Chapter Three

Politics and Government

Festivals and Confucians

At every Duanwu festival, the palace bestows court officials with cakes and zongzi outside the Meridian Gate.1 There are several rounds of toasting with wine, and then they leave. High civil officials accompany the emperor to the Rear Gardens. They watch military officials perform the Willow Shoot.2 When the activities are finished, all leave. The emperor greets his mother, and they go to the Inner Pool.3 They watch the dragon boats, and the sound of the cannons does not stop. For the most part, these activities have gone on since the Xuande reign [1426–1435].

In the bingxu year [1466], no one heard the cannons sound. People wondered about it. Later they heard a court attendant say, “That day the eunuchs memorialized about setting off the cannons. The emperor stopped them, saying, ‘If the sourpuss Confucians hear of it, then there will be lots of criticism and discussion.’” The emperor’s compassionate concern for the words of others was like this, and we can look up to his sagely virtue. (SZ 1.1)

A Celebrated Official

When his excellency Chen Yi [1389–1456], courtesy name Ximin, of our Suzhou served as grand coordinator in Shaanxi, he employed the law with lenience and fairness. In managing affairs, he was unassuming. Over several years, the rain and sunshine arrived in a timely fashion, and good annual harvests came repeatedly. The common people trusted and cherished him. Because of his fine whiskers, they called him “The Bearded Grandpa.” At one point he had to return to the court to discuss matters. Commoners spread a rumor that he would be replaced, and several thousand people blocked the road to detain him. His excellency told them that he would return, and
then they slowly dispersed. When he came back, they lit incense and welcomed him.

When commoners or their parents became sick, they would make a vow to carry his excellency’s sedan chair. They would not use doctors and medicines, or offer prayers, but they always recovered. As soon as he left his office quarters, people fought to carry him. Even though he forbade it, they did not stop. When his excellency left his post, someone painted this scene. He gained the people’s hearts like this.

The one who replaced his excellency wanted to put a stop to this problem and remedy it with fierceness. Knowledgeable people also regarded it as appropriate. Commoners outwardly respected the new man but inwardly were really furious with him. Moreover, droughts and floods came one after the next, and fighting on the frontier broke out daily. He did not restore the previous ambience. So those that enjoyed discussing his excellency believed not only that his virtue benefited the people but also that his blessed protection of the people had an extensive reach.⁴ (sz 1.5)

**CHASTISING THE COURT**

During the Hongwu reign [1368–1398], the court sought people proficient in calendrical calculation, who could tabulate the past and know the future. Those who turned in flawless results on the examinations would certainly be enfeoffed as marquis and be granted a salary of 1500 dan.⁵

The Shandong native and National University student Zhou Jingxin memorialized, “The longevity of the dynasty’s destiny lies in the depth of its virtue. It is not decided by calendrical calculation. It is a matter of fact that the Three Dynasties possessed the Way for a long time. After the Three Dynasties, only the Han, Tang, and Song had profound benevolence and immense virtue. Starting with Emperor Han Gaozu’s [r. 206–195 BCE] expansive benevolence, the Han continued with Emperors Wen’s [r. 179–157 BCE] and Jing’s [156–141 BCE] respectfulness and thrift, Emperors Zhao’s [r. 86–72 BCE] and Xuan’s [71–48 BCE] worthiness and brilliance, Emperor Guangwu’s [r. 25–57 CE] restoration, and Emperor Zhang’s [r. 76–88] longevity. There later was Tang Taizong’s [r. 627–649] forceful implementation of benevolence and righteousness, and Song Taizu’s [r. 960–975] sincere mind and love for the common people. Consequently, their dynasties possessed the Way for a long time. No dynasty had a shorter destiny than the Qin [221–206 BCE]. Next was the Sui [581–617], and then next were the Five Dynasties [907–960]. As for
Emperor Qin Shihuang’s [r. 221–209 BCE] cruelty, Sui Yangdi’s [r. 605–617] violence, and the Five Dynasties’ evil, it was all brought on by human affairs. How could the fault lie with calendrical calculation?

“Respectfully considering how his Sage Highness responded to Heaven and revered the mandate, swept away the many stalwarts, rescued those caught in disorder, and executed the violent, his merit is great. That said, his divine martial prowess surpasses that of Emperor Gaozu, but his expansive benevolence does not match his. His worthy brilliance surpasses that of Tang Taizong, but his loyalty and generosity does not match his. Consequently, since the unification, the dynasty’s policies and instruction have not yet been disseminated, and the four quarters have yet to be brought to order. Prostrate, I request that you emulate Emperor Han Gaozu’s expansive benevolence, join with Tang Taizong’s sincere earnestness, and take the Three Dynasties’ tax collection policies as your model. Then the dynasty’s fortunes can be extended for myriad generations. So why must you make inquiries of these men with their divination techniques?”

He further said, “His majesty for successive years has embarked on distant campaigns. All the people are of one word. All know that you would take it as shameful to be unable to transmit the nation’s treasure. You need only to wish to take it and that is all. Your subject has heard that the transmission of the nation’s treasure comes from the time of King Ping of Chu in the Warring States era [403–221 BCE]. He took the jade that Bian He found and had it carved. Qin Shihuang hid it and called it the jade seal. Since then, successive ages have treasured it, and later it had this fame.

“The Changes says, ‘The sages’ great treasure is called “the high position.” How can they keep that position? It is called benevolence.’ This remark understands that benevolence is the ruler’s treasure. The jade seal is not a treasure. Moreover, as for the lords of the Warring States, the lord of Zhao first obtained the treasure, but he could not keep his kingdom. The lords of the Five Dynasties all obtained this treasure, and their dynasties were all quickly lost. In sum, it was because they only knew to view a jade seal as a treasure but did not know to view benevolence and righteousness as greater treasures. No government that brought peace to the empire and ruled the world for a long time matches those of the Three Dynasties. During the Three Dynasties, the jade seal did not yet exist. This indeed makes it very clear that possessing the empire lies in benevolence and righteousness, and not in this seal. Today you use the military repeatedly to obtain treasure. The troops and common people are hard pressed and suffer. This is to mistake the real, true, great treasure and exchange it for a useless, small treasure. The Sage One’s wisdom flows through the empire and
brightly illuminates the myriad things. How then can one slight benevolence but value jade, or cherish jade but not cherish benevolence?"

He further said, “At present the labor service requirements are many and difficult. Although the population is abundant, the people’s burdens are numerous and taxes are excessive. Although the field harvests are plentiful, there are poor commoners. The transformation by Confucian instruction is extensive, but the people remain unhappy. This is what is called ‘goodness alone.’ The laws and systems are strict, but the people do not submit. This is what is called ‘the law alone.’”

