Scribe in the Wilderness:
The Manchu Conquest and the Loyal-Hearted Historiographer's
(xinshi 心史) Mission

Achim Mittag (Essen)

As this is not the heart-and-mind of one single gentleman [Zheng Sixiao 鄭思肖], but the heart-and-mind of all men in the world for a myriad of generations, so is his chronicle not merely a chronicle of the times from the late Song 宋 to the early Yuan 元 dynasty, but the truthful chronicle of All-under-Heaven for a myriad of generations. (Cao Xuequan 蕭乾休, in 1645)1

This paper deals with the Xin shi 心史, or A History of a Loyal Heart,2 an extraordinarily peculiar work of Chinese history writing, which has traditionally been attributed to Zheng Sixiao 鄭思肖 (1241–1318), poet, painter, and a preeminent Song loyalist. Having allegedly been wrapped in waxed paper, sealed in an iron case (tiehan 鐵函) and suspended in a well at a Suzhou 蘇州 monastery on the 7th day of the fourth month, 1283, the Xin shi, or (Tiehan) Xin shi (鐵函心史) 心史, was presumably retrieved after more than 355 years, on the eve of the imminent Manchu conquest of the Ming 明 dynasty, to be precise: on the 8th day of the eleventh month, 1638, after a longer drought that had dried up the well.

The controversy over the Xin shi's authorship is a cause célèbre of Chinese textual criticism. Down to the present day it has remained a fervently debated question whether Zheng Sixiao is to be considered the author or whether the work was “forged” by one or more persons from the late Ming period,3 presumably with a background in Ming loyalism. To date, neither assumption can be proven beyond doubt.

Over this debate a most characteristic feature of the Xin shi has gotten out of sight, namely the fact that it encompasses a spectrum of very different voices. These range from the restrained historian’s voice that gives a well-informed matter-of-fact account of the Song dynasty’s demise (“Dayi liuexu 大義略敘,” pp. 157-191) to an agitated autobiographical voice which may well be interpreted as indicative of a process of “working through” of traumatic experiences, be it that this voice belonged to a real person or is partly or entirely fictitious.


2 For further remarks on the title and its translation, see below.

3 In the present article “late Ming” is understood in a broader sense, including the restorationist attempts in the 50s and 60s of the seventeenth century. Similarly, “Ming-Qing transitional period” roughly refers to the seventeenth century. For further definitions of this period, see Koon-piu Ho: “Should We Die as Martyrs to the Ming Cause? Scholar-officials’ Views on Martyrdom During the Ming-Qing Transition,” in: Orient Extremus 37:2 (1994), 123-151, here p. 123, n. 2.
The synthesis of so different voices in one single work that is allegedly authored by one single person presupposes a finely structured composition which speaks to certain historiographical and literary contexts. Assuming that the Xin shi is in fact a significant work of late Ming historiography, the following discussion is aimed at highlighting various facets of these contexts under five headings:

(1) the basic character of the Xin shi as an “ego-document;”

(2) the Xin shi’s peculiar melange of historical accounts, personal memories, and prose writings, and the literary concept that underlies the juxtaposition of historical narration and poetry;

(3) the Xin shi’s doctrine of “legitimate rule” (zhengtong 正統);

(4) the notion of gonglun 功論, “the discourse that holds to the general norm of what is right and wrong,”

(5) the author’s pose as a “scribe in the wilderness” (yeshi 野史).4

I begin with a brief survey of the work, including the discussion of an argument which in my estimation tips the scale in favor of the late Ming authorship hypothesis.5 The Xin shi is a collection of 250 poems and forty texts of different genres – historical and biographical accounts, autobiographical notices, solemn manifestos, and other miscellaneous writings which are all related to the Mongol conquest of the Song dynasty, supposedly covering the time from 1268 to the eve of the Xin shi’s alleged suspension, i.e. the 7th day of the fourth month, 1283 (final postscript of “Jiu jiu shu 九九書,” p. 114). Allegedly, the Xin shi was printed in the year following its retrieval and first published in early 1640. This edition carries a foreword by Zhang Guowei 張國維 (1594-1645, jinshi 进士 1622), who, after the Manchu conquest of Nanking in the fifth month of 1645, played a significant role in establishing the temporary court of the Ming Prince of Lu 隆王 in Zhejiang.6 Apart from Zhang’s foreword, there are seventeen other persons’ postscripts (ba 后) and afterwords, the latest of which is dated as of the first intercalary month of 1640 (pp. 297-315). A revised edition, presumably done with newly cut printing blocks, carries two forewords and one afterword, dated between the first intercalary and the seventh month of 1640 (pp. 315-319).7

As to the controversy over the Xin shi’s authenticity, suffice it to say that the two prominent early Qing scholars Xu Qianxue 徐乾學 (1631-1694) and Yan Ruoju 袁若璩 (1636-1704) were the first to raise suspicions against the alleged authorship of Zheng Sixiao.8

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4 For the sake of readability, I speak of “the author” although we must reckon with a multiple authorship. – For the multiple meanings of yeshi, see below note 51.
5 This does not exclude per se the possibility that a number of the Xin shi’s poems and prose writings might well originate from the hand of Zheng Sixiao or any other Song loyalists.
6 The Prince of Lu, also known under his assumed title of “administrar of the realm” (jiangue 監國), was supported by a group of Ming loyalists, to which also Huang Zongxi 黃宗羲 (1610-1695) belonged; see Arthur W. Hummel (ed.), Eminent Chinese of the Ch’ing Period (1644-1912), 2 vols. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1943/44, pp. 180-181.
7 For a detailed account of the alleged discovery of the Xin shi and its two early editions, see Chen Fukang, Jingzhong qishu kao 井中奇書考, Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 2001, pp. 134-149; for biographical materials on the altogether twenty persons (plus three persons who assisted at collating the text for the second edition), see ibid., pp. 153-169.
8 Cited in Chen Fukang, Jingzhong qishu kao, pp. 267-268.
Obviously basing themselves on the same source, they concurred in identifying Yao Shilin 夏士聰 (1561 – c. 1651) as the forgerer. Since then numerous arguments in favour of the spuriousness hypothesis have been advanced; they can be grouped under four categories:

