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## Exemplary Everymen: Guo Shidao and Guo Yuanping as Confucian Commoners

In the chapter of *Song shu* 宋書 (*History of the Song Dynasty*) titled “Accounts of the Filial and Righteous” (“Xiaoyi zhuan” 孝義傳) one finds a striking pair of life histories dedicated to a father, Guo Shidao 郭世道 (fl. 427), and his son, Guo Yuanping 郭原平 (d. 473).<sup>1</sup> The chapter is important on two counts: first, *Song shu* is the first dynastic history to have a section explicitly devoted to exemplars of filiality and righteousness.<sup>2</sup> Second, it has pride of place among *Song shu*’s four collective biographies, which means that Shen Yue 沈約 (441–513), the compiler of the history, probably considered it to be the most important,<sup>3</sup> and inside it, Shen framed the Guos as especially significant.

“Accounts of the Filial and Righteous” has twenty main biographies of virtuous men. Some are fairly brief – the shortest only seventy-one characters long. Each person featured usually embodied within his/her person the virtue of either filiality or righteousness: of the twenty major accounts, nine exemplars only perform filial acts and nine only

I WOULD like to thank *Asia Major*’s two anonymous reviewers, whose constructive criticism vastly improved the quality of the article; also, the editors of the journal, who helped guide the project forward. The Citadel Foundation’s generous support has made this research possible. Please note that throughout this essay, anecdotes about the two Guos are, in most cases, given in summary, interpretive form. Thus I provide an appendix containing complete translations of the two biographies from *Song shu*; the reader can refer there to the fully contexted anecdote, which is located easily by scanning through the appendix texts.

<sup>1</sup> *Nanshi* 南史 states that Guo Shidao’s name is Shitong 世通; Li Yanshou 李延壽 (612–678), *Nanshi* (Zhonghua shuju edn.; Taipei: Dingwen shuju, 1980) 73, p. 1800. Given that Shen Yue 沈約 lived closer in time to the Guos and the fact that the Guos and Shen shared the same patron, Cai Xingzong 蔡興宗 (417–474), the *Song shu* reading is probably the accurate one.

<sup>2</sup> The first dynastic history containing a chapter solely devoted to accounts of the filial and righteous is Fan Ye’s 範曄 (398–445) *Hou Han shu* 後漢書, chapter 39. However, the chapter does not have a special title to identify it as such, nor is it located among the other collective biographies. Both *Hou Han shu*’s and *Song shu*’s chapters on the filial and righteous are based on Hua Qiao’s 華嶠 *Hou Han shu*; see Song Zhiying 宋志英 “Hua Qiao *Hou Han shu* kaoshu” 華嶠後漢書考述, *Shixueshi yanjiu* 史學史研究 104.4 (2001), p. 27, and my own work, *Selfless Offspring: Filial Children and Social Order in Medieval China* (Honolulu: U. Hawai’i P., 2005), p. 60.

<sup>3</sup> The other three collective biographies in descending order are: fine officials (*liangli* 良吏), recluses (*yinyi* 隱逸), and imperial favorites (*enxing* 恩倖).

perform righteous ones. Guo Shidao and Guo Yuanping are exceptional in that they are the only exemplars who perform both filial and righteous acts. Moreover, Guo Yuanping's biography is singular because at 1,229 Chinese characters it is by far the longest – the next largest account merely has 534. If we add Guo Shidao's life to that of his son, the total is 1,497, nearly triple the size of the next largest account. Within this chapter, they are also the only father and son to have separate biographies. Hence, given such emphases the biographies of the Guos are clearly the most significant. But why did the Guos merit such attention?

Guo Shidao was a merchant who was renowned for filiality and honesty. He displayed extraordinary devotion to his step-mother while she was alive, to the extent that he sacrificed his son on her behalf. After her death, he endeavored to finance the building of her grave's tumulus entirely with his own labor and money; moreover, long after she was gone, he never stopped mourning her. In his dealings with others, he manifested the same altruistic spirit, to the extent that he refused to profit at other men's expense. A touring high official made his sterling behavior known to the court; as a result, the emperor exempted him from the *corvée* labor tax and gave him other rewards. The governor put him forward as a "Filial and Incorrupt" (*xiaolian* 孝廉) candidate for office; however, Shidao did not accept the appointment.

Yuanping was both a farmer and merchant. He inherited both his father's filiality and integrity. In his youth, to support his parents, he hired himself out as a carpenter. When his father died, to be able to build his father's tomb by himself, he apprenticed himself to tomb-builders; moreover, to pay the funeral expenses he sold himself into indentured servitude. He soon became a master tomb-builder; yet, he never endeavored to get rich through his expertise. For the next thirty years he devoted himself to serving his mother. After her death, he engaged in various commercial activities, such as trading goods and selling cash crops. Like his father, he never took advantage of others in commercial activities. In fact, he endeavored to help fellow villagers in many ways, to the point where he nearly died protecting them. Due to his selfless behavior, again as with his father, he refused appointment as a "Filial and Incorrupt" candidate. To reward him for his outstanding virtue, the governor tried to obtain a government post for Yuanping's second son, but nothing came of these attempts.

In sum, neither father nor son was politically significant. They never held public office; they did not even seem to serve as informal

leaders within their own communities. What makes them interesting is that they were noteworthy not merely because of their superb embodiment of filiality, but also because of the outstanding behavior they displayed in commercial and communal settings. But, who were these men and what was their actual status? What message was Shen Yue attempting to convey through their biographies? I will argue that the Guos were special commoners: they were farmer-merchants who belonged to the local upper-class, in a sense members of the subelite. Moreover, Shen Yue lavished attention on them because they furnished the perfect model of subelites who knew their place and knew how to act within an increasingly wealthy and commercialized world.

To substantiate my claims, I divide the essay into four parts: the first describes the historical context of the Guos' biographies by sketching the growth of the commercial economy in southeast China as well as the ascent of subelite commoner families. The second part will examine the identity of the Guos and their place in society. The third will explain the messages contained within the biographies' motifs and indicate the linkages between filiality and righteousness. The fourth and final section will consider the reasons why Shen Yue placed so much importance on the Guos. A translation of both men's biographies is appended.

#### THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Guos lived in Yongxing 永興 commandery, part of Guiji (or Kuaiji) 會稽 prefecture. Guiji prefecture was located in the eastern part of modern-day Zhejiang province, just south of Hangzhou Bay, and Yongxing was in the northwestern part of Guiji, close to Hangzhou. In the fifth century, Guiji was one of the most prosperous and economically vibrant areas in southern China. Part of the reason was location. Guiji was only about 250 kilometers from the southern regimes' greatest market, the capital of Jiankang 建康 (Nanjing), which in the fifth century might have had a population of close to one million people. Owing to its prosperity and its tight commercial links with the capital and the Lake Tai region, Guiji was part of the vibrant region known as Sanwu 三吳 (Guiji, Wujun 吳郡, and Wuxing 吳興), which provided the capital with nearly all of its food supplies.<sup>4</sup> Due to Guiji's seaside location, goods were easily transported by boat to the capital, as well

<sup>4</sup> Liu Shufen 劉淑芬, "Jiankang and the Commercial Empire of the Southern Dynasties," in Patricia Ebrey, Scott Pearce, and Audrey Spiro, eds., *Culture and Power in the Reconstitution of the Chinese Realm, 200-600* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2001), pp. 43-44.

as overseas. Within Guiji itself, transportation of goods was facilitated by its many waterways, including a canal that went more than 200 kilometers from the Qiantang 錢塘 River all the way to the commandery of Shangyu 上虞.<sup>5</sup> The biography of Guo Yuanping makes obvious the importance of these canals to internal trade: in 463, due to a great drought, he was initially unable to ship his melons to market because the canal that he used did not have enough water to carry his boat.

Guiji also prospered because it was an urbanized manufacturing center. Liu Shufen 劉淑芬 notes that it was famous for its Yue-ware pottery, bronze mirrors, paper, linen, and hemp textiles. Archeological excavations have proven that many of these Guiji produced goods made their way to modern-day Jiangsu, Anhui, and Hubei provinces, and even Japan. Wuxing itself produced Deqing 德清-ware pottery. Wuxing also had the Xiling 西陵 Market at which merchants bought agricultural goods to take to the Lake Tai region; on the average day, the government collected 3,500 cash in taxes.<sup>6</sup> Guiji prefecture itself had a strong demand for goods. Its largest city, Shanyin 山陰 (present day Shaoxing 紹興), had thirty thousand households, or roughly 150,000 people. During the time of the Wu state (220–280), Guiji was already home to many powerful families; after the fall of the Western Jin (265–317), it attracted many northern émigré families. These wealthy and well-connected households created a huge demand for luxury goods, especially from Southeast Asia.<sup>7</sup>

Guiji was merely one of the places in the south that was caught in a wave of commercialization. This came about due to a number of factors: the south's relative peace, the prolific construction of waterways, thriving internal and external trade, and the multi-cropping of rice. This commercialization manifested itself in multiple ways. Garrison cities along the Yangzi River and the coast soon became sprawling commercial centers that were teeming with merchants. The geographical treatise in *Sui shu* 隋書 provides a vivid sense of the scope of urbanization and commercialization.

Jingkou 京口 (Zhenjiang 鎮江) in the east has connections with Wujun (Suzhou 蘇州) and Guiji. To the south it connects with Jiang 江 (Nanchang 南昌) and Hu. To the west, it is linked with the capital. Each of these places is a large city. Their people were originally

<sup>5</sup> See Zhang Chengzong 張承宗, Tian Zebin 田澤濱, and He Rongchang 何榮昌, eds., *Liuchao shi* 六朝史 (Zhenjiang: Jiangsu Guji chubanshe, 1991), p. 201.

<sup>6</sup> See Liu Shufen, *Liuchao de chengshi yu shehui* 六朝的城市與社會 (Taipei: Taiwan xuesheng shuju, 1992), pp. 210–23, and idem, “Jiankang and the Commercial Empire,” pp. 35–52.

<sup>7</sup> Liu, *Liuchao de chengshi*, p. 223.

skilled in warfare; thus, they were often called the crack troops of All-under-Heaven... The customs of the people of Xuancheng 宣城 (Xuanzhou 宣州), Piling 毗陵 (Changzhou 常州), Wujun, Guiji, Yuhang 餘杭 (Hangzhou 杭州), and Dongyang 東陽 (Jinhua 金華) are also the same. However, these numerous prefectures have many rivers and lakes and flat and fertile land. Since these places have the bountiful products of both land and sea, marvelous and rare goods accumulate there; as a result, merchants congregate there.<sup>8</sup>

This passage gives testimony to the urban and commercial richness of southeast China at this time; it simultaneously underscores the importance of martial culture in this area – a point to which we return in a moment. Markets were not only found in cities: informal “grass markets” (*caoshi* 草市) emerged in the countryside.<sup>9</sup> Some rural areas were commercialized to the extent that they relied on the market for their daily food. Jiang Fuya 蔣福亞 has pointed out that when Guo Yuanping needed rice to feed his household, at the end of the day, he bought it at the market. Obviously, there were food stands there. Other anecdotes indicate that the inhabitants of Yongxing were dependent upon merchants bringing food from other places; if the merchants failed to come, the inhabitants would starve.<sup>10</sup> Engaging in commerce was so lucrative that, as a privilege, high civil and military officials were exempt from marketplace taxes; many nobles, generals, and government officers engaged in trade.<sup>11</sup>

The increasingly monetarized economy of southern China is also evident in the adoption of commercial taxes and the prevalence of money. To take advantage of increasing trade, governments during the Southern Dynasties (420–589) levied a number of commercial taxes. The most important of these, which began in the Eastern Jin period, was the distribution tax (*sangu* 散估). The amount of the tax was 4 percent of the price of the good being sold (the buyer paid 1 percent, the seller 3). This tax was levied on the sale of slaves, domestic animals, and land. At important crossroads and barriers, government agents also imposed tolls on traveling merchants. The amount of the toll could reach 10 percent of the cargo’s worth.<sup>12</sup> There was even a tax on us-

<sup>8</sup> Wei Zheng 魏徵 (580–643), *Sui shu* 隋書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1973) 31, p. 887.