In ancient times Ji An said to Emperor Wu of the Han [r. 140–87 BCE], ‘Your majesty inwardly has many desires but outwardly extends benevolence and righteousness. How can you desire to emulate the rule of Tang and Yu? At present you desire a wealthy nation, a strong army, high walls and deep moats, magnificent and beautiful palaces, extensive territory, and an abundant population of commoners. So you acquire many soldiers, amass wealth on a grand scale, go on campaign without missing a day, and the work of civil construction never ceases. How can the empire be ruled like this?”

He further said, “In the fourth year of the Hongwu reign [1371], Your Majesty selected the empire’s officials and functionaries. In the thirteenth year [1380], they together were charged with being the Hu faction. In the nineteenth year [1386], the people’s misfortunes began and went on for repeated years. In the twenty-third year [1390], there was the great massacre of the capital’s commoners. The measure recklessly labeled them as criminals, not distinguishing between the good and the bad, and all were killed. How could there be no loyal subjects and ardent gentlemen? Good men and gentlemen were mistakenly put on the list. Thereupon we see that His Majesty’s virtue is slight, but his desire for slaughter is deep-seated. Since ancient times those who were not addicted to killing people could unify the empire, but most of those who later killed did not prosper. The lords of the Qin, Sui, and Yuan dynasties were fond of killing without end, and their descendants were extinguished. During the Han, the government mistakenly killed a filial woman, and then Donghai had three years of drought. At present we have had floods and droughts for successive years and have not had a bountiful harvest. It was perhaps brought on by how the slaughter of innocents stirs and injures harmonious qi.”

He further said, “The systems of the enlightened ruler reward without surplus and punish without excess. Today punishments already are excessive, and rewards have no sense of restraint. The elders of the empire have no merit and no virtue, yet others give them five ingots of silver. As for the military officials
who leave to campaign, their positions are high and their salaries substantial. They pacify the bandits and defend against humiliation. They fulfill their duties as a matter of course. Today the rewards have no limit. Taxes are heavy, and the punishments burdensome. The poor people are straitened and distressed, but the state excessively rewards people without merit. It truly is senseless. It is fitting to limit the rewards for those without merit and be lenient with the taxes on poor people. Then the empire will be very fortunate, and the commoners will be very fortunate.” The rest, which treated such matters as the circulation of paper money and the abolition of sentencing criminals to frontier labor service, addressed the problems of the time.

The memorial ran over three thousand characters long, and I have recorded it, summarizing the essentials. It is not known what Shandong prefecture or county Jingxin was from or what office he later held. I asked men from Shandong who served at court, and none knew him. How impressive! He was one who had no office or charge to offer his opinions but still could speak in such a straightforward way! It cannot be forgotten. (SZ 1.8–10)

CRIME, CONSULTATION, AND REDEMPTION

In the third year of the Tianshun reign [1459], Nanzhili [Anhui and Jiangsu] Troop Purification Censor Guo Guan upheld the law with considerable strictness. In Kunshan County [Jiangsu], there was a man who made baseless accusations, until twenty-four people were implicated and sent off into the army. My family at the time were village heads and were among those sent away.

We were going to explain this injustice to his excellency, the grand coordinator. We heard that Zha Yongchun of Taicang [Jiangsu] was familiar with the ways of government and discussed our plans with him. Zha said, “Grand coordinators and censors receive edicts and put them into practice. Appealing to him would be no help.” We further discussed our plans with Gao Siping of Kuncheng [Jiangsu]. Gao said, “You could appeal to the grand coordinator.” Someone asked him about Zha’s remarks. Gao said, “These are not the words of a knowledgeable person. At the capital, criminal cases at the censorate of the Ministry of Punishments inevitably fall to the Court of Judicial Review. It dares to render a decision only after assessing matters appropriately and without any interference. If the censor is outside the capital carrying out official business, it is as if there is no one by his side. If there is injustice in a criminal case, who but a grand coordinator can straighten matters out and correctly reverse the verdict? Appealing to him will be helpful.”
Thereupon we went to appeal. As it turned out, his excellency Cui, the censor-in-chief grand coordinator, reversed the verdict. The twenty-four men were all returned to civilian life. As the saying goes, “If you want things done right, ask three old men.” I believe it is so. (SZ 2.12)

EUNUCHS, 1

Commoner families in the capital envied the wealth and high status of the eunuchs. They privately castrated their boys and requested that the court accept and employ them. There also were young scoundrels as well as married men who had castrated themselves. The Ministry of Rites each time would memorialize and request instructions in these matters.

For the most part, the emperor would approve that they be expelled, and they all avoided the death penalty. They were registered and sent to garrisons north of the Great Wall. Their name was the Pure Armies. When there was an amnesty, the authorities, according to precedent, would memorialize that the men be sent to the South Garden to grow vegetables. When there was a vacant spot in the eunuch ranks, then the authorities chose someone to come in and carry out their duties. There were also those who were intelligent and quick in solving matters, and they rose to important positions. Yet these were only those who had been at the front and then filled positions as eunuchs in the palace storehouses. They could be selected and sent to schools to study. Later many succeeded as court attendants. Their moral caliber was very high.

Those who castrated themselves were even slighted by their own kind. Knowledgeable people believed that the court’s laws and prohibitions were too slack. Consequently this mutilation became a trend over time like this. If one wanted to eliminate this trend, the best thing would be that they not be dispatched to cultivate vegetables when amnesties were granted. I submit that they should have their heads shaved and become monks. If those that later grew their hair were under arrest for their whole life, then this trend would naturally disappear. Such a pity! None dare to speak of how people harm their own kind. (SZ 2.19; GD 74.1625)

MEMORIES OF THE FOUNDER’S RIVAL

The Hongwu emperor once went out incognito to the Sanshan district [Nanjing]. He saw an old woman who had a seat and tatami at her door. When he used it to sit down for a while, he asked the old woman where she was from. She replied that she was from Suzhou [Jiangsu]. He further asked how things
went when Zhang Shicheng [?–1367] was in Suzhou.\(^{16}\) The old woman said, “When the emperor of the Great Ming made his move, Prince Zhang [Zhang Shicheng] himself knew that he was not the Son of Heaven with the true mandate. The entire city was turned over to the emperor. The people of Suzhou did not suffer then from the hardships of war. We are moved by his virtue up to the present day.” He asked her name and then left.

The next day, the emperor said to his court ministers, “Zhang Shicheng originally displayed no profound benevolence or generosity toward the people of Suzhou. Yesterday I met an old woman from Suzhou. She was deeply moved by his virtue. Why, out of the multitudes of people in the capital, do we not have this woman?”

After the twenty-fourth year of the Hongwu reign [1391], the state moved people and populated the capital in full. That most were inhabitants of Suzhou and Songjiang was because of this incident. (SZ 3.33)

RASH PROPOSALS

When younger men have just passed the examinations and discuss political affairs, it is most appropriate that they be careful. In sum it is simply the common sense found in the classics. With respect to old statutes of the ancestral patriarchs [the Hongwu and Yongle emperors] and the court’s new statutes, if these men do not understand them or know them completely, and should they say things that are wrong or absurd, it will be more than a laughing matter for others.

