



## THE LAST CAMPAIGNS OF WANG YANGMING

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On 11 April 1528 an order was issued by Wang Yangming 王陽明 (Wang Shouren 守仁; 1472-1529), the well-known philosopher and teacher who was then serving as the supreme commander of the provinces of Jiangxi, Huguang, Guangdong, and Guangxi, to launch a surprise attack against the so-called Yao 猺 bandits in the areas of Duanteng 斷藤 (Chopped Rattan) Gorge and Bazhai 八寨 (Eight Stockades) in central Guangxi. More than 13,000 soldiers, most of whom were themselves “non-Chinese,” according to a report submitted by Wang, apparently took part in the three-month-long offensive. In all, some 3,000 “bandits” were decapitated, while more than 1,000 of their family members were captured. The official toll, however, tells only part of the story. Over the course of the campaign, thousands of people from the targeted areas were reported to have drown or starved to death, while countless villages were said to have been destroyed. For Wang Yangming, the strike against the so-called Yao bandits was an absolute triumph. Not only did it “once and for all redress the wrongs suffered by tens of thousands of people,” he claimed, it also succeeded in “eliminating a problem that has festered for some one hundred years.”<sup>1</sup>

That Wang Yangming would be in charge of such a bloody campaign should come as no surprise. Long before he was officially recognized, in 1584, as one of the four most influential Confucian (*ru* 儒) teachers in Ming times—the other three being Xue Xuan 薛瑄 (1392-1464), Hu Juren 胡居仁 (1434-84), and Chen Xianzhang

<sup>1</sup> Wang Yangming, “Bazhai Duanteng xia jieyin shu” 八寨斷藤峽捷音疏 [On the victories in Bazhai and Duanteng Gorge], in *Yangming quanshu* 陽明全書 [Complete works of Wang Yangming] (1572), Sibū beiyao ed. (repr., Taipei: Zhonghua shuju, 1985), 15:6b-14a (hereafter cited as *YMQS*); for the number of soldiers, see 15:6b-7a, 8a; for casualties, see 15:11a; for the quotation, see 15:12b.



陳獻章 (1428-1500)—Wang had been known for his long-standing concern for border defense and for his ability as a commander. In a chronological biography compiled by one of his disciples, it is especially noted that as a teenager Wang Yangming had visited several strategic passes in the northern region, where he had come to “aspire to [one day] pacify and supervise the four corners” of the Ming realm. Whether Wang had actually harbored such ambitions as a young man we cannot be sure. What is clear is that in time he did demonstrate through his words and actions his serious interest in military affairs. In 1499, in his first major memorial to the emperor, for instance, Wang Yangming, then aged twenty-nine and a newly-minted graduate of the civil service examination system, decided to offer a series of reasonable but unusually candid recommendations on border defense. Central to his arguments was his conviction that the Ming needed to do more to recruit and cultivate talents in military affairs. Nor were Wang Yangming’s interests and involvement limited to policy formulation. In time, he would have many occasions to conduct military campaigns in person. From 1517 to 1518 he was in charge of suppressing a number of uprisings in the provinces of Fujian, Jiangxi, Huguang, and Guangdong. More significant, in 1519 he was responsible for capturing Zhu Chenhao 朱宸濠, the Prince of Ning 寧 and an uncle of the reigning emperor, who was then plotting to usurp the throne.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> For the inclusion of Wang Yangming’s tablet in the Temple of Exemplary Teachers (*Xianshi miao* 先師廟), see Shen Shixing 申時行 (1535-1614) et al., eds., *Ming huidian* 明會典 [Collected statutes of the Ming] (1587; Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1989), 91.520-21. For the intellectual and political background of the inclusion, see Hunglam Chu, “The Debate over Recognition of Wang Yang-ming,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 48, no. 1 (1988): 47-70. For a concise biography of Wang Yangming, see Wing-tsit Chan, “Wang Shou-chen,” in *Dictionary of Ming Biography, 1368-1644*, ed. L. Carrington Goodrich and Chaoying Fang (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), 1408-16. For a pioneering if relatively uncritical study of Wang’s official career, see Yü-chüan Chang, *Wang Shou-chen as a Statesman* (1940; repr., Arlington, VA: University Publications of America, 1975). For a more recent study that offers discussion on Wang’s political thought and career, see Zhang Xianghao 張祥浩, *Wang Shouren pingzhuan* 王守仁評傳 [Critical biography of Wang Shouren] ([Nanjing]: Nanjing daxue chubanshe, 1997). For Wang’s visits to borderland passes, see Qian Dehong 錢德洪 (1496-1574), comp., “Nianpu” 年譜 [Chronological biography], in *YMQS*, 32:2b. For Wang’s memorial, see “Chenyán bianwú shù” 陳言邊務疏 [Recommendations on borderland affairs], in *YMQS*, 9:1-9a; for translations, see Wang Yang-ming [Wang Yangming], *Instructions for Practical Living and Other Neo-Confucian Writings by Wang Yang-ming*, trans. Wing-tsit Chan (New York: Columbia

But while the use of force was at times deemed legitimate within the moral order we call Confucianism, Wang Yangming's decision to go to war against the "Yao bandits" in Duanteng Gorge and Bazhai still raises a number of important questions. If Wang indeed based his actions not just on politics, but at least to some degree on principles, why then did he decide to strike against the so-called Yao bandits when, just two months earlier, he had made a special effort to placate the native chiefs of Tianzhou 田州 in western Guangxi? While one may agree with Philip Ivanhoe that "to see the many facets of Wang's life as a congeries of tense dichotomies in need of resolution" is to impose unduly the sensibility of our time onto a Ming thinker, one may still justifiably ask how Wang Yangming's military undertakings can help us better understand his humanistic vision. In particular, in light of his decision to attack the "Yao bandits," how should one come to terms with Wang's views on human nature and with his oft-stated ideal of "forming one body with Heaven, Earth, and all things"? While scholars have long recognized the importance of Wang Yangming's official career, most have regarded his policy choices as either a natural extension of his moral philosophy or a clear sign of his moral hypocrisy. The aim of this essay is to offer a different perspective. While it seeks to make sense of Wang's military decisions in light of his philosophical positions, it also locates his attitude toward the "non-Chinese" (*man* 蠻, *yi* 夷, etc.) within the broader context of mid-Ming political discourse. In so doing, it draws attention not only to the *range* of responses by Ming scholar-officials, but also to the *limits* of their options. It must be noted that I do not use the terms "Yao" and "bandit"—or, for that matter, "Chinese" and "non-Chinese"—as reified labels; I employ them here solely to describe how Wang Yangming and his fellow Ming officials had come to view the world around them.<sup>3</sup>

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University Press, 1963), 284-92; Chang, *Statesman*, 169-84. For a survey of Wang's involvements in borderland affairs, see Taniguchi Fusao 谷口房男, "Ō Shujin to shōsū minzoku" 王守仁と少数民族 [Wang Shouren and the minority nationalities], in *Kanan minzokushi kenkyū* 華南民族史研究 [Studies on the ethnohistory of south China] (Tokyo: Ryokuin shobō, 1997), 211-30. For the rebellion of Zhu Chenhao, see James Geiss, "The Cheng-te Reign, 1506-1521," in *The Cambridge History of China*, vol. 7, *The Ming Dynasty, 1368-1644, Part 1*, ed. Frederick W. Mote and Denis Twitchett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 423-30.

<sup>3</sup> For the comment of Philip Ivanhoe, see his *Ethics in the Confucian Tradition: The Thought of Mengzi and Wang Yangming*, 2nd ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2002), xiv.