<sup>9</sup> See Zhang et al., *Liuchao shi*, pp. 214–15, and Jiang Fuya 蔣福亞, *Wei Jin Nanbeichao shehui jingjishi* 魏晉南北朝社會經濟史 (Tianjin: Tianjin guji chubanshe, 2005), p. 476.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> Charles Holcombe, *In the Shadow of the Han: Literati Thought and Society at the Beginning of the Southern Dynasties* (Honolulu: U. Hawaii P., 1994), p. 69.

<sup>12</sup> See Zhang et al., *Liuchao shi*, pp. 216–17, and *Sui shu* 24, p. 689.

ing oxen to pull one's boat up the embankment.<sup>13</sup> Indicative of the significance of these taxes, which were probably collected in coin, 46 percent of the annual taxes that the Liu-Song government received in 475 were in grain, but nearly an equal amount was received in cash: 39 percent. In telling contrast, during the Tang-dynasty Tianbao 天保 reign period (742–755), the government received only 12.5 percent of its taxes in cash.<sup>14</sup> Despite this inflow of money, the Southern Dynasties struggled to meet the growing demand for currency. They attempted to solve the problem by repeatedly minting government coins, or by sometimes allowing the people to mint their own. The results were disastrous – the coins were made of inferior metal and were not uniform in weight, shape, or width. In desperation, in 465, emperor Ming of the Liu-Song 宋明帝 (r. 465–472) prohibited the private minting of coins; instead, he urged people to use old Eastern Han coins. In 523, emperor Wu of the Liang 梁武帝 (r. 503–549) attempted to solve the problem of scarce currency by issuing lead coins. Kawakatsu Yoshio 川勝義雄 believes that these failed policies were being driven by the increasing number of financial transactions that were taking place.<sup>15</sup> The growing importance of the market economy and the use of money have led a number of experts to claim that the south was experiencing a level of commercialization that would foreshadow its experience during the Song 宋 era (960–1279).<sup>16</sup>

The age's commercialism was not without its detractors. Throughout the early-medieval period, writers bemoaned the corrosive effect that money and extravagance were having on society. According to these critics, people are obsessed with obtaining wealth and spending it on rare goods. What mattered about a man is not his knowledge or his comportment, but what was in his purse. In his essay "On the Money God" ("Qianshen lun" 錢神論), the recluse Lu Bao 魯褒 (fl. ca. 300) most poignantly expresses this sentiment.

Zixia 子夏 says, "Life and death are a matter of destiny; wealth and honor depend on Heaven." I think "Life and death are no matter of destiny; wealth and honor depend on money." How do I know? Money can turn misfortune into fortune, failure into success. The

<sup>13</sup> Zhang et al, *Liuchao shi*, pp. 216–17.

<sup>14</sup> Kawakatsu Yoshio 川勝義雄, "La decadence de l'aristocratie chinoise sous les Dynasties du Sud, *Acta Asiatica* 21 (1971), pp. 32–36.

<sup>15</sup> Kawakatsu, "La decadence," p. 37, and his *Rikuchō kizokusei shakai no kenkyū* 六朝貴族制の研究 (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1982), pp. 359–70.

<sup>16</sup> See Holcombe, *Shadow of the Han*, pp. 68–72, and Kawakatsu, "La decadence," pp. 36–39.

endangered will become safe, and the dead will come alive. The length of a life, physique, emolument, nobility and lowliness are all determined by money. What does it have to do with Heaven?<sup>17</sup>

Lu Bao turns Confucius' disciple's statement completely on its head: money takes Heaven's place as the decider of one's fate – it rather than Heaven is all-powerful. Ge Hong 葛洪 (284–363) similarly notes that money, through the means of making bribes, was the way to gain public office, pass examinations, and to extract one from lawsuits.<sup>18</sup>

Since people with wealth want to distinguish themselves from others through the display of their rare and costly possessions, this love of money also fuels conspicuous consumption. Many early-medieval writers identify extravagance as a fundamental social ill. Since easy money could be made through supplying the rich with luxury goods, untold numbers of farmers were entering the cities to become merchants. When farmers do not engage in their profession, both food production and their own livelihood suffer. For the Confucian philosopher Fu Xuan 傅玄 (217–278), the way to stop extravagance was to have members of the upper class curtail their desires and inhibit the activities of merchants. His collection of short writings *Fuzi* 傅子 states,

If the upper classes desist in their desires, the lower classes will turn back to the true [path] ... Therefore, the intelligent ruler ceases desiring and is lenient to those beneath him, harries the merchant and tarries the farmer, and honors the root [occupation] and humbles the branch. The Court [will then be] without officials who conceal the virtuous, the market without monopolistic traders, and the state without people who possess vast tracts of land.<sup>19</sup>

By discouraging extravagance, the ruler is thereby able to prevent wealth and land from becoming concentrated in the hands of the few; he is also able to prevent the impoverishment of the many. This same fear that the lure of money was leading peasants to abandon their fields to become merchants prompted early-medieval rulers to issue edicts repeatedly that condemned the growth of the merchant class. By using measures such as awarding the title of “diligent farmer” (*litian* 力田) to

<sup>17</sup> The translation is that of Victor Cunrui Xiong, “Lu Bao, ‘On the Money God,’” in Paul Rakita Goldin, Victor H. Mair, and Nancy S. Steinhardt, eds, *The Hawai'i Reader in Traditional Chinese Culture* (Honolulu: U. Hawai'i P., 2005), p. 257; “Qianshen lun” in vol. 2 of Yan Kejun 嚴可均, comp., *Quan shanggu Sandai Qin Han Sanguo Liuchao wen* 全上古秦漢三國六朝文 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1958) 113, p. 2107.

<sup>18</sup> See Jay Sailey, *The Master Who Embraces Simplicity: A Study of the Philosopher Ko Hung A.D. 283–343* (San Francisco: Chinese Materials Center, Inc. 1978), pp. 390–91.

<sup>19</sup> The translation is from Jordan D. Paper, *The Fu-Tzu: A Post-Han Confucian Text* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1987), p. 63; “Fuzi,” in Yan, *Sandai Qin Han Sanguo Liuchao wen* 47, p. 1729.

one commoner per commandery, performing the *jitian* 籍田 ritual, in which the emperor and his high officials toiled in the fields on the first day of spring,<sup>20</sup> and curtailing the movements of vagrants and peddlars 游食商販, they urged people to apply themselves to agriculture.<sup>21</sup> In 428, due to the increasing number of vagrants, emperor Wen of the Song 宋文帝 (r. 424–453) issued this type of edict, urging people to return to the work of agriculture and sericulture.<sup>22</sup>

Another problem was that it was not just farmers who were dabbling in commerce; members of the upper class were doing so as well. In remonstrating with the crown prince who was given to luxurious living and breaking taboos, Jiang Tong 江统 (d. 428) states,

When Gong Yizi 公儀子 was a minister in Lu, he then plucked out all the vegetables in his garden, saying that one who eats by means of emoluments does not contend for profits with the poor and base people. Since the Qin and Han dynasties, customs have become more superficial. Among those who are dukes and earls, each and every one of them has fields in which they plant fruits and vegetables; each and every one of them receives profits from markets and wells. Gradually they copied each other's behavior, so that now no one takes it as shameful. If we base ourselves on the ancient way, this is truly embarrassing.<sup>23</sup>

Obviously, Jiang Tong was criticizing the crown prince for engaging in market activities for a profit. In doing so, he appeals to the Confucian idea that officials should only live off their salaries; to do otherwise, would increase the possibility that commoners would earn less money and thus not be able to support themselves.<sup>24</sup>

A great number of merchants, though, were members of the sub-elite – rich families that had great influence at the commandery and prefectural levels, but who were not regarded as belonging to the prestigious elite, known variously as “genteel lineages” (*shizu* 士族), “lineages known for generations” (*shizu* 世族), and “flourishing lineages” (*shengzu*

<sup>20</sup> For more information on the *litian* title and the *jitian* ritual, see Derk Bodde, *Festivals in Classical China* (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1975), pp. 223–41.

<sup>21</sup> See Victor Cunrui Xiong, “The Four Groups (*Simin* 四民) and Farmer-Merchant Antithesis in Early Imperial China,” *Chinese Historians* 8 (1995), pp. 112–13. For an edict that endeavored to halt the movement of peddlars, see Fang Xuanling 房玄齡, *Jin shu* 晉書 (Zhonghua shuju edn.; Taipei: Dingwen shuju, 1987) 26, p. 786.

<sup>22</sup> Shen Yue 沈約, *Song shu* 宋書 (Zhonghua shuju ed.; Taipei: Dingwen shuju, 1980) 5, p. 80.

<sup>23</sup> *Jin shu* 56, p. 1537.

<sup>24</sup> See Chen Huan-Chang, *The Economic Principles of Confucius and His School* (New York: Longman, Green & Co., 1911), pp. 543–51.

盛族). In Southern Dynasties sources, subelite families were known by a number of terms, such as “magnate lineages” (*haozu* 豪族), “magnate families” (*haoyou* 豪右), “magnate households” (*haojia* 豪家), “great surnames” (*daxing* 大姓), “big lineages” (*dazu* 大族), “magnate gates” (*haomen* 豪門), “powerful lineages” (*qiangzu* 強族), “local magnates” (*tuhao* 土豪) and “cold-gate households” (*hanmen* 寒門).<sup>25</sup> Families of this type were usually skilled in military affairs – here we should remember the *Sui shu*’s description of families from the southeast being skilled warriors. In addition, these subelite families were usually rich: their wealth came through both land-holding and commercial activities.<sup>26</sup> Tang Changru 唐長孺 thinks that the reason so many members of the southern royalty were interested in commerce is because many of their favorites were merchants from subelite families.<sup>27</sup>

Two indicators that a family’s status was inferior were the types of taxes it paid and a local ranking of three and below. A good indication that a family was of humble status was whether its members were subject to corvée labor taxes. Tang Changru believes that to avoid these imposts many subelite men became the clients or “family students” (*mensheng* 門生) of great families.<sup>28</sup> Ochi Shigeaki 越智重明, likewise, thinks that corvée labor imposts led many members of these families to seek regular bureaucratic posts, by which means they could obtain immunity from these obligations and simultaneously elevate their status.<sup>29</sup> Another measure of a family’s prestige was its “local ranking” (*xiangpin* 鄉品) according to the Nine Ranks of the Impartial and Just (*jiupin zhongzheng* 九品中正) system. Due to the fact that subelite families had members who had received a classical education, those men all had the potential to serve in government; as a result, their members were assigned a local ranking by the presiding Impartial and Just official.<sup>30</sup> Men who received a ranking of three or below belonged to subelite families. As Shen Yue put it,

<sup>25</sup> The meaning of “cold gates” is that due to their social insignificance, no carriages would cross their gate’s threshold, hence it was cold from inactivity. For information on subelite families, see Miyakawa Hisayuki 宮川尚志, *Rikuchōshi kenkyū seiji shakai hen* 六朝史研究政治社会篇 (Tokyo: Nihongakujutsushinkōkai, 1956), pp. 339–98.

<sup>26</sup> Kawakatsu, *Rikuchō kizokusei shakai*, pp. 375–86.

