Shrines, Governing-Class Identity, and the Cult of Widow Fidelity in Mid-Ming Jiangnan

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THE SHRINE CONSTRUCTED IN 1498 to the faithful widow Qian of Changshu county (modern Jiangsu province) gave her a place in local history that no woman had occupied before. Though the ideal of widow-fidelity was nearly two millennia old and was understood to be part of "Confucian" (*ru*) teaching, it had always been expressed more as precept than as practice. Earlier communities rarely congratulated themselves on their faithful widows; even widows whom the emperor had honored were generally recorded in the dynastic rather than the local histories. But the widow Qian, who committed suicide in 1435 upon the death of her husband, was celebrated in prose and poetry, written up in the county history, and granted a shrine with the same spring and autumn sacrifices that the government accorded enshrined men. Now she was a visible part of the ritual landscape, with a corresponding multiplier effect on her iconic power.

When and how did agendas converge to make her fidelity so important to the county? The transition obviously occurred over a period from late Southern Song to early-middle Ming, or from roughly the late twelfth to the late fifteenth century. Patricia Ebrey gives examples of prominent widows remarrying without apology well into the Southern Song (1993, 204–5), and very few extant Song and Yuan gazetteers list faithful widows at all. Shrines to Confucian worthies first spread widely in the Song dynasty, but there were almost no Song dynasty shrines to Confucian-exemplary faithful widows (Neskar 1993). By the late 1400s, however, virtually all local histories contained relatively formulaic lists of faithful widows and widow-suicides. From the sixteenth century on, monuments to the heroines of fidelity were to be found in every county. Marriage patterns, while never universally transformed, were significantly altered: widow-remarriage, at least in elite discourse, became something to justify, avoid, or explain away. This change did not require new language, since the major

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tropes for describing the Confucian virtue of women had existed for centuries. New in the Ming was the prominence society accorded those tropes.

Qian's may well have been the first widow's shrine in Zhejiang and Jiangsu provinces, and a look at its origins will help us understand how the cult of heroic fidelity took root in this rich and culturally influential Yangtze delta region ("Jiangnan," or "South of the River"). We will see that her enshrinement was part of a larger project to Confucianize the county's understanding of itself, a project in which most of her fellow-honorees were men. We will also see, however, that the discursive practices constituting male Confucian worthies were not the same as those for the heroines of fidelity. Women would be exalted in local history for heroic suffering, and in poetry for their appealing pathos; men would be enshrined for community service and productive careers. The faithful heroine was enshrined for a gesture, rather than a life, and as an ideological construct, rather than a recognizable individual. But the Ming founder had explicitly identified "Chineseness" with Confucian formulae like the Three Bonds and the Five Relationships, in which women's fidelity was understood as the domestic analogue of male loyalty. (The Five Relationships are those between ruler and subject, husband and wife, parent and child, older and younger sibling, and older and younger friend.) His construction of what it meant to be "worthy" and Chinese made a place for the faithful widow's gesture and gave communities an incentive for claiming the glory of her self-sacrifice.

This essay will proceed chronologically, starting with the earliest extant versions of Qian's story, and moving to the way those mid-century representations were taken up again in the 1490s when her shrine was erected. In each case we will look at the history and the connotations of the language employed, and ask whose interests were served by it. (These were not, as we will see, exclusively local interests.) Along the way, we will stop to consider what Qian might have made of her own elevation. This will give us a sense of the evolution of the ritual landscape, and also let us relate the rhetoric of widow-fidelity to questions of social status. The enthusiastic accounts of the 1440s and 1450s, and the Changshu county officials, gazetteer, and shrine of the 1490s, will be placed in a survey of mid-Ming Jiangnan counties, drawing data from twenty-one county and prefectural gazetteers.[1] Overall, we will get a sense of the period from the Chenghua (1465–88) through the early Jiajing (1522–67) eras as a turning point in the self-representation of Jiangnan communities, changing the world in ways that would have startled our heroine. An epilogue will show how the "otherness" of the male-constructed heroine of fidelity could shift with the times: the widow Qian in the fifteenth century stimulates an optimistic and vigorous response, but by the early Qing she could also function as a symbol of loss.

Earliest Versions

The widow Qian has already been mythologized by the time we meet her in two accounts from the mid-fifteenth century. The first, by the Changshu county literatus Ji Chi, established Qian as a heroine of Confucian fidelity, but it was the second, by the poet Gong Xu (1382–1469), that would lift her above other faithful young widows

[1]Sources used are primarily the Jiangsu and Zhejiang volumes of the Tianyi ge collection of Ming dynasty gazetteers. See the list of references for full list of sources.

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with similar stories.[2] Ji Chi, as a native of Changshu county, was doubtless closer to the local sources; Gong Xu was from another Jiangnan county, Kunshan, and the preface to his poem speaks of Widow Chen, rather than Widow Qian. But the stories that Ji Chi and Gong Xu told were virtually indistinguishable, and by 1539 Ji Chi's heroine Qian was understood to be the true subject of Gong Xu's poem.[3] Moreover, while Gong Xu and Ji Chi turned her story to different ends (Ji Chi saw himself as a moral instructor to his own class, while Gong Xu was a passionate defender of the poor), their aims were ultimately complementary.

Ji Chi: History and Heroic Fidelity

Ji Chi's account, which may have been a petition for official recognition, reads as follows:

> The virtuous woman (*lienü*) surnamed Qian was from a peasant family of Jian Village in Changshu county. She was given in marriage to Lu Mao. She exemplified the virtues of a wife, filially serving her parents-in-law and settling disputes between the wives of her husband's brothers. Everyone praised her virtue.
>
> Lu Mao fell ill with consumption. The household was poor, but Qian labored at her loom and spinning wheel to supply him with food and medicine. One day, Lu Mao spoke to Qian, saying: "I am ill and unlikely to leave my bed again. You are young, and we have no children. Moreover, you will be poor, with no one to depend on. It would be permissible for you to remarry. Do not take me into account in making your decision."
>
> Weeping, Qian answered him, saying: "I have heard that nowhere is there a woman who can serve two husbands. My lord need not worry on this account."
>
> Prior to this, Qian's parents had already made plans to find another husband for her, on the grounds that Lu Mao was poor and ill. Qian tacitly understood this, and avoided visiting her own family. But after a year Lu Mao's illness reached a crisis, and their poverty grew daily worse. Lacking alternatives, Qian had to go back and tell her parents of their troubles, and beg them for a bit of grain. She returned to find Lu Mao already dead. She wailed bitterly.
>
> She prepared all the bowls and basins of sacrificial food, and when the rituals were over, she hung herself by the side of the corpse. This took place in the tenth year of the Xuande reign period [1435], on the sixth day of the third month.
>
> Alas! Qian was born into a peasant family, where no father or brother was able to instruct her in the *Odes* or *Rites*—and yet she was heroically virtuous (*lie*) to this degree. This is sufficient to prove that Heavenly Principle and the natural disposition of the common people are not to be destroyed in a day. Now, doesn't this shame [women] with prominent husbands from families of renown, who remarry on the

[2]Gong Xu's poem is included in his *Ye gu ji* (Works of the Ancient Rustic), published in 1463. Gong speaks of having known the story for ten years, which would make 1450 a reasonable latest possible date for Ji Chi's account. Since Ji Chi's account seems to be a petition for official commendation, however, it seems likely that it was written closer to the time of Qian's death.

[3]In the 1499 *Changshu xianzhi,* Gong Xu's Widow Chen is the apparent subject of the shrine entry (2.68a), whereas Widow Qian's story is told in the *Lienü zhuan* section, which compresses Ji Chi's account (4.86b–87a). But in the 1539 *Changshu xianzhi,* the shrine—where Gong Xu's poem had already been engraved for forty years—is understood as having been established for Widow Qian. The widow's natal surname does not appear in the *body* of Gong Xu's poem, and later gazetteers quote only the poem, not the preface.

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> very evening of their husbands' death? And if poverty means that Qian will not have her virtue officially commended, and the fame of her self-sacrifice will be lost in obscurity, what means will there be to encourage the reform of manners and customs? Therefore, deeply moved, I have composed this account, in order that those in charge of morals and customs may forward it upward.
>
> (*Changshu xianzhi* 1687:22.5a–b)

Ji Chi served as an education official in several Jiangnan counties and also contributed to a number of Jiangnan local histories. He was recommended to his first position, as Assistant Instructor (*xun dao*) in Kunshan county, during the Yongle reign period (1403–25). By the time Qian died, he would thus have been at least ten or fifteen years into his career, a career that depended on inculcating correct attitudes among students in the county schools (*Changshu xianzhi* 1499:4.67a). Not surprisingly, therefore, he wrote Qian up as the sort of model who could inspire his students to admiration and their wives to emulation. The paragon that he created resolves disputes, reminds her husband that fidelity (and thus loyalty) is sacred, avoids her own relatives who want her to remarry, and carries out proper Confucian funerary ritual (we will return to this point below). Finally, she takes her own life.

Why, we may want to ask, was Qian's suicide experienced as such a fitting end to her story? By hinting at pressure to remarry, Ji Chi set Qian's options up as fidelity (refusal to remarry) or death. These were, in fact, the only possible outcomes for a Confucian moral-exemplary widow story by the early Ming. The influential Song dynasty Neo-Confucian Cheng Yi had made the antithesis explicit by demanding that widows choose death over remarriage, and widow-chastity would be advocated by the School of the Way (*Daoxue*) Neo-Confucians who rose to power by the late Yuan. But giving one's all for fidelity had acquired an additional emotional charge in the century and a half preceding Qian's death, a charge that doubtless shaped even a measured account like Ji Chi's.

This emotional charge derived from the fact that there were actually two ways for women to give their all in the exemplary tradition: death to avoid remarriage, and death to resist rape by an outsider, typically a bandit or an invading soldier. The two paths are analytically inseparable, since resisting either rape or remarriage means cleaving to the patriline, the settled community, or the empire, which are interdependent in the Five Relationships grammar of Confucian socioethics (Liu 1990). With regard to widow-remarriage, Bettine Birge (1995) has outlined the remarkable late Yuan convergence of Mongol steppe customs (levirate marriage) and School of the Way demands for widow chastity. The brief period during which Mongols imposed the levirate on all of their subjects marked a radical break with Chinese law and custom that had heretofore allowed widows to retain their dowries, return to their natal families, and remarry. The imposition of the levirate was lifted by the 1290s, but a decisive change had been wrought in the ideological climate: the Mongol understanding of a widow and her property as belonging to her husband's family now dovetailed with Confucian demands for fidelity to the husband's patriline, and laws of the early 1300s stripped widows of mobility and property, even as protections were put in place against forced remarriage, levirate or otherwise. But the very protections afforded by the new laws suggest that widows were now radically vulnerable, and indeed all of the developments above constructed widows as a new class of exemplary martyrs.