## Troubles in Guangxi

The last campaigns of Wang Yangming actually began not in Duanteng Gorge or Bazhai but in the native domain (*tusi* 土司) of Tianzhou. As is well known, since as early as the Qin dynasty it had been common for the centralizing state to rely on native chieftains to maintain order in areas where the state was unable or unwilling to assert direct control. Even though the rules and regulations that governed such arrangements had changed over time, the principle that guided their functioning had remained remarkably consistent: in exchange for a semblance of order in its borderlands (where the majority of native domains were located), the centralizing state was willing, to an extent, to leave the chieftains alone and let them rule as they desired. In the case of the Ming, the choice to continue the practice of co-opting native chieftains was made quite early on. Following his conquest of the Huguang region in 1364, Zhu Yuanzhang, the future Ming founding emperor (r. 1368-98), was said to have reappointed many of the chieftains there to the same posts they had held under Mongol rule. In time, the practice of recognizing native domains was extended to all the provinces in the

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For two views on the relationship between Wang's moral and political philosophy, see Xiao Gongquan [Hsiao Kung-ch'üan] 蕭公權, *Zhongguo zhengzhi sixiang shi* 中國政治思想史 [A history of Chinese political thought] (Taipei: Lianjing, 1982), 600-606; Xu Fuguan 徐復觀, "Seijika to shite no Ô Yōmei" 政治家としての王陽明 [Wang Yangming as a statesman], in *Yōmeigaku no sekai* 陽明学の世界 [The world of Wang Yangming], ed. Okada Takehiko 岡田武彦 (Tokyo: Meitoku Shuppansha, 1986), 216-34. For portrayals of Wang Yangming as an enemy of the people, see, for example, Yang Chengzhi 楊成志, "Wang Yangming yu shaoshu minzu" 王陽明與少數民族 [Wang Yangming and the minority nationalities], *Guangxi minzu yanjiu* 廣西民族研究, 1985, no.1:1-6; Yang Shilu 楊世璐, "Wang Shouren dui Guangxi shaoshu minzu de jiaofu shuping" 王守仁對廣西少數民族的剿撫述評 [On Wang Shouren's extermination and pacification of the minority nationalities in Guangxi], *Guangxi minzu yanjiu*, 1985, no. 2:28-34. It is alleged in some sources that Wang was appointed to Guangxi on the recommendation of the powerful minister Gui E 桂萼 (d. 1531) with the expectation that he would take advantage of the disorder in Annam (present-day northern Vietnam) to reoccupy the territory. But even if the allegation is true, it is evident that Wang never intended to carry out the minister's wish; see Tian Rucheng 田汝成 (*jìnshi* 1526), *Yanjiao jiwen* 炎徼紀聞 [Records of things heard on the torrid frontier] (pref. 1558), Jiaye tang congshu 嘉業堂叢書 ed., 1:9a; Zhang Tingyu 張廷玉 (1672-1755) et al., eds., *Ming shi* 明史 [History of the Ming] (1739; Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974), 195.5167. For issues surrounding the use of labels, see Leo K. Shin, *The Making of the Chinese State: Ethnicity and Expansion on the Ming Borderlands* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), esp. chap. 1.

southern border zone. While it is difficult to determine the precise number of *tusi* at any given time, it is evident that by the end of Zhu Yuanzhang's reign at least forty-six major domains had been recognized in Guangxi alone.<sup>4</sup>

Although the institution of chieftaincy did to some extent function as it was intended, by the second half of the fifteenth century the domain of Tianzhou had apparently become a major source of troubles. At the center of the seemingly endless cycle of violence were the intense competition among aspirant chieftains as well as the inability or unwillingness of the centralizing state to enforce its rules and regulations. However, while the history of violence in Tianzhou is long and confusing, the contour is clear: ambitious headmen or kinsmen jealous of the power of the incumbent chieftain would from time to time usurp the chieftaincy by staging coups of their own or by collaborating with opportunistic chieftains from surrounding domains. The result was a series of claims and counterclaims that often baffled local Ming officials, who were more interested in swiftly restoring order than in adjudicating succession disputes. But while Ming officials were reluctant to be drawn into local warfare, they did find it necessary to act once such violence threatened the stability promised by the institution of chieftaincy. In the case of Tianzhou, the line had apparently been crossed by the early sixteenth century. Not only had the chieftain Cen Meng 岑猛 repeatedly defied the Ming court by withholding his troops from government operations, he had also threatened to take over nearby domains. As Cen Meng became increasingly belligerent, the pressure to curb his power also intensified. By 1525, unbeknownst to him, the Ming court had finally decided to launch a major campaign against the most powerful chieftain in Guangxi.<sup>5</sup>

It was against this background of heightened tensions in Tianzhou

<sup>4</sup> For the history of the institution of native chieftaincy, see, for example, Wu Yongzhang 吳永章, *Zhongguo tusi zhidu yuanyuan yu fazhan shi* 中國土司制度淵源與發展史 [Origins and history of development of the institution of native chieftaincy in China] (Chengdu: Sichuan minzu chubanshe, 1988); Gong Yin 龔蔭, *Zhongguo tusi zhidu* 中國土司制度 [The institution of native chieftaincy in China] (Kunming: Yunnan minzu chubanshe, 1992). For the practice of native chieftaincy during the Ming, see Shin, *Making of the Chinese State*, chap. 3. For a comprehensive list of native domains in Guangxi, see Gong Yin, *Zhongguo tusi zhidu*, 997-1158.

<sup>5</sup> For a concise history of violence in Tianzhou, see *Ming shi*, 318.8244-54; for a discussion, see Shin, *Making of the Chinese State*, chap. 3.

that in June 1527 Wang Yangming, then fifty-four years old, was ordered to Guangxi. Although by then Cen Meng had been eliminated, some of the native chiefs who had worked under him had continued to resist. Wang's task was to re-establish order in the area once and for all. It is unclear why Wang Yangming, of all senior officials, was chosen for the assignment, but it has been speculated that some of his colleagues were keen on keeping the increasingly influential scholar-official away from the emperor. For his part, although Wang had been in self-imposed retirement for a number of years and his health had been deteriorating, it is evident from his writings that he had been keeping abreast of the affairs of the state. In the memorial to the emperor in which he asked to be excused from his commission, Wang Yangming could not help but volunteer his assessment of the situation in Tianzhou. The key to restoring order in the area, according to him, was not to complicate the existing military command structure but to make sure that the commander-in-charge was granted the necessary authority. Though Yao Mo 姚鏞 (1465-1538), whom Wang would eventually succeed, might have made some mistakes, it was important that the commander be given every chance to succeed. Only after Yao Mo had exhausted his options, Wang advised, should the court proceed to select an official familiar with the region to replace him.<sup>6</sup>

By the time Wang Yangming finally assumed the position and arrived in Guangxi in December 1527, he had clearly given further thought to the situation in Tianzhou. In a memorial submitted not long after his arrival, he surprised many by arguing that even though the chieftain of Tianzhou deserved to be punished, Ming officials should bear partial responsibility for the state of disarray in the *tusi*

<sup>6</sup> For a Ming-period account of the war against Cen Meng, see Tian Rucheng, *Yanjiao jiuwen*, 1:1-9a; for a discussion, see Taniguchi Fusao, "Shion Denshū hanran shimatsuki" 思恩田州叛乱始末記 [An account of the rebellions in Sien and Tianzhou], in *Kanan minzokushi kenkyū*, 163-89. For the appointment of Wang Yangming, see *Ming shilu* 明實錄 [Veritable records of the Ming] (1418-mid-17th century; repr., Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan lishi yuyan yanjiusuo, 1961-66), *Shizong shilu* 世宗實錄, 76.1697, 77.1709-10, 78.1741-42. For the political context of the appointment, see Timothy Brook, "What Happens When Wang Yangming Crosses the Border," in *The Chinese State at the Border*, ed. Diana Lary (Vancouver, University of British Columbia, forthcoming). For Wang's memorial, see "Cimian zhongren qi en yang bing shu" 辭免重任乞恩養病疏 [On declining an important post and begging for imperial favor in order to recuperate from illness], in *YMQS*, 14:1-2a.

area. In particular, Wang pointed out that though the Ming had set up an inter-provincial military office to tackle specifically the problems in the southern borderlands, through a combination of neglect and complacency officials had allowed the local military administration “to deteriorate day by day.” Just as “there are at the top no commanders who can be relied on,” Wang observed, “there are at the bottom no [regular] soldiers who are fit for service.” Rather than imposing a degree of order, the military arrangement in the southern provinces actually exposed the increased reliance by the Ming state on native chieftains and their soldiers. To Wang Yangming, the solution was obvious. Instead of relying on native soldiers to conduct its military campaigns, whether within or outside Guangxi, the Ming should reform its military so that it could depend on its own forces to maintain order.<sup>7</sup>

