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*Culture, Courtiers, and Competition*

The Ming Court (1368–1644)

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## FOUR

*The Jiajing Emperor's Interaction**with His Lecturers*

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In an imperial court that operated mainly through ceremonial protocol and written communication, as the Ming court did, one institution allowed the emperor and his learned officials to have direct intellectual and social contact: the thrice-monthly classics-mat lectures and the daily lectures on the classics and histories. Patterns of interaction were fluid, because both the lecturers and the emperor assumed dual roles. The emperor was the ruler. The lecturers might consider him their student as well, and he in turn might see them not only as his teachers but also as his servitors. Furthermore, according to classical precepts, he was the teacher of all his subjects. How each person understood his role and determined which facet of his role was paramount in a given situation affected both the course and the result of the interaction. Personality and atmosphere dictated different styles of expression at the court. Moreover, despite their common educational and career backgrounds, the interactions among lecturers were complicated by personal connections and differences in rank. In the case of court lectures, cooperation and struggle between the emperor and his lecturers and among the lecturers themselves often resulted in tense relations, mainly because the stakes were so high—who was to define the proper moral and social standards for the ruler and the ruled.

This chapter examines the inherent tensions in the triangular relationship of the emperor, the lecturer, and the lecturer's supervisor, the grand secretary, as well as the political maneuvers that inadvertently changed the culture of the court during the late Ming period. It focuses on the inter-

action of the Jiajing emperor (r. 1521–66) and his learned elite courtiers as seen in their classics-mat and daily lectures on Confucian classics and histories. The chapter begins with a brief description of the lectures during the first sixteen years of the Jiajing emperor's reign drawn from court chronicles and more detailed accounts by the participants. It then traces the shifting relations between the emperor and his lecturers as revealed through such issues as the proper observance of the death anniversaries of imperial ancestors and other sensitive subjects, lecturers' styles and skills, and the mutual responses of the emperor and lecturers. Finally, it shows the limits of the institution in educating and guiding the emperor along the paths advocated by the Confucian scholar-official.

Other issues are important for a fuller understanding of the Ming lecture system. The protocol of a typical lecture, lecture essays as a genre of writing, contending books on the imperial reading list, the lecturers' backgrounds, and the political thinking of eminent lecturers all deserve closer attention. This chapter touches on them only in passing; fuller treatment must await separate studies.

*The Institution of Classics-Mat Lectures in the Ming*

The first Chinese emperor to study the Confucian classics seriously was Emperor Xuandi 宣帝 (r. 73–49 BCE) of the Western Han dynasty, who convened the famous colloquium on the Five Classics in the Stone Ditch Pavilion (Shiquge 石渠閣). Institutionalized sessions in the palace to read the classics began in the reign of Tang Emperor Xuanzong 玄宗 (r. 712–55) when learned officials were appointed attendant academicians.<sup>1</sup> The term "classics-mat" (*jingyan* 經筵) was adopted in Northern Song times for the regular lectures or colloquia attended by the emperor and his courtiers. Academicians from the prestigious Hanlin Academy were appointed attendant readers and expositors. Granted the title *shuoshu* (說書, lit. "expounding the book"), junior lecturers staffed the sessions. The basic organization and format devised in the Song were retained, with some modifications, in later times. The idea behind the institution proved to be so attractive that the practice was continued in all later dynasties, including the Yuan when the lectures were given in Mongol or Uighur rather than in Chinese.<sup>2</sup>

1. For accounts of imperial lectures and colloquia in Han and Tang times, see Wang Yinglin, *Yubai*, 26.549–51.

2. For accounts of the institution in Song and Yuan times, see Zhu Ruixi, "Songchao jingyan zhidu"; and Zhang Fan, "Yuandai jingyan shulun."

In the Ming, imperial lectures began with the founding Hongwu emperor, and many of his discussions on classical exegesis and historical lessons survive to the present.<sup>3</sup> The study sessions became formalized, in the institutions of the large classics-mat lecture and the small daily lecture (*ri-jiang* 日講), only when the Zhengtong emperor began his reign in 1436, at the age of nine *shu*. From then on, the lectures were held in the Literary Splendor Palace (Wenhudian 文華殿) in the southeast quarter of the Forbidden City, immediately after the morning court audiences.<sup>4</sup>

Classics-mat lectures were major gatherings, and attendance by the senior officials in both the civil and the military echelons of the central government was obligatory. The grand secretaries, ennobled officers, the heads of the Six Ministries, censors in chief, the minister of the Court of Judicial Review, the commissioner of the Office of Transmission, senior academicians of the Hanlin Academy, and the pair of investigating censors and the pair of supervising secretaries serving as prefects for the occasion attended the emperor with the added generic title of "classics-mat officials" (*jingyanguan* 經筵官). The lecturers were invariably chosen from among the grand secretaries, Hanlin officials, and the chancellor of the National University.

The event cannot quite be understood as a colloquium during the Ming. In Song times, the emperor himself engaged in a discussion with the lecturer, and interested participants could query one another.<sup>5</sup> Most of the time in the Ming, the emperor listened from his seat, while the lecturer stood before him and delivered a monologue. The daily lectures could be somewhat more relaxed, since normally only a pair of lecturers under the supervision of a grand secretary attended the emperor. In both the classics-mat and the daily lectures, the lecturers on duty submitted the text of their talk to the palace office managing the event a day before the occasion.

By the early sixteenth century, classics-mat lectures were normally held on the second day of each ten-day cycle during the second, third, and fourth months (the spring series), and the eighth, ninth, and tenth months

3. For a recent study on this topic, see Zhu Honglin (Hung-lam Chu), "Ming Taizu de jingshi jianglun qingxing."

4. For the general protocols of the Ming institution of the imperial lecture and major events in its history to the late sixteenth century, see Liao Daonan, *Diange cilin ji*, 15.1a-18b; and Yu Ruiji, *Libu zhibiao*, 14.1a-4b. These sources inform the description in the following paragraphs.

5. See Zhu Ruixi, "Songchao jingyan zhidu," pp. 240-43.

(the fall series) of the year. During these months, daily lectures were given on the remaining days.<sup>6</sup> Except when he had to fulfill more important state functions or familial obligations, the emperor, according to the class schedule drawn up by the grand secretariat and approved by the emperor, was to appear at all lectures unless he was sick or the weather was too inclement. Theoretically, nine large lectures were held each season; in practice they were often suspended. High-ranking members of the court and mid-ranking officials from the literary, censorial, and supervisory bodies, however, were zealous in urging new emperors to attend these study sessions in order to advance their learning and to become familiar with their advisors. The ultimate goal was the perfection of their virtue and enhancement of the welfare of the state. Most Ming emperors, however, remained enthusiastic only during the first few years of their reigns. The Jiajing emperor, a cousin of the heirless Zhengde emperor (r. 1506-21) called to the throne from his principedom in Huguang province, was no exception to this rule, although he did not cease attending lectures until his sixteenth year on the throne.

In the following, I first briefly chronicle the Jiajing court's lectures, using the reign's Veritable Records as the major source.<sup>7</sup> Memorials and personal writings of the lecturers and their supervisors, as well as comments by later Ming writers, are then used to illuminate the more intimate interactions of the parties involved.<sup>8</sup>

6. Liao Daonan, *Diange cilin ji*, 15.4a-6a. To make the distinction, some Ming institutional historians, like Liao Daonan, also called the larger lectures "monthly lectures" (*yuexiang* 月講).

7. The *Ming Shizong shilu* 明世宗實錄, hereafter cited as *MSZSL*, is cited according to the following convention: in a citation such as *MSZSL* 3.115-16/Zhengde 16/6/xinsi or *MSZSL* 12.427/Jiajing 1/3/wuwu = *MSZSL* A.B/C/D/E, A = *juan* number in *MSZSL*, B = page number(s) in the reprint edition, C = year under the Zhengde or Jiajing reign titles, D = month of the year (a + before the number indicates an intercalary month), and E = day in the 60-day cycle.

8. For a study of lectures during the Hongzhi reign (1488-1505), discussed in terms of imperial education, which also includes contemporary opinions that reflect early Ming ideas and ideals of the institution and assessments of its implementation, see Mano Senryū, "Mindai no shinkō ni tsuite." For descriptions of the format of the Wanli emperor's lectures and comments on the imperial commitment to the institution as a state function, see Ray Huang, 1587, pp. 10-12, 42-48.

*The Study Sessions of the Jiajing Emperor*

The Jiajing emperor's first study session was held about two months after he ascended the throne on May 27, 1521. As proposed by the chief grand secretary, Yang Tinghe 楊廷和 (1459–1529), once every three or five days, the grand secretaries and selected Hanlin officials would present to the emperor oral expositions of the Ming founder's admonitions to his successors, the *Ancestral Instructions* (*Zuxun* 祖訓), in plain language in the Informal Hall (Biandian 便殿). Called "straightforward elucidations" (*zhibjie* 直解) in their written form, these expositions were afterward submitted in clearly written memorandums (*jiatie* 揭帖). The early harmony between emperor and officials<sup>9</sup> ended a few months later when Yang Tinghe and his colleagues refused the emperor's proposal to elevate the titles of his deceased father and his mother, who was still alive.<sup>10</sup>

This refusal sparked the so-called Great Rites Controversy (*Dali yi* 大禮議), a protracted struggle between the Jiajing emperor and the majority of civil officials. The central issue was whether a prince inherited the throne because of his blood or because of dynastic need. Also in dispute was whether a prince could posthumously be installed as a full-fledged emperor in the imperial ritual hierarchy when his son became an emperor.<sup>11</sup> This set of controversies would deeply influence the classics-mat lectures of the Jiajing emperor, the political atmosphere of his reign, and bureaucratic ethics and styles during the rest of the Ming dynasty.<sup>12</sup>

The first classics-mat lecture was convened in the eighth month (September 2, 1521) as scheduled.<sup>13</sup> The State Duke of Ding 定國公, Xu Guangzuo 徐光祚 (d. 1527), and Grand Secretary Yang Tinghe were appointed co-administrators of the lectures; the other three grand secretaries were associate administrators. The staff included sixteen lecturers.<sup>14</sup>

The grand inaugural lecture was delivered by the second grand secretary, Jiang Mian 蔣冕 (1463–1533), since Yang Tinghe was on leave because

9. MSZSL 3.115–16/Zhengde 16/6/xinsi.

10. MSZSL 4.181/Zhengde 16/7/jiazi.

11. On the nature and significance of this controversy, see Fisher, *The Chosen One*. For a different view of the controversy, see Hung-lam Chu, Review of *The Chosen One*.

12. For a recent study on the impact of the Great Rites Controversy on bureaucratic ethics in the Jiajing reign, see Hu Jixun 胡吉勳, "Dali yi yu Mingting renshi bianju."

13. MSZSL 4.186/Zhengde 16/7/dingmao.

14. For the various appointments and participants in this occasion, see MSZSL 4.194–97/Zhengde 16/7/renshen; and Jiang Mian, *Xianggao ji*, 23.11b–12a.

of an eye disease. Jiang Mian noted that the emperor was so pleased with the lectures that he showered the lecturers with gifts and feasted the participants after the event. Jiang, too, was pleased that the assembled officials wore pale green robes instead of red ones to show their respect to the deceased Zhengde emperor, and especially so when, subsequently, the emperor "attended the daily lectures uninterruptedly. Even on rainy days, [he attended] his exposition and reading sessions, until he called for a halt to them at the end of the year."<sup>15</sup>

The emperor, however, declined the grand secretaries' request for more lecture sessions at the conclusion of the year. The emperor was displeased at their repeated refusals to elevate the status of his deceased father and his soon-to-arrive mother.<sup>16</sup> Obviously, the early promise of the lectures fell under the shadow of the unfolding ritual disputes between the emperor and his officials.

The first year of the Jiajing era (1522) in fact saw only one classics-mat lecture.<sup>17</sup> Failing to move the emperor, Yang Tinghe and his colleagues could only urge him to accept their straightforward elucidations and to study privately and practice calligraphy with the aid of selected eunuchs from the Directorate of Ceremonial (Silijian 司禮監). Specifically, the grand secretaries proposed, these eunuchs would accompany the emperor to his study after court audiences. They and the emperor together would read aloud at least ten times the text of the book assigned at a given session. The eunuchs were also to ensure that the emperor thoroughly understood the words he had read. The lecturers, meanwhile, stood ready to answer whatever questions the emperor might have about his reading.<sup>18</sup>

During the following two years, only one large lecture was held.<sup>19</sup> No other scheduled lectures were conducted, even after Yang Tinghe retired in the spring of the third year (1524)<sup>20</sup> and after the emperor's parents were elevated as "Emperor and Empress Dowager Who Bore the Present Emperor" (*bensheng* 本生).<sup>21</sup> However, to judge from an imperial order to sus-

15. Jiang Mian, *Xianggao ji*, 23.11b–12a.

16. MSZSL 7.281/Zhengde 16/10/guimao.

17. MSZSL 13.465/Jiajing 1/4/wuxu.

18. MSZSL 15.489/Jiajing 1/6/dingchou.

19. MSZSL 24.694/Jiajing 2/3/guihai.

20. MSZSL 36.899/Jiajing 3/2/bingwu.

21. MSZSL 38.964–5/Jiajing 3/4/guichou.

pend the lectures and from a censor's response that "the suspension is too early,"<sup>22</sup> the daily lectures were still being held.

