

Reduce, Re-use, Recycle: Imperial Autocracy and Scholar-Official Autonomy in the Background to the Ming History Biography of Early Ming Scholar-Official Fang Keqin (1326–1376)*

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The Qing dynasty's (1644–1911) sponsorship of the compilation of a history of its predecessor, the Ming dynasty (1368–1644), was part of its own legitimation. But the *Ming History* (*Mingshi*), like earlier official histories, was not pure imperial propaganda. As summarized in a recent overview of Chinese historiography, official histories told the truth, in order to correctly praise the worthy and criticize the faulty, to show and reinforce cosmic and human moral patterns, and to illustrate techniques of governance.¹ Even with the copious Ming private histories, local gazetteers, and collected writings, the official *Ming History* remains a first and fundamental source. It is worth investigating precisely how its compilers balanced the political danger of writing, under the eye of the conqueror, about a defeated dynasty and a conquered nation, with their great responsibility as historians: authorities on both cosmic and quotidian truths. Can we believe what the *Ming History* tells us? In particular, can we trust its biographies for basic facts about individuals on whom few other sources of information survive?

Frederick W. Mote, describing the *Ming History* as the endpoint of a long historiographical process, called comparison of the biographies leading up to the official one “*de rigueur*,” and urged students to

[...] at least attempt to show how the elements comprising the *M[ing]S[hi]* biography were transmitted and employed, and what judgments on exclusion were used by the *MS* compilers.²

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1 Oh-cho Ng and Q. Edward Wang, *Mirroring the Past: The Writing and Uses of History in Imperial China* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2005), x-xv.

2 Frederick W. Mote and Howard Goodman, *A Research Manual for Ming History*, (Princeton: Chinese Linguistics Project, Princeton University, 1985), 26–27, 64. The manual provides facsimiles of the sources, a vocabulary list, maps and other reference materials, and comments on some of the compilations, and it sets up exercises to examine the differences among the sources. But since the *Manual* was a student exercise book, Mote gave a translation of only the final, *Ming History*, biography. The subject is Li Shimian, and the particular focus is on the incident of 1443 in which eunuch dictator Wang Zhen pilloried Li for three days, releasing him in the face of mass protest demonstrations by students. The *Manual* also includes a facsimile and a translation of the *Ming History* biography of Liu Jin, with comments and questions by Howard Goodman. The manual should now be used alongside Hung-lam Chu’s “Textual Filiation of Li Shimian’s Biography: The Part about the Palace Fire in 1421,” *The East Asian Library Journal* 13.1 (Spring 2008): 66–126. Li Jinhua’s study of the compilation of the *Ming History* similarly provides the texts of different versions of one year from the “Basic Annals” and of the biography of Wang Wei for readers to compare, but makes

Such work has been published in a few cases of major biographies: Mote's own study of Li Shimian's, Barbara Krafft's study of Wang Shizhen's³, and Roger V. Des Forges's studies of the (apocryphal) Li Yan.⁴ This article takes the biography of scholar-official Fang Keqin 方克勤 (1326–1376) as a test case for using entries in the grouped biographies of minor figures. It traces the creation of Keqin's biography backwards: from the official *Ming History* compiled under Zhang Tingyu and published under Qing imperial auspices in 1739; to the *Draft Ming History* (*Mingshi gao*) compiled under Wang Hongxu but rejected by the throne in 1723; back through the late-Ming and early-Qing biographical anthologies; and finally back to the epitaphs written by those who knew Fang personally. It also places the biography in comparative contexts.

A close reading of Fang Keqin's official *Ming History* biography seems to suggest a certain critique of imperial authority. But it is not at all clear, from the way scholars have thought about the grouped biographies (*liezhuan*) so far, that close reading is a justifiable technique. Certainly, the *Grand Records of the Historian* (*Shiji*) by Sima Qian both set different parts of his history off against one another and made explicit comments so that the biographies, among other things, criticized imperial policies. Sima expected his readers to read carefully and think hard, transforming themselves in the process.⁵ But although the *Shiji* was the model for later dynastic histories' division into annals, treatises, tables, and biographies, the official histories differed from it in many ways, losing color and strength with the individuality of the historian. The biographies, it is generally thought, lost their edge: particularly those of men who were not especially prominent, and were

few comments. Li Jinhua 李晉華, *Mingshi zuanxiu kao* 明史纂修考 [A History of the Compilation of the Ming Dynasty History] (Beiping: Harvard-Yenching Institute, 1933), chapter 7, 84–105.

- 3 Barbara Krafft, to identify the sources of the *Ming History* biography of Wang Shizhen (1526–1590) looked at his biographies (as listed in the Harvard-Yanqing index of 89 collections; she did not have access in 1958 to the *Mingren zhuanji ziliao suoyin*) in a similar way, comparing which narremes were included and their wording. She found that four of them were closely related: the *Ming History* or *Draft* biography; Li Zhi's version in *Xu Cangshu*, the version in the Taicang gazetteer; and the epitaph (*shen dao bei*) by Wang Xijue. Two-thirds of the official biography was virtually identical to the gazetteer; of the remaining third, the discussion of Wang's literary circle might have been expanded and reworded from Li Zhi, while the other paragraphs might have come from the epitaph, but not directly. Krafft concluded that while the precise relationships of the texts remained unclear, the near-identity of the *liezhuan* and the gazetteer contradicts the idea that the compilers of the *Draft* took reports from various documents and biographies to construct a unique and original biographical account. The only alternative, in her view, was that there was a lost prototype on which both the gazetteer and the *Draft* drew, of which the *Draft* retained more paragraphs. I guess that the lost prototype may have been Chen Jiru's epitaph for Wang Shizhen. If so, Krafft was wrong to dismiss Olbricht's view that early, social biographies were the direct source of the official biographies. Barbara Krafft, "Wang Shih-chen (1526–1590): Abriss seines Lebens," *Oriens Extremus* 5 (1958): 169–201. More up-to-date papers on Wang Shizhen appear in two special editions of *Ming Studies* (nos. 53 and 55), edited by Kenneth Hammond. Chu Hung-lam argues that a lost work supposedly by Jiao Hong is the same as Li Zhi's *Xu cang shu*, see Chu Honglam (Zhu Honglin) 朱鴻林, *Mingren zhuanji sheng ping fazheng* 明人著作與生平發微 (Guilin: Guangxi Normal University Press, 2005), chapter 2.
- 4 Roger V. Des Forges, "The Legend of Li Yen: Its Origins and Implications for the Study of Ming-Ch'ing Transitions in 17th Century China," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 104.3 (1984): 411–436. Roger V. Des Forges, "The Story of Li Yen: Its Growth and Function from the Early Ch'ing to the Present," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 42.2 (1982): 535–587. Des Forges shows that Li Yan's biography is not reliable, but also that it was questioned by Chinese historians close to the time.
- 5 Grant Hardy, *Worlds of Bamboo and Bronze: Sima Qian's Conquest of History* (New York: Columbia University, 1999).

grouped into categories extolling virtues such as filiality. Brian Moloughney, for instance, is presenting a consensus view when he writes that the main purpose of the *liezhuan* sections of the *Ming History* was to reproduce exemplars to inspire later generations of scholar-officials.⁶ Denis Twitchett wrote that biographies underwent far less editing than the “Basic Annals” (*benji*) sections and were meant to provide moral exemplars and to fill out the narrative of particular reigns.⁷ Thomas Wilson, in presenting the vigorous early Qing debate over the *liezhuan* classification of Confucians in the *Ming History*, has argued that perhaps the standard history’s most important function was to legitimate the new political and moral order, so that the overthrow of the previous dynasty did not invite continued violence.⁸ It is a real question whether one may justifiably read closely a text that is minimally edited from earlier sources created in different circumstances; that presents a stereotyped exemplar of virtue; and that provides additional details for a narrative essentially directed at legitimating imperial power. The first part of the paper compares the *Ming History* and *Draft* versions of the biography to question these standard understandings of both the process and the purposes behind the creation of biographies.

Part Two, to assess how far the compilers were purposely creating a new text, traces the sources of the *Ming History* biography: could the *Draft* have been drawn entirely from any of the late Ming and early Qing biographies? Part Three examines the early Ming sources those interim biographies were drawing on, the “social biographies” written by people who knew the subject.⁹ In this case, the main writers are Fang Keqin’s son Xiaoru (1357–1402) and Xiaoru’s teacher Song Lian (1310–1381). To put the complicated relations here as simply as possible: As Zhu Yuanzhang (1328–1398; r. as the Hongwu emperor 1368–1398; temple name Taizu) was building his new Ming dynasty, scholar Song Lian (1310–1381) advised him on developing a new, absolutist, style of rulership. Fang Keqin, an upright prefect, was executed by Zhu on charges of corruption. Fang Keqin’s son Xiaoru (1357–1402) offered to die in his father’s place, and then wrote his father’s necrology just as he was becoming Song Lian’s prize disciple. Song Lian wrote a shorter epitaph for his pupil’s father, but in a few years, after decades as Zhu’s right-hand man, he was also persecuted by the emperor and died. The aging Zhu chose his deceased first son’s son as heir. Fang Keqin’s famously filial son Xiaoru became an advisor to the young second emperor, Jianwen, recommending reduction of central power. When the young Jianwen emperor’s uncle usurped the throne and proclaimed himself the Yongle emperor, supposedly to protect his father’s governmental legacy, Fang Xiaoru refused to admit his legitimacy, and was executed with some 800 kinfolk. – It seems likely that Fang Xiaoru’s account of his father’s service and execution under his own executioner’s father, and the advisor and teacher Song Lian’s rewriting of Xiaoru’s account, will have something to say about power and about authority: the authority of rulers, of fathers, of scholars, of the righteous.

6 Brian Moloughney, “From Biographical History to Historical Biography,” *East Asian History* 4 (1992): 1–30.

7 Denis Twitchett, “Problems of Chinese Biography,” in *Confucian Personalities*, ed. Arthur F. Wright and Denis Twitchett (Stanford; Stanford University Press, 1962), 27.

8 Thomas A. Wilson, “Confucian Sectarianism and the Compilation of the *Ming History*,” *LIC* 15.2 (Dec 1994): 53–84., 53.

9 The term is from David S. Nivison, “Aspects of Traditional Chinese Biography,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 21.4 (1962): 457–463. This distinction between those who knew and did not know the subject personally differs from Barbara Krafft’s distinction between earlier biographers who still had some kind of “living interest” in the subject and later ones who approached him only as a scholar. Krafft also shows that the *earliest* biographies are not always the most detailed, because in sources written before Wang Shizhen’s death, he is granted only a few lines. Only posthumous portrayals are filled out. Krafft, “Wang Shih-chen,” 171.

By the time the *Ming History* was compiled, Fang Xiaoru was a hero, but while his father may have enjoyed a certain fame in his lifetime, his writings have not survived and he cannot be treated like the later, famous Ming literati Wang Shizhen, Yang Jisheng, or the “celebrity” Chen Jiru.¹⁰ Fang Keqin’s relative unimportance means that this study may suggest guidelines for use of *Ming History* biographies of obscure figures. Knowing how one complex human being – one executed for corruption – was re-written as an exemplary upright official, researchers may be able to guess at omissions, distortions, and inventions in cases where the social biographies are not extant. Part Four shows that the *Ming History* compilers were creatively manipulating several sources in writing Fang Keqin’s biography. Part Five thus proposes a close reading of the biography, offering a hypothetical interpretation of the *Ming History* awaiting confirmation or refutation by other scholars. Part Six tests the hypothesis in one small way, considering part of the chapter of grouped biographies in which Fang appears as a set of cases.

1 The Official Biography of Fang Keqin

The biographies (220 chapters or *juan*) make up the bulk of the official histories: they are far longer in the *Ming History* than the annals of each reign (24 chapters); the treatises on particular topics such as astronomy, the calendar, geography, and governmental systems (75 chapters); and the charts and tables of royal lineage, high office holders, etc. (13 chapters). Some, but not all, of the biographies of the *Ming History* are divided into categories of person according to station in life or a didactic scheme. Fang Keqin is in chapter 281, which is dedicated to the category *xunli* 循吏, usually translated as “exemplary functionary” or “upright official.” Fang’s biography is short: as Denis Twitchett wrote, “It is the extreme concision of the majority of the *liezhuan* that makes them appear far less lifelike than many of the longer private accounts.”¹¹ The *Ming History* biography is only 389 characters long, and was drawn directly from the slightly longer Wang Hongxu draft of 407 characters. The words that appear in the *Draft* but were omitted from the final *Ming History* version are **in bold** here, and the translation is broken into paragraphs according to their ultimate source in the “account of conduct” by Fang Xiaoru, which will be discussed in detail below.

- A [1] Fang Keqin, aka Qujin, a native of Ninghai.
- B [8] In the late Yuan, bandits arose in Taizhou, and Wujiang Vice-Prefect Jin’gangnu received orders from the Branch Secretariat to raise a naval force to oppose them. Keqin presented a plan, but it was not accepted; he fled into the mountains. **Lacking food, every day he sought pine to supply his hunger.**
- C [12] In Hongwu 2 he was appointed a county assistant instructor; **subsequently** he resigned and went home because his mother was old.
- D [13] In [Hongwu] 4, he was summoned to the capital and **ordered to be tested. His name** tested second in the Ministry of Personnel exam,
- E [15] and was especially appointed prefect of Jining.

10 See *Ming Studies* 53 and 55, special issues on Wang Shizhen edited by Kenneth Hammond, and Jamie Greenbaum, *Chen Jiru (1558–1638): The Background to, Development of, and Subsequent Uses of Literary Personae* (Leiden: Brill, 2007).

11 Denis Twitchett, “Problems of Chinese Biography,” 28. Here and elsewhere, I have silently converted Wade-Giles romanization to *Hanyu pinyin*.

- F [23] At that time it had been previously ordered that people who cultivated waste land would only be taxed after three years. The clerks collected taxes without waiting out the time; the people said that the edicts were not trustworthy and abruptly left off, so that the fields again became waste. Keqin made a pact with the people that taxes would accord with the set time. He divided the fields into nine grades to levy corvee and other taxes; the clerks had no opportunity to engage in corruption: more fields were opened every day.
- G [22] He also established several hundred community schools and repaired the Confucian temple building: *jiaohua* rose and flourished.
- H [26] In the height of summer, a general oversaw commoner men in building a wall; Keqin said, “Just now in their farming the people have no leisure – how can one further trouble them with basket and spade?” He **privately petitioned about it to** the Secretariat and got the corvee ended. Before this, there had been a long drought; afterwards there was a great soaking rain. The Jining people sang about it: “What stopped our corvee? His Honor’s power. What revived our millet? His Honor’s shower. Let his Honor never leave: us people’s father and mother.”
- I [16] In the three years he oversaw affairs,
- J [42]**whips and rods were not used,**
- K [32] the population increased several times over and the whole prefecture was well-supplied.
- L [40] Keqin’s way of governing was to take transformation through virtue as the root,
- M [41] He did not delight in seeking renown. He once said: “Seeking fame inevitably sets up danger; setting up danger inevitably brings calamity to the people. I cannot bear it.”
- N [49] His personal expenditures were simple and plain: he did not change his one cotton robe for ten years and did not eat meat twice in one day.
- O [47] Taizu used laws severely and many scholar-officials were sent into exile; Keqin unceremoniously took pity on those who passed through Jining.
- P [39] The Duke of Yongjia, Zhu Liangzu, was once leading a navy to Beijing when the water dried up. He levied 5,000 men to dredge the river. Keqin could not stop it, but prayed to Heaven with tears. Suddenly there was a big rainstorm, the water rose several feet, and the boats were therefore able to get there. The people regarded it/him as divine.
- Q [17] In the eighth year he went to court, where Taizu congratulated him on his achievements, gave him a feast, and send him back to the prefecture.
- R [18] Shortly thereafter, on the accusation by subordinate official Cheng Gong, he was exiled to hard labor in Jiangpu,
- S [19] and further becoming involved in the “blank forms” affair,
- T [20] he was executed.
- U [60] His sons: Xiaowen and Xiaoru. Xiaowen was 13 when his mother died and ate only vegetables for the whole 3 years of mourning. Xiaoru has his own biographical essay.¹²

12 Wang Hongxu 王鴻緒, “Fang Keqin,” in “Xunli,” in *Mingshi gao liezhuan* 明史稿列傳, in his *Hengyun shanren wenji* 橫雲山人文集 (rpt. Taipei: Mingwen, 1991), 157.2b-3b (rpt. vol. 97, 373–374). Zhang Tingyu, “Fang Keqin,” in “Xunli,” in *Mingshi* (rpt. Beijing: Zhonghua, 1974) 24/281/7187–7188.

1.1 Fang Keqin as Upright or Exemplary Official

Denis Twitchett expressed a common view when he wrote that

The *liezhuan* style of biography was essentially an exploration not of a life but of the performance by its subject of some function or role... The details of a man's actions, the illustrative episodes characterizing his conduct, the quotations from his writings – all were selected to produce a consistent and integrated picture.¹³

Herbert Franke identified seven common topoi in the biographies of upright officials:

1. The person was precocious as a child;
2. Friends or relatives predicted a brilliant career for him;
3. He exhibited great filial piety, modesty, perseverance, etc.;
4. He impressed the emperor on first meeting;
5. The emperor addressed him with his *zi* (style name) instead of his *ming* (given name);
6. As a resident administrator, he was benevolent and effective: the people regarded him as “father and mother;”
7. He was poor.¹⁴

In Fang's biography, Franke's tropes 1 and 2 do not appear; both were available in earlier versions, but the compilers omitted them.¹⁵ As for 3, his filiality seems to appear in paragraph C. Franke's trope 4 appears in paragraph Q. Although 5 does not appear, this may simply be a change from Tang practice, since the emperor did congratulate and feast him.¹⁶ Trope 6 is strongly presented in several paragraphs, especially H. Although paragraph N represents not poverty but frugality, that is actually the point of Trope 7. Overall, in terms of what was included, the biography partially fits the stereotype and supports the idea that the function of *liezhuan* was to provide moral exemplars. (Brian Moloughney's further argument that the exemplars were intended to assure people that moral behavior paid off in one's career is not supported by this biography.)¹⁷ That function, however, does not account for the changes that occurred between the *Draft* and the *Ming History*. If the point was merely to praise Fang as a good official, why omit the details given here in boldface, especially paragraph J on his reluctance to punish people?

According to the exemplar model of *liezhuan* composition, every element was selected to make one point. But since standards of what it meant to be a *xunli* might change over time, we should look at the definition of “upright official” that the compilers were using. Lien-sheng Yang writes that by the Yuan and Ming, the Song practice of commenting on individuals, and making praise and blame explicit, had been sublimated into comments on every chapter that functioned

13 Denis Twitchett, “Problems of Chinese Biography,” 35.

14 Herbert Franke, “Some Remarks on the Interpretation of Chinese Dynastic Histories,” *Oriens* 3 (1950): 113–122.

15 Song Lian wrote: “When my senior was still a child, he was solemn. At five years old, he knew how to read books and punctuate for himself. At ten years old, he had memorized the Five Classics. Several elders cried out with love and praise, seeing him as a prodigy.”

16 Xiaoru reports (and Song Lian omits) 12. “The students did not care to privately call him by his surname, so they used the *hao* he had chosen: Yu'an [...]”

17 Moloughney, “From Biographical History to Historical Biography?”

as ‘objective’ group judgment.¹⁸ The introduction to this chapter (*juan* 281) of biographies explains that

Ming Taizu took warning from the Yuan period, when the ruling of officials was lax and the people’s livelihood was destitute. He heavily restrained greedy officials and established for them severe laws. When prefectural, subprefectural, and county officials came to court, as they retired from the audience, he declared: “The world is newly pacified. The wealth and strength of the common people are in a distress. Like a bird first flying, or a tree first sprouting, you must not pluck its feathers or shake its roots. But only the pure can restrain themselves and love the people. The greedy will exploit the people to fatten themselves. You take warning by this!”

