

Ping Dong

Historical Background of Wang Yang-ming's Philosophy of Mind

From the Perspective of his Life Story



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ISBN 978-981-15-3035-7

ISBN 978-981-15-3036-4 (eBook)

<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-3036-4>

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Preface

The book, *Historical Background for Wang Yang-ming's Philosophy of Mind: From the Perspective of His Up-and-down Life Experience*, was adapted from my lectures of *Legendary Life of Wang Yang-ming* in "Lecture Room¹" of China Central Television (CCTV). Wang Yang-ming's deeds can be found not only in the official historical records, but also in his disciples' biographies and memoirs, and folklore in the unofficial history as well. My lectures were generally based on various official histories, Wang Yang-ming's own writings, and his disciples' records. With these materials as my sources, I hope that I can let people understand this ancient sage, Wang Yang-ming. He not only diligently pursued his objective of being a sage in life, but also persistently sought the ideal state of a sage in ideology. Surely, in view of this point, it is more important for us to understand his ideological state and appreciate his personality in order to have a more meaningful life for ourselves. Wang Yang-ming's ideology was severely criticized in the past, for it was regarded as "subjective idealism." However, he actually did not deny objective existence. In his opinion, before objectivity enters into people's mental world, it remains in a state of "stillness," which is impossible for people to clearly understand and get hold of. Therefore, he put much more emphasis on this point that the objective existence of the real world can be brought into our subjective world only through people's own practical activities, and only in this way objective things can be truly understood and thus their existence can be of real meaning to us. This point of view is not equal to "subjective idealism." With respect to his theory of "The Oneness of Knowing and Doing," neither can we have any one-sided understanding, nor can we take "Knowing" as "Doing." Actually, what Mr. Yang wanted to tell us was that the understanding of anything cannot just stay at the level of "Knowing," but we must put the "Knowing" into use in real life. Only by putting the "Knowing" into practice through "Doing," the "Knowing" is truly reliable and effective. In real life, "Doing" is always more important than simply "Knowing." He proposed "The Theory of Original Knowledge" in an attempt to arouse every one of us to truly be aware of the

¹A Chinese television program hosted by China Central Television (CCTV), in which scholars from various disciplines are invited to provide lectures.

existence of our “Original Mind,” and to realize that our “Original Mind” is good, pure, and noble. Therefore, in order to be in line with our “Original Mind,” we should do moral things and live a moral life. Because of this, reverence for one’s own “Original Knowledge,” and reverence for one’s own “Original Mind” become everyone’s bounden duty and the ultimate goal of moral cultivation. Frankly speaking, we should not have reverence for nothing, but must for something in our life. We should at least have enough reverence for our own “Original Knowledge,” because this kind of reverence is indeed respect for the value of our own lives, and respect for others’ lives as well.

While I was delivering *Legendary Life of Wang Yang-ming* in “Lecture Room” of CCTV, I got a lot of selfless help from the colleagues of the CCTV column group. Special thanks go to my friends Nie Cong-cong, Yu Hong, Wang Shan, and Meng Qing-ji, who put forward many suggestions for improvement in view of my lecture manuscripts, especially for their detailed and specific guidance in terms of the narrating methods. Without their help, I am afraid that I cannot finish these lectures. Sincere thanks to all of them! In terms of the publication of the book with the same title *Legendary Life of Wang Yang-ming* in Chinese, I would like to show my thanks to Cai Chang-hong, the Executive Editor, and his colleagues from the Commercial Press. They did not show any single bit of “laziness” in spite of tight time. It is very impressive for their responsible spirits in the editing process. I am surely responsible for all the mistakes made in the description of the events if they are not in keeping with the historical records, or correctly expressed. Readers are also welcome to criticize and correct the mistakes if they find any.

Hangzhou, China
November 2010

Ping Dong
(Translated by Hu Hai-peng)

Acknowledgements

I am indebted to many people who have helped me make a reality the English version of my book *Historical Background for Wang Yang-ming's Philosophy of Mind: From the Perspective of His Up-and-down Life Experience*.

First of all, I would like to thank Professor Wang Xiaolu and Professor Cai Liang, together with team members at Zhejiang University, Ningbo Institute of Technology for their unfailing support of this translation project. In the past few years, they have mobilized all kinds of resources available to keep the endeavor going. Their academic passion and effective coordination means so much to me.

I would like to thank the faculty members of the School of Foreign Language Studies, Zhejiang University, Ningbo Institute of Technology, who volunteered to participate in the project. Without their active engagement and unremitting efforts, the translation of my book would be impossible.

I am grateful to many scholars and experts for taking the time out of their busy schedule to proofread the English drafts and make insightful suggestions. I am also grateful to Terence Noel for his meticulous revision of the whole book.

Last but not least, many thanks go to the editing team for their professional work.

Without all this, I could not have possibly gone so far.

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Chapter 1

Experiencing “Gewu Zhizhi”



1.1 An Amazing Child

It was a cloudy winter day in 1506 (the first year of the Zhengde Emperor¹ of the Ming dynasty), and a piercing wind was hovering in the bitterly cold air. Outside the Wu Men (Meridian Gate) of the Forbidden City, a group of lieutenants of the Jinyiwei Guard² was escorting a young 30-year-old officer. They tore off his robe and threw him onto the ground with his face down, and prepared to torture him with “Tingzhang.”³ The so-called “Tingzhang” was invented by Emperor Zhu Yuanzhang of the Ming dynasty, aimed at punishing the “misbehaving” civil and military officials. As the lieutenants were about to raise the sticks and start beating, the supervising eunuch ordered, “Pull off his trousers!” The moment the word “start” was spat out of the eunuch’s mouth, the convicted official’s trousers were torn off and the lieutenants began to execute the punishment. Everything left was blood and mangled flesh.

As a “regulation of clan” of the Ming dynasty, “Tingzhang” had always been a “special treatment” designed for “misbehaving” officials. But this time, something was different. On previous occasions, whoever was being punished could wear thick clothes filled with thick cotton, some even covered their body with blankets and rugs during the flogging. Even so, the flogged officials would sometimes be beaten to death. It was the supervising eunuch who proposed the “fundamental change” of caning on the naked body. This change added nothing but physical pains and degrading treatment to the person being punished on top of the already shameful and humiliating character of the punishment in public. Afterward in the Ming dynasty, owing to the cruel change, dying under the wooden sticks became quite common. Nevertheless, this young official was so lucky that he managed to survive the severe 40 lashes and narrowly escape death though he was badly injured. Then he was

¹The Ming dynasty Emperor of China between 1505 and 1521.

²The imperial military secret police that served the emperors of the Ming dynasty in China.

³Flogging with a big stick at Court.

put into Jinyiwei Guard jail where people could hardly escape from death. Lucky enough, this young official remained alive and was banished. Although he was being hunted down by the Jinyiwei Guard on his way of banishing, again he miraculously survived. This young official later became one of the most legendary characters in Chinese history and one of the greatest contributors to the development of Chinese culture after Confucius⁴ and Mencius.⁵

This young official, the first person who was flogged in public with his pants off, is our main hero in this book, named Wang Yang-ming.

It is well known that names of ancient Chinese people were quite complicated. Normally there used to be a last name, a first name, a courtesy name and an alternative name for a person. Master Wang Yang-ming’s last name was Wang, his first name Shou-ren,⁶ courtesy name Bo’an, and alternative name Yang-ming. Back in ancient times, it was impolite to call others by their first name directly. So, everybody called him Master Yang-ming to show their respect. Until today we still follow the usual practice by calling him Wang Yang-ming or Master Yang-ming.

Wang Yang-ming may not be well known to today’s people, but yet 100 years ago. he was a household name. Master Yang-ming lived in the mid-Ming dynasty, which was 400–500 years ago from now. However, anyone who talks about Ming history would never miss him as he was such an important figure that without introducing him, you would never get a complete history of the Ming dynasty.

“Legendary” and “unique” are the two best words to describe and summarize the whole life of Master Yang-ming. “Legendary” refers to his fabled and unusual life and unbelievable experience with a lot of fantastic stories, while “unique” points out the fact that Master Yang-ming was a special person with his unique style recorded in the long history of China, like a solitary peak standing out among other ridges. Here are some fantastic stories from his daily life:

- (1) When he was 12, he made a wild statement that, instead of devoting his life to becoming a Zhuangyuan,⁷ he would rather “learn to be a sage.”
- (2) When he was 15, he went to the country border for military observation and practiced riding horses and shooting arrows. After coming back, he was bent on presenting the Emperor with his opinions on frontier defense.
- (3) When he was 17, he got married but disappeared on his wedding day.
- (4) After succeeding in the Imperial Examinations and being entitled Jinshi,⁸ he upheld justice and spoke frankly to the authorities. As a result, he was put into Jinyiwei Guard’s jail and almost beaten to death. After being released,
- (5) He was hunted down relentlessly.
- (6) He was banished to an extremely remote and deserted area. Faced with the threats of death, Wang finally figured out the way to be a sage.

⁴ A Chinese teacher, editor, politician, and philosopher of the Spring and Autumn period of Chinese history.

⁵ A Chinese philosopher who is the most famous Confucian after Confucius himself.

⁶ Wang Shou-ren is Wang Yang-ming’s original name.

⁷ The number one scholar in the Chinese Imperial Examinations.

⁸ One of the successful candidates in the highest Imperial Examinations.

- (7) Despite his frail, unhealthy condition, he commanded in the mountain and won every battle effortlessly.
- (8) He accidentally discovered a military *coup d'état* within the imperial family of Ming and promptly decided to confront the well-equipped troop of 100,000 soldiers with a motley crew of 10,000 men he gathered in haste. Within 10 days, he suppressed the riot and caught the enemy leader alive.
- (9) Not only was Yang-ming a military talent, but also a master of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism. It is alleged that his “*Dao Skills*” also reached a very high level.

Wang Yang-ming, a legendary and unique figure, is known as a talented military strategist, as well as a renowned philosopher, an educator, and a poet. He integrated all the personalities that were considered of the highest standard in ancient Chinese culture. Thus, in ancient times, Master Yang-ming gained a great reputation and was known as “the only perfect human-being in history” and “a man with real three eternities.” What does “three eternities” mean? It means that if a person could make contributions in the following three areas, he would live in people’s hearts forever. So, which three areas were these? “The establishment of virtues came first, followed by the achievements in his military performance, and after that was the proposal of philosophies.”⁹ In other words, the highest level a person could reach was the virtues to be imitated by his descendants; then came the achievements to be eulogized by others; and the last was a philosophy, an original ideology, to be studied and passed on. In short, “virtues,” “achievements,” and “philosophies” are the “three eternities.”

Throughout the long span of history, there appeared numerous heroes in every age. Some had virtues but failed to make achievements, some did make achievements but did not propose a philosophy, and some did propose a philosophy but might not have had virtues. It was overwhelmingly difficult to integrate the “three eternities” within one person. Nevertheless, Wang Yang-ming made it. He was a model of virtues, a grand achiever, and a master of philosophy. In his 57-year life, he realized the integration of the “three eternities,” which won him the name of “a man with real three eternities” and “the only perfect human-being in history.”

From the perspective of “virtues,” Yang-ming made up his mind to become a “sage” from his childhood. That was why he took sage as his benchmark for his behavior and set a good example of morality for us to follow.

From the perspective of “achievements,” he had military talent and made himself a military general. His military achievements actually saved the political destiny of the Ming dynasty.

From the perspective of “philosophy,” he is the most innovative ideologist and philosopher in Chinese history. Some of his theories such as “The Oneness of Knowing and Doing” as well as “Realizing the Original Knowledge” have had a profound influence on Chinese people and have changed the overall pattern of the development of Chinese intellectual history since the mid-Ming dynasty. His philosophies have been passed from generation to generation until now. Renowned educator Tao

⁹Quoted from Tso Chuan (Commentary on Spring and Autumn Annals by Zuo Qiu-ming): The 24th Year of Xiang Gong.

Xing-zhi believed in Wang Yang-ming’s philosophy of “The Oneness of Knowing and Doing” throughout his life. Tao Xing-zhi had formerly been named “Tao Wen-rui.” After absorbing Wang’s philosophy of “The Oneness of Knowing and Doing,” he was so impressed that he changed his name to express his admiration of Wang Yang-ming. First he named himself “Zhi-xing (知行, knowing and doing),” later he changed it into “Xing-zhi (行知, doing and knowing).” He even invented a Chinese character as his signature which looks like the combination of the two Chinese characters “知 (knowing)” and “行 (doing).” Wang’s theories attracted a large number of researchers who later established “the study of Wang Yang-ming’s theory.” His philosophies were even introduced to countries such as Japan, making indelible contributions to the development of Japanese intellectual history and the Meiji Restoration. Zhang Tai-yan once said, “Japanese reforms used Wang Yang-ming’s philosophies as their guidance.” In the book *The Philosophies of Yang-ming in Japan*, Japanese scholar Takase Wu Jiro pointed out that Yang-ming’s philosophies had laid the foundation for the source of literally all the ideas of our great reformers and activists, which demonstrated the feature of the study of Wang Yang-ming’s theory in Japan.

However, such a great man, a master of literary and military arts, and a paragon integrating “the three eternities” into one body, lived an extremely difficult life full of ups and downs.

Mencius once said, “Whenever Heaven invests a person with great responsibilities to the world, it first tries his resolve, exhausts his muscles and bones, starves his body, leaves him destitute, and disturbs his endeavors. In this way develops his patience and endurance, and conquers his weakness.” It is a perfect reflection of Yang-ming’s life. Political corruption enlightened his heart and his miserable life paved his way to become a sage. All of his experiences brought out his “legendary” and “unique” features and made him become a “real man” between Heaven and Earth with noble spirits, great achievements, a bright mind, and profound thoughts to enlighten the following generations.

Yang-ming’s era has passed away forever. But, the everlasting charm of historical figures and events remains from generation to generation due to the significance attached to them in modern times. Today, when we talk about Wang Yang-ming, we not only want to learn about his legendary experiences, but also want to feel and appreciate his extraordinary life, his generous mind, deep thoughts, and bright personality, which will of course inspire us to enhance the life realm of our own.

Now let’s review Master Yang-ming’s legendary life, starting from his miraculous birth.

During the reign of Ming Xianzong, there was a Wang family living in Yuyao County, Zhejiang Province. The family moved from Langya, Shandong Province during the Western Jin dynasty and was a renowned literary family in Yuyao. The master of the family was called Wang Lun, with Tian-xu as his Courtesy name. He was also alternatively named Zhu-xuan Weng¹⁰ because he had deep affection for bamboo and grew bamboo all around his house, so he called himself “Zhu-xuan

¹⁰Literal meaning: an old man living in a bamboo house.

Weng.” He was a literary scholar who liked reading and playing musical instruments. He had a son named Wang Hua, an even more talented and promising young man. For quite a while, everyone in the family was anxious about Zheng (Wang Hua’s wife), who had been pregnant for 14 months and was still not about to give birth to the baby. It worried the whole family, especially the hostess, Cen, who was so looking forward to the safe birth of the baby that she lost all her appetite for food and drink. One night, however, Cen had a beautiful dream of a gorgeous fairy who wore a piece of rainbow color cloth, rode on a cloud and sent a baby into her arms accompanied by a wonderful melody of fairy music. The moment she was about to stretch out her hands to take the baby, she was woken up by a sudden cry of the baby. Meanwhile, a real cry of a baby from the next room greeted her ears. Her 14-month-pregnant daughter-in-law finally delivered a baby boy. Everybody in the family was overwhelmed by the joy. Both Wang Lun and Cen believed that this baby was nothing ordinary but sent by the fairy. Thus, in order to respond to the cloud on which the fairy rode, Wang Lun named the newborn baby “Yun (cloud).” Accompanied with the news of the baby’s birth was the spread of Cen’s dream in the neighborhood. The neighbors believed in it so much that they thought it was an auspicious sign and thus named the house where the baby was born “the House of Auspicious Cloud.”

Wang Yun, the baby born in “the House of Auspicious Cloud,” was the man we later called Wang Yang-ming. The date he was born was the 30th of the ninth month of the Chinese Lunar Calendar,¹¹ in the eighth year of the reign of the Chenghua Emperor (October 31, 1472).

As almost every remarkable figure in Chinese history was born with a legend, Wang Yang-ming’s birth fits the pattern. It is impossible and unnecessary to verify whether there was really a “fairy who rode on a cloud playing a musical instrument” when Wang Yang-ming was born. But, one thing that can be sure is that Wang Yun was really an adorable boy. That was why his grandfather Wang Lun and his grandmother Cen treated him as the apple of their eyes and took extra care of him. Whenever Wang Lun read in the study, Wang Yun would accompany him and listen very carefully in silence. But gradually, something uneasy aroused the worry of the family. They thought that little Wang Yun was somehow different from other kids and that something was wrong with the boy since he still couldn’t speak at the age of five. The family started to worry that Wang Yun was a born deaf. Yet judging from his behavior in daily life, Wang Yun was actually a very brilliant child and was nothing like one born deaf. On account of this, Wang Lun paid even more attention to this grandson.

One day, Wang Yun was playing with other kids outside the gate when a monk passed by. The monk was tall and wore a sacred look on his face. He walked in front of Wang Yun, rubbed his head, and sighed, “What a brilliant kid! It’s such a pity that your god-granted talents are unraveled by your name!” His words happened to be caught by Wang Lun. He was startled at this and suddenly had an epiphany. Accordingly, he changed Wang Yun’s name into “Shou-ren (keep benevolence).” It was said that

¹¹On Chinese Lunar Calendar, the same way other dates are named in the whole book except for the ones with particular notes.

after changing to the name “Shou-ren,” Wang Yun started talking instantly. What did the monk mean by saying “your talents are unraveled by your name”? Let’s just talk about this. Based on his grandmother’s dream, the baby was sent by a fairy riding an auspicious cloud. There is an old saying in China that “the secret of heaven should never be disclosed.” However, the baby was named “Yun,” which “disclosed” the “secret of the heaven.” Furthermore, the word “Yun” in traditional Chinese (雲), written as the character of rain (雨) on top of the character cloud (云), is a homophone of “Yun (speaking).” If “rain” were put on top of “speaking,” how could it be possible for the child to speak? As for the new name “Shou-ren,” changed by his grandfather, its origin can be found in *The Analects of Confucius*—Weiling Gong, “Confucius said that one who is intelligent needs to keep his talents by benevolence or else he would lose them even if he has got them.” It reminds people that even if a person is talented, without benevolence he would not be able to keep his talents. The name “Shou-ren” represented his grandparents’ wish that the child should keep his talents with benevolence. Once the benevolence is kept, one is able to hold his talents so that he will become a man full of benevolence and spread out his love to the whole world.

Doubtlessly, there is no need to explore whether Wang Shou-ren did start talking after changing his name or not. The authenticity of the story itself is untraceable. It reflects, however, the fact that Wang Yang-ming was different from other children when he was young, and that he only started talking when he was 5 years old. And that’s all. No matter what happened to him, Wang Yun, now named Wang Shou-ren, could talk, which relieved the whole family. With the care of his family, Wang Yang-ming grew up healthily and happily and won Wang Lun’s special favor.

One day, Wang Lun was reading in the study and Wang Yang-ming stayed aside as usual. To Wang Lun’s surprise, his grandson could recite all the books he had read before! So Wang Lun asked, “When did you read all these books?” Wang Yang-ming answered, “Whenever grandfather read the books aloud, I tried to remember everything by heart. It’s just that I couldn’t speak then.” This astonished Wang Lun and made him firmly convinced that his grandson was an extraordinary talent sent by the fairy. Therefore, he became more proud of Wang Yang-ming’s intelligence and paid more attention to him.

At the age of 10, which was in 1481, Wang Yang-ming’s father Wang Hua was entitled Zhuangyuan (the first place) in the Imperial Examination and was appointed as an editor in the Imperial Academy. The next year, in order to fulfill his filial duties and take care of his father whenever needed, Wang Hua decided to take Wang Lun to Beijing to live with him. Wang Lun was quite delighted, of course, and decided to take Wang Yang-ming with him for the following reasons. First of all, as it was a long and exhausting trip from their hometown Yuyao to Beijing, on the one hand taking Yang-ming with him on the road, it would be much more enjoyable with the company of his intelligent grandson, and on the other hand the trip could broaden Wang Yang-ming’s horizons and enlarge his knowledge while watching the landscapes and observing the people and their lives on their way to the capital. Secondly, taking Wang Yang-ming to Beijing enabled him to live with his father so as to enjoy the pleasure of a family reunion of three generations. Last but not least, Beijing was such a prosperous

city where talents were gathered that Wang Yang-ming could not only increase his experience but also receive better education.

Thus, Wang Lun took his grandson Wang Yang-ming with him and went to Beijing. They traveled northward. When they reached Jinshan Temple in Zhenjiang, it was already late, so they decided to settle down at the temple where some of Wang Lun's old friends in Zhejiang held a dinner to treat them. With the bright moon hanging in the sky, the wind gently whispering, and the river and the sky being connected by the same hue, Wang Lun and his old friends felt a strong urge to compose poems after everyone drank three cups of wine. They were bowing their heads, twirling their beards, and whispering their verses but couldn't make their poems rhyme. At that moment, Wang Yang-ming blurted out a poem:

*Tiny is Jinshan Temple looking like a fist,
Beating the Weiyang sky in the river twist.
Drunk I am leaning against the moon hanging over Miaogaotai,
Playing the jade flute that blows through the cave of sleeping dragon beast.*

It is known to all that Jinshan Temple is now situated on the south bank of the Yangtze River.¹² But, in the ancient times, Jinshan was actually an island right in the middle of the river isolated from the bank. It didn't start to move toward the bank until the mid-Qing dynasty. Compared to the grand Yangtze River, Jinshan was just "about the size of a fist." Yet, it stood in the middle of the river so it seemed that it broke the river apart. That was why Yang-ming said, "Beating the Weiyang sky in the river twist." "Weiyang" refers to Yangzhou¹³ where Zhenjiang used to belong. "Miaogaotai" was on the top of Jinshan. Drunk, he was leaning against the moon hanging over Miaogaotai, playing the jade flute that blows through the cave of a sleeping dragon beast. What an elegant scene it was! This poem of Wang Yang-ming, in spite of the simple words, has extraordinary artistic conception that shows both broadness and grandness. It was not only pertinent to the scenery in front of them, but also to their fancy imagination. No wonder the poem amazed everyone present. One of them said to Wang Yang-ming, "What a remarkable talent you are! We are ashamed of ourselves! Look, Jinshan is in the moonlight, the moon shines hazily in the sky, but the mountain house blocks the moon, and the sky is far away from the water. Could you compose another poem on the theme 'The Mountain House Blocking the Moon' please?" Everybody could understand that this old man doubted this intelligent 11-year-old boy's talent and was suspicious that he had written the poem in advance. So he wanted Yang-ming to come up with a poem instantly. Beyond everyone's expectation, Wang Yang-ming chanted the following poem right after the old man requested it:

¹²Known in China as the Chang Jiang, the longest river in Asia and the third longest in the world.

¹³A prefecture-level city in central Jiangsu Province.

*With a closer mountain and a farther moon, the moon looks smaller,
Based on the scene we may see, the mountain is bigger;
Given a pair of eyes as big as the sky,
We may conclude that the mountain is smaller but the moon is bigger.*

In our daily life, the way we judge things mostly relies on the position we stand in. The fact that “the mountain is closer” whereas “the moon is farther” makes us believe the mountain is bigger than the moon. Although it is a “common sense” we get from our life, nevertheless, it is not the truth. If a person could have a pair of eyes “as big as the sky,” we can get a panoramic view of everything in the world. It is then natural for us to tell the wrongness of this common sense and acquire the truth. This poem of Wang Yang-ming was not only a visionary one with lofty meaning, but a reflection of his passion for breaking through the limits of common sense and for seeking the truth.

However, Wang Yang-ming was then only 11 years old and hadn’t received any formal education. The following year, when he was 12, his father Wang Hua hired a teacher to let Yang-ming receive systematic training on Confucian classics. During those years of schooling, the independent and bold traits in Wang Yang-ming’s personality were gradually displayed. Unlike other students who followed the teacher and the rules obediently, Wang Yang-ming would do something beyond others’ expectation. Sometimes he could be very naughty as he played with other students and played jokes on them. Thus, he was regarded as a “misbehaving” student. But other times, he sat alone and absorbed himself in his thoughts. His father Wang Hua was always worried about the fact that his son would become a person who only knew about boasting and grandstanding so he became stricter with him and often punished him for his wild behavior. However, every time he wanted to punish Yang-ming, the grandfather would stand up for his grandson. Grandfather was convinced that the child was just different and this smart and visionary child would definitely be a great person eventually.

At school, Wang Yang-ming once asked his teacher earnestly, “What is the first priority of life?” The teacher answered seriously, “The first priority of life is to study hard, and to be a Zhuangyuan like your father in the future.” Wang Yang-ming thought about it for a while and said, “I don’t think that being a Zhuangyuan is the most important thing.” The teacher then asked, “Well then, what do you think is the most important thing in one’s life?” Wang Yang-ming thought it over and answered with a serious look, “Studying hard and being a sage should be the top priority of life.” His father Wang Hua happened to pass by and overhear it. He responded with a smile, “Look at yourself! How much do you know about being a sage?”

It’s hilarious to hear “to be a sage” coming out from a 12-year-old child’s mouth. The so-called “sage” is the most valued personality trait one could hold in traditional

Chinese culture. Figures like Emperor Yao,¹⁴ Emperor Shun,¹⁵ Yu the Great¹⁶ of the Xia dynasty, Tang of Shang,¹⁷ King Wen of Zhou,¹⁸ King Wu of Zhou,¹⁹ Duke of Zhou,²⁰ Confucius, and Mencius can be called “sage.” These people are more than models of personalities; they are performers of cultural ideology and practitioners of bringing blessings to the people. Confucius once said that a sage should be able to “bring blessings to the people and serve the people.” Although 12-year-old Wang Yang-ming might not really have understood what a “sage” really was, “to be a sage” was the beginning of his wild ambition. At the time, he hadn’t entered the real society, but his question “what’s the first priority of life” itself clearly showed that young Wang Yang-ming had already stepped on his way to find the goal and meaning of life. In his later life, the question would reveal itself from time to time. He would again adopt his own way to answer the question with his own life experience.

It is obvious that from the above narratives we can conclude Wang Yang-ming was truly an “amazing child.” Normally, a fetus stays in its mother’s womb for 10 months²¹ before birth but he stayed there for 14 months. Usually children start talking when they are 1–2 years old but he couldn’t speak until 5. Most children are not as observant as he was, and his poem “With a closer mountain and a farther moon, the moon looks smaller …” composed at the age of 11 was the best evidence showing his keen observation. Also, ordinary children are obedient but he was more of an individual thinker than a “good” child. Unlike others he was ready to stand out by asking thought-provoking questions like “What’s the first priority of life?” The questions might sound childish but exhibited the beginning of his independent thinking.

Except for the events mentioned above, his childhood was nothing different from other children. He was naughty and a little bit troublesome, like any other little boy of his age. It was recorded that Wang Yang-ming was full of mischief. To be exact, he was fond of making jokes and playing tricks on others. According to the literature, he was “bold and unrestricted,” which means that he refused to be restricted by regulations and often surprised others. In his daily life, he was taught by his strict father and loved by his indulgent grandparents. Comparably speaking, he grew up in a favorable environment. He was born in a scholarly family. His grandfather, a country gentleman, was fond of reading. His father was a Zhuangyuan. In such family surroundings, he was greatly exposed to poetry and literature, without playing poker

¹⁴ A legendary Chinese ruler, according to various sources, one of the Three Sovereigns and the Five Emperors.

¹⁵ A legendary leader of ancient China, regarded by some sources as one of the Three Sovereigns and Five Emperors.

¹⁶ A legendary ruler in ancient China famed for his introduction of flood control, inaugurating dynastic rule in China by founding the Xia dynasty, and for his upright moral character.

¹⁷ The first king of the Shang dynasty in Chinese history.

¹⁸ King of Zhou during the late Shang dynasty in ancient China.

¹⁹ The first king of the Zhou dynasty of ancient China.

²⁰ A member of the Zhou dynasty who played a major role in consolidating the kingdom established by his elder brother King Wu.

²¹ Ten obstetric months (there are 28 days in one obstetric month).

or mahjong. In a word, Wang Yang-ming did grow up under the influence of literature. He lived with his grandfather after birth. They played together and studied together. What a loving and moving scene it was! A good family environment would have a profound impact on the growth of a child. As the sayings go, “One takes on the attributes of one’s associates (If you live with a lame person you will learn to limp)” and “Fleabane living in hemp is straight with no holding,” both of which emphasize the important impact of environment on a person’s development. Within a family, parents are always the first teachers of a child. As Wang Yang-ming grew up, the tolerance and love he received from his grandfather was a perfect buffer against the strictness of his father, enabling him to have a natural and healthy development. The environment he grew up in had an inestimable influence on his later achievements. After growing up and becoming an adult, he published his views on how to educate children:

Most children like playing and hate restriction. Like a sprout, if it grows comfortably it would grow up healthily, but if it is blocked in its growth, it would perish. Education is a similar process which requires encouragement. Children need to develop interest in order to improve. It’s like being nourished by spring rain and gentle wind, in which all trees would grow naturally and healthily. If their interests are neglected, it’s like growing in frosty weather that would only lead to their withering.

The quotation means that most children love playing and hate being restricted as far as the natural disposition of children is concerned. They are like new sprouts that would grow exuberantly and freely in a comfortable and growth-promoting environment. But in contrast, if they grow with a stone pressing upon them, they would never grow comfortably and freely, let alone developing into a large tree. Thus, parents need to make sure that they take their children’s dispositions into account when they try to educate their children. With good guidance, parents can intrigue their children’s interest in knowledge and make them willing to learn. If they feel interested in learning by themselves, they will grow healthily and naturally like trees nourished by sunshine and rainfall. On the other hand, if children are over-restricted, their dispositions will be twisted like trees suffering from frosty weather, and will surely be doomed to “wither.”

These words best conclude Wang Yang-ming’s personal experience. They have had a thought-provoking influence on education today. It is more often than not that parents want their children to have a bright future and tend to push their own will on their children instead of letting them have their own thought. They deprive their children of their time for playing, and force them to play the piano today, to practice drawing tomorrow, to take part in math competition the day after tomorrow, and so on. In the end, their children would not have any interest in anything. On account of this, it would be better to let children have chances to show their dispositions rather than strictly arranging their activities. To cultivate a child’s interest in learning, parents should start from themselves and create a studious environment for the child. It is rather difficult for a child to be interested in learning if he/she grows up in a family where grown-ups are playing poker or mahjong all the time.

In this respect, Wang Yang-ming was lucky. He was not only born into a literary family with a studious atmosphere, but also lived in an environment where his

dispositions were freely developed and where he was led on a right path to success. All those “amazing” stories about his childhood couldn’t totally prove that he was a gifted person. All his talents actually were the reflection of his education received in an excellent family atmosphere.

However, at the age of 15, Wang Yang-ming left home abruptly. Why did he leave and what on earth would he do next?

(Translated by *Cai Liang*; Proofread by *Wang Xiao-lu*)

1.2 An Extraordinary Youth

In the first part of this chapter, we have learned about some “extraordinary” anecdotes surrounding the young Wang Yang-ming, one of which was his great ambition to be a “sage” through his study even at the early age of 12. An ambition is something that one longs for and chases after, and interestingly, in practice people tend to become what they expect to be. In this sense, an ambition always counts for much, with which one’s life turns out to be marked by significant events.

Though Wang Yang-ming’s big idea “Studying hard and being a sage should be the top priority of life” was then teased by his father Wang Hua, yet it stopped being a tease and his open-minded father did not go far in deriding his whimsical desires. For Yang-ming, his intention to be a “sage” became even stronger with his father’s negative poke. Then what is a “sage”? Not yet clearly defined in his mind, he vaguely pictured that a sage could, at least, protect his country and people from being attacked by outsiders, and meanwhile lead his people to live peacefully and in contentment. Thereafter, this vision guided him to study the art of war and practice martial arts while he was keeping a sharp eye on the border of the Ming dynasty of his age.

One day in the fall when Yang-ming was 15, he, accompanied by two young houseboys, was nowhere to be found. Thinking that he was only being naughty to kill his time somewhere for a couple of days, his father did not show much concern about it at first. However, days had passed without any trace of him before his family got worried and started to look for him everywhere. The search went on for over a month before he eventually came back, thin and swarthy, like a swordsman with a sword by the waist. Where did the 15-year-old go? It turned out that he went to the northern frontier to investigate the well-known Juyong Three Passes.

Here are a few words on the background. The Ming dynasty had replaced the Yuan dynasty, though its northern border was frequently harassed by the restless Mongolian tribes under the leadership of the “Little Prince” Dayan Khan. Gradually, they grew strong enough to provoke Ming’s troops in the northern boundary and quite a few Ming high-ranking military officers fought to death at their hands in Ganzhou. It happened when Yang-ming was 15 and it shamed him deeply. As for him, to be a sage meant, first of all, to be in a position with the power of defending his country. Then examining the terrain of the border should be a first move. His action following his thought, he made a field trip to Juyong Three Passes, actually referring to the three passes: Juyong Pass, Zijing Pass, and Daoma Pass, which used to be

barriers and strategic forts against infringement from the northern minority invaders. Ascending Juyong Pass which had been renovated in 1368, and overlooking the rolling Great Wall and the massive green mountain ranges all around, Wang Yang-ming spontaneously had a strong sense of macho and heroic spirit, thinking if he were assigned to guard the frontier, he would definitely block the enemies out to ensure the people’s safety. Legend has it that he was then “having a strong passion for governing or ruling a country.” That means, militarily, he would safeguard the boundary to guarantee his people’s safety; politically, he would maintain a sound and stable environment for individuals from all walks of life to enjoy peace and prosperity.

As a 15-year-old boy, Yang-ming did amaze us with his extraordinary aspiration. Unlike Chen Zi-ang, who ascended the Great Wall, sighing his verse, “The sky and earth forever last, Here and now I alone shed tears.” to express his frustration since his talents were not being recognized. Conversely, Yang-ming, standing on the top of the Juyong Pass of the Great Wall, was occupied with an idea of how he could put his thoughts into practice and do something for his country. In the following month, he engaged himself with going inside the Pass to investigate all the necessary details: such as the details about the Mongolian minorities, including their ethnicity, history, customs, and traditions; about how their ancestors had been defending the minorities in history; about how they could make an effective counterattack when abruptly invaded. His practice was not confined to the above activities; furthermore, he went in person to inspect the geographic landforms, geographic situation of mountains and rivers, and road transports as well as the military defense systems around Juyong Three Passes. He did not satisfy himself with oral interviews, but rather went alone outside the Passes to get to know the minorities, and to learn their horseback archery, and their arts of chasing and shooting. With his perseverance and strenuous training, he quickly mastered the skills of defending and even won respect among the young ethnic minorities, who were greatly impressed by his performance within such a short time. After 1 month or so, he went back to Beijing.

Back in Beijing, he was still occupied with his “ambition of ruling a country or a government.” The following year, at the age of 16, he experienced a refugee riot led by Liu Tong (alternative name Liu Qian-jin) and Shi Long (alternative name Shi He-shang) at the intersection of three provinces: Huguang,²² Henan, and Shanxi, due to year-to-year famine. These rebellions established a kingdom called “Han” beginning with a reign called “De Sheng” and gathered rioters under the yellow flag as their banner, whose momentum really frightened the imperial family in Beijing and its troops. At this, Yang-ming hit upon an idea, “Isn’t it a good chance for me to realize my ambition?” Locking himself in his study, Yang-ming wrote a voluminous memo to the Emperor, expressing his military thoughts and strategies for defeating the enemies based on his inspection of Juyong Pass. He even requested the Emperor to authorize him the right to lead the troops to conquer the rebellions. Finishing his memorial and handing it to his father in the hope of submitting it to the Emperor, he again got a sharp rebuke from his father.

²²Today’s Hunan and Hubei Provinces.

Studying the art of war, inspecting the frontier, and practicing horseback archery are what Yang-ming had assumed was the way to become a sage, and by which he was naïve as to imagine contributing his wisdom to his country through submitting his military tactics to the Emperor of his age. To his surprise, he was severely scolded even by his father, which, like cold water, drew him back to the track of reading books though it could not extinguish the flame of his great passion.

At that time in the Ming dynasty, many scholars worshiped Zhu Xi²³ as the greatest sage after Confucius and Mencius. Hence, Zhu Xi's thoughts became popular and his books were a must read. Then Yang-ming envisioned again, "I can be a sage as long as I can have a good command of his books, who knows?" Embraced by such a surmise, he turned to a comprehensive study of the great thinker.

Of Zhu Xi's thoughts, the most noted and popular one was his concept "Gewu Zhizhi" (achieving knowledge by investigating the world). So, how to interpret the idea? Different scholars had differing views. As for Zhu Xi, he referred to the Chinese character "ge" literally as "wrestling," while indicating another Chinese character "wu" as an "object." When wrestling, one has to have face-to-face combat with an "object." And this face-to-face combat leads us to a comprehensive understanding of the rival (the object itself) and results in fully mastering the details of the enemy (essence of the object)—that is, "zhizhi" in Chinese, which literally means "achieving sagehood or knowledge," or putting it another way, "expanding knowledge by face-to-face study or investigation of the object in practice." So Zhu Xi's philosophy "Gewu Zhizhi" conveys the idea that to understand a certain object in one's daily life, what one needs to do is to study and investigate it until he becomes wholly omnipotent by accumulating knowledge and experience of it. But in a complicated world, how can one study and understand everything? Zhu Xi held the belief that, though individually things are different, in essence they have a universal law by nature, which he categorized as the most general and dominant truth and termed it "universal law," and that each individual object has its particular internal "law" that distinguishes it from others, which he termed as "specific law." To put it simply, Zhu Xi thought that each object has a unique trait by which to label itself, and it is this trait that is its "law." What one needs to do is to "investigate" it with non-stop effort, day by day, one by one, until one day, he will be suddenly enlightened by the whole thing he has observed or investigated, and will approach "the universal law." And only then can he reach the state of being a "sage" full of knowledge.

This philosophy "Gewu Zhizhi" was very popular then and Yang-ming took it for granted without any doubts. According to Yang-ming, as everything has its "specific law" and "universal law" as well, then every plant, be it a blade of grass or a flower, should have its own "specific law" or "universal law." One can be a "sage" so long as one "investigates" the "specific law" of an object until he or she completely "masters its universal law." To become a sage, why not just begin with "gewu"? He then discussed with his intimate friend Qian, who shared common ground with him and also desired to be a sage, about "investigating" the bamboo in his family garden. He

²³ A Song dynasty Confucian scholar who was the leading figure of the School of Principle and the most influential rationalist Neo-Confucian in China.

persuaded his friend, “Since we both want to be sages through investigation, let’s start with observing the bamboo here. You take the lead and just study and see what supreme universal law we can find.” Qian went to “study” the bamboo, face to face, for three whole days, only to be found breaking down from over “investigation.” Yang-ming concluded that it might be Qian’s physical weakness that resulted in his failure of “gewu” and decided to try the “bamboo investigation” himself. Likewise, face to face, he began to “study” the bamboo. One day passed, yet nothing was found; 2 days passed, and still nothing about the law was discovered; 7 days passed, he was only to be found breaking down like his friend. Frustrated, he sighed to Qian, “How can we both become sages? If it is difficult even for one thing, how can we bring ourselves to investigate all the things in the world?”

The failure of the “bamboo investigation” happened when Yang-ming was 16 (he lived in Beijing then), which, by the way, had a great impact on the rest of his life. We can find the following two pieces of evidence. One is that though he followed Zhu Xi’s conception of “Gewu Zhizhi” and put it into practice, he only found it unworkable. While continuing his pursuit to be a sage, he began to doubt Zhu Xi’s theory, feeling that it is an unsuitable approach to the realm of sages, and as a result, this incident carried seeds for his later work “The Philosophy of Mind.” The other is the impact of the incident on his later health. Historical records show that when he grew up Yang-ming was frequently troubled with coughing up blood, which seemed rooted in the incident of “the 7-day bamboo investigation.”

You can imagine how frustrated and depressed the 16-year-old youth was! His aspiration to be a sage guided him to try a series of hands-on practices—going outside of the pass, drilling in horseback archery, submitting a memorial to the Emperor—in all of which he found disapproval from his father. His aspiration to be a sage led him to “observe laws through investigation” under the influence of Zhu Xi, but only ended up breaking down from over-investigation. He was then so confused and helpless that his grandfather and father, both worrying about his going off on wild fancy and becoming a parents’ anxiety and social burden, considered finding him a wife to change the situation. So the next year in 1488 when Yang-ming was 17, his father made him marry Miss Zhu, the daughter of Zhu Rang (Courtesy name Yanghe), a top official in charge of provincial civil affairs at Buzheng Si in Jiangxi Province.

In ancient China, tradition has it that the bridegroom-to-be needs to provide a wedding dowry for the bride-to-be’s family in person before the wedding ceremony. Yang-ming’s father-in-law, a native from Yuyao like Yang-ming, lived in Nanchang then since he was in charge of provincial civil affairs there. In order to deliver the dowry personally and marry Miss Zhu, Yang-ming went to Nanchang from Shaoxing in July (his family had then moved to Shaoxing from Yuyao). Attracted by Yang-ming as such a handsome and charming youth, the would-be father-in-law was only too happy beyond words to set the wedding date within days. However, the very wedding day surprised all the people unexpectedly in that the groom was nowhere to be found.

At the wedding party, all the guests had gathered and when it was the auspicious time for the ceremony the groom was found to be missing. How could a wedding

be held without the groom? Mr. Zhu Rang, cool as it was in fall, sweated all over with anxiety and was at his wits' end as to a solution. He had no alternative but to send servants to look for him everywhere, wondering why Yang-ming chose the critical moment to vanish as there was not any trace of his disappearance. Was there any possibility that the young man was not satisfied with his daughter and chose purposefully to escape the marriage? But it could not be the reason, for his daughter was so beautiful and charming. Then could it be that he ignored him as he was too much occupied with official business? It could not be possible either as Yang-ming had already expressed his understanding earlier. Then could it be that something unexpectedly bad happened to him when he was hanging around, since he was totally new here. If so, he could not bring himself to face his friend Wang Hua. Struggling and tangled with this, he sent more people to look for Yang-ming. But for the whole night, Yang-ming remained out of sight until the sun rose high the next morning, he was found to come back home alone, smiling with a relaxed look.

Then where had he been? The story goes that when all the people in his bride's family were busy preparing for the ceremony, he had nothing to do and went out to hang around Nanchang City aimlessly. Unconsciously, he approached the Guangrun Gate, the southwestern gate of Nanchang City, which is the prosperous business center of the city. Outside the city gate, the famous Nanpu Pavilion was built over the Zhangjiang River. Today Nanpu Pavilion has become far more famous because it is situated close to Tengwang Pavilion, or the Pavilion of Prince Teng, whose splendor and majesty was lauded by Wang Bo, a poet in early Tang dynasty. In one of his masterpieces, "Preface to the Pavilion of Prince Teng," he described it as follows:

In the morn the rosy clouds from the southern shore flit across the painted pillars. In the eve the rain in the western mountains are drawn in by the red curtains.

Inside the Guangrun Gate was a famous Taoist temple named "Tiezhu Gong."²⁴ Yang-ming idled aimlessly that day, wishing to cast a glance at the Zhangjiang River and Nanpu Pavilion. But when he passed by the Tiezhu Gong, noticing an old Taoist inside, a smile on his face, sitting in meditation in such peaceful serenity and leisure with a gesture "focusing on his breath to silence his mind" that he was totally attracted and drawn inside out of curiosity and fell into conversation with the Taoist, who happened to be talkative. Yang-ming was dramatically impressed by his volubility and formula for fitness, totally unaware of the passing time.

The incident that his very wedding night saw his going on chitchatting with a Taoist so far as to forget his wedding day was often cited as another "extraordinary" anecdote. Unimaginably queer as it is, yet it is so natural to Yang-ming. Firstly, he had never stopped questing for the path to become a sage and kept feeling depressed by his failure in the "bamboo investigation" that let him down so much, so this talk with a Taoist naturally illuminated a way to pursuing his dream again, for the regimen and meditation reminded him of his old ambition. Though still vague about

²⁴This name was later changed to "Wanshou Gong (Longevity Abbey)" and was destroyed in the period of the Cultural Revolution. Nanchang 21 Middle School was built on it.

what a sage looked like, he was sure the Taoism of regimen and meditation could lead him to his goal. Secondly, though a 17-year-old youth, he was in frail condition and frequently troubled by coughing, a never-curable ailment resulting from the “bamboo investigation.” So the old Taoist’s words concerning regimen and meditation in keeping healthy aroused his great interest such that he missed a critical moment of his life. However, it has to be mentioned that this bond to Taoism, the first time after he grew up, exerted remarkable influence on Yang-ming’s later career, not only on his way of thinking, but also on his way of keeping fit, both physically and mentally, both to a great extent.

After the wedding, the newly married couple stayed with the bride’s family in Nanchang for one and a half years. In December of the following year, when Yang-ming was 18, he took his wife back to his hometown of Yuyao. The past 6 or 7 years before his marriage only witnessed Yang-ming’s numerous efforts of trying to become a sage, yet they were only found to be in vain, and even worse he was left in a frail condition. Now Yang-ming had to take a very practical move since he was old enough to attend the imperial examinations. In an era when achieving everything was decided by a set of imperial examinations, Yang-ming had no alternatives if he cherished his lifelong pursuit of “ruling a country or a government.”

In 1492 when Yang-ming was 21, he successfully passed the provincial examination and became a Juren, a candidate qualified for a higher level national examination. Then he moved to Beijing, on the one hand to attend to his father, meanwhile on the other hand, to prepare for the following year’s national examination. If he succeeded, he could be a Jinshi, a candidate qualified for the highest imperial exam and would be assigned a position in government. Yang-ming worked hard and was confident and determined to attain the goal. Frequently he was seen to stay up so late that his father, worried about his health, had to order the servants to take away the candles from his study. However, Yang-ming would choose to go on reading by lamplight and stay up after his father fell into deep sleep.

The talent he was born with, combined with his diligence, would naturally help him achieve his goal of becoming a Jinshi. However, out of all expectations, the road turned out to be tortuous and he failed the national examination the following year when he took it. The reasons can be attributed to himself and other factors. As for himself, he studied hard indeed, but the books he selected for preparation were Confucian Six Classics and sub-history records, which served as a good channel for cultivation of Chinese culture and one’s manners, but not accorded with the requirements of Imperial Examinations. The other reasons are hard to tell, but it was most likely that someone was jealous of his talents.

It was recorded in documents that, on hearing of his failure for Jinshi, his friends and acquaintances naturally came to comfort him. Li Dong-yang, Zaixiang, in power at that time, a leading literati and enjoying a very high reputation among the men of letters, mocked Yang-ming with an ironic tone, “Even if you failed this year, you are bound to come out first in the palace examination next time with your talent. Now I’d like to test you with an essay entitled ‘Reflection on the next Zhuangyuan’, how about that?” The people present could easily sense the sarcasm, for it was just like the way we ask a loser who failed to pass the entrance examination for higher

education today to talk freely about his/her future admission to top universities like Qinghua University or Peking University. What an embarrassment!

However, Yang-ming ignored the irony as he had already had such experience like writing a poem on the spot at 11. Now maturing into a self-possessed and confident youth, he calmly took a brush to compose another on-the-spot essay at one stretch (what a pity, this article is untraceable). His response, it was said, amazed all the scholars and officials present, “Genius! Talent!” At this someone envied, “this guy is really talented, but if he were picked as the top one in the examination and assigned to be a top official, could there be any place for us in the imperial palace?”. The dark side of human nature—jealousy of the talented—has long been there, and Yang-ming failed again for the same reason in his second Imperial Examination 3 years later, though he was gifted.

In this chapter, a picture of “an extraordinary youth” of Wang Yang-ming is presented. Now let’s summarize his extraordinary character. (1) From what has been discussed earlier, we can see that Wang Yang-ming went out to inspect Juyong Three Passes at the age of 15 through a very unique way of putting his ideas into practice, during which he was invisible for a month, and this “disappearance” was an “extraordinary” escape; (2) His “Bamboo Study” at the age of 16 turned out to be another example of “extraordinary” practice in that he wanted to apply Zhuxi’s Philosophy of “Gewu Zhizhi” by studying bamboo for 7 days himself, even if it was not in accordance with Zhuxi’s original intention; (3) At the age of 17, he made his wedding ceremony again an “extraordinary” one, for the groom was nowhere to be found on the very wedding day; (4) He was made to write an onsite essay entitled “Reflection on the next Zhuangyuan” by Zaixiang Li Dong-yang after Yang-ming failed the Imperial Examination at the age of 22, but he proved to us what an “extraordinary” top scholar he was! (5) Later, he was sent to Longchang and was confronted with the threat of death, he simply lay down in the coffin to feel what death was like. Can we again call it an “extraordinary” death experience?

In fact, Wang Yang-ming’s whole life was filled with too many such “extraordinary” events, and these “extraordinary” cases just tell us what kind of person Yang-ming was: fully independent, greatly confident, and remarkably competent in putting things into practice in person, which not only shows his unique character, but also his aboveboard personality.

His failure in the Imperial Examination at 22 was indeed a setback, but Yang-ming did not quit. His failure did not stop him from becoming a sage and he always tried his way to reach his goal through his “extraordinary” approach in his life.

And his initial goal of being a Jinshi was reached 6 years later when he was 28.
(Translated by *Zhang Zhen-mei*; Proofread by *Wu Hui-qin*)

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Chapter 2

Learning “Saint Theory”



2.1 A Maverick

At the age of 22, Wang Yang-ming failed in the Imperial Examination in the national capital for the degree of Jinshi. The Imperial Examination was the essential path for the educated at that time to their dreams and career ambitions, so failure should be a real blow to everyman who would have considered their efforts for years as null. But Wang Yang-ming, for whom the failure was not a big deal, stayed confident. Man proposes and God disposes. Wang once mentioned that “people view a flop in the civil examination inglorious while I believe that indignity is the depression from the failure.”

However, it is hard to believe that the flunk exerted no impact on Wang Yang-ming. In his time, “job opportunities” were far from various and abundant. Getting a degree in the Imperial Examination and starting a career in government was the most decent, respected, and convenient means to achieve one’s ambition and aspiration. Therefore, disappointment after the examination drove him back to his hometown. It has already been mentioned in the previous chapter that Wang Yang-ming’s family had moved from Yuyao to Shaoxing, but Yuyao was his birthplace, and what’s more, his friends, relatives, and father-in-law were all in Yuyao, so he went back and forth between the two places.

Generally, people might not discredit the setback in the civil examination if Wang Yang-ming had devoted himself to the preparation of the next exam after returning. To their surprise, he didn’t throw himself into study materials or model essays but to nature instead.

Longquan Mountain in Yuyao has been a famous scenic area to date. There used to be a Longquan Temple in the mountain where Wang Yang-ming invited friends to compose verses and enjoy the landscape when he was in Yuyao. Magnificent scenery in Jiangnan¹ soothed his mind, broadened his horizons, and invigorated his poetry, which made him a renowned poet then.

¹A region south of the Yangtze River.

After a period of idyllic life, Wang Yang-ming realized that his pursuit was not to be a poet but a sage. Indulgence in landscape and poetry was departure from his original intention. Reflection on his past life bolstered his will to “study to become a sage,” so he left the poetry club and friends in Yuyao and went back to Beijing.

In Beijing, Wang Yang-ming was still full of contradiction and anguish. On the one hand, he held that his first priority was to be a sage, not a government official. Since his adolescence, his explorations, trials, and practices on the pathway to becoming a sage had twisted and turned and had brought him pain and confusion. On the other hand, another civil examination in the capital 3 years later was pressing. He had to again prepare for the examination with conflicts between the ideal and reality. Although detailed historic records on his second exam at the age of 25 are hard to find, it is certain that he failed. Besides obstacles placed in his way by officials who were jealous of his talent, lack of full preparation might also be an important reason for his second failure.

Consecutive flops in the Imperial Examination might destroy ordinary people or scare them off. But Wang Yang-ming was maverick because he didn’t quit (he knew that the exam was the threshold for his aspiration), though neither did he concentrate on preparation. He looked more like a chairwarmer. It was not until the age of 28 when he participated in the examination for the third time that Wang Yang-ming was entitled Jinshi. In about a decade from the age of 24–5 years after the third exam, he was never deterred from the road to becoming a sage and “redid” all the trials he had taken before he was 22.

The first trial was the study of military strategies. The second flop in the civil examination didn’t lead Wang Yang-ming to self-pity or concentration on exam preparation. Instead, he found himself addicted to the art of war. He collected extant works on warcraft and read them with annotations. He became so obsessed that every time he had visitors, he would talk about military strategies. According to the local customs, hosts would entertain their guests with snacks like peanuts and seeds. Wang Yang-ming used the snacks to present his tactics on embattling and explained them with excitement like nobody was watching. After getting the degree of Jinshi, he wasn’t designated an official but was sent to the Ministry of Works for internship. During that period, he was assigned to supervise the building of the tomb of Wang Yue, a member of the nobility. Wang Yue was born in Xun, a county of the Henan Province. He was a general and was promoted to the Shangshu² of Bing Bu.³ His tomb was built by the central government because of his high status as “the Earl of Weining.” For others, supervision of tomb building was not a big job at all, but Wang Yang-ming treated it with seriousness and innovation. He organized tomb builders into basic military units and trained them according to military practices. Laborers were required to follow special working hours and work in collaboration. Spare time was used for military exercise and practice in embattling. Interestingly, a military means of management was rewarded by high work efficiency. The tomb was completed on time with good quality. Wang Yang-ming refused remuneration

²Minister.

³Ministry of War in feudal China.

from Wang Yue's family and finally kept the sword of Wang Yue as a memorial. It's said that he had had a dream before the assignment in which Wang Yue gave him a bow and arrow as a gift.

The second trial was the re-study of the classics of Zhu Xi, especially theories and practices on "Gewu Zhizhi." Wang Yang-ming once believed that the problems about "ge zhuzi"⁴ when he was 16 might lie in the lack of "proper sequence" suggested by Zhu Xi. Therefore, he strictly followed the "sequence" this time, but it appeared to have little effect. What was worse, he suffered from a severe relapse due to excessive mental efforts. He had to abandon Zhu Xi's Gewu Theory for a second time and sighed, "a sage's words and deeds may not be applicable to all," which again, indicated his doubts on Zhu Xi's theories.

Seeking a therapy for his relapse turned him to Taoism, his third trial. After his internship in Gong Bu,⁵ Wang Yang-ming was sent to the Huai'an⁶ region for a legal case review as an official in Xing Bu.⁷ He was quite industrious and finished his mission ahead of schedule. Then he visited Jiuhua Mountain, one of the best-known scenic spots in China and also a holy place for Buddhism and Taoism. He possibly got some "inherited teachings" from the masters of Taoism during his visit. From his verses and articles, we can find that Wang Yang-ming at that time had the idea of becoming a hermit. The strenuous task plus a relapse worsened his cough to hemoptysis. In his second year in-service (1502 when Wang Yang-ming was 31), he had to ask the central government for sick leave. Back in Shaoxing, he found himself a cave in Kuaiji Mountain and named it "Yang-ming Dongtian" where he practiced breathing exercises of Taoism. Undoubtedly, the purpose of his practice was for health recovery, but as time went on, it was said that Wang Yang-ming was able to "forecast" based on his self-cultivation and meditation. It is said that one day when Wang Yang-ming was sitting in the cave, he suddenly asked his servant to welcome visitors outside and told him the number of people, their names, and location. The servant was surprised to see four people just as his master described halfway to the mountain. There are quite a number of similar stories of Wang Yang-ming being enlightened by Taoism. We needn't be too serious on whether they are authentic, but one thing for sure is that people who knew Wang Yang-ming well thought highly of his self-cultivation. Later when he began to give lectures on his theories, a student wanted to consult him on Taoism but was turned down. Wang Yang-ming considered his cultivation "not truly Taoism, but dallying with the spirit."

As for his fourth trial, Wang Yang-ming also showed his strong interest in Buddhism alongside Taoism, especially the thoughts and methodology of Zen. It was said that in the second year (1503, when Wang Yang-ming was 32) since he had gained the capability of "precognition," he stayed in Hangzhou for some time to recuperate,

⁴Bamboo investigation.

⁵Ministry of Works in feudal China.

⁶Formerly called Huaiyin until 2001, a prefecture-level city in central Jiangsu Province of Eastern China.