In the meantime, tension between the emperor and his few supporters from the junior ranks on the one hand and the multitude of courtiers on the other increased as the emperor slighted the beloved Hongzhi emperor (r. 1488–1505; and formally Jiajing's adoptive father) and his surviving empress. The outcome was bloodshed. On August 19, 1524, a week after a mass protest to the throne in front of the Left Concord Gate, more than 220 officials, who had been detained and awaited punishment, were further interrogated and variously sentenced to exile after torture, suspension of salaries, or a beating with a pole in the open court. Sixteen lower-ranked officials died on the spot.<sup>23</sup>

The triumphant emperor also began to change the format of his study sessions; Hanlin officials could no longer monopolize the delivery of lectures. Zhan Ruoshui 湛若水 (1466–1560) informs us that the emperor decreed in the seventh month of the fourth year (July 1525) that civil officials could present plainly worded elucidation of the classics and the histories to the throne. As a result, Zhan wrote his voluminous work of statecraft learning, *Sage Learning Thoroughly Understood by the Investigation of Things* (*Shengxue gewutong* 聖學格物通).<sup>24</sup> Now especially interested in the *Book of Documents*, the emperor later that year ordered the grand secretaries to annotate three chapters from the classic, using as their model the founding emperor's annotation of the "Great Plan" ("Hongfan" 洪範) chapter. These chapters in question—"Counsels of Gao Yao" ("Gaoyao" 皋陶謨), "Instructions of Yi" ("Yixun" 伊訓), and "Against Luxurious Ease" ("Wuyi" 無逸)—are considered rich in the principles of governance. The resultant compilation was entitled *The Three Essentials of the Book of Documents* (*Shujing sanyao* 書經三要).<sup>25</sup>

In the second half of the fifth year (1526), the lectures briefly resumed. The emperor did not appear at court most of the time. More than 800 officials even missed the court gathering one morning in the tenth month when a classics-mat lecture was supposed to be held.<sup>26</sup> More regular lectures, on the "Great Plan" chapter of the *Book of Documents*, were held only in the following year (1527). Lecturer Gu Dingchen's 顧鼎臣 (1473–1540)

22. MSZSL 38.970/Jiajing 3/4/guichou.

23. MSZSL 41.1080/Jiajing 3/7/guiwei.

24. See Zhu Honglin (Hung-lam Chu), "Mingru Zhan Ruoshui."

25. MSZSL 58.1394–95/Jiajing 4/12/wushen.

26. MSZSL 69.1579/Jiajing 5/10/renshen.

original expositions had captured the emperor's attention.<sup>27</sup> Hanlin Compiler Liao Daonan's 廖道南 (js. 1521, d. 1547) elucidation of the "nine standards" of the Great Plan also proved stimulating.<sup>28</sup>

Most noteworthy were the lectures on Zhen Dexiu's 真德秀 (1178–1235) *Extended Meaning of the Great Learning* (*Daxue yanyi* 大學衍義), the great statecraft classic in the Neo-Confucian tradition, which contains both the maxims of the Classics and the main lessons of the great historical compilation *Comprehensive Mirror* (*Zizhi tongjian* 資治通鑑) by Sima Guang 司馬光 (1019–86). Beginning in the fifth month, both straightforward elucidations and oral expositions were presented regularly on the third and eighth days of the ten-day cycle by six additionally appointed daily lecturers and six lecturers from the Hanlin ranks specifically appointed for the task.<sup>29</sup> The regular daily lectures also grew more frequent. In the tenth month, five lecturers were promoted to senior positions in the Hanlin Academy for their diligent service.<sup>30</sup> In contrast, the emperor reprimanded daily lecturer Dong Qi 董紀 (1483–1546) for improper movements during an exposition and reading session.<sup>31</sup> The emperor also demoted lecturer Wang Tian 汪佃 (1474–1540) to the provinces for a slow and unsatisfactory presentation.

The same year (1527) witnessed an unprecedented shake-up of the Hanlin. It ended the Grand Secretariat's long-standing role as the institutional mentor, and de facto director, of the Hanlin Academy. Only officials of solid learning, good writing skills, and fine conduct were to stay. Many of the new lecturers who filled the twenty-two vacancies had supported the imperial position in the Great Rites Controversy.<sup>32</sup>

The eventful sixth year ended with the emperor emerging as an accomplished Neo-Confucian author. He wrote a "Maxim of Seriousness and Oneness" ("Jingyi zhen" 敬一箴) and annotated both the "Maxim of the Mind" ("Xin zhen" 心箴) by the Song scholar Fan Jun 范浚 (fl. 1130s–40s) and the "Four Maxims [of Seeing, Hearing, Speaking, and Acting]" ("[Shiting-yan-dong] Si zhen" 視聽言動四箴) by the Neo-Confucian master Cheng Yi 程頤 (1033–1107). These works were glossed primarily by Zhang

27. MSZSL 75.1682/Jiajing 6/4/wuchen.

28. MSZSL 76.1690–3/Jiajing 6/5/xinsi, 104.2460–1/Jiajing 8/8/bingxu.

29. MSZSL 76.1695–7/Jiajing 6/5/yiyou; for details, see Yang Yiqing, *Chenbanlu* 宸翰錄 4 (first printed in mid- or late Jiajing period), in *Yang Yiqing ji*, pp. 815–17.

30. MSZSL 81.1801/Jiajing 6/10/wuwu.

31. MSZSL 81.1811/Jiajing 6/10/yichou.

32. MSZSL 81.1813–15/Jiajing 6/10/bingyin.

Cong 張聰 (1475–1539), the new dominant grand secretary. The emperor's handwritten copies of the texts were soon copied and carved on stone steles erected in the two Hanlin academies and the two national universities in Beijing and Nanjing, and in all government schools throughout the empire.<sup>33</sup>

The emperor's interest in the lectures revived in the seventh year of his reign (1528). He attended three classics-mat lectures in the spring series.<sup>34</sup> He devoted all the fall daily lectures to the "Great Plan" chapter of the *Documents*, which was expounded solely by Gu Dingchen.<sup>35</sup> A poem by Gu reveals that evening sessions were also held.<sup>36</sup> That enthusiasm probably reflected the state of his emotional life. The Empress Chen, who died in the tenth month and was given the uncomplimentary posthumous title of Regretful Intelligence (Daoling 悼靈), was denied a last visit from her father on her deathbed.<sup>37</sup> The emperor even rejected the lecturers' requests that they be allowed to wear light-colored gowns to express their grief.<sup>38</sup>

During the sole classics-mat lecture recorded in the eighth year (1529), lecturer Lu Shen 陸深 (1477–1544) protested to Jiajing that when Grand Secretary Gui E 桂萼 (*js.* 1511, d. 1531) had edited Lu's essay, he had distorted its meaning.<sup>39</sup> Lu petitioned that such editing be prohibited. Furious, the emperor lambasted Lu as prone to exaggeration, deceit, maliciousness, and self-indulgence for making such a solicitation and demoted him to a minor post in Fujian.<sup>40</sup>

In the next year (1530), the emperor became increasingly engaged but watchful during the daily lectures and over the occasional lecture essays. He disapproved of lecturers who skipped certain texts in order to avoid sensitive subjects.<sup>41</sup> He ordered each of the grand secretaries and lecturers to present an exposition of one chapter of a classic.<sup>42</sup> He summoned Vice Minister Xia Yan 夏言 (1482–1548) to expound the *Extended Meaning*.<sup>43</sup>

33. MSZSL 82.1843/Jiajing 6/11/jiawu; Zhang Cong, *Yudui lu*, 2.18b–20a.

34. MSZSL 84.1893/Jiajing 7/1/xinsi, 85.1919/Jiajing 7/2/dingwei, 86.1947–49/Jiajing 7/3/jiashen.

35. Gu Dingchen, *Gu Wenkang gong xingao*, 2.1a–2b.

36. *Ibid.*, 6.6a–b.

37. MSZSL 92.2126–27/Jiajing 7/9/xinmao, 93.2137–43/Jiajing 7/10/dingwei.

38. MSZSL 94.2194/Jiajing 7/+10/xinmao.

39. MSZSL 99.2333/Jiajing 8/3/wuxu.

40. MSZSL 99.2335–36/Jiajing 8/3/guimao.

41. Zhang Cong, *Yudui lu*, 12.16a–17b.

42. MSZSL 120.2868–69/Jiajing 9/12/dingchou.

43. Xia Yan, *Guizhou xiansheng zonyi*, 7.4b–5b.

Most tellingly, on New Year's Day of the tenth year (January 18, 1531), he forwarded to Zhang Cong abstracts of lectures by Gui E and the other lecturers during the preceding year. Zhang was instructed to read them carefully and confidentially and to submit an evaluation. Zhang reported back that same day.<sup>44</sup>

A new ceremony introduced early in the tenth year suggests the importance the emperor placed on the lectures. A rite of paying homage to the "former sages and teacher"—that is, the Duke of Zhou and all the sages from Fu Xi to King Wu of Zhou, and Confucius—was ordered to be held on the first day of the spring and the fall series of the classics-mat lectures.<sup>45</sup> The unexpected absence of three lecturers two months later, however, again suggests a continuous suspension of lectures—in all likelihood due to the emperor's health.<sup>46</sup> But evidence also suggests that lectures resumed in the fall series.<sup>47</sup> Special lectures on the "The Seven Month" ("Qi-yue" 七月) poem from the *Book of Poetry* and the "Against Luxurious Ease" chapter from the *Book of Documents*—classic examples extolling imperial concern for agriculture and personal diligence—were also delivered in the newly constructed Against Luxurious Ease Hall (Wuyidian 無逸殿) in the West Park (Xiyuan 西苑).<sup>48</sup>

Anxious for an heir, however, the emperor turned to Daoist practices. On December 31, 1531 (eleventh month of the tenth year), a *jiao* 醮 ceremony was held in the Respectful and Peaceful Hall (Qin'andian 欽安殿) for the purpose of gaining an heir. Minister of Rites Xia Yan was appointed commissioner of the ceremony, and Vice Ministers Zhan Ruoshui and Gu Dingchen served as the guiding officials who received the offering-prayer (*yingci* [qingci] *daoyinguan* 迎詞【青詞】導引官). In rotation, the five highest-ranking military and civil officials daily offered incense and conducted appropriate rites. On the first and the last day of the ceremony,

44. Zhang Cong, *Yudui lu*, 26.1a–3b.

45. MSZSL 121.2904–5/Jiajing 10/1/renzi.

46. MSZSL 123.2955/Jiajing 10/3/yiwei.

47. See MSZSL 129.3066/Jiajing 10/8/guiwei for the emperor's rejection of a lecturer's request for leave to visit his ancestors' graveyards, citing his involvement in the daily lectures; and MSZSL 132.3132/Jiajing 10/11/xinwei for Minister of Rites Xia Yan's disapproval of a suggestion that the emperor visit the National University and listen to lectures there delivered before the beginning of the spring and fall series of lectures. He noted that doing so might be too much for the emperor, since he was "continuing with his classics-mat and daily lectures."

48. MSZSL 129.3080–81/Jiajing 10/8/dingwei, 130.3092–93/Jiajing 10/9/renshen.

the emperor himself conducted the rituals.<sup>49</sup> A month later (January 12, 1532), Gu Dingchen presented seven "Walking in the Void" prayers (*buxuci* 步虛詞) for the ceremony to maximize its effect. The emperor praised his loyalty and affection, and kept copies of Gu's prayers in the palace as a sign of his appreciation.<sup>50</sup>

In the eleventh year of Jiajing's reign (1532), lectures were still occasionally held.<sup>51</sup> Confucian-minded lecturers, however, now entered a new era in which they had to surrender even the rhetoric of shaping the imperial personality. With the veteran lecturer Gu Dingchen leading the change, classics-mat lecture essays were soon superseded by Daoist offering-prayers (*qingci* 青詞) as a way of interesting the emperor or procuring his favor.