I remember that after I had just passed the jinshi examinations, I heard several men who had passed in my year discuss the restrictions against marrying courtesans, proposed by the censor-in-chief, his excellency Li Kan [1407–1485]. Some asked, “What if the rule makes them change their profession so as to not break the law?” Li Zhao, who also passed the examinations that year, said, “They inevitably would tattoo her face. If the punishment made her someone that no one would want, then no one naturally would do this.” Everyone praised it as a good idea. I also had known him for a long time.

Recently I obtained August Ming Ancestral Injunctions (Huang Ming zuxun).\(^{17}\) Its opening chapter says, “When the imperial descendants become emperor, they need only adhere to the statutes and Grand Pronouncements (Dagao).\(^{18}\) Neither uses the punishments of tattooing, cutting off the feet, cutting off the nose, or castration.\(^{19}\) If any subject dares to memorialize for the use of these punishments, the various civil and military officials will memorialize immediately for their impeachment. The offender shall be sentenced to death
by slicing, and his entire family shall be put to death.” It makes one’s hair stand up on end.

In discussing official matters and systems, the sages had to inform those who entered official ranks to study the ancients. When it comes to the various books setting out this dynasty’s legal system, one must look at everything and then have a broad understanding. (SZ 3.33)

ADVICE TO THE COURT AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

The Jingtai emperor assumed the throne on the sixth day of the ninth month of the fourteenth year of the Zhengtong reign [1449]. The present emperor, at the time, was already the heir apparent. The next year was the first year of the Jingtai reign [1450]. The Yingzong emperor returned from the northern courtyard and resided in the southern palace. The next year, the Jingtai emperor registered his own son to be heir apparent and further enfeoffed the present emperor as the Prince of Qi. A while later, the heir apparent passed away, and disasters came one after the other.

The present Nanjing personnel attendant, his excellency Zhang Lun [1413–1483], at the time was a director at the Bureau of Ceremonies. He responded to an imperial rescript and discussed fourteen matters of cultivating virtue and mitigating disasters. Among them, the matter of “earnestness in filial piety and righteousness” was viewed as especially pressing. The main message was that the emperor emeritus [the Yingzong emperor] had reigned over the world for fourteen years [1436–1449], and his majesty previously had personally accepted the registered enfeoffment as Yingzong’s subject. This made Yingzong the empire’s father. When the throne was passed down to his majesty, he would honor him as emperor emeritus. This made [the Yingzong emperor] the most honored one in the empire. Each month, during the days of the new and full moons, as well as on annual seasonal holidays, it was appropriate that [the Jingtai emperor] would lead various officials to pay court at Yan’an Gate to carry out fully the Way of veneration and honor. As for the position of heir apparent, it could not be left vacant for long. It would have been fitting to extend the righteousness of treating him as if he were his own son. If the court ordered that the Prince of Qi be restored to the position of heir apparent, then harmonious qi would fill the world, the sounds of joy would be bountiful and spread widely, the mind of Heaven would return on its own accord, and disasters would naturally cease.

The memorial was sent in, and the Jingtai emperor was furious. They arrested Zhang, detained him in the imperial prison, and tortured him for five
Torture was part of accepted Chinese judicial procedure, as it was in many countries elsewhere in the fifteenth century. Ming officials drew on codified practices first composed centuries earlier in the Tang dynasty. In theory, officials turned to torture when suspects, in the face of strong, persuasive evidence, refused to admit their guilt or supply further evidence. These practices, in theory, were strictly regulated. Only supervising officials could command that torture be employed, which was then carried out by specific individuals, with specific implements and specific limitations. Women, children, the ill, and the elderly were subject to different rules than healthy adult men. Officials who violated these guidelines were liable for censure and punishment. Judicial torture had a central role in the Chinese literary and theatrical imagination, with many accounts, sometimes highly exaggerated, in Yuan-Ming-era operas and stories. Unfortunately, we lack adequate historical sources that tell us how or how often torture truly was applied.

Ming-dynasty torture had its special features. First, Ming emperors, beginning with the founder, continued Mongol Yuan-dynasty practices and had officials beaten and otherwise mutilated at court. These brutal habits differed from those of the Song (960–1279), the previous Han dynasty, where the stiffest punishments given officials generally were demotion, long-term exile, and proscription of their written works. Chinese political culture, albeit an abstract term, assumed more violent forms in the fifteenth century than in the eleventh. Second, the court and palace eunuchs employed their own large-scale, de facto secret police forces and prisons, which operated freely, without any oversight or codes. It was at their hands that most of the dynasty’s most spectacular cases of elite torture (and martyrdom) took place, well into the seventeenth century.
died in prison. In the first year of the Tianshun reign \([1457]\), it was ordered that they release his excellency Zhang. He was promoted to be vice-minister of the right of the Ministry of Rites. Later, his assignment was changed to the Nanjing Ministry of Rites and converted to the present post. (SZ 4.37)

**Career Counseling**

After I passed the *jinshi* examinations, I served in the Ministry of Works. My father’s friends Xu Weng and Meng Zhang said, “The road of official service is a place where vipers gather. You, milord, in the past were utterly straight and nothing could make you crafty. Today, however, it is not appropriate to be like this. When you sit among them, you may not only not discuss other people’s strong points and weak points, their successes and failures, but you must be very careful even when discussing their prose and poetry. Otherwise, we fear that slander and criticism will break out.”

At first I did not think this to be the case. Later I was appointed to be a director of the Bureau of Operations in the Ministry of War. After serving my term, there was a falling-out between myself and others who passed the *jinshi* examinations my year. They happened to be in the Henan Circuit and nailed me in the performance evaluations. The Ministry of Rites made inquiries among public opinion and put the matter to rest. Moreover, in one year I was transferred twice. I began to believe that Xu Weng’s words were not baseless, but I further appreciated that people have their own destiny, which cannot be harmed by those who commit evil acts. (SZ 4.40–41; GD 76.1652)

**Eunuchs, 2**

During the Hongwu reign \([1368–1398]\), eunuchs could only read and did not understand the concepts of righteousness and principle. During the Yongle reign \([1403–1424]\), the court began to order the Ministry of Personnel to send educational officials awaiting assignment to enter the palace and teach. At the start of the Zhengtong reign \([1436–1449]\), the eunuch Wang Zhen \([?–1449]\) founded a school in the palace treasury. He chose examining editors and proof-readers from the Hanlin Academy to come in and teach. As a result, there were many intelligent men among the eunuchs who understood culture and righteousness. Yet at the time, their positions only handled palace treasury and yamen matters. Few at that point left the palace on outside assignments. During the Xuande reign \([1426–1435]\), many were sent out, but they returned when they finished their work.
Today, though, eunuchs are engaged with matters outside the court, such as frontier defense; supervising troops at the capital; training divisions; managing internal and external capital granaries; and superintending construction, pearl excavation ponds, silver mining, maritime trade, weaving and dyeing factories, and other affairs. They are everywhere.