Resistance to rape dominated the two dynastic histories authored by scholars who shaped the moral and emotional climate of the early Ming. Whereas the tenth-century

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Old Tang History had chronicled roughly equal numbers of women who died resisting rape, of faithful widows who did *not* die, and of women who were exemplary daughters or mothers, the *Song History* of the 1340s (late Yuan) devoted its chapter on women almost exclusively to heroines who died reviling brutal attackers. In the corresponding chapter of the *Yuan History,* produced a mere twenty-five years later at the beginning of the Ming, nearly ninety percent of the women chronicled die resisting rape or remarriage. The late Yuan authors of the *Song History,* adherents of Song dynasty School of the Way Neo-Confucianism, had battled their way to dominance at the Yuan court (Dardess 1973, 32–38, 53–94), and the scholars who compiled the *Yuan History* were similarly embattled School of the Way adherents who had seen desired reforms frustrated during the breakup of the Yuan (Dardess 1983, 85–183). (Recruited by the Ming founder, they worked to realize their aspirations in the new dynasty.) At the risk of some reductionism, then, one can say that the fervor and emotional commitment characteristic of the School of the Way seem to have shaped both the *Song History* and the *Yuan History* canons of exemplary women.

Thus it is no wonder that Ji Chi, writing just as the empire was settling into "normal Confucian government" after the turbulence of conquest and consolidation (Dreyer 1982, 221–36), exalted Qian's death. The Ming founder had legitimated his new rule in part by a violently personal repudiation of Mongol Yuan customs like the levirate, and a corresponding ideological elevation of the Five Relationships (Dardess 1983, 183–255; Farmer 1990). This violent elevation of the Five Relationships was followed by the Yongle emperor's use of School of the Way teachings to legitimate his own violent usurpation of the throne. For men of Ji Chi's time, both were part of community memory. The combination seems to have given fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Five Relationships thinking an all-or-nothing quality.

We will miss the richness of history, however, if we read Ji Chi's account as a didactic production and nothing more. The *lienü,* with her potential for both heroism and pathos, was particularly well suited to display both the moral *and* the poetic sensibilities of her chroniclers. Context suggests that Ji Chi hoped not only to instruct his students, but also to make his name in the world of letters by joining the ranks of other men of letters who were writing accounts like his.

This context is particularly well documented in Kunshan, where Ji Chi had held his first position. The 1538 Kunshan gazetteer lists a number of biographies of faithful widows written by local literati in the middle decades of the fifteenth century. Young widow Li, who during the first emperor's reign refused to submit to her brother's jailers, was eulogized by Chen Qianfu, a student at the National University (12:3b–4a). Another young widow, surnamed Xu, who bathed and purified herself as she vowed never to remarry, was written up by Lu Ru, a drafter of documents in one of the Six Ministries (12:61–b). Zheng Wenkang, who had earned the highest civil-service examination degree in 1449, rescued from obscurity the beautiful Miss Xue, a Hongwu reign period silversmith's wife who managed to avoid violation by hanging herself, after marauding soldiers forced her husband to hand her over (12:3a–b). Turning to women of their own day, Zheng Wenkang and the far more famous Ye Sheng (a fabled icon of scholarly purity whom we will meet again below) made a pilgrimage together to venerate another widow Qian, a woman of spotless reputation living out in the Kunshan countryside (12:8a–b).

These were the men Ji Chi joined by writing his essay, and he apparently gained the reputation he sought: Jiangnan gazetteers remember him as a man of literary cultivation (*Changshu xianzhi* 1499:4.67a; *Kunshan xianzhi* 1538:5.14a), and the 1539 Changshu gazetteer notes his highly literary courtesy name Master Youmei ("Friend

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of the Plum") and the location of his tomb on the eastern slope of Yu Mountain, one of the most important ritual sites in the county (10:16a). His biography of the Changshu widow Qian, the only piece of his writing preserved in Changshu county gazetteers, must have contributed to that reputation.

Gong Xu: Poetry, Pathos, and Passionate Compassion

Just as in county ritual and historiography, we can discern a fourteenth- and fifteenth-century transition in the kinds of poetry Jiangnan literati would write and collect. Jiangnan gazetteers contain the occasional Tang or Song dynasty poem for a faithful widow or heroic victim, but it is around the time of the *Song History* and the *Yuan History* (late Yuan and early Ming) that the heroine of fidelity comes into her own as a poetic subject. The Jiangyin county poet Wang Feng (1319–88) exemplifies this trend: his work in general was shaped by the turbulence of the transition from Yuan to Ming, and his subjects were often heroines of the sort who were eulogized in the *Yuan History.* Young women in his poems drown themselves to escape bandits; mothers and daughters vow to choose death over violation; and Wang Feng avers that their example will reform popular morals (*Jiangyin xianzhi* 1548:14.49b–50a, 51b–52a).

On the whole, though, Wang Feng seems less concerned with popular morals than with conveying the pathos of his subjects' situations. The same note of pathos can be seen in Ji Chi's account, as well, and it characterizes much of the early Ming poetry about the heroines of fidelity, who for the most part were young, vulnerable, and attractive. We see this in the poems that can be paired with some of the Kunshan essays described above. A widow Cao, already eulogized for her purity and filial piety by her Hongwu contemporaries, was recast in a poem by one Wang Dashan as that enduring figure of Chinese poetry, the lonely wife pining for the husband who will never return (*Kunshan xianzhi* 1538:16.17a). And Widow Li, who fended off her brother's lustful jailers, had a poem written for her by one Zhang Shen. Like Ji Chi, this poet wants to rescue Widow Li from the obscurity to which her poverty would otherwise condemn her (16.16a–17a).

The late Ming cult of emotion or *qing* is often traced to the teachings of Wang Yangming (1472–1529), but these poems remind us how characteristic the note of passion already was by the early Ming. Pei-yi Wu points out that the revered Confucian eremite Wu Yubi (1392–1469) wrote what might be called the first "subjective diary" in the history of Chinese letters, displaying an "unabashed interest in his own moods" that made him a pivotal transitional figure between the "sober and mannerly Song masters" and the "fervent and restless Neo-Confucians of the late Ming" (Wu 1990, 93–95). Similarly, our mid-fifteenth-century poets approached their martyred heroines with a degree of personal passion quite different from the stern insistence on widow-fidelity characteristic of Song dynasty School of the Way teachers. As early as the 1430s, the dramatist Zhu Youdun (1379–1439) had gone still further, by writing seven plays about *courtesans* martyred for their fidelity (Idema 1985, 111–75). The faithful courtesan would become irresistible to later writers: her gesture, repudiating her entire milieu, was heroic indeed, and the pathos of her solitary resistance allowed her rescuers to experience themselves as correspondingly heroic. Faithful women, excluded from public life while held up as exemplars to public officials, were perfect Others, on whom early Ming Confucian emotionalism could be projected.

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Thus it is no surprise that Ji Chi's account (or something nearly identical to it) inspired the poet Gong Xu to write his seven-syllable-line, old-style "Verses for the Heroic Lu Family Widow" (Zhui fu Lu liefu ge).[4] He had already written or was soon to write poems about two other locally famous and romantically tragic suicides: young Widow Wu, who vowed suicide even as her husband lay on his deathbed (she was inspired by the recent example of a Miss Zheng, about whom "the whole countryside was talking"); and a bereaved fiancée named Miss Gu, who resisted her brother's attempt to give her away in marriage by wrapping her body in impenetrable layers of silk. This so impressed the chosen husband that he allowed her to hang herself. Gong Xu was unreserved in his praise of Miss Gu: "Only with this death do we see the purity (*zhen*) of her emotions (*qing*)!" (*Kunshan xianzhi* 1538:12.9a, 16.17a–b)

It is easy to imagine how a network of acquaintances and letters could have brought Qian to Gong Xu's attention. Not only did Ji Chi serve his first appointment in Gong Xu's home county of Kunshan, but biographies note his contributions to early Ming Kunshan gazetteers. And Gong Xu, as we will see below, spent time in Changshu county during his turbulent youth. Gong Xu says in the preface to "Verses" that "a countryman Zhang Youding" had told him the story some ten years earlier. Whoever Zhang Youding was, he seems to have given Gong Xu substantially Ji Chi's account. Though there are minor divergences (not only do the women's surnames differ, but Gong Xu's "son of the Lu house" is a musician), still Gong Xu's heroine is a peasant woman, whose husband (surnamed Lu) falls ill, whereupon she visits her own parents after a year of bitter poverty, begs them for grain, collapses in sobs when she returns to find her husband dead, and finally, "the sacrifices finished," joins him in death. Like Ji Chi, Gong Xu praises her for reaching the heights of virtue despite her humble origins:

Collapsing and wailing and gasping for breath
The sacrifice finished, she joined him in death
Who would think that the heart of a poor village wife
Could so nobly and righteously honor her pledge?

And Gong Xu, too, laments that she is likely to be forgotten:

Ten years have gone by since I first heard her name
And I sigh that so few men accomplish the same
Her fragrance is certain to vanish away
With no pen of the ancients to rescue her fame.
[Literally: "What mighty pen of the Spring and Autumn period will write down her story?" With the implication that otherwise it will be lost.]

But her potential obscurity (rhetorically so useful to both men) affected Ji Chi and Gong Xu quite differently. Ji Chi feared (conventionally) the depletion of his instructional repertoire, while in the coda to the "Lament," Gong Xu portrays the neglect of Qian's reputation as yet another enormity visited by the powerful upon the poor:

[4]Gong Xu, *Ye gu ji,* middle *juan:* 5b–6a.

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Has my lord not seen:
How the rich flay the poor, and take away their titles—
All it takes is a thousand measures of grain
To buy yourself the name of "righteous commoner,"
And make your doorway glitter with gold and jade.