During the twelfth year (1533), only one classics-mat lecture is recorded for the spring series and one for the fall series.<sup>52</sup> The fall one seems to have been a celebration to mark the birth of the first imperial son.<sup>53</sup> Lingering antagonism among the lecturing staff, however, marred a summer lecture on the *Extended Meaning*. Gu Dingchen could not attend because of illness. Two of his colleagues declined Grand Secretary Zhang Cong's request to serve as his substitute. The emperor disciplined the two by replacing them with new lecturers.<sup>54</sup>

No lecture was recorded in the thirteenth year (1534). The emperor was ill in the spring,<sup>55</sup> and his sixty-day absence from the court initiated a lingering, bureaucratic malaise. One day in the eighth month (October 4, 1534), 184 civil and military officials failed to appear at the morning court audience.<sup>56</sup> Only one classics-mat lecture was held in the fourteenth year (1535), in the third month.<sup>57</sup>

49. MSZSL 132.3134-35/Jiajing 10/11/guiyou.

50. MSZSL 133.3147-48/Jiajing 10/12/yiyou.

51. See MSZSL 137.3231/Jiajing 11/4/guimao for two censors alleged to have mishandled their business because of a classics-mat lecture; and MSZSL 142.3303-5/Jiajing 11/9/dingsi for the emperor asking the grand secretaries what Wu Hui 吳惠 and Guo Weifan 郭維藩 had meant in their lectures. The lectures had suggested, respectively, restraining "unnecessary expenditures and constructions" and ending "malpractice but showing magnanimity."

52. MSZSL 148.3411/Jiajing 12/3/yisi.

53. MSZSL 153.3472/Jiajing 12/8/jichou.

54. MSZSL 152.3455-56/Jiajing 12/7/yisi.

55. MSZSL 160.3576/Jiajing 13/+2/dingsi.

56. MSZSL 166.3656/Jiajing 13/8/xinyou.

57. MSZSL 173.3753/Jiajing 14/3/renxu.

The last classics-mat lecture of the Jiajing reign found in the Veritable Records was held on the eleventh day of the third month of the fifteenth year (April 1, 1536).<sup>58</sup> A few months later, when an official petitioned the throne to collect books for the palace library and for the emperor to attend lectures during his free time, Jiajing responded, "Books may be stacked up like pillars, but if one does not read them seriously, their accumulation is just for vain glory. In addition, if officials do not correctly nourish their minds, it would be useless even if they are called [to lecture]."<sup>59</sup> He would have occasion to appoint another lecturer as a substitute for one on leave, but that was merely to fill the roster.<sup>60</sup> The last memorial calling for classics-mat lectures came a year later, in the seventh month of the sixteenth year (1537). The emperor struggled for a pretext for his inactivity: "I have not lightly abandoned the classics-mat lectures. It was because of the renovation of the Literary Splendor Palace that the spring lecture series was suspended this year. Shen Han 沈翰 [*jr.* 1535; the memorializing supervising secretary] should be open and honest in what he has to say but should not express himself in the way he does. For in doing so, he is only inviting fame for himself by going against the monarch."<sup>61</sup> No one would subsequently challenge the emperor to resume his study of the classics and histories.

Meanwhile, beginning from the fall of 1536, when the first imperial daughter was born,<sup>62</sup> the Jiajing emperor emerged at once as a devoted filial descendent and a fertile father, apparently on the advice and prescriptions of his Daoist advisors. For two years, he made five visits to his ancestors' mausoleums and begot six princes and one more princess. Now quite busy as a father devoted to the Daoist rituals, he observed more *jiao* ceremonies and read more *qingci* prayers.<sup>63</sup>

A review of the sixteen years of the Jiajing court's lecture activities makes it apparent that the lectures were not purely educational, not merely learning sessions devoted to the classics and histories. Although in accordance with institutional requirements but in effect much conditioned by

58. MSZSL 185.3913/Jiajing 15/3/bingyin. This is corroborated by a late Ming historian who noted that "only since the sixteenth year of Jiajing was the emperor rarely to be seen in the lectures" (Huang Jingfang, *Guoshi weiyi*, p. 187).

59. MSZSL 189.3996/Jiajing 15/7/gengchen.

60. MSZSL 190.4007/Jiajing 15/8/gengzi.

61. MSZSL 202.4242/Jiajing 16/7/dinghai.

62. MSZSL 190.4006/Jiajing 15/8/wuxu.

63. For these events, see MSZSL 191.4038/Jiajing 15/9/gengwu to 216.4409/Jiajing 17/9/xinwei.

the political situation, the performance of all those involved in the lectures revealed tensions in the ethics of government and differences in the implementation of dynastic rites. The Confucian scholar-officials grew disillusioned with the ideal of molding the Jiajing emperor into a sympathetic monarch through their elucidation of the classics and the sages. Why the emperor proved reluctant to learn from them becomes apparent upon closer examination of their interactions.

*Observing Death Anniversary Rites and  
Dealing with Sensitive Subjects*

Two events concerning observance of the death anniversaries of the imperial ancestors might have subtly affected the psyches of the Jiajing emperor and his lecturers. Both happened in the first year of the Jiajing reign. The first was triggered by Lü Nan 呂柟 (1479–1542), a well-known Confucian scholar and moralist of the time.<sup>64</sup> After expounding the Be Respectful Morning and Night (Suyeweiin 夙夜惟寅) section of the “Canon of Shun” (“Shundian” 舜典) chapter of the *Book of Documents* in a classics-mat lecture, Lü made the unconventional move of memorializing the throne in person. The day happened to be the anniversary of the death of the founding emperor’s mother. Feeling it relevant to the classical lesson he had just expounded, Lü asked the emperor to observe this anniversary and to “brighten his filial piety by accepting remonstrance” and to wear the *shenfu* (袵服), a kind of unadorned dress for the observance of that rite. He also requested the emperor to cancel the routine banquet for the participating officials that day.<sup>65</sup> The emperor interrupted Lü by saying “I know” and then left. Lü was obliged to submit a memorial asking punishment for his breach of the rule that the lecturer presented nothing other than his exposition. He was pardoned.<sup>66</sup>

The other event took place a month later. On a scheduled classics-mat day, the lecture was canceled to observe the anniversary of the death of the Hongxi emperor, the fourth monarch of the dynasty. Earlier, Supervising Secretary An Pan 安磐 (*js.* 1505) and others had memorialized on the difficulties this coincidence presented. If the attending officials were to dress in red and to have the banquet afterward as protocol required, they would

64. Lü Nan, *Jingyezi neipian*, p. 328, biographic accounts of Lü Nan.

65. *Ibid.*, p. 328.

66. *MSZSL* 13.465/Jiajing 1/4/wuxu.

demonstrate a lack of filial piety. If, however, the lecture were canceled, it would mean abandoning learning. They suggested moving the lecture to the previous day as the correct course of action.<sup>67</sup>

The emperor asked the Ministry of Rites to deliberate the suggestion. The ministry’s reply was based on the authority of the *Classic of Rites* regarding death anniversaries: “When the Hongzhi emperor was on the throne, the classics-mat lecture was conducted on the anniversary of the Chenghua emperor’s death. He wore a green flower-patterned robe and bestowed the after-lecture banquet. We suggest this practice be followed.”<sup>68</sup> The emperor settled the divergent opinions by canceling the lecture in a solemn but grand show of filial piety—sending sacrificial offerings to the mausoleum of Hongxi.

These two events show what was considered appropriate in offering advice to the emperor. As the emperor saw it, Lü Nan was at fault; his petition was more show than substance. If he had truly been serious about the emperor’s ritual obligations, he should have urged him earlier in a memorial, not broken the rule against pronouncing it in the presence of all the court dignitaries. Lü, for his part, was proposing ritual remedies for the emperor. The emperor seems to have understood Lü’s intention at least; he subsequently pardoned Lü’s breach of etiquette. But he still had not grasped the nuances of Lü’s thought. In asking the emperor to observe the death anniversary of his ancestress, Lü was reminding him not to forget her descendants, especially, of course, the Hongzhi emperor, who was now the emperor’s adoptive father.

This idea was also embedded in the Ministry of Rites’ deliberation of An Pan’s suggestion. An Pan’s suggestion both to arouse the emperor’s sense of filial piety and to keep his learning session at the same time made good sense. By sending An’s memorial for ministerial deliberation, the emperor was signaling his inclination to approve it. The response of the Ministry of Rites, headed by Yang Tinghe’s staunchest ally, Mao Cheng 毛澄 (1461–1523), was the problem. One eminent historian of the dynasty, Zhu Guozhen 朱國禎 (1557–1632), perceptively observed, “The discussants argued for such trivialities to the effect that the great rite [of holding the lecture] was abandoned; as for the Hongzhi emperor, he truly was the sage ruler of ten thousand generations.”<sup>69</sup> The Ministry of Rites, in its inflexible

67. *MSZSL* 14.475/Jiajing 1/5/dingsi.

68. Zhu Guozhen, *Yongchuang xiaopin*, p. 31.

69. *Ibid.*



counter-suggestion, was not so much trying to maintain its authority in matters within its jurisdiction or merely trying to avoid possible inconveniences resulting from schedule changes. Rather, it was attempting to instill in the emperor a sense of respect for the late Hongzhi emperor by recommending that his practice be emulated. Aware of his courtiers' intention, the emperor's reaction was equally subtle: he would be even more filial to his ancestors but would not follow Hongzhi's example.

As the observance of death anniversaries became a standard reason for suspending the classics-mat lecture, the emperor also became more mindful of expressions his lecturers considered taboo. For a time, he appears to have been broadminded. In the fourth year of his reign (1525), Supervising Secretary Zheng Yipeng 鄭一鵬 (*js.* 1521) memorialized that since history was a mirror for the emperor, the lecturers should not lecture, as they had been, only on ordered times but not chaotic times, on cases of successes but not cases of failures. The emperor agreed that in their lecture essays and oral expositions the lecturers not avoid anything they considered a sensitive subject.<sup>70</sup>

A Wanli period (1573–1620) historian also informs us that the emperor could be rather understanding. One day in the fall of the sixth year of his reign, before he reprimanded the daily lecturer Dong Qi for his bad manners,<sup>71</sup> the emperor noticed that in that day's lecture on the *Analects*, the entry about Zengzi 曾子 (one of Confucius' leading disciples) on his deathbed had not been expounded. Presumably the lecturer had skipped it because he considered it a taboo for an auspicious occasion like the lecture. The emperor, however, told his attendants that since life and death were natural to mankind, mention of death should not be avoided. The emperor ordered both a written presentation and an oral exposition of this entry. The same historian agreed with the lecturer's judgment, but also praised the emperor's decision as "excelling the ordinary view of the world."<sup>72</sup>

"The Metal-Bound Coffin" ("Jinteng" 金滕) chapter of the *Book of Documents* was also skipped in the lectures of the eighth year. The emperor confided to Zhang Cong that he believed the reason for the omission was that this chapter dealt at length with King Wu's illness. The emperor insisted, however, that it be elucidated. Zhang Cong was instructed to ask

70. Chen Zilong and Xu Fuyuan, eds., [*Huang*] *Ming jingshi wenbian*, 3.2188, memorial by Zheng Yipeng.

71. *MSZSL* 81.1811/Jiajing 6/10/yichou.

72. Deng Shilong, *Guochao diangu*, 35.637–8.

the lecturers to compose and present the missing lecture essays.<sup>73</sup> To borrow another Wanli period historian's praise for the imperial reaction in this case, the emperor appears as "this understanding and broadminded."<sup>74</sup>

The same historian immediately added, however: "This would happen only during his early years on the throne. In his later years, even sickness and illness of the officials themselves were not to be mentioned because even these words had become taboos, much less an inauspicious word like death."<sup>75</sup> True, but the point is that this change occurred only toward the very end of his reign. An observation by the late Ming historian Huang Jingfang 黄景昉 (1596–1662) further suggests that the emperor was once rather openminded about the texts the lecturers expounded.

During the last years of the Jiajing reign, the emperor sought long life and revered Daoism. He thought many things violated taboo. This was rather unlike his early years on the throne. Liao Daonan had the occasion to lecture on the section "Gaozong of Yin in Mourning" ("Gaozong liang'an" 高宗諒闇) [of the *Book of Documents*]. For not following Grand Secretary Zhang Cong's instruction for avoiding the taboo, he was impeached by Zhang. The responding decree nonetheless said, "Life and death are the normal way of mankind; to offer advice is the responsibility of the lecturers. Have Liao Daonan present his lecture as usual." The emperor also commanded, "Formerly Xu Jin 徐縉 [*js.* 1505] omitted the section 'Mengjingzi 孟敬子 asking about illness' in the *Analects*. That was not appropriate." How enlightening and penetrating was the imperial opinion. It exceeded all expectations.<sup>76</sup>

The change in the emperor's attitude and the consequent circumspection of the lecturers were tied to the Great Rites Controversy. Many things might be misconstrued as an allusion to it. The coordinating and supervising grand secretaries favored a prudent silence. The emperor's failure to discourage his lecturers from subscribing to such taboos, on the other hand, shows the resilience of a cultural tradition in addition to the precariousness of the time. The lecturers were playing their proper role as servitors. Since a servitor should always respect his monarch, expressions that might invoke ominous associations had to be avoided. It was incumbent on the monarch to exercise discretion in his reactions to these sensitive questions. Broadmindedness might encourage him to be accommodating, but his officials would not ignore the taboo unless they were so instructed.