Once, in Tongzhou [Jiangsu], I met eunuch Zhang, a native of Jiaozhi [northern Vietnam]. He said that in the Yongle reign, when the court dispatched eunuchs to conduct business at the five military commissions and the six ministries, the eunuchs all would greet the commission and ministry officials at a distance of ten feet. On the road, if eunuchs encountered dukes, marquises, imperial sons-in-law, or earls, the eunuchs would have to dismount their horses or carts, and stand to the side. Now, eunuchs shout at the officials of the treasuries and ministries as if they were the eunuchs’ subordinates. When dukes, marquises, imperial sons-in-law, or earls encounter eunuchs on the road, they turn back and avoid them. In addition, they call eunuchs “respected grandfather.” (sz 4.41)

THE CATASTROPHE REVISITED

During the northern campaign in the jiawu year [1474], our return route south went through Xuanfu [Shanxi] and passed through Tumu. I asked about when the imperial palanquin (chejia) fled and lost the throne in the jisi year [1449]. There was an old commoner who said, “In the beginning, the great army exited the pass as it went north. Because this area had the benefits of water and pastureland, they used it to set up camp and offices. At first, when owls suddenly gathered above, people suspected in their hearts that something was amiss. Moreover, the mountain in previous times had a spring, which flowed into the Hun River and never ran dry. When it dried out, they discussed moving the camp near the Hun River to be near water. The enemy from far away saw the movement of troops and horses. They made a great cry, and the battle was joined. Before the armies met, our generals were confused and could not make any plans. The troops lay piled like pillows under the hoofs of foreign horses. Consequently, the imperial palanquin fled, and the emperor lost the throne. No one knows what happened to the great general the Duke of Ying, the Minister of War Kuang [Ye], and the others.” One can say that the leaders of the northern troops invariably waited for us to move before they made their move. If our troops had been as resolute as a wall and had not moved, then the defeat would not have been nearly so swift.
Chapter Three

The Mongol Threat, according to Huang Yu (fl. late fifteenth century)

The calamity at Tumu, many historians suggest, led to long-term changes in Ming northern-frontier policy. Aggressive pacification campaigns were replaced by a defensive posture, relying on the Great Wall and a network of garrisons, stretching hundreds of miles in forbidding terrain. Despite Lu Rong’s assertion that Chinese officials deserved the blame for the battlefield defeat, for his peers, such as Huang Yu, the Mongols remained a formidable, alien adversary, as seen in Shuanghuai suichao, a contemporary anthology:

Although the Mongols revere our righteousness and come to the court, their people always number over a thousand and their horses come to the ten thousands. They scrutinize the strengths and weaknesses of our deployments. We cannot know if they are deceiving China for the time being, harboring plans to attack. By custom they tend camels, horses, cattle, and sheep. They drink koumiss and eat meat, and dress in animal pelts and leather. They make bows, arrows, knives, and spears for weapons. They gallop and hunt, and are brave in combat. Each time they enter China to raid, a single man rotates among three horses. For food, they take cheese stuffed in leather bags and do not use supply carts. So the people and horses do not stop, and their keenness for battle is undiminished. They come like the wind and rain, and nothing can stop them. They depart like arrows shot from a bowstring, so fast that we cannot catch up. Yet attacking cities and infantry combat are not their strong suits. That being so, what should be our defense policy? It is simply to provide adequate food and troops, to set up camp and keep watch, to wait for the horde’s ambitions to become arrogant and their minds rebellious, and then defeat them with planning.²

¹ These visits to the court constituted foreign tribute missions, in an effort to expand trade between the Ming and its neighbors. The Mongols and other states eagerly pursued this trade, but some Ming officials viewed this relationship with suspicion. The expression “admire our righteousness” (muyi), used for centuries, referred to foreign submission to the supposed superior moral force of the Chinese throne.

² Huang Yu, Shuanghuai suichao, 86.
Before this, high officials had memorialized seven times, urging the emperor to bring back the army. All suggestions were ignored. I dare say it was that Wang Zhen was in charge. Consequently Esen [?–1454/1455] took advantage of the victory and invaded the territory, annihilating fortifications, stampeding and plundering people and livestock, and attacking and capturing prefectural and county seats until he pressed close to the capital.\textsuperscript{26} I would say that the eunuch Xi Ning [?–1450) was originally of foreign stock, and the defeat at Tumu and surrender to the caitiffs was due to him.\textsuperscript{27} That is why later it became so senseless and violent. At the time, our forces relied on the junior guardian, his excellency Yu Qian [1398–1457].\textsuperscript{28} Internally, he had general control of the essential state business; externally, he cultivated the military administration. Also, the Wuqiang marquis Yang Hong [1381–1451] and the Wuqing marquis Shi Heng [?–1460] both resisted with murderous force.\textsuperscript{29} Thus they were able to resolutely protect the capital and the dynasty’s altars of soil and grain.\textsuperscript{30}

Recently civil officials at the Hanlin Academy have related these events. They say we met them in battle and lost. In fact, their understanding is incorrect. (SZ 4.45; GD 76.1656)

\textbf{WORTHLESS IMPORTS}

In the \textit{xinchou} year of the Chenghua reign [1481], the western foreigners from Samarkand presented two lions as tribute goods.\textsuperscript{31} When they arrived at Jiayuguan [Gansu], they memorialized that the court send high officials to meet them and that the court dispatch troops to protect and escort them along the way to the capital. The matter was given to the Ministry of War. I said that the presentation of tribute goods was a matter for the Ministry of Rites. The Ministry of War only transmitted the documents and dispatched soldiers to protect and escort them.

At the time, his excellency Chen Yue [1429–1488] from Hejian was a director of the Department of State Affairs and would certainly want to review the memorial. I drafted the memorial and said in sum that lions inherently were rare animals. However, they could not be used as sacrificial goods at the imperial suburban temples and could not be used as harnessed beasts for the imperial palanquin.\textsuperscript{32} In general, they are useless things and are not fit to be accepted. Moreover, I elaborated that unusual birds and rare animals are not raised in China and that it was taken as a rule that we do not value odd things, contemptible articles, and the like. I said forcefully that we ought to
AN OBJECTION TO ANIMALS, BY CHEN XUAN (1429–1486)

On the guihai day of the fifth month of the twenty-first year of the Chenghua reign [1485], Guangdong Provincial Administration Commissioner of the Left Chen Xuan memorialized, “It has been transmitted that the Samarkand envoys have returned to their country from Guangdong. They will go to Malacca, seeking to buy lions to offer as tribute. I judge lions to be useless wild beasts. Guangdong for repeated years has had floods and drought. In addition, there are earthquakes and comets. Such disasters are unusual, and the people are unsettled. I request that we quickly stop these gifts.” The petition was sent down to the Ministry of Rites. It proposed, “It is appropriate to order those accompanying the Department of Language Translators to order the foreign envoys to return quickly when they get to Guangdong. They are not permitted to make trouble.” Approved by the court.¹

¹ Ming Xianzong jing huangdi shilu, 266.3b.

refuse them. If the court perhaps worried that it would come to be passed down that the court praised the prudence of frontier states that came bearing tribute, then we should allow that they come on their own. This would fulfill the ritual of submitting tribute goods. If the court dispatched high officials to meet the envoys, this would be construed as our requesting the goods. In ancient times the Son of Heaven requested chariots and gold from the feudal lords. The Spring and Autumn Annals censured it.³³ How much more so for the Chinese emperor? To request wondrous things from foreigners—how could this not be laughed at by the whole world in later generations?

