




## A Noble Deed in the Mandarin Banquet: The Moral Cultivation of Filial Piety in Eastern Han Dynasty

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### ABSTRACT

The story of Lu Ji's noble deed, Hiding Mandarins for His Mother, is one of the most widely spread filial piety tales in Chinese history. Scholars have focused on interpreting his virtue with Confucianism axiology while neglecting the political significance embedded in the story. To study the historical impact that moral exhortation had through the up and fall of empires, this article investigates the general social environment of late Eastern Han Dynasty, mainly focusing on the social backgrounds of two great noble clans. Aligning with current mainstream Sinology and historiography, this study draws heavily on historical textual interpretation methods and employs comparative methods, focusing on specific cases of the two noble clans as a starting point. In the core event of the banquet, Lu Ji's behavior was coined into a virtue standard by descendants while Yuan Shu's turned out to be a failure. The contrast between the two is argued, to be an appropriate way of how moral cultivation was constructed during East Han Dynasty, which is far earlier than the time scholars accomplished moral paragons according to historical or virtual events. Through background, contextual and behavioral analysis, it can be concluded that the so-called noble deed was not only a performance of Chinese traditional emphasis on filial piety but also of great political significance to the two clans at that time. The prominence of political virtue surpassed ethical value to a greater extent, if a certain dichotomy has to be drawn for these two intertwined categories.

**Keywords:** Eastern Han Dynasty; Filial Piety; Confucianism; Scholar-official Clan; Moral Cultivation.

### INTRODUCTION

The narrative of Twenty-Four Filial Exemplars sets a fundamental axiology for public discourse and beneficence persuasion in East Asia societies (F. L. Hsu, 1971; Haboush, 1995; K. T. Sung, 1995; Holzman, 1998). One noticeable figure of those exemplars was Lu Ji whose courtesy name was Gongji, who served the Southern Yangtze River Regime as a minister in the late years of the Eastern Han Dynasty. He was born and raised in a large clan in Wu County, Wu Commandery, and was the younger son of Lu Kang, the Administrator of Lujiang Commandery at that time. Unlike other moral decisions that require devotion or sacrifice, what Lu Ji had done was considered to be asking for minimal exertion (Xun & Cheng, 2022). Chen Shou the historian recorded Lu Ji as an erudite and knowledgeable genius, who excelled at astronomy, calendars, and arithmetic (S. Chen, 2011). He had made annotations for Yi Jing and Taixuan Jing, and was believed to be the designer of Huntian Tu, which was a successful illustrative equipment for astrological knowledge. He was later made the Administrator of Yulin and the side general (S. Chen, 2011). The renowned narrative of Hiding Mandarins for His Mother is situated within the same melodic cadence as Chen Shou's laudation of him. The story was documented in the following manner. When six years old, he was brought to Jiujiang attending Yuan Shu's banquet. Guests were served with mandarin oranges. He took three mandarin oranges, and when leaving, he bowed and oranges fell to the ground. The host, Yuan Shu asked: "Young man, I treat you with etiquette and honor. Why do you put those oranges under your clothes?" Lu Ji kneeled down and replied: "I want to take them back to my mother." Yuan Shu was impressed (S.

Chen, 2011).