73. Zhang Cong, *Yudui lu*, 12.16a–17b.

74. Xu Xuemo, *Shimiao zhiyulu*, 5.2a.

75. *Ibid.*, 5.2a.

76. Huang Jingfang, *Guoshi weiyi*, p. 187.

*The Sensitive Emperor and  
His Insensitive Lecturers*

The emperor's sensitivity to the implications of the lecturers' words and gestures is amply demonstrated in the repeated requests that he treat the lecturers kindly. In a memorial not included in the Veritable Records, Yang Tinghe revealed that the imperial presence had awed and terrified the lecturer Zhao Yong 趙永 (*js.* 1502). In the eighth month of 1522, Zhao, a first-time temporary lecturer, was ordered to lecture in the rear hall of the Literary Splendor Palace on short notice. He arrived in great haste without an opportunity to prepare properly. Immediately after he performed the kowtow ceremony, he was ushered to the lectern facing the imperial seat. He was too frightened to make himself fluent. Eventually his exposition was discontinued to bring an end to the awkward situation. The emperor later dispatched a senior eunuch to console Zhao. The grand secretaries acknowledged the imperial grace the following day by sending the memorial noted above.<sup>77</sup>

As chancellor of the National University, Zhao Yong had lectured in public with success when the emperor visited the university earlier in the year.<sup>78</sup> This time, in contrast, the awesome aura of the emperor in the lecture room shattered his self-confidence. The emperor, however, was not ungracious in the end.

The emperor's demands on the lecturers' deportment increased as his readings in classical exegeses and the dynasty's governmental statutes progressed.<sup>79</sup> In the tenth month of 1527, he ordered the Grand Secretariat to inform the veteran lecturer Dong Qi that his movements during an exposition and reading session had been inappropriate. When the frightened Dong rectified himself and memorialized his gratitude, the emperor then replied:

Your job is that of exposition and reading, and your position is that of a great minister. How could you lose the integrity of being respectful and modest? I cannot bear reprimanding you in words. So I especially ordered the Grand Secretariat to

77. Yang Tinghe, *Yang Wenzhong sanlu*, 2.17a-18a.

78. *MSZSL* 12.425/*Jiajing* 1/3/*jiayin*.

79. For instances of the emperor's recent enthusiasm for reading classical writings and asking questions based on them, see *MSZSL* 76.1695-7/*Jiajing* 6/5/*yiyou*, 76.1699/*Jiajing* 6/5/*xinmao*, 77.120-21/*Jiajing* 6/6/*guihai*, and 81.1795-6/*Jiajing* 6/10/*yiyou*.

inform you. You should respectfully appreciate my intention and strive to do your job well to satisfy the demands of your appointment.<sup>80</sup>

The nature of Dong's offense is unclear. A Wanli period observer put the affair this way: "During classics-mat lectures, a lecturer's appearance and deportment and his language could make manifest his virtue. . . . Emperor Shizong's warning to Dong Qi was effective. Dong quickly reformed himself and was then known for his respect and circumspection. It could be said that the emperor and servitors of those times complemented one another."<sup>81</sup> The last sentence is intriguing. Does it mean the servitors deliberately misbehaved in order to allow the emperor to display his sagacity?

Probably not: the next day Hanlin Reader-in-Waiting Wang Tian was dismissed from his lectureship and sent away from the court for being "slow and unversed in his presentation" on the "nine standards" of the "Great Plan" chapter. The emperor in fact took it upon himself to do the expounding. He told the grand secretaries that "when an emperor is able to exhaust what ethical principles demand of him as one who stands above all, and when the people below are thus transformed and when ethical order is made clear and the way of humanity made perfect, fortune will come by itself." His Majesty simply did not see "teachers" in his lecturers.<sup>82</sup>

Shortly thereafter the shake-up of the Hanlin establishment began. According to a late Ming reckoning, the housecleaning entailed sixteen dismissals and affected more than 70 percent of all positions in the academy.<sup>83</sup> Both Hanlin scholarship and lecturing skills were called into question. Thereafter, more Hanlin officials put the knowledge they had gained from experience in other offices at the disposal of the emperor. Gui

80. *MSZSL* 81.1811/*Jiajing* 6/10/*yichou*.

81. Deng Shilong, *Guochao diangu*, 35.637-38.

82. The Great Rites Controversy probably figured in the charges against Wang Tian. Wang was the brother of Wang Jun 汪俊 (*js.* 1493), the minister of rites who in 1524 led 250 court officials in memorializing against an early step the Jiajing emperor took to distance himself from the late Hongzhi emperor and to elevate the status of his own deceased father. The same year, Wang Tian and another of his brothers, Wang Wei 汪偉 (*js.* 1496), a vice minister of personnel, also separately joined in memorials that objected to other facets of the issue. For details of the Wang Tian incident, see Hu Jixun, "Dali yi yu Mingting renshi bianju," pp. 445-52.

83. *MSZSL* 81.1813-15/*Jiajing* 6/10/*bingyin*; Jiao Hong, *Yutang congyn*, p. 278.

E, for instance, may be considered representative in offering to the throne works of a more practical nature.<sup>84</sup>

Yet, not all lecturers proved to be well trained for the job. In the eighth year of the Jiajing era (1529), lecturer Sheng Duanming 盛端明 (1470–1550) was impeached by an attending supervising secretary for his rushed delivery (*ciqu poci* 詞氣迫促) of a classics-mat exposition of the *Mencius*. The emperor replied that “lecturing officials must be carefully chosen; those like Sheng Duanming surely are not helpful.” Sheng was then transferred to Nanjing.<sup>85</sup> The new Hanlin leadership did not significantly improve the manner or skill of the lecturers.

Proper outward appearance and serious inner cultivation were essential for successful lecturers. Ray Huang describes a later paragon of a lecturer, Zhang Juzheng 張居正 (1525–82), as “always well-groomed, [his] mind was just as sharp and meticulous as his clothing and manners.”<sup>86</sup> Those qualities were as true of the successful lecturers half a century earlier. During the Zhengde and the early Jiajing reigns, Yang Tinghe had also been impeccably groomed. In the seventh year of Jiajing (1528), when he was a classics-mat lecturer, Lu Shen wrote about the lecturers’ seriousness in preparing their person and mind for their job as follows:

Whenever a lecturer was about to deliver his lecture, he perfumed his cloth, hat, belt, and boots. When he went home after the event, these articles would be stored in a particular case to show that he dared not slight them. Before the day of presentation, he would fast and bathe, and rehearse his lecture in the hope that he could move the emperor when he lectured. This single thought of sincerity could not be easily expressed in words.<sup>87</sup>

The understanding that proper appearance and manners were closely tied to respect and reverence is clear in the case of Senior Compiler He Tang’s 何塘 (1474–1543) lecture to the Zhengde emperor. He Tang was dismissed from the court for what happened during a classics-mat lecture he delivered in 1513. According to the *Veritable Records of the Zhengde* era:

He Tang was uncultivated in his appearance and manner; his clothes were threadbare, and his face was dirty. Now at his first presentation, he read in a crippled and

84. For some of the works presented by Gui E, see *MSZSL* 83.1872/Jiajing 6/12/dingsi, 102.2400/Jiajing 8/6/wuchen, and 120.2873/Jiajing 9/12/renwu.

85. *MSZSL* 100.2361/Jiajing 8/4/dingmao.

86. Ray Huang, 1587, p. 10.

87. Zhu Guozhen, *Yongchuang xiaopin*, p. 31.

dry tone, so raggedy that he was almost unable to finish his lecture. All the attending great ministers were taken by surprise. The emperor was furious when the lecture was over. He dispatched eunuchs to inform the Grand Secretariat that he intended to beat He Tang in the court. Grand Secretaries Yang Tinghe and others came to He’s rescue in roundabout ways. A decree was then issued to categorically reprimand his disrespectful manner and to send him away for an appointment in the provinces.<sup>88</sup>

The point noted in the *Veritable Records* was that the occasion itself demanded elegant attire and a fluent and clear presentation. These were expressions of serious commitment to the lectures, and hence respect for the emperor and the audience at large.<sup>89</sup>

Another incident, however, shows the Jiajing emperor’s sensitivity to the language of his lecturers. A memorial by Minister of Personnel Fang Xianfu 方獻夫 (*js.* 1505, d. 1544) in the ninth month of the eighth year (1529) revealed that Advisor to the Heir Apparent Lun Yixun 倫以訓 (b. 1498, *js.* 1517), Fang’s fellow Guangdong native, had lectured on a passage from the *Book of Documents*. In his exposition, Lun made the statement that “posterity’s learning of the mind-and-heart is not clear.” The emperor told Fang that Lun’s “exposition is not sound,” and asked Fang for an elucidation.

Fang came to Lun’s defense most tactfully, relating his impression of Lun’s exposition and his own understanding of the issue Lun raised.

Lun Yixun said, “Posterity’s learning of the mind-and-heart is not clear. The good mind-and-heart is, rather, understood in terms of mercy and compassion” (*cibei lianmin* 慈悲憐憫). At that time I also felt that his exposition was lacking clarity. Probably in saying this, he was referring to Buddhist learning, which takes quietude and the void as the heart of the method of cultivation and takes mercy and compassion as the good fruit [of practicing the teaching], but does not understand that in the kingly way [i.e., in Confucianism] benevolence and righteousness go hand in hand. It was simply that his words failed to focus on the main points and were not clear.

Fang then went on to offer his elucidation of the essence of the learning of mind-and-heart, drawn entirely from the theories of Neo-Confucian masters, ranging from Zhou Dunyi 周敦頤 (1017–73) and the Cheng brothers

88. *Ming Wuzong shilu*, 99.2067/Zhengde 8/4/gengshen.

89. A modern annotator of He Tang’s works has argued that He angered the emperor, or rather the grand secretaries, for not heeding the grand secretaries’ advice for modifying his lecture essay, which contained remonstrance of the emperor. For this, he was reprimanded and dismissed from office. See He Tang, *He Tang ji*, p. 449.

to their Southern Song intellectual heirs. He contrasted them with Buddhist doctrines.<sup>90</sup>

From another memorial Fang Xianfu submitted later, it is clear that the emperor had forwarded Fang's response to the Grand Secretariat for another explanation. The emperor ordered the grand secretaries to discuss the errors in the Buddhist doctrine of mercy, the distinction between good mind-and-heart and good nature, and the effort to exert to the utmost one's mind-and-heart and one's nature.<sup>91</sup> Fang said since the emperor's points were clear and the Grand Secretariat's detailed answer was also clear, he would not dwell on the question further but would discuss the new issue the emperor had raised with him: the effort to establish the original moral and intellectual foundation of the imperial person.<sup>92</sup>

Why was the emperor so suspicious of and unsatisfied with Lun Yixun's exposition? Lun's exposition might have been understood as disapproval of the emperor's actions in the great ritual disputes or as critical of the emperor's general attitude toward the highest level of the bureaucracy. The emperor had recently been lauded for his accomplishments in the learning of the mind-and-heart. Now, according to Lun, mercy and compassion were not part of that learning. Lun seemed to be suggesting that the emperor lacked these qualities, and that it was acceptable for him to lack them. The emperor thus could view this exposition as ridiculing him.

### *The Successful Lecturer—Gu Dingchen*

The contrasting example of a successful lecturer is Gu Dingchen, who was among the first group of lecturers appointed to the initial classics-mat and daily lectures of the Jiajing emperor in the summer of 1521. By the time

90. Fang Xianfu, *Xiqiao yigao*, 3.3b–6b. It is not clear whether Lun had a southern accent that gave rise to the emperor's misunderstanding and criticism and commission. Fang Xianfu, however, spoke the same dialect as Lun did. Facility in Mandarin was as necessary as mastery of the classics for success. We know that two years prior to this, the eminent fellow Guangdong native of Lun and Fang, Huo Tao 霍韜, had declined an appointment to the lectureship, because he was afraid that his southern accent might give rise to misunderstanding (*MSZSL* 78.1738–39/Jiajing 6/7/jichou).

91. At this time, the Grand Secretariat was staffed only by Zhai Luan 翟鑾 (1477–1546) and possibly the newly recalled Zhang Cong. Yang Yiqing retired in the ninth month of the year. Gui E was dismissed in the eighth month. That perhaps was another reason, even the main reason, for asking Fang Xianfu, who was not a grand secretary but nonetheless counted as a confidant of the emperor.

