

Culture & State
IN CHINESE HISTORY

Conventions, Accommodations, and Critiques



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STANFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS, STANFORD, CALIFORNIA 1997

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CHAPTER 2

The Formation of "Dao Learning"
as Imperial Ideology

During the Early Ming Dynasty

Benjamin A. Elman

When the Prince of Yan in Beijing (Northern peace), Zhu Di (r. 1360–1424), installed himself as the Yongle (Eternal happiness) emperor (r. 1402–24) of Ming China (r. 1368–1644), it is said that he personally asked both the eminent Confucian scholar Fang Xiaoru (r. 1357–1402) and then capital vice-censor Lian Ziming (d. 1402) to serve him. A controversial *secundus* in the 1385 palace examination, who had dared to criticize in his examination essay the executions of many officials, Lian had loyally and bravely served both the founding Hongwu (August military; r. 1368–98) and the succeeding Jianwen (Establish culture; r. 1399–1402) emperors. When Lian contemptuously refused and berated the Prince for his immoral actions, Zhu Di had Lian's tongue cut off to silence him. The Prince of Yan then justified his military revolt, his occupation of the Ming capital, Yingtian (present-day Nanjing), and his ascension in place of the Jianwen emperor by saying: "My only desire was to emulate the Duke of Zhou, who came to support young King Cheng."¹ Lian put his finger to his mouth and, using his blood, traced on the ground: "Where is King Cheng?"²

In Fang Xiaoru's case, the confrontation was equally chilling. The Prince of Yan, politely at first, demanded that Fang, a confidant of the Jianwen emperor and most likely the last official to see him, draft the announcement of the Prince's succession to the throne. When Fang refused and labeled Zhu Di a criminal, the two men got into a heated argument.³

PRINCE: "I modeled myself on the Duke of Zhou, who served King Cheng and no more."

FANG XIAORU: "Where is King Cheng?"

PRINCE: "He burned himself to death [in the palace]."

FANG: "Why don't you establish King Cheng's son as emperor?"

PRINCE: "The nation requires a mature ruler."

FANG: "Then why don't you establish King Cheng's younger brother as ruler?"

PRINCE: "These are my family's affairs and that's all."

The Prince became agitated and gave Fang Xiaoru a writing brush to prepare the announcement of his accession. Fang threw the brush to the ground and in tears scornfully continued the argument:

FANG: "If I must die, then so be it. I will not write the draft for the announcement."

PRINCE (loudly): "How can you expect to die so suddenly? In dying, are you not concerned about your relatives to the ninth degree?"

FANG: "What does it matter to me if you make it to the tenth degree?"

The Prince of Yan, realizing that Fang Xiaoru would never acknowledge him as the new emperor, ordered his attendants to use knives to slit open Fang's mouth on both sides up to his ears. Then, Fang was tossed back into prison, where his friends and followers were brought to him one by one. When Fang refused to see them, all were killed. It is said that Fang was in agony for seven days, but until his death he continued to mock Zhu Di for his pretensions and left a lyric that became famous.⁴

"King Cheng," that is, the Jianwen emperor, was probably dead. Only the remains of the empress and their eldest son were found in the debris of the burned palace. Zhu Di conducted a funeral service for the fallen ruler on July 20, one week after the fall of the capital on July 13, although rumors that the Jianwen emperor had escaped the burning palace continued throughout the Ming dynasty.⁵ Lian Ziming was executed, along with his entire family and lineage. Of the latter, over 150 people were murdered, some only distantly related (the ninth or tenth degree of kinship). Several hundred others were banished. In Fang Xiaoru's case, 873 relatives were also executed. Besides Fang and Lian, the kin of other Jianwen loyalists were also eliminated; estimates range as high as ten thousand for the total number of officials and members of their families murdered in 1402.⁶

The Jianwen reign was expunged from the historical records, becoming instead the thirty-first to the thirty-fifth years of the late (d. 1398) Hongwu emperor.⁷ The "Veritable Records" of the early reigns were twice tampered with, and in the final version of the account of the Hongwu reign the "Veritable Records" were doctored with falsehoods to confirm Zhu Di as the legitimate and sole successor to his father, the Hongwu emperor.⁸

As the Eternal Happiness emperor, Zhu Di became a powerful and influential monarch, known posthumously as Taizong (Paramount scion) and Wen huangdi (Emperor of culture) since his death in 1424, the latter an ironic—even if clever—choice given the military manner in which he had removed the Establiher of Culture (Jianwen). And in 1538 Zhu Di was granted the additional temple name Chengzu (Formative ancestor) by the Jiajing emperor (r. 1522–66), who like Zhu Di established a new line of imperial succession.

In effect, Zhu Di was the second founder of the Ming dynasty (he moved the capital from Nanjing to Beijing [Northern capital] in 1415), after his father, posthumously known as Taizu (Paramount ancestor). Moreover, after the usurpation, Zhu Di actively promoted Confucian studies, especially the Southern Song (1127–1279) Confucian persuasion known as Daoxue (Dao Learning), which had become the core curriculum of the civil service examinations in 1313 during the Yuan dynasty (1280–1368) and since 1384 during the Hongwu reign. Zhu's own *Shengxue xinyfa* (The methods of the mind in the sages' teachings), completed in 1409 and presented to his designated successor, was emblematic in his mind of the unity of the *daotong* (orthodox transmission of the Dao) and the *zhitong* (statecraft legitimacy) that he claimed for his reign.⁹ The "sagely Duke of Zhou" had by his own hand become a "sage-king," a paragon of Cheng-Zhu (Cheng Yi, 1033–1107, and Zhu Xi, 1130–1200) ideals. In addition, Dao Learning moral philosophy was successfully utilized as political ideology to draw attention away from the events of 1402.¹⁰

The "Jianwen martyrs," however suicidal their actions, were motivated by morally compelling Confucian political ideals that had preceded but were still part of Dao Learning in the tumultuous early years of the fifteenth century. At the same time, however, the political usurper, Zhu Di, culturally usurped the Dao Learning strand of Song moral philosophy and became a great Ming emperor. Both sides claimed orthodoxy, the authorization of the past to legitimate present actions.¹¹ Zhu Di was the victor in the world of power, but Lian Zining and Fang Xiaoru became historical legends. Both the martyrdom of loyal Confucian officials and the sageliness of the new emperor were woven into the historical tapestry known as the "Ming dynasty." Who was the real Confucian? Zhu Di? Fang Xiaoru? Who had the right to judge? Was Zhu Di's support for Dao Learning merely a ploy? Or was it his only way psychologically to cleanse himself and the officials loyal to him for the brief period of bloodletting he had personally ordered? As historians, not philosophers, we must deal with both sides.