This story made Lu Ji a typical example of filial piety and was listed among the Twenty-four Filial Exemplars in Chinese history, which had a significant effect on traditional society (K. T. Sung, 1990; Ye, 1996; Y. X. Jiang, 2001; G. J. Chen & Z. L. Wu, 2008). In a social environment where people paid great attention to moral cultivation, the fact that he took mandarins for his mother was widely celebrated and praised. There were many poems praising him for this act, which reflected the importance and recognition of filial piety in Chinese culture (K. Chen, 1968; Mo & Shen, 1999). Throughout the ages, people have attached great importance to the connotation of filial piety in the story of such noble deeds and their variations (Gundry, 2017; Kimbrough, 2019; Brown, 2020). For people who were involved, like Lu Kang and Yuan Shu, this event had more political meaning despite the obvious virtue well-known by people. It is the task of historical study to demonstrate two influential clans in the Three Kingdoms period are portrayed with more detailed political virtues, rather than follow the logic of the scholars who only focus on the moral value of the story. This research helps to prove reliable evidence to add more details of this event, which helps to draw a more comprehensive picture of the Banquet. It also focuses on the specific analysis of people's words and behaviors at the Mandarin Banquet by providing new insights into the traditional filial culture.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Within the research threads and methodological paths of this study, there are three dominant scholarly consensuses. The most dominant of these traditions is Sinology and political historiography which takes Chinese history, especially the moral virtues records, writings and historical achievements of individuals prior to the Han and Tang dynasties, as its object of study. In this tradition, scholars have often been able to present a clear picture of the counter-action between the central government and the great, scholar-official noble clans in feudal China, often through a concise examination of historical documents (Y. C. Wang, 1949; Han, 2013). This type of research is often effective in presenting the interaction of political rights between the nobility and the central government, but it does not examine in detail the differences in spirituality between different scholar-official clans.

In contrast, many scholars have focused on the use of historical sources to portray specific characters within specific clans and to examine the specific relationship between historical events and personal charisma (G. J. Chen & Z. L. Wu, 2008; Y. Wang, 2010; H. Schmidt-Glintzer & T. Jansen, 1994). The two major clans and the characters within them, which are the subject of this study, have also received attention from such scholars. Yuan Shu had been long regarded as a typical character of indulgence and insurgency throughout Chinese history, who had been set as a negative example to warn the later generations (K. H. Huang, 2010). His incomprehensible insane action of usurpation in his late years was something that evolved with the time change as the social environment exacerbated. Though the central power declined during the last years of the Eastern Han Dynasty, the Yuan's Clan maintained its high political status. Their family powers were still strong enough, including senior official titles and a wide-spread social network, enabling its members to speak loud voices in politics, directing or even manipulating the political change. Meanwhile, the inevitable decline in central authority meant that the Dynasty could not maintain the unity of the nation as it was in the past, and could not have enough power to control those large landowning clans, those large clans gradually generated their ideas and started managing their own affairs. The primary task was to expand their political power, including the annexation of land, trying to take higher official positions, accumulating all kinds of resources, or even beginning to establish their military force. Those were not only effective ways to develop their political forces, but also effective means of self-protection to survive under such a chaotic time, especially after the great impact of the Yellow Turban Rebellion. Under this circumstance, Yuan's brother could stand out and play an important role during that time.

On the other hand, there was weak unity within the family. Attention has been paid to the fall of great families (K. H. Huang, 2010). Yuan Shao did a better job than his younger brother, he was capable and won a better reputation because of his character, and people all would like to come to him. However, in Yuan Shu's eyes, he was initially the side son of his father, if not been adopted by his uncle, he could not gain the main son's status as he was. These were something that irritated him. The world knew that the brothers did not get along with each other, but this inharmony was not significant initially, for the brothers could still fight together when facing the eunuchs. As the chaos of the eunuchs was solved, the two brothers no longer had a reason to stand together and begin to fight against each other, their relationship broke up and turned into a public issue. In the course of presenting the family's decline, the research techniques of thematology became another trend (Fei & T. J. Liu, 1982). In the process of scholar-official clans' decline, there are a large number of historical accounts that share the same matriarchal theme. Scholars have focused on a number of elements or themes that characterise the process of family decline, such as the eventual collapse of hierarchy and Confucianism and moral exercises as core values (K. Chen, 1968; Mo & Shen, 1999; Y. Wang, 2010). Besides, the study of banquets has become quite well-

established in comparative literature (Hosein, 2001). It is worth noting that effective methodological integration between these different academic positions has not occurred, which is one of the breakthroughs that this study has attempted to make in terms of the object of study and research methodology.

## METHODOLOGY

The study attempts to use a thematological perspective to construct correlative interpretations between the text of the *San Guo Zhi* as primary literature and specific events that have thematic research implications. The Mandarin Banquet is regarded both as a representative event of political power negotiation and a thematic horizon to showcase how the culture of filial piety is constructed.