(1) the Xin shi’s miraculous discovery, along with the questionable durability of the iron case and the allegedly well-preserved state of the manuscript;

(2) a conspicuous lack of any independent sources, in particular of any records in local gazetteers, that could certify the various reports of the Xin shi’s discovery and publication, which are given in the paratexts accompanying the two early editions;

(3) there is a number of the Xin shi’s reports and references to historical events and figures which are suspected to be incorrect, misdated, anachronistic, or, considering the closeness of certain events, just overly well-informed;

(4) internal errors and other mistakes.

9 According to Yan Ruou, his source of the information about the Xin shi’s forgery was a certain Cao Rong 曹溶 (1613–1685). As from 1690–1692 Yan Ruou assisted Xu Qianxue at compiling the Da-Qing zhi shi at Xu’s private villa at Dongting Mountain 洞庭山 on Lake Taihu 太湖 (see Hummel, Eminent Chinese of the Qing Period, pp. 310-312 and 908-910), it is very likely that Xu got his information either from Yan, or also from Cao Rong.


13 The earliest such source seems to be an account contained in the Wu shi hui 五史會 by Liu Tinglun 劉廷棟 (1662), cited in Chen Fukang, Jingzhong qishi kao, p. 138. Note that this account may have been written down years after 1644. – Another point that arouses suspicion is the absence of Zhang Guowei’s foreword from the edition of his collected writings.

14 E.g., the assertion that work on the Song dynastic history started prior to 1283 (p. 190).

15 E.g., the surrender of Suzhou in 1276; see Lu Tongqun, “Xin shi shi yifa weishu,” p. 42; Lu raises here an acute argument; Chen Fukang’s refutation (id., Jingzhong qishi kao, pp. 310–311) is not very convincing.

16 E.g., the reference to followers of the Lamaist Yellow Sect; see Li Zefen, “Tieban Xin shi wei Mingren de weishu,” p. 700. In contrast, the reference to the Mongol habit of wearing a queue seems not to be an anachronism; see Huber, Wen Tian-hsiang, pp. 300–301, n. 147.

17 E.g., the second failed Yuan naval expedition to Japan in 1281 (p. 95), but especially Wen Tianxiang’s imprisonment and execution in late 1282 (pp. 127–128); as to the latter point, see Li Zefen, “Tieban Xin shi wei Mingren de weishu,” p. 699.

18 E.g., the given date of “Deyou sixth year 德祐六年” which is mistakenly referred to as the year jinshua 金虜 (instead of qingchen 唐臣; see Lu Tongqun, “Xin shi shi yifa weishu,” p. 42; the inclusion of Wen Tianxiang’s 文天祥 name in a commemorative text dedicated to the Song martyrs, which is dated the
Yet the proponents of the authenticity hypothesis – among them notably Yu Jiaxi 余嘉锡 and, in recent years, Chen Fukang 陈福康, who must be credited with a fine edition of the Xin shi (cf. n. 1) – made great efforts to refute each and every argument challenging the Xin shi’s authenticity.19 The outcome is that the case remains unsettled and the dispute will go on for certain.

The argument which eventually convinced me of the late Ming authorship hypothesis has to do with the Xin shi’s title. In Western literature it has variably been translated as “History from the heart” or “History in terms of the xin 心 philosophy (xin, the heart), the subjective power, the inner values.”20 Judged from the Xin shi’s contents, it appears that the Xin shi’s author, when using the term “xin,” probably had in mind the concept of the heart as the inner agency which regulates our “sentiments” (qing 情) in accordance with the “Five Basic Human Relationships” (wu lun 五倫). As such the heart is the organ of filiality (xiao 孝) and loyalty (zhong 忠), the core values which form the very basis of the state (p. 122). They are the two key themes that run like a leitmotiv throughout the Xin shi. The following passage well expresses the ardour with which the Xin shi’s author contemplated these two supreme ethical norms:

I have heard my father say: “To live or die is a small matter, but a moral lapse is a great matter. The servitor of one ruler will die in preference to serving another.” Moreover, he told me: “The family teaching that I received from my father and grandfather, and that sustained the family, has consisted purely of filiality and loyalty. I pass it on to you. Do not forget your father’s words!” Often I have sat through the night, alone and forlorn, overcome with grief and choking with sobs, turning over and over in my mind these thoughts of country and of family.21

Throughout the Xin shi lingers the author’s anxiety over the insufficient observance of his filial and loyal duties; thus, self-admonitions (li 禮) abound:

twelfth month 1281, i.e., one year before Wen’s execution (p. 156); see Huber, Wen T’ien-hsiang, p. 85; the disregard of Song Gaozong’s taboo character gou 稽 in the case of a reference to Li Gou 李耽 (1009–1059; p. 135); see Sikú quan shu zongmu jiào 四庫全書提要, reprint in 2 vols., Peking: Zhonghua shuju, 1981, 174/1544-a-b.


