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COMPETING INSTITUTIONS: COMMUNITY SCHOOLS AND "IMPROPER SHRINES" IN SIXTEENTH CENTURY CHINA

Sarah Schneewind

If we look at the mess village customs are in, it is all because many do not have primary schools . . . Today, the authorities do not take responsibility for this . . . If there are abandoned community schools, they make them into granaries and stables, or reduce them to vegetable plots . . . There are plenty of Buddhist and Daoist temples in places without one academy or primary school . . .¹

In 1375, following a Yuan precedent, the first Ming emperor mandated the establishment of a public primary school in every village and neighborhood throughout China to teach basic literacy and obedience to the law. Five years later he rescinded the "community school" policy because clerks, administrators, and local rich families were using them to oppress the poor.² In the place of officially-managed schools, Zhu called for virtuous commoners to open schools.³ In the mid-1400s, the central government again promoted

¹ 1550 Beizhili *Guangping fuzhi* 5/19/21. I would like to thank the Committee on Scholarly Communication with China for funding my research in China in 1994-1995; Katherine Carlitz and John Dardess for comments on the version of this paper delivered at the AAS meeting in March, 1998; and Joseph McDermott and an anonymous reviewer for further comments.

² Edward Farmer, the foremost student of Zhu Yuanzhang's policies, has commented that Zhu was "a shrewd and far-sighted legislator, a constitutional architect . . . [who] proposed, reviewed, modified, and reissued [law codes] over a period of three decades." Edward Farmer, *Zhu Yuanzhang and Early Ming Legislation* (Leiden: E. J. Brill 1995):10. Zhu did frequently adjust local institutional legislation. But Farmer's formulation, I believe, underestimates the degree to which he was forced into making changes by resistance from both state personnel and subjects that caused the policies to fail. The community school policy is one example.

³ Confusion about whether or not community schools were state schools thus dates back to the Ming founder himself. The confusion, most recently exemplified in the contrasting views of Angela Leung and William Rowe in the same conference volume (Angela Ki Che Leung, "Elementary Education in the Lower Yangtze Region in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries," in *Education and Society in Late Imperial China, 1600-1900*, ed. Benjamin A. Elman and Alexander Woodside (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994):384; William T. Rowe, "Education and Empire in Southwest China: Ch'en Hung-

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community schools, particularly in connection with border pacification and recruitment of talent for government service. From the 1470s to the 1550s, they were enthusiastically established by some magistrates, subprefects, and prefects (hereafter simply magistrates) as a way to improve popular morality.⁴

Community schools provide one window onto the process of Ming state-building at the local level. Ideally, the central government—court and upper bureaucracy—set policy about local institutions; local administrators carried out the policies; and local subjects then benefitted from or at least had to accept the institutions. The history of community schools points up several flaws in that ideal process. First of all, even though every village and town was supposed to have a community school, most magistrates apparently made no attempt to establish or maintain them. Magistrates who *did* establish schools, therefore, must have had more complex motives than simple obedience to a central directive. Secondly, the central community school policy was always vague about who should attend and teach schools, how schools should be funded, what should be taught, whether tuition should be charged, and so on. Magistrates who established schools therefore improvised on the form and funding of the schools.⁵ Third, the schools often collapsed soon after the establisher left his post.⁶

The history of community schools also shows that state-building did not take place in a vacuum. Schools often competed directly with local religious

mou in Yunnan, 1733-1738" (in Elman and Woodside 1994:427) results from the attempt to identify the true essence of labels that were not applied consistently, as has been pointed out by Zhang Jianren, *Mingdai jiaoyu guanli zhidu yanjiu* (A Study of the Ming Period Educational Management System) (Taipei: Wenjin chubanshe, 1993):36; by Evelyn Sakakida Rawski, *Education and Popular Literacy in Ch'ing China* (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, 1979):35; and by Johanna Handlin, *Action in Late Ming Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983):25, n.55. In the Ming, while most recorded community schools were established by magistrates, some magistrates set up charitable schools and some locals established community schools; for a community school to last for a reasonable period *and* make it into the historical record probably required both official and local support. See Chi Xiaofang, *Mingdai shexue xingshuai yuanyin chutan* (A Preliminary Exploration of the Reasons for the Rise and Fall of Ming Dynasty Community Schools), *Journal of Chinese Studies* 2 (1993):19-28.

⁴ For details on the history of community schools in the Ming, see my forthcoming dissertation, "Community Schools and Improper Shrines: Local Institutions and the Ming State."

⁵ As Thomas Nimick has shown, "the administration of individual counties varied considerably despite the fact that they were part of a highly developed bureaucracy." Thomas Nimick, "The County, the Magistrate and the Yamen in Late Ming China" (Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton University, 1993):4-5.

⁶ Similarly, Alexander Woodside has commented that "most Qing charitable schools probably enjoyed extremely brief existences," in part because people took over their properties. Alexander Woodside, "Some Mid-Qing Theorists of Popular Schools," *Modern China* 9.1 (1983):5.

institutions, as the epigram suggests. The usual expression of this competition was to describe an official as having “destroyed improper shrines [to] establish community schools (*hui yinci li shexue*).” The first man whose activities were described this way was a Yuan official in Hejian prefecture, and the first Ming official was Zhang Bi, Prefect of Nan’an from 1478 to 1484.⁷ According to gazetteers, more than a hundred Ming officials active all over the empire “destroyed improper shrines,” and about forty of them also “established community schools.”⁸ The competition between schools and shrines was clearly expressed by the activists. For instance, one official admonished local leaders: “Family schools and village schools are the system of our dynasty modeled on the perfect Zhou. How can you instead have divine halls and Buddhist quarters?”⁹ And in about 1532, Xu Jie began a long harangue to the pupils of the Yungai Community School about their duties as Confucians by referring to the fact that the school building replaced a humble, cramped “improper shrine,” set up by what he called “miscellaneous Daoists and Buddhists.” He admonished the pupils: “If you know the origin of this [school] building, then do as I charge you.”¹⁰

There were at least three motives behind Xu Jie’s speech. First, it was engraved on stone to assure the survival of the school by commemorating its founding. Second, the speech stressed that the community school replaced the shrine, fighting heterodoxy by physically occupying its space, displacing its practitioners, and re-educating youngsters in the Confucian religion. Third, at the time, Xu Jie was in exile from the capital, serving as a lowly

⁷ The Yuan official was Lü Sicheng (1540 Beizhili *Hejian fuzhi*). Zhang’s activities are reported in many sources, for instance *Mingshi gao* (Draft Ming History) 162/7. A note on dates: the years given are calculated by adding to the reign date (Jiajing 5 becomes 1526), since the months in which events happened are not usually recorded in gazetteers.