Within the banquet scenario as a specific hermeneutic and thematic study, two important actions will be discussed. Lu's renowned participation in Yuan Shu's banquet encompasses the first one as his stealth of the mandarin oranges, and the second one as his response to the host's interrogation. In the textual and hermeneutical analyses of these two key behaviors, a number of important ethical principles will be engaged as underlying assumptions in the analytical process. The first are core moral principles of Confucius, the central founder of Confucianism in China. The most important way in which Confucius' moral principles are influenced is by praising those whose actions include the basic virtues of filial piety and deference. In addition to teaching positive virtues, Confucius and his disciples, and Confucianism as a whole, also made judgements about basic social norms. For example, in the treatment of theft, a clear negative attitude is held (Y. Li, 2012). Positive moral principles such as praising filial piety and negative moral principles such as prohibiting theft would present themselves as antagonistic in the analysis of specific behaviors. This conflict will be the central theme of the banquet.

The subtle relationship between host and guest is an equally important moral principle in Confucianism (Ivanhoe, 2014). This moral principle contains both ethical and highly important political science implications. It is also a principle that will be repeatedly reaffirmed in specific behavioral analyses of Lu Ji. By using these moral principles, which are fundamental to Confucian education, this study will provide a complete dissection of the significance of Lu's behaviors in ethical cultivation within a comparative family/clan cultivation perspective.

## THE BANQUET

### Yuan Shu's Noble Clan and His Political Virtue

The banquet was held in the year when the political career of Yuan Shu, the host of this banquet was in peril. Coming from a prominent clan, his prosperity was a typical symbol of the emergence of the "Clan of noblemen" during the last years of the Eastern Han Dynasty. The elder son of a noble clan, for most of the occasion, benefit privileges in mastering politics, economy, and ideological influence on the society. Yuan's Clan possessed the governmental tutorship of Meng Xi's interpretation of *Yi Jing* for generations. The clan had produced renowned figures for generations. His ancestor, Yuan An, a serious and dignified person, eventually became *Situ* (the Excellency of the Masses), one position among *San Gong* (three ducal ministers), which referred to three highest officials in the Eastern Han Dynasty. Despite *Situ*, the rest two were called *Taiwei* (the Grand Commandant) and *Sikong* (the Excellency of Works). Among Yuan An's later generations, in each generation, there would always be at least one descendant who finally got a position in *San Gong*. Including Yuan An, this situation has lasted for four generations (S. Chen, 2011).

The Yuan's Clan had disciples and followers all over the nation. During the Eastern Han Dynasty, scholars could become bureaucrats and participate in politics by means of "Chaju", which literally meant "being inspected and then recommended" (Jian, 1979; Bai, 1999). Special officials took charge of "Chaju", inspecting capable people and offering them positions in the empire. Those people who were recommended became affiliates of the referrer. While swearing allegiance to the court, the disciples also had to be loyal to their referrers, to keep their status and benefits. Those people serve their referrers just like a minister to their ruler and a son to their father, even to flatter and bribe. The bureaucrats and their followers collaborated as a political group, increasing the political effects together. The officials found themselves in a dualistic relationship: commissioned by the nation, they were responsible to be allegiant to the Emperor and to serve the empire. Meanwhile, as disciples of their referrer, they were also obliged to follow their referrer's will. In the late years of the Eastern Han Dynasty, there were families of scholars who had specialized in one scripture for many generations, and their disciples inherited their family studies, forming clans with many generations being public officials. Their essence was the landowning class, with being in exalted positions for generations and followers all over the world. At that time, these clans took leadership among the scholar class and established a sophisticated social relationship.