<sup>27</sup> Tang Changru, “Nanchao Hanren de xingqi” 南朝寒人的興起, in his *Wei Jin Nanbeichao shi luncong xubian* 魏晉南北朝論叢續編 (Taipei: Boshu chubanshe, 1985), pp. 116–17.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 113–20.

<sup>29</sup> Ochi Shigeaki, “Gi Shin Nanchō no saika kyukanryō ni tsuite” 魏晉南朝の最下級官僚について, *Shigaku zasshi* 史學雜誌 74 (1965), pp. 25–30.

<sup>30</sup> For the details of this system, see Donald Holzman, “Civil Society vs the State in Early Medieval China: The System of the Nine Categories and the Impartial and Just,” in Léon Vandermeersch, ed., *La société civile face à l’état: Dans les traditions chinoise, japonaise,*

As time has passed, this trend [of one's rank being based on a family's past achievements] gradually became more pronounced, so that now if a family of "those who wear [court] robes and caps" (*yiguan* 衣冠) does not have a ranking of two, then it is of commoner status (*beishu* 卑庶). The Way of the Zhou and Han was for the wise to govern the foolish. Slaves of the lowest ranking were mixed together with others; achievements were used to determine ranks. [Likewise] since the Wei-Jin era, the noble (*gui* 貴) have governed the base (*jian* 賤). The categories of genteel (*shi* 士) and commoner (*shu* 庶) were clearly not the same.<sup>31</sup>

One should note that Shen Yue implies here that in his day all of the ranked families shared a certain feature, namely possession of learning and influence. They all wore court clothes and caps (*yiguan*), but they had different statuses: those that were ranked two were the elite, while those ranked three and under were commoners. Families ranked at two would naturally be superior to and in control of those lower ranked despite the fact that the latter may have had very talented members. Still, even though these families had lower status, they were by no means ordinary commoners – their literacy and leadership potential set them above other commoners.

During the Liu-Song dynasty (420–479), when the Guos lived, subelite families were becoming increasingly significant both politically and economically. After all, the founder of the dynasty, Liu Yu 劉裕 and his supporters from the Northern Garrison Army (Beifujun 北府軍) were nearly all from subelite families.<sup>32</sup> Tang Xiejun 唐變軍 has shown that, during the Song, many branches of the Wuxing Shen 吳興沈 were able to transcend their subelite status and achieve genteel status due to their close association with and support of Liu Yu and his successors.<sup>33</sup> Nearly simultaneously, beginning in the late Eastern Jin (317–419), under Sima Daozi 司馬道子 (364–417), subelite men began to fill low but substantive posts within the government, such as secretariat drafter (*zhongshu sheren* 中書舍人) and clerk in the Department of State Affairs (*shangshu lingshi* 尚書令史), and document clerk (*dianqian*

*coréenne et vietnamienne* (Paris: École Française d'Extrême-Orient, 1994), pp. 50–52, and Miyazaki Ichisada 宮崎市定, *Kyūhin kanjin hō no kenkyū* 九品官人法の研究 (Kyoto: Dōhōsha, 1956), pp. 105–23.

<sup>31</sup> *Song shu* 94, p. 2302.

<sup>32</sup> Chen Yong 陳勇, "Liu Yu yu Jin Song zhi ji de hanmen shizu" 劉裕與晉宋之際的寒門士族, *Lishi yanjiu* 歷史研究 6 (1984), pp. 31–40.

<sup>33</sup> See Tang Xiejun, *Liuchao Wuxing Shenshi jiqi zongzu wenhua tanjiu* 六朝吳興沈氏及其宗族文化探究 (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2007), pp. 222–38.

典籤) in local administrations. Continuing this trend, Southern Dynasties emperors tried to regain control of the government by using their favorites, who were predominately subelite men.<sup>34</sup> Of course, this gave the subelite unprecedented power and significance, but it also sharpened the animosity of the great families, which is why the Song period is also the time when the distinction between genteel and commoner was becoming sharper and more rigid.

### THE VALUE OF QING

The genteel, upper-class espoused an ethos that loathed the search for profit and glory – the money-grubbing and power-seeking that they saw as typical of the subelite. The upper-class ethos, by contrast, was one of “purity” (*qing* 清). Within a framework of Confucian social action, this ethos combined the Mohist idea of curbing extravagance and living frugally with the Daoist notion of limiting one’s desires and being content with what he/she has.<sup>35</sup> By the Eastern Han, it had come to mean being uncontaminated by the desires of the everyday world. The second-century *Shiming* 釋名 defines *qing* and its synonym *lian* 廉 “incorruptibility” in the following way: “*Qing* means clear (*qing* 青). It means to get rid of the dirty and distance oneself from the filthy. Its color is like that of blue-green. *Lian* means to curb (*lian* 斂). It means to restrain and regulate oneself 清青也, 去濁遠穢色如青也. 廉斂也自檢也.”<sup>36</sup> Men who were pure excelled at controlling their desires and not being contaminated by the temptations of ordinary life: they wanted neither to enrich themselves materially nor advance themselves politically. Thus, men who were *qing* usually displayed one or more of the following behaviors: they refused to engage in money-making ventures, shunned office-holding, lived frugally, declined to profit at others’ expense, gave away their wealth, and refused to accept charity. Simply put they had few or no desires.<sup>37</sup> During the Eastern Han, many lite-

<sup>34</sup> Tang, “Nanchao Hanren de xingqi,” pp. 116–119; Miyazaki, *Kyūhin kanjin hō*, pp. 283–300.

<sup>35</sup> Concerning the Mohist and Daoist roots of this concept, see my “Accounts of Filial Offspring: *Ru* Ideology in Early Medieval China,” Ph.D. diss. (University of California, Berkeley, 1996), pp. 268–71. Rather than emerging from Daoist concepts directly, Kan Huai-chen believes that the idea of *qing* came from the Han Confucian and Daoist yearning to have pure *qi* 氣. See his “Purifying the World: A Political Discourse in the Late Han,” in Ching-I Tu, ed., *Interpretation and Intellectual Change: Chinese Hermeneutics in Historical Perspective* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 2005), pp. 85–90.

<sup>36</sup> See Li Fang 李昉 (925–996), *Taiping yulan* 太平御覽 (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 1986) 425, p. 1a. Note that this passage is not present in the extant version of *Shiming*.

<sup>37</sup> For an overview of the importance of *qing* in the early-medieval period and its meaning, see Watanabe Shinichirō 渡部信一郎, “Sei: Aruiwa 2–7 seiki Chūgoku ni okeru ichi ideorogi: keitai to kokka” 清, あるいは二, 七世紀中國における一イデオロギ, 形態と國家, *Kyōto furitsu*

rati embraced the ethic of *qing* to fight against the political and moral decay that they saw as endemic in the world. The modern scholar Kan Huai-chen 甘懷真 states it well when he says, “*qing* was not a mode of governance, but a political movement that aimed at the purification of the corrupted world through human action.”<sup>38</sup> Men who embraced this ethic thought that the best person to put into office was one who was disinterested in being there.

One of the most common ways that early medieval men demonstrated their purity was by living in a form of genteel poverty because it dramatically underscored their lack of interest in material wealth. In fact, some writers equated poverty with purity. The present text of the *Liezi* 列子, which is most likely a fourth century AD fabrication, contains the following statement: “Those who are famous must be incorrupt (*lian* 廉). Incorruptness means being poor. Those who are famous must yield to others. Yielding to others means being base (*jian*).”<sup>39</sup> The men who deserve fame for their virtue, then, are those who can do without riches and are willing to humble themselves. By living in voluntary poverty, then, one vividly demonstrated his indifference to both wealth and status.<sup>40</sup> It is no wonder that early medieval men so treasured eremites – they were men who lived a simple life and embodied the renunciation of fame and fortune.<sup>41</sup> For those pure men who

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*daigaku gakujutsu hōkoku (jinbun)* 京都府立大學學術報告 (人文) 31 (1979), pp. 2–5; Yoshimori Kentsuke 葭森健介, “Menfa ‘guizu’ zhipei ji ‘qing’ de linian” 門閥貴族支配及清的理念, *Wen shi zhe* 文史哲 216.3 (1993), pp. 90–91; Ueda Sanae 上田早苗, “Kizoku teki kansei no seiritsu: seikan no yurai to sono seikaku” 貴族的官制の成立, 清官の由來とその性格, in *Chūgoku chūseishi kenkyū* 中国中世史研究 (Tokyo: Tokai daigaku chubansha, 1970), pp. 103–4.

<sup>38</sup> Kan, “Purifying the World,” p. 81.

<sup>39</sup> See D. C. Lau 劉殿爵 and Chen Fong Ching 陳方正, *Liezi zhuzi suoyin* 列子逐字索引 (Hong Kong: The Commercial Press, 1996), j. 7, p. 38. For a discussion on the text as a fourth-century forgery see Michael Loewe, ed., *Early Chinese Texts* (Berkeley: The Society for the Study of Early China, 1993), pp. 299–301; Yang Bojun 楊伯峻, *Liezi jishi* 列子集釋 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1979), pp. 323–48; and A. C. Graham, *Studies in Chinese Philosophy and Philosophical Literature* (Albany: State U. New York P., 1990), pp. 216–82.

<sup>40</sup> Medieval Europe provides an interesting parallel to this phenomenon. Lester Little has noted that the medieval commercial revolution so deeply troubled Christian theologians that it caused them to redefine what virtue and vice meant: they recast mercantile greed, rather than knightly pride, as the worst of the Seven Deadly Sins. Furthermore, due to the overwhelming importance that was now placed on generating money, clerics increasingly reinterpreted spiritual virtue as the willingness to forsake material wealth. This stress on voluntary poverty eventually led to the creation of the Dominican and Franciscan mendicant orders. See his “Pride Goes before Avarice: Social Change and the Vices in Latin Christendom,” *The American Historical Review* 76.1 (February 1971), pp. 16–49, and his *Religious Poverty and the Profit Economy in Medieval Europe* (Ithaca: Cornell U.P., 1978).

<sup>41</sup> On the connection between incorruptibility and reclusion, see Alan J. Berkowitz, *Patterns of Disengagement: The Practice and Portrayal of Reclusion in Early Medieval China* (Stanford: Stanford U.P., 2000), pp. 5–6.

because of their unselfishness were pressed into holding office, it was expected that they would support themselves merely through their salary and that at the end of their lives they would have accumulated no wealth from their office-holding.

If this ethos is what upper-class men admired and lived by, why would an important official like Shen Yue want to write about the Guos who were subelite men who contaminated themselves in the filthy market?

#### WHO WERE THE GUOS?

Before we can answer this question, we need first to establish who they were and what their status was. The Guos materialized in the written record because, in an effort to reward them, a number of officials memorialized the throne about their outstanding conduct. In 427, while making an inspection tour, an envoy named Yuan Yu 袁愉 heard about Guo Shidao's exploits and made them known to the throne. Emperor Wen of the Liu-Song had nothing but praise for Shidao's conduct and ordered that the local prefect put a placard on the gate of Guo's village gate, exempt his family from corvée labor taxes, and rename the village "The Hamlet of Filial Conduct" (Xiaoxingli 孝行里). This memorial most likely provides the basis for Guo Shidao's biography in *Song shu*. The last line of Shidao's biography states that the governor, Meng Yi 孟顛, using the category of "Filial and Incorrupt," recommended him for office – an honor that Shidao declined. We know of Guo Yuanping's virtuous acts because they too drew the attention of several governors. The governor of his commandery, Wang Senglang 王僧朗, put Yuanping forward as a Filial and Incorrupt candidate for office. Yuanping declined the honor. Afterwards, when a new governor, Cai Xingzong 蔡興宗 (417–474), took office, he attempted to show respect to Yuanping by giving him one hundred bushels (*hu* 斛) of grain from his private holdings.