⁸ Many more established schools without destroying shrines, as my survey of over 600 gazetteers shows. I demonstrate below and in my dissertation that “improper shrines” were often Buddhist institutions. Timothy Brook, tracing the rise of gentry patronage of Buddhist institutions in the Ming, argues that gazetteer editors generally maintain a “pose of distress” about the prevalence of Buddhism in gentry culture and the society at large. Timothy Brook, *Praying for Power: Buddhism and the Formation of Gentry Society in Late-Ming China*. (Cambridge: Council on East Asian Studies, 1993):64. But in about 115 of the gazetteers I looked at, it was not just a pose: disapproval of Buddhism had concrete results.

⁹ In 1522, Zhou Yu (Kunshan native), was posted to Anpu county in central Yunnan. His self-appointed mission was to “implement Chinese [culture] and change barbarian [culture], to expel heterodoxy and elevate orthodoxy, to destroy improper shrines and set up community schools.” He lectured local leaders on the importance of having community schools to educate children and accused them of toadying to ghosts and deities instead of doing their duty as subjects. 1500 Yunnan *Xudian fuzhi* 2/30a.

¹⁰ Xu Jie, “Record of the Yungai village community school in Nanping county” in his *Shijingtang ji* 14/20b. Also reprinted in *Siku quanshu* 1457-222.

judge or acting prefect in Fujian. His activities there, including destroying improper shrines and establishing community schools, earned him promotion to provincial posts in Zhejiang and Jiangxi overseeing education. After re-entering capital politics, Xu, a follower of Wang Yangming, became a major power broker and amassed more land than any of his colleagues.¹¹ Similar mixed motives appear in the story of Wei Jiao, to which we will now turn.

Wei Jiao's Reforms in Guangdong

The issue of the extent of central control over local institutions and the phenomenon of competition between community schools and local religious institutions are both illuminated by the story of Wei Jiao (1483-1543, Kunshan native), vice education intendant for Guangdong in the early 1520s. Education intendants were censors assigned to a particular province. They inspected prefectural, subprefectural, and county schools, supervised and certified government students, oversaw examinations, and carried out other matters connected with education, including popular customs.¹² Wei Jiao was atypical of the men who established community schools and destroyed improper shrines in that his post was at the provincial level, but the rich sources on his activities illuminate the dynamics of the replacement of schools by shrines carried out by mid-Ming magistrates.¹³

Upon arrival in Guangdong, Wei deputed magistrates, teachers, and others to pull down local religious institutions and set up community schools and shrines to Confucian figures. In central and eastern Guangdong, hundreds of community schools were established.¹⁴ Wei attended to detail; he himself traveled to the western-most prefecture of Guangdong to try to enforce his orders, studying the situation in part through gazetteers. He gave community school teachers careful pedagogical instructions that stressed illustrating moral principles with concrete examples that pupils could follow in their daily lives. He told the teachers: "Don't go feeding them a lot of

¹¹ *Dictionary of Ming Biography* (hereafter *DMB*) 572; *Mingshi* 19/213/5631.

¹² See Tilemann Grimm, "Ming Education Intendants" in *Chinese Government in Ming Times: Seven Studies*, ed. Charles O. Hucker (New York: Columbia University Press).

¹³ In 1520, a new metropolitan degree holder, Zhu Chang, who had benefitted from the personal attention of Education Intendant Gu Qian, suggested ordering Education Intendants to attend the community schools again. The Ministry of Rites agreed and it was so ordered. *Ming Wuzong shilu* 189/3588-90. Wei may have been responding to this command.

¹⁴ By my count, about 50 schools are definitely attributed to Wei in Guangdong gazetteers, and there are about 375 more that may have been established on his orders. See in addition to other gazetteers cited below 1843 Guangdong *Yingde xianzhi* 5/65-6 and 1779 Guangdong *Geyang xianzhi* 2/29.

vain verbiage about nature and fate and profound and august principle and whatnot.”¹⁵

Attendance was mandatory for boys from 6 or 7 years old to 12 years old. Wei's plans for the school day incorporated lessons in ritual, reading, writing, reciting, music, and for the brightest pupils calligraphy, math, and the theory of charioteering. He invented a dual system of schools, whereby the pupils of small village and neighborhood schools took turns attending larger, centrally-located schools to practice ritual under the direction of a qualified scholar. “Ritual” included how to embody proper social relations and carry out the basic ceremonies of marriage, capping, funerals, and sacrifice to ancestors.¹⁶

Teachers were to be chosen for their virtue, love of poetry and ritual, leadership, and ability to be respected by the local people. They were directed to reprimand pupils not only for laziness or rowdiness in school, but for misbehavior outside school: arrogance, wearing clothing beyond what was allowed by statute, riding fast horses, drinking and gambling, and loving pleasure and indolence. Teachers were also to link the village with Wei's office at the provincial level by reprimanding and reporting not only pupils but also other villagers, as a supplement to the community compacts Wei also promoted. For instance, someone who volunteered to pay for a poor person's funeral would be recorded in the “Proclaiming Goodness Register.” Families who feasted and sang when they were supposed to be in mourning would be recorded in the “Reforming Faults Register.” Someone who previously had engaged in quarreling and bringing lawsuits, but had changed his behavior, would be recorded as “reformed.” Local people could report on one another to the teacher, and all the registers were to be sent up to Wei's office.¹⁷ As far as I know, only Wei Jiao ever proposed this use of community school teachers. The proposal may have been connected with his theories on the

¹⁵ Wei Jiao, “Liangnan xuezheng” (School Administration in Guangdong) in his collected works, *Zhuangqu yishu*, juan 9. In *Siku quanshu* (pp. 1267-848—1267-877). Hereafter “Lingnan.” 9/30. Wei's educational methods did meet some criticism. Zhan Ruoshui saw Wei during this period, and in one letter to a friend gently mocks Wei's self assurance, while in a later letter he uses him as a negative example he hoped his correspondent, Xie Weiren, would avoid. Wei, Zhan wrote, had set up general precepts for pupils. One pupil had said, “I don't know how to get a handle on these!”—complaining that the precepts were too abstract. Wei dismissed the comment, saying “What does a child know?” But Zhan agreed with the pupil and urged Xie not to rely on abstract principles to run his school. *Zhan Baizuan xiansheng wenji* (Zhan Ruoshui's collected works) 7/46b-47a, 7/69.