When it came to the generation of Yuan Shao and Yuan Shu, they still maintained significant political influence. Both brothers owned high positions in the court. They were exceptionally active in politics, even trying to manipulate the Emperor according to their wills. A major flaw for Yuan Shu was his well-known bad reputation. Throughout dynasties, people held a contemptuous attitude toward him. Chen Shou diminished that Yuan Shu was extravagant and reckless, though his clan was glorious, this glory was never able to save him from his self-inflicted ruin (S. Chen, 2011). Pei Songzhi's attitude was even more radical, he believed that Yuan Shu's evil deeds had reached the limit where both human beings and ghosts were outraged, and Chen Shou's degrading was not aggressive enough to reveal the wickedness (S. Chen & Pei, 1999). It is said that Yuan Shu wanted honey water in his last times, but this could not be achieved, eventually, he vomited blood and died (S. Chen & Pei, 1999). This ending had always been made as a typical mockery to warn people not to follow for generations, even in today's modern life.

The evolution of Yuan Shu's political virtue came from various aspects. The cause stemmed from a change in status within the Clan. Yuan Shao and Yuan Shu were half-brothers. Although Yuan Shao was older than Yuan Shu, he was born of a concubine and was the illegitimate son. Yuan Shu was the child of the primary wife and the legitimate son of the family. According to the ancient Chinese patriarchal law, Yuan Shu's status was initially nobler than Yuan Shao's. This situation changed after Yuan Shao was adopted by Yuan Feng's elderly brother, Yuan Cheng, and from then he attained the status of a legitimate son as well (S. Chen & Pei, 1999). Yuan Shu would not like to see a person with humble status made the same as him overnight.

Their personalities varied from each other. Yuan Shao honored his parents by keeping mourning them for many years. He was good at socializing, which earned him a good reputation which was the reward for being filial and pious (Moody, 1975). People and guests all came to him, he treated them sincerely with virtue. No matter whether penniless or rich, he treated them equally with courtesy. Yuan Shu, on the contrary, was known for his dissoluteness when he was young. He enjoyed hunting and wandering around, leading a dissipated life. This behavior did not abate until he grew older, when he began to learn how to respect others (Fan, 1959), it was still hard to change his intrinsic indulgent nature. Yuan Shu not only deeply despised his brother, but also was very jealous of his brother, just because his brother behaved more properly and received more respect than himself. This could be learned from a letter sent to Gongsun Zan, in which Yuan Shu wrote that he never treated Yuan Shao as his sibling, a son from Yuan's Clan (Fan, 1959). Within the Clan, Yuan Shu was very disapproved of his brother's promotion. In politics, he envied that his brother was better at politics than himself and was dissatisfied with the fact that his political influence was not as significant as his brother's. His brother's excellence frustrated Yuan Shu's self-esteem. Under this circumstance, this frustration turned from personal jealousy into mutually irreconcilable conflicts. This was manifested in the political actions, in which Yuan Shu would oppose his brother in many aspects. The intrafamilial discord has transformed into public issues, with sibling rivalry involving various disputes over interests. Chaotic time was the catalyst for the increasing tension relationship between them, due to the loss of authority and cohesion for the center. Some people remained loyal to the Dynasty, making efforts to maintain the stability of the reign of the central, while other people started to plot for themselves and strive for their own expansion. It is undeniable that the Eastern Han Dynasty was in a state of decline and collapse (Roman, 2021). In such a trend, seeing his brother was doing better, Yuan Shu started to make profits for himself, taking great advantage of the superiority of his Clan. He was eager to appease his bruised ego, and on the other, he hoped to expand his political influence at this very time in order to seek development and expansion of his power, offering him the chance of survival.

Therefore, it was not surprising that the proud Yuan Feng's legitimate son could engage in various crazy actions in his later years, even his later actions of usurpation in his last years seemed reasonable. The Yuan brothers' confidence stemmed from their powerful family, a strength that was the result of long-term efforts and management for generations. However, Yuan Shu's plan came to a sudden pause after his great frustration in the Battle of Kuangting, in which he was defeated and fled to Jiujiang Commandery. Retreating to Jiujiang Commandery did not mean he could temporarily rest with no worries, on the contrary, it was at this time that Yuan Shu fell into great crisis.