⁷Ministry of Penalty in feudal China.

and frequented temples like Hupao Temple and Jingci Temple.⁸ Once he learnt that a Zen monk had shut himself into practice austerity for 3 years without speaking or opening his eyes. Wang Yang-ming was quite curious and went to visit the monk. At his first glance, Wang Yang-ming called out to the monk “Monk, what are you blah blah talking about all day? What do you keep your eyes open watching all day?” It should be noted that the monk had already been in retreat with his eyes closed and mouth shut for 3 years. However, Wang Yang-ming asked what he talked about and watched all day, where lay Zen (the Buddhist allegorical word or gesture). At this the monk was so astonished that he opened his eyes and conversed with Wang. Wang asked him whether he had family and the monk said that his mother was still alive. “Do you miss her?” asked Wang Yang-ming. “How can I not do so?” replied the monk. Wang Yang-ming was impressed and talked with him on Confucianism. It was human nature to long for the family. The elimination of love for the family was devoid of humanity. The monk wept after listening to his words and packed for home the next day.

The words to the monk were the true feelings of Wang Yang-ming himself. When he cultivated himself in the cave, he had achieved a profound state of Taoism and had the idea of being a Taoist priest. Nevertheless, images of his grandmother and his father appeared in his mind now and then (his mother died when he was 13 and his grandfather, Wang Lun, passed away when he was 19). It was love and care for his family that prevented him from acting on his intention of leaving home. His shouting at the monk actually revealed his profound understanding of Zen Buddhism. His conversation with the monk in Hupao Temple was a verification of whether his own feelings were common in the real world.

From the abovementioned trials and stories, we can determine at least two traits of Wang Yang-ming’s character. Firstly, he was a man with persistence and determination. He vowed to become a sage at the age of 12 and held onto that into his 30s despite various setbacks and hardships. All his trials, such as the practices on riding and fencing, the study on battling and military strategies, and cultivation on Taoism and Buddhism, were conducted for his ultimate goal of being a sage. His persistence and determination guided and enriched his life and led him to a grand spiritual world. His aspiration was further fortified after he persuaded the monk to go back home. Secondly, he had a strong will of practice. Setting the goal at the age of 12, he thought that a sage should at least be capable of defending the country and protecting the people. He was then valiant in “repelling the barbarians in the north on horseback” outside Juyong Three Passes alone. When studying Zhu Xi’s thoughts of “Gewu Zhizhi,” he followed through in the “bamboo investigation.” He began to cultivate the rules of Taoism after listening to a regimen from Taoist priests. He was not satisfied with his writing at first. By diligent practice in Nanchang, he established himself in Chinese calligraphy. His poetry was significantly improved in the club during his stay in Yuyao, and he was abreast of leaders in poetry in his time. He used seeds and laborers in practicing battling when he studied military strategies.

⁸The second prominent Buddhist temple after Lingyin Temple beside West Lake in Hangzhou, China.

All of these exemplified his ability of practice. Wang Yang-ming valued the transfer of theories to action and was also good at turning action into knowledge, which laid foundation for his thoughts of “The Oneness of Knowing and Doing.”

After 32 years of twists and turns, Wang Yang-ming eventually found his path to sagehood, which made Confucianism the central philosophy of benevolence and righteousness. Being a sage was about the realm of morality, and the life of a sage was about rules of ethics. The high realm of morality was “oneness of all in the world,” and the noble life was “performing great deeds and assisting the commonage.” From 1503 when he was 32, Wang Yang-ming ended wondering on Buddhism and Taoism, and set his thoughts on Confucianism. He respected Confucianism as the “philosophy of sage” and became a hardened follower and practitioner. He emphasized the significance of building aspiration and considered it the root of knowledge and life. Only through the guidance of aspiration could life be meaningful and colorful. He formally accepted disciples after 34 and gave lectures on the “philosophy of sage” and “sagehood,” which attracted many aspiring youngsters. In the same year, he met a man named Zhan Ruoshui and they became close friends. Zhan was from Zengcheng, Canton Province and was obsessed with the “philosophy of sage” too. They exchanged thoughts and ideas, and appreciated each other. The friendship with Zhan anchored Wang Yang-ming’s belief in sagehood.

Hardships and setbacks Wang Yang-ming had endured since 12 paved his way to sagehood. After 34, he met a bosom friend and started to receive disciples and give lessons on his thoughts. Continuing to do so seemed a safe and smooth way to be a respected thinker or philosopher.

However, the year 1505 was doomed to be unusual for the 34-year-old Wang Yang-ming and for the Ming dynasty. In that year, the death of Emperor Zhu You-tang (at the age of 36) provided his eldest son Zhu Hou-zhao with access to the throne.

Why was that unusual? Because Zhu Hou-zhao was different from other newly enthroned emperors. Firstly, he was only 15 when he became the Emperor. Secondly, he was appointed the chief Prince since childhood and was served and pampered by eunuchs and maids in the Imperial Court, where he could literally play at will. This made him playful and wayward, a typical “troublemaker.” Thirdly, being 15 meant that he had grown out of innocent childhood and wanted to have his own voice, but it also meant that he was still ignorant about government politics and state affairs. For this reason, his old man, Emperor Zhu You-tang, appointed eight experienced and prudent assisting ministers before death with the hope that his son could properly handle state affairs in cooperation with the ministers. In Zhu Hou-zhao’s eyes, the assisting ministers were too serious to play with, so he turned a deaf ear to their ideas and suggestions. The throne was merely a playground for him.

Besides his special status and life experience, the personality of Zhu Hou-zhao had a great dependence on another person whose name was Liu Jin. Liu was a eunuch and his real surname was not Liu but Tan. He was from a humble family in Xing-ping of Shanxi Province and went to the capital for a living where he met a eunuch surnamed Liu. He peered enviously at the affluence and sycophants around the eunuch and begged the eunuch to bring him into the Imperial Court. He was

refused as he was not a castrato. Liu Jin then removed his own genitalia by himself to show his determination. The eunuch had to accept him and renamed him Liu. From this incident, we can see that Liu Jin was brutal and insidious. In historical records, Liu was described as a “sly and ruthless” man.

Only for deceit and brutality, Liu Jin might not have been able to climb to the top in the Imperial Court. He was “smart” enough to cater to his master. Since Zhu Hou-zhao’s appointment as the chief prince, Liu had attended upon and accompanied him. He made every effort to please the prince and to win his trust. Zhu Hou-zhao’s notorious name as a playful emperor had much to do with Liu. The enthronement of Zhu Hou-zhao was great news for Liu Jin and he could smell a brilliant future.

A playful emperor and a cunning lackey with various tricks would surely bring trouble to the Imperial Court every day. When Zhu Hou-zhao was still a prince, Liu Jin had formed a clique with seven other eunuchs to expand his power and influence. They were called “Eight Tigers” and day after day played gamecock, horse racing, binge drinking, ball games, and wrestling with Prince Zhu Hou-zhao. They even slipped out to the town center and went whoring. After Zhu Hou-zhao became Emperor, his unruly and licentious life deteriorated with the incitement of the “Eight Tigers.”

The misdemeanors of Prince Zhu Hou-zhao were acceptable as a prince who had little to do with government political affairs but intolerable as an emperor, especially to the nine assisting ministers. For amusement, Zhu Hou-zhao stayed with the “Eight Tigers” every day, causing great anxiety for the nine ministers. For the sake of the Ming dynasty, the ministers were looking for counterplans to eliminate the gang of “Eight Tigers.” A political struggle between the Emperor and the ministers was taking shape.

In the second year (1506), the political struggle gradually emerged and constantly became more heated. Such a campaign was not only related to the future of the country but also brought fundamental change to Wang Yang-ming’s life. He paid a heavy price for justice and his ideal of sagehood, but his life was destined to fire up after all the risks and calamities.

(Translated by *Lin Xiao*; Proofread by *Chen Ming-yao*)

2.2 Risking His Life to Petition the Authorities

After Zhu Hou-zhao was enthroned, he fooled around with a group of eunuchs, entertaining themselves every day with cockfighting, horse riding, singing, dancing and drinking, and seldom attending to state affairs. The gang of “Eight Tigers” with Liu Jin as its head became more and more arrogant and domineering under the shelter of the power and influence of the Emperor. Since Zhu Hou-zhao ascended the throne, many honest ministers in the Imperial Court submitted written statements to persuade him to stand with dignity as an emperor and stay away from the “Eight Tigers.” They entreated him to concentrate his energy on dealing with state affairs and carry out the Emperor’s duty in earnest. However, Zhu Hou-zhao ignored them and paid no

heed to their suggestions. The political situation worsened quickly, which aroused deep concern among those honest cabinet ministers. They unanimously agreed that by no means could they tolerate the outrages of the “Eight Tigers,” nor allow the little Emperor to run wild, otherwise the Ming dynasty would be ruined by him. After reaching a consensus, the Shoufu Dacheng⁹ Liu Jian, Xie Qian, and Li Dongyang took the lead in writing to the Emperor and demanded publicly that the “Eight Tigers” be put to death. But their act produced no effect. Then officials of various ministries and commissions in Beijing and Nanjing also continuously submitted written statements to the Emperor to make the same requests, but also in vain. A fierce political fight began and came out into the open.

One day in October 1506 (the first year of the Zhengde Emperor), Han Wen, the Shangshu of Hu Bu,¹⁰ came back from the Imperial Court. He cried bitterly at the political situation and the evil ways of the “Eight Tigers.” Li Meng-yang, Langzhong of Hu Bu,¹¹ who was standing beside him, said: “As the Minister of the country, morally speaking, you are consubstantial with the state and are supposed to find ways to save the country. What’s the point of simply crying here?” Li Meng-yang, Langzhong of Hu Bu, was one of the fifth-ranked officials in the Imperial Court. Although he ranked high in the government, he had an even higher reputation for his poetry. Being a famous poet and *littérateur* at that time, he was influential among intellectuals. Li Meng-yang was not only good at writing articles, but also upright and outspoken, hating evil as much as hating an enemy. Hearing what Li Meng-yang said, Han Wen agreed: “You are right, but what should we do then?” Li Meng-yang said “Recently many of the cabinet ministers wrote to the Emperor asking him to impeach those eunuchs, which indicates that there are many people holding the same opinion as you do. If you can consult with those ministers who have a common hatred for the “Eight Tigers” and submit a joint letter promising to sacrifice your life for getting rid of Liu Jin, it seems not so difficult to achieve it.” Han Wen found the suggestion reasonable, and said immediately: “Yes, you are right. Even if we aren’t to achieve it in the end, if I were to die for my country at my age, I would not regret it a bit, because I would die for a righteous cause.”

So the next morning when he went to the Imperial Court, Han Wen snatched a moment to confer secretly with all the ministers of different boards, suggesting the submission of a joint letter to put Liu Jin to death. This suggestion was approved of by all ministers. After their discussion, Han Wen invited Li Meng-yang who was adept at writing articles. Li Meng-yang accomplished the draft of a memorial in one breath. It was a coherent whole without any corrections. When Han Wen read it, he took out a pen to revise it and said: “This memorial is for an unusual purpose, so neither elegant diction nor literary grace is needed. If it is too elegant, I am afraid it might not bring the Emperor to realize the truth. And it doesn’t need to be a long one as that would bore him and would fail to produce the desired effect.” This impeachment memorial, drafted by Li Meng-yang and revised by Han Wen, was plain but serious, sonorous,

⁹Prime Ministers.

¹⁰Ministry of Revenue.

¹¹Administrative Director of the Ministry of Revenue.

and just. In the memorial, they criticized the “Eight Tigers” by name, censured the Emperor himself for being on intimate terms with the gang, and requested the public and resolute elimination of the “Eight Tigers.”

The next day Han Wen assembled the nine highest ranking officials in the highest state organs of supervision, judiciary, and administration, i.e., the so-called “Nine Ministers” to sign their names on the memorial and presented it to the Emperor. Zhu Hou-zhao was fond of play, and he had never been put in such a situation before as he was still quite young. Taking the memorial and reading it, he burst into tears and even lost his appetite for anything. When the “Eight Tigers,” with Liu Jin as their leader, got to know the situation, they were all in a fluster and wept on each other’s shoulders.

The submission jointly signed by many ministers made the confrontation of the two political powers public. It also pushed Zhu Hou-zhao to the eye of the storm. Zhu had to make a decision on the matter. On the one hand, he didn’t want to put the “Eight Tigers” to death, but on the other hand, the running of the state affairs relied on these important ministers. So he was hesitant for a moment and unable to extricate himself from the difficult situation. Then Zhu Hou-zhao made a suggestion: the “Eight Tigers” could be transferred from Beijing to Nanjing and be exempt from execution. But this suggestion was rejected by Liu Jian and other cabinet ministers who thought the execution must be handled thoroughly and completely without leaving any loose ends which may lead to resurgence. At this, Zhu Hou-zhao suggested inviting the highest ranking official of the Sili Jian to discuss the matter with the cabinet ministers. The Sili Jian was one of the chief government offices administering eunuchs and the internal affairs of the Imperial Court in the Ming dynasty. The highest ranking official was called Head Eunuch.

The “Eight Tigers” headed by Liu Jin were all eunuchs in the charge of the Sili Jian. That was why Zhu Hou-zhao invited the Head Eunuch to confer. Within a day, the proposal of transferring Liu Jin and other men of the gang to Nanjing was discussed three times. The conference actually turned out to be a negotiation. But Liu Jian and other officials persisted in making no concession and putting the “Eight Tigers” to death. They even started disputing with the Emperor in the Imperial Court. With a strong sense of righteousness, Xie Qian, standing beside the other ministers, rebuked Liu Jin and his followers. Both parties refused to make any concession. The Head Eunuch Wang Yue who was in charge of the Sili Jian also supported Liu Jian and other cabinet ministers in doing away with the “Eight Tigers” as they had brought such calamity to the country and the people. Though Wang Yue was a eunuch, he was a man with a sense of justice and had served Zhu Hou-zhao in East Palace several years ago. So he went to the Emperor alone to instill the righteousness of the action into the Emperor’s mind and persuaded him to support the ministers’ suggestions, otherwise the situation might get out of hand. It was the persistence of Liu Jian, Xie Qian, and other officials, and also the support of Wang Yue from the Sili Jian that brought the Cabinet and the Sili Jian to an agreement on the issue of eliminating the “Eight Tigers.” Zhu Hou-zhao had no alternative but agree to arrest the “Eight Tigers” headed by Liu Jin the next morning when they went to the Imperial Court and to put them into prison.

So far it seemed that the cabinet ministers with Liu Jian as a representative had won in the political fight. Everything would be fine if the Emperor ordered the arrest of the “Eight Tigers” the next morning. However, life is as unpredictable as the weather. At this critical moment, there appeared an informer. Who was that informer? It was Jiao Fang, the Shangshu of the Ministry of Personnel, who not only took part in all the steps of the incident but also knew about the Emperor’s final decision. But this Jiao Fang was really an ignorant, incompetent, and very selfish person of inferior character. He was a very good friend of Liu Jin. Seeing Liu Jin gaining power, he curried favor with him. Although he signed his name on the impeachment memorial, he did it under pressure. When the resolution was made to arrest Liu Jin and the other “Seven Tigers” the next morning, Jiao Fang was too impatient to wait and informed Liu Jin of the secret that very night.

When Liu Jin got the news, his face turned pale and a tremendous fright took hold of him. But he was a sinister and deceitful person after all. After he regained his composure, Liu Jin immediately assembled the other “Seven Tigers” and went to meet Zhu Hou-zhao that same night. At the sight of the Emperor, the “Eight Tigers” fell down on their knees around the Emperor. They kowtowed to the Emperor and wept in great distress, saying: “Your Majesty! Please show mercy to us! If you don’t bestow any favor, we, who have been obedient and faithful to you at all times, will be eaten by dogs tomorrow morning.” It has been mentioned above that Zhu Hou-zhao didn’t really want to execute them. He was forced to make the decision to arrest them. Sympathetic as he was, he frowned at the scene and kept silent since the decision had been made after all. Liu Jin, who was extremely good at carefully observing a person’s every mood, saw hope in the Emperor’s facial expressions. He stopped crying and said indignantly to the Emperor, “Your Majesty! The people who want to do harm to us are not those ministers, but Wang Yue.”

As known to all, it was the cabinet ministers such as Liu Jian, Xie Qian, and Li Dong-yang who proposed to the Emperor to kill Liu Jin. It had nothing to do with Wang Yue at first. But why did Liu Jin insist that the person who wanted to do harm to them was Wang Yue? From this we may conclude Liu Jin was really very cunning and sinister. Wang Yue was in charge of the Sili Jian. At that time, there were three forces contesting each other: ministers, the Sili Jian, and the Emperor. No matter who would support whom, the joined forces would certainly become the more powerful. Suppose the Sili Jian supported the Emperor, then the ministers might not win. That was why Liu Jin insisted that it was Wang Yue who wanted to do them harm. Moreover, Liu Jin also wanted to take the chance to knock Wang Yue off his perch as he was in charge of the Sili Jian which supervised the inner chamber’ affairs.

This unexpected remark of Liu Jin aroused Zhu Hou-zhao’s attention immediately. When he first heard it, he failed to understand, so he asked, “Why do you say that?” Liu Jin said, “Wang Yue belongs to Eastern Depot (Dong Chang),¹² but he instigated the group of officials of the outer chambers to submit the impeachment memorial and encouraged them to criticize us as much as they can. When he conferred with Liu Jian and other cabinet ministers, he took Liu Jian’s side and said that the eagles

¹²A Ming dynasty spy and secret police agency run by eunuchs.

and dogs that we offered to you as presents bring calamity to the country and the people. He is also a eunuch in the inner chambers. Hasn’t he ever offered to Your Majesty any dogs or eagles? Why does he choose to blame us?” Zhu Hou-zhao found the remarks reasonable to some extent and so became angry. He said, “Wang Yue, wait and see how I shall punish you.” To Liu Jin’s ears, the Emperor’s words sounded favorable. He chuckled to himself but pretended to be indignant. He said, “Your Majesty, you have to deal with numerous affairs of the state every day. When we take you for a walk, it is just to drive away your cares. When we present dogs and eagles, it is to entertain you after you finish your busy work. Is it all wrong? How could it wreck the country? How could it be possible that dogs and eagles have anything to do with attending to a myriad of state affairs? Those cabinet ministers dare to hold you hostage only because the Sili Jian is in the charge of Wang Yue, and we do not have our own people there. If we do, everything will be at your disposal, Your Majesty, and then those conceited and ignorant officials would not dare to make any irresponsible remarks.” These words catered exactly to Zhu Hou-zhao, so he immediately gave orders to dismiss Wang Yue from his post as Head Eunuch of the Sili Jian and appointed Liu Jin instead. He also appointed Qiu Ju commander-in-chief of Eastern Depot and Gu Da-yong commander-in-chief of Western Depot (Xi Chang),¹³ both of whom were members of the “Eight Tigers.” The situation took a sudden turn.

Well, we need to explain a little bit about Eastern Depot, Western Depot, and the Jinyiwei Guard. Simply put, these were organs of secret agents in the charge of the Emperor in the Ming dynasty. They were privileged and brutal. The Jinyiwei Guard was established early in the Ming dynasty in the direct charge of the Emperor and was responsible for inspecting the Emperor’s servants, bodyguards, and officials. They had their own prison and were authorized to arrest and lock up officials without any proceedings. Eastern Depot was set up in the eighteenth year of Chengzu Yongle¹⁴ in the Ming dynasty (1420). It was run by the Emperor’s trusted eunuchs and was superior to the Jinyiwei Guard. Western Depot was set up in the thirteenth year of Xianzong Chenghua¹⁵ in the Ming dynasty (1477). It used to be even superior to Eastern Depot. But this organization met with universal objection because of its inhumanity and was abolished several years later in the eighteenth year of Chenghua (1482). That is to say there was no Western Depot in 1506 (the first year of the Zhengde Emperor).¹⁶ The Western Depot, an even more ruthless spy organization than the Jinyiwei Guard and Eastern Depot, was reestablished right after Zhu Hou-zhao’s order of appointing Gu Da-yong commander-in-chief.

That was an eventful night for Liu Jin, a night of great sorrows and joys, and violent ups and downs. With his cunning, Liu Jin not only barely escaped death but

¹³ Also a Ming dynasty spy and secret police agency run by eunuchs.

¹⁴ The third emperor of the Ming dynasty in China, reigning from 1402 to 1424.

¹⁵ Emperor of the Ming dynasty in China between 1464 and 1487.

¹⁶ After Liu Jin was killed in the fifth year of the Zhengde Emperor (1510), the organizational system of Western Depot was abolished. Since then the Western Depot was never set up and it disappeared forever in history.

also suddenly became the commander of the Sili Jian. His sinister and ruthless cruelty was now exposed without any concealment. He immediately ordered the confidential arrest of Wang Yue, the Head Eunuch of the Sili Jian that very night and put him into prison without any delay. Liu Jian and other cabinet ministers knew nothing about the unforeseen midnight events in the inner chamber. When they went to the Imperial Court the next morning, they were still expecting the Emperor to issue an imperial edict to arrest the “Eight Tigers.” But when the imperial edict was issued, it was to announce that Liu Jin was appointed Head Eunuch of the Sili Jian, Qiu Ju commander-in-chief of Eastern Depot, and Gu Da-yong commander-in-chief of Western Depot. Wang Yue and his party were sent off to Nanjing. Hearing this, Liu Jian, Xie Qian, and the others felt sad and indignant, but they knew there was no way to redeem the situation since it was out of hand. So they presented a written statement to the Emperor, asking for “Zhishi,” i.e., resignation from their official posts.

Liu Jian, Xie Qian, and Li Dong-yang were the first to sign the memorial requesting the Emperor to kill Liu Jin. The three now jointly signed the written statement asking for resignation. Since Liu Jin had come into power, he would inevitably protect those who belonged to his own faction and eliminate those who held different views. So he delivered a false imperial edict compelling Liu Jian and Xie Qian to retire at once and to drive them out of the Imperial Court, except Li Dong-yang. Why not Li Dong-yang? Because when they conferred with the Emperor to punish the “Eight Tigers,” Liu Jian refused to yield an inch and even quarreled with the Emperor on the spot, determined to get rid of Liu Jin. Xie Qian listed their crimes one by one and kept scolding them severely. Only Li Dong-yang didn’t say anything the whole time. When Liu Jian and Xie Qian packed up and left the capital, Li Dong-yang went to see them off. At the farewell dinner, Li sighed and shed some tears. Liu Jian said: “Why are you crying now? If you had obeyed your conscience and said a word instead of keeping silent, now it would be the three of us instead of two to leave.” Hearing it, Li Dong-yang was unable to utter a word. This event made it evident who had a better moral quality.

As surviving adherents and first-assisting ministers of a former dynasty, Liu Jian and Xie Qian ended up in being evicted from the Imperial Court, which was almost a political earthquake at that time and led to public outcries. Officials of different ranks in Beijing and Nanjing and those who had a sense of justice submitted written statements to the Emperor, urging Liu Jian and Xie Qian to stay while censuring the “Eight Tigers” for their evils. But the “Eight Tigers” were now in power and were in charge of secret agencies like Eastern Depot, Western Depot, and Jinyiwei Guard. They sent hired thugs all around and began to take large-scale revenge. After Liu Jian and Xie Qian were driven out of the Imperial Court, Han Wen, the Shangshu of Hu Bu, who proposed to submit a joint letter by nine ministers, was removed from the office. Li Meng-yang, Langzhong of Hu Bu, who drafted the memorial, was demoted to Jingli of Buzheng Si¹⁷ in Shanxi Province. After being sent off to Nanjing, on his way, Wang Yue, Head Eunuch of the Sili Jian, was killed by spies from the Jinyiwei Guard dispatched by Liu Jin. The informer Jiao Fang, the Shangshu of Li Bu, an

¹⁷A provincial-level administrative official in the Ming dynasty.

incompetent and morally inferior person, also held the post of Grand Scholar¹⁸ of Wenyuan Ge (Wenyuan Chamber)¹⁹ the imperial library in the Forbidden City. Jiao Fang and Liu Jin acted in collusion with each other. Liu Jin, puffed up with pride, often forged imperial decrees. He kept a sharp lookout for disobedient officials and arrested those who dared to criticize. This created a foul atmosphere in the Imperial Court and officials of all departments in Beijing and Nanjing were jittery.

But the cry for justice had never stopped. After Liu Jian and Xie Qian were expelled from the Imperial Court, many officials in Nanjing such as Dai Xian, Jishizhong²⁰ of the Hu Ke,²¹ and Bo Yan-hui, Jiancha Yu, investigating Yushi²² persisted in presenting written statements to the Emperor asking him to severely punish Liu Jin and other treacherous Imperial Court officials and correct the state laws. They wanted ministers like Liu Jian and Xie Qian back and to return the Imperial Court administration back to the right track. However, Liu Jin delivered a false imperial edict to arrest Dai Xian and Bo Yan-hui and put them into the prison of the Jinyiwei Guard.

You know, Jishizhong and investigating censors were all officials in the supervision organs of the government in the Ming dynasty. Their duty was to supervise government officials. Once they found any malpractice such as taking bribes and bending the law, they could report directly to the Imperial Court. They were responsible for making public opinions known to the officials and the government, so they were collectively called Officials of Remonstration with the responsibility of criticizing and correcting all kinds of acts and policies of the Imperial Court. For this reason, generally the officials of remonstration couldn't possibly be arrested or even killed for criticizing the state. Otherwise, who would want to be an official? Without them the path of remonstration would be blocked and there would be no communication between the higher and lower levels, which was equal to losing one's eyes and ears. Now people like Dai Xian and Bo Yan-hui were arrested for sending in a memorial criticizing the state. Whatever the reason for the arrest, it was extremely abnormal.

The political situation of the Ming dynasty at the time was like having black clouds hanging over the city, and wind and rain sweeping across a gloomy sky. Even upright officials began to keep silent. Then it was Wang Yang-ming who was the first one to stand out. In an attempt to rescue Dai Xian and Bo Yan-hui, Wang Yang-ming risked his life to present to the Emperor. Wang held the position of Zhushi of Bing Bu, which was the lowest ranking official in Bing Bu. His official rank and duty might render his attempt futile, since everyone against Liu Jin had encountered all kinds of retaliation—being put into prison or killed. The result was almost predictable. But why did Wang Yang-ming still insist on sending in the memorial? This was because a righteous action should be taken for granted and not be evaded. We all remember that Wang Yang-ming was determined to become a sage from his childhood. A real sage should at least dare to adhere to the principles of justice, stay on the path of rectitude,

¹⁸Grand Secretary.

¹⁹An imperial library in the Forbidden City.

²⁰An imperial official.

²¹Board of Revenue.

²²Investigating Censor.

uphold justice and make the cause of truth and righteousness evident to all people on the earth. Although most officials preferred to keep their mouths shut at the rampage of Liu Jin and other evil forces, the consciousness of a sage in Wang Yang-ming was aroused. A sense of justice and morality and a sense of responsibility in pleading for the people occupied his mind. It has already been mentioned that Wang Yang-ming was a man of action. When he realized where justice lay, he was bound to practice it. So in some sense, although he had predicted the result of his presenting, Wang Yang-ming still persisted in sending in the memorial. He practiced his childhood aspiration of being a sage and it fully embodied his commitment to justice and morality. Wang Yang-ming was not someone who only considered his private interests; rather, he was one who bore in mind the interests of the nation and the people. In dire peril, he showed lofty morality and noble character. His daring spirit of carrying on in spite of being blocked by millions of people merits our admiration even several hundred years later. His brave steps forward started from his consciousness of being a sage. But this was only a beginning in his life.

Frankly speaking, this written statement presented by Wang Yang-ming had harsh terms couched in a mild tone. He expressed three points clearly in his memorial.

First, Dai Xian and Bo Yan-hui were supposed to be “Yanguan,”²³ officials of remonstration, whose responsibility and obligation were to criticize the state. If their suggestions were feasible, the government was supposed to adopt them. Even if they made wrong suggestions, the government was supposed to tolerate them. However, they were directly put into the prison of the Jinyiwei Guard when they were fulfilling their duty, which certainly made the other officials jittery. Who would dare to speak outright in the future? The implication was that if nobody dared to speak, the Emperor would be completely isolated.

Second, it was winter. The weather was cold and the ground was frozen. If Dai Xian and Bo Yan-hui died in prison, the Emperor would certainly earn a bad reputation of killing officials of remonstration. It was undoubtedly disgraceful to the country. (In fact, after Dai Xian was flogged in the Imperial Court and put into the prison of the Jinyiwei Guard, he died in it. And Bo Yan-hui died at home soon after he was released from the prison).

Third, taking everything into consideration, Dai Xian and Bo Yan-hui should be released immediately and restored to their original posts.

Though the tone was mild, Wang Yang-ming spoke with the force of justice in this memorial. Liu Jin had never imagined that when all civil and military officials of the Imperial Court remained silent, a small Zhushi of Bing Bu should have the courage to be so outspoken. He was shamed into anger and delivered a false imperial edict to arrest Wang Yang-ming and punish him with 40 lashes²⁴ in the Imperial Court.

As for Tingzhang—the flogging in the Imperial Court—it was mentioned at the beginning of the book that it was a kind of penalty invented in the Ming dynasty to punish disobedient officials. To put it bluntly, Tingzhang was a kind of penalty

²³The supervisory official of feudal dynasties.

²⁴*History of Ming*, *Legend of Wang Shou-ren* recorded 40 lashings at the Imperial Court, *The Major Events of Ming History* recorded 50 lashings and *Guoque* recorded 30.

that involved being beaten on one's buttocks in public outside the Wu Men of the Forbidden City, which was the most insulting and cruel penalty. It was the colonels of the Jinyiwei Guard who did the flogging and it was the Head Eunuch of the Sili Jian and conductor of the Jinyiwei Guard who supervised it. All these colonels were well trained. They could control skillfully whether to beat heavily or lightly with the stick according to the hints given by the supervisor. That meant they had the fate of the condemned in hand. It was said that there were generally three kinds of commands. The first one was to “beat to interrogate,” meaning to beat the condemned just to teach him a lesson. The condemned may be bruised badly, but would not have his bones broken. The second one was to “heavily beat to interrogate.” The condemned may not only be bruised all over but also often become disabled. The third one was to “severely beat to interrogate,” which meant to beat with all strength. The man under the stick had a slight chance of survival. Previously, the condemned was not only permitted to wear clothes but also to have thick cotton wadding lined inside the clothes. They could also wrap themselves up with things like felt. In spite of this, the condemned would sometimes die from the flogging. The imperious and despotic Liu Jin hated the upright officials to the marrow of his bones.²⁵ So he arbitrarily altered this “ancestors’ law” and demanded that the man to be beaten have his clothes taken off and be flogged naked. Wang Yang-ming was one of the earliest men who received the special treatment of being flogged in the nude.

With the order given by Liu Jin, the sticks in the hands of the colonels of the Jinyiwei Guard rained on Wang Yang-ming. Wang Yang-ming was badly mangled at once. After 40 lashings, Wang Yang-ming was already unconscious and at his last gasp. There was barely any breath left in his body. One of the colonels put his fingers under Wang Yang-ming’s nose and felt he was still breathing. Liu Jin said ghastly: “Throw him into prison!” Without caring about whether he was dead or not, those colonels pulled Wang Yang-ming up from the ground and dragged him all the way to the prison of the Jinyiwei Guard.

(Translated by Zhou Wen; Proofread by Wenren Xin)

2.3 A Narrow Escape

After the punishment by flogging, Wang Yang-ming was on the verge of death. He was taken to the jail of the Jinyiwei Guard where he finally came back to life. As he found himself still alive, a complicated feeling crept upon his mind. He was delighted with his survival but aggrieved at his desperate situation. He couldn’t help thinking of his life in the past 30 years. Determined to be a sage from childhood, he made strenuous efforts and various attempts to achieve this aspiration. However, just as he found a way to sagehood, his normal life was disrupted by such a big setback. He was filled with humiliation, bitterness, and pain which kept him awake

²⁵ *Minghuiyao*, volume six and seven: “In Zhengde years the treacherous Liu Jin grabbed the power and began to order the removal of the clothes of the prisoners who were often beaten to death.”

throughout the night. He was very much conscious of the dirty, murky politics of the Ming dynasty, which threw the country into a degrading state. Trapped in the dark prison, he longed for the brightness of daylight. Looking about the dilapidated cell he found a hole on the roof, from which a sword-like ray of moonlight penetrated the darkness, illuminated the cell, and lit up his mind. His aspiration to be a sage and his commitment to the people and state revived at that very moment. He thought about his father and friends, and also sages in history. He remembered Sima Qian,²⁶ a famous historian and the author of *Shi Ji*, *Taishi Gong Zixu*.²⁷ And Sima Qian's words clearly came to his mind:

Xi Bo deduced *Zhouyi*²⁸ when he was imprisoned in Youli²⁹; Confucius wrote *The Spring and Autumn Annals*³⁰ when he and his students were trapped in difficulty on their way from the State of Chen to the State of Cai; Qu Yuan³¹ composed *Lisao*³² after he was exiled from his motherland; Zuo Qiu produced *Guoyu* when he became blind; Sun Zi³³ accomplished *The Art of War* after his legs were cut off; Lv Bu-wei compiled *Lv Lan* after he was demoted to the State of Shu; Han Fei created two great works *Shuo Nan*³⁴ and *Gu Fen*³⁵ when he was imprisoned in the State of Qin. *Shi*³⁶ was mostly expressions of sages' indignation at injustice.

These are stories of sages, which can be elaborated as follows. The first story is about King Wen of Zhou, who held to his aspiration even when he was imprisoned in Youli by King Zhou of Shang.³⁷ He engaged himself in divination and the elucidation of *Zhouyi* and succeeded in developing 8 trigrams into 64 hexagrams, which enabled the theory of *Zhouyi* to explain the Three Agents of Heaven, Earth, and Man. The second story is about Confucius, who traveled around the kingdoms, trying to persuade the rulers to practice his theory of humanity. He was once trapped in the states of Chen and Cai, struggling against hunger and poverty. He was not overwhelmed by the hardship and finally compiled the great work of *The Spring and Autumn Annals*, which served as principles of governance for future rulers and deterrent to conspirators and usurpers. The third story is about Qu Yuan, a great and

²⁶A Chinese historian of the Han dynasty and is considered the father of Chinese historiography for his *Shi Ji*.

²⁷*Records of the Grand Historian—The Author's Preface*.

²⁸Also known as *The I Ching* or *The Book of Changes*, one of the oldest of the Chinese classic texts.

²⁹Now in Henan Province, China.

³⁰An ancient Chinese chronicle that has been one of the core Chinese classics since ancient times.

³¹A Chinese poet and minister who lived during the Warring States period of ancient China.

³²Literally: “Encountering Sorrow,” a Chinese poem written by Qu Yuan dating from the Warring States period of ancient China.

³³A Chinese general, military strategist, and philosopher who lived in the Spring and Autumn period of ancient China.

³⁴Literally: *The Difficulty of Persuasion*.

³⁵Literally: *Solitude and Resentment*.

³⁶The *Classic of Poetry*, also *Shijing* or *Shih-ching*, translated variously as the *Book of Songs*, *Book of Odes*, or simply known as the *Odes* or *Poetry*.

³⁷The last king of the Shang dynasty of ancient China.

loyal patriot, who was exiled by Emperor King Huai of Chu.³⁸ He was grief-stricken by the wrongs and injustice, but he endured the hurt and composed the poetic masterpiece of *Lisao*, setting up a model for the Chinese literary world. All these great figures encountered tremendous hardships. As they fought their way through, they enriched their lives with a glorious significance.

The above-cited words were originally written by Sima Qian, with the intention of inspiring himself to accomplish his masterpiece *Records of the Grand Historian*³⁹ after he was punished with humiliating castration. The story had it that Emperor Wu of Han⁴⁰ dispatched Li Ling, the grandson of Li Guang, the renowned General Fei, to lead the military campaign against the Huns.⁴¹ Running out of food and supplies, Li Ling had no choice but surrender to the Huns, because the reinforcements of the government failed to arrive on time. Sima Qian interceded with the emperor and argued that Li Ling’s surrender was forgivable, which offended the emperor, though. As a result, the emperor punished him with the harsh penalty of castration and cast him into prison. Sima Qian spent his life studying hard, and eventually accomplished the masterpiece of eternal value. Now Wang Yang-ming was pondering over his own life. Confronted with a similar adverse situation, he was inspired by the examples of the great figures in history, and further determined to pursue his ideal to be a sage and to devote his life to the pursuit of human justice and integrity. He wrote a poem in jail to express his strong will, “My mind is absolutely no rolling stone, it will never shift for fortune or misfortune,” meaning that his determination to be a sage was firm and solid, and would not easily change; all the sorrow and delight, honor and disgrace, gain and loss in life were unable to shake his will.

Once settled in mind, Wang Yang-ming started to follow the examples of the sages in history. Just as King Wen of Zhou did in prison, he began divination with the *Zhouyi* hexagrams, not to foretell his own destiny, but as a way to express his will. The first hexagram he worked on was *Dun*, which was explained in *Zhouyi* as good for a noble man and bad for a petty person. *Dun* literally means withdrawal. A man of noble virtues chooses to live in reclusion when he recognizes the gap between his ideal and the practical world. He retreats with an open and peaceful mind without compromising his ideal. Thus, it is an auspicious choice for him. On the contrary, a petty, mean person withdraws from the common life because the world fails to satisfy his selfish desire and interest. Hence, his retirement with feelings of anger and resentment is naturally inauspicious. Being trapped in prison, unable to exert his influence on the political operations at the Imperial Court, reclusion became Wang Yang-ming’s choice of life, as he would never yield to such vicious people in power as Liu Jin, a senior eunuch official. So he reckoned the explanation of *Dun* fit well with his mind, which indicated that he was satisfied with the message of the hexagram of *Dun*. Then he addressed a second hexagram, *Gu*, which means

³⁸The king of the State of Chu during the Warring States period of ancient China.

³⁹A monumental history of ancient China.

⁴⁰The seventh emperor of the Han dynasty of China.

⁴¹A nomadic people, who lived in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, and Central Asia between the first century AD and the seventh century AD.

confusion and disorder. In a situation where things are in disorder, a man of integrity and capability is expected to step forward to address the confusion and restore order. The hexagram of *Gu* is explained in *Zhouyi* as indicating “a noble man awakens the people through nurturing his own virtues.” It means that in a confusing situation, a noble man should make efforts to develop his own virtues, with which to inspire and enlighten the common people. His virtues would spread and benefit the common people, just as winds blowing rain and dew across the land. Even if he was not in adequate capacity or status to do this, he should still nurture his own character and virtues to be a man of noble ideal. Just as *Gu* is interpreted in *Zhouyi*, “If unable to serve in the imperial monarchy, foster one’s own virtues.” In other words, if things are in a chaotic state, and a man has no access to the political center, he is not to abandon himself. He should keep cultivating virtues, be a man of noble pursuit in spite of the humble and impoverished situation he is in. Now when Wang Yang-ming fell into adversity, “to develop virtues” was the most advisable way for him to protect and develop himself. To stress this point, he asserted, “Hexagram *Gu* offers the best way to protect myself.”

Thus it can be concluded that although he was trapped in prison and bore shame and wounds from the humiliating punishment of flogging, Wang Yang-ming had no regret over his deeds. He was in effect more reinforced in his aspiration to be a sage. Holding King Wen of Zhou as his role model, he worked on *Zhouyi* as King Wen of Zhou did in prison to express a strong will. Although detained in the dark and grimy prison, Wang Yang-ming felt like bathing in a warm refreshing breeze, free and magnanimous. He said, “Between heaven and earth, I see nothing but vigor and vitality.” He was a noble man without selfish intention, so he felt open and liberal, just as an old saying put it, “A selfless mind possesses a boundless world.” He had a couple of inmates who not only received his words of comfort but also lessons of self-development. He told them why one should learn to be a sage, and why a selfless mind would enjoy a boundless world. Though in prison, he did not stop preaching his belief in being a sage. He had the ultimate commitment to the pursuit of ideals described by Confucius in the remark “When a man has learned the wisdom of Dao in the morning, he would have no regret even if he would die before sunset.”

Wang Yang-ming was stranded in the prison of the Jinyiwei Guard for about 6 months, which did not wear down his will, but reinforced his aspiration to be a sage. In the summer of 1507 (the second year of the Zhengde Emperor), the Imperial Court issued the final conviction that demoted him to the Longchang Yi, a courier station in Guizhou Province, where he was to take the post of Yi Cheng, a station agent.

Here it is important to make a few points clear. First, before being imprisoned, Wang Yang-ming served as a secretary in Bing Bu, the Ministry of War, a sixth rank position in the nine-rank hierarchy of officialdom of the Ming dynasty. As a courier station agent was not even taken into the hierarchy, it indicated that he was deprived of official rank and position in the government system. Second, a courier station was a rest house in ancient times for travelers in transit, such as deliverymen of official dispatches, officials, and officers, where they took a rest or sought accommodation. It was an early form of government-run hostels with the station agent in charge of

it as a manager. The Longchang Yi was located in Xiuwen County, approximately 40 km away from Guiyang, the capital city of Guizhou Province. Elaboration about the place of Longchang is given in the following chapter.

It was a miracle for Wang Yang-ming to survive the harsh punishment of flogging and 6-month imprisonment. Once released from prison, he hit the trail for his post in Longchang, planning to make a short stop halfway at his hometown for some necessary preparations.

He left the capital city, traveling southward. As he proceeded, he sensed more and more clearly that something was not right. For sure it had nothing to do with his weak physical condition or the tough, tiresome journey. All of a sudden, he realized he was being tailed. He became alert instantly. His first thought was that they were Jinyiwei Guard guards sent by Liu Jin to murder him. He remembered Wang Yue who was assassinated by the Jinyiwei Guard on his way to Nanjing. Assassination was actually Liu Jin's favorite intrigue. If it was really the case, he was exposed to a great danger. He did not stop, though, but kept an alert eye on the surroundings, often changed the way he made the trip, traveling in daytime some days or night time other days until he arrived at the northern bank of the Qiantang River.⁴² His hometown was just across the river when the tracking Jinyiwei Guards showed their true colors. The secret tracking and assassination became open chasing and killing.

Gazing at the flowing water at the riverbank, Wang Yang-ming realized he was unlikely to escape the killing hands of the Jingyiwei. He composed two pieces of death poetry, one of which says,

*My loyalty is eternal as the heaven and the earth,
Yet my body in the river is only the food of fish.
How many upright officials grieved to death,
The waves are day and night weeping for Zi-xu.*⁴³

This means that “I am sure of my loyalty as bright as the sun and the moon, so I have no shame standing between heaven and earth, or facing my own conscience. I'd feel no regrets even if I had to end my life in the river. In history, many loyal, righteous men ended in tragedy, like the minister Wu Zi-xu in the Spring and Autumn period,⁴⁴ who died for justice with a noble heart. For hundreds of years, the rolling waves in the flowing river had been mourning over his death.” Apparently in the poem, Wang Yang-ming compared himself to Wu Zi-xu, the renowned minister of the Wu kingdom, who was put to death and thrown into the Yangzi River because of his expostulation with King Fuchai of Wu.⁴⁵ After finishing the poem, Wang took off his clothes and shoes and jumped into the cold and wavy river in the dark of night.

⁴² An East Chinese river that originates in the border region of Anhui and Jiangxi Provinces.

⁴³ Referring to Wu Zi-xu, a general and politician of the Wu Kingdom in the Spring and Autumn period.

⁴⁴ A period in Chinese history from approximately 771–476 BC.

⁴⁵ The last king of Wu, a state in ancient China, who reigned toward the end of the Spring and Autumn period.

When the Jinyiwei Guards raced to the bank, they found no one but Wang's clothes and shoes floating on the river. They were convinced that he had drowned himself in the river as they saw the two death poems left on the bank. The news reached the government of Zhejiang Province, and the heads led a school of officials to the site and held a funeral there for him. Wang Yang-ming's family and relatives were grief-stricken at the tragic news. However, they could do nothing but prepare a funeral for him.

However, Wang Yang-ming was not really drowned. He jumped into the rough water to escape the chasing of the Jinyiwei Guard, and left behind the clothes and shoes to mislead the guards. This was his trick, but it was a forced choice at the critical moment. As he jumped into the river in the darkness of night, he was unable to tell whether he was going to survive. The death poems he had written conveyed his true feelings at the grave moment.

After jumping into the river, Wang Yang-ming was washed away immediately and carried downstream, unable to swim up to the bank. Making it worse, he was hit by a huge wave and lost consciousness. He found himself lying on a shipboard when he recovered at last. It turned out that he was fortunately saved by a passing merchant vessel heading for the Zhoushan Islands and coastal places of Fujian Province for business. He stayed on board as the ship sailed along the Qiantang River, out of the Hangzhou Bay, stopped at the islands and finally arrived in Fujian. By this time, he had regained his strength. He went ashore after thanking the shipowner for their help.

He had no idea where to go. He had never been here before and was totally unfamiliar with the place. After the ordeal he was in rags and looked shabby. So he avoided busy towns and cities, but followed the remote mountain tracks. Unknowingly, he went into the Wuyi Mountains,⁴⁶ where steep cliffs, lofty peaks, and fragrant flowers were impressively beautiful and undisturbed. He was deeply absorbed in the quiet, peaceful atmosphere, a sense of joy springing up in his heart. He recalled his life over the past 36 years when he experienced the dramatic rise and fall, bitterness and hardships, but still unable to achieve his aspiration of being a sage. The political life of the monarchy was dark, the Imperial Court was in the harsh control of a group of evil officials and eunuchs, the ruling emperor lived in extravagance and profligacy while the common people struggled in hunger and poverty. For all his determination to serve the country and people, he had not found the way to the attainment of the aspiration. Now it seemed to him that rather than mixing with the despicable people at the Imperial Court and struggling between favor and humiliation from the Imperial Court, it would be better to retreat to this beautiful mountain as a hermit. He would enjoy real freedom and ease, living in harmony with nature, free from worldly desire. He used to dream of being a hermit, now the idea sprang up again in his mind, much stronger than ever!

Once he made up his mind to settle down in the quiet mountain, Wang Yang-ming regained a peaceful mind. By this time, an irresistible fatigue was coming over him from the days of journey. It was already late, he was hungry and exhausted. Seeing

⁴⁶ A mountain range located in the prefecture of Nanping, in northern Fujian Province near the border with Jiangxi Province, China.

a temple in the near distance, he dragged himself toward it, intending to spend the night there and wait till the next morning to think about any plan. It was a small temple in a poor condition. He knocked on the door, and explained his intention to the monk who answered it. But the monk refused him, saying that the temple was too small to put him up, and as they had no visitors at other times, there were no vacant room available. He told him to seek a place somewhere else and closed the door right away. Wang Yang-ming had no alternative but to move on. After a while, he saw a deserted old temple, very shabby, but it had a censer altar inside. Stricken by awful tiredness, he went in, lay down on the altar, and fell asleep immediately.

The next morning, he woke up and saw the very monk who had refused him standing there. With a startled look on his face, the monk asked, “Did you have a good sleep?” “Yes!” he answered. “Did you hear something unusual?” the monk asked again. “I seemed to hear a tiger roaring, but I was too tired to care.” Upon the reply, the monk looked him up and down and blurted, “So weird you are, sir. It’s incredible!” He kept murmuring such words as “amazing,” “mysterious,” “strange,” and the like, then warmly invited Wang to his temple for breakfast. Wang was so hungry that he followed the monk without hesitation.

One may wonder why the monk came to the temple so early, and why he was so surprised when he saw Wang was safe and sound. The fact was that the vicinity was frequented by tigers and it was said that the very shabby temple was their lair. The few passers-by who spent the night there were killed by the tigers without exception. Of course, the monk knew it well. Deliberately, he rejected Wang Yang-ming, thinking that Wang would be forced to sleep in the “tiger’s lair.” He took it for granted that Wang would be killed and eaten up by tigers, so he came to the temple early next morning to collect Wang’s belongings. Therefore, it was no wonder that he was so astonished to see Wang lying on the altar, alive and sleeping soundly.

Wang Yang-ming followed the monk to his temple and ate some simple food to sate the hunger. He was about to leave when the monk stopped him and said, “Please wait a moment. A master wants to meet you.” Wang was wondering who would like to see him in the deep mountains. Now it was his turn to be surprised when he saw an elderly Taoist priest with a long white beard and mustache, greeting him with a big smile. With a close look, Wang Yang-ming was amazed to recognize that it was the very Taoist master who had conversed with him the whole night in the Taoist temple of Tiezhu Gong in Nanchang, when he missed his own wedding at the age of 17. Although it had been some 20 years since that, he felt as if he was in a dream! The master took out a roll of paper and handed it to him. He unfolded it and saw it was a poem written by the master, which contained the two lines, meaning “I met you twenty years ago, and I knew you’d be here today even before you arrived.” Seeing that the master knew quite well about his recent experiences and whereabouts, he dispelled the doubts in his mind.

The master asked him, “You’ve experienced an ordeal. What’s your plan for the future?” Wang replied, “I do not care about worldly affairs any more. I’d like to be a hermit, to live in reclusion.” The master said, “You cannot be a hermit. If you hide away, all your family will be in disaster!” Wang was startled by the remark. The master continued, “You have your family, and your father is an official of the

government. Now you are a demoted person. Your case is known both inside and outside the Imperial Court. If you disappear all of a sudden, do you think Liu Jin will let you go? Even if they can't track you down, do you think they will leave your father and your family alone? Obviously not. He would take advantage of it and convict you of conspiring against the Imperial Court and resisting the imperial decree. You will get the whole family involved in your case and bring the family into the calamity of extermination!" Wang Yang-ming was startled at these words and woke up from his thoughts of being a hermit. He asked the wise man for advice, who proposed practicing a divination first. So he did. It was hexagram *Ming Yi*, whose manifestation was the divination of *Kun* on its upside while the divination of *Li* on its downside. *Kun* is the earth while *Li* is the fire. Thus, the former represents darkness while the latter represents light, which is explained in *Zhouyi* as "light in the earth," meaning the light goes under the earth and is blocked in showing its brightness. It is a divinatory hexagram symbolizing a man of virtue suffering a disaster. When injustice befalls a wise man, what should he do to resolve the crisis? The best way is to behave cautiously, keep integrity in the heart and bide time until the right chance comes along. It is suggested in *Zhouyi* to "cherish righteousness in mind but deploy flexibility in behavior in order to bear the disaster," and "when in severe hardship, one should strengthen resolution and nurture virtues." These remarks indicate that when a man with virtue encounters a grave situation, he should stick to righteousness and integrity in mind, but keep a low profile in behavior with flexibility. Only in this way can he survive disaster and hardship. It is a fair and just strategy in times of difficulties. Now being a convicted official demoted to Longchang, Wang Yang-ming was a typical case of a righteous man befallen with injustice. If he did not report to his post in Longchang but retired to a secret life in the mountains for self-cultivation, he would fail to stick to the principles of righteousness and integrity even though he could claim that he had attained a perfect understanding of worldly affairs and had no interest in fame or wealth any more. It would not accord with what the hexagram record said, nor was it a wise way to tackle the hardship.

The master's insights enlightened Wang Yang-ming. He took the master's advice and decided to go to Shaoxing, his hometown, to make some preparation before setting out for Longchang to fulfill his duty. He wrote a poem on the wall right away, which said,

*Dangers no more retain in my heart,
Like clouds sweeping across the sky.
The sea waves fleet thousands of miles in the silent night,
The heavenly wind accompanies the hermit dashing through the moonlight.*

In the poem the poet expressed his decision not to yield to the vanity of the world. And the heavenly wind indicated the uprightness in the world while the hermit referred to himself. This poem displayed Wang Yang-ming's broad mind and independent character. He was trying to say, "I do not have a place in my heart for such worldly concerns as dangers and hardships, fame and wealth, gains and losses, grace and disgrace. For me, they are like the clouds sweeping across the sky, unable

to change its original crystal blue color. In the quiet and peaceful night, I ponder over the prospect of the country and the hardness of my own life. These thoughts well up in my mind, just like the rough waves I have experienced, rolling up and down the beach endlessly. Although my future is full of uncertainty and danger, my heart is as bright as the crystal moon high in the sky. In the spirit of righteousness I will go ahead with a free mind to meet all the challenges in my future life!”

After finishing the poem, Wang Yang-ming bade farewell to the Taoist master and the monk and set out on his journey. The master gave him an ingot of silver as traveling expenses. Wang left the Wuyi Mountains for the city of Nanchang and then sailed across Poyang Lake⁴⁷ for Nanjing, where his father Wang Hua served as the Shangshu of Li Bu.⁴⁸ The father and the son finally met, and sighed with mixed feelings over what had happened. Shortly afterward, Wang left Nanjing for his hometown, Shaoxing. After finishing the necessary preparations at home, he departed for Longchang in December of that year.

Here some additional information needs to be provided. The above story is taken from one of the historical records. There are no agreed-on records about his being chased by Jinyiwei Guard guards and jumping into the Qiantang River. Apart from the above version, there are three others available.

According to one version, after he jumped into the river, he did not drift downstream or “traveled by sea,” but swam back to the bank right away. He went directly to a temple called Shengguo Temple near the West Lake of Hangzhou and hid there to recover from the illness. The incident of “traveling by sea” was merely a scene in his dream. After he felt a bit better, he went back to his hometown, packed up, and then left for Longchang.

Another version tells that after he arrived ashore of Fujian, he went into Wuyi Mountains, slept in the tiger’s lair, and met the Taoist master as was described in the above. The difference in this story lies in the point that he did not go back home, but went to Longchang directly.

There is still another version which tells that Wang Yang-ming was indeed chased by two Jinyiwei Guards, but he arrived in Hangzhou ahead of them, and took refuge in Shengguo Temple to heal his wounds. A few days later, two heavily built northern men, who were in fact Jinyiwei Guards, came to the temple. They found Wang and asked him, “Are you Zhushi Wang?” With the answer “Yes,” they continued, “We have some words for you.” Instantly, they grabbed him by the arm and marched him toward outside of the city. Before long, they were overtaken by two neighbors of the temple, who witnessed the happenings, worried about Wang’s safety and followed to find out. Once they reached a deserted place outside the city, the guards said to the neighbors, “To tell you the truth, we are Jinyiwei Guard guards. We are here to execute the order of eunuch Liu to kill Zhushi Wang. It has nothing to do with you, so you’d better get clear of here!” But the two neighbors replied, “Zhushi Wang is a good man, a man of good character. How can you have the heart to murder him? Besides, you’re now in the city of Hangzhou, and if you murder him and throw the body into

⁴⁷The largest freshwater lake in China, located in Jiangxi Province.

⁴⁸Ministry of Personnel.

the river, the local authority will get involved and will certainly carry out a thorough investigation. So, you cannot do that!" The two guards were in a dilemma, "What should we do now? If we don't kill him, we'll be unable to report to the Imperial Court and will be killed instead." The two neighbors suggested, "In that case, please allow him to have a whole body! Please let him drown himself in the Qiantang River, thus his body will remain whole and the locals will not get encumbered." The two guards accepted their suggestion at last. When they reached the bank, Wang said to the two neighbors, "I'm surely to die tonight. I want to thank you for your great friendship and ask you to do me one more favor. Be sure to send a message to my family, tell them to come and bury me." "But we need some proof to convince your family when we take them the message" they said. "I happen to have paper with me, but no writing brush," he answered. So they borrowed one for him. Promptly, he wrote two death poems and asked them to hand them to his family as a proof. That night, he went down the riverbank, hid himself in a corner of the dam, stripped off his shoes and belt, threw a big rock into the river, attempting to make a false impression that he jumped into the river and committed suicide. The next day, he was on board a small boat and arrived in Fujian by sea. The story roughly corresponds with the first narration.

Of the four versions in the records, the first one seems to be most credible. The river was wide and swift, he jumped into it in order to escape the killing of the Jinyiwei Guards. It was an act out of panic, and naturally he was unable to foresee the result. It was more likely that he was carried downstream by the torrents. (It's true we don't know whether he was a good swimmer or not). The following parts of the story are reasonably true that he was later saved by the crew of a merchant ship, made a stop at Zhoushan, and arrived in Fujian by sea, for the Qiantang River poured into the Hangzhou Bay, and the Zhoushan Islands were not far off the sea coast. It also makes sense that when he got ashore in Fujian Province, ventured into Wuyi Mountains, he felt inspired to live as a hermit, because it fitted with his character. Once he decided to go to Longchang to take the appointed post, he first turned back to Nanjing to see his father, and then went to Shaoxing, his hometown. This was a reasonable arrangement in his situation as he had an exhausting trip of escape, being left with no supplies to sustain him. He would have no way to deal with the harsh environment in Longchang if he went there directly from the mountains in Fujian Province. Therefore, it is more convincing that he went back home for some preparation before going to Longchang as planned.