¹⁶ Lingnan 9/18, 26. See also Wei's “Instructions to Community [School] Teachers,” 1798 Guangdong *Dongguan xianzhi* 45/32a. Mandatory attendance contravened the plans of the first Ming emperor, who was concerned that poor boys from small families were being forced to attend against their will.

¹⁷ Lingnan 9/18, 24-5, 35-7.

etymology of the word *she* (community) and its connection to the origin of the bureaucracy.¹⁸

The wide establishment of community schools was a national policy, but there was no money in local budgets earmarked for them. Wei and magistrates who established schools had to find their own sources of funding. The teacher's salary, though low in comparison with the salaries of county school teachers, was the key expenditure for a community school, running at a maximum of about 8 taels a year plus grain. Some schools were supported by endowment of shops or land. School buildings were usually two or three buildings totaling about eight rooms or bays. Pupils were sometimes charged fees, but sometimes given stipends.¹⁹ Where did the buildings, land, and money come from?

Wei Jiao, and others before and after him, made schools out of so-called "improper shrines" (*yinci*). *Yin* was an old derogatory term for cults and shrines that can be translated in many ways, including "excessive," "licentious," "lewd," "profane," "profligate," and "illicit."²⁰ I prefer "improper" because there were so many different reasons that cults were given the label. In the Ming, *yinci* referred variously to shrines of cults not officially approved by the central government; small, weird, local cults; cults to deities who were not efficacious, i.e. did not answer people's prayers; cults to deities who answered improper prayers; and cases in which the god was a good one but was worshiped by the wrong people. For Wei and some other Ming officials, especially after about 1470, "improper shrines" included all Buddhist and Daoist temples, apparently even ones that appeared in the centrally-promulgated ritual statutes. Wei's most precise definition named as improper "all shrines to deities and Buddhist buildings that are not recorded in the ritual regulations, do not relate to improving morality (*fengjiao*), [and/or] do not have an official patent."²¹

Wei's deputies in each county attacked temples, defrocked uncertified

¹⁸ Wei Jiao, *Zhuangqu yishu* 1/5, 2/38.

¹⁹ For details on these practical matters see my forthcoming dissertation.

²⁰ Paul R. Katz, *Demon Hordes and Burning Boats* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995):29, note. See also Valerie Hansen, *Changing Gods in Medieval China, 1127-1276* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990):84-85. Kenneth Pomeranz reports that for late Ming gentry, *yin* meant "supplementary" rather than "heterodox," allowing them to approve cults that were not strictly orthodox (*zheng*), and to call on "additional powers to supplement those invoked in ancestral worship and other 'proper' rites." Kenneth Pomeranz, "Power, Gender and Pluralism in the Cult of the Goddess of Taishan," in *Culture and State in Chinese History: Conventions, Accommodations, and Critiques*, ed. Theodore Huters, R. Bin Wong, and Pauline Yu. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997):184.

²¹ Wei Jiao, "Text of the Orders to the Prefectures and Counties to Establish Community Schools" 1798 Guangdong *Dongguan xianzhi* 45/31a.

clergy, and seized temple lands. Large temples were converted into academies and community schools. Their images were melted down, and their paraphernalia was destroyed or used in new shrines to Confucian worthies and, in one instance, an arch to a chaste widow.²² The wood and tiles from smaller temples were sold to pay for official repairs, or used to build community schools and Confucian shrines. Temple estates were confiscated to support the new institutions.²³

Had Wei been instructed by the central government to make such sweeping changes? In 1521, the year Wei came to Guangdong, the new Jiajing emperor did order the sale or demolition of some extra buildings, including religious buildings.²⁴ Wei refers obliquely to this edict.²⁵ Later in his reign, the Jiajing emperor did allow Gui E, Huo Tao, and Fang Xianfu to attack Buddhist institutions in the two capitals.²⁶ But that was after Wei had left Guangdong.

Three decades earlier, in 1488, the new Hongzhi emperor had offhandedly authorized suppression of what officials of the Ministry of Rites called "all 'palaces,' hermitages, shrines and temples in the capital and the provinces that bring no benefit to the people and do not accord with the ritual statutes."²⁷ But at the same time, he had specifically *refused* requests to suppress or tone down some of the very cults that Wei attacked in Guangdong and that magistrates attacked elsewhere. Two examples are the Perfect Warrior (Zhenwu) and Mount Tai or the East Marchmount (Taishan).²⁸ So

²² See 1835 Guangdong *Nanhai xianzhi* 29/28b.

²³ Lingnan 9/6, 44, etc.

²⁴ *Ming Shizong shilu* 0031-2.

²⁵ Lingnan 9/21b.

²⁶ In 1527, Gui, Huo, and Fang, with imperial permission, attacked nunneries in Beijing, searched out monks without certificates, and destroyed privately-built temples and monasteries. In 1536, the Buddhist temples in the imperial palace were pulled down, relics were destroyed, and 169 gold and silver Buddhist statues were melted down. The following year, Huo Tao got the emperor's permission to shut down all the Buddhist nunneries in Nanjing, on the grounds that they were in fact brothels. The nuns were married off or returned to their families; the buildings were converted to government shrines or schools; and the temple lands were confiscated. *DMB* 321, 681, 757; *Mingshi* 17/196/5188. The questions arise: if the emperor had approved an attack on Buddhism, why was it necessary to claim that the nunneries were brothels? Why not just explain that they were extra institutions not appearing in the ritual regulations?