### **The Noble in Danger**

Multiple reasons led to the crisis. Even before the Battle of Kuangting, Yuan Shu's negative fame was already widely known. During his time in Nanyang Commandery, he over-exploited and levied exorbitant taxes, from which people all suffered (S. Chen, 2011). In the first year of Chuping (190 AD), Wang Yun planned to assassinate Dong Zhuo, the pretext he used to assemble military forces was to fight against Yuan Shu (Fan, 1959). Dong Zhuo's tyrannical behavior was already known nationwide, at this time, Wang Yun would use Yuan Shu as an excuse, reflecting a consensus that Yuan Shu was treated as a negative archetype. To kill Zhang Wen, Dong Zhuo needed an excuse before executing, so he fabricated a rumor, which was that Zhang Wen secretly colluded with



Yuan Shu. It seemed that if someone wanted to add a bad title to others to prove them wicked, the effective way was to link this person with Yuan Shu. As early as when Guan Dong Military Union planned to attack Dong Zhuo, Gongsun Zan has already realized that Yuan Shu was not reliable and had his own ambition (S. Chen, 2011). That's why after Ma Midi's death at Yuan Shu's place because of humiliation, Kong Rong argued that Yuan Shu's rebellious heart did not come overnight (Fan, 1959). Based on Yuan Shu's notorious record, if someone could order the court to issue an edict to crush Yuan Shu in the name of treason, he would be put in catastrophe immediately. What's more, Yuan Shu had to find another stronghold after being evicted. He eagerly needed a chance to adjust he and his military to make a comeback later. Jiujiang was his target. But his action of taking the Jiujiang Commandery also worsened his reputation. There were two different narrations. One was when Yuan Shu arrived at Jiu Jiang Commandery, he killed Chen Wen, who was Yang Zhou Cishi (the state inspector of Yang Zhou) at that time. Yuan Shu usurped his place and thus had Shouchun County, the capital of Jiujiang Commandery and the official title (Chen, 2011; Fan, 1959). Another story was that Chen Wen had already passed away before Yuan Shu came to Shouchun. After Chen Wen's death, Yuan Shao initially made his sibling Yuan Yi succeed in the position, but Yuan Yi was killed by Yuan Shu. Yuan Shu then made Chen Yu the new inspector. When defeated by Cao Cao, Yuan Shu fled to Shouchun for refuge but was refused. He had no choice but to evacuate to Yinling County, where he gathered his men and attacked Chen Yu. The latter was scared and fled back to Xiapi commandery (Chen, 2011; Fan, 1959). No matter whether killing Chen Wen or deporting Chen Yu, his behavior of harming the formal officials of the Eastern Han Dynasty could definitely be regarded as treason by others (Eicher, 2019).

Even during that chaotic time, the Yuan's Clan maintained its political status, their strong backbone still gave out a voice, that was loud enough to shock the scholars and landowning classes in Jiangdong. They still owned a large scale of followers, who could be potentially important participants in this banquet (S. Chen, 2011; Fan, 1959, K. H. Huang, 2010). Yuan Shu's official position offered him proper and legal status to hold this banquet. Before escaping to Jiujiang, he had already served as Huben Zhonglangjiang (the Lieutenant General of Huben) and Hou Jiangjun (General of the Back, though this title was offered by Dong Zhuo), which were all central bureaucratic officials. When coming to the local area in the name of a central official, it was not impossible for him to feast the scholars in the name of disseminating grace from His Majesty the Emperor. His self-declared title might be controversial, for this position was obtained by improper means. Still, it worked when calling on scholar classes in Jiangdong to come to the banquet and letting the ordinary people know that it was Yuan Shu who taking charge of inspecting Yang Zhou. Though knowing the host's awful reputation, the scholar classes from Jiangdong could do nothing with him, even openly opposing him. Thus, even as loyal as Lu Kang could only submit to him temporarily and attend the banquet. The third reason was because of Yuan Shu's personality. Despite being despised by people, Yuan Shu was not a totally incompetent person, he still had some wisdom and power, and was clear that this political showmanship was necessary to fight for chances to survive.