With regard to the troubles in Tianzhou, Wang suggested that a change in the government’s approach was in order. Until Wang Yangming was appointed to the province, the strategy under Yao Mo, his predecessor, had been one of relentless pursuit. Not only was Cen Meng eventually compelled to commit suicide, other native chiefs who had worked under the chieftain of Tianzhou had also become targets of persecution. In Wang’s view, the intense pursuit by Ming officials of Lu Su 盧蘇 and Wang Shou 王受, the two leading native chiefs, had especially been a misguided effort. He argued that even though the two native chiefs had been in the company of Cen Meng, they had not been known for their unruliness. It was only after Lu Su and Wang Shou had been identified by Ming officials as targets of suppression, Wang maintained, that they became bold and defiant. To restore order in Tianzhou, according to him, the Ming should temporarily suspend its pursuit and allow the native chiefs to surrender. If Lu Su and Wang Shou did step forward to submit themselves, the Ming would be able to avoid a protracted and costly conflict; if, on the other hand, they decided not to do so, the Ming “would then be able to have no regrets in exterminating them.”<sup>8</sup>

Perhaps in anticipation of his critics, in a follow-up memorial Wang Yangming further outlined ten reasons why the Ming should use

<sup>7</sup> “Fu ren xie en sui chen fujian shu” 赴任謝恩遂陳膚見疏 [Some humble views on the occasion of assuming office], in *YMQS*, 14:2-5a; for quotations, see 14:2b.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*; for the quotation, see 14:3b.

suasion rather than force in tackling the native chiefs of Tianzhou. His arguments were threefold. First, a protracted war not only would deplete government resources, it would also lead to the loss of tens of thousands of innocent lives. Even among people who might survive the crossfire, Wang warned, many would still fall victim to famine and banditry. Second, by prolonging the war officials risked exhausting and alienating many of the native soldiers who had been commissioned from as far as the province of Huguang to fight on behalf of the government. Even if the Ming succeeded in capturing Lu Su and Wang Shou, Wang cautioned, the result would be the empowerment of those chieftains who had provided the necessary troops. Third, even if the Ming turned out to be victorious, the area of Tianzhou would still be devastated. Not only would there be few people left to cultivate the land, the government would now have to station regular soldiers permanently there to maintain order.<sup>9</sup>

Whether by chance or by design, by early 1528 Wang Yangming had clearly made a breakthrough. As soon as he arrived at the city of Nanning 南寧 (in southwestern Guangxi), where war plans against the two native chiefs were being hatched, Wang announced that all government soldiers who had been gathered for the campaign would be decommissioned. The significance of this gesture was not lost on Lu Su or Wang Shou. Although the two native chiefs were at first understandably skeptical, after much negotiation through intermediaries Lu Su and Wang Shou at the end agreed to surrender. In two well-coordinated petitions to Wang Yangming, the native chiefs sought to make the case that they were simply victims of circumstances. As soon as the government forces began to close in on the domain of Tianzhou in the early summer of 1526, according to the petitions by Lu and Wang, it became impossible for anyone associated with the Cen Meng to escape suspicion or persecution. It was only, as the native chiefs claimed, after the Ming court had decided to be magnanimous, that they were finally able to step forward to declare their innocence. In all, some seventy thousand

<sup>9</sup> “Zoubao Tianzhou Sien pingfu shu” 奏報田州思恩平復疏 [Report on the pacification of Tianzhou and Sien], in *YMQS*, 14:5b-12, esp. 8-10a. Wang’s arguments here are at times reminiscent of those offered by Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 (1007-72) concerning the so-called *man* bandits in Hunan; see *Ouyang Wenzhong gong wenji* 歐陽文忠公文集 [Collected writings of Ouyang Xiu], Sibū congkan chubian suoben ed., 105.811-12.



people were said to have followed the lead of Lu Su and Wang Shou to surrender to the Ming.<sup>10</sup>

But while the “pacification” of the native chiefs was at the time a major achievement for Wang Yangming, it was only one of many important tasks he had to tackle. Now Wang had to concentrate on coming up with a long-term solution for Tianzhou. From the outset, it is obvious that he was approaching the problem of native chieftaincy somewhat differently from his predecessor. For him, to restore order in Tianzhou the state must again make use of native chieftains. Unlike many Ming officials, Wang did not consider the institution of chieftaincy itself an aberration. He contended that just as in the “central plains” it was common for the state to distinguish between large and complex administrative units and those that were relatively small and simple, in borderland areas, where customs and practices were different from the norm, it was reasonable for the state to distinguish between domains that should be ruled by regular officials and domains that might be left to native chieftains. Though some officials would complain that to allow native chieftaincy to continue in Tianzhou was to encourage further erosion of the Ming prestige, Wang argued that the criterion should be whether a particular arrangement would work or not. “If by eliminating the native chieftains the native population would be pacified, why [would the state] endure the troubles of insisting on retaining the chieftains?”, Wang asked rhetorically. “But if by removing the chieftains the native population would rebel, why would any upright, compassionate person be willing to make the people rebel by insisting on the removal of the chieftains?”<sup>11</sup>

In particular, to restore order in Tianzhou Wang proposed the following measures. First, a regular prefect should be appointed to the area both to provide supervision and to promote agriculture. While the appointed prefect would not engage in the direct administration of the domain, he would serve as a constant reminder of the presence of the centralizing state. Second, because the people of Tianzhou apparently still desired to have a member of the Cen clan to be their

<sup>10</sup> “Zoubao Tianzhou Sien pingfu shu,” esp. 5b-7a, 10b-11. For more details on the negotiation, see Tian Rucheng, *Tanjiao jiwen*, 1:3b-4a.

<sup>11</sup> “Chuzhi pingfu difang yi tu jiu an shu” 處置平復地方以圖久安疏 [On settling the pacified areas so as to bring about long-term peace], in *YMQS*, 14:14-23a; for quotations, see 14:14b.



leader, or so claimed Wang Yangming, the Ming court should appoint one of Cen Meng's sons to be the next chieftain. The new chieftain would need to undergo a long period of probation and be ultimately under the oversight of the regular prefect, but he would still be seen as a critical link between the state and the native population. Third, in order to decentralize power the Ming court should appoint, in addition to the native chieftain, a number of native police (*xunjian si* 巡檢司). In Wang's scheme, the native police would each be in charge of a small area within Tianzhou, and they would all be under the direct supervision of the regular prefect. Fourth, education should be revived. While it was probably premature to formally re-establish a government school in the domain, Wang argued, it would be appropriate to have an instructor from a nearby government school to travel periodically to the domain so as to lecture to interested students.<sup>12</sup>

### Pursuing the “Yao Bandits”

Although it was not part of his original mandate, by the time Wang Yangming had settled the situation in Tianzhou it became apparent to him that he needed to turn his attention to the troubles in Duanteng Gorge and Bazhai. As in the case of Tianzhou, the area of Duanteng Gorge (also known as Teng 藤 [Rattan] or Dateng 大藤 [Big Rattan] Gorge) had been a source of much concern for Ming officials since the early fifteenth century. Extending some sixty kilometers along the meandering Qian 黔 River, the Gorge had evidently long occupied a strategic place on the transportation network in Guangxi. Boats loaded with grain and salt from the commercial hub of Wuzhou 梧州 in the eastern part of the province almost always had to travel through the Gorge to reach the far side of Guangxi. From the late-fourteenth to the mid-sixteenth century, the so-called Yao bandits from the Gorge area were reported to emerge frequently to attack merchant boats and to pillage nearby regular administrative areas. In response to

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., esp. 14:15b-23a. One reason Wang Yangming decided to reinstall a Cen descendant as the chieftain of Tianzhou, according to a later Ming-period account, was to prevent Lu Su and Wang Shou from amassing too much power; see Tang Shunzhi 唐順之 (1507-60), *Guangyou zhangong lu* 廣右戰功錄 [Record of military achievements in Guangxi] (postscript 1559), Baibu congshu jicheng ed., *ye* 5.