The founder was so earnest in evaluating officials on the basis of their building of schools and encouragement of sericulture and agriculture, the section continues, that he actually executed a particular magistrate with other talents. As a result, Hongwu-era resident administrators feared the law, purified themselves, and cherished the people. Government was clean for “over 100 years,” but worsened after the Hongxi era (1425), and especially after the Jiajing era (1522–1566), as official greed brought disaster while financial need drove the government to stress tax collection and punish many good magistrates. Finally, evaluations became meaningless, government worse and worse, and the people poorer and poorer. “Neither the flourishing time of Renzong [i. e. Hongxi, r. 1425] and Xuanzong [r. 1426–1435], nor the legal minutiae of Taizu, could be recaptured.”¹⁹ This is the overture to the chapter on “upright officials.”

To be an “upright official” in this context, then, was to be good at practical administration of the people’s livelihood and moral education (*jiaobua*), and to be personally incorrupt. Does every anecdote in Fang’s biography, beyond the basic career narrative and Franke’s *topoi*, contribute to this characterization? Paragraphs A, C-E, and Q-T outline the facts of Fang’s life and career. Paragraphs F-L fit, because they assert that Fang, working with the central government, assured the people their livelihood and worked at their moral transformation. Paragraphs M and N show that he was personally incorrupt, seeking neither fame nor comfort. But paragraphs B on the late Yuan, C on his returning home, O on scholar-officials sent into exile, and P on the rainstorm are hard to account for if the only point was to show Fang as an exemplar according to the chapter introduction’s criteria.

Narrating Fang Keqin as a straight exemplar was possible; Yin Shouheng’s *Ming shi qie* had done it a century before the completion of the *Ming History*. With a single point to make, Yin selected and reworded only 14 narremes from his sources: he begins with Fang’s appointment by the Ming to a teaching post, omits his resignation, relates his appointment and some actions as prefect, and simplifies his demise. He notes that sometimes Fang acted privately or did forbidden things to benefit the people; and he ends with a long comment about how Fang, like Wen Weng and other good Han-era officials, both taught and managed the people of his jurisdiction – in contrast, Yin writes, to the prefects and magistrates of his own day, who merely pay lip service to *jiaobua* by worshipping Confucius twice a month.²⁰ All complexities of Fang’s relations with the two dynasties are gone, all Fang’s oddities are gone, all supernatural

18 Lien-sheng Yang, “The Organization of Chinese Official History: Principles and Methods of the Standard Histories from the T’ang through the Ming Dynasty,” in *Historians of China and Japan*, ed. W.G. Beasley and E.G. Pulleyblank (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), 53.

19 *Mingshi* 24/281/7185–7186.

20 Yin Shouheng 尹守衡, *Ming shiqie* 明史竊 (c. 1634; rpt. Taipei: Mingwen, 1991), 77.3–5 (rpt. vol. 84, 473–474).

occurrences are gone: Fang is only a paragon of Confucian government who assures the people's livelihood and teaches them morality. The *Ming History* compilers could have copied Yin's simplistic text or written a similar one. But they did not.

1.2 Mere Corroborative Detail, Intended to Give Artistic Verisimilitude to an Otherwise Bald and Unconvincing Narrative

The second major function of the biographies, as expressed by Wang Hongxu, chief compiler of the *Draft Ming History*, and as commonly held, is to fill in the annals' (*ji*) outline portrayal of the era.²¹ There are specific entries in the "Basic Annals of Ming Taizu" that correlate with Fang Keqin's activities, such as Taizu's proclamations on encouraging agriculture, building schools, not harming the people, and so on. Just to give a few examples from the Hongwu reign-era proper (1368–1398) and within Fang's lifetime: In early 1368, Taizu pointed out the necessity for incorruptibility, in order to give people a respite after the fighting; Fang assured the people a respite from clerky corruption and was incorrupt himself.²² It was Taizu, of course, who had granted the three-year tax remission on newly-reclaimed fields that Fang enforced.²³ Taizu ordered community schools in villages throughout the empire, and Fang established several hundred.²⁴

In more general terms, the judgment in the chapter introduction, in the "Basic Annals," and elsewhere in the *Ming History* is that the Ming founder promoted moral education and the peoples' livelihood, while still attending to defense. His severity was too exacting and caused the deaths of many good officials, but it effectively protected the common people from official avarice and cleaned up the lax administration of the late Yuan period.²⁵ Fang's biography does fill out this picture. Paragraph B suggests the bad government and chaos of the late Yuan, its inability to use good men and good plans. Paragraphs F-K can be read as illustrating the accomplishments of the first reign, as Fang earned a reputation for practical government and for reining in corrupt clerks. O refers to Taizu's severity. P is still hard to fit in, but supplementing the "added detail" function to the "exemplar" function of biographies, we can more or less account for the basics of each paragraph.

21 See for instance Wang Gongxu 王鴻緒, "Wang Hengyun shi li yi (1)" 王橫雲史例議 (上) from *Mingshi gao* 明史稿 reprinted in *Mingshi li an* 明史例案 (Precedents of the Ming History), edited by Liu Chenggan 劉承幹 (Wuxing: Liushi Jiaye tang, 1915), 2.34a. Twitchett, "Problems of Chinese Biography," 33 also writes that the official histories' biographies are comments on their period, to be read in conjunction with the annals.

22 Romeyn Taylor, trans., *Basic Annals of Ming T'ai-tsu* (translation of the *Ming History*, "Taizu benji") (San Francisco: Chinese Materials Center, 1975), 58, item 131. This book is available through the Ming History English Translation Project, at <http://chinesestudies.ucsd.edu/mingstudies/ba/Taizu.html>.

23 Taylor, *Basic Annals*, 61, item 153.

24 Taylor, *Basic Annals*, 78, item 323. But see Sarah Schneewind, *Community Schools and the State in Ming China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 27, on the timing of the edict and Fang's action.

25 See the section on "laws and punishments," which tells us that the founder used harsh laws in the beginning to deal with the special circumstances of the chaotic post-Yuan period, not as a model. Not until the 30th year of his reign, after he had repeatedly reformed his system, did he declare it complete and inviolable. *Mingshi*, "Xingfa" 8/7/2279. See also Taylor, *Basic Annals*, 24.

1.3 Puzzles

Still, within paragraphs, the details leave some puzzles, which remain or are even compounded if we consider the changes from the *Draft*. First, in B, why did Fang “flee” (*tao* 逃)? Why was the *Draft*’s extra sentence removed? Both versions seem to condemn the Yuan, but it is not clear what happened. Second, in C, why did Fang take a post as a county teacher for the Ming and then resign and go home after only a year or two? And was the word *xun* 尋 removed just for brevity? Third, in H, since it was an order of the secretariat that stopped the corvee, and since the central government was committed to protecting the people’s livelihood, why does Fang get so much credit? Why did the Zhang Tingyu team omit “privately” (*mi* 密)? Fourth, in D, once Fang had answered the summons to come to the capital, why did he still have to be “ordered” to be tested? Was this additional step, reported in the *Draft*, omitted from the *Ming History* simply because it was redundant?

Furthermore, the “main line of history” was that attention from the throne kept things running smoothly. Why were there still so many clerks, generals, and dukes abusing the people (F, H, P)? Again, if the emperor was the one who was running things properly, why did Fang have to end droughts (F, P), in the case of P with no help from the central government? If Taizu was able to assure livelihood and a solid defense simultaneously, why do the two interests clash so dramatically in P? And if we read the text as a whole, rather than as a pastiche of paragraphs, what about the juxtaposition of the emperor’s approval (Q) and Fang’s execution by that same emperor (I) on false charges (R, S)? Finally, there is the problem of paragraph O: “Taizu used laws severely and many scholar-officials (*shi da fu*) were sent into exile; Keqin unceremoniously took pity on those who passed through Jining.” A dutiful official focuses on applying central systems to the welfare of local people. Is Fang acting in this way when he helps scholar-officials whom the center has designated criminals, possibly using local resources to do so?

I think that some of these puzzles can be solved through a close reading. At the end of the paper I will show how they can be solved while still taking the functions of the biography to be presenting an exemplar and filling-out the details of a reign, but only if we broaden those categories and attribute to the compilers a less complacent, less subservient, less centralized view of the Ming and Qing mandates to rule than the categories usually imply. But whether my specific close reading is right or wrong, the mere process of closely reading this biography is unjustified if, as in Twitchett’s view, the *liezhuan* were “inserted more or less ready-made” late in the compilation of a standard history.²⁶ Only if the *Draft* compilers were actively rewriting the texts they inherited, not mindlessly slotting them in at the last moment, is *any* close reading of the *liezhuan* legitimate. The next part of this article will begin a comparative reading of the biography by tracing what sources the compilers had available to them and how Keqin’s official biography follows or diverges from those sources.

2 Worthy Predecessors: Late-Ming and Early-Qing Versions

Before I can argue that the *Ming History* compilers manipulated the text in certain ways, I have to show what it looked like when they got it. Frederick Mote noted that in writing the *Draft Ming History*, Wang Hongxu and his team “plagiarized the excellent work of a succession of worthy predecessors” who had written and compiled Ming biographies for inclusion in differ-

²⁶ Twitchett, “Problems of Chinese Biography,” 27.

ent kinds of works. As far as I know, Fang Keqin had caught the interest of about sixteen such writers.

Table 1: Compilations with biographies of Fang Keqin

Date	Author	Type of source, or category Fang is included in.	Compilation	# characters
1377–1380	Fang Xiaoru	Account of conduct	Xiaoru's works	4,347
1377–1380	Song Lian	Epitaph + ode	Song's works	3,041 + 352
1377–1380	Su Boheng	Preface + lament	Su's works	1,436 + 154
Late 16th c.	Deng Yuanxi	Upright official	<i>Huang Ming shu</i>	1,132
1609	Li Zhi	Zhejiang	<i>Xu cangshu</i>	1,111
1602–1620	Lin Zhisheng	Illustrious officials contributing to the enterprise	<i>Huang Ming ying shi ming chen</i>	764
1622	Guo Tingxun	Zhejiang	<i>Benchao fensheng renwu kao</i>	644
1620s	Su Maoxiang	Elegant capacity & governance	<i>Huang Ming bao shan leibian</i>	106 + 57
1632	Zhu Guozhen	Prefects	<i>Huang Ming kaiguo chen zhuann</i>	1,271
1632	Zhang Xuan	7 different categories	<i>Xiyuan wenjian lu</i>	
1632	Song Kuiguang	Fang family	<i>Chongzhen Ninghai xianzhi</i>	747
1634	Chen Renxi	Illustrious prefects and magistrates	<i>Huang Ming shi fa lu</i>	approx. 980
c.1634	Yin Shouheng	Upright official	<i>Ming shi qie</i>	566
1640	He Qiaoyuan	Officials, by reign	<i>Ming shan cang</i>	915
c. 1662	Fu Weilin	Upright and good	<i>Ming shu</i>	1,067
1681	Xu Kairen		<i>Ming mingchen yanxing lu</i>	approx. 1,600
1723	Wang Hongxu	Upright official	<i>Ming shi gao</i>	407
1736	Zhang Tingyu	Upright official	<i>Ming History</i>	389

2.1 Structure

A trio of social biographies was written about Fang Keqin soon after his burial in 1377. The first was an “account of conduct” by his son Fang Xiaoru. Normally, such a document was submitted to the government for placement in the Veritable Records and as a bid for posthumous honors. But Fang Keqin had been executed as a criminal; official recognition was impossible and Xiaoru was asserting his father’s worthiness privately.²⁷ Fang Xiaoru’s account is over 4,300 characters long. It is divided into sections demarcated by an “*aiya*” or other expression of distress. Omitting the introduction and conclusion, which were not re-used in other sources, I broke the rest of the text into 60 paragraphs (*zhang* 章), each composed of one anecdote or comment expressed in one or more sentences (*ju* 句).²⁸ (It is these numbers that appear in the translation from the *Ming History* and *Draft* in Part One.) The relationships among versions can be seen by tracing which *zhang* (paragraphs or narremes) are included, and in what order, as well as particular wordings of *ju*. This rigorous approach makes possible a

27 There was no death-notice for Keqin in the Veritable Records as we have them, or I have not found it. Hok-lam Chan says that the “account of conduct” would not have been submitted to the government for an executed person (personal communication, March 2008).

28 See William G. Boltz, “The Composite Nature of Early Chinese Texts,” in *Text and Ritual in Early China*, ed. Martin Kern (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2005), esp. 58, on the portability of *zhang* (paragraph) units. This kind of punctuation of a text is fundamental to reading, and Fang Xiaoru tells us that his father could do it at a tender age.

more precise and subtle analysis of the processes of reduction, re-use and recycling in successive rewritings than does merely looking for salient similarities and differences in wording.

To begin with Fang Xiaoru's ur-text: after the unique introduction begging his new teacher, Song Lian, to write an epitaph for his father, Section 2 gives a basic chronology to death, including Keqin's relations with the Yuan, the Ming, and his local community (*zhang* 1–20). Section 3 covers his accomplishments and style while prefect (*zhang* 21–43). Section 4 shows his moral rectitude (44–55); Section 5 his appearance and demeanor (56–58); and Section 6 his legacy (59 & 60). Then there is the son's unique conclusion.²⁹ In response to Xiaoru's request, Song Lian wrote a 3,041-word *mubanwen* 墓版文 and a 352-word *ming* 銘.³⁰ As intended, he based his text on Xiaoru's, but he did not adopt his pupil's version wholesale.³¹ As well as writing his own introduction and conclusion appropriate to the genre and to his relationship to Keqin, Song Lian took about 55 of Xiaoru's 60 body paragraphs, changed their order, sometimes reworded them, and usually deleted several sentences within them. Song Lian did not divide his essay into sections with “*aiya*” demarcations, so I have divided it topically.³² His Section 2 gives a complete life chronology, incorporating Keqin's time as a prefect (which Xiaoru had treated separately) and the burial in its place; and adding Xiaoru's offer to take his father's punishment (which Xiaoru had omitted, presumably knowing Song Lian would put it in). Section 3 covers Keqin's personal qualities and relationships, and includes one substantial addition to paragraph 48. Section 4 focuses on Keqin's incorruptibility, and makes one substantive addition to paragraph 50.

29 Fang Xiaoru, “Account of Conduct of my Late Father” (先府君行狀) in his *Fang Xuezheng xiansheng Xun zhi zhui ji* 方學正先生遜志齋集, 22.1–6. My analytical treatment does not do justice to the grace and careful structure of Fang Xiaoru's essay, which were lost when Song Lian and then others rearranged and reduced the text. For instance, the section on his appearance begins and ends with his father's face, moving from his daily demeanor to his tragic death: “56. My father's face was as white as jade; his beard and brows were luxuriant and beautiful. He did not laugh or chat casually. He did not look from side to side. His movements and countenance as he moved around all accorded with the rites and laws. 57. He dealt in sincerity, not show. In dealing with people he did not blow hot and cold because of a short or long [acquaintance]. Once a topic of conversation had been established, he understood it through and through. 58. Everything he said was based in correctness. Later, he had even better command of and familiarity with the Way of character and fate. Glory and disgrace, benefit and harm he viewed as one. Near the end he knew he could not save himself. But when he gave up his life, the color of his face did not change.”

30 Perhaps also in 1377, certainly not long afterwards, Su Boheng 蘇伯衡 wrote a “Lament for Mr. Fang Zhenhui, with preface,” *Zhenhui xiansheng Fang gong ai ci youxu* 貞惠先生方公哀辭 (有序), which he says is to supplement Song Lian's epitaph. *Sung Pingzhong wenji* 蘇平仲集, 21.271–274. Adding a brief introduction and longer conclusion, it re-uses the same *zhang*, with considerable re-wording that mostly did not change the meaning, and intersperses them with commentary to make explicit which virtues each demonstrates. In two cases Su splits a *zhang*, once to divide the number of households and amount of taxes when Fang took office from the results of his rule; once to separate the secular parts of the city wall, rain, and ditty incident from the heavenly aid. Because Su's piece did not have much influence on later biographies, I will not discuss it here (even though I like it the best). I am also not discussing the verse portion of Song Lian's piece.

31 On the relationship of Song Lian and Fang Xiaoru, their differing approaches to governing, etc., see John W. Dardess, *Confucianism and Autocracy: Professional Elites in the Founding of the Ming Dynasty* (Berkeley: University of California, 1983), 266ff.

32 Song Lian, “Gu Yu'an xiansheng Fang gong muban wen” 故愚庵先生方公墓版文 in his *Song Xueshi wenji* 宋學士文集 (rpt. Taipei: Taiwan Shangwu, 1968), 47.816–821.

Table 2: Structural comparison of the first two social biographies.

Fang Xiaoru	Song Lian
I. intro: burial and plea to Song Lian	I. Intro: transmittal
II. outline chronology, <i>zhang</i> 1–20	II. complete chronology, <i>zhang</i> 1, 2, 4, 7, 8, 10–15, 21–36, 38–40, 37, 41, 42, 16–18, 43, Xiaoru’s offer, 19, 20, burial.
III. work as Prefect, <i>zhang</i> 21–43	III. personal, <i>zhang</i> 60, 56, 45, 46, 57, 47, 48+ drinking story
IV. his moral rectitude, <i>zhang</i> 44–55	IV. purity, <i>zhang</i> 49, 55, 53, 54, 50, 51, reworked 44+50+58 (see discussion below)
V. personal, <i>zhang</i> 56–58	V. conclusion, including his relation to Xiaoru and 59 on Keqin’s writings (<i>Wumanyi</i>)
VI. his legacy, <i>zhang</i> 59 & 60	
VII. conclusion: transmittal	

Clearly, Song Lian is moving text around, not copying mechanically. He worked with Fang Xiaoru’s text by reduction, re-use, and recycling; and later compilers used the same processes in working with Song Lian’s text. “Reduction” means deleting words or sentences within a paragraph, or omitting entire paragraphs. Perhaps surprisingly, if we believe that the life-stories of Chinese figures are highly stereotyped even in the first, family-produced sources, reduction can change meaning rather dramatically. “Re-use” simply means that a compiler copies a whole *zhang* or *ju*, or re-words it without significant change in meaning, and uses it for a similar purpose within his new text. Finally, compilers can “recycle” an individual *zhang*, moving it to a different position relative to other paragraphs, or rewording it significantly, to make it serve quite a different purpose. As I will show, moving paragraphs can create different effects, so that *zhang* may be recycled, not merely re-used, even if the words are unchanged or simply reduced.

We can trace reworking of Song Lian’s text at a general level by looking at the *zhang* structure. For instance, here is the structure of Fang’s biography in Li Zhi, *Xu Cang Shu*:

Career: 1, 2, 8, 12, 13, 15, 14, 21, 22, 23, 24, 26–34, 36, 38–40, 37, 41, 42, 16–18, 43, Xiaoru’s offer, 19, 20

Person: 44, 57, 49, 55, 53, 54, 47, 48+drinking, reworked 44+50+58

Conclusion: Song Lian’s encomium

And here is the structure of the version in Xu Kairen, *Ming mingshen yanxing lu*:

Career: 1, 2, 8, 13, 15, 21–35, 38–40, 37, 41, 42, 16–18, 43, Xiaoru’s offer, 19, 20, Su Boheng’s posthumous name for him

Person: 44, 57, 49, 55, 53, 54, 47, reworked 44+50+58

Conclusion: Song Lian’s encomium

Both are closer to Song Lian’s order than to Xiaoru’s but do not follow slavishly. Structural analysis also suggests the autonomy of the *Draft* compilers. Not only do they omit 90% of Xiaoru’s text, and nearly that amount of Song Lian’s, but they re-order paragraphs. Between his own introduction and conclusion, Song Lian uses Xiaoru’s *zhang* in this order (as shown above in Table 2):

1, 2, 4, 7, 8, 10–15, 21–36, 38–40, 37, 41, 42, 16–18, 43, Xiaoru’s offer, 19, 20, burial, 60, 56, 45, 46, 57, 47, 48+, 49, 55, 53, 54, 50, 51, reworked 44+50+58, 59

If we compare with the *Draft Ming History*, omissions will not be surprising given the low word-count (although they may be significant). There are no additions of whole paragraphs, but there are several changes in order (marked with #) if one compares pairs:

1, 8, 12, 14, 15, 23, #22, 26, #16, 42, #32, 40, 41, 49, #47, #39, 17–20, 60.