Passionate defense of the common people was a hallmark of Gong Xu's fifteenth-century persona, and his championship of virtuous but (as he feared) insufficiently recognized young widows must be seen in that light. Gong Xu's consciousness was shaped by the turbulence of the early Ming: after losing his father, a military official, at the age of three *sui,* he was passed from relative to relative until, at age fourteen, he was assigned to the guard of the second (Jianwen) Ming emperor's Jinchuan Gate. He was on duty when Yongle's troops stormed the gate in 1403 and forced their way in to usurp the throne. Biographies of Gong Xu say that he fought furiously while his companions scattered. Marked as a Jianwen loyalist, he was forced into hiding in Changshu and Kunshan counties. The prominent Chen and Ma families, noted bibliophiles, hid him in a granary, where he read voraciously by day and slipped out to visit his mother by night.

In time the Yongle vigilance relaxed, and Gong Xu was able to make a living selling medicine and teaching. When an amnesty was finally declared some twenty years later, Gong was sought out for government service as an education official, but he refused, in lines whose fame increased as the centuries went on: "I'm an old soldier who has come to no harm. Why should I carry the sorrow of the Jinchuan Gate into a new career?" The accounts describe him living thereafter in a hovel, farming thirty *mou* of meager soil, attended by one aged maidservant. Tradition has it that he died at the age of eighty-eight, correctly attired and properly seated, intoning the opening lines of the Confucian classic *The Great Learning.* (White vapors were seen rising miraculously from the hut.) When the Jianwen martyrs were fully rehabilitated on the ascension of the Wanli emperor in 1573, a shrine to Gong Xu was built at the side of the Kunshan Confucian school.[5]

During the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, with the Jianwen martyrs still in dangerous disgrace, Gong Xu could hardly be venerated as a hero of loyalty. (That would come later.) He was inserted, instead, into the popular tradition of beloved recluses (*Kunshan xianzhi* 1538:11.13b–14a). His own preface to his collected works contributed to this persona: describing himself as too rough and clumsy to fashion himself to the prevailing taste, he says that his "feet have rarely trod the paths of power and influence," and that "all I really know how to talk about is farming and herding." Collectors would anthologize the poems he wrote to his wadded-paper quilt and to the starving mouse who troubled his studio at night (Qian Qianyi 1910, *jia* 22:25a–b). His merit lay in his sincerity, a virtue idealized throughout the Ming: "When I say a thing I do it—I can't worry about pleasing folks' eyes and ears."

What this meant, of course, was that he could present himself as a privileged advocate for the common people, and a bitter critic of those who neglected or took advantage of the people's suffering. In poems he sent to the eminent official and bibliophile Ye Sheng (1420–74), he described the misery wrought by the floods of 1455:

[5]This follows the biography in *Suzhou fuzhi* 1747: 58.27b–28a. Earlier biographies tend to emphasize only one aspect, either Gong Xu the recluse or Gong Xu the loyalist.

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The pot's out of millet, no wood in the stove
Nothing but tree-bark to stave off our woes
Selling and burning what little we have—
Alas for the poison that eats at our souls.

(Ye 1980, 319)

And when he unburdened himself in a poem to his younger kinsman Gong Li, "An account of the people's suffering [*min qing*] in the year Jia Shu [1455], sent to Provincial Commissioner Yanwen [Gong Li]," we hear the same scathing tone as in the conclusion of his poem for widow Qian:

District officials sat and watched, and pretended not to know
Drinking all day with their actors and singing-girls.
Looking after their own interests, they excavated the dykes—
After this it was impossible to stop the floods.

(*Ye gu ji,* middle *juan:* 1a–2b; also in Qian Qianyi, *jia* 22.26a–b)

Righteous passion like Gong Xu's was an essential component of Ming dynasty *shi* ("scholar-official") identity, that is to say, the identity of the class of men educated to govern. A true *shi* was supposed to remain devoted to principle in the face of all venality and opportunism. Gong Xu was no real rustic; his kinsman and close friend Gong Li received the highest-level degree in the 1436 civil-service examination and rose to a Rank 3a position. Gong Xu himself was on letter-writing terms with Ye Sheng, whose stellar career culminated as Vice Minister first for Rites and then for Personnel. Gong Xu's self-chosen poverty simply marked him as a special *kind* of *shi:* the standard hyperbole for an incorruptible official, for example, was that he died with no money on his person or in his dwelling. And righteous indignation like Gong Xu's was a standard attribute of those idealized officials. In describing the flood of 1455, the 1538 Kunshan gazetteer couples Gong Xu with just such an exemplar, Kunshan's Magistrate Zheng, who leaped from his sedan chair when he arrived at the scene of misfortune, wept with the people, and then rode off on a furious circuit of the surrounding estates, demanding their contribution to the relief effort ("In through their doors he charged, crying out: 'You who are fortunate, warm, and well-fed—how can you bear to sit by and watch my people starve?' "[6]) This passionate compassion was a particularly attractive element in the *shi* repertoire of self-description, and it would play a big part in the way literati chroniclers were attracted not just to the constancy but also to the *ordeals* (occasions for compassion) of their faithful heroines.

One need not be cynical to note the mutually reinforcing relationship between the reputations of Gong Xu and the widow Qian. Her suffering contributed to the consolidation of his poetic persona, and it was his growing fame that brought her suffering to the attention of the 1490s notables who built her shrine. But before turning to their stories, let us briefly try to imagine what Qian might have thought about her own canonization, if she was indeed the "peasant woman" of the extant accounts.

Social Status and the Rhetoric of Fidelity

How might a "peasant woman" have encountered heroines of fidelity? What cases might she be aware of, and what language might *she* have used to think about them?

[6] *Kunshan xianzhi* 1538: 13.15a–16a.

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None of this can be answered with any precision, but searching for answers will remind us that the early fifteenth century still looked very different from the late Ming and Qing, so far as the social expression of the cult of fidelity is concerned.

On the one hand, the poems noted above, with their Confucian categories of praise, were being written within the decades before and after Qian's death. Early Ming emperors had already sent officials to scout out faithful widows for imperial commendation (T'ien 1988, 1–4). A number of Changshu county households, as we will see below, bore the visible decoration bestowed by the emperor on virtuous widows. And in nearby Kunshan county, a stele had been erected at the tomb of a Faithful Widow Mao nearly a century before Qian's death (*Kunshan xianzhi* 1538:2.16b,12.2a).

But a stele is not a shrine with regular spring and autumn sacrifices, and the faithful widow was not yet the dominant female icon that a Jiangnan community would use to represent itself. At the temple of the rain-bringing White Dragon, the dragon's human mother was evoked in local lore—but she was a spirit to be placated, not an exemplar (*Changshu xianzhi* 1499:2.73a–76b). The Song dynasty regional gazetteer covering the area of Changshu county lists three "*lienü*" who underwent ordeals to resist remarriage, but all three are from ancient history, not the community of the compilers' own day (*Wu jun zhi* 1192:27:8b–9a). The Song/Yuan *Qin chuan zhi,* most recent predecessor of the 1499 Changshu county gazetteer, lists no faithful widows at all. The 1499 gazetteer contains a list of faithful widows, but has no entries on tombs, shrines, or arches to faithful women for Qian to have seen as she made her way to local temples. Changshu county literati were moved to poetry by the tomb of "The Woman of Qi," a Spring and Autumn era maiden brought to their region in marriage, who asked to be buried on the local Wu mountain so that she could gaze back at her homeland for eternity. But the woman of Qi was understood in terms of natal family and native place, not marital fidelity (*Changshu xianzhi* 1499:1.62b–63a). The excavation of the tomb of a Tang dynasty faithful widow caused a stir in Changshu county in the 1490s, but during Qian's life the Tang widow's bones still mouldered in obscurity (1.64a–b).

Moreover, while there had been locally famous suicides of women fighting off rape by soldiers at the fall of the Yuan, there was no hint, in early fifteenth-century Changshu county, of the public spectacle that widow suicide would become in some places later in the Ming (T'ien 1988, 48–56). Qian probably would not have had the opportunity to read (or be read to) about famous cases. By 1405 the Yongle court had commissioned both the *Instructions for the Inner Quarters* (*Neixun*), with its prescriptions for the self-immolation of widows (T'ien 1988, 3), and Xie Jin's *Notable Women Past and Present* (*Gu jin lienü zhuan*), containing examples of Confucian virtue from ancient times to the early Ming (Xie 1983). But the printing boom that would make popular treatments of these stories accessible at anything near the social level of a peasant woman was a century away.[7]

The language of Ji Chi's account reminds us, however, that a well-articulated rhetoric of female virtue did already exist at the time of Qian's death. The question is, whose rhetoric was it? The evidence suggests that in early-fifteenth-century Jiangnan, the cult of widow-fidelity and suicide was still mainly a literati enterprise, in both theory and practice.

Ji Chi's own language shows us that he was talking not *to* the masses of the governed but *about* them, for purposes that made sense primarily to men like himself.

[7]See, for example, the *Lienü zhuan yanyi* described in Carlitz 1991, 125–26, 133.

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A peasant woman would have missed the reference to Heavenly Principle, though it would have been understood by Ji Chi's colleagues and mentors, for whom the perennially debated question of whether human nature was good or bad hinged on theories about Heavenly Principle. Qian might not have been aware that there were fathers and brothers who taught the *Rites* and *Odes* to their daughters and sisters—here, too, Ji Chi is writing for men like himself, whose childhoods were spent memorizing texts like the *Rites* and *Odes.* These two texts were badges of civilization as men of his class understood it: the scholars who compiled the *Yuan History* in 1369 describe heroine after heroine resisting rape by soldiers, crying out that as daughters of families who studied the *Rites* and *Odes,* they can never submit (*juan* 200–1). Ji Chi's conventional account of the widow Qian thus invokes the Chineseness of court and scholarly self-understanding—a text-based, literati consciousness.

And once women could be praised as loyal not just to husband or lineage but to civilization itself, the literati men whose preferred career path required saturation in the Confucian classics naturally assimilated women of their own background to this high standard, despite regulations that repeatedly restricted court recognition to wives of commoners.[8] Sixteen of the fifty faithful widows listed in the 1499 Changshu gazetteer had received imperial commendation; eight of them are identified as being from *shi* or governing-class families (some quite prominent), and only one is explicitly identified as a "woman of the people" (4:83b–91b). Indeed, the entry on an exemplary widow surnamed Xu says that "one must be a *shi* to do this" (4:84b–85a). Widow Xu was in fact the daughter of the prominent local scholar Xu No, who glorified his county by collecting the genealogies of notable families (4.62b). Of the twenty-six Ming cases in the 1538 Kunshan gazetteer chapter on virtuous women, fully twelve are from scholar-official families, two are doctors' daughters, and only five are identified as being from poor, artisan, or merchant families (and merchant families might of course be well-to-do) (12.1a–12a). Miss Zheng, who inspired the not-yet-widowed Ms. Wu (the wife of a county clerk) to the suicide commended in Gong Xu's poem, "was born and raised in a scholarly [*ru*] household" (12.6b): her brother became a noted historian, and her father was a pioneer in local ritual reform, interring his mother in accordance with the Song Dynasty Neo-Confucian prescriptive text *Zhu zi jia li* (Master Zhu's Family Rituals), explicitly rejecting the Buddhist ritual elements that a peasant woman would have considered normal funeral practice (11.14a–b).