such attacks, the Ming court decided in 1465 to launch a major military campaign in the area. Some 190,000 soldiers (the majority of whom were supplied by native chieftains) were said to have been commissioned. In the Gorge area alone, nearly 320 settlements were reported to have been destroyed, while more than 3,200 “bandits” were said to have been decapitated. But the campaign did not result in long-lasting peace. Attacks by the so-called Yao bandits would continue. By the 1520s, Ming officials were apparently ready for another major military operation in the area.<sup>13</sup>

As in the case of Duanteng Gorge, the area of Bazhai had also long been a source of troubles for the Ming. As early as 1376, not long after the founding of the dynasty, “bandits” from Bazhai were reported to have begun attacking nearby regular administrative units. What made the area of Bazhai (also known as Shizhai 十寨, or “ten stockades”) especially troublesome, according to the records, was its geography. Ming officials observed that, while the people of Bazhai could travel easily to other parts of central Guangxi and cause havoc far away from home, the “stockades” or settlements themselves were enclosed by mountains. As soon as the government forces showed any signs of movement, the *man* and *yi* “bandits” from Bazhai could quickly retreat to their camps and set up defense at strategic passes. Over the course of the fifteenth century, numerous attempts had been made by the Ming to establish control in Bazhai, but almost all resulted in failure and clearly none had any long-term impact. In one episode, the official in charge of a failed campaign was said to have ordered some of his own soldiers beheaded so that he could pass the heads off as those belonging to the “bandits.” Although no major incident was reported in the area in the early sixteenth

<sup>13</sup> For Wang’s decision to go to war against the “Yao,” see “Zhengjiao ren’e Yao zei shu” 征剿稔惡猺賊疏 [On the extermination of the ferocious Yao bandits], in *YMQS*, 15:1-2. For a Ming-period account of the violence in Duanteng Gorge, see Tian Rucheng, *Yanjiao jiuwen*, 2:1-19a. For recent studies, see, for example, Gao Yanhong 高言弘 and Yao Shun’an 姚舜安, *Mingdai Guangxi nongmin qiye shi* 明代廣西農民起義史 [History of peasant uprisings in Guangxi during the Ming] (Nanning: Guangxi renmin chubanshe, 1984), 19-51; Zhang Yigui 張益桂 and Xu Shiru 徐碩如, *Mingdai Guangxi nongmin qiye shigao* 明代廣西農民起義史稿 [Draft history of the peasant uprisings in Guangxi during the Ming] (Nanning: Guangxi renmin chubanshe, 1988), 78-100. For the war of 1465-66, see also Frederick W. Mote, “The Ch’eng-hua and Hung-chih Reigns, 1465-1505,” in *The Cambridge History of China*, 377-80.

century, there too officials were evidently ready by the 1520s for another attempt to re-establish control.<sup>14</sup>

While Wang Yangming might have long concluded that a strike against the “Yao bandits” was imperative, encouragement from his fellow officials had evidently made the task even more urgent. In one correspondence quoted by Wang in his memorial to the emperor, several of his subordinates reported that even though a large number of *man* and *yi* had submitted to the Ming following the campaign against Tianzhou, the “Yao bandits” of Duanteng Gorge continued to attack regular settlements. As a result, “[the number of registered] residents has dwindled day by day, and [the remaining] villages have become less populated day by day.” In another correspondence quoted by Wang, officials including Lin Fu 林富 (*jinsi* 1502), who would succeed Wang Yangming as supreme commander of Guangxi, also reported that the “Yao bandits” of Bazhai continued to be troublesome despite the success of the Ming in Tianzhou. According to Lin Fu and others, “not a single month in a year, not [even] a single ten-day period in a month,” would pass without reports of pillage and plunder carried out by the *man* and *yi*. Even though requests for military operations had been made “hundreds of times,” they observed, no serious action had been taken. In these officials’ view, time had come for a resolution: “As long as the Yao bandits are not exterminated, there can be no peace among the residents.”<sup>15</sup>

By the spring of 1528, the question for Wang Yangming was not whether to strike against the “Yao bandits”, but how best to execute the attack. In his eyes, two models were obvious: one, the model of a large-scale military campaign, and the other, that of an “eagle” (surgical) strike. Despite the advantages associated with large-scale campaigns, Wang Yangming concluded that to tackle the problems of Duanteng Gorge and Bazhai an alternative ap-

<sup>14</sup> For an account of the violence in Bazhai, see Su Jun 蘇濬 (1541-99), ed., *Guangxi tongzhi* 廣西通志 [General gazetteer of Guangxi] (1599; repr., Taipei: Xuesheng shuju, n.d.), 33:42-44. For recent studies, see Gao Yanhong and Yao Shun’an, *Mingdai Guangxi nongmin qiye shi*, 82-94; Zhang Yigui and Xu Shiru, *Mingdai Guangxi nongmin qiye shigao*, 64-77.

<sup>15</sup> “Zhengjiao ren’e Yao zei shu,” 15:1-2; for quotations, see 15:1. Despite some of the official reports, it seems evident that the representatives and agents of the centralizing state were often as much to blame for the violence in Guangxi as the so-called Yao bandits; see Shin, *Making of the Chinese State*, chap. 4.

proach was needed. In a memorial submitted to the emperor he argued that the key to success was the element of surprise. If news of an imminent attack was widely circulated, he maintained, even if hundreds of thousands of soldiers were deployed the war might still not be won easily. In planning the attack he decided to take advantage of several unique opportunities. First, since he had been authorized to act according to his judgment, Wang believed he now had the flexibility to order a strike without having to seek prior approval from the court. Second, a large group of native soldiers from Huguang was then on its way home from Guangxi now that its service was no longer needed in Tianzhou. For Wang Yangming, this presented a golden opportunity to launch a surprise attack against the “bandits” in Duanteng Gorge. Third, following their surrender Lu Su and Wang Shou, according to Wang, were eager to contribute to the military actions of the Ming. In his view the participation of the native soldiers from Tianzhou would be a major boost to the government’s efforts.<sup>16</sup>

The strategy of Wang Yangming did apparently catch the local population by surprise. In the area of Duanteng Gorge, people were said to have initially been prepared for an attack by the Huguang native soldiers. In anticipation, many had even moved their families and livestock further up the mountains. But, according to a memorial submitted by Wang Yangming, since the government had not shown any signs of deployment people there gradually became less vigilant. When the time finally arrived and the people of Duanteng Gorge were confronted with a highly coordinated assault, they were devastated. In one incident, according to Wang, more than 600 people were drowned to death while trying to cross a river. In all, in the Gorge area alone more than 1,100 “bandits” were reported to have been decapitated, while some 600 of their family members were said to have been captured. Likewise, in the area of Bazhai people were evidently also caught by surprise. According to one report, following major combats in the area more than 4,000 bodies were found scattered throughout the mountains.<sup>17</sup>

For Wang Yangming, the surprise attack was an absolute triumph. He observed that since the founding of the dynasty repeated efforts

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> “Bazhai Duanteng xia jieyin shu,” 15:6b-14a, esp. 6b-9b.

had been made to subdue the bandits of Duanteng Gorge and Bazhai. There had been some successes, to be sure, but on the whole the area had remained highly troublesome. Among the attempts to establish order, Wang observed, the wars led by Han Guan 韓觀 (d. 1414) in the early Ming and by Han Yong 韓雍 (1422-78) in the Chenghua period (1465-87) had been particularly noteworthy, if only for the size of the military forces deployed. But even in the effort led by Han Yong (in which some 190,000 government soldiers had reportedly been commissioned), the results had been relatively modest. By contrast, Wang boasted in a memorial submitted after the surprise attack that the latest campaign was a resounding success. Even though the operation had lasted just three months, had required not even 16,000 soldiers, and had cost only a tenth of a large-scale campaign, it had managed to eliminate more than 3,000 bandits—an impressive feat by all counts.<sup>18</sup>