However the records differ, it is for sure that in order to escape the assassination of the Jinyiwei Guards, Wang Yang-ming endured tremendous sufferings and difficulties. Fortunately, he survived all the trials and tribulations. In December of that year, with a short rest in his hometown, he set out on the journey for Longchang, probably unaware at the time that he was to encounter more severe tests of life in Longchang.

(Translated by *Shi Ya-bo*; Proofread by *Zhu Lu-ping*)

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Chapter 3

Proposing His “Philosophy of Mind”



3.1 The Enlightenment in Longchang

After undergoing untold hardships, Wang Yang-ming by all means got rid of the hunt of the imperial military secret police. Then he returned to his hometown, Shaoxing, Zhejiang, by making a detour from Fujian and Jiangxi. After some rest, he set off to where he was relegated—Longchang,¹ Guizhou.

It was really distant from Shaoxing, Zhejiang to Longchang, Guizhou under the travel conditions of his time. There was not so much knowledge about the natural environment and living conditions of Longchang, so Wang Yang-ming must have had some expectations about the nasty environment before his departure. With this in mind, he did not plan to go there alone, but with a retinue. When leaving, his students as well as his family all came to see him off. By the way, we have to mention another person named Xu Ai, with Yueren as his Courtesy name. He admired Wang Yang-ming’s knowledge greatly while Wang Yang-ming appreciated his diligence and he later became Wang’s brother-in-law. When Wang Yang-ming was leaving for Longchang, Xu Ai also came to see him off and formally acknowledged him as his teacher to inherit Sage Theory. Among many of Wang Yang-ming’s students, Xu Ai was not only one of his earliest but also one of his favorite students, regarded as “my Yan Yuan”² by Wang Yang-ming. It was a pity that he died at the age of 31, a premature end of life like Yan’s, and Wang Yang-ming grieved deeply at his death. Xu Ai was a vital figure in the early spread of Wang Yang-ming’s philosophy.

Wang Yang-ming left Shaoxing in December of 1507 (the second year of the Zhengde Emperor), and arrived at Longchang, Guizhou in the spring of 1508 (the third year of the Zhengde Emperor), which was called the place of “indigenous diseases” at that time because of a sultry climate with an average altitude of 1,300 m, plenty of rainfall, and high humidity. Longchang was located among mountains and thorns without convenient transportation though it is easily accessible at present.

¹Longchang is now where Xiuwen County, Guizhou Province is located.

²Confucius’ favorite disciple.

Longchang was an area inhabited mainly by Miao and Buyi nationalities so there was a language barrier for the Han nationality. To sum up the several points mentioned above, we can conclude that Longchang’s living conditions were horrible in Wang Yang-ming’s time and even could be described as extremely abhorrent to an official of Han nationality.

After his arrival at Longchang, Wang Yang-ming first encountered an essential living problem—housing. At that time, there was only a courier hostel without any other houses. Where could he live? He could only build a thatched shed by himself, which was lower than his shoulder and could only house one person. The shed was too shabby to keep out wind and rain so it was always wet inside when there was wind or rain. However, he still kept at his work. He went around and learned about the geography of the mountains and rivers as well as the customs and traditions of local people. There is one especially noteworthy point that it was a habit for Wang Yang-ming to learn in person about the local terrain and landform as well as the actual living conditions and customs of local people, which will be mentioned again later. In the process of his learning, he found a cave in Mount Longgang in the northeast of Longchang, which was called “East Cave” by local people. Surrounded by tall and old trees and beautiful scenery, the cave can shield wind and rain despite its dankness, so Wang Yang-ming moved in and settled down. Living in this natural cave renamed as “Yang-ming’s Little Cave,” Wang Yang-ming was indeed reduced to the living status of “dwelling in rocky caves.” However, he even felt somewhat delighted in his inner heart due to his peace of mind. He recalled the old story that Confucius once “was wishing to go and live among the nine wild tribes (minorities) of the east.” With the lofty ideal of humanity, Confucius traveled around the countries of Zhongyuan³; when he could not achieve his ideal, he once came up with such an idea of living among the minorities where he might realize his ambition instead. When his student asked, “How can you live in such a squalid place?” “Where a gentleman dwells, how can there be anything squalid?” he refuted. A gentleman can live comfortably in whatever place, i.e., a gentleman can influence the local people where he lives; when the culture is spread and the local customs are changed, how can there be anything squalid? Now Wang Yang-ming was living among the minorities, but his state of mind was tranquil and peaceful despite the primitive material conditions. Therefore, he wrote, “I really believe there is nothing squalid even if I live among the minorities; as long as my state of mind is tranquil and peaceful, I can discover the significance of life from the primordial surroundings. I miss my hometown too, but as a gentleman, I can live anywhere adaptably; and I have never regretted my past behavior.”

Nevertheless, after temporarily solving the problem of housing by living in the cave, Wang Yang-ming immediately encountered another serious living problem—unacclimatization. As we know, when a person migrates to another place from his usual residence, the difference in climate, environment, and food will disagree with him physically, which is “unacclimatization.” Guizhou is a plateau. Although it is not at a very high altitude, Longchang has a totally different climate from Zhejiang.

³Also Central Plain, the area on the lower reaches of the Yellow River which formed the cradle of Chinese civilization.

Moreover, Wang Yang-ming had just arrived there and lived in the cold and dank cave, so it was inevitable for him to feel uncomfortable under such harsh living conditions. It was because of “unacclimatization” and those hard living conditions that all three retinues he took fell ill. Comparatively, his own condition was rather good though he did not feel very well. Taking these retinues, Wang Yang-ming had expected they could look after him, whereas now he had to take good care of them. He not only cut the firewood, fetched the water, and cooked porridge to feed them, but also sang songs and hometown tunes to make them feel better. Due to illness the patients were in a bad mood and criticized his singing as unpleasant. He was not upset by the criticism and told stories and jokes to cheer them up instead. It was just under his care that they gradually recovered their health.

After some time, Wang Yang-ming was faced with another even worse living problem—lack of food. The food was running short. How could he solve this problem? It was spring, the season to grow crops. Wang Yang-ming saw the local Miao people sowing grains by means of slash-and-burn farming, that is, first slashing the grasses and bushes, burning them up, and finally sowing seeds in the field. This was certainly a rather primitive but simple way of farming. Wang Yang-ming learned the approach from the local people, cultivated a piece of land and sowed grains himself. Meanwhile, he found the housing of local Miao people was also rather primitive, mainly “shacks.” As a result, he taught the local people to make shelter and build houses with wood, which not only improved the living conditions of local people but also spread the culture of Han people.⁴ The Miao people were also very thankful for Wang’s friendliness. When learning that “Yang-ming’s Little Cave” he lived in was really a small dank place without yang (sunshine) and ming (brightness) but a damp cave, they cut wood in the mountain and helped him build several houses, where he could live better, reading and lecturing. He named those houses “Longgang Academy” and later many buildings were added to it, such as Binyang Hall, Helou Veranda, Junzi Pavilion, Wanyi Cave, etc. By the way, these buildings still exist in Xiuwen County, having undergone much reconstruction.

One day an official came when Wang Yang-ming was getting on well with the local people. When he saw Wang Yang-ming, he accused Wang in a patronizing tone of not having paid a visit to the Taishou⁵ of Sizhou, Guizhou after his arrival at Longchang. In fact, the official was sent by the Taishou to humiliate Wang. The Sizhou government was located in today’s Chenggong County of Guizhou Province, and Longchang was under its governance at that time. The official was extremely rude to Wang Yang-ming, insulting him abusively. While Wang tolerated it, the local Miao people could not, so many of them came and beat up the official. He went away in dismay. When he got back to Sizhou, he certainly reported it to the Taishou, adding trimmings. Naturally, the Taishou was so enraged that he reported it to the higher authorities, the Ancha Si⁶ of Guizhou, complaining that Wang Yang-ming

⁴ Also Han Chinese, simply Han, an ethnic group native to East Asia, constituting the overwhelming majority of the population of China.

⁵ Grand Administrator.

⁶ The Provincial Surveillance Commission.

ganged up with the local people and showed contempt for the government authority, and demanding Wang apologize to him by saluting and kowtowing. Since the Ancha Si took charge of the judicial affairs of the whole province, it aroused the attention of Fushi (Deputy Judge) Mao Ke when the Taishou reported it to the Ancha Si. Mao Ke was sort of Wang Yang-ming's fellow townsman, as Mao was also from Yuyao, Zhejiang Province. However, when he received the Taishou's complaints, he was very dissatisfied with Wang and wrote him a letter, hoping he would get a clear understanding of the situation and put himself in a right position. Wang was required to apologize to the Taishou by saluting and kowtowing, and not to make things worse, otherwise it would be hard to tell whether his future in Longchang would be a blessing or a disaster. After receiving his letter, Wang Yang-ming immediately wrote a reply to him with roughly three points.

“First, according to the letter, the Taishou of Sizhou sent the official to show his kindness. It was not at the Taishou's command but out of the official's own arrogance that he humiliated me. It was also not my intention that the local people of Longchang beat up the official. They did so because they did not like his arrogance. That is to say, the Taishou has never humiliated me while I have never showed him any arrogance either, so there was no guilt or fault for either of us at all. So then why should I apologize to him by saluting and kowtowing”?

“Second, it is normal for us lower-ranking officials to kowtow to higher-ranking officials. It is not a shame, but there must be some reason for such etiquette. It is self-disgracing to kowtow to the one who does not deserve it.” By saying so, Wang Yang-ming was implying that he would not do anything to disgrace himself.

“Third, you have mentioned weal and woe, gains and losses in the letter. I am a mere nobody relegated by the Imperial Court, so I can only depend on the values of propriety, righteousness, integrity and honor in this remote uncivilized place. I will never care about weal and woe only if I insist on those values. It must be woe without them.”

As can be seen from the above points, under such difficult circumstances, Wang Yang-ming did not yield to higher ranking officials' authority, but completely stuck to the independence of his principles, which best manifests the value that “poverty and low status do not move you from your principles while authority and might do not distort you.” Wang Yang-ming was a dignified gentleman who dared to stand between heaven and earth. It was because of his tactful and righteous attitude in his reply to Mao Ke that Mao felt ashamed and did not persecute him on the matter after receiving his reply.

Sometime later, another official came to Longchang who was very polite and humble to Wang Yang-ming. He was sent by An Shi, Xuanwei Shi of Shuixi Xuanwei Si,⁷ which was the name of Tusi, the local chieftain, with the hereditary municipality chief as the head, whose seat was located in today's Guiyang, capital city of Guizhou Province. It turned out that Xuanwei Shi An heard of the fame of Wang Yang-ming and admired him very much. When hearing about the difficulty of his life, he sent some supplies, such as rice, chicken, goose, firewood, charcoal, etc. as well as the gift

⁷Chief official of Pacification Commission.

of silver, gold, and horses. Wang Yang-ming also wrote a reply to the chief official, saying, “Your friendliness is greatly appreciated. However, I’m only a petty official who has been relegated by the Imperial Court. Money and horses are of absolutely no use in Longchang, so I will definitely not take them. As for supplies like rice, you will not feel happy if I do not take them. Therefore, I will only take rice, chicken, goose, firewood and charcoal. Thank you again for your kindness.”

To sum up, when he first came and lived in Longchang, Wang Yang-ming experienced extremely tough living conditions in a completely unfamiliar environment, one beyond his expectations. Living in a gloomy and dank cave with various noxious insects and miasma, all three of his retinues fell ill, and Wang Yang-ming himself strongly felt the fragility of life. He had to gather firewood, cook, and attend to the patients of his group all on his own. Moreover, he had witnessed the scene of “frozen bodies lying by the roadside” in Longchang. An anonymous Limu⁸ from the capital city hurried to Longchang with a son and a servant, but on the way, within 3 days they died one by one. They may have died from starvation, coldness, illness, tiredness, or some other cause. Although he did not know them, their death aroused in him a deep sympathy for human life as well as an infinite sense of desolation for his own future and fate. He led two young retinues to bury the three deceased people and even wrote an article to honor them. That incident had a great impact on his thoughts and feelings: in the environment where he lived, with a great scarcity of living materials—even necessities of life not being satisfied—he could feel the most severe challenges to life itself almost every day. It even made him face death directly. When survival becomes the biggest and the most fundamental problem in life, worldly fame and honor become pale and unimportant, and how to live on is the most important. Survival became the most crucial issue to Wang Yang-ming after his arrival at Longchang.

Wang Yang-ming later recalled that under such circumstances, gains or losses, honor or disgrace had become meaningless, and that he had not taken them into consideration, but was only concerned with life or death. Since he was constantly faced with the threat of death, he began to give careful consideration to “the problem of death.” However, he adopted an eccentric approach: he made a stone coffin and lay inside to experience death, meditating with eyes shut; meanwhile, he continued asking himself: “what would a sage do in such a situation?” Day and night he sat in meditation and gradually slipped into the state of “one-pointedness of mind.” In a moonlit night, light suddenly rose from the bottom of his heart and with the light he found himself completely integrated with the fullness of nature and boundless universe. Meanwhile, an infinite joy surging in his heart made him let out a loud scream, which resounded through the skies in the silent night and soon merged into the rolling mountains. His three retinues were woken up by the scream and amazed to see him covered in sweat with a look of ecstasy on his face.

That incident is known as Wang Yang-ming’s “Enlightenment in Longchang.” What on earth had he gained in his enlightenment? Frankly speaking, we really cannot know the details of the situation, but one thing is certain: that he had been

⁸Clerical official.

set free from the problem of death, the long-time barrier in his heart, and gained an understanding of the truth of life. Since the fetters of death had been cast off and surpassed, the threat of death was left behind him and no longer important to him at all.

Then what is “enlightenment”? In fact, it is not mysterious but quite common in life. It is a peculiar state of mind in which the thread of thought is suddenly animated by continuously considering and reflecting on some problem that has long troubled one. This state of mind is likely to be suddenly reached when one is “triggered” by some phenomenon in a particular circumstance. Many ancient and current ideologists and scientists at home and abroad have had similar experiences. For example, once Archimedes was thinking about how to measure the volume of an irregular shaped object. One day when he dipped himself into the bathtub and the water overflowed from it, he suddenly perceived the solution and became so excited that he ran out of the bathroom in his birthday suit, shouting “Eureka! Eureka!” (I’ve got it! I’ve got it!) This “enlightenment” is the sudden animation of a certain thought which is casually triggered by something. This trigger is only effective to the mind reflecting on a certain problem for a long time. Ever since people have employed a kettle to boil water, the phenomenon has existed that the kettle lid vibrates as the water is boiling. However, it was Watt that was inspired to develop innovations for the steam engine. What’s more, it is common to see a ripe apple falling from the tree, while this phenomenon became the trigger for Newton to discover the law of gravity. Therefore, as a state of mind, “enlightenment” is not mysterious, but commonly existing in our daily practice.

Wang Yang-ming continuously thought about the problem of “death,” and when he “penetrated” it in a particular way, death no longer seemed that terrifying. Death is not the opposite of life, but a part of life, an important event in the living process. Confucius once said, “Whilst you do not know life, how can you know about death?” “Life” and “death” are only two different aspects of the same “living” process. Likewise, we can also say, “Whilst you do not know death, how can you know about life?” It was because Wang Yang-ming had perceived and even surpassed death that he could more profoundly perceive the meaning of life. In his eyes, everything in nature, including green mountains, clear water, white clouds, flying birds, and swimming fish, took on the great joy of life. His mind became as broad and boundless as nature. Thus, he had perceived a truth: the truth of everything is in one’s mind. With a correct state of mind, everyone can perceive the truth of things properly. Therefore, he said, “There is the Tao of Sage in one’s nature.” He thought it was absolutely wrong to pursue “the Tao of Sage” as something external, looking for it outside oneself as he did in the past.

In his opinion, when one is living in the world and dealing with various people and things, the attitude matters because it directly determines the outcome. What is attitude? Attitude is only the manifestation of one’s inner state of mind. In this sense, one’s own state of mind directly determines the attitude and manner one takes to deal with people and things, while the attitude and manner directly determine the outcome of dealing with people and things. Everyone has to come to terms with such an outcome; as a result, it is crucial for us to deal with people and things in a proper

state of mind. If we deal with people and things in a narrow, selfish, and gloomy state of mind, our outlook will become narrow, selfish, and gloomy; likewise, if we deal with people and things in the world with a broad, selfless, and bright state of mind, our outlook will become broad, selfless, and bright.

There is a story “Yiren Qiefu”⁹ in *Liezi*,¹⁰ an ancient book in China. Someone lost an axe and suspected his next-door neighbor, Lao Zhang’s son, of stealing the axe. The story goes like this: “One day, a man lost his axe and considered that it was stolen by the son of his neighbor. The more he observed the kid’s behavior and manners, the more he believed the child did this. Later the man found the axe in one of the foxtail piles, and knew that he had wronged his neighbor’s son. And then, he found the more he observed the kid, the more innocence he found.” This can be regarded as an example that “the state of mind” determines one’s attitude and opinion toward people and things. Du Fu, a prominent poet in the Tang dynasty, once wrote a famous poem, two lines of which went: “The flowers are weeping at one’s sadness while the birds are startling at one’s departure.” The blooming spring flowers are supposed to be a feast to one’s eyes. But in the eyes of one who is sad, the beautiful flowers seem to be weeping sadly. It is always upsetting to depart from one’s family, so when seeing the birds taking off from the trees, one will feel startled due to the association of departure. This is another example that “the state of mind” determines one’s attitude and opinion.

We already know that Wang Yang-ming had made up his mind to be a sage since his childhood. In order to be a sage, he repeatedly attempted *Gewu Zhizhi*, i.e., “achieving knowledge by investigating the world,” in accordance with the opinion of Zhu Xi, a notable Confucian scholar in the Song dynasty. For example, he attempted to *ge zhuzi*, i.e., to investigate bamboo, at the age of 16, as is mentioned in Sect. 1.2. Hence, the significance of his “Enlightenment in Longchang” can be simply summarized as follows:

- (1) Wang Yang-ming accomplished his “Enlightenment in Longchang” in a special state of mind, that is, “what would a sage do in such a situation?” It was such an idea of Wang Yang-ming that made him actually enter “the state of mind of a sage.” Therefore, the “Enlightenment in Longchang” was a natural result brought about by his long-standing ambition of “being a sage” in the specific living space of Longchang.
- (2) Wang Yang-ming’s “Enlightenment in Longchang” practically led to the denial of Zhu Xi’s opinion that “there is *tianli* or *li*¹¹ (heavenly principles) in everything.” Wang Yang-ming’s opinion was just the opposite: that everything’s *tianli* is in one’s own mind. Therefore, it is of vital importance to maintain the right state of mind. If one’s state of mind is not rightly set, it is impossible to speak

⁹The Suspect of Stealing the Lost Axe.

¹⁰Also *The Book of Lieh-tzu*, a Daoist text attributed to Lie Yukou, a c. fifth century BCE Hundred Schools of Thought philosopher (but Chinese and Western scholars believe it was compiled around the fourth century CE).

¹¹Feudal ethics as propounded by the Song Confucianists.

or act in the right way. Therefore, the “Enlightenment in Longchang” was the beginning of his formal breakup with Zhu Xi’s theory.

(3) Meanwhile, the “Enlightenment in Longchang” was also the starting point of the establishment of Wang Yang-ming’s philosophical theory with “mind” as its core, on which all of his thoughts and opinions afterward were based.

After the “Enlightenment,” a fundamental transformation happened to Wang Yang-ming’s life in Longchang. He wanted to perceive joy in the hard life, and to put his thoughts into practice with all his heart. The next year, another significant transformation took place in his life.

(Translated by Yao Yu; Proofread by Pan Xun-yi)

3.2 The Oneness of Knowing and Doing

In the last section, the extreme conditions Wang Yang-ming experienced in Longchang were discussed. But Wang Yang-ming stood out among his fellow people in his tenacious pursuit of his ideal of “becoming a sage” notwithstanding whatever conditions he was in. His persistence in becoming a sage finally led to his “Enlightenment in Longchang,” a definitive breakthrough in his contemplation, and a transformative milestone in his outlook on life and the world. This spiritual leap-forward may seem straightforward and unexceptional to us today, because even in our wildest dreams we cannot imagine the level of deprivation and adversity that Wang Yang-ming had to endure in Longchang. Words or documentation would pale and muffle against these extremely harsh conditions. Seldom could anyone face such dire circumstances and still maintain serenity and dignity as not everyone is equipped with the ability to find peace and pleasure in such austere country life.

It was not long after his transformative enlightenment when Wang Yang-ming started his lectures in Longchang. He truly viewed teaching as his life’s mission. He would talk about Taoism and the meaning of life from his own unique perspectives first to his servants then to the local Miao people. Some of his disciples would come to Longchang to visit him and attend his lectures, whose participation naturally delighted Wang Yang-ming very much! They strolled in the open fields, appreciated the moon beside the creeks, drank wine by the candle in the thatched shelter, and explored the Sages’ spirituality. The following poem is the proof of the situation:

*There’s true joy in lecturing
When we laugh absent of vulgarity.
Confucius in the breeze in Yi River¹² we reminisce;
Thousands of years apart but with so much similarity.*

He found great joy giving lectures to his disciples, which was precisely what made his situation similar to Confucius’. However, some disciples could not stand the

¹²The river flowing through Linyi, Shangdong, China.

hardships and would leave after two or three nights' stay, which left Wang Yang-ming with remorse and conjecture. He wrote a poem,

*Hundreds of miles you came,
But three nights later you left.
The guqin¹³ you wouldn't play,
The wine you wouldn't taste.
With the profound respect you are hurrying away,
Just due to the care from me you are not content?*

His poem represented his addressing his disciples, “You came here from the places hundreds of miles away, but how could you say goodbye when you have only stayed here for three nights. I have guqin here but you don't play. I treat you with wine but you don't drink. The fact that you came from afar to see me indicates the profound respect you want to display to me. Could it be that you are not satisfied with my improper care of you so you are now hurrying away?” He thus said to his disciples,

*Like the dust is the wealth, uncontrolled;
Like the catkin is the fame, afloat.
Enjoy the pondering together, my disciples,
My philosophy you may feel, interesting.
Why not come, bringing your books,
With me in the cottage, we reside.*

The poem can be explained as, “Wealth and fame are like the dust on earth and the floating catkin in the sky since they are leisurely and uncertainly flying up and down. Although the living conditions here are difficult, you may find the real pleasure and enjoyment from the lectures and discussions on the Tao of Sage. You disciples, why not bring your books to live in the cottage with me, together pondering the Tao of Sage and appreciating the joy of life?” These poems clearly revealed Wang's serene mental state as well as his persistent pursuit of Tao of Sage and Truth, in addition to his deep concern and affection toward his disciples.

In 1509 (the fourth year of the Zhengde Emperor), there came to Longchang a guest named Xi Shu, Courtesy name Yuanshan, deputy Tixue Shi, an education official from Guizhou Province. On hearing about Wang's Enlightenment in Longchang and his giving lectures in Longchang, Xi Shu came and wanted to ask him for his insight on “the similarities and differences between Zhu and Lu.” What were “the similarities and differences between Zhu and Lu”? Zhu was Zhu Xi while Lu was Lu Jiu-yuan, both of whom were famous philosophers in the Southern Song dynasty, and who constantly argued against each other, both sticking to their own viewpoints. When it came to the later generations, “the similarities and differences between Zhu and Lu” became a significant philosophical problem among the scholars and intellectuals, therefore an essential problem in Chinese ideological history as well. When Xi Shu came to consult with Wang for his insight on the matter, Wang Yang-ming

¹³A plucked seven-string Chinese musical instrument of the zither family.

did not answer directly; instead, he elaborated on his enlightenment in Longchang, which he called “The Oneness of Knowing and Doing.” Since Xi Shu had never heard about “The Oneness of Knowing and Doing,” he was dubious of this theory, and returned to Guiyang even more confounded. Several days later, Xi Shu made a second visit and Wang Yang-ming discussed with him again. After several visits and discussions like this, Xi Shu finally came to believe in Wang Yang-ming’s philosophy of “The Oneness of Knowing and Doing,” convinced that it was the real Tao of Sage. He could not hold his joy and excitement, claiming “I had never imagined that the real Tao of Sage would strike me at this moment!” As a result, he tried his best to invite Wang Yang-ming to Guiyang Academy to spread his new thoughts to the students and learners there.

Of course, Wang Yang-ming gladly accepted the invitation since lecturing was his interest and it would definitely be beneficial to the spreading of his philosophy of “The Oneness of Knowing and Doing.” *The History of Ming*¹⁴ documented Wang Yang-ming’s lecturing in Guiyang Academy in 1509 (the fifth year of the Zhengde Emperor), claiming that this incident made a great contribution to the construction and development of Guizhou culture. This was also an initial spreading of Wang Yang-ming’s unique thoughts to the outside world.

Wang Yang-ming spent almost 1 year lecturing in Guiyang Academy. In the spring of 1510 (the fourth year of the Zhengde Emperor), his 3 years of relegation came to an end, and he was promoted to Zhixian¹⁵ of Luling County.¹⁶ His actual stay in Longchang was 2 years, to be exact.

Luling County, now Ji'an County in Jiangxi Province, while a small county at the time, was quite well known due to the cultural celebrities like Ou-yang Xiu¹⁷ and Wen Tian-xiang.¹⁸ We could guess that Wang Yang-ming was happy when he was finally able to leave Longchang. He once wrote, “Spread the word please, you white crane on the mountain peak; this common man is to leave Longchang finally.” It is true that it was at Longchang where Wang had his mental leap-forward and experienced the Enlightenment, but the isolated location and the hard living conditions made it difficult to spread his ideas and thoughts. However, he could never expect that he was to face even more severe circumstances in Luling County. All the incidents that would happen after he arrived there were going to be real tests of his political management ability.

Wang Yang-ming assumed office in Luling County on March 18, 1510 (the fifth year of the Zhengde Emperor). On the first day of his arrival, thousands of local people swarmed into the county office building, shouting and yelling angrily, full of rage and uproar. When some officials proposed to bring in county guards to drive those people out of the building, Wang Yang-ming did not agree. Although he did not

¹⁴One of the official Chinese historical works on the Ming dynasty.

¹⁵County Magistrate, an archaic title referring to an official position in ancient China which was used in the Song, Ming, and Qing dynasties.

¹⁶Now Ji'an County in Jiangxi Province.

¹⁷A Chinese statesman, historian, essayist, calligrapher, and poet of the Song dynasty.

¹⁸A scholar-general in the last years of the Southern Song Dynasty.

understand what the local people were talking about and what they wanted to do, he was certain that they came here for some reasons, possibly because of difficulties or injustice. As their tribune, when the local people came here for help and protection, how could he drive them away?

Walking down from his seat immediately, Wang Yang-ming talked to several experienced and reasonable men, enquiring about what problems they had encountered. In 1507 (the second year of the Zhengde Emperor), a eunuch surnamed Yao, as imperial commissioner, came to Jiangxi, requiring all the counties to pay a tribute of ko-hemp cloth every year. The quantity of ko-hemp cloth depended on the size of the county. If some counties did not have a sufficient quantity of cloth, they needed to go to other counties to purchase it. Luling County did not produce ko-hemp cloth, so it needed 105 taels of silver to purchase it from other counties. The poor local people, unable to bear the additional taxation allotment, objected to the policy strongly. In 1508 (the third year of the Zhengde Emperor), the two officials in charge of levying the additional allotment could not levy any silver from the local people, and then, under the huge pressure from superior officials, turned over their own money to the superior officials. In 1509 (the fourth year of the Zhengde Emperor), the two officials, again against their own wills, turned over their own money to the superior officials. In 1510 (the fifth year of the Zhengde Emperor), before the arrival of Wang Yang-ming, the two officials visited the local people for levying the additional allotment, making the local people realize this sum of silver was mandatory and would be levied every year. In those years, the taxes and levies in Luling County were rather high; due to its mountainous location, Luling County needed to pay tribute to the Imperial Court every year, such as fir, nanmu, charcoal, farm animals, and so on, equal to 3498 taels of silver. In 1510 (the fifth year of the Zhengde Emperor), the total sum of silver was tripled, amounting to more than 10,000 taels of silver, plunging the impoverished local people into misery and despair. When the local people learned of the arrival of the new county magistrate, they spontaneously carried out group petitions for the reduction of taxes and levies.

Having learned about the details, Wang Yang-ming was overwhelmed with sadness and sympathy. He had never imagined how destitute life the local people led and how heavy the taxes were. If the situation could not be improved, it would definitely threaten the stability of the whole Luling County. Immediately on the spot, he announced, “You fellow folks, please go home right now. I will report your misery and difficulties to the higher authorities. Not only the 105 taels of silver for ko-hemp cloth will be exempted, but also all the other taxes and levies will be exempted for this year.” Hearing this announcement, the local people calmed down and dispersed.

With the crowd gone, Wang Yang-ming sank into deep thought. On the first day in office, he made such a big decision of granting tax exemption, which would probably displease and offend the Imperial Court and lead to his demotion yet another time. However, as the county magistrate, he would place the interests of the local people above personal interests, rather than only taking his own interests into consideration. “Seeing the common people’s difficulties, one could not help but to solve them; knowing the current malpractices, one could not dare to expostulate.” These would never happen to Wang Yang-ming. Therefore, he sent 100 taels of silver levied last

year to the higher authority on the one hand, and on the other hand, he drafted a document asking for the tax exemption in Luling County, stating, "If the Imperial Court blamed me for the tax exemption in Luling County, I will take the full responsibility, willing to be dismissed from office and back to countryside farming, without any complaints nor bitterness."

After handling group petitions, Wang Yang-ming went to the countryside to observe the people's condition and to learn about the folk customs in person. On his way, a group of common people stopped him, wanted him to redress an injustice, thus he asked them to visit the county government office building the next day. It was absolutely unexpected that as soon as the door of the county government was opened the next day, thousands of people rushed into the house, claiming to file lawsuits. Wang Yang-ming calmed down these people and invited those with the loudest cry to hand in their written complaints. After reading and inquiring, he found what they argued about were either trifles or false claims, so he dismissed the crowd. Thereupon, he acquainted himself with the simplicity and honesty of the folk customs as well as its lack of humility and virtuousness. As long as any conflict or disagreement arose, the local people would litigate nine times out of ten. Hence, for one thing, the folk custom was short of humility and virtuousness, for another, the county government failed to deal with piles of cases in time. Another statement was made: "from now on, the county government will not take up any new cases from the local people. The season for spring plowing has come, and the spring planting should be in full swing. If I continue to deal with various lawsuits, thousands of people will come to file lawsuits neglecting what is required for each season, which definitely does no good. If there is any great grievance that needs to be addressed, I will make investigations and redress any injustice. Neighbors are expected to show understanding and friendliness, and make compromises to each other. When any conflict or disagreement arises, the two parties should first discuss with each other, through mediation if necessary, about any dispute, showing more tolerance and forgiveness toward one another. Fighting legal battles will hurt the feelings and harmony of the neighborhood, which is absolutely not the philosophy of life. Now I will make an agreement with you folks: From now on, lawsuits will not be engaged unless it is a major and urgent case. Filial piety, benevolence, and righteousness are extolled among folks. I will call on and pay tribute to those families who are well-known for their kindness and friendliness."

Curiously enough, after the posting of this statement, one by one, people came to withdraw their lawsuits, hence the change of the local customs.

When the summer came, Luling County suffered a severe drought, which dramatically decreased the yield of autumn grain. What was worse, the drought led to more serious problems. To sum up, they were: (1) the spread of epidemic diseases. The severe drought and water depletion resulted in poor sanitation and food insecurity, which further caused epidemic diseases. What is worse, rumors of plague flew among folks. When there was an ill person at home, everybody fled and escaped, as if he had been infected by a plague. The patient's family members would not take care of him, afraid of being infected, resulting in the starvation of the patient and the death of the whole family. Such a vicious cycle aggravated the epidemic disease. (2) Frequent

fire hazards. The dry and hot weather easily caused fires. When a fire broke out, there was no water to use, leaving lots of residential houses burned down. In that year, more than 1000 family homes were victims of fire, leaving thousands homeless. (3) A theft and burglary plague. Due to both natural disasters and man-made hazards, many local people in the county got into groups for stealing, or formed gangs. They would loot, burglarize, or simply rob the neighborhoods. Gangster groups in nearby mountainous areas also joined in these horrific activities. For a time, the Luling County became a hell for the poor, who were literally struggling to just stay alive.

Facing such grave problems, Wang Yang-ming, as the magistrate of Luling County, was fully dedicated to drought relief, making efforts to resolve those problems. He streamlined his efforts into three areas: Firstly, to cope with epidemic diseases, Wang Yang-ming, on the one hand, called on family members not to abandon their sick members but to take good care of them, and most importantly to keep their living quarters clean and hygienic. If the patients unfortunately died, the families needed to bury them as soon as possible to prevent the outbreak of a plague. On the other hand, he called upon the rich to donate grain, medicine, and silver to support the poor, and the government sent doctors to various towns and villages to help the patients.

Secondly, to prevent fire outbreaks, Wang Yang-ming himself carried out site surveys of residential structures in Luling. He found that the main reasons for frequent fire outbreaks included narrow streets, close proximity among housings, high buildings, and no fire walls between houses. So, once there was a fire, it would spread very quickly from home to home and become a big fire, burning down many houses at a time. During the reconstruction after fires, he initiated a series of new requirements to make residential structures more fireproof. For example, when rebuilding their houses, all were required to retreat three feet to widen the streets; two adjacent families were required to increase the space between two houses by two inches each side, and all the houses along the streets could not be higher than 5 m, and the multi-storey buildings not higher than 7 m. In addition, Wang also redesigned the water supply grid map, and built various water storage facilities in different neighborhoods, in case of a fire emergency. All these measures could cut off the fire source effectively and made it much easier to put out a fire to save life and property. Though these measures were like mending the fence after the breakage, they became useful in future firefighting efforts.

At this point, we need to mention *A Chronicle of Wang Yang-ming's Life*,¹⁹ which recorded an incident of a severe fire outbreak when Wang "prayed against the wind, offered a sacrifice of blood, and extinguished the fire." In other words, he carried out a religious ceremony to change the direction of the wind and put out the fire. Certainly its truth cannot be proved, but at least it can show the fact that Wang Yang-ming made great efforts to fight against disasters. On the other hand, Wang Yang-ming used Taoist magic arts to get rid of the crisis, which would not be the first nor the last time. He used the same method in getting rid of Zhu Chen-hao's chase, which we will mention in later chapters.

¹⁹Ming·Longqing Edition, collected by Lizhou Library.

Thirdly, to fight against thefts, robberies, and burglaries, Wang Yang-ming implemented the Baojia System,²⁰ a community-based system of law enforcement and civil control. In cities, ten families would be one Jia while in the countryside, one village constituted one Bao. With Bao and Jia as the basic units, the folks were expected to maintain harmonious neighborhood relationships, helping one another, and when robbers or burglars attacked the place, all in the units would come to support and help to fight the thieves, robbers, and so on. With the implementation of the Baojia System, a network of self-protection and mutual defense among folks was established, effectively curbing the rampant banditry. Wang liked the Baojia System so much that, 5 or 6 years later, he again used it in Jiangxi, Huguang, Fujian, and Guangdong Provinces, in the crackdown on banditry in those places. But he improved the Baojia System substantially and renamed it Shijiapai System,²¹ which played a significant role in combating crime.

During his 7 months as Magistrate of Luling County, Wang Yang-ming successfully dealt with a series of emergency incidents, including group petitions, collective litigation, drought, epidemic diseases, fire, thieves, and brigands. The effective handling of these outbursts of crime and natural disasters reflected his outstanding political talent and statesmanship in challenging situations. During his 7-month period of being an official, he was assiduous in government affairs, provided good service for the people, building up an image of a diligent and loving magistrate. He focused on people and their livelihood, committed to long-term social stability, fully devoted to the restoration and reconstruction of the social life and production after the drought and fire disasters, all of which spoke well to his remarkable political vision. He definitely was not a person who was anxious to achieve quick success and get instant results only for his own political gains. In the following chapters, we will see more examples of Wang’s aiming for long-term results in handling city affairs and his devotion to serving the common people throughout his life, wherever he was.

In the autumn of 1510 (the fifth year of the Zhengde Emperor), Liujin was executed. In November, Wang Yang-ming was summoned to the capital city to meet with the emperor, thus ending his career of being a county magistrate. Before his leaving, he issued his last proclamation, in which he first criticized himself, and then expressed his sincere hope that local people would continue to educate and discipline young people, promote courtesy and kindness toward one another, maintain trust and harmony among neighbors. He told his people that kindness was the root of happiness, and happy families could protect properties, as well as enhance feelings of well-being in life. Finally, he said: “Alas! Words have limits, but my sincere wishes for you all are limitless. I have to go now, so I’m saying farewell to you. But please be sure to remember what I have said!” The few sentences reflected his deep love for the people in Luling.

²⁰A community-based system of law enforcement and civil control created by Wang An-shi of the Song dynasty.

²¹A household registration and inspection system with ten families as a unit.

Being the magistrate in Luling County was his first administrative position. In these 7 months of service, he adeptly handled a series of emergent events, and effectively practiced his abilities in coping with unexpected and challenging situations. Moreover, these experiences were his first applications of his philosophy of the Oneness of Knowing and Doing.

At this point, let us go back and give some explanations of Wang Yang-ming's philosophy of the Oneness of Knowing and Doing. Generally speaking, before we can carry out an action, we need first to figure out how to do it. In other words, before an action can be taken, we need to develop the knowledge about this action. If we do not know how to do it, how could it be possible for us to do it? Therefore, in our common sense, knowledge precedes action. Zhu Xi agreed with this "knowledge preceding action" sequence. He maintained that we must first obtain or develop necessary knowledge about any action before it can be taken, that is why we should first "Gewu" before "Zhizhi"—gaining knowledge is a must before taking actions. After the Enlightenment in Longchang, Wang Yang-ming believed that there was something wrong with this common-sense theory of knowledge and action sequence. If we apply this knowing before doing doctrine to morality, we would encounter serious problems. Why? He explained, if knowledge came first, then in reality, people probably would overemphasize the importance of knowledge while neglecting the importance of action. Since knowledge has no limits, people might spend their whole life in pursuing knowledge, without any actions, leading to the false dichotomy of separating knowledge from action, leaving knowledge meaningless in reality. Thus, Wang Yang-ming argued that to overcome this problem of false dichotomy, we must advocate the philosophy of the Oneness of Knowing and Doing, that is, to let people know that taking concrete steps to do things is much more important than just developing or acquiring some abstract knowledge.

Wang's advocating of the Oneness of Knowing and Doing, on the one hand, was to correct the popular misperception of "knowledge prior to action"; on the other hand, the original meaning of knowledge and action was that they are two sides of one coin, i.e., they were two aspects of the same thing, which had been ignored by people. Then how to unite these two aspects? Wang Yang-ming would often use daily examples to illustrate his point. For example, in "I want to write," the thought of "I want to write" was the knowledge, while preparing the ink and lifting up the brush was action; if one truly wanted to know how to write a word, he needed to write it down in practice, thus knowledge and action were unified as one. For another example, a person who was well aware of filial piety but never served his parents accordingly could not be called a filial son, and only when he took the real action of filial piety, such as greeting, attending to, and serving his parents, could he be called a filial son who truly understood the essence of filial piety. During his time in Luling County, Wang Yang-ming once said "Seeing common people's difficulties, one did not help to solve them; knowing the current malpractices, one could not dare to expostulate," which were perfect examples of "knowing" without "action," and then what was the use of the county magistrate? Here "seeing common people's difficulties" was knowledge, while "solving them" was action; "knowing the current malpractices" was knowledge, while "correcting them" was action. If we not only "saw common

people's sufferings, but also took measures to solve them; and if we not only knew about malpractices, we also dared to confront and correct them,” then we could call it the Oneness of Knowing and Doing. After the fires, he investigated the causes of the fires, attributing them to too-narrow streets, too-dense housing, and too-high buildings—this was “knowledge.” Then he took action and required them to widen the streets, increase the space between houses, and limit the heights of the houses—this was “action,” just as Wang Yang-ming emphasized, “if we know something and we know it clearly and thoroughly, such knowledge could only be realized by action, in which case knowledge would be necessarily unified with action; if we carry out an action in an orderly and systematical way, such action is the ultimate embodiment of true knowledge, in which case action is also necessarily unified with knowledge.” Those people who talked about their knowledge about certain action without any real movement nor practice would not, at any rate, be called to have possessed this knowledge; consequently, knowledge and action were not only originally unified as one, but also in real life, they were combined as a whole. Wang Yang-ming stated, “Knowledge is the beginning of action while action is the fulfillment of knowledge, which can be called fulfilling any action started, embodying the whole process of knowledge.”

At the time, Wang Yang-ming’s philosophy of the Oneness of Knowing and Doing was a radical new school of thought that had a powerful impact. Those who attended his lectures were skeptical about his theory at the very beginning, but gradually they came to firmly believe in his theory. From the time he started giving lectures in Guiyang Academy, his original new thoughts enjoyed rapid dissemination. It should be pointed out that the Oneness of Knowing and Doing represented Wang Yang-ming’s first stage of innovation, his ideological realization after the Enlightenment in Longchang, as well as the crystallization of practice in unifying knowledge with action.

By the way, though the Oneness of Knowing and Doing was first advocated and defined by Wang Yang-ming, it had indeed historically originated from Confucianism. For instance, here is the very first sentence in *The Analects*,²² “Isn’t it a pleasure to study and practice what you have learned?” “Study” was knowledge and “practice” was action. In the same way as “study and practice” were the Oneness of Knowing and Doing. One constantly applies knowledge to practice and comprehends the correctness of knowledge, bringing him/her endless joy, which is definitely “a pleasure to study and practice what one has learned.” Here was another interesting sentence in *The Great Learning*,²³ “Girls don’t need to learn how to raise children before they get married.” Once they get married and have children, they would naturally know how to bring children up. This was also the Oneness of Knowing and Doing, and was regarded as the origin of this ideology. Consequently, though it was Wang

²² Also known as the *Analects of Confucius*, a collection of sayings and ideas attributed to the Chinese philosopher Confucius and his contemporaries, traditionally believed to have been compiled and written by Confucius’ followers, and one of the “Four Books” in Confucianism. The other three are the *Great Learning* (《大学》), *Doctrine of the Mean* (《中庸》), and *Mencius* (《孟子》).

²³ One of the “Four Books” in Confucianism, the authoritative books of Confucianism in China written before 300 BC.

Yang-ming who first explicitly advocated the Oneness of Knowing and Doing, this concept had indeed historically originated from Confucianism. In short, knowledge is meaningful only when it is put into practice, which is the essence of the Oneness of Knowing and Doing theory.

In November 1510 (the fifth year of the Zhengde Emperor), Wang Yang-ming left Luling County for the capital city to meet with the emperor who bestowed upon him the position of the Zhushi of Xing Bu,²⁴ which meant he was restored to his former official position since he used to be Zhushi of Xing Bu before his demotion to Longchang. From this period until 1515 (the tenth year of the Zhengde Emperor), he experienced frequent position changes, finally ending with the position of Honglusi Qing in Nanjing, a Level Four official among imperial official rankings. Those jobs were often not very demanding, therefore this was the period when Wang held lots of lectures. Along with his official travels, he gave lectures in Beijing, Nanjing, Chuzhou, Shaoxing, and so on. We need to know that during this period the main topic of his lectures was still the Oneness of Knowing and Doing. After his dissemination and development, this new ideology had become increasingly important. In his eyes, it was an effective way to realize the ideal of “being a sage.” This new ideology had a tremendous impact on the academia at that time, resulting in his increased influence as a major scholar with more and more disciples.

Certainly Wang Yang-ming was totally enjoying such a lecturing life, deriving joy and pleasure from discussing and debating with his students. However, in 1516 (the eighth year of the Zhengde Emperor), his joyful lecturing life came to an abrupt end because the Imperial Court appointed him another position, being “Zuo-Qiandu-Yushi-Xunfu of Ducha Yuan”²⁵ governing Nan-Gan-Ting-Zhang and other places. Ducha Yuan, also Censorate, was a high-level supervisory agency in the Ming dynasty, the main officials being Zuo-Du-Yushi,²⁶ You-Du-Yushi,²⁷ Zuo-Fu-Du-Yushi,²⁸ You-Fu-Du-Yushi,²⁹ Zuo-Qiandu-Yushi,³⁰ and You-Qiandu-Yushi.³¹ Qiandu-Yushi ranked fourth among imperial officials. Nan-Gan-Ting-Zhang referred to Nan'an and Ganzhou in Jiangxi Province, and Tingzhou and Zhangzhou in Fujian Province. Xunfu, translated as grand coordinators and provincial governor, was in charge of military affairs and civil administration. At that time, the government office building for Xunfu of Nan-Gan-Ting-Zhang was located in Ganzhou, so from this post name we could clearly know that Wang Yang-ming would set off to Ganzhou, whose jurisdiction area covered the vast bordering land in Jiangxi, Fujian, Guangdong, and Huguang Provinces.

²⁴Head of Ministry of Penalty.

²⁵Institute of Supervision.

²⁶The chief censor in the Institute of Supervision on the left, an official on the second level.

²⁷The chief censor in the Institute of Supervision on the right, an official on the second level.

²⁸The deputy chief censor in the Institute of Supervision on the left, an official on the third level.

²⁹The deputy chief censor in the Institute of Supervision on the right, an official on the third level.

³⁰The assistant censor in the Institute of Supervision on the left, an official on the fourth level.

³¹The assistant censor in the Institute of Supervision on the right, an official on the fourth level.

Why did the Imperial Court appoint him to the position of “Zuo-Qiandu-Yushi-Xunfu of Du Chayuan” governing Nan-Gan-Ting-Zhang and other places at that time? What kind of hardship might he encounter after his setting off for Ganzhou?

(Translated by *Wang Xue-qin*; Proofread by *Sun Xiao-qin*)

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Chapter 4

Practicing His Military Thoughts



4.1 Mission Entrusted in Political Crisis

In September 1516 (the eleventh year of the Zhengde Emperor), the Imperial Court issued a new appointment of “Zuo-Qiandu-Yushi-Xunfu of Du Chayuan” governing Nan-Gan-Ting-Zhang and other places to Wang Yang-ming. Then why did the Imperial Court designate Wang Yang-ming such an appointment at that very time?

As we know, the reign of Zhu Hou-zhao, Emperor Wuzong of Ming,¹ was one of the darkest periods of the whole Ming dynasty. The emperor himself, unambitious, flighty and impatient, self-willed and conceited, was absolutely a philistine. At the beginning of his accession to the throne, he was addicted to frolicking, luxurious feasts, and conviviality. He put eunuchs such as Liu Jin and others in important positions, while upright ministers were expelled so that the whole Imperial Court was filled with a foul atmosphere, and the country was increasingly beset by enemies within and without. From 1508 (the third year of the Zhengde Emperor) on, natural calamities and man-made disasters kept rising one after another every year, and thievery became more and more serious. Vast junctional areas of the four provinces of Jiangxi, Huguang, Fujian, and Guangdong were the most seriously ravaged by rampant thieves and brigands. Topographically, it was vast in area, with lofty mountains and high ranges such as Damao Mountain,² Dayu Range,³ Jiulian Mountain,⁴ Bamian Mountain,⁵ and so on, and they were all connected in unbroken lines. Since it was a heavily populated area, each bandit head often took control of a mountain stronghold lording it over a district, and meanwhile they ganged up with one another to share information and commit crimes, which resulted in the lower production and a terrible life for the local people. In 1511 (the sixth year of the Zhengde

¹Zhengde Emperor, the Ming dynasty Emperor of China between 1505 and 1521.

²A mountain in Fujian Province.

³A mountain range that forms a natural border between Jiangxi and Guangdong Provinces.

⁴A mountain that forms a natural border between Jiangxi and Guangdong Provinces.

⁵A mountain in Hunan Province.

Emperor) or so, the Imperial Court began to send army men to arrest and exterminate the thieves and brigands. Instead of achieving any effect, however, the suppressions brought about even more bandits. On the one hand, the officers and army men seemed weak and incompetent so that the bandits' arrogance was further inflamed and they behaved with more unbearable insolence. On the other hand, some good ordinary people felt hopeless and they simply joined the bandits. Therefore, till the tenth year of the Zhengde Emperor, about the year 1516, in the boundaries of the four provinces, there appeared three major factions: (1) the first one bristled within the borders of Zhangzhou prefecture in Fujian Province, with Xiaoxi⁶ as its base, and Zhan Shi-fu, and Wen Huo-shao as its chiefs; (2) the second one was entrenched inside Nanan and Ganzhou Prefectures in Jiangxi Province, taking Hengshui and Tonggang as its main bases, with Xie Zhi-shan and Lan Tian-feng as its heads; and (3) the third, moving about inside the territory of Huizhou Prefecture, Guangdong Province, they took the place Litou as their stronghold and had Chi Zhong-rong (or Chi Da-bin in other references) lead them. These three factions were the most powerful, with each having followers as many as thousands in number, and naturally the most swollen with arrogance. After previous fruitless efforts, the Imperial Court appointed Wang Yang-ming “Zuo-Qiandu-Yushi-Xunfu of Ducha Yuan” governing Nan-Gan-Ting-Zhang and other places at the time. Therefore, we might as well say that Wang Yang-ming was entrusted the great mission just in the critical political crisis.

Here we must make clear this concept of “bandits or robbers,” especially the nature of the gang. Some previous scholars thought that those so-called “bandits” were “insurgent peasants,” hence Wang Yang-ming was stigmatized to have ruthlessly suppressed the peasant uprisings. Actually, according to the historical materials, the personnel constituting the bandits were rather complicated in the objective sense. Their main purpose was to loot though at times they would capture territories, and at one time or two, they even breached county governments here and there. So on the whole, these factions did not reach the level of uprising, or even peasants uprising, in that the latter always had one common leader and held one unified political purpose, which was to overthrow the rule of an emperor or to terminate a dynasty. While each of the regional bandits here fought his own battle, they did not keep in step with one another, and meanwhile they basically fought to loot for goods from the ordinary people, so they should be regarded as folk bandits. Simply taking them as peasants' uprisings is surely not so objective or true to the actual situation then.

Undoubtedly, Wang Yang-ming was quite clear about the real intention of the emperor when he was offered this new appointment. Therefore, he became extremely hesitant when the imperial decree was issued on September 14. He submitted a statement to the Imperial Court immediately requesting to resign from this new mission, and within the statement he listed three major reasons.

Firstly, he said that he had always been feeble and sick so that he was afraid not to be able to assume the heavy military responsibility of commanding the army

⁶A town in Zhangzhou, Fujian Province.

rushing on the battlefield. In the event of failure, he would tarnish the Imperial Court, let alone being utterly discredited himself.

Secondly, as a grand coordinator was an executive holding the military and political scepter of a region, such a vital position should never be given up easily, but should be held by a real qualified person instead. He himself, however, was mediocre even inferior in talent, pedantic, and perfunctory in nature. Thus, he could not be the right person for the position.

Thirdly, he lost his mother early in his boyhood and was brought up mainly by his grandmother Cen. Now that she was already 97 years old, he had to stay around her to fulfill filial duty rather than leave and go far away from home.

In view of the above three points, Wang Yang-ming advised the Imperial Court to send someone else and allow him to hold his original post.

Now let's analyze the resignation of Wang Yang-ming. In all his three excuses, only the second, which says that he was mediocre and inferior in talent, was just a polite formula, while the other two were indeed his actual situations. This might be the real reason for his hesitation. For one thing, he consistently intended to become a sage and had a keen interest in military strategies and tactics for a long time so that the new appointment asking him to be a "Zuo-Qiandu-Yushi-Xunfu of Ducha Yuan" governing Nan-Gan-Ting-Zhang and other places to guard the regions and protect the people by eliminating the local rebellions really offered him a great opportunity to show his rare gifts and bold strategy, and thus to realize his ambition of being a sage. So in this sense, this gracious declination was not all his real intention. But as a matter of fact, he was always poor in health and was not really cured from his coughing. A few years before, he had been frequently transferred from position to position, and busy with lecturing from place to place. Although he did recuperating programs with noticeable effects, the disease was never uprooted and it attacked him from time to time. Now he would have to go to the vast and boundless mountain areas to suppress the bandits in Jiangxi. It was uncertain whether he could withstand the toil of fighting here and there even if he could survive the treacherous wars. Deep in the valleys, the air was damp and a miasma was rampant, which would be likely to worsen his poor physical condition. Considering this, one should by no means view this resignation of Wang Yang-ming as a hypocritical pretense, but a true reflection of his mixed emotions at that time.

In fact, the Imperial Court would not approve of this resignation since the terrible situation in this particular provincial area was worsening day by day and Wang Yang-ming then had no other choice but to accept the critical mission despite all his personal problems. Then on October 24 that same year, the Imperial Court transmitted another imperial edict to Wang Yang-ming ordering him to accede right away. Seemingly still waiting for the final approval of his resignation from the emperor, Wang Yang-ming did not go to his post at once as ordered. Interestingly soon afterward, just on November 14, another Du-Yushi named Wen Sen forfeited the chance to combat the bandit rebellion while pleading for retirement, excusing himself for illness. The official document from Li Bu⁷ replied that, if Wang Yang-ming followed Wen Sen's

⁷Ministry of Personnel.

lead, he would make the matter worse, and surely would subject himself to severe punishment. Wen Sen was berated accordingly. Meanwhile, the Imperial Court issued the third imperial edict demanding Wang Shou-ren (the real name of Wang Yangming) to assume the post without any delay. On December 2, the final approval from the Imperial Court came, saying, “Wang Shou-ren is not allowed to resign.”

In his own prophetic vision, Wang Yangming had foreseen from the very beginning that the Imperial Court would never allow him to resign, so shortly after his submission of the resignation he rushed back to Shaoxing City from Nanjing. Maintaining his health while waiting for the approval of the Imperial Court on the one hand, and on the other hand, he was making every preparation for his new post in Jiangxi. So on December 3, 1516 (the eleventh year of the Zhengde Emperor), the following day after the fourth order came urging him to take office, he set off hurriedly to Jiangxi from Shaoxing. This marked the second major turning point of Wang Yangming, from which he began his military life, when he was 45 years old.

Without any stop, Wang Yangming rushed to Jiangxi Province, and boarded a ship sailing southward along the Gan River.⁸ An interesting thing happened when they arrived in Wan'an County,⁹ where they encountered hundreds of bandits who were recklessly robbing so that all merchant ships dared not go forward. Seeing this, Wang Yangming reorganized the ships, allying them into battle arrays. He had all flags hoisted and all the drums beaten thunderously while the ships kept advancing forward. The bandits were frightened, promptly thinking that they ran into a superior force this time and as a result they stopped looting and began to worship on bended knees on the bank. Wang Yangming stopped the fleet of ships, went ashore and talked to the robbers, “You were originally law-abiding people and were obliged to commit crimes. Now I have come and shall send officials here to placate you. Therefore, we hope you will again abide by the law and behave yourselves from now on rather than keep doing evil, otherwise, you will stew in your own juice!” Hearing this, the bandits all broke up in a hubbub instantly. From this episode, we can see how serious the famine was as most of the bandits were just desperate exiled persons ganging up.

In the first month of the lunar year in 1517 (the twelfth year of the Zhengde Emperor), Wang Yangming arrived in Ganzhou, Jiangxi Province. Despite his fatigue after the long journey, he began his work at his earliest convenience, i.e., on the next day of the Lantern Festival (January 15th of Chinese Lunar Calendar), 1517. He devoted himself heart and soul to dealing with the local military and political affairs.

The top priority for him then, of course, was to pacify the disturbances of insufferably arrogant bandit robbers in the junctional areas of the four provinces. For Wang Yangming, that was the fundamental purpose of his new office-holding. Being a newcomer in Ganzhou, he did not know the actual situation and had no idea where to start. That was the so-called being pressed for time with heavy tasks. From the

⁸The Gan River flows through the western part of Jiangxi Province, China, before flowing into Lake Poyang and thence into the Yangtze River.