Where, then, would a "peasant woman" encounter motifs like loyalty, wifely fidelity, filial piety? Obviously in storytelling and local spectacles like drama (particularly likely if Gong Xu is correct, and her husband was indeed a musician). The motifs of loyalty, fidelity, and filial piety formed the narrative kernel of many popular entertainments. There is evidence, however, that the nonelite population had its own responses to the Confucian paragons of the literati. The Han dynasty filial son Wang Xiang might sleep on the ice or cling to the pear tree in the storm, but the structure of extant dramatic texts suggests that what audiences devoured was the tale of the evil stepmother who made him do it (Qian Nanyang 1956, 17–34). *Pipa ji* (The Lute), when recast as an early Ming literati drama, extolled ordeals of wifely

[8]This reverses the pattern demonstrated by Jennifer Holmgren (1985, 10–11) and Patricia Ebrey (1993, 202), in which chaste widows commended in earlier eras tended *not* to come from *shidafu* families. My 1499 Changshu *xian* results accord with those reported by Elvin (1984, 125–26) for Jiaxing prefecture.

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fidelity, but the popular antecedents of this play were satisfying hate-the-villain accounts of an ingrate husband (Mulligan 1976, 27–31).

Moreover, even shrines whose names connote the Confucian virtues to us often had a very different meaning in the popular religious practice of the 1430s. The people of Yangzhou and environs venerated the Han paragon Dou *xiao fu* (Filial Daughter-in-Law Dou), a widow whose mother-in-law committed suicide so as not to burden her. The widow was herself then executed on a false charge of murder. The Han source says that Heaven responded by causing a three-year drought, broken only by apology to Dou's wronged spirit.[9] Brief mentions of Song dynasty shrines to Dou contain no descriptive essays,[10] but comparative evidence suggests that her early shrines had more to do with danger than with virtue, more to do with Heaven's power to punish injustice than with filial service to her mother-in-law. Song dynasty shrines to women were generally to figures like the Mother of the White Dragon, or the "Woman who washed silk" (*Wan sha nü*), who came to the aid of the fleeing Wu Zixu (*Yizhen xianzhi* 1548:12.4b). Such women were associated with famous men or with elemental forces of nature, not with the canonical Confucian virtues. (Dou's sixteenth-century "Confucianization" will be touched on below.) Similarly, there had been shrines in Changshu county to Filial Son Zhou since the Song dynasty, but Song dynasty commemorative essays emphasize not so much his service to his mother as his magical posthumous appearance to her, promising to extend his powers on behalf of the locality. Qian probably joined in the popular reverence for Filial Son Zhou as a bodhisattva-like figure who could cure the sick or feed the multitudes in times of famine.[11]

Thus there may well have been a divide between Qian's ritual world and that of the men who built her shrine. Qian's ritual world would, in fact, have been shaped by the Buddhist and Daoist temples, and the temples and shrines to locally venerated gods, that dominated the landscape. The 1499 *Changshu xianzhi* lists close to twenty Buddhist temples, monasteries, and nunneries rebuilt in the early Ming and presumably still standing in Qian's day; Daoist structures are similarly numerous. (This is a conservative estimate; many more structures are listed with no rebuild date.) Early Ming Changshu county literati wrote approving commemorative essays when Buddhist temples were rebuilt, but I will try to show below that in the late fifteenth century, deploying the symbols of the *ru* or Confucian tradition seems to have made them feel most in tune with their times. Officials and notables of the 1490s, as we will see, were out to *change* the way women like Qian thought.

A newly widowed peasant woman would probably have been facing poverty or the prospect of being sold (since a second marriage would be little more than this), either of which might have made suicide attractive as a way out. She would have had some local models of women's heroic ordeals or death (resistance to rape by soldiers, or dramatic heroines whose husbands' ingratitude makes them shine by contrast). Language like Ji Chi's was current enough among the literati that it could have been *part* of her oral-culture mix. But one can probably assume that prevailing popular ideas about ghosts and hells, Buddhas and heavens, would have concerned her more.

[9]*Shuo yuan* (Garden of Tales), *Gui de* (Outstanding Virtue) chapter.

[10]The 1542 *Weiyang {Yangzhou prefecture} zhi,* 11.18a, quotes a Song dynasty gazetteer to the effect that Yangzhou had had a shrine to *Dou Xiao fu,* but says that its whereabouts are now unknown.

[11]See accounts in *Qinchuan xianzhi* 1196:10.7a; *Changshu xianzhi* 1499:2.76b–78a; and *Suzhou fuzhi* 1749:22.9a.

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In short, though there was language available to her for imagining her own death in an orthodox Neo-Confucian way, it seems improbable that these were the exclusive terms in which she would have thought. By the end of the century, however, the ritual landscape was being powerfully transformed, and later widows would grow up in constant sight of shrines and arches to the canonical Confucian virtues. More might feel called to the heroism that literati writers, for their own reasons, attributed to the widow Qian.

The 1490s

When the new magistrate Yang Ziqi (1458–1513) arrived in Changshu county in 1496, he was thirty-eight years old and on his third regular posting as a magistrate. If he did well in Changshu county, he would be eligible for promotion up and out of the ranks of county magistrate. His first posting, in Kunshan, had created quite an impression: fresh from the *jinshi* or highest-level examinations of 1487, Yang "destroyed heterodox shrines by the hundreds, tossing images into water or flames" (*Kunshan xianzhi* 1538:9.14b), put an indignant stop to noncanonical religious celebrations, rebuilt the community school (2.7a), and built the first new Confucian shrines that Kunshan had seen since the reign of the founding Ming emperor. All of this he did in less than the three years of a full term, since he had to leave Kunshan early to mourn his father's death.[12]

When he arrived in Changshu county he could not have been luckier in his local notables, the men on whom any magistrate had to rely. Waiting for him was Zhou Mu, possibly some ten years older, forcibly retired from one of the most eminent careers in recent Changshu history (he had reached the position of Vice-Provincial Commissioner, rank 3b), and now devoting himself not only to the arts and Neo-Confucian scholarship, but also to the elevation of clan and county ritual. Establishing shrines came naturally to both Yang and Zhou, and the 1655 Changshu county gazetteer, in its entry on the Wei xuan ci ("Shrine for Making Hidden Virtue Manifest") describes what happened next:

> Gong Xu of Yufeng [Jade Peak, in Kunshan] had written a poem entitled "A Lament for the Faithful Widow of the Lu Family." Zhou Mu showed it to Magistrate Yang, who established this shrine to make her fidelity known, and also had the poem engraved on a stele. Chen Bo wrote a colophon, which said: "A woman's fidelity only becomes widely known when her husband or her son is prominent and prosperous. Those whose stories are lost because of poverty and obscurity are beyond number."
> (Quoted in *Suzhou fuzhi* 1748:23.29b–30a)

This "Shrines and Temples" entry then concludes by quoting the lines from Gong Xu's poem that were engraved on the 1498 stele—a quotation that, as we will see, did not include the indignant coda about the suffering of the poor.[13] The poem, as

[12]Many biographies of Yang Ziqi exist. See, in addition to the Changshu *xian* and Kunshan *xian* gazetteers cited below, the sources listed in MRZJ, 695. Yang was revered for centuries as a model magistrate, as we can see from *Anting zhi* 1808:4.2a. (The town of Anting was on the sixteenth-century border between Jiading county and Kunshan county.)

[13]*Changshu xianzhi* 1499:2.68a–69b gives the text that was engraved on the stele; the final stanza as found in Gong Xu's *Ye gu ji* is omitted. It is this poem without the final stanza that is reproduced in all subsequent county and prefectural gazetteers.

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engraved, concluded instead with the next to last stanza of Gong Xu's poem (". . . no pen of the ancients to rescue her fame"). There is some confusion over the original location of the shrine: Chen Bo's 1499 colophon says that it was erected "by the side of her former dwelling" (*Changshu xianzhi* 1499:2.69a), but the 1499 gazetteer shrine entry proper says that the shrine was built just to the west of the Confucian School (2.68b).

What was behind this flurry of activity sixty years after Qian's death? Ji Chi and Gong Xu, her original chroniclers, had both been offered government service through the recommendation channel; and for Ji Chi, at least, this had happened during the last of the eras when a strong Ming emperor, Yongle, put his personal stamp on the government. Our 1490s protagonists are very different. Yang Ziqi, Zhou Mu, and Chen Bo had all come up through the status- and consciousness-molding examinations during the rise in influence of powerful ministers and bureaucrats who borrowed the prestige of the official state-strengthening Ming ideology, with its Five Relationships grammar that put the emperor at the apex of authority, in order to increase their own effectiveness. Ji Chi was perfectly "orthodox" in matching his sentiments to official ideology, but Yang Ziqi and Zhou Mu were in a position to put this orthodox agenda into practice.

This is evident in their accomplishments. During his three-year tenure in Changshu county, Yang Ziqi would establish at least eight shrines to Confucian exemplars (only one other had been established since the Hongwu era), and he would work with Zhou Mu on at least three of them: Qian's shrine, and shrines to the locally venerated Cheng-Zhu scholars Wu No (1372–1457) and Zhang Hong (fl. 1370s–1430s). Like a wave of magistrates to be discussed below, Yang Ziqi established county-level shrines to earlier civil servants (his own name would be venerated at the Ming *huan ci* or Shrine to Eminent Officials after he left Changshu). By commemorating men like themselves, Zhou Mu and Yang Ziqi were not just commemorating virtue; they were (consciously or unconsciously) manipulating the state-sanctioned canons of virtue to legitimate the claim that they and men like them were the appropriate shapers of policy for the empire. Qian's shrine, elevating the loyalty/fidelity that the governing class considered one of their own defining traits, has to be seen as part of the same effort.