²⁷ *Ming Xiaozong shilu* 13/0305. The emperor commented individually on other provisions of the memorial, but approved what amounted to a request for an all-out attack on unauthorized Buddhist and Daoist institutions merely by including it in his final comment: "the remainder shall be done as the memorial suggests." Widespread destruction was not the focus of the report, nor of the new emperor's attention. They concentrated on affairs in the capital and on what the emperor should and should not countenance there. And the recorded response to the edict was tiny (see below).

²⁸ In 1488, the Rites officials had recommended reductions in the worship of the old Daoist deity Zhenwu, the Perfect Warrior. Both the first and third Ming emperors credited their

when Wei Jiao demolished or converted the temples of the Perfect Warrior (in Fengchuan, Guishan, and Zengcheng counties) and the East Marchmount (in Fengchuan, Haiyang, Jieyang, and Guishan counties) he was attacking cults that were still sponsored by the dynasty, even if, according to the ritual regulations, they were not supposed to have temples in these locations.²⁹

Accusations Against Wei Jiao

Huizhou's respect for ancient shrines, the ancients said, was an inherited custom of Guangdong, and so no one has been able to change it, until now when they have been destroyed for the first time and made into community schools and academies, and education and sacrifices take place there. That the people have turned from heterodoxy to orthodoxy is due to Zhuangqu's [Wei Jiao's] efforts.³⁰

Although accolades in gazetteers show that some Cantonese greatly admired Wei and his plans, he may have left Guangdong just in time to avoid trouble. According to his gazetteer biographies, his strictness in administering schools "inconvenienced people in Guangdong [so that they] wanted to hurt him, and incited the submission of memorials impeaching him."³¹ The aggrieved parties and the grounds for impeachment are not specified. According to the *Ming History*, the impeachment was submitted in 1526 by two high officials who had personal grudges against Wei. Another official, Ma Li, vigorously defended Wei, and he escaped unscathed, to carry out similar reforms as education intendant of Henan a few years later.³²

military success to Zhenwu. Zhu Yuanzhang built him a temple in Nanjing, and Zhu Di added a temple in Beijing and a high complex on Wudangshan. The Rites officials, complaining about the expense, the involvement of Daoists, and other matters, requested a return to the practices of the first reign. The Hongzhi emperor declined to authorize any changes. *Ming Xiaozong shilu* 13/0304. On Zhenwu, see John Lagerwey, "The Pilgrimage to Wu-tang Shan," in *Pilgrims and Sacred Sites in China*, ed. Susan Naquin and Chü-fang Yü (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992). On the East Marchmount, see in the same volume Pei-yi Wu, "An Ambivalent Pilgrim to T'ai Shan in the Seventeenth Century."

²⁹ 1588 Guangdong *Zhaoqing fushi*, 1547 Guangdong *Chaoyang fuzhi*, 1548 Guangdong *Xiangshan xianshi*, 1556 Guangdong *Huizhou fuzhi*, 1820 Guangdong *Zengcheng xianshi*.

³⁰ 1556 Guangdong *Huizhou fuzhi*. A comment in community school section of Boluo county section. See also 1798 Guangdong *Dongguan xianshi*.

³¹ The impeachment was submitted in connection with the Great Reckoning of 1526 by Grand Secretary Jia Yong and Minister of Personnel Liao Ji. 1849 Nanzhili *Wuzian Yuanhe Weiting zhi*; 1911 Nanzhili Kunshan *Xinyi zhenzhi* 5/8b; *Mingshi* 24/282/7/49-50.

³² *Mingshi* 24/282/7249-50. Wei's collected works contain a much shorter collection of documents from his tenure in Henan very similar to those from Guangdong, but there is little trace of his activities in Henan gazetteers.

Ma Li defended Wei on the grounds that he was renowned throughout the realm for his great learning. Wei also had a reputation for moral purity, based on his conduct during an eight-year stint at the Ministry of Justice in Nanjing. He had avoided carelessly punishing people, and while the other officials feasted and enjoyed themselves, Wei looked sad, wore plain clothing, and abstained from wine and meat.³³ Wei was also a follower of revered Confucian Hu Juren.³⁴ Impeachments and counter-impeachments were rampant in the early Jiajing period, so Ma Li had no reason to believe the accusations engineered against Wei.

But in fact Wei may well have been corrupt. In 1525, the year Wei went home to mourn,³⁵ Guangdong was assigned a new governor (*xunfu*), Yao Mo (1465-1538, Zhejiang Cizi native). When Yao Mo arrived in Guangdong, he found that several thousand *mou* of land had been confiscated from Buddhist and Daoist temples on Wei's orders. But the land was not being used to support new Confucian shrines, academies, and community schools. Instead, it had entered the family estates of Huo Tao and Fang Xianfu. Yao re-confiscated the land for the state. Huo and Fang were furious. They were just coming to power at court as part of Gui E's clique and managed to temporarily discredit Yao and escape punishment.³⁶

But is there in fact reason to believe that Wei Jiao arranged or acquiesced in the massive transfer of temple land to Fang and Huo? I'd like to look at this question briefly from four angles. First, can we clear Wei of suspicion on the grounds of his moral purity? We cannot, because among other things, Huo Tao himself, one of the land-grabbers, also worked at garnering a reputation for moral purity.³⁷ Second, can we clear Wei because of his connection with the much-admired Hu Juren? We cannot, because Fang and Huo, for their part, were connected with the paragon Wang Yangming himself. Fang Xianfu

³³ 1911 Nanzhili Kunshan *Xinyi zhenzhi* 5/7.

³⁴ We had first heard Hu Juren's teaching when he was 24, and when he retired, he cultivated it and gathered more than 100 disciples, among them another Kunshan native, Gui Youguang. 1911 Nanzhili Kunshan *Xinyi zhenzhi* 5/7 and 5/9; *Mingshi* 24/287/7382.

³⁵ His replacement as Vice Education Intendant, Ouyang Duo, arrived in Guangdong in 1525. *Mingshi* 18/203/5363.

³⁶ *Mingshi* 17/196/5278.