Following the military actions in Duanteng Gorge and Bazhai, Wang Yangming again proposed a series of measures to promote long-term peace. Unlike in the case of Tianzhou, however, his proposals this time were entirely concerned with strengthening the presence of the state in the troubled areas. First, Wang recommended that Nandan 南丹 Guard (*wei* 衛) be moved from its current location in Binzhou 賓州 to the area of Bazhai. Since Bazhai was the source of much trouble in central Guangxi, he argued, it would be far more effective to have the 500 soldiers attached to the Guard stationed in the middle of Bazhai. Second, he recommended that the seat of Sien 思恩 prefecture be moved to a more accessible location. Since Bazhai was administratively a part of Sien, Wang reasoned that it would reduce the chance of future banditry if the “Chinese” (*xia* 夏) and “non-Chinese” (*yi*) populations of the area could be brought to interact more frequently in the new prefectural seat. While he was clearly concerned with strengthening the administrative presence of the state in Bazhai and beyond (in his memorial he suggested also the establishment of two new county seats in the greater Sien area), Wang was mindful of the different conditions and needs of Duanteng Gorge. The key to deterring future disorder in the Gorge area, according to him, was not to establish yet another administrative seat or to build up a large army to intimidate the local *man* and *yi* population;

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, esp. 9b-14a.

rather, it was to strengthen the existing policing arrangement in the area so that it could finally fulfill its functions.<sup>19</sup>

Clearly, Wang Yangming believed that different circumstances required different responses. In confronting the native chiefs of Tianzhou, he was persuaded by the argument that the *man* and *yi* people there should not be held entirely responsible for the turmoil. Rather than convert Tianzhou into a regular administrative unit, he therefore concluded that it would be preferable to allow native chieftains to continue to rule the domain. By contrast, in tackling the “Yao bandits” of Duanteng Gorge and Bazhai Wang was convinced that the *man* and *yi* responsible for the violence had gone far beyond their bounds. For him and for his fellow officials, time had indeed come for the Ming to deal the bandits a fatal blow.

Although Wang’s approach to the problems of the “non-Chinese” might seem inconsistent, it is perhaps more helpful to consider his strategic choices as a reflection not only of the political and socio-economic realities on the ground, but also of his philosophical views regarding the nature of the “non-Chinese.” While Wang Yangming was convinced of the capacity of the *man* and *yi* to be transformed or “civilized,” as we will see, he also believed that such transformations would need to take place at different pace and in different forms depending on circumstances.<sup>20</sup>

### The Nature of the “Non-Chinese”

To appreciate how the military undertakings of Wang Yangming can help us better understand his vision as a philosopher, it is important that we consider more carefully his positions on the boundary between “Chinese” and “non-Chinese.” While Wang does not seem to have accorded particular attention to the *man* and *yi* when he formulated his most significant ideas, it is clear from his writings that he believed that “non-Chinese” people were not inherently distinct from their

<sup>19</sup> “Chuzhi Bazhai Duanteng xia yi tu yong’an shu” 處置八寨斷藤峽以圖永安疏 [On settling Bazhai and Duanteng Gorge so as to bring about long-term peace], in *YMQS*, 15:14b-20.

<sup>20</sup> It was alleged by Tian Rucheng (*Yanjiao jiuwen*, 1:8b), and later repeated by a number of Ming writers, that Wang Yangming would come to regret his strategy for Tianzhou. But since we do not have any independent evidence that he ever made such a claim, it is unclear how one should interpret this assertion.

“Chinese” counterparts. To Wang and his fellow *ru* scholars, Heaven, Earth, and all things in between were endowed with the same *li* 理. But in contrast to the prevailing orthodox interpretation, Wang Yangming maintained that this “coherence” or “pattern” or “principle,” as the term *li* is variously translated, need not be sought outside of oneself. Instead, he argued that people should concentrate on refining their own *qi* 氣, their inner “ether-energy,” so that their “original nature” (*benxing* 本性), being no longer “clouded” by an unrefined *qi*, could fully manifest itself, and, thus, the universal *li* it embodied. For Wang, the distinction between “Chinese” and “non-Chinese” people was not whether they shared the same *benxing* (which they did), but how their “animated nature” (*qizhi zhi xing* 氣質之性)—the actual rather than the original state of their *xing*—revealed itself. According to him, that the animated nature of the *man* and *yi* was closer to that of animals than to that of the “Chinese” had to do with the fact that, as in the case of birds and beasts, the “non-Chinese” had allowed their selfish desires to corrupt their *qi*; in so doing, they had also allowed their *benxing* to be “clouded.”<sup>21</sup>

To be sure, Wang Yangming was mindful of the apparent primitivism of the *man* and *yi*. This we can gather from his writings dated to his years in exile to a courier station in northwestern Guizhou. Even though during his banishment in that southwestern province Wang did achieve a series of intellectual breakthroughs, for him the punishment was no doubt a traumatic experience in many ways. Not only had he suffered a major setback in his official career, in his new surroundings he also had to fight constantly for his dignity, if not always for his life. While comments on the perils of living in Guizhou among various *man* and *yi* are found in many of Wang’s poems, it is through his letters and essays written in exile that one can best appreciate the challenging conditions that he faced. For example, in a letter dated 1508 to a certain vice-commissioner Mao,

<sup>21</sup> For an introduction to Wang’s moral philosophy, especially in comparison with and contrast to that of Mengzi, see Ivanhoe, *Ethics*. For Wang’s comparison of the nature of *man* and *yi* with that of birds and beasts, see, for example, *1MQS*, 14:15a. For a discussion of Wang Yangming’s attitude toward the “non-Chinese,” see Kandice Hauf, “‘Goodness Unbound’: Wang Yang-ming and the Redrawing of the Boundary of Confucianism,” in *Imagining Boundaries: Changing Confucian Doctrines, Texts, and Hermeneutics*, ed. Kai-wing Chow, On-cho Ng and John B. Henderson (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 129-35.



in which Wang gently but firmly declined Mao's suggestion to offer an apology to another senior provincial official (for an altercation that need not concern us here), he was very clear about what was at stake. For him, to live in that part of the Ming realm among the "non-Chinese" was to live among diseases (*zhangli* 瘴癘), *gu* 蟲 poisons, and spirits (*chimei wangliang* 魑魅魍魎). As he came to terms with his new environment, however, he also came to accept that he "could well be facing death three times a day" (*ri you san si yan* 日有三死焉). What had kept him at peace, he suggested in this letter, was his realization that even though he had no control over when he would die, he had the choice to uphold the moral principles he held dear. Since he was not even afraid of dying in this land of *man* and *yi*, he implied, why should he compromise his moral principles by offering an unwarranted apology?<sup>22</sup>

But while Wang Yangming was sensitive to the general lack of ritual propriety (*li* 禮) among the "non-Chinese," in time he would come to conclude that such an absence reflected not an innate aversion to propriety on the part of the *man* and *yi*, but their inherent honesty and simplicity. This sympathetic view is perhaps most explicitly expressed in an essay composed in commemoration of the completion of his place of study in Guizhou. By naming his studio "Whence the Coarseness?" (*He lou* 何陋) after a passage in the *Analects*, Wang was clearly evoking the sentiment attributed to Confucius that where an exemplary person (*junzi* 君子) dwelt, what coarseness there had been would dissipate in no time. But in his essay Wang Yangming also sought to make a more nuanced point. He argued that while it was true that the local *yi* population spoke "the language of birds," preferred to live in mountains, and had no beautiful clothing or elaborate rituals to show for, this state of affairs had actually more to do with its hitherto limited contacts with the "Chinese" (*zhu xia* 諸夏) than with the innate quality (*zhi* 質) of the *yi*. In fact, Wang would argue, especially when compared with the hypocrisy and wickedness

<sup>22</sup> For Wang's reply to vice-commissioner Mao, see "Da Mao xianfu" 答毛憲副, in *YMQS*, 21:1b-2a. For Wang's experience in Guizhou, especially with regard to his relations with the native population, see Tu Wei-ming, *Neo-Confucian Thought in Action: Wang Yang-ming's Youth (1472-1509)* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1976), 129-37; Yu Huaiyan 余懷彥, ed., *Wang Yangming yu Guizhou wenhua* 王陽明與貴州文化 [Wang Yangming and the culture of Guizhou] (Guiyang: Guizhou jiaoyu chubanshe, 1996), 62-72.

of some “Chinese” people the candor of the “non-Chinese” was far from a sign of being coarse.<sup>23</sup>