To be sure, most Mandarins, as we will see, were indispensable handmaidens in the wedding between Dao Learning philosophy and state autocracy during the Hongwu and Yongle emperors' reigns. Moreover, the repeated ideological uses of Dao Learning by rulers such as Zhu Di, were not accidental or fortuitous. The Confucian canon and its commentators, after all, had since the Han (206 B.C.–A.D. 220) and Tang (618–907) dynasties been supported by and in turn been supportive of the imperial system. Li Shimin (the future Emperor Taizong of the Tang, r. 626–49), for instance, had assassinated his brother, the chosen successor, in 626 and then forced his father, Emperor Gaozu (618–26), to abdicate in his favor. Later in 638, Li Shimin authorized the compilation of the *Wujing zhenyiyi* (Orthodox meanings in the Five Classics) to provide the definitive textual basis for Confucian learning.¹²

After the fall of the Song dynasty, Yuan, Ming, and Qing rulers wisely chose the moral philosophy of Dao Learning to serve this ideological function. Given the alternatives offered by Buddhism, Daoism, or popular religion, which Mongol, Han Chinese, and Manchu emperors also utilized to assert dynastic legitimacy,¹³ their appeal to Dao Learning put them in touch with the most lettered and influential elite: the Han Chinese literati (*shu*).¹⁴ In Weberian terms, some sort of "selective affinity" between the Ming state (the ruler and his bureaucracy) and Confucian philosophy (Dao Learning) likely existed. In particular, we should note the hidden affinity that united the purely moral values of Dao Learning and the social values of local Han elites, an affinity that gathered covert strength during the Yuan dynasty when Han Chinese were marginalized under Mongol rule. When Mongol rulers in the early fourteenth century turned somewhat from coercive to cultural forms of control vis-à-vis the Han Chinese, they reproduced a structure of political relationships that during the Song had empowered Han elites through the civil service examinations in the state bureaucracy. In effect, by the early Ming, the values of the state educational system for elite men were automatically linked with the Dao Learning sympathies of local elites. The latter thus were advantaged in their quest for prestige and status because the civil examinations tested what they took as their cultural birthright: mastery of Dao Learning. A marriage of convenience between the ruler and his Confucianized elites lurked beneath the events of 1402.¹⁵

Such a view, however useful, is still too one-sided. On the other side were the few martyrs like Fang Xiaoru and Lian Zining who defied imperial ideology disguised as orthodoxy and chose the Confucian path of martyrdom. Dao Learning served both sides. The *raison d'être* for both imperial

power and literati idealism was located, selectively to be sure, in the Confucian canon. Both sides could appeal to important aspects of that canon to legitimate their actions and claim the "orthodox" legacy of the past on their behalf. What I hope to provide here is an analysis of the cultural content of state ideology in early Ming China, or in other words, how Dao Learning orthodoxy, as the state defined it, over time served imperial purposes. At the same time, however, the legends of Lian Zining and Fang Xiaoru remain anomalous surds in the historical record. If the early Ming is a frightening period in Chinese history because of the terrible slaughter of officials by the Hongwu and Yongle emperors, it is also frightening because a few Confucians were willing to die, and sacrifice almost all their kin, rather than submit to them.

How doctrine becomes ideology is an important historical question. In raising this question, we move immediately from the internal integrity of philosophical positions to the political, social, and economic uses of ideas in particular historical contexts. How ideas inform and authorize action is a question that carries us beyond the domain of "pure" philosophy and the traditional history of ideas. Instead of interrogating ideas in "texts" for their universal "meaning," we decipher how they reveal the particular "contexts" of those whose actions were informed and served by references to those ideas. In the contemporary turn from the history of ideas to cultural history, our role as intellectual historians shifts from trusting in the ideals of philosophy to distrusting their historical uses.¹⁶

The Dao Learning orthodoxy in court politics and elite society (usually mispackaged as "Neo-Confucianism") has hitherto been praised by intellectual historians for its philosophical vision as a sophisticated and multidimensional set of metaphysical doctrines and moral teachings, which emerged during the Song dynasties (960–1279) and were later systematized by Zhu Xi, arguably the greatest philosopher in Chinese history. But outside the domain of its contemporary champions, the Cheng-Zhu school of Dao Learning has also been blamed by social historians for its political uses as an autocratic state ideology.¹⁷ Song Dao Learning philosophy and political autocracy became dubious partners during the Mongol Yuan dynasty when, at the urging of Confucian (many non-Han Chinese) advisers in 1313, the interpretations of the great Song philosophers Cheng Yi and Zhu Xi were for the first time made the orthodox guidelines for the imperial examination system belatedly resumed in 1315. Thereafter, the reproduction of the bureaucracy was premised on the mastery of Dao Learning moral philosophy. In addition to this educational function, the

Cheng-Zhu school also provided the cultural language of imperial power, as emperors like Zhu Di and his successors claimed the mantle of the sage-kings for themselves. They repossessed the "orthodox transmission of the Dao," and thus their "starecraft legitimacy" before the Confucian literati was reestablished.¹⁸

This brief partnership in turn led to a long-term political and cultural relationship that was consummated in a formal wedding between Dao Learning teachings on the Classics and imperial state power during the Ming and Qing dynasties. Han-Chinese Ming and Manchu Qing emperors, like their Mongol predecessors, believed that the Cheng-Zhu school provided the cultural and political justification for their rule. When emperors selected Cheng-Zhu learning as the verbal machinery of their rule, they in effect tied the constitutionality of their dynasty to that philosophy and committed the state to its educational propagation in schools and on civil examinations. How did this come about?

"Orthodoxy" and "ideology" are frequent terms in this paper. Although there were many political and cultural definitions in Ming China, by state "orthodoxy" I mean what the state publicly authorized as orthodox. At times, such as during the Song dynasty, the state orthodoxy came from wider literati circles; at other times, such as in the early Ming, it was made the core of the civil service examination curriculum and thereby influenced literati culture. Thus, Dao Learning moral philosophy chiefly concerns me here not as an autonomous field of inquiry with its own inherent intellectual integrity and growth, which of course it had, but rather as a system of concepts, arguments, and beliefs endorsed and manipulated by the state for its larger political purposes. That process of manipulation—when concepts, arguments, and beliefs selectively serve to legitimate political sovereignty—is what I refer to as "ideology."

In this chapter, I will try to show how the late imperial state in China successfully incorporated Dao Learning philosophy into the civil service examination system to enhance its larger agenda of training loyal officials who would share power with the ruler and serve the larger interests of the dynasty. The political coherence of imperial ideology derived from its intimate ties to and selective reproduction of Cheng-Zhu learning. That ideological coherence, however, was more extracted from than reflective of the philosophical doctrines on which it was based. State ideology may have had many selective affinities with Confucian moral philosophy, but the political purposes to which those affinities were applied were determined by the needs of the state rather than the integrity of the philosophy. The emperor (or those who spoke for him), not the philosopher, had the

final say on how Confucian concepts, arguments, and beliefs were put into educational practice through the civil examinations. Hence, the actions of the Jianwen martyrs were never part of the examination curriculum or an object of official study. Their legends, however, lived on, just as candidates relearned, generation after generation, the sagely model set by the Duke of Zhou in dutifully serving his brother's son, King Cheng.

As a carefully crafted Confucian disguise worn by an autocratic but not yet totalitarian state, Dao Learning when translated into imperial ideology helped justify, that is, induce public acceptance of, the bureaucratic and military forms of power on which the Ming and Qing empires were largely based. This chapter, then, seeks to identify during the early Ming the political and cultural uses of that imperial disguise in the required educational curriculum of the civil service examinations. Many helped to create it. Many saw through the disguise. After 1425, most, fortunately, never had to face cruel but charismatic sage-kings like the Hongwu emperor or the Yongle emperor again. Hence, they could live with the disguise, and literati during the late Ming were able to change and modify it to serve their needs, thereby reopening the tragic cases of Fang Xiaoru and Lian Zining for re-evaluation.