The honors and gifts reveal much about the Guos' relative status. Most importantly, the fact that Guo Shidao's family was subject to the corvée labor tax discloses that they were of commoner status. Significantly, while rejecting other honors, Shidao's biography says nothing about his declining the tax exemption. Another important signifier of lower status was that both father and son were nominated for office via "Filial and Incorrupt." Although this was the most common and prestigious route to office during the Han dynasty (206 BC–220 AD), by the time of the Southern Dynasties, it was an inferior route, and became

used only the subelite. In a study of 864 men who entered the government during the Western Jin and Southern Dynasties, Luo Xinben 羅新本 found that only twenty percent entered the government either as “Flourishing Talent” (*xiucaai* 秀才) or “Filial and Incorrupt” candidates. Despite the fact that Filial and Incorrupt candidates were put forth by the numerous prefectures, whereas Flourishing Talent candidates were recommended by the less numerous regions, we know of many more Flourishing Talent candidates (74) than Filial and Incorrupt candidates (only 12). Luo believes this is because the Filial and Incorrupt candidates were predominantly from “cold gate” families and thus had unremarkable careers.<sup>42</sup> Ochi has documented that during the Southern Dynasties, when Filial and Incorrupt candidates entered government their first position was that of drafter (*sheren*) or clerk (*lingshi*), which as mentioned earlier were the usual positions given to the subelite.<sup>43</sup> Another Song dynasty filial son, Wu Kui 吳達, was offered the important post of being in charge of the prefecture’s personnel bureau (*jun gongcao* 郡功曹), but he refused to take it because “his gate was cold (*men han* 門寒).” Afterwards, he was put forward as “Filial and Incorrupt.”<sup>44</sup> Clearly, men who were nominated as “Filial and Incorrupt” were more than likely to be members of the subelite. During the early-medieval period, the fast track to higher office would be to receive a direct summons to serve on the staff of a high official or governor. Men who were promoted in this way became clients of those who appointed them and were tied to their fortunes.<sup>45</sup> Since one could avoid many formalities and skip taking an examination, this was a much preferred way into enter office.<sup>46</sup> That both Guos were never summoned to become part of someone’s staff once again underscores their low status.

Nevertheless, because “Filial and Incorrupt” candidates had to pass a written examination, we know that Guo Shidao and Yuanping were literate. The *Tongdian* 通典 states,

<sup>42</sup> Of the twelve Southern Dynasties men who we know were Filial and Incorrupt candidates, Luo thinks, that with one exception, all the others were from “cold gate” families; Luo Xinben 羅新本, “Liang Jin Nanchao de xiucai, xiaolian chaju” 兩晉南朝的秀才孝廉察舉, *Lishi yanjiu* 3 (1987), pp. 117–21.

<sup>43</sup> Ochi Shigeaki 越智重明, “Shin Nanchō no shūsai, kōren” 晉南朝の秀才孝廉, *Shien* 史苑 66 (1979), pp. 85–114.

<sup>44</sup> Cited in Luo, “Liang Jin Nanchao de xiucai,” p. 121. See *Song shu* 91, pp. 2247–48.

<sup>45</sup> The best introductions to this patron-client system in early-medieval China are Andrew Chittick, *Patronage and Community in Medieval China: The Xiangyang Garrison, 400–600 CE* (Albany: State U. New York P., 2010), and Kan Huai-chen 甘懷真, *Huangquan, liyi yu jingdian quanshi: Zhongguo gudai zhengzhishi yanjiu* 皇權禮儀與經典詮釋, 中國古代政治史研究 (Taipei: Taiwan daxue chuban zhongxin, 2004), pp. 236–45.

<sup>46</sup> Luo, “Liang Jin Nanchao de xiucai,” p. 119.

According to the [Liu-]Song regulations, the four prefectures of Danyang, Wu, Guiji, and Wuxing must each year put forward two candidates; the other prefectures must put forth one. Each candidate that is put forward by a region as a “Flourishing Talent” or by a prefecture as a “Filial and Incorrupt” must take an examination (*ceshi* 策試). The Son of Heaven or a relative personally visited [the examination area].<sup>47</sup>

That the emperor might visit the test venue signals the importance of the examination. Indeed, if a candidate did not pass the test, the governor or regional inspector who recommended him could be dismissed from office.<sup>48</sup> Yet, having to take an examination did not mean that the “Filial and Incorrupt” candidates would have necessarily needed a high degree of literacy. Shen Yue did not have much regard for the “Filial and Incorrupt” test as a way of selecting men for talent. He tells us that, “If a “Flourishing Talent” candidate answers five questions correctly then he is praised; if a “Filial and Incorrupt” candidate answers one, then he is able to pass. This is the inconsequential art of burrowing insects. It has nothing to do with successes or failures in governing.”<sup>49</sup> Shen’s comments indicate that “Filial and Incorrupt” candidates merely had to correctly answer one question, which to him appears to be a laughable achievement. The account of the filial son Pan Zong 潘綜, which is also from the *Song shu* chapter on the filial and righteous, further discloses that “Filial and Incorrupt” candidates were selected more for their outstanding conduct rather than superb learning. It shows that such candidates had to meet the Four Selection Criteria (*sike* 四科): they had to behave morally, understand the classics, comprehend the law, and be able to speak. Yet, the governor who wanted to recommend Pan Zong for higher office admitted that Pan’s literary ability was a bit lacking. Nevertheless, the governor was sure that he would more than make up for it with the inspiration of his example.<sup>50</sup>

Cai Xingzong’s efforts to advance the careers of Guo Yuanping’s sons also shed light on the Guo’s humble status. Although no one tried to elevate either Guo Shidao or Guo Yuanping directly into a central government post, in his capacity as governor of Guiji, Cai Xingzong tried unsuccessfully to elevate Yuanping’s second son into office as a “Renowned for Filiality” (*wangxiao* 望孝) candidate. His reason for doing so is telling. He informs us that the candidates for office that the people

<sup>47</sup> See Du You 杜佑 *Tongdian* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1988), vol. 1, p. 333.

<sup>48</sup> *Jin shu* 78, p. 2055; cited in Ochi, “Shin Nanchō,” pp. 96–97.

<sup>49</sup> *Tongdian* 16, p. 388.

<sup>50</sup> *Song shu* 91, p. 2248.

of Guiji esteemed most were those who were nominated as “Renowned for Filiality” and “Renowned for Planning” (*wangji* 望計). The men who usually filled those positions were from elite lineages (*shengzu* “flourishing lineages”) and they received nothing less than pure posts, such as editorial director or assistant in the Palace Library. However, even though Cai was going to recommend a man of good pedigree for the position of “Renowned for Planning,” due to Yuanping’s outstanding conduct, governor Cai was going to put forth Guo’s second son as the candidate for “Renowned for Filiality.” Through this pair of candidates, Cai Xingzong obviously wanted to make a contrast between the fine learning of the elite and the superb conduct of commoners.<sup>51</sup> Later on, Cai Xingzong attempted to elevate Yuanping’s second son as an erudite at the Imperial College. That Cai Xingzong would recommend him for such a position must have meant that he had a much higher level of literacy than his father, which would have allowed him to serve in such a post. If Yuanping had as much education, it is difficult to believe that he would not have been offered such an opportunity.

Nonetheless, even though the Guos were commoners, they were by no means ordinary ones. They came from a family that had enough resources to educate at least some male members. Such learning was a precondition for being put forward as “Filial and Incorrupt.” Since the Guos were known within their commandery and prefecture due to their receiving a local ranking, they were probably recognized as an elite commoner family. Even though they were not a part of either the national or regional elite, the Guo family was most probably part of the local or district one. Despite their status at this level, the family was still a “cold gate” or commoner one that had yet to earn its place on a larger stage. It would do so through its members’ virtuous behavior.

Having now established that the Guos were members of the sub-elite, to understand the messages that the biographies were meant to convey, let us examine the types of behavior for which the author praises them. Since both accounts largely begin by detailing their subjects’ filial behavior and only then discuss righteous behavior, I will organize this section of the article in the same manner. We should keep in mind that the audience of these accounts, as they are incorporated into the *Song shu* chapter, are very much like Shen Yue himself: the intended readers were other literate men who were likely to have held office.

<sup>51</sup> I would like to thank an anonymous reader for reminding me of this point.

## THE GUOS' FILIALITY

Both biographies structure filial piety in the same way – they describe how both Guos reverently cared for their parents while they were alive, and then served them in an extreme manner after their death. During the Southern Dynasties, showing these complementary sides of filial piety was highly conventional.<sup>52</sup>

In this era, for accounts of filial piety perhaps the most important theme was that of reverent care (*gongyang* 供養), which means that a filial child selflessly endeavored to meet all of his living parents' material needs and wishes, while doing so in a manner that underscored their superiority and his/her own inferiority. Guo Yuanping provides us with many examples of reverent care. If while on the job his employer offered Yuanping tasty food, then since he was unable to provide his parents with such delicacies, he would content himself with salted rice. By refusing to eat prestige food, Yuanping was doing two things. First, to preserve familial hierarchy, he was refusing to elevate himself above his parents by consuming better food. Second, he was simultaneously underscoring his shame for an inability to fulfill his son's duty to present his parents with delicacies. Likewise, "When he was in front of his mother he would show her whatever he was eating; in his private room he never recklessly tasted food. He carried on this behavior from this point until her death, which came after more than thirty years." He always showed her his food to indicate that it was in no way superior to hers; he never ate in his room so that there was no chance that he would eat more or better than her. In short, he followed a dietary regimen that ensured that he never treated himself better than his mother, and did so for more than thirty years. In those cases when there was no food at all at home, for the entire day, Yuanping would not let even a morsel of food enter his mouth; instead, waiting until the day's end, he would use his daily wage to buy food at the market, cook it, and respectfully present it to his parents. That is, despite engaging all day long in manual labor, he would only satisfy his hunger after his parents had satisfied their own.

A variation on this theme of reverent care is the deprivations Yuanping underwent to nurse his ill father. His biography relates, "For years, Yuanping did not unfasten his belt; his mouth tasted neither salt nor vegetables. Furthermore, he never slept or lied down." While his father was ill, since his father could probably not enjoy food, Yuanping likewise declined to eat anything that had even a modicum of taste.

<sup>52</sup> See Knapp, *Selfless Offspring*, chaps. 5–6.

Furthermore, Yuanping neither disrobed nor slept so that he was in a constant state of readiness to serve his father. In this statement, we have an example of how these moral anecdotes were often exaggerated to highlight the exemplar's virtue: it is not humanly possible for someone to go without sleeping or lying down for years on end. This is obviously a formula that is meant to convey that he assiduously cared for his sick father. The purpose of such an exaggeration is to make it memorable.

The most spectacular and for us disturbing story of reverent care is that of the filial son Guo Ju 郭巨.<sup>53</sup> He was a poor man who had both an elderly mother and a young son. His mother often yielded her food to her grandson. Realizing that he could not afford to support both materially, based on the logic that he could always have another son but never another mother, Guo Ju decided to bury his son alive. Just as he was digging the pit, he discovered a pot of gold from Heaven that allowed him to nurture both his son and mother.<sup>54</sup> The same plot reappears in Guo Shidao's biography.

His household was poor and without any property, to the extent that he had to hire out his labor to support his step-mother. His wife had a son. Discussing the matter with his wife, he said: "We exert ourselves to nurture both, but our ability to do so isn't enough. If we raise this child the cost (in regard to nurturing my step-mother) will be steep." Thereupon he tearfully buried his son.<sup>55</sup>

Shidao performs the exact same filial act as Guo Ju, but he goes one step further. He does it for his stepmother, rather than his biological mother. Moreover, there is no heavenly intervention that saves the day. Thus, Shidao sacrificed his own son, the future of his family, for a woman to whom he was not biologically related. Clearly, one's wife and children should be secondary to one's elderly parents.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>53</sup> Guo Ju was not related to Guo Shidao and Guo Yuanping. In fact, I think he was an entirely fictional character born out of oral culture; *ibid.*, p. 34.