For Wang Yangming, what contributed to the commonality between “Chinese” and “non-Chinese” people was not only their shared “original nature” but also their possession of the same “innate moral knowing” (*liangzhi* 良知). As human beings, according to Wang, *man* and *yi* people were endowed with a moral consciousness that, when functioning in its most natural state, would enable them to act appropriately in all situations. That such *liangzhi* is present in all human beings (and animals) is clearly a critical idea in Wang’s philosophy. In a letter written late in his life to a certain Nie Bao 聶豹 (1487-1563), Wang Yangming sought to explain to his would-be disciple how grasping the idea of *liangzhi* could help one understand how order in the world could be attained. In times past, he argued, by devoting their efforts to eliminate their selfishness, and hence extending their “innate moral knowing,” people were able to share with one another a universal sense of right and wrong. “They treated others as they would treat themselves, and they treated the state as their own family” (*shi ren you ji, shi guo you jia* 視人猶己、視國猶家). During the times of the sage-kings, he maintained, though death penalties were meted out from time to time, the people had no complaints. This was so not only because the sage-kings spoke and acted with their *liangzhi* extended, but also because “all beings with blood and breath” (*you xue qi zhe* 有血氣者), including the “non-Chinese” (*manmo* 蠻貊), shared the same innate moral knowing.<sup>24</sup>

Wang Yangming’s view on the commonality between “Chinese” and “non-Chinese” should no doubt be understood in the context of his oft-stated ideal of “forming one body with Heaven, Earth, and all things” (*yi tian di wanwu wei yi ti* 以天地萬物爲一體). As Wing-tsit Chan noted some time ago, though the idea of *wanwu yi ti* had existed since ancient times, it was Wang Yangming who was its most influential advocate. How Wang understood this idea is evident from a passage in a letter to his friend Gu Lin 顧璘 (1476-1545):

The heart-and-mind of a sage regards Heaven, Earth, and all things as one body. [A sage] looks upon all people under heaven without regard to their

<sup>23</sup> “He lou xuan ji” 何陋軒記 [In commemoration of the Studio of Whence the Coarseness], in *IMQS*, 23:4; Tu, *Neo-Confucian Thought*, 135.

<sup>24</sup> For Wang’s reply to Nie, see *Chuan xi lu* 傳習錄 [Instructions for practical living], *IMQS*, 2:29b-30a; for a translation, see Wang, *Instructions*, 166-67.

being inside or outside [one's family] or their being far or near. [A sage] treats all who have blood and breath as if they were one's brothers and children, [and a sage] wants to safeguard, educate, and nourish all without exception, so as to fulfill one's desire of forming one body with all things.<sup>25</sup>

For Wang, the sages were not the only ones who had the aptitude to form one body with all things. Everyone, including the “non-Chinese,” had that capacity. It was only after people had allowed their selfishness and material desires to cloud their heart-and-mind that they no longer wanted to treat others as they would treat themselves. To explain his views further, in the “Discourse on ‘The Great Learning’” (*Daxue wen* 大學問) Wang Yangming extended a thought experiment first employed by Mengzi. According to Wang, when one feels a sense of alarm and commiseration at seeing a child about to fall into a well, it is not simply because one's nature is essentially good, as Mengzi might explain, but because “one's humaneness extends to form one body with the child” (*qi ren zhi yu ruzi er wei yi ti* 其仁之與孺子而爲一體). Similarly, when one feels a sense of regret at seeing tiles and stones shattered, it is not because they are living beings—as children, animals, and plants are—but because “one's humaneness forms one body with tiles and stones” (*qi ren zhi yu wa shi er wei yi ti* 其仁之與瓦石而爲一體). For Wang, the notion of *wanwu yi ti* could thus be understood at two levels: not only should “Chinese” and “non-Chinese” people be considered as “one body,” the “non-Chinese” themselves should also be seen as possessing the same capacity to empathize with all things.<sup>26</sup>

Although Wang Yangming insisted that all human beings share the same “original nature,” the same “innate moral knowing” and the same capacity to “form one body with Heaven, Earth, and all things,” he also believed that “non-Chinese” people—given their beastly “animated nature” and ignorance of ritual propriety—could and should be transformed or “civilized” (*hua* 化). In the essay celebrating the completion of his studio discussed earlier, Wang in fact compared the *man* and *yi* with pieces of jade that had not been chiseled (*wei zhuo zhi yu* 未琢之玉) and blocks of wood that had not been carved

<sup>25</sup> *Chuan xi lu*, 2:11b; Wang, *Instructions*, 118. The extended passage from which this quotation is drawn has traditionally been separately titled by scholars as “Pulling up the Root and Stopping up the Source” (*Ba ben sai yuan* 拔本塞源) after a key phrase in the section.

<sup>26</sup> For Chan's comments, see Wang, *Instructions*, xxxix. For Wang's thought experiment, see “Daxue wen,” in *YMQS*, 26:1b; Wang, *Instructions*, 272.

(*wei sheng zhi mu* 未繩之木). Even though “non-Chinese” people had long indulged in sorcery and ignored ritual propriety, he maintained, as in the case of a piece of jade or a block of wood in the hands of a craftsman, they could in time be transformed with the help of an exemplary person. Similar sentiments can also be found in an essay written in commemoration of the refurbishment of a native shrine devoted to Xiang 象, the infamous brother of Shun the sage-king. In this essay, Wang suggested that the local *yi* people were actually worshipping not the original but the reformed Xiang. In his view, the shrine was thus a fitting testimony not only to the importance, but also to the power of transformation.<sup>27</sup>

But while Wang Yangming considered the “civilization” of *man* and *yi* desirable, he allowed that the transformation would sometimes need to take place gradually. For him, a case in point was the conversion of the domain of Tianzhou. In one of the memorials discussed earlier, in which he proposed a list of measures to restore a semblance of order there, Wang also offered an intriguing metaphor to illustrate why it would be wise to allow native chieftains to continue in some ways to rule Tianzhou. In the memorial Wang compared the nature of the “non-Chinese” with that of the reindeer (*milu* 麋鹿). To attempt to rein in the *man* and *yi* by imposing onto them the administrative structure of the “central plains,” he said, would have the same effect as letting loose a group of reindeers inside a hall. The result would be a complete destruction of the place. A more effective way to rein in the reindeers was to allow them to roam in the open within clearly defined boundaries and under sufficient oversight. What Wang Yangming had in mind for Tianzhou, as we have seen, was that while the *man* and *yi* in the domain would continue to be ruled by native chieftains, a regular official would also be appointed to the region to serve as a supervisor. In time, Wang hoped, the “non-Chinese” in Tianzhou would come to gradually accept “Chinese” rule.<sup>28</sup>

Even in the context of the campaigns against the “Yao” of Duanteng Gorge and Bazhai, Wang Yangming insisted that any attempt by

<sup>27</sup> For the metaphor of “uncarved blocks,” see *LMQS*, 23:4b. For Wang’s commemorative essay for the shrine for Xiang, see “Xiang ci ji” 象祠記, in *LMQS*, 23:5b-6b; for discussions, see Tu, *Neo-Confucian Thought*, 130-31; Hauf, “‘Goodness Unbound,’” 133-35.

<sup>28</sup> “Chuzhi pingfu difang yi tu jiu an shu,” 14:15.