From Usurper To Sage: The Yongle Emperor and the Ideological Uses of Dao Learning

The Eternal Happiness reign began with a bloodbath. It ended with Zhu Di, the Prince of Yan, a declared sage-king in the line of Yao, Shun, and Yu. Unlike Han and Tang emperors, who had not received the transmission of statecraft legitimacy, the Yongle emperor, like his father, had reassessed the orthodox transmission of the Dao through his support for Dao Learning. He could not have accomplished this feat without Confucian collaborators. If the suppressed memories of Lian Zining and Fang Xiaoru lived on as legend, the cultural work needed to augment Zhu Di's imperial legitimacy and to domesticate Dao Learning and turn it into orthodox ideology was carried out by men who made the transition from serving the Jianwen emperor to submitting to the Yongle emperor with few overt qualms of conscience. For every Lian Zining, there were many others like Hanlin academician Yang Rong (1371-1440) who greeted the Prince of Yan when he entered Nanjing and chose to serve the new ruler. Yang changed his name from Zirong to commemorate the occasion. Yang Rong had taken his *jinsbi* in 1400, placing sixth, under the tutelage of the Jianwen emperor.¹⁹

The examiners and 110 graduates of the 1400 *jinsbi* examination were representative of the fact that most officials did not heed the Confucian injunction that having served the Jianwen emperor, they could not very well serve his murderer (*bu erchen*).²⁰ Records from the palace examination of 1400, for example, show that Fang Xiaoru was one of the Jianwen emperor's readers for the examination, and Xie Jin (1369-1415) was one of the officials in charge of collecting the candidates' papers. Both were Hanlin academicians. Rather than martyr himself in 1402, Xie Jin, a *jinsbi* of 1388, chose the path of least resistance. For his loyalty, Zhu Di reappointed Xie to the Hanlin Academy and immediately delegated him in 1402 to go through the Jianwen emperor's papers and remove anything that might be used to challenge the usurpation of power. Next, and still in 1402, the Yongle emperor put Xie Jin in charge of the first revision of the Hongwu emperor's "Veritable Records," which had to be altered to confirm Zhu Di as emperor and denigrate the Jianwen emperor as ruler. Among the changes introduced was the claim that Zhu Di was born to the Empress Ma (he was likely born of a concubine). The version of history that Zhu Di had Xie Jin help prepare (there was a second revision; see below) thus presented Zhu as the eldest surviving son of Zhu Yuanzhang. Zhu Di rightfully should have been designated the heir apparent in 1392 when his older brother died, but through the machinations of unscrupulous advisers serving the future Jianwen emperor, the successor became instead the unqualified son of the original but now dead heir.²¹

Hu Guang (1370-1418) was selected as *optimus* on the 1400 palace examination. Like Lian Zining, Hu was one of the Jiangxi elite so prominent in the Jianwen emperor's court. Hu had finished eighth on the metropolitan examination the same year and second in an earlier Jiangxi provincial competition. Curiously, the Jianwen emperor had Hu change his name to Jing before he entered the Hanlin Academy because the original was the same as that of a Han dynasty official.²² Another Jiangxi native who took his *jinsbi* degree in 1400 was Jin Youzi (1368-1431), who finished seventh on the palace examination and thirteenth on the metropolitan. Earlier he had finished ninth on the Jiangxi provincial examination.²³ Jin was a fellow townsman of Lian Zining. Both had grown up and studied Confucius' *Spring and Autumn Annals* together as young men in preparation for the civil examinations.²⁴ After 1402 both Hu Guang and Jin Youzi loyally served the Yongle emperor. Zhu Di did not have to worry about any regional opposition from Lian's cohorts. Hu immediately changed his name back to Guang. Changing names perhaps mitigated the moral dilemmas Hu faced.²⁵ Reappointed by Zhu Di as a Hanlin academician, in

1414 he was placed in charge of the *Wuying Sishu daquan* (Complete collection [of commentaries] for the Five Classics and Four Books) project that the Yongle emperor authorized to define Cheng-Zhu Confucian orthodoxy (see below). Jin Youzi joined Hu Guang and Yang Rong on this influential cultural project.²⁶

In addition to ordering changes in the "Veritable Records of the Hongwu Reign," whose first revision was completed in 1403, Zhu Di also instructed Xie Jin in 1404 to employ some 147 scholars to bring together all extant classical, literary, and historical writings in a single collection, which when completed in 1404 the emperor named the *Wenxian dacheng* (Great collection of written documents). In some ways this project continued similar projects initiated during Zhu Yuanzhang's reign. Xie Jin in 1388, for example, had suggested to the Hongwu emperor that he authorize a compilation of essential Song Confucian writings on the Classics.²⁷ Previously in 1373-74, Zhu Yuanzhang had already indicated his interest in copying Tang Taizong (see above), in compiling definitive records of classical learning and ancient institutional works. At that time a work entitled *Qunying leiya* (Classified essentials of the Classics) was prepared to explicate the Four Books and Five Classics.²⁸

The haste with which this project was undertaken, so soon after the usurpation, and the fact that Xie Jin, who had just completed an initial whitewashing of the "Veritable Records," was chosen to collect and edit the materials suggests that Zhu Di had political as well as cultural motives in mind when he said to Xie:²⁹

The world's affairs and matters from antiquity to today are scattered throughout many books. They are not easy to examine or read. I want to gather all affairs and matters recorded in each book and unify all the various compilations by using a phonetic scheme to facilitate study. Whatever contains words dealing with the techniques and crafts of the classics, histories, philosophers, *littérateurs*, the hundred schools, astronomy, geography, yin-yang, prognostication, medicine, Buddhism, and Daoism should all be collected into a single work.

In addition to collecting documents, the compilers could ferret out materials damaging to the legitimacy of Zhu Di's accession to the throne. It is likely, then, that the compilation had its darker side, political shadows that reached deep into the eighteenth century when the Qianlong emperor, who well understood Zhu Di's motives and knew the records of the Yongle reign very well (see below), authorized in the 1770s and 1780s the voluminous *Siku quanshu* (Complete collection of the four treasures) project in part to ferret out anti-Manchu writings.³⁰

The political implications of the project are clearer when we take into account Zhu Di's unhappiness with the *Wenxian dacheng* when it was completed in 1404.³¹ In 1405, the Yongle emperor instructed his close confidant Yao Guangxiao (1335-1418) to undertake the project. A staff of 2,169 compilers, among whom were Buddhists and medical specialists, was placed at Yao's disposal to comb all known works and copy them for the project. A Buddhist monk critical of Dao Learning,³² Yao had been instrumental in encouraging Zhu Di to revolt against the Jianwen emperor in 1399 and remained until his death one of the emperor's closest advisers. Moreover, shortly after completing this encyclopedic project in 1407, which became known as the *Yongle dadian* (Great compendium of the Yongle era), Yao was put in charge of a second revision of the Hongwu emperor's "Veritable Records" that lasted from 1411 to 1418. All copies of the first revision completed by Xie Jin, like copies of the original completed during the Jianwen reign, were eradicated. All that survived was Yao's second revision.³³

When we note that there were 472 graduates of the 1404 metropolitan civil service examination, the first under the Yongle emperor, and that this was the highest number since 1385, when Zhu Yuanzhang needed to fill his depleted bureaucracy after the Hu Weiyong (d. 1380) affair (in which Zhu eliminated those he charged with treason), then we can agree with Danjō Hiroshi's conjecture that the sudden increase in *jinshi* reflected the emperor's need to produce, immediately, literati loyal to him and not the Jianwen emperor. When asked by his examiners what the quota should be in 1404, for example, the emperor replied that he wanted to set the quota at its highest level to date but that this should not be taken as a precedent.³⁴ After the completion of the palace examination, the emperor further ordered that all candidates who had earlier failed the metropolitan examination should be re-examined in a special literary examination. In this way, another 60 loyal students were chosen to enter the National School to prepare for the next metropolitan examination.³⁵