Moreover, just as we noted Ji Chi's desire for a literary reputation, so we must consider the full range of Yang Ziqi's possible motivations. The establishment of such a shrine may well have been a way to position oneself advantageously for promotion. To have a shrine placed on the roster of official sacrifice required that a memorial be sent upward through the prefectural and provincial authorities to the Bureau of Rites and the Censorate.[14] Magistrates, censors, prefects, and other officials could all apparently initiate this process, and it must have been a good way to bring oneself to the notice of one's superiors.

A look at Zhou's and Yang's careers, praised in 1530s gazetteers in remarkably similar terms, will show why the two men worked so well together.

Yang Ziqi was from Ciji county in Ningbo prefecture, Zhejiang province, and thus no stranger to the Jiangnan culture he would be administering. In his first posting to Kunshan we already see the seeds of everything he would accomplish later in Changshu county. As with many a venerated magistrate, he is said to have jailed tax-shifters "the moment he alighted from his cart." He zeroed in on the most

[14]T'ien 1988, 5. Two of the sources used here describe the process: *Jurong xianzhi* 1496: 11.50a–51a, and *Jiangyin xianzhi* 1548: 18.4a–5a.

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promising students at the county school, coaching them so that they all passed the provincial-level (*juren*) examinations. No county resident escaped his zeal: "He went into people's houses to investigate whether they were industrious or lazy, urging them on or punishing them [as appropriate]" (*Kunshan xianzhi* 1538:9.14b–15a). And he soon put a stop to the annual three-day festival for the Kun-mountain spirit, in which the populace, "as though crazed," paraded the images of the city god and other deities through the streets in the mountain god's honor (2.10a–b).

Yang Ziqi was thus a passionate Confucian canonizer, moved, in the words of his eminent friend Wu Kuan (1436–1504),[15] to "exalt what was correct (*zheng*) and extirpate what was heterodox (*xie*)." And in commissioning the Kunshan shrine for the venerated Ye Sheng, Yang was able to extirpate the heterodox in favor of mentors to men like himself. As Wu Kuan tells us in his essay commemorating the shrine, Yang Ziqi "had from his youth been aware of Ye Sheng's reputation, and now, having gained the opportunity to serve as magistrate, could not at first think what to do to encourage the general veneration [of Ye Sheng]. But the [Hongzhi] emperor had just ascended the throne, and empowered his officials to tear down Buddhist monasteries that were not on the official registry. Magistrate Yang availed himself of this edict, saying in delight: 'Now I can achieve my purpose!' " Yang soon found an appropriately uncanonical monastery just behind the Confucian school, "took special pains to destroy its images," and replaced them with those of Ye Sheng. At the New Year he "led all the functionaries, teachers, and students to bow [at the shrine] and make sacrifice" (*Kunshan xianzhi* 1538:14.35b–38a).

Yang Ziqi earned enduring fame in Kunshan despite the impermanence of some of his spectacular achievements: the resilient god of Kun mountain, for example, had risen from demotion before (the Ming Bureau of Rites had stripped away what they considered the excessive titles bestowed on him during the Song), and now the god rose again, as the lively three-day festivals started right back up when Yang moved on to his next posting (*Kunshan xianzhi* 1538:2.10a–b). But by the time Yang Ziqi reached Changshu county he was perceived as a seasoned veteran. His Changshu county gazetteer biography says that he dealt with flood danger by having dykes built or reinforced, rationalized the tax and service levies to make them less unpredictable and frightening, and thus reduced vagrancy by persuading people to return to their lands. As in Kunshan, he took personal charge of the Confucian school (no exemptions for inclement weather!), and on the ritual front, he used the county wine-drinking ceremony to reconcile opposing factions. He instituted lectures on the first and fifteenth of each month to instruct local scholars on the capping and marriage ceremonies, and dealt with the dearth of appropriate ritual materials (a problem for many of his fifteenth-century colleagues) by commissioning new and ritually correct musical instruments.

As a result of all this, "the sick no longer prayed to [presumably uncanonical] shrines, loafers no longer drank in the marketplace, and enemies no longer attacked each other on the roads."[16] And to leave the historical record as shipshape as the county itself, in 1499 Yang is credited with commissioning the first Ming dynasty Changshu county gazetteer.[17]

[15]Wu Kuan served in the Hanlin Academy, and rose to be Vice Minister for Personnel. See DMB, 1487–89.

[16]Yang's biography in *Changshu xianzhi* 1539, *juan* 5, is wrongly collated, beginning on 5.36b but continuing on 5.18a–19a.

[17]This 1499 gazetteer reproduces prefaces to the 1254 and 1365 editions of *Qinchuan xianzhi,* Qinchuan xian being an old name for Changshu xian.

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Accounts in the 1539 Changshu gazetteer chapter on "Shrines and Temples" (*ci miao*) show us how Yang worked to have the visible language of commendation demonstrate that it was men of his own calling who were best able to insure local peace and harmony. He worked with a number of sojourning censors to establish the *Huai de sheng ci* or Shrine for the Preservation of Virtue and Life, in response to the nascent threat of coastal pirate depredations. In addition to establishing the shrines to Wu No and Zhang Hong, he brought Changshu into line with current practice by establishing a shrine to the vastly more famous Song dynasty Neo-Confucian Fan Zhongyan (989–1052), to whom Ming reformers of Neo-Confucian ritual all looked for guidance. In order to build shrines to the Tang poet Zhang Bi, who had served in Changshu county, and to He Ziping, an idealized magistrate of the fifth century, he tore down a Buddhist convent and an older uncanonical (*yin*) shrine to a General Wen, whose exploits had apparently not been sufficient to earn a place on the official roster of sacrifice (*Changshu xianzhi* 1539:4.1a–11b).

Zhou Mu had passed the *jinshi* examination in 1475, thirteen years before Yang Ziqi, and was already in his third official appointment when Yang first went to Kunshan. He started out on a faster track than Yang Ziqi, and his career is a typical Ming story of precocity, patronage, and disappointment. In the Xing ren si (Nanjing messenger office), which Charles Hucker calls a low-level but generally advantageous springboard for new graduates (1985, 245), he gained the patronage of the powerful Minister of Personnel Wang Shu (1416–1508), who engineered his rapid rise to the position of Zhejiang Provincial Vice-Commissioner of the Right (rank 3b). Here, Zhou's loyal Changshu county biographers tell us, his zeal caused jealous colleagues to turn against him. Zhou took the initiative by submitting his resignation and returned home. He was busy adapting Song dynasty Neo-Confucian ritual texts, and reforming clan and county wedding, capping, and funerary rituals, when Yang Ziqi arrived (*Changshu xianzhi* 1539:8.37a).

Zhou Mu's achievements in the Vice-Commissioner's position that made him a glory of the county show him to have been another activist missionary-Confucian official. In the Zhejiang county of Yongkang, the populace had long been at the mercy of a few powerful bullies; Zhou Mu resolved the problems as soon as he arrived, bringing under control a faction said to number several hundred. He put the military registration of the Hangzhou garrisons on a sound footing, plugging loopholes and ending coercion. He established in Hangzhou a free public cemetery like the one in Changshu county, to put an end to the "detestable" Hangzhou custom of cremation. As with Yang Ziqi in Kunshan, Zhou Mu is said to have "put the reform of public morals first among his government duties" (*Changshu xianzhi* 1539:8.37a).

Zhou Mu's memorials, which are included in his Changshu county gazetteer biography, make clear his sense that men like himself were entitled to address problems of state. In memorials on the conduct of imperial ancestral sacrifices (to be kept simple) and the causes of drought (due to tax imbalances), he tacitly asserts the right of the trained scholar-official to make policy for the empire. He makes this attitude explicit when he memorializes in favor of Nanjing Minister of Rites Geng Yu (1430–96), jailed with his colleagues after a fire in the Ministry. Zhou Mu writes that such cases should be handled "gravely and deliberately," since precipitately jailing such important ministers, the "arms and legs of the state," risks alienating other officials. The bureaucrats know best, he seems to be warning the court; the safety of the state lies in seeing to it that the officials are not disaffected.

Yang Ziqi and Zhou Mu had pursued similar ends in their official careers, and a meeting of minds was to be expected when Yang arrived in Changshu county. Yang

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was on his way to considerable fame as a poet,[18] and Zhou Mu was a connoisseur of painting; this probably recommended them even further to each other. In any case, the evidence is that the two worked well together. Zhou Mu's Changshu gazetteer biographer says that the shrines to Wu No and Zhang Hong "were both Zhou's idea" (*Changshu xianzhi* 1539:8.36b), and the 1539 "Shrines and Temples" section shows that Yang supported the effort, seeing to it that each was endowed with thirty *mou* of land to cover the cost of sacrifice and upkeep (4.7a).

This cooperation between Yang and Zhou was typical of the way sixteenth-century Jiangnan gazetteers describe the establishment of Ming shrines. A 1487 shrine to several Song dynasty officials in Yizhen county, for example, was first proposed and later repeatedly augmented by secretaries from the Nanjing Ministry of Works, but local notables were needed to bring the project to completion. A court directive to stop work (there may have been suspicions that material was being diverted from other authorized projects) met an impassioned response from an Yizhen notable, Retired Commander of the Embroidered Guard Ling, who expostulated that the commemoration of virtue was a glorious act and that the "people's labor" (i.e., the service levy) and the "people's money" (i.e., tax revenue) were not being used. Commander Ling not only saw to it that other local notables contributed, but in a splendid gesture put up most of the money (four hundred taels of white gold) himself.[19]

Such a shrine was meant to be impressive: this one in Yizhen county had three ceremonial gates leading to the chamber where images of the Song officials were displayed, and behind the shrine a wing to house the three Daoist monks hired as caretakers. The shrine was walled, and all around were planted auspicious trees. (Later, in 1518, a *lou* or tower with three more rooms would be added.) The overall effect would be certain to stir the righteous and respectful emotions of "all who passed on the North-South Road."

What can these cases tell us about the shrine that Yang and Zhou established for the widow Qian? The Changshu gazetteer tells us nothing about what her shrine looked like or how money was raised for construction, but data on other Jiangnan women's shrines give us grounds for reasonable assumptions, and show us that these shrines to female worthies looked much like those built for men. (Similarities in their probable agendas will be discussed below.) A 1540s Haizhou shrine to the Confucianized Filial Daughter-in-Law Dou consisted of three rooms, a gate emblazoned with the name of the shrine, another room in back for the caretaker, provisions for Spring and Autumn sacrifices, and walls all around. There was probably a modeled image as well, as we know to have been the case in a 1530s shrine to another Changshu county widow, surnamed Lu (*Suzhou fuzhi* 1748:23.25b). The financing of Qian's shrine was probably a community affair, if the 1540s Haizhou shrine is any guide: there the sojourning subprefect (*zhi zhou*) Wang Tong "caused those who lived in the vicinity of the site to contribute money to rebuild the shrine." The likelihood that the Changshu shrine resembled the Haizhou shrine is reinforced by the fact they created, in their respective areas, the same sorts of ties between sojourning officials and local students. Just as Yang Ziqi commissioned a colophon from Chen Bo, so Subprefect Wang had a local licentiate write a commemorative essay when the Haizhou shrine renovations were complete (*Haizhou zhi* 1572:49a–50a).