Ming officials to “civilize” the *man* and *yi* must in the end allow the people in question to fulfill their natural feelings. This sentiment of Wang is perhaps most clearly expressed in a correspondence addressed to his fellow officials following the attacks. In this communication, Wang declined the request by other officials to station a large army in the once-troubled areas. He argued that while it might sometimes be necessary to use force, “the superior way to handle the *yi* is to conquer their heart-and-mind” (*chu yi zhi dao, gong xin wei shang* 處夷之道，攻心爲上). In trying to put the heart-and-mind of the *yi* at ease, Wang advised, officials must learn to be patient. He maintained that people of the past had been able “to form one body with Heaven, Earth, and all things” and, thus, “to master the will of all-under-heaven” (*tong tianxia zhi zhi* 通天下之志). When undertaking any major project they had been able to “direct it by following the flow of the situation” (*shun qi qing er shi zhi* 順其情而使之), “guide it according to the trends of events” (*yin qi shi er dao zhi* 因其勢而導之), “advance it by taking advantage of opportunities” (*cheng qi ji er dong zhi* 乘其機而動之), and “promote it by being timely” (*ji qi shi er xing zhi* 及其時而興之). As a result, things were accomplished. This, for Wang Yangming, seemed to be the right approach in trying to transform the “non-Chinese.”<sup>29</sup>

### The Boundary between *Hua* and *Yi*

To appreciate the significance of Wang Yangming’s positions, it is important that we situate them within the wider context of Ming policy and intellectual debates. Although early Ming emperors such as Zhu Yuanzhang and Zhu Di (r. 1402-24) enjoyed boasting about the unifying power of the centralizing state, by the mid-fifteenth century the political confidence that had accompanied the rise of the Ming had clearly been replaced by an acute sense of vulnerability. Haunted especially by the debacle near Fort Tumu 土木 in 1449, in which Emperor Zhu Qizhen (r. 1435-49, 1457-64) was unexpectedly captured by the Oyiroids (the Oirats or Western Mongols), the Ming court in the latter half of the fifteenth century was in many ways split between officials who favored adopting a relatively defensive posture

<sup>29</sup> “Suirou liuzei” 綏柔流賊 [The Pacification of bandits], in *YMQS*, 18:20b-22b.

and those who preferred taking a more aggressive stance against the enemies. With regard to the northern regions, as Arthur Waldron has shown, the intense and often bitter debate would in the end result in the building of a long, costly, and ultimately ineffective wall along the border. By contrast, with regard to the southern borderlands, where the “non-Chinese” seemed not to pose as great a threat to the Ming state as the Mongols, the debate was centered on how much effort should be put into transforming the *man* and *yi*. While some officials favored preserving the boundary between “Chinese” and “non-Chinese,” others argued for a more proactive approach in “civilizing” the *man* and *yi*.<sup>30</sup>

Of the officials during the mid-Ming who insisted that the boundary between “Chinese” and “non-Chinese” must be defended, one of the most erudite and articulate was no doubt Qiu Jun 丘濬 (1421-95). A native of Qiongshan 瓊山, located in the far south in modern-day Hainan Island, Qiu was probably one of the very few highly-placed officials at the time who had had first-hand experience with the *man* and *yi* while growing up. A student at the Imperial Academy in the Ming capital at the time of the Tumu debacle, Qiu Jun was obviously influenced also by this traumatic experience when he formulated his opinions. Among Qiu’s writings, the most influential was without doubt the *Supplement to “The Extended Meaning of the Great Learning”* (*Daxue yanyi bu* 大學衍義補). Even though it is billed as a “supplement” to a work by Zhen Dexiu 真德秀 (1178-1235), Qiu’s *magnum opus* is in fact a very different composition, focusing not on individual ethics but on government administration. Presented in 1487 to the newly-enthroned Zhu Youtang (r. 1487-1505), the work, which runs to 160 *juan*, is at once a masterly display of scholarship and a comprehensive blueprint for government action. While Qiu was clearly concerned about the border problems in the north, in the *Supplement* he also thought it necessary to include a detailed discussion of the problems raised by the “non-Chinese” in the south.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Arthur Waldron, *The Great Wall of China: From History to Myth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), chaps. 5-9.

<sup>31</sup> For a biography of Qiu Jun, see Goodrich and Fang, *Dictionary of Ming Biography*, 249-52. For Qiu and his text, see Hung-lam Chu, “Ch’iu Chün (1421-1495) and the ‘Ta-Hsüeh Yen-I Pu’: Statecraft Thought in Fifteenth-Century China,” Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 1983. For Qiu’s views on border defense, see the section “Yu yi di” 馭夷狄 [Subduing the non-Chinese], in *Daxue yanyi bu* (1487; repr., Taipei: Qiu Wenzhuang gong congshu jiyin weiyuanhui, 1972), *juan* 143-56.

Underlying Qiu Jun's arguments in the *Supplement* was his conviction that it was part of "the coherence of all-under-heaven" (*tianxia zhi li* 天下之理) that there existed a boundary between "Chinese" (*hua* 華) and "non-Chinese" (*yi* 夷). In Qiu's view, the "Chinese" had long occupied the center while the "non-Chinese" had dominated the peripheries. Over time, the *hua* had come to be "mixed with and assimilated to one another" (*hun er tong* 混而同), while the *yi* had developed a wide variety of temperaments and customs. To maintain peace, he observed, the earliest rulers of the "central dominion" (*zhongguo* 中國) had decided to confine the "non-Chinese" to the latter's territories rather than to transform or "civilize" them. The border troubles of earlier dynasties, especially the Han and the Tang, had stemmed precisely from their rulers' failure to "defend attentively the boundary between the center and the periphery" (*jin nei wai zhi fang* 謹內外之防) and to prevent "the amalgamation of the customs of *hua* and *yi*" (*hun hua yi zhi su* 混華夷之俗). To avoid such mistakes, particularly with regard to the northern border region, Qiu argued, Ming emperors should resist, among other temptations, the urge to allow the "non-Chinese" to settle inside the central domain. For Qiu, that there should be a rigid boundary between the "Chinese" and "non-Chinese" was evidenced by the mountains and rivers that had served to separate the two. It would be a mistake in his view if the Ming were to try to breach such natural barriers.<sup>32</sup>

In the case of the southern borderlands, where the "non-Chinese" had long lived alongside the "Chinese," Qiu Jun reckoned that to reaffirm the boundary between *hua* and *yi* the Ming would need to adopt a more proactive but flexible approach. First, in areas where there was a significant "non-Chinese" population (such as Tianzhou), the Ming court should recognize an even greater number of native chieftains and establish more clearly the physical boundaries of their domains. Not only should such chieftains be required to

<sup>32</sup> Qiu Jun, *Daxue yanyi bu*, 143:4b-5a, 153:1b-2a, 143:6, 7b-10b, 144:8b-9a. For Qiu's views, see Li Zuoran [Lee Cheuk Yin] 李焯然, "Qiu Jun 'Daxue yanyi bu' dui Mingdai bianfang de jiantao" 丘濬《大學衍義補》對明代邊防的檢討 [Evaluation of the Ming border defense by Qiu Jun in his *Supplement to the "Extended Meaning of the Great Learning"*], in Yamane Yukio *kyōju taikyū kinen Mindaishi ronsō* 山根幸夫教授退休記念明代史論叢 [Collected studies on the history of the Ming on the occasion of the retirement of Professor Yamane Yukio], ed. Mindaishi kenkyūkai Mindaishi ronsō henshū iinkai 明代史研究会明代史論叢編集委員會, vol. 1 (Tokyo: Kyūko shoin, 1990), 627-44.

participate in Ming military operations, they should also be expected to enhance the stability of the border areas by checking each other's power. Second, in areas where officially recognized chieftains were deemed unnecessary, Qiu Jun recommended that interactions between "Chinese" and "non-Chinese" people be severely limited. Chinese merchants who wished to travel to the mountains to trade with the *man* and *yi* should be restricted to bartering. No money should change hands, and no non-native goods should be purchased from the "non-Chinese." With such restrictions in place, he argued, "the money they [the *man* and *yi*] got [from banditry] would be of no use; even if they wanted to use it, there would be nothing for sale." In the absence of natural barriers, as he saw it, artificial ones would suffice.<sup>33</sup>

But while Qiu Jun insisted on the need to affirm the boundary between "Chinese" and "non-Chinese," other Ming officials argued on the contrary that the *man* and *yi* in the borderlands should be promptly transformed and incorporated into Chinese rule. Among those who took this position was the official Yao Mo, who, as we have seen, had led the war against Tianzhou before he was replaced by Wang Yangming. For Yao, to allow native chieftains to continue to rule native domains such as Tianzhou was akin to nurturing tigers—there could only be trouble at the end. For him, the question was not whether to convert Tianzhou into a regular administrative unit, or whether to appoint regular officials to the area; the question was how to make sure that the right people were appointed to the positions. Though there were indeed cases in other converted domains in which recently-appointed officials were causing as much grief and trouble as the original native chiefs, Yao Mo was convinced that the problem was with the selection of appointees, not with the practice of conversion itself.<sup>34</sup>

For officials such as Yao Mo, converting native domains into regular administrative units was only one of the necessary tasks. In one of his memorials regarding Tianzhou, Yao also recommended the re-establishment of a Confucian school (*ruxue* 儒學). "It is through people

<sup>33</sup> Qiu Jun, *Daxue yanyi bu*, 153:6-7a, 11b-13, 14b-17a; for the quotation, see 153:15b.