⁹In Nan'an, Jiangxi Province.

previous chapters, we already have a general knowledge of Wang's basic work style. He was really down to earth concerning his work. Wherever he went, he would implement a thorough field investigation, including the customs and living conditions of the local people. Shouldering the important mission of sweeping away the serious local banditry the moment he came to Jiangxi, he did likewise to know various practical situations since there were actually no better ways to observe and experience the reality. Accordingly, within his administrative region, the first thing he took up was issuing government documents to all the subordinated prefectures the minute he assumed the duty, demanding them by all means to fulfill the following tasks and to make prompt reports. The tasks he assigned were as follows:

First, conscientiously assess the substantiality of such military facilities as block-houses and forts, and check the number of soldiers, the military training status, and combat capabilities.

Second, make an exhaustively detailed survey of the activities of the bandits, including which gangs were very frantic and rampant, which were already dismissed and in need of being placated, and which could be talked into surrender. All these must be made clear and recorded in full detail. Furthermore, the relevant feasible and specific measures had to be worked out.

Third, conduct a full investigation into the local people. This should cover aspects such as which people were particularly familiar with the local terrains and could serve as guides, which rich families were willing to contribute their money and grain, which wasted fields were suitable for military use, and the like. All these were to be examined clearly and listed with specific names and amounts.

Fourth, look into the local transportation carefully and thoroughly, especially the main roads and citadels that the bandits and robbers mainly haunted, where new checkpoints could be set to cut the passage of the gangs. All these should be reliably detailed and clearly marked in maps.

Wang Yang-ming stressed the general working principles concerning the above aspects, "See to strive for practicability rather than the least work on empty talk." He demanded that all prefectures fulfill all the above requirements within a month and with nobody muddling through their work. In the meantime, he himself reached out deep into the ordinary people, investigating the real situations of different places. More importantly, he was good at learning lessons from earlier repeated failures in the fights against the bandits. On the strength of these investigations and the lessons learned, Wang Yang-ming made prompt but sound judgment, and turned to all pre-war military preparations, among which, two things were well known.

The first was the enforcement of Shijiapai System. So what was the system? Simply, it is a ten-family-unit household registration and inspection system invented by Wang Yang-ming. At first, the system was only implemented among city residents, and later carried over into the rural areas. The actual practice went like this: Every household hung a wooden board outside their house, on which were written names, numbers, native places of the family members, the temporary residents if any. Then every ten households formed a unit, of which there was another wooden board for the detailed family information of the ten households. Each day one person from one of the ten families took turns to preside at checking the population information

door by door. Should anyone suspicious or any unregistered temporary residents be found, they must be reported to the local government offices immediately. Provided any concealed case turned up, all the ten families together would be punished by the law. This Shijiapai System was actually a creative reformation of the original Baojia System. One may well remember that earlier in the Luling County, Wang Yangming waged the Baojia System, in which the self-defense of individual families was combined with the collective joint defense, and hence reinforced the effective official supervision over people. Now Wang Yang-ming exercised the Shijiapai System because he found out that one major reason why in so many previous suppressions the bandit forces had never been wiped out was that the mountain fastnesses usually had their spies hide among the ordinary people at the foot of the mountains so that whenever there were any signs of government officers and army men, they would have already got fully prepared before the battle. In that case, the military actions of the government forces were always in the open air while those of the bandits went on secretly. As a result, gangs won every battle launched openly by the government. Every time the government started a military action, it only became a waste of man power and money as no substantial effect had been gained. By carrying out the Shijiapai System, Wang Yang-ming's real intention was to cut off the enemy's communication with the outside, and to the maximum degree it prevented the enemy from planting their spies to steal military information, or prevent any other contacts with the bandits on the sly, so that military secrets could be safe, and accordingly, the government stood a far better chance to win against the bandits and robbers.

The second was the training of militiamen. Why? The answer was that after his investigation of the officers and army men, Wang Yang-ming found serious problems within the army, such as inadequate funding for military expenditure, shortage of troops, weakness in combat capabilities, and doldrums in the soldiers' morale. Wang Yang-ming once said, "Sending such a troop into the battlefield is nothing more than driving sheep into a pack of wolves, since such armed forces cannot qualify for any military missions at all." Such problems with the troops had been noticed, of course, so "Tu Bing"¹⁰ or even "Lang Bing"¹¹ had often been recruited for battles. Time after time, conventional forces of the government would develop serious anaclisis in face of any wars, whether major or minor ones. Then the vicious circle began: the more dependent the regular armed forces became, the less attention they paid to the development of their own military qualities and the weaker they became. Then by the way, what were "Tu Bing" and "Lang Bing"? As for "Tu Bing," they were native local minority troops coming from two tribes of Yongshun¹² and Baojing¹³ in west Huguang Province, while "Lang Bing" came from such counties as Donglan,¹⁴

¹⁰Soldiers from minority regions.

¹¹Wolf-like barbarian soldiers from minority regions.

¹²Now a county of Hunan Province.

¹³Now a county of Hunan Province.

¹⁴Now a county of Guangxi Province.

Nadi,¹⁵ and Nandan¹⁶ in Guangxi Province. These ethnic armed groups were brave and battlewise, and they were often used as the main forces to suppress bandits by the government. However, Wang Yang-ming thought that the long-distance transfer of these troops had the following disadvantages: (1) The movement was too sluggish and time-consuming. Such a transfer took several months at least, or even a few years sometimes. (2) It greatly increased military expense, wasting human and material resources. (3) It caused the military action to be widely known so that sudden and unexpected attack became impossible, thus bungling the chance of winning the battle. (4) These valiant warriors tended to be chaotic and less disciplined so that wherever they passed through, the people were plunged into an abyss of misery, which made them no less sinful than the bandits and robbers, so using them for suppression was just quenching a thirst with poison. Chen Jin, the Du-Yushi before Wang Yang-ming, requisitioned “Lang Bing” in 1512 (the seventh year of the Zhengde Emperor), as a result, wherever the troops went, they raped women, looted properties, burned houses, slaughtered the innocent, some even had their whole families exterminated so that people suffered from terrible miseries. Chen Jin then received severe punishment by the Imperial Court. Given this, Wang Yang-ming demanded that they change the thought and mentality of always blindly depending on the ethnic armed groups and face up to the battles, and for this the government had to build up their own crack troops. In order to achieve this ambition, he ordered all his prefectures to select brave talents with at least one ability, the so-called heavily built phenomena such as outstanding archers, crossbow operators, martial arts experts, masters of free combat, and the like, to form a troop of about 2,000 people. Wang Yang-ming assembled them in Ganzhou City and conducted military training for them himself. It was just the establishment of this elite squad that optimized the inner military structure of the officers and men, so that the soldiers’ morale and combat effectiveness were greatly improved.

The Shijiapai System and militiamen training were the two most important pre-war preparations Wang Yang-ming made for the purpose of rooting out the bandits and robbers after he arrived in Ganzhou. Then it was February of 1517 (the twelfth year of the Zhengde Emperor), Wang Yang-ming had made all necessary pre-war preparations, and felt it was then the right time to launch military attacks against those entrenched bandit forces. From then on, he commanded three major battles in a row against the enemies and eliminated completely those ever present, intricately intertwined bandits and robbers who had been doing harm for years in the junctional areas of Jingxi, Fujian, Huguang, and Guangdong Provinces.

Based on the reports from different districts informing him about the specific activities of the bandits, Wang Yang-ming first planned to clean up bandit gangs headed by Zhan Shi-fu and Wen Huo-shao in the southern area of Zhangzhou by focusing the military forces there and carrying out comprehensive action. For this he began his battle disposition in February that year. We must remember here that Wang Yang-ming assumed his duty in Ganzhou only about a month ago, so the time

¹⁵Now combined to Nandan County in Guangxi Province.

¹⁶Now a county of Guangxi Province.

interval was rather short. Therefore, we can see that he was highly efficient. The first battle he started was mainly in the boundary area of the south Zhangzhou, Fujian Province and the northeastern part of Guangdong Province, so we might well call it the Zhang Nan Campaign.¹⁷

Now, let's turn the topic of the Zhang Nan Campaign to the brief summary of the basic strategic thoughts Wang Yang-ming displayed in his pre-war preparations.

- (1) Do according to *The Art of War*.¹⁸ One tactic in *The Art of War* goes that knowing your enemy and yourself, you can fight a hundred battles and win them all. An actual war is made of offense and defense. Wang Yang-ming read a lot of books on the art of war so that he knew quite well its truth, and developed them into his own capacity in commanding battles in later days. He first gained thorough knowledge about the military power on both sides and started the wars with full assurance. Upon reaching Ganzhou, he carried an extensive survey and research into the military strength, arm of the services, suppositions scales, war power, and so on of both sides. In the meantime, he sent spies to detect other detailed information about the enemy. Training militiamen was just to make up for the shortage of manpower resources on the part of the government. An overall knowledge of the enemy's situation as well as that of his own and never launching with little preparation or assurance were Wang Yang-ming's basic strategy and tactics.
- (2) Isolate the enemies. Although bandits in the junctional areas of the four provinces were widely scattered and various in military forces, they kept colluding regularly and exchanging information with each other so that once there was official military action, all bandit strongholds were tipped off and quickly got support from each other. As a result, it was finally the official armies who were surrounded and isolated, with the result self-evident here. What Wang Yang-ming meant to do was to change from the disadvantage of often being isolated to the advantage of active isolation of the enemies. So in actual military dispositions, he sent soldiers to tightly guard all the passes to the mountain tops so as to cut off the roads as well as the way of communication. Strict enforcement of the Shijiapai System cut off cleanly and clearly the possibility of being spied on by the enemies from the mountains. In this way, the government had almost all the situations of the enemies at their fingertips while the enemies knew nothing about their opposition. This measure saw a striking effect in the battle since government troops could attack the bandits unexpectedly and suddenly.
- (3) Concentrate superior forces to surround the enemies. Since the border areas of the four provinces were rather vast, a unilateral attack against the enemies tended to achieve very little in that when attacks came from the east, the enemies would escape west, and vice versa. In view of this, Wang Yang-ming cuts apart the enemy forces and surrounded them separately, and then concentrated superior forces on sweeping away smaller enemy troops one by one. The Zhang

¹⁷The campaign which took place in the Southern Zhangzhou.

¹⁸Also known as the *Sunzi* (“Master Sun”) or *Sunzibingfa* (“Master Sun’s Art of War/Master Sun’s Military Strategy”), an ancient Chinese military treatise dating from the fifth century BC.

Nan Campaign was a case in point in which Wang Yang-ming concentrated his superior forces in Guangdong and Fujian Provinces to attack the enemies from both the western and eastern sides. This cut-apart-and-surround strategy improved the effect and efficiency of the war enormously.

(4) Capture the leader instead of killing more. Wang Yang-ming stressed that the aim of a war was to disintegrate the enemy troops so that they could no longer do harm to the ordinary people. The bandits and robbers, originally good people, had actually been forced to become bad men for reasons of one sort or another, so indiscriminate slaughter was undesirable. This analysis reflected more truthfully the situations of the bandits in different places then. Every time after winning a battle, Wang Yang-ming made every effort to pacify those minor offenders, which fundamentally helped Wang Yang-ming win a universal support from the majority of the people.

As we all know, Wang Yang-ming had previously been nothing but a scholar and had had no battlefield experience at all. So how could he direct military operations with miraculous skills? Every why has its wherefore. We may still remember that at the age of 12, Wang Yang-ming had the dream of becoming a sage. At the age of 15, he went to inspect the frontier juncture. Probably from then on, he developed the habit of on-site examination wherever he went. Later on, he carefully studied various kinds of books on the art of war, including strategies and tactics. While reading the books, he simulated military operations with nut kernels, exercising his ability in formation and lineups of battle arrays. Having succeeded in receiving the Jinshi degree, he trained the laborers with military strategies and tactics when he supervised the construction of the mausoleum for Wang Yue, Earl of Weining. All these experiences laid a solid foundation for his later military career. What is more, Wang Yang-ming was not only an advocate of the Oneness of Knowing and Doing but a firm practitioner of this philosophy. He consistently integrated learning into practice. When he was county magistrate in Luling, he learned politics from political practice and made everything into perfect order so that he won love and esteem from the people. When in war, he learned the art of war, put the theories into practice, and therefore won many great battles. We might well say that his military feat was born out of his childhood ambition of becoming a sage. And also, of course, it was the result of his combination of theoretical learning with military practice. Just as is known to all that opportunities are given to those who are well prepared.

Now let's come back to the Zhang Nan Campaign. In the pre-battle military dispositions, Wang Yang-ming carefully analyzed the situations of both sides with the officers. He required chief commanders in Guangdong and Fujian Provinces to cooperate with each other to surround the enemies. As planned, military forces in Guangdong advanced eastward, meanwhile a tight guard was kept in all passes to prevent the enemies from escaping westward on the one hand, and cut off completely any possible contact or communication between the bandits outside and inside Guangdong Province on the other hand. In the opposite direction, the troops in Fujian Province pressed westward from the east in their process of advancement and at the same time they had to take strict precautions against road traffic and information

transmissions of the bandits and robbers. He ordered all of the commanders to start the attack all at once.

As Wang Yang-ming anticipated, the converging attack would surely turn out to be effective. When the battle broke out, its progress was fairly smooth at the beginning. The troops in Fujian were brave and skillful in battle, which had a great impact on the enemies, and as a result small-scale victories were gained one after another. Battlefield situations, however, were more often than not complex and easily changeable. Soon after several minor victories, the war situation suddenly changed unfavorably since something went wrong in the cooperation between the east and the west. The military forces in Fujian were doing just well, as the officers and soldiers followed Wang Yang-ming's instructions strictly and fought bravely so that the gangs headed by Zhan Shi-fu could not bear the attack and retreated westward. Under this circumstance, however, the troops in Guangdong did not fight back fiercely to block the enemies so that the surrounding plan shattered. The enemies broke the line of defense and escaped into such natural defenses as Xianghu Mountain,¹⁹ and Jianguan,²⁰ etc., taking favorable terrains at once. Such being the case, the initial favorable battle situation took a sudden turn and hurtled toward defeat. The Zhang Nan Campaign was caught at a stalemate.

That reversion was out of the expectation of Wang Yang-ming. Facing the new situation, he immediately reanalyzed the situation, adjusted the plan, redeployed the military disposition, and ultimately reversed the tide. Then what rearrangement did Wang Yang-ming make? And by what means did he finally win the battle?

(Translated by Sun Yong-tian; Proofread by Sheng Yue-dong)

4.2 Moving to Fight in Jiangxi

The early stage of Zhang Nan Campaign had been smoothly progressing, however, with the battle going on, the enemy troops successfully broke through to Xianghu Mountain, Jianguan and Ketang Cave²¹ at the boundary of Fujian and Guangdong Provinces due to the poor cooperation of the troops from Guangdong Province. Then the battle was brought to a stalemate since the imperial troops could hardly find effective ways to attack the enemy who had occupied the favorable terrain at the time.

Apparently, it was extremely unfavorable for the imperial troops to get stuck in such a position which would not only undermine the soldiers' morale but increase military spending, so Wang Yang-ming anxiously desired to end the battle as soon as possible. How to figure out a way to turn around the deadlock became the foremost problem Wang Yang-ming was faced with.

¹⁹ A mountain in Guangdong Province.

²⁰ A town of Guangdong Province.

²¹ A cave in Ketang Town in Guangdong Province.

With the battle in stalemate there was a serious disagreement in terms of the judgment about the present situation and further military cooperation between officers from Fujian and Guangdong, since the former advocated a massive attack at the right opportunity to thoroughly eliminate the enemy troops, who, as they argued, had been living on a razor's edge with severe damage despite the natural barriers of Xianghu Mountain, while the latter emphasized the advantages of enemy troops who had occupied lofty mountains and the disadvantages of imperial troops who were insufficient in number and weak in fighting capacity, proposed putting off the final fight to the autumn with the assistance of "wolf soldiers," ethnic armies.

Wang Yang-ming, with his own independent judgment of the battle, severely criticized the head officers from both sides. On the one hand, he pointed out that it must be admitted that the battle had been in stalemate and it was the enemy troops who had occupied the more favorable terrain, so the massive attack might turn out to be a military risk without a guarantee of overall victory, for the enemy would undoubtedly take further precautions. Thus, the strategy of "sudden onslaught" from Fujian officers was infeasible. On the other hand, Wang Yang-ming felt there was a serious fear toward the enemy among the Guangdong troops, which helped the enemies to break through successfully. As for the proposal of frequently transferring "wolf soldiers," Wang Yang-ming viewed it just as the typical reflection of fear of the enemies. As a matter of fact, such a movement, as the last resort, was meaningless since it would inevitably waste time and greatly increase military spending, which would finally add a burden to ordinary people. Besides, Wang Yang-ming held the view that the key to victory is how to effectively deploy the troops rather than how many soldiers are involved. In fact, the present number of 2,000 soldiers was sufficient for the fight. Therefore, the proposal of officers from Guangdong was also impractical.

Then what measures should be taken? Wang Yang-ming put emphasis on the unity of thinking from different officers, eliminating both the unnecessary fear, which would lead to bungling opportunities of winning the battle, and the underestimation of enemy troops, which would lead to rash advance. He understood that effective measures must be adopted so as to turn around the military situation. So he carried out a military deployment on the basis of his own judgment and strictly gave orders with the following requirements:

First, there should be a public announcement that the battle had ceased. Ask the soldiers to spread the word that the imperial troops had come up short in the battle and had to wait for the arrival of "wolf soldiers" before they could renew the attack since the enemy troops had moved to the natural barriers of Xianghu Mountain; as well as this order the imperial troops to claim that they would not resume the fight until the autumn since it was unfavorable for the imperial troops to fight in the warm spring. Wang Yang-ming required the officers to dismiss soldiers as pretense of ceasefire so as to deceive the enemies. In the meantime, he demanded that the soldiers should stay nearby, be ready to assemble at any time and to gather as soon as possible.

Second, the troops should make preparations for upcoming military action. Meanwhile, spies should be dispatched to carry out reconnaissance and to report the enemy troops' movements.

Third, the soldiers should swiftly get together and attack the enemies at the proper time. Besides, soldiers should fight in their full strength, even at the risk of their lives, and whoever shrank back in battle would be severely punished according to military law.

Fourth, there must be a clear task division in the fighting process. The vanguards should just undertake the task of breaking the enemy troops' formation, while the following massive forces would have the responsibility of capturing or killing the head officers of the enemy troops. No division in the imperial troops was allowed in disarray just to compete for military exploit and honor.

Fifth, unnecessary massacres were not allowed in the upcoming campaign, the aim of which was just to kill head officers of the enemy troops.

Sixth, there must be cooperative military action with strict discipline.

After making the latest military deployment, Wang Yang-ming led one branch of the troops to Shanghang²² via Tingzhou²³ to observe the situation, with the intention of directing the campaign on the front line by himself. The new deployment, particularly the pretend signs of ceasefire soon turned out to be effective, misleading the enemy troops to become less alert with the false assumption that the battle would pause for a while. Then the opportunity arose on February 29 when Wang Yang-ming commanded the military officers to quickly assemble the troops and swiftly march in three divisions toward Xianghu Mountain, the bandits' lair. The enemy troops, however, were still unaware of the attack until the imperial troops laid siege to Xianghu Mountain and conquered the main strategic positions of each road. The joint attack was launched at 7 a.m. In spite of desperate resistance, unable to find the way out, the enemy officers and soldiers were mostly killed or captured. This battle came to an end with the imperial troops' total victory at noon.

The battle of Xianghu Mountain, with 22,000 officers and soldiers directly involved, was the most significant part of the whole Zhang Nan Campaign, which thoroughly turned round the overall situation of the war since a great amount of the elite forces in the enemy troops was destroyed. Besides, there was a powerful military pressure put on the rest of the enemy troops. At this point, it was the imperial troops who took over the advantages. Moreover, the victory of the battle greatly inspired the imperial troops, and convinced some officers who had been in fear of the enemy. After the main battle, Wang Yang-ming sent an order to track down and arrest those enemy soldiers still at large lest they collect again to fight back. Meanwhile, Wang Yang-ming ordered the troops to follow up the victory with a second attack on Ketang Cave and Jianguan, which were, respectively, the lairs of Zhan Shi-fu and Wen Huo-shao, the chief enemy leaders. In the battle of Ketang Cave, Wang Yang-ming divided the troops into five divisions, with successive and non-stop attacks, finally capturing Zhan Shi-fu and some of his followers alive and driving the rest into other stockaded villages. On March 20 Wang Yang-ming began to attack Jianguan and after dozens of fights captured the enemy leaders alive, including Wen Huo-shao. Considering the situation that there were still enemy troops fleeing to mountains at the boundary

²²A county of Fujian Province.

²³A city of Fujian Province.

between Fujian and Guangdong Provinces, Wang Yang-ming commanded the imperial troops in Fujian Province, Guangdong Province, and Jiangxi Province to take unified military action at midnight on March 21 so as to clean up the rest of enemy troops at the boundary between Fujian and Guangdong Provinces.

The end of the battle of Jianguan basically marked the end of the whole 3-month Zhang Nan Campaign, leading to the rooting out of bandits at the boundary between Fujian and Guangdong Provinces for many years. Then Wang Yang-ming withdrew troops back to Ganzhou in April.

Coming back to Ganzhou, Wang Yang-ming immediately turned to the post-war reconstruction of civil production and people's lives. He issued an official placatory statement, urging those who had been following the bandits to obey the law and work hard in production in the spring plowing season, inculcating them with such obligations as working hard in producing crops, guarding houses, protecting family members, respecting parents, and raising children. They were also instructed to do good rather than evil so as to bask in blessings and escape from misfortune, and to keep rightful etiquette as law-abiding citizens.

Although the Zhang Nan Campaign had come to an end, Wang Yang-ming continued to ponder on how to eliminate the recurrence of bandits at the boundary between Fujian and Guangdong where bandits were most likely to rise over the last few decades. After conducting a site investigation in the area with Xiaoxi²⁴ as the central place haunted by bandits, he noticed the region was vast and inconvenient for traffic, and it was under the administration of Nanjing County which actually was unable to control this area. Therefore, he insisted on promoting political reconstruction, setting up a new county with Xiaoxi as the center, so as not only to control the significant routes between Fujian and Guangdong, but to strengthen political administration and found academies in this region, thus to promote benevolence and etiquette. After consultations with the Fujian Provincial Ancha Si,²⁵ the Prefecture²⁶ of Zhangzhou, and the Magistrate of Nanjing County, Wang Yang-ming designated Xiaoxi as the place of a new county and delimited the boundary. This new county was first named Qingping County,²⁷ and was then renamed Pinghe County.²⁸ With the approval of the central government, Pinghe County was officially founded in March 1518 (the thirteenth year of the Zhengde Emperor).

Having finished the post-war rehabilitation, Wang Yang-ming began to reevaluate the military situation of the boundary between the four provinces. With the Zhang Nan Campaign at an end, bandits in the boundary between Fujian and Guangdong had basically been wiped out. Judging from the situation, Wang Yang-ming considered it necessary to launch other military attacks against the most rampant bandits mainly at Hengshui, Zuoxi, and Tonggang²⁹ in Jiangxi Province. Even when Wang Yang-ming

²⁴Now a town of Ganzhou, Jiangxi Province.

²⁵Fujian Provincial Surveillance Commission.

²⁶Higher administration than a county in ancient China.

²⁷Used to be a county of Jiangxi Province.

²⁸A county of Jiangxi Province.

²⁹Three of them are mountain villages in Jiangxi Province.

still concentrated on the attack upon Zhang Nan, bandits in Hengshui and Tonggang with Xie Zhi-shan and Lan Tian-feng, as their heads came out to plunder properties of local inhabitants and recklessly and violently assault nearby county towns. It was the precipitous terrain with steep mountains and cliffs which could hardly be conquered that emboldened the bandits with no scruples. Wang Yang-ming was also aware of the impracticability of immediate attack on Hengshui and Tonggang. On the one hand, the imperial troops in Jiangxi Province were too weak in combat capability to vanquish the enemy troops due to lack of routine drilling. On the other hand, it was necessary to transfer troops from Jiangxi, Huguang, and Guangdong so as to launch the attack. Before that, he must overcome a lot of problems lest the intended military action should turn out a great risk, such as poor cooperation among leading officers from various regions, dread of enemies among officers, disobedience against command, lack of courage among soldiers, deficiency of combat capability, etc. Then Wang Yang-ming made efforts on regulation inside the troops with adaptation of military structure as well as the consolidation of fighting capability prior to planning specific strategies for the Hengshui and Tonggang Campaign. In particular, he took measures as follows.

First, Wang Yang-ming managed to deal with the decentralization of military power. In May 1517 (the twelfth year of the Zhengde Emperor), he wrote to the central government, reporting the general situation of the Zhang Nan Campaign and analyzing the military trend at the time. Meanwhile, he asked for greater military power, which was finally approved of in September, granting him the power to handle and supervise the military affairs of Southern Jiangxi, Tingzhou and Zhangzhou with eight flags as the authority of discretion. Actually, Wang Yang-ming had already started projecting the next military action according to his own approaches just after writing to the central government in May.

Second, Wang Yang-ming reorganized the troops as the solution to the injustice in award and punishment as well as the disobedience in the process of fighting. He reshaped the troop structure as follows: every 25 soldiers were grouped into units of Wu³⁰ with the leader Xiaojia; every 50 soldiers were grouped into units of Dui with the leader Zongjia; every 200 soldiers were grouped into units of Shao with the leader Shaozhang and the assistant Xieshao; every 400 soldiers were grouped into units of Ying³¹ with the leaders Yingguan³² and Canmou³³; every 1,200 soldiers were grouped into units of Zhen with the leader Pianjiang³⁴; every 2,400 soldiers were grouped into units of Jun³⁵ with the leader Fujiang.³⁶ Besides this, Wang Yang-ming set a rule that higher ranking officers were authorized to impose punishment on lower ranking officers so as to enforce and maintain strict military discipline. Meanwhile,

³⁰ A basic five-man unit of the army in ancient China.

³¹ Camp.

³² Camp Officer.

³³ Staff Officer.

³⁴ Subordinate General.

³⁵ Army.

³⁶ Vice General.

he set up a command system with a commander seal for each level to use in military transfer as the token in case of spies.

Third, Wang Yang-ming strived to tackle the soldiers' weak combat capability resulting from a lack of routine drilling. On the one hand, he replenished the troops with excellent soldiers recruited from ordinary people. On the other hand, he amassed the newly reorganized military units to conduct military drills on the drilling ground in the city of Ganzhou, and to promote coordination with a uniform command so as to improve overall combat capability.

Fourth, Wang Yang-ming made great efforts to tackle the shortage of military funds. He submitted a proposal to the central government in June, requesting to modify laws on salt, to encourage the salt business, and to supplement military funds by levying salt taxation, which finally received approval from the government.

Fifth, Wang Yang-ming established strict disciplinary measures that would be enforced on the troops. For example, officers and soldiers would be beheaded for delaying the fulfillment of a military plan, fleeing from the battlefield, breaking military discipline, disturbing inhabitants or robbing private properties where they stayed, even just picking up valuables from the ground while marching, etc. This strict discipline significantly guaranteed the combat effectiveness of his troops, and in return the ban on disturbance and robbery of the people's goods made the people all the more supportive of his troops.

These were some of the main measures Wang Yang-ming took to strengthen the form of his troops prior to specifically planning the Hengshui and Tonggang Campaign.

Apart from these measures taken to enhance his troops' fighting capability, Wang Yang-ming also did something to prevent the enemies from colluding with each other because he realized that the enemy troops in Hengshui and Tonggang had been keeping in touch with those in Litou, Longchuan County, Guangdong Province, despite the long distance between them. Therefore, in the process of the battle, it was important to keep the target enemy troops in Hengshui and Tonggang isolated, without any mutual contact or sharing of information with other enemy troops, and to prevent military support from the enemy of the strongpoint in Litou, Guangdong Province, who must at least be made to keep neutral by taking a wait-and-see attitude toward the battle. To this end, Wang Yang-ming released an official announcement with conciliatory intent to the bandits in Litou and sent some cattle, wine, treasure, and cloth, expecting them to stop fighting with and to surrender to the central government with sincere repentance. With earnest exhortation, this announcement was written in simple words and easy to understand, not only reassuring the bandits in Litou, but also persuading some of their heads to surrender. Those who did surrender played a very important part in the siege of Litou. We will talk about it later.

As was mentioned above, Wang Yang-ming had made a lot of preparations for launching the Hengshui and Tonggang Campaign. It was in July that he started to substantively plan the wide-ranged and tough military action. Wang Yang-ming carried out his meticulous military deployment to ensure that the battle would progress smoothly until the government troops would win the final victory.

The main target of the siege was the enemies in Hengshui, Zuoxi, and Tonggang, which chiefly lay in Dayu County, Nankang County and Shangyou County, Nan'an Prefecture, Jiangxi Province. Among these bandits, those in Tonggang were recognized as the toughest ones holed up in the most difficult terrain. Therefore, at the military meeting attended by Wang Yang-ming and other officers from the provinces of Jiangxi, Huguang and Guangdong, the majority proposed to conquer Tonggang before they attacked Hengshui and Zuoxi because they thought that once the toughest enemy was completely wiped out, the rest would be relatively easy to deal with. However, Wang Yang-ming held a different view. He argued that Hengshui and Zuoxi were most dangerous to Jiangxi and Huguang and should be annihilated prior to the others. If Tonggang was attacked first, troops from Huguang and Jiangxi must be transferred, thus troops from Jiangxi had to take a detour round Hengshui and Zuoxi before they could lay siege to Tonggang, which was actually quite risky since the troops from Jiangxi, exhausted after a long-distance March, were likely to get attacked from both front and behind. In contrast, if the imperial troops conquered Hengshui and Zuoxi first, it was much more likely for them to win the battle by moving forward step by step to Tonggang and laying a siege in cooperation with the troops from Huguang. In the meantime, Wang Yang-ming stressed that it was helpful to mislead the enemy into considering Tonggang would be the first target could make bandits in Hengshui and Zuoxi less vigilant. Besides, bandits in Tonggang would gradually become less alert when they found no attacks arriving as expected, which would help the imperial troops to capture the enemies unprepared. Wang Yang-ming's analysis was so penetrating that officers from various provinces were deeply convinced and they reached consensus that the first attack should be against Hengshui and Zuoxi instead of Tonggang.

In accordance with the strategy to isolate one gang of bandits from the others and crush them one by one, Wang Yang-ming first commanded one of the battalions from Fujian to enter Nan'an. In this battle, the troops from Jiangxi would be the main force to attack Hengshui and Zuoxi with the plan of action. Wang Yang-ming estimated in advance that the troops from Huguang could reach the place as they had been supposed to just at the time when the enemies in Hengshui and Zuoxi were annihilated, thus the troops from Hubei and Guangdong could meet to lay siege to Tonggang.

In order to beat the enemies effectively with concentrated superior force, Wang Yang-ming divided the main forces into ten posts with a mission of attack to get near the target. The deployment of ten posts was quite meticulous so as to encircle and wipe out the enemies, which also ensured sufficient forces to intercept, track down, and arrest the enemy soldiers who might retreat in disorder when defeated. A general principle was set that the enemies of individual sections must be left within the imperial troop's range of attack, isolated from each other, and never allowed to join up again or support each other. The various branches of imperial troops were supposed to assemble at Tonggang via Hengshui and Zuoxi. With reiteration of strict military discipline, Wang Yang-ming ordered all of the troops to March on the night of October 7 according to a pre-planned route.

It was proved in the combat that the deployment arranged by Wang Yang-ming was really effective. The surrounding bandits' lairs were quickly crushed by various troops marching toward Hengshui and Zuoxi on a large scale. Xie Zhi-shan, the ringleader of the bandits, was still unaware of the danger when the imperial troops arrived at Hengshui because on the one hand he had been misled into the misconception that it would be Tonggang that would be attacked first rather than Hengshui, and on the other hand he had neglected to take precautions, thinking that Hengshui was almost unconquerable with its natural barriers. It had never occurred to him that the imperial troops would lay siege to Hengshui from all directions so quickly. There was a desperate but hopeless resistance and the trend of the battle was irretrievable. Finally, Xie Zhi-shan was killed and many others lost their lives by falling into the ravine. Meanwhile, Zuoxi was also conquered and all the troops gathered in Hengshui. It was an exceptionally tough battle with heavy rain and dense fog, which was favorable for enemies to flee in all directions, who, as Wang Yang-ming warned, were certain to gather together as a potential menace if no follow-up action was taken. However, there was not sufficient time to make another chase and attack since it was already October 15, while they were supposed to attack Tonggang together with troops from Huguang on November 1. Time was pressing as it took at least 3 days to get from Hengshui to Tonggang with more than 50 km of mountain path. Then Wang Yang-ming urgently adjusted his strategy, dividing the troops into two divisions, one of them attacking from the front and the other from behind, to chase the rest of the enemy troops in Hengshui and Zuoxi, who by October 28 was eliminated at large, apart from those who fled to Tonggang. Then the imperial troops continued to march toward Tonggang following the previously planned route.

Tonggang, with natural barriers, could be accessed to the center only by five paths, which had been heavily guarded by massive forces of Lan Tian-feng, the ringleader of the bandits in Tonggang. It was rather tough, even impractical, to attack the place by force, for the commanding elevation was under the control of enemy troops and the imperial troops could in no way seize the paths under the falling stones or logs pushed down by the enemy guards. Besides, there was heavy rain which added more difficulty to the attack. In face of such a situation, Wang Yang-ming proposed requesting Lan Tian-feng to capitulate, which could at least gain time or induce him to let down his guard if he did not want to surrender, so as to give a chance to break through the natural barrier. Wang Yang-ming then chose two captives who had been old friends of Lan Tian-feng, absolved them from guilt and lifted them into the bandits' lair with ropes to request Lan Tian-feng to capitulate, which, as Wang Yang-ming expected, was somehow effective in making the bandits less alert. On November 1, the imperial troops, despite the natural barriers and heavy rain, managed to break the guard of Tonggan while Lan Tian-feng was discussing with the crew whether they should capitulate or not. It was a tough fight when the imperial troops attacked from all directions and Lan Tian-feng responded in haste. Finally, the bandits' lair in Tonggang was conquered and Lan Tian-feng was killed. By November 13, the enemies in Tonggang were basically wiped out. On December 9, Wang Yang-ming returned with troops in victory, marking the end of the Hengshui and Tonggang Campaign.

It is worth mentioning that Wang Yang-ming expected the battle to be quite tough in his planning, and ordered the troops from Huguang to set out on November 11 in cooperation with the troops from Jiangxi to carry out the siege on Tonggang. However, the battle progressed much more smoothly than he expected, so that the troops from Huguang had still not entered the field of Jiangxi by the time Tonggang was conquered. Therefore, Wang Yang-ming sent messengers to inform the officers of troops from Huguang that it was unnecessary for them to come across the boundary since the battle was already over. In spite of their absence, they were still awarded grand prizes and honor.

All the battles of the Hengshui and Tonggang Campaign took 3 months; actually 2 months to wipe out more than 80 bandits' lairs, root out bandits in Jiangxi who had been an affliction for many years, and bring back peaceful life, which conformed to the interest of most ordinary people. So Wang Yang-ming gained a great reputation, almost like a god. He was greeted by the people with joss sticks on the head when he led troops back by way of Nankang County. In various regions of Jiangxi, a lot of temples were set up to worship him during seasons of the year.

On December 20, Wang Yang-ming came back to Ganzhou. He commended officers with meritorious conduct in the battles and wrote to the central government asking for promotion for them. Meanwhile, he gave profound consideration to the long-term stability and development of this region, just as he did after the Zhang Nan Campaign. Geographically speaking, Hengshui, Zuoxi, and Tonggang were rather remote, lying across Shangyou County, Nankang County, and Dayu County, with a distance of nearly 300 km to the capital area of each county, thus actually lying in a vacuum of administration, out of effective control from the three counties, which actually could be considered the essential cause of rampant bandits. Wang Yang-ming considered it necessary to set up a new county in the region of Hengshui to prevent the resurgence of bandits. After conducting the survey by himself, Wang Yang-ming selected Hengshui as the location of a new county named Chongyi and marked the boundary. This proposal was immediately approved by the central government. Chongyi County was set up in April 1518 (the thirteenth year of the Zhengde Emperor). The first Zhixian was Shu Fu, the previous Xiancheng of Nankang County.

The complete end of Hengshui and Tonggang Campaign marked the elimination of bandits in the boundary of the Jiangxi, Fujian, Huguang, and Guangdong Provinces. With the successive victories of the imperial troops, bandits in the boundary of Guangdong and Jiangxi Provinces, taking Litou, Longchuan as their stronghold, were trapped in isolation. After the Hengshui and Tonggang Campaign, Wang Yang-ming continued his planning for the Litou Campaign. Litou was located in Jiulian Mountain, Longchuan County, Guangdong Province. The ringleader was named Chi Zhong-rong, with the nickname of Chi Da-bin. Bandits in Litou, emboldened by the complex terrain and natural barriers, plundered and ravaged recklessly. Among bandits at the boundary of the four provinces, those in Litou were the strongest. When planning the Hengshui and Tonggang Campaign, Wang Yang-ming had formed an overall strategy, involving the attack on Hengshui first, next on Zuoxi, the siege on Tonggang with the troops from Jiangxi and Huguang Provinces together, and finally annihilation of Litou bandits with all the troops from Jiangxi, Huguang, and

Guangdong Provinces, which exactly reflected his particular emphasis on bandits in Litou. Under his rigorous planning and deployment, the Litou Campaign progressed quite smoothly and inexorably, somehow with a sign of amusement.

(Translated by Ding Ying; Proofread by Lin Xiao)

4.3 Taking Litou by Strategy

Wang Yang-ming launched two campaigns successively in the border areas of the four provinces of Jiangxi, Huguang, Fujian, and Guangdong, i.e., the Zhang Nan Campaign and the Hengshui and Tonggang Campaign. He eradicated the bandits in the border regions of Fujian and Guangdong Provinces, as well as those stationed in Hengshui and Tonggang in Jiangxi Province. There remained only one big bandit strongpoint—Litou, which was located in Longchuan, Huizhou, Guangdong at the junction of four provinces. After the Hengshui and Tonggang Campaign, he immediately planned to suppress the bandits in Litou.

Litou, which was divided into upper, middle, and lower parts, was located in a Jiulian mountainous area, Longchuan County, Guangdong Province, where there were rolling mountains and strategically important terrains. The bandits in Litou led by Chi Zhong-rong (nicknamed Chi Da-bin, i.e., Chi with ferocious whiskers) had been running rampant against the local people. With the natural barrier of Jiulian Mountain he acted brazenly and without scruple. The Imperial Court could do little to stop their evil doing. Several years before, the Imperial Court had moved thousands of “wolf troops” to encircle and suppress these bandits, but they failed to achieve the desired results, which in turn added to Chi Zhong-rong’s insolent arrogance. He boasted, “It’s easy to deal with wolf troops. It takes the Imperial Court at least half a year to move the wolf troops, but I only need to take one month to avoid them.” That was true. As a result, he became more unscrupulous.

Among the bandits in the border areas of the four provinces, the ones in Litou were the strongest. Wang Yang-ming paid special attention to the bandits in Litou, and referred to them as the giant of bandits, whom he elected as the last to be conquered in his military encirclement and suppression of these bandits. He compared it to processing logs, i.e., dealing with those parts first which were easy to cut and leaving the tough nuts to the end. Now that the other bandits had been suppressed and wiped out, he would crack the hardest nut in Litou. On the one hand, he was thinking over the details of a general military attack on Litou, and on the other hand he was trying his best to find a breakthrough to ensure the final success of the battle. With a tight military deployment and new breakthrough, the Litou Campaign went on smoothly, and in the end the imperial army conquered Litou swiftly, which was like splitting bamboo in a comic environment. Then how did it come to this?

As mentioned in the previous chapter, while launching the Hengshui and Tonggang Campaign, Yang-ming had issued a bulletin in Litou and rewarded the bandits there with cattle and wine so as to prevent them from offering their military aid to those in Hengshui and Tonggang. The bulletin was easy to understand and touching. Several

sub-chiefs of the bandits in Litou, including Huang Jin-chao, came over with their men and surrendered to the Imperial Court. Wang Yang-ming accepted Huang's surrender sincerely but with caution. Inspired by this, a plan of taking Litou by strategy gradually emerged in Wang's mind.

Wang Yang-ming forgave Huang Jin-chao's crimes for his surrender and rewarded him. To show his sincerity Huang asked to atone for his crimes by joining in the combat against Hengshi. Wang agreed, and gave him 500 soldiers. Hengshui was conquered on October 12. Huang Jin-chao wrote a letter to Chi Zhong-rong, telling him that Wang Yang-ming had conquered Hengshui and treated the men who came to surrender sincerely. In the end, he hoped that Chi Zhong-rong could also surrender with his men. Receiving the letter, Chi was scared. And he believed that Wang Yang-ming surely would attack Litou after Tonggang was conquered. Actually, Chi was unwilling to surrender in his heart, yet he was under Wang's military pressure. Therefore, Chi stepped up war preparations in Litou on the one hand, and on the other hand, at the same time, he sent his brother Chi Zhong-an together with 200 people to surrender to Wang Yang-ming. These guys led by Chi Zhong-an were old and sick. Obviously, Chi had his own purposes in doing this. On the surface, he would like to show his "sincerity" of surrender, but his real purpose was to spy. Once Wang Yang-ming attacked Litou, these guys would become moles, i.e., Chi had inserted his own soldiers into the imperial army. Wang saw through their trick, but he kept quiet and welcomed them, rewarding them with gifts. In the battle of Tonggang, Chi Zhong-an asked to take part, and Wang agreed. But these guys were sent to an area far away from Litou to prevent them contacting Chi Zhong-rong.

Then how to take military action effectively in Litou? Wang Yang-ming thought that different from other regions, Litou was difficult to attack owing to its steep terrain and the fact that the bandits occupying this region had a strong fighting ability with extraordinary skills. If the bandits were in combat readiness, it would be difficult for the imperial army to win in the campaign. So it would help a lot if the enemy neglected to take precautions and the imperial army moved confidentially. Therefore, during the interval of attacking Tonggang, Wang summoned dozens of people familiar with Litou from nearby counties to learn the real situation there. These people all insisted that Chi Zhong-rong should be eliminated because he was a wicked man and had conducted all sorts of evil doings. They also pointed out that it was necessary to move a great number of "wolf soldiers" to destroy the bandits because "wolf soldiers" were good at fighting in mountain areas. Otherwise, it would be of no avail. But Wang believed that it was not a must to mobilize "wolf troops" in this campaign. As the Chinese saying goes, there are no constant conditions in warfare. It was most important of all to seize opportunities and adopt appropriate tactical strategies to win the battle. So Wang confidentially deployed military operations against Litou. He sent an official document to Huizhou Prefecture, Guangdong Province and ordered the officers there to call in troops and get a detailed knowledge of the terrain around Litou, getting well prepared for the campaign according to his strategy. Besides, he was seeking favorable opportunities by quietly watching the movements of Chi Zhong-rong and his underlings.

After Tonggang was conquered, Chi Zhong-rong was scared and preparing for war even more actively. Wang Yang-ming knew that with no detailed knowledge of the military installation and road conditions in Litou, once the campaign started, the imperial army would be in a passive situation. As the old Chinese saying goes, “How can you catch tiger cubs without entering the tiger’s lair,” equivalent to English proverb “Nothing ventured, nothing gained.” So he made a decision out of others’ expectations by sending a representative to Litou with various goods. The representative said to Chi Zhong-rong, “Since you have asked your brother to cross over, we know you were sincere in surrender, so Wang Gan-zhou (Wang Yang-ming) delegated me to reward you.” Seeing Chi’s men stepping up readiness for war, the messenger continued, “Why are you so busy with preparations for war?” Failing to conceal the fact, Chi was embarrassed and said, “I am sorry, we are doing this because I have learned that Lu Ke of Longchuan County would attack us. As a matter of fact we do not intend to fight with the imperial army but instead we are preparing to fight against his troops.”

This Lu Ke mentioned by Chi had been a minor bandit, but under Wang Yang-ming’s appeal he had already submitted to Wang with over three thousand followers. Wang had accepted Lu’s surrender and asked him to go back to Longchuan and get ready for attacking Litou. Learning that Chi Zhong-rong and Lu Ke hated each other, Wang decided to capture Chi wittily by taking advantage of their conflict.

When Wang Yang-ming and his soldiers arrived at Nankang County after the victory of the battle of Tonggang, Lu Ke came and reported to Wang that Chi Zhong-rong hatched a sinister plot and was busy preparing for war. Actually, Wang had already learned about this. But unexpectedly, Wang raged, “Chi Zhong-rong had already planned to submit to me. How dare you make a false accusation against him?” Wang ordered his men to bind Lu, and declared that he would put Lu to death. Lu was put into prison. Didn’t Wang know that Lu was telling the truth? Why did he fly into a rage? The reason was that Chi Zhong-an and his men were at the scene, and Wang performed this to deceive them. When Chi Zhong-an and his men saw Lu Ke come to accuse Chi Zhong-rong, they were scared. Seeing Wang put Lu into prison, they all became joyful and recounted his crimes. Naturally, Wang Yang-ming had noticed the change of their facial expressions. But out of these men’s expectation, the very night Lu Ke was confined, Wang explained to Lu that he was taking advantage of Lu to trap Chi Zhong-rong. Wang also asked Lu to summon his man back immediately after he returned and cooperate with the imperial army to conquer Litou.

When Wang Yang-ming reached Ganzhou on December 20, he held dinners and entertained his soldiers. He promulgated the order to stop the fight since the bandits in Hengshui and Tonggang areas were conquered and the bandits in Litou had announced that they would submit genuinely. To give a false impression, Wang disbanded the army. At the same time, Wang told Chi Zhong-an, “You may go back and help your brother to make preparations for the defense. Although Lu Ke was put into prison, you’d better beware of his henchmen’s attack.” Hearing this Chi chuckled to himself. Chi Zhong-an reported everything to his brother when he returned. Hence, the preparations for war were slackened in Litou.

Several days later, Wang Yang-ming dispatched an officer to Litou and granted the bandits with an amnesty, asking them to get well prepared for Lu Ke's sneak attack. Chi Zhong-rong and his henchmen were all delighted. After a few days, Wang sent his adviser Lei Ji to Litou. When Lei arrived, he tried to persuade Chi Zhong-rong to Ganzhou, "Now that the government has granted you with various rewards, you'd better show your gratitude. Why not call on Wang Yang-ming in Ganzhou personally? What's more, Lu Ke did not find it acceptable that he was put into prison and even said that you would rebel and that you would surely resist if the official soldiers came to capture you. So why don't you go to Ganzhou before the imperial soldiers come? If you go, the government will really believe you and at the same time Lu Ke will surely be put to death since his lies will collapse by themselves." Chi thought it reasonable, so he said to his henchmen, "What on earth does Wang Gan-zhou intend to do? I'd better go and see. You guys guard our home and I'll be back in a few days." Then he went to Ganzhou together with over 40 warriors, all with extraordinary skills.

Now the trick of trapping Chi Zhong-rong was almost fulfilled. As soon as Chi left Litou, Wang issued his military orders confidentially, ordering ten army divisions to encircle Litou, which kept the bandits in the mountains under his military control.

But Chi Zhong-rong was a man with sinister motives. When he arrived at Ganzhou, he went to the parade ground first instead of calling on Wang Yang-ming. He felt delighted inwardly when he found the parade ground was empty and all the government soldiers had gone home. The streets were gay with lanterns and colorful decorations; people were ready for the Chinese New Year and there was no trace of military training. He bribed the jailer and found Lu Ke in the prison trussed up tightly. Now he truly believed that Wang Yang-ming was tricked into trusting his surrender and he felt relieved. So he went to visit Wang. Wang asked directly, "Chi Zhong-rong, why did you visit the parade ground first instead of seeing me when you reached Ganzhou? Do you suspect me?" Chi Zhong-rong responded immediately, "No, no ... I would not dare doubt you, my respectable provincial governor." Hearing this, Wang Yang-ming changed from anger to joy and was all smiles. He entertained Chi and his retinues in the Xiangfu Palace in Ganzhou, where everything was in order. Chi was pleased. But without Chi suspecting, that very night Wang Yang-ming released Lu Ke, asking him to assemble his soldiers and make preparations to attack Litou. On the second day, Chi wanted to go home, but Wang insisted that Chi had better stay for a few more days. Wang stated two reasons. Firstly, Chi could not arrive home before the Spring Festival even if he set off right now since it was already December 24 (Chinese Lunar Calendar) and it took nearly 8 days traveling from Ganzhou to Litou. And secondly, if Chi went back it would be necessary for him to visit relatives and friends during the Spring Festival, which would be really tiresome. What's more, a lantern festival would be held in Ganzhou. Chi had no other choice but to stay there. Wang directed his men to entertain Chi so as to reassure him.

As was recorded, although Wang Yang-ming trapped Chi with tricks and was ready to attack Litou, he was also sincere in trying to persuade Chi to submit. Wang asked Chi to dress in official robes and taught him etiquette. What's more, Wang invited Chi to walk with him in the street of Ganzhou intentionally in order to watch his attitudes and manners. Finally, Wang found that Chi was a crusty man and would

never submit. At this point, Wang made up his mind to kill Chi. However, after Chi was dead, Wang felt so sad that he ate nothing all day long.

On January 3, 1518 (Chinese Lunar Calendar, the thirteenth year of the Zhengde Emperor), Wang Yang-ming estimated that Lu Ke should have arrived home and all the government forces should have got to the areas as ordered. So with his soldiers hiding in the hall, Wang held a banquet during which he killed Chi Zhong-rong and his retinues.

On one hand, Litou had no supreme leader since Chi Zhong-rong was killed; on the other hand, the bandits there were not in combat readiness because Wang had managed to give a false impression that the imperial army would not attack Litou. These two points greatly ensured the success of the Litou Campaign.

On January 7 (Chinese Lunar Calendar), Wang Yang-ming gave the order to attack Litou. The bandits in Litou had got Chi Zhong-rong's letter before he died which said that Ganzhou had stopped preparing for war, so they made almost no preparation for fighting. Thus, the imperial armies succeeded easily, and the military strongpoints of the bandits were conquered in succession. But unexpectedly, approximately 800 capable and vigorous bandits fled to Jiulian Mountain and occupied the advantageous position, which added great difficulty to the pursuit. Attack by force was obviously unwise and actually useless. Then what should they do? Wang believed that although the enemies had occupied the advantageous positions, they were chased and in disorder and had difficulty in resisting the military attack effectively, which was advantageous to the imperial army. Suddenly an idea occurred to him that he would adopt another strategy rather than attack by force. He selected 700 robust and athletic soldiers, and ordered them to wear the enemy's uniform and sneak in among the enemy troops under the cover of night. Those soldiers ran toward the cliff occupied by the enemy. Seeing this, the bandits on the cliff took them for their fellow guys and helped them to get onto the cliff. The imperial army occupied the natural barrier rapidly through the strategy of "fishing in muddied waters." On the second day, the enemy found they were cheated, but it was too late to fight back. Therefore, at the beginning of March the Litou Campaign was declared a victory.

After the Litou Campaign, Wang Yang-ming concerned himself with the local area's lasting stability. In order to strengthen the political influence of the central government, he added Heping County, originally a part of Longchuan County, Guangdong Province. What was more, he appealed to the Imperial Court for the exemption of people's taxes and corvee in Heping for 3 years, which was ratified.

He spent a little more than 1 year (from February 1517 to March 1518) eradicating the bandits in the border areas of the four provinces—Jiangxi, Fujian, Huguang, and Guangdong—which ensured the peaceful life of the local people. Therefore, his military activities were supported and he himself was highly esteemed by the people in Jiangxi.

In view of the three campaigns, we may summarize Wang Yang-ming's strategy and tactics as follows:

- (1) Know the enemy and know yourself, and do not fight non-prepared wars. Wang Yang-ming would make great effort to get well prepared for every battle he

would fight by obtaining the details of the power of the enemy, including arms, weapons, morale, combat capability, etc., and by solving any problem discovered in good time, which laid the foundation for the final victory.

- (2) Isolate the enemy, and maintain the strength of forces. Wang Yang-ming paid special attention to the tactics of isolating the enemy, such as cutting off the enemy's road traffic and communication, making the enemy unable to pry for information, preventing them from getting military aid, keeping the target enemy in an isolated state, and putting them within the range of military attack, which resulted in their failure to know the real situation and thus ensured the superiority of the imperial army.
- (3) Slacken the enemy's vigilance and undermine their will to fight. In a war, Wang Yang-ming would deceive the enemy by using spies and spreading false information, which played a crucial role in the Zhang Nan Campaign, the Litou Campaign, and later in the suppression of Zhu Chen-hao's rebellion. As the saying goes, "All is fair in war," or "Deceit is not to be despised in war," or "In war there is no objection to deceit." So adopting various tactics of disinformation is essential in the victory of a war, which showed Wang's outstanding military wisdom, and created opportunities for the imperial army to defeat the enemy by surprise.
- (4) Concentrate the superior forces to wipe out the enemy, and give them no way to flee. First, isolate the enemy; then concentrate the superior forces to surround the enemy. The three campaigns mentioned above demonstrated Wang Yang-ming's military thought of concentrating the superior forces to fight a war of annihilation. As for the isolated enemy, Wang Yang-ming would use the tactic of surrounding and outflanking the enemy, in order to keep the enemy within the bounds of a military attack, which effectively ensured the victory in the battles.
- (5) Grasp the overall situation by means of flexible tactics, and gain the upper hand of the war. Whenever Wang Yang-ming planned a battle, he paid special attention to taking into account the overall situation. For example, in the Hengshui and Tonggang Campaign, he spread the message of "attacking Tonggang first" in order to stabilize the situation in Litou. Whenever an unfavorable situation emerged, he would adopt flexible tactics to reverse it. For instance, in the course of conquering Litou and trapping Chi Zhong-rong, he ordered the government soldiers to wear the enemy's dress and sneak in among the enemy troops, which helped the imperial army to gain the upper hand, thus ensuring the final victory of the battle.
- (6) Punish the principal culprit, and do not carry out massacres. Whenever Wang Yang-ming set out his war strategy, he emphasized the importance of punishing the principal culprit only. No killing was allowed if the enemy had given up resistance. And he also made great effort to conciliate the captured subordinate bandits, which reflected his generosity and his unique understanding of the purpose and significance of war.
- (7) Emphasize military discipline, and strictly keep the rules for reward and punishment. Being strict in discipline and discriminating in rewards and punishments contributed to enhancing the army's fighting capacity. While the soldiers were

marching or stationed in the residential area, he made rules of not taking a single thing from the residents, which resulted in local people's support. And it also embodied his deep love for the people.

(8) Pay special attention to the people's livelihoods, and achieve long-term stability after war. Wang Yang-ming believed that war is launched to help the people live a prosperous life. Therefore, whenever a war ended, he would try his best to achieve the local area's lasting stability. For example, he added Pinghe County in Fujian Province, Chongyi County in Jiangxi Province, and Heping County in Guangdong Province. He strengthened the administration and advocated moral education in these areas, which showed that he was a man with outstanding political foresight who was not eager for quick success or instant benefits.

Of course, Wang Yang-ming's military thought was the crystallization of his reflection on ancient military strategy and tactics. He applied his military thought to battles. What's more, his military thought in turn had a profound impact on the formation of later military thought in China, and even in Japan.

Through the three campaigns, Wang Yang-ming eliminated the banditry in the areas bordering the four provinces and completed his first step in becoming a sage and realizing his ambition of making achievements all over the country. It was the fruit of his long years' studying military tactics. And it was also a test of his philosophy—"The Oneness of Knowing and Doing." He applied his military knowledge in the battles and in turn he took from them more military knowledge to enrich his military thought. Therefore, knowledge and action, like a bird's wings or a vehicle's wheels, were mutual and indispensable in the process of gaining knowledge.

Wang Yang-ming eliminated the bandits with his brilliant military talents. In other words, he had fulfilled the task granted by the Imperial Court. So when the battles ended, he handed in his retirement report on March 4, 1518 (the thirteenth year of the Zhengde Emperor). In the report, he emphasized his poor health and described himself as a useless man suffering from coughing, hot flushes, and paralysis of hands and feet, in the hope that the Imperial Court would understand and allow him to resign and stay home. But out of his expectation, the Imperial Court did not sympathize with him and the official reply did not come until October 2, which said that Wang Shou-ren made contributions in suppressing the revolts, but the resignation was not allowed since he only got occasional minor illness which only needed a little care.

We have reason to believe that Wang Yang-ming described his illness honestly in his resignation report because in the battles fought in mountains, sometimes he had to command troops from a stretcher. Therefore, it is understandable that he wanted to go home to recuperate, to give lectures, and improve his thought as he longed to do. But the Imperial Court did not think so, and thought that he only had a minor illness and as a result rejected his application. Hence, he had to stay in Ganzhou and devote himself to his duty.