Xie Jin, an examiner in 1400 under Jianwen, was again chosen examiner in 1404 under Yongle.³⁶ The *optimus* for the 1404 palace examination was Zeng Qi (1372-1432), from Jiangxi. In fact, the top seven places went to candidates from Jiangxi, the top three from Jishui county, Xie Jin's and Hu Guang's own home county. As in 1400, the Jiangxi graduates quickly filled the Hanlin Academy. In total, 24 percent of the 472 graduates came from Jiangxi, compared with 18 percent from Zhejiang and 15 percent from Jiangnan. In 1406, 25 percent of the *jinshi* came from Jiangxi; in 1411 this figure rose to 32 percent.³⁷ Later in 1404, Xie Jin was promoted

to the rank of grand secretary.³⁸ Loyalty to the new emperor, particularly among the Jiangxi elite, was clearly rewarded.³⁹ Throughout the Yongle reign, Jiangxi natives took 25–30 percent of the *jinsi* degrees.

Not surprisingly, the palace examination questions and answers for the 1404 and 1406 examinations, and thereafter, made no mention of the Jianwen reign or even that there had been a civil war. As in the "Veritable Records," the Jianwen reign simply disappeared. Zhu Di himself prepared the policy question for the 1404 palace examination, although on later palace examinations he delegated the responsibility to Hanlin academicians. In 1404, the emperor asked candidates to explain the different institutional systems of antiquity; in 1406 he required them to comment on the changes in schooling during the Han, Tang, and Song dynasties. His focus in 1404 was on the political order; in 1406 the emphasis was the role of education in ordering society.⁴⁰

Zeng Qi's policy answer in 1404, which earned him first place, simply conceded that "the emperor had received the mandate to rule and now occupied the position of a sage." Zeng, paraphrasing Zhu Di's question, continued:⁴¹

Your humble servant recognizes that the emperor's mind-heart is the mind-heart of the Yellow Emperor, Yao, and Shun. All those sages before and after have had this mind-heart. The Paramount Ancestor [i.e., Zhu Yuanzhang], as sage and worthy, [wisely] wielded both civil and military power. The exalted Ming was set in motion, and its great virtue was accomplished. He was the esteemed ruler who unified heaven and magnified filial piety and thereby exemplified in reality this mind-heart. That is why Your Majesty has felicitously continued the intentions of the people and spoken of their affairs. How can [the needs of] this age and this people be disregarded?

Lin Huan, the top graduate in 1406, who went on as a Hanlin compiler to work on the *Yongle dadian* project, similarly made the ruler's mind-heart the central theme of his answer:⁴²

I have heard that order has its origin. It emerges after one first seeks illumination in the mind-heart. Enacting order has its model. It resides in examining widely into antiquity. Consequently, seeking illumination in the mind is the origin of order, and examining into antiquity is the trace of [that] order. Sages in ordering the world never failed to take the examining of antiquity as the Way. Moreover, when have sages not based the occurrence of order on the mind-heart? Only the Paramount Ancestor [Zhu Yuanzhang], as sage and worthy, [wisely] wielded both civil and military power. The exalted Ming was set in motion, and its great virtue was accomplished. He was the esteemed ruler who unified heaven and magnified filial piety. He initiated the building of the broad foundation, taking care that the six schools would

be united and the political unification would last ten thousand generations. His achievement has been rarely duplicated. Your Highness has succeeded with precious intent in thoughtfully forging ahead of past glories and continuing the beatific plans [of before] and opening tomorrow's glory.

Lin's verbatim duplication of part of the earlier pledge of loyalty prepared by Zeng Qi suggests that such pledges had political rather than cultural meaning. Throughout the Ming, formulaic paeans to the emperor became a major aspect of the civil examinations.⁴³ In Yongle's case, they papered over his 1402 usurpation of power. Imperial focus on the unified mind-heart of the emperor in 1404 and 1406, which became one of the most widely wielded slogans in Ming civil examinations, dared from the Yongle reign, when Zhu Di successfully used this Dao Learning image after the "terror of 1402" to co-opt moral legitimacy of Dao Learning for his usurpation. The *xinfa* (methods of the mind-heart) of the sage-kings had been a frequent subject in literati writings to that point, but it was during the Yongle reign that this philosophic doctrine was turned into imperial ideology on the civil service examinations. From 1371 to 1400, not a single policy question on the palace examination had addressed the sage-kings' methods of the mind.⁴⁴ After the 1404 and 1406 palace examinations, the subject appeared repeatedly in policy questions on the Ming metropolitan examinations.⁴⁵

Zhu Di's *Shengxue xinfa*, completed with the help of Hanlin academicians in 1409 and presented to the designated successor, the future Hongxi emperor (r. 1425), for his moral cultivation, preached the unity of the orthodox transmission of the Way and statecraft legitimacy.⁴⁶ In many ways a prelude to the Dao Learning compendium known as the *Xingli daquan* (Great collection of works on nature and principles), compiled in 1414–15, Zhu Di's own selection of Cheng-Zhu Confucian commentaries represented imperial reauthorization of Dao Learning as cultural and philosophic orthodoxy. Zhu Di's elucidation of the famous doctrine of the *daoxin* (mind of the Dao) serves as a representative example. Citing Zhu Xi and his Song disciples, the emperor demonstrated that he was in complete agreement with Zhu Xi that the mind of the Dao, as the venue for moral principles, should be the master, while the "human mind" (*renxin*), the venue for selfish desires, should take its orders from the former. The emperor, in effect, took Zhu Xi's place in educating his son. Moreover, Zhu Di claimed that he had repossessed the "*xinfa* of the kings and emperors of ten thousand generations."⁴⁷

Perhaps by 1409 the Yongle emperor had put behind him his brutal actions in 1402, but even if he had, the almost obligatory use of the *xinfa*

doctrine as early as the 1404 and 1406 palace examinations suggests that more than just the imperial conversion to Dao Learning orthodoxy was involved. As a true sage-king, Zhu Di could have it both ways: he used Cheng-Zhu Learning for political legitimacy; at the same time he became perhaps the greatest imperial patron of Song Dao Learning. Yet, his preface to the *Shengxue xinfu* did have some darker elements. Speaking of the principles of loyalty the ruler expected of his officials, Zhu Di wrote:⁴⁸

When the ruler becomes a ruler like Yao and Shun, the people become like the people of Yao and Shun. As for illustrious officials such as Gao [Yaol], Gu, [Hou] Ji, and Xie,⁴⁹ can they not be called glorious? Therefore, in upholding high principles without submitting to threats, nothing is greater than loyalty. Those who receive their positions and salaries from the ruler should concern themselves with the nation as they do their families. They should forget about themselves and follow the nation. They should not avoid difficulties or dangers. Nor should they make plans according to their own benefit. They should strengthen their resolve and ascertain that their resolve is unchangeable.

