Sarah Schneewind

**Peculiar Living Shrines and Yuan Governance as Background to Ming Populism**

**Abstract** Although post-mortem apotheosis and secular honor in temples have received more attention, shrines to living men were also ordinary institutions from Han times onwards in Chinese history. Previous scholarship so far on pre-mortem shrines in Tang and Song relates them to pre-mortem commemoration in inscribed records of local commendation on the one hand and Neo-Confucian Daoxue Shrines to Local Worthies on the other. That scholarly work suggests that Tang and Song premortem shrines when political were basically elite institutions; and that when common people were involved their motivations were religious rather than political. In Ming times, by contrast, premortem shrines were normatively established by commoners and constituted a venue for popular political participation, while the steles commemorating the shrines explicitly argued that non-elite people had the right to political speech. This article speculates, as a hypothesis awaiting further research, that both Yuan modes of government generally, and creative uses of premortem enshrinement in Yuan times specifically, may have contributed to Ming populism.

**Keywords** dezheng bei, qusi bei, sheng ci, living shrine, commemorative stele, Yuan government, Yuan-Ming transition, pre-mortem shrine

**A Minnow in a Ditch**

The *Zhuangzi* 莊子 recounts that Gengsang Chu 庚桑楚, a follower of Lao Dan 老聃 (571BC−471BC), settled in the Zigzag hills. He surprised residents...
by preferring ignorant and boorish servants. After three years, Zigzag was
prospering, so local people figured Gengsang had to be some kind of sage.
They asked one another “Why don’t we together invoke him as we do the
personators of ancestors, and raise an altar to him as we do to the spirit of the
grain?” (*shi er zhu zhi, she er ji zhi* 而不相與尸而祝之) Gengsang objected to being enshrined, but his disciples thought he should
accept the honor. He explained that it is the Dao that makes nature work, but
commoners attribute it to beings, and make offerings to approach them. “Now
these small people of Zigzag in their opinionative way want to present their
offerings (zudou 俎豆) to me, and place me among such men of ability and
virtue.” Mistaking Gengsang’s objection for modesty, the disciples urged him
to accept this entirely local honor—as minnows and eels find sufficient a ditch
too narrow for big fish—and argued that honoring the worthy was right. “From of old Yao and Shun acted thus—how much more may the people of
Zigzag do so! Master, let them have their way!” Gengsang clarified that he
objected precisely to the very idea of making distinctions by honoring some
over others—which his Daoist disciples should surely have known, and as he
had modelled by choosing lumpish servants.¹

Zhao Yi 趙翼, writing in the mid-Qing, comments on the Gengsang Chu
story, “Thus this was already the beginning of this kind of thing.” What kind
of thing? The enshrinement of living men.² The many Song and Yuan living
shrines or premortem shrines (sheng ci 生祠) that, like those of later times,
honored officials merciful to commoners or helpful to literati, or men who
could be swayed by flattery, deserve in-depth study by specialists in those time
periods. Here I will look only at some oddball Yuan shrines I came across,
offering a hypothesis that Yuan experiments with living shrines influenced
Ming premortem thought and practice, as Yuan government also shaped Ming
populism. I will mention but not evince here the conclusions I have drawn
about Ming living shrines.³

¹ *Zhuangzi*, Chinese Text Project. Zigzag is Brook Ziporyn’s translation of Weilei.
² Zhao Yi, *Gaiyu congkao*. After mentioning Gengsang Chu, Zhao Yi located the real
beginning of living shrines in the early Han, citing the *Shiji*: Everyone in Yan and Qi established
altars *she* 社 to the Han general and administrator Luan Bu, and the residents of Qi established
shrines to Minister Shi Qing.
³ Sarah Schneewind, *Shrines to Living Men in the Ming Political Cosmos*.
The first section of this article considers continuity and discontinuity. The second section summarizes and critiques scholarship on premortem shrines and steles from Tang to Yuan. The third section points out a pattern in Yuan government that may have influenced not only the Ming state as scholars have long known, but also political conceptions more generally, in ways that appear in Ming premortem rhetoric and practice. Finally, I recount some creative Yuan uses of premortem shrines.

**The Sinological Fish-Trap**

Historians working on most areas of the world feel no need to trace every topic as far back as possible. Studies of the French Revolution need not mention Charlemagne. Sinologists, by contrast, blessed with what we call a continuous written tradition, tend to chase down earliest references. But of course tropes and words may be retained while social practice and understanding change.

Late-imperial references to enshrinement often borrow the phrase from the anecdote about Gengsang Chu (shì ěr zhǔ zhī, shé ěr jí zhī hūn) to say that people portray someone, pray, create a shrine or altar, and make offerings. The actions are not distinguished. Shì 士 originally referred to the “personater,” a descendent who acted for the dead man in ancestral ritual. But with this Zhuangzi passage as the *locus classicus* it also came to mean making an image or a spirit-tablet for offerings. Œ Zhu 祝 encompasses both praying to and praying for someone. The two altars lost their specificity and the same language applied to dead men, gods, and living men. A capsule biography of a Song official records continuing offerings by local residents, using the precise phrase from the Zhuangzi, 士而祝之 社而稷之. Here is a variant for a dead Song man: “Personate to invoke him, make him a she altar to make offerings to him” (shì ěr zhǔ zhī, shé ěr cí zhī 士而祝之 社而祠之). A Ming variant:

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5 Boltz translates zhù 祝 in the context of verses calling down a spirit as “supplications” (Judith Boltz, “Legacy of Zigu,” 382). The word meant “to pray” or “a prayer” even in the Shang oracle bones (Adam Craig Schwartz, “China’s First Prayer,” 94, 102).
7 *Jiangxi tongzhi* 126/24. The ancient term shé was reused in Yuan and Ming times. It referred to a local earth altar, and was adopted, as I will discuss below, for a kind of state-imposed community organization.
“Portray and pray to him, enshrine and shelter him” (shi er zhu zhi, ci er yu zhi). A Yuan source, speaking of the East Marchmount god: We shi er zhu him to help our magistrate. For men enshrined alive, until today the common people shizhu him, we are often told: (Bai xing zhijin shi zhu zhi). When a magistrate was promoted away, “the gentry and commoners portrayed and prayed to him” (士民祝之). Or more poetically: “Today, they miss and sing of him; later they will personate and pray to him” (今日思而歌之, 他日而祝之). Sometimes the phrase is extended, using Gengsang’s own term for making offerings: shi zhu er zu dou.  