The differences go beyond “minimal editing,” and suggest that – unless the compilers adopted a missing source dramatically different from all others – the *Draft* compilers were thinking about the precise effect they wished to create out of existing materials.

2.2 Reduction and Re-use in the Interim Biographies and *Draft*

Setting aside for now the three social biographies, as shown in Table 1 the earliest extant version is Deng Yuanxi’s *Huang Ming shu* of the late sixteenth century, which is clearly based on Song Lian, not Xiaoru or Su Boheng.³³ Deng ends with a reduced version of Song’s final encomium that Fang was like “a gentleman of old who embodied the Way and completed virtue.” Li Zhi’s 1609 *Xu cang shu* version is nothing more than a very slightly reduced copy of Deng.³⁴ Barbara Krafft’s study of various biographies of Wang Shizhen praises Li Zhi for rearranging material from the epitaph (a spirit-way stele) by Wang Xijue into a more orderly and pointed narrative, not strictly chronological but lively and detailed, and Franke cites Krafft to conclude that Li Zhi was one of the few writers who “newly elaborated biographies.”³⁵ But while Li may worked hard on his account of the major, and recent, figure Wang Shizhen, in Fang’s case Li Zhi added nothing to Deng Yuanxi’s account; he may not have done so for other minor figures either.

Even though Deng and Li Zhi’s accounts were so similar, Su Maoxiang read both. His compilation of biographical episodes illustrating particular virtues explicitly cites Li Zhi as the source for several episodes from Keqin’s life as examples of good governance, and Deng Yuanxi for a story illustrating “elegant capacity.”³⁶ Guo Tingxun’s version in his collection of biographies sorted by native place copies Li Zhi’s but is shorter, and has some minor reword-

33 Deng Yuanxi 鄧元錫 (1529–1593), *Huang Ming shu* 皇明書, 28.2b–5b. See Wolfgang Franke, *An Introduction to the Sources of Ming History* (Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya, 1968), 2.1.2. There is a 1606 preface, and Franke dates the work to the late sixteenth century, presumably not long before Deng’s death. The Mingwen reprint (1991), though supposedly a facsimile, is missing two pages. The Xuxiu Siku quanshu edition (published by Shanghai guji) is complete.

34 Li Zhi, *Xu cang shu* 續藏書 (1609; rpt., Beijing: Zhonghua, 1962), 27.1ff. See Franke, *Introduction*, 3.3.15. and Ng and Wang, *Mirroring the Past*, 219ff. Li omits five characters saying that what Keqin studied was the Zhu Xi school (worded differently from Song Lian) [2]; reverses “sheep and cattle;” omits “It was really like a world of perfect peace” [32]; and makes a couple more very minor omissions or changes.

35 Krafft, “Wang Shi-chen,” 171 (see also Franke, *Introduction*, 75). Without the *muzhi ming* for Wang by Chen Jiru and a number of early other texts, Krafft cannot show that Li was innovating. Chu Hung-lam argues that a lost work supposedly by Jiao Hong is the same as Li Zhi’s *Xu cang shu*; see Chu Honglam (Zhu Honglin) 朱鴻林, *Mingren zhubi zhe sheng ping fazheng* 明人著作與生平發微 (Guilin: Guangxi shifan daxue, 2005), chapter 2.

36 Su Maoxiang 蘇茂相, *Huang Ming baoshan leibian* 皇明寶善類編 (Wanli era; rpt. Taipei: Mingwen, 1901), rpt. vol. 22, 725–726, 781–782. See Franke, *Introduction*, 3.1.3. “Governing affairs” (*zhengshi* 政事) is illustrated with *zhang* 40, 16, 37, 41, 42, 55, and 53; “elegant capacity” (*ya liang* 雅量) with Song Lian’s tale about Keqin’s gracious handling of a drunken guest (48+).

ings.³⁷ The difference is not great. Chen Renxi's version in his 1630 political encyclopedia is identical to Li Zhi's except that it ends with Keqin's execution, eschewing any comment on his person and qualities. Franke describes this source as completely based on or copied verbatim from "documentary sources" such as the *Veritable Records* (*shilu*); but in Fang Keqin's case there was no such account available.³⁸ Lin Zhisheng's version in his collection of officials in four categories who were proposed for posthumous titles is also in this text family, but has some different phrasings and adds a new final judgment that: "His death was not his fault; the whole world pitied him."³⁹ This clarification was necessarily explicit in the context of requesting honors for an official executed for corruption.

Zhu Guozhen's version is slightly longer again, and begins a bit differently (by stressing Keqin's admiration of the Zhu Xi school, rather than his study from elders) but is fundamentally in the same family of texts, and ends like the others with Song Lian's encomium, in the same words.⁴⁰ Zhu is mostly copying Li Zhi, but he has read Song Lian cursorily and occasionally uses Song's wording, for instance to restore explicitness to the corrupt relation that led to Keqin's initial arrest; and he also strikes out on his own in some places. One cut based on mispunctuation results in a distorted claim that "temples and communities all had schools," and Zhu goes on to elaborate: if there were some that had been abandoned, monks were set to rebuilding or repairing them. This is fiction: Song Lian had reported (copying Xiaoru 23) that Keqin set monks to rebuilding the Confucian temple, and that he had (separately) established schools in hundreds of places. Zhu's cut seemed natural to him, because from about 1470 it had become common to replace temples with community schools.⁴¹ Fu Weilin's early Kangxi *Ming shu* copies Zhu Guozhen's version of this biography word for word, except for necessary changes and his attribution of Song Lian's encomium to "everyone" (*ren jie yi wei* 人皆以為) – which was fair, considering how often the comment had been repeated by that time.⁴²

37 Guo Tingxun 過廷訓, *Guochao fensheng renwu kao* 國朝分省人物考 (1622; fac. rpt., Taipei, Chengwen, 1971). See Franke, *Introduction*, 3.1.5. Working with Li Zhi's text (none of his omissions from Deng Yuanxi reappears), Guo slightly rewords Keqin's permitting people to complain to him personally without interference [21]; he omits the branch secretariat's approval of Fang's permitting people to use boats [24]; he omits Keqin's eating rice gruel at his desk if things were busy [28]; where Li Zhi had already dispensed with the earthly paradise, Guo omits the livestock Keqin's governance assured the people [32]; he omits the rebuilding of prefectural altars entirely [33]; he omits half of the plan for slack labor [34]. He omits one more single word and changes two others.

38 Chen Renxi 陳仁錫, *Huang Ming shi fa lu* 皇明世法錄 (1630; rpt. of *liezhuan* portion, Taipei: Mingwen, 1991), 90.3b-5b. See Franke, *Introduction*, 6.6.7.

39 Lin Zhisheng, *Huang Ming yingshi ming chen beikao lu* 皇明應謚名臣備考錄 (1602–1620; rpt., Taipei: Mingwen, 1991), 9.3–4 (功名名臣 section). See Franke, *Introduction*, 3.3.18. In describing Fang's opening the yamen to complaints, Lin rewrote Song Lian's "if a subject had something that was unsettling him" to "if a subject had something troubling him." This phrase was particularly susceptible to rewriting; Zhu Guozhen rewrote it too, to "something he was not happy about." Krafft credits Lin Zhisheng with innovations in the biography of Wang Shizhen as well: it was the first to discuss his intellectual and literary views. Krafft, "Wang Shih-chen," 172.

40 Zhu Guozhen 朱國禎 (*Huang Ming kai guo chen zhuan* 開國臣傳 (1632; rpt. Taipei: Mingwen, 1991), 8.18–20. See Franke, *Introduction*, 2.1.3 (4)).

41 See Schneewind, *Community Schools and the State in Ming China*.

42 Fu Weilin 傅維麟, *Ming shu* 明書 (1662–1667), 138.4ff. See Franke, *Introduction*, 2.1.7. "Keqin" replaces "His Honor;" "at the beginning of the Ming" replaces "at the beginning of our dynasty."

Not all compilers merely copied Li Zhi's reduction of Deng Yuanxi. The compiler who worked the hardest on Fang Keqin was Xu Kairen. Xu uses direct quotes from both Song Lian and from the Deng Yuanxi text family where it differs from Song Lian; he refers to Su Boheng's lament; and he uses Xiaoru's word for how his father treated other people (*hou* 厚, "generously?") instead of Zhu Guozhen's (*en* 恩, "kindly").⁴³ Out of both the early and later sources he had made his own, rather complete, version.

He Qiaoyuan's *Ming shan cang* is also creative.⁴⁴ He drew on all three early Ming texts: on Su Boheng, which he explicitly mentions, and on Song Lian for ordering and wording, and on Xiaoru, for instance for the detail (omitted by Song) that while in office Keqin was attended at home by only one son and one serving boy. *Ming shan cang* differs from the Li Zhi family of texts: for example, it begins by mentioning Keqin's Tang poet ancestor, includes his stint as a teacher in the early Ming, and explains that he made suggestions to the Yuan government before entering the mountains. He Qiaoyuan also did some nice rewriting, for instance in dramatizing Keqin's declaration that if necessary he would break the law.

Xiaoru 24: [...] The Jining people requested to use boats to go to their corvee duties, but the various subofficials feared that order would be hard to change. Then my late father said "I cannot refuse to break the law when I know that it is a case of following what's good for (*bian* 便) the people." [...]

Ming shan cang: [...] The people all reported/requested to [use] the boats [to go to] corvee. The subofficials said, "Who is going to die?" Keqin said "I [will] die. I know how to help (*bian* 便) the people and that's all."

As discussed above, Yin Shouheng's *Ming shi qie* is different again: it omits several episodes and could not have served as the source for the *Draft*.⁴⁵ *Xiyuan wenjian lu* draws on both Fang Xiaoru and Song Lian, providing anecdotes about Fang in seven of its categories.⁴⁶ The Chongzhen gazetteer for Fang Keqin's native county has a whole separate section on the Fang family, including a biography of Keqin that is basically a reduction of Song Lian's text, but may also have involved consultation with Xiaoru's text, because it gives a correct date for his appointment as teacher.⁴⁷ Krafft concluded in the case of Wang Shizhen that the *Ming History*

43 Xu Kairen 徐開任, *Ming mingchen yanxing lu* 明名臣言行錄 (1618; rpt. Taipei: Mingwen, 1991) 6.9–12 (rpt. vol. 50, 391–398). See Franke, *Introduction*, 3.3.2.

44 He Qiaoyuan 何喬遠, *Mingshan cang* 名山藏 (1640; rpt. Taipei: Mingwen, 1991), rpt. vol. 75, 313–317. See Franke, *Introduction*, 2.1.5., and Ng and Wang, *Mirroring the Past*, 208ff. He Qiaoyuan had also preceded Su Maoxiang's collection (Franke, *Introduction*, 78).

45 Yin Shouheng 尹守衡, *Ming shiqie* 明史竊 (c. 1634; rpt. Taipei: Mingwen, 1991), 77.3–5 (rpt. vol. 84, 473–474). See Franke, *Introduction*, 2.1.4. Krafft found that in the case of Wang Shizhen, Yin Shouheng's choice of words was identical to that of the first social biography she found, the epitaph by Wang Xijue, except that Yin added citations from Wang Shizhen's letters to Li Panlong. Both Yin and Li Zhi seem (reasonably enough) to have taken more trouble over prominent and recent figures than over obscure and long-ago ones. As Krafft says, Wang Shizhen still held a "living interest" for the late-Ming writers. Krafft, "Wang Shih-chen," 171, 172.

46 Zhang Xuan 張萱, *Xiyuan wenjian lu* 西園聞見錄 (1632; rpt. Taipei, Mingwen), rpt. vol. 116, 68–69; vol. 117, 513; vol. 118, 76; vol. 119, 481; vol. 124, 115, 276–277, 296–297. See Franke, *Introduction*, 4.1.7., and Ng and Wang, *Mirroring the Past*, 216ff.

47 Song Kuiguang 宋奎光, [Zhejiang] *Ninghai xianzhi* 寧海縣志 (1632; rpt. Taipei: Chengwen, 1983), 7b.1–3 (rpt. vol. 2, 469–473). There are other gazetteer biographies: for instance in the Jiajing *Zhejiang tongzhi*

drew on the gazetteer, but in this case omissions make it clear that that was not the case: for instance, the name and title of Wujiang Vice-Prefect Jin'gangnu are not provided in the gazetteer. And similarly even the opening makes it plain that the *Draft Ming History* was not just copying from the family of texts sprung from Deng Yuanxi and spread by Li Zhi. Li Zhi and Chen Renxi begin with the following, and the others are identical or much the same (the numbers in brackets are the paragraphs of Fang Xiaoru's text):

- [1] Fang Keqin was a Zhejiang Ninghai native.
- [2] When young, he followed local men senior to him in study (*xianda*) to learn, exhaustively inquiring and strenuously searching, to the point of forgetting bed and food.
- [8] In the chaos of the Yuan period, he gave up grain and hid among the mountains and ravines.
- [12] At the beginning of our dynasty he was summoned and resigned.
- [13] He was urgently sought out.
- [15] He left home/raised his family status becoming prefect of Jining prefecture. [The emperor] gave him a cap and belt and a send-off essay and poem.

The many details omitted by the *Draft* cannot tell us about its sources. But, conversely, many details present in the opening of the *Draft* are missing from the Deng Yuanxi text family (they are underlined below) and from the gazetteer. Recall that the *Draft* begins:

Fang Keqin, aka Qujin, a native of Ninghai. In the late Yuan, bandits arose in Taizhou, and Wujiang Vice-Prefect Jin'gangnu received orders from the Branch Secretariat to raise a naval force to oppose them. Keqin presented a plan, but it was not accepted; he fled into the mountains. Lacking food, every day he sought pine to supply his hunger. In Hongwu 2 he was appointed a county assistant in-structor; subsequently he resigned and went home because his mother was old. In [Hongwu] 4, he was summoned to the capital and ordered to be tested. His name tested second in the Ministry of Personnel exam, and was especially appointed prefect of Jining.

These details could not have come from any of the interim biographies. They all omit, moreover, the ditty in paragraph H.

In sum, neither Deng Yuanxi's compilation nor any of those from the seventeenth century derived from it, nor the more creative versions, could have been the only source for the *Draft Ming History*. It is of course possible that I have failed to find texts that the Wang Hongxu team had; Lynn Struve comments that the *Draft* compilers, working in the Kangxi era (1662–1722) had “copious materials [...] no longer available” to the Zhang Tingyu team⁴⁸, and presumably no longer available to us. But given the similarity among all these other versions, and their differences from the *Draft*, it would still have been a purposeful choice for the *Draft* compilers to turn away from the standard presentation of Fang Keqin to a less-well-known (we may assume, since it is not preserved) model. Let us now turn to the early Ming sources, on which the *Draft* compilers must have drawn, even if they also read the work of their many worthy predecessors.

46.14b-15a, but it is short (245 characters) and uninterestingly like the other Song Lian-derived ones. The even shorter biography (80 characters) in the (*Jijing*) *Shandong tongzhi* 26.17b (reprinted in 1990 *Tianyige* series, 212) is more independent in its wording but could not be the basis for the *Draft Ming History*.

48 Lynn A. Struve, *The Ming-Qing Conflict, 1619–1683: A Historiography and Source Guide* (Ann Arbor: Association for Asian Studies, 1998), 52.

3 Early Ming Biographies of Fang Keqin

It is well-accepted that “social biographies” by people who had known the subject were the basis for the “historical biographies” that followed, largely copying without much innovation.⁴⁹ Peter Olbricht determined that unlike the other parts of the official histories, the *liezhuan*, which he studied for the period 400–1400, were almost exclusively based on privately-written sources: the *muzhi ming*, *shen dao bei*, and *xingzhuang*. Olbricht regarded the *xingzhuang* as less reliable than the *muzhi ming* and *shen dao bei*, yet quoted Gu Yanwu’s complaint that even the latter two were being written by men too close to the deceased for objectivity. In Olbricht’s view, the origins of the *xingzhuang* in the family cult, and the context of a man, as part of a family, being presented to the state for honors, mean that “we may not expect individual characterization.”⁵⁰ David Nivison wrote that a lifelike account was possible in social “informal” biography by a writer who “knew his subject intimately, and wrote from very personal motives.” But he contrasted those with the “stereotyped and often quite false” biographies in the standard histories.⁵¹ Studying the social and official historical biographies of Keqin together, how can we re-evaluate these judgments?

In Fang Keqin’s case, the epitaph by Song Lian draws directly on the “account of conduct” by Fang Xiaoru, and all later versions are based primarily or sometimes solely on Song Lian. Perhaps because Xiaoru was an unusually gifted writer, to my mind the character of Fang Keqin emerges quite clearly from his account, although of course one cannot know. But the Fang Keqin we meet in his son’s account is quite different from the man painted by Song Lian, although both texts are social biographies. On the other hand, while the personality of the man is subdued in the *Ming History*, it is not “quite false.” Every incident in it ultimately derives from the first account by Fang’s son. Xiaoru may have stretched the truth; but I do not think Song Lian (and Su Boheng) would have repeated what their contemporaries would have known to be out-and-out lies. In what follows, I will lay out the differences between Fang Xiaoru’s and Song Lian’s versions.

3.1 From Rulin to Xunli

Arthur Wright summed up the vision of the ideal scholar-officials, the best men of the Confucian tradition.

Steeped in the Classics and in history, shaped by stern family discipline, tempered by introspection, and sobered by their vast responsibilities, these men were thought to have the power to transform their environment, to turn ordinary folk into the path of virtue. When opportunity offered, they were expected to nurture the same virtues in their official colleagues and in their lord and monarch. They had the obligation to admonish their monarch when in deed or policy he did violence to the *li* [ritual order] and the cardinal virtues. While working this moral transformation, they were to serve as interpreters and transmitters of the heritage and as artists and thinkers who would adorn and enrich it.⁵²

49 See e.g. Franke, *Introduction*, 75.

50 Peter Olbricht, “Die Biographie in China,” *Saeculum* 8.203 (1957): 224–235. See also Franke, *Introduction*, 7, for *Ming History* compiler Xu Jianxue’s comment that “Family records and private historical writings are not wholly reliable; it is necessary to take the Veritable Records as the fundamental source, and other works for additional reference.”

51 David S. Nivison, “Aspects of Traditional Chinese Biography,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 21.4 (1962): 457–463.

52 Arthur Wright, “Values, Roles, and Personalities,” in *Confucian Personalities*, ed. Arthur F. Wright and Denis Twitchett (Stanford; Stanford University Press, 1962), 7.

Many of these characteristics appear in Fang Xiaoru's portrayal of his father. The overt theme of Xiaoru's essay is the transmission of learning, both to other people during Keqin's lifetime, and to later generations. The introduction states the date and place of burial, and then expresses the "fear that his flourishing virtue has not yet been recorded, so there is nothing to clearly express it to coming generations," and begs Song Lian – unnamed but identified as Xiaoru's teacher and (accurately) as "one whom the world today regards as a teacher and as an intellectual leader, one whose words will be transmitted to later generations" – to write an epitaph.⁵³ The end of the essay considers the general problem of how transmission occurs, then how that applies to Keqin; and then mirrors the introduction: repeating Xiaoru's own inability (as yet) to reach people, renewing his request, and returning to the buried body.

Alas! My late father's way was to model timeliness on the *Changes*, take governance from the *Documents*, esteem reverence from the *Rites*, embody harmony from the *Music*. He made his speech elegant with the *Odes*; he ordered affairs with the *Springs and Autumns*. The depth, height, breadth and greatness [of his learning] cannot be measured or known. But in his family, there was transformation to good habits; in office he achieved the task of enriching the common people. He manifested it in administering affairs and wrote about it in his essays.