His excellency Chen looked it over and feared that the emperor would object to it. Then we consulted with the Ministry of Rites. At the time, his excellency Zhou from Sichuan was director of the Department of State Affairs. He also said that we should not send officials to meet and accept them. The matter was then put to rest. But they sent eunuchs to meet them. The animals looked simply like yellow dogs, only that their heads were big and their tails long. The heads and tails were hairier, and that was all. Basically, there was no great difference from dogs. What Chuogenglu (Notes taken during breaks in farming) says is complete nonsense.³⁴ Every day a lion eats one live sheep and a bottle of sweet and sour yogurt. Those who take care of the lions are all
given government positions. The Court of Imperial Entertainments daily gave them wine and food. The costs were incalculable. At court no one was aware that when lions are in the mountains and forests, there are no people to mix sweet and sour yogurt to feed them. I daresay that the foreigners do this just to deceive and manipulate the Chinese. Chinese know only to take their superiors’ orders. Why are they happy to be deceived and manipulated, and do not wake up? (SZ 6.69–70; GD 78.1684)

A PASSION FOR DETAIL

As for the great ministers who were grand coordinators in Jiangnan, I consider his excellency Zhou Chen [1381–1453] to be the most renowned. In fact, his excellency’s ability and understanding were inherently superior to those of other people. His care and concentration on official matters also were what other people could not match.35

I heard that his excellency had a journal. He personally wrote there what he did each day and did not leave out the smallest detail. Each day, he would invariably record in detail whether the weather was overcast or sunny, or windy and rainy. For example, it would say, “in the morning of such-and-such a day, it was sunny, and in the afternoon, it was overcast. Such-and-such a day there was an east wind, and such-and-such a day there was a west wind. Such-and-such a day it was sunny in the daytime and rainy at night.”

People at first did not know why. One day, some commoners in a certain county declared that a transport boat had been lost on the river because of the wind. His excellency asked, what day was the boat lost? Was it in the morning or afternoon? Was it an east wind or a west wind? The person did not know and gave wild answers. His excellency reported the facts point by point, and the person submitted in astonishment. A deceptive scheme thus failed. His excellency’s compulsive recording of the wind and rain in fact was official business and not idle jotting. (SZ 7.81–82; GD 79.1698–99)

TAX WOES

Surveying farmland is simply good government. If the task is entrusted to the right people, who will do their duty and survey, they will see the true mu and qing numbers. They can clarify in each case who has plenty and who is lacking. Then those who have plenty cannot secretly harm the poor, and those who are lacking will not wrongly pay grain taxes. It will eliminate problems and bring forth benefits.
When Zhou Chen [1381–1453] was grand coordinator, he undertook this measure. But he entrusted a secretary of the Ministry of Revenue, He Yin, with the task, and every day He was just sunk in his wine. He never went through the farmland and wastes to oversee and view personally the surveying. He only relied on the clerks to provide reports and always allowed them to measure and handle matters. He did not consider that, with the things of this world, there sometimes is abundance, sometimes shortage, and sometimes neither abundance nor shortage. One cannot even them out with a single standard.

In cases where they assessed property holdings that had grown by a small amount, the clerks invariably called them “increased-output” households. When they assessed holdings that were less than the original number, they invariably called them “identical-amount” households and did not deduct a single item. With respect to the residences of the soldiers and commoners inside the Taicang prefectural seat, the wards and river routes were all treated as grain-submitting farmlands. The survey extended to the Twenty-Seven Security Wards in the northern suburbs. It further yielded farmland with a certain number of mu, and 293 odd mu were given to the Taicang government school to collect rents from them. In sum, taxed lands shrunk in the city and grew in the suburbs and villages. So there are increased-output households, which are not reported to have land beyond the original quotas. Other places that produced grain in abundance were households that sent officials to the capital.

From the beginning of the Zhengtong reign [1436–1449] until now, the identical-amount households have paid grain taxes to the government when they had no land, and the households of capital officials have enjoyed the benefits of no taxes. In this case, although He Yin left behind problems for the common people, Zhou Chen was content with this finished state of affairs and did not examine the problems. In fact, he too cannot be without responsibility.

Yin was a native of Nanhai in Guangdong. I asked about his family line, and it certainly was a mess. Isn’t this perhaps retribution for his serving as an official and not doing his job in good faith? (SZ 7.84; GD 79.1701–2)

**The Decline of Learning**

Each time I read Zuozhuan, the feudal lords, whether discussing events or remonstrating with their superiors, refer to the ancient systems as readily as if pointing to their palms. For example, the mother of Gongfu Wenbo [fl. early fifth century BCE], although she was only a woman, related the whole section of the ancient system about how the kings and queens personally wove their headdress
strings. If she missed nothing from start to finish like this, then we can know about the erudition of scholars of that time. On this point, not only do we see that the talented ancients all had useful learning, but we can also divine the success of the ancestral kings’ work of transformation through instruction.

Today, each time the Ministry of Personnel tests National University students on the meaning of the classics, there are some students that cannot remember the basics. They recklessly write whatever language they do every day and fill up the blank pages. They call them “essays for getting taken out to dinner.” Indeed, these essays can land them an official position. When I first learned this, I was shocked and thought it strange. This trend has existed since the Xuande [1426–1435] and Zhengtong [1436–1449] reigns. Although contemporary writings and ancient principles of conduct are very different, there is nothing worse than this when it comes to slipshod government!

Alas! Can one entrust the people’s affairs to these sorts of people and expect that commoners will not suffer? (SZ 8.93–94; GD 80.1716)

**Power and Its Perils**

When their excellencies Yu Qian [1398–1457] and Wang Wen [1393–1457] were killed, they were falsely accused of greeting a prince living outside the capital and setting him up as ruler. Wen said he had been wronged, and Qian simply that those princes who did not have gold tallies could not be summoned to court, and that ought to straighten things out.37

At the time the eunuchs from the Directorate of Credentials and the Directorate of Palace Seals learned about this. They inspected the tallies of each princely establishment. The tallies were all present, save that of Prince Xiang’s household. Everyone fell under suspicion and did not know why the tally was missing. Then they asked an old retired eunuch. He said that he had remembered that an old woman during the Xuande era [1426–1435] had an edict to take it away, but he did not know where it was. An old palace woman was still alive and would certainly know the details.