92. Fang Xianfu, *Xiqiao yigao*, 3.6b–7b.

the emperor ended his study sessions fifteen years later, Gu was a minister of rites (rank 2a) and a concurrent Hanlin academician (5a), exclusively in charge of the instruction of a new class of Hanlin bachelors—the “teacher” of potential future ministers and even grand secretaries.<sup>93</sup> Three years later (1538), he was appointed a grand secretary. Since he had been the *optimus*—the first-place graduate of the palace examination—of the class of 1505, he thus achieved all that a Confucian literatus could hope for as an official.<sup>94</sup>

Little is known about Gu's early career as a lecturer, but he must have been competent and well received. In the sixth year (1527), after Gu recovered from a long period of illness, Grand Secretary Yang Yiqing 楊一清 (1454–1530) was happy to request his return to the classics-mat and daily lectures. The emperor's loyal supporters, Zhang Cong and Gui E, were appointed at the same time.<sup>95</sup> Gu soon stimulated the emperor to a new level of interest in classical exegesis when he expounded on the “Great Plan” chapter of the *Book of Documents*, in which he ventured an interpretation different from that of the standard commentary by the Song Confucian scholar Cai Chen 蔡沉 (1167–1230), an important disciple of Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200). The emperor was so struck with Gu's originality that he confidentially asked both Gui E and Yang Yiqing for an assessment. The replies by Gui E and Yang Yiqing reveal the emperor's motives and the exegetical differences at issue.<sup>96</sup>

Gui's reply was drafted by his confidant and ghostwriter, the eminent Confucian scholar Wei Xiao 魏校 (1483–1543).<sup>97</sup> It includes the imperial inquiry, which suggests that the emperor had first asked help from Gui E

93. *MSZSL* 173.3754–56/Jiajing 14/3/dingmao, 174.3786–87/Jiajing 14/4/wushen.

94. Jiao Hong, *Guochoao xianshenglu*, 16.41; Gu's epitaph was written by Yan Song 嚴嵩 (1480–1565).

95. *MSZSL* 75.1677/Jiajing 6/4/jiayin.

96. *MSZSL* 75.1682/Jiajing 6/4/wuchen. For the imperial inquiry to Gui E and Gui's reply, see Wei Xiao, *Zhuanggu yishu*, 2.14a–17a.

97. This relation has eluded modern scholars. When, however, the works of Gui and Wei are compared against their respective careers, it is plain. In one Ming edition of Wei Xiao's collection, *Zhuanggu xiansheng yishu* 莊渠先生遺書, collated and published by one of his eminent disciples, the famous writer Gui Youguang 歸有光 (1507–71), there are notes under the titles of replies to the emperor's questions stating that the replies were composed for Gui E. Wei's improvement of Gui's memorials was also no secret among Ming writers. It, for example, is mentioned in Huang Jingfang, *Guosbi weiyi*, p. 157. Note that Wei Xiao is misromanized Wei Chiao (Wei Jiao) in Goodrich and Fang, eds., *Dictionary of Ming Biography*, pp. 204, 990, 1625.

and then confirmed his own understanding with Yang Yiqing. It also reveals the sensitive and careful emperor's initial inclination toward Gu Dingchen's interpretation and his uneasiness about the traditional exegesis. Gui, slightly modifying the words of Wei Xiao, offered an interpretation in support of Cai Chen. It is unclear whether Gui was trying to forestall Gu's rise. But his answer was perhaps why the emperor solicited a second opinion from Yang Yiqing.<sup>98</sup>

Yang Yiqing's reply makes clear that Gu Dingchen offered an unconventional elucidation by altering the order of two key words—and concepts—in a line of the "Great Plan" chapter. But Gu felt unsure about the implications of this rereading, because then the meaning and moral of the classical text would differ from the traditional understanding. He resolved to leave the validity of his interpretation for the emperor to decide himself. Gu's unassuming attitude worked: it drove the emperor to compose a response, which upheld the standard interpretation, from which we know he was then under the influence of Gui E. But he was not certain about his own understanding and asked for Yang Yiqing's judgment. He was modest enough to instruct Yang that "if my answer is acceptable, then you improve its wording. If not, then do nothing about it." Yang, after a careful, and seemingly convincing, analysis, upheld the classic interpretation, hence concurring with the emperor's understanding.

In the middle of his reply, where his own analysis of the classical exegesis began, the well-rounded Yang Yiqing stressed that Cai Chen's interpretation was based on the interpretation passed down by classical experts of the Han and the Tang. In his conclusion, Yang emphasized that the crux of the issue—the word order—had been confirmed by Confucian masters of Han and Tang times as well as by Neo-Confucian masters of the Song. The founding Ming emperor, too, based himself on the old text when he annotated the "Great Plan" chapter. When the Yongle emperor exalted the *Six Classics* and the *Four Books* and had the *Great Compendia* of them distributed to the government schools over the empire, the exegesis for the *Book of Documents* adopted was also that by Cai Chen. Since no one had doubted it in the past, there was no reason to doubt it now. Thus, Yang was sure Gu's exegesis was no good. But Gu's effort to get at the truth when he had doubts was proper to the discussion of learning. Implicitly, therefore, Gu should not be reprimanded even if the result of his inquiry was unsound.

98. Wei Xiao, *Zhuanggu yishu*, 2.814a-17a; see also Gui E, *Wenxiang gong zonyi*, 5.18a-20a.

The emperor received Yang's reply with approval, and Gu stayed on as a lecturer.<sup>99</sup>

Obviously, it was Gu Dingchen's stimulating thinking and apparently unpretentious attitude that brought him so much regard from the emperor, who was eager to learn and to show what he knew. A month later, Gu was appointed one of eight special lecturers to expound the *Extended Meaning of the Great Learning* in the summer months and beyond.<sup>100</sup> Soon after the shake-up of the Hanlin Academy in the same month, he lectured on the "Maxim of the Mind" by Fan Jun of the Song, prompting the emperor to annotate the text. The emperor subsequently also annotated the "Four Maxims [of Seeing, Hearing, Speaking, and Acting]" by Cheng Yi and his own "Maxim of Seriousness and Oneness." Gu was thus the inadvertent architect of the many pavilions that housed the steles inscribed with imperial words and brushwork in the Hanlin academies and national universities and government schools throughout the empire.<sup>101</sup>

In the eighth month of the following year (1528), Gu was appointed the sole daily expositor to lecture on the "Great Plan" chapter, which the emperor said was the great norm and great model for rulership. For three months, he lectured "unceasingly through summer and winter." The emperor was so solicitous about Gu's health as to order the grand secretaries to delete a few sentences from the long text to ease Gu's job. He wanted Gu to compose his straightforward elucidation more carefully and elaborately to better aid his governing.<sup>102</sup> Gu noted in a poem that the emperor ordered him to give his best in the lectures to match the imperial intention to seek learning and governance. The end of the poem suggests their harmony: "I thereby pledge my little effort to repay Your graceful treatment, without daring to say that our relationship is as congenial as the fish and the water."<sup>103</sup> Indeed, the emperor also commended Gu for having "finished the exposition of the entire chapter, in detail and with all his heart."<sup>104</sup> Gu occasionally had to lecture even in the evening.<sup>105</sup> He was rewarded with promotion to

99. Yang Yiqing, *Miyulu* 密諭錄 1, in *Yang Yiqing ji*, pp. 918-29.

100. *MSZSL* 76.1695-97/Jiajing 6/5/yiyou.

101. Jiao Hong, *Guohao xianzhenglu*, 16.41; see also Huang Jingfang, *Guoshi weiji*, p. 165.

102. Gu Dingchen, *Gu Wenkang gong xugao*, 2.1a-2b.

103. Gu Dingchen, *Gu Wenkang gong shigao*, 5.13a-b.

104. Gu Dingchen, *Gu Wenkang gong xugao*, 2.1a-2b.

105. *Ibid.*, 6.6a-b, for the poem; 2.3a-36a, for the entire text of his lecture notes and essays on the "Hongfan" chapter.

supervisor of the Household of the Heir Apparent (rank 3a). Later, on Gu's request, the emperor also bestowed imperial pronouncements to commend his grandparents, parents, and himself.<sup>106</sup>

Gu's fish-and-water interaction with the emperor was again apparent when late in the ninth year of Jiajing (1530), the emperor initiated the rite of sacrificing to the "former sages and teacher [Confucius]." He was among the three grand secretaries and seven lecturers especially summoned to pay homage and obeisance to them in the Literary Splendor Palace. Each of the favored officials was commanded to present an exposition of a passage from a classic. Gu wrote on one from the first chapter of the *Doctrine of the Mean*.<sup>107</sup>

Despite the emperor's occasional suspicions, Gu maintained the imperial trust. Early in the tenth year, we find the emperor confiding to Zhang Cong that Gu's lecture essays submitted in the year past contained "words of hidden disloyalty."<sup>108</sup> Fortunately for Gu, nothing worse ensued. Some time later, Gu also survived a false accusation (the details of which are unknown) by his fellow lecturer Dong Qi.<sup>109</sup> Gu's failure to appear at a daily lecture suddenly attended by the emperor after a long suspension was pardoned.<sup>110</sup>

Gu cemented the imperial favor by presenting to the throne the aforementioned "Walking in the Void" prayers—seven in total—as an aid to the Daoist ritual for the birth of an imperial son. The emperor praised Gu's loyalty and affection and kept his offering prayers in the palace.<sup>111</sup> Gu again escaped severe discipline when he was sick and failed to present a lecture one day in the twelfth year. Both Grand Secretary Zhang Cong and the emperor were much angered by the refusal of two other lecturers to serve as ad hoc substitutes.<sup>112</sup> In the third month of the fourteenth year (1535), with the approval of Grand Secretaries Zhang Cong and Li Shi 李時 (1471–1538), Gu was given the unprecedented appointment of sole instructor of the next class of Hanlin bachelors.<sup>113</sup> As noted above, little more than three years later, he would be appointed grand secretary.

Late in 1540, after having composed many more *qingci* prayers for the emperor, Gu died in office. For this, he has been mocked in history as the

106. Gu Dingchen, *Gu Wenkang gong shucao*, 1.12a–14a.

107. *Ibid.*, 1.16a–18a.

108. Zhang Cong, *Yudui lu*, 26.3a–5a.

109. MSZSL 121.2903/Jiajing 10/1/bingwu.

110. MSZSL 123.2955/Jiajing 10/3/yiwei.

111. MSZSL 133.3147–48/Jiajing 10/12/yiyou.

112. MSZSL 152.3455–56/Jiajing 12/7/yisi.

113. MSZSL 173.3754–56/Jiajing 14/3/dingmao.

"grand councilor of *qingci* prayers," excelling in nothing but pleasing the emperor with non-Confucian literature. His influence was such that for the remainder of the Jiajing reign, Hanlin scholar-officials rather than Daoist priests composed the *qingci* prayers.<sup>114</sup>

In a more positive light, posterity remembered Gu for his harmonious relations with the emperor, an interaction characterized as being like "salt and sour plum," one complementing the other and resulting in a state of mutual respect.<sup>115</sup> Versatile both as a classical student and as a writer, he put to good use a flexible mind and an unpretentious if sometimes diffident attitude. He was no blind follower of traditional commentaries, but neither was he a vocal anti-traditionalist. He was not afraid to make his own point known, even to the emperor, yet he did not insist on the validity of his originality. Thus he impressed the emperor with his earnestness and his honesty.

But he could not have been a dull lecturer to be able to finish his discussions of the long and difficult "Great Plan" chapter in the first place. We have no direct information on how Gu lectured. The erudite Jiao Hong 焦竑 (1541–1620) in the Wanli period related the following anecdote about him as a lecturer. Gu was lecturing on the passage on Xianqiu Meng 咸丘蒙 in the *Mencius*. When he came to the line "Yao died," the attending officials were all frightened, looking at each other with surprise [for the topic was considered proscribed in the classics-mat lectures]. Gu then continued slowly, saying, "Yao was then one hundred and twenty years old." On that note the officials regained their poise.<sup>116</sup> Such were the art and the craft of a masterful lecturer, combining suspense with a witty punch line. This story may suggest more about the late Ming image of a successful lecturer, but it is probably not far off the mark as far as Gu's pleasing qualities as the emperor's regular lecturer are concerned.

#### *Lu Shen's Grievances Against the Grand Secretariat*

The case of Lu Shen further shows the complexity of interaction with the emperor and lecturers. The immediate issue was whether it was appropriate for the grand secretaries to edit and modify the lecturers' essays. In the

114. Tan Qian, *Guoque*, 55.3456.

115. Gu Dingchen, *Gu Wenkang gong wencao*, undated preface by Jiang Dejing 蔣德璟 (*jr.* 1622, *d.* 1646). This term was first used in "The Charge to Yue" ("Yueming" 說命) chapter of the *Documents* to denote the job of a prime minister, which is to govern the state effectively, much as the functions of salt and sour plum are to flavor thick soup.

116. Jiao Hong, *Yutang congnyu*, p. 32.

fall of the seventh year (1528), Lu was appointed classics-mat lecturer as chancellor of the National University. According to his biography, his elucidation was earnest and honest, and the emperor listened to him with favor. Soon, he was given a copy of the *Canon for the Clarification of Human Relations* (*Minglun dadian* 明倫大典), the "white paper" of the history of the Great Rites Controversy, an imperial gesture that marked him as a loyal senior official.<sup>117</sup> But, as noted above, he violated classics-mat etiquette and was dismissed after a stern reprimand.<sup>118</sup> Lu's memorial inveighing against the editorial efforts of the grand secretaries is worth quoting at length, because it reveals much about the incident itself, the daily practices of the institution of the classics-mat lectures, and the aspirations of the lecturers.