Lian Zining, Fang Xiaoru, and the Jianwen martyrs, not Zhu Di's well-placed collaborators such as Xie Jin or Hu Guang, had lived up to this ideal. But the former remained anathema in public life, although the emperor did on occasion, as in 1413, wish that Lian Zining had submitted to him. On the other hand, Hu Guang, when he died in 1418, was greatly honored for his service. Earlier, however, Xie Jin, hated by the Yongle emperor's designated successor for Xie's opposition to Zhu Di's choosing him over the Prince of Han, was eventually thrown into prison in 1411, where he died in 1415, on charges of *lèse majesté*.⁵⁰

Establishing a Classical Curriculum: The *Wujing Sishu daquan* Projects

In addition to the "correction" of the historical record, Zhu Di's regime required educational legitimization. The Yongle emperor wished to "appear as sage ruler, a teacher of his people, and a patron of learning."⁵¹ These cultural endeavors were brought to a climax in 1415 by publication and dissemination of three classical projects, the *Sishu daquan* (Complete collection [of commentaries] for the Four Books), *Wujing daquan* (Complete collection [of commentaries] for the Five Classics), and *Xingli daquan*, whose purpose was to define and print for use in all government schools down to the county level the sources candidates should use to prepare for the civil service examinations.

Confucian scholars first prepared two major projects, which enshrined the Cheng-Zhu school of *lixue* (studies of principles) as civil service examination orthodoxy. Entitled the *Complete Collection* [of commentaries] for the *Five Classics and Four Books*, these two anthologies were compiled in great haste. It took only nine months, from 1414 to 1415, for Hu Guang and his staff to prepare and blend the mostly Yuan scholia (which frequently cited earlier Han, Tang, and Song commentaries) into a coherent passage-by-passage commentary for the *Five Classics* and *Four Books*. The haste with which the commentaries were compiled, perhaps to add cultural luster to the events surrounding the move of the capital to Beijing in 1415, elicited much later criticism for their lack of comprehensiveness. Because the three collections were compiled by Hanlin academicians who had previously been employed in revising the "Veritable Records of the Hongwu Reign" and had also helped edit the *Yongle dadian*, later scholars such as Gu Yanwu (1613-82) suspected that the real purpose of the *Sanbu daquan* (Great collections trilogy) was to cover up the accomplishments of the Jianwen reign in classical learning.⁵²

The ruler [that is, Zhu Di] lied to the court, and those below [that is, the bureaucracy] swindled the literati. Was there ever anything like this in Tang or Song times? Did they not compromise honest and upright officials while replacing the Jianwen emperor? Moreover, when the writing of [eight-legged] examination essays began, literati all at once discarded the "practical learning" transmitted since the Song and Yuan dynasties. Those above and below were mutually glibble and became fixated on careerist interests, never stopping to ask why. Alas! The demise of classical studies in reality began from this.

Other Qing Confucians also frequently blamed the Yongle projects and their pervasive influence on the examinations for the decline of classical studies during the Ming dynasty. The compilers of the *Ming History* had similar complaints.⁵³

Zhu Di's intent becomes clearer when we read the preface he immediately prepared when the last part of the trilogy, the *Xingli daquan*, was completed and all three works were officially authorized for printing. Zhu wrote in 1415 that upon succeeding to the throne, all sage-kings had "used the Way to order the world." Hence, he himself, "as successor to the illustrious foundations established by the great emperor, the Paramount Ancestor," had ordered the Hanlin academicians to prepare the three works "to include whatever had clarified the meaning of the Classics and to exclude whatever was contrary to the lessons of the Classics."⁵⁴ In their own statement, Hu Guang and the compilers (including Yang Rong and

[in Youzi] echoed Zhu Di's pretense that the Jianwen emperor had never existed and that Zhu was the legitimate successor by praising him in no uncertain terms: "Never before has there been a ruler of such great action, who has been able to clarify the Way of the Six Classics and continue the [national] unity from our previous sages like this."⁵⁵

The *Great Collection of Works on Nature and Principles* represented curriculum support for the moral philosophy of Song Dao Learning and was required reading for the first session of the provincial and metropolitan civil service examinations for the duration of the Ming dynasty. The *Complate Collection for the Four Books*, interestingly, included a full and unexpurgated version of the *Mencius* for the first time since the 1370-72 provincial, metropolitan, and palace civil examinations. Zhu Yuanzhang had been angered by the political philosophy of Mencius, whom the Cheng-Zhu school had enshrined as Confucius' doctrinal successor in the Confucian lineage of orthodox teachings.⁵⁶ What infuriated the Hongwu emperor was the passage in the *Mencius* (one of the Four Books and hence part of session one of the Ming civil service examinations) in which Mencius defended an ascending view of political power based on the people and drew limits to the loyalty an official owed his ruler:

When the ruler regards his officials as the ground or the grass, they regard him as a robber and an enemy.

Such questioning of the bonds between the ruler and his officials was tied to Mencius' claim that the ruler served the people.⁵⁷

Mencius said: "The people are the most important element [in a state]; the spirits of the land and grain are the next; the sovereign is the least important."

In fact Mencius cited Confucius for his position:⁵⁸

Confucius said: "The Way has only two courses, that of benevolence and that of malevolence. One who carries the oppression of his people to the highest pitch will himself be slain, and his kingdom will perish. If [such a ruler] does not carry oppression to an extreme, his life will still be in jeopardy, and his kingdom will be weakened. He will be called [a tyrant] as You [r. 781-770 B.C.] and Li [r. 878-827] [in antiquity] were."

Such Confucian political parables, Zhu Yuanzhang had discovered, directly challenged the state's sovereignty, based since the early empire on a descending view of power emanating from the ruler. Instead, for Mencius the state derived its power from the "ascending" will of the people. These threats to imperial sovereignty were more than Zhu Yuanzhang could tolerate. Around the time he abolished the civil examinations in 1372,

Zhu demanded of his ministers that the text of the *Mencius* be removed from the reading list for civil service examination candidates. In addition, Zhu called for removing Mencius from the sacrificial ceremony performed for Confucius and the official Confucian pantheon of sages, scholars, and martyrs.⁵⁹

Zhu Yuanzhang's ministers, particularly Qian Tang, tried to head off these dangerous precedents, which threatened Cheng-Zhu intellectual orthodoxy, by agreeing to remove those passages in the *Mencius* that the emperor found objectionable. They successfully prevailed on him, however, to keep the remaining text as required reading for the examination system. Because the examinations were soon stopped, however, the censored version of the *Mencius* was not used in the civil examinations until 1384, after Zhu had successfully purged his enemies from the civil and military bureaucracies.⁶⁰

Later, in 1394, Liu Sanwu (1312-99?) was entrusted with preparation of a formal edition of the *Mencius* that deleted 85 sections that Zhu Yuanzhang found objectionable. The expurgated version was entitled the *Mengzi jiewen* (Abridged version of the *Mencius*).⁶¹ Thereafter the censored edition of the *Mencius* was the standard text for civil examination candidates until 1414-15, when the original curiously was restored. The Yongle emperor also restored Mencius' tablet to the Confucian temple as part of his efforts to patronize Confucian letters.