None of the worthies and upright officials of antiquity was better than he. But of the people of antiquity, some like this have been transmitted, and some also have not been transmitted. Those who were transmitted necessarily either occupied a high position, or had descendents, or they established their words – thus they were transmitted. Those who were not transmitted, either their position was lowly so others did not know [about them], or their descendents did not know [how] to praise them, so they just were not transmitted.

In this case, my late father's position was not illustrious when he died. He died after just a few years, so those who knew him were few. But in the next ten years, won't there be even fewer who know about him? And in the next hundred years is it possible that anyone will still know about him? Although there is me, this unfilial orphan, still existing, my years are tender and my position is humble and my words do not yet have credibility in the world; my deeds have not yet gone out to the four directions. Who then can transmit him/his learning? There may be someone to do it in the future, but I cannot be sure that [there will be] such a one [as] could do it. For this reason, I cannot but be sad, and have anxiously planned to ask you, honorable sir. If you would mourn the dead and sympathize with the living and give him an epitaph, not only will the several orphans not dare to forget [our debt to you], but also our late father, responding to your virtue, beneath the earth will not rot.

As I will show below, Xiaoru is positioning his father as a figure in the Neo-Confucian "transmission of the Way." If he had succeeded, his father might have been included in the more prestigious *Rulin* (Forest of Confucian scholars) section of the official history.

At the moment of writing, Song Lian was grooming Fang Xiaoru to succeed him as leader of the intellectual world. Xiaoru was probably already living near Song in Jinhua, and Song Lian certainly had an interest in clearing his disciple's father's name. Yet Song's rewrite undermined Xiaoru's bid to categorize his father as an intellectual. Song begins by picking up and making concrete Xiaoru's theme of transmittal, and transmutes it into a boast about his native Zhejiang. He mentions several men whose names have been passed down, and whose influence has continued, and then turns to Fang, clearly placing him in the thread of orthodox

53 Quotations of this text are my translation of Fang Xiaoru, "Account of Conduct of my Late Father" in his *Fang Xuesheng xiansheng Xun zhi zhai ji*, 22.1–6. I am grateful for Dr. Baomin Ye's help and explanations.

learning. His conclusion, too, includes Keqin's learning and his intellectual connection with Zhu Xi. But Song's real emphasis is on Fang's incorruptibility and his ability in practical governing. Fang was a Neo-Confucian *follower*, yes; but Song Lian denies his intellectual leadership.⁵⁴

As was usual, Xiaoru began with his father's forbears, especially a Tang poet, Fan Gan, on his father's side and a Song Prime Minister, Xi Jian, on his mother's side; and then moved to his precocious learning.

2 When my father was born he was already extraordinarily sedate. At five years old he could read books and punctuate them for himself. In his teens he had memorized the Five Classics and made essays with some unusual wordings. The elders in the village cried out that he was unusual and called him a prodigy. When he was a bit older, he read the writings of the Guan-Min school [i. e. Song *Daoxue*] and sighed: "This is what studying should be like!" So he cut away frivolous things and with his whole mind pushed at the mysteries of life. Closing his door he studied without recognizing hunger or thirst, cold or heat.

Song Lian deletes some words, adds others, and rewords some sentences, in some cases adding details (underlined). He writes:

[2] When my senior was still a child, he was solemn. At five years old, he knew how to read books and punctuate for himself. At ten years old, he had memorized the Five Classics. Several elders cried out with love and praise, seeing him as a prodigy. When he was capped, he read all of the works of Zhou Dunyi, the Cheng brothers, Zhang Zai, and Zhu Xi and sought out local men senior to him in study to learn about the origins and results of things, at every step exhaustively inquiring into the mysteries of life and virtue, even several times neglecting bed and food in his efforts. Then he sighed deeply saying: "To do study, one must unite Heaven and Man and only then may it be considered study. If you omit that, then it is not study."

Song has changed Xiaoru's report of when Keqin accomplished various things. He has expanded Keqin's words. He has added in the study of "virtue" (*daode* 道德); in Song Lian's view, according to John W. Dardess, although acting on Confucian principles could take many forms from relying on force of personality to gain power to writing history and literature, "the only truly legitimate career for the *ru* [Confucian] was that focused on 'virtue' (*daode*), an all-encompassing orientation."⁵⁵ In Xiaoru's telling, his father had learned directly from books, and corrected the errors of those around him (see below). Song's introduction had stressed the glory of Zhejiang in promoting learning, and so he also added that Fang sought elders (among those glorious Zhejiangese) to learn from. Like his rewording and reduction from "not recognizing hunger or thirst, cold or heat" to the less dramatic neglect of "bed and food," and his expansion of Keqin's admiration of the Neo-Confucians, Song's mention of studying from elders was taken up by later compilers from Deng Yuanxi on, but did not make it into the *Ming History*.

54 Perhaps Song Lian did not wish to share credit for Fang Xiaoru's *daoxue* accomplishments. A comparison: In a 1636 colophon to Shi Pan's *Juying mantan*, Xu Bo criticized his categorization in the prefectural gazetteer: "the recently compiled prefectural history places [Shi Pan] in the section "Xunliang zhuan" (Biographies of Good Officials) but does not mention his erudition. It seems not to have given a full picture of his career [...]." Cited in Tai-loi Ma, "The Collecting, Writing, and Utilization of Local Histories During the Late Ming: The Unique Case of Xu Bo (1570–1642), in *The East Asian Library Journal* 13.1 (2008): 9–32, 23.

55 Dardess, *Confucianism and Autocracy*, 160.

Xiaoru goes on to claim that even as a teenager, Keqin had an impact on those around him. Yes, he closed his door to study, but he opened it again to teach: a major theme in Xiaoru's text.

- 3 At 18 or 19 years old he had abundantly completed his virtue and was an illustrious Confucian (*ru*). Those taking instruction and people with questions/doubts lined up at his door. My late father spoke with his mouth and wrote with his hand, with vivid gestures and detailed explanations of even the smallest matter, so that each got the answer he desired. Originally, the county people from Song times had considered the chiseling of elegant prose to be learning. None had discussed the Way of the Duke of Zhou and Confucius until my late father first taught them with the *Changes*, laying out and explaining its theory. Gentry customs underwent a great change.

In good *Daoxue* fashion, Keqin turned the attention of the educated from mere literary flourish to fundamentals, and he preferred the most mysterious of the classics. Following the trajectory of the "Great Learning," he began with sincere study and understanding, and then reached outward to others. Xiaoru comes back to Keqin's learning in several other places. Paragraph 6 tells how he embarrassed a supervisor of schools by knowing more than he about the *Changes*. Paragraph 7 enumerates the many fields of knowledge he mastered, "measurement of the waxing and waning of yin and yang; the enumeration of the names and matters of music and rites; the well-field and feudal systems; the theories of ordering and drawing borders." The conclusion describes how he embodied the lessons of each classic, transforming his family, enriching the people, and writing about the Way in his essays. Paragraph 58 says that "Everything he said was based on correctness." And what he learned, he transmitted, in whatever way was available to him.

- 59 My father's learning was clear, pure, and correct. To pass on Zhu Xi's [learning] he took as his own responsibility. His will became ever deeper and more far-reaching. Whenever there was a timely opportunity and he was in a position to do so, he wished to promote [Zhu Xi's learning] to purify other people; otherwise, he wished to escape as a hermit into the hills and gardens to transmit his calling through books – all to instruct later generations. He was unable to complete either of these [aims]: Heaven snatched away his years [...].

He learned, he transmitted, he transformed people, and he left writings. Xiaoru is making a bid for his father to be considered primarily a Confucian thinker and transmitter of the Way.

Su Boheng wrote that Fang was both "a true Confucian of our times; [and] an upright functionary of our dynasty."⁵⁶ But Song Lian worked hard to shift emphasis away from Keqin's intellectual and teaching pursuits. First, he completely omitted *zhang* 6 on the embarrassment of Dong Yi, a supervisor of schools who fancied himself an expert on the *Changes* until he talked with Keqin, who was supposedly studying with him. Secondly, in shortening *zhang* 7 on the fields of knowledge he mastered, Song omitted the sentence "More and more people sought instruction from him." Third, he completely omitted *zhang* 9, which begins:

- 9 But he was even more focused on teaching young students, lecturing on the great moral relations of ruler and minister, father and son, to move them. Those who heard understood in their hearts, and some even wept.

Fourth, describing suggestions Keqin sent to the fledgling Ming, Song Lian gives only the briefest summary of the contents, deleting several sentences outlining the argument, which

56 Su Boheng, "Zhenhui xiansheng Fang gong aici," start of rhymed lament.

according to Xiaoru had run to several thousand words (*zhang* 11). Fifth, in a paragraph about Keqin's teaching in a county school, Song Lian did copy Xiaoru's comment that the school emptied when Keqin left, but he deleted:

- 12 Whether from near or far they gradually scattered and left. Down to today, when speaking of the flourishing of the way of the teacher, people always mention my late father.

And from Xiaoru's paragraph describing the Jining people's grief at Keqin's demise, Song Lian deleted:

- 43 The young students of the prefecture who had become *xincai*, when they heard that my father had died, marched in funeral procession outside the gate and cried until they lost their voices.

Making people good was a duty of an "upright official," but serious intellectual creativity and having disciples were not. By textual reduction – leaving things out – Song Lian rejected Xiaoru's bid to have his father considered as a *Daoxue* figure.

Later compilers took their cue from Song, further downplaying Keqin's intellectual side. Typical is this from Zhu Guozhen's 1632 (*Huang Ming kai guo chen zhuan*) and Fu Weilin's almost identical (for this biography) *Ming shu*.

His scholarly line was from Zhu Xi. In study he even forgot bed and food. Sighing he said, "To do study, one must unite Heaven and Man and only then may it be considered study. If you omit that, then it is not study."

This is all that is left of the many paragraphs Xiaoru had devoted to his father's intellectual life. In the end, Keqin missed categorization in the "Forest of Scholars," and the *Ming History* completely omitted his intellectual side.

Denis Twitchett argued that the incorporation of family-produced texts into official accounts was easy because family and official interests both aimed to produce an image of a stereotypically virtuous person, and he suggested that the point of the "formulaic passages and conventional anecdotes" was to justify placement in a particular category.⁵⁷ Arthur Wright went so far as to write that a teenage gentry boy would early on choose among the perhaps thirteen approved types of exemplars to imitate; the categories in the standard histories were not just after-the-fact filings of a person's life; rather he had been creating himself in that particular way all along.⁵⁸ Fang Keqin's case shows that roles were not so cut-and-dried.

3.2 From Personality to Persona

Fang Xiaoru, having lived alone with his father in Jining, must have known him well. He portrays Keqin as strange and intense, emotional and pious; but Song Lian's version frequently mutes these characteristics. Xiaoru tells us:

- 28 My father felt the need to eliminate harm to the people as [others feel] hunger and thirst. If there was a troublesome matter he could not work out to a conclusion, he would at once give up wine, meat, and sex. Whenever suing parties brought miscellaneous affairs for him to settle, if it was a big matter he would beat them into being ashamed, if it was a small matter he would lecture and dismiss them.

57 Denis Twitchett, "Chinese Biographical Writing," in *Historians of China and Japan*, ed. W.G. Beasley and E.G. Pulleyblank (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), 107–108.

58 Wright, "Values, Roles, and Personalities," 8ff.

He did not keep the accusation documents. He was especially careful about jail, checking every month and every day to be sure people were not just stuck there, and, if there were cases that were not all cleared up or resolved, he would [just] make and eat some rice gruel.

Song Lian omits the first two, underlined, sentences, so that Keqin's just eating a little gruel at his desk seems like the rational time-saving of a hard-working bureaucrat, whereas Xiaoru had portrayed a man with a strong drive to purify himself in order to make the cosmos run right for the people in his care.

Xiaoru's account of what became paragraph H in the *Ming History* is also packed with emotion.

26 It used to be that when the city wall was in disrepair, it would be rebuilt by soldiers. The military commander, presuming upon the strength of an important person, in the fifth and sixth month requisitioned more than 10,000 commoners to build it. The people could not get their farm work done and wailed with grief as they went to work. The sound could be heard for several li, and from dawn until dusk it did not stop. My late father was so sad and angry that he did not eat. He said, "The people are troubled and there's no help. For what purpose have I been placed here?" He *privately notified the Secretariat. The masses [of officials] thought they would get in trouble and did not dare put their names to it; only my late father wrote about it. Prime Minister Hu reported it [to the emperor], and on the same day an edict put a stop to it. Before that, it had not been raining. My late father in undress and with bare feet went to pray at the various shrines. With tears falling, he lay below the shrine and vowed that if it did not rain he would not stop. When the edict arrived and the people happily cried out and scattered [to their homes], it poured with rain. That year the five grains all ripened. The people's song said: "What stopped our corvee? It was His Honor's power. What ripened our grain? It was His Honor's kindness. Let His Honor never leave. He is us people's father and mother." From this time, he prayed three times for three harvests and they all had good yields.

(*Here is the "privately" the *Ming History* finally took out.) So sad and angry that he could not eat, Fang felt that he was not earning his salary if he could not protect local people from demands for labor and from drought. Courageously, he wrote to the central government, knowing full well that the powerful person standing behind the military man might retaliate; in great distress of mind, he went to all the gods to beg for help, taking vows to express his sincerity. In the same instant, both efforts paid off, and some songster linked them in a ditty. Song Lian preserved this *zhang* almost intact, but he omitted the underlined sentence linking Fang's anger and inability to eat.⁵⁹

In other cases, too, Song toned down Keqin's emotional piety. Xiaoru reports that:

27 In the fifth year in the summer the neighboring counties had locusts. My late father pitied them and sent a letter to the God of Soil, altered his diet, examined his sins, and burned incense all night beseeching Heaven. Suddenly there was heard in the air a humming sound. When illuminated, it was all flying locusts. In the fall, in all four directions outside [his jurisdiction] there was famine; only in the prefecture was there a complete ripening. People thought it strange.

Song Lian says:

[27] In the fifth year in the autumn [*si*] the nearby counties all had locusts. My senior examined his transgressions and altered his diet, bowed his head and told Heaven. In the night, there was heard in the

59 He clarifies Fang's comment about his salary and adds Prime Minister Hu's given name, and changes one word in the ditty: "grace" becomes "rain."

air a humming sound. When illuminated, it proved to be flying locusts darkening the sky and passing. Only the prefecture had a harvest.

One could say that Song Lian is merely making the text more efficient, but the reduction really changes the tone. Song Lian's Keqin is less intense. He does not pray all night long; the night is only when the locusts left. He does not beseech Heaven, just reports, and there is no letter to the God of Soil. His pity for the people is not mentioned. The narreme is less a real story of an emotional man than a stereotyped episode.

Fang's troubled relationship with food appears again in his filial piety. Song Lian's reduction – “[45] in the chaos of war, he carried his mother on his back fleeing into the deep valleys, both his heels bleeding” – made it into many versions, though not the *Ming History*. It is better than the popular but cardboard “Keqin was filial and friendly to the utmost” 孝友備至. But Xiaoru had written:

45 When the pirates in disorder plundered villages and burned houses, my late father personally carried his mother into the mountains on his back to escape, and did not even turn around to look for his wife and two sons. Both his heels were bleeding but he felt no distress. When he left home to serve in office, he worried about his mother, and at first faced south and bowed [in her direction], and was unhappy all day long. If it happened that there was an unusual food, he would immediately with tears running down say, “If my mother has not tasted it, how can I eat it?” and he would hang it up and reject it until it was rotten and stinky in the end.

Once we recognize that Song Lian is out to cover up Fang's strangeness, his treatment even of Keqin's incorruptibility becomes questionable. After tales of his father's generosity to fellow officials, Xiaoru describes how he welcomed discomfort despite the scorn of the worldly:

49 His monthly salary of 20 *dan* was all scattered among his friends. He was not a bit niggardly, yet supplied himself very poorly. He did not dress in silks or wear silk jacket and breeches but dressed just like a commoner [*lit.* “a cotton-clothed”]. At the time someone disparaged my late father. My late father said “My way should be like this.” He did not eat meat twice in one day; some days, if there was no business, he would fast, saying: “I may not eat without having earned my salary.”

50 Every night he prayed and told Heaven everything he had done.

51 When he first arrived, a *bu* of grain could be sold for three taels of silver. My late father set aside all the leftovers from his daily food in the office to give the soldiers food. Someone asked my late father to consider his family's livelihood. My late father replied: “Putting the state first – that's OK. Dare I aim at profit?” The place where he lived was tumble-down, and a clerk asked to fix it up, but he would not allow it, saying, “Do not trouble the people on my account!” Instead, he used his own salary to buy reed mats to make a screen, just enough to block the wind out. Scattered to the left and right of his bed were various books. Anyone entering his room would get the impression that no-one lived there. He was in office five years with only one son and one serving-lad. At the time people said my late father could not manage, but he was content.

52 The subprefect of Yuezhou went through the serving-lad to present two papayas. My late father beat the lad several tens of strokes and ordered the subprefectural clerk to return them.

53 A countryman of his, magistrate of a county in another prefecture, sent a letter pressing on him a scalded goose, but my late father refused and cut off contact. Some thought this was too extreme, but my father said, “I am not trying to buy fame; my character is just such that I do not delight in anything outside my allotted portion.”

54 Any little firewood or fodder he came by he traded for grain and did not take a single penny from anyone. Every time he toured the counties he supplied his own means, unwilling to take even a cup of soup. When he left office he was very poor, and traded his horse to walk, and his luggage was extremely scant, so that the onlookers sighed.

Again, one gets of sense of a man with a deep and spiritual sense of responsibility, who feels guilt about every bite of food he takes. Surely he needed some firewood and fodder, but all he can think of is grain. He thinks of his “allotted portion” as small and precarious; he gives up eating at the drop of a hat. His frugality is not mere carelessness about himself, but is maintained against the pleas of those who would like to help him, and who remind him in vain of his duty to his family. When he finds himself exposed to temptation (two pieces of fruit!) through the one servant in his household, he beats him like a mad thing, even though the boy was only a hapless go-between, and presumably one of “the people” Keqin could not bear to see suffer.

Fang Keqin’s fervor is underlined if we compare with the work that set the format for all later official histories, Sima Qian’s *Records of the Grand Historian* (*Shiji*). The chapter heading *xunli* in this case is translated by Burton Watson as “reasonable officials.” As the chart illustrates, these anecdotes of pre-Han officials overlap thematically with about 19 paragraphs of Fang Xiaoru’s account of his father’s conduct. But they do indeed illustrate “reasonableness” rather than a fervent pursuit of “uprightness.”

Table 3: Incidents in the *xunli* chapter of *Shiji* compared with Fang Keqin.