<sup>54</sup> For a translation of this narrative, see Knapp, "Early Medieval Filial Piety Stories," in Goldin et al., eds., *Hawai'i Reader*, pp. 278–81.

<sup>55</sup> See Appendix, p. 47.

<sup>56</sup> Although we find this tale shocking as did some literati in the late-imperial period, for contemporaries I think it would have been seen as nothing but admirable behavior. Infanticide was a practical measure that was used to enable a family to limit its size or maintain its wealth. As Anne Behnke Kinney has observed in relation to Han China, "The tendency to attach no blame to those who abandoned children, to omit any discussion rationalizing the action, and to depict the abandoning parent as emotionally detached are features of the narrative that underscore the idea that infant abandonment was a commonplace activity, and that most people considered it a reasonable action"; *Representations of Childhood and Youth in Early China* (Stanford: Stanford U.P., 2004), p. 112. Since Guo Shidao was only engaging in this

Note that to care for his stepmother, Guo Shidao degraded himself by working as a hired laborer. Due to the family's presumed poverty, like his father, Yuanping engaged in the demeaning practice of renting out his labor. His account tells us that by nature he had a talent for working with wood, so he supported his family through carpentry.<sup>57</sup> As a motif, self-abasement like this was prevalent in filial piety stories from this period.<sup>58</sup> Although we would not regard wage-laborers as extremely poor, early-medieval Chinese envisioned short-term wage-laborers as belonging to the same category as long-term debt-bondsmen. As Hori Toshikazu 堀敏一 has noted, for a Chinese of this period, working as a hired laborer was one form of selling oneself, hence the words *mai yong* 買庸 “to buy a wage-laborer,” or *mai yong* 賣庸 “to sell oneself as a wage-laborer,” were often used.<sup>59</sup> That the same word, *yong*, could designate both a short-term wage-laborer and a debt-bondsman indicates that contemporaries viewed these two types of worker in the same way. Moreover, both wage-laborers and debt-bondsman were similar in that their poverty forced them to depend on other men for their livelihood. In short, both types were subservient to and dependent upon others; the only difference was the length of term and degree of subservience. The following statement, by Xiahou Zhan 夏侯湛 (ca. 251–291), leaves little doubt that *yong* stood for one of the lowest social classes of his day.

[My son] is rich in virtue and noble in his position. Those whom he has discovered and illuminated, even though they were clients (*ke* 客) who guided cows or wielded pestles, or dependents (*li* 隸) who hired out their labor (*yonglin* 庸賃) or protected gates, or gentlemen who turned their backs on the vulgar and embraced ridicule, they nonetheless all rose to become great officers and illustrious as high ministers.<sup>60</sup>

Some of the men Xiahou Zhan's son recommended to office came from the lowest social class, that of *ke* “clients” and *li* “dependents.” Here *li* is synonymous with *yong*: people who perform menial tasks for a wage. It is also telling that wage-laborers here are put on the same

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behavior for the best of reasons, contemporaries would have regarded his act as exemplary, which is the way they regarded Guo Ju.

<sup>57</sup> *Song shu* 91, p. 2244.

<sup>58</sup> Knapp, *Selfless Offspring*, pp. 123–24.

<sup>59</sup> Hori Toshikazu, *Chūgoku kodai no mibunsei* 中国古代の身分制 (Tokyo: Kyoko shoin, 1987), pp. 85–86, n. 45, and pp. 271–72.

<sup>60</sup> *Jin shu* 55, p. 1492, which is cited in Hamaguchi Shigekuni 濱口重國, *Tō ōchō no sennin seido* 唐王朝賤人制度 (Kyoto: Toyoshi kenkyūkai, 1966), p. 470.

level as clients whose status, in some respects, was comparable to that of slaves.<sup>61</sup> Of course, that the Guos became hired laborers is only admirable if they had a choice in the matter. If they were truly poor, it might have been their only option. But, in thinking about this motif, we need to remember that the Guos were wealthy enough to provide their sons with education and probably were members of the local elite. As a result, the anecdotes probably exaggerate their poverty and their decision to work as hired laborers was voluntary. By making this choice to work as hired laborers to provide reverent care to their parents, both Guos indicated that on their parents' behalf they were willing to undergo social humiliation.

The second most important theme in early medieval filial piety tales is that of mourning for one's parents in a manner that "exceeds the rites" (*guoli* 過禮). One of the most common motifs that illustrate this theme is that of limitless mourning, that is, even though one should only don the ritual mourning garments for three years, a filial child will endeavor to maintain certain mourning rites for the rest of his or her life. Guo Shidao's account tells us that,

After the mourning period was completed, broken-hearted with grief he always yearned for her. For the rest of his life he acted like a mourner. Because he always had the desire to sacrifice to his parents, there was never a moment that their memory left his heart; as a result, he never undid his clothes or took off his hat.

Even though his parents were dead and the mourning rites had been completed, for the rest of his life, Shidao never abandoned the mourner's attitude of ascetic subordination. No matter how long ago they passed away, his life was always dedicated to serving his parents. Guo Yuanping was not much different. His account tells us that,

After his father's burial, [he] built a small hut with two rooms, which he called an "offering hall" (*citang* 祠堂). Every year when the holidays or the winter and spring sacrifices arrived, for several days, he would grieve [for this father] and would refuse all food except porridge. After the mourning rites were completed, he never again consumed fish or meat."

Just like his father, Yuanping was unwilling to end his mourning. Although he could no longer express his grief through the mourning rites,

<sup>61</sup> For information on the status of clients during the Six Dynasties, see Tang Changru, "Clients and Bound Retainers in the Six Dynasties Period," in Albert E. Dien, ed., *State and Society in Early Medieval China* (Stanford: Stanford U.P., 1991), pp. 111–38; and Wang Yi-t'ung, "Slaves and Other Comparable Social Groups during the Northern Dynasties (386–618)," *HJAS* 16 (1953), pp. 348–49.

he did so by acting like a mourner on festival days and by restricting his diet. Through their behavior, both Guos illustrated that they would never stop depriving themselves on their parents' behalf.

According to Confucian thought, a ritual is not performed correctly unless the participant displays true sincerity. Hence, when one sacrificed to the ancestors, he or she had to act as if they were present.<sup>62</sup> True filial acts have to be done in the same spirit. A filial child does not leave serving his/her parents to others because they will not perform the duties with the requisite amount of love and devotion. Thus, a standard motif in filial piety stories is that a filial child will always personally undertake all of the tasks necessary to meet the parents' daily needs. This principle also applied to death. A truly filial child will personally undertake many of the acts necessary to properly bury his or her parents because these details cannot be left to others who will lack the proper attitude. Usually, a filial child signals this commitment by personally constructing the tumulus that covers the tomb. This motif figures in both accounts of the Guos. In Shidao's case, he endeavored to construct his stepmother's tumulus, but in doing so he accepted funerary gifts from his relatives. Not being satisfied with this, after the tumulus was completed, he hired out his labor so that he could return to his relatives double the amount that their gifts were originally worth. As for Yuanping, he took this principle to its logical end. Not only did he want to build his father's tumulus by himself, he also wanted personally to design the tomb itself. Nevertheless, he did not have the necessary skills, so he apprenticed himself to a professional tomb builder. He literally wanted to do everything himself.

Other common exemplary mourning motifs, such as voluntary abasement and serving the dead like the living, also appear in the Guos' accounts. To meet the various funerary expenses, Yuanping sold himself into a form of indentured servitude,<sup>63</sup> which was called "a client who owes ten *fu* of labor 十夫客."<sup>64</sup> His most famous exemplary act,

<sup>62</sup> *Analects* 111/12 states, "Sacrifice as if they were present. Sacrifice to the spirits as if the spirits were present. The master said, 'If I do not [personally] take part in the sacrifice, it is as if I did not sacrifice'"; William Hung et al., comps., *Lunyu yinde* 論語引得 (Rpt. Taipei: Ch'eng-wen Publishing Company, 1972).

<sup>63</sup> For a discussion of whether filial sons who sold themselves, as did Guo Yuanping, were slaves or debt-bondsmen, see Hori, *Chūgoku kodai no mibunsei*, pp. 25–81, and Takenami Takayoshi 竹浪隆良, "Kan Rikuchōki ni okeru jinshin no baibai to shichiire" 漢六朝期における人身の売買と質入れ, *Rekishigaku kenkyū* 歴史学研究 564 (February 1987), pp. 1–12.

<sup>64</sup> The original reads *you zimai shifu* 又自賣十夫 "again, he sold himself into an obligation of ten *fu* units." I think *shifu* in this passage is shorthand for *shifuke*. Hence *zimai shifu* means that "he sold himself as a client who owes ten *fu*." "*Shifuke*" also appears in the biography of Wu Dazhi 吳達之; see Xiao Zixian 蕭子顯 (489–537), *Nan Qi shu* 南齊書 (Zhonghua

though, was the way in which he treated his mother as if she was still alive. It turned out that her tomb was near many fields that did not belong to Yuanping. When it was time to prepare the ground, the men who were plowing often worked naked. Fearing that this would insult his mother, Yuanping sold his home and exhausted his wealth to buy all of the surrounding fields for more money than they were worth. When it came time to prepare the soil, fully dressed, Yuanping himself would plow the fields while sobbing.<sup>65</sup> This, in fact, was the filial act for which he became most famous and was incorporated into Xiao Guangji's 蕭廣濟 (fifth century) "Xiaozi zhuan" 孝子傳 ("Accounts of Filial Children").<sup>66</sup>

One can justifiably wonder, though, whether these anecdotes were apocryphally credited to the Guos. After all, filial sons were regularly said to have built their parents' tumulus or to have worked as hired laborers on their behalf. Perhaps these were just formulas added to pad the biographies of men who were known for filiality. Nevertheless, the unique quality of any particular element in an anecdote may suggest an overall authenticity. There are in fact no equivalents in filial piety accounts of a son learning tomb construction to bury his father. This unique aspect indicates that Yuanping probably did undergo that training, thus drawing his contemporaries' attention. In the same way, the preciseness of the technical term *shifuke* also suggests real experience rather than just a stock formula. Buying land near his mother's tomb to shield her from naked peasants is also not a stock motif. Of course, Shidao's burial of his son is clearly in imitation of the Guo Ju story, but that does not mean it did not happen. Since this act is what made him famous and brought him to the attention of local authorities, this too might be historical fact. Thus, there is much in both Shidao and Yuanping's biographies that is too specific and singular to be only pious embellishment.

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shuju edn.; Taipei: Dingwen shuju, 1987) 55, p. 961. As quoted in *Taiping yulan* 517, p. 7a, the term used is "*shifuyong* 十夫庸." According to Hamaguchi, it is not clear whether *shifu* refers to a type of labor or a measure of the amount of labor owed. For him, what is clear is that a *shifuke* was a type of debt-slave whose extent of labor owed his master was limited; see his *Tō ōchō*, pp. 484–85. Watanabe Shinichirō 渡部信一郎 believes that *fu* was a measure of the labor owed. He points out that during the early-medieval period, the term *fuzhi* 夫直 meant the price of a set amount of labor; and hence Yuanping sold himself for the price of ten *fu* units of labor. When he worked that amount of time or paid his creditor the cash equivalent, his obligation would be repaid. See Watanabe, *Chūgoku kodai shakai ron* 中國古代社會論 (Tokyo: Aogi shoten, 1986), p. 163 and nn. 12–13; also Hori, *Chūgoku kodai no mibunsei*, pp. 262–63, 270–71.