Having usurped the throne from the Jianwen emperor, whom he accused of incompetence and heresy, and whose officials he described as traitorous vermin (*yianzhen*), Zhu Di apparently had little to fear from Mencius' legitimization of regicide. He himself had just removed an emperor whom he accused of corruption and immorality.⁶² In fact, perversely, what had offended Zhu Yuanzhang now could be welcomed, although still unofficially, by Zhu Di as justification for his military action. An unworthy ruler had been rightfully forced out of office.⁶³ Despite this concession, the *Daquan* collections clearly represented the changing political circumstances within which the Five Classics and Four Books were interpreted.⁶⁴ The early Ming compilers of the *Complete Collection of the Four Books*, which highlighted for examination candidates Zhu Xi's explanation of the *Great Learning*, *Analects*, *Mencius*, and *Doctrine of the Mean*, fully accepted, for example, the rigorous moralism that derived from Zhu's bifurcation of heavenly principles from human desires. They were later accused by Qing dynasty Han Learning advocates of accepting a Buddhist vision of good versus evil, which was more formalistic and inflexible than the more qualified and nuanced dualism that Zhu Xi himself had enunciated.⁶⁵

When they chose comments on the text of the *Mencius*, for example, the Hanlin scholars working on the *Complete Collection of the Four Books*, such as Hu Guang, still were careful to set limits to Mencius' discussion of the legitimate grounds for officials and the people to oppose an evil ruler. For the passages that earlier had enraged the Hongwu emperor but were tolerated by Zhu Di, Hu Guang chose commentators who stressed that Mencius' words applied only to the chaotic historical situation of the Warring States period. Accordingly, Mencius stood as a guide to the past. His criticism of ancient tyrants could not be translated into a binding precedent for later, "enlightened" ages. Moreover, the commentaries chosen indicated that he had set limits in his attack on evil rulers.⁶⁶

Without Mencius's theories, there would have been no way to warn those who during later generations served as rulers of the people. . . . However, Mencius said: "If one has the moral integrity that Yi Yin [renowned advisor of the first Shang ruler, ca. 1766-1753 B.C.] had [in urging banishment of the ruler], then it is permissible [to do so]. If, however, one does not have the moral integrity of Yi Yin, then a person [who speaks in this way] must be a usurper."

When the ruler's sovereignty was based on a descending view of political power, then the moral criteria of loyalty predetermined the limits of political criticism. If Confucians dissented from the policies of their ruler, the forms of dissent were ideologically circumscribed. In state affairs, high moral ground had been granted the ruler. He alone determined the acceptable limits of Mencius' theories in the civil examinations, although some late Ming literati outside the bureaucracy, many of them associated with the Donglin Academy in Wuxi and the Fushe (Return to antiquity society) in Suzhou, began to challenge the court's descending view of power at the same time that they historically rehabilitated the Jianwen emperor, Fang Xiaoru, and Lian Zining.

Furthermore, the concern for self-cultivation, so prominent in the writings of Song Confucians such as Cheng Yi and Zhu Xi, and so heralded by the Yongle emperor after 1402, likely did play an important function in granting Confucians some political autonomy and moral prestige, which was institutionalized through the avenue of moral remonstrance. Remonstrance as a form of political dissent in turn served to measure the ruler according to universal Confucian standards. Zhu Di seems to have understood this, even if his motives for supporting Dao Learning had their opportunistic political side. During the Ming and Qing, however, rulers frequently closed this avenue of dissent or diverted it into a form of bureaucratic surveillance.⁶⁷

Moreover, even if the complete *Mencius* was rehabilitated in 1415, the passages that had troubled Zhu Yuanzhang in 1372 were thereafter rarely chosen by examiners for essay topics in the provincial or metropolitan civil examinations.⁶⁸ Nor were these passages often raised in Ming-Qing palace examinations. In uncensored form (a major concession by Zhu Di to Confucians to be sure), Mencius was allowed to speak to his readers. In substance, however, the passages critical of ancient rulers were usually left out of the actual proceedings of the civil examinations.⁶⁹ The *Daquan* trilogy was thereafter printed and distributed to all county and prefectural schools for use by students in their preparation for state examinations. A sage-king like Zhu Di was the beneficiary of all that the Confucian canon could offer. Even its dissenting portions had been turned to his favor.

Epilogue

The Yongle emperor, after moving the capital from Nanjing to Beijing in 1415, eventually became one of the greatest rulers in Chinese history. Some have linked the move to Zhu Di's desire, in part, to get away from Nanjing, where the memories of the 1402 martyrs still lingered.⁷⁰ Moreover, after 1425, the civil examinations became the principal means for filling higher offices in the state bureaucracy. From 1238 in north China and 1271 in the south until 1315, there had been no state examinations of any kind in China. Between 1315 and 1450, most official positions were still filled by recommendation or other special procedures. Only on the 1385 and 1404 metropolitan examinations, discussed above, did early Ming civil examinations ever approach in scope and magnitude the level of Song civil service appointments to the bureaucracy through examinations. For all intents and purposes, the hiatus in the institutional role of civil examinations as a major feature of Chinese political life lasted two centuries.

Accordingly, although the designation of Dao Learning as the state's ritual orthodoxy by the Southern Song court in 1241 and its designation as civil examination orthodoxy by the Yuan in 1313 were important events, these were only steps to the eventual triumph of Cheng-Zhu Dao Learning during the Yongle reign. By becoming the principal road to official appointment, the civil service examinations thereby guaranteed that the state curriculum established in 1415 based on Dao Learning and the *Daquan* trilogy, which became the key texts in the curriculum, would be studied and mastered by millions of examination candidates for the civil service

until 1900. The cultural reproduction of Dao Learning in this manner was institutionalized for half a millennium.⁷¹

The early Ming thus marked the unrivaled highpoint of the status of Cheng-Zhu Dao Learning in the "examination life" of Han Chinese literati. Put another way, although many Confucian believers had perished, Dao Learning overall had benefited from the sometimes tepid support of Zhu Yuanzhang and the "unswerving faith" of Zhu Di. So much so that Qing Confucians such as Zhu Yizun (1629-1709) and Quan Zuwang (1705-55) rightly, if naively, believed early Ming emperors to be stalwarts of Cheng-Zhu orthodoxy. These late imperial examples of a convenient, historical amnesia about the early Ming dynasty have lasted into our time.⁷²

But the triumph of Dao Learning as state ideology during the early Ming was achieved at a considerable price. In the process, the linkage between autocratic state power and Cheng-Zhu philosophic discourse was consummated in a wedding between perhaps the most powerful and expansive emperor in Chinese history, Zhu Di, and Dao Learning moral ideals based on personal self-cultivation. Zhu Di, using the sage-kings' methods for the transmission from one ruler to the next of the sagely mind of the Dao, became a Dao Learning exemplar. Ming Confucians thus served a state whose emperors at bottom remained insensitive to subtle shadings of moral theory or less than stark hues of right and wrong.