Incident in <i>Shiji</i> , with page number in Watson’s translation	Paragraph in <i>xing-zhuang</i> by Xiaoru	Paragraph of Keqin in <i>Mingshi</i>
Sunshu Ao lived in retirement and was recommended for office. 413	13	D
Sunshu Ao guided the people and improved customs. Zichan improved customs/morality. 415	40	L
Sunshu Ao arranged productive activities appropriate to each season, improving people’s livelihoods. 414	34, 36	
Sunshu Ao got an inconvenient new royal policy reversed. 414	24	
Gongyi Xiu rejected tasty vegetables and fine cloth. 416	45, 49, 51, 52	N
Sunshu Ao found a better way to impose a royal policy effectively. 414–415	23, 25, 30	F
Shu-sun Ao did not get upset when dismissed from office, knowing it was not his fault. 415	58	
When Zichan died the people mourned, saying “Who is there for the people to turn to now?” 415	39 + 43	P
Gongyi Xiu refused the gift of a fish. 416	53, 54	
Shi She proved his filiality. 416	44, 45	
Li Li explicitly connected his sense of responsibility for his work with accepting a salary from the government. 417	49	N
Li Li was by implication usually very good at deciding difficult criminal cases. 417	28	

The different tones and directions of similar anecdotes reflect the changes of a millennium, in which Confucian self-cultivation had become an increasingly religious path.⁶⁰ When the minis-

60 Shi She slit his own throat when it turned out that a murder he was investigating was committed by his father: the Euthyphro dilemma was still being openly discussed. By early Ming times, the ideological muting of the conflict between “parallel” family and public virtues (see Norman Kutcher, *Mourning in Late Imperial*

ter of Lu, Gongyi Xiu, refuses to accept a gift of a fish (#10), he wishes to avoid practical consequences of the *appearance* of corruption. He says:

“Now that I am prime minister I can afford to buy all the fish I want. But if I should accept this gift and lose my position as a result, who would ever provide me with fish again? Therefore I have not accepted it.”⁶¹

In the early Ming, official corruption and allegations of corruption were both very real forces in politics: forces that ultimately killed Keqin. Moreover, the textual presences of exemplars like Gongyi led in the Neo-Confucian age to the suspicion that refusing gifts was itself a bid for fame, so that as Xiaoru tells us “Some thought [refusing a goose] was too extreme” (*zhang* 54), and Keqin defends himself by saying, “I am not trying to buy fame; my character is just such that I do not delight in anything outside my allotted portion.” Xiaoru may have stressed this point precisely because the false charges against Keqin, before the affair of the blank forms, were that he had appropriated thatch and charcoal belonging to the yamen. Appearances were important, yet Keqin’s extreme refusals spring from a religious self-denial, whereas in the *Shiji*, refusal is not religious or even ethical; rather, it exemplifies reasonable, practical action: a way to get more fish later. Again, in the *Shiji*,

When [Gongyi Xiu] ate some home-grown vegetables and found them very tasty, he immediately pulled up all the vegetables in his garden and threw them away. At the same time, discovering that the cloth being woven by the maids in his house was very fine, he hastily turned them out of the house and burned their looms. “Growing vegetables at home and weaving cloth like this!” he exclaimed. “Do you want to make it so that the farmers and the weaving girls have no place to sell their goods?”⁶²

Superficially, this resembles Keqin’s plain lifestyle, but the point is quite different. True, Gongyi Xiu is unwilling to compromise the people’s livelihood through his own, but Gongyi’s is a practical, economic concern, whereas Keqin is driven by a fanatic filiality and sense of guilt over every mouthful. Much more extreme than Gongyi, he refuses to get his house repaired; trades every shekel he can spare for grain; dresses like a commoner; and hangs up goodies until they rot because his distant mother cannot taste them.⁶³

In Song Lian’s version, Keqin refuses gifts neither so pragmatically as in the *Shiji* nor so emotionally as in Xiaoru’s text. The point is rather rectitude and admirable, well-planned, frugality. Song recycles Xiaoru’s paragraphs partly through reduction, partly through changed

China: Filial Piety and the State. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999) meant that Keqin’s struggle is minor and conventional: he gives up office to take care of his mother, but the reader is never sure whether this is a reason or an excuse. When Sunshu Ao got an inconvenient new royal policy reversed, it was about currency; Ming Confucian rhetorical discomfort with merchantile activities meant that Fang promoted not trade, but agriculture.

61 Burton Watson, trans., *Records of the Grand Historian of China: translated from the Shih chi of Ssu-ma Ch’ien* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961), 416.

62 Watson, *Records*, 416.

63 The more practical nature of the *Shiji* biographies of officials is underscored by the total absence of omens, which had not yet trickled down from the throne. See Keith Nathaniel Knapp, *Selfless Offspring: Filial Children and Social Order in Medieval China* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2005), esp. 85, for the trickle-down process.

words (underlined), partly through added comment and explanation (**in bold**), and partly by re-ordering so that *zhang* 53–55, which are unambiguously about resisting corruption, are in the midst of this set. In Song’s telling:

[49] He did not dress in silks or wear silk jacket and breeches but dressed just like a commoner. For several years he did not change his cap. He did not eat meat twice in one day. If he had not managed official business, he would fast, **thereby deeply preserving uncorruptness!**

[51] When he first arrived at his post, a *bu* of salary grain could be sold for 3 taels of silver. **He was told that there was a lack of food for the soldiers. Every month he took 10 *dou* as food**, and the extra was all stored in the granary. Some murmured that this was wide of the mark, not [proper] sympathy.

[55] He would not take the least little thing from people. Every time he toured the counties he supplied his own means, unwilling to take even a cup of soup.

[53] The subprefect of Yuezhou went through the serving-lad to present two papayas. He beat the lad ten [strokes] and ordered the subprefectural clerk to return them.

[54] There was a countryman of who was magistrate of a Raoyang, and sent scalded goose **with a bribery document**. He strongly refused and ended their relations.

[reworked 44+50+58] In his later years, he was even more fearful **and ashamed. He wrote down everything he did**, and at night he reported it all to Heaven. **Before high and low, he was not embarrassed or ashamed.** Glory and disgrace, benefit and harm he viewed as one.

Song Lian systematically cut out many of Xiaoru’s comments about Keqin’s writings. Now he puts writing back – but only as a record of deeds. At one stroke he has reduced Keqin’s heartfelt piety to a Franklin-esque record of merits and demerits (common in late imperial China)⁶⁴, and made it a practice only of his later years; what Xiaoru had attributed to his later years was more intellectual and spiritual: “an even better command of and familiarity with the Way of character and fate.” The overall thrust of all these changes is to make Keqin much more rational, a model upright administrator. Much of his personality is gone, and his humility is asserted instead of being shown as the result of a great sense of guilt. Most interim biographies preserved Song Lian’s reworking of Xiaoru’s 44, 50, and 58 into one chunk, quite different in tone, and omitted even the last sentence of that. In the *Draft* and *Ming History*, all that remains to prove Keqin’s purity is his disdain for seeking fame (41) and a comment on his clothing and food to be discussed below.

3.3 Xiaoru and Song Lian on Keqin’s Autonomy I: the Yuan

Recall that the *Draft*’s concise treatment of Keqin’s relations with the Yuan raised some puzzles. What had actually happened? As Xiaoru shows, having already affected his neighbors, the young Keqin was ready for a larger sphere.

4 In 1344, Jiangzhe [province] held a great examination and my late father went there to be tested. At the time, the authorities used taboo avoidance [eschewing sensitive issues in examination essays] to eliminate and select gentlemen. My late father spoke about important contemporary affairs and laid out each individual case of the sources of chaos and order of antiquity, saying that if one does it like

⁶⁴ See Cynthia Brokaw, *The Ledgers of Merit and Demerit: Social Change and Moral Order in Late Imperial China* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).

this, then there will be order, and if not, certain defeat. Those who saw looked at each other and stuck out their tongues and said “Extraordinary talent! Extraordinary talent! [Han scholar-official] Jia Yi does not surpass him!” They really did not dare to place my late father’s name [on the list].

The young Keqin, flush with pride in his new knowledge, took the opportunity of an exam to address contemporary issues, apparently with the ambition of serving in the Yuan government. What he had to say, however, was too politically sensitive, and the examiners did not dare to send him on to higher levels where he might offend someone. Xiaoru goes on to assure his readers that his father was actually a loyal patriot who longed for the Song, despite having just taken a Yuan exam:

- 5 My late father toured the old capital of the Southern Song [presumably the exam had been held in Hangzhou]. He wrote an essay and bought a ladle of wine [to make a libation] at the tomb of [Song patriot] Yue Fei. He sang Xuli odes [expressing longing for a lost dynasty] and the tears streamed down his cheeks. Those who saw him thought that he was an extraordinary person.⁶⁵

Xiaoru reports that Keqin tried again to advise the Yuan government:

- 8 Just at that time, the eastern sea bandits arose in Jiangzhe. The Branch Secretariat ordered Wujiang Vice-Prefect Jin’gangnu to fund the gathering of commoners into camps as naval soldiers. My late father said: “This crisis is so severe, how can I not speak?” So he visited Jin’gangnu and said, “The people who have become bandits, some are pressed by hunger and cold; some are driven away by their corvee duties. Now these people are already riff-raff. How can you make them leave their wives and children to be soldiers? Isn’t that more or less leading them to become bandits? This is what is called ‘causing banditry’, not ‘fighting banditry.’” Jin’gangnu was angry and sent him away. After a while, the naval soldiers ended by killing the officials in charge of them along the road, and going to join the bandits. Jin’gangnu broke his foot in leaping from a wall to run away, and began to feel regret, saying: “I did not take the advice of Mr. Fang Keqin, and thus have come to this pass.” Not long after this, Attendent Censor Zuo Današiri came to the prefecture to discuss the pacification. Vice Censor-in-chief Liu Ji was his assistant. My late father sent up a letter suggesting a plan of attacking and arresting them, as it was not right to be lenient. Liu Ji wondered at my late father’s advice but could not employ it, so the prefecture and counties were overrun and the people suffered. My late father became angry and feigned illness, and determinedly did not go out. He walked in the mountains and ravines, looking for pine to eat, sometimes abstaining from grains and refusing to eat. He did not return for many days.

Song Lian kept most of this *zhang*, only shortening and clarifying Fang’s advice. But what does it mean that Xiaoru followed it with *zhang* 9, which Song Lian omitted?

- 9 But he was even more focused on teaching young students, lecturing on the great moral relations of ruler and minister, father and son, to move them. Those who heard understood in their hearts, and some even wept. At this time the people of other districts often put on caps with pheasant feathers [as an emblem of courage], and carried daggers and swords, following the powerful and noble to rob and steal. Only in the district where he lived did not a single person join the chaos. If any neighbor in the district had a dispute someone would lead them both to my late father for judgment. My late fa-

65 Song Lian was able to omit this *zhang* (5) because he recycled *zhang* 4 to make Keqin’s examination itself a reprimand to the Yuan. “[4]. In 1364 (*shì*) he once lined up in the examination hall, speaking about what harmed and profited dynasties/the country. [He spoke] sternly and impatiently, without fearing anything. The authorities did not dare to select him.”

ther would teach them about ritual and yielding, and many came to feel regret. Some came with goods to thank him, but he definitely would not accept it.

I have already discussed Song Lian's deletion of the first two sentences. The rest of the paragraph shows that Fang, rejected by the Yuan, was very much engaged with governance: he needed no imprimatur from the central government. His learning and virtue alone were enough to transform people; even though he held no position, people voluntarily came to him to settle disputes; and his incorruptibility showed itself even in this informal capacity. No stern laws were needed to make him honest. This kind of autonomy had no part in Song Lian's vision of government: a vision of strong central control, which he taught to Ming Taizu. Writing in the 1350s, Song Lian had justified his own refusal to act to save people from the chaos of the times by saying that he could not do so without holding office.⁶⁶

Xiaoru followed this vision of Fang as doing governance on his own authority with a further rejection of a minor government role, and shows him deploying his false or temporary hermit-hood (which I will discuss below) as a mere excuse. Xiaoru continues:

10 When the circuit was looking for a private secretary to serve him he approached my late father to propose it. My late father excused himself as unwilling, saying "I have been refusing grain for a long time now. I am not up to dealing with human affairs." In every essay he wrote, he expressed his sympathy with the people and his worry about the world. Gentlemen said that my late father regulated his behavior as purely and correctly as [famous recluse and poet] Tao Qian, that he predicted the times and affairs as accurately as [Han statesman] Jia Yi, and that his natural endowment was so balanced and strong that he need not suffer by comparison with Cheng Bozi [i. e. Song *Daoxue* founder Cheng Hao].⁶⁷ Those who knew thought it was thus.

Keqin has no need to work for the government in order to govern. Gauging the times, he "withdrew," but only in name. He kept writing, and he kept working for the people, and changing lives. But Song Lian, after reporting Jin'gangnu's regret and Liu Ji's inability to follow Keqin's plan, reduces this picture dramatically:

[9] My senior became angry and walked in the mountains and ravines, looking for pine to eat, and did not return for many days.

[10] When the circuit invited my senior to enter as a private secretary, my senior excused himself saying "I have been refusing grain for a long time now. I am not up to dealing with human affairs."

Since Keqin was not working for the government, he ought to have truly withdrawn, in Song Lian's opinion: and so it appears in Song Lian's version.

Now we can go back to the question of why Keqin "fled" in the *Draft*. Recall:

B [8] In the late Yuan, bandits arose in Taizhou, and Wujiang Vice-Prefect Jin'gangnu received orders from the Branch Secretariat to raise a naval force to oppose them. Keqin presented a plan, but it was

66 Dardess, *Confucianism and Autocracy*, 163.

67 Peter Ditmanson, in a personal communication (February 21, 2009), explained that Cheng Bozi 程伯子 was an honorific title referring to Cheng Hao and Cheng Shuzi 程叔子 one referring to Cheng Yi: something like Cheng the Elder and Cheng the Younger. Ditmanson commented: "The context in the passage seems to work right, as Cheng Hao was known more for his inner strength and purity, as opposed to Cheng Yi, who was known more for his stern morality."

not accepted; he *fled* into the mountains. Lacking food, every day he sought pine to supply his hunger.

The first question is whether the reductions here came from interim biographies. Zhu Guozhen had reduced the *zhang* to: “In the chaos of the Yuan period, he hid himself in the mountains and ravines, giving up grain and looking for pine to eat.” Li Zhi reversed the phrases: “In the chaos of the Yuan period, he gave up grain and hid among the mountains and ravines.”⁶⁸ “Giving up grain” is a more spiritual exercise than “lacking food,” and strengthens the idea that Keqin was so disenchanted with the government of the times – not just peevish about the Yuan’s rejection of his plan – that he withdrew into a kind of Daoist hermit-hood. This interpretation is also adopted by *Ming shan cang*:

[8] At the end of the Yuan, the subprefectures and prefectures of Zhedong were overrun.⁶⁹ Keqin laid out a plan. The authorities did not use it. He entered the mountains, searching for and eating pine.

All of these sources suggest that Keqin went through a phase as a mountain hermit in response to the Yuan – his rejection of it, or its rejection of him. Thwarted in an attempt to take on the role of savvy Confucian advisor, or just troubled by the times, he opts for the role of weird wandering Daoist. None of the interim biographies say that he “lacked food” or that he had to “flee,” although “hiding” might imply that. Xu Kairen’s 1681 *Ming mingchen yanxing lu* gives a slightly longer reduction:

[8] At that time, Fang Guozhen [Song Lian: the sea-commoners] caused chaos. The Jiangzhe branch secretariat ordered Vice-Prefect Jin’gangnu to gather commoners into camps as naval soldiers. His Honor visited Jin’gangnu and said: “Commoners have become bandits because their resources were exhausted. Those who have not become bandits also are poised to move. How can you confer soldier-hood on them? This is what is called adding to banditry, not attacking banditry.” Jin’gangnu was angry and did not reply. After a while, the naval soldiers ended by killing the officials in charge of them along the road, and running away to join the bandits. Jin’gangnu leapt from a wall in running, and broke a foot, and began to feel regret, saying: “I did not take the advice of Mr. Fang, and thus have come to this pass.” Then he (Fang) hid in the mountains and ravines, looking for and eating pine, and did not return.

This copies Song Lian’s reduction of Xiaoru almost word for word, up through Jin’gangnu’s regrets, but adds the name of Fang Guozhen (not in *Draft*); removes the name of Jin’gangnu’s jurisdiction (included in the *Draft*); omits the whole interaction with Liu Ji; has Fang “hide” in the mountains; and suggests that he stayed away for longer than “many days.”

Xiaoru’s, Song Lian’s, and even Xu Kairen’s Fang are rather different from the political refugee in the *Ming History* who has only sympathy for the common people. He does indeed worry about them, but knows that they are one step away from turning to banditry; that step taken, he recommends destroying them. The Yuan commander is indeed angry at him, but far from persecuting him comes to see that he was right. The plan whose rejection sends him into the mountains is in fact offered to Liu Ji, who later became a stalwart supporter of the Ming founder. It was only after submitting this second plan that Fang became so angry that he stalked into the mountains, and then only for a matter of days, not really becoming a hermit. The details given and omitted show that the *Draft* compilers had to be working with Song

68 Li Zhi, “Zhifu Fang gong,” in *Xu cang shu*, 27.1.

69 This phrasing suggests that *Ming shan cang* used Xiaoru’s text.

Lian's text, but they probably had read interim biographies and had them in mind. They clearly manipulated the text to condemn the Yuan government, shield Liu Ji, make Keqin a benevolent would-be official, and suggest a period perhaps of withdrawal, perhaps of persecution. The *Ming History* removed the last ambiguous sentence, and with it any suggestion of Keqin's Daoist side. As Lynn Struve has written of the *Ming History*, mid-Qing worries about Ming loyalism mean that "Readers must exercise their imaginations vigorously to sense that there had been any Yuan loyalism or reluctance to serve the overbearing Hongwu [...] emperor."⁷⁰

3.4 Xiaoru and Song Lian on Keqin's Autonomy II: Keqin and the Ming

For Fang Xiaoru, his father's relations with the Ming also fitted into a pattern of his knowledge and its recognition by others. He narrates Fang's recruitment and betrayal by the Ming regime in one story, followed by a separate story of his successes in office. Song Lian puts almost all incidents into one narrative, which both mutes the Ming founder's betrayal of Fang and undermines Fang's autonomous value, weaving his accomplishments into those of the dynasty.

Xiaoru writes:

- 11 In the winter of *dingwei* (1367), the great Ming army settled the prefecture and county. My late father wrote a document about the reasons for the rise and extinction of dynastic states and wanted to go to headquarters to present it. The parts: select wise talent, pacify the people's hearts, exterminate strongmen, eliminate forcible corrupt demands, and illuminate moral transformation through teaching (*jiaohua*). In outline: the people's hearts/minds are the basic energy of the dynasty-state, and *jiaohua* is the tool by which one harmonizes and nourishes that basic energy. If one does not put talent into office, then *jiaohua* will not be carried out. If one does not eliminate troublesome demands, then the people's hearts will not be settled. Losing the people's hearts yet winning the empire, slighting *jiaohua* yet seeking to govern – I cannot presume to know how to do this. He wrote several thousand words like this.

In line with his downplaying of Keqin's intellectual contributions, Song Lian omits everything underlined, from the first *jiaohua* onwards. But he makes further, Ming-centric, changes. Eschewing Xiaoru's neutral calendrical term, Song refers to the year as "In the first year of Wu," centering it on Zhu Yuanzhang, who declared the Wu dynasty just one year before declaring the Ming. Song then adds a completely new sentence about Keqin's optimism about the new regime. Then, while Xiaoru merely reports that "In Hongwu 3 the prefecture selected him as a county school teacher," Song Lian brings the emperor into the picture (Song's additions in bold face):

- [12] **In Hongwu 2, an edict established prefectural and county schools, and he was selected as a county school teacher. My senior was happy in educating talent, so he rose and responded to the command.**

But he had resigned by Hongwu 4, after no more than a year, whether because he had doubts about the regime, or because he was still mad that his detailed proposals in 1367 had had (in Song Lian's words) "no result," or because he really did wish to devote himself to his mother.

The next few *zhang* show how reluctantly he responded to Ming recruitment. Xiaoru writes:

70 Struve, *Ming-Qing Conflict*, 53.

- 13 In the fourth year, an official of the branch secretariat, Mr. Yuan Hong, with a letter and money came seeking him. My father escaped to another county. The prefectural official visited the house, and asked all of his various connections about where he was. My father had no choice but to come out.
- 14 At the time he was already 46 years old. When he got to the capital, he called on the censor in charge of these matters twice, asking to be excused on account of his mother's age. The official asked him about government and said in surprise, "Today the various prefectures are lacking officials and the master has happened to come to the court. How could I dare to conceal a worthy?"
- 15 And sent him to the Ministry of Personnel to take an exam on the *Changes*. He ranked second, so was granted a cap and belt⁷¹ and made Prefect of Jining, with the prestige title "Grand Master for Court Precedence" [rank 4b].