The son of Yuan's Clan, bearing a respectful aristocratic rank, still lavishly laid out and held banquets after his defeat. This seemed absurd on the surface, but in fact, it was precisely the very talisman that enabled him to extend his political life, a strong guarantee that less risky of being eradicated by the scholars who lived around once the conflict erupted. He hoped to establish a reliable relationship with the scholar classes in Jiangdong by this banquet, at the same time he could seek allies. Bad reputations sought good ones. That is the true play of Yuan Shu's banquet.

### POSSIBLE TRUTHS OF LU JI'S MENTAL ACTIVITIES

Lu Ji was born and raised in a large family with aristocratic rank not so eminent as Yuan's Clan where, however, a good upbringing with Confucian moral theories and practices is perfectly implanted (S. Chen, 2011). Immersed in the traditional Confucian "filial piety" education, he grew up with the good moral character of filial piety to his parents. There were certain ritual rules as being a guest, however, his mother's preference for oranges came up as ruling superior. Lu Ji did not think it was against traditional Confucian rituals to "steal" oranges to bring them back to honor his mother, and it was also in line with the universal value of filial piety. It was only right and reasonable to respect his mother and bring oranges to her. The orange bearer, who was caught red-handed, was not ashamed of this but was honest in his heart that the oranges were for respecting his mother as a child, so he answered respectfully and graciously, "I want to bring them back to my mother" (S. Chen, 2011). This could be understood and accepted by scholars as a general explanation of the whole story.

In addition to the aforementioned rudimentary elucidation, it is evident that there exists a continuum of potential explanations to elucidate the multifarious range of internal cognitive processes underlying Lu Ji's response. An unconsciousness behavior explanation is available. When he was taken by his father to Yuan Shu's place as a guest, he saw some oranges and, driven by his innocence as the nature of a child and embarrassed to ask

Yuan Shu or his father for them, he took some and hid them in his sleeves. When taking the oranges, he did not have a clear judgment of whether it was against the etiquette law to do so or not. Later, Yuan Shu found out and questioned him. Hearing Yuan Shu saying such words, it was not until this moment that Lu Ji began to doubt what he had just done, realizing it was incorrect to take someone's things without either their permission or noticing them, which was not presentable (Y. Li, 2012). Though hesitating in a flash, he was driven back quickly by moral propriety and immediately made a judgment that he was taking the oranges to honor his mother and that such "filial" behavior was not unbecoming. Therefore, although slightly blushing after being revealed, he still replied with the answer.

We could add an innocent version. Seeing the oranges, Lu Ji was driven by his child's nature and took some of them. Later, Yuan Shu found out that the young gentleman Gongji had taken some oranges. Although Lu Ji realized that this was inappropriate, he still did not make a judgment on whether his act of "taking someone's things without their permission/without telling them" was following the etiquette (Y. Li, 2012). Even the very basic principle "Do not take things from other people's houses" has not been realized (Y. Li, 2012). There was only the embarrassment of being caught red-handed at that moment, and his mind raced to figure out how to resolve this awkward situation. After some quick brainstorming, he replied that these oranges were taken back to his mother, which successfully defused the awkward atmosphere. Although the future Yulin administrator was able to resolve the embarrassment at that time, in terms of Confucian etiquette, this kind of practice of trying to get a momentary advantage out of a quick speech or finding an excuse to smooth over an embarrassing situation is not reliable in terms of etiquette and law in the long run. In short words, these smarty pants brought temporary harmony, but it is not a long-term solution.