<sup>34</sup> "Tiaochen chuzhi bing hou difang shu" 條陳處置兵後地方疏 [Recommendations for the aftermath of the military operation], in Yao Mo, *Dongquan wenji* 東泉文集 [Collected writings of Yao Mo] (1547), National Central Library [Taipei] microfilm, 4:51-62; for the comparison with tigers, see 4:52b.



of character that customs and morals are changed,” he observed; “and it is through schools that people of character are cultivated.” Though there had earlier been a functioning school in Tianzhou, according to Yao Mo the chieftain Cen Meng had run it to the ground by chasing away both teachers and students. In the same way as its earlier incarnation the school proposed by Yao would be led by an instructor and an assistant instructor. It would give priority to students from Tianzhou, but at first it would also accept students from outside. In addition to the Confucian school, Yao also suggested the setting up of community schools (*shexue* 社學). By disseminating down to the village level the teachings of the Ming founder and the moral precepts embodied in the classics, he believed, such schools would serve to transform “non-Chinese” people into “Chinese” (*bian er wei hua* 變而爲華). And he predicted that, if the proposed schools were all properly put into place, “after ten to twenty years there would no doubt be capable persons emerging from this area.”<sup>35</sup>

But even such staunch proponents of the “civilizing project” as Yao Mo would concede that not everything could be accomplished right away. Though Yao was convinced that the native domain of Tianzhou should be converted, he was just as adamant that, in order to facilitate administration, officials appointed there should be open to adopting selected local customs. In particular, he noted that there had long been in Tianzhou a practice of dividing the domain into units of *jia* 甲 (of which there were fifty) and of appointing local headmen (*chengtou* 城頭 or *toumu* 頭目) to collect land taxes (*zu* 租) from the people. Though the Ming could in theory gather more taxes if they replaced the existing collection system with one that was commonly used in the “central plains,” Yao argued that the overall costs of replacing such an entrenched practice would probably far outweigh any revenue gains. While “it is necessary that regular officials be appointed,” he maintained, “it is unworkable to apply solely Han rules” (*chun yong Han fa bu ke ye* 純用漢法不可也). In the case of Tianzhou officials should retain the native administrative system but assign Ming official titles to the headmen. In addition, officials should lower the tax quotas allocated to some of these *chengtou* and refrain from burdening the headmen with excessive demands. The key, Yao argued, was to convert native domains into regular

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 4:57b-58b.

administrative units whenever possible, even if it meant that not all Ming practices would be followed.<sup>36</sup>

Although Wang Yangming would be seen as having reversed many of Yao Mo's policies, his position on the need to "civilize" the "non-Chinese" was actually closer to that of Yao than to that of Qiu Jun. To be sure, Wang was in favor of preserving the institution of chieftaincy, a position also shared by the ever-cautious Qiu Jun. But both Wang and Yao would agree that the ultimate goal of the Ming presence in the border regions was to transform the *man* and *yi*, and both would argue that, to restore a semblance of order in Tianzhou, officials would need to combine the practices of native and Ming rule in one form or another. But while Wang Yangming and Yao Mo would agree on the objective and on at least one of the key principles in handling the "non-Chinese," as we have seen, Wang's strategies were evidently grounded on a more comprehensive reflection on the human condition in particular and on the heavenly principle in general. Whereas Yao Mo emphasized the importance of affirming Ming control, especially in cases when native rule had proved undesirable, Wang Yangming stressed the fundamental commonality not only between "Chinese" and "non-Chinese" but also between human beings and all things under heaven.

### The Last Campaigns in Retrospect

The last campaigns of Wang Yangming produced no long-lasting peace. To expect otherwise would perhaps be to put too much faith in violence. The domain of Tianzhou, as it turned out, was again thrown into disarray not long after Wang had departed. Even though Wang and his successor in Guangxi, Lin Fu, had intended to let Cen Bangxiang 岑邦相 (the teenage son of Cen Meng) serve as a chieftain-in-probation, and eventually to allow him to assume full responsibility for the much-diminished Tianzhou, in reality it was Lu Su, the native chief, who was able to wield much power behind the scene. By 1534, Lu apparently had had enough with even such a façade; that year he ordered Bangxiang murdered and arranged for Cen Zhi 芝, a younger cousin of Bangxiang, to become his puppet chieftain. But such usurpation of power only precipitated more turmoil. Cen

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 4:55-57.

Bangzuo 邦佐, an older brother of Bangxiang and the chieftain of a separate domain, decided to launch an attack against Tianzhou. Other chieftains in the region also took sides. Lu Su managed to survive the challenge, but in 1538 he was finally forced out of Tianzhou. The demise of Lu Su did not end the troubles for the domain, however. In 1550 a certain Mo Wei 莫葦, from a nearby domain, claimed that he was in fact a paternal uncle of Cen Zhi and sought to take over Tianzhou by force. It was only with the help of some neighboring chieftains, according to the records, that Tianzhou was able to fend off the attack.<sup>37</sup>

In central Guangxi as well troubles associated with *man* and *yi* “bandits” would continue to plague the Ming. In Duanteng Gorge, for example, following the campaign of Wang Yangming control over desirable land was apparently a major point of contention between the local “Yao” population and some of the officially appointed native chiefs. By 1538, conditions in the Gorge area had become such that Ming officials evidently found it necessary to launch another attack. Over 50,000 soldiers reportedly took part in the campaign. As a result, Hou Gongding 侯公丁, the “Yao” leader, was swiftly put to death and more than 4,500 men and women were said to have been killed, captured, or otherwise “pacified.” Troubles would continue in the area of Bazhai as well. Even though in the decades following the campaign of Wang Yangming Ming officials had made an effort to install a number of native chieftains in the area, these agents were apparently causing more problems than they were worth. By 1579 Ming officials had once again decided to launch an offensive. This time more than 100,000 soldiers were reported to have participated in the campaign. In all, some 15,000 “bandits” and their families were said to have been killed or captured.<sup>38</sup>

To be sure, Ming China was a violent place. While the reasons for the endemic violence in the southern borderlands were many, what is clear is that the confidence of many a Ming scholar-official

<sup>37</sup> For accounts of violence in Tianzhou following the campaign of Wang Yangming, see Tian Rucheng, *Yanjiao jiuwen*, 1:4b-8a; Su Jun, *Guangxi tongzhi*, 31:37b-40a; *Ming shi*, 318.8252-53.

<sup>38</sup> For the 1538 campaign in Duanteng Gorge, see Tian Rucheng, *Yanjiao jiuwen*, 2:7b-11a. For Bazhai, see Su Jun, *Guangxi tongzhi*, 33:42-49a. For recent studies, see Gao Yanhong and Yao Shun'an, *Mingdai Guangxi nongmin qiye shi*, 42-47, 92-94; Zhang Yigui and Xu Shiru, *Mingdai Guangxi nongmin qiye shigao*, 95-100, 72-77.



in the superiority of “Chinese” civilization did limit the options for solutions. Whereas Qiu Jun would argue in favor of an isolationist policy and of restoring what he thought was the practice of the sage-kings, in which the boundary between “Chinese” and “non-Chinese” was steadfastly demarcated, Yao Mo was determined that the *man* and *yi* in the Ming borderlands be brought under “Chinese” rule lest they should continue to be a source of constant problems. Even Wang Yangming, who believed that all human beings shared an identical “original nature” and “innate moral knowing,” did not doubt the need to transform or “civilize” the “non-Chinese.” For him, the question was not whether to “civilize” the *man* and *yi*, but how to approach the task. But just as one must be careful not to conflate necessarily the rhetoric of Ming scholar-officials with their actions, one should also be mindful, given the context of imperial China, of the power of rhetoric itself. While the claim of the superiority of one’s way of life could be a powerful unifying force—something we are able to observe perhaps all too vividly in our own time—an uncritical acceptance of one’s beliefs could easily blind one from seeing alternative solutions.