Again, Song Lian presents this process a bit differently. He explains that "because his mother was old, he could not bear to leave her side," so Fang ran away from Yuan Hong. In Xiaoru's telling we cannot be sure whether Fang's mother was an excuse or a real reason; Song Lian eliminates the former possibility. He also deletes the final (underlined) sentence of *zhang* 13, undercutting the overwhelming sense of Fang's reluctance. In describing his appointment, Song explicitly mentions the emperor (*shang* 上); Xiaoru had not.

Here the major divergence in the organization of paragraphs begins. Xiaoru continues the tale of Keqin's career in terms of his relation with the central government, leaving his accomplishments as prefect for a separate section, whereas Song Lian turns now to those accomplishments in their chronological place. So Xiaoru reports that after three years his father earned the best provincial evaluation; was feasted and complimented by the emperor; was impeached by a magistrate he had had beaten, and whose friendship with the investigator resulted in further false charges; after a period of exile was further implicated in the case of the pre-stamped blank tax forms; and was executed. Song Lian could hardly omit Keqin's demise, which occasioned his writing; he re-uses these *zhang*, with a few minor changes and the addition of Xiaoru's twice offering to take his father's place (useful in his own campaign to promote Xiaoru). But by textually separating his impressment into the regime from his execution, Song minimizes the sad irony of Keqin's relations with the Ming.

Xiaoru's introduction to Section 3 on the years as prefect gives the only hint of a good feeling toward the Ming, as if to underline again the irony of the relationship.

Alas, how painful! At first when my father received the mandate for Jining he regarded it as an extraordinary act of grace; he could not do other than to exert all his strength.

There follow 23 paragraphs (21–43) on Keqin's relations with the people, mainly but not solely those of his jurisdiction. Song Lian re-used 22 of these, but with reductions of up to several sentences in a *zhang*. Song emphasizes the court over Keqin's autonomous action and takes out derogatory comments about the governance of other prefectures (perhaps to avoid offending the living).

For example, the very first *zhang* in this section focuses on Keqin's communication with the people.

- 21 When he arrived at the post he wrote signs and hung them along the public highway, announcing the imperial court's intention of nourishing the people and the Way of filiality, younger-brotherliness, loyalty and trustworthiness. If the people/a subject had something unfair/something unsettling

71 Some later biographies add that he was given a send-off essay and ode by the emperor.

them/him (*bu ping* 不平), he/they could visit the prefectural yamen and speak to him personally. He prohibited the clerks from yelling at them. Every day he led the elderly gentlemen to sit and discuss, and asked them about everything (*de shi* 得失, lit. “getting and losing”).

Song Lian deleted the underlined phrase to emphasize the court over Keqin’s independent understanding of principle. This paragraph proved popular with later compilers, and was open to revision.⁷² But the *Draft* dropped *zhang* 21; before a very reduced 22 on local schools, it took a distorted 23, leaving out the portions underlined below (paragraphs G and F in the *Draft*). Xiaoru wrote:

- 23 Originally, there was an edict that if the people opened up waste land it would only be taxed after three years. The clerks, with an eye to fast rewards, did not wait until the time was up to collect (the taxes) and furthermore assigned corvee according to [their total holdings of] fields. The people increasingly lost interest, and did not open up additional fields. My late father knew the reason, so he send down an order announcing the former edict and he made a pact with the people that [corvee loads] would be assigned according to the number of adult males. He made up a book ordering the people number of men and land-holdings in upper, middle and lower classes, and the lower category was [further] distinguished into three. So each time tax [demands] were issued, they were set from above, and the clerks had no way to ply their corrupt practices. He frequently went out in person to encourage and oversee [the people]. When he met the old, he urged them to teach the young; the young he ordered to use their strength in the fields. All were happy, as if he were a parent. When he first took up his post, even if there was a very bad harvest, the people had to yield it up to other prefectures. My late father earnestly soothed and did not dare to trouble them.

One might say that Song Lian’s omission (underlined) of Keqin’s repetition of the imperial edict contradicts my argument that Song Lian was focusing on the court, but I think the effect is to make Keqin’s actions seem like an administrative filling out of the central measure, whereas in Xiaoru’s version it seems as if the edict can only take hold at all through the working of Keqin’s personal efficacy. Song Lian also omits a criticism of the central government’s management, and a focus on Keqin’s personal relationship with his people.

The next episode was included in interim biographies, but not in the *Ming History*. Xiaoru writes:

- 24 At the end of that year, armor and uniforms were being transported to Yan [the Beijing area]. At the time there was an order that anyone who allowed people doing corvee to use boats would be executed, so the neighboring prefectures made people use ox-carts to carry out the business. Heaven rained and snowed, and the oxen were about to die and lay in heaps. The Jining people requested to use boats to go to their corvee duties, but the various subofficials feared that order would be hard to change. Then my late father said “I cannot refuse to break the law when I know that it is a case of following what is good for the people.” So they used boats for transport. He reported everything about it to the Shandong branch secretariat, and the branch secretariat did not raise any questions. Later, in other prefectures [using] wheeled vehicles, when it rained, snowed or was foggy, more than half of them would be destroyed, and the people even bought carts and oxen to supply [the corvee demand], but they still could not satisfy it. Eight or nine out of every ten families saw its productive base broken. But the people of [Jining] prefecture, using boats, suffered no harm. They pointed to Heaven saying “He who gave the people life (*huo*) was Prefect Fang.”

72 *Ming shan cang* retains “*bu ping*” but Lin Zhisheng says: “If the people had something troubling them” (*min you suo huan* 民有所患), and the Li Zhi family of texts say “unhappy” (*bu le* 不樂). Yin Shouheng’s *Ming shi qie* says that Keqin asked the elders about the people’s troubles.

Here is Song Lian's version, with underlining marking some of the changes:

[24] At the end of that year, armor and uniforms were being transported to Yan. At the time there was an order that anyone who allowed people doing corvee to use boats would be executed, so other prefectures used ox-carts to carry out the business. Heaven rained and snowed, and the oxen were about to die on the road. Eight or nine out of every ten [families]' productive base was broken. The people requested to use boats to go to their corvee duties, but the various sub-officials feared the order and made difficulties. My senior said "I cannot refuse to break the law when I know that it is a case of following what is good for the people." So they used boats for transport. He reported everything about it to the Shandong branch secretariat and the branch secretariat regarded it as right and did not raise any questions.

Song Lian has recycled – that is, substantially changed the import of – the sentence about 80% or 90% of families being bankrupted: instead of describing a continuing bad situation outside of Fang's jurisdiction, it now describes the situation that Fang faced, and suggests that he let it get pretty bad before acting: he was at least somewhat unwilling to go against central directives. (In paragraph 27 about the locusts, too, Song Lian's revision plays down the misfortune of the surrounding prefectures.) Instead of the sub-officials fearing that the center would be unreasonable, they merely have an appropriate awe of the law. Instead of the provincial officials merely turning a blind eye to avoid trouble, they actually approve of Keqin's decision. Finally, Song Lian leaves out the people's gratitude to Keqin personally for refusing to follow an order.

Similarly, in a final example, Xiaoru reports (Song's omissions are underlined and some of his changes are noted):

30 The two provinces of Jiangxi and Zhejiang had an edict ordering transport of more than 1,000,000 [catties] of grain through three thousand *li* [Song Lian: "several thousand li"] of Jining's land and water. My late father watched over them as if they were his own people [Song Lian: "the people of his jurisdiction"], not permitting them even the smallest resentment or unhappiness. It was usually the system that for every *bu* (5 or 10 pecks) they would separately add 4 *sheng* to make up for the rotten grain. My late father, pitying them because the road was so long and wretched, suggested to the court to forgive [the extra]. The people of the two provinces were moved to tears. When he reached the court and the capital, several tens of people crowded bowing before his horse saying "This was our old father when we were transporting grain!"

Song Lian changed a number of words slightly, including replacing "his own people" with the more bureaucratic "the people of his jurisdiction." He omitted the initial edict that caused the problem, and completely omitted the gratitude of the people, leaving the last action that of a merciful court.

Song Lian's changes make the court look better and Keqin look less like an autonomous moral leader. Song downplays both Keqin's willingness to serve the Yuan and his reluctance to serve the Ming. But he cannot completely re-create Fang to suit his own ideological leanings or justify his own career choices, and some of the very themes he mutes re-emerge in the *Draft*. Further examples of how Song Lian changed Xiaoru's text, and how later compilers changed Song's, allow us to assess how reliable the *Draft Ming History* is, whether its compilers invented as well as copying, what they decided to omit, and perhaps, finally, why.

4 The Reliability of the *Ming History*

This case suggests certain straightforward lessons for reading other official biographies. The compilers were not making stories up out of whole cloth: every incident they reported, including miracles and popular acclamation, derives from the earliest source. But they did not get all their facts straight, if we take that earliest source as the standard and set aside the (unanswerable) question of how far Fang Xiaoru was himself stretching the truth. In some cases, errors came from following earlier compilers. For instance, one revision by Song Lian to put the court at the center led eventually to a mistaken date. Song Lian reports:

[12] In Hongwu 2, an edict established prefectural and county schools, and he was selected as a county school teacher. My senior was happy in educating talent, so he rose and responded to the command.

Xiaoru had said that Keqin was selected in Hongwu 3, and Song Lian, dating the edict, does not contradict that. But later biographers reduced this to say that Keqin was appointed in Hongwu 2, which potentially more than doubles the time he served as an official teacher.⁷³ For he had resigned by some time in Hongwu 4, serving perhaps only a few months.

Why? His mother was not significantly older when he resigned to take care of her than when he had taken up the post. Related to this is the question of whether the *Ming History* team removed the word *xun* 尋 from the *Draft* casually, just to save one space. Since the character was not systematically removed from biographies in chapter 281, it was probably a conscious choice made here.⁷⁴ One might speculate that the space of time evoked by the word would suggest to the reader that something had changed Fang's mind: perhaps disillusionment with the new Ming dynasty?

As a second example of later reductions that distorted fact, let's look at that cotton gown:

Xiaoru 49:

不服紈綺，不帛襦袴，一如布衣。

He did not dress in silks, or [wear] silk jacket and breeches, but dressed just like a commoner.

Song Lian:

不服紈綺，馭一布袍，數年載不易。

He did not dress in silks or wear silk jacket and breeches but dressed just like a commoner. For several years he did not change his cap.

Su Boheng:

不馭紈綺。大布之衣，寒暑不易。

He did not wear silks. His clothing of coarse cotton cloth did not change in winter or summer.

Deng Yuanxi:

一布袍數年不易

One cotton gown he did not change for several years

Li Zhi, Xu Kairen:

73 The Chongzhen *Ninghai xianzhi* is the exception: it reports his appointment year as Hongwu 3.

74 For example, the word was retained at *Mingshi* 24/281/7186, 7190.

一布袍數十年不易

One cotton gown he did not change for several [or] ten years

Draft:

一布袍十年不易

One cotton gown he did not change for ten years

Xiaoru's original point was that his father continued to wear plain cloth even in office. A combined process of reduction and exaggeration seems to have led, step by step, to a distortion in the *Draft*. But since we know that the *Draft* compilers did not have *only* Li Zhi or Xu Kairen before them, their selection of this wording suggests either purposeful invention, or mere carelessness unrelated to what had gone before, or a selection of wordings from a number of different sources. Perhaps, like earlier scribes, they not only used more than one text, but also worked from memory.⁷⁵ Presumably they were all men with a longstanding interest in biography who would have read the extant collections before; and they were in the habit of memorizing what they read. This "distortion" of fact actually efficiently communicates Fang's oddity and extremeness, which his son had portrayed in so much more detail.

A third caveat involves numbers. It is commonplace to read in the *Ming History* and other sources that large numbers of people gathered to weep at a magistrate's going, or protest his arrest. Xiaoru tells more than one such story, yet his claim is rather modest: when Keqin went into exile because of a fabricated accusation, unhappy people filled the road, and "several hundred people walked following him more than a hundred *li*" (43). Perhaps Song Lian found the two "hundred"s inelegant; he made it "almost a thousand people." Li Zhi, Xu Kairen and others inflated it to "several thousand." Certainly, some people may have accompanied Keqin as he went to his first punishment. There are a number of motives from curiosity onwards (it is not every day one gets to watch the prefect being marched off to jail!) that might have led them to do so. But clearly such numbers must be handled with caution.

A fourth distortion resulted from a simple textual reduction and a fifth from an addition. Xiaoru had reported that the clerkly disregard of the three-year tax remission on new fields meant that

23 The people increasingly lost interest, and did not open up additional fields [...]. He made up a register of documents ordering the people by number of adult men and land-holdings into upper, middle and lower classes, and the lower category was [further] distinguished into three.

The *Draft* took this, but said (with the discrepancies in bold type):

[F] The people said that the edicts were not trustworthy and abruptly left off, so that **the fields again became waste**. Keqin [...] divided the fields into **nine** grades to levy corvée and other taxes.

Xiaoru reported five categories of land. Song Lian and all others, except Yin Shouheng and He Qiaoyuan who report just three, drop the word "the lowest" (*xia*) before saying "divided into three," yielding nine categories. Later writers (except for Su Boheng) also reword the episode with two words, 且散, so that Song Lian's faithful "The people increasingly lost interest, and fields were not additionally opened" became "The people increasingly lost interest and

75 See Christopher M. B. Nugent, "The Lady and Her Scribes: Dealing with Multiple Dunhuang Copies of Wei Zhuang's Lament of the Lady of Qin," *Asia Major* third series, 20.2(2007): 25–73, 28.

scattered.” Hence the *Ming History*’s implausible claim that people actually abandoned fields already under cultivation.⁷⁶

Quotations of speech are another troubling area. Denis Twitchett wrote that since the original writer may have been present, scholarly suspicions that the conversations in official biographies might be unjustified.⁷⁷ We have here a more complex process. I showed above that Song Lian expanded Keqin’s admiring comment when he discovered the Song Neo-Confucians (*zhang* 2). But reduction was more common. Almost all versions report a comment of Keqin’s about *jinning*: pursuing fame or reputation. In Xiaoru’s version this was embedded in a well-formed sequence; the *zhang* divisions reflect later omissions. Song Lian’s omissions are underlined.

- 40 My late father, in governing, put *jiaohua* first, and was able to win through virtue. The assistant magistrates at first were sometimes haughty and rude. My late father treated them with great sincerity and they all felt ashamed, submitted, and wanted to be his disciples. Some warriors and fierce generals did not act according to ritual, but after a long time they became trustworthy and loving. All the clerks he hired had good native qualities and little showiness and he personally set a good example for them, so that they would enter goodness.
- 41 He did not delight in (those who?) sought fame and once said “Those who work for fame must make people fear them [“plant danger”]. To “plant danger” one must hurt other people. To hurt others in order to profit myself: I cannot bear to do it.”
- 42 In front of the prefectural courtyard, he did not line up clubs and fetters, and the leather whips hung in the porch, to express that he would not wantonly punish people. Those who had transgressed he admonished with moral principle in order to make them ashamed. At first they doubted him; then they submitted; then they trusted him. This is hard to achieve!
- 43 At the point when because of an official dispute he was transferred south, the people cried and shouted, filling the road, as if they were losing a close relative, and several hundred people walked following him more than a hundred *li*. The young students of the prefecture who had become *xinwei* [held low-level qualifications], when they heard that my father had died, marched in funeral procession outside the gate and cried until they lost their voices.

Many biographies re-used 40, reducing it to

Keqin’s way of governing was to consider customs urgent and moral transformation basic.

We might even consider this a recycling, since the reduction makes it sound like he was working mainly on popular morals, whereas the bad ways Xiaoru points to were rather those of other officials, clerks, soldiers, and even generals.⁷⁸ I made 41 a separate *zhang* because of the

76 Quan Zuwang’s criticism of the *Ming History*’s errors (Struve, 56) was justified; but he was not free of such errors himself, as who is? See Schneewind, *Community Schools and the State in Ming China*, 29, 48.

77 Twitchett, “Problems of Chinese Biography,” 29.

78 Xiaoru has already shown that Keqin tamed such people: “38. Public documents piled up on the table – the crowd arguing noisily – in half a word he would settle it. [An example:] The great general and Duke of Wei Xu [Da] and the Duke of Cao Li [Wenzhong] were leading 1,000,000 horses and men to Yan. They stayed in the prefecture a bit long. The important officials and powerful clerks demanded grain and fodder. Fighting with each other over who would be supplied first, they stood before my father yelling at each other. My late father easily settled the awards so that everyone was satisfied. The whole army said he was

omission, but in context, Keqin is commenting not so much on himself as on other people. He may even be saying, not that he can not bear to chase after fame by overawing others himself, but that he can not bear other people who do, and thinks they are courting trouble. Proof is then offered that he does not like to hurt people or even overawe others: he does not use whips and fetters if he can avoid it. The result, as promised at the beginning of 40, is that people came to submit to him and then trust him. That is why they mourned him along the road. Song Lian reduced and rearranged, recycling the *zhang* about governing through the transformation of customs by having it lead into Keqin's education of the clerks in the classics and the laws. The quotation about seeking fame, thus decontextualized, is easier to read as merely a comment on himself, and Song Lian also reworded it. Xiaoru had written that Keqin once said:

Those who work for fame must make people fear them ["plant danger"]. To "plant danger" one must hurt other people. To hurt others in order to profit myself: I cannot bear to do it.

Song Lian has 16 words instead of 22:

His nature was not to delight in pursuing fame. He often recited to himself saying: "Pursuing fame will certainly set up danger. Setting up danger will certainly lead to harming the people. I can not bear to do it."

Song Lian does follow this with the hanging whips and fetters, but since he does not immediately report how the people responded, the contrast between Keqin's human approach and that of the Ming generals is lost. The *Ming History* omits another two words to tell us:

He did not delight in pursuing fame. He once said: "Pursuing fame will certainly set up danger. Setting up danger will certainly bring calamity to the people. I cannot bear it."

The brevity of the revised remark brings an aphoristic quality that distances us from the living person. In addition, the *Ming History* version of the quote fits its tone overall: the *Ming History* Keqin repeatedly proves unable to bear it when calamity is brought upon the people by demands from the central government.

These distortions show the *Draft* and *Ming History* as in some cases the product of a cumulative process of compilation. We must be careful in using precise dates and numbers, and some quotations will have been boiled down to the point of meaning something rather different. Nevertheless, when relying on the *Ming History* for biographies of men for whom we have few other sources, we can be reasonably confident about the outlines of their careers and that each episode has a basis in earlier sources.

4.1 New Text, Choices, and Omissions in the *Ming History*

All of the *Ming History*'s stories about Fang Keqin, including all of the miracles attributed to him, appear in the very first, contemporary, source. The compilers not just making things up to create an exemplar. Yet the *Draft* did add text and change words. Xiaoru reported that:

39 The Yongjia lord Zhu Liangzu with a naval force of several hundred boats was campaigning northwards. Just at that time, the river dried up and the boats got stuck and could not move. In great anger

capable." This incident was popular with later compilers too, but they did not like the generalization based on it.

he ordered my late father: “Get 5,000 people out here immediately to dredge this river! If you don’t, I’ll have you punished according to martial law!” At the time the day was nearly dusk and my late father could not bear to trouble the people. He withdrew and prayed to Heaven. In the night, at the third drum, there was a great rain. By early dawn the river had risen several feet and the boats could leave. No-one dared to speak of it.

Song Lian re-used this incident, with several inconsequential rewordings and a change of the time to the second drum. Although this incident was repeated in various versions, and the *Draft* and *Ming History* stress that Fang was unable to stop the order instead of repeating that he could not bear to trouble the people, the closest we get to the *Draft*’s new claim, retained by the *Ming History*, that “The people regarded it/him as divine” (民以為神) is *Ming shan cang*’s comment that “His divine response was like this” (其神應如此). Along with Song Lian and Li Zhi or Xu Kairen, the *Draft* compilers may have had *Ming shan cang* in front of them, and chosen and restated just this bit; or they may simply have innovated.