To another extreme, one may also treat Lu Ji as a genius politician. His father, Lu Kang, had mentioned to the son that he despised Yuan Shu's personality. As a representative celebrity of Jiangdong and the administrator of Lujiang Commandery, he had to accept this tricky invitation. If the young gentleman had once heard his parents' conversations about that tough guy; or without Lu Kang's mentioning, this piece of concern could be perceived by the son with his intelligent mind and keen intuition. In short, before going to the banquet, Lu Ji, although only six years old then, already knew that there was a complex and delicate relationship in politics between Yuan Shu and his father, even between the whole Lu family and the entire Lujiang Commandery (S. Chen, 2011). Knowing this invitation was not a simple matter, the young guest had to be well-prepared in his mind. But when it comes to the banquet, seeing the oranges, Lu Ji's pure nature of childish naivety instincts comes back and takes dominance. Driven by this nature, he took some oranges away. That is why Yuan Shu came up with the question. The young man felt ashamed to be caught in the scene, but also immediately perceived the subtle atmosphere at the banquet, as well as the host's words. As a child who was inculcated in a scholarly family environment for a long time, the keen sense of such political relationships, family moral reputation, etc. all came back again at once. Given the delicate relationship (or conflict) between the two adults, and even to protect the family's reputation and the interests of the entire family, Gongji gave a quick response, saying these oranges were for his mother. At that time, the guests stopped paying attention to the delicate atmosphere and began to praise the orange bearer as a good and filial child, and the banquet returned to the original atmosphere where guests mingled and drank. Unlike the above "quick wit in an emergency", the previous one was smarties, the wit here was great intelligence. This is the act of Lu Ji the orange bearer, after understanding the whole family relationship and even the whole social environment at that time, to ease the relationship between the Lujiang administrator and the so-called "Yangzhou provincial governor". Thus, it can be seen that Lu Gongji, despite his young age, has shown remarkable political wisdom.

Lu Ji has already realized that Yuan Shu had a complex and delicate political relationship with his father, even with the whole Lu Clan and the entire Lujiang Commandery. He understood that his father considered Yuan Shu a "rebel" guy, and knew that the fugitive had an insubordinate heart, while at the same time, the Lujiang administrator was loyal to the Han Dynasty all his life (Chen, 2011). Even though, due to Lu Kang's identity as a representative celebrity of Jiangdong and the administrator of Lujiang Commandery, he had to attend the banquet of the "minister of disobedience". Father's worry called upon the son's filial pious heart. That was the reason that he was mentally prepared before the banquet.

### IN DEFENCE OF FAMILY INTEGRITY

Based on the properties of mandarins in the East Han dynasty, it could be assumed that Yuan Shu's action of treating his guests with noble fruits indicated that although he had a bad reputation, he was aware of the most basic etiquette, recognizing the significance of providing exemplary treatment to guests as a means of attracting and garnering acknowledgment from potential visitors (Sterckx, 2006). His behavior of offering mandarins worked as reflecting the distinguished status of the guests through those precious, as well as bringing in the

scholar clans around Jiangdong to support him. His political goal of being able to survive in Huainan without being evicted or destroyed is revealed. At the same time, being proud of his nature, and serving Mandarin hospitality also had a sense of showing off, claiming his political capital was strong. This was also a must-do step because this would invariably give the scholar clans living around a deterrent, warning them not to interrupt his intentions here. His seemingly flaunting behavior was a combination of grace and power, which was a good way to continue his political career.

The mandarins were used to serve guests. Lu Ji's behavior of hiding mandarins in sleeves and taking them away was puzzling. Seeing this, it was natural for Yuan Shu to ask questions. Even if he was a child, taking fruits that treat guests away without the host's permission was not honorable. Bearing Yuan Shu's personality in mind, it was possible that questioning at this time also had a sneering meaning, insinuating Lu's Clan's tutor was improper, that the child who was educated in Lu's Clan, whose behavior and demeanor were not appropriate. The child raised in Lu's Clan would steal the host's mandarins.

Lu Ji's response was precisely the embodiment of his family's upbringing. Facing such questioning, Lu Ji must have learned the intended meaning, realizing that the host was puzzled by his behavior. Perhaps he could also catch a little bit of mockery. The most important thing he realized from this questioning was that it was ungenerous and not the right behavior to sneak away the host's mandarins as a guest in front of the public. His being able to realize the impropriety of his demeanor was exactly a reflection of his decent family education.

He had a calm and generous performance in the face of questioning, explaining that those mandarins were to honor his mother. Regardless of whether he genuinely wanted to honor his mother or he played smart tricks to disguise this improper behavior, the fact that he was able to react in this way was a sign of good family manners. At least, when other people looked at the child from the surface, they would think the child was well-educated. A six-year-old child would still be