The matter of the classics-mat lectures is of great consequence [to governance]. Its foremost task is to help nourish the emperor's virtue, which also does much to spur the [lecturing] officials' integrity. Why? When the emperor is sitting in front of a lecturer, his awesome appearance only a few feet away, the latter respectfully bows and then rises to elucidate the classics, talking about filial piety and loyalty, about benevolence and righteousness, about honesty and shame, about propriety and modesty. If he, reflecting on his own behavior, should find a lack of any of these virtues and yet does not feel shame in his face, who of the listeners would believe his words? Hence he, the lecturer, must enhance his effort to inculcate and embody these virtues before he can move the emperor and have him sincerely believe in what he has heard. This is why the lecture essay must come from the very hand of the lecturer himself. The essay is not merely for the convenience of reading and oral presentation.

However, lecture essays need to be worded in a warm and mild tone to fit the style of informing an emperor. This could seldom be achieved without the help of the [experienced] grand secretaries. That is why they have to be sent to the Grand Secretariat for modification. The real intention here is to get rid of any appearance of shallowness and vulgarity, and thus to nourish the emperor's intention of growing close to his Confucian officials. It is not merely for the refinement of the writing itself.

I have already considered the matter thoroughly. I dare not disregard the established practice and lightly act on what I believe. But if I lecture in this way [reading only the modified lecture essay], I am not sincere. What good is this for Your sagely learning? When I memorialized You in person, I said much of the good sense of my lecture essay was not presented, the essay's coverage was rather broad, and that it did not confine itself to the matter of literary expressions. Now, reading

117. Jiao Hong, *Guochao xianzhenglu*, 18.42; Lu Shen's epitaph was written by Xu Zan 許讚 (1473–1548).

118. *MSZSL* 99.2333/Jiajing 8/3/wuxu, 99.2335–36/Jiajing 8/3/guimao.

Your instruction [that I should speak what I have to say], my fear increases even more. It appears that in my haste, my foolish opinions did not reach You after all.

Moreover, now that the grand secretaries are in charge of everything and, according to the established practice, they are given concurrent directorship of the lectures, as they are all furthermore experienced in the study of literature, it is reasonable that when they modify the lecture essays they impart refined ideas to them. But this is only a minor point. If the lecture essays completely reflect the ideas of the Grand Secretariat, and the lecturers only read them out aloud, it would simply be incommensurate with the very intention [of the lecture institution], and thus far from the way of reciprocating sincere expressions between the emperor and the lecturer. This is why I present my forthright admonition.

I hope You realize my humble sincerity and specifically tell the Grand Secretariat to simply graciously allow us lecturers to present our opinions in the lecture essays. By way of this, the grand secretaries can also measure the level of our accomplishment. As for the discussion of ideas imbedded in the essays and the refinement of their literary expressions, they may do all they can and not merely read them.

I wish to ask that [in the lecture essays] apart from offering annotation and elucidation of the classical texts, all major government issues of the empire be allowed to be presented in analogy to the classics, one by one or in categories. In this way, whatever is not completely implemented by the ministerial offices, whatever the supervising secretaries and investigating censors know but dare not speak out, whatever the various provincial authorities are charged with but could not accomplish, can all be heard by Your Majesty in due course. In this way, the imperial position will daily grow more exalted, Your sagely learning will daily deepen, and we Your officials will further improve ourselves.<sup>119</sup>

The last paragraph was the cause of Lu Shen's dismissal. Given that the young emperor was prone to dominate the court, and the Grand Secretariat was working to control information and to influence policy, Lu's memorial inevitably raised a set of issues that could hardly be settled to the satisfaction of all concerned. Lu's contemporaries would have easily grasped the implications of his request. His sponsor, Grand Secretary Yang Yiqing, was losing the imperial ear and Zhang Cong, Yang's competitor, had recently been joined by Gui E in the Grand Secretariat. For Yang to regain the initiative, Zhang and Gui would have to be confronted and their domination undermined. Gui E was in actuality eliciting imperial support to expel Lu from the court when he memorialized in his own defense that Lu submit his original essay to justify his claim.<sup>120</sup>

119. Chen Zilong and Xu Fuyuan, eds., [*Huang*] *Ming jingshi wenbian*, 2.1552; Lu Shen, *Xingyuan ji*, 2.1a–3a.

120. He Liangju, *Siyouzhai congshuo*, pp. 147–48.

Theoretically speaking, if Lu prevailed, the Grand Secretariat's power and influence would be much reduced. If the lecturers were able to advise the emperor freely and converse with him in the lectures, the grand secretaries would be weakened in their monitoring and coordinating of the most critical state affairs. As the institutional administrators of the classics-mat and daily lectures, they would also more easily be exposed to the unpleasant consequences of unanticipated blunders by the lecturers.

The last point was indeed raised by Xu Xuemo 徐學謨 (1522–93), a perceptive ex-minister and unofficial historian of the Jiajing reign. As Xu saw it, “the established practice of the previous reigns” (*leichao taoshu* 累朝套數) was for the lecturer to submit his draft essay “ten days before the lecture to the Grand Secretariat for revision, and expound the revised essay when the day came.” Xu thought Lu right in requesting an end to this practice in favor of the lecturers’ presenting their independently written essays unaltered. But problems remained. “Suppose the lecture essays are not revised by the grand secretaries, and there comes a frantic youth who indulges himself in wild talk while great civil and military ministers are standing at the side of the emperor. What if the emperor could not bear listening? That is why lecture essays have to be previewed as a precaution.”<sup>121</sup> For the grand secretaries and the lecturers not to reach some prior understanding about what the emperor was to hear was imprudent, to say the least.

Xu did not advocate heavy editing by the grand secretaries. With excessive rewriting, “the lecturers are unable to convey their thoughts regarding correcting the emperor.” A late Ming commentator also said that modification of lecture essays was a common problem. Words of remonstrance would be considered taboo and thus avoided.<sup>122</sup> True enough. But there was no lack of ambitious officials who, given the avenue, would ignore any taboo in pursuit of personal advantage, often under the pretense of loyalty and uprightness.

A case in point is Hu Shining 胡世寧 (1469–1530), no “frantic youth” but a seasoned senior bureaucrat, who submitted unsolicited lecture essays to lodge charges against other senior courtiers. In the winter of the fourth year (early 1526), as vice minister of war, Hu submitted a memorial on the emperor's health and learning. In it he also stated, “if the emperor does not maintain proper confidentiality, he will lose his officials.” Hu asked the em-

121. Xu Xuemo, *Shimiao zhiyulu*, 6.1a–b.

122. Chen Zilong and Xu Fuyuan, eds., [*Huang*] *Ming jingshi wenbian*, 2.1552; Lu Shen, *Xingyuan ji*, 2.1a–3a.

peror not to forward the memorial to the ministries, where it would become public knowledge. For this request, one supervising secretary impeached him as evil and treacherous and for opening an avenue for secret reports.<sup>123</sup> The Veritable Records' short account aimed merely at showing Hu's lack of the ethical integrity demanded of a Confucian scholar-official. The substance of the impeachment, however, is revealed in the memorial itself. The outcome of unedited lecture essays being read in public can be inferred.

The problem with Hu Shining's memorial, titled “Pledging Loyalty and Giving Aid” (“Zhongyishu” 忠益疏),<sup>124</sup> was the three attached lecture essays. Hu wrote that he meant to submit these essays when he was called to the capital. Concerned that this might invite the “world's ridicule and offend the court” but unable to overcome his “utmost and uncontrollable loyalty to and affection for the emperor,” he presented them alongside his memorial. He hoped the emperor would read them and keep them for further reference if he found them relevant to the way of government. But if the emperor deemed them irresponsible or disloyal in nature, he hoped the emperor would give him a critical written reply and punish him, which he would willingly accept.

The first of these extraordinarily long “lecture essays” elaborated on the celebrated section of the *Great Learning* that taught that only a benevolent man (ruler) could love the good man (minister) and dislike the bad man (minister) and that a great minister was one who knew how to apply this principle in his unselfish and impartial recommendation of officials to the ruler. The implication was that the present court lacked such great ministers.

The second essay elaborated on a passage of the *Book of Documents* that stated that only the king, not the ministers, could give favor, mete out punishment, and enjoy good food. Hu was actually talking about restoring the power to recommend official appointments to the Ministry of Personnel from the Grand Secretariat. Most specifically, he cited the recent appointment of Grand Secretary Jia Yong 賈詠 (1464–1547) as evidence that the imperial influence was far overshadowed by that of the Grand Secretariat. Despite having lost his initial bid to head the Ministry of Personnel to the emperor's handpicked Xi Shu 席書 (1461–1527), Hu charged, Jia Yong became a grand secretary by the endorsement of the Grand Secretariat, which enjoyed the support of many courtiers. Hu went on to urge the emperor to

123. MSZSL 59.1404/Jiajing 4/+12/gengchen.

124. For the text of Hu's memorial and accompanying essays, see Hu Shining, *Hu Duanmin gong zuyi*, 5.24b–39a.



be resolute "for the benefit of the dynasty." Hu's actual target was the head grand secretary, Fei Hong 費宏 (1468–1535). His ambition to succeed Fei was not altogether unknown.<sup>125</sup>

The last essay went beyond the pale. Elaborating on the teaching of the *Book of Changes* that both ruler and servitor must observe the greatest confidentiality in handling affairs of mutual interest, Hu in effect asked the emperor to keep the memorialist's advice [and ill reports of others] to himself to prevent open attacks from the courtiers.<sup>126</sup>

It is difficult to imagine what might have happened if a similar essay had been presented in the open classics-mat lecture. Would the implicated officials have had to ask for pardon on the spot? Was the emperor to uphold or dismiss the charges? What if the emperor had no time to reflect and could not answer and hence caused an awkward impasse in the lecture hall or an embarrassingly abrupt end to the solemn but also joyous event? Hu Shining obviously knew that his request for confidentiality from the emperor was extraordinary. Fortunately, he was no lecturer. The Jiajing emperor certainly was also aware of difficulties of this kind when he sided with Grand Secretaries Zhang Cong and Gui E against Lu Shen.

The most nettlesome issue was the degree of revision satisfactory to the grand secretaries or both them and the lecturers. In what spirit should modifications be made and for what reasons? The case of He Tang during the Zhengde reign shows that the grand secretaries did not force a lecturer to modify his lecture essay if he was unwilling. Lu Shen's case also suggests that changes in the final version of the essays needed the common assent of the lecturers and their seniors. Lu Shen made his case precisely because Gui E recklessly edited his essay. What the emperor should or should not be told in the lectures was not simply an academic issue. Unfortunately, we do not have Lu Shen's original essay to see if it might have proven offensive to the emperor or have jeopardized the grand secretaries.

Since an emperor's learning was in the last analysis the learning of ruling and governing, classics-mat lectures theoretically were not confined to textual exposition but, rather, were to bring classical lessons to bear on current government issues and policies. Combining classical elucidation and political discussion, however, might not deliver what the lecturers had hoped for. It is unlikely that the lecturers' knowledge of the operations of the government surpassed that of the grand secretaries. The emperor, too,

125. Huang Jingfang, *Gnoshi weiyi*, p. 158.

126. Hu Shining, *Hu Duanmin gong zongyi*, 5.24b–39a.

was likely to be uninformed but autocratic if forced to make decisions without prior deliberations with his senior advisors when issues were suddenly raised in the lecture sessions. The emperor could respond well to governmental issues only when he was well versed in the governing codes and administrative statutes of the dynasties and was fairly knowledgeable of affairs of state. That, however, would require another kind of imperial learning, such as that Qiu Jun 丘濬 (1421–95) elaborated in his 1487 statecraft work, *Supplement to the Extended Meaning of the Great Learning* (*Daxue yanji bu* 大學衍義補), which provided a body of organized and fact-oriented knowledge pragmatic enough to diagnose governmental problems and offer remedies.<sup>127</sup>

### *The Interactions of the Emperor, Grand Secretaries, and Lecturers*

The triangular relationship among the Jiajing emperor, his grand secretaries, and his lecturers grew increasingly complicated. Early in his reign, Jiajing heeded the grand secretaries' advice and diligently attended the lectures. Even when he was sufficiently displeased by his antagonists in the ritual disputes to halt the classics-mat lectures and reduce his daily lectures, he did not stop his own reading. His special study of the *Extended Meaning of the Great Learning* was unprecedented for an emperor. He was keenly interested in scholarship and learning, and he no doubt had educated eunuchs to answer his queries.