In another case both Song Lian and the Wang Hongxu team working on the *Draft* recycled two of Xiaoru’s paragraphs to make quite different points. Xiaoru had written:

- 47 In dealing with friends he was kind, and he loved to give alms to those facing difficulties. When he was living in Jining, the southern officials who passed through he always supplied with wine and grain. Those from his native prefecture he treated more generously, and those from the same county more generously yet. If they said they were cold, he gave them clothing; if they said they were hungry he gave them food. For those who could not walk, he ordered boats to take them.
- 48 A man of his native place was made vice-magistrate of Laiwu and wanted to receive his mother, but he said he did not have the means. My late father gave him his salary for a whole month. When a fellow official was arrested for some cause and had nothing to wear or eat, my father bought cloth every year to supply him, every day ordered him to eat with him, and on some nights invited him home to drink. He did this for a full three years, as if it were just one day.

Xiaoru is illustrating his father’s generosity, steadiness of purpose, and proper sense that those closest to one should be treated most considerately (although he seems to have thought little about his family, apart from his mother). It is quite likely that the boats with which he aided these townsmen were requisitioned from the long-suffering commoners. One of the officials Keqin helped had been cashiered, but the point is that Keqin’s aid was not merely the gesture of a moment, but a sustained effort possible only for a man who had really cultivated his moral nature.

Song Lian first reduced and then added. He boiled the first episode down to:

- [47] The southern officials who passed through the prefecture he always supplied with wine and grain. For those who could not walk, he arranged boats or vehicles to send them on.

Then, although Xiaoru had used 48 as an example of Keqin’s sincerity and steady purpose, Song Lian – in his sole substantial addition – instead recounts that he not only drank with a fellow official in trouble, but graciously forgave him for some rudeness when he got drunk, or rather refused to admit that there was anything to forgive, saying that he himself had also drunk too much at times. This story, retained intact by later compilers but not the *Ming History*,

makes Keqin appear more sociable – one of the boys – and helps Song Lian cover up his oddness and his intense piety.⁷⁹

The *Ming History* recycled these same paragraphs 47 and 48 to quite different effect, like Song Lian both by dramatic reductions and by adding a most unusual amount of text.

O Taizu used laws severely and many scholar-officials were sent into exile; Keqin unceremoniously took pity on those who passed through Jining.

There had been no implication in earlier versions that the officials passing through were on their way to exile, and only one was identified explicitly as having been cashiered. Rather than the regional and local loyalties of Xiaoru's father, the Fang of the *Ming History* is braving the anger of the emperor or even expressing a solidarity with all officials against a tyrant. No version before Wang Hongxu's *Draft*, as far as I have seen, had added the comment that "Taizu used the laws severely" or the explanation that "many scholar-officials were sent into exile." The *Draft* rejected Song Lian's rewriting of these two *zhang*, adding text that was apparently safe itself (for Taizu's severity appears in many other places in the *Mingshi*) to turn a non-political episode into a political one that seems to grant Fang the right to judge Taizu's decisions.⁸⁰

Biographies often include popular political ditties, which it would be lovely to draw on as a faint echo of popular opinion. But: were they invented by the compilers for dramatic effect? Or where did they come from? In this test case, we see the ditty originating in the very first source. Xiaoru reports that the people sang:

26 孰罷我役，使君之力。孰成我黍，使君之惠。使君勿去，我民父母。

"What stopped our corvee? It was His Honor's power. What ripened our grain? It was His Honor's kindness. Let His Honor never leave. He is us people's father and mother."

Fang Xiaoru may have made the ditty up himself, of course, even as he dealt with the aftermath of his father's execution and his feeling about, among other things, having offered to die in his place. But it is at a minimum possible that someone, even if only a sycophantic prefectural clerk, once sang this song in Xiaoru's hearing. Song Lian changed one word in the ditty to complete the internal rhyme of the second line: "kindness" (*bui* 惠) became "rain" (*yu* 雨). The ditty appears in none of the interim biographies except for the Ninghai county gazetteer. But the *Ming History* has it, and has made another change from Song's version: "ripened" (*cheng* 成) became "revived" (*huo* 活), a much more loaded term that could refer to the people themselves, and that had appeared elsewhere in Xiaoru's text (in *zhang* 24). Again, the compilers are not manufacturing a ditty, but are honing it to a point.

The *Ming History* retained Song Lian's normalizing of Fang Keqin's strange piety; only his tearful prayers and perhaps that ten-year-old cotton gown convey something of it. But it is striking that of the many available interactions of Keqin with the people, the *Ming History* uses only three, and two of those have a supernatural element. Su Boheng, by contrast, gives twelve *zhang* in the section on the people, and only three on Heaven, even as he explicitly gives the two equal weight. The *Draft* compilers went out of their way to choose this kind of narreme.

79 The narreme was repeated all alone in Su Maoxiang, *Huang Ming baoshan leibian*, rpt. 022–725f., as an example of *ya liang*, "elegant capacity [for drink]." *Huang Ming shu* is cited as the source.

80 As well as examples given above, see Taylor, *Basic Annals*, 122.

The compilers' purposiveness also appears in the many available narremes they chose to omit that would have demonstrated incorruptibility or filled out the Hongwu-era details. Turning again to the "Basic Annals," for instance, Taizu attended to the altars of Soil and Grain.⁸¹ Xiaoru had reported, and Song Lian and the interim biographies re-used much of:

33 My late father, in making offerings to the gods, did his best to follow ritual. The altars to Soil and Grain, Mountains and Streams and various altars within the jurisdiction were kept up and decorated. Things like the sacrificial vessels and sacrificial clothes and ritual baths he personally made. Around the outside wall he forested it with famous trees, doing everything in accordance with the rules. Nothing was neglected.

Taizu arranged for discussion of ways to respond to fires in the capital; Keqin taught people to make tiles and arranged for tiled housing to be built to stop what had been the common occurrence of fire in the prefectural seat.⁸² Taizu refused a gift of fine bamboo-ware from Qizhou and ordered that such frivolous giving stop; Fang Keqin refused two papayas, a goose, and any help fixing up his house, and habitually would not even trouble people for a cup of soup.⁸³ Taizu asked for suggestions about "anything of benefit or harm that could properly be promoted or eliminated" and set up a petition drum. Keqin talked with the elders daily about everything and permitted anyone to complain at the prefectural office.⁸⁴ A compiler merely illustrating how an upright official carried out the intentions of the Ming founder would surely have included these anecdotes, so popular with the interim biographers.

Other narremes showed Fang Keqin's work for the people, but made other parts of the government look bad. Song Lian had merely slightly reduced but the *Draft* entirely omitted, for instance, *zhang* 25, in which tax grain transport was imposing a major burden on the people of Shandong province. Keqin proposed a solution to the province, which rejected it, but the Board of Revenue ultimately approved it, "greatly embarrassing" the important provincial officials. In the changes from the *Draft* to the *Ming History*, even more criticism of the early Ming government was taken out, as I will discuss below. The many careful choices made suggest that the official compilers were aiming at a precise effect, an effect going beyond either presenting an exemplar or filling out a reign narrative. Comparative readings justify a close reading.

5 An Independent Mandate

The following proposed close reading of Fang's *Ming History* biography addresses some of the puzzles pointed out in Part One. Recall that in paragraph F, Fang found that government clerks in Jining were improperly collecting taxes on newly-opened fields, so that farmers in Jining had lost faith in the homesteading edicts, and had gone so far as to stop tilling the new fields. Fang stopped clerky corruption by categorizing families into tax grades. This is a paper-based administrative measure typical of the early Ming effort at registration and categorization, and the abuses he stopped were precisely the kind the introduction to chapter 281 on upright officials focuses on. But how did Fang do it? Did his power stem from his position as prefect? That is, was he obeyed as a

81 Taylor, *Basic Annals*, 58, item 134.

82 Taylor, *Basic Annals*, 60, item 151; Fang Xiaoru, *zhang* 36.

83 Taylor, *Basic Annals*, 58, item 138; Fang Xiaoru, *zhang* 52, 53, 54, and 55.

84 Taylor, *Basic Annals*, 61–2, items 153 and 161; Fang Xiaoru, *zhang* 21.

delegate of the central government, of the Ming court? Not quite. For Fang made an agreement or pact or compact (*yue* 約) with the people that the taxes would be collected only as had been decreed. Apparently his personal word was more effective and trustworthy than the central, imperial edict it confirmed, which the *Ming History* explicitly says the people had lost faith in.

Next (in H), Fang faced down a stronger abuser, and won the backing of the central government. A general had commoners building a wall, and Fang managed to obtain an order from the court to stop the work. Not only did this lighten the people's burden, but it ended a long drought; Heaven sent rain, presumably as a sign of approval. Was it the new Ming dynasty that Heaven was approving or Fang himself? The people's ditty, reported here, mentioned only Fang. The *Ming History* immediately notes a further sign of approval: in the three years Fang oversaw Jining, the population doubled and supplies were ample. The next two paragraphs (M and N) then explain Fang's power: his personal thriftiness, suggesting incorruptibility, and his focus on virtue over renown. On the surface, this cause and effect fit perfectly with the Ming founder's admonition in the introduction to the chapter: because Fang is an incorrupt administrator, and does not try to pluck feathers from the people, their fledgling wealth matures (K). It fits also with the judgment of the founder at the end of the "Basic Annals" of his reign: "Gentlemen conducted themselves according to their station and the common people were amply provided for."⁸⁵ But Fang's purity is also a kind of personal holiness. His personal qualities operate like the signs of a deity's efficacy, giving his actions legitimacy and his commands weight. Spiritual power makes an effective official, one who has tapped into the basic patterns of the universe so that they respond to his actions. The straightforward, secular tone of the introduction to the "upright officials" *liezhuan* meets a more complex and spiritual understanding of the world. Moreover, compared with Song Lian's version, the *Ming History* makes the connection between Fang and Heaven even more direct, and more strongly related to the idea that Heaven and the people speak with one voice. Xiaoru had reported, in the city wall/rain/ditty incident, and Song Lian and interim biographies had re-used:

26 Before that, it had not been raining. My late father in undress and with bare feet went to pray at the various shrines. With tears falling, he lay below the shrine and vowed that if it did not rain he would not stop.

It is the *Draft* compilers who removed the intermediary deities and made the rain a direct response to Keqin.

In a third clash, Fang again demonstrated his spiritual power (paragraph P). When the Duke of Yongjia's navy foundered in mud, he levied a huge amount of labor for dredging. Fang could not countermand the order, but his tearful prayers brought rain, and "the people regarded [his efficacy in this case? himself?] as divine" (*min yi wei shen* 民以為神). (I have shown above that the *Draft* innovated with this phrase.) Again, Fang pities the people for having to meet central demands, and it *could* be only that his sincerity and purity make his prayer effective. But this second rain-making incident is also related immediately after a more direct criticism of the Ming founder: that he

[...] used the laws severely and many officials were banished. Fang unceremoniously aided those who passed through Jining.⁸⁶

85 Taylor, *Basic Annals*, 124.

86 Song Lian had reduced Xiaoru's *zhang* 47 to report: "The southern officials who passed through the prefecture he always supplied with wine and grain. [...] (Several sentences of Xiaoru's text omitted) [...] For those

Placement implies, in this addition to and recycling of Xiaoru's text, that Keqin's heartfelt prayers were effective precisely because of that action.⁸⁷ His power/virtue relates to solidarity not only with the common people he ruled, but also with fellow officials who had displeased the emperor. If we read this incident in conjunction with the "Basic Annals," it seems even more significant. At one point when he was on campaign, Taizu's armed forces could not pass through canal locks because of a lack of water. Suddenly, there was a heavy rain, so that the ships rose. Taizu exclaimed "This is Heaven helping me!"⁸⁸ In Keqin's biography, Heaven is not presented as helping the Duke of Yongjia (who was after all working for Taizu), but as responding to Fang's sincerity. Taizu and Fang have the same relationship with Heaven.⁸⁹

These incidents may suggest that Fang governed Jining with autonomous legitimacy; they may even cast doubt on the legitimacy of Ming Taizu. Yet the Ming was defeated; why camouflage criticism of its founder? As Lynn Struve has shown, the *Mingshi* was shaped by complex Qing politics under three monarchs.⁹⁰ The Kangxi emperor (r. 1662–1722) put a loyal favorite, Wang Hongxu (1645–1723), in charge and frequently asked about the project. In 1692 he objected to the many criticisms of Ming Taizu he saw in the draft basic annals and biographies. Kangxi wanted a sympathetic portrait of the founder in order "to win the people's hearts" to the Qing⁹¹, and moreover, as a hard-working ruler himself, Kangxi admired the Ming founder's great achievements and understood the challenges he had faced. Criticism was inappropriate.⁹² Ten years later, Kangxi rejected Wang's draft of the biographies.⁹³ Wang reworked it on his own time, but the Yongzheng emperor (r. 1722–1735) rejected the *Draft* and put Zhang Tingyu in charge of revisions. The final version was published under the Qianlong emperor (r. 1736–1796/99) in 1739.⁹⁴ The key concerns, Struve shows, were loyalism and the

who could not walk, he arranged boats or vehicles to send them on." The *Draft* omitted the details, which might have reminded readers that Taizu had provided that if an official died on duty, local officials should provide boats or wagons, provisions, and an escort for them to get home. Taylor, *Basic Annals*, 77, item 313.

87 Allan Barr writes that reports of supernatural intervention may either be reports of what was thought to have happened, or the author's creation of justice through the text itself. Allan H. Barr, "Laozhai zhibi and Shiji," *Asia Major, Third Series* 20.1(2007): 133–153, 138.

88 Taylor, *Basic Annals*, 35, item 19.

89 Su Boheng had suggested a parallel between Fang and Ming Taizu by saying that "My senior received his mandate in the summer of *renzhi* (1372–1372)" and that with such virtues as he demonstrated, "[even] ruling all the subcelestia [would] present no difficulties." Su Boheng, "Zhenhui xiansheng Fang gong aici."

90 Struve, *Ming-Qing Conflict*, 50–51, 53. On the Qing emperors' involvement with the *Mingshi*, see also Ng and Wang, *Mirroring the Past*, 239–243.

91 Lien-sheng Yang, "The Organization of Chinese Official History," 53. See also the introduction to Taylor, *Basic Annals*. See also *Long Live the Emperor! Uses of the Ming Founder across Six Centuries of East Asian History*, ed. Sarah Schneewind (Minneapolis: Society for Ming Studies, 2008), 7.

92 Li Jinhua, *Mingshi zuanxin kao*, 2–3.

93 Struve, *Ming-Qing Conflict*, 49, 75 note 4.

94 Struve, *Ming-Qing Conflict*, 49–52. Struve, 52: "The completed *Ming History* was submitted by Zhang to the Qianlong emperor in the fourth year of his reign, 1739." Franke, *Introduction*, 2.1.9: "The work was completed in the 12th moon Yung-cheng 13, early in 1736, printed by the Wu-ying-tien and published in 1739." Ng and Wang, *Mirroring the Past*, 242–243: "The *Ming History* was finally completed in 1735, the last year of the Yongzheng reign, and was presented to and approved by the succeeding Qianlong emperor four years later."

succession, understood in universal, not just Ming/Qing-specific terms. As well as pointing out the troubles from which the Qing had saved China, Yongzheng wished to suppress any hint of contemporary reluctance to accept the early Ming emperors, the legitimate rulers chosen by Heaven.⁹⁵ Both Kangxi's personal feeling for Taizu and the general concern with dynastic legitimacy meant that criticism of the Ming founder had to be camouflaged.

Some of the changes in Keqin's biography from the *Draft* to the final *Ming History* seem designed to mute even further the criticism of the Ming founder. In paragraph H, all the biographies up through the *Draft* had stressed that Fang was running a risk by reporting on the situation. The *Draft* retained the word "privately," to hint that he was taking special action and to better explain the popular gratitude. By omitting this one word, the *Ming History* compilers made early Ming government generally look less bad. Similarly, they completely omitted the very popular narreme about whips and fetters: Fang's not using them perhaps suggested too clearly that most other prefects were using them, and reminded the reader of the dynastic founder's own use of violent punishments.⁹⁶ Again, the *Draft* had reported in paragraph D that he was not only summoned to the capital but also "ordered to be tested" in Hongwu 4. This gestures towards the great reluctance Fang exhibited according to Xiaoru (*zhang* 13) and even Song Lian, who report that he went to the capital only when he could not escape investigators who were pressing his kith and kin, and that once in Nanjing he still twice begged to be excused.⁹⁷ The *Ming History* reduction of the paragraph side-steps the implication that Fang was unwilling to serve, an implication that throws a nasty light on his relations with the Ming from the start. For it suggested that he had not even wanted the official post that killed him.

If my reading is correct, the unknown compilers of the *Draft* were not only condemning Ming Taizu, but were presenting a view of legitimate authority granted by Heaven to righteous scholar-officials that was independent of the throne. Zhang Tingyu's team let the view stand, only toning down the criticism slightly. This close reading runs contrary to the emperor-centered narrative offered by the *Ming History* on the surface and to the absolutist program of the Qing throne. Yet such a use of an exemplary official's biography was not new. As with many historiographical conventions, the category "*xunli*" first appeared in Sima Qian's *Shi ji* (The Records of the Grand Historian).⁹⁸ The section, whose heading Burton Watson translates as "The Biographies of the Reasonable Officials," is introduced with the following comment:

Laws are to guide people and punishments are to prevent evil. But if both the civil and military [sides of government] are not instituted, the commoners (良民) will be fearful. Those who cultivate them-

95 Struve, *Ming-Qing Conflict*, 53. In his astonishing propaganda campaign to win over one obscure critic, Yongzheng stressed, in Struve's words, "the importance of faithful service, on the part of both officials and commoners, to the current head of the dynasty that Heaven had chosen [...]." See also Jonathan D. Spence, *Treason by the Book* (New York, N.Y.: Viking, 2001).

96 Xiaoru's claim that "In front of the prefectural courtyard, he did not line up clubs and fetters, and the leather whips hung in the porch to express that he would not wantonly punish people," re-ordered by Song Lian to immediately precede his prefecture's being named the best in the Hongwu 5 provincial evaluation, had been selected for compilation by Jiao Hong 焦竑 (1541–1620) in his (*Guochao*) *xiansheng lu* 國朝獻徵錄 and copied from him by the *Yuan Ming shilei chao* 元明事類鈔 (Siku quanshu edition, 11.7). It also appeared in many other interim biographies. The *Ming History* editors sacrificed one of the best-known stories about Keqin.

97 Compare the entry in the "Basic Annals": "officials were to go bearing gifts and with due courtesy invite outstandingly worthy scholars to take up official careers." Taylor, *Basic Annals*, 61, item 153.

98 Watson, *Records*, vol. 2, 413–418.

selves, when given office, have never made trouble. To fulfill official duties and behave in a reasonable way: this can also be considered governing. What need is there to be stern and awesome?⁹⁹

At its inception this category had the potential to criticize the emperor; Watson points out that each of the exemplars here lived in much earlier times, whereas each of the “harsh officials” in the next section is a contemporary; and that each of the anecdotes here contrasts with a specific policy of Emperor Wu.¹⁰⁰ With this in mind, a third reason for camouflaging criticism of the Ming founder may have been that it was really have been directed at Kangxi himself.¹⁰¹ But given Wang Hongxu’s close relation to Kangxi, this may be an excessively vigorous exercise of the reader’s imagination, to take Struve’s phrase out of context.¹⁰²

Fang Keqin was categorized in the *Ming History* as an upright official, and anecdotes and judgments about his life were compiled according to principles that earlier historians have explained. But his role as an exemplar does not explain all of the paragraphs in his biography, nor why certain incidents that would have boosted that categorization were left out. His biography also does put flesh on the bare-bone picture of the particular *successes* of the early Ming in the “Basic Annals” and elsewhere in the *Ming History*. In my view, however, Fang’s biography also points to the *failures* of that reign, in such a way as to offer the attentive reader a deeper critique of Taizu, even imperial power generally. Fang’s virtue was autonomous, springing from his personal practices and sympathies, manifested in his practical and spiritual efficacy, and appreciated by Heaven and by the people in his jurisdiction.