20 Jay, A Change in Dynasties, p. 65, and Huber, Wen T’ien-hsiang, p. 63 ("Geschichte im Sinne der Philosophie des Hsin [xin, des Herzens], des subjektiven Vermögens, der Gesinnung"). Huber’s translation brings to mind the identification of the heart-and-mind with the Principle (xin jì 心即理), a central concept of Wang Yangming’s 王陽明 (1472–1528) philosophy, which was of great impact on the intellectual world of the Ming-Qing transition; see Wang Fansen 王汎森: “Xīn jì ji’ shuo de dòngguó yu míngqíng qíngchǔ xuèfèng zhí zhuan biàn 《心即理》說的動輒與明末清初學風之轉變,” in: (Zhōngguó wénhuà yuán) Lìbì yuàn yuánjiù zázuó 中國文學研究院 - 历史語言研究所雜集 (65 (1994), 333-373. Going through the Xin shi, we find, however, that the author abstains from entering into any profound philosophical discussions.

My heart will not change for all times
I have sealed this pledge with drops of blood. (p. 27).

In using the term *xin* in the book’s title, we also might suspect an allusion to a famous poem by Wen Tianxiang 文天祥 (1236–1283), the paragon of Song loyalty who also occupies an important place in the *Xin shi*.22 In the two closing lines of this poem Wen expresses his unflagging loyalty to the Song dynasty even in face of its imminent demise:

“In this life since antiquity who can escape death.
Better to preserve a pure heart than to have the world change.

*My heart will not change for all times*
*I have sealed this pledge with drops of blood.*

The allusion to Wen Tianxiang is further corroborated by a strange story according to which, following Wen’s execution, his heart is dissected and finally devoured by Kubilai Khan and other Mongol leaders (p. 128) – a story for which the *Xin shi* seems to be the only source.

These remarks on the *Xin shi*’s title – here understood as “a history of a (loyal and filial) heart” – may suffice. In contrast to what *xin shi* means in the *Xin shi*’s title, the term takes on quite a different connotation in a passage found in Lü Zuqian’s *Lü shi jì* (1137–1181) Donglai [Zuo shì] bòyi 東萊（左氏）博議 (*Comprehensive Expositions of the Zuo Commentary*),23 which, to my best knowledge, is its earliest occurrence. In this passage, *xin shi* refers to the historiographers (*shi* 史) who record the movements of the ancient sage-ruler’s heart-and-mind (xin). There is no direct nor indirect reference to this passage in the *Xin shi*, which is significant in two respects:

Firstly, in late Song times Lü Zuqian was considered a leading authority in historical matters and his *Donglai bòyi*, intended for providing guidance in the preparations for the state examinations, circulated widely; hence, it is rather unlikely that a scholar as broadly educated as Zheng Sixiao would have ever overlooked the reference to “*xin shi*.” In contrast, it is not at all surprising that a late Ming author missed it.25

Secondly, Lü Zuqian’s use of the term *xin shi* evokes the archaic idea of two historiographers to the right and the left of the ruler, of whom one was thought to record the latter’s words, the other his actions.26 The underlying concept of historiography as a court-centered enterprise contrasts starkly with the *Xin shi*’s concept of historiography which gives weight to the role of the educated elite (see below Sections 4 and 5).

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22 There are two texts devoted to Wen: “Wen chengxiang xu 文丞相敘” (pp. 122-129) and “Wen chengxiang zan bing xu 文丞相贌序” (pp. 153-154); for an analysis of these two texts (primarily the first one), see Huber, *Wen T’ien-hsiang*, pp. 62-81.


25 By the Ming, Zhu Xi had become the “master historian,” second only to Confucius; see Benjamin Elman: *A Cultural History of Civil Examinations in Late Imperial China*, Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 2001, pp. 490-492, 498.

Once we begin to perceive the *Xin shi* as a late Ming work published not earlier than 1645, some interesting things come into sight such as, for instance, the pervasive use of veiled language.27 Another meaningful facet concerns the place where the *Xin shi* was retrieved: the Chengtian Monastery 楊天寺 in Suzhou; for Ming “surviving subjects” (yimin 進士) this was a place to which were attached memories of the Ming dynasty’s glorious founding era.28 As for the *Xin shi’s* title, it is worth noting that a new edition of the *Ting shi* (Stories Noted on a Small Table) by Yue Ke 岳珂 (1183 – later than 1240), published during the Jiajing era (1522–1566), included a supplement containing the biography, prose writings, poetry, and other biographical materials of his grandfather, the celebrated Southern Song general Yue Fei 岳飞 (1103–1141).29 In a word, this was a rudimentary model for a “history” (shi 史), conceived as an amalgam of the protagonist’s poetry and other historical and biographical materials.

1.

In her introduction to the recently published issue on “Traumatic Memory in Chinese History,” Professor Lynn Struve has stressed the tremendous variety of memory-texts throughout Chinese cultural history. As she points out in her own contribution to this theme issue, the broad genre of memory-texts saw a conspicuous growth in the Ming-Qing transition: “the middle of the seventeenth century in China was marked by a phenomenal outpouring of memoir-like personal accounts, which, in their variety of content and general lack of genre adherence, are best subsumed by the inclusive term ego-document.”30

As an example of such a memoir, Lynn Struve discusses the *Yusheng lu* 養生錄 (Record of Life Beyond my Due) by Zhang Maozi 張茂滋 (b. 1634?), in which the author reports his traumatic experiences encountered during the Qing conquest – mass suicide among the household members, a massacre, jailing, and humiliations. What keeps Zhang Maozi alive –

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27 We permanently encounter phrases which can be read as, “Qing will crumble” (chui qing 崩清; p. 84), “burn down Qing” (shang qing 上清; p. 42), “restore Ming” (guo ming 光明; pp. 42, 84), etc.