[18]Like Gong Xu, he would be anthologized in Qian Qianyi's *Lie chao shi xuan, bing* 7.

[19]*Da zhong jie ci* (Shrine to Great Loyalty and Fidelity), *Yizhen xianzhi* 1567: 12.2a, 14.52b–53a. Commander Ling's claim was de rigeur; most Ming Confucian schools and temples are described as having been financed by local notables, without recourse to tax monies.

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Zhou Mu's choice of a poem by Gong Xu probably impressed Yang Ziqi, who, as an aspiring poet who had served in Kunshan, would have known Gong Xu's reputation well. But even though both Yang and Zhou were celebrated for rescuing "the people" (*min*) from powerful bullies ("alighting from his cart, he clapped the miscreants in irons . . ."), still it was not in the interest of county harmony (or the official advancement that depended on it) to have a shrine proclaim how the rich were exploiting the poor, or how officials colluded in the exploitation. By cutting off Gong Xu's indignant final stanza, Yang and Zhou could manipulate the poem so that it now described willing self-sacrifice for the sake of canonical virtue. Gong Xu's passion and reputation were not to be discarded, but the sojourning official Yang Ziqi and the local notable Zhou Mu, taking the local management of virtue into their own hands for their own purposes, brought him firmly into line.

Yang Ziqi's vigorous activity would propel him even higher than Zhou Mu, who had only reached the position of Provincial Vice Commissioner, rank 3b. Yang would eventually become Henan Provincial Commissioner, rank 2b. And he may well have had coattails, even at this early stage in his career: Chen Bo, the 1496 *juren* degree-holder who wrote the colophon quoted above, was part of the Changshu county literary establishment (his father was a highly regarded scholar who had studied with Wu No), but neither Chen Bo nor his father had passed the *jinshi* or highest-level civil-service examination. Could it have been Yang Ziqi's recommendation that got Chen the position of Assistant Instructor in Ciji county, Yang's native place? If so, it would be Chen's part in elevating the heroine of Gong Xu's famous poem that gave him resources to invest in his son Chen Hou, who did pass the *jinshi* examination of 1517. Chen Hou rose to the rank of Surveillance Vice-Commissioner, rank 4a, and as was Ming custom, Chen Bo's paternal attentions were then rewarded with the honorary title of Assistant Surveillance Commissioner, rank 5a (*Changshu xianzhi* 1499:8.17b–a8b, 3.11b, 3.66b).

The Late Fifteenth-Century Context

Yang Ziqi and Zhou Mu were far from alone in their passion to put Changshu county on the right ritual path. The writings of Ye Sheng, whom Yang Ziqi revered, show how widely shared were Yang's and Zhou's concerns. Ye sanctions the practice of revising Song dynasty ritual texts to fit Ming needs, as Zhou Mu was doing, by finding an appropriate quotation from the Song dynasty sage Zhu Xi himself (Ye 1980: 103). Investigating the early history and Ming revival of the county wine-drinking ceremony, in which exemplary elders were honored, Ye argues that this ritual and the erection of shrines to local worthies, like the ones credited to Yang Ziqi, transformed popular morals by making the Way visible to the common folk (1980, 208, 225).

Moreover, Ye's brief accounts make clear that the late fifteenth century witnessed a widespread attack on "noncanonical" (*yin*) shrines, which were everywhere: Ye describes not only local granary spirits whose cults were being forcibly replaced by the state-sponsored cult of the City God (*Cheng huang shen*), but even a *Hu xue you shan da wang* (Great King who Aids in Study and Conduces to Virtue), whose effigy at the side of a Guangdong county school inspired such terror in the local education officials that they were frightened to tear it down. (Shrines in aid of education were not automatically canonical; the approved curriculum had to be supported by

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acceptable spirits!) Ye Sheng notes with approval that the Great King was replaced by a group of appropriate worthies (1980, 63–64). The cult of the City God was generally intended to channel popular fervor: Ye Sheng tells us how the Ming founder had commanded the building of temples to the City God in every locality, where they would supplant sacrifice previously offered to locally venerated ghosts (*gui*) and spirits (*shen*). The cosmic resonances of state power were to be underscored by having new officials visit the City God temple immediately upon reaching their districts (1980, 296–97).[20] Ye Sheng's historical précis gives us the theory behind Yang Ziqi's practice in rebuilding the Changshu county City God temple for the first time since the founding emperor's reign period.

Ye Sheng, in his turn, was following the lead of figures like the wide-ranging Confucian synthesizer Qiu Jun, appointed Grand Secretary in 1491 by the Hongzhi emperor (r.1488–1506), himself known to later history as a particularly staunch supporter of *ru* ideals and of the civil bureaucracy. Qiu Jun produced a widely republished revision of Zhu Xi's handbook *Family Rituals,* and Ye Sheng echoes Qiu Jun both in his rationale for revising Zhu Xi (175) and in his little history of the state cult of the City God.[21]

Yang Ziqi and Zhou Mu were thus in accord with the best-known scholar officials of their age, who described their motivations in terms of an orthodoxy explicitly grounded in the *ru* or Confucian tradition. This was not due to directives from above; the era of effectively despotic emperors had ended with the death of Yongle in 1425. Edward Dreyer (1982) has traced the steps whereby *ru*-oriented civil servants gradually gained power at court, and the establishment of the examinations as the primary route to officialdom must have enhanced the influence of the examination curriculum—a curriculum which included, for example, Zhu Xi's *Family Rituals.*

We can see from the accounts above how these developments played out at the lower levels of officialdom. The Changshu and Kunshan histories examined here evince none of the disdain for the civil-service examinations that would characterize some Jiangnan gazetteers a century later, when "our scholars" would be said to study with no attachment to the vulgar goal of success. Yang Ziqi is relentless in preparing students for the examinations, and is praised for it. Yang Ziqi and Zhou Mu are both repeatedly described as promoting the life-cycle rites of *Family Rituals.* Brook (1989) has shown that gentry families never in fact abandoned Buddhist funerary ritual en masse, but our sojourning officials and local notables (Yang Ziqi, Zhou Mu, Miss Zheng's father) show us that claims of adherence to *Family Rituals* already functioned as markers of moral prestige by the early-fifteenth century.

Magistrates, Notables, and Shrines

This *ru* language was apparently a language that worked: Yang Ziqi was promoted expeditiously, and Zhou Mu was able to use both his achievements abroad and his ritual reforms at home to position himself as a local leader. And they were not alone. At least half of the twenty-one Jiangnan gazetteers surveyed here describe one or

[20]David Johnson (1985, 443) shows how these City God temples were, in Tang and Song, the "spontaneous expression" of a "newly emerged urban mercantile elite." Hamashima 1992 describes the early Ming transformation of the City God into a routinized expression of state power.

[21]See Qiu Jun, *Daxue Yanyi bu, juan 61.*

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sometimes two late fifteenth- or early sixteenth-century "culture-hero" magistrates or other local officials of Yang Ziqi's type, men who stamp out tax evasion, tear down noncanonical shrines, and put up the bulk of new shrines.

The brief biographies of fifteenth-century officials in Wenzhou prefecture, for example, emphasize a mixture of compassion (e.g., praying for rain) and ritual correctness (controlling the people through law and ritual); Wen Lin, who served as magistrate of Yongjia county during the Chenghua era (1465–88), is the first to be credited with tearing down *yin* shrines (*Wenzhou fuzhi* 1537:3.17b). Also in the Chenghua era, the Taiping county magistrate Chen Jingsuo "led the populace in tearing down yin shrines" (*Taiping xianzhi* 1540:4.13b, 12a). Magistrate Huang Fu of Jiangyin county destroyed *yin* shrines and drove out evildoers, even dismantling, in 1498, the venerable shrine to a Song dynasty loyalist, on the grounds that local "witches and wizards" (*wu ji*) had perverted the shrine to mystify the masses (*Jiangyin xianzhi* 1548:8.6a). Gui E, who arrived in Wukang county in 1513 and had to leave to mourn his mother before his term was over, uprooted evildoers and began to tear down *yin* shrines "as soon as he alighted from his cart." He promoted Confucian ritual and rode about the countryside to find out the people's grievances (*Wukang xianzhi* 1550:6.4a–b). In Jiading county, Li Zikun equalized the tax rolls and service levies, replaced sixteen *yin* shrines with community schools, renovated the library at the Confucian school, built shrines to faithful women, Confucian worthies, and filial sons, and made sure to learn all the people's secrets during his tenure from 1534 to 1537 (*Jiading xianzhi* 1605:4.6a, 32a; 9.6b–7a).[22]

However prevalent these hero-stories, though, our examination of specific shrines above has shown us that collaboration between sojourning officials and local elites, rather than unilateral action by the magistrate or prefect, was the norm. How can we find the actual balance of initiative and accomplishment? The timing of the wave of heroic magistrate stories provides a clue: the late-fifteenth and early-sixteenth centuries also saw the rise of a characteristically Ming set of shrines that suggest a different way of framing the question.

The period from 1470 to 1550 saw a burst of construction in Zhejiang and Jiangsu of worthies' shrines generally, and, most notably, of the paired shrines that helped shape a Confucian-canonical view of a county's history, namely the Shrine to Local Worthies (*Xiang xian ci*), where male exemplars of *ru* virtue were honored; and the Shrine to Eminent Officials (*Ming huan ci*), honoring men who had served in but were not native to the county (see table 1). The shrines to Eminent Officials, where hundreds of men are canonized, celebrate such achievements in the public sphere as wise administration, water control, or disaster relief. Hundreds more men are canonized at the shrines to Local Worthies, where they are celebrated primarily for scholarly achievement, charitable endeavor, or reaching high office. (Men canonized at individual shrines are celebrated mainly for the same range of contributions as we find at the Shrines to Local Worthies—they are censors, scholars, magistrates, local benefactors. A small number are celebrated for military achievements.) A few Tang and many Song figures are among these numbers, and in fact the Ming shrines to Local Worthies were sometimes constituted by consolidating Song shrines, assimilating them to the new tradition of the ubiquitous paired shrines, and then adding Ming exemplars. Sojourning officials and local worthies had both been

[22]In addition to these officials, see also *Gaochun xianzhi* 1526:3.1a–b for magistrates Xiong Ji and Liu Qidong; and *Tongzhou zhi* 1578:5.12a–23b, 6.34a–b for Assistant Subperfect (panguan) Shi Limo.