Anyway, the wars were over and now he could devote more time to his philosophical thinking. In most of 1518 (the thirteenth year of the Zhengde Emperor), besides dealing with local military affairs in Ganzhou, he recuperated and gave lectures. A number of young men were interested in his thought in Jiangxi Province, including

Zou Shou-yi, Ou-yang De, Huang Hong-gang, and so on, who became his disciples, and later the backbone of the Jiangyou School.³⁷

On June 5, 1519 (the fourteenth year of the Zhengde Emperor), Wang Yang-ming received the Imperial Court's command that he should hurry to Fujian where an army mutiny occurred. So he set off along the Ganjiang River for Fujian via Nanchang. On June 15 he arrived at Huangtunao in Fengcheng County, outside Nanchang City. Gu Bi, Zhixian³⁸ of Fengcheng County, welcomed him and reported to him some surprising news which influenced his life thereafter. What on earth was the news about? And what reaction would he have after he learned the news?

(Translated by *Jiang Yang-fen*; Proofread by *Wu Yue-min*)

4.4 Suppressing Zhu Chen-Hao's Rebellion Alone

As soon as Wang Yang-ming arrived at Huangtunao, Fengcheng County, on the outskirts of Nanchang City, on June 15, 1519 (the fourteenth year of the Zhengde Emperor), Gu Bi, Magistrate of Fengcheng County, told him the astonishing news: Zhu Chen-hao, the Ning Wang,³⁹ had rebelled the day before. Wang Yang-ming should not enter Nanchang City in any event!

Upon this news, Wang Yang-ming felt like he'd been struck by lightening! He at once calmed down and in a flash made a judgment according to the situation. He decidedly turned around and returned to his boat and went back to Ji'an. Meanwhile, Zhu Chen-hao's scouts found his tracks and immediately sent a great number of troops to chase after him. Let's not start with whether Wang Yang-ming could throw off Zhu Chen-hao's chase, but who Zhu Chen-hao was.

Zhu Chen-hao was the fifth generation of Zhu Yuan-zhang, Ming Taizu.⁴⁰ After Zhu Yuan-zhang established the Ming dynasty, he appointed his sons as princes, including his 17th son, Zhu Quan, as Prince of Ning. Zhu Chen-hao, one of the offspring of Zhu Quan, was given this title as the fourth generation of Prince of Ning in 1497 (the tenth year of the Hongzhi Emperor⁴¹ in the Ming dynasty). Nanchang had not been Prince Ning's original fief, but was later changed into his fief during the reign of the Yongle Emperor.⁴² Zhu Chen-hao was surely a clan relative to Zhu Houzhao, Emperor Wuzong of Ming.⁴³ According to the family hierarchy, Zhu Chen-hao was one of the grandfathers of Emperor Wuzong, though only 12 years older. These

³⁷ A school of Wang Yang-ming's philosophy at Jiangyou.

³⁸ County Magistrate.

³⁹ Prince of Ning.

⁴⁰ Hongwu Emperor.

⁴¹ (July 30, 1470–June 8, 1505) was the ninth emperor of the Ming dynasty in China between 1487 and 1505.

⁴² (May 2, 1360–August 12, 1424), personal name Zhu Di, the third emperor of the Ming dynasty in China, reigning from 1402 to 1424.

⁴³ Zhengde Emperor.

two descendants of Zhu Yuan-zhang, Ming Taizu, were black really sheep to the royal family. As Emperor, Zhu Hou-zhao ignored state affairs and day and night just spent time traveling, singing, dancing, catering (capering), cockfighting, running horses, hunting rabbits with hawks, mostly not staying inside the Forbidden City. While in Nanchang, Zhu Chen-hao yearned for Beijing. According to his wish, Zhu Chen-hao really wanted to be emperor. Since the emperor didn't want to stay in Beijing, he would like to go there instead. So almost at the same time as Zhu Hou-zhao began to reign, Zhu Chen-hao started to plot how to take his place.

According to historical records, Zhu Chen-hao behaved frivolously, was good at indulging in empty talk, doing nothing practical, whitewashing, and boiling the ocean. Princes in accordance with regulations of the Ming dynasty enjoyed very honorable status, with ministers bowing down to worship them although they had no actual fiefs. Yet they had the right to control thousands of guard troops and to mobilize local troops although they had no local authority. During the Yingzong Period (1457–1464, the Zhengtong Emperor), Zhu Dian-pei, Zhu Chen-hao's grandfather, the Ning Wang of the time, broke the law and his garrison was removed. In other words, when Zhu Chen-hao became the Ning Wang, there was no garrison in the Chamber of Ning Wang. Zhu Chen-hao knew clearly that if he had no absolutely loyal troops, it was impossible for him to take the Emperor's place. Thus, from 1507 (the second year of the Zhengde Emperor), he left no stone unturned to restore the garrison system in the Chamber of Ning Wang.

As is well known, the eunuch Liu Jin manipulated the Imperial Court at that time. Therefore, Zhu Chen-hao managed to connect with Liu Jin and sent him 20,000 Chinese tael silver dollars. As he gained benefits from Zhu Chen-hao, Liu Jin arbitrarily delivered a false decree to restore the garrison and station farm systems in the Chamber of Ning Wang. Thereafter, Zhu Chen-hao began openly and unscrupulously to expand his own troops on a large scale, to encroach on the people's properties, and to establish partisans. After Liu Jin was executed by Linchi, i.e., by a thousand cuts and into myriad pieces, Bing Bu⁴⁴ decreed to dispose of the garrison in the Chamber of Ning Wang again. However, Zhu Chen-hao did not stop expanding his private troops but all the more paced up his preparation for his ambition by looting public wealth, encroaching private properties, plundering merchant ships, as well as collaborating with bandits looting around. Not only did local civilians suffer from him, but also local officials who did not obey him would be elbowed out or even be killed at will. Besides, he sent his trusted followers to Beijing, bribing big shots in the Imperial Court publicly with carts of silver. After receiving his considerable bribes, Lu Wan, the Shangshu⁴⁵ of Bing Bu then put in a good word for him in any case. Qian Ning, Emperor Zhu Hou-zhao's foster son, was also his key tempting target. With their urgent incitements, the garrison in the Chamber of Ning Wang was restored again in 1514 (the ninth year of the Zhengde Emperor). With his increasingly explicit rebellion ambition, Zhu Chen-hao practically established another Imperial Court, where

⁴⁴Ministry of War.

⁴⁵Minister.

he referred to himself as monarch, his troops as emperor's guards, and his orders as imperial edicts.

Since 1515 (the tenth year of the Zhengde Emperor), Zhu Chen-hao publicly enlisted warriors into his troops, collaborated with bandit leaders like Ling Shiyi, Liu Niansi, and Lang Bing and Tu Bing from other places, sent people to Guangzhou to purchase ox leathers, made helmets and weapons, and produced French firecrackers which were the precursor of artillery, the most advanced weapon at that time. The Chamber of Ning Wang manufactured massive weapons day and night. After years of preparation, Zhu Chen-hao had a troop of hundreds of thousands of well-armed soldiers. Furthermore, he sent scouts into the Imperial Court in Beijing. If there was any news, he could receive the message within 10 days across ten thousand miles.

Besides, he associated with local scholars as his think tank for scheming and planning his armed rebellion. Here two figures should be mentioned, Liu Yang-zheng and Li Shi-shi. Liu was a local Juren⁴⁶ in Jiangxi Province, renowned for his talents, especially for the art of war. When Zhu Chen-hao received Liu in the palace for the first time, Liu greeted him and praised him, remarking on his prominent look that could bring order out of chaos, and Liu also told Zhu about Zhao Kuang-yin's⁴⁷ story of being draped with the imperial yellow robe by supporters and then acclaimed emperor. Naturally, Zhu was delighted. The rebellion plot was made in their discussions. The other figure Li Shi-shi who was a Jinshi⁴⁸ and You-Du-Yushi,⁴⁹ famous for his poetry, calligraphy, and painting, also played a major role in Zhu's rebellion plot.

Zhu so rampantly built up military forces that it was out of the question that the Imperial Court knew nothing about Zhu's massive military expansion. The point is the Zhengde Emperor Zhu Hou-zhao, self-conceited and unable to distinguish right from wrong, ignored the Imperial Court affairs and Zhu Chen-hao's deeds, while the latter was more insidious and apparently knew that the only way to achieve his dream of becoming Emperor was to deceive the Zhengde Emperor using anything he could to please the Emperor. For instance, Zhu Chen-hao knew that the Zhengde Emperor was noted for his playfulness and that he would spend tens of thousands of Chinese tael of silver decorating the Imperial Court with new-style lanterns and colored hangings for every Spring Festival. In January 1514 (the ninth year of the Zhengde Emperor), Zhu Chen-hao, to please the emperor, particularly sent his men to the Imperial Court with various gorgeous lights to decorate the pillars of Qianqing Gong⁵⁰ and with fireworks to decorate its eaves. Unexpectedly, the fireworks were lit up, and Qianqing Gong caught fire and then burnt to the ground. Ridiculously when the Emperor saw the fire in the Leopard House, he cheered, "What a fire!" What an absurd Emperor you see!

⁴⁶A successful candidate in the Imperial Examinations at the provincial level in the Ming dynasty.

⁴⁷Song Taizu, the first emperor of the Song dynasty.

⁴⁸A successful candidate in the highest Imperial Examinations.

⁴⁹Whose duty is similar to the Attorney General in the U.S.

⁵⁰Also Palace of Heavenly Purity.

It was the Emperor's absurdity and ignorance that not only made Zhu Chen-hao's rebellion plot possible but also caused his plot to nearly to come true. From 1515 (the tenth year of the Zhengde Emperor), upright officials continuously exposed Zhu Chen-hao's rebellion scheme, but aroused no attention from the Imperial Court, and even got killed. In June 1519 (the fourteenth year of the Zhengde Emperor), Yang Ting-he, the Da Xueshi⁵¹ of the Cabinet, had ensured Zhu Chen-hao's rebellion preparation so that the Imperial Court decided to remove Zhu's garrison once again as a necessary move.

On June 13, it happened to be Zhu Chen-hao's birthday and he was holding a grand banquet to treat the main local officials from various places of Jiangxi Province, when the Imperial Court sent officials to Nanchang to announce the edict of removing Zhu's garrison. At the news, Zhu Chen-hao was astonished and conferred with Liu Yang-zheng for countermeasures. Liu said, "It comes down to the pivotal moment that the only way out is to rise up right now. Otherwise, without the garrison, your Majesty has no military troops to rely on." Zhu Chen-hao asked how. Liu replied, "According to the routine practice, all the key officials in Jiangxi will come to celebrate your birthday tomorrow. We must take the opportunity to put them under house arrest, forcing them into obeying; otherwise they will be killed directly if they disobey you." Zhu Chen-hao regarded it as a marvelous idea. On the second day, as expected, almost all the key officials came to the Chamber of Ning Wang to show their gratitude to Zhu for the invitation when they were suddenly besieged by Zhu's soldiers. Zhu declared, "My guests! Our Emperor is so decadent, traveling around and ignoring the Imperial Court affairs. His reign is done! The Empress Dowager therefore gave me a secret imperial edict to start a military action, send troops to the Imperial Court, and supervise the Imperial Court. What is your attitude?" Upon this apparent revolt, most officials knew clearly what was going on, but they were forced to accept it noncommittally as they were trapped. However, there were few officials who were hard nuts and refused to surrender. Sun Sui was one of them. Sun Sui, a censor, was from Yuyao, a town fellow of Wang Yang-ming. Two years earlier, he had intended to expose Zhu's rebellion seven times but all were hindered by powerful and treacherous Imperial Court officials. At this decisive moment, he stood up and questioned Zhu, "Where is the confidential edict? Show us!" Zhu replied, "Stop asking! What I want you to do is to give me a reply. Will you escort me to Nanjing?" Sun broke out in curses and immediately was killed. And all other disobeying officials were arrested.

Zhu Chen-hao then declared an uprising right on the spot, abolished the Zhengde title of the emperor's reign and appointed Li Shi-shi the Zuo-Chengxiang,⁵² and Liu Yang-zheng the Right-Chengxiang.⁵³ He issued an official denunciation of Zhu Hou-zhao, gathered one hundred thousand soldiers, held an abrupt and massive attack at Jiujiang and Nankang, and occupied both. Meanwhile, he sent trusted followers to take over the seals of municipal governments in Jiangxi. As a result, the government work grounded to a complete halt in Jiangxi Province.

⁵¹ Grand Secretary.

⁵²The Left Prime Minister, higher rank than the Right Prime Minister.

⁵³The Right Prime Minister, lower rank than the Left Prime Minister.

All the above happened the day before Wang Yang-ming arrived at Fengcheng County, so he naturally had no clue about the rebellion. The moment he got the news, he at once turned back to his ship and headed for Ji'an. He knew clearly that he could not mobilize troops in counties around Nanchan, which were now under Zhu Chen-hao's control. It was Ganzhou that was his reliable base area for him to establish his counterinsurgency unit. Nearby, he thought of Wu Wen-ding, Zhifu,⁵⁴ of Ji'an Prefecture whom he could trust because Wu had participated in the Hengshui and Tonggang Campaign. He hurried for Ji'an; however, his ship couldn't move because of a strong south wind. It is well known that most Chinese rivers flow from west to east, but the Gan River flows from south to north into Poyang Lake.⁵⁵ Therefore, Wang had to head for Ji'an against the flow and the wind. The matter of fact was that the boat was immovable! It was a real emergency when Zhu's scouts found Wang's tracks and led thousands of soldiers to chase after Wang. At this critical moment, Wang burnt incense to pray to heaven, "May heaven bless the rain! Let there be a north wind! Let me quash the revolt!" According to historical records, the north wind, as he wished, started blowing at once. But the boatman, out of fear, dared not steer the boat. Out of anger and worry, Wang cut one ear off the boatman with his sword. Then the boat finally went. The big sailing boat went slowly against the currents. Wang could see Zhu's soldiers chasing after and hear their drums beating aloud. An idea came to him that he should exchange his official attire with the ones of his followers. So he wore plain clothes, found a small boat and fled away with his adviser Lei Ji in the darkness.

What should be mentioned is that Wang Yang-ming had intended to go to Fuzhou as his original destination with his wife Mrs. Zhu, and his foster son Wang Zheng-xian. Now when he was dropped off by Nanchang, Wang, in a fisherman's disguise, had to leave them to escape from Zhu's chase. He worried about their safety and felt hesitant when Mrs. Zhu came to the fore of the boat, sword in hand, and said to Wang, "Don't worry about us. If Zhu Chen-hao's men catch up, I will defend with this." How many heroes and heroines the region south of the Yangtze River has bred since ancient times! Even today we can still be deeply moved by Mrs. Zhu's heroic act.

Zhu Chen-hao's soldiers chased up and boarded the boat, only to find that an official sitting in the middle was not Wang Yang-ming. Out of rage the soldiers raised their knives but did not strike down as a voice was heard nearby, "What is the use of killing this man?" Luckily the man saved his life. As Zhu Chen-hao's soldiers wasted some time on the sailboat, Wang finally had time to escape their chase.

According to the situation at that time, Zhu Chen-hao would do well to steer his fleet east on the Yangtze River and conquer Nanjing City immediately after occupying Jiujiang and Nankang. Due to his sudden revolt, Nanjing might not be prepared. Had he occupied Nanjing City, he would have the leverage to challenge Beijing's Imperial Court. Actually, Zhu Chen-hao had already thought of this move. But why couldn't he realize this step?

⁵⁴Magistrate of a prefecture.

⁵⁵Located in Jiangxi Province, the largest freshwater lake in China.

It turned out that Wang consulted Lei Ji, his adviser, for the solution after he threw off Zhu Chen-hao's chase. Wang, an experienced and wise military leader, figured out that Zhu Chen-hao had only three ways to go after the revolt which was not yet known in Nanjing or Beijing. The best way for him was to steer his troops north and occupy Beijing directly. The second-best way was to occupy Nanjing City as the base area to challenge Beijing's Imperial Court. The worst way was only to occupy Nanchang, which would incur disasters for the people in Jiangxi Province. Obviously, Zhu's worst way was Wang's best. Thus, Wang's priority was to hold back and keep Zhu's troops from leaving Jiangxi to pose a direct threat to Beijing or Nanjing. Then how to stop Zhu? Wang worked out the strategy of sowing discord among the enemy. He, in the name of Yang Dan, the provincial commander-in-chief and the Du-Yushi of Military Affairs of the Guangdong and Guangxi Provinces, falsified a confidential letter which said Yang Dan carried out a confidential task in Jiangxi with 480,000 odd soldiers. Those municipal governments that received the letter should prepare for army provisions or receive military punishment. Besides this, it mentioned that the Imperial Court, aware of the ambition of the Ning Wang revolt, mobilized imperial armies to ambush the Ning Wang, ready for a final attack. Yang Dan's troops were to cooperate with the imperial armies.

Wang Yang-ming forged this "confidential letter" and showed it to Lei Ji, who smiled, "It sounds real, but I'm afraid the Ning Wang will not believe it." Wang replied, "he will feel unsure and hesitant, and then reluctant to make the next move." Lei agreed with Wang's opinion and added, "It is certain that Zhu Chen-hao will suspect its truth upon reading the letter." Then Wang replied, "It is not that important whether Zhu believes the letter or not but it is important to make him doubt. Only if he doubts, his momentum is gone!"

But how to have Zhu receive the letter without revealing any flaw? Wang and Lei played a trick promising to pay a couple of yourens⁵⁶ hundreds of Chinese tael and to make arrangements for their families whatever the outcome, and asking the yourens to disguise themselves as messengers. Meanwhile, Lei seized Li Shi-shi's family members, tied them up in the stern of the boat and intentionally allowed them to see the confidential letters being stitched into those messengers' clothes. After the confidential letters were stitched in, Wang played the trick as if he just happened to be there and flew into rage, shouting to Lei, "It's top secret. How could you reveal it to them! I had to organize them." Then, he pushed Li Shi-shi's family members on shore and made as if to kill them with sword in hand, but sighed, "Heaven will punish the Ning Wang for his revolt. But it's unnecessary to kill you innocent people. Only if you keep it secret, I will set you free." After he released them, undoubtedly Zhu Chen-hao got this "confidential message." Zhu seized those yourens and indeed found the confidential letters stitched in their clothing. He hesitated and canceled his plan to attack Nanjing, just biding his time.

⁵⁶ Actors or actresses.

Wu Wen-ding, Zhifu⁵⁷ of Ji'an, as well as the local soldiers and civilians, exulted at Wang Yang-ming's arrival on June 18. The moment he reached Ji'an, Wang Yang-ming wrote to the Imperial Court the document, *Quick Report on Ning Wang's Revolt*,⁵⁸ and sent the message to the Emperor, hoping that the Imperial Court would dispatch troops to quash the revolt. Meanwhile, he took advantage of his power as the Junwu of four provincial military affairs and issued a decree to Hu Guang, Canton, Fu Jian Provinces, ordering them to reinforce Jiangxi Province to counter the insurgency. He set up in Ganzhou, Jiangxi, and commanded all cities and counties in Jiangxi Province to summon troops at his disposal.

At that time, Wang Yang-ming, without a single soldier at hand, realized that only by using his trick of sowing discord among the enemy could he stop the Ning Wang for a while. To further confuse so as to gain time for his own troops, Wang Yang-ming again employed the same trick, but this time he wrote another confidential letter of welcome to the imperial armies in his own name. It read that following the imperial edict, the Bing Bu⁵⁹ had promptly dispatched troops for Jiangxi to surround and suppress the Ning Wang. Eunuch Xu Tai led 40 thousand border soldiers, headed for Nanchang by land via Fengyang⁶⁰; 40 thousand soldiers from the Beijing area would advance to Nanchang both by water and land via Xuzhou⁶¹ and Huai'an⁶²; over 480 thousand soldiers were gathered in the Guangxi and Guangdong Provinces, among which over 80 thousand vanguards had already arrived at Ganzhou; over 200 thousand soldiers were gathered in Huguang Province, among which over 60 thousand vanguards had already arrived at Huangzhou⁶³; Wang Yang-ming himself gathered over 100 thousand soldiers, among which over 20 thousand vanguards had already stationed at Ji'an. When all these troops reached the planned spots, they would altogether attack and destroy Nanchang. With the same function as the previous false message this letter was obviously to keep Zhu inside Jiangxi, so it also mentioned if Zhu Chen-hao held fast to Nanchang, all government armies could only bide their time due to inappropriate time and place. On the contrary, once Zhu left Nanchang, or even Jiangxi, he would be besieged and squashed by the imperial forces. Besides, the letter mentioned that the Ning Wang's advisers Li Shi-shi, Liu Yang-zheng, Ling Shiyi, and Liu Nansi all sent Wang Yang-ming confidential letters that they would change their positions in the war. Therefore, utterly isolated, Zhu's days were numbered! Intendedly, Wang let Zhu's scouts seize Wang's messengers who carried this letter. In addition, Wang assigned his followers to copy the letter and post them up in the area, including at fork roads and roads haunted Zhu's troops, to agitate Zhu's soldiers into surrender.

⁵⁷Prefect of a prefecture.

⁵⁸Chinese Pinyin: *Feibao Ning Wang Moufan Shu*.

⁵⁹Ministry of War in feudal China.

⁶⁰A county in Anhui Province.

⁶¹A city in Jiangsu Province.

⁶²A city in Jiangsu Province.

⁶³Now Huangguang, Hubei Province.

Let's review the series of tactics Wang employed in the battles. In today's terms, he actually fought the intelligence war or the information war by using these tactics like false information, discord between enemies, and so on, in order to deceive enemies by mixing the false information with the genuine, spreading misleading news, and creating confusion in the enemy camp. At that time, he did not have a single soldier in his control, but all these tactics helped him achieve his goal as if he fought the enemy with heavy arms. These tactics did work for the following reasons. Firstly, the series of false intelligence made Zhu suspicious, hesitant, and sticking to Nanchang, with no further move toward Nanjing, which gained enough time for Wang to gather troops. Secondly, these false documents alienated Zhu's core strength, including Zhu, his counselors Li Shi-shi and Liu Yang-zheng, and his generals Li Shiyi and Liu Niansi, broke their close relationships, aroused discord, suspicion, and distrust among them, and finally contributed to a death blow to Zhu's military bloc. Thirdly, those thousands of posts calling on enemy to surrender disintegrated the morale of Zhu's armies, seriously damping their combat effectiveness. No doubt these tactics are now deemed as the key factors to Wang's military victory in the battle of suppressing Zhu Chen-hao's rebellion because it was Wang Yang-ming's false information that hindered Zhu from leaving Nanchang, and thus winning time for Wang's military action and counterattack. In the *Art of War*, there is a saying about "subduing the enemy without fighting." At the beginning of this battle, Wang did defeat the enemy without combat, which reflected Wang's great military wisdom.

On the other hand, Wang surely knew that he only performed "The Stratagem of the Empty City," presenting a bold front to conceal a weak defense and that the only way to quash Zhu's troops was an actual military strike. That was why he was very upset when no troops responded to his call or came to the rescue. Meanwhile, on the enemy's side, after Zhu received the report from the scouts, only to find out that there were no imperial troops in Jiangxi by July 2, he realized that he was fooled by Wang. Then Zhu left behind over 10,000 soldiers in Nanchang, led in person 60,000 soldiers (claimed to be 100,000 soldiers) headed for Anqing to surround it, from Poyang Lake, via Jiujiang. Zhu clearly attempted to take over Anqing as the major fortress between Nanchang and Nanjing, and then to occupy Nanjing and ascend the throne there to rival the Emperor in Beijing's Imperial Court. Heart torn with anxiety upon such news, Wang realized that it was urgent at that moment and that it was extremely hard to prevent Zhu from taking over Nanjing once Anqing was overcome.

However, still without a single soldier at hand, how could Wang Yang-ming withstand Zhu Chen-hao's hundreds of thousands of chosen soldiers and eventually win the victory of the counterinsurgency?

(Translated by *Lin Jing-jing*; Proofread by *Shi Ya-fang*)

4.5 Capturing Zhu Chen-hao Alive

Knowing that Zhu Chen-hao, with heavily armed soldiers, had left Poyang Lake for Anqing, Wang Yang-ming was extremely worried. He was fully aware that Nanjing would be in imminent danger and the situation would become more complicated if Anqing were to be taken over. Without a single soldier under his command, what could he do? One cannot make bricks without clay. Once again, Wang was forced to turn to the neighboring provinces for support. In a serious and sincere tone, he appealed to the neighboring provinces to work together for the common good of all and to protect the emperor with armed forces. In the meantime, he issued an irrevocable order to all the counties and prefectures within Jiangxi Province, demanding that a specified number of troops be summoned up right away. These soldiers were to assemble at Zhangshu Town in Linjiang Prefecture⁶⁴ on July 15. Accompanied by Zhifu Wu Wen-ding,⁶⁵ Wang led an army from Ji'an Prefecture and marched directly to Zhangshu.

The troops, led by officials including Zhifus, Zhixians, Tongpans,⁶⁶ and commanders, rushed from all directions to Zhangshu on July 15 as expected. On July 18, after a short rest, Wang and his army pledged to fight until they were victorious. The whole army marched north under Wang's leadership and was stationed in Fengcheng County outside Nanchang. On July 16, Zhu launched a joint attack against Anqing but met with stout resistance from the opposing soldiers located there. After the first round of attack, Anqing was at stake. Given the current military situation, the top priority would be to break the siege of Anqing launched by Zhu. At this critical moment, Wang held a military meeting with his officers. At the meeting, many officers suggested that an army should be dispatched immediately to support Anqing. If Anqing was taken down, the situation would get much worse. However, according to Wang, though the top priority was to come to the rescue of Anqing, sending reinforcements was not the best solution. In his view, Nankang and Jiujiang, both set with Zhu's soldiers, had already become enemy territories. Zhu also had his crack troops stationed in Nanchang, with over 10,000 soldiers. Reinforcing Anqing would lead to an unfavorable situation. Zhu would turn around and make a frontal attack against the imperial reinforcements. At the same time, the armies in Jiujiang, Nankang, and Nanchang would go all out and attack them from behind. If it happened, Wang's army would get stuck in the middle of a double siege. Although sending reinforcements could temporarily save Anqing, the soldiers there were too tired to be backups. Given these circumstances, the imperial army would be left fighting alone. Taking all the factors into consideration, Wang Yang-ming made a bold decision to attack and take over Nanchang. In Wang's opinion, Zhu's crack troops in Nanchang were rebels and did not have an advantage in terms of the number of soldiers. As rebels, they were morally doomed to fail. The "defending army" led by Wang, though assembled

⁶⁴Under the jurisdiction of Yichun City today.

⁶⁵Prefect of Ji'an Prefecture.

⁶⁶Deputy Prefect.

hastily, represented justice and possessed the moral advantages. If they got everything ready before the attack, it was possible for them to occupy Nanchang. Once Nanchang was occupied, Zhu would lose his most important base. Thus, it could not only keep Anqing out of danger, but also hold Zhu in check. Zhu would not dare to attack Nanjing rashly. After an agreement was reached at the meeting, Wang carefully deployed troops for the military attack on Nanchang. He divided the hastily assembled troops into 13 divisions, each with its own specific tasks and marching routes encircling Nanchang.

After the military deployment, Wang issued official notices to all the residents of Nanchang, including the garrisoned soldiers and Zhu's family members. These notices said that Zhu Chen-hao's rebellion was against the will of heaven, and that the local residents should keep on with their routine life without panic. Now an army totaling 200,000 soldiers under Wang's command was ready to attack Nanchang. In response to that, all the people of Zhu's house were supposed to open the door and yield, all the soldiers guarding Nanchang to give up resistance and surrender, and all the rebellious officials to welcome the arrival of the imperial army and help console the civilians. Those who resisted without repentance would surely meet their death. Creating fear among Zhu's people, these official notices did contribute to the attack on Nanchang.

Wang and his army pledged to fight until victory while waiting in Shicha⁶⁷ on July 19. In the meantime, a strict military order was issued demanding that soldiers proceed in a unified manner. After the first round of drums, the soldiers were required to approach the city of Nanchang. After the second round of drums, the soldiers were required to climb up the city walls of Nanchang. After the third round of drums, if Nanchang was not conquered, the Wuzhang⁶⁸ would be punished by death. After the fourth round of drums, generals would be punished by death if Nanchang was not conquered. On that night, the 13 divisions left Shicha and headed for their respective charging positions. The next morning at dawn, they launched a joint attack on Nanchang.

The attack on Nanchang went quite smoothly. Although Zhu's soldiers put up fierce resistance, they eventually failed to withhold Wang's massive military charge. The official notices made by Wang contributed to the disintegration of Zhu's soldiers' morale. Zhu's soldiers fell apart the moment they encountered Wang's divisions head-on. When those at Zhu's residence learned that Nanchang had fallen into the hands of Wang's troops, they were so shocked and frightened that they felt they had no choice but to burn themselves. The fire spread so quickly that the neighboring civilian houses were also ablaze. Wang asked his soldiers to put out the fire immediately to placate the residents of Nanchang. He also made a series of post-war arrangements to console civilians, such as cleaning up the war fields, and sealing off Zhu's residence and his storehouses. Wang also issued an order that coffins be bought for those who were burned at Zhu's residence and that funerals be held according to the local rituals and customs. Other arrangements were carried out in an orderly way.

⁶⁷ A place of Fengcheng County near Nanchang City.

⁶⁸ The lowest ranking military officer in ancient China.

As for Zhu Chen-hao, in those days he was anxious about his continual failed attempts to surround and annihilate Anqing. On July 18, the day right before Wang took an oath in Shicha, Fengcheng County, a message arrived from Nanchang requesting the need for imminent support from his army. Wang had assembled his army in Fengcheng and was preparing to attack Nanchang. Fear welled up inside Zhu and prompted him to withdraw the siege of Anqing in order to support Nanchang. Knowing Zhu's intention, his military adviser Li Shi-shi discouraged him from withdrawing, "The current priority is Nanjing instead of Nanchang. We can take this opportunity to go east along the Yangtze River and occupy Nanjing as soon as possible. As long as you ascend the throne, Nanchang will inevitably submit to your rule." However, instead of taking Li's advice, Zhu first dispatched an advanced detachment of 20,000 soldiers to come to the rescue of Nanchang, and then he directed the rest of his army to March toward Nanchang.

Wang was informed of Zhu's withdrawal on July 22. With an army of twenty to thirty thousand soldiers in total, Wang neither had any support of soldiers from the neighboring provinces nor from the Imperial Court. Confronted with Zhu's reinforcement to Nanchang, serious understaffing of soldiers would become a critical issue for Wang. Many of Wang's military officers suggested that the best policy should be to defend Nanchang all out, expecting the arrival of reinforcements. Otherwise, it would be hard for Wang to fight alone against Zhu's 100,000 crack troops. At this time, there was a military setback that caused Wang to almost kill his chief commander Wu Wen-ding.

It turned out that Zhu's advanced detachment totaling 20,000 soldiers marched hastily day and night in order to support Nanchang. Attempting a sneak attack against Wang, a division of 1000 soldiers took a shortcut to access Nanchang. Simultaneously, Wang also detached a division of 500 soldiers under the command of Magistrate Wu to challenge Zhu's division halfway and block them. Both sides had an unexpected and fierce encounter halfway, with Wu ending up defeated. Hearing about the defeat, Wang got irritated and blamed his chief commanders for being unable to carry out his military tactics, believing them to be too attached to their own viewpoints. He intended to punish Wu and others "according to military rules." On second thought, however, as he needed all the military talents he could get, it would be better to be lenient and monitor their future behavior. This small setback had some impact on the mood of the chief commanders who were in favor of defending Nanchang.

Nevertheless, Wang firmly believed that it was not the best policy to risk annihilation by holding Nanchang in defense. In his view, although the disadvantage was obvious in terms of the number of soldiers he had, knowing how to mobilize soldiers was more important than simply having an advantage in numbers. In Wang's view, he had at least two advantages. First, morally speaking, Zhu and his soldiers were uneasy rebels while Wang's army meant to be an army of justice with high morale, which was a prerequisite for victory. Second, it was predictable that Zhu became irritable upon hearing Nanchang, once his own base, had been taken. After marching all the way from Anqing, his troops were both arrogant and sluggish. Although they were large in number, their fighting capacity seemed inadequate. Wang concluded, "Zhu Chen-hao's idea was probably the same as yours, maintaining that we can only

hold Nanchang in defense. If we take the initiative to attack them instead of defending Nanchang, we will surprise Zhu and be victorious by undertaking the unexpected.” Wang helped his chief commanders reach consensus and emphasized once again the strict military disciplines, followed by a detailed military deployment to block Zhu’s troops on Poyang Lake.

According to his deployment, a small division totaling 400 soldiers would go back and forth on Poyang Lake to deceive and ambush Zhu’s troops, making full use of reed marshes as cover. Frontal, side, and rear attacks would be deployed and undertaken by different divisions. As soon as the deceiving soldiers led Zhu’s troop into the encirclement, the frontal attack would be launched, followed by side and rear attacks.

On July 23, Zhu’s advanced detachment arrived in Qiaoshe.⁶⁹ It was quite a view with numerous ships lining the river for several kilometers. On July 24 at dawn, Zhu’s arrogant troops were in full sail, approaching Wangjiadu along Gan River. Wu Wending, Ji’an Zhifu, launched a frontal attack first and then pretended to be defeated. This served as bait to mislead Zhu’s troops to go further. Seeing that Wu and his soldiers were defeated, Zhu’s troops raced to chase them. Thus, the soldiers at the front could not shield those at the back. At this moment, Wang ordered the divisions to attack Zhu’s troops from all directions all at once. Wang’s soldiers ambushed them on a large scale, shouting loudly. Wu turned around to join the fight against Zhu’s terrified troops. Over 2000 soldiers were killed and tens of thousands of soldiers drowned. The battle added to Zhu’s terror, and he had no choice but to withdraw. In the meantime, Zhu mobilized troops stationed in Jiujiang and Nankang to help make up for his loss of soldiers.

As soon as Wang knew that the soldiers guarding Jiujiang and Nankang were redeployed out of town, he detached troops immediately that night. The quick reoccupation of Jiujiang and Nankang by Wang’s army cleared the way for their final decisive battle with Zhu.

Zhu launched a massive attack on the following day (July 25). At first, affected by unfavorable wind, Wang’s troops had to withdraw, with a loss of several dozen soldiers. Seeing that, Wang immediately issued an order that all soldiers should withstand the attack without backing off. Those who did were beheaded. Wu, Zhifu of Ji’an, dared not back off a little bit. Standing on the prow of the warship beside the cannons, with his hair and beard burnt by the artillery fire from Zhu’s troops, he summoned his courage and commanded his soldiers to charge and fight desperately. Suddenly a piece of white cloth rose from the command ship where Wang stayed, and written on it was, “The Ning Wang has been taken! Stop the large-scale killing!” which sent out a message that Zhu had been captured and that there was no need to kill his soldiers excessively. On hearing it, Zhu’s soldiers were shocked and flew into a panic. Suspicious and confused, they had no desire to continue fighting. Zhifu Wu took this opportunity to order his soldiers to advance. Zhu’s army was defeated and Zhu had to withdraw after his warship got hit by Wang’s artillery fire. After retreating

⁶⁹About 30 km north of Nanchang, along Gan River.

to Qiaoshe, Zhu ordered that all the warships be connected to one another to form a square pattern, getting ready for a battle the following day.

On July 26, after a fierce struggle with Zhu and his army at Poyang Lake, Wang eventually captured Zhu alive. In the end, it all went more smoothly than expected. As soon as Wang knew that Zhu had connected all his warships together, he decided to attack the enemy with fire. With several warships connected to one another as a whole, no single ship could move freely or quickly. If one warship caught fire, those connected to it could not escape. Wang asked Wu to prepare tools for the fire attack that very night and reassigned the operation tasks to all the divisions involved. The minute the battle began, “fire arrows” were shot toward Zhu’s warships like rainfall. Under the heavy fire attack, Zhu’s ships were in such confusion that they could not strike back. One of the ships among Zhu’s ship assemblage suddenly caught fire, and all those on board tried in vain to escape. Among them were Zhu’s concubines and maids. Shouting and crying loudly, they had no choice but to jump into water.

Having realized that nothing could be done about the situation, Zhu tried to escape by disguising himself as a fisherman. He looked around in panic and happened to see a fishing boat in the reed marsh by the lake. He hastily gestured the fisherman on the boat to come over. Without any hesitation, Zhu got aboard the boat and asked the fisherman to go immediately. The fisherman rowed quickly, heading for Wang’s commanding ship. It turned out that this trick had been arranged by Wang beforehand. After the capture of Zhu, all his commanders and chief officers, including Li Shi-shi and Liu Yang-zheng, were captured alive. Meanwhile, Wang gave orders that any of Zhu’s escaping soldiers should be captured. By July 28, Zhu’s remaining troops had been eliminated, marking victory in the suppression of rebellion.

With his hands tied behind his back, Zhu was sent under escort to see Wang. Upon seeing Wang from afar, he yelled at him, “Mr. Wang, would it be enough if I dismiss all my guards and reduce myself to a plebeian?” Wang replied, “You are subject to the state law.” It was obvious that Zhu, though a captive, still behaved with arrogance. When Zhu entered Nanchang under escort, he noticed that Wang’s soldiers looked orderly and powerful. Zhu laughed at Wang, saying, “Mr. Wang, I rebel for personal reasons. Why did you bother to fight with me?” In the end, Zhu said to Wang in a sincere tone, “Mr. Wang, could you please do me a favor? My concubine Ms. Lou was a virtuous woman, who, from the very beginning, tried in vain to persuade me to give up. I regret not taking her advice. Now that she drowned herself, I wish you could help bury her in a decent way. In ancient times, the tragedy of King Zhou of Shang resulted from listening to his consort Daji. In contrast, my tragic ending was the result of failing to take my concubine’s advice. It’s too late for me to regret now!” From this, it was clear that Zhu still had a sense of conscience.

Zhu’s concubine, Ms. Lou, was the daughter of a well-known scholar, Lou Liang.⁷⁰ She was virtuous, respectful, and educated, and had attempted to dissuade Zhu from rebelling from the very beginning. Thirty years earlier, after Wang got married in Nanchang, he and his new wife dropped by Shangrao⁷¹ and paid a visit to Lou Liang

⁷⁰ A famous Confucianist.

⁷¹ A city in Jiangxi Province.

on their way to his hometown Yuyao. Wang had a discussion with Lou Liang about Zhu Xi's theory of "Gewu Zhizhi." According to the old customs, Lou Liang might be viewed as one of Wang's teachers. On hearing that Concubine Lou drowned herself, Wang sent people to search for her body in the lake. When her body was found, they discovered that she had tied herself tightly with paper strings all over her body before drowning to keep her clothes tidy. Wang was saddened by her death and asked his soldiers to bury her by keeping to the local protocol.

Zhu's rebellion was one of the important political events that shocked the Imperial Court. Thanks to Wang's great strategy, the rebellion was quickly suppressed. The rebellion lasted only for 41 days, starting from Zhu's rise in arms on June 14 and ending with Zhu's capture on July 26. It only took about 1 week, starting on July 20 for Wang to launch an attack on Nanchang and capture Zhu. It took less than 10 days to bring an end to the battle by capturing all of Zhu's forces on July 28.

One thing worth mentioning is that throughout the whole military operations, Wang relied on twenty to thirty thousand commoners assembled in Jiangxi Province. In his own words, "an army with a total number of twenty to thirty thousand disorderly people defeated a strong army of one hundred thousand soldiers," which indeed proved to be a military miracle.

For more than 40 days, Wang and his soldiers were fighting alone, without any support from the Imperial Court or the neighboring provinces. Fujian was the only province responding to his request for support. However, when the reinforcement from Fujian finally arrived, the battle had already come to an end. Wang rewarded the officials and soldiers from Fujian according to the usual practice, and made subsequent arrangements for them to go back.

At the time when Zhu rebelled against the Imperial Court, Wang just happened to be passing by the province. Without any military order, the so-called "Imperial Order," he could have played it safe by turning a blind eye to what was going on. However, this was not his character. As mentioned many times, Wang was both an advocate for and a practitioner of "The Oneness of Knowing and Doing," who took every opportunity to put his own thoughts, ideas, and knowledge into practice. Being an ambitious and noble man, he would not sit by and tolerate Zhu's rebellion. With his brilliant military wisdom and great strategic skills, he stepped forward bravely to suppress the rebellion and saved the Ming dynasty at the critical moment. He once called himself a "paralyzed wreck," but this "paralyzed wreck" made vigorous efforts to turn the tide and saved the future of the Ming dynasty.

Wang submitted to the Imperial Court a formal report entitled "Victory Report on Capturing Zhu Chen-hao," describing the suppression of the rebellion in great detail. What was more, he also submitted to the Imperial Court a list of people worthy of merit for recognition. He arranged a messenger to deliver the "Victory Report" to the Imperial Court promptly.

After the "Victory Report" was presented to the Imperial Court, Wang set about routine post-war affairs, such as consoling the civilians, dismissing the troops, and bringing life in Nanchang back to normal. In the meantime, he saw to it that all the captives were identified and their personal information recorded, prior to being imprisoned. After that, a roll of the captives was submitted to the Imperial Court.

It was at this very moment that a shocking message from the Imperial Court arrived. Emperor Zhu Hou-zhao had decided to “lead the military operation in person” on Zhu Chen-hao, although the latter was already captured. As was widely known, it was on July 26 that Zhu was captured in the battle on Poyang Lake, and it was on July 28 that Zhu’s remaining troops were eliminated and the battle came to an end. On July 30, Wang had sent an express messenger to deliver the “Victory Report on Capturing Zhu Chen-hao” to the Imperial Court. It was not until early August that the Zhengde Emperor called a meeting of the Bing Bu, negotiating a “Strategy on Suppressing Zhu Chen-hao.” He issued an imperial decree to the Bing Bu, stating, “In reference to the priority case of the Ning Wang in Jiangxi plotting an uprising, your Ministry has agreed to exterminate the rebels. I myself shall lead the imperial army to go on a punitive expedition. No appointment of a commander-in-chief is needed.” That is to say, Zhu Chen-hao, the Ning Wang, was so abhorrent in plotting an uprising that the Bing Bu decided to suppress the rebels after negotiating with officials at a meeting. I will personally lead an imperial army to exterminate the rebels. Such being the case, it is unnecessary to appoint a commander-in-chief for this purpose. The emperor, self-entitled “The Mighty Punitive Expedition General Zhenguogong,” led an imperial army of over 10,000 soldiers and left Beijing for the South. He ordered that Eunuch Zhang Yong, Eunuch Zhang Zhong and Xu Tai, a frontier commander, go with him.

When the emperor and his army reached Liangxiang (today’s Fangshan District in Beijing), the *Memo on the Capture of Zhu Chen-hao* from Wang had arrived. Now that Zhu was captured alive and the anti-rebellion battle was over, it seemed unnecessary and ridiculous for the emperor to go on the punitive expedition in person. However, the emperor maintained a lofty stance by announcing the victory to the public. He could have abandoned the punitive expedition and returned to Beijing. However, being an emperor, Zhu Hou-zhao believed that it was a rare opportunity for him to lead the punitive expedition in person, and he could not give up halfway. Instead, he continued his punitive expedition for the pretentious reasons that “although the head of the rebellion was captured, his remaining troops were yet to be eliminated. If not, they would bring dire consequences.” That is to say, even though Zhu was captured, his influence was still out there. If they were not wiped out, endless troubles would follow. In this way, the emperor justified his punitive expedition.

Undoubtedly, Emperor Zhu Hou-zhao’s behavior was absurd. As a matter of fact, it was the absurdity of the emperor that resulted in a series of dangerous political situations in the following days. It also put Wang Yang-ming in a series of tough situations. Why did Emperor Zhu Hou-zhao insist on “leading the punitive expedition in person?” How did it put Wang Yang-ming in tough situations? What did he do to address them?

(Translated by *Zhang Ping*; Proofread by *Lu Rui-rong*)

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Chapter 5

Pushing His Idea of Governance



5.1 The Fatuous Emperor

After he had successfully put down Zhu Chen-hao's rebellion, Wang Yang-ming disbanded the armies in Nanchang and managed to appease the public, in an attempt to help the local people return to their normal lives. Meanwhile, Wang Yang-ming submitted the memorial entitled *Memo on the Capture of Zhu Chen-hao* to the Imperial Court in the first place, in which he gave a full account of how he ended the revolts. However, Emperor Zhu Hou-zhao ignored the letter only to decide on a whim to send a punitive expedition against Zhu Chen-hao in person!

Why on earth did the Emperor persist in involving himself personally in the so-called battle? Did he really intend to fight against Zhu Chen-hao?

As mentioned repeatedly in previous chapters, we can see very clearly that it was a crying shame for Zhu Hou-zhao to be in power as an emperor. During his 16-year ruling period, the Ming dynasty witnessed the darkest political chaos. At the beginning of his reigning period, Zhu Hou-zhao put the Imperial Court in a total mess, blindly trusting Liu Jin, a senior eunuch, dismissing senior officials from the position at will, and making false charges against loyal and reliable officials. Even after Liu Jin was executed, he still didn't come to his senses. He turned to favor and trust such treacherous followers as Qian Ning and Jiang Bin, wandering around to idle away his time all day long. As an emperor, he led a profligate and promiscuous life without respect to ethics. He stayed away from Beijing most of the time. Even when he was in Beijing, he showed up neither at the Imperial Court nor the Imperial Harem, but at the "Leopard House." Mind you, since the title "Leopard House" is quite misleading, it should not be taken literally. In fact, it was not a place where leopards were kept, but a place privately reserved for the Emperor's indecent pleasure. It was built in the second year of his reign at the instigation of Qian Ning.

So what kind of person was Qian Ning? Well, frankly speaking, he was a scoundrel. According to the historical records, Qian Ning came out of nowhere with no family name. When he was a child, Qian was sold as a domestic servant to a eunuch named Qian Neng. Being docile and smart, he pleased Qian Neng and was named after his

master. After Qian Ning died, this adopted “son” was enlisted in the Jinyiwei Guard, the imperial military secret police as a grand favor bestowed by the Imperial Court. As he spared no effort to ingratiate himself with Liu Jin, he had the opportunity to attend upon the Emperor. Being devious and slick, Qian Ning became a skillful bowman, capable of drawing the bow both on the left and right. His uncommon ability pleased the Emperor who began to be on intimate terms with Qian. Gradually, they became so attached to each other that Qian Ning acted like a shadow of the Emperor. Then one day, the Emperor declared Qian Ning as his foster son on the spur of the moment. It meant a lot to Qian Ning indeed—he became noble and honorable overnight, and he felt as if he had reached the sky in a single bound. He couldn’t have been more conceited, swaggering, and defiant. Claiming to be one of “the concubine’s children of the Emperor” in public, he wheeled and dealt around, trying to serve his master attentively and thoughtfully. Now that he knew well about the Emperor’s tastes and hobbies, he managed to assemble a group of monks who had expertise in “Mi Xi,”¹ dancing beauties and skillful musicians, which struck Zhu with a thrill of joy. Subsequently, Qian Ning persuaded the Emperor to build a particular place in the Forbidden City to accommodate those performers, and named it the “Leopard House.” Later on, Emperor Zhu Hou-zhao resided there day and night indulging himself in those extremely extravagant and luxurious obscene secret plays and licentious performances. In the “Leopard House,” he behaved just like a free and violent leopard: there he played Cu Ju,² wrestling, feasting, singing and dancing, music, women musicians, obscene plays, and so on. What a dissolute life! The passionate emperor even tried a thousand ways to make merry. He invented a new way of drinking, in which the beauties and eunuchs fed him with wine in turn. If he got drunk, he would fall asleep by pillowing his head on Qian Ning. As soon as the Emperor woke up from the drunken sleep, the games resumed. Frequently the ministers and senior officials went to the Imperial Court only to find the Emperor was absent and they had to wait for a long time before he showed up late in the morning. If they could see Qian Ning coming out of the “Leopard House,” those ministers were sure that the Emperor would appear soon after. After Liu Jin, the former senior eunuch, was killed, his home was searched and the property confiscated. But the property did not become state-owned but privately owned by the “Leopard House.” Moreover, the last end of Liu terrified Qian Ning to some extent, which reinforced his belief that he should try to establish a good connection with the lords of the vassal states in order to consolidate his position in the Imperial Court. When the Ning Wang rushed around in Beijing aiming to restore his defenses through bribery with the enormous bribes carried by mule carts, Qian Ning tried every possible means to help. So it would be fair to say, the rebellion of the Ning Wang had something to do with Qian Ning.

Well, that is the story of Qian Ning, and here comes another “big shot”: Jiang Bin. Jiang was another man who was specially trusted and favored by the Emperor.

¹Literally meaning: a secret play; real meaning: an obscene play in the Imperial Harem.

²A kind of ancient Chinese football.

Coming from Xuanfu,³ he had a contact with Zhu by the introduction of Qian Ning. Once being a frontier commander at the border, Jiang Bin was well built and had amazingly strong arms. He had expertise in military strategy and tactics as well, which made him interesting and compatible with the Emperor. Before long he gained the trust of Zhu and was allowed to go to the “Leopard House” at will and even slept together with the Emperor. With their closeness, Jiang Bin found that the Emperor’s pursuits not only lay in merry-making in the “Leopard House,” but something more exciting and stimulating, such as “playing with the troops,” which was just right up his alley. Then he encouraged the Emperor to assemble and bring some troops from the frontier to the capital Beijing and drill the soldiers in the palace. Zhu was very pleased with the interesting idea because it would make his crazy idea of “playing with the troops” come true, and so he did. When he was dressed in shining armor, seeming majestic and dignified, and riding slowly on a caparisoned steed through the military teams side by side with Jiang Bin, the Emperor felt just terrific! Very soon the Zhengde Emperor even raised an army of eunuchs from the palace. The army was at his command and was drilled all day long, shouting and shuttling back and forth in the Forbidden City. Emperor Zhu Hou-zhao struck a pose in a battle robe and wore a sun hat with long peacock feathers on it, just like a real general. What a fantastic thrill! It couldn’t have been better! To feed the Emperor’s addiction to troops, Jiang Bin tempted Zhu Hou-zhao by saying, “Your Majesty, my hometown Xuanfu is really a wonderful place, which produces not only a wealth of beautiful girls, but also skillful musicians. Above all, you can watch the genuine battle array there, with the troops galloping across the battlefield varying from minute to minute. Majesty, don’t you think it a good idea to relax yourself, and go and have a look there, instead of staying in the stifling Imperial Court doing everything with the interference of those ministers?” This idea just suited the Emperor down to the ground, and it was accepted on the nod. Hurriedly, they slipped out of the palace in plain clothes without any delay. However, as they intended to go through Juyong Pass in Changping,⁴ much to their surprise, Zhu Hou-zhao was recognized by Zhang Qin,⁵ the Xun’an Yushi. Under the strong opposition and earnest persuasion of Zhang Qin, the Emperor had to go back dejectedly, with his inner fury restrained and unexposed. Several days later, the Emperor and his servant sought another opportunity to flee and finally succeeded in crossing the Juyong Pass and arrived at the destination, Xuanfu. Now we could easily conceive how hospitable and attentive Jiang Bin was once they settled there. He strained every nerve to please the Emperor. At first, he set about to build a magnificent house with a big courtyard for Zhu Hou-zhao, called “Chamber of Zhenguo Lord.” It was so named because the Zhengde Emperor had enjoyed being a commander when he “played with the troops” and declared himself to be “Zhu Shou—Mighty General and Zhenguo Lord.” Zhu Shou is another name he gave to himself. Once the construction was completed, Jiang Bin gave the order to move all the beautiful dancing maids, exotic treasures and instrument players from the “Leopard House”

³Now Xuanhua County, Hebei Province.

⁴A district of Beijing.

⁵The Imperial Itinerant Inspector.

to the new place where he even slept together with the Emperor. Frequently, the Zhengde Emperor went out to hunt frantically and recklessly for beautiful women among the natives during the night. Zhu Hou-zhao was so pleased and joyful staying here that he often referred to the residence as his new “home.” And from then on he went back “home” from time to time, seeking to recruit beautiful women far and near to make merry no matter the women were married or pregnant. For instance, one of his favorite women, lady Liu, was the wife of Yang, a musician working for the Chamber of Jin Wang in Shanxi Province. Likewise, lady Ma, wife of a conductor named Bi Chun, was pregnant when she was taken to the Zhengde Emperor. The Emperor enjoyed traveling thousands of miles away with his followers. Wherever they went, they searched for beautiful women voraciously. The number of recruited women reached several hundred. Those women were dragged in carriages traveling along with Emperor Zhu Hou-zhao. Besides, the most absurd story was that the Emperor ordered those beautiful women to share the carriages with the monks. The women were given round balls and were asked to tease the monks by hitting them on the baldhead with the balls when the carriages jolted badly on the rough road. Emperor Zhu Hou-zhao became overjoyed and couldn’t help laughing broadly at the sight of this.

It turned out that such a silly and fatuous emperor brought great misfortune not only to the Ming dynasty, but more directly to Wang Yang-ming. When Zhu Chen-hao first revolted, the Emperor still felt at ease, traveling here and there and having a good time either in the “Leopard House” or in the Chamber of Zhenguo Lord in Xuanfu. It was not until Zhu Chen-hao was captured by Wang Yang-ming that the Emperor and Jiang Bin began to plan a strategy against Zhu Chen-hao, because it suddenly occurred to the Emperor that it was a golden opportunity for him to “play with the troops!” In the past, he had only played in the palace and watched at the frontier, but never in a genuine battlefield. Wasn’t it the chance of a lifetime? How wonderful! It was unnecessary to command generals and military officers to send troops and Emperor Zhu Hou-zhao decided to lead an army to fight against rebels in person. That is to say, the Emperor’s real intention here was to take the chance to travel around devouring the prosperity and beauties from the south of Yangtze River on the one hand and on the other hand to play with the troops on his own, rather than end the revolts.

For Wang Yang-ming, the Emperor’s crazy mind was indeed unimaginable. Hearing the news that the Emperor would lead his army to put down Zhu Chen-hao’s revolt, Wang assumed that the Emperor might not know much about the actual situation, possibly because his *Memo on the Capture of Zhu Chen-hao* was delayed on the way somehow and didn’t reach the Imperial Court on time. Thus, on August 17, he wrote another letter to the Emperor entitled *Memorial on the Request of Stopping the Emperor’s Punitive Expedition*, restating that since the anti-rebellion war had come to an end, Zhu Chen-hao and other chief leaders were entirely captured and all the supporters cleared up, he was going to take all the captives under escort to the Imperial Court in person. However, much to his surprise, he got an order from the Emperor once again, asking him to stop taking the captives to the Imperial Court, and wait for the Emperor’s punitive expedition to Jiangxi Province.

Up to then, facing the abnormal response from the Zhengde Emperor, Wang Yangming began to realize what a severe situation he was in. He was actually involved in an even grimmer and more complicated political war that he had never confronted, as his enemy was neither bandits in the mountains nor the unjustifiable rebellious under the Ning Wang, but Emperor Zhu Hou-zhao. With tremendous courage and wisdom, Wang had once mapped out proper strategies to deal with the bandits in the mountains, having the situation at his command and never getting confounded and stuck. He was capable of employing ingenious and artful tactics with facility even when the news about Zhu Chen-hao, the Ning Wang's revolt, was laid on him abruptly. But now, when he realized the Emperor's obstinate persistence in battle against the Ning Wang personally in spite of his discouragement, Wang Yangming was torn with anxiety and could not fall asleep for days. Wang Yangming was well aware of the situation he was faced with. On the one hand, the Zhengde Emperor was leading the army in the company of such vile people as the eunuchs Zhang Zhong, Zhang Yong, Xu Tai, and Jiang Bin, who behaved arrogantly and imperiously like brutal beasts in reliance on the blind trust of the Emperor. On the other hand, the people in Jiangxi Province could not suffer more and bear another war after those years of successive turbulence in Nanchang City. If the Emperor led the army south into Nanchang again, the people would confront another disaster. Therefore, the top priority for Wang Yangming currently was to try every possible means to prevent the Emperor and his troops from entering Nanchang.

However, as for the Emperor, he just wanted to have fun and the people's miseries were not his concern. His followers like Jiang Bin, Xu Tai and Zhang Zhong were wild and unbridled to the extreme, hunting and robbing the beauties, curiosities, and treasures all the way to Nanjing. In October, when the Emperor arrived in Nanjing, the whole city fell into chaos. Jiang Bin, Xu Tai, and others frantically extorted money from the local people, playing the gangster. Many local officials bravely stood up to the violence. Here are some examples.