Early in the Hongzhi reign (r. 1488-1505), for example, the court attempted to eliminate what it considered "immoral shrines" (*yinci*). This action was not unprecedented. Early in his reign, as we have seen, Zhu Yuanzhang had wanted Mencius' tablet removed from the official Confucian sacrifices. What was new in the later policy was a proposal to remove all tablets commemorating Confucius' disciples and all Han dynasty Confucians from the Confucian Temple, a proposal that was actively debated. In 1530, the tablet commemorating the Later Han (25-220) classicist Zheng Xuan (127-200) was removed from the Confucian Temple. Even though initially opposed and successfully mitigated by Ni Yue (1444-1501), who contended that Han Confucians had been invaluable in preserving and transmitting the Classics, the subsequent removal of Zheng Xuan's tablet revealed the degree to which the Cheng-Zhu Dao Learning orthodoxy during the early Ming had begun to sanctify itself through policies of ritual exclusion.⁷³

Universal "truth," legitimated by the state in the form of the hegemony of Cheng-Zhu Confucian discourse in late imperial official and educational life, drew the Classics and Four Books into its own conser-

vative agenda, rather than following, for example, the more reformist agendas of earlier Northern Song or Former Han Confucians. Despite challenges in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries by the influential philosopher-general Wang Yangming (1472-1529) and his vocal followers,⁷⁴ such questioning of state orthodoxy never effectively penetrated the curriculum of the Ming civil service examinations. The classical slogan "exalt the ruler and expel barbarians" (*zunwang rangyi*) derived from the *Spring and Autumn Annals*, for instance, became in the hands of Ming officials a means, at times unsuccessful, to exalt the ruler's authority and to place upon his subjects demands for unquestioned loyalty. A descending view of political power remained orthodox.⁷⁴

How Dao Learning Confucian philosophy first took hold as imperial ideology in late imperial China is best explained by unraveling the interconnected political, moral, and institutional threads that were woven together into their final, imperial form under the Yongle emperor. Even if Emperor Wu (r. 140-87 B.C.) of the Han, Taizong of the Tang, and Taizu of the Song (r. 960-76) were his historical predecessors in such imperial cum Confucian cultural endeavors, and even if Emperor Lizong (r. 1225-64) of the Southern Song and Renzong (r. 1312-20) of the Yuan had already placed Dao Learning on the imperial pedestals of first ritual and then civil service examination orthodoxy, Zhu Di still left a legacy for the Ming and Qing dynasties that overshadowed them. The imperial state and its Cheng-Zhu ideology that collapsed in the late nineteenth century drew its cultural lineage directly—Song and Yuan precedents notwithstanding—from the early Ming.

Early Ming emperors chose Dao Learning to win the support of their most important social group, the literati. One of the exact uses of Dao Learning for an emperor such as Zhu Di who had usurped the throne was that support of Cheng-Zhu learning as a cultural vision of the late imperial state translated into a compelling *raison d'être* for political legitimacy that induced literati obedience. When it was politically institutionalized, the cultural content of Cheng-Zhu philosophy allowed the Yongle emperor and his ministers to appeal to the Way of the sage-kings, which since antiquity had been the model for contemporary governance, and thus repossess the *daotong*. They claimed, moreover, that the moral principles of antiquity had been transmitted, mind to mind, from the sage-kings to the present emperor. Thereafter, emperors, Mandarins, and Dao Learning were inseparable. The social habits, political interests, and moral values inherited by Mandarins since the Yuan and Ming dynasties were then

officially reproduced (with much unofficial and official dissent) through a system of state schooling and civil examinations that acquired their mature form during the fifteenth century and lasted until the late nineteenth century.⁷⁵

The memory of Zhu Di's violent usurpation weighed heavily on the conscience of the Ming, however. The famous Jiangxi literatus Wu Yubi (1392-1469), for instance, refused to participate in early Ming examinations because he was unwilling to serve the Yongle emperor, whom he considered a usurper. Such refusal alienated him from his father, Wu Pu (1363-1426), who had passed the 1400 metropolitan examination ranked first (he was fourth on the Jianwen palace examination) and had by 1403 become actively involved in revising and reissuing the "Veritable Records of the Hongwu Reign" for which the Yongle emperor quickly promoted him a grade in the Hanlin Academy. Wu Pu then served as a deputy chief compiler for the *Yongle dadian*. Wu Yubi's animosity toward the Yongle reign and the disgraceful actions of his father was echoed by his Jiangxi disciple Hu Juren (1434-84), who also refused to take the examinations, even though the Yongle emperor was already dead. Hu spelled out the subtext of his actions by appealing indirectly in his writings to the Mencian injunction against political usurpation. Both Wu Yubi and Hu Juren became model Dao Learning scholars honored for their integrity and moral cultivation by later Ming Confucians. Despite the instrumental uses of Cheng-Zhu learning by the early Ming state, its intellectual standing among dissenting Confucians like Wu and Hu would become a beacon for late Ming Cheng-Zhu scholars.⁷⁶

In addition, troubling legends of the heroism of Lian Zining and Fang Xiaoru remained, and their question "Where is King Cheng?" still went unanswered. Zhu Di himself only relented in his persecution of the families of the Jianwen martyrs in 1416, when he learned from Hu Guang, who had just returned from Jiangxi to attend his mother's funeral, that the people there were finally pacified.⁷⁷ Pardons were granted in succeeding reigns for surviving family members of the Jianwen emperor's executed officials. In 1425, for example, thousands of Fang Xiaoru's descendants were rehabilitated by the Hongxi emperor.⁷⁸ The next year, the Xuande emperor (r. 1426-35) pardoned Lian Zining's surviving family.⁷⁹ But not until 1573 were all the Jianwen martyrs pardoned.⁸⁰

Pressure on the Ming house to accord the Jianwen reign itself full legitimacy began to grow in the Wanli reign (1573-1619), during which Tu Shufang (fl. 1564-98) compiled the *Compendium of Unofficial Records*

on the Jianwen Reign. Tu's interest in the martyrs dated from 1579 when he had been appointed an official in Jiangxi and discovered that the martyrs' descendants were still subject to recrimination. He submitted a memorial in 1584 asking for their full pardon. Then in 1595, Tu began work on the *Compendium*, which was completed in 1598. About the same time a shrine for the Jianwen martyrs was erected in Nanjing, and a local shrine in Jiangxi was built for Lian Zining.⁸¹ In an afterword to Tu's work, Yao Shilin (1561-1651?) wrote of the pain and sufferings the 1402 martyrs had undergone, which, he contended, had overturned the Way.⁸²

Moreover, in the 1590s, Zhu Lu (1553-1632), initiated a work (revised in 1615 and printed in 1621) entitled *Jianwen shufa mi* (Draft of the principles for compiling documents of the Jianwen reign), in which he reconstructed, with annotations, the *Jianwen benji* (Basic annals of the Jianwen reign). Zhu Lu thereby established the historical legitimacy of the Jianwen emperor and publicly described the manner in which the "Veritable Records of the Hongwu Reign" had been censored and rewritten by Zhu Di's unscrupulous officials to expunge the Jianwen reign from historical documents. Although he blamed Zhu Di's officials and not the emperor, Zhu Lu made public the manipulations of history that had occurred.⁸³

Emperor Wen's [i.e., Zhu Di] public-mindedness managed to extinguish his private motives, but hadn't he revealed blemishes on his record? Those who polish jade try very hard to gloss over and thereby remove blemishes, but the blemishes are irrevocable. For a thousand years it cannot be completely clear. History today is just like this!