³⁷ Huo joined Zhan Ruoshui—also from a wealthy Cantonese family—in making a declaration of purity in office in 1539: both stated that they had paid for their own supplies instead of using official vouchers to requisition them. *DMB* 38. It is ironic that in 1529, when Huo Tao was ordered to edit the *Collected Statutes*, he expressed concern that in 140 years of the dynasty, recorded tax-land had been reduced by more than half through grants to royalty and dishonest practices. *Mingshi* 7/77/1882. His analysis was not only hypocritical, but also wrong, according to Martin Heijdra, "The Socio-Economic Development of Ming Rural China (1368-1644): An Interpretation" (Princeton University, Ph.D. dissertation, 1995):65-67.

was a disciple of Wang Yangming, and Huo Tao a supporter.³⁸

Third, there is the question of timing. Wei arrived in Guangdong and issued orders attacking improper shrines in 1521. The next year he ordered the surveying and confiscation of temple lands.³⁹ Wei left Guangdong in 1525, the same year that Yao discovered the misappropriation of the land. So, while we could hypothesize that Fang and Huo acted after Wei left the post, they would have had to move very fast indeed. It is more likely that the transfer occurred while Wei was still in office.

Fourth, snippets in the *Ming History* show that Wei was friendly with Huo Tao and knew Fang Xianfu. Fang and Wei—as well as Zhan Ruoshui—earned their metropolitan degrees in 1505. Fang Xianfu and Zhan Ruoshui were close friends until about 1527, and Zhan was acquainted with Wei before that, so Zhan may have brought Fang and Wei together if their sharing an exam had not. As for Huo Tao, he must have known Wei by 1528, when he asked Wei to speak for him. Huo may have known Wei through Fang Xianfu, or Zhan Ruoshui (they were all Guangdong men) or through Wei's acquaintance Gu Dingchen, whom he worked with at one point.⁴⁰

So there is no *a priori* reason to exonerate Wei from wrongdoing, and the timing of events makes it possible, even likely, that Wei cooperated in the usurpation by two of his friends of temple lands that had been confiscated to support shrines, academies, and community schools. In return, though I have no evidence of this, they may have sheltered him from impeachment.

Wei Jiao Versus the Clergy and People

If Wei was involved in the misappropriation of land, it was just one more reason for popular dislike of Wei as evinced in the accusations brought against him. One of Wei's deputies told the elders of Nanhai county that "according to my instructions, in every matter [I am] to be guided by the views of the people (*Ruming, shishi yu min yi zhi*)."⁴¹ But this expression of what in a

³⁸ *Mingshi* 17/196/5186; *DMB* 673.

³⁹ His first proclamation in the post, an exhortation to Government Students, is dated the eighth month of Zhengde 16 (1521). *Lingnan* 9/6-7, 26a.

⁴⁰ *DMB* 36; *Mingshi* 17/197/5211; *Mingshi* 24/283/7264; Zhan Ruoshui 7/46b-47a, 7/69. *Mingshi* 17/103/5115. Gu Dingchen was from Wei's native Kunshan, and their families were acquainted. In fact, long before either Wei or Gu had been born, Wei's father had had a dream that predicted correctly that Gu would be the primus in the 1505 metropolitan exam, as he was. The dream was that he (Wei's father) and Gu's father went to court over a piece of land and Gu's father won, making Wei's father very angry until he woke up. Decades later, he realized that the dream had predicted Gu's precedence over Wei in the examination. Wei's rank was only 2/9, supposedly because he mentioned a delicate issue about the emperor's private life. 1849 *Nanzhili Wuzian Yuanhe Weiting zhi* 20/12.

⁴¹ 1835 *GD Nanhai xianzhi*.

later era would be called the mass line could not mask the fact that Wei's campaign had the potential to alienate large numbers of people.

As well as demolishing or converting places of worship, Wei destroyed religious relics. He tore up and burned a robe that had belonged to Bodhidharma.⁴² The same temple also had the Sixth Patriarch's begging bowl, and Wei personally demanded that the monks hand it over. He hurled it onto the floor, and it broke into two pieces. When Wei looked at the pieces, he found that each had on it one half of his own surname, so that one read *wei* (abandon) and the other *gui* (ghost). Wei was spooked—perhaps afraid that the bowl foretold his fate as an abandoned ghost—and spared the temple.

In the late Ming, a provincial degree holder named Peng had a dream about this incident. Peng dreamed that he entered a government office where a judge presided, dressed like a king. The lictors called out “the case of Wei Jiao!” and the judge began to question Wei.

“Why did you break the begging bowl of Caoxi?” he demanded.

Wei replied, “I am a follower of Confucius. I was the education intendant in Guangdong, and I destroyed several thousand hundred [sic] improper shrines. How could it be only one almsbowl [you're asking me about]?”

The spirit-judge said, “I heard that in the broken bowl was the word Wei.’ If there was a divine weirdness like this, how could you take it for a heterodox doctrine and destroy it?”

Wei replied, “Wei is my surname. Seeing that destiny had already been pre-determined, even if I wanted to not destroy it, how could I?”

The spirit said “Fix it!” and departed.⁴³

The dream can help us imagine the bitterness of believers who saw places of worship and objects of reverence destroyed. As Wei himself pointed out, the land he confiscated had all been donations from believers.⁴⁴ Wei also threatened the livelihood of clergy and other popular religious and medical practitioners described by Wei as “as class of misguided people who call themselves things like ‘teacher,’ ‘married Daoist priest,’ ‘master teacher,’ ‘madam teacher,’ ‘sage’ and so on.”⁴⁵ Wei forbade them to practice. He also feared

⁴² 1911 Nanzhili Kunshan *Xinyi zhenzhi* 5/8b.

⁴³ 1849 NZ *Wuzian Yuanhe Weitong zhi* 20/13.

⁴⁴ Lingnan 9.26a.