When Jiang Bin and his group arrived in Nanjing, they made trouble in the streets and robbed people of their money almost every day, leaving locals extremely miserable. A man named Qiao Yu, the Shangshu of Bing Bu in Nanjing, a well-known poet and essayist as well, had a close association with Wang Yangming in the early years. When Qiao couldn't stand Jiang Bin's outrageous behavior anymore, he decided to teach him a lesson. While Jiang Bin had been a general at the frontier, large and robust, Qiao Yu asked some short but skillful folk martial artists to fight him on the drill ground. Being flexible and nimble, those folk martial artists had the advantage over Jiang Bin, throwing him to the ground and beating him heavily.

Another man named Kou Tian-xu, Prefect of Yingtian Prefecture of the day, was Qiao Yu's fellow townsman from Shanxi Province. He was a truly wise and funny man, tall in height, but nearsighted. Knowing someone sent by Jiang Bin would come for money every day, he deliberately wore an unsuited hat and particularly small clothes to meet them and politely addressed them "My Lord," pretending that he was too poor in eyesight to recognize them. When he was asked for money, he would respond with a deep sigh, "Oh, my! People in Nanjing are penniless and there is no money or goods stored in the government warehouse as well. Look at me, as

Prefect of the Yingtian Prefecture, I have to be on duty dressed like this every day.” And another day, when he knew how Jiang Bin was punished by Qiao Yu, he followed the same example. He sent for similar short but strong martial artists among the folks to patrol in the streets. Once they found Jiang Bin and his men extorting money from people or making trouble in the market, they would fight them. As a result, Jiang Bin’s gangs had to restrain themselves in Nanjing.

Jiang Yao, the Taishou of Yangzhou, was another honest and humorous man. When Emperor Zhu Hou-zhao and his men marched to Jiangxi from Yangzhou by boat, all the local residential houses along the river were ordered to be pulled down just for the convenience of towing the Emperor’s boat. Hearing this, Jiang Yao said, “The houses along the river are not the place that the Zhengde Emperor is going to visit. If they need to tow the boat, obviously, they can make their way along the banks. Why should they take the trouble to pull down the houses? So, no one is allowed to do that. If it offends the Zhengde Emperor, I, as the Taishou of Yangzhou, will take all the responsibility.” One day, when Jiang Bin demanded he tell the local wealthy and influential families, Jiang Yao replied, “Oh, Yangzhou is really a tiny place, with four wealthy and influential families only.” Jiang asked, “Which four? Tell me quickly!” Jiang Yao answered, “The first one is the Zhuanyun Si⁶ of the Huai River Basin Areas⁷; the second is the Yangzhou Chamber⁸; the third is the Chaoguan⁹ Zhushi; and the last one is the Jiangdu County¹⁰ Government. The people of Yangzhou are too poor and there are no other families richer than those four.” Another day Jiang Bin issued a decree intending to select some concubines for the Zhengde Emperor from the local girls.” Jiang Yao said, “There are only three young girls in Yangzhou.” “Where are they?” Jiang Bin inquired. Jiang Yao answered, “I, the prefect, have three daughters. If the Zhengde Emperor needs them badly, all that I can do is to have the honor of sending them to him, for there are no other young girls here.” Hearing this, Jiang Bin could say nothing in reply.

From the cases above, we could clearly see the so-called “Emperor’s Punitive Expedition” did bring extra burdens to the local people. What was worse, the followers like Jiang Bin and Xu Tai abused their power and domineered the local people ruthlessly, loaning the power of the Emperor to the devil, and throwing people into greater misery, while the upright government officials like Qiao Yu, Kou Tian-xu, and Jiang Yao, who fought for justice in their peculiar manners, were still in the minority.

Wang Yang-ming was well aware that if the Zhengde Emperor led the army into Nanchang, the local people were doomed to be afflicted with torturous suffering. Prioritizing the best interests of the people, Wang Yang-ming decided to ignore the Zhengde Emperor’s order to “stop taking the captives to the Imperial Court, and waiting for the Emperor’s punitive expedition to Jiangxi Province.” Seriously ill as

⁶Transport Department.

⁷The areas north and south of the Huai River.

⁸The official residence for the prefect of Yangzhou Prefecture.

⁹Tax Office.

¹⁰In Jiangsu Province.

he was, he worked diligently and managed to restore the local political order and reconstruct the cities in Jiangxi. On July 30, the day after putting down the rebellion led by Zhu Chen-hao, Wang Yang-ming submitted a written statement to the Imperial Court requesting an exemption from grain tax in Jiangxi Province with the aim of resuming the local production as soon as possible. As the Ning Wang had seized some government seals from the prefectural magistrates of Jiangxi at the beginning of his rebellion and a great many local government officials were involved in the affairs for one reason or another, the local official governance was paralyzed. After the war, Wang Yang-ming differentiated the guilty officials by either demanding them to atone for their crimes in their posts or assigning them to a new office. Thus, the political order of government in different levels was soon resumed. As soon as a series of military and political affairs were settled, Wang Yang-ming decided to send Zhu Chen-hao and other captives under escort to the Imperial Court in person by waterway on September 11. Wang Yang-ming thought that since the Zhengde Emperor came in person in the name of sending a punitive expedition against Zhu Chen-hao, if he sent Zhu away to the capital before the Emperor arrived, there would be no reason for the Emperor to lead the army into Jiangxi anymore.

However, things were not as simple as Wang had expected. When he, with Zhu Chen-hao and other captives under guard, reached Guangxin,¹¹ he unexpectedly received an official document from Zhang Zhong, passed on by the Ancha Si of Jiangxi Province and entitled “Eunuch Zhang, the Imperial Envoy and Guard.” In the document, Zhang Zhong loftily accused Wang Yang-ming of negligence of duty in appeasing the public and dealing with local affairs in Nanchang, and of his persistence in sending the captives in person in disregard of the Emperor’s order. What was more, Zhang Zhong claimed that it was unsuitable for the army serving outside the Imperial Court to escort so many females of Ning Wang, “If someone violates propriety, who is to blame?” Thus, he demanded that Wang return to Nanchang immediately and send the captives back to Jiangxi, and wait for the Emperor’s order.

The “official document” from Zhang Zhong was written in a haughty tone. It also involved a hidden vicious attack as well, which showed his deliberate evil intentions. On receiving it, Wang Yang-ming responded immediately and reacted accordingly. For one thing, he wrote back to the judge of Jiangxi (who had passed on the document to Wang Yang-ming) about the arrest of Zhu Chen-hao and other rebels. In the letter, he particularly emphasized that the safety of the female relatives of the Ning Wang could be guaranteed as they were guarded by the internal staff from the respective chambers of the generals, and he asserted that he would never return to Nanchang but go on his way to Nanjing with the captives. For the other, he wrote to the Bing Bu asking for a test on the authenticity of the “official document” from Zhang Zhong. In fact, Wang had no doubt about the authenticity of the document. Doing this, he just wanted to inform the Bing Bu of the situation he was in, and the stand and attitude he took on this matter.

Then came the most incredible and ridiculous part of the story. When Zhang Zhong got to know that Wang Yang-ming was staying in Guangxin and refused to

¹¹Now Shangrao, a city in Jiangxi Province.

obey orders, he ordered people to go to Guangxin to bring the message. He clearly and firmly demanded Wang take Zhu Chen-hao and other captives back to Nanchang and to release them around Poyang Lake. That is to say, Zhu Chen-hao should be free when the Zhengde Emperor came. And the Emperor could capture him again on his own! Apparently, such an incredible and ridiculous decision was by no means made by Zhang Zhong. Without the permission of the Emperor, no matter how bold and reckless he was, he would never dare to act like this. Apparently, the Emperor was the strong backstage supporter of all the decisions. Facing this, how courageous and resourceful Yang-ming was to reject the order! At that time, Wang refused Zhang sternly in the reply, while Zhang was unwilling to give up, and he persisted in sending messages to Guangxin again and again. In order to avoid more trouble, Wang Yang-ming and his men left Guangxin overnight. Along the river, they went to Zhejiang Province via Yushan County and Caoping Inn.

In early October, Wang Yang-ming reached Hangzhou with the captives. A eunuch named Zhang Yong and his army had already arrived there and was waiting for them. Zhang Yong, generally an honest man, had once made contributions to the arrest and killing of Liu Jin, so had already won a good reputation. After arriving in Hangzhou, Wang Yang-ming decided to call on him. However, Zhang Yong set out in advance only to pave the way for the Emperor's next trip. It was natural for Zhang to take sides with the Emperor that it would be better for Wang to release Zhu Chen-hao to Poyang Lake, and to let the Emperor capture the supposed free man again. So, when Wang paid the visit, Zhang Yong refused to see him. Then, pushing the gatekeeper away, Wang shouted loudly and emotionally, "I am Wang Shou-ren. I came over to discuss state affairs with you. Why do you refuse to meet me?" Hearing this, Zhang was astounded by his inspiring righteousness and noble aspiration! When they met eventually, Wang revealed his inner thoughts to Zhang. He earnestly expected Zhang to persuade the Emperor to stop and go back to Beijing, the capital city. He told Zhang that people in Jiangxi couldn't afford to withstand more wars and chaos after suffering years of turmoil and torment from the Ning Wang. Zhang Yong was stirred by Wang Yang-ming's words. Then Zhang responded, "I am well aware of some vile creatures around the Emperor, I accompanied the Emperor with my mouth shut and assisted him quietly. I know what I was doing during this trip was not for claiming the credit at all. Now we can try to obey the Emperor and then act according to the circumstance. Then there is probability to turn things right. If not, at the instigation of the vile creatures, the situation will be out of control. So, what we can do now is to bide our time for further action." On October 9, Wang Yang-ming went to see Zhang Yong again. As they were standing by the Qiantang River, Zhang Yong pointed to the ship where Zhu Chen-hao was being guarded, saying "I want this!" Wang Yang-ming responded with a smile, "What do I have it for?" At last, Zhu Chen-hao was handed over and sent back to Nanjing under escort by Zhang Yong.

After that, Wang was feeling very fatigued, mentally and physically. Having been in poor health, he felt even worse after years of military service and finally collapsed. Then he lived in Jingci Temple in Hangzhou to take a rest, nursing his body and mind, and above all, waiting for the news of the Emperor's return to Beijing. In his regard, the Emperor was intent on Zhu Chen-hao after all. Since Zhu Chen-hao had been

handed over to Zhang Yong, it was natural for the Emperor to return to Beijing as soon as he met Zhu Chen-hao in Nanjing.

However, Wang's anticipation turned out to be too simple and naive. He got the news of the Emperor one day, not about his return to Beijing as he expected, but about his going on his way to the South. The Emperor and his army had reached Yangzhou by then. Hearing this, Wang Yang-ming left for Zhenjiang immediately by waterway in spite of his poor condition, to attempt to dissuade the Emperor in person from going to Nanchang. However, as soon as he arrived in Zhenjiang, he unexpectedly got an imperial order appointing him a concurrent post of Jiangxi Xunfu¹² and to leave to assume office without any delay. Hopeless and helpless, he had to turn back to Nanchang from Zhenjiang along the Yangtze River in November.

At that time, Nanchang city was trapped in a great disaster once again when the northern troops led by Jiang Bin and Xu Tai settled there. With the streets full of armies and horses, it was difficult for people to walk around and it was easy to imagine what the locals were suffering from. What was worse, in the name of hunting for remnants of Zhu Chen-hao's gang, Jiang Bin, Xu Tai, and their troops killed common people at random, claiming military credit with the shedding of innocent blood. Not to mention they plundered people's money and property at will. And the most shocking and incredible of all, they spread rumors around, framing Wang Yang-ming up noisily with their ulterior and dirty motives. They spread malicious tales, saying "Wang Yang-ming was virtually one of Zhu Chen-hao's accomplices, and the plotter and maker of the rebellion. He had no alternative but to arrest Zhu Chen-hao only when he got to know the Emperor was about to go to Nanchang in person with the imperial military. That is to say, Wang Yang-ming was not only a conspirator, but a man with phony military merit." Such villains as Zhang Zhong and Xu Tai were, they even intended to arrest Wang Yang-ming with the merely contrived and calculated accusations. As Wang Yang-ming was on his way and they couldn't arrest him, they arrested Wu Wen-ding and tortured him during the interrogation instead. Wu was the former prefect of Ji'an, was promoted to be the Jiangxi Ancha Si after the war, and had made the biggest contribution to the extermination of the rebellion. From this case, we can easily conceive how tyrannical and reckless they were in Nanchang, abusing the Emperor's power.

Returning from Zhenjiang, Wang Yang-ming encountered the last thing he wanted to see in Nanchang: The people there were plunged into dire suffering again soon after the war and they were afflicted by the outrages from the evil creatures like Jiang Bin, Xu Tai, and Zhang Zhong even more than they had been from Zhu Chen-hao. Abetted by the Gang of Zhang Zhong, the soldiers of the northern army often hurled abuse and insults at the sight of Wang Yang-ming. Being aggressive, they often made trouble or even had physical conflicts with Wang Yang-ming in public. Faced with such a situation, Wang Yang-ming, putting the general interest of the public in priority, remained calm and tolerant to their vicious deeds. He was kind and courteous to the soldiers in return. Confronted by them in the street, Wang greeted them first; hearing of the casualties in the army, Wang made inquiries and expressed

¹²Provincial Governor.

his sympathy and solicitude for them. Before long, the northern soldiers were greatly touched by Wang's words and acts, saying "Wang always receives us with courtesy. How can we treat him so rudely like this in return?" The soldiers gradually paid their admiration to him.

In fact, Wang's top priority at the moment was to make the troops withdraw and to restore the people to their normal life as soon as possible. Having gained great esteem among the soldiers, he managed to find a way to draw the troops out of the city. Firstly, he made an official announcement to the public, literally calling on Nanchang citizens to make allowances for the northern soldiers go around and try to be charitable. He argued, "These soldiers are far from their land, leaving their wives and children at home. Their homesickness is almost unimaginable to you all. In addition, the damp weather here doesn't agree with them either. You can't realize how painful they may feel in their bodies. Thus, hopefully, stop making complaints and show consideration for them all." Apparently, the announcement was made to the Nanchang people, yet it was aimed at the northern soldiers, provoking strong surges of nostalgia for their homeland and families. It happened that when the Winter Solstice¹³ was approaching, Wang Yang-ming prearranged to hold a memorial ceremony for it. He called for each family in Nanchang to offer sacrifices to their elders and deceased ancestors. Since it was not long after the rebellion and war against Zhu Chen-hao and the follow-up slaughter of the innocent by the gang of Zhang Zhong, the city became white all over on that very day. People were all dressed white, long and narrow white flags for calling back the spirits of the dead could be seen everywhere, and white joss paper flew in the air with the crying around all day long. Having seen this, the northern soldiers missed their families a lot and an overwhelming bout of homesickness prayed on their mind. They demanded to go back home. When Zhang Zhong and Xu Tai realized the army's morale had gone too far, they were afraid that they couldn't stay in Nanchang any longer. Whereas they were not reconciled to accept the defeat and leave, they made terms with Wang Yang-ming by demanding to have an archery contest with him. They claimed that they would leave if they were defeated. Boasting of their archery skills, they believed that Wang was doomed to lose and prepared to use the occasion to humiliate him.

As Zhang Zhong and Xu Tai challenged him to the contest, Wang Yang-ming declined it and confessed that he was just a bookworm who was not adept at archery at all. However, Zhang and Xu were not content to let him off, insisting on having the contest. Under such circumstances, Wang had no choice but to meet the challenge. The following day, in an open area on the drill ground, an arrow target was set in the center with northern soldiers around. Wang Yang-ming approached the shooting range calmly and slowly. Fitting arrows and pulling the bow three times in a row, Wang hit the very target without any mistake. Every time he succeeded, the soldiers watching cheered and shouted "Well done!" Zhang and Xu were absolutely shocked at the sight, because it never occurred to them that Wang had such amazing archery skills, and that above all an unfavorable atmosphere in the army was alarming to

¹³ Also known as hibernal solstice or midwinter, on December 22, when the sun is at its southernmost point in the Northern Hemisphere.

them. They wondered, “How could our troops side with Wang Yang-ming!” As they had made an agreement before the contest, Zhang Zhong and Xu Tai had to withdraw the troops from Nanchang at the time when it was already December.

In time, Wang Yang-ming successfully forced the northern army to leave Nanchang by virtue of his noble character, his brilliant political savvy, and his skillful archery. After a momentary relief, people in Nanchang would devote themselves to the recovery of their normal lives. Meanwhile, Emperor Zhu Hou-zhao’s punitive expedition was still on the way and Wang Yang-ming’s mental burden and suffering actually were still on the horizon.

(Translated by *Cui Li*; Proofread by *Li Jiang-xia*)

5.2 Enduring Humiliation

The troops from the North headed by Zhang Zhong and Xu Tai finally withdrew from Nanchang after Wang Yang-ming, his brilliant political savvy and his skillful archery. After a momentary relief, people in Nanchang would devote to yet far from over, for the Emperor still settled in Nanjing, bringing his punitive expedition in person. Therefore, this was actually the start of Wang’s humiliation.

In December, Zhang Yong arrived in Nanjing from Hangzhou, after escorting Zhu Chen-hao and other captives all the way. As was mentioned above, Emperor Zhu Hou-zhao had demanded that Wang Yang-ming should release Zhu Chen-hao at Poyang Lake and let the Zhengde Emperor capture Zhu Chen-hao again. The troops headed by Zhang Zhong and Xu Tai who had arrived in advance were supposed to display the power of the Zhengde Emperor’s military force; however, Wang Yang-ming unexpectedly paid no attention to the official announcement in the name of Zhu Shou—the Mighty Punitive Expedition General Zhenguogong, and handed the captives to Zhang Yong in Hangzhou. What was more, the withdrawal of the Northern troops stimulated by Wang Yang-ming was also beyond their expectation. Now that Zhu Chen-hao was sent to Nanjing, it was impossible to send him back to Poyang Lake and here came the problem: How could the Emperor end his grand punitive expedition without any gains? Then a drama was performed in this way: Emperor Zhu Hou-zhao led his troops out of Nanjing a couple of miles further, organizing the imperial army into two queues of neatly dressed, powerful soldiers in glittering armor and waited for Zhu Chen-hao and other captives escorted by Zhang Yong. The Emperor himself couldn’t be more majestic-looking in his battle robe, riding on a horse with his sharp sword. On Zhang Yong’s arrival, the Emperor ordered Zhang to release the captives and then to boost his soldiers’ morale by capturing the fugitives again. Of course, you may guess what happened next. Without much difficulty, the fugitives were captured and thrown into prison vans again and were sent to Nanjing by the Emperor’s expedition.

After all this farce, Zhu Hou-zhao still felt that neither the fun nor the accomplishments were satisfying enough so he was unwilling to leave for Beijing. His intention was clear to his toadies, i.e., Zhang Zhong, Jiang Bin, and Xu Tai. What

was more, they hated Wang Yang-ming as he deprived them of their opportunity to win honor by capturing Zhu Chen-hao. So they decided to bring a false charge against Wang Yang-ming by telling the Emperor that Wang was colluding with Zhu Chen-hao to plot another rebellion. The Emperor asked how they got to know that. Zhang Zhong replied that Wang dared not come if the Emperor called him in. Therefore, in the first lunar month of 1520 (the fifteenth year of the Zhengde Emperor), the Emperor issued an imperial decree, demanding Wang Yang-ming call on him in Nanjing. Wang Yang-ming set off from Nanchang right after receiving the decree. Zhang Zhong had Wang held up in Wuhu¹⁴ for half a month from the moment he was informed of Wang's decree.

Wang Yang-ming was thus stuck in Wuhu in a dilemma full of indignation, but there was nobody to pour his heart out to. However, it was the natural surroundings with green mountains and clear water that recalled his old days of cultivating himself in Daoism. Consequently, he forgot all about government affairs and settled down in a humble hut in Mount Jiuhua¹⁵ in Anhui Province, meditating quietly and cultivating himself peacefully day after day. Before long, Zhang Yong heard about Wang's life in green mountains and clear water that recalled the Zhengde Emperor that Wang Yang-ming was really loyal to his sovereign and loved his country. How could Wang Yang-ming be a rebel? If such a faithful official were to be punished in this way by the government, nobody else would sacrifice his life for the country. Later, Zhang Yong told Emperor Zhu Hou-zhao where Wang Yang-ming was and how he was stuck in that situation. Emperor Zhu Hou-zhao sent someone to confirm it and based on the report the Emperor ordered Wang to return to Jiangxi Province.

On his way back to Jiangxi, after having had a detailed analysis and judgment, Wang Yang-ming was anxiety-ridden about the political situation then. In his view, Emperor Zhu Hou-zhao was not only overindulgent in life and ignorant in political views, but was also close to vile characters that were all snakes with cunning tricks. At this time, the troops going out to battle for the Emperor's punitive expedition were actually headed by Jiang Bin, a vile character. So, if Jiang was to hatch a sinister plot, the Zhengde Emperor would surely be in much greater danger of being seized by Jiang Bin than the threat from Zhu Chen-hao's rebellion. Wang Yang-ming was torn with anxiety at the thought of this. In February 1520 (the fifteenth year of the Zhengde Emperor), regardless of the rumors and frame-ups against him, Wang held a military review when he arrived in Jiujiang on his way back to Nanchang and made proper military preparations to protect the Zhengde Emperor. Actually, what Wang Yang-ming was worrying about turned out to be a fact. History recorded that later in June that year, Emperor Zhu Hou-zhao was found to be missing on the night when he was traveling to Mount Niushou¹⁶ near Nanjing. All his guards were greatly frightened and searched around for the whole night. Jiang Bin was said to mean to rebel at that very night.

¹⁴ A prefecture-level city in southeastern Anhui Province.

¹⁵ Literally: "Nine Glorious Mountains," one of the four sacred mountains of Chinese Buddhism.

¹⁶ In the south suburbs of Nanjing.

In June that year, the situation turned more complex with the Zhengde Emperor and his troops stationed in Nanjing for a long time. Jiang Bin and Zhang Zhong made more rumors and frame-ups of Wang Yang-ming colluding with Zhu Chen-hao, Wang's hoarding of Zhu Chen-hao's possessions, even his rise in rebellion, and so on. However, on the other side, Wang Yang-ming, despite the villains' suspicions, centralized the military forces in Ganzhou, which was near Nanchang, and reviewed and trained them in person. Jiang Bin and Zhang Zhong made more suspicions against him which had not been justified yet and his military training would be more likely to arouse suspicion. Soon after, Jiang Bin sent someone stealthily to spy on Wang's acts. Thus, Wang's students also persuaded him to go back to Nanchang so as to put himself out of suspicion and danger. However, Wang Yang-ming explained solemnly, "Zhang Zhong made more suspicion and being cultivated with my students? I was able to keep myself in peace even in the face of danger while I was circling around those traitor ministers. What's more, some great dangers are unavoidable. I care nothing because what I am doing now is reasonable." The truth was that Wang Yang-ming did all of these military preparations to protect the Emperor from the mutinies of Jiang Bin and Zhang Zhong. Wang Yang-ming was afraid of nothing as he was perfectly open in all his actions.

The Emperor-ming was afraid of nothing as he waed for almost a year from August 1519 (the fourteenth year of the Zhengde Emperor) to July 1520 (the fifteenth year of the Zhengde Emperor). Although Zhu Chen-hao, the rebel, was already captured and in prison in Nanjing, the Emperor thought his accomplishments in the punitive expedition were not shown off to the public. Zhang Zhong, Jiang Bin, and Xu Tai would even have plotted to cover up the fact that it was Wang Yang-ming who captured Zhu Chen-hao and to have all the credit for themselves. However, Zhang Yong flatly said to the Emperor that it was unreasonable because Zhu Chen-hao had been captured obviously before the Emperor set off from Beijing. The public witnessed that it was Wang Yang-ming who escorted the captives all the way northward from Jiangxi Province to Zhejiang Province, so it was impossible to wipe out Wang's achievements. Without other choices, the Emperor agreed and ordered Wang Yang-ming to submit a report reiterating how Zhu Chen-hao was captured. On July 17, Wang Yang-ming revised the previous memorial *Memo on the Capture of Zhu Chen-hao* he had submitted to the Imperial Court concerning the capture of Zhu Chen-hao 1 year before into a revised memorial *Memo on the Emperor's Punitive Expedition to Jiangxi* in which he restated that his success in this capture was accredited to Emperor's plot and to his joint efforts with Jiang Bin, Zhang Zhong, Xu Tai, and Zhang Yong. Then the Zhengde Emperor began to reconsider returning to Beijing after the report was received. It was understandable that Wang Yang-ming's revised memorial was the very sign of Wang's personal sacrifice for the country and his dignity even though he had to endure humiliation.

On the twelfth of the eighth leap month in 1520 (the fifteenth year of the Zhengde Emperor), Emperor Zhu Hou-zhao and his troops left Nanjing and arrived at Qing Jiangpu¹⁷ in Huai Emperor, Emperor Zhu Hou-zhao and his troops left Nanjing and

¹⁷A district of Huai'an.

arrived at Qing Jiangpu understandable that was, for he had never tried this fun activity before. Unfortunately, the boat capsized and he fell into the water accidentally; since then he fell ill though he was rescued soon. They arrived in Tongzhou¹⁸ near Beijing in October. In November, the Emperor arrested Lu Wan, the Shangshu of Bing Bu, and other rebels such as Qian Ning for their collusion with Zhu Chen-hao. On December 5, a decree was issued by the Emperor to order the death penalty for Zhu Chen-hao, and that his corpse be burned and remains be cast into the air. It is worth mentioning that the Emperor was supposed to follow the law and rituals instead of sentencing the death in such a hurry though Zhu Chen-hao deserved the death penalty. His ministers persuaded him to first escort the captives back to Beijing and then to hand them over to the Xing Bu according to judicial procedure. Moreover, it was the ritual to offer sacrifices to Heaven, Earth, and ancestors and declare the sentence to the public before carrying out the death penalty. Why did the Emperor insist on executing death penalty in such a hurry? It was recorded in history that at that time, Jiang Bin still didn't give up encouraging the Emperor to move forward to Xuanfu, Jiang Bin's hometown which the Emperor took as "home for fun" and the Emperor even liked this idea very much, so he hastened to carry out the death penalty instead of going back to Beijing to execute Zhu Chen-hao and other rebels. However, the Emperor's bad physical condition and fatigue prevented him from going to Xuanfu. They returned to Beijing with a grand victory ceremony celebrating the Zhengde Emperor's return triumphant from the punitive expedition on December 10. The ceremony witnessed thousands of captives and their relatives standing shoulder to shoulder with white paper on their backs with their names and the skulls of those killed hung on bamboo poles one by one. The long line extended for miles. The Emperor was riding a horse in martial attire at the Zhengyang Gate¹⁹ very arrogantly. He watched the sight for a long time before he returned to the Forbidden City.

In 1521 (the sixteenth year of the Zhengde Emperor), Emperor Zhu Hou-zhao died in his Bao Fang (Leopard House) at a young age of 31, ending his ridiculous life. He assigned his cousin Zhu Hou-cong to inherit the throne as the Jiajing Emperor on his deathbed.

After the Jiajing Emperor succeeded to the throne, he had Jiang Bin and other vile characters executed, so it seemed that the Jiajing Emperor brought positive influences back to the Imperial Court. However, the rumors and frame-ups against Wang Yang-ming didn't get justified. On June 16, 1521 (the sixteenth year of the Zhengde Emperor), Wang Yang-ming received the decree from the Jiajing Emperor which ordered Wang to go to Beijing immediately to be called in by the Emperor and to be commended for his contributions in Jiangxi Province in the capture of Zhu Chen-hao and other rebels. Wang Yang-ming set off from Nanchang 4 days later. However, without expecting it, he was informed by another "days lathalfway that he needn without expecting i Was the Imperial Court so inconstant in decision-making, issuing an order in the morning and rescinding it in the evening? It turned out that some government officials were led to believe Jiang Bin' Estories against Wang

¹⁸Tong County during 1914–1997, now a district of Beijing.

¹⁹One of the nine gates of the imperial capital, Beijing.

Yang-ming and even that some brought a contemptible charge against Wang that he took action on his own to capture Zhu Chen-hao regardless of the imperial order. In this sense, Wang Yang-ming again became the victim of power play in the Imperial Court.

However, for Wang Yang-ming, in his mind, it was his true duty and responsibility to get the bandits under control in the borders of the four provinces, i.e., Jiangxi, Fujian, Huguang, and Guangdong, to put down the rebellion of Zhu Chen-hao and to take him as a captive. Therefore, he did not care about recognition from the Imperial Court at all nor had he regard for fame and honor, which were considered transient and unreliable just like clouds in the sky. Since Wang Yang-ming had experienced so many hardships and dangers in life, he became increasingly aware of his true mind which could give him true power. He believed that his future path out of his true mind must be positive and bright, the same as his world. The only depression in the bottom of his heart was his attachment to his family in his hometown. It had been 5 years since he left his hometown near Hangzhou in September 1516 (the eleventh year of the Zhengde Emperor). In these 5 years, his beloved grandma Cen passed away and his father Wang Hua was aging. Actually, Wang Yang-ming submitted a written statement after he got the bandits under control in the borders of the four provinces, asking for permission from the Imperial Court to visit his family, but he failed four times. When he arrived in Hangzhou in 1520 on his way to escort the captive Zhu Chen-hao to the Zhengde Emperor, he did not go back home for urgent business, even though his hometown was just miles away. Therefore, he devoted himself to the nation and meanwhile he was filled with guilt for his family, especially to his grandma, whom he failed to accompany even in her last minute. This time when he was denied the chance to meet the Jiajing Emperor, he was delighted rather than resentful as he had arrived in Zhejiang Province. Therefore, he wrote a fifth letter, asking for permission to visit his family and he finally made it.

So in August 1521 (the sixteenth year of the Zhengde Emperor), he returned home, saw his relatives, made sacrifices to his ancestors, and renovated the tombs of his ancestors in Yuyao, Zhejiang Province. In December, a decree from the Emperor was sent to celebrate his promotion to the Shangshu of Bing Bu, and Canzan Jinwu in Nanjing with the new title “Xinjian Bo,” so the decree did add some happy atmosphere to the Wang family on that day for that was his father’s birthday. However, after the decree had been announced to him and all the officials had gone away, his father Wang Hua said to him with worry and frowning, “When the Ning Wang rose in rebellion, I thought you were doomed to die; when you fought against Zhu Chen-hao face to face, I thought it hard for you to defeat him, but you won; when you were stuck in those rumors and frame-ups of Jiang Bin, I thought you were in extreme danger. However, now you survived, got promoted and reunited with us as well. This is our happiness while it’s also awful because it’s a mixed blessing.” After hearing all the talks, Wang Yang-ming knelt down before his father and promised, “I will definitely keep in mind what you have said today and never forget it!”

Their conversation moved all their friends and relatives present at the gathering. It is true that people usually stay strong-willed in face of trouble while riches and honors are likely to corrupt people. People will exert their efforts to change things for

better in difficulty, while riches and honors may make people greedy or arrogant and stop at nothing. It is not easy to be a man, as Mencius described, whom neither riches nor honors can corrupt, neither poverty nor humbleness can strike, and neither threats nor forces can bend. Wang Hua was really a great father, instructive and influential, for he could keep himself detached and composed when his son got promoted.

Surely, Wang Yang-ming himself was stable in behavior and reliable in character even when he was promoted to a higher rank for his rich experiences and noble thoughts. However, one thing has to be pointed out that his rise in the official world did not mean that he was rehabilitated by the Imperial Court from the gang of Jiang Bin and Zhang Zhong's gratuitous framing, nor did it mean that the Imperial Court already believed in him completely but was a plot to cover the power struggle from the public. The fact was that among all the officials who had fought with Wang Yang-ming against Zhu Chen-hao, only Wu Wen-ding, Magistrate of Ji'an Prefecture, Jiangxi, was later promoted to Fu-Du-Yushi. But all the other officials were either exiled or taken into custody instead of being honored, and thus it was evident that justice was not done. Therefore, Wang Yang-ming tried hard to resign his title "Xinjian Bo," for he did not see righteousness in the Imperial Court. On the tenth day of the first lunar month in 1522 (the first year of the Jiajing Emperor), he listed the following four reasons in his statement for resignation:

- (1) Zhu Chen-hao's statement for resion had been lasting for almost 10 years, while his rise in rebellion was put down only within 10 days. This was aHeavens. Willns. This was atemenhuman ability. It is the first reason that I cannot accept the title though I appreciate Heaven's help and do not want to claim the work of Heaven for myself.
- (2) The Imperial Court had long perceived Zhu Chen-hao's conspiracy and had made assignments to certain officials to capture him. Now, none of them was granted a reward but only me. It is, in my opinion, unfair to cover up their share of contributions, which is the second reason.
- (3) Zhu Chen-hao only me. It is, in my opinion is being suppressed should be attributed to the concerted efforts of a lot of officials in Jiangxi Province. Obviously, I was not the only one to be given the credit. It is the third reason.
- (4) I have been fulfilling my duty as an official serving the Imperial Court. If I accepted the promotion, I would be taking entire possession of something not supposed to be mine and would be a person full of guilt. It is the fourth reason.

Wang Yang-ming emphasized finally, "The greatest disaster is no more than greed for Heavene help; the greatest wickedness is no more than insulting the subordinate; and the greatest shame is no more than forgetting his own guilt." In his explanation, he insisted that his resignation was not because he intended to refuse the honor granted by the Imperial Court, but because he wanted to avoid becoming an evil person with all the above four weak points.

Wang Yang-ming explained that the resignation was actually not only his strong protest against the unfair Imperial Court decisions, but also a reflection of his endurance of humiliation, whose rage at the humiliation at that time can still be felt today. Distress from the loss of his father in February caused a reoccurrence

of Wang Yang-ming's old disease. Thus, by rejecting all visitors, he mourned his father and meanwhile recovered himself at home. Later he received the reply from the Imperial Court in July, which stated that his resignation was denied since in the name of justice he should be praised and promoted for his devotion to the country and his achievements for the government. In Wang Yang-ming's opinion, the so-called "justice" even irritated him because true justice had not been manifested. So he wrote his statement again in illness asking to resign the award of the new title. He expressed his indignation in the statement at the injustice done by the Imperial Court to the officials in Jiangxi who fought for the suppression of Zhu Chen-hao's rebellion. In his statement, Wang Yang-ming revealed the fact that some imperial officials took the officials from Jiangxi into custody and tortured them severely. Even today we can feel his indignation in the statement though such kind of indignation was rarely found in his other works. However, his second statement was ignored by the Imperial Court.

Actually, evidence showed that the Imperial Court made a pretense to the public as it was two-sided: commending Wang Yang-ming's public as it was and persecuting the officials who fought with him. What was more, the "certificate" and the "corresponding salary" that went with the new title "Xinjian Bo" had never been given to Wang Yang-ming and thus it was only an empty promise. Wang Yang-ming during that period, though renowned far and wide, was actually unemployed at home, no different from any ordinary person.

At the time when Wang Yang-ming wrote his statement for resignation, another incident happened. Cheng Qi-chong, Yushi²⁰ of Jiangxi Province, also wrote a statement to the Imperial Court, claiming that Wang Yang-ming was part of Zhu Chen-hao's rise-up party. Cheng Qi-chong's statement led to a heated debate, during which most officials argued for Wang Yang-ming's led to a heated debate, during which most officials in Wang Yang-ming's view, there was no need to defend himself, for "silence will eventually stop slanders." According to Wang, as long as one has confidence in his/her "true mind" and sincere reflections on his/her behavior, and as long as what one has done is altruistic and promising, those rumors and frame-ups will reveal themselves to the public one day. This incident showed that some officials in the Imperial Court did everything possible to frame-up Wang Yang-ming for their jealousy of him. When it came to 1523 (the second year of the Jiajing Emperor), some officials still criticized Wang Yang-ming's theories as "a False Philosophy." He was dauntless and still kept silent when his theories were attacked as "a False Philosophy."

Giving lectures meant so much to Wang Yang-ming that he regarded it as the most meaningful thing in his life. Whether it was after his suppression of Zhu Chen-hao or it was when he dutifully handled various local military affairs in Jiangxi Province, he never stopped giving lectures in Nanchang and Ganzhou. After he went back to his hometown, he enjoyed sharing lectures with his students in the natural surroundings of bamboo or woods except for the mourning time for his father. Someone once remarked that Wang Yang-ming would be perfect without lectures. However, Wang

²⁰Censor.

himself would rather sacrifice all the other honors for the only pleasure in his life—giving lectures. For him, only when he was giving lectures could he enjoy his free journey in his “true mind.” Without doubt, his wisdom in thoughts was developed and broadened with his accumulation of experiences in life. Especially after he survived all the hardships and frame-ups after he had succeeded in the suppression of Zhu Chen-hao, he became better aware of the importance of his vived all.” Actually, in enduring humiliation, he better drew the essence of his thought from his awareness and submersion in the Enlightenment in Longchang as “Original Knowledge,” which perfected his philosophical ideas. Then what does his “Original Knowledge” really mean?

(Translated by *Ruan Zheng*; Proofread by *Xu Xue-ying*)

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Chapter 6

Establishing His Philosophical System



6.1 Doctrine of Conscience

Upon hearing of Zhu Chen-hao's revolts, Wang Yang-ming, as an official passing through Jiangxi Province, raised an army of militia villagers within his limited power and in quite a short time suppressed the rebellion, making it a feat of "defeating a strong enemy of 100,000 soldiers with a mob of 10,000 militias" and saved the political destiny of the Ming dynasty. But such a clear fact turned out to be ambiguous due to the Emperor's absurdity and false accusations of some villains. Some of his disciples as well as a few officials who had been with him during the suppression were meanly persecuted and some were even persecuted to death. Truth was covered with lies and justice was not done. It is not rare in history that loyal officials and righteous men suffered from mortification, but things that happened to Wang Yang-ming were extremely rare.

Yet, what we have just said here is no more than an average person's conjecture of the mentality of a noble character, for Wang Yang-ming himself took them with ease, bearing no resentment. He firmly believed that facts were facts, and that facts would not be changed by lies, just as the sunlight could not be forever blocked by clouds. He was also firm in the belief that justice and righteousness existed as truth was in the hearts of people, for there was a "compass" in everyone's mind. As long as we frankly conduct ourselves under its guidance, we shall not feel lost.

After the war to suppress the rebellion, in the process of fighting a battle of wits and courage against Zhu Hou-zhao, the Zhengde Emperor, and the villains around him, Wang Yang-ming made a great leap again in developing his thought. The landmark of the leap is his doctrine of "Original Knowledge," symbolic of the completion of his philosophic thinking. Since then, Wang's "Philosophy of Mind" was truly established, a school radiant with freedom and vitality in the history of ancient Chinese thought.

As we may remember, the first leap in his thought development happened while he was trying to comprehend how to be a sage in Longchang, Guizhou Province, during which he was enlightened that "Intuition suffices to make one understand the

way of being a sage.” That is to say, there originally exists “a way of being a sage” in everyone’s nature, or in other words, how to be a sage in our mind. What we should do is to know our initially bright heart under the self-reflection of the mind, which requires that we should from time to time reflect on our words and actions in our everyday life so that the original substance of mind will be faithfully present. If not, or if we just take the way of being a sage as something objective in the material world and search for it, we will go astray. After the enlightenment in Longchang, Wang summarized his thoughts as “Oneness of Knowing and Doing,” emphasizing that true knowledge must be transformed into action, and all our practices and conduct in life are not only the result of application of knowledge, but also a reliable source of knowledge. Therefore, in no cases are knowledge and action inseparable but are one. “Oneness of Knowing and Doing” indicates a complete process of knowing and a philosophy of life as well.

As frequently stressed above, Wang Yang-ming was not only an advocate of the theory of “Oneness of Knowing and Doing,” but more of a practitioner himself. He was quite good at applying all sorts of knowledge to his life experiences and perceiving new knowledge from life as well. During his 5–6 years in Jiangxi, he went through fire and water in many battles. And yet, instead of being awarded by the Imperial Court, he suffered from all kinds of humiliation. A lot of unfounded charges which had confused right and wrong attacked him. On top of this, he had to bear all these misstatements while enduring the feelings of missing his family and mourning his beloved ones, and doing his best to perform his duty of handling all kinds of complicated civil and military issues to alleviate the sufferings of the people. It is not hard to imagine how painful he must have felt when he was trapped in such extreme distress. He had even written four letters to the Imperial Court, entreating time and again a permit for a visit to his family and parents, but each time he was declined. When he got to know that his father was badly ill, he missed his family even more badly. He even said something like this, “If declined once more, I would no longer wait for a permit, but run the risk of my life to escape!” The fact was that he didn’t escape but stayed to deal with the issues in Jiangxi “at the risk of” his health because his inner heart told him that every day the Jiangxi people were experiencing death or departure from their families. The pains they suffered were as much as he did. He stayed to do what he could to lessen their sufferings.

We will not forget that Wang was determined to be a sage since he was young. He called Confucianism “the Study of Sage.” In his mind, to become a sage, one had to follow Confucian teachings. According to Confucianism, “Self-cultivation of Nature and Character” is an important issue. It does not advise us to escape from daily life into deep mountains or forests for seclusion like Wang did in his youth. Instead, we should cultivate ourselves in everyday life while dealing with other people and things. This kind of cultivation, as pointed out by Mencius, is not easy. It requires us to “stimulate the mind in order to keep it tenacious.” What does it mean? As in Wang Yang-ming’s case, he gave up all his private interest and desires and listened to a call of justice and righteousness in his heart, and then in the very complicated and tangled circumstances obeyed the call in his life. This is what it means by “stimulating the mind in order to keep it tenacious.” With constant application of this thought, Wang

understood that there is a “thing” in everyone’s heart which knows forever what is right or wrong, good or evil, and justice or injustice. He named the “thing” as “Original Knowledge.” Talking of this concept, he said that he came to realize it via his life experience through numerous hardships and dangers, and that it was the root of “being a sage,” a bit of “true blood” passed down through generations. He further said, “Original Knowledge” is initially possessed by every one of us, something inborn within us, not acquired through later learning, such as reading books. So he also called it “the Original Substance of the Mind” because it exists in our mind from the start of our life. In addition, “Original Knowledge” is possible to be applied to life experience. According to Wang, it is the root and nature of being a human. Then what are the features of “Original Knowledge”? Wang Yang-ming’s understanding is elaborated as follows:

- (1) “Original Knowledge” is innate, starting at birth, hence also called one’s “natural virtue” or “conscience”; it is eternal and never disappears. It exists even in the evilest person like Zhu Chen-hao.
- (2) “Original Knowledge” knows of its own existence and is conscious of the outside world. It is always awake, not asleep; therefore, an innate supervisor of our conduct in life, and a sober looker-on, observing our words and actions. The often-told story goes that one of Wang’s disciples once asked the master, “When I am asleep, I have no senses of the outside world. Doesn’t it mean that my ‘Original Knowledge’ is also asleep and thus absent for a while?”, and that Wang gave him a quite interesting reply, “Your ‘Original Knowledge’ is often ‘on alert’, ‘clear but not dim’. Otherwise, how can you promptly wake up at a call?”
- (3) Just because “Original Knowledge” is awake, soberly watching out for our words and actions, it can make proper judgment on rightness or wrongness of our actions. As Wang always said, “Original Knowledge” differentiates what is good and what is evil. The key problem is that people do not always submit themselves to it but act against it. As a result, immorality happens. Here is an example. When a thief steals, his “Original Knowledge” surely tells him that “stealing is bad”; otherwise, why does he try to avoid being seen? When abiding by his “Original Knowledge,” he won’t steal, but when not, he does it. Knowing it is bad but still doing it is a kind of disunity of “Knowing” and “Doing.”

“Original Knowledge” being the source of the three points above, Wang emphasized that it is the “Original Knowledge” that constitutes the “Original Mind,” which is the initial state of our mind, the source of our life; something from which we obtain knowledge, hence the source of our rationality; something on which we develop our morals, hence the source of our morality.

By now we should be clear that our life will present a fairly good look when every one of us can conduct according to our “Original Knowledge” and will become meaningful and radiant with virtue if we can observe public rules and norms. “Original Knowledge” makes us noble. Although “Original Knowledge” is eternal, our senses such as the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and body, in dealing with the outside world, always take the liberty to make distinctions even to such an extent that prejudice is

mistaken for truth. In this way, life goes astray from the direction of “Original Knowledge,” or in other words, “Original Knowledge” is covered by prejudice, which is quite dangerous in that we are losing the root and nature of our life. If values are lost in our pursuit of sensual desires and satisfaction, we will become decadent in nature. If we don’t mend our ways we will sooner or later become the captives of desires and eventually turn out to be “things” instead of human beings. As a “thing,” how can a person be called man again? Man should not be a thing, but should have integrity of feelings, rationality, and morality.

Now there is a question for everyone, that is, how can one return to the original state of the mind? Or to put it in another way, how can one return to the “Original Knowledge” and make it the governor of his/her life? It is because only when guided by the “Original Knowledge” can he/she keep a balance between heart and body, can his/her existence remain a wholeness as a human being, and can his/her personality be integrated.

Returning to the “Original Knowledge,” or the “original state of mind” or the “true nature” means a return to the nature of life, termed by Wang as “Realizing the Original Knowledge,” which contains the following two meanings in his opinion:

- (1) According to Wang Yang-ming, everyone has “Original Knowledge,” and yet it is most likely to be covered in our dealings with various daily affairs because we may be blindly led by satisfying our desires via sensory organs like eyes, ears, nose, and mouth. Once covered, it cannot play its due role in our life. So the first meaning of “Realizing the Original Knowledge” is the demand for us to keep aware of the fact that “Original Knowledge” is our true nature; to make our life full of meaning, we need to make it reappear and guide us in everyday life. Wang employed an analogy to explain the idea that the “Original Knowledge” is as bright as a mirror, reflecting faithfully everything before it, whether big or small, beautiful or ugly. However, if the mirror is discarded for long, it will rust and no more play its role though it is still a mirror. But when we remove the rust, it will become bright again and can do all the things that a mirror does. In the same way, if we shelve our “Original Knowledge” for long, allowing it to be covered with private interests and selfish desires, it will also become a rusty mirror. Self-cultivating manner and temperament according to the teachings of sages is like removing the rust. If we keep on removing the bad for the good, our “Original Knowledge” will eventually restore its brightness, we will be bathed in the glory of good, and our life will become a brilliant shining. There is no doubt that “Realizing the Original Knowledge” should be done by oneself, i.e., perceiving his/her own “Original Knowledge,” removing the evil, and frequently honing his will. This is what self-awareness means.
- (2) The second meaning of “Realizing the Original Knowledge” is that when we are aware of our “Original Knowledge,” we should make it present in all aspects of our life. As Wang said, we should extend our “Original Knowledge” to all things, that is, whatever we do, we do it according to our “Original Knowledge.” The realization of “Original Knowledge” is the fulfillment of our existence, of its value and meaning as well. The “Realization” in this sense guides us to do

things according to our “Original Knowledge,” unalloyed with selfishness or desires, for it naturally tells right from wrong, beautiful from ugly. Following “Original Knowledge,” we can find the true look of things. It ensures us to handle everything in the due way; after doing it, there will be no hassling over gains or losses. A mirror faithfully reflects what is shown in front of it; once the object is moved away, it leaves no trace in the mirror. In the same way, once we have properly behaved according to our “Original Knowledge,” we can surpass the constraints to the mind and reach a broad, free, and easy realm. Morality is noble in that it contains no selfishness, no personal interests or desires, and it is beyond any utilitarianism. Mencius once asked whether it is moral to do a good deed, e.g., to help others? Of course it is, but if you do it just for the purpose of winning praise from others, it is no more than a thing “for favor,” which cannot be regarded as a moral action, for a truly moral action is done “from benevolence and righteousness,” a natural action from our heart with no utilitarian motives. That is why the action out of benevolence and righteousness is a truly moral and noble action.

As far as the two meanings of Wang’s “Realization of the Original Knowledge” are concerned, we can find that Wang proposed two things for us to realize the Original Knowledge. One is that everyone should be conscious of its presence in his/her mind, and the other is that he should also apply the innate Original Knowledge in his/her life. “Doing” goes with “Knowing.” In whatever sense, the two should be in one. This is the most fundamental principle. “Oneness of Knowing and Doing” is an effective way of extending the knowledge. This is what Wang always adhered to.

Here “Knowledge” in “Oneness of Knowing and Doing” is not what we generally think of as knowledge, but refers to the “Original Knowledge” or “the Original Mind.” This is what Wang meant by saying “There is nothing outside the mind,” or “Nothing is outside the mind.” But unfortunately, the statement is often misunderstood.

As is generally accepted, things exist objectively, independent of man’s will. This is of course true. However, on the other hand, when we face a “thing” and try to understand it, this particular “thing” has in fact entered into our conscious world or mental world. But when it hasn’t, we have no way to perceive or deal with it. Such kind of existence is meaningless to us.

Take Zhu Chen-hao’s rebellion for example. Before Wang arrived at Fengcheng, Jiangxi Province, he surely had no idea of it, let alone to think of suppressing the insurgency, for it had not been in his mind at that time. But when the governor of Fengcheng told him about it and he got to know some details; in other words, when the incident of Zhu Chen-hao’s rebellion truly entered his mental world, it became possible for him to take proper actions to handle it with reflection and guidance of his “Original Knowledge.” People deal with or interact with people and things in this world. Therefore, it is an interactive process. In Wang’s opinion, the “interaction” connects us with other people and things in the world. In other words, it is the communication of thoughts and the application of knowledge that connect us with the world. The broader our mental realm is, the nobler we will become; the stronger our practical ability is, the more colorful life we will live. The world we have built

up by interacting with various people and things belongs to ourselves, and therefore we should take responsibility for it. In this sense, we should not say “the things” in the objective world are just outside our mind.

Is there any opposite case? Yes, there is. We have the word “absent-minded,” meaning the mind is not there, not in the “particular thing” we are involved with. In this case, we may say that the “particular thing” has not entered our mind. Then what may happen in this situation? We may answer the question by quoting the words from *Great Learning*, “The result of absent-mindedness is looking without seeing, listening without hearing, and eating without tasting.” Please think of it: Can we have a full understanding of a thing and handle it in a proper way in a case like this? What is the meaning of such existence of things to us?

Therefore, Wang advanced the notion that “There is nothing outside the mind.” What he really meant is that things not yet entering one’s mental world make no sense to us, and that all the meaningful things to the person are those that we have paid close attention to and have become part of his/her mental world. Just for this reason, he demanded that everyone realize their Original Knowledge and expand our spiritual world as much as possible. Since our capacity of mind or Original Knowledge is infinite, we can make many things connect with us and put them into our mind as long as we really concern ourselves with them. In this way can we reach the realm of taking “all the things under the heaven as oneness of benevolence and kindheartedness.” Only when our mental world becomes boundlessly expanded, can we get rid of our personal interests or desires and gain infinite freedom of life and ease of mind.

Although Wang’s concept that “There is nothing outside the mind” or “Nothing exists outside the mind” sounds strange to us today, even his disciples present at his lectures felt it was difficult to understand. A good case in point is the story that goes like this:

On a sunny spring day when azalea blossomed everywhere on the cliff, Wang and his students were making a tour in Kuaiji Mountains¹. A student then asked him, “You always told us ‘Nothing exists outside of the mind’. Now please look at those flowers. Aren’t they blossoming there irrespective of our existence? Is there anything related between the flowers and our mind?” Wang replied to it. “Both the flowers and you are in a state of ‘solitude’ when you don’t notice them. But when you see them, you become aware of their colors and the flowers are no longer outside your mind.

Wang Yang-ming did not deny the objectivity of the flowers, but he stressed that they existed in a state of solitude before they were noticed or before they came into our mental world. Solitude is a state not so “clear” to us, not so understandable or easily grasped, but as soon as we see the flowers, their colors, shapes and smell their scents, they are immediately captured by our mind. In this sense, we may say that only when things come into our mind can their existence become obvious to us and the meaning of their existence be properly understood. Otherwise, the lonely existence bears no significance to us.

¹A short range of mountains in Shaoxing, Zhejiang Province.

What we have elaborated on in this chapter is just a brief introduction to Wang's thoughts instead of the whole system. Starting from 1520 to 1521 (the fifteenth or sixteenth year of the Zhengde Emperor) Wang Yang-ming began to preach his "Original Knowledge" in Ganzhou. From then until 1527, except for the 3 years he was in mourning for the death of his father, his main activities in Shaoxing were giving lectures mainly on "Original Knowledge." A friend of his who had attended his repeated speeches on "Original Knowledge" said to him, "Apart from the 'Original Knowledge', do you have anything else to talk about?" Wang answered him very confidently, "Apart from the 'Original Knowledge', what else is worth talking about?" In his opinion, the ultimate aim of whether reading and studying or getting on in the world is to "enlighten one's original mind" or one's "Original Knowledge," which is the basis of all one's learning and the foundation of all one's achievements. As the "Original Knowledge" helps build up the value in our life, the mind is set to learn once the "Original Knowledge" is made clear. Therefore, there is indeed nothing much worthy of being talked about except for the "Original Knowledge."

On an unprecedented scale, his thoughts were spread with his lectures and became popular near and far, changing the historical pattern of traditional Chinese ideological history, and making himself one of the most creative and greatest philosophers and ideologists in Chinese history. His "Theory of Original Knowledge" broke away ideological shackles since Zhu Xi brought a fresh style into the ideological world, and in fact played a great role in emancipating the mind. It can also be said that his "Theory of Original Knowledge" brought a revolutionary transformation to the ideological background at that time.

Wang Yang-ming immersed himself in the pleasure of giving lectures, ignorant of the frame-up of villains and the injustice of the Imperial Court. Indeed, those 5 or 6 years out-of-office became the happiest time for him. However, he was not ignored by the Imperial Court. In 1527 (the sixth year of the Jiajing Emperor), he was remembered by the Imperial Court and was appointed a new position. Forced to bid farewell to his beloved lecture hall, Wang Yang-ming, dragging himself, headed for a strange, faraway place.

(Translated by *Chen Jun-lin*; Proofread by *Yue Ming*)

6.2 Appointment to Guangdong and Guangxi

From 1522 (the first year of the Jiajing Emperor) to 1526 (the fifth year of the Jiajing Emperor), instead of being engaged in political activities, Wang Yang-ming spent most of his time delivering lectures in Shaoxing, Yuyao, and other places, which was also his favorite activity. Although Jiang Bin and other gangsters had been either put into death or exiled, the Imperial Court did not rehabilitate Wang Yang-ming for what he had been wrongly accused of. In spite of the fact that Wang Yang-ming was

offered a title of “Xinjian Bo,”² he had never enjoyed the special treatment, so the title absolutely existed in name only. Nevertheless, Wang Yang-ming was no more concerned about how he was treated because he obtained great pleasure from his lectures.

During these 5 years, some changes had taken place in his life. In January 1525 (the fourth year of the Jiajing Emperor) when he was 54, his wife Ms. Zhu died, which wrapped him in deep grief. Besides, his own physical condition was not always good. He had never fully recovered from coughing which started from his childhood and deteriorated with years of military life. Owing to his condition, he had to pay more attention to his own health while delivering lectures. Moreover, from relevant historical materials, we also know that Wang remarried a Ms. Zhang, who became his second wife around the end of 1525 (the fourth year of the Jiajing Emperor). Ms. Zhang gave birth to a boy in November of the following year. Since Ms. Zhu, Wang Yang-ming’s late wife, never gave birth to a child, they only adopted Wang Zheng-xian, his cousin’s son, as his own son. Now with the birth of his own son in his later years, he felt extremely gratified.

Wang Yang-ming’s comparatively relaxing life of delivering lectures was not interrupted by the Imperial Court until May 1527 (the sixth year of the Jiajing Emperor). He had to bid farewell to his beloved teaching platform, to pause his wandering in the ideological world, to say goodbye to his own little son, and to get dressed in military uniform again in order to support the collapsing Ming dynasty with his weak body.

In May 1527 (the sixth year of the Jiajing Emperor in the Ming dynasty), he was appointed Zuo-Du-Yushi in Ducha Yuan, in charge of the military affairs in Guangdong and Guangxi Provinces. He was sent to settle the Si-en³ and Tianzhou⁴ affairs because according to the Imperial Court, the “military rebellion” became very tricky there and Wang Yang-ming was the right person to clean up the mess.