<sup>65</sup> *Song shu* 91, p. 2245.

<sup>66</sup> See *Taiping yulan* 821, p. 10a; and Ouyang Xun 歐陽詢 (557–641), *Yiwen leiju* 藝文類

## THE GUOS' RIGHTEOUSNESS

After describing their filial acts, both accounts follow with descriptions of how the Guos' acute sense of "righteousness, or *yi*" benefited others.<sup>67</sup> *Yi* in the context of early-medieval China designates the benevolence one displays towards siblings, which is then extended to members of one's local community.<sup>68</sup> To illustrate Guo Shidao's embodiment of this virtue, his account merely provides one anecdote; however, Guo Yuanping's account has no less than seven. These tales predominately concern economic and good neighbor issues; the beneficiaries of their righteous acts are local community members. The purpose of these stories is to show how commoners should act in the everyday world – one which was increasingly commercialized.

A number of the anecdotes concern how one should behave when buying and selling goods. Both accounts make it quite clear that there was absolutely nothing wrong with a commoner engaging in trade to make a living, which is what both Guos attempted to do in a number of ways. What the accounts do condemn is making a profit at another's expense. For example, when Guo Shidao and his partner were trading goods in Shanyin 山陰, they mistakenly made a thousand more cash than they should have in the transaction. When Shidao discovered this, he urged his partner to return the difference to the other party. His partner almost split his sides laughing and refused to do so. Shidao then took a thousand cash of his own reserves and gave it to the shorted customer, who was surprised and sighed in amazement. He offered Guo half of the money, but this was refused. We can easily relate to someone's wanting to keep an accidental windfall, but for Guo Shidao even unintentionally shortchanging someone was morally unthinkable.

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聚 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1999) 65, p. 1158. This work contains the filial piety stories of both Guos (Guo Shidao burying his son and Guo Yuanping buying the land around his mother's tomb), and the specific language is very close to that of the *Song shu* biographies. One might be tempted to say that Shen Yue took the stories from Xiao Guangji's *Xiaozhi zhuan*. However, *Xiaozhi zhuan* usually only had anecdotes about the exemplar's filiality, not those about their righteousness. It could be then that both Xiao Guangji's *Xiaozhi zhuan* and Shen Yue's *Song shu* had a common source, such as a "Guo Yuanping biezhuàn" 郭原平別傳 or a family biography of the Guos.

<sup>67</sup> In her *The Art of Doing Good: Charity in Late Ming China* (Berkeley: U. California P., 2009), pp. 7–8, Joanna Handlin Smith rightly notes that *yi* can have any number of translations from "righteousness," "charity," to "justice." In medieval China it could also denote "loyalty." In this article, I will merely translate it as "righteousness" in the sense that one is always doing what ought to be done.

<sup>68</sup> For the definition of *yi* in the context of *Song shu*'s "Xiaoyi zhuan," see my "Why is Yang Gong a Filial Son? The Connection between Filiality and Righteousness in Early Medieval China," paper presented at the American Association for Chinese Studies, Nashville, Tenn., October 22, 2005.

Moreover, while earning money was fine, one should not earn too much. Guo Yuanping constantly reduced the price of both his goods and services. His biography tells us that, “by nature he was modest, thus, each time he worked for others he would only take the fee that one would pay an unskilled laborer 散夫價.” The implication here is that, as a skilled worker, he could have charged a much higher fee. In a similar manner, because of his humble origins, when hiring himself out to construct tombs, Yuanping would only charge a low rate. In other words, because he was commoner he did not deserve high pay. Moreover, on his days off, he would come over to help (thereby effectively reducing the number of days one would have to pay him for doing the job). He likewise systematically reduced the price of goods that he sold.

Each time he went to the market to sell goods, when people asked him how much [an item] cost, he would reduce it and say it cost half [of its actual price]. After this happened for a long time, the people of the market town all knew this. Thereupon, they would add money to reach the actual price. He, though, would want to yield on the price and would desire the buyer to slightly reduce his or her offer. He would always want to make it slightly lower and only then accept the price.

Yuanping was simply unwilling to receive the fair market price of his goods and services. In part, he charged less than he could have to indicate that he had no desire to earn a profit; in part, he wanted to show that the service that he was providing, whether in goods or labor, was more important than the payment he received. In other words, even in commercial transactions, helping others was more important than benefiting oneself.

While the purpose of anecdotes like this is to broadcast Confucian ideas on how commoners should act, they also make it clear that fifth-century commoners had a keen sense of the monetary worth of goods and labor. Yuanping knew exactly the monetary worth of his goods, which made him not want to accept their full price. His fellow townsmen, though, also knew their exact worth, which is why they were always endeavoring to pay more because they wanted Yuanping to receive his goods' fair market value. Likewise, when Shidao received funerary gifts from his relatives, he knew exactly how much they were worth, which enabled him to repay at double their cost. If he did not have a market consciousness, how would this be possible? Since money was so common, nearly everyone calculated goods and services in terms of cash. Hence, one of the most common words in the two biographies is *zhi* 直

that means “price, cost, or wages.” Guo Shidao “hired out his labor so that he could return double the original cost 先直 [of the gifts].” “The owner of the money was surprised and kept sighing. He offered Shidao half of the money 半直 [that Shidao returned to him.]” As for Yuanping, “when he was able to make it cheap and insignificant only then would he accept the price 取直.” Obviously, money weighed heavily on the minds of fifth-century commoners.

In this changing world, though, where making money was becoming everyone’s concern, the anecdotes about righteousness remind the reader that helping others is really what is truly important. The Guos never think about own interests; they only think about benefiting others. As an indentured servant, Yuanping would unfailingly yield the easiest tasks to the other slaves, while choosing the most laborious for himself. His owner found this so unfair that he could not endure making use of him. In a similar fashion, Yuanping never missed an opportunity to aid others. When he noticed that someone was trying to get his boat over a canal embankment, Yuanping would use his oar to help him get it across; right when he was ready to cross a river in his boat, if he saw that others had not arrived in time, he would without fail wait for them. Since fifth-century merchants would have understood the wisdom of the adage “time is money,” Yuanping surely had more concern for others than his own interests.

While extending neighborly help might not seem all that extraordinary, Yuanping was also willing to give away his wealth and well-being. One night, a man was stealing bamboo shoots that were growing on Yuanping’s roof. Yuanping startled the thief, causing him to fall into the ditch that surrounded Yuanping’s home. Brimming with remorse, Yuanping stated, “I am unable to distribute charitable goods widely; consequently, I have caused this man to fall.” To help people steal the bamboo shoots more easily, he put a bridge over the ditch; furthermore, those shoots that he had already harvested, he would place outside his fence, so that his fellow villagers could help themselves. However, his neighbors were then so ashamed of their conduct that they never came again to steal his shoots. In short, rather than blame others’ for their cupidity, he blames himself for not donating more of his goods as charity – he should have never hoarded the shoots as his own. (One wonders whether he was holding on to them to fetch the right market price?) If giving away marketable goods was not enough, he was even willing to sacrifice his own life to help others. Once, when he was helping someone punt his boat, a fight broke out. A clerk wanted

to arrest the participants. Everyone fled except Yuanping. He was arrested and taken to the government office. Since the magistrate was new and did not know Yuanping, he wanted to punish him severely. Yuanping confessed to the crime, and for righteousness' sake he would not say a word of what actually happened. Happily, the magistrates' clerks knocked their heads on the ground and pled mercy for him. He escaped unharmed. Yuanping did nothing wrong, yet to protect his fellow community members, he was willing to confess to a crime he did not commit, even at the possible cost of his life. All of these episodes demonstrate that in his dealings with others Yuanping was much more concerned with aiding them than himself.

In the same manner, Yuanping refused to accept any special treatment from officials or the government. Why should he receive privileges when many other members of his community were also in need of imperial largesse? As a result, Yuanping would not accept gifts from officials who wanted to reward his virtue. For instance, once there was a drought that dried up the waterway that Yuanping used to take his melon crop to market. Pitying his poverty and age, the district magistrate ordered that this canal be flooded with water. Yuanping objected saying, "In a year that all under heaven is experiencing a terrible drought and the common people are all beset by hardships, how is it possible that you could reduce the amount of water for irrigating fields to float a boat that transports melons?" He then walked his crop to Qiantang 錢塘. Here, Yuanping points out that, when others probably did not have enough to eat, the district magistrate would be using precious water to transport a mere cash crop. Likewise, when the governor, Cai Xingzong, wanted to give Yuanping a hundred pecks of grain, he swore on the point of death that he would not accept it. When someone asked him why, he replied, "If his honor gave it to me because of my righteous behavior, then if I am lacking even one iota of goodness, I will have wrongly received this bestowal. If he gave it to me because I'm poor and old, there are many who are long in tooth – their empty homes abut each other. I am not the only one who suffers." In both cases, Yuanping affirms that he will not profit at the expense of others: he feels that any reward he receives will deprive someone who needs it just as much as he. The one telling exception to this is when a retired official named Xu Yaozhi 許瑤之 attempted to give him floss silk. Yuanping would not accept the present; several tens of times he returned it to Xu Yaozhi. Finally, an exasperated Xu Yaozhi personally went to see him and said, "This winter is exceedingly cold; furthermore, Jianan 建安 floss silk is of good quality. I'm merely using it to uphold and revere the principle

of hierarchy.” In this case, Yuanping accepted the gift. He was willing to do so because it was given to him not as a special dispensation, but rather to illustrate an important principle – that the elderly should be revered. He agreed to it because it would set an example, which would benefit many in addition to himself.

#### THE CONNECTION BETWEEN FILIALITY AND RIGHTEOUSNESS

Although the logic of combining filiality and righteousness together might not at first be readily apparent, reading these anecdotes makes it manifest. Filiality and righteousness are part of the same moral continuum. Filial children put their parents’ interests before their own; in fact, they oftentimes sacrifice their own interests to further their parents’. To nurture or bury their parents in an elevated manner, filial sons degraded their social status by undertaking jobs that only the most desperate of people would accept, such as working as a hired laborer or selling oneself into debt-slavery. By this means, they underscore that a clear hierarchy should hold sway in the family. Simply put, filial sons like Guo Shidao and Guo Yuanping are selfless children.

Anecdotes about righteousness largely make the same points, except that the recipients of the subject’s altruistic conduct are members of the community rather than parents. As the narratives plainly show, righteous commoners should help others before helping themselves. They refuse to profit at the expense of others; instead, they endeavor to profit others at their own expense. In other words, parallel to the filial son, the righteous commoner should place the interests of his fellow community members before his own. Likewise, just as filial sons endeavor to illuminate hierarchy by acting like lower-class people while treating their parents as if they were of a higher status, righteous men try to do the same. They attempt to highlight social hierarchy by depriving themselves of the fair market value of their goods and labor. Since their origins are humble, why should they be able to charge a high price? In other words, the market system is defective because it does not take into account social differences between buyers and sellers.

In sum, righteousness is merely filiality extended to the larger community. A man who is selfless in serving his parents will also be so in serving his community. Thus, after listing Guo Shidao’s filial acts, his biography states, “His habits of benevolence and generosity spread throughout his village and relatives. No one in the village, no matter whether old or young would call him by his personal name.” Note that

the acts of benevolence and generosity that the account has referred to before this statement are his filial acts towards his family members. It is precisely his filiality that garners his fellow villagers' support and inspires their acts of benevolence and generosity.