⁴⁵ Lingnan 9.21a. Some of these people may have been sectarian leaders of the kind discussed by Daniel L. Overmyer in “Alternatives: Popular Religious Sects in Chinese

that they would try to get jobs as community school teachers—maybe because the schools were so often held in their former places of operation. Wei ordered the voluntary retirement of all teachers who fell into the following categories:

. . . unemployed clerks or officials who began their careers as clerks, government students who were dismissed because of a fault in their behavior or are in mourning for a parent, malicious fellows who are literate but don't behave properly and teach mischief, Daoists, shamans, and practitioners of heterodox arts.⁴⁶

It is important to realize that if Wei's aim had been merely to teach boys to read, write and figure, which was what ordinary people wanted out of primary education according to Hsiang-kwang Liu's research, the dismissal of these teachers and the destruction of temples would not have been necessary.⁴⁷ There were other cases in the Ming period in which community schools were held in functioning temples and teachers were paid by taxes on monks.⁴⁸ Literate monks and others proscribed by Wei could perfectly well have served as teachers. But Wei and other activists were competing with the clergy for material resources and the people's respect; cooperation did not suit them. Community schools supplanted shrines and temples; Confucian education supplanted popular religious beliefs and practices; Confucian teachers supplanted clergy. That at least was the plan.

But the plan was not very successful. Some counties carried out Wei's reforms only belatedly; in Gaoming county, resistance forced a delay of several years; 37 or so out of 41 schools had been ordered to be made of unidentified improper shrines by Wei in 1522, but "because it was difficult to get rid of them, the affair was not completed" until 1526.⁴⁹ Many localities apparently

Society," *Modern China* 7.2 (1981). Wei's language echoes, but does not exactly reproduce, that of the Ming Code. See Romeyn Taylor, "Official Religion in the Ming" in *The Cambridge History of China*, volume 8:888-89.

⁴⁶ Lingnan 9/46b.

⁴⁷ Hsiang-kwang Liu, "Education and Society: The Development of Public and Private Institutions in Hui-chou [Anhui province], 960-1800" (Columbia University, Ph.D. dissertation, 1996):70, 72.

⁴⁸ In perhaps 1474, in Xinzhang county, a school was held at the Prefect's order in the Stone Buddha Temple, with no indication that the activities of the temple were interfered with (1477/1521 Zhejiang *Xinchang xianzhi* 5/24; also 1587 Zhejiang *Shaoxing fuzhi* 18/8a). Even after the Hongzhi edict, in 1493, all but two of the twenty village community schools Lantian Magistrate Shi Shan had set up were in shops and temples (1571 Shaanxi *Lantian xianzhi* 1/8). In 1513, Shouzhou Subprefect Lin Xi raised money for paper and other supplies by enforcing a tax on Buddhist monks or temples (1550 Nanzhili *Shouzhou zhi* 3/9, 5/69).

⁴⁹ 1588 GD *Zhaoqing fuzhi* 13/28.

never implemented the policies. Others reversed them as soon as Wei left. As one gazetteer put it, "Wei did not have enough time to complete the transformation of customs."⁵⁰

Why did Wei's carefully planned institutional reforms fail? On the one hand, well-to-do people like Huo Tao and Fang Xianfu appropriated temple land intended for schools—perhaps in some cases with the connivance of Wei himself. A gazetteer comments:

The temples and hermitages of Huizhou were made into academies in the early Jiajing period by Vice Education Intendant Wei Jiao. Now, there are very few Buddhist and Daoist properties not swallowed up by powerful families, so why should Huizhou be any different?⁵¹

On the other hand, ordinary people had little motivation to support a wholesale attack on their religious beliefs, institutions and practitioners.

Many of the community schools Wei had sponsored became defunct shortly after he left Guangdong. To give only two examples, in Enping county the Two Kings temple was made into a school that was defunct by 1588. The same was true of the Five Manifestations (Wuxian) temple and another temple in Deqing subprefecture.⁵² The 1535 provincial gazetteer laments that after Wei left, "no-one could keep [the schools] up. The dormitories were abandoned and ruined. The school sites returned to the possession of influential families."⁵³ The Nanhai county gazetteer, from the native place of Fang Xianfu and Huo Tao, includes a "Record of Four Community Schools" written in 1541 by Xian Guiqi, a disciple of Zhan Ruoshui. Xian had been a pupil in a community school converted from an improper shrine at Wei's behest, making him one of the very few Ming men known to have attended community school. After Wei left, Xian wrote, the community schools and the improvement of popular morality in general (*jiaohua*) in general were not attended to again until 1540, when Hong Yuan, another disciple of Zhan's, became Regional Inspector of Guangdong.⁵⁴

How did schools meet their demise? In some cases, as we have seen, wealthy families or other subjects claimed the school sites.⁵⁵ Sometimes

⁵⁰ 1588 GD *Zhaoqing fuzhi*.

⁵¹ 1556 GD *Huizhou fuzhi* 14/19b-20a.

⁵² 1588 GD *Zhaoqing fuzhi*. On Wutong and Wuxian see, most recently, Michael Szonyi, "The Illusion of Standardizing the Gods: the Cult of the Five Emperors in Late Imperial China," *Journal of Asian Studies* 56.1 (1997).

⁵³ 1535 GD *Guangdong tongzhi chugao* 16/25.

⁵⁴ 1835 GD *Nanhai xianshi* 29/34-35.

⁵⁵ Unidentified subjects claimed the school site of the Western Ward Community School in Gaoyao county (1588 Guangdong *Zhaoqing fuzhi*).

officials themselves were to blame. For example, in Zengcheng, Wei had smashed a temple's images and converted it into a community school in 1524, but later officials used the building for other purposes. Eventually it passed into the hands of commoners and became a hideout for thieves and even a murderer.⁵⁶ In another case, a magistrate received orders to sell off a school site to raise money to pay border troops' wages.⁵⁷

In other cases, however, schools became defunct because the temples they replaced revived, sometimes reportedly "in a very short time,"⁵⁸ sometimes within the Jiajing period. The most salient case is that of Zhaoqing prefecture, especially Fengchuan county. In 1523, under Wei's orders, a number of temples were converted into community schools and other institutions, but many had reverted to temples before the publication of the 1588 gazetteer.

In Gaoyao county, the Wenchang temple (*gong*) was made into a community school, but the school became defunct and the land fell into civilian hands. The school was moved elsewhere, but then became a shrine. The lesser Wutong temple and another temple in Fengchuan county were made into schools that failed when the temples were "revived as of old (*fu ru gu*)."⁵⁹ Ten other temples in Fengchuan, including the temples to the Perfect Warrior, East Marchmount, Five Manifestations, and Wutong, were made into schools, shrines to Confucian figures, an archery range, and kiosks commemorating the worthy and warning the bad that had been mandated under the first Ming emperor. Of these, only the kiosks were still extant in 1588; the East Marchmount temple had apparently not revived, but all seven other temples were back in business.⁵⁹ Although this gazetteer is unusual in recording so explicitly the revival of demolished shrines, the rapid abandonment of community schools when their sponsors went to another post occurred throughout China, and we can assume that often the temples they had been housed in returned.