Then what is the “Si Tian Affair”? We have to make a brief introduction first.

Si-en⁵ and Tianzhou⁶ were both prefectures under the control of Tusi⁷ in Guangxi Province. The Zhifu of the two prefectures shared the same family name, Cen and they were originally from the same clan, but there existed acute contradictions and accumulated grievances over the years. Here is the story:

Tianzhou was established in 1369 (the second year of the Hongwu Emperor in the Ming dynasty) when Zhu Yuan-zhang (the first emperor of the Ming dynasty) appointed Cen Bo-yan the first Zhifu in Tianzhou and the title was hereditary. After three generations, the title was passed to Cen Pu, who had two sons. The elder son was named Cen Xiao and the younger son was named Cen Meng. In 1499 (the twelfth year of the Hongzhi Emperor in the Ming dynasty), Cen Xiao killed his father Cen

²New Earl of the Construction, a title for Wang Yang-ming after his pacification on the bandits in Jiangxi Province.

³A former prefecture in Guangxi Province.

⁴A former prefecture in Guangxi Province.

⁵Now Huanjiang Maonan Autonomous County, Hechi, Guangxi Province.

⁶Now Tianyang County, Baise, Guangxi Province.

⁷Headmen of national autonomous region in the Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties.

Pu because he felt that his father was partial and did not like him. However, the two Tumu⁸ under Cen Pu, one of whom was Huang Ji and the other was Li Man, killed Cen Xiao. And by then Cen Meng was only 4 years old. Soon after that, Huang Ji and Li Man were at war against each other. Since Li Man occupied Tianzhou, Huang Ji together with Cen Meng, turned to the Du Fu⁹ of Nanning and falsely accused Li Man of mutiny. The Du Fu of Nanning then ordered Cen Jun, Zhifu of Si-en Prefecture to send troops to escort Cen Meng to Tianzhou. However, Li Man refused to accept Huang Ji and Cen Meng, so Huang Ji had to return to Si-en with Cen Meng. In fact, Huang Ji was not a good man. He offered his daughter to marry Cen Jun after he arrived at Si-en. At the same time, he plotted partitioning Cen Meng's territory of Tianzhou. He even imprisoned Cen Meng. When Deng Ting-zan, the Du Yushi, learned about it, he ordered Cen Jun to set Cen Meng free and appointed Cen Meng Zhifu of Tianzhou according to the hereditary system. Cen Jun didn't obey it, which forced Deng Ting-zan to send troops to go on a punitive expedition to attack him. Cen Jun had no choice but to set Cen Meng free. In 1502 (the fifteenth year of the Hongzhi Emperor), Huang Ji and Cen Jun, united with other Tusi, sent troops to attack Tianzhou. Tianzhou was breached and Cen Jun occupied Tianzhou, which turned Cen Meng into a fugitive again. In 1505 (the eighteenth year of the Hongzhi Emperor), the Imperial Court sent troops to fight against Cen Jun and have him killed, whereupon the Imperial Court removed the Tusi system in Si-en and changed it to "Liuguan Zhifu" (flowing official prefect), governing both Si-en and Tianzhou. As for Cen Meng, he was demoted to Qianhu¹⁰ of Pinghaiwei¹¹ in Fujian.

Here we should briefly explain the term "flowing official prefect." Since the Ming dynasty, the Tusi system was set up in the regions inhabited by a concentration of ethnic minorities, and the Tusi's ruling power was hereditary. Si-en and Tianzhou at that time were both under the dominion of Tusi from the Cen Family. As for some Tusi who were unwilling to follow the Imperial Court, the Tusi systems in those regions would be removed and the Tusi's power would be revoked accordingly, and returned to the Imperial Court. And then the Imperial Court would send officials from the Han nationality to rule it. Those officials were called "flowing officials" because just like the flow of water the officials only served a certain length of term in contrast to the hereditary Tusi system and the authority was not hereditary, so "flowing officials" came into being. "Gai-Tu-Gui-Liu"¹² is to remove the Tusi system and set up replaceable officials, which is very important in the history of the Ming dynasty as well as a strategy toward the regions where a concentration ethnic minorities lived.

Cen Meng disagreed with the Imperial Court policy of "Gai-Tu-Gui-Liu," which made him so unhappy that he refused to take over the position of Qianhu in Pinghaiwei of Fujian. In 1505 (the first year of the Zhengde Emperor), Cen Meng bribed Liu Jin with the aim of retaining his former position of Tianzhou prefect but finally

⁸Hereditary official subordinate to Tusi.

⁹Viceroy.

¹⁰A military officer.

¹¹An ancient city in Fujian Province.

¹²Change from Tusi to flowing officials.

he only got the position of “Tongzhi¹³ and Lingfushi¹⁴ of Tianzhou.” Despite all that, Cen Meng tried his best to manage Tianzhou and gradually became powerful. During the reign of the Zhengde Emperor, the bandits in Jiangxi Province became an increasingly serious problem. Chen Jin, the Du-Yushi at that time ordered Cen Meng to send forth his troops to help exterminate the bandits. Owing to his achievements he was promoted to “Zhihui Tongzhi¹⁵ of Tianzhou.” However, this position couldn’t satisfy Cen Meng but aroused his resentment because his main goal was to restore the previous official system in Tianzhou. In 1523 (the second year of the Jiajing Emperor), Cen Meng dispatched troops to attack Sicheng.¹⁶ Why did Cen Meng do so? Because in Cen Meng’s eyes, Sicheng was originally part of Tianzhou and his attack was to seize back the property of his ancestors which was now occupied by others. But the other officials at the time regarded his action as a rebellion and asked the Imperial Court to send troops against him.

In April 1526 (the fifth year of the Jiajing Emperor), an army of 80,000 men commanded by Yao Mo, Du Yu Shi was sent to attack Tianzhou. When Cen Meng heard about it, he didn’t resist and even ordered his subordinates not to go into combat. Instead, he wrote Yao Mo a letter to tell his grievance in the hope that Yao Mo would listen to him. Nevertheless, Yao Mo ignored him and continued his attack and killed Cen Bang-yan, Cen Meng’s eldest son. In spite of this, Cen Meng didn’t organize a military confrontation but fled to Cen Zhang’s in Guishun¹⁷ because Cen Zhang, the Zhizhou¹⁸ of Guishun, was his relative by marriage. It was totally unexpected that Cen Meng was poisoned by Cen Zhang in Guishun and his head was presented to Yao Mo. Therefore, Yao Mo reported his victory to the Imperial Court and as a result removed the Tusi system in Tianzhou, at the same time changing the administration into the system of “the flowing officials.”

In May 1527 (the sixth year of the Jiajing Emperor), Lu Su, the Tumu of Tianzhou, together with Wang Shou, the Tumu of Si-en revolted with their basic objective to restore the Tusi system in Tianzhou and Si-en. Lu Su concealed the news of Cen Meng’s death. Under the banner of Cen Meng, he immediately recruited thousands of village soldiers and occupied Tianzhou. Meanwhile, Wang Shou also occupied Si-en with thousands of soldiers. However, they did not intend to be against the Imperial Court so they conveyed to Yao Mo their readiness to accept amnesty but got no response from him. Yao Mo assembled all the troops in Guanxi, and deployed forces of the “Tu Bing” under the Xuanwei-Si of Yongshun and Baojing in Huguang as well as the ethnic troops from Ganzhou in Jiangxi and from Tingzhou in Fujian. The assembled army was sent to Nanning immediately. Lu Su and Wang Shou were under the large-scale suppression of the troops from four provinces. The result, however, was unsatisfactory with the defeat of the troops of the Imperial Court.

¹³ An associate Zhifu (prefect).

¹⁴ A title for an official, subordinate to a Zhifu.

¹⁵ Deputy Commander.

¹⁶ Now Lingyun County, Guangxi Province.

¹⁷ A former prefecture, now Jingxi County in Guangxi Province.

¹⁸ Chief of a prefecture, lower than a Zhifu.

At this point, things turned out to be worse. Yao Mo assembled the troops from four provinces to exterminate Lu Su and Wang Shou in the name of the Ming Imperial Court but failed, which deeply embarrassed the Ming Imperial Court. So some people of the Court criticized Yao Mo for messing things up in panic. They asked the Imperial Court to reappoint Wang Yang-ming by offering him the power to govern the military affairs in Guangdong and Guangxi Provinces so that Wang Yang-ming could be sent to deal with the affairs in Si-en and Tianzhou; in other words, Wang Yang-ming would be sent to clean up the mess made by Yao Mo.

Wang Yang-ming was not only a wise man but also a man with excellent political wisdom. Although he had kept teaching in the previous 5–6 years without engaging in any political activities, he was quite aware of the Imperial Court's intention at the time. When the order from Bing bu arrived, he replied immediately without any delay. In his letter, he clearly stated the following two points.

First of all, in a sincere tone, he claimed that he was in poor health and even a cough would make him faint, which prevented him from returning to the battlefield. If he cared only about his own fortune and fame regardless of his actual health condition, the consequence would be his death, which was nothing to himself but a great loss to the Imperial Court. Even if he could die a hundred times he could never make up for the damage to the Imperial Court. So he hoped that the Imperial Court would take his actual health condition into consideration and accepted his resignation from the new appointment.

Secondly, he also praised Yao Mo earnestly. He considered Yao Mo to be competent, sophisticated, and experienced. Although he had been defeated in this battle, it was only a natural thing in the battlefield. He wanted the Imperial Court to continue to rest hope on Yao Mo, to be patient with him and to give him time. He was sure that Yao Mo would succeed in the end.

When this sincere letter arrived, the Imperial Court would of course not accept Wang Yang-ming's request. Meanwhile, in the Jiajing Emperor's opinion, Wang Yang-ming refused the appointment because he was unhappy with Yao Mo. Hence, Yao Mo should retire in order to get Wang Yang-ming to take over Yao's position. With this in mind, the Jiajing Emperor asked Yao Mo to retire and ordered Wang Yang-ming to go to Guangxi for the third time, asking Wang to feel free in dealing with the Si Tian Affair as Yao Mo had already retired.

At this point, we have to make it clear that we cannot regard the appointment of Wang Yang-ming to govern military affairs in both Guangdong and Guangxi Provinces as real trust from the Imperial Court or as a vindication of the false charge against him many years ago after putting down the rebellion of Zhu Chen-hao. In fact, the Imperial Court never cleared up the matter of the false charge made by the villains. Regardless of his poor health, the aim of the appointment was only to take advantage of his talent to clean up the mess in Guangxi. Under the pressure of the Imperial Court, Wang Yang-ming had no choice but to go to Guangxi in spite of his poor health.

On September 8, 1527 (the sixth year of the Jiajing Emperor), Wang Yang-ming left Shaoxing under orders and started the long journey to Guangxi in a very complicated mood. He was unwilling to say goodbye to his favorite teaching life. He

was clearly aware of his worsening health and worried about the uncertain future in Guangxi, a place thousands of miles away from home. He seemed conscious of something, so before he left Shaoxing, he wrote his famous “Ke Zuo Si Zhu” (a calligraphy work by Wang Yang-ming). He put it up on the wall of the lecture hall, leaving his earnest teachings for the scholars and his disciples as well. On the night before he left, his disciples learned that he would leave for Guangxi Province and came to see him off. Wang Yang-ming feasted with them in the yard of his house. It was a crisp fall night, with the bright moon shining in the sky and fresh breeze blowing. Wang Yang-ming was in high spirits. He, together with his disciples, played the stringed instruments, read and wrote poetry, quite like the situation in which Confucius agreed with Zeng Dian, one of his disciples. After most of his disciples left, two of his most important disciples, Qian De-hong and Wang Ji stayed behind. Wang Yang-ming discussed his philosophy in detail with them and answered all their questions. By clarifying his principles again, he brought forth the famous “Four Sentence Teaching.” This event is very important in the study of Wang Yang-ming’s theory. It was known as “Tianquan Zhengdao” or the “Tianquan Sermon” because the conversation between Wang Yang-ming, Qian De-hong, and Wang Ji took place at “Tianquan Bridge.”¹⁹ The second day, when Wang Yang-ming left Shaoxing for Guangxi, Qian De-hong and Wang Ji walked a long way to see him off. They didn’t say goodbye until they reached Yan Zi-lin Fishing Platform, where they showed their distress at parting after Wang Yang-ming answered their questions again. The last argumentation about “Mind” between Wang and his disciples is known as “Questions and Answers at Yantan.” We can safely say that it was Wang’s last argumentation of the important issues concerning his philosophy.

In October, Wang Yang-ming arrived in Nanchang, where he received an unusually warm and ceremonious welcome by the people. Both sides of the road were full of people who warmly welcomed him by holding burning incense in their hands. People lifted up his sedan chair, passing it on. Wang Yang-ming was escorted with big crowds in front and behind, who went with him all the way to his residence. The enthusiastic atmosphere moved Wang Yang-ming deeply. He recalled the war fighting against the Ning Wang in order to put down his rebellion 10 years before and was full of complicated feelings. With drums and horns blowing and arrows whistling still ringing in his ears, he had a strong feeling that the world had changed but people remained the same. He expressed his deepest gratitude to the people in Nanchang. During his stay in Nanchang, he visited the Confucius Temple, where he delivered a lecture on *Daxue* (*The Great Learning*) at Minglun Hall. The lecture enjoyed an unprecedented presence. With military affairs to deal with, he did not dare to stay any longer and had to bid farewell to the people in Nanchang in a hurry. Again he went up along the Gan River and reached Ji’an. In Ji’an, more than three hundred of his disciples came to greet their teacher and Wang Yang-ming delivered his last large-scale public lecture there.

¹⁹The first bridge at Wang Yang-ming’s mansion.

On November 20, Wang Yang-ming arrived in Wuzhou, Guangxi Province, where the Zongdu Fu²⁰ of Guangdong and Guangxi Provinces was situated at the moment. Once he reached Wuzhou, he began to work immediately on the military affairs concerning Si-en and Tianzhou “rebellion.” In fact, Wang Yang-ming had already started to investigate Lu Su and Wang Shou’s “rebellion” since he entered Jiangxi Province. In October, he issued a document to the military governments in Jiangxi, Huguang, Guangdong, and Guangxi Provinces, asking them to research the real situation of Lu Su and Wang Shou’s “rebellion” and report honestly the details and their own views on it. Meanwhile, he made necessary preparations for the possibly coming war, including money, food, soldiers, and so on. As for the 6,000 soldiers recruited by Yao Mo, the former Du Yushi in Huguang, he ordered them to station in Wuzhou temporarily before his arrival. On the second day after his arrival in Wuzhou, Wang Yang-ming wrote to the Bingbeidao²¹ in Guangdong and Guangxi Provinces and asked them to enforce the “Shijiapai System” strictly. We have mentioned several times that it is a kind of household registration system with ten families as a unit created by Wang Yang-ming and proved effective in several practices. Wang Yang-ming brought forth a famous point of view that “The extraterritorial protection policy should be based on internal pacification; and the art of pacifying the people should be based on a change of customs.” It roughly means that the protection from external enemies should depend on internal governance and the maintenance of social stability should be based on a change of customs. The “Shijiapai System” which he promoted was a practical and effective measure with “internal governance” as its fundamental purpose.

Wang Yang-ming made necessary preparations and in the meantime launched a number of investigations on the causes and effects of Lu Su and Wang Shou dispatching troops. It was based on careful research that he got the truth of the so-called “rebellion” of Lu Su and Wang Shou. After carefully analyzing the causes and effects of the Si-en and Tianzhou Affair, he formed his basic principle in dealing with the Si-en and Tianzhou Affair. In his opinion, pacification should be the best strategy. He reported to the Imperial Court his own opinion and put forward two suggestions at the same time.

First of all, the so-called “rebellion” of Lu Su and Wang Shou was not true and the Imperial Court should exonerate them in order to give them a second chance. If the Imperial Court insisted on sending troops against them, the war could last for a long time because the local people would not support it regardless of the excuse. Therefore, it actually would be impossible for the Imperial Court to build up its authority, and neither would it be good for the country because the huge military consumption that came along with the war would increase the burden and make people lose trust in the Imperial Court.

Secondly, in consideration of the living habits, cultural traditions, and other aspects of the local minorities, the policy of replacing Tusi with Han officials promoted by the Imperial Court in southwest minority regions, the so-called “Gai-Tu-Gui-Liu”

²⁰The governor-general’s residence.

²¹An official of rectifying armed force in the Ming dynasty.

policy was not always effective. The Imperial Court should treat it differently. He claimed that the “Gai-Tu-Gui-Liu” policy introduced in Si-en and Tianzhou with no exception didn’t bring real benefits to local minority people; instead, new problems concerning habits, cultural traditions, and other aspects arose. Hence, the Imperial Court should maintain Tusi system to implement local autonomy and at the same time establish a Han Prefect in order to strengthen supervision and management of the local autonomy in ethnic minority regions.

Wang Yang-ming’s main ideas were very clear, i.e., the policies in Han regions should not be imposed without exception in ethnic minority regions. In order to win universal support of the minority people, the Imperial Court should not try to alter in any way but with different treatments. Local autonomy was a more effective way in ethnic minority regions. Taking the real situation in Si-en and Tianzhou into consideration, it was the entirely carrying out the “Gai-Tu-Gui-Liu” policy that led to the discomfort of local people in their habits and other aspects of life, which had a direct influence on the uprising of Lu Su and Wang Shou. As for the local people’s attachment to the Tusi system, Yao Mo, the former Du Yushi, took a commanding attitude and resorted to arms frequently without any sympathy and understanding, which provoked the resentment of the local people. Judging from the situation then, Lu Su and Wang Shou did not really want to confront the Imperial Court. It was Yao Mo who misjudged the situation as well as flustering and overreacting, which made the situation even worse, finally leading to a total mess that was difficult to clean up. Since the fault lay with the Imperial Court, they should correct the mistake once they learned it and should not leave it be. Therefore, the best strategy for the Imperial Court was to pacify Lu Su and Wang Shou in order to prevent the situation from getting worse. Only in this way could the Imperial Court re-establish its authority and show its original intention to appease the people.

According to the historical record, when Wang Yang-ming’s report arrived at the Imperial Court, it aroused controversy among the officials there but finally got the support from the Bing Bu. Then the Imperial Court issued an order to approve Wang Yang-ming’s strategy, let him act according to the circumstances and concurrently appointed Wang Yang-ming the Xunfu of Guangdong and Guangxi Provinces on December 2. The Xunfu before Wang Yang-ming was Yao Mo. After the handover, Wang Yang-ming dealt with the “rebellion” in Si-en and Tianzhou at once. He solicited opinions from all sectors and reached the agreement that it was correct to pacify Lu Su and Wang Shou. In late December, he ordered Lin Fu,²² You-Buzhengshi²³ of Guangxi Province, to dismiss the troops assembled from the three provinces. The soldiers were sent back to rest and farm. Within several days, Wang Yang-ming had dismissed thousands of soldiers. In order to solve the problem of traveling expenses, he allowed soldiers to sell horses, swords, guns, and other weapons by themselves. Then he used the military funds to buy them back. Although Wang Yang-ming dismissed the armies from the three provinces, he did not send the “Tu Bing” assembled from the two Tusis of Huguang and Baojing because it was a long

²²The grandfather of Lin Zhao-en, the founder of “Sanyism”.

²³The chief executive of a province on the right, an official on the third level.

journey from Guangxi to Huguang and the “Tu Bing” were poorly disciplined and would disturb people’s life on their way home. Therefore, it was ordered that before sending them back, all the prefectures and counties along the way should make preparations of army provisions.

As for Lu Su and Wang Shou, they indeed had no intention of rebellion. They assembled the villagers and fled into the woods just because they had no other choice but to save their own lives. The immediate dismissal of armies undoubtedly showed them hope for a new life. In January 1528 (the seventh year of the Jiajing Emperor), they sent leaders under them to see Wang Yang-ming and expressed their desire to surrender. Wang Yang-ming placated them kindly and issued an order again to urge Lu Su and Wang Shou to surrender with their armies. In the order, Wang Yang-ming said, “Although there is no great evil in you, it does not necessarily mean that you have committed no crime. You assembled thousands of people into the woods, which actually separated thousands of couples, broke up fathers and sons, and made brothers unable to reunite, feeling alarmed day and night. That is your crime. Just because you led people to flee into the woods, the Imperial Court had to dispatch armies which caused three provinces to become unpeaceful. That is also your crime. I fully sympathize with you because I know that your intention of escaping into the woods was to save your lives. You should dismiss the army and surrender within 20 days after you receive this order. Otherwise, the Imperial troops will be sent against you and you will come to a bad end which you deserve.”

When Lu Su and Wang Shou received this order, they felt very pleased. With no hesitation, they removed the defense and decided to surrender. Wang Yang-ming asked them to discipline their soldiers and not to disturb people’s life along their way. “No damage to people’s bushes and trees.” On January 26, 1528 (the seventh year of the Jiajing Emperor), Lu Su, together with more than 40,000 people and Wang Shou, together with more than 30,000 people arrived in Nanning and stationed outside the city. On the second day, Lu Su and Wang Shou tied themselves up and offered to surrender. Wang Yang-ming claimed that their surrenders should be praised but proper punishment was also necessary because they had disturbed the peace for more than 2 years. They received a punishment of flogging and Lu Su and Wang Shou gladly accepted without complaint.

After the surrender, Wang Yang-ming ordered them to dismiss their armies and sent the soldiers back to their hometowns to engage in production. Up until then, the once notable affair, the so-called Si Tian “rebellion,” which had lasted more than 3 years, shocked the Imperial Court and caused the futile attempts at suppression by troops from four provinces, was settled by Wang Yang-ming immediately and properly without using any soldiers, and won him the support of the local people. On February 13, Wang Yang-ming wrote to the Imperial Court about the whole process of handling the Si Tian affair.

From the settlement of Si Tian Affair, we can find that Wang Yang-ming was a man who sought truth from facts and dared to stand up for the truth. Judging from the situation at that moment, the Imperial Court sent him to Guangxi because the attempted suppressions had been futile then. The original intention of the Imperial Court was to make use of his military abilities to defeat Lu Su and Wang Shou.

Nevertheless, after the careful investigation, Wang Yang-ming stated that Lu Su and Wang Shou did not intend to betray the Imperial Court. It was the improper policy and a particular official's misjudgment and overreaction that led to the worsening consequence. When he realized the policy of "Gai-Tu-Gui-Liu" introduced by the Imperial Court without exception harmed the feelings of minority people, he dared to correct it and continued the minority autonomy policy. He never put himself on the opposite side of the people but kept the people and the country's interest at heart all the time. Some people in the later generations criticized his offering amnesty to Lu Su and Wang Shou and considered it unwise to exercise minority autonomy in Si-en and Tianzhou. A specific territorial environment will result in a specific lifestyle, which in turn results in specific cultural traditions. From the perspective of political administration, in order to achieve the effect of the administration, the administrative system and mode must be adjusted with the specific cultural traditions. After Si Tian Affair, Wang Yang-ming, on the one hand, kept the Zhizhou²⁴ in a Tusi to show his respect for the lifestyle and cultural traditions of ethnic minorities; on the other hand, he set up the "flowing official prefect" to strengthen the supervision and guidance of the minority regime, which showed his concern for the unity of political administration of the Imperial Court and also strengthened the minority people's approval of the central government. Based on these points, Wang Yang-ming's strategy was full of political vision and progressiveness.

Wang Yang-ming also held the view that in areas of relatively concentrated ethnic minorities, such as Si-en and Tianzhou, the reason why the effect of political administration was not thought of as ideal was due to the poor education. If education fell behind and moral education couldn't be spread, all of these would directly influence the effect of political administration. After the suppression of Si Tian Affair, he set up a Sitian School, and at the same time founded the Binyang Academy in Binzhou and the Fuwen Academy in Nanning, where he came to teach. The establishment of the school and colleges not only showed Wang Yang-ming's view of moral priority, but also enhanced the spread of Han culture in ethnic minority regions.

After pacifying Lu Su and Wang Shou and settling the Si-en and Tianzhou "rebellion," Wang Yang-ming was supposed to report to the Imperial Court and leave Guangxi, going back to his lecture hall in Shaoxing. But at that time, he was concerned about another situation in Guangxi. That was the local armed forces based in Duanteng Gorge,²⁵ Ba Zhai,²⁶ and other places. These armed forces were becoming a seriously unstable factor affecting the political stability of the Imperial Court. Since Wang Yang-ming was both Zongdu of military affairs and Xunfu of administrative affairs of Guangdong and Guangxi Provinces, it was his duty to protect local stability as well as to maintain the living and political order. He planned to clean up the local armed forces based in Duanteng Gorge, Ba Zhai, and other places so as to maintain

²⁴ Governor of Tusi system.

²⁵ A gorge in Guangxi.

²⁶ Eight mountain villages in Guangxi.

the political stability and unity of the Imperial Court. Therefore, he carried out the last war in his life. So what would the final result be?

(Translated by *Sun Juan*; Proofread by *Lu Yi-ye*)

6.3 The Last Battles

After Wang Yang-ming sorted out the rebellions in Si'en and Tianchuan, he turned to the rehabilitation of these two places by setting up schools in order to reinforce moral education there. And meanwhile, he decided to deal with the local ethnic minority armed forces in Duanteng Gorge and Ba Zhai, as they had been deranging and disturbing the political order and the lives of the local people. In Wang Yang-ming's military career, these were the last battles. First we had better get to know something in general before we move on to the process of the battles.

- (1) Where is Duanteng Gorge? Duanteng Gorge is a gorge extending for more than 40 km in the lower reaches of the Qianjiang River,²⁷ with the main body lying in today's Guiping City of Guangxi. It is the longest and most rugged gorge in Guangxi. In the Ming dynasty, the inhabitants around Duanteng Gorge were mostly from ethnic minorities like the Yao and Zhuang nationalities, whose living habits and cultural traditions were quite different from those of the Han nationality.
- (2) Why is the gorge called Duanteng Gorge? Originally, Duanteng Gorge (literally Broken Vine Gorge) was called Dateng Gorge (literally Big Vine Gorge). It was said that there were vines of liana on the banks of the river. The vines were so big and thick that they could grow all the way from one side of the river to the other side. They submerged into the river in the daytime and emerged at night, so the local people used this kind of vine to get across the river. During the years 1464–1487 (in the reign of the Chenghua Emperor in the Ming dynasty), because of the same cause—that the local armed forces of ethnic minorities seriously interfered with the political administration order of the Imperial Court—a person called Han Yong led a troop into this area, crushed the armed forces of the ethnic minorities and chopped the vines down. From then on, Dateng Gorge was changed to Duanteng Gorge. Then during the years 1505–1521 (in the reign of the Zhengde Emperor in the Ming dynasty), Chen Jin, a Du-Yushi before Wang Yang-ming gave permission to the local ethnic groups to draw commercial taxes from passing merchant ships, so the name of the gorge was again changed to “Yongtong Gorge” (“Yongtong” literally means “forever flowing” in Chinese). However, today some people still stick to its original name “Dateng Gorge.”
- (3) As for the name “Ba Zhai,” it is impossible to list the exact eight villages. Due to the constant changes in the names of the villages through history, it is also very hard for us to specify their exact locations. However, one thing is sure, that

²⁷A short section of the Xi River system and, thus, the greater Pearl River system in Guangxi, China.

generally most of them are in the two counties of Shanglin and Xincheng in the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region today.

After we've got to know the above three points, we can have a rough picture of the region in our mind. The vast area of Duanteng Gorge and Ba Zhai was situated right in the heart of Guangxi, with a difficult terrain. It could be said that this area was full of high mountains and precipitous paths, towering hills and turbulent rivers, steep cliffs and bottomless pools. Therefore, it was not easy for people to get access to this area, especially in a time without the convenience of modern transportation and communication systems. Furthermore, Duanteng Gorge was very close to Ba Zhai. West across Duanteng Gorge was the access leading to Ba Zhai. Almost at the beginning of the Ming dynasty (1386), armed forces began to be set up by people from ethnic minorities in Duanteng Gorge and the Ba Zhai villages. They attacked the county government and robbed the local people, posing a serious threat to the ruling order of the Imperial Court and seriously interfering with the daily life of the local residents. Therefore, almost at the same time, the Imperial Court began to detach and later kept sending troops into the area in order to clear out these forces. According to historical records, the largest scale battle could be dated back to the years of the Chenghua Emperor (1464–1487), Han Yong sent 160,000 soldiers into the campaign. When it came to the reign of the Zhengde Emperor (1505–1521), the local armed forces revived again. Since 1526 (the fifth year of the Jiajing Emperor), the so-called “rebellion” headed by Lu Su and Wang Shou in Si'en and Tianzhou had largely tied down the imperial troops, and meanwhile the armed forces in Duanteng Gorge and Ba Zhai were getting more and more active. They acted in collusion and frequently went around robbing rampantly and posing a ceaseless threat to the local people and the government on a monthly and even daily basis. According to Wang Yang-ming, places like Duanteng Gorge and Ba Zhai “are the base of the armed forces. Their hideouts were quartered in the region and extended to thousands of miles. The ferocious robbers have been a great torment to the local people but their pernicious influence has hardly ever been exterminated... They have been the root of the problems of the rampant robberies in Guangdong and Guangxi Provinces, so if they continue to exist, the robbery cases in this region would never disappear anyway.” Thus, in February 1528 (the seventh year of the Jiajing Emperor), Wang Yang-ming offered amnesty to Lu Su and Wang Shou, settled the Si Tian Affair and planned to clean up the armed forces in the area of Duanteng Gorge and the Bazhai villages.

As we have mentioned above, in order to show his sincerity in offering amnesty to Lu Su and Wang Shou, Wang Yang-ming had dismissed the troops in the three provinces assembled by Yao Mo, the former Duyushi, but kept the Tu Bing from Huguang Province. Why didn't he send the Tu Bing back? He aired his view that it took time as there were more than 6,000 Tu Bing in the troop and it was quite a distance between Huguang and Guangxi, and that they were more relaxed in discipline and the undisciplined Tu Bing might disturb the life of the inhabitants along the road, so their route should be carefully planned and the soldiers should be strictly constrained and put under surveillance when they marched through the towns and countryside.

But in fact, Wang Yang-ming meant to hold the troop back for his military purpose. It was this troop of more than 6,000 Tu Bing from Huguang that constituted the main force to surround and attack Duanteng Gorge.

On the other hand, Lu Su and Wang Shou showed that they were willing to be under his command to show gratitude to Wang Yang-ming and to show loyalty to the Imperial Court. Wang Yang-ming told them to dismiss their troop and give their soldiers 3 months to take a rest and do some farm work. After 3 months, this troop was reassembled to be the main force to attack the Ba Zhai villages.

Let's focus on one thing at a time. First, let's look at the battle of Duanteng Gorge. In late February 1528 (the seventh year of the Jiajing Emperor), Wang Yang-ming issued a public order to the Tu Bing from Yongshun and Baojing Counties of Huguang Province and asked them to evacuate from Guangxi. Meanwhile, he issued documents to the governments of every county or prefecture along the route to ask them to put the passing Tu Bing under strict discipline and surveillance, so that they would not disturb the people and spoil anything even the grass and trees. However, at the same time, he confidentially gave a secret command to the commanders of the troops, that is, the Xuanwei Shi of Xuanwei Si of Yongshun and Baojing Counties, to take advantage of the evacuation, cooperate with the Imperial troops, and launch the attack on the Ba Zhai villages. Thus, the public evacuation of the troops of Huguang from Guangxi was actually a secret and large-scale military deployment.

In order to implement a clear up of the armed forces in Duanteng Gorge and secure a complete victory, Wang Yang-ming sent undercover informers to make careful and solid investigations into the roads and traffic of the villages around the gorge. He put the campaign into two stages: the first stage was mainly to attack the major stockaded villages of Niuchang, Liusi, and Modao; the second one was to attack the two major stockaded villages of Xiantai and Huangxiang. In the first stage, he divided the troops from Huguang into six divisions to encircle the three stockaded villages of Niuchang, Liusi, and Modao simultaneously. In late March, Wang Yang-ming gave the commanders of all the six divisions clear deployment instructions of their specific routes and issued strict disciplinary orders to the troops. He stressed that the primary goal of the military action was to "stop the chaos and bring peace back to the people," to chop off the head of the robbers, "but not to take credit for killing as many enemies as possible." Therefore, in no way were soldiers allowed to make trouble when they passed through the prefectures, counties, and villages along the route. "Any soldier who violates the military orders and spoils even the grass or trees will be beheaded in public according to the military laws." The commanders of the troops were required to get familiar with the roads, the armed forces of the enemies, and the villages along the route before they arrived at their designated places. They were also ordered to plant flags to designate "good villages." When firing began, yellow cloth was supposed to be tied on the arms of the Imperial soldiers as a sign, and the crossroads were garrisoned by troops to prevent the enemies from escaping.

The military actions against Duanteng Gorge were taking place in an abrupt manner. Wang Yang-ming did not give any warnings beforehand. He was staying in Nanning and did not show any military intentions, and the Tu Bing of Huguang, who were previously stationed in Nanning, were evacuating from Guangxi to Huguang on

a large scale in the broad daylight. But how could such an apparent “evacuation” turn out to be “marching”? These Tu Bing had to get across Guiping County before they got back to Huguang. So it was actually a public military disposition that appeared to be an evacuation. When the Tu Bing were stationed in Nanning, they did not prepare the army horses and supplies, nor carry out any military activities, so they did not look like they were going to fight when they assembled in Guiping County, and neither did they draw any attention from the villages around Duanteng Gorge. All the plans were carried out so secretly that they did not get on the nerves of the armed forces in villages around Duanteng Gorge.

On the early morning of April 2, all the troops launched attacks on the major villages of Duanteng Gorge all at once, so sudden and so unexpected, like lightning, that their enemies could not make any defense but fall into a total mess. Wang Yang-ming’s troops took advantage of rigorous training and thorough preparation while their enemies were in a state of relaxation and without preparation. This was where the Imperial troops took the decisive occasion and won the battle. However, they were also confronted with some strong resistance. But on the whole, the battle went smoothly in Duanteng Gorge. On February 10, the first stage of the battle was won, a great victory, and the enemies from the major villages of Niuchang, Liusi, and Modao were cleared out.

Without any procrastination, Wang Yang-ming sent the order to have the troops begin the second stage of the campaign. He targeted the major villages of Xiantai and Huaxiang this time. Late on the night of April 11, he adjusted the plan, redeployed the soldiers and commanders, redirected the marching routes, and made appointments with the troops to launch attacks simultaneously at dawn on April 13. As their enemies were already on the defensive this time, the battle was more challenging. But on the whole it was a smooth battle. After 10 days of fighting, on April 24, all the local village stockades had been breached and the major enemies were vanquished. Thus, it could be announced that the battle of Duanteng Gorge was as almost at an end.

Let’s move on to the campaign of Ba Zhai. Compared with the battles in Duanteng Gorge, the battles in Ba Zhai were much tougher, for Ba Zhai covered a vast territory, a difficult terrain and more fortified villages. The so-called “Ba Zhai” referred to the eight big stockaded villages, each with a population of as many as 10,000 people and more. They occupied favorable locations and their influence in the area could not be underestimated. These eight villages were both independent and interconnected. They used to go around robbing on their own, but they could gang up as a whole to fight together if there was an alert or an attack from the Imperial troops. So Wang Yang-ming once put it that Ba Zhai went under the name of eight villages but was actually a one piece entity, which was largely responsible for the reasons why they were so powerful so as not to be broken up by the Imperial troops.

Overall, Wang Yang-ming took the campaigns of Duanteng Gorge and the Ba Zhai villages as a whole in his deployment, but the attacks against the Ba Zhai villages were relatively independent in his military strategy due to the differences in the main forces, the targeted enemies, the strategic principles, and the specific attack plans. The campaign of the Ba Zhai villages was planned in late March, launched in the

early April, carried out in late April, and ended for the most part in the middle of June. The specific operational process lasted about one and a half months.

It has been mentioned above that the Tu Bing from Huguang were once stationed in Nanning. At that time, all the villages in Ba Zhai were quite on alert in case Wang Yang-ming would deploy Tu Bing and launch a sudden attack on them. But they felt reassured when they saw what happened next: The imperial troops were dismissed on a large scale; Lu Su and Wang Shou's troops were also disbanded after being offered amnesty; and soldiers from Huguang ceased fire and withdrew one after another. They thought Wang Yang-ming was not able to get at them, even though he was well known as a man skillful and smart in battle. Therefore, they were no longer on such high alert as before. Moreover, when they found Wang Yang-ming turning a deaf ear to their minor cases of robberies, which they meant as an attempt to get a reaction from him, they felt assured and became more reckless. They slacked or even gave up the thought of preparing for possible battles. They did not know Wang Yang-ming was actually adopting the strategy of "playing cat and mouse" with them, so without them knowing, the enemies in Ba Zhai could not escape from the military snare set by Wang Yang-ming any longer.

When the gang leaders of Ba Zhai fancied themselves clever, they boldly went out on their robberies again, slack in war preparations. Wang Yang-ming took it as "a destined opportunity that cannot be missed," and picked the right time to surround and launch an attack on them. Therefore, in early April, Wang Yang-ming called a secret meeting with people like Lin Fu, the You Buzhengshi, and some others, to give them confidential instructions to deploy concrete strategies to implement and encirclement and attack on Ba Zhai. He also ordered Lu Su and Wang Shou to assemble their troops confidentially, getting ready to attack the eight stockaded villages. What is worth mentioning is that the troops led by Lu Su and Wang Shou were from the local residents. They were both familiar with the terrain in the Ba Zhai villages and experienced and skillful in the battles in mountainous regions, so they were actually the main forces in the campaign, while the Imperial troops were in the position to cooperate with them. At the same time, Wang Yang-ming ordered every prefecture and county to strictly follow the "Shijiapai System" and to get ready for the battles.

On April 22, all the troops strictly abided by Wang Yang-ming's elaborate deployment and arrived at their designated action positions, respectively. All the marching was done furtively, "moving rapidly at night, with a stick in the mouth; passing the villages silently, with no attention drawn from the villagers." The next morning, all the troops launched the attacks on Ba Zhai simultaneously. The strategy of sudden attack proved to be effective after the battle started. All went smoothly. Shortly after the battle started, all the troops broke through the natural strongholds of the enemies, bravely rushed into the eight stockaded villages, and breached all of them.

Half a month later, the major stockaded villages of the enemies were almost torn down, which indicated a decisive victory in the battle of Ba Zhai. However, when Wang Yang-ming assessed the outcome of the campaign, he found quite an extraordinary phenomenon that although all the stockaded villages were broken up, the chief leaders were almost nowhere to be found. They were not killed nor captured.

In Wang Yang-ming's eyes, it was very strange and unusual, for in most cases, when a stockaded village was taken, the gang leaders were either killed or captured. There were rare cases that a few leaders might run away, but when it came to the disappearance of most gang leaders, it was simply unbelievable. To make it worse, he found the soldiers were not as uplifted as before. They looked sagged and low spirited.

It raised great concern with Wang Yang-ming. Judging from his experience, there must be some hidden problems with his own troops, and most probably, some women from the enemy villages sneaked in among the troops and lured the soldiers with their fortune and beauty, and thus those greedy soldiers were made to either let the gang leaders go or refuse to fight bravely. It was very dangerous in the course of battle. The troops would be greatly compromised once the enemies got to know it and came back with a surprise attack. Wang Yang-ming ordered the commanders to take their token flags and brands and to patrol the camps. Soldiers who were found to give shelter to these women would not be punished directly. Instead, they would be sent to search for the escaping gang leaders in the mountains. If they made contributions, they would be forgiven and have the women and fortune back after the troop returned in victory. However, those who refused to offer help due to their addiction to the beauty of the women would be beheaded in the open air to ensure the strict discipline in the army.

Wang Yang-ming's purge measures for military discipline soon took effect. When it came to early June, with the rigorous supervision of the commanders, all the troops made their contributions. The enemy leaders were either captured or killed, the eight stockaded villages were swept away, and the enemies scattered all around. So Wang Yang-ming issued the order to chase and exterminate the scattered enemies. The remnants of enemy armies were pushed to the bank of the Hengshui River (also Liu River). In order to get across the river, thousands of enemies scrambled onto the ships but only to capsize all of them. Countless of them fell into the river and died. With no ships left, together with the thunderstorm and the heavy rain, Wang Yang-ming's troops had to withdraw and get back to their camps. The rain lasted for more than 10 days. When it cleared up, Wang Yang-ming sent his soldiers to search for the enemy remnants, but only to be shocked at finding thousands of people died in the caves, trees, and under the cliffs, their bodies piled up and beginning to decay.

Judging by the situation at this point, Wang Yang-ming estimated that there were virtually no more remnants of the enemies from Ba Zhai left, so he ordered the troops to return. The campaign of Ba Zhai was thus announced as ended.

After the campaigns, Wang Yang-ming awarded the soldiers from Huguang and commanders like Lu Su and Wang Shou as a matter of routine. On July 10, Wang Yang-ming submitted *Memo on the Victory in Ba Zhai and Duanteng Gorge* to report in detail to the Imperial Court about the attacks on the two places. Two days later, he submitted to the Imperial Court another statement of his comprehensive ideas on the administrations in Ba Zhai and Duanteng Gorge. He proposed strengthening the management in Ba Zhai and Duanteng Gorge in order to prevent the possible risks and dangers in the future. He proposed in the statement the following five suggestions:

- (1) Move and establish Nandan as a guard town in Ba Zhai villages. Wang Yang-ming believed that this move could cut off the bonds between the eight stockaded villages, no matter how difficult the terrain and how interconnected the villages might be. Therefore, it could be a safety shield against possible robberies of the stockaded villages in the future. Even if there were some cases of robberies from the eight stockaded villages, it could be easier for the government to put them down.
- (2) Move the site of prefectural government of Si'en from Qiaoli to Huangtian. The prefectural government of Si'en was originally built in Qiaoli, which was located among mountains. It was very inconvenient for the inhabitants due to the difficult transportation. However, Huangtian was flat and fertile with a distance of no more than 30 km from Qiaoli, and the transportation there was much easier. Therefore, it fits the life of the inhabitants much better.
- (3) Build Sanli as the seat of Fenghua County. Fenghua belonged to the Si'en Prefecture, but it did not have its county seat, while Sanli was the ideal place for the county seat, though it belonged to Shanglin County, it had a vast and flat land. If Sanli was to be built as the county seat, Fenghua County could control the traffic around it and form a reciprocal relationship with the capital city of Si'en Prefecture so as to enhance the political management in this area and to facilitate the life of the inhabitants as well.
- (4) Add Liuguan County and put Silong under its jurisdiction. Silong originally belonged to Xuanhua County, Nanning Prefecture, but with a fairly large territory, it was not easy to be managed. By adding a new county administration in it and transferring it to Tianzhou Prefecture, it could be much easier for the government to enhance the management of the area.
- (5) Build a guarding town castle in Wutun, a place around Duanteng Gorge.

On the whole, in his five suggestions above, Wang Yang-ming took into consideration both the facilities of political management and those of the life of the people. Actually, neither of them could work alone without the other. The place with relatively inconvenient transportation and weak administration tends to be the place for the people with a harder life, which in turn largely leads to the ganging up of people in the mountains. According to Wang Yang-ming, as long as the people had a peaceful environment for life, it would not be too difficult for the people to obtain substantial life resources, and thus a good life order could naturally be set up. On the basis of it, the enhancement of political management and moral education could lead people to pursue a life of goodness and honesty. Changing the custom of a place and changing the will of the people would result in the people's pursuit of virtue, which is the fundamental way to realize long-term stability.

After the campaigns of Ba Zhai and Duanteng Gorge, Wang Yang-ming's health deteriorated sharply. However, he went on as usual to conduct surveys on the topography everywhere and investigations into the geographical conditions of the region. Actually, he was devoting himself to the design of long-term stability with a good political order for the Imperial Court and to the guarantee of solid benefits in the lives of the people.

However, one thing that has to be mentioned is that not all the above five suggestions by Wang Yang-ming were carried out and put into practice, for they aroused a bitter dispute in the Imperial Court. Wang Yang-ming implemented the first three: (1) move and establish Nandan as a guard town²⁸ to Ba Zhai villages; (2) move the site of prefectural government of Si'en from Qiaoli to Huangtian²⁹; and (3) build Sanli³⁰ as the seat of Fenghua County. On the whole, these measures did help to build more rational basic-level administrative divisions and a more balanced distribution of political influences, which could undoubtedly enhance the political administration of these places by the Imperial Court and improve its effectiveness as well.

In early September 1528 (the seventh year of the Jiajing Emperor), the Imperial Court issued an imperial edict to award 50 liang³¹ of silver and 4 pi of silk³² to him for his contributions to the suppression of rebellions in Si'en and Tianzhou, but did not mention anything about the encirclement and attack on Ba Zhai and Duanteng Gorge. On September 22, Wang Yang-ming submitted his memo to show his gratitude to the Imperial Court as he always did. In the memo, he mentioned his health condition, that he “has already been confined to bed for more than a month!” He also said, “I’m getting more seriously ill each day, so I’m afraid that I would not have the chance to serve the Imperial Court and see you, Your Majesty.” We can read an air of depression between the lines. In fact, Wang Yang-ming had not been strong since he was very young, and his health condition got worse in all the sufferings after he entered political circles. His footprints were left in places with extremely hard living conditions, like the mountains and the brambles. Since 1516 (the eleventh year of the Zhengde Emperor), he had been serving in the army and involving himself in all the hardships of the campaigns. He devoted not only his bone and flesh but also his wit and intelligence to the victory of every battle. After the rebellion of Ning Wang and Zhu Chen-hao was appeased, he had to deal with all the political powers on the one hand, and endure the humiliations of various attacks and false charges on the other hand. Somehow, he managed all the hardships, but still, his health deteriorated. When he went back to his hometown, he took rest to regain his health, and at the same time, indulged himself in deep philosophical thinking. For sure, it was the happiest time in his life. In the lively and vigorous nature with the flying birds and leaping fish, he delivered lectures and had discussions with his disciples. He also savored the broadness, profoundness, loftiness, and boundlessness of the Tao of Sage, and he sampled the eternal joy and delight he found in the bond with the ancient sages. He also recovered gradually from his terrible health condition, although it was the same time a year earlier that he was ordered to go to Guangxi, where he found himself not adjusted to the climate and the customs, on the constant go between battlefields, and exhausted both in body and mind in all the troubles, all of which had made his previous cough worse.

²⁸Now in Xincheng County, Guangxi.

²⁹Now in Wuming County, Guangxi.

³⁰Now in Shanglin County, Guangxi.

³¹A unit of weight (=50 g).

³²Four bolts of silk.

In 1528 (the seventh year of the Jiajing Emperor), Wang Yang-ming was in quite a good mood. He accomplished his mission to quash the rebellions in Sien and Tianzhou. Apart from that, he helped the country to exterminate the problem that lasted for dozens of years in Ba Zhai and Duanteng Gorge. He could also go back to his home and his platform, could range along the mountains and rivers, discussing with his disciples about the study of saints. However, at this time, it might never occur to Wang Yang-ming that Kuaiji Mountain, where there was a beautiful landscape he was longing for and the platform for study of saints he was holding in his heart and mind, would become a place that only his soul would come back to. Neither would he have thought that the false charges from the villains in the rebellion of Zhu Chen-hao would continue even so long after it had ended, and the expedition to Ba Zhai and Duanteng Gorge could be the excuse for them to slander and defame him.

Wang Yang-ming would go through life in an expedition of the dedicated pursuit of being a sage.

(Translated by *Hu Sai-zhu*; Proofread by *Liao Jia-dong*)

6.4 Bright as My Heart

Though he was in very poor health between August and September of 1528 (the seventh year of the Jiajing Emperor), Wang Yang-ming insisted on checking the terrain all round and continued to be deeply concerned about achieving a long and peaceful reign in the country, while dealing with the aftermath of suppressing Ba Zhai and Duanteng Gorge. When October came, there were signs of his health deterioration: his cough was worse plus pyogenic infections caused by heat, maladjustment to the strange places, the tiresome travel, and inadequate medical care. He coughed day and night and ate only a small amount of porridge. He was well aware of his health conditions and thus expected more than ever to return to his hometown and see the doctors there.

Wang Yang-ming went back to Nanning from Hengzhou³³ in October. When his boat passed a stretch of rapids, he asked the boatman where it was. The boatman told him it was “Wuman Tan” and there was the Temple of General Fu-bo on the bank. Hearing that, he asked to pull over and took all the trouble to drag himself to the temple to worship Ma Yuan, General Fu-bo despite his disease. Why did he do that? For the fun of sightseeing? Of course not. There was a reason for his worship in Fu-bo Temple. He once dreamed of worshiping in this very Temple of General Fu-bo at the age of 15. He also wrote a poem in the dream starting with the following two sentences, “Back from battles was General Ma Fu-bo, with the art of war learned in youth was a white-haired old man.” It was at the very age of 15 when Wang Yang-ming investigated Juyong Three Passes. At that time, “with the ambition of managing and planning the world,” he was filled with pride and enthusiasm. Four decades had quietly gone away and he was now indeed a “white-haired” man. Now he came to

³³Now Heng County of Guangxi.

Fu-bo Temple and stepped into it, only to find the temple almost looking like what he dreamed of 40 years ago. He was so shocked that he could not help inscribing two poems on the wall. One of them started with the following two lines: “The poems were made in my dream 40 years ago. Could it be possible that the trip was arranged by man?” He seemed to feel vaguely as if some incredible magic power had played a part in what had happened to him. Then who was the very General Fu-bo? His name was Ma Yuan, a renowned general in the Eastern Han dynasty. Ma Yuan was famous for his skill in maneuvering troops. He once led an army on a punitive expedition to Jiaozhi³⁴ and suppressed a rebellion there. When they passed Wuman Tan, it was difficult for the troops to cross the river by boat because of the rapids and irregular reefs. Therefore, Ma stationed the troops on the bank and dredged the river. Later generations built a temple on the bank and offered sacrifices to commemorate him. Ma was entitled Xinxi Hou.³⁵ In his very late years, he still went out for battle under orders and finally died of diseases in the army. However, he was slandered by the villains even after his death, so Liuxiu, Emperor Guangwu, deprived him of his title of Xinxi Hou. Master Yang-ming would never know about the coincidence between what happened to him after his death and what happened to General Fu-bo.

Master Yang-ming then went back to his boat after leaving the temple. Back to Nanning, he submitted a written statement to the Imperial Court about his health conditions and asked for the permission to receive medical care in his hometown on October 10. He pleaded with the Emperor to assign someone to take over his position, the Xunfu of Guangdong and Guangxi. He also wrote in the letter that he could not afford any delay in the curing of his disease and he was then “confined to his boat,” namely, living on his boat, and ready to depart Nanning for his hometown via Guangzhou. He expected to march ahead and wait for his replacement meanwhile so that he might fulfill the final official business transition. By his estimate, the new Xunfu would arrive when he reached Shaozhou and Nanxiong, the area close to the border between Guangdong and Jiangxi.

His plea for the permission of medical care at hometown was the last written statement to the Imperial Court in his lifetime. There appeared a note of extreme sincerity and pathetic appeal in his statement. He had, according to his own evaluation, fulfilled and even surpassed his mission of being the Xunfu of the two Guangs,³⁶ with his successful suppression of the rebellion of Si'en and Tianzhou long ago and the clearance of bandits in Ba Zhai and Duanteng Gorge. The political society and civil life there were under recovery and reconstruction. Everything was going on in the right way. That was why he thought that his requests would be approved and a new Xunfu would soon be assigned to take his place, and that the handing-over procedure would soon be completed and then he could be at home receiving medical care. However, out of Wang Yang-ming’s expectations, his statement, actually a plea

³⁴Used to refer to the area of the greater part of Guangdong and Guangxi Provinces, plus the north central part of Vietnam.

³⁵Marquess of Xinxi.

³⁶Referring to Guangdong and Guangxi Provinces.

with honesty and sadness, was suspended by Gui E, Neibu Dachen,³⁷ and Li Bu Shagnshu.³⁸ People still feel indignant when they recall the event hundreds of years later.

As a matter of fact, Master Yang-ming was in absolute ignorance about Gui E withholding the statement at that time. He was still waiting for the approval from the Imperial Court anxiously but faithfully. Several days later, his health became even worse so that he stopped waiting and asked Lin Fu, You-Buzhengshi of Guangxi Province to run his official business. He then left Nanning right away and boated down the river to the east, waiting for the new Xunfu of the two Guangs officially designated by the Imperial Court.

In Guangzhou, Master Yang-ming took a side trip to Zengcheng³⁹ to worship in a temple of one of his distant ancestors and visited Zhan Ruo-shui, an old friend of his. In 1505 (the eighteenth year of the Hongzhi Emperor), at the age of 34, Master Yang-ming encountered Zhan Ruo-shui in Beijing. They felt like old friends at the first meeting and encouraged each other since then. They took the learning from the sages as their mission and became friends and soul mates. Although with the passage of 20 years they both made their own academic achievements and had different views and ideas, they were still friends. It was a pity that Zhan was not at home when Master Yang-ming arrived at his house. His son kindly asked Master Yang-ming to stay a night, but he refused politely and then left. Actually, it was his last visit to his old friend Zhan Ruo-shui but unfortunately he failed to see him.

He stayed in Guangzhou for several days. When he left there, his disease became more serious with constant coughing, pyogenic infections all over, and diarrhea. He even could neither get to his feet nor sit at ease. He was still waiting for and longing for the new Xunfu to come to take his place but in vain. He had to extend his stay in Guangzhou and planned to go on to the east if he still could not meet the new Xunfu's arrival. He had faith that the new Xunfu was on his way and he might arrive a couple of hours later, or maybe the next day and that he would meet the new Xunfu when he reached the middle of Nan'an and Ganzhou in Jiangxi Province. He once expressed his anxiety in a letter to an old friend, "Morality can only be promoted when one is alive. With the skin gone, to what can the hair attach?" Confucius once said, "People can promote the morality, but not vice versa." A person as a being only exists with a "living body." When the "living body" is gone, he or she will not be able to "promote morality," which can be illustrated by the relation of skin and hair. We could apparently sense his urgency and worry about his condition. As a matter of fact, his statement was detained by Gui E so that the Imperial Court had no knowledge about his situation. Consequently, there was no appointment of any new Xunfu. It had been a whole month since early October. Master Yang-ming had paused numerous times waiting for the new Xunfu for the work handover, only to miss the best time of curing his disease. He finally decided to move on to the east when he was too sick to delay. On November 21, he reached Jiangxi Province via

³⁷Interior Minister.

³⁸Minister of Personnel.

³⁹A district of Guangzhou City.

Dayu Range, then went down the Zhang River,⁴⁰ and arrived at Nan'an⁴¹ of Jiangxi on November 25.

However, at that time he was extremely fragile and his disease was very grave. Although he was declining day by day when he just left Nanning, it was with hope and faith that the Imperial Court was sending someone to take over from him and the determination and desire of going home backed him up. Reaching Dayu Range meant entering the border between Nan'an and Ganzhou of Jiangxi Province, a place that he could not be more familiar with, a place that he had traveled all over, fought for, and lived in, a place that enlightened him on the morality of sages, a place that he devoted his wisdom and thought to, and a place that witnessed the beautifying of his life. Yes, in Master Yang-ming's heart, the very place of Jiangxi had long become his second home, and now he came back and could finally feel at home!

On January 9, 1529 (November 29 of the Chinese Lunar Calendar, the seventh year of the Jiajing Emperor), Master Yang-ming passed away on his boat pulled over in Qinglongpu of Nan'an.⁴² His life ended there after 57 years of hardships and honors.

In practice, when he departed Guangzhou, his disciple, seeing the seriousness of his health, had prepared the wood for his coffin and took the wood with the boat all the way. On November 25 (Chinese Lunar Calendar), at the news of Wang Yang-ming's arrival at Nan'an Zhou Ji, the Tuiguan of the county, also Yang-ming's disciple came to see him. Wang Yang-ming struggled to sit up with ceaseless coughing. After quite a while, he asked Zhou Ji, "How is your learning coming on?" After he answered Wang's question, Zhou Ji inquired about Wang Yang-ming's health with great concern. Wang replied, "My disease is severe! Now I still have breath just because of the little Yuan Qi⁴³ left in me." Master Yang-ming was concerned with the learning of his disciple and the practice of sages' morality at the last moment of his life. It was on November 29 (Chinese Lunar Calendar) when Wang Yang-ming, with his eyes tightly shut and his breath very weak, sent someone for Zhou Ji to his bed. A long time later, he opened his eyes and said to Zhou Ji, "I am going!" Tears running down Zhou Ji's face, he asked Wang Yang-ming about his will. Master Yang-ming smiled faintly, "Bright as my heart, nothing should be said." With these words, he closed his eyes and passed away.