28 Zhu Yuanzhang 朱元璋 (r. 1368–1398) adopted Zhang Shicheng’s 孫士誠 (1321–1367) prerogatives as King of Wu 吳王 before founding the Ming dynasty. Prior to his defeat against Zhu in 1367, Zhang had established his palace at the Chengtian Monastery; see (jiatuang zhuangyou) Yiyong zhongxiu 一通志 (reprint 35 vols., Peking: Zhonghua shuju, 1986), “Suzhoufu III 蘇州府, 三,” 79/3b, h.8-10 (p. 3344). Zhang, who was married to a woman who descended from the house of Song, was held in esteem by the local people, in particular the Suzhou literati; the practice of commemorating him persisted until modern times; see Goodrich and Fang, *Dictionary of Ming Biography*, pp. 99-103, especially p. 102.

29 A *Song Bibliography*, edited by Yves Hervouet, Hong Kong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 1978, pp. 338-339. *Siku quanshu yongmu jiaozhuan* 141/1200a-b. The *Ting shi* ranks among the Song foremost “off-brush notes” (biyi) that deal with historical subjects; it was highly regarded by late Ming scholars, which is attested, e.g., by Zhu Guozhen 莊國珍 (1557–1632) in the preface of his *Yongzhuang xiaozhuan* 倪瓊小傳; cited in Liao Ruiming 樂國銘, “Mingdai zhanggu bi de shixue jiazhhi – yi Shuangzui guji wei zhongxin 明代掌故筆記的史學價值 – 以“雙緒姑記”為中心” in: *Di jian jiaojian shu ge yu zhi huan hui* 第三屆史學中國詩詞畫文集, edited by Guoli Zhongxin da xue lishi xue xue huibian 統中興大學歷史學會編, Taizhong: Qinfeng, 1991, 171-195, p. 173. A collated re-edition of the *Ting shi* was published during the Tianqi era (1621–1627) by Yue Yunsheng 趙元聲 (1557-1628), Yue Fei’s descendant in the eighteenth generation; see Shao Yichuan 郭乙川 and Shao Zhang 郭章, *Zengxia Siku jiaozhuan mu chu zao zhu* 增訂四庫簡明目錄校注, Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1979, p. 505.

amidst enormous guilt feelings about his survival – is to transport the remains of his revered paternal grandfather, Zhang Kentang, back to the family’s hometown and to immortalize him through the very act of composing the *Yusheng lu*. Thus, this memoir, says Lynn Struve, “is cast as an account of how the cosmic forces of loyalty and filiality have quasi-supernaturally guaranteed the perpetuation of the family line and the transmission of the sterling example of Zhang Kentang, whose name opens and whose death-poem closes the *Yusheng lu*.”

Basiclly, this characterization of the *Yusheng lu* applies as well to the *Xin shi*, with the difference that in the latter it is the father (or the purported father), Zheng Qi (1199-1262), rather than the grandfather, who is at the very focus of the author’s mind. Thus, the *Xin shi* begins and ends with showing reverence for the father; while the opening preface contains an elementary poetics which is put into the father’s mouth (pp. 3-4), the author writes in the two postfaces:

> If someone asks me, “Whom do you look upon as your teacher in the philosophical teachings and the art of composing prose writings and poetry?,” I shall reply in all my born days by one single sentence, “In all my life I have orientated myself to nothing else than learning from my father!” (p. 193).

> That today I have some faint idea about humaneness and righteousness and can make up some phrases consonant with the Way – all this is owed to my father’s words. (p. 195).

In contrast to the *Yusheng lu*, the *Xin shi* is silent about any eye-witnessed atrocities or shattering experiences. And yet a tense atmosphere of looming disaster, anxiety, despair, and psychological suffering is created throughout the book. Things come to a crisis with the surrender of the author’s hometown Suzhou:

> As I remember my father’s teachings [on filiality and loyalty]
> Day and night I shed tears of blood, and am nearly mad with grief.
> There is my old mother, ill with her old illness,
> Dependent on me to keep her alive a bit longer:
> I want to die, but cannot do so in my pursuit to be a filial son.
> I want to live on, but cannot do so in my pursuit to be a loyal servitor.33

What makes the *Xin shi* comparable to the *Yusheng lu* – despite all differences in form and content – is that it also qualifies as an “ego-document” par excellence. Thus, the intense personal voice speaks to us not only throughout the two hundred and fifty poems, but also throughout the prose writings, being finely modulated in accordance with the varied sorts of texts: self-hortitations (“Zi jie 自戒,” p. 121), solemn manifestos (“Jiu jiu shu 九九書,” pp. 103-114), a fantasy travelogue of a dream travel to mythical regions in Western Sichuan (“Meng you Yuzhenfeng can meihua ji 夢遊玉真峰餐梅花記,” p. 117-120), a highly stylized autobiographical portrait (“Yishi jushi zhuan 一室居士傳,” pp. 137-138), the father’s biography (“Xianjun Jushanweng jiazhuan 先君菊山翁家傳,” pp. 141-144), and the many

32 Another difference is that Zheng Sixiao, the *Xin shi*’s purported author, is childless and is aware of the disruption of the family line beyond his death (see, e.g., pp. 108, 144).