Subsequently they went to ask her. She said that when the Xuande emperor passed away, “the old lady” believed that if the nation had an older ruler, it would be a blessing for the dynasty. She wanted to summon Prince Xiang and so took the edict and entered the palace.38 Later the three scholars surnamed Yang discussed the matter but could not come to an agreement, and so the plan stopped.39 At the time the tally was in a small heated room in the rear palace. “The old lady” was the then–Empress Dowager Zhang (?–1442). They sent a message to the current empress dowager requesting it, and the edict, as it
Insignias of Power

Tallies (fu) played many roles in traditional Chinese life. As in other cultures, Chinese entered contracts by splitting tallies, in which one side of the tally fitted the other side in a unique way. Tallies also conferred political authority and served as credentials. In high antiquity, Heaven had bestowed tallies on worthy leaders-to-be. Emperors and governments granted tallies to envoys and officials taking up posts outside the capital. By Yuan and Ming times, tallies no longer were split and functioned more as tablets (pai). Over the centuries, tallies were made in different materials, such as gold, silver, jade, and ivory, and sometimes took the shape of tigers, dragons, fish, or mythical beasts. Different materials and designs accorded with different categories of nobles and officials. Officials generally wore them at the waist, attaching them at the belt. In other contexts, different sorts of tallies, made of paper, functioned as religious talismans and were thought to ward off demonic forces and cure disease.

FIG. 3.1. A Ming palace tally. The face reads, “Officials attending court wear this tally. Those without the tally will be punished according to the law. Those who borrow or lend it will be punished identically. Not for use outside the capital.” The smaller characters, which went on the side, read, “Military. Number 3744.” From Luo Zhenyu, Zengding lidai fupai tulu (Beijing: Dongfang Xuehui, 1925), 102.
turned out, was just in that place. It was already buried under more than an inch of dust. It is also the case that if the old eunuch and the old woman had not been there, then these officials would have died unjustly. Later, it was because of this incident that the Tianshun emperor became aware of the injustice done to these two men and regretted it. In adjudicating capital cases, one must be careful! (SZ 8.97; GD 80.1719–20)

FOREIGN OCCUPATION, 1

It was inherent grand destiny that the Mongols entered and ruled China. That being said, it also was the force of numbers that won the battle. At the time, figures such as Liu Binzhong [1216–1274], Xu Heng [1209–1281], Dou Mo [1196–1280], Yao Shu [1201–1278], Yao Sui [1239–1314], Hao Tianting [1247–1313], and Wang Pan [1202–1293] were all talented men from the Song. If they could have been like Boyi and Shuqi’s not eating the Zhou grain, or Lu Zhonglian’s not treating the Qin as emperor, or Tian Heng and his guests not being Han dynasty subjects, or Gong Sheng and his ilk not serving Wang Mang, then who would have accompanied those foreign rulers, standing apart above the people, establishing standards and arranging regulations, making rituals and performing music, in order that the Mongols might be secure for extended rule in China?

That being so, the reason that the Yuan lords occupied China for as long as ninety-odd years was actually because Chinese people supported and assisted them. Bingzhong and his cohort were gentlemen who followed the times and made a name for themselves. His excellency Xu himself undertook the study of the sages and worthies, but did they not also submit to the foreign master? The model of The Spring and Autumn Annals is to honor China and expel the barbarian clans. In that work, the Chinese states of Lu and Qi lacked the power to expel barbarian clans. It would have been acceptable not to serve in office, like Liu Yin [1249–1293], so I must criticize them. (SZ 8.100)

CURRYING FAVOR

In the latter years of the Chenghua reign [1465–1487], Grand Eunuch Liang Fang and others led rich merchants in the capital to collect and purchase ancient and new articles, and submit them to the court, in order to stimulate the emperor’s fondness for fine things. Subsequently, the doors opened wide for those hoping to get lucky. Sons of rich families tried to submit rare articles but lacked proper credentials. They then gathered at various Buddhist and
Daoist temples, wrote Buddhist and Daoist astrological works, and submitted them. Then they received official positions.

Those originally who were at the palace, serving as ushers at the Department of State Affairs, were promoted to various levels, up to the ranks of vice-minister at the Court of State Ceremonial, the Court of Imperial Sacrifices, and the Court of Imperial Stud. Commoners received ranks such as recorder and usher at the Court of State Ceremonial. Government students, Confucian gentlemen, craftsmen, and musicians, as well as workers in the households of distinguished imperial relatives, presented together various sorts of valuable goods. It was called “transmitting tribute goods.” In fact, the orders came from the palace, and these people had been selected by the Ministry of Personnel. So they gave that name. The flood of famous treasures into the palace was unmatched by any other reign.

A while later, because there were strange astral events, the emperor cultivated his person and restrained his appetites. The court discussed eliminating these people. They examined the numbers, and there were 36 men who originally held office and received promotions, and there were 538 commoners who received offices. All were stripped of their offices, and an edict ordered them to return to their original hometowns and stay there, never to be employed by the government again. The military officials who received promotions ought to have amounted to many times this number, and they did not have time to register them. (SZ 9.116–17; GD 81.1744)

**Service and Its Difficulties**

At the upper and lower narrows of the Si River at Baibu Hong and Lüliang in Xuzhou [Jiangsu], the stone corners are steep and forbidding. The current is swift, and it is extremely dangerous. During the Zhengtong reign [1436–1449], the assistant regional commander of the Transport Office, Tang Jie [fl. 1435–1449], proposed constructing a sluice gate by the narrows’ side to accumulate water so that people could avoid the hazard. The sluice gate was built but could not work, and later was abandoned.

In the sixth year of the Chenghua reign [1470], Guo Sheng [fl. 1470], secretary in the Ministry of Works, dredged over three hundred rocks from Baibu’s outer narrows, where boats capsized. He also dredged in the middle channel of the narrows, piled up the stones, and built a stone wall to reinforce the outer narrows banks. It was over 130 zhang long and 1 zhang high. In the eighth year [1472], Secretary Xie Jingxiu [fl. 1472] rebuilt the stone wall for the
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bank of Lüliang upper narrows, which was 36 zhang long, 9 chi across, and 5 chi high. At the bank of the lower narrows, it was 35 zhang long, 1 zhang and 4 chi across, and 5 chi high. In the twenty-first year [1485], Secretary Fei Xuan [1475 jinshi] renovated Lüling’s upper and lower towing paths for a certain number of zhang.