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Table 1. Dates of Construction of Ming huan ci and Xiang xian ci (Source: Gazetteers listed in List of References)

Locality	Ming huan ci	Xiang xian ci
Jurong xian		1460/1471
Xinchang xian	1471	1471
Taiping xian	1504	1475
Haizhou		1475/1499
Jiangyin xian	1490	1490
Changshu xian	Before 1499	Before 1499
Tongzhou	1515	1515
Pujiang xian	1516	1516
Haimen xian	1519	1519
Wukang xian	1519	1519
Tiazhou*	1522	1522
Yizhen xian	1526	1526
Yangzhou fu*	1525	1525
Chun'an xian	1525	1525
Gaochun xian	1526	1526
Jiading xian	1534	1534
Kunshan xian	1536 (rebuild)	1536 (rebuild)
Taixing xian*	1540	1540

*Data for these *xian* is taken from the 1542 *Weiyang zhi,* a Yangzhou Prefecture gazetteer.

enshrined in the Song, but the standardized names and regular pairing of the Shrine to Eminent Officials and the Shrine to Local Worthies seem to have been Ming innovations: the two shrines were usually constructed together and almost always listed together in Ming gazetteers.

Rather than apportioning credit between locals and sojourners, then, we should probably consider the discursive function of these paired shrines. The standardization of these shrines at the county level subtly elevated the importance of the county as a focus of local affiliation. But this very standardization also implied insertion into an empire-wide matrix. While the sojourners commemorated at the Shrine to Eminent Officials were remembered specifically for what they had done in the county, still the ubiquity and standardization of these shrines inserted the county into a national web. And the pairing of the shrines inserted local notables into that web also, with attendant prestige. The Shrines to Eminent Officials and Shrines to Local Notables, going up at both the county and the prefectural level, made visible to everyone the fact of an interwoven educated elite, some of whose members held office while others stayed home (some, of course, did both at different periods), but all of whom deserved governing power whether they exercised it officially or not. (Brook 1993 shows that gentry patronage of Buddhism remained alive into the late Ming, but it was not a factor in the particular dynamic outlined here. The 1499 Changshu county gazetteer lists no Buddhist temple restorations during the burst of Confucian construction described above.)

These shrines were hardly a direct expression of the throne: despite the first Ming emperor's directive to enshrine "loyal ministers and self-sacrificing officials, and all who made meritorious contributions to the state, or showed love and compassion

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toward the people," the gazetteers surveyed here record almost no shrines to Confucian worthies erected before 1470 or so. (The one Yongle-era gazetteer in my sample, the *Leqing xianzhi,* lists no worthies' shrines at all.) The language of these shrines appeals to a Confucian model of hierarchy that puts the emperor at the apex, but the prestige of that language is used to bolster local power, and the dispersion of power suggested by pairing the Shrines to Eminent Officials and the Shrines to Local Worthies had no place in the top-down vision of the earliest Ming emperors.

That these shrines work to communicate a model of secular social power is clear from the important fact that none of them is *ling* or "efficacious"—as, for example, the shrine to a *bodhisattva* Guanyin or even a Filial Son Zhou (see above) would have been. No one prayed for sons or success at Ming worthies' shrines. On the contrary: where enshrined figures developed a reputation for efficacity (the Guangdong Great King who Aids in Study, the Song dynasty loyalist perverted by local religious practitioners), their shrines had to be dismantled. Worthies' shrines *replace* "efficacious" shrines, replacing supernatural power with the social power of the resident elite.

Shrines to Women

Shrines to women were one small facet of this Confucian edifice. Counting the Shrines to Eminent Officials, the Shrines to Local Worthies, and shrines to individuals or small groups, and restricting the list to new Ming shrines or Ming reconstructions of earlier shrines, the twenty-one Ming gazetteers surveyed here list on the order of 100 shrines erected by 1550 to Confucian-exemplary figures. Only 10 of the 100 shrines are new shrines to women, and they are concentrated in six of the twenty-eight localities covered by my sources. The significance of these shrines, however, lies not in their numbers but in the simple fact of their existence. In the centuries-long history of local shrine-building, the late-fifteenth century saw the first beginning of the wave of shrines to women as Confucian exemplars. (No Confucian shrines to women are noted in the extant Song and Yuan gazetteers contained in SYFZ, and shrines to *women* are almost completely absent in Neskar's 1993 account of Confucian shrines in the Song.)

In all of the localities surveyed here, new shrines to women went up only after the construction of new Ming shrines to men was well underway (see table 2). Qian's shrine, erected in 1498, is the first of the ten, and we have looked at its local context

Table 2. Construction of Ming huan ci, Xiang xian ci, and Shrines to Women*

Locality	Ming huan ci	Xiang xian ci	Women's shrines
Taiping xian	1504	1475	1514, n.d., 1540
Jiangyin xian	1490	1490	1510
Changshu xian	Before 1499	Before 1499	1498, 1537
Yangzhou fu	1525	1525	1528, n.d.
Jiading xian	1534	1534	1534, 1547
Kunshan xian	1536 (rebuild)	1536 (rebuild)	1525

*See appendix A for shrine names and women commemorated.

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above. In the other five localities with new Ming shrines to women, the shrines to Local Worthies and Eminent Officials were already in place before ground was broken for the women's shrines. Chronology thus links the women's shrines to the larger shrine-building enterprise described above, and the way women's shrines are identified with county or prefecture standardizes them in an empire-wide matrix, much as we saw for shrines to male worthies.

Moreover, the Ming-Confucian agenda of these women's shrines is clear from the way some of them supplanted earlier shrines, much as the Kunshan shrine to Ye Sheng and the myriad Ming shrines to the City God supplanted earlier cults. Jiangyin county essays recorded a Five Dynasties shrine to a Miss He, who drowned herself to avoid rape as she was fleeing warfare. As with other early shrines to women, this Five Dynasties shrine was originally intended more to *propitiate* than to instruct. The drowned Miss He appeared in a dream to the village head, demanding sacrifices from the land where she had met her death. A shrine was therefore established. But the Yuan-Ming transition poet Wang Feng, whom we have met above, recast her in a poem as a martyr to virtue rather than an avenging ghost. How much better it is, he exclaimed, that she died to preserve her virtue and repay Heaven, than if she had simply returned home alive but dishonored! (*Jiangyin xianzhi* 1548:8.14b). In the centuries following the original establishment of the shrine, it seems to have been reconfigured as a temple to Qian hu Qi niangzi (Seventh Mother Qi of Qian [front] Lake), whose name suggests a deity who could be prayed to for children. But in 1510, the potential of Wang Feng's poem was realized when the shrine was restored as the local Temple to Heroines of Virtue (*Lienü miao*). Just as Yang Ziqi and Zhou Mu had Gong Xu's poem engraved on a stele at Qian's shrine, so the provincial Administrative Assistant Commisioner (*canyi*) Zhang Jian had Wang Feng's poem engraved on a stele at the temple, to make it clear that Miss He the martyr to Confucian virtue had supplanted Miss He the avenger (*Jiangyin xianzhi* 1548:8.4a).

Similarly, Song and early Ming shrines to Filial Daughter-in-Law Dou were allowed to crumble during the Confucianizing late fifteenth and early-sixteenth centuries—except where her story was retold to fit the new *ru* context. Her shrine in Haizhou was rebuilt in the 1470s with new inscriptions emphasizing her chastity and filial service, and again in 1546 with the addition of a *Ci xiao men* (Gate of Maternal Love and Filial Piety) (*Haizhou zhi* 1572:10.38a, 49a–51a). With the new gate and commemorative essays to match, the shrine now emphasized a canonical expression of the Five Relationships, the bond between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, rather than the revenge of the daughter-in-law upon her accuser.

Shrines to women *and* shrines to men thus both could Confucianize the county's self-image, knitting it more closely to the empire as a whole, while simultaneously strengthening the ties between local notables, sojourning officials, and higher levels of the bureaucracy. But shrines to women and shrines to men did not promote the county's image in exactly the same way. The number of women canonized at *ru* shrines is far smaller than the number of men. No nationally famous women exemplars rival the Song dynasty Confucian Fan Zhongyan, enshrined in many Jiangnan counties during the Ming. And, most important, men and women were canonized for very different virtues. Male exemplars canonized in the early Ming brought glory to the county through scholarship and service, while their female counterparts were almost exclusively martyrs.

The gazetteers studied here do record a few male martyrs: there are eight shrines to the Song dynasty loyalist Wen Tianxiang, and six other men, at a total of five shrines, are canonized as martyrs: one from the Tang, two from the Song, and three

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from the Ming.[23] We get a foretaste of the rich martyrology of the late Ming in the Taiping county account of the Shrine to Loyalty and Fidelity (*Zhong jie ci*), established between 1538 and 1540 to commemorate the Hanlin Compiler Wang Shuying. Wang is described as having "died with Fang Xiaoru" at the forcible end of the second (Jianwen) emperor's reign period, and the magistrate and local notables of Taiping county are said to have felt disgraced that while Fang was enshrined in his home county of Ninghai, Wang was neglected in theirs. Strenuous efforts of notables and sojourning officials corrected the situation, and as we will see below, a companion shrine was established to honor the suicides of Wang's wife and daughters (*Taiping xianzhi* 1540:4.24b–25b). But Wang Shuying and martyrs like him made up a minuscule fraction of Jiangnan men enshrined before the middle of the Ming. (The balance would shift after the 1550s, when numbers of men died fighting the Japanese pirates.)

By contrast, all twenty women canonized at the ten shrines in table 2 can be understood as martyrs (see appendix A). For the five women canonized in the 1542 *Weiyang zhi* (a Yangzhou prefectural gazetteer), we have no stories, only brief shrine descriptions,[24] but all five are designated *lie* or "ardently heroic," an appellation reserved in these gazetteers almost exclusively for women who die young, defending their virginity or widow-chastity. One of the five was a Song dynasty concubine (the faithful concubine is a well-loved trope, since her fidelity, less *required* than a first wife's, is an even more powerful exemplar), two may have been unmarried daughters (no dynasty given), and of the other two, we learn only their surnames and that they were women of the Ming.