Under the Wanli emperor in 1595, the Jianwen reign title was officially restored after repeated requests.⁸⁴ Li Zhi (1527-1602), in his iconoclastic writings, heralded the bravery of both Fang Xiaoru and Lian Zining, which caused Li to wonder about the political cost of the dynastic unity the Yongle emperor had achieved.⁸⁵ Even in official circles, the Hanlin academician Jiao Hong (1541-1620), for example, included official biographies for the Jianwen martyrs in his 1616 biographical collection of noted Ming officials from 1368 to 1522 entitled *Record of Verified Documents During the Ming Dynasty*.⁸⁶ But the Jianwen emperor did not receive a posthumous temple name until 1644, and then only from Ming loyalists in Nanjing after Manchu forces took control of the northern capital of Beijing. The next year, the Southern Ming court hurriedly granted posthumous honorific names to the Jianwen martyrs, including Fang Xiaoru and Lian Zining. Ai Nanying (1583-1646), an outspoken Jiangxi critic of late Ming political affairs who served the Southern Ming after the fall of Bei-

jing, prepared an eloquent defense in 1631 of both the moral stature of the Jianwen emperor and the righteous legacy of the "Jianwen martyrs."⁸⁷

If the emperor wishes to make plans for the affairs of the empire, then he must first teach the empire about loyalty. If he wishes to teach the empire about loyalty, then he must first clarify the distinction between the ruler and his officials. Moreover, if he wishes to use those eliminated [Jianwen] officials [as examples] to teach the empire about loyalty, then he first must be clear about how the Jianwen emperor went about being the ruler. Then he can show how the eliminated [Jianwen] officials went about being officials. The Jianwen emperor was in fact the eldest grandson of the great emperor, the Paramount Ancestor [Zhu Yuanzhang], and the eldest son of the designated successor. He was in power for four years. Reverent and compassionate, he was never deficient in virtue. When he received [the mandate] and took the throne his name was truly orthodox.

Ai Nanying reassessed the legitimacy of the Ming in light of the tragic events of 1402, after which Zhu Di had moved the capital to Beijing. Using the form of a memorial sent from the Ministry of Rites in Nanjing to the emperor, Ai contended that the present reign must acknowledge its ties to the fallen Jianwen emperor and his martyred officials. Zhu Yuanzhang's successor had not been Zhu Di. Ai Nanying intimated that the succession of Ming emperors after Zhu Di was illegitimate. By writing the memorial from the Jianwen emperor's Ming capital of Nanjing, Ai urged the Ming court to acknowledge the mandate to rule that Zhu Yuanzhang had transmitted to his grandson some 260 years before. The Jianwen martyrs should be vindicated.⁸⁸

Qian Qianyi (1582–1664), a noted Ming Confucian, was serving Prince Fu in Nanjing when the 1645 pardons were announced. Earlier he had spent considerable time in his *Mingshi gao* (Draft history of the Ming dynasty; now lost) unraveling the events surrounding what he considered Zhu Di's immoral usurpation. Qian's elegy to Fang Xiaoru and the Jianwen martyrs said of Zhu Di only that "the Prince of Yan's grandsons were today's emperors." When Nanjing fell to the Manchus later in 1645, he was among the first important southerners to give allegiance to the Manchus.⁸⁹ Moreover, many late Ming scholars wrote of Yongle collaborators such as Hu Guang with scorn: "The Jianwen emperor personally selected Hu Jing [Guang] to be the [palace examination] *optimus*. The imperial grace granted him was incalculable, and yet Ching threw the emperor away as he would a ceremonial cap."⁹⁰ The fall of the Ming dynasty forced many to reconsider the moral legitimacy of the dynasty they had served. After two centuries of suppression, in which the historical

records of their lives had taken on unofficial but legendary meaning as heroic Confucians, Lian, Fang, and the Jianwen martyrs were publicly apotheosized into sagely officials.

Under the Qing dynasty, Ming emperors and ministers were initially discredited, and the Jianwen martyrs were openly praised. The early Qing Confucian Shi Runzhang wrote in his 1663 preface to Lian Zining's collected works:⁹¹

When I read history like this, I immediately threw away the rolls [of the book] and became speechless, unable to keep my eyes from opening wide [in anger]. By writing on the ground using the blood issuing from the tongue in his mouth [lit., "heavenly gate"], Lian enabled us to see how by energizing his tongue like the sun and moon he wielded his pen to scold [Zhu Di] with great wrath.

Meanwhile, Dao Learning survived to provide the Manchu Qing dynasty with its required Confucian legitimization to elicit from Han literati their voluntary submission. The civil examinations were immediately restored, although the Oboi regents for a time tried to put an end to the by then infamous eight-legged essays on the Four Books. After this attempt failed in 1667, the mastery of Cheng-Zhu learning again became the chief route to high office for Han Chinese males.⁹²

Ming loyalists, fortunately, were not as suicidal as their Jianwen predecessors. Instead, they lived to see the "enemy" wrap itself in Dao Learning garb and complete the transfer of the mandate to rule to the Manchu imperial family and its conquering armies. Moreover, the Manchus were sensitive to the moral sensibilities of famous Ming loyalists such as Fu Shan (1607–84).⁹³ When the Kangxi emperor (r. 1662–1722) had the Han-lin scholars compile the Dao Learning tract entitled the *Xingli jingyi* (Essentials of works on nature and principles) (issued in 1715), and the *Guin tushu jicheng* (Synthesis of books and illustrations past and present) encyclopedia, revised and printed in 1728 under the Yongzheng emperor (r. 1723–35), he was taking a page out of the Yongle reign to present himself as a Confucian sage-king. Likewise the Qianlong emperor (r. 1736–95) in 1773, when he ordered the compilation of the greatest bibliographic project in history, the *Siku quanshu*, which was used in part to ferret out anti-Manchu writings.

The 1673 Kangxi Preface to the reissuing of the Ming version of the *Xingli daquan*, for a final example, linked early Qing Confucian legitimacy to the cultural policies of the Hongwu and Yongle emperors and based that legitimacy on the methods of the mind transferred from the early

sage-kings to their Qing peers. The Kangxi and Qianlong emperors became enlightened sage-kings too.⁹⁴ Harold Kahn has put it best: "Perhaps, after all, the historian in such cases was helpless: it took an emperor to know one."⁹⁵ Although Fang Xiaoru and Lian Ziming were legitimate heroes by the eighteenth century, their heroism was now part of the Qing cultural tapestry rewoven from early Ming cultural and political strands. Cheng-Zhu learning was again at the center of the tension between imperial interests and literati moral values.

CHAPTER 3

Canon Formation in Late Imperial China

Pauline Yu

Standard accounts of Chinese literary history have long told us that the supreme literary achievement of China's elite culture was the classical poetic tradition, whose highest expression was attained during the period corresponding roughly to the first half of the eighth century, later identified as the High Tang.¹ Both constituents of this commonplace have been subjected, appropriately, to scholarly interrogation in recent years. On the one hand, the critical lens has widened its focus considerably to reveal the increasingly wide authorships and audiences for other literary forms in late imperial China. On the other hand, the privileging of Tang—especially High Tang—poetic production has been destabilized not only by attention to the actual multifariousness of a mythically monolithic style and to the prolific poetic productions of later ages but also by research into a range of cultural activities, such as writings by women and non-canonical poetic forms, that were previously either consigned to the margins of scholarship or not recorded at all. These investigations have offered, and will continue to offer, a salutary counter-argument to the image of a late imperial literary world constrained within rigid, narrow, and pre-emptive orthodoxies. Before we rush to dismiss the historical valorization of High Tang poetry as a simple discursive formation, however, we should pause to consider the possible impulses and conditions contributing to its enduring power. Such an examination may provide insights not only into specific cultural values and the forces behind them but also into the broader process of canon formation itself.

Some 2,200 poets and almost 49,000 works were collected in the *Complete Poems of the Tang* (*Quan Tang shi*), commissioned by the Qing emperor in 1705 and completed two years later. The figures for the following centuries are significantly more daunting, for works by more