All were fine projects that benefited the people, but the three men suffered slander and criticism, and their careers ended in failure. In sum, those with ambitions to accomplish things and make a name for themselves usually cannot avoid minor disputes. Those officials who do not initiate anything are usually jealous; the authorities cannot inspect the critics’ charges, usually believe them without any doubts, and then discard the projects and the people. Knowledgeable and clever people have their ways of punishing others. People follow set routines, and even if there is business that should be done, they put it all off, so as to avoid slander and criticism. Alas! The difficulties of the way of official service are like this. (SZ 10.119–20)

THE FOUNDER AND HIS FAILURES

At the beginning of the dynasty, the nation suffered from the problems of the Yuan. The government used strict laws and severe punishments to renew the world. Thus the commands were carried out, the prohibitions halted bad conduct, and society was like grass bending before the wind. Yet there were many matters in which people submitted to the laws for a time but in their hearts violated them behind the back of the authorities.

Hongwu-era [1368–1398] coin, Ming paper currency, the Grand Pronouncements (Dagao) of the Ming founder, and Hongwu Rhymes (Hongwu yun) are just such examples. Hongwu coins did not circulate at all among the people. When I was young, I saw them, but today I do not see a single specimen. For the most part, people smelted and destroyed the coins, and made implements from them. As for the paper money, today only government offices use it, and one string is worth only three li of silver or two units of coin. When the common people get them, they just put them aside and do not use them.

Grand Pronouncements is used only when judicial authorities are determining punishments. They say, “There is Grand Pronouncements, which reduces the punishment by one degree,” and that is all. The common people have never seen it. How much more so for their even reading and discussing it? Hongwu Rhymes partly incorporates Tang Rhymes (Tang yun), which comes closest to human feelings. But now the book is used only as a model for
calligraphy for state memorials. For composing poetry, people still use *Tang Rhymes*, both for official or unofficial works. No one has ever followed *Hongwu Rhymes*.  

(10.122–23; GD 82.1754)

**FOREIGN OCCUPATION, 2**

The world has fixed, unchanging principles. Even mediocre people can understand them. When it comes to the transformations of destiny and the arrival of opportunities, however, even superior intellects and great worthies cannot predict them. Chen Liang’s [1143–1194] *An Inquiry into History* (*Zhuo gu lun*) says, “Fu Jian [338–385], a crafty, foreign strongman, took over three kingdoms as if he were pulling down dead trees. He believed no one in the world could match him. His greedy mind had been aroused, and he immediately wanted to deploy his armies and swallow the Jin dynasty [266–419]. Although Jin was weak, it was the Central Kingdom [China]. Although the Former Qin dynasty [350–394, ruled by Fu Jian] was strong, it was foreign. Since ancient times, how could there be any foreigners who could completely swallow China!”

Chen’s discussion was about fixed principles. Who knew that a century later, the Yuan clan would enter and master China, and unify the Chinese and foreigners? This had never happened before. Yet were not the Song Chinese and the Mongols foreign? Did not Chen think that women could not be placed above men, just as foreigners cannot be placed above Chinese? Several centuries earlier, there already had been women who changed their surnames, altered their titles, and were lords ruling the world, like Wu Zhao [624–705]. Yet how do the Chinese and foreigners in later ages share the world but still have this definite unchanging principle? (10.124; GD 82.1756)

**CAPITAL PUNISHMENTS**

The Chenghua emperor’s court [1465–1487] did not lightly kill people. In its later years, it killed two and made people extremely happy.

The itinerant commoner Wang Chen used his illusory techniques to make his way among noble families. He accompanied Grand Eunuch Wang Jing [fl. 1483] on official duties. Wherever he went, he took wealth and goods, and plundered gifts and all kinds of precious, rare things, disturbing others without end. The affair was discovered, and he was executed in the market. His head was displayed in Suzhou and other places.
Company Commander Wei Ying was an assistant to Grand Eunuch Wang Zhi (fl. 1476–1482). He stirred things up and killed people, and people were angry at him. Zhi fell and was transferred to a post north of the Great Wall, but his intentions to hurt others did not cease. He had over ten people arrested and sent manacled to the capital, accusing them of being rebels. The emperor ordered the city officials to interrogate them, and all had been slandered falsely. In fact, Ying had framed them and sent in the accusation. He wanted to use it to win honor, and that is all. Yet he was accused and executed in the market, and his head was displayed at the place of the arrest.

EDUCATION AND SCHOOL CONSTRUCTION
Promoting schools fundamentally is good government, but what they call today promoting schools is only such activities as reporting and selecting government students, and constructing buildings, and that is all. They are all secondary activities and are not those undertaken by people who understand the essentials. The essentials lie in raising scholars’ morale, making scholars forthright and generous, and rewarding and encouraging scholars’ good conduct. Presently people neglect all of these and only strive in secondary matters.

Among them, constructing buildings is an especially harmful matter. In general, high officials estimate the costs, and they always run to several thousand liang of silver. The prefectural and county officials entrust the project to their accomplices. The expenses are incalculable, and the embezzlement truly is immense. Consequently, they waste resources for nothing, and after a short time the schools again fall into disrepair. This is what is called a harmful matter.

How much more so now when school houses are repeatedly repaired, but students do not return to academic work. One enters these courtyards and does not see people. They resemble abandoned Buddhist temples. This can be deeply sighed over. In general, authorities in recent times only seek the fame that comes with a stele carved to commemorate their having done the construction, but they do not know the essential reasons to promote schools.

A SHAMEFUL PEACE AND ITS CULPRITS
The Song [960–1279] and Jin [1115–1234] dynasties made a peace agreement, and the world’s later ages have blamed only Qin Gui [1090–1155].
AN EMPEROR IN RETIREMENT, BY ZHOU MI (1232-98)

During the Chunxi reign (1174–1179), the retired emperor Gaozong enjoyed the empire. Every time that Emperor Xiaozong (r. 1163–1189) visited Gaozong at his retirement palace, they went on outings to the lakes and hills, and rode in great dragon boats. High ministers and attending officials, the powerful eunuchs serving at the various palace agencies, and the capital’s public security forces would ride in big boats, numbering without question in the several hundred. At the time, the world had long been at peace, and the emperor shared his happiness with the commoners. On each outing, he would go observe those selling things, and there was no sense of restraint. Smaller boats with painted oars would cling to their boats’ sides as if woven together... Occasionally, he would hail small boats and offer them gifts. For example, the emperor once praised the fish broth of Fifth Sister-in-Law Song. People then together hastened to her shop, and she eventually became a rich old woman.²

On the fifteenth day of the third lunar month of the sixth year of the Chunxi reign (1179)... [Gaozong during an outing at West Lake in Hangzhou] commanded that all the turtles and fish being sold at West Lake be released.³ He also summoned all the merchants at the lake. The eunuch palace attendants

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1 Literally, “pay his respects to the three basilicas of Virtuous Longevity.” The three basilicas refer to the imperial palace, and Virtuous Longevity was the title taken by Gaozong after he abdicated in 1164.
2 Zhou, Wulin jiushi, 3.375.
3 Buddhists believed that the liberation of living things, an act of compassion, would win karmic merit.
used small colored banners to call them, and each was bestowed with gifts. At the time there was a Fifth Sister-in-Law Song, who sold fish broth. She answered His Majesty and introduced herself, “I am a native of the Eastern Capital [the Northern Song capital of Kaifeng in Henan] and came here to Lin’an, following the imperial palanquin.” The emperor emeritus specially announced that she should board his boat and sit with him. He took note of her advanced years and gave her ten strings of gold cash, one hundred strings of silver cash, and ten bolts of silk. He further ordered the eunuchs of the Rear Garden to provide her with his own refreshments.