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forewords and afterwords accompanying the various parts of the book. In fact, there are only three major texts in which the personal voice is distanced.34

2.
In the Catalogue of the Imperial Library (Siku quanshu zongmu tiyao 四庫全書總目提要) the Xin shi is categorized under the fourth rubric of "collectanea" (jihu 集部). However, the book is much more tightly organized than any usual edition of an individual author's collective writings since the items are arranged in strict chronological order (see the table below).35

Table: Contents of the Xinshi as related to major historical events of the late 13th century

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>general history</th>
<th>parts I-VI of the Xinshi 心史</th>
<th>contents</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2nd month 1273:</td>
<td>I) &quot;Xianchun ji 成春集,&quot; 1 juan preface dated 17th day of the first month 1279</td>
<td>50 poems covering the period from 1268 to the New Year's Day of 1276</td>
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<td>fall of Xiangyang 襄陽</td>
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<td>2nd day of the twelfth month 1275:</td>
<td>II) &quot;Dayi lüexu&quot;, 1 juan preface dated the 21st day of the first month 1279</td>
<td>70 poems covering the period from the New Year's Day of 1276 receding in time to the twelfth month 1275</td>
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<tr>
<td>surrender of Suzhou 蘇州</td>
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<td>first month 1276:</td>
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<td>surrender of Hangzhou 杭州</td>
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<tr>
<td>2nd month 1279:</td>
<td>III) &quot;Zhongxing ji 中興集,&quot; 2 juan preface dated 15th day of fourth month 1280</td>
<td>61 poems covering the period from the fourth month 1279, to the eighth month 1280; 69 poems covering the period from the ninth month 1280, to after the sixth month 1281; &quot;Zixu 自序&quot; (dated ninth month 1281)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Song defeat in the battle of Yaishan 宜山; end of the house of Zhao 趙</td>
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<td>six and seventh month 1281:</td>
<td>IV) &quot;Jiu ju shu 九九書&quot;, preface dated sixth month 1282; final postscript: 7th day of fourth month 1283</td>
<td>&quot;Chenzi mengxi 臣子盟徽&quot; (dated ninth month 1276), &quot;Hou chenzi mengxi 後臣子盟徵&quot; (dated first month 1278), three postscripts (dated ninth month 1278; eleventh and twelfth month 1282); &quot;Jiu ju shu jiu ba 九九書後九跋&quot; (dates ranging from first month 1279 to eleventh month 1281)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Khubilai's failed naval invasion of Japan at Kyushu</td>
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34 Namely the main historical account ("Dayi lüexu"), Wen Tianxiang's biography ("Wen Chengxiang xu"), and a biography of a Song martyr's widow ("Ouyang Menggui zhongqie rourou zhuan 欧陽夢桂忠妻柔弱傳," pp. 154-155).

35 Note that the poems in Part III overlap in time with the prose writings in Parts IV and V. The same is true with the items in Part IV which were allegedly added later on. Also, the historical account in Part VI, "Dayi lüexu," does not fall under the chronological framework.
What is striking about this arrangement is that it subtly imitates the classical model provided by the *Book of Odes* (*Shijing* 詩經) and the *Spring and Autumn Annals* (*Chunqiu 春秋*). According to Mencius (*Mengzi 孟子* IVB.21), the two canonical texts record, respectively, the history before and after “the extinction of kingly rule” (wang zhi xi 王者之跡熄), i.e. the demise of the Western Zhou dynasty.36

Significantly, the idea of poetry and historical narration complementing each other in their genuine function to retain and represent the historical memory was a particular strand of late Ming literary thought. Above all, this strand was represented by the renowned literary critic Jin Shengtan 金聲嘆 (d. 1661), who also hailed from Suzhou. Jin perceived of the *Odes* and the *Annals* as having set a precedent for remembering the historical past; according to Jin, this precedent was followed, in early times, by Qu Yuan’s 屈原 (c. 340–278 B.C.) “Lisao 雄騏” and Sima Qian’s 司馬遷 (c. 145–90/85 B.C.) *Shi jì 史記*, and, in more recent times, the *Xixiangji 西廬記* (Romance of the Western Chamber) and the *Shuihu zhuan 水湖傳* (Water Margins), respectively.37 We may conclude that in a way the *Xin shi* brought Jin Shengtan’s concept to the full by incorporating poetry and historical narration in one single work.

36 Since poetry expresses “sentiments” (qìng), which were thought to be more authentic than what is seen or heard, poetry was traditionally considered an important medium of historical memory – a fact that is, among others, reflected by reckoning the *Odes* among the “Three Histories” (*san shi 三史*) edited by Confucius.

37 This idea is developed in particular in the following two texts: “Guanhuatang pi di wu caizishu *Shuihu zhuan* xu yi 貫華堂批第五才子書『水湖傳』序” and “Guanhuatang pi di wu [ed.] caizishu *Xixiangji II*: Du di liu 貫華堂批第五才子書『西廬記』卷之二: 讀第六才子『西廬記』法,” in: Jin Shengtan 金聲嘆, compiled by Ai Shuren 艾舒仁 and punctuated by Ran Ran 蕭, Chengdu: Ba-Shu shushe, 1997, pp. 221-226 and 341-351. See also the biographical entry on Jin Shengtan in Hummel, *Eminent Chinese*, pp. 164-166.

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3. The most important single treatise of the whole Xin shi is an essay on the topic of “legitimate rule” (“Gujin zhengtong dalun 古今正統大論”; pp. 132-137). From Song times onward this topic had become a hotly debated issue in the field of historiography. The tone that is struck in the essay under discussion suggests that the Xin shi’s author reckoned his treatise as the final word in this debate. Thus, he does not shy away from criticizing Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 (1007–1072) and even Zhu Xi 諸熹 (1130–1200) for their alleged miscomprehensions of two concrete points (pp. 135-136).