6 Grouped Biographies (*Liezhuan*) as Cases

The recent volume *Thinking with Cases* suggests seeing the grouped biographies (*liezhuan*) as sets of cases, but itself includes no such analysis.¹⁰³ Cases, Charlotte Furth explains, are not self-contained anecdotes, but provide evidence for a larger argument. But they do not merely illustrate a larger principle already well understood, because their particulars are important in themselves. The author of a set of cases presents himself as an expert, and it may be (it is not quite clear from the volume) part of the definition of a “case” that he gives his judgment on how each case (for instance of a crime) correlates with larger patterns (for instance, how a crime is categorized in the law): thus, “a case transforms facts into evidence,” allowing the author to argue for some claim.¹⁰⁴ Thinking about Fang Keqin as one case in a set of cases

99 Sima Qian, *Shi ji*, j, 219. My translation varies somewhat from Burton Watson’s, but I have retained his “behave in a reasonable way,” because it clearly makes sense in the context. Watson, *Records*, 413.

100 Watson, *Records*, 413 note 1. This point resonates with Grant Hardy’s view in *Worlds of Bamboo and Bronze* that Sima Qian’s denunciation of Qin Shihuangdi is actually directed at Han Wudi.

101 Tim Wright suggested this at the workshop “Writing Lives in China,” Sheffield, March 17, 2008.

102 Struve, *Ming-Qing Conflict*, 53.

103 *Thinking with Cases: Specialist Knowledge in Chinese Cultural History*, ed. Charlotte Furth, Judith Zeitlin, and Pingchen Hsiung (Honolulu: University of Hawaii, 2007), 15.

104 Charlotte Furth, “Introduction” to *Thinking with Cases*, 3–4. Hung-lam Chu, “Confucian ‘Case Learning’: The Genre of *Xue’an* Writings,” in *Thinking with Cases*, 244–273, points out that the authors of *xue’an* writings “did not pass judgment on the cases, out of respect for the readers’ own judgment” (267), so explicit expert judgment may not be required for something to be a case. On the other hand, Chu also says that in the *xue’an*, “the cases are irreducibly individual” (259), which seems not to fit the introduction’s definition of cases.

(the “upright officials” grouped biographies) may clarify what the *Ming History* compilers were up to, although given the prominence of his son, Keqin’s biography may have received more attention most, and many of the biographies in chapter 281 are so brief that I refer to them as “snippets.”

Comparing the tables of contents of the *Ming History* and *Draft* for chapter 281, after the introductory comment discussed above, the main biographies are mostly the same, but the *Ming History* has added two (for a total of 30) and moved some others around, and has added ten secondary biographies appended to main ones, and some even shorter, listed in the table of contents only as “etc.” Clearly, someone was thinking about the impact of the chapter as a whole. As it appears in the *Ming History*, the chapter is 33 pages long in the modern reprint (as compared with about 80 pages for the next section, “forest of Confucian scholars”) and very roughly 14,000 characters long.

Fang Keqin comes second, after Chen Guan (1325–1371), who protected his home and village in the late Yuan, applied for a position with Zhu Yuanzhang in the civil war, and was then made prefect of Ningguo, where he revived learning, set up household registers which Taizu then took as a model for the whole empire, worked on irrigation, and treated mercifully some rather hapless thieves. Summoned to the capital in Hongwu 4 (1371), Chen took sick and died. There is an “expert judgment:” this was how Chen balanced severe correctness with mercy in governing.¹⁰⁵ After Fang Keqin comes Wu Li, another late Yuan/early Ming scholar given a teaching post, long afterwards recommended to the court, and made Vice-Magistrate of Nankang. There he first rigidly enforced Confucian ways on the fierce and violent people, making lots of arrests; and then when the people were sufficiently transformed he became more liberal. He stood up to the magistrate when he arrested all the neighbors of a man who insulted him as he toured the counties: “Only one person rebelled against Your Honor. What is the neighbors’ crime? Now you have locked up a whole crowd, and yet the arrest is not yet made. The urgent and the extra should be distinguished! What about it?” He also showed the spiritual power of the Confucian by overthrowing a local snake cult. The result of his six years as vice-magistrate: the people loved him (*baixing ai zhi* 百姓愛之). He was made magistrate of Anhua, where he moderated the counter-productive violence of Taizu’s famous general Wu Liang (1324–1381): first by convincing an entrenched rebel to submit peacefully; then by preventing the mass reclassification of farmers as military families. As subprefect of Weizhou, he then plotted with the civilians of his jurisdiction to avoid requisitions of their livestock by the Shandong army and by the emperor himself, thus preserving their families, while those of other jurisdictions were broken. When Wu Li left, the Weizhou people all went to see him off, with tears streaming.¹⁰⁶

Since Fang Keqin is sandwiched between Chen and Wu, reading the three biographies together seems justifiable. There may be a connection between Chen Guan’s approach and the idea that the severity needed early in the Hongwu reign could perhaps more quickly have been followed by a kinder, gentler approach. Wu Li’s biography, too, shows the move from severity to mercy, and critiques collective punishment of the kind that was so common in the Hongwu era. Perhaps it was precisely because its most dramatic example was Fang Xiaoru and his clan’s fate under the Yongle emperor that Fang Keqin appeared here. On the one hand, these men

105 *Mingshi* 24/281/7186–8187. On chapter 281, see also Thomas G. Nimick, *Local Administration in Ming China: The Changing Roles of Magistrates, Prefects and Provincial Officials* (Minneapolis: Society for Ming Studies, 2008), 45–46.

106 *Mingshi* 24/281/7188–7189.

are recognized and employed by the Ming state; on the other, they stand up to it as Fang did. Since no “expert judgment” is rendered in Wu Li’s case, we might see the reaction of the people as the judgment.

The chapter now switches gears. Instead of continuing with unconnected individual biographies, in both the *Draft* and the *Ming History*, the compilers make a connection by time and type of official:

At this time, the vice-magistrate of Henci, Liao Qin [(1324–1404)], was also known as upright and capable.

And what happened to him? Locked up on some charge, he was finally released because of age. His road home lay through his old jurisdiction, where the people competed with one another to offer him lamb, wine, and bolts of silk – which he righteously refused, staying there only one night.¹⁰⁷ Again connectedly, the chapter continues: “[There were] others like:” another vice-magistrate, who earned the highest evaluation; when he was named to a central post the people of his jurisdiction “strove to beg to retain him” and he was sent back to them. Then follows a list of four early Ming county officials who were accused of something, but because the people of their jurisdictions (*bumin* 部民) begged, they were forgiven and sent back to their posts (and one rose to a fairly high provincial post thereafter). After this, the chapter continues, of the subprefectural and county officials we know about in the Hongxi and Xuande periods (1425–1435) there were eleven men (listed), and in the period 1436–1464 there were another seven (listed), who were all going to be promoted or transferred, and the people of the jurisdiction made such requests. Note that although the court recognized the worth of these men (hence the promotions and re-postings), it is the people’s requests that are highlighted, and that are the basis of the grouping, not the imperial response to such requests.

The chapter now gives another biography, of Gao Dounan (about 200 characters), followed by a snippet on his son. The focus is very clear now: it is not on his character, although that is briefly described, nor on what he did in office, which is boiled down to “lots of good governing.” Rather, the spotlighted episode occurs when, late in Taizu’s reign, he and nine other magistrates were accused of something. The elderly commoners of Gao’s jurisdiction hastened to court on foot, to report all the good administration he had done. Taizu congratulated him, awarded him some money and a dragon robe, sent him back to his post in Dingyuan county, and even reimbursed the elders’ travelling expenses. The men accused with him were also sent back to their posts, and did an even better job than before, and Gao was chosen a bit later (*xun*) as an exemplary upright official. In a second post, as sub-prefect, Gao was again loved by the people no less than in Dingyuan; and the Yongle emperor granted his request that his son succeed him when he retired.¹⁰⁸ If we read this with what has come before, and consider it as a case (that is, not just yet another example that shows the exact same thing) we might think that the point is to praise Taizu for learning to be more lenient, following the example of Wu Li, and following the lessons in leniency Wu Li taught to his superior magistrate and to General Wu Liang. But it is also clear that the reason Taizu rethought was the request of the people. So this case brings together two separate themes of what came before.

Although an busy emperor might read just the first few pages, the chapter is meant to be read by thoughtful people as a whole, not as one damn exemplar after another. That impression is strengthened by the fact that next snippet is about the first of those listed as accused and released with Gao Dounan. It omits his surname: one ought to remember him from the

107 *Mingshi* 24/281/7189.

108 *Mingshi* 24/281/7190.

list. We now get a few further details: like Gao, Yu Chancheng was rescued by the elders of his jurisdiction hurrying to kneel and request his retention; Taizu feasted both him and the elders, gave him a reward, and sent him back to work.¹⁰⁹ Numbers Two and Three from the Gao list then get their own snippets, and Numbers Seven, Six, and Nine appear in a together. Each snippet gives slightly different details, but the point is the emperor respecting the peoples' requests – or to be precise not their requests, but their judgment of the official's character, for the Hongxi emperor does not send one man back to his jurisdiction of 20 years earlier, as 200 county people asked, but employs him in a different county.¹¹⁰

The chapter continues:

At the time, Taizu was controlling officialdom through the net-ropes of severe law, so resident administrators accused of small faults were abruptly taken into custody. Hearing of their worthiness, [Taizu] sent them back right away, and also rewarded them, and some of them went on to be promoted. In Hongwu 29 [the same year as Gao Dounan's case], when [four listed magistrates] were accused and arrested, the people of their jurisdictions begged the court for mercy. Taizu was pleased, and made the four men prefects [of such and such places]. Because of this, the senior officials vied to help and encourage others, so the whole period saw many effects of officials' being just and respecting the laws.

This seems to put the focus back on Taizu and his good government. But in the cases given, just as salient as the emperor's responsiveness is the officials' vulnerability to unfair arrest, which is here again (as in the chapter introduction and in Keqin's biography) explicitly linked to Taizu's policies, but now no repetition of the assurance that such policies were necessary. Furthermore, the dates mentioned tilt Taizu's responsiveness to late in the Hongwu era; it is not suggested that he was always so. After the comment quoted above, there is a snippet about the rescue by elders and subsequent promotions of one of the four men mentioned above, and a longer account of Shi Chengzu, made a magistrate by Taizu at the end of his reign. As we move on into the fifteenth-century reigns, yet more examples are given of people's approval and rescue from state injustice of good administrators. It is true that there are some details on what made their governance good, and it is true that some of them also do miracles. (One is a triple whammy. Chuzhou had trouble with a tiger, and also drought and locusts. Xie Zirang prayed to the gods: two days of big rain, the locusts all died and the tiger ran away.¹¹¹) But the trope repeated over and over is the people's speaking up for official and their views being accepted.

But whether or not this specific interpretation is correct, it is clear that the chapter was meant to be read as a whole. Although some men got longer, more complex, biographies that could be read in various ways (perhaps putting three such right up front was in itself part of the camouflage), most got only snippets that made the points the compilers wanted to emphasize: and those points were not simply the characteristics of exemplars, nor merely additional details on Taizu's reign. I think it is likely that the section was intended as a somewhat camouflaged criticism of the Ming founder, and that, more generally, it was making an argument for the independent legitimacy of good officials, demonstrated by the people's love and support. In this scenario, the throne plays the role of an intermediary or interpreter. Successive emper-

109 *Mingshi* 24/281/7190.

110 This was Kang Chanmin. *Mingshi* 24/281/7191.

111 *Mingshi* 24/281/7193.

ors act on their recognition of the officials' legitimate authority, rather than creating that authority or being the recipient themselves of these signs of popular approval.

Thinking about *liezhuan* as a set of cases can be useful. It explains why the compilers did not make up new material. As evidence for an argument (whatever it might be), the particulars of each case were important, and had to be basically true or at least documented. There was innovation in the *liezhuan* categories: Apart from the well-known addition of the "Daoxue" category in the *Songshi* for the Neo-Confucian masters, Li Jinhua pointed out that in the *Ming History*, three categories were added to reflect significant developments in the period: eunuch factions, roving bandits, and aboriginal headmen.¹¹² There is no reason, then, that even with traditional categories the compilers should have been bound to merely provide illustrations of well-known principles of exemplary government or facts filling in the outline of a reign given by the annals. Moreover, You Tong drafted a number of biographies for the "upright officials" section that were omitted from the *Draft* and *Ming History* or moved to another category.¹¹³ The compilers took trouble over choosing men, choosing details about those men, and placing them with respect to one another and to the comments that, along with the mutual references of the various narremes within the chapter, formed a coherent argument or set of arguments.

Conclusion

Seventy years ago, Charles Gardner lamented the absence of features of modern historical writing in Chinese traditional historiography. No bibliography, no references; no background to events; no private life of the rulers; no direct explanations of causation; no gradual processes of change; and most perhaps lamentably, "the reader of Chinese history [...] closes his book without having established any serious contact with [the author]." No systematic rallying of facts, no illuminating textual and footnote commentary on those facts, no judicious summary: no personal guidance from the specialist writing on his own subject. Gardner concludes: "We are left instead in the hard, cold world to analyze our facts as best we can and to struggle with our own feeble light to appraise and to interpret."¹¹⁴ Perhaps – but our worthy predecessors did careful work in their own way, and for their own purposes, just as we do.

Fang Keqin was a complicated person, who was not just living out a role that had been laid out for him by the thousands of exemplars of remembered time. As I see him in Xiaoru's account, he matured from a cocky youngster eager to work for whoever was in charge, to an adult intellectual angry that his worth was not recognized, to a more cautious middle-aged man unwilling to leave his mother to serve a brutal new ruler. But his religious commitment and his passion for justice meant that when he had no choice but to serve, he put his whole heart into working for the people, despite the suffering he thereby inflicted on his own family. Readers may understand him differently, but certainly Keqin was no cardboard exemplar. Xiaoru's quite understandable fury at an unjust government comes through, too, in his detailing of the ineptitude and abuses of authority of various Ming personnel. Perhaps he knew his language would be toned down when he submitted his text as a rough draft to his teacher for an epiphany, begging him to assure transmittal of his father's life and learning. Xiaoru, in portraying

112 Li Jinhua, *Mingshi zuanxin kao*, chapter 5, 54.

113 Li Jinhua, *Mingshi zuanxin kao*, 67 lists a number of biographies for the *xunli* section drafted by You Tong. Most do not appear at all; Jiang Ang 姜昂 appears in a different chapter of biographies.

114 Charles S. Gardner, *Chinese Traditional Historiography* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, 1938), 75–78.

his father, certainly both concealed and chose. But both Song Lian and Su Boheng, whose piece I have not discussed much because of its lesser influence on later texts, surely knew at least the outlines of Keqin's career when they endorsed Xiaoru's version by reworking it in their own ways. If we dismiss "accounts of conduct" as nothing more than elegant strings of out-and-out lies, or if we expect from them no individual characterization, we are unjust to all these earlier scholars, and furthermore will have nothing left to work with ourselves.

In re-working Xiaoru's text, Song Lian recast both Keqin's personality and his times. He re-ordered paragraphs, eliminating a few entirely; he reduced many of those he kept, sometimes giving quite a different flavor to what remained; he re-worded in a few places, sometimes with the effect of exaggerating, sometimes for clarification. He added, possibly from his own knowledge or other stories told by Xiaoru but possibly as inventions, two narremes: one in which Fang Keqin appears as the ultimate magnanimous host and a good drinker himself (or not unwilling to be thought one); and the other (re-worked from three of Xiaoru's paragraphs) his writing down of all his deeds to report to Heaven. He muted Fang Keqin's intellectuality, his teaching vocation, and his dramatic impact on other people, especially students. It was Song's account that began Keqin's transformation from an ambitious, angry, intensely pious, and quite strange person into a paragon of upright administration. Song, promoter of autocracy as an antidote to chaos, downplayed how the new regime had aggressively hunted Fang up only to betray him, and other injustices and faults in early Ming government. He put the court's initiative front and center whenever possible. But with the two possible exceptions noted above, which do not relate to the court directly, Song Lian did not lie. He did not invent. He worked with what Fang Xiaoru had given him, much of which we can presume he already knew in outline, given his both his official position and his personal interest in Xiaoru. His techniques were: re-use (using the same paragraphs, sometimes re-ordered or with minor changes, for basically the same purpose); reduction (including the deletion of entire paragraphs), which might change the meaning rather dramatically; and recycling, or using paragraphs in such a different order or with such different wording that the meaning was quite different.

Subsequent compilers of collections of biographies who chose to include Fang worked mainly with Song Lian's text, and continued to reduce, re-use, and recycle, smoothing out Keqin's character even further. Of the texts that survive, most are quite similar to one another, stemming from Deng Yuanxi's late-sixteenth-century *Huang Ming shu*. Even the illustrious Li Zhi did no more than cut a few words from Deng's revision of Song Lian's text. Xu Kairen and He Qiaoyuan worked harder, consulting Xiaoru and Su Boheng as well as Song Lian or a Song Lian-derived text. Of course one cannot presume that these writers treated each of their subjects in the same way, but if we, in turn, do not have time to read every single account of a man we need to know a bit about, this test case might suggest which of our predecessors to turn to first. In terms of reliability, numbers are exaggerated, and what look like direction quotations are somewhat distorted. But very little is invented. The main lines of the man's career, including episodes of popular and heavenly approbation, all originate from the earliest source.

The number of compilations that included biographies of or narremes about Fang Keqin should also prepare us for the finding that Wang Hongxu and the compilers of biographies of the *Draft Ming History* – presumably, since they were chosen for this task, men with a long-standing interest in such matters – came to their work with ideas about Keqin and the other subjects already in mind. The category "upright official" had to be filled in, and Fang had been put in it already by Deng Yuanxi. But the Qing compilers of the *Draft and Ming History* were

not – unless there are interim texts I have not seen – merely mechanically reproducing a dull exemplar. As Qing-era historian Zhao Yi wrote in reference to two other biographies,

Without consulting and comparing with other books, one cannot know how painstakingly the [*Ming*] *History* compilers deliberated.¹¹⁵

The compilers were not copying just one biography from a late-Ming or early-Qing compilation, but were drawing from Song Lian's long epitaph while consulting other versions, or remembering them from long lives of reading, and in some cases retaining the distortions of those sources. Indeed the memorials and correspondence in Liu Cheng'gan's *Mingshi li'an* show the compilers reading, comparing, judging, and using a variety of earlier histories.

In reading the biographies in the standard histories, we should not view them as necessarily merely the end product of successive redactions of social biographies. The grouped biographies on “upright officials” seem to work together as a set of cases making specific arguments with selected facts, arguments made both explicitly by the compilers and implicitly by the approving people they support. Reading them closely is justified. Keqin was a rather minor figure who could easily have been made into a straight exemplar through nothing but reduction, yet the compilers chose to include some rather puzzling episodes. Available narremes about Fang could also more fully have filled out the details of admirable imperial actions reported in the “Basic Annals” of the Hongwu reign, but they chose to leave out many of those. They left out some episodes popular in earlier versions, and in some cases, they actually added context to relate Keqin's story to their camouflaged account of the era. A date is wrong; a quirk of dress distorted; a quotation is reduced and out of context, and Fang's relation to the Yuan is simplified. But, again, the compilers did not invent. Every single narreme, including miracles and the complimentary popular ditty, is attested in Xiaoru's account. From earlier versions, using again reduction, re-use, and recycling, and small additions, they carefully constructed a biography that not only presented an exemplar and filled out the main line of history, but also got around the Kangxi emperor's strictures on criticizing Ming Taizu, pitting Heaven's support of Keqin against Taizu's mandate. In a quite different style, their portrait of the man and the troubled times was close to Xiaoru's original portrait, yet addressed, in one chapter of a vast work, the most fundamental issue: the legitimacy of imperial rule, be it Chinese or Manchu.

115 From Zhao Yi 趙翼 (1727–1814), *Ershei'er shi zha ji* 二十二史劄記, quoted in Li Jinhua, *Mingshi zuanxun kao*, 55.