The Message of Wei's Story

Wei's story can be seen in several contexts. Joseph McDermott, responding to an earlier draft of this article, suggested looking at Wei's activities

⁵⁶ The school and the shrines to Confucius and former worthies that it contained were not revived until 1554, after a murderer had been arrested there and an active magistrate had given the elders and gentry a good talking-to. 1820 Guangdong *Zhengcheng xianshi* 5/39.

⁵⁷ The school site was not sold until 1622, when it was probably already defunct (1779 Guangdong *Jieyang xianshi* 2/29). In addition, the gazetteer reports that no trace remained of community schools the authorities had made out of demolished improper shrines in the eight wards and uncountable country villages.

⁵⁸ 1588 Guangdong *Zhaoqing fuzhi* 21/18a.

⁵⁹ 1588 GD *Zhaoqing fuzhi* 13/13ff., 13/36, 21/18.

in terms of how “*Guangdong ren*” (Cantonese people) and other locals became “*Zhongguo ren*” (Chinese people), in part through the imposition of metropolitan culture; as part of the history of Buddhism in Southeast China; and as a link in the emergence of the lineage as the defining institution of village life in Guangdong. All of these are indeed important. The adulation of Wei in many Guangdong gazetteers and the role of locals themselves in establishing schools and suppressing improper shrines, both at home and where they held office, suggest the eagerness of the Guangdong gentry to be part of the national scene. Wei, of course, with all of his Guangdong connections, encouraged this desire, among other things establishing a shrine in one county to 28 model locals.⁶⁰ Another passage in the Beizhili gazetteer that supplied my epigram laments that many upper class families (*shifu jia*) still have no ancestral hall (*citang*). Gentlemen who know about ritual propriety, the gazetteerist writes, set up ancestral shrines and forbid their descendants to have to do with “improper shrines,” in context meaning Buddhist and Daoist institutions.⁶¹

My interest in Wei, however, stems from my assessment of Ming state power through a case study of Zhu Yuanzhang’s community school policy. I consider Wei’s story, and the larger movement to destroy improper shrines and establish community schools, in terms of three topics: the success of Zhu Yuanzhang’s policies; Ming policy toward religious institutions; and the overall power of the Ming central state.

Wei and other activists promoted some of the institutions, including community schools, that made up the local component of what Farmer has called “the Ming constitution,” the system designed largely by Zhu Yuanzhang in the first reign of the Ming that “strongly influenced the development of Chinese government and society for the next six centuries.”⁶² But they completely neglected other elements of Zhu’s complex and self-contradictory plans for local society, such as the system of Village Elders (*li laoren*) and the promulgation of the *Great Warning* (*Yuzhi Da Gao*). In effect, Zhu’s laws about local, non-fiscal institutions served the same function as the Classics and other writings—they were part of a rich repertoire of texts invoked to justify the institutions activists believed in. They were not binding on magistrates;

⁶⁰ See especially the Ming materials preserved in the 1798 Guangdong *Dongguan xianzhi*, including Huang Zuo’s adulatory preface to the 1562 edition (old prefaces/8a), a list of 48 named community schools 9 and others without names), many established by locals from the Yongle period on (7/5), and local man Lin Lie’s destruction of improper shrines in Fujian (27/20-1) and other. For the shrine to local worthies, see 36/2b. See also the many commemorative arches for metropolitan degree holders in the 1464 edition (1464 Guangdong *Dongguan xianzhi* 3/n.p.).

⁶¹ 1550 Beizhili *Guangping fuzhi* 16/6b.

⁶² Farmer 1995:16-17, 9, 17.

most made no attempt to establish or revive them.

Similarly, activist attacks on Buddhism were not in the spirit of the founder, nor of the central government as a whole. Timothy Brook and Chün-fang Yü differ on whether the laws directed at monks and monasteries in the first reign represent a major suppression or a good-faith, and effective, attempt to reform and strengthen Buddhism.⁶³ But if the amalgamation of temples and other measure did constitute suppression, as Brook says, it was camouflaged in the language of bureaucratic rationalization so as not to alienate the new dynasty's subjects.⁶⁴

Similarly, although the Rites ministers in 1488 requested the Hongzhi emperor to authorize an empire-wide attack on popular religion, Buddhism and Daoism, they recognized the opposition such an attack would face. Even cults that were strictly speaking illegal, that is, not included in the ritual regulations of the dynasty, would be impossible to destroy if they had been sponsored by previous dynasties and Ming emperors and had large followings. So the ministers suggested less drastic measures.

If among [the 'palaces,' hermitages, shrines and temples in the capital and the provinces that bring no benefit to the people and do not accord with the ritual statutes] there are some that have been honored and built by successive dynasties and are difficult to destroy, then [at least] reform their names and titles and reduce their rituals and ceremonies. This should all be done with a heart-and-mind respectfully serving the gods and careful of worldly custom.⁶⁵

The general suppression authorized by the Hongzhi emperor was thus moderated by expected resistance from the clergy and believers.⁶⁶

⁶³ Chün-fang Yü, *The Renewal of Buddhism in China: Chu-hung and the Late Ming Synthesis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981):144-47; Chün-fang Yü, "Ming Buddhism," in *The Cambridge History of China*, vol. 8:909; Timothy Brook, "At the Margin of Public Authority: The Ming State and Buddhism," in Hutters, Wong, and Yu 1997.

⁶⁴ Brook 1997:163.

⁶⁵ *Ming Xiaozong shilu* 13/0305.

⁶⁶ This key passage appears in the *Veritable Records* version of the incident and in the *Draft Ming History* but was totally omitted from the *Ming History*. Similarly, in regard to the specific cults discussed, even when the ministers regarded them as totally invalid, they made few drastic recommendations because they recognized, in some cases explicitly, that people would resist the abolition of established cults. The report specifies lesser measures to be taken in the case of one cult "if today, because of the patronage of successive reigns, it is difficult to do away with their worship ceremonies entirely." *Ming Xiaozong shilu* 13/0311.