At the core of the author’s argumentation lies the distinction between “China” (Zhongguo 中國) and the “barbarians” (yi 貓狄). Since times immemorial, says the author, there has been no greater man-made disasters than those caused by subordinates running the affairs of a lord and by barbarians running China’s affairs. Running China’s affairs was never to the benefit of the barbarian tribes themselves; in the contrary, it caused their inborn nature getting perverted, eventually sending them to their doom. Thus the author concludes that it is only in the barbarians’ own interest to run their own affairs and follow their inborn nature.

At a different place, the author points out that the principle of “legitimate rule,” inaugurated by the “sage-rulers” (shengren 聖人), defines “China” as the land of man, as distinguished from the barbarians who are like dogs and sheep and do not belong to the human species (renlei 人倫; p. 103). Acknowledging that barbarians have come to reside in China at one or another time, the author compares them to oxen and horses which strangely acquired human language, dress in clothes, and wear shoes, yet will forever remain animals (p. 132).

From the foregoing remarks it is clear that, in the view of the Xin shi’s author, no barbarian ruling house can possibly be categorized as having attained to the lofty principle of “legitimate rule,” not even the glorious Tang 唐 dynasty (618–907). However, pointing to the Tang dynasty’s long enduring rule and noting the great peaceful order achieved during the Zhenguan 貞觀 reign era (626–649), the author argues that the Tang still should be classified under “China” as the second best category, together with the Western and Eastern Jin (Xi-Jin 西晋, Dong-Jin 東晉) and the four southern dynasties, Song 宋, Qi 齊, Liang 梁, and Chen 陳. The eminent status of “legitimate rule” is exclusively reserved to the early sage-kings, the Three Dynasties (Xia 夏, Shang 商, Zhou 周), the Western and Eastern Han (Xi-Han 西漢, Dong-Han 東漢) the Shu-Han 蜀漢 and Song 宋 dynasties. The main part of the treatise is dedicated to the remaining rulers and ruling houses which are rigorously sorted out from the two-layered scheme “legitimate rule” /“China.” The two distinguishing categories employed are “traitors” (ni 致; Wang Mang 王莽, Cao Cao 曹操) and “usurpers” (jian 致), under the latter category fall (a) rulers with a barbarian ancestry

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38 Zhenglong is usually translated as “legitimate succession;” the translation that is preferred here takes into account that the aspect of “succession” in the sense of “legitimate inheritance” is ignored in the Xin shi’s zhenglong treatise.

(Sui Wendi 隋文帝), (b) woman rulers (the two empresses Lü 吕后 and Wu 武后), and (c) "bandits" (dao贼 盗贼; the Chinese ruling houses of the Five Dynasties). In addition, the Qin 秦 dynasty is branded as "immoral" (bu dao 不道).

There are a number of details from which it becomes sufficiently clear that this treatise originated against the backdrop of the late 明 Zhengtong debate. One such detail, for example, is the deprecation of Cao Cao (155-220), who is being lumped together with Wang Mang (see also p. 94). This reflects the influence of the Romance of the Three Kingdoms (Sanguo yanji 三國演義), which took shape and gained popularity over the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and in which the historical figure of Cao Cao is cast in a distinctly unfavorable light. 40

A more thorough exploration of the treatise under discussion as part and parcel of the 明 Zhengtong debate must be left to a later point of time; here I will limit myself to three remarks:

1) It is worth noting that the treatise, when speaking of the Chinese/barbarian distinction, consistently uses the term “Zhongguo” instead of the more conventional term “Hua 华.” The use of “Zhongguo” suggests the idea of a geographical entity which is separated from the regions inhabited by the barbaric people. This brings to mind Wang Fuzhi’s 王夫之 (1619-1692) reflections on the Chinese/barbarian dichotomy. According to Wang, the fundamental difference between Chinese and barbarians must be ultimately attributed to the different climatic and natural environments, which again account for different nutrition, bringing about two different modes of living – the Chinese agrarian society and the nomadic life of the barbarians. The conclusion that Wang drew from this reasoning is that China has definite natural boundaries, a conclusion that effected his historical judgments in one way or the other. 41

2) The Ming debate on “legitimate succession” gained fervor in the course of the sixteenth century, along with various attempts to rewrite the Song dynastic history. 42 A new chord was struck by a treatise which has traditionally been attributed to the venerated Confucian martyr Fang Xiaoru 方孝孺 (1357-1402), but which is likely to have originated from the second half of the fifteenth century. 43 This treatise compares with the one contained in the

43 See John Fincher “China as Race, Culture and Nation: Notes on Fang Hsiao-ju’s Discussion of Dynastic Legitimacy,” in: Transition and Permanence: Chinese History and Culture. A Festschrift in Honor of Dr. Hsiao Kung-cluan, edited by David C. Buxbaum and Frederick W. Mote, Hong Kong 1972, 59-69. Note that this article does not touch on the problem of the treatise’s authorship. Its tone is so radically anti-barbarian that it is more than reasonable to assume that it was written after the 1449 Tumu 土木 incident. Moreover, it is to be remembered that Fang Xiaoru’s writings were suppressed for over one century; see Goodrich and Fang, Dictionary of Ming Biography, p. 432.
Xin shi in two respects: Firstly, it equally emphasizes the fundamental distinction between Chinese and barbarians, similarly comparing the latter to beasts ("If they were elevated to a position above the Chinese people, this would be to lead the world to animaldom. If a dog or a horse were to occupy a human’s seat, even small boys would be angry and take a club to them."[44]). Secondly, it also rigorously excludes all dynasties founded by “frontier barbarians” (bian yi 迁夷) from the “legitimate succession.”

Another zhengtong treatise which needs further study in the present context is a treatise by Wang Shiqi (b. 1554, jinshi 1589), son of the eminent Wang Shizhen 王世貞 (c.1526–1590), in which the topic is intelligently discussed under six categories of “sovereign rule” (tong 王) [45].