At the time, Grand Councilor Zhao Xiong (1129–1193), Military Affairs Commissioner Wang Huai (1126–1189), and Participant in Determining Government Matters Qian Liangchen (?–1189) accompanied the imperial palanquin and were on duty at the western studio of Xianying Abbey. The emperor bestowed them with wine and food, and fans inlaid with kingfisher feathers. At the shen hours (3–5 p.m.), the imperial boat docked at Huaguang Gazebo, and the group went to Huifang to rest a bit. At the time, the emperor emeritus was already drunk, and the officials had to support him as he got on the boat. Together they rode in sedan chairs and returned to the palace. Everyone in the capital went to watch and praised his sage filial piety.

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4 That is, she numbered among the tens of millions of refugees who fled south after the collapse of the Northern Song.

thoughts. He probably could not have lived his whole reign in that remote nook, Lin’an. He would have been so busy with restoration plans—how could he have noticed the fine landscape?

Jujing, Yujin, and other gardens now in Hangzhou are said to have all begun in the Shaoxing reign [1131–1162]. Emperor Xiaozong [r. 1163–1189] then made them into places to take care of his parents. Recently I strolled through Bao’en Temple. On the top of the mountain to the rear, there was a flat clearing. It is said to be Gaozong’s Kuaihuo [Joyful Living] Terrace. At the time he ate Fifth Sister-in-Law Song’s varieties of fish broth, he was treating the empire as a source of enjoyment and paid no attention to the enmities of
rulers and fathers. How can the crime of the peace agreement be attributed only to Gui! (SZ 13.165; GD 69.1544)

RIGHTING INJUSTICE

Recently while traveling on a road in Tonglu [Zhejiang], I saw a woman across a stream sorrowfully accusing someone of killing her husband. But the stream was deep and the water wide. I was thinking about how to handle the situation. The attendants thought that she was crazy and said that the matter was not worth inquiring into. I believed that she was extremely grief-stricken, and that she certainly was not crazy. There happened to be a county official accompanying me, and I prevented him from sending her away. I ordered him to go hear what she had to say and return.

She was a commoner surnamed Chen. The husband and wife played with a monkey as they performed in public and begged for food. In the evenings, they stayed at a family's house in the mountains. That family made its living by fishing. The family's brothers had not married and together took care of their own mother. They saw that Chen's wife was hard-working and plotted to get her. One night they said to Chen, "What you earn by performing with a monkey is nothing. Our family each day gets several times as much profit as you do. Tomorrow, why not come with us and try?"

So the next day they went out together. At dusk the brothers came back together, but Chen did not arrive. The wife asked them about it. They said, "Your husband was snatched away by a tiger." The wife did not believe them. She howled and cried, and did not sleep. The fisherman's mother spoke to her with tender words and wanted to make her the wife of her son. The woman did not consent. She also said that she would press charges with officials and seek the whereabouts of her husband.

The brothers were terrified and then tried to kill her and the monkey. They threw the monkey into the river and buried the wife in an abandoned tomb. After two nights, the wife revived. She realized that someone was stamping on the side of her body and shouting, "A bright star has arrived. Why not hurry up and press charges?" The wife opened her eyes dimly and still did not know where she was. She happened to see a crack of light, as the sunlight penetrated inside. Then through the crack she smashed through and came out. Then she finally knew it had been an empty coffin. She ran back and forth, waiting like mad for an official to come by. So people called her crazy.

I ordered the authorities in this case to arrest and question the family. The monkey also had revived and returned to their house. The family had gotten
THE STATE AND THE SUPERNATURAL

Extraordinary officials, in the popular mind, had ties with the unseen world or possessed supernatural powers. In operas and stories, famous magistrates, such as Judge Bao and Judge Dee, often solved cases through divine assistance and visions.¹ This notion helped spur the development of shrines to officials, who were thought to continue serving as investigators and judges in administrative positions in the afterlife. These conceptions gave people a ready means to understand Lu’s achievement. Many biographies of Lu mention this incident.

¹ See, for example, Idema, Judge Bao; and van Gulik, Celebrated Cases.

the monkey into a bamboo cage and tossed fire into it, but the fire could not burn it. The authorities got the full truth, and the fisherman brothers were condemned to death.

This certainly was not a coincidence. Recently I have heard village rumors go around that I have heard ghosts make charges of wrongful deaths and that I have personally adjudicated in these matters. It is all wild talk. (SZ 13.166)

IMAGE ISSUES

The Hongwu emperor once assembled artists at the court to paint the imperial countenance. Most works did not receive his approval. There was one man with a brush who wanted to make his work lifelike. He thought it would certainly be appreciated by the emperor. When he presented it for the emperor to see, such indeed was the case. The painter had sought to understand the emperor’s intentions. Besides touching up the likeness a bit, he made the face appear more majestic and then presented it. The emperor was greatly delighted and then ordered many copies made and distributed to the princes. In sum, it was that the emperor had his own intentions, and the other artists could not understand it.

I also heard that the image of the local earth god (tudi shen) at Heavenly King Temple in Suzhou had been made by a painter at the palace during the Hongwu reign [1368–1398]. At the start of the Yongle reign [1403–1424], there was Company Commander He. As he went to serve at the Suzhou garrison, he happened to see it. He bowed and cried, and someone asked him the reason. He said that he had served as an aide to the Hongwu emperor for a long time and recognized the emperor’s face. In sum, this image was lifelike! (SZ 14.170)
Chapter Three

Releasing a Thief

When his excellency Wei Ji [1375–1472] was vice-director in the Ministry of Rites, he once accumulated over one hundred liang of silver as payment from those requesting texts from him, and put the money in his studio, but the money disappeared. A patrolman investigated and learned it had been stolen by a clerk. They discovered the loot, and the clerk had already spent one paper bundle’s worth, but the rest was still there. They sent him to the judicial authorities to be tried and punished. His excellency pitied the man’s poverty. As he went to get his official cap and belt, he said, “If we handle it according to the law, not only will it ruin this clerk, but his wife and children will probably have no place to go to.” Then they released the man. (SZ 15.187)