The fifteen women whose stories we do have were all young wives or widows of the early Ming. Two were faithful widowed daughters-in-law who lived on in self-sacrificing service to their mothers-in-law. The other thirteen died to resist rape (5), to resist remarriage (3), to follow their husbands to the grave (2), and, in Taiping county, to share the martyrdom of Wang Shuying (3). None of their shrines was established solely to honor a chaste widow who lived on: the two faithful daughters-in-law in this sample were honored at the "Shrine to the Five Chaste Ones" (*Wu zhen ci*) in Kunshan county, along with three women who died. Kunshan had a particularly rich tradition of honoring women martyrs to chastity and fidelity: the original Three Chaste Ones (the two daughters-in-law were added later) are Widow Li, Miss Xue, and Widow Huang who inspired the poems and essays noted above in "Earliest Accounts." And as with our widow Qian of Changshu county, the shrine for these fourteenth-and early-fifteenth-century paragons was not established until much later, in 1525 (*Suzhou fuzhi* 1748:23.7b).

The wave of Ming worthies' shrines that began in the 1470s or so was soon followed by a wave of county-level gazetteers, usually the first to have been produced in any given Jiangnan region since Song or Yuan. These gazetteers now routinely contained Biographies of Women chapters devoted overwhelmingly to faithful widows and widow-suicides. But the shrines discussed here, honoring almost exclusively young women who died, reverse the proportions typically found in local histories,

[23]1496 *Jurong xianzhi,* 5.26b, 9.39b (Xiang xian ci, Tang); 1548 *Jiangyin xianzhi,* 6.5b (Daocheng ci, Song), 6.6a (Chen Lieshi ci, Song), and 6.6b (Er hou ci, Ming); 1540 *Taiping xianzhi,* 4.24b–25b (Zhong jie ci, Ming).

[24]This gazetteer is incomplete. The brief descriptions of the women are from the Rituals and Music section (11.18b), but juan 22–31, containing the *Lienü zhuan* with its fuller accounts, are missing.

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where faithful widows who live on outnumber suicides by two to one. And while Ming and Qing emperors, officials, and literati were consistently ambivalent about issuing awards to women who committed suicide simply to follow their husbands or fiancées, shrines were erected to them nevertheless. The Ming let stand the earlier Yuan dynasty regulations that recognized women over fifty years of age who had been widowed without remarrying for at least twenty years (the duration proving their commitment to fidelity). But these regulations were apparently no match for the aura of pathos that surrounded young suicides; localities petitioned to be allowed to erect such shrines, and the petitions were granted (Elvin 1984, 123–28).

What can we make of the discrepancy between the higher proportion of widows who live on in the gazetteers, and the shrines' focus on women who die? The answer, I think, can be found in the character of Ming gazetteer biographies of women: as I have observed elsewhere (Carlitz 1994), even the typical gazetteer account of the widow who lives on is more often than not the story of an ordeal (self-disfigurement, suicide attempts). And we must remember that about a third of the women in the gazetteers do die. Women's shrines can be seen simply as honoring the epitome of a trend, rather than as contradicting the general trend. As I have tried to suggest above, this exaltation of martyrdom has complex roots—in the School of the Way, in the sometimes embattled stance of adherents of the School of the Way, in the sociodynamics of Mongol Yuan rule, in the character of early Ming philosophical writing (whose emotional tone has still to be adequately explained), in the experience of early Ming despotism, and in the attractiveness of a new poetic subject, the *lienü,* whose youthful vulnerability was typically described as *sexual* vulnerability.

But however different the character of Confucian shrines to men and women in the early-middle Ming, the women's shrines support the same vision of social power as do the shrines to men. Martyred women give their all in support of that vision, and, as objects of rescue, provide occasions of achievement for officials pitted in struggle against the powerful and slippery characters understood to be preying on the unfortunate and the state itself. Ming shrines to male worthies valorize the local and the national elite simultaneously, while shrines to virtuous women claim credit for the community in the name of the translocal values of the state-sponsored Five Relationships. This appeal to the Five Relationships could also serve very specifically local purposes, however: knitting a woman closer to her family of marriage, it aided the movement toward lineage consolidation and the formalization of genealogies that was gaining ground during the late-fifteenth century (recall the suicide of Widow Xu, daughter of the genealogy-collecting Xu No) (Chu 1989, 2–3).

The martyrdom of the *lienü* thus served the nascent Ming dynasty by exemplifying a recognizably Chinese web of loyalties, and later it served both her local and her sojourning sponsors by giving them the wherewithal to instruct students, experience profound emotion, and position themselves advantageously with regard to a number of discourses. The widow Qian, as men of the 1450s and 1490s constructed her, fills all of these roles. An exemplar of a new sort of ritual orthodoxy, she helps Ji Chi teach men and women of his day, and undergirds efforts at ritual reform. Suffering both her poverty and her widowhood, she is an occasion of passionate compassion for Gong Xu. Embodying School of the Way fervor and sincerity, she is an irreproachable badge of local honor for the Confucian notable Zhou Mu to bring to the attention of the magistrate Yang Ziqi. Her story properly tamed, she helps Yang Ziqi advance his illustrious career, and Chen Bo his more modest one. T'ien Ju-k'ang has written eloquently of the way suffering *lienü* came to symbolize lost opportunities for frustrated scholars (T'ien 1988, 90–113). Our evidence shows us, however, the

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essentially optimistic and practical use that could also be made of her suffering in the early-middle Ming, when the examination route and Confucian officialdom itself still looked to most governing-class men like the best place for their efforts.

Epilogue: The Widow Qian in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries

The 1655 *Changshu xianzhi,* quoted above, synthesizes all earlier accounts of Qian's shrine. The compiler of this 1655 gazetteer was a Changshu county Provincial Graduate named Gong Liben. He wrote in a world vastly different from that of Yang Ziqi or Zhou Mu: the capital and most of the empire had fallen to the Qing; personal friends like the loyalist poet Chen Zilong had committed suicide; the tattered Southern Ming was making its futile last stand in Guizhou. Gong Liben responded by reassembling the past in a gazetteer whose wealth of detail exemplifies the rich local histories of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (often a better source of Ming data than the Ming gazetteers themselves). Qian was not the widow whom Gong Liben celebrated at greatest length; he spent many more pages on a Jiajing-era suicide surnamed Lu (noted above), who stabbed herself and her daughter in order to avoid rape by her husband's assassins. But Gong Liben's entry on Lu Mao's wife Qian, which compresses Ji Chi's account, assured that she would remain in the records, and a brief look at her fortunes between 1498 and 1655 will suggest what a complex symbol the faithful widow had become by Gong Liben's time.

Shrines and gazetteers both show us the growing social importance of the *lienü* cult over the course of the sixteenth century. Yang Ziqi's 1499 *Changshu xianzhi* commemorated a total of fifty-one *lienü* (almost all of them widows); the *Changshu xianzhi* of 1539 adds nearly fifty more. And in 1538, the magistrate Feng Rubi commissioned the second *lienü* shrine in Changshu county, the Er lie ci (Two Martyrs' Shrine) honoring Lu and her daughter. Sometime thereafter, the Two Martyrs' Shrine was rebuilt next to the Hui ri si (Wisdom-sun/Buddha-wisdom Temple). Qian's shrine was moved to the same place. The Hui ri si, a Buddhist temple during the Song and Yuan dynasties, was by early Ming times being used to propagate the *sheng dao* (sagely way), or state-sponsored Confucian teachings (*Changshu xianzhi* 1539:10.17b–18a). Grouping the two women's shrines indicates a growing sense of genre, of the category of heroically faithful widow, and placing the two shrines next to the Hui ri si associated them even more forcefully than before with official state orthodoxy. The continuing elevation of the cult can be seen in the later move of Lu's shrine to Yu Mountain, one of the most important ritual sites in Ming dynasty Changshu county.[25]

The evolution of the Ming dynasty governing class, and the symbols by which it defined itself, thus institutionalized the cult of faithful widows. But the note of pathos continued to resonate, the more so as a cult of martyrdom for men and women emerged as the dynasty went on. This cult of martyrs even transformed the reputation of one of Qian's earliest champions, the poet Gong Xu. After the Jianwen loyalists were rehabilitated in 1573, Gong Xu's public persona underwent radical change. The beloved recluse slipped into the background; post-1573 accounts of Gong Xu all

[25]1748 *Suzhou fuzhi*: 23.24a, 1539 *Changshu xianzhi* 10.30b for successive rebuilding of Lu's shrine; 1748 *Suzhou fuzhi* 23.29a for location of Qian's shrine.

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feature, instead, his doomed heroism at the Jinchuan Gate.[26] Thus when Gong Liben described Zhou Mu presenting Yang Ziqi with Gong Xu's poem, the Gong Xu now evoked was a martyr to the sort of principle venerated by Gong Liben's own Ming loyalist friends. Qian's fidelity, which once signified the rising power of *ru* men, could now be a reminder of what they had lost.

Appendix A: Shrines and Virtues

Shrine date	Gazetteer	Shrine name and action commemorated
1498	1499 *Changshu xianzhi*	Wei xuan ci (SFH)
1510	1548 *Jiangyin xianzhi*	Lienü miao (SRP)
1514	1540 *Taiping xianzhi*	Liefu ci (SAR)
pre-1540	1540 *Taiping xianzhi*	Lienü ci (SAR)
1525–38	1538 *Kunshan xianzhi*	Wu zhen ci (SFH, 2 SRP, 2 FW)
1528	1542 *Weiyang zhi*	San lienü ci (three women commemorated, no details)
n.d.	1542 *Weiyang zhi*	Shuang zhen nü (two women commemorated, no details)
1534	1605 *Jiading xianzhi*	Zhen nü ci (SFF)
1537	1539 *Changshu xianzhi*	Er lie ci (2 SAR)
1540	1540 *Taiping xianzhi*	Zhen lie ci (3 SFH)
1547	1605 *Jiading xianzhi*	Ai zhen ci (MRP)

FW: Faithful widow who lives on — SFH: Suicide to follow husband in death
SAR: Suicide to avoid remarriage — SRP: Suicide to avoid rape
SFF: Suicide to follow fiance in death — MRP: Murdered avoiding rape

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[26]See, for example, Li Zhi's account in *Xu cang shu* (A Book to be Hidden, Continued), *juan* 7, p. 127.

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