Most of the time he placed great trust in the senior grand secretary. For example, he accepted the format and personnel proposed by Yang Yiqing for the daily exposition of the *Extended Meaning*, as well as the lecturers recommended by head grand secretaries Yang Tinghe, Fei Hong, Yang Yiqing, and Zhang Cong. In most cases, he also granted their requests to lighten punishments for lecturers who had offended him in some way. He even invited the grand secretaries to excursions, lectures, and banquets in the imperial parks.

Response memorandums by grand secretaries published after they died reveal some of the emperor's concerns in learning. A few examples may suffice. Yang Yiqing's replies show that the emperor read the classics and the laws and statutes of the dynasty closely in order to make decisions and implement policy. For instance, he asked about improving the text of a

127. Hung-lam Chu, "Ch'iu Chün's *Ta-hsiieh yen-i pu*."

section of the *Collected Administrative Statutes of the Great Ming* (*Da Ming buidian* 大明會典) on the capping rite.<sup>128</sup> His frequent questions to Fei Hong about poetry and essay composition prompted the jealous Gui E to compose a critical memorial.<sup>129</sup> Gui also opposed trite and convoluted exegesis by lecturers.<sup>130</sup> All the emperor's inquiries to him were about the classics. Gui's replies proved satisfactory; he employed the eminent classical scholar and Neo-Confucian theorist Wei Xiao to draft most of them during the years Wei served at the court.<sup>131</sup> The subjects of Jiajing's questions to Zhang Cong ranged from poetry appreciation to the emperor's annotations of three chapters of the *Book of Documents* to points made in lecture essays.<sup>132</sup> Most important, Zhang Cong was asked to polish the emperor's own annotations of the "Maxim of the Mind" by Fan Jun and the "Four Maxims" by Cheng Yi.<sup>133</sup>

In effect satisfying the Jiajing emperor's desire to reach the classical ideal of embodying the role of a ruler and the role of a teacher in one person, Zhang enjoyed the emperor's trust longer than anyone. Marked by trust and candidness, the relationship between the emperor and Zhang indeed approached the classical ideal that the ruler treat his officials as neighbors treat each other—friendly and close—if not yet as close as the "salt and sour plum" relation that Gu Dingchen's admirer would have us believe existed between Gu and the throne.

A measure of cordiality was maintained even when the emperor's trust in a grand secretary dissipated and another advisor took center stage. Yang Tinghe was verbally abused only long after he returned home, and then posthumously when the final verdict of the Great Rites Controversy was made public. The favorite Zhang Cong suffered three forced retirements, but those were due to Zhang's arrogance and his scheming against his rivals, not because the emperor had an inclination to be impolite to him.

When the emperor disagreed with his senior advisors, he usually showed his displeasure indirectly by denying them audiences, refusing to

128. For Yang Yiqing's replies, in which the imperial inquiries were cited, see Yang Yiqing, *Miyulu* 1, in *Yang Yiqing ji*, pp. 918–29.

129. For Gui's memorial, see *MSZSL* 68.1565/Jiajing 5/9/bingwu. For the full text, see Gui E, *Wenxiang gong zouyi*, 1.22a–24b; for Fei's reply, *MSZSL* 69.1573–74/Jiajing 5/10/wuchen.

130. See Wei Xiao, *Zhuangqu yishu*, 2.43a–46a; Gui E, *Wenxiang gong zouyi*, 7.26b–29a.

131. Wei Xiao, *Zhuangqu yishu*, 2.33b–46a; Gui E, *Wenxiang gong zouyi*, 7.17b–29a.

132. Zhang Cong, *Yndui lu*, 12.13a–14a, 14a–15a, 16a–17b.

133. *Ibid.*, 2.18b–21a, 23a–24b.

attend study sessions at which they were present, or punishing a lecturer they had recommended. Generally the grand secretaries responded by trying to maintain their dignity as best they could. Seldom would they initiate changes in the routine of the study sessions or criticize individual lecturers. They made their opinions and ideas known when they were ordered to draft responses to critical memorials.

When the emperor raised questions about the lecturers, the grand secretaries' usual response was first to offer opinions for the emperor's reference. Even the headstrong Zhang Cong and Gui E followed this course. Zhang would not comment categorically on the shortcomings of individual lecturers until the emperor issued a second order for him to do so. Likewise, when accused by Lu Shen of changing the meaning of his lecture essay, Gui asked permission to submit Lu's original to the emperor so that Jiajing could judge for himself.

The grand secretaries prevailed when the emperor consulted them on classical or literary questions by offering learned answers that displayed a ready grasp of the classics. Yang Yiqing was a master of this art. The emperor asked him if Fei Hong's opinion that Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 (1007–72) not be honored in the Confucian temple was right, since he had found in Ouyang's exegesis of "The Successful Completion of the War" ("Wucheng" 武成) chapter in the *Documents* reasons to justify his elevation of his deceased father during the ritual disputes. Yang honestly and calmly answered that since only a single piece of Ouyang's exegetical works on the subject could be found, he could not be considered a candidate for such an honor, which was reserved exclusively for recognized, esteemed classical scholars alone.<sup>134</sup> Xu Xuemo judged Yang's answer a model reply by an official to an emperor.<sup>135</sup>

Much of the Jiajing emperor's interaction with his grand secretaries in the study sessions also bore on the debates and disputes surrounding the rites to elevate his own parents. Relations peaked after Yang Tinghe's staunch supporters and identifiable sympathizers in the court were cashiered. But the emperor's good mood was soon dissipated by the struggles among the grand secretaries and among their protégés. When the emperor's interest in literature deepened, Fei Hong and Yang Yiqing polished his compositions. Gui E and Huo Tao 霍韜 (1487–1540), who were not grand secretaries but were close associates of Zhang Cong, memorialized

134. Yang Yiqing, *Miyulu*, in *Yang Yiqing ji*, 1.927–28.

135. Xu Xuemo, *Shimiao zhiyulu*, 4.5a–b.

the emperor advising him to end his literary exercises and censured Fei and Yang for engaging the emperor in poetry composition. Their criticisms were motivated by jealousy of potential rivals for the emperor's favor and a desire to encourage the emperor to pursue more philosophical and seemingly more pragmatic studies.

Their protests ironically undermined their influence on the emperor. When the imperial interest in literature declined, the emperor became more ideological and religious. After the emperor shifted his favor decisively to Daoism, his formal study of Confucian classics and histories ceased.

The Jiajing emperor's interactions with the lecturers were relatively simple. He was seldom in direct contact with them. When it became necessary to commend or reprimand them, the emperor normally referred the matter to the grand secretaries. He also sought the grand secretaries' counsel when he was not sure about a lecturer's point. Otherwise, the interactions took place through official documents—rescripts and memorials.

During the lectures, the emperor was sensitive to what he heard and saw. He showed disapproval of circuitous criticisms given by Wu Hui 吳惠 (*jr.* 1511) and Guo Weifan 郭維藩 (1475–1537). When they presented substantial evidence of the malpractices they had hinted at in their lectures, however, the emperor did not fault their precise but critical memorials. The point to be noted here is that prudent lecturers might act in concert, but they had to begin with hints and suggestions and dwell on principles until they were commanded to be concrete and specific.

The emperor's reaction was harsher when a lecturer was arrogant, as in the case of Dong Qi. His ire was roused, too, when the lecturer was ill prepared, as Wang Tian's case illustrates. One reason for his impatience was his own strong educational background. Unlike most of his predecessors, he had received a good education as a prince in the province. As Yang Yiqing remarked to reaffirm the imperial commitment to the lectures, "Royal tutors and reader-companions were ordered to read and expound the classics and histories to You. No things for pleasure were allowed in Your presence, no mean persons were allowed by Your side."<sup>136</sup> Jiajing's solid intellectual foundation made simple and routine elucidation by the lecturers unappealing.

The lecturers' tendency to be pedantic also bored the emperor. Hu Shining accurately described the situation: "Your Majesty has reached a stage of sagacious comprehension. . . . [The lecturers] should not read and

136. Yang Yiqing, *Miyulu*, in *Yang Yiqing ji*, 18.694–96.

expound [the classics] line by line and chapter by chapter, which wastes much time and squanders one's mind and labors." Hu wanted the lecturers to discuss personnel matters and the handling of state affairs.<sup>137</sup> Yang Yiqing also pointed out the lecturers' regrettable practices: "They would choose to expound delightful expressions from the [assigned] books [but] not expressions they felt to be slightly suspicious or taboo. . . . [Or] they would present flattery at the end of the lecture to make the emperor feel self-important."<sup>138</sup> The lecturers' preferences were inspired more by a desire for self-protection than by an effort to promote imperial arrogance. In the end, however, they also lost the emperor's interest.

Many lecturers and potential lecturers sought the emperor's attention by presenting unsolicited writings under the pretext of displaying loyalty and affection. The results were mixed. Hanlin Compiler Sun Cheng'en 孫承恩 (1481–1561), who lectured on the *Extended Meaning*,<sup>139</sup> earned imperial praise when he presented his rhymed writings and memorials urging the emperor to devote himself to learning and personal cultivation.<sup>140</sup> Liao Daonan, as mentioned above, gained imperial approval when he presented his unsolicited elucidation of the "Great Plan" chapter of the *Documents*.<sup>141</sup> Often lecturers presented congratulatory writings en masse to the throne for the celebration of auspicious events or natural phenomena. These likewise met with approval. In contrast, the emperor coldly rebuffed Zhan Ruoshui and told him that he could better achieve his aims by not bothering the emperor with memorials urging serious learning and courtesy to the ministers.<sup>142</sup>

The emperor became furious when the lecturer's comments implied criticism of the emperor's position in the Great Rites Controversy—the singular event that haunted his psyche as well as the atmosphere of the lectures. Even writings of dubious relevance could provoke criticisms of officials who had once opposed his position. For instance, when he read Zhu Xi's "Inscription for the Hall to Brighten Ethical Relationships of the Youxi County School in Nanjian Subprefecture" ("Nanjian zhou Youxi xianxue Mingluntang ming" 南劍州尤溪縣學明倫堂銘); he charged his adversaries with the following: Qiao Yu 喬宇 (1457–1524) did not listen to

137. Hu Shining, *Hu Duanmin gong zongyi*, 8.35a–43a.

138. Yang Yiqing, *Miyulu*, in *Yang Yiqing ji*, 18.694–96.

139. Jiao Hong, *Guocao xianzhenglu*, 18.24; Sun's epitaph was written by Xu Jie 徐階 (1503–83).

140. MSZSL 2.88/Zhengde 16/5/gengshen, 5.223/Zhengde 16/8/yiwei.

141. MSZSL 76.1690–93/Jiajing 6/5/xinsi.

142. MSZSL 133.3150/Jiajing 10/12/wuzi.

his teacher Yang Yiqing; Gui Hua 桂華 (*juren* 1513) was on poor terms with his brother Gui E; Zhan Ruoshui kept his distance from his friend Fang Xianfu.<sup>143</sup> The second person in each pair supported Jiajing in the Great Rites Controversy.

The case of Hanlin Compiler and potential lecturer Yang Ming 楊名 (1505–59) shows how far the Jiajing emperor could go when provoked. Yang criticized Minister of Personnel Wang Hong 汪鎰 (*js.* 1502, d. 1536) and Marquis of Wuding Guo Xun 武定侯郭勛 (d. 1541) as bad ministers. He also criticized the emperor for patronizing Daoist priests inside the palace. The infuriated emperor shot back that Yang was “fishing for reputation and marketing uprightness” (*guming maizhi* 沽名賣直), drawing wrong analogies, and attempting to avenge the losers in the ritual controversy. Yang was imprisoned for interrogation and torture. The incident grew more serious when Wang Hong countered that Yang Ming was attempting to rehabilitate the disgraced former grand secretary Yang Tinghe, his fellow native and close neighbor, by forming alliances with other officials. Wang added that Yang was encouraged to be so deceptive and daring because the grand secretaries were enforcing conformity and consolidating their power by forming cliques. The emperor ordered an investigation of those behind Yang Ming, which implicated Hanlin officials Cheng Wende 程文德 (1497–1559) and Huang Zongming 黃宗明 (*js.* 1514, d. 1536). They were demoted to the provinces, and Yang Ming was exiled.<sup>144</sup>

The emperor's rage and scorn for the lecturers were often well founded. In addition to an occasional lack of preparation and unapproved leaves of absence, some of the longtime daily lecturers exhibited a lack of personal integrity and official ethics. Despite the lecturers' various shortcomings, the emperor stopped the supervising secretaries and investigating censors from following the practice of enumerating lecturers' failings in their lectures.<sup>145</sup> The seasonal gifts to the lecturers continued, and their deceased parents were always given exceptional honors—posthumous titles, government funds for the construction of graveyards, and sacrificial offerings from imperial envoys—“in consideration of their [sons'] service in the reading and exposition sessions.” For the same reason, lecturers received good appointments in the higher levels of the central government. Even imprudent and corrupt lecturers were punished relatively lightly. When the

143. MSZSL 73.1653–54/Jiajing 6/2/jiaxu.

144. MSZSL 143.3326–31/Jiajing 11/10/jiashen.

145. MSZSL 73.1644/Jiajing 6/2/renzi.

veteran lecturer Dong Qi was found guilty of making unsubstantiated accusations against his fellow lecturers and of delaying the observation of his mourning obligations in anticipation of a favorable appointment, he was permanently dismissed from officialdom. However, he was spared an exhaustive investigation and allowed to continue to wear official attire.<sup>146</sup> When Xu Jin, another veteran, was impeached, interrogated, and found guilty of bribery, the emperor only deprived him of his official status.<sup>147</sup>

All in all, the interactions of the emperor and his lecturers were cordial, formal, and serious. The emperor was never easygoing but seldom overly harsh. Occasionally, he surprised the lecturers by calling an unscheduled session or by meeting in an unfamiliar location. The lecturers were also respectful, particularly following a reprimand for lack of proper manners. Few lecturers were able to gain the favor and regard the Jiajing emperor showed Gu Dingchen. The secret of Gu's success was his modest but honest expression of his own understanding of the classical texts he was expounding. One can only wonder why so few of his colleagues studied his example.