The benefits of this combination of filiality and righteousness are numerous. Due to their perfection of filial righteousness, such people treat everyone as a relative; as a result, they receive deference back from everyone, and despite constant sacrifice they profit in the end. Yuanping facilitates the theft of his bamboo shoots, yet no one dares to do so again. He cuts the prices on his goods, yet people strive to pay him more. We saw many other examples of this sort of effective righteousness in which his fellow community members were transformed by his example and wanted to do business with him. Thus, the accounts of the Guos show how commoners can transform their families through their filial actions, which are then extended to the community at large. It helps us understand what early-imperial Chinese meant when they used the curious expression "employing filiality to govern all-under-heaven 以孝治天下." That is to say, if the emperor selflessly serves his parents, and by extension, his subjects, the whole realm will be transformed in the way just described concerning the Guos. Finally, in addition to this sort of perfection of filial righteousness, we can see the roots of the Confucian mercantile ethic, which consisted of being honest, trustworthy, generous, frugal and not resorting to deceit to earn money, that emerged with force in late-imperial China.<sup>69</sup>

#### SHEN YUE'S INTEREST IN THE GUOS

We now return to the question of why did Shen Yue place so much stress on these two particular filial sons? One possibility was that it was not his emphasis at all. It is well known that Shen Yue compiled *Song shu* in a remarkably short time: within a year, the fastest time for any dynastic history. Due to this, scholars have maintained that he merely edited preexisting materials, to which he added editorial comments. If the biographies in his "Accounts of the Filial and Righteous" were merely taken whole cloth from another book, then the emphasis on Guo Shidao and Guo Yuanping is not Shen's. Still both Richard Mather and

<sup>69</sup> For an excellent discussions of Confucian mercantile ethics in late-imperial China, see Qitao Guo, *Ritual Opera and Mercantile Lineage: The Confucian Transformation of Popular Culture in Late Imperial Huizhou* (Stanford: Stanford U.P., 2005), pp. 56–60, and Richard John Lufrano, *Honorable Merchants: Commerce and Self-cultivation in Late Imperial China* (Honolulu: U. Hawaii P., 1997), pp. 51–67.

Tang Xiejun have persuasively argued that Shen made sizable contributions to the work's contents.<sup>70</sup>

If Shen did have an active hand in shaping the contents of the chapter, one possibility why the Guos figure so large might be connected to patronage. An important fact about the biography of Guo Yuanping is that the governor, Cai Xingzong, who tried so hard to give his second son a good government job was also Shen Yue's patron.<sup>71</sup> In fact, Cai played a huge role in Shen's career. Due to the fact that his own father was killed in 453 for his part in a plot against the throne, Shen languished in obscurity until he was twenty-seven. It was at that point that Cai, then governor of Ying province and recognizing his talent, offered him a position on his staff. In the language of the time, Cai Xingzong was his first lord or "old lord" (*jiujun* 舊君). Thus, Shen surely felt heavily indebted to Cai. Dedicating a chapter in his work to filial sons, a category of people that Cai found particularly admirable, would be a way to honor his memory.<sup>72</sup> While this is possible, there is no direct evidence to support the supposition; moreover, since he also praised He Ziping and Zhu Bainian, it still does not explain why the Guos should figure more prominently.

A more compelling reason emerges from his comments that begin the chapter on the filial and the righteous. Shen starts by complaining that the men of his time have lost their moral bearings – filiality and loyality mean little to them.

Public morals have become superficial and moral transformation has become meager; the rites are violated and the Way is lost. Loyalty does not firm up the nation and filiality fails the family. Furthermore, the people (*min* 民) of this time try to grab power and profits. They serve in office to obtain authority. The glory they gain is not established through their conduct.<sup>73</sup>

Note that Shen describes the malefactors of his time as *min*, which in early-medieval times usually meant commoners. The *Nanshi*'s variant of this passage is telling: it replaces *min* with *meng* 萌, which means "cultivator" or "commoner."<sup>74</sup> So in effect he is complaining that commoners are anything but pure. They are only interested in obtaining power and glory. They want to hold office to benefit themselves. Is

<sup>70</sup> See Tang, *Liuchao Wuxing Shenshi*, pp. 299–305, and Richard Mather, *The Poet Shen Yüeh (441–513): The Reticent Marquis* (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1988), pp. 26–36.

<sup>71</sup> I owe a debt of thanks to the anonymous reader who made me aware of this important fact.

<sup>72</sup> While he was the governor of Guiji, Cai Xingzong honored and gave awards to three filial sons: Guo Yuanping, Zhu Bainian 朱百年, and He Ziping 何子平.

<sup>73</sup> *Song shu* 91, p. 2241.

<sup>74</sup> *Nanshi* 73, p. 1798.

Shen not complaining about the subelite families that were fast gaining power in his day? Many of the men who have biographies in his collective biography of imperial favorites 恩倖 were members of these same reviled commoner families. It is also well known that Shen was highly agitated by the blurring of the line between gentlemen and commoners, to the extent that he impeached Wang Yuan 王原 for marrying his daughter to a rich, subelite family and asked emperor Liang Wudi to check land registers from past dynasties, so that subelite families that were claiming to be genteel could be punished.<sup>75</sup>

The Guos are a perfect foil. They are commoners like the men who are acting so outrageously by usurping the genteel's power and privileges. Yet, unlike them, their behavior perfectly cleaves to the standards of purity. They lived frugally, declined to profit at others' expense, gave away their wealth, and refused to accept charity. Of course, since they were commoners, it was fine for them to engage in money-making ventures, as long as they were not too interested in making money. Yet, given the fact that these men had extensive commercial dealings and had plenty of opportunities to make money, they consistently use various means to reduce the amount of profit they would make. The Guos also had a keen sense of hierarchy. Yuanping, knowing he was of lower birth, often charged less for his goods and services. Perhaps even more to the point, neither Guo shows any interest in holding office. Both men refuse their appointment as "Filial and Incorrupt" candidates. Both also refuse to receive gifts from officials or important men within the community. Hence, they are subelite men who truly know their place – they show no interest in breaching the elite-commoner barrier. They are commoners who truly live and breathe purity. Hence, it is not too much of a stretch to believe that the author of these accounts put the Guos forward as models of how commoners could also embody this social and political ideal of purity. Thus, good commoners should maintain their virtue by not taking advantage of opportunities; instead, they should perfect themselves by always striving to serve others, even to the detriment of their own pocketbook.

Even though critical of the sub-elite's tendency to crave wealth and power, Shen Yue simultaneously viewed its members, if they stayed in their proper place, as having the potential to be moral saviors. He

<sup>75</sup> See Cheng Zhangcan 程章燦, "Shen Yue 'Zoutan Wang Yuan' yu Nanchao shifeng kaobian" 沈約奏彈王原與南朝士風考辨, *Chuantong wenhua yu xiandaihua* 傳統文化與現代化 18.6 (1995), pp. 19–25, and David G. Johnson, *The Medieval Chinese Oligarchy* (Boulder, Col.: Westview Press, 1977), pp. 9–10, 36–38.

makes this clear in his comments that close the chapter on the filial and righteous.

The historian states: During the era of the Han, the genteel (*shì*) devoted attention to governing their selves; as a result, loyalty and devotion became custom – this phenomenon even reached high officials. If it was not for this they would not act in this way. During the Jin and Song Dynasties, public morals have deteriorated and righteousness has been lacking. Belaboring the body and honing one's conduct are practices that are rarely performed by the rich and noble. Men who establish their family through filiality or have their loyal acts recorded in the histories are predominately rustics – they do not come from the wearers of caps and hair-pins (that is, the higher classes or families of officials). If one uses these examples to speak of prestige and moral transformation, can nobles and high officials not be ashamed?<sup>76</sup>

To Shen Yue, proper moral behavior is difficult to find among the upper elite who live in luxury at the capital. Virtue instead is found among those who dwell in the uncorrupted countryside. But who are those “rustics”? Are they ordinary farmers? The answer is manifest in the identity of the men who Shen selected for this chapter on the exemplars of filiality and righteousness: the great majority, like the Guos, were members of the subelite. Many were subject to corvée labor duties; many were recommended as Filial and Incorrupt; many offered positions as low-level officials. They were obviously not illiterate farmers, but commoners who had been groomed to serve officialdom in some capacity.

Subelite families like the Guos offered hope of social renewal. Such people do not overstep their social and political bounds; instead, they take to heart the cultivation of such virtues as filiality and loyalty. Although Shen's own family, the Wuxing Shen, were one of the most prominent families in the realm, surely he did not forget his own ancestors' subelite origins and thus wanted to call attention to their potential to morally transform the elite.

## CONCLUSION

Although historically obscure, Guo Shidao and his son Yuanping have much to tell us about life in Southern Dynasties' Jiangnan. Through their literacy and the probability that they were ranked under the Nine

<sup>76</sup> *Song shu* 91, pp. 2258–59.

Rank system, we can see that they were most likely members of the local elite. However, since the family was still subject to the *corvée* labor taxes and only had access to government service through the lowly “Filial and Incorrupt” recommendation category, the Guos were obviously still merely commoners. Thus, the Guos provide us with a glimpse of subelite or elite-commoner men who never entered officialdom and remained on the political periphery.

The Guos’ lives also demonstrate the extent to which subelite families were involved in the fifth-century commercial and monetary economy of the southeast. Both Guos were merchants who transported their wares to neighboring cities. Yuanping was clearly both a farmer and a merchant: he sold melons as a cash crop and probably bamboo shoots as well. Yuanping sometimes also performed artisanal work as a carpenter and tomb designer for wages. Given the prevalence of commercial activities in their lives, they calculated their costs and labor entirely in terms of money. In these ways, they were probably in no way different than other elite commoners who were living in the southeast at that time.

In the eyes of Shen Yue (or the person who wrote the accounts that Shen Yue edited), what made them special was that their attitude towards money-making was completely different from that of their peers. Instead of trying to maximize income by any means, the Guos always kept other people’s goals in mind. They were never too busy to help a neighbor or fellow villager: they did not believe that time was money. They were unwilling to make demands on public resources to benefit themselves materially; as a result, they consistently rejected gifts from local or retired officials. They also were well aware of their relatively humble place in society, so they never endeavored to use their notoriety to gain political office. As their biographies make evident, their selflessness at home laid the foundation for their selflessness in the community. These men could be righteous because, in serving their parents, they had already established the habit of benefitting others before themselves.

It was the community aspect of their ethical lives that made men like Guo Shidao and Guo Yuanping completely different from the typical subelite. The latter would use every possible means to make money and amass wealth. They would live extravagantly, making sure that everyone knew they were well-to-do. Sooner or later, such upstarts would employ riches to secure political office. The Guos were the antithesis of the typical *hanmen* or *haozu* that the “pure” upper-class so thoroughly

despised. Despite their low status, the Guos embodied the upper-class ethos of purity – they lived in voluntary poverty and eschewed wealth and power. It is for this reason that Shen Yue, and other upper-class men like him, found the Guos to be so admirable.

APPENDIX: TRANSLATIONS OF THE  
ACCOUNTS OF GUO SHIDAO AND GUO YUANPING

*The Biography of Guo Shidao* 郭世道 in *Song shu* 91, pp. 2243-44

Guo Shidao was a person from Yongxing 永興 in Guiji 會稽. While being born, his mother died. His father took another wife. Shidao served both his father and step-mother well. His adherence to the way of filial devotion (*xiaodao* 孝道) was both pure and complete. At fourteen, he lost his father. He remained in mourning in excess to what the rites required, to the point where he nearly could not overcome his grief.

His household was poor and without any property, to the extent that he had to hire out his labor to support his step-mother. His wife had a son. Discussing the matter with her, he said: “We exert ourselves to nurture both, but our ability to do so isn’t enough. If we nurture this child the cost (in regard to nurturing my step-mother) will be steep.” Thereupon he tearfully buried his son.

When his mother died, he carried dirt on his back to make her tumulus. His relatives all offered him help and funerary gifts, but there was very little that he accepted. After the burial was completed, he hired out his labor to pay back double the amount of money that his relatives had given to him beforehand.