At the end of his life, Wang Yang-ming failed to see the new Xunfu sent by the Imperial Court who was supposed to take over his position of the Xunfu of two Guangs, failed to see his rehabilitation by the Imperial Court for the slander and false charges of all sorts against him since he had suppressed Zhou Chen-hao's rebellion, and failed to see the return of the right path of the human world and the righteousness of the Imperial Court as he had longed for all the time. He went to see the deceased sages with a crystal, transparent and brightest heart, and a selfless, open, tolerant mind. However, as put by Wang Yang-ming himself, "there is a compass in

⁴⁰The origin of Gan River.

⁴¹Now Dayu County in Jiangxi Province.

⁴²Now Chijiang Village, Qinglong Town, Dayu County, Jiangxi Province.

⁴³The motive force of the Corporeal Soul which animates the body.

everyone's mind." The righteousness of the world might not exist in the Court. Yet, it existed in every citizen's mind. His coffin was received with his disciples' loud cries and people's burning incense wherever it passed after it left Nan'an, from cities to villages, even to remote mountainous areas. All put on their white funeral costumes, beat on their chests and cried as if for the loss of their own parents.

On December 11, 1529 (November 11 of the Chinese Lunar Calendar, the eighth year of the Jiajing Emperor), Master Yang-ming's coffin was buried among the green mountains five Lis⁴⁴ to Lanting⁴⁵ from Shaoxing, a place of his choice. The tomb lies in front of green mountains, embraced by the shade of trees. There is a stream, Hongxi, running in front of the tomb. Before the stream are open vast fertile fields. His funeral was a ceremonious one as over 1,000 disciples from all over the country besides his family attended it, but his funeral was also a deserted one as the Imperial Court did not show any concern for it, neither did it hold a Xudian⁴⁶ for Wang Yang-ming, nor did it award a Shihao⁴⁷ to him. The Imperial Court even did not send any officials to participate in the funeral as if he were nobody but a civilian. That was why on his tombstone was simply engraved "Master Wang Yang-ming's Tomb."

However, Master Yang-ming was after all not a common civilian. When he was alive, he was the one that was framed and attacked by crafty villains and was a victim of super power struggles in the Imperial Court, while after his death, he was still the one that was framed and attacked by crafty villains and subjected to a sacrifice of justice and righteousness. Remember Master Yang-ming's last statement to the Imperial Court for the permission to get medical care at his hometown on October 10, the seventh year of the Jiajing Emperor that was detained by Gui E? Actually, he did so on purpose by using Wang Yang-ming's statement as a frame-up. After Wang Yang-ming's death, Gui E impeached Master Yang-ming and accused him of deserting his post without permission, despising the Imperial Court, reversing the use of favors and disfavors in the business of Si'en and Tianzhou, going on a punitive expedition without authorization to Ba Zhai and Duanteng Gorge, cheating in taking the credit for suppressing Zhu Chen-hao's rebellion, and so on and so forth. He even proposed that the emperor should hold a meeting on the punishment of Master Yang-ming's wrongdoings. He disparaged Wang Yang-ming's theory as discarding the ancient modes and disrespecting the masters, holding strange and conspicuous ideology, having a high opinion of himself, censuring Zhuxi and distorting the sage of old. The emperor was greatly enraged and gave the order to deprive Wang Yang-ming of the title "Xinjian Bo" as a hereditary rank and Yang-ming's philosophy was forbidden as a "False Philosophy."

It was after the Jiajing Emperor died and his son succeeded in the first year of the Longqing Emperor in the Ming dynasty (1567) that all the false charges against Master Yang-ming were corrected. Given the fact that officials all over the country submitted statements as to the truth and the innocence of Wang Yang-ming, Emperor

⁴⁴Li: Chinese measurement for distance.

⁴⁵A town of Shaoxing, Zhejiang Province.

⁴⁶A court ceremony for a deceased official.

⁴⁷A posthumous title.

Muzong of Ming⁴⁸ sent out the decree: Wang Yang-ming was awarded the title “Xinjian Hou”⁴⁹ and conferred on a Shihao “Wencheng”.⁵⁰ The decree had finally come almost 40 years after his death! His tomb was by then already covered with green grass and trees. Such late glory meant nothing to Master Yang-ming but it has showed to all that lies will eventually be debunked by the truth, truth will sooner or later shine its own glory, and justice will always be unearthed after all.

Recalling the whole life of Master Yang-ming, we can always feel his bright and noble personality, his open and upright mind, his passion for pursuing truth, and his temperament of freedom in life from his rough and bumpy life experience. You may still remember that Wang Yang-ming had always been determined to be a sage since childhood. To be a sage he led a bold, unconventional, and unconstrained life in his teens. He practiced horsemanship and archery, studied the art of war, learned Taoism, conducted research on Buddhism, recited poetry and composed songs, and ground away at the classics. All these activities showed his ambition and determination to become a sage. Some researchers criticized him by saying that he had taken many detours to form his philosophy, displaying too much obsession with diverse ways of non-sages. But as a matter of fact, he had always adhered to his ambition to be a sage. All that he did, as mentioned above, indicated his determination to become a sage in every way. From the perspective of his whole life experiences, he couldn’t have accomplished military achievements without his study of the art of war, he couldn’t have created his profound and distinguished Philosophy of Mind without his research on Buddhism, and he couldn’t have become the great man who had virtually achieved the state of the “Three Immortals”⁵¹ without his successful achievements in his career and thought. What makes Master Yang-ming outstanding is that he specialized in extracting various thoughts and then integrating them into unique and creative new thoughts, and in turn putting the new thoughts into daily practice.

Therefore, it is very important for one to have an ambition, without which, a person would be aimless, and would be likely to get lost in life and fail to realize the meaning of life. Ambition supports and motivates a meaningful life. One will live up to one’s expectations through consistent practice, and will constantly shape oneself to be closer to the expected state. Interestingly enough, one’s expectations for oneself always have such effect on one’s life and will always be realized in the end. As Mengzi once said, everyone can become a sage. One is actually Emperor Yao when he or she wears what Emperor Yao wears, says what Emperor Yao says and does what Emperor Yao does. Master Yang-ming had made up his mind to be a sage since childhood and at last did become a sage. If the ambition is regarded as “Knowing,” then Master Yang-ming’s “Oneness of Knowing and Doing” refers to the fact of life. In this sense, a person’s “Knowing” decides his/her “Doing.” Therefore, “Doing” is the external form of “Knowing” and “Knowing” is the internal state of

⁴⁸ Temple name of Longqing Emperor.

⁴⁹ New Marquess of Construction, the title for Wang Yang-ming awarded after his death.

⁵⁰ The posthumous title to Wang Yang-ming conferred after his death.

⁵¹ Referring to morality, feat, and works.

“Doing.” And the ultimate state of “The Oneness of Knowing and Doing” is in this way presented in our real life.

Master Yang-ming attached great importance to “The Oneness of Knowing and Doing” which, in his case, was the key to his success in becoming a sage and a great man of the “Real Three Immortals.” As time goes by, his great “achievements” have gone in the long history but his “virtue” and “thought” glitter brightly in history, which instead of slipping away have become even brighter and guide our present life in a meaningful way.

His philosophy of “Realizing the Original Knowledge” puts special importance on the necessity of the cultivation of one’s inner spirit. Undoubtedly, the existence of a person is first of all physical since his/her body is material. On the other hand, the existence of a person is more than material since in addition to the physical body a person has thoughts and consciousness, so we can also find the existence of spirit. One’s body may be contaminated with all sorts of dirt, so may one’s spirit. Clean water can wash dirt off one’s body while only truth can purify one’s mind. One can keep a healthy body nurtured by materials. Similarly, one can keep a healthy mind nurtured by spirits. Merely caring for one’s physical conditions but neglecting one’s spiritual state may break the balance of the two forms of existence, which may result in a split personality when the balance is destroyed seriously, or a walking dead when the imbalance goes so far that one has only a body without mind. Of course, no one is willing to turn into a “walking dead.” Such being the case, the cultivation of an inner spirit is essential to everyone.

The philosophy of “Realizing the Original Knowledge” proposed by Master Wang Yang-ming in practice tells us that we all have “Original Knowledge” which is the nature of life and the original state of every mind. In other words, our true inner world, or the “Original Mind,” or the “Inborn Nature,” whatever it is called, is the essential reason why we are different from other animals. If, in our life, we want to live like a human being, or live up to what a human being is like, we will have to realize our “Original Knowledge,” express our inborn spirits through behavior and follow our “Original Knowledge” in our daily practice and discipline ourselves against all those material desires with the “Original Knowledge.” Otherwise, we will be captives of personal desires and selfishness of all sorts, and our practical life will stray too far away from the humane value when we solely follow our material needs and physical well-being.

One has to have some “spirit” without which, one may become dejected, may feel unstable, may drift aimless, and may float up and down in the sea of desires. Master Wang Yang-ming taught us to realize the “Original Knowledge,” which indicates that we are supposed to retrieve our “Original Knowledge,” keep it in our mind, and consult it in our life. Only in this way, can our lives have strong roots to support us so that we may fulfill our lives and live a frank, forthright, righteous, and courageous life, a life that human beings are supposed to live. Nowadays, the harmony of the society we are pursuing is based on the harmony of each individual’s body and mind which can be maintained mainly by “Realizing the Original Knowledge.” Adhering to “Realizing the Original Knowledge” and “The Oneness of Knowing and Doing” may lead us to a brilliant realm. In our daily life, the state of our mind tends to decide

our attitude toward the outside world, our attitude decides the ways we behave, and the ways we behave directly decide the results of our response to the world, namely, the practical situation of our life. Only a bright mind can bring about a bright world.

Wish us to have an infinitely broad and bright world!

(Translated by *Nan Er-li*; Proofread by *Xu Zhi-yuan*)

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Glossary

Alphabetical order	Proper names	Chinese terms	Notes	Chapters
A	A Chronicle of Wang Yang-ming's Life	《王阳明先生年谱》		3.2
	An Shi	安氏		3.1
	Ancha Si	按察司	The Provincial Surveillance Commission	3.1
	Anchasi	按察司	Judge of a province	5.1
B	Ba Zhai	八寨	Eight mountain villages in Guangxi	6.2
	Baise	百色	A city in Guangxi Province	6.2
	Bamian Mountain	八面山	A mountain in Hunan Province	4.1
	Baojia System	保甲法	A community-based system of law enforcement and civil control created by Wang An-shi of the Song dynasty	3.2
	Baojing	保靖	Now a county of Hunan Province	4.1
	Beijing	北京		1.1
	Bi Chun	毕春	A conductor	5.1
	Bing Bu	兵部	Ministry of War in feudal China	

(continued)

(continued)

Alphabetical order	Proper names	Chinese terms	Notes	Chapters
C	Bingbeidao	兵备道	An official of rectifying armed force in the Ming dynasty	6.2
	Binyang Hall	宾阳堂		3.1
	Binyang Academy	宾阳书院	An academy found by Wang Yang-ming	6.2
	Binzhou	宾州	A town of Binyang County in Guangxi	6.2
	Bo Yan-hui	薄彦徽		2.2
	Buddhism	佛教		1.1
	Buyi	布依族		3.1
	Buzheng Si	布政司	Provincial administrative institutions and divisions directly under the central government in the Ming dynasty	1.2
	Buzheng Si	布政司	A provincial-level administrative division in the Ming dynasty	2.2
	Canmou	参谋	Staff Officer	4.2
C	Cantron Province	广东省		2.1
	Canzan Jinwu	参贊机务	A counselor in charge of confidential affairs	5.2
	Cen	岑氏		1.1
	Cen	岑	A family name	6.2
	Cen Bang-yan	岑邦彥	Cen Meng's eldest son	6.2
	Cen Bo-yan	岑伯彥	The first Zhifu in Tianzhou	6.2
	Cen Jun	岑濬	Zhifu (prefect) of Si-en	6.2
	Cen Meng	岑猛	Cen Pu's younger son	6.2
	Cen Pu	岑溥	The descendant of Cen Bo-yan	6.2
	Cen Xiao	岑暎	Cen Pu's elder son	6.2
	Cen Zhang	岑璋	Zhizhou of Guishun	6.2

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Alphabetical order	Proper names	Chinese terms	Notes	Chapters
	Chamber of Jing Wang	晋王府		5.1
	Chamber of Zhenguo Lord	镇国公府		5.1
	Changping	昌平	A district of Beijing	5.1
	Chaoguan	钞关	Tax Office	5.1
	Chen Jin	陈金	A Du Yushi in the Ming dynasty	4.1
	Chen Zi-ang	陈志昂		1.2
	Cheng Qi-chong	程启充	Yushi (Censor) of Jiangxi Province	5.2
	Chenghua Emperor	成化皇帝		1.1
	Chengong County	岑巩县	A county in Guizhou Province	3.1
	Chengzu Yongle	明成祖永乐	The third emperor of the Ming dynasty in China, reigning from 1402 to 1424	2.2
	Chi Da-bin	池大鬓	Nickname of Chi Zhong-rong	4.1
	Chi Zhong-an	池仲安	Chi Zhong-rong's brother	4.3
	Chi Zhong-rong	池仲容	Ringleader of bandits	4.1
	Chongyi	崇义县	In Jiangxi Province	4.2
	Chuzhou	滁州	In Anhui Province	3.2
	Confucian Six Classics	儒家六经		1.2
	Confucianism	儒学		1.1
	Confucius	孔子	A Chinese teacher, editor, politician, and philosopher of the Spring and Autumn period of Chinese history	1.1
	Confucius Temple	孔庙		6.2
	Cu Ju	蹴鞠	A kind of ancient Chinese football	5.1
D	Da Xueshi	大学士	Grand Secretary	4.4
	Dai Xian	戴铣		2.2
	Daji	妲己	The favorite consort of King Zhou of Shang	4.5

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Alphabetical order	Proper names	Chinese terms	Notes	Chapters
	Damao Mountain	大帽山	A mountain in Fujian Province	4.1
	Dao Skills	道术		1.1
	Daoism	道教		1.1
	Daoma Pass	倒马关		1.2
	Dateng Gorge	大藤峡	Another name for Duanteng Gorge	6.3
	<i>Daxue</i>	大学	<i>The Great Learning</i> , one of the “Four Books” in Confucianism	6.2
	Dayan Khan	达延汗		1.2
	Dayu County	大庾县(今大余县)	In Jiangxi Province	4.2
	Dayu Range	大庾岭	A mountain range that forms a natural border between Jiangxi and Guangdong Provinces	4.1
	De Sheng	德胜		1.2
	Deng Ting-zan	邓廷瓒	Du Yushi	6.2
	Donglan	东兰	Now a county of Guangxi Province	4.1
	Du Fu	杜甫	A prominent Chinese poet of the Tang dynasty	3.1
	Du Fu	督府	Viceroy	6.2
	Duanteng Gorge	断藤峡	A gorge in Guangxi	6.2
	Ducha Yuan	都察院	Institute of Supervision	3.2
	Dui	队	Team	4.2
	Duke of Zhou	周公	A member of the Zhou dynasty who played a major role in consolidating the kingdom established by his elder brother King Wu	1.1
	<i>Dun</i>	《遜》		2.3
	Du-Yushi	都御史	An ancient official title	4.1

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Alphabetical order	Proper names	Chinese terms	Notes	Chapters
E	Earl of Weining	威宁伯		2.1
	East Cave	东洞		3.1
	Eastern Depot	东厂	A Ming dynasty spy and secret police agency run by eunuchs	2.2
	Emperor Guangwu	光武帝	An emperor of the Han dynasty	6.4
	Emperor Shun	舜	A legendary leader of ancient China, regarded by some sources as one of the Three Sovereigns and Five Emperors	1.1
	Emperor Wu of Han	汉武帝	The seventh emperor of the Han dynasty of China	2.3
	Emperor Wuzong of Ming	明武宗	Zhengde Emperor, the Ming dynasty Emperor of China between 1505 and 1521	4.1
F	Emperor Yao	尧	A legendary Chinese ruler, according to various sources, one of the Three Sovereigns and the Five Emperors	1.1
	Fangshan	房山	A district in Beijing	4.5
	Fengcheng County	丰城县	In Jiangxi Province	4.3
	Fenghua	凤化	A county of Si'en, Guangxi	6.3
	Fengyang	凤阳	A county in Anhui Province	4.4
	Forbidden City	紫禁城	The Chinese imperial palace from the Ming dynasty	1.1
	Four Sentence Teaching	四句教	Wang Yang-ming's teaching principle	6.2
	Fujian Province	福建省		2.3
	Fujiang	副将	Vice General	4.2
	Fushi	副使	Deputy official	3.1

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Alphabetical order	Proper names	Chinese terms	Notes	Chapters
	Fuwen Academy	敷文书院	An academy found by Wang Yang-ming	6.2
G	Gai-Tu-Gui-Liu	改土归流	Change from Tusito flowing officials	6.2
	Gan River	赣江	The Gan River flows through the western part of Jiangxi Province, China, before flowing into Lake Poyang and thence into the Yangtze River.	4.1
	Ganzhou	甘州		1.2
	Ganzhou	赣州	In Jiangxi Province	3.2
	ge zhuzi	格竹子	Bamboo investigation	2.1
	Gewu Zhizhi	格物致知	Achieving knowledge by investigating the world	1.1
	Gong Bu	工部	Ministry of Works in feudal China	2.1
	Grand Scholar	大学士	Grand Secretary	2.2
	Great Wall	长城		1.2
	Gu	《蛊》		2.3
	Gu Bi	顾佖	Zhixian (County Magistrate) of Fengcheng County, Jiangxi Province	4.3
	Gu Da-yong	谷大用		2.2
	Gu Fen	《孤愤》		2.3
	Guangrun Gate	广润门		1.2
	Guangxi Province	广西省	Now Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region	
	Guangxin	广信	Now Shangrao, a city in Jiangxi Province	5.1
	Gui E	桂萼	Interior Minister and Minister of Personnel	6.4
	Guiping	桂平	A city in Guangxi	6.3

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Alphabetical order	Proper names	Chinese terms	Notes	Chapters
	Guishun	归顺	A former prefecture, now Jingxi County in Guangxi Province	6.2
	Guiyang	贵阳	In Guyang Province	2.3
	Guiyang Academy	贵阳书院		3.2
	Guizhou	贵州	A province in China	2.3
	<i>Guoyu</i>	《国语》		2.3
	guqin	古琴	A plucked seven-string Chinese musical instrument of the zither family	3.2
H	Han	汉		1.2
	Han Fei	韩非		2.3
	Han people	汉族	Also Han Chinese, simply Han, an ethnic group native to East Asia, constituting the overwhelming majority of the population of China	3.1
	Han Wen	韩文	Minister of the Ministry of Revenue in the Ming dynasty	2.2
	Han Yong	韩雍	A famous general and poet in the Ming dynasty	6.3
	Hangzhou	杭州		2.1
	Hangzhou Bay	杭州湾		2.3
	Head Eunuch	掌印太监		2.2
	Hechi	河池	A city in Guangxi Province	6.2
	Helou Veranda	何陋轩		3.1
	Henan	河南	A province in China	1.2
	Hengshui	横水	A mountain village of Jiangxi Province	4.1
	Hengshui and Tonggang Campaign	横水、桶冈战役		4.2
	Hengshui River	横水江	Also Liu River	6.3
	Hengzhou	横州	Now Heng County of Guangxi	6.4

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Alphabetical order	Proper names	Chinese terms	Notes	Chapters
	Heping County	和平县	In Guangdong Province	4.3
	<i>History of Ming</i>	《明史》	One of the official Chinese historical works on Ming dynasty	3.2
	Honglusi Qing	鸿胪寺卿		3.2
	Hongzhi Emperor	弘治皇帝	(July 30, 1470–June 8, 1505) was the ninth emperor of the Ming dynasty in China between 1487 and 1505	4.4
	House of Auspicious Cloud	瑞云楼		1.1
	Hu Bu	户部	Ministry of Revenue	2.2
	Hu Ke	户科	Board of Revenue	2.2
	Huai River	淮河	A major river in China, located about midway between the Yellow River and the Yangtze River	5.1
	Huai River Basin Areas	两淮	The areas north and south of the Huai River	5.1
	Huai'an	淮安	Formerly called Huaiyin until 2001, a prefecture-level city in central Jiangsu Province of Eastern China	2.1
	Huai'an	淮安	A city in Jiangsu Province	4.4
	Huang Hong-gang	黃弘纲	Wang Yang-ming's disciple	4.3
	Huang Ji	黃骥	A Tumu under Cen Pu	6.2
	Huang Jin-chao	黃金巢	A subchief bandit in Litou	4.3
	Huanggang	黃冈	A county in Hubei Province	4.5
	Huangtian	荒田	A place in En'si, Guangxi	6.3
	Huangtunao	黃土脑	A place name	4.3

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Alphabetical order	Proper names	Chinese terms	Notes	Chapters
I	Huangxiang	花相	A major stockaded village around Duanteng Gorge	6.3
	Huangzhou	黃州	Now Huanggang, Hubei Province	4.4
	Huanjiang Maonan Autonomous County	环江毛南族自治县	An autonomous county in Guangxi Province	6.2
	Hubei	湖北	A province in China	1.2
	Huguang	湖广	A province of China during the Yuan and Ming dynasties, today's Hunan and Hubei Provinces	1.2
	Huizhou Prefecture	惠州府		4.1
	Hunan	湖南	A province in China	1.2
	Huns	匈奴	A nomadic people, who lived in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, and Central Asia between the first century AD and the seventh century AD	2.3
	Hupao Temple	虎跑寺		2.1
	Imperial Academy	翰林院		1.1
J	Imperial Harem	后宫		5.1
	Imperial Examination	科举考试		1.1
	Inherited teachings	真传		2.1
	Internal governance	治内		6.2
	Investigating Yushi	监察御史	Investigating Censor	2.2
J	Ji'an County	吉安县	A county in Jiangxi Province	3.2
	Jiajing Emperor	嘉靖皇帝	The eleventh emperor of the Chinese Ming dynasty who ruled from 1521 to 1567	5.2
	Ji'an Prefecture	吉安府	A prefecture in Jiangxi Province	4.4

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Alphabetical order	Proper names	Chinese terms	Notes	Chapters
	Jiang Bin	江彬	A frontier commander, and also Zhengde Emperor's favorite and trusted follower	5.1
	Jiang Yao	蒋瑶	The Taishou of Yangzhou	5.1
	Jiangdu County	江都县	In Jiangsu Province	5.1
	Jiangnan	江南	Regions south to the Yangtze River	2.1
	Jianguan	箭灌	A town of Guangdong Province	4.1
	Jiangxi	江西	A province in China	1.2
	Jiangyou School	江右王门学派	A school of Wang Yang-ming's philosophy at Jiangyou	4.3
	Jiao Fang	焦芳	A Shangshu of Ministry of Personnel in the Ming dynasty	2.2
	Qiaoshe	樵舍	About 30 km north of Nanchang, along Gan River	4.5
	Jiaozhi	交趾, 或: 交趾	A large district in ancient China, now refers to the district in Northern Vietnam; the name for various provinces, commanderies, prefectures, and counties in northern Vietnam from the era of the Hùng kings to the middle of the Third Chinese domination of Vietnam (c.7th–10th centuries) and again during the Fourth Chinese domination (1407–1427).	6.4
	Jin Wang	晋王	Prince of Jin	

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Alphabetical order	Proper names	Chinese terms	Notes	Chapters
	Jingci Temple	净慈寺	The second prominent Buddhist temple after Lingyin Temple beside West Lake in Hangzhou, China	2.1
	Jingli	经历	A provincial official	2.2
	Jingxi County	靖西县	In Guangxi Province	6.2
	Jinshan Temple	金山寺		1.1
	Jinshi	进士	A successful candidate in the highest Imperial Examinations in ancient China	1.1
	Jinshi	进士	Former third degree candidate in the national civil service examination; a successful candidate in the highest Imperial Examinations	1.2
	Jinyiwei Guard	锦衣卫	The imperial military secret police that served the emperors of the Ming dynasty in China	1.1
	Jishizhong	给事中	An imperial official	2.2
	Jiuhua Mountain	九华山		2.1
	Jiujiang	九江	A city in Jiangxi Province	4.4
	Jiulian Mountain	九连山	A mountain that forms a natural border between Jiangxi and Guangdong Provinces	4.1
	Jun	军	Army	4.2
	Jun County	浚县		2.1
	Junzi Pavilion	君子亭		3.1

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Alphabetical order	Proper names	Chinese terms	Notes	Chapters
	Juren	举人	Former second degree candidate in the provincial examination; a successful candidate in the Imperial Examinations at the provincial level in the Ming and Qing dynasties	1.2
	Juyong Pass	居庸关		1.2
	Juyong Three Passes	居庸三关		1.2
K	Ke Zuo Si Zhu	客座私祝		6.2
	Ketang Cave	可塘洞	A cave in Ketang Town in Guangdong Province	4.2
	King Fuchai of Wu	吴王夫差	The last king of Wu, a state in ancient China, who reigned toward the end of the Spring and Autumn period	2.3
	King Huai of Chu	楚怀王	(328–299 BC) the king of the State of Chu during the Warring States period of ancient China	2.3
	King Wen of Zhou	周文王	King of Zhou during the late Shang dynasty in ancient China	1.1
	King Wu of Zhou	周武王	The first king of the Zhou dynasty of ancient China	1.1
	King Zhou of Shang	商纣王	The pejorative posthumous name given to Di Xin (帝辛), the last king of the Shang dynasty of ancient China	2.3
	Kou Tian-xu	寇天叙	Prefect of Yingtian Prefecture	5.1

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Alphabetical order	Proper names	Chinese terms	Notes	Chapters
	Kuaiji Mountain	会稽山	A short range of mountains in Shaoxing, Zhejiang Province	2.1
	<i>Kun</i>	《坤》		2.3
L	Lan Tian-feng	蓝天凤		4.1
	Lang Bing	狼兵	Wolf-like barbarian soldiers from minority regions	4.1
	Langya	琅琊		1.1
	Langzhong	郎中	Administrative Director	2.2
	Lanting	兰亭	A town of Shaoxing, Zhejiang Province	6.4
	Lei Ji	雷济	Wang Yang-ming's adviser	4.3
	Leopard House	豹房		5.1
	<i>Li</i>	《离》		2.3
	<i>Li</i>	里	Chinese measurement for distance	6.4
	Li Bu	吏部	Ministry of Personnel	2.3
	Li Bu Shagnshu	吏部尚书	Minister of Personnel	6.4
	Li Dong-yang	李东阳		1.2
	Li Guang	李广	A famous general in the Han dynasty of China	2.3
	Li Ling	李陵	Li Guang's son	2.3
	Li Man	李蛮	A Tumu under Cen Pu	6.2
	Li Meng-yang	李梦阳		2.2
	Li Shi-shi	李士实	One of Zhu Chen-hao's advisers	4.4
	liang	两	A unit of weight (=50 g)	6.3
	Liangxiang	良乡	Now Fangshan District in Beijing	4.5

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Alphabetical order	Proper names	Chinese terms	Notes	Chapters
	<i>Liezi</i>	《列子》	Also <i>The Book of Lieh-tzu</i> , a Daoist text attributed to Lie Yukou, a c. fifth century BCE Hundred Schools of Thought philosopher (but Chinese and Western scholars believe it was compiled around the fourth century CE)	3.1
	Limu	吏目	Clerical official	3.1
	Lin Fu	林富	You Buzhengshi of Guangxi Province	6.2
	Lin Zhao-en	林兆恩	Founder of Sanyiism	6.2
	lingchi	凌迟	Be executed by thousand cuts and myriad pieces	4.4
	Ling Shiyi	凌十一	A minor bandit	4.4
	Lingfushi	领府事	A title for an official, subordinate to a <i>Zhifu</i>	6.2
	Linjiang Prefecture	临江府	A prefecture in Jiangxi Province	4.5
	<i>Lisao</i>	《离骚》	Literally: “Encountering Sorrow,” a Chinese poem written by Qu Yuan dating from the Warring States period of ancient China	2.3
	Litou	利头		4.1
	Litou Campaign	利头战役		4.3
	Liu	刘	Surname	2.1
	Liu Jian	刘健		2.2
	Liu Jin	刘瑾		2.1
	Liu Niansi	刘廿四	A minor bandit	4.4
	Liu Qian-jin	刘千斤		1.2

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Alphabetical order	Proper names	Chinese terms	Notes	Chapters
	Liu River	柳江	Literally: Willow River, a tributary within the Pearl River system in Guangxi, China	6.3
	Liu Tong	刘通		1.2
	Liu Yang-zheng	刘养正	One of Zhu Chen-hao's advisers	4.4
	Liuguan	流官	A county of Si'en, Guangxi	6.3
	Liuguan Zhifu	流官知府	The prefect of flowing officials	6.2
	Liusi	六寺	A major stockaded village around Duanteng Gorge	6.3
	Liuxiu	刘秀	Emperor Guangwu	6.4
	Longchang	龙场	In Guizhou Province	1.2
	Longchang Yi	龙场驿	A courier station in Guizhou Province in ancient China	2.3
	Longchaun County	龙川县	In Guangdong Province	4.2
	Longgang Academy	龙冈书院		3.1
	Longqing Emperor	隆庆皇帝	The twelfth emperor of the Ming dynasty of China from 1567 to 1572	6.4
	Longquan Mountain	龙泉山		2.1
	Longquan Temple	龙泉寺		2.1
	Lou Liang	娄谅	A famous Confucianist	4.5
	Lu Jiu-yuan	陆九渊		3.2
	Lu Ke	卢珂	A person's name	4.3
	Lu Su	卢苏	The Tumu of Tianzhou	6.2
	Lu Wan	陆完	Shangshu of Bing Bu	4.4
	Luling County	庐陵县	Now Ji'an County in Jiangxi Province	3.2
	Lv Bu-wei	吕不韦		2.3
	Lv Lan	《吕览》		2.3

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Alphabetical order	Proper names	Chinese terms	Notes	Chapters
M	Ma Yuan	马援	The real name of General Fu-bo, a renowned general in the Eastern Han dynasty	6.4
	Mao Ke	毛科		3.1
	Meiji Restoration	明治维新		1.1
	<i>Memo on the Capture of Zhu Chen-hao</i>	《擒获宸濠捷音疏》	A memo submitted to the Court concerning the capture of Zhu Chen-hao	5.1
	<i>Memo on the Emperor's Punitive Expedition to Jiangxi</i> <i>Memo on the Victory in Ba Zhai and Duanteng Gorge</i>	《重上江西捷音疏》 《八寨断藤峡捷音疏》	A memo submitted to the Court concerning the capture of Zhu Chen-hao rewritten after the Emperor's Punitive Expedition to Jiangxi A memo submitted to the Court concerning the defeat of Bazhai and Duanteng Gorge	5.2
	<i>Memorial on the Request of Stopping the Emperor's Punitive Expedition</i>	《请止亲征疏》	A memorial submitted to the Court concerning the request of stopping the Emperor's punitive expedition	5.1
	Mencius	孟子	A Chinese philosopher who is the most famous Confucian after Confucius himself	1.1
	Mi Xi	密戏	Literally meaning: a secret play; real meaning: an obscene play in the imperial harem	5.1
	Miao people	苗族		3.1
	Miaogaotai	妙高台		1.1

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Alphabetical order	Proper names	Chinese terms	Notes	Chapters
N	Ming dynasty (1368–1644)	明朝(1368–1644)	The ruling dynasty of China, then known as the Empire of the Great Ming for 276 years (1368–1644)	1.1
	Ming Taizu	明太祖	Zhu Yuanzhang, Hongwu Emperor	4.4
	Ming Xianzong	明宪宗		1.1
	<i>Ming Yi</i>	《明夷》		2.3
	Minglun Hall	明伦堂	A hall of Confucius Temple in Nanchang	6.2
	Modao	磨刀	A major stockaded village around Duanteng Gorge	6.3
	Mount Jiuhua	九华山	Literally: “Nine Glorious Mountains,” one of the four sacred mountains of Chinese Buddhism	5.2
	Mount Longgang	龙冈山		3.1
	Mount Niushou	牛首山	In the south suburbs of Nanjing	5.2
	Mrs. Zhu	诸夫人	Wang Yang-ming’s wife	4.4
N	Ms. Zhang	张氏	Wang Yang-ming’s second wife	6.1
	Muzong	穆宗	Temple name of Longqing Emperor	6.4
	Nadi	那地	Now combined to Nandan County in Guangxi Province	4.1
	Nan'an	南安	Now Dayu County in Jiangxi Province	3.2
	Nan'an Prefecture	南安府	In Jiangxi Province	4.2
	Nanchang	南昌		1.2
	Nandan	南丹	Now a county of Guangxi Province	4.1
	Nanjing	南京		2.2
N	Nanjing County	南靖县	A county of Jiangxi Province	4.2
	Nankang County	南康县	In Jiangxi Province	4.2

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Alphabetical order	Proper names	Chinese terms	Notes	Chapters
	Nanning	南宁	The capital of the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region	6.2
	Nanpu Pavilion	南浦亭		1.2
	Nanxiong	南雄		6.4
	Neibu Dachen	内部大臣	Interior Minister	6.4
	Nine Ministers	九卿		2.2
	Ning Wang	宁王	Prince of Ning	4.4
	Niuchang	牛肠	A major stockaded village around Duanteng Gorge	6.3
O	Original Mind	本心	The initial state of our mind	6.1
	Ouyang De	欧阳德	Wang Yang-ming's disciple	4.3
	Ou-yang Xiu	欧阳修	A Chinese statesman, historian, essayist, calligrapher, and poet of the Song Dynasty	3.2
P	Peking University	北京大学		1.2
	pi	匹	Bolt	6.3
	Pianjiang	偏将	Subordinate General	4.2
	Pinghaiwei	平海卫	An ancient city in Fujian Province	6.2
	Pinghe County	平和县	A county of Jiangxi Province	4.2
	Poyang Lake	鄱阳湖	The largest freshwater lake in China, located in Jiangxi Province	2.3
	Poyang Lake	鄱阳湖	Located in Jiangxi Province, the largest freshwater lake in China	4.4
	Prefecture of Zhangzhou	漳州府	A city of Jiangxi Province	4.2
Q	Qian	钱	Surname	1.2
	Qian De-hong	钱德洪	One of Wangle Yang-ming's disciples	6.2

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Alphabetical order	Proper names	Chinese terms	Notes	Chapters
	Qian Neng	钱能	A eunuch in the Court	5.1
	Qian Ning	钱宁	Emperor Zhu Hou-zhao's foster son	4.4
	Qiandu-Yushi	金都御史	The assistant censor in Institute of Supervision; an official of the fourth level	3.2
	Qianhu	千户	A military officer	6.2
	Qianjiang River	黔江	A short section of the Xi River system and, thus, the greater Pearl River system in Guangxi, China	6.3
	Qianqing Gong	乾清宫	Also Palace of Heavenly Purity	4.4
	Qiantang River	钱塘江	An East Chinese river that originates in the border region of Anhui and Jiangxi Provinces	2.3
	Qiao Yu	乔宇	The Shangshu of Bing Bu in Nanjing, and also a well-known poet and essayist	5.1
	Qiaoli	桥利	The city where the En'si prefectoral government is located	6.3
	Qing dynasty (1616–1911)	清朝 (1616–1911)		1.1
	Qing Jiangpu	清江浦	A district in Huai'an City	5.2
	Qinghua University	清华大学		1.2
	Qinglongpu	青龙浦	Now Chijiang Village, Qinglong Town, Dayu County, Jiangxi Province	6.4
	Qingping County	清平县	Used to be a county of Jiangxi Province	4.2
	Qiu Ju	丘聚		2.2

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Alphabetical order	Proper names	Chinese terms	Notes	Chapters
	Qu Yuan	屈原	A Chinese poet and minister who lived during the Warring States period of ancient China	2.3
	Questions and answers at Yantan	严滩问答	At Yantan Wang Yang-ming expressed his last argumentation of the important issues concerning his philosophy	6.2
	<i>Quick Report on Ning Wang's Revolt</i>	《飞报宁王谋反疏》	Chinese Pinyin: <i>Feibao Ning Wang Moufan Shu</i>	4.4
R	Realizing the Original Knowledge	致良知		1.1
	<i>Records of the Grand Historian</i>	史记	A monumental history of ancient China	2.3
S	Sanli	三里	A place in Si'en, Guangxi	6.3
	Sanyiism	三一教	Also Sanyi Teaching	6.2
	Shandong	山东	A province in China	1.1
	Shanghang	上杭	A county of Fujian Province	4.2
	Shanglin	上林	A county of Si'en, Guangxi	6.3
	Shangrao	上饶	A city in Jiangxi Province	4.5
	Shangshu	尚书	Minister	2.1
	Shangyou County	上犹县	In Jiangxi Province	4.2
	Shanxi	陕西	A province in China	1.2
	Shanxi Province	山西省	A province in China	2.2
	Shanxi Province	山西省	A province in China	5.1
	Shao	哨		4.2
	Shaoxing	绍兴	A city in Zhejiang	1.2
	Shaozhang	哨长		4.2
	Shaozhou	韶州		6.4
	Shengguo Temple	胜果寺		2.3

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Alphabetical order	Proper names	Chinese terms	Notes	Chapters
	<i>Shi</i>	《诗》	The <i>Classic of Poetry</i> , also <i>Shijing</i> or <i>Shih-ching</i> , translated variously as the Book of Songs, Book of Odes, or simply known as the Odes or Poetry	2.3
	<i>Shi He-shang</i>	石和尚		1.2
	<i>Shi Ji, Taishi Gong Zixu</i>	《史记·太史公自序》	<i>Shi Ji (Records of the Grand Historian)—The Author's Preface</i>	2.3
	<i>Shi Long</i>	石龙		1.2
	<i>Shicha</i>	市汊	A place of Fengcheng County near Nanchang City	4.5
	<i>Shihao</i>	谥号	A posthumous title	6.4
	<i>Shijiapai system</i>	十家牌法	A household registration and inspection system with ten families as a unit	3.2
	<i>Shoufu Dacheng</i>	首辅大臣	Prime Minister	2.2
	<i>Shuixi Xuanwei Si</i>	水西宣慰司	Shuixi Pacification Commission	3.1
	<i>Shuo Nan</i>	《说难》		2.3
	<i>Si Tian Affair</i>	思田事务		6.2
	<i>Sicheng</i>	泗城	Now Lingyun County, Guangxi Province	6.2
	<i>Si-en</i>	思恩	A former prefecture in Guangxi Province	6.2
	<i>Sili Jian</i>	司礼监	One of the chief government offices administering eunuchs and the internal affairs of the court in the Ming dynasty	2.2
	<i>Silong</i>	思龙	A town in Guangxi	6.3

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Alphabetical order	Proper names	Chinese terms	Notes	Chapters
T	Sima Qian	司马迁	A Chinese historian of the Han dynasty and was considered the father of Chinese historiography for his Records of the Grand Historian	2.3
	Sitian School	思田学校	A school set up by Wang Yang-ming	6.2
	Sizhou	思州		3.1
	<i>Spring and Autumn Annals</i>	《春秋》	An ancient Chinese chronicle written by Confucius that has been one of the core Chinese classics since ancient times	2.3
	Spring and Autumn period	春秋时代	A period in Chinese history from approximately 771 to 476 BC	2.3
	State of Cai	蔡国	A country in the Spring and Autumn period in Chinese history from approximately 771 to 476 BC	2.3
	State of Chen	陈国	A country in the Spring and Autumn period in Chinese history from approximately 771 to 476 BC	2.3
	State of Qin	秦国		2.3
	State of Shu	蜀国		2.3
	Sun Sui	孙燧	An official	4.4
	Taishou	太守	Grand Administrator	3.1
	Takase Wu Jiro	高瀨武次郎		1.1
	Tan	谈	Surname	2.1
	Tang of Shang	商汤	Or Cheng Tang (成汤), recorded on oracle bones as Da Yi (大乙), was the first king of the Shang dynasty in Chinese history	1.1

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Alphabetical order	Proper names	Chinese terms	Notes	Chapters
	Tao of Sage	圣人之道		3.1
	Tao Wen-rui	陶文濬		1.1
	Tao Xing-zhi	陶行知		1.1
	Taoist temple	道观		1.2
	Temple of General Fu-bo	伏波将军庙	A temple memorizing Ma Yuan, General Fu-bo in the Eastern Han dynasty	6.4
	Tengwang Pavilion/the Pavilion of Prince Teng	滕王阁	A building in the north west of the city of Nanchang, and one of the Three Great Towers of southern China	1.2
	<i>The Analects</i>	《论语》	Also known as <i>The Analects of Confucius</i> , a collection of sayings and ideas attributed to the Chinese philosopher Confucius and his contemporaries, traditionally believed to have been compiled and written by Confucius' followers, and one of the "Four Books" in Confucianism. The other three are the <i>Great Learning</i> (《大学》), <i>Doctrine of the Mean</i> (《中庸》), and <i>Mencius</i> (《孟子》)	3.2
	<i>The Art of War</i>	《孙子兵法》	An ancient Chinese military treatise dating from the fifth century BC which was attributed to the ancient Chinese military strategist Sun Zi	2.3

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Alphabetical order	Proper names	Chinese terms	Notes	Chapters
	The Art of War	《孙子兵法》	Also known as the Sunzi (“Master Sun”) or Sunzibingfa (“Master Sun’s Art of War/Master Sun’s Military Strategy”), an ancient Chinese military treatise dating from the fifth century BC	4.1
	The Du Fu of Nanning	南宁督府	Viceroy of Nanning	6.2
	<i>The Great Learning</i>	《大学》	One of the “Four Books” in Confucianism, the authoritative books of Confucianism in China written before 300 BC	3.2
	The Mighty Punitive Expedition General Zhenguogong	奉天征讨威武大将军镇国公	The title conferred to Zhegnde Emperor by himself	4.5
	The Oneness of Knowing and Doing	知行合一		1.1
	The Philosophy of Mind	心学		1.2
	Three Immortals	三不朽	Referring to morality, feat, and works	6.4
	Tianli	天理	Heavenly principles—feudal ethics as propounded by the Song Confucianists	3.1
	Tianquan Bridge	天泉桥	The first bridge at Wang Yang-ming’s Mansion	6.2
	Tianquan Zhengdao	天泉证道	Tianquan Sermon	6.2
	Tian-xu	天叙		1.1
	Tianyang County	田阳县	A county in Guangxi Province	6.2
	Tianzhou	田州	A former prefecture in Guangxi Province	6.2
	Tiezhu Gong	铁柱宫	A Taoist temple in Nanchang	1.2
	Tingzhang	廷杖		1.1

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Alphabetical order	Proper names	Chinese terms	Notes	Chapters
	Tingzhou	汀州	In Fujian Province	3.2
	Tingzhou	汀州	A city of Fujian Province	4.2
	Tixue Shi	提学使	An education official from the provincial government	3.2
	Tonggang	桶冈	A mountain village of Jiangxi Province	4.1
	Tongpan	通判	Deputy Prefect	4.5
	Tongzhi	同知	An associate Zhifu (prefect)	6.2
	Tongzhou	通州	Tong County during 1914–1997, now a district of Beijing	5.2
	Tso Chuan	左传	Commentary on Spring and Autumn Annals by Zuo Qiu-ming	
	Tu Bing	土兵	Soldiers from minority regions	4.1
	Tuiguan	推官	A term for an official, equal to a judge of the county	6.4
	Tumu	土目	A hereditary official subordinate to Tusi	6.2
	Tusi	土司	Prefect in minority regions	3.1
	Tusi	土司	A chieftain of nationality autonomous region in the Yuan, Ming, Qing dynasties	6.2
	Two Guangs	两广	Referring to Guangdong and Guangxi Provinces	6.4
W	Wanan County	万安县	In Jiangxi Province	4.1

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Alphabetical order	Proper names	Chinese terms	Notes	Chapters
	Wang Bo	王勃	A Tang dynasty Chinese poet, traditionally grouped together with Luo Binwang, Lu Zhaolin, and Yang Jiong as the Four Paragons of the Early Tang	1.2
	Wang Bo-an	王伯安	Wang Bo-an is Wang Yang-ming's courtesy name	
	Wang Gan-zhou	王贛州	Wang Yang-ming	4.3
	Wang Hua	王華	Wang Yang-ming's father	1.1
	Wang Ji	王畿	One of Wang Yang-ming's disciples	6.2
	Wang Lun	王伦	Wang Yang-ming's grandfather	1.1
	Wang Shou	王受	The Tumu of Si-en	6.2
	Wang Shou-ren	王守仁	Wang Shou-ren is Wang Yang-ming's original name	
	Wang Yang-ming	王阳明	A Chinese idealist Neo-Confucian philosopher, official, educationist, calligraphist, and general during the Ming dynasty	1.1
	Wang Yue	王越		2.1
	Wang Yue	王岳	A Head Eunuch of Sili Jian in the Ming dynasty	2.2
	Wang Yun	王云		1.1
	Wang Zheng-xian	王正宪	Wang Yang-ming's foster son	4.4
	Wang Zheng-xian	王正宪	Wang Yang-ming's adopted son	6.1
	Wanyi Cave	玩易窝		3.1
	Weiyang	维扬		1.1
	Wen Huo-shao	温火烧		4.1

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Alphabetical order	Proper names	Chinese terms	Notes	Chapters
	Wen Sen	文森		4.1
	Wen Tian-xiang	文天祥	A scholar-general in the last years of the Southern Song Dynasty	3.2
	Wencheng	文成	The posthumous title of Wang Yang-ming conferred on him after his death	6.4
	Wenyuan Ge	文渊阁	An imperial library in the Forbidden City	2.2
	West Lake	西湖		2.3
	Western Depot	西厂	A Ming dynasty spy and secret police agency run by eunuchs	2.2
	Western Jin dynasty (215–316)	西晋 (215–316)		1.1
	Winter Solstice	冬至	Also known as hibernal solstice or midwinter, on December 22, when the sun is at its southernmost point in the Northern Hemisphere	5.1
	Wu	伍	A basic five-man unit of the army in ancient China	4.2
	Wu Men Gate	午门	The Meridian Gate of the Forbidden City	1.1
	Wu Wen-ding	伍文定	Magistrate of Ji'an Prefecture, Jiangxi Province in Ming dynasty	4.4
	Wu Zi-xu	伍子胥	A general and politician of the Wu Kingdom in the Spring and Autumn period	2.3
	Wuhu	芜湖	A prefecture-level city in southeastern Anhui Province	5.2

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Alphabetical order	Proper names	Chinese terms	Notes	Chapters
X	Wuman Tan	乌蛮滩	The location of Temple of General Fu-bo	6.4
	Wuming	武鸣	A county in Guangxi	6.3
	Wutun	五屯	A place around Duanteng Gorge	6.3
	Wuyi Mountains	武夷山	A mountain range located in the prefecture of Nanping, in northern Fujian Province near the border with Jiangxi Province, China	2.3
	Wuzhang	伍长	The lowest ranking military officer in ancient China	4.5
	Wuzhou	梧州	The former Zongdu Fu of Guangdong and Guangxi Provinces; now a city in Guangxi	6.2
	Xi Bo	西伯		2.3
	Xia dynasty	夏朝		1.1
	Xiancheng	县丞	Assistant of county magistrate in ancient times	4.2
	Xiangfu Palace	祥符宫	A palace in Ganzhou City	4.3

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Alphabetical order	Proper names	Chinese terms	Notes	Chapters
	Xiaoxi	小溪	A town of Pinghe County, Ganzhou, Jiangxi Province	4.2
	Xie Qian	谢迁		2.2
	Xie Zhi-shan	谢志珊		4.1
	Xieshao	协哨		4.2
	Xincheng	忻城	A county in Guangxi	6.3
	Xing Bu	刑部	Ministry of Penalty in feudal China	2.1
	Xing-ping	兴平	A county in Shanxi Province	2.1
	Xinjian Bo	新建伯	New Earl of the Construction, a title for Wang Yang-ming after his pacification on the bandits in Jiangxi Province	5.2
	Xinjian Hou	新建侯	New Marquess of Construction, the title for Wang Yang-ming awarded after his death	6.4
	Xinxi Hou	新息侯	Marquess of Xinxi	6.4
	Xishu	席书	A deputy Tixue Shi of Guizhou Province in Min dynasty	3.2
	Xiuwen County	修文县	A county of Guizhou, China	2.3
	Xu Ai	徐爱		3.1
	Xu Tai	徐泰	An officer	4.4
	Xu Tai	许泰	A frontier commander	4.5
	Xuanfu	宣府	Now Xuanhua County, Hebei Province	5.1
	Xuanhua	宣化	A county of Nanning Prefecture, Guangxi	6.3
	Xuanwei Shi	宣慰使	Chief official of Pacification Commission	3.1
	Xuanwei-Si	宣慰司	An agency between province and prefecture	6.2

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Alphabetical order	Proper names	Chinese terms	Notes	Chapters
Y	Xudian	恤典	A court ceremony for a deceased official	6.4
	Xun'an Yushi	巡按御史	The Imperial Itinerant Inspector	5.1
	Xunfu	巡抚	Provincial Governor	5.1
	Xuzhou	徐州	A city in Jiangsu Province	4.4
Y	Yan Yuan	颜渊		3.1
	Yang Dan	杨旦	The provincial commander-in chief and the Du-Yushi of Military Affairs of Guangdong and Guangxi Provinces	4.4
	Yang Ting-he	杨廷和	Da Xueshi of Cabinet	4.4
	Yanghe	养和		1.2
	Yang-ming Dongtian	阳明洞天		2.1
	Yang-ming's Little Cave	阳明小洞天		3.1
	Yangtze River	长江	Known in China as the Chang Jiang, the longest river in Asia and the third longest in the world	1.1
	Yanguan	言官	The supervisory official of feudal dynasties	2.2
	Yangzhou	扬州	A prefecture-level city in central Jiangsu Province	1.1
	Yangzhou Chamber	扬州府	The official residence for the prefect of Yangzhou Prefecture	5.1
	Yao Mo	姚镆	Du Yushi	6.2
	Yi Cheng	驿丞	An official of a station agent	2.3
	Yi River	沂河	The river flowing through Linyi, Shandong, China	3.2
	Ying	营	Camp	4.2
	Yingzhang	营官	Camp Officer	4.2
	Yiren Qiefu	疑人窃斧		3.1

(continued)

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Alphabetical order	Proper names	Chinese terms	Notes	Chapters
	Yongle Emperor	永乐皇帝	(May 2, 1360–August 12, 1424), personal name Zhu Di, the third emperor of the Ming dynasty in China, reigning from 1402 to 1424	4.4
	Yongshun	永顺	Now a county of Hunan Province	4.1
	You-Buzhengshi	右布政使	The chief executive of a province on the right; an official on the third level	6.2
	You-Chengxiang	右丞相	The Right Prime Minister, lower rank than the Left Priminister	4.4
	You-Du-Yushi	右都御史	The chief censor in Institute of Supervision on the right; an official on the second level	3.2
	You-Fu-Du-Yushi	右副都御史	The deputy chief censor in Institute of Supervision on the right; an official on the third level	3.2
	Youli	羑里		2.3
	You-Qiandu-Yushi	右金都御史	The assistant censor in Institute of Supervision on the right; an official on the fourth level	3.2
	Youren	优人	Actor or actress	4.4
	Yu the Great	大禹	A legendary ruler in ancient China famed for his introduction of flood control, inaugurating dynastic rule in China by founding the Xia dynasty	
	Yuan dynasty (1206–1368)	元朝 (1206–1368)		1.2

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Alphabetical order	Proper names	Chinese terms	Notes	Chapters
	Yuanshan	元山		3.2
	Yueren	曰仁		3.1
	Yushan County	玉山县	In Jiangxi Province	5.1
	Yuyao County	余姚县	Proper name of a county of Zhejiang, China	1.1
Z	Zaixiang	宰相	Prime minister in feudal China	1.2
	Zen	禅宗		2.1
	Zeng Dian	曾点	One of Confucius' disciples	6.2
	Zengcheng	增城	A district of Guangzhou City	2.1
	Zhan Ruoshui	湛若水	An old friend of Wang Yang-ming	2.1
	Zhan Shi-fu	詹师富		4.1
	Zhang Nan Campaign	漳南战役	The campaign which took place in Southern Zhangzhou	4.1
	Zhang Qin	张钦	A Xun'an Yushi	5.1
	Zhang River	章水/章江	The origin of Gan River	6.4
	Zhang Tai-yan	章太炎		1.1
	Zhang Yong	张永	A eunuch in the Court	4.5
	Zhang Zhong	张忠	A eunuch in the Court	4.5
	Zhangjiang River	章江		1.2
	Zhangshu Town	樟树镇	A town of Linjiang Prefecture, Jiangxi	4.5
	Zhangzhou	漳州	In Fujian Province	3.2
	Zhao Kuang-ying'	赵匡胤	Song Taizu, the first emperor of Song dynasty	4.4
	Zhejiang Province	浙江省	Proper name of a province in China	1.1
	Zhen	阵		4.2
	Zheng	郑氏		1.1

(continued)

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Alphabetical order	Proper names	Chinese terms	Notes	Chapters
	Zhengde Emperor	正德皇帝	(October 26, 1491–April 20, 1521) the Ming Dynasty Emperor of China between 1505 and 1521	1.1
	Zhenguogong	镇国公	Zhenguo Lord	5.1
	Zhengyang Gate	正阳门	One of the nine gates of the imperial capital, Beijing	5.2
	Zhenjiang	镇江	A prefecture-level city in central Jiangsu Province	1.1
	Zhifu	知府	Prefect of a prefecture	4.4
	Zhihui Tongzhi	指挥同知	Deputy Commander	6.2
	Zhishi	致仕	Resignation from an official post	2.2
	Zhixian	知县	County Magistrate, an archaic title referring to an official position in ancient China which was used in the Song, Ming, and Qing dynasties	3.2
	Zhizhou	知州	Chief of a prefecture, lower than a Zhifu	6.2
	Zhongyuan	中原	Also Central Plain, the area on the lower reaches of the Yellow River which formed the cradle of Chinese civilization	3.1
	Zhou Ji	周积	The Tuiguan of Nan'an County, Jiangxi Province	6.4
	Zhoushan islands	舟山群岛		2.3
	Zhouyi	《周易》	Also known as The I Ching or The Book of Changes, one of the oldest of the Chinese classic texts	2.3
	Zhu Chen-hao	朱宸濠		3.2

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Alphabetical order	Proper names	Chinese terms	Notes	Chapters
	Zhu Dian-pei	朱奠培	Zhu Chen-hao's grandfather	4.4
	Zhu Hou-zhao	朱厚照	The Zhengde Emperor of the Ming dynasty of China between 1505 and 1521	2.1
	Zhu Quan,	朱权	Prince of Ning	4.4
	Zhu Rang	诸让		1.2
	Zhu Shou	朱寿	Another way Zhengde Emperor named himself	5.1
	Zhu Xi	朱熹	A Song dynasty Confucian scholar who was the leading figure of the School of Principle and the most influential rationalist Neo-Confucian in China	1.2
	Zhu You-tang	朱祐樘		2.1
	Zhu Yuan-zhang	朱元璋	The Hongwu Emperor (October 21, 1328–June 24, 1398), the founder and first emperor of China's Ming dynasty	1.1
	Zhuangyuan	状元		1.1
	Zhuanyun Si	转运司	Transport Department	5.1
	Zhushi	主事	The lowest ranking official in the central government in the Ming dynasty	2.2
	Zhu-xuan Weng	竹轩翁		1.1
	Zijing Pass	紫荆关		1.2
	Zongdu Fu	总督府	The governor-general's residence	6.2
	Zongjia	总甲		4.2
	Zou Shou-yi	邹守益	Wang Yang-ming's disciple	4.3

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Alphabetical order	Proper names	Chinese terms	Notes	Chapters
	Zuo Qiu	左丘		2.3
	Zuo-Chengxiang	左丞相	The Left Prime Minister, higher rank than the Right Prime Minister	4.4
	Zuo-Du-Yushi	左都御史	The chief censor in Institute of Supervision on the left; an official on the second level	3.2
	Zuo-Fu-Du-Yushi	左副都御史	The deputy chief censor in Institute of Supervision on the left; an official on the third level	3.2
	Zuo-Qiandu-Yushi	左金都御史	The assistant censor in Institute of Supervision on the left; an official on the fourth level	3.2
	Zuo-Qiandu-Yushi-Xunfu	左金都御史巡抚	An ancient official title	3.2
	Zuoxi	左溪	A mountain village of Jiangxi Province	4.2

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