The relationship between the grand secretaries and the lecturers was more ambiguous. The grand secretaries were unanimous in urging the emperor to study and to grant frequent audiences to senior officials. Their institutional roles, however, differed. The grand secretaries' duty was to nominate and evaluate lecturers, and they did promote their own candidates. Even Gui E, who was critical of the lecture tradition, promoted his scholarly advisor and ghostwriter Wei Xiao to a position that qualified him to be appointed a classics-mat lecturer.<sup>148</sup> But since all the grand secretaries before Zhang Cong and Gui E began their careers as Hanlin officials, they shared a general understanding with the lecturers regarding the appropriate content and delivery of the lectures. Harmony and cooperation were made possible by the fact that there was a kind of teacher-disciple relationship between them. The result of this relationship was reciprocal: the grand secretaries were willing to help the junior lecturers they introduced to overcome their initial difficulties, but they also counted on the latter's support when they confronted the emperor. Thus, most lecturers were protégés of the grand secretaries.

146. MSZSL 121.2903/Jiajing 10/1/bingxu.

147. MSZSL 127.3024–26/Jiajing 10/+6/gengyin.

148. For Gui's recommendation of Wei, see Gui E, *Wenxiang gong zonyi*, 6.23a–24a; for Wei's promotion to chancellor of the National University, see MSZSL 99.2352/Jiajing 8/3/renxu.

That relationship, however, began to change following the departure of Yang Yiqing, the last of the statesmen who had begun their career in the Hanlin Academy and matured during the Hongzhi reign. Zhang Cong and Gui E adopted a markedly different style in handling relations with lecturers. When Zhang felt that classics-mat lecturer Wei Xiao was threatening to engage the scholarly attention of the emperor, he did not hesitate to promote Wei to a high-ranking office, the officials of which nonetheless were disqualified from serving as lecturers.<sup>149</sup> The unprecedented shakeup of the Hanlin Academy in 1527 testifies to the threat the emperor's confidants perceived in the close alliance of the Grand Secretariat and the Hanlin Academy. The bloody group protest in 1524 against the emperor's resolute elevation of his parents, on the other hand, was proof of the success of the more traditional relationship between the grand secretaries and the lecturers. Lu Shen's later protests against Gui E were a counter-example in two senses—a show of support for Yang Yiqing's more amiable relations with the lecturers and criticism of Gui E's adversarial style of relations. If it had been Yang Yiqing who modified Lu Shen's essay, one wonders whether Lu would have protested.

Despite the domination of Zhang Cong and Gui E, some continuity with the old style of relations survived. It was the rivalries among the lecturers themselves and their sponsors that encouraged the emperor's arbitrary behavior and eventually led to his loss of respect for the institution altogether. When the grand secretaries and the lecturers held the same views or stood on the same ground, even a headstrong emperor could be guided to a compromise. For instance, the Jiajing emperor accepted the same traditional exegesis advocated by both Yang Yiqing and Gui E at the expense of a new interpretation by Gu Dingchen, to which he was initially inclined.

However, it was also Gui E who demanded that each day one lecturer be called to lecture without a supervising grand secretary being present so that advice could be given free from intimidation and possible retaliation.<sup>150</sup> This mistrust of, or challenge to, higher authority weakened the strength of the institution in the long run. The days when Lü Nan and Lu Shen courageously voiced their opinions to the face of the emperor came to an end when the lecturers, and eventually their mentoring and supervis-

149. Huang Jingfang, *Guoshi weiji*, p. 157.

150. Gui E, *Wenxiang gong zuoyi*, 2.1a–2b; see MSZSL 76.1695–97/Jiajing 6/5/yiyou for the date.

ing grand secretaries, became adept at and willing to present Daoist *qingci* prayers. No longer could they aspire to the mantle of imperial “teacher”; their new function was to cater to the emperor's wishes. Their ability to claim the moral high ground and serve as a wise counselor or a critic was vanquished by their desire to please the emperor and advance their own careers.

### Conclusion

The Jiajing emperor obviously took the lectures seriously. Ever sensitive to his lecturers and their lecture essays, he was also dissatisfied with certain conventions of the system and traditional interpretation of the classics. His moods, however, were much conditioned by the lingering ritual disputes over the clan and dynastic status of his parents.

As David Robinson argues in Chapter 8 in this volume on the imperial family and the Mongol legacy, the Jiajing emperor's status as an outsider—a prince from the provinces—deeply influenced his perception and reception of court culture. Unfamiliar with the style the prestigious Hanlin academicians adopted in the lectures, he deeply distrusted the courtiers in ascendance during the early years of his reign, who extolled the harmony of civil officials under the leadership of the Grand Secretariat in negotiation or confrontation with the throne.<sup>151</sup> His confidants, who eventually came to dominate the Grand Secretariat and the Hanlin Academy, had not begun their civil service careers in the Hanlin. Their antagonism against the establishment led to hostility toward the lectures and lecturers as traditionally constituted. Tension developed among all those involved in the institution. In good times, cordiality and mutual respect prevailed; in bad times, the emperor suspended both lectures and court audiences, and the grand secretaries chastised disrespectful lecturers.

Most fundamentally, these tensions betrayed the emperor's sense of frustration. From his lecturers, he demanded a seriousness that was to be manifested in their manner and preparation. If the student should be respectful to his teachers, so his servitors (the teachers) should also be respectful to their monarch (the student). The problem lay in the priority to be given these conflicting roles. Timely emphasis of their political, social, and ethical roles proved difficult for both the Jiajing emperor and his lecturers.

151. For this point as it relates to the preceding Zhengde emperor, see Hung-lam Chu, Review of *The Chosen One*, esp. p. 275.

The nature of the court vastly complicated the question of what role was to be adopted at what time. Culture may be understood as expressions that a large group of people deeply believe in and unconsciously act out. The court was burdened because its actions had far-reaching repercussions. It was not merely the center of government. It was also the source of civilization. The scholarship it promoted, the ways of learning it practiced, the morals it exalted, the ethics it professed, eventually influenced the rest of the empire. The behavior of the emperor and his officials was emulated by aspirants to court life and high culture. Whether the emperor indeed behaved as a respectful student of his courtiers had a great impact on the aspirations and morals of officials and the populace at large.

The problem was who was to dictate what expressions and styles were correct and worthy for the court to exemplify. The grand secretaries and the lecturers cherished their job in the belief that an emperor's classical and historical learning was an inseparable part of statecraft. An emperor who could learn from what they taught would tend to share their political culture and thus be more inclined to respect the institutions and administrative mechanisms through which government functioned and operated. Accordingly, they saw themselves both as teachers and as advisors to the emperor. Their ideal demanded the monarch to learn from them before he ruled them.

The Jiajing emperor did not entertain this idea for long. Competing attractions vied for his body and his spirit, his emotions and his intellect. In fact, he learned quickly to turn himself into the ruler and teacher of all. Early in his reign, the format and the substance of the lecture were defined for him by Grand Secretary Yang Tinghe, who also urged him to study the founding emperor's *Ancestral Instructions* in hopes that he would become a strong ruler. In the end, he not only specifically studied the *Extended Meaning*, a text the dynastic founder exalted, but also emulated the founder in annotating classical works of statecraft value and authoring maxims in the tradition of Neo-Confucian philosophy. In doing so, he showed himself not only a worthy filial descendant but also an embodiment of the classical ideal of combining the roles of ruler and teacher in one person. The function of the lecture now changed from instruction of the emperor to observation and evaluation of the lecturer. As the lecturer's dual roles of teacher and servitor shrank to the latter, halfhearted and perfunctory performances became the rule. The serious lecturer found no genuine satisfaction in what had become a hollow performance. The nature of the lecture changed when ambitious courtiers used it for career advancement and power.

Equally observable in the court lectures throughout these years were imperial comments on such values as filial piety, loyalty, affection, sincerity, respectfulness, and seriousness. "Loyalty and affection," that is, an official's loyalty to and affection for his emperor, were especially emphasized. But the understanding of these terms changed over the years. The argument between lecturer Lu Shen and Grand Secretary Gui E over the control or promotion of the kind of information and knowledge deemed important for the emperor to receive in the classics-mat lecture was also a matter of showing loyalty and affection. Both Lu Shen's demand for consistency in style and substance in the presentation of lectures—sincere, earnest, and relevant to current issues—as a proper way of informing an emperor and the monitoring grand secretary's stress on smooth and direct elucidation of classical precepts were inspired by the ideal of loyalty and affection. Their divergent stations led them to stress different facets of the same goal.

It remained for the emperor to endow the sense of "loyalty and affection" with a new form and substance. The emperor was fond of using the phrase "loyalty and affection" to praise officials whose deeds he appreciated. Both good-willed and self-serving memorialists invoked the same phrase. Only the lecturers seldom belabored the point. They considered their very job an unmistakable manifestation of their loyalty and affection. What could be more loyal and loving than educating the imperial person in the sages' wisdom and virtues they extolled? They defined loyal as faithful. Faithfulness to the lecture institution and earnestness in their lectures were expressions of supreme loyalty.

The Jiajing emperor, however, favored a more personal expression of the same value, as evinced in his use of the same phrase to praise Gu Dingchen's composition and presentation of Daoist *qingci* prayers for the imperial cause. Although neither the first nor the only Ming monarch with this preference, he was the most successful. For a long time to come, the loyalty and affection of his courtiers would be transformed from respect for dynastic statutes and institutions to a sycophancy symbolized by leading courtiers' expertise and enthusiasm in the composition of *qingci* prayers. Daoist priests, alchemists, and whoever satisfied his personal whims and lusts were loyal and loving to him, and by extension to the state and the dynasty.

In so doing, the Jiajing emperor fostered a political culture that eventually saw civil courtiers degenerate into imperial sycophants. In the process, the courtiers forfeited their political significance in relentless struggles for

power and wealth under an autocracy that appeared dictatorial but was in fact subject to many competing influences. This drastic change in court culture did not go unnoticed. As a late Ming comment on Hu Shining's lecture-cum-confiding report writings noted: "One wonders if it was not the customs of his times that caused him to behave thus, evidence that even the worthies were not exempted [from selfish considerations]."<sup>152</sup>

152. Huang Jingfang, *Guoshi weiji*, p. 158.

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## FIVE

*Didactic Picturebooks for Late Ming**Emperors and Princes*

Julia K. Murray

This chapter examines Ming officials' use of pictures as a means of encouraging a young emperor or heir apparent to develop into an ideal Confucian sage ruler. It focuses on four illustrated anthologies of historical exemplars, all of which were devised as supplements to the normal princely curriculum of the *Four Books* and *Five Classics*. Created over a 100-year period, from 1495 to about 1595, these compendia took the form of albums of paintings matched with punctuated and annotated texts. Three were sponsored by officials whose duties included lecturing to the emperor or crown prince, and one was submitted by a minister at the Nanjing court. Chronologically and in certain other respects, the four compilations fall into two pairs. The earlier two, submitted in 1495 and 1539, respectively, bore the same title, *Sheng Gong tu* 聖功圖 (Pictures of sagely accomplishment).<sup>1</sup> Intended for instructing very young crown princes, both were rejected by the reigning emperor and neither has survived, except through descriptions in documentary accounts. By contrast, numerous woodblock-printed editions reproduced and perpetuated the two later collections, *Dijian tushuo* 帝鑑圖說 (The emperor's mirror, illustrated and discussed; submitted to the throne in 1573) and *Yangzheng tujie* 養正圖解 (Cultivating rectitude, illustrated and explained; 1597). Even though the handpainted originals are not

1. Submission memorials for both are recorded in *Xiaozong shilu* in *Ming shilu* (hereafter cited as XZSL), 105.2b-3a (pp. 1914-15); and *Shizong shilu* in *Ming shilu* (hereafter cited as SZSL), 226.6a-b (pp. 4703-4), respectively.