As the Xin shi author points out, his zhengtong treatise was originally intended as the basis of a projected “world chronicle” with the designated title of Comprehensive Mirror According to the Doctrine of Legitimate Rule (Zhengtong tongjian 正統通鑑), but due to various obstacles, the author had to give up on his ambitious plan (pp. 136-137). The inquiry into the historiographical genre of “world chronicles” referred to and the treatment of the zhengtong issue in the works of this new genre of history-writing is yet another desideratum [46].

A characteristic trait of Ming historical culture is a discourse that went on over time and acquired a much more general tone than any previous debates over historical issues. In contemporary language, this discourse was referred to as gonglun, “the discourse that holds to the general norm (of what is right and wrong).” In fact, to maintain and develop this discourse was considered the ultimate aim of the “study of the historical past” (shixue 史學). A forceful expression of this idea is found in the preface of a world-chronicle modeled on Zhu Xi’s Tongjian Gangtian 通鑑綱目 (The String and Mesh of the Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government), which is attributed to Wang Shizhen. It opens with a definition of what history is about:

Historical works are books in which one age is summed up and which represent the discourse that holds to the general norm (of what is right and wrong) [gonglun] for ten thousand generations. What is meant by the term gonglun is that there is a definitive standard for praising what is good and condemning what is evil (shan qi shan, e qi e 各宜善, 惡宜惡), for acknowledging what is true and refuting what is false (shi shi, fa fa 是是, 非非).[47]

As to the subject matters of this discourse, none stirred up more emotions or aroused more debates than, firstly, the affair of the Jianwen 建文 emperor’s (r. 1398–1402) “abdication” (xunguo 逆國) and the Yongle 永樂 emperor’s (r. 1402–1424) questionable accession to the throne and, secondly, the infamous coup d’état known as “the seizing of
the palace gates” (duo men 堂門) through which the Jingtai 僧泰 emperor (r. 1450–1456) was forced to abdicate. The enduring debate on these two key events in Ming history was accompanied by notorious criticisms of the virulent “Veritable Records” (shihua 言錄) of the Jianwen and Jingtai reigns, which mounted during the Wanli 萬歷 era (1573–1619). Thus, with regard to the official historiography, the “discourse that holds to the general norm” functioned as a kind of independent truth-keeping agency.

Moreover, criticism of the deliberate distortions in the Ming dynasty’s official records went hand in hand with attempts that aimed at sorting out fact from fancy throughout the abundant “non-official histories” (yeishi 野史) and “stories relating to historical matters” (xiashuo 小說). To set right the historical facts vis-à-vis a growing mass of unreliable reports was considered another primary task of the “discourse that holds to the general norm.”

The Xin shi’s use of the notion of gonglun places the work clearly into the later Ming intellectual world. There are three occurrences to be investigated. At the first instance, the “eulogy” of a Song martyr’s high-minded widow opens with the statement that, “From the ancient past to the present it is only ‘the discourse that holds to the general norm’ which cannot be extinguished.” Hence, even a person of as low a social status as a woman can become the object of high respect by later generations (p. 155).

Next comes the occurrence of “gonglun” in a short introductory note to the “Dayi lüexu,” the historical account of the Song dynasty’s demise, which forms one of the Xin shi’s main items. Stressing his intention to give a straightforward account, the author opines that it would not help to camouflage the evil caused by some Song officials who kept their

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48 See Zhao Yuanzhu 趙園著: Ming Qing zhi ji yeshi yanjiu 明清之際士大夫研究, Peking: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2000, pp. 165-191.
50 An interesting piece of evidence for the regard for the “discourse that holds to the general norm” is provided by a contemporary author who negatively commented on the requests to revise the “Veritable Records” of certain reign eras, on the grounds that, as long as such a discourse held sway, any revisions were unnecessary; see Shen Defu 申德符 (1578–1642), Wanli yebo bian 萬曆野保編, 3 vols., Peking: Zhonghua, 1959, 1997, p. 801.
51 Note that yeishi refers either to the privately working historiographer or to the product of his writing, that is an “unofficial history.” The term originated in the later Tang period. It appears for the first time in a poem by Lu Guimeng 魯圭蒙 (d. 881), and in a book title in a work by Sha Zhongmu 沙仲穆, written between 889 and 905. See Che Jixian 車吉信 and Wang Yuji 王育濟 (eds.): Zhonghua yeshi 中華野史, 16 vols., Jinan: Taishan chubanshe, 2000, Vol. I. 1. In a more narrow sense, however, the term yeishi refers to off-brush notes (biyi 笔記) on historical subjects.
52 On the growth of miscellaneous records (contemporary referred to as yeishi, biyi, and xiashuo) in the second half of the Ming period, see Xie Guozhen 謝國珍, “Ming Qing yeshi biyi gai shu 明清野史筆記概述,” in: included in: Minggong Qingshu de xiaoyan 明末清初的學風, Peking: Renmin, 1982, pp. 88-104.
53 See, e.g., Jiao Hong’s 姚絳 (1539–1597) proposal submitted in connection with the large-scale project of compiling a Ming state history (guishi 衆史), in which the notion of gonglun figures prominently; see “Xin shi tiao chen si shi yi 修史條陳四事議,” in: Duyuan ji 清訓集 (provided with text-critical notes and punctuated by Li Jianxiong 李劍雄, 2 vols., Peking: Zhonghua, 1999), pp. 29-31; Edward T. Ch’en: Ch’ien Hsiang and the Restructuring of Neo-Confucianism in the Late Ming, New York: Columbia University Press, 1986, pp. 52-55.
monarch uninformed because "the discourse that holds to the general norm", once it prevails throughout the realm, cannot be extinguished for a thousand years" (p. 157).