After the mourning period was completed, broken-hearted with grief he always yearned for her. For the rest of his life he acted like a mourner. Because he always had the desire to sacrifice to his parents, there was never a moment that their memory left his heart; as a result, he never undid his clothes or took off his hat.

His habits of benevolence and generosity spread throughout his village and to his relatives. No one in his village, no matter whether old or young, would call him by his personal name. Together with another man, he would often sell goods in the market at Shanyin 山陰. By mistake they obtained a thousand copper cash, but Shidao did not know it at the time. He only found out about it after they had departed from [the buyer]. Shidao requested that his companion take this money and return it to its owner. His partner

laughed heartily and refused. Shidao then used his own money to make up the amount and took it back to the man. The owner of the money was surprised and sighed in amazement. He took half the money and gave it to Shidao. Shidao refused it and left.

In 427, a high envoy was sent out to inspect the realm. Yuan Yu 袁愉, a senior recorder, memorialized [the throne] about Shidao's pure conduct. Emperor Taizu 太祖 (Liu Yilong 劉義隆; r. 424-453) praised him. He also ordered that the prefect display a plaque on his gate, exempt him from taxes and corvée labor, and change the name of the hamlet he lived in, which was Lone Maple Hamlet, to that of the Hamlet of Devoted Conduct. Meng Yi 孟顛, the governor, recommended him to an office as a "Filial and Incorrupt" candidate, but he refused to take it.

*The Biography of Guo Yuanping 郭原平 in Song shu 91, pp. 2244-47*

Shidao's son was named Yuanping. His style name was Changtai 長泰. He inherited his father's perfect conduct. In nurturing his parents he made it a point to use his own labor. By nature he was skilled at carpentry. He would hire out his skills to support his parents. By nature he was modest and humble. Whenever he worked on someone's behalf as a carpenter, he would receive the rate of an unskilled laborer (*sanfujia*). If his employer offered him a meal, due to the fact that his family was poor and his parents were never able to have delicacies, he would merely eat salted rice. If his household sometimes did not have food, then for the entire day, in accordance with the principle that one should not satisfy his hunger alone, he would insist on working until dusk [without eating]. Thereupon, he would receive his pay and return home. In the hamlet he would buy grain and only after he cooked and respectfully offered it [would he eat].

His father was in the grip of a serious illness for many years. During this time, Yuanping never loosened the belt of his clothing; salted vegetables never entered his mouth. He continued this behavior for many years; furthermore, he never slept. When his father died, Yuanping wailed, stomped his feet, and lost consciousness due to his overwhelming grief. Only after several days did he regain consciousness.

He considered serving the dead as a duty that one's feelings and the Rites alone could complete; hence, in regard to building the tomb and conducting the funeral, he did not desire to borrow

the labor of others. Even though he was intelligent and ingenious, he did know how to build a tomb. Only because of this, he sought out a man in town who had tomb-builders. He helped them by expending his strength. After a long time of unremitting toil, he became quite adept at [building tombs]. Moreover, he sold himself as a [type of] client-owing-ten-*fu* to pay the numerous expenses. As for the burial, it was frugal but conformed to the Rites. By nature he was without learning, thus he followed his heart and naturally performed (the correct rites). After the burial, he went to his owner and attended to his work without rest. He divided the tasks with the various slaves; each time he would give them the easier ones, while he would take on the laborious ones. His owner could not bear to make use of him (because of this). Every time he was sent to do a task, he would work diligently and would never stop for even a moment. To support his mother he hired out his labor during his private time 私夫. He gathered together any remaining money to redeem himself.

Due to his native intelligence and ingenuity, since he studied tomb building, he especially excelled in this matter. Every time it was an auspicious year the people who sought his skills filled his gate. Due to his poor origins, he would only charge a low wage for the jobs he accepted. Moreover, during his free days 夫日, he would come over to help. Since his father's funeral had already been completed, he himself put up two small houses as an offering hall. Every year when the holidays or the "winter and spring sacrifices" arrived, for several days, he would grieve [for this father] and would refuse all food except porridge. After the mourning rites were completed, he never again consumed fish or meat. When in front of his mother, he would always show her what he was eating; in his private room he never recklessly tasted food. From this point to her death, it was more than thirty years.

After completing his term of office as an aide to the prefect of Jianan 建安郡丞, Xu Yaozhi 許瑤之 of Gaoyang 高陽, who resided in Yongxing 永興, returned home and gave Yuanping a *jin* 斤 of floss silk. Yuanping would not accept it. There were several tens of occasions where Xu sent the silk to him and Yuanping returned it. Xu because of this finally went himself and said: "This year is exceedingly cold. Furthermore, Jianan floss silk is of good quality and I'm merely using it to uphold and revere the principle of hierarchy." Only then did Yuanping bow and accept it. Upon his mother's death, he greatly mortified and emaciated his body; he

barely escaped death. In front of her tumulus, there were several tens of *mu* 畝 of farmland that did not belong to Yuanping. Each year in the agricultural months, the cultivators would usually work naked. Yuanping did not want to allow other people to insult his mother's tomb; thereupon, he mortgaged his family's wealth to buy this land at a high price. During the three months of agricultural work, he would then properly wear a full set of clothes and shed tears, while he himself plowed the land.

Every time Yuanping went to the market, people would ask him the price of his goods. He would reduce the [true] price by half. After this happened many times, the townspeople all knew of this; as a result, they would add money to the original price. Both sides would yield to each other in this way. [Yuanping] desired that the buyer would slightly lessen the price. If he was able to bring about a reduction, only then would he accept the price.

The ground under Yuanping's home was moist. It was surrounded by a ditch, which allowed the penetration of water with silt. On top of the house, he had planted small bamboos. One spring evening, there was a person who wanted to steal the [bamboo] shoots. By chance Yuanping got up and saw him. The burglar fled but he fell into the ditch. Yuanping believed that because he was not able to broadly give out charity that he had caused this man to fall; consequently, he built a small bridge over the ditch to the place where he had planted the bamboo, so that one could walk over easily. He also picked shoots and placed them outside his fence [so that others could freely pick them]. His neighbors were deeply ashamed; no one ever again took them.

When Taizu (emperor Wen) died, Yuanping cried painfully to let out his extreme grief. Each day he only ate one stalk of wheat; he did this for five days. Someone asked him about it saying, "Are we not all emperor's subjects? Why should you alone act in this way?" Crying, Yuanping answered with these words: "The previous court treated my family especially well. We were bestowed the award of publically being praised. Nevertheless, we are unable to requite this kindness; thus, it is merely [an expression] of my own heart's grief.

Yuanping took raising melons as his occupation. In 463, there was a huge drought. The channel for transporting melons did not have enough water to accommodate a boat. The district magistrate, Liu Sengxiu 劉僧秀, took pity on him because he was a poor, old

man. He released water into the channel. Yuanping stated, “Everywhere there is a great drought. All commoners are suffering. How is it possible that you can reduce irrigation water to allow for the passage of a boat transporting melons?” Unexpectedly, to sell his goods, he walked from his road all the way to Qiantang 錢唐.

Each time he went out, if he saw that a person who had not yet quite succeeded in pulling his boat up over the embankment, he would then quicken the pace of his own boat so that he could help him. In pulling his own boat [over the embankment], he would never borrow the labor of others. Even though his own boat could have already crossed [a river], if there was someone who had not yet arrived, he would invariably stop and wait. He took this as a constant rule. Once in the southern part of the district, at Guofeng Embankment 郭鳳隸, he was helping someone pull up their boat. He encountered some men who were fighting there. A clerk there [was about] to make a report about the situation; those who heard about this fled. Yuanping alone remained there. The clerk arrested him and escorted him to the district *yamen*. The district magistrate was newly arrived, so he was not familiar with Yuanping. He was about to severely punish Yuanping, but he merely loosened his clothing to receive the sentence. Due to his sense of righteousness he uttered not a word. Everyone who was near, no matter whether he was young or old, kow-towed and requested that the magistrate spare him. Only because of this was he able to escape the punishment. From this point on, only those who did not seek an audience with the head of the locality could receive the people’s respect.

The governor, Wang Senglang 王僧朗, recommended Yuanping as a filial and incorrupt (*xiaolian*) candidate; however, he did not accept it. When governor Cai Xingzong 蔡興宗 (417–474) came to the prefecture, he particularly esteemed Yuanping. He bestowed his own private rice upon Yuanping and the wife of Shanyin’s 山陰 Zhu Bainian 朱百年. His teachings stated, “[This] gift for ten years is to be recorded in our national history. I have heard that bestowing grain on the poor is the court’s priority; how much more [would we do so] if it was old and poor Gao Chai 高柴 or Lao Laizi’s 老萊子 wife suffering hardship in her old age.<sup>77</sup> Yongxing’s Guo Yuanping has inherited filiality and virtue; he is proficient

<sup>77</sup> Gao Chai was a filial son who never revealed his teeth and cried blood while mourning his parents. Lao Laizi was a recluse who was also famous for acting like a child in front of his elderly parents, so that they would forget about their age.

in his profession and concentrates his spirit; his benevolence is profound and has outstanding conduct; he follows the behavior of men from the far past; he resides in steadfastness and finds himself comfortable with frugality. This glorious old man is upright and solemn. Although Shanyin's Zhu Bainian's cultivation of the way of filial devotion has come to an end, his wife Kong is old and maintains her widowhood. She is poor and oppressed in her waning days. Thinking back about my respect for the way [Zhu Bainian] transformed manners causes me to sigh in admiration. From my own stores, I would like to give each one [GuoYuanping and Zhu Bainian's widow] a hundred bushels of rice." Yuanping repeatedly declined to receive the present and swore that he would die before he would accept it. Someone said to him, "Our lord has praised your pure conduct and feels sympathy for your being old and poor. Hence, if he gives you this present, how is it appropriate for you to refuse it?" Yuanping retorted: "If the lord has done this because of my righteous conduct, then if I have even a smidgen of unrighteous behavior, I can't shoulder the responsibility of accepting this present. If he is giving it to me because I am poor and old, those who are old and poor are legion, not just me alone." In the end, he was not willing to accept the gift. Zhu Bainian's widow was also refused to accept the gift.

Guiji esteemed those who were selected as Renowned for Planning 望計 and Renowned for Filiality 望孝. They usually came from the most powerful lineages and their first positions in government were nothing less than an assistant in the Palace Library (*Bishu lang* 祕書郎) or an editorial director (*zhuzuo lang* 著作郎). In 471, Xingzong wanted to recommend the eldest son of Kong Zhongzhi 孔仲智 of Shanyin 山陰 as the Renowned Planner candidate and Yuanping's second son as the Renowned for Filiality candidate. Zhongzhi was from one of Guiji's famous households (*gaomen* 高門); Yuanping displayed the best conduct within the region; thus, he wanted them to form a pair. But, at that moment, Mingdi 明帝 (r. 465-471) had not issued orders to search for talented men; as a result, the two selections were tabled. In 472, Xingzong was summoned to return to the capital. He again memorialized the throne about Yuanping's outstanding behavior and how [his descendant] should be promoted to a prominent office to enhance social customs. At the time that he recommended that Yuanping's second son be promoted to the position of erudite at the Imperial

University, Xingzong died and the matter was not carried out. The next year, in 473, Yuanping died at home.

From when he was young until he was old, Yuanping often exchanged goods, but he never had contrary words with anyone. In the several tens of years that he lived with his family, he never manifested either joy or anger in his face. He had three sons and one younger brother: they all had outstanding conduct befitting their family. His eldest son, Bolin 伯林 was recommended as a Filial and Incorrupt candidate, while his second son, Lingfu 靈馥, was [put forward for the post of] chancellor of Confucian Education. Both refused the positions.

