

The Activities of Yu Anqi, Late Ming Mountain Person

The purpose of this paper is to clarify, in part, the activities of so-called mountain people in late Ming. Mountain people were essentially merchant-intellectuals who first appear in Tang sources but whose activities become conspicuous in late Ming. References to mountain people abound in contemporary sources, the great majority of which are pejorative. The question in my mind, however, is whether or not these assessments are in any way objectively true.

As such, I set about examining how mountain people are depicted in the *Ming Shilu*, a fundamental source from the Ming dynasty. Happily, Academia Sinica's Computing Center enables keyword searches of a massive collection of digitized sources. A basic keyword search for "mountain people" reveals no references prior to the Wanli period. This does not mean that they did not exist, but rather that it was only during the Wanli period that their activities became politically and socially significant.

The references that appear in the Wanli period can be divided into two categories. First, we see mountain people depicted as fomenting disorder by forming coalitions with those in power in Peking and other cities, and by spreading rumors about contemporary political incidents. In response, the emperor thrice ordered their expulsion from the capital, but the fact that the orders of expulsion were frequently reissued is testament to their ineffectiveness. Second, we see mountain people doing much of the same in frontier military compounds: spreading rumors, forming coalitions with powerful generals, wasting war funds.

These disparaging references, however, are official depictions. In order to investigate how much they matched reality, I began looking into the activities of one Yu Anqi, a fairly representative late Ming mountain person. I found that he did indeed travel between the capital and frontier military compounds, associate with literati-bureaucrats and military figures and he was even involved in a case of internecine feud within the imperial household. These events in Yu Anqi's life correspond to the image of mountain people in the *Ming Shilu*. However, there is more: Yu Anqi compiled numerous books and was actively involved in publishing and other cultural activities. Moreover, his relations with upper-level bureaucrats were not unilateral, but appear to have been beneficial to both parties. Unfortunately, due to time restraints I will not be able to talk about Yu Anqi's life in any detail.

Late Ming was marked by the most furious commercialization of Chinese society prior to the modern period. I believe that, for good or bad, mountain people functioned as carriers of information critical to this commercializing society.

In addition, the term "mountain people" originally referred to physicians, diviners, musicians, artists, and others who earned their livelihood by practicing an art or selling their technical expertise. It is important to bear this in mind when considering mountain people in late Ming. Indeed, the Jesuit Matteo Ricci was often referred to as "resourceful mountain person" because of his knowledge of astronomy and cartography.

There is a tendency divide Chinese history into the study of elite intellectuals on the one hand and the people on the other. This is wholly inadequate, particularly for the early modern period onward, which witnessed a marked increase in an intermediate stratum between the ruling intellectual elite and the ruled. Representative of this middle stratum were the mountain people. The link between the increase in numbers of members of this middle stratum and their upward economic and social movement is surely not coincidental.