The third and last instance occurs in the "Overall Postface" ("Zong houxu 總後序"), which reviews the Xin shi's structure and considers the book's title before contemplating historiography in general:

Histories are meant to account for the alternation of order and chaos, to analyze what proved to be successful and what went wrong, to clarify the periods of legitimate and illegitimate rule, and to set straight the fundamental principles of human relationships. If this is not achieved, "the discourse that holds to the general norm" cannot eventually be settled and the work does not earn to be called a history. (p. 196).

The Xin shi's use of the term gongtun makes it clear that the inherited system of official historiography was no longer seen fit to warrant a "definitive standard" in historiography. This is also reflected by the fact that the Xin shi's author finds it necessary to discuss at length the twofold problem that a historian is confronted with: establishing the facts vis-à-vis a mass of contradictory reports of a certain event and making a suitable record of it (p. 191).

5. Central to our interpretation of the Xin shi is its author's adoption of the pose as a "scribe in the wilderness" (yeshi). "When the empire is in good order," says the Xin shi's author, "the historical records (shi 史) are lodged in the court, but in times of turmoil they are entrusted to the common people" (p. 196). Elsewhere he remarks: "Presently the court is without a Bureau of Historiography and the routine affairs (of record-keeping) are taken care of in all four directions so that in the mountains and forests there must be those who compile 'histories in the wilderness' (yeshi)" (p. 147). And later on, towards the end of the text from which the latter quotation is taken, the author regrets his knowledge (wenzhi 闢 厂) lacking broadness to compile a "history in the wilderness" (yeshi) and expresses his wish to discuss the compilation of such a historical work with an experienced gentleman of high moral character (ibid.).

Here as well as elsewhere, the term yeshi is used without the pejorative tone which accompanied its use by those late Ming critics cited above who were concerned about the spread of private and semi-private historical accounts. This positive connotation of "yeshi" is closely associated with Yuan Haowen 元好問 (1190–1257), the prominent Jin 金 dynasty's scholar and poet, who, after the Mongol conquest, threw himself into the preservation of the Jin historical records and cultural heritage. Working in a complex of houses named the "Pavilion of the Scribe in the Wilderness" (yeshi ting 野史亭), he collected all sorts of materials which later served as an indispensable source of the Jin history's compilation.54

Another Jin scholar, Wang E 王鈞 (1190–1273), who joined Yuan Haowen in his unrelenting efforts to lay the ground for the Jin dynastic history, memorialized in 1261 to Kubilai Khan, recommending the compilation of the Liao and Jin histories. It is in this memorial that the later often repeated dictum originated, "A state can be vanquished, but its history may not be destroyed" (guo ke wang, shi bu ke mie 國可亡, 史不可滅).55

Among Song loyalists the compilation of the Song history did seemingly not mobilize such great energies as did the Jin history project for Yuan Haowen, Wang E, and other Jin loyalists. There may be several reasons for that; one perhaps being the Mongol takeover of the complete archival materials pertaining to the Song history after the fall of Hangzhou in 1276.56 In contrast, the writing of Ming history was greatly en vogue after the fall of the dynasty in 1644.57 A formidable example of the widespread devotion among Ming loyalists to the writing of the history of their fallen ruling house is provided by Tan Qian (1594–1658), author of the voluminous Ming chronicle 郭資 (Guo que).58

The idea that the “scribes in the wilderness” are responsible for preserving the historical memory after a dynasty’s demise was also forcefully articulated by no less scholar than Huang Zongxi (1610–1695):

As soon as the historical records of the state have ceased to be kept, the “histories compiled in the wilderness” become the state histories. Consider Chen Shou’s 陳壽 (233–297) 蜀志 (Shu zhi) or Yuan Haowen’s 南冠錄 (Nan guan lu).—who decreed their compilation? And yet who would not call them state histories?59

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57 See Zhao Yuanzhu, Ming Qingshi ji shi de yanjue, pp. 436-445.

58 Goodrich and Fang, Dictionary of Ming Biography, pp. 1239-1242.

In our context it is important that Huang Zongxi, through his choice to abandon military resistance, to devote himself to studying and teaching for the rest of his life, and to take an active, albeit indirect part in the state project of compiling the Ming history, assumed a kind of role model for many Ming “surviving subjects” (yimin). His personal conduct and his writings provided for orientation and guidance amidst a fundamental orientational crisis, which definitely was more intensively felt than by the Song “surviving subjects” almost four centuries earlier. The tense atmosphere of self-indignation and guilt feelings, paired with a general pressure of a stridently moralizing debate, is exemplarily reflected by the discussion about the question whether one ought to die as martyrs of the Ming cause or not.

Against the backdrop of this general picture of the intellectual climate in the Ming-Qing transition we can perceive a possible key motive behind the writing of the Xin shi, namely, to carve out a niche in which the “surviving subjects,” tormented with guilt feelings and troubled by mutual excluding moral obligations, could accommodate themselves to the circumstances of their own survival. According to this interpretation then, it was through the Xin shi that the historical figure of Zheng Sixiao rose to become a kind of patron of a precarious, yet meaningful existence as a “scribe in the wilderness.”

60 This aspect needs to be further investigated in the larger context of a reappraisal of Huang Zongxi, for which Lynn Struve has prepared the ground with her magisterial article: “Huang Zongxi in Context: A Reappraisal of His Major Writings,” in: Journal of Asian Studies 47 (1988), 474-502.
62 See Koon-piu Ho, “Should We Die as Martyrs?” (cited above, n. 3).