We could say, “The continuity from Zhuangzi to Ming is clear.” Indeed, the Zhuangzi passage does raise points that appear in Ming discourse about living shrines. Such shrines were, ideally, the work of locals who shared the Zigzag people’s gratitude for concrete benefits like prosperity. Most enshrinees were officials, but some were local men; Gengsang is somewhere in between. As here, Ming language sometimes leaves open whether the “people” involved were local residents generally, or specifically commoners; commoner sponsorship was socially (not legally) required to make a shrine legitimate. Ming shrine sponsors often cooperate with one another, say explicitly that that is what they are doing, seek no bureaucratic approval, and ignore the enshrinee’s objections. Finally, as here, honors for the living and the dead are not carefully distinguished. We could draw a straight line from Gengsang Chu to Ming living shrines. Or we could trace living shrines back to Han judicial official Yu, father of Dingguo. Yu resigned to protest the unjust execution of a filial widow. A resulting drought was reversed by a new prefect making sacrifices at her grave, and then locals enshrined Yu while he was still alive.

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9 Yuan Jue, Yanyou Siming zhi, 19/9–10.
10 Zhang Guowei, Wu zhong shuili quanshu, 19/34.
12 Zhang Guowei, Wu zhong shuili quanshu. But Deborah Sommer, personal communication, says that there was lots of shi personation in Ming. Nor did the personater need to be related to the spirit; for instance, officials could personate imperial ancestors at the imperial ancestral rites. Thanks to Richard Wang and Xiaofei Kang for help with these terms.
13 For these points, see Schneewind, Shrines to Living Men in the Ming Political Cosmos.
alive.\textsuperscript{14}

But of course, to argue that the Zhuangzi explains late-imperial living shrines would be nonsense: The point of the anecdote was its Daoist lesson. Ming writers referred to Yu in a variety of contexts, while to justify living shrines they appealed more frequently to the post-mortem shrine in Tongxiang to Han official Zhu Yi. We should not assume that our categories were theirs. Further, continuities in language may disguise real social change. A Jurong county stele for a Tang figure says that because of his aid,

\begin{quote}

The people's hearts responded with joy. The elders all said: “Those who gave us life were our parents; he who enabled us to live on was none other than His Honor.” When he was about to leave on a military expedition, commoners blocked the road weeping, and wanted to establish a living shrine for His Honor, to transmit knowledge of his flourishing virtue to later generations. Therefore they set up a shrine-hall and opened a charitable well in the marketplace.\textsuperscript{15}
\end{quote}

The language and the placing of the initiative in the hands of commoners (\emph{baixing 百姓}, “hundred surnames”) could have come straight out of a Ming pre-mortem stele essay. Ming authors had read Zhuangzi, the histories, and existing steles—but they understood and deployed what they read in their own, post–Yuan context. Chen Wenyi argues correctly that steles exemplify how a

\textsuperscript{14} \textit{Hanshu} 71/3041 (7a), biography of Yu Dingguo, transl. Burton Watson, \textit{Courtiers and Commoners in Ancient Chinese Selections from the History of the Former Han by Pan Ku}, 165ff. Watson notes that this is said to be the first living shrine. It is also the first story he knows of in which an unjustly punished ghost causes trouble until the injustice is righted. See also R. H. van Gulik, \textit{Crime and Punishment in Ancient China: T'ang-Yin-Pi-Shih}, 71. The Song writer Chang Dacheng wrongly attributed the shrine to Yu Dingguo, as pointed out by Osabe Kazuo, “Shina seishi shoko,” 35–49. Other Han men won living shrines, see \textit{Hou Hanshu}, e.g., Wang Tang 4/61/1105 and Ren Yan 9/76/2462; Mu-chou Poo, \textit{In Search of Personal Welfare: A View of Ancient Chinese Religion}, 196; Miranda Brown, “Returning the Gaze: An Experiment in Reviving Gu Yanwu (1613–1682),” 55; and the Ming imperial compilation \textit{Wulan shu} 26/15.

\textsuperscript{15} The original text reads: 苦心感悅。父老鹹曰: 生我者父母, 活我者惟公也。公旌旆將行, 百姓遮道而泣。願立公生祠傳子傳孫, 不忘盛德。於是立祠開義井於市。See Yang Shiyuan, \textit{Jurong jinshi ji}, accessed through Stanford.
cultural device can appear the same on the surface yet change dramatically over time.\textsuperscript{16} What scholars have shown so far about pre-mortem commemoration before Ming differs from the deep populism of Ming living shrine theory and practice.

### Pre-Mortem Commemoration From Tang to Yuan

Shrines are buildings and/or images and steles are engraved texts. As forms of premortem commemoration, they often appear together, and share some characteristics. In scholarship, discussions of numbers and of central control are intertwined. Liu Shengjun and Lei Wen show that the Tang central government closely controlled pre-mortem and posthumous shrines and steles honoring officials. The \textit{Tang Code} outlawed initiating a “Virtuous Governance Stele” (dezheng bei 德政碑) or shrine to oneself and required that central authorities verify the facts about the commemorated man, and that the emperor approve each monument.\textsuperscript{17} Liu Shengjun reports 114 Tang steles to living government officials, mostly prefects and magistrates. Most were in the North, but even Guangzhou had three.\textsuperscript{18} They fall about evenly on either side of the An Lushan rebellion in 755, with government control initially looser, ramping up as the state solidified, and continuing even as other aspects of government slid out of central hands after the rebellion.\textsuperscript{19} About two-thirds of pre-mortem monuments were legally approved, including the three in distant

\\[\text{16} \text{Chen Wenyi, “Cong chaoting dao difang—Yuandai qui bei de shengxing yu yingyong changyu zhuanyi,” 108.}\]
\[\text{18} \text{Liu Shengjun, “Tangdai ‘shengci libei’—Lun difang xinxi fazhihua,” 480–83.}\]
\[\text{19} \text{Ibid., 473–80.}\]
Guangzhou, and even in late Tang times as a broader range of locals initiated petitions to the court, including yamen personnel, commoners (baixing), and Daoist and Buddhist clergy.\textsuperscript{20} Steles outnumbered shrines in Tang times; of twenty-six magistrates with pre-mortem steles, for instance, only four had premortem shrines.\textsuperscript{21} Central approval came after local initiative: Liu sees this as meaning that the center was susceptible to local, even lower-class, pressure, while Lei Wen sees the court purposely strengthening its connection with localities and extending its influence.\textsuperscript{22}

Chen Wenyi agrees that originally “virtuous governance” steles and departure steles (\textit{qusi bei} 去思碑) expressed local subjects’ feelings, with the emperor’s glory just added on from outside. In late Tang and Song the steles became mutual “toasts” of approval between the emperor and pure-stream officials. In Song, although one often cannot tell whether shrines and steles had gone through an approval process, central approval still lay at the heart of this political expression, but Song regulations fundamentally concerned retention requests, merely appending rules for shrines and steles.\textsuperscript{23} A major change came in Yuan law: Pre-mortem commemoration did not require government approval.\textsuperscript{24} A Yuan writer stated explicitly: “As for setting up a stone and engraving praise, in the law there is no restriction.”\textsuperscript{25} Chen Wenyi argues that once deregulated by the Yuan as part of the regime’s generally hands-off approach to culture, pre-mortem commemoration shifted to a purely local expression.\textsuperscript{26} In Ming times, the freedom from required approval developed into claims that it was locals, including commoners, who rightly decided which magistrates and other officials deserved to be commemorated, based on their

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 488.
\item \textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 487.
\item \textsuperscript{22} Ibid., 488; Lei Wen, “Tangdai difang cisi de fenceng yu yunzuò—Yi shengci yu chenghuang shen wei zhongxin,” 34–35.
\item \textsuperscript{23} Chen Wenyi, “Cong chaoting dao difang,” 59–61. Retention requests far outnumbered both steles and shrines after early Song.
\item \textsuperscript{24} Ibid., 58–59. Chen writes that Ming and Qing law reverted to requiring permission ahead of time for departure steles, but that enforcement was so lax that extant steles do not report going through an application process (p.63, n.47).
\item \textsuperscript{25} Ibid., 62.
\item \textsuperscript{26} Ibid., 107–8.
\end{itemize}
service to the people.

Rather than independent *dezeng bei*, Song pre-mortem steles whose language sounded much the same usually accompanied living shrines; adding in the many shrines without steles, this means that shrines outnumbered steles.27 This makes sense given the rapid spread of deity shrines in Song.28 But in Yuan times there were more steles than shrines, as the elite preferred to celebrate officials in writing.29

Sukhee Lee, agreeing that there were more departure steles in Yuan than Song, studies them in the context of elite-state relations. He points out a paradox: That members of the Yuan local elite worked harder on community projects and paid more for them than in Song times, yet wrote departure steles giving officials the credit.30 To resolve the paradox, Lee argues that the newly-insecure Yuan elite, deprived of the examination route to office, engraved steles to claim a state connection. The steles were not really about the officials’ achievements.31 It is only the increased number of steles we must explain, because the accomplishments locals lauded in the Yuan steles “fit seamlessly with those of ‘good officials’ [*xun hù* (循吏)] of previous dynasties, and we do not see any substantial change that would fundamentally separate them from their Southern Song counterparts.”32 Yet Lee has argued that Song prefects won the local-elite approval primarily by “honoring the schools,” even over legal and livelihood matters.33 The Yuan departure steles, by

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27 Ibid., 61.
31 Ibid., 254–58. Lee makes other good points about the practice of engraving departure steles. That Iiyama Tomoyasu’s contention that they were good for official careers leaves open the question of the motivation of the authors, and that if authors were merely pressed by the officials into writing them in ways that they saw as illegitimate the essays would have been omitted from their collected works. The steles could indeed exhort later officials to act in particular ways, he says; but if that was the purpose why did they multiply precisely in Yuan times? Lee argues rightly that we cannot take steles at face value, but he has done just that in discussing Song officials’ activities.
32 Ibid., 250.
33 Ibid., 161–63.
contrast, do honor contributions to schools, but also contributions to security, famine and tax relief, water control, settling disputes, and the explicitly class-based issue of village service. Given Lee’s insight that Southern Song educated men when wearing their “local elite” hats understood yi  to mean “sharing—even if just with kinfolk”—while in their “official” hats they pushed the meaning closer to “righteousness”—sharing with the whole community—the changed emphasis within traditional language must have meant something. The focus on practical issues that affected all, rather than on elite-centered schools, suggests a less elite group of sponsors of premortem honors.  

Two axes of analysis of the differences over time and between shrines and steles. Scholars tend to associate premortem steles with elite political action, and shrines more with popular action and with religious activity. Liu Shengjun writes that rural commoners apparently felt that setting up an image and praying showed more gratitude than a stele. Shires were meant for prayer, and could be as small as a portrait at home; they were more amendable to popular action. Chen Wenyi writes that as the aim of commemoration changed from prayer to celebration in Yuan times, steles multiplied and fewer shrines were built. A Yuan story, however, shows that politics and religion were interwoven in the resonant cosmos, through steles as well as shrines. The story goes that one Mr. Yang, a retired Yuan official of good Confucian family, having buried his great-grandfather, grandfather, and father, wanted to place a stele beside the tombs, but his area produced no suitable stone. Someone told him of a stone naturally formed like a tortoise-shaped stele base, and Yang had it fetched. That night three loud noises came from the tortoise. Someone else

34 See Lee, Negotiated Power, 249–50.
36 Departure steles were further “popularized” in Ming, according to Lee, “What separates the Yuan practice from that of the Ming is that in the Yuan many famous writers . . . wrote qusi bei, whereas in Ming very few were written by such influential literati writers.” See Lee, Negotiated Power, 249, note 145.
38 Liu E, “Guangdong qianxian Zhang gong shengci ji” 3/8 draws attention to the ease with which people could create and make offerings to portraits with or without a dedicated building.
reported the location of a stone naturally shaped like a stele slab, perfectly sized to fit the tortoise. When Yang had that fetched, the air grew misty and dark and the slab made a great noise and jumped out of the cart. The person whom Yang asked to write the inscription was initially suspicious, but local elders and officials in Yang’s former jurisdiction explained that it was hardly surprising that the ghosts and spirits were repaying Yang with the tortoise and the stele slab. For he had done an excellent job as a resident administrator—and he had a “Virtuous Government Stele” there to prove it. Steles worked spiritually as well as politically.

A surface reading of the sources grants sponsorship of living shrines to “commoners” as a matter of course. Of the roughly fifteen living enshrinees in the official Song History, it is said that “the people [ren] loved him and set up a living shrine for him”; that “the residents of the county [yi ren] set up a living shrine to him”; that “the people [min] of the two subprefectures and the associated Qiang people all drew his image and set up living shrines to serve him,” and so on, and there are other examples in other Song sources. But further research is needed to determine who these sponsors were. For the terms ren and even min, although we translate them as “the people,” do not necessarily refer to commoners; they may mean just “local residents,” including or even limited to gentry. For instance, a Ming History entry I will discuss below says that Prefect Tao An summoned li min of Raozhou to fight off an attack. This term surely means “state personnel and residents”—why would the literati or gentry be excluded from the defense effort? Thus when a line later we see that zhou min, the people of the prefecture, “built a living shrine to serve him,” we should not assume that min were commoners alone.

When reports of living shrines definitely mean commoners, they have vocabulary for that: The Yuan History biography of Chen Tianxiang (dates unknown) reports that he accorded in every matter with the hopes of the

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40 1630+ SX Weizhou zhi 4/42–3 (580–1).
42 Robert Hymes pointed out on the first draft of my book the need for care with the term min. See Schneewind, Shrines to Living Men, 178–79. See also Lee, “The word min . . . masks the heterogeneity of the ‘people’. . .” (Negotiating Power, 183–84).
43 Mingshi 13/136/3926.
“masses” or “everyone” (zhòng 众) and the commoners (baixīng) built him a living shrine. The attribution of shrines to min in different times does not necessarily reflect unchanging practice.

Some sources and scholars associate non-gentry shrine practice with foolish religious beliefs. As Lei Wen recounts that a late-Tang regional warlord, Dong Chang (董昌, 847?–96), built a temple with his own image, made of fragrant wood, with lungs and innards of gold, jade, and fine white silk, and attended by images of his wives. While a hundred musicians performed, officials sacrificed live animals, prayed in ranks, and presented the temple with clay horses; Dong complacently accepted flattering comments that the horses appeared to neigh and sweat. He announced that alcohol offered to his image made him tipsy and dismembered a traveler who dared to hint that, after all, it was only an image. Lei Wen also reports that Tang judge Li Xuan received a plaint alleging that common people praying at the living shrine to one Mr. Jia were able to “capture blessings” (huòfú 获福) there—through witchcraft. Judge Li was not worried. Jia had a reputation as a good official, and his shrine expressed continuing affection; witchcraft was unlikely in such precincts and what harm it could do if, as a side-benefit, people praying there felt blessed? In Tang texts, worship in living shrines appears as the folly of commoners and usurpers.

Song primary sources and scholarship similarly associate worship, non-elites, and ignorance. Ellen Neskar has studied Shrines to Local Worthies that honored local gentrymen or officials. Her paradigmatic case of the latter is a premortem shrine. The Worthies shrines, soberly decorated but centered on an image, were meant for elite men’s moral transformation; they did not pray for miraculous aid, and commoners were kept out. The shrines were smallish and soberly decorated with texts, but most also contained a lifelike portrait.

44 Yuanshi 13/168/3942, 3944.
46 Lei Wen, “Tangdai difang cisi de fenceng yu yunzuo,” 36, citing Zizhi tongjian, j. 259; Xin Tangshu, j. 225; and Taiping guangji, 290/2310. Dong Chang ends a three-part chapter on “treacherous officials,” implicated in the fall of the dynasty.
drawn on cloth or silk, or an image of clay or wood. Neskar reports that:

The use of images was controversial. There was always the fear that images would be vulgar and become confused with the images of deities used in popular religion . . . 49

Once there was an image, and if lower-class people were allowed in, worship would result, scholars-officials assumed, so they tried to separate worthies from popular deities, and allowed only degree-holders or students into Worthies Shrines. 50 Linda Walton has hypothesized that shrines to officials, perhaps particularly living shrines, may have been meant to distract people from the popular cults that were multiplying and gaining official approval in Song times. The politics/religion elite/popular dichotomy may seem like common sense to us (as well as to Gengsang Chu), but speaking of a living shrine commemorated by Neo–Confucian Chen Dexiu, Walton rightly notes that we cannot tell what such a shrine meant, what community it served, or how it differed from a deity shrine. 51

What is more noteworthy is that Song writers’ fretting over class boundaries in discussing Shrines to (living or dead) Local Worthies contrasts strongly with Ming living shrine discourse. According to Chen and Lee, Yuan literati used prenortem commemorations to “reconfirm their status as representative voices of local society” and assert “their right to political participation.” 52 But by

50 An image of scholar Zhou Dunyi 周敦頤 was removed from a temple to the demonic popular deity Wutong, but what was he doing there in the first place? Neskar, “The Cult of Worthies,” 34–37, 162–63.
51 Linda A. Walton, “Southern Sung Academies as Sacred Places,” 343–45. Similarly, Beverly Bossler comments that the Song “creation of exemplar shrines sometimes overlapped with, or sought to rechannel, popular impulses to honor exemplary figures perceived to be supernaturally powerful.” See Beverly Bosler, Courtesans, Concubines and the Cult of Female Fidelity, 261–63. For a Song report in a recently-excavated stele, that all the people of Sichuan, regarding An Bing as their “World-Saving Guanyin,” set up the living shrine to make respectful offerings chongsi 崇祀 to him. See Chen Xianyuan, “An gong shengci bei kao”; Cai Dongzhou, “Gansu Huixian Xianrenguan Anbing shengci bei kaoshu.” The shrine retained the title “Living Shrine” when it was rebuilt right after An’s death.
52 Lee, Negotiating Power, 258, speaking for himself, and 259 quoting Chen Wenyi’s dissertation.
Ming times, the sponsorship and voice of ordinary people (real or faked) was the critical legitimating feature for shrines to living officials, and often had a very clear political edge.\textsuperscript{53} Politics was neither relegated to steles nor limited to the elite. Indeed, Ming authors used premortem essays to argue that commoners had a right to participate in politics. On the religious side, reports or fantasies of commoners’ regular and informal offerings in such shrines were positive tropes. Neither mocked nor disparaged, commoners’ emotional desire to recompense the enshrinee with offerings was the very basis of a legitimate shrine.

Perhaps this attitude had some basis in the living shrine practice of Yuan. In 1277, three years before Lian Xixian’s death,

When the men of Jinghu South heard that Lian Xixian would indeed depart, they followed him. Howling and weeping and thronging about the chariot in which he was riding, they would not let him go. Xixian consoled them over and over again, and saluting them tearfully parted. The great ones had portraits drawn and shrines established for him, while the lesser ones had tablets written out and showed their reverence before it.\textsuperscript{54}

The elision of central approval, the centrality of commoners as sponsors, the respectful treatment of their religious impulses, and their open and legitimate political participation—all these set Ming premortem shrines apart from Tang and Song ones. I agree with John W. Dardess’s affirmative answer to the question “Did the Mongols matter?”\textsuperscript{55} Yuan precedents may have served as a bridge to this valorization of popular participation from Song patterns of premortem commemoration by and for elite men. The next section will propose wider Yuan patterns of government that may have played into the changes.

Patterns in Yuan Governance

Three decades ago, Elizabeth Endicott-West looked at the regulations and

\textsuperscript{53} Schneewind, \textit{Shrines to Living Men in the Ming Political Cosmos}, especially chap. 6.

\textsuperscript{54} Su Tianjue, \textit{Yuanchao mingchen shilüe} 7/11v–26r. Thanks to Chris Atwood for the translation.

\textsuperscript{55} John W. Dardess, “Did the Mongols Matter? Territory, Power, and the Intelligentsia in China from the Northern Song to the Early Ming,” 111–34.
structure of local Yuan administration, but left open the “perplexing question” of how the autocratic Yuan regime actually connected with people living on “the ground floor of history.” Peter Bol built on work by John Dardess to point out that the Ming state “recognized and institutionalized” local institutions initiated by elite Neo-Confucian thinkers in Jinhua and “throughout the south” from the mid-twelfth century onwards, but his discussion elides the style of government of the whole Yuan period of several generations. Dardess answers in the affirmative the question “Did the Mongols matter?” but says little about local government. Sukhee Lee has recently written that “The operation of the state in southern Chinese local society has yet to be seriously addressed by scholars of the Yuan period.” Emboldened by this gap, I will offer a suggestion about the shape of Yuan local government, based on secondary work, that relates to Yuan creativity in living shrine practice and aspects of Ming populism.

The basic aim of Yuan government was to enrich Mongols. Yet within that were elements of consultation and representation with locals, even a feeling that commoners should manage themselves. Endicott points out that key players in local government, the darughachi, could develop shared interests with the people of the jurisdiction; some acted “as benefactors and defenders of the interests of the people over whom they had managerial control.” Whereas Lee assumes that these officials (who could be of various ethnicities including Han) were incompetent and distant, Cho Won has developed Endicott’s point, arguing that some darughachi earned their

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56 Endicott-West, Mongolian Rule in China: Local Administration in the Yuan Dynasty; and “Imperial Governance in Yuan Times,” quotation from 548.
57 He says only “Neither the Song nor Tang dynasties had begun by trying to stabilize local society through the creation of local institutions managed by non-bureaucratic local leaders.” Peter Kees Bol, “The ‘Localist Turn’ and ‘Local Identity’ in Later Imperial China,” 7–8, 13.
58 Lee, Negotiated Power, 232.
60 Patricia Ebrey’s comments on the panel at the Second Conference for Middle Period Humanities underlined this point.
61 Endicott-West, Mongolian Rule in China, 121.
departure steles by working not only on taxation, defense, and judicial matters but also on household management, farming and planting, building schools and temples, regulating religious rituals and social customs, prohibiting harsh policies, suppressing local bullies, condemning official corruption, alleviating the effects of natural disasters, rationalizing tax collection and leaving instructions on that for successors, and managing transport and construction. Cho argues that it was precisely their status as members of eminent Mongolian and Semu families, able to bypass channels and report directly to the court, that gave them the power to support local commoners. If even, as Lee argues, departure steles were composed as meaningless text that constituted self-serving gentry flattery of officials, the mixed audience implied by the precarious situation of the elite (meaning that families moved from gentry to commoner and back) may have read them differently, especially in later generations. They constituted a record (however mendacious), engraved in stone, of government officials working for the common good.

Yuan governed through groups and their representatives, rather than through a strictly bureaucratic hierarchy. Early on, the royal house enfeoffed relatives in appanages and in Schurmann’s term “allied” with merchants organized into companies called ortaq and with organized Buddhist, Daoist, Muslim, and Nestorian Christian clergy. The allies of Yuan—the kinds of local powerholders they worked with—differed in North and South, as Wang Jinping’s recent monograph examines. Even after the 1260 centralization, Yuan worked through groups. The Yuan requisitioned specialized labor by

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64 The term “social group” may refer to people who were actually connected with one another (like members of the same family, village, or small cult); or to people whom outside observers see as sharing characteristics. Historians should distinguish associational from analytical “groups.”
65 Schurmann, *Economic Structure of the Yuan Dynasty*, 4–7, 91, 214. Schurmann writes, “Since the Mongolian system of social relationships was based on a hierarchy of personal and class servitude, a number of complex categories were established which defined the relation of the people to their rulers” (p. 7).
66 Wang Jinping, *In the Wake of the Mongols: The Making of a New Social Order in North China, 1200–1600*, which came out after this article had been submitted.
hereditary categories—commoners, soldiers, artisans of different kinds, Confucians, Buddhists, Daoists, doctors, musicians, actors, postal workers, boatmen, tenants, diviners, couriers, etc.—who therefore shared long-term interests.67 Yuan multiplied laws and courts so that members of different ethnic, religious, and professional groups were answerable to their own leaders, who spoke to the government.68 The misdemeanors of Buddhists or soldiers, for instance, would be handled by their non-state superiors, while laymen were the jurisdiction of civil officials; cases involving members of two different groups were settled by representatives of both groups, such as the “spokesman for the medical profession” or even more precisely “the leader of the medical association” and “the head of the [specific] musicians’ group.”69 In collecting agricultural taxes in kind and in labor, the Yuan relied on a quota system to demand payment from mid-level offices or wealthy village heads instead of assessing individual tax-payers.70 Yuan multiplied group heads by dividing the duties of Song village service: One set of village leaders was to manage tax collection and a second set, heading 50-family associations called she 社, encouraged agriculture and education, settled disputes, and took charge of community granaries.71 Sukhee Lee shows that whereas in Southern Song prefectural and county governments paid for, supported, and controlled even institutions typically associated with local-gentry activism from defense to infrastructure to charitable granaries to the community libation ceremony, Yuan government policy was that “the beneficiary pays.” Waterworks were funded by adjoining land-owners proportionately to their holdings; the sea transport headquarters was funded by sea transport workers, who also paid for

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68 Paul Heng-chao Ch’en, Chinese Legal Tradition under the Mongols: The Code of 1291 as Reconstructed, 82−88.

69 Ch’en, Chinese Legal Tradition under the Mongols, 87−88. Herbert Franke, “The Role of the State as a Structural Element in Polyethnic Societies,” 101. For artisans’ courts, see Chu Ch’ing-yuan, “Government Artisans of the Yuan Dynasty,” 238−42.

70 Uematsu, “The Control of Chiang-Nan in the Early Yuan” 49−68.

71 Schurmann, Economic Structure of the Yuan Dynasty, 43−48, 51−52.
the state-sponsored rebuilding of the temple to their patron goddess; merchants paid for the renovation of the commercial tax office; medical households funded the rebuilding of state medical schools; and Confucian households paid for rebuilding Confucian temples and schools. The Yuan thought of people in groups and negotiated with them and controlled them that way. Yuan policies also promoted associations such as lineages and academies, which could — regardless of the government’s intent — serve functions beyond their ostensible familial or educational purposes. Overall, Yuan dealt with its subjects in groups, even in associations, pushing forward a social inclination to organize by shared interests.

These groups had legitimate power because consultation was part of the Yuan mode of governance. Endicott-West describes the daily conference of all local officials as the “cornerstone” of Yuan local administration; it assured collective responsibility, but also led to considerable delays in settling legal cases — one absent official would hold up business. That surely opened the way for locals of all ranks, organized by themselves or the state into groups, to lobby one party or another for action or to instigate a filibuster. Given that the darughachi were even more dramatically outsiders to local society than Song magistrates, to know what was good for locals they must have asked around. Yuan local governance thus intensified the trend identified by Hartwell as falling between 1082 and about 1230, in which bureaucratic specialization declined and “policy was proposed and decided on the basis of the ad hoc needs asserted by local interest groups.” Lee fills out Hartwell’s point, saying that Southern Song officials consulted with members of the literati elite in

72 Lee, Negotiated Power, chaps. 2 and 3, and 242–43.
schools. In Yuan times consultation expanded to include other groups, and that consultation, as part of the Yuan practice of dividing its subjects into categories and dealing with them through group leaders, may have given working people the sense that they could participate—after all, they were now being asked to pay for state projects that they would benefit from. This way of working, in which the gentry elite were not the only or even chief connection between state and society, may have opened up a space for commoner creativity in institutions and political claims.

As in well-known central policies like the wei-so system and the 1313 adoption of the Neo-Confucian curriculum for the examination system, Yuan government laid the groundwork for Ming. Ming divided the population into hereditary groups, although the categories were far fewer than Yuan, nor were they always strictly enforced. The she system of local administrative units with broad duties, coexisting with a separate structure for tax collection, was also adopted by Ming. Later in his reign Taizu obscured the Mongol heritage of his state institutions. But the Yuan History, compiled very soon after the Ming conquest, repeatedly praises Yuan both for specific local state institutions including office land, community granaries, public pharmacies, and the she, and precisely for respecting property rights as previous dynasties had not done—that is, for allying with social groups like merchants and landowners on a good faith basis.

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76 Lee, Negotiated Power: schools for consultation with elite p. 149, p. 161, p. 165. But he shows that they also disregarded those elite views in the interests of protecting the poor, p. 109; and notes that in the translated passage on p. 163 the officials are also instructed to pass judgment on the literati.

77 The Yuan principle that “the beneficiary pays” may be the Yuan “bridge” (p. 272) between the Southern Song and Ming principles of operation that Lee lays out on p. 148, note 153.

78 von Glahn, The Economic History of China, 281–82. The Ming community school, shexue, had its origins in Yuan policy, too; Schurmann, Economic Structure of the Yuan Dynasty, 46; and Schneewind, Community Schools and the State in Ming China, 12–13, 27.

79 Dardess, Confucianism and Autocracy: Professional Elites in the Founding of the Ming Dynasty, 195, and R. Bin Wong, China Transformed, 80, both cited in Schneewind, Community Schools and the State in Ming China, 185, note 29.

80 Schurmann, Economic Structure of the Yuan Dynasty, 12, 14–15, 20–21, 53.
Yuan governance made a place in politics for subjects other than the literati and military elite. I propose that the approach appealed to the Yuan commoner and Ming dynastic founder Zhu Yuanzhang 朱元璋 (1328–98); that Ming commoners inherited the idea that they could and should manage themselves; and that Yuan practices accustomed elite men to commoner participation. Those habits of mind may be particularly clear in living shrines. In Yuan times, shrines no longer required central approval, nor did they hew to gentry norms, since non-gentry could act politically. The last section of this article describes some odd shrines that exemplify Yuan creativity.

**Peculiar Yuan Premortem Shrines**

Two living shrines from the *Yuan History* illustrate Cho Won’s argument that high-ranking officials could earn local gratitude precisely because of their privileged access to the throne. Cui Bin 崔斌 (1222–78) was a favorite advisor to Khubilai whose advice preserved the people of Tanzhou from massacre during the conquest, so “the Tanzhou people regarded him as virtuous and made a living shrine to him.”81 Dorji 朵兒只 (1304–55) served in a high post in Jiangzhe. When the elders of Hangzhou wanted to build a living shrine to him, his upright refusal (based on the idea that he might err later) referred to his inherited close connection with them.

In the past, my father brought order to Zhe province, and in fact I was born here. It is right that you elders should cherish me, and how could I be without feeling towards you Hangzhou people? But today, the empire is at peace, and as I enjoy the privilege of holding the position of Grand Councillor here, who knows but that my protection of the laws and systems will not disgrace my late father’s all-sufficient rule? What use [then] would be this empty fame?82

81 *Yuanshi* 13/173/4037.
82 *Yuanshi* 10/119/2943–45 for his father Toghto 脫脫; *Yuanshi*, 11/139/3353–55 and Dardess, *Conquerors and Confucians*, 69–70 for the son. This is not the compiler of the *Songshi*. There were about 20 Toghtos active in Yuan times, not carefully distinguished in the index to the *Cambridge History of China: Alien Regimes*. 
Powerful men could choose to serve locals, and locals could choose to recompense their benefactors with living shrines and the rhetoric of affective ties.

Most commonly, enshrinement alive was for (departing) officials not at the central or provincial levels, but from the route on down to the county. A typical example, at the level of route commander (working under the darughachi and supervising about 100,000 souls), was Zhang Mao 張懋 (d. 1280). In Jizhou, Zhang wiped out a violent gang called the “Ten Tigers,” set up charitable granaries, and otherwise governed so well that several thousand absconded households returned; they “mutually led one another in making a living shrine to make offerings to him.”

But Yuan living shrines are as local as one for an irrigation engineer on his waterworks, minnow-in-a-ditch style; and as national as imperially-ordered shrines for prominent figures like the Bayan Merkid 巴延蒙克 and El Temur 燕鐵機. The shrine ordered for El Temür recognized his former achievements despite his later corruption. Yuan people built living shrines for all levels of state personnel.

Yuan theory expressed this variety, too. One celebration of a living shrine to a provincial official who had drained the Guangdong swamp of corrupt officials (including ex-pirates) opens by saying that problems are problems for the whole country, and mentions an imperial order for worship, but ultimately attributes the shrine’s rightness to popular gratitude. Was worship beyond the level of the prefecture justifiable? The question was explicitly answered in a Yuan stele about a ruined shrine in Changping county to Tang statesman Di Renjie. In 1299, the county magistrate rebuilt it, and then came to consult the writer, Song Bo 宋渤 (1341−70). He was worried: Di deserved (posthumous) worship for his loyal and capable services to the Tang, and two localities where Di had served had given him living shrines—no problem there. But he had

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84 Gui Zhi, “Yuandai da kexuejia Guo Shuoqing, 52−54.” Song and Ming men were also enshrined alive at waterworks and bridges.
85 On the shrines for Bayan 巴延 in 1331, see Dardess, *Conquerors and Confucians*, 55, and *Yuanshi* 3/39/16b. For other imperial orders 3/35/14b, 35/19b, 36/7a.
86 *Yuanshi* 3/35/782.
87 An exception may be the enfeoffed princes, as Iiyama Tomoyasu pointed out.
88 Liu E, “Guangdong qianxian Zhang gong shengci ji.”
never served in Changping. Ought he to be enshrined there? To the magistrate’s query Song replied that Di had benefitted the whole area. The shrines to him scattered throughout it arose from a real response that could not be forgotten, with locals leading one another to enshrine him. The shrines were proper (yi 宜). This way of thinking means that the locality itself is defined by the consciousness of the residents, and not by the lines the state draws.

Continuing the elite tradition of premortem enshrinement, one Yuan official won a living shrine for reviving an academy. But it was not only Confucian institutions that rewarded supporters in this way. In the 1350s, the abbot and monks of Kunshan’s Guangxiao (Broad Filiality) temple enshrined the Kunshan Prefect (apparently still in office) to thank him for protecting the temple from heavy taxes and conscription, and to remind later administrators to do the same. They commissioned an essay from a sojourning literatus, Zheng Dong 鄭東 (to be inscribed in the seal-script calligraphy of one Yang Xixian). Zheng opens with a discussion of the broad benevolence of Buddhism’s grace, which captured (huo 獲) the love of rulers, officials, and commoners. That love and faith underlie the Guangxiao’s long history dating back to Tang and its staff of 200. But declining land fertility, changes in Yuan tax law, and Kunshan’s elevation to the status of prefecture meant that corvée demands had reduced the temple to a skeleton of its former self until fortunately, in Spring 1349, Shi Wenbin 史文彬 arrived—an active and intelligent prefect whose many contributions were documented on other steles. Here, Zheng only tells us that he treated the people “like a kindly mother who takes an infant to her bosom.” He relieved the monks’ difficulties, saving them from dispersal. They told one another:

Since His Honor’s grace to us is as genuine as this, if we fail to recompense him it will really mean something is lacking in our hearts. It is proper to make an image to enshrine him, not only to make him draw near the Buddha, but also to ask for gifts of great flourishing blessings. Moreover, morning and evening it will be as if we could be near His Honor’s face,

89 Song Bo, “Chongxiu Di Liang gong ci ji,” 1–2.
90 Lu Xinyuan, Wuxing jinshi ji 14/5–7.
and respect and love him. Thus we can really exhaust[ively express] our hearts.92

The stress on nearness, and feeling, is typical, but the hope for the enshrinee’s conversion is not. Once the shrine had been set up in the temple, the abbot explained to Zheng Dong his desire for an inscription to remind all the monks to cherish Shi forever. He expressed a Buddhist idea that runs directly counter to the usual promises of the premortem genre that the worthy enshrinee will be remembered forever: “All human feelings will slacken as affairs lengthen, and having slackened will be forgotten.”93 Zheng Dong concludes by looking forward and backward in the passage of those human affairs, talking again about human feelings and about the power to capture hearts and minds.

Those in ancient times who were good at governing were able not to thwart the feelings of people, so their administration failed to capture no-one. Therefore, the superior man always rules through virtue; the inferior man always rules through violence [xìng刑, lit. punishments]. Violence is the source of resentment; virtue is the nursery of grace. Those who came to govern Kunshan before His Honor—I don’t know how many there were, but I have never heard of one who managed to be enshrined. Looking at it from this case, the response [yìng应] to violence and virtue is great and far-reaching indeed! This being so, those who come after His Honor, if they also manage to treat people with virtue as he did, may they not also be enshrined as he was?94

The ideas sound Buddhist, but the monks appear as a category of subject—in consonance with the Yuan approach to governing by dividing people into groups—and they set up a shrine in just the way “the people” did.95 Whether

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92 Ibid.
93 Ibid.
94 Ibid.
95 Song statesman Fan Zhongyan earned a pre-mortem shrine from grateful monks, see Wang Zhi, "Chōngxiù Fān Wénzhēng gōng Zhōnglì Mào ji," 1/36; Judith Boltz, “Not by the Seal of Office Alone,” 241–305. Temples also housed living shrines set up by the public; a Song and a Yuan example appear at 1506 NZ Suzhou Gusu zhi 27/17, 28/13.
this “response” to virtue or violence worked through Buddhist karma or the resonant cosmos, Zheng strongly implies that Shi’s predecessors were inferior men, and warns Shi’s successors. Ming premortem shrine texts frequently criticized former officials and instructed later ones.

A very common trope in premortem discourse was the Gantang (sweet-pear) tree of Ode 16. The poem recounts how his feudal subjects gratefully preserved the tree under which Duke Shao of the Zhou had meted out justice. In Ezra Pound’s translation:

Don’t chop that pear tree!
Don’t spoil that shade;
That’s where ole Marse Shao used to sit,
Lord, how I wish he was judgin’ yet.

A Yuan-period legal collection invokes this ode. So do many Ming premortem steles, and the foundational scholarly article on Ming living shrines cites a writer’s claim that upon reading the Gantang poem, he “knew the reason why later generations made living shrines.” The comment actually comes from a Yuan essay for a living shrine, and a very unusual one, at that.

Chen Lü commemorated a pre-mortem shrine to an official, Jie Xisi 揭傒斯 (1274–1344), built by his personal servant Zou Fu 鄒福 (1903–31). Well-known to Jie’s acquaintances, since he had not left his master’s side for two decades, Zou had requested the essay, explaining to Chen that “It was my parents that gave me life, but it was Milord who completed me.” He was grateful for Jie’s care and teaching, and in particular for Jie’s lack of haughtiness despite the gap between his high rank and Zou’s lowly status. Chen focuses on Jie’s humility: A true gentleman does not distance himself from others because of rank, age, knowledge, or wisdom. “Our sort” 吾黨 should learn from both his example and that of his servant. Their relation proves, writes Chen, that the kind of “utmost cherishing” 至愛 and resulting “deep grateful response” 深感

96 Shi himself also carved such a warning on stone: “Your salary, your emolument; /The people’s oil, the people’s fat!/ Beneath you: easy to oppress the people;/above you: hard to cheat Heaven!” 耶爾俸爾祿/民膏民脂/下民易虐/上天難欺. See Zhu Gui, Mingji lu 5/6.
illustrated in the Gantang ode truly exist in the world, whatever skeptics may say—perhaps implying “and even when gentlemen are excluded from government” as Southerners were in Yuan times. Chen reports at length Zou’s explanation: He was at a loss how to repay Jie’s kindness and care, for if he wanted to give him clothing, well, all his clothes had come from Jie; if he wanted to give him food, all his food was Jie’s; if he wanted to seek out all the treasures of the empire to profit and delight him, they would be insufficient and anyway Jie did not value that kind of thing. When Jie was posted south, Zou had a chance to return home. He built a hall of four columns to the west of his residence and hung up a painting of Jie with his birthdate and time. He intended to kneel and clasp hands there each morning and evening praying for good fortune for Jie, hoping for a good response (from unspecified forces), to fully express the gratitude in his heart. The stele would pass the legacy to his sons and grandsons.99

The Gantang tree in the Ming repertoire of honors extended this truly personal relationship between unequal parties to incorporate a departed official into his former jurisdiction. Its appearance in this personal situation highlights how the image of the Gantang tree symbolized the emotional response called forth in the lowly by the personal care and lack of haughtiness of their superiors, foreshadowing Ming populism. Just as the servant’s words are reported at length here, and those of the Huangs in the shrine to Tang Di 唐棣 (1296–1364) discussed below, so Ming steles for premortem shrines report (or fabricate) the words of commoners.

Tang Di, as Magistrate of Xining from 1345, cleaned up local government, reduced its burdens, and increased its services, as well as effectively praying for rain. Locals set up shrines to him in the school building, and all over the county, and hung an image of him in a Buddhist temple. But the Huang clan 我諸黃 they repeatedly call themselves in their long disquisition on Tang’s virtues, which Yuyong repeats to Yang, wanted their own shrine so as to remember how he had gotten government off their backs. They built one in Wucheng Town, planning to involve the petty urbanites and farmers of the town 鎮之廛氓野夫 in making offerings, and then sent local

literatus Yuyong Zishao—apparently none of them had enough status to do this—to ask a former co-worker of Tang’s, Yang He, for a stele essay that would outdo all the others in elegance. Yang comments that he had seen Tang’s achievements with his own eyes—indeed it is he, not the Huangs, who mentions Tang’s successful prayer for rain in the autumn of 1347—but that being requested by subjects to write this essay was even more moving. The people’s gratitude, rather than the author’s own knowledge of objective accomplishments, is what matters; that will continue to be true in Ming premortem discourse. Yang describes the image in the temple: Tang’s image is dressed in court robes, dignified enough to call forth respect from all, including later officials, who will learn from the details recorded here and be moved by the image to emulate them. To address future officials, the shrine in the school would have sufficed. The outpouring of sentiment and cash suggests that various people wanted their own shrines to Tang—perhaps hoping his efficacy in office would continue in spirit while his body was elsewhere, as some Ming anecdotes attest.

In Dongguan, Guangdong in about 1277, grateful locals put the portrait of still-living Li Chunsou 李春叟 (jr. 1256) into his father’s sacrificial hall. This was not the only Yuan case in which family members, some living and some dead, were enshrined together. The living shrine Wenzong 文宗 ordered for El Temur for military contributions in 1331 was accompanied by shrines to his ancestors. Grateful farmers and merchants planned to recompense Naiman with long remembrance of his defense of Xia county in 1355. In addition to public shrines, a commoner named Wang Yi separately built one in Zhulü village; Gui Xi的歸晞 essay commemorates that one, completed in 1362. Along with Naiman himself, it included his father, Minister of Education Aduwen 阿都溫 (in the center facing south) and his younger brother, also an official (to the father’s left, facing West). Gui offers two explanations for why all three men were enshrined. In the prose record, he explains that two years after Naiman’s initial defense, the bandits had returned, and while he fought...
them off again his father detailed troops to soothe and settle the county, while
the younger brother followed Naiman into battle. The father lodged with
Wang at the time, so when it was over, he established this shrine. Gui Xi’s
verse for the shrine, however, argues that Aduwen had taught Naiman to be
loyal, so he deserved enshrinement as a wise father. “Who could say this was
not proper?” challenges the verse. And likewise, the prose record explains: If
you want to criticize the shrine’s origin, that is because you do not know all
the details. For alongside the shrine, Wang Yi built a charitable school,
endowing it with 200 mou of fields to support the teacher. His thinking was
that it was the Ru 学 learning of Naiman that had led to his meritorious virtue
toward the people, so an academy would allow the growth of men who could
deal similarly with the trouble of the future.103

Conclusion

In Yuan shrine practice, it seems, “anything goes.” Imperial commands, later
misconduct, Buddhist sponsors, multiplicity, a bondservant honoring his
master, and even family connections could not render commemoration
improper. Tao An 陶安 (1315–68), later the chief architect of Taizu’s ritual
order and himself a pre-mortem enshrinee, recorded in about 1348 that a
group of elders had knelt before one Fei Xian’s horse to request a stele about
their former prefect, whom they had already enshrined. Fei objected that
having married into the prefect’s family his writing might seem
“self-interested” (私). But the elders insisted:

You cannot get out of this on the grounds of such jealous suspicions.
Engraving a stone is to express the public view [公]; how could it be
called “self-interested”?104

Even personal connections could not necessarily undermine the public

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103 Gui Xi, “Naiman gong shengci ji”; Dang Baohai, “Chahan Tiemuer de zushu shengnian yu
hanxing,” 175–76. Dang identifies Naiman as Chahan Tiemuer.
104 Tao An, “Guwen Linlang jiangbei huaidongdao lian fengzi zhishi fei jun [Shen]
xingzhuang.” Tao Xueshi wenji 19/5b.
propriety of a shrine or stele backed by the people. Tao An himself, as prefect of Raozhou before the Ming conquest was complete, organized locals to fight Zhu Yuanzhang’s rival Chen Youliang 陈友凉 (1320–63)—and then protected those who had followed Chen in those chaotic times from execution by Ming army officers. Tao won a poem of praise from the Ming founder, and a living shrine from the Raozhou people.105

Tao An’s was not the only particular living shrine that bridged the Yuan–Ming transition. In the 1350s, a stalwart Yuan general, the Khitan, Shimo Yisun 石抹宜孫 (?–1359), while defending Chuzhou, Zhejiang, earned a living shrine and gathered an intellectual coterie that included Zhejiang men Zhang Yi 章溢 (1314–69), Liu Ji 劉基 (1311–75), and Song Lian 宋濂 (1310–81). In 1356, the Ming tried to turn him, but he fought to the death. Zhu Yuanzhang, impressed by his loyalty, revived the premortem shrine. This occurred in the summer of 1360, just when Zhu was working to win over the Zhejiang intellectuals who became so central to his government.106 The shrine bridged bottom–up and top–down sponsorship, life and death, and Yuan and Ming.

Tang and Song living shrines shared elements with Ming living shrines. Yet the institution changed over time. Tang and Song shrines required central permission; Ming shrines did not. Tang elite men preferred steles to shrines, using them for political relationships and associating shrines with foolish popular religion. Song elite men built living shrines to worthies, but excluded commoners, despising their religiosity, while Ming premortem commemorations dwelt on popular sentiment and offerings to the point of lavishly faking them when they were lacking. In Ming times, premortem shrines mediated political participation by commoners, which within the confines of the premortem genre was well–accepted by elite writers.

I have proposed that it was Yuan that bridged the gap. Yuan governance taught commoners to work to govern themselves, while the darughachi consulted locals on what to do. The language of close relations between official

105 Mingshi 13/136/3925–6; Schneewind, Shrines to Living Men in the Ming Political Cosmos, 54.
106 Mingshi 12/124/2718. DMB 91,933. Yuanshi 186/4309–111 does not report the living shrine.
and locals was developed further. Once no official approval was required, shrine and stele could become truly local and independent even of the local literati. The resulting creative and peculiar shrines with their steles still stood in Ming times and later, like one extant even in Qing that recorded the names of 30 sponsors, not one with an official title. Language on another stele extant in Ming insisted on right of the group to enshrine, setting an example for political action by commoners. The creative space narrowed again somewhat in Ming times, but it settled on a far more populist pattern than in Song times. The Yuan mattered to Ming: Not only to the shape of the state, but to political thinking by Ming subjects.

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1506 Nan Zhili Suzhou Gusu zhi
Electronic Siku Quanshu Jiangxi tongzhi
1515 Jiangxi Ruizhou fuzhi
1517 Jiangxi Jianchang fuzhi
1596 Zhejiang Xiushui xianzhi

107 MG Jiangsu sheng tongzhi gao, 47–48, in Zhongguo lidai shike shiliao hubian.
108 See Lu Xinyuan, Wuxing junshi ji 14/6 (p. 601) for this sentence with reference to premortem enshrinement in a revived academy, led by the Dean and apparently referring to action by literati.


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