Three local Fujian men who attacked Buddhism and popular cults in a 1525 gazetteer also made allowance for popular feeling. In a long essay recommending a strenuous attack on religious institutions, they wrote:

To solve these problems, all the monks and priests should be driven out . . . [But] if it is too difficult to eliminate the temples completely, those allowed to remain should be reduced in size, so that each has only 2 or 3 people and an income of 20 or 30 *shi* of grain.⁶⁷

Both central officials and local men recognized and pragmatically allowed for the power of clergy and believers to oppose attacks on religious institutions.

But despite the precedent set by the Ming founder, the tone set by the central government, and the warnings of local elite men, Wei and a hundred or so mid-Ming activist magistrates used no camouflage and made no allowances for popular faith in attacking institutions they believed to be wrong or saw as competitors for material, spiritual, and social resources. Heedless of the hostility they aroused, they attacked Buddhist institutions as “improper shrines.” It is noteworthy, too, that they talked about the need for suppression in terms of truth and current social and economic problems. They rarely referred to the Hongwu regulations according to which many of these institutions should already have been eliminated through amalgamation, or to the edict of 1488. The only destroyer who is explicitly recorded as responding to the 1488 edict clearly did so from his own motives. Kunshan Magistrate Yang Ziqi (1458-1518) rejoiced at the edict, saying “Now I can achieve my purpose!”⁶⁸ The inscription Magistrate Yang commissioned from a friend to record his activities also reported that most local administrators either

⁶⁷ 1525 Fujian *Yanping fuzhi*.

⁶⁸ For this incident and more on Yang, see Katherine Carlitz, “Shrines, Governing-Class Identity, and the Cult of Widow Fidelity in Mid-Ming Jiangnan,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 56.3 (1997):626, 624ff. In all, Magistrate Yang identified 110 “improper shrines,” in this case unauthorized (*wu e*) Buddhist and Daoist temples. After announcing the court’s intentions to the people, “he demolished the images in the temples and dispersed the clergy, sending them back to their families. He did not move a beam or change a wall, but kept the buildings while changing their function. In the center he drew Confucius’ likeness, and on the side he established community schools.” (Wang Jianzhi, “Yupu shexue ji” (Record of Yupu Town Community School), in *Siku quanshu* p. 1385-185. Only this record refers to the Hongzhi order, but timing suggests that a few other cases of destruction of “improper shrines” may have been related to it. See material on Shunde Magistrate Wu Tingju in 1535 *Guangdong tongzhi chugao* 11/6; Vice Administrative Commissioner of Yunnan Lin Jun in *Mingshi* 194/5137; conversion of unauthorized chapels and hermitages in 1512 Nanzhili *Songguang fuzhi* 13/31b (reprint 736); Magistrate Ma Zheng in 1683 Jiangxi *Yongning xianzhi* 2/8, 1/32; and Taizhou Subprefect Xu Peng in Qianlong Nanzhili Dongtai *Xiaohai zinzhi* 4/6b.

avoided the task completely or carried it out only in part with the excuse that it was difficult to do.⁶⁹

The mid-Ming movement to “destroy improper shrines and establish community schools” provides a new perspective on state-building. State institutions, including community schools, competed with local and clerical institutions and individuals for resources and prestige; state-sponsored institution-building was not centrally directed; and it was not particularly successful. Moreover, those who carried it out had their own agendas, which ranged from earnest Confucian reform to building their reputations to selfish acquisition.

Glossary

Chi Xiaofang	池小芳	Lin Xi	林僖
citang	祠堂	<i>Lingnan xuezheng</i>	嶺南學政
Fang Xianfu	方獻夫	Ma Li	馬理
fengjiao	風教	Ma Zheng	馬正
gui	鬼	Peng	彭
Gui E	桂萼	Ruming, shishi yu min yi zhi	如命，事事論民意指
hui yinci, li shexue	毀淫祠，立社學	shexue	社學
Huo Tao	霍韜	Shi Shan	石山
Jia Yong	賈詠	shifu jia	士夫家
li laoren	里老人	<i>Shijingtang ji</i>	世經堂集
Liao Ji	廖紀	Taishan	泰山
Lin Jun	林俊		

⁶⁹ Wang Jianzhi, “Yupu shexue ji.”

Wang Jianzhi	王鑒之	yixue	意學
wei	委	yinci	淫祠
Wei Jiao	魏校	“Yupu shexue ji”	嘸浦社學記
Wenchang gong	文昌宮	Yuzhi Da Gao	御製大誥
wu e	無額	Zhan Ruoshui	湛若水
Wu Tingju	吳廷舉	Zhang Bi	張弼
Wutong	五通	Zhenwu	真武
Wuxian	五顯	zheng	正
Xian Guiqi	洗桂奇	Zhou Yu	周恩
Xu Jie	徐階	Zhu Shang	朱裳
xunfu	巡撫	Zhuangqu yishu	莊渠遺書
Yang Ziqi	楊子器	zongci	宗祠
Yao Mo	姚奠		

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1525 Fujian *Yanping fuzhi*

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1798 Guangdong *Dongguan xianzhi*

1779 Guangdong *Geyang xianzhi* 2/29

- 1556 Guangdong *Huizhou fuzhi*
- 1835 Guangdong *Nanhai xianzhi*
- 1535 Guangdong *tongzhi chugao*
- 1548 Guangdong *Xiangshan xianzhi*
- 1843 Guangdong *Yingde xianzhi*
- 1820 Guangdong *Zengcheng xianzhi*
- 1683 Jiangxi *Yongning xianzhi*
- 1512 Nanzhili *Songjiang fuzhi*
- 1550 Nanzhili *Shouzhou zhi*
- Qianlong Nanzhili Dongtai *Xiaohai xinzhi*
- 1849 Nanzhili *Wuxian Yuanhe Weiting zhi*
- 1911 Nanzhili *Kunshan Xinyi zhenzhi*
- 1571 Shaanxi *Lantian xianzhi*
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- 1477/1521 Zhejiang *Xinchang xianzhi*

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