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Huangfu Mi, Preface To And Biographies From "Accounts Of High-Minded Men"

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IN CHINA, THE customary path for the educated man was to become a scholar-official, one who could apply his knowledge and talent to the benefit of the state and the people through an official position in the state administration. While this path might lead to worldly success and an enduring legacy, it also could lead to frustration and compromise in terms of realizing one's personal aspirations, or perhaps to censure and punishment, or even execution, because of complicity in the doings of a faction that lost power or influence. Some men, however, forewent or withdrew from office, choosing instead to remain "in reclusion": disengaged from worldly affairs, freed from compromise, and resolved to the fulfillment of their lofty, individualistic pursuits. These High-minded Men achieved recognition by centuries and centuries of scholar-officials for having forged an alternative to the conventional life of service to the state, and as a rule they were appreciated as exponents of the sort of freedom that those bound to official position could never attain. Often portrayed as uncompromising in ethical conduct, unconventional in lifestyle, or unencumbered in mindset and doings, these High-minded Men were portrayed as the antithesis of the government official. They commonly were associated with mountains and the wilderness, their place of residence often being portrayed as a private spot far away from the centers of political and worldly activities, so they sometimes have been termed "recluses" or "hermits" in English; in Chinese they commonly are known as "Hidden Men," "Disengaged Persons," or "High-minded Men."

Copious references to High-minded Men are found throughout Chinese writings from the earliest times through the present, and at least since the beginning of the Common Era biographical accounts of these men were compiled in a very large number of books, for reference, for edification, or for appreciation. The earliest extant compilation of these accounts is Huangfu Mi's (215–282) *Accounts of High-minded Men (Gaoshi zhuan)*. Huangfu Mi himself practiced reclusion as a way of life, and later compilations of the lives of men in reclusion invariably would include an account of him, too. Like Huangfu Mi, all of the people whose accounts Huangfu Mi chose to include in his *Accounts of High-minded Men* practiced reclusion; in their own way they shunned political involvement and eschewed appointments in the central administration. Huangfu Mi's preface to his *Accounts* is brief, but it provides explicit information concerning the author's intentions and his understanding of the parameters of substantive reclusion; furthermore, Huangfu Mi's compilation by and large set the pattern for how reclusion came to be seen in traditional Chinese culture. Huangfu Mi's initial remarks establish the validity of reclusion since great antiquity and include a number of classical justifications. He then goes on to critique earlier compilations of accounts of reclusion and ends by expressing his own intentions. He is explicit that principled suicide was not to be considered within the compass of his vision of high-minded conduct. The individuals whose biographies are included below from Huangfu Mi's *Accounts* all have been celebrated in Chinese writings throughout the ages as High-minded Men par excellence.—AB

Preface

Confucius stated that "[King Wu of Zhou] called to office those who had retired into obscurity, so that throughout the kingdom the hearts of the people turned toward him." Master Hongya established the Way of High-mindedness during the age of the earliest emperors, and Xu You and Shanjuan would not let down their resolve during the reigns of Tang and Yu (i.e., the legendary Emperors Yao and Shun). [Through the Three Ages of Antiquity, the Qin and the Han, and down to the Wei arising and receiving the mandate, in all these times the rulers of worthy men in each and every case extended invitation to those who were secluded in the cliffside crannies, and sought after those who had withdrawn from the age. (Note from *Taiping yulan*)]

On account of this, in [the *Book of*] *Changes* there are the implications of (gifts to worthy men of) "bundled silk," and in [the *Book of*] *Rites* there is the institution of (ritually bestowed) "dark-colored pecuniary silks." The poets issued forth the song "White Colt" (about the flight of the worthy man from an unworthy court); the *Spring and Autumn* [*Annals*] extolled the integrity of Zizang (who declined the throne on principle); and according to the "Monthly Ordinances of the Hall of Clarity," during the final month of spring, one should "extend invitations to renowned gentlemen and pay ceremony to worthy ones." This being the case, then, gentlemen who loftily made renunciations were the ones promoted by the regal government, serving the function of curbing corruption and quelling avarice.

Many are those [men-in-reclusion] who were omitted or passed over by the [Grand] Historian [Sima Qian] and Ban [Gu] (in their comprehensive histories of the times). Liang Hong (before 24–after 80 B.C.E.) eulogized Disengaged Persons, and Su Shun (late 1st–early 2nd c. C.E.) classified High-minded Gentlemen. Some, in recording also cases of letting down one's resolve, were indiscriminate and adulterated. Others selected from the Qin and Han of recent times, and did not reach back to the distant past. Now, when we contemplate these men, we especially adore what they have established; how much more so should we acclaim their virtue and extoll their deeds!

I, Mi, have selected from past and present the men of eight ages who themselves were not humbled by a king or a lord and whose reputations were not dissipated by the passage of time, from [the time of] Yao down to the Wei, more than ninety men in all. All those who may [simply] have held fast to their resolve in the manner of [Bo] Yi and [Shu] Qi (who starved to death in the mountains rather than associate with a ruler they thought to be unworthy), whose chosen acts mayhaps were like those of the two Gong (Gong Sheng, who starved himself to death rather than visit the court of the "usurper" Wang Mang, and Gong She, who often was paired with Gong Sheng as a literary reference), I do not record. Authored by Huangfu Mi.

Biographies from Huangfu Mi's *Accounts of High-minded Men*

The Nest-dwelling Elder

The so-called Nest-dwelling Elder was a Hidden Man (i.e., a man in reclusion) of the time of (the legendary emperor) Yao. He lived in the mountains, and did not pursue worldly gain. As he was old in years and slept in a nest he had made in the trees, people of the time called him the Nest-dwelling Elder. When Yao wished to cede his rule to Xu You, Xu You told the Nest-dwelling Elder, who said, "Why do you not hide yourself and keep your brilliance inside? It's as if you're no friend of mine." He then pushed him down with a blow to the chestXu You felt mortified

and could not contain himself. He then went over to a clear and cold waterflow to rinse out his ears and wipe his eyes, and said, "In making him listen to those covetous words, I have betrayed my friend." Thereupon he departed, and they did not see each other for the rest of their lives.

Xu You

Xu You, whose courtesy-name was Wuzhong, was a man from Huaili in Yangcheng. As a person he held fast to dutiful conduct and followed the path of uprightness. He would not sit at an inappropriate placement, would not eat inappropriate victuals. He later went into reclusion amid the marshes and fertile lands. When Yao wished to cede his rule to Xu You, he told Xu You, "When sun and moon have come out, yet one does not extinguish the candle's flames, then in terms of providing illumination, are they not disadvantaged? When timely rain has fallen, yet one still irrigates and waters, then in terms of providing moisture, is that not just making work? Now you, sir, are quite established and so all under heaven is ordered; yet still I act as your surrogate. I regard myself as inadequate, and request to convey the rule of the empire to you." Xu You replied, "You brought order to the empire. As the empire already is in good order, were I to go ahead and replace you, would I be doing it for a name? A name is the guest of reality; would I be doing it to be a guest? When the wren nests in the deep woods, it takes no more than a branch. When the mole rat drinks from the river, it does no more than fill its belly. Go home and desist, m'lord! I have no use at all for the empire. Even when the man in the kitchen has not put order to the kitchen, the surrogate of the ancestors who is leading the sacrificial ceremonies certainly will not leap over the goblets and platters to replace him."[1] He did not accept and escaped away.

Nieque (Xu You's teacher) met up with Xu You and asked, "Where are you off to?" Xu You replied, "I'm escaping Yao." Nieque asked, "What are you referring to?" Xu You answered, "Now Yao understands how worthy men profit the empire, yet he does not understand how they cheat the empire. It is only people other than the worthies who understand this." Xu You thenceforth hid out plowing in the area of Song shan, the central of the five sacred peaks, at the base of Ji Mountain on the northern bank of the Ying River. For the rest of his life he showed no fancy for governing the empire.

Yao once again summoned Xu You, to be leader of nine states. Xu You did not even wish to hear about it, and rinsed out his ears on the bank of the Ying. Just then his friend, the Nest-dwelling Elder, was leading his oxen over to water them. He saw Xu You rinsing his ears and asked the reason. Xu You replied, "Yao wished to summon me to be the leader of the nine states. I loathed hearing his words, and for this reason rinsed my ears." The Nest-dwelling Elder said, "If you were to place yourself on a high cliff or in a deep vale, the roads used by men would not reach you, and who would be able to see you? You purposely flit about wishing to be heard of, seeking your fame and renown. You have fouled my oxen's mouths." He led his oxen upstream to water them.

When Xu You died, he was buried at the top of Ji Mountain. Also called Xu You's Mountain, it is located a bit more than ten tricents south of Yangcheng. Yao subsequently visited his grave and gave him the posthumous title of Lord of Ji Mountain, and thus his spirit could receive sacrifices accessory to those provided to the Five Sacred Peaks. From generation to generation he has been presented sacrificial offerings, and this practice continues up until today.

Lao Zi

Lao Zi, Li Er, with the courtesy-name Boyang, was a man from Chen. He was born during the time of the Yin (Shang) dynasty and served as principal historian for the Zhou. He was devoted

to nourishing his vital essence and *qi*. He placed value on receiving from others and did not make a show of himself. He transferred to the position of historian and conservator of the archives, where he remained for more than eighty years. The *Records of the Grand Historian (Shiji)* says that it was for more than two hundred years. At the time he was known as a hidden princely man. He was given the posthumous appellation "Dan." When Confucius went to Zhou he visited Lao Zi. Recognizing him as a sage, Confucius took him as his teacher. Later, when the virtue of the Zhou declined, Lao Zi mounted a cart pulled by a black ox and entered into the area of the Greater Qin (i.e., the far western, non-Sinitic civilizations). When he was passing through the western pass, the guardian of the pass, Yin Xi, observed the ethereal emanations and knew of his arrival in advance. So he posted a description, blocked the way, and waited for him. Finally, Lao Zi did arrive as expected. Yin Xi compelled him to compose writings, so he wrote down the *Classic of the Way and Virtue (Daode jing)* in more than five thousand words. Lao Zi is considered the patriarch of the lineage of Daoist teachings. Because he was old in years, his writing was known as the *Lao Zi (Master Lao)*.

Laolai Zi

The one known as Laolai Zi was a man from (the state of) Chu. Having met with a time when the world was in disorder, he fled from the world and farmed on the sunny side of Meng Mountain. Aster and reed served for his walls, tumbleweed and artemisia were used for his room. Branches and timber served for his bed, yarrow and mugwort were used for his mat. He drank from the waters and ate wild pulse; cultivating the mountains, he sowed and planted. Someone spoke of him to the King of Chu, and the King of Chu thereupon arrived by carriage at Lai Zi's gate. Lai Zi just then was weaving a basket. The king said, "I would humbly wish to trouble you, master, with looking after the government." Laolai Zi said, "I assent." The king departed. Laolai Zi's wife returned from wood-gathering and said, "Did you agree to it?" Laolai said, "It is so." His wife then said, "Your wife has heard that one who can feed you with wine and meat can follow up with whip and cane. One who can make designs with office and salary can follow up with the executioner's axe. Your wife is one who is unable to submit to the control of another." His wife then threw down her basket and departed. Laolai Zi also followed after his wife; they stopped when they had reached Jiangnan (the territory south of the Yangtze). They said, "The hairs and feathers of birds and beasts can be plaited into clothing, and their leftover kernels are sufficient for food." Confucius once heard of their rationale, and furrowing his brows he took on a renewed countenance over it. Laolai Zi composed writings amounting to fifteen rolls (of bamboo or wooden strips), which spoke of the utility of the lineage of Daoist teachings. No one knows how he came to his end.

Yan Hui

Yan Hui, with the courtesy-name of Ziyuan, was a man from the state of Lu. He was a disciple of Confucius. He was poor, but he found joy in the Way. He withdrew to reside in the humble alleyways, sleeping with crooked elbow (for his pillow). Confucius said, "Hui, you've come from a family that is poor, and you live in the most modest circumstances. Why do you not take an official position?" Hui replied, "I do not wish to serve in office. I possess fifty *mu* (a bit less than six acres) of land outside the city wall, sufficient enough to provide porridge and gruel, and ten *mu* of gardens inside the wall, sufficient enough to produce silk and hemp (for cloth). Drumming out the musical tones *gong* and *shang* is sufficient enough for my amusement. I repeat what I have

heard from you, my Master, and this is sufficient for my happiness. What would I wish to take up official service for?" Confucius was moved and took on a renewed countenance, and said, "Excellent!, Hui's convictions."

Zhuang Zhou

Zhuang Zhou (also commonly referred to as Zhuang Zi, i.e., Master Zhuang) was a man from Meng in the state of Song. When young he studied the *Lao Zi* and worked as a deputy officer in the Lacquer Garden. He subsequently left the world behind, freed himself from constraint, and no longer served in office. Of kings, lords, and men of consequence, not one could obtain his services in any particular capacity.

King Wei of Chu sent his grandees to engage Zhuang Zhou's services with hundreds in gold. Zhou just then was fishing on the banks of the Pu; grasping his fishing pole he did not pay them heed. He said, "I have heard that in Chu there is a sacred tortoise that has been dead for two thousand years. Wrapped in cloth and kept in a basket, it is stored in the temple hall. Would this tortoise prefer being regarded as precious, having his bones preserved without anything for it to do, or would it prefer living and dragging its tail in the mud?" The grandees said, "It simply would rather drag its tail in the mud." Zhuang Zi said, "Be off. I am just now dragging my tail in the mud."

Someone further invited Zhou with coins worth thousands in gold to serve as prime minister. Zhou replied, "Do you not see the sacrificial ox used in the suburban sacrificial rites? It is clothed in patterned embroidery, and fed with grasses and pulse. At the moment it is led into the great temple, it wishes it were an orphan piglet, but can it get its wish?" To the end of his life he did not serve in office.

Heshang Zhangren

As for the one known as Heshang Zhangren (the Adept by the River), it is not known from which state he hailed. He had keen understanding of the arts of Lao Zi, and hid his family and personal names, residing by the banks of the (Yellow) River. He wrote a *Commentary to the Lao Zi by Line and Section,* and for this reason he was known to the world as the Adept by the River. At the end of the Warring States period, when the feudal lords were vying with one another, all the men who expounded ideologies overcame one another with power and position. Only the Adept hid himself in reclusion, practicing the Way. He had not declined even when aged. He passed on his vocation to Anqisheng, and through it has come to be considered as a patriarch of a lineage of Daoist teachings.

Anqisheng

The one known as Anqisheng (literally, "Born in What Period?") was a man from Langya. He received his teachings from the Adept by the River and sold medicinal substances by the shores of the sea. Even when old he did not serve in office. People of his time called him the Thousand-Year-Old Elder. When Qin Shihuang, the First August Emperor of Qin, traveled to the east, he requested to speak with Anqisheng, and for three days and three nights presented gold and ceremonial jades, which straightaway were counted in the hundreds of thousands. Anqisheng moved it out to the Fuxiang Pavilion, then departed. He left behind a vermilion-colored jade pillar-foot-

ing in reciprocation and left a piece of writing to be given to the First August Emperor, which read, "After several tens of years, look for me at the foot of Penglai Mountain (where Transcendents lived on an island amid the ocean)." When the Qin was vanquished, Anqisheng and his friend Kuai Tong had some associations with Xiang Yu (a contender for the empire), who wished to grant him an entitlement, but he would not accept in the end.

The Four Hoaryheads (Si hao)

The ones known as the Four Hoaryheads (Si hao) were all from Zhi in Henei (north of Luoyang, near modern Jiyuan *xian,* Henan), or, according to one source, from Ji (northeast of modern Xinxiang City, Henan, west of modern Ji *xian*). The first was called Dongyuan gong (Elder of the Eastern Garden); the second, Luli xiansheng (Master from Lu Hamlet); the third, Qili ji (Younger One from Qi Hamlet); and the fourth, Xia Huang gong (Venerable Huang from Xia). They all (were dedicated to) cultivating the Way and refining themselves; if not for a higher purpose they would be unmoved. During the time of the First Emperor of Qin, when they perceived the tyrannical way of the Qin government, they withdrew into the mountains of Lantian (some twenty-five miles southeast of the capital) and composed a song, which goes:

Hazy so hazy, the high mountains;
The deep valley twists and twines.
Fulgent, refulgent, the purple polypore:
With it we remedy hunger.
The ages of Yao and Shun are distant,
Where might we find a home?
Horses in fours, baldachins tall—
The troubles they bring too great.
Wealth and nobility may awe people, but—
  that can't compare to the way
Being poor and humble frees the will.

They then together set off into the Shangluo region (near Lantian), going into reclusion at Mount Difei to await the settling of the world. When the Qin was overthrown, the Han Emperor Gao heard of them and summoned them (for office), but they did not go. They hid themselves deeply in the Southern Mountains (i.e., Zhongnan shan); he was unable to bend them.

Xiang Zhang

Xiang Zhang, with the courtesy-name of Ziping (also known as Shang Ziping), was a man from Chaoge in Henei (northeast of western Xinxiang City, Henan). He lived in reclusion and did not serve in office. By nature he esteemed equanimity, and he was fond of and proficient in the *Lao Zi* and the *Book of Changes.* Being impoverished, he lacked the wherewithal to feed himself, but charitable people repeatedly provided food on his behalf. He accepted this, and taking for himself only what was sufficient, returned the remainder. Wang Yi, Grand Minister of Works under Wang Mang, selected him for office year after year before he came (to the capital). Yi wished to recommend him to Mang and desisted only after steadfast refusal. Xiang Zhang then secluded himself in reclusion at home. Reading the *Book of Changes,* when he came to the hexagrams "Sun" and "Yi" ("Diminution" and "Increase," i.e., loss and gain), he sighed deeply and exclaimed, "I

long have known that wealth is not comparable to poverty, and that prominent status is not as good as humble circumstances. Yet I never understood how superior life was when compared with death. During the Jianwu period (25–56 C.E.), the marriages of my sons and daughters were all completed; I now declare that I am severing all familial responsibilities and will not have any further interest in them. It is to be as if I were dead." With this he then set free his will and along with Qin Qing of Beihai, a man who shared his predilections, together roamed the five sacred peaks and the great mountains. In the end it is not known what became of him.

Yan Guang

Yan Guang (also known as Zhuang Guang), with the courtesy-name of Ziling, was a man from Yuyao in Guiji (near modern Shaoxing in Zhejiang Province). When young he made a name for being high-minded, and studied at the imperial academy with the future Guangwu emperor. When that emperor took the throne, Guang then changed his family and given names, and went off hidden in reclusion. The emperor remembered how worthy he was and issued a description of him in order to seek him out. Later, the state of Qi sent in a memorial stating that there was a lone man dressed in sheepskin who fished in the wetlands. The emperor suspected that this was Guang, and sent a comfortable carriage (with padded wheels) and bolts of rich dark silk to invite him in for an official post. Three times he turned it back, but he finally arrived.

The minister of affairs (Hou) Ba and Guang went way back as friends, and Ba wished to convince Guang to relent and come to Ba's residence to speak with him. He sent Hou Zidao, the subsidiary clerk in the western administrative bureau, to present a letter to Guang, but Guang would not get up from the bed, where he sat casually with his arms around his knees. When the letter was opened and read, he asked Zidao, "Junfang (i.e., Hou Ba) has always been foolish, and now that he is in one of the three highest posts, does he not rather seem an errand boy?" Zidao replied, "In rank he has reached to the highest office, and he is not foolish." Guang said, "What did he say to you when he sent you to come?" Zidao passed on what Ba had said, and Guang said, "You say he is not foolish; were those words foolish or not? The Son of Heaven summoned me three times before I came. Having yet to appear before the ruler of men, ought I to appear before the servant of men?" When Zidao sought a reply (for Hou Ba), Guang said, "My hand is unable to write." He then gave his reply verbally (for the messenger to record). The messenger objected that it was too skimpy a reply, and could it be made more ample? Guang replied, "Is this selling vegetables, this seeking for more?" Ba memorialized Guang's reply, and the emperor laughed, saying, "That's the old attitude of that crazy churl."

The imperial chariots and quadrigae arrived at Guang's lodging that very day, but Guang stayed abed and would not rise. The emperor approached his bedside and patted Guang's belly, saying, "Now, now, Ziling, would it not be reasonable to help out one another?" Guang remained asleep and did not respond for quite some time. Then he opened his eyes and said, "Of old, Yao of Tang displayed great virtue, but the Nest-dwelling Elder rinsed out his ears. Men for this reason may set their will. Why have you come to press me?" The emperor said, "Ziling, in the end will I be unable to make you give in?" He then climbed into the imperial carriage, breathed a sigh, and departed.

He later again led Guang into the (private quarters of the) palace. Discussion led to their friendship of former days. They conversed with each other for days on end, and accordingly slept in each other's company. Guang was selected for the post of grand master of remonstrance, but he did not let down his resolve. He then went to farm in the Fuchun Hills (in modern Zhejiang),

where later people called his fishing spot Yan Ling Rapids. In the seventeenth year of the Jianwu period (41 C.E.) he was once again given a special summons, but he did not go. He died at home at the age of eighty.

Han Kang

Han Kang, with the courtesy-name of Boxiu, was a man from Baling in Jingzhao (outside the Han capital of Chang'an). He often roamed the famous mountains in search of medicinal plants, which he sold in the Chang'an market. For thirty years he would not haggle over prices. Once a girl was buying some simples from Kang, and she became angry when Kang held to his price. She said, "Be you, sir, Han Boxiu, and so no second price?" Kang said with a sigh, "I had desired to avoid a reputation, but now even little girls all know of me. Of what use could even medicines be?" So he ran off into the Baling mountains. He was repeatedly summoned for postings as an erudite and in the imperial conveyance bureau, but he never went. During the time of Emperor Huan (147–167), he was offered appointment with full ceremonial offerings of bolts of dark silk and a comfortable carriage. An envoy with the imperial proclamation in hand met up with Kang, and Kang had no recourse but to feign acceptance. He excused himself from the comfortable carriage and rode alone in a brushwood cart. He went forth one dawn before the others and arrived at a way station, where the station head was just then sending out men and oxen to repair the roads and bridges because Master Han, Recipient of Imperial Summons, was due to pass by. Seeing Kang's brushwood cart and his cloth headscarf, he took Kang for an old peasant, and requisitioned his ox. Kang straightaway released it from its yoke and gave it to him. After a while the envoy arrived, and as the oldster whose ox had been requisitioned was in fact the Recipient of Imperial Summons, the envoy wished to petition to have the station head executed. Kang said, "This is the result of an old man giving it up; what is the crime of the station head?" The envoy then desisted. Subsequently, along the way Kang ran away into hiding. He died in his longevity.

Pang gong

The one known as Venerable Pang (Pang gong) was a man from Xiangyang (modern Xiangfan City, Hubei) in the Southern Commandery. He lived to the south of the Xian hills and never once entered into the city compound. He and his wife treated each other with the respect accorded a guest. The Inspector of Jingzhou, Liu Biao (142–208; post held 190–195), repeatedly had extended invitations to him but could not get him to comply, so he personally went to inquire after him. He said, "How could preserving intact a single person compare with preserving intact all under Heaven?" Venerable Pang laughed, and said, "The wild goose and the grey crane nest atop the tall forests, and in the evening have their place to perch; the turtle and the alligator make their dens at the bottom of the deepest abyss, and at night have their place of lodging. Now, the choice of what to adopt or reject, when to act and when to refrain from action, likewise are the nest and den of a man. Moreover, each but finds his place to perch or lodge; it is not all under heaven that he would hold for his own." With this he excused himself to till upon the knoll, while his wife and children weeded ahead. Liu Biao pointed to them and asked, "If you, sir, would dwell in hardship amid the furrowed fields, and not consent to office and emolument, then what will your descendants have to bequeath to their posterity?" Venerable Pang replied, "People of the world all bequeath them peril; today I alone bequeath them peace. What I bequeath might be dif-

ferent, but it is not that I pass nothing down." Biao heaved a sigh and departed. Later, leading his wife and children, Venerable Pang climbed Deer Gate Mountain (Lumen shan), where he gathered simples, never to turn back.

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Notes

1. This sentence, as indeed the whole paragraph, is based on the second section of the first chapter of the *Zhuang Zi*.