, and the court gave him an official position. After Yu died, the court wished to make his son an official. Because his son really was a provincial graduate, the court made his grandson an official. (SZ 12.153)

PAPER CONSUMPTION

In Quzhou in Zhejiang, the common people make paper for a living. Every year they provide the supply for official stationery. The enormous public and
private expenses are incalculable. Yet the imperial household and noble officials at first did not pay attention to it.

I heard that in the Tianshun reign [1457–1464], there was an old eunuch returning from Jiangxi. He saw that the imperial household used stationery to cover the walls. He choked with sobs as he looked at it. It probably was that he knew making paper was not easy and felt pity at the extremity of the extraordinary waste.

I further learned from an elder who said, “During the Hongwu reign [1368–1398], the National University student classroom records and paper used for calligraphy practice were sent each month to the Ministry of Rites. The calligraphy practice paper was later sent to wrap up noodles for the Court of Imperial Entertainments. The classroom registers were later sent to serve as reverse-side draft paper for the judicial offices. They spared expenses like this.

During the Yongle [1403–1424] and Xuande [1426–1435] reigns, given the expenses of the New Year’s Lantern Festival and fireworks, they still used old paper on both occasions. Later it was not like this anymore. During the Chenghua reign [1465–1487], they always used placard paper for shooting star fireworks and such. Its costs were incalculable!

The world now has no eunuchs like that man. It is difficult to speak about. (sz 12.153)

OFFICIAL RECTITUDE

Wang Qi’s courtesy name was Wenjin, and he was a native of Renhe [Zhejiang]. At the provincial examinations, he placed into the second class for the Ministry of Rites and was appointed an instructor in Ruzhou [Henan]. He was named investigating censor and was praised for his learning and probity. He was promoted to Shanxi assistant surveillance commissioner. He superintended schools, and due to him, the customs of the scholars were transformed. He was transferred to Sichuan, was unhappy, and requested to retire from service. His age was only fifty.

Qi conducted himself with purity and uprightness. While in office, he had no visitors who came on private business. All his life he did not work to amass wealth, and he lived contented in poverty. At a time of great dearth, he had nothing to meet his daily needs. As winter continued, it snowed heavily. Every day he lay stiff in bed and did not leave his gates. There were gifts of food. If they did not come from his old friends, he did not accept them. Even if they were old friends, they would come many times, and he would reject their gifts.
A neighbor had consoling words: “Being an official greatly burdened Your Excellency. With your single word, you could give relief to anyone. Why then make yourself suffer like this?” Qi said, “I seek only not to be ashamed in my heart, and that is all. Although I am hungry and cold, nothing makes me unhappy. Why should there be any consolation?”

In the Tianshun reign [1457–1464], he finally died of hunger and cold. The prefect of Hangzhou, Hu Jun, learned about this and mourned him. He informed the provincial and surveillance commissions. He memorialized on his behalf to have him enshrined at the shrine for district worthies. This story comes from the shrine records. *(SZ 12.154)*

**Learning and Lavatories**

His excellency Ouyang Xiu [1007–1072] recorded that Qian Weiyan [962–1034] read the classics and histories when he was seated. When he lay down, he read minor narratives (*xiaoshuo*). When he went to the toilet, he read short verse. Never for an instant did he let go of books. When his excellency Song was at the Historiography Bureau, he had a book tucked under his arm every time that he went to the toilet. The sound of recited verse could be clearly heard from outside.

Although these cases are enough to show the scholarly devotion of these two excellencies, the toilet is a filthy place. One goes there only because one has no choice. How is it a place to read books? As for Buddhist and Daoist disciples, they will not recite scriptures unless they burn incense. So how can we Confucians disrespect our calling like this? If his excellency Ouyang in this case was thinking about the composition of verse and prose, then there is no harm to the cause of righteousness. *(SZ 13.158)*

**Retribution for a Spendthrift**

A Mr. Chen was a native of Tusong in Changshu [Jiangsu]. His household was very rich, but they were extravagant and lacked restraint. Every time they had a large banquet, when it came to food such as chicken and geese, they would always set a complete bird, with head and tail, before each guest. He once docked his boat at Shapentan in Suzhou [Jiangsu] and bought crabs to make crab claw soup. Because the claws were extremely small, he threw them all in the river. He was on familiar terms with a courtesan and had gold and silver head ornaments made for her. The courtesan mocked his stinginess and dumped them all in the river. He ordered that ornaments be made again.
For many years he owed taxes and money for official goods and materials. The officials pursued him for repayment, and he then went bankrupt. He rented a house to live in and personally grew vegetables. His wife wove hemp sandals to support the household. An old man who lived next door pitied their suffering. He brought a jug of Chinese clear liquor and a plate of tofu to give to them. With one bite, the man became ill for several days. His wife asked, “What if the head ornaments from Shapen had been kept to pay for daily expenses?” He said, “Now you are killing me too!” (SZ 14.169–70)

**DRINKING HABITS**

When the ancients drank liquor, they did so with a sense of measure, and most sessions did not go into the night. As for

> Happily and long into the night we drink;—
> Till all are drunk, there is no retiring,

it was simply the Son of Heaven feasting the feudal lords and showing his compassionate grace. It was an unusual banquet. So the gentleman condemns drinking long into the night. In the capital, it was only officials linked with the six ministries and thirteen circuits who often drank into the night. In general, only when the yamen’s business is finished can they move to the banquet tables. Under the circumstances, they had to drink into the night. Those in the Hanlin Academy, the six offices of scrutiny, and the less taxing positions all drank during the day. At my district covenant banquet, we usually dispersed as dusk fell. In recent years, this covenant banquet custom has been revived by the younger generation.

Drinking late into the night does not take into account the feelings of the host, who naturally should finish the affair. One also must feel for the difficulties of servants and attendants, and the earnest concerns of the parents. The academician Li Binzhi did not drink much, but when it came to the linked-verse composition and chess playing that accompanied the drinking, he was delighted and never got tired. Once he returned home in the middle of the night after drinking. His father had not gone to bed and was waiting for him. Binzhi deeply regretted it. From then on, he pledged that when he went to banquets, he swore not to stay so late as to see candles lit. When sunset approached, he invariably would be first to take his leave and return home. This is the kind of son that people should want to be. (SZ 14.179)
THE GRIEF INDUSTRY

In the poetry collections of ancient men, there are works of grieving elegies and tearful expressions of sorrow. In general, they drew from deep friendship and profound admiration, in which writers could not stop themselves and did not wait for requests from other people.

Upon the deaths of their parents, officials now always search everywhere for elegiac verses and make a book of them. Literati force themselves to follow their intentions. It is the same everywhere. In general, upon the deaths of high officials, there are those who compose the spirit road steles (shendaobei) and those who compose the grave declarations (mubiao). For example, in cases of cabinet high ministers, there are three people. One is asked to do the spirit road stele and one is asked to do the burial record (zangzhi). With the remaining one, he fears that he will be left out, and so they ask him to write the preface for the elegiac verses. In each case, supplicants bring substantial amounts of cash and gifts at the visits and also use the works as sample texts for later on. After they have a preface for the poems, then they cannot be without the poems. So they search everywhere for poems and stanzas to finish the book.

There are also officials with undistinguished records. The next-of-kin take these funerary accounts and return to show them to the people of their district. They believe that the deceased was highly regarded by famous people for his whole life. Moreover, people so cherish and respect their parents that if they did not do this, then something would be missing in their mourning rituals.

Consequently, everyone strives in these tasks and does not know that they should not regard them as important matters. In extreme cases, we have filthy-rich Jiangnan households who have never associated with court officials. They too invariably curry favor and associate with these writers, tossing them gifts and requesting elegiac verses. Those who accept the gifts never inquire if the person was worthy or not, and fulfill their requests however they like. The filthy rich take them and not only bring them together and make a book but in some cases carve them in stone at gravesite pavilions or carve them in wood at the family schools. Those that profit from their gifts but are tired of their requests make several ready-to-use, generic poems in preparation for dealing with these matters. When it comes time to print and circulate the poems, then this one and that one are completely identical. This is most pathetic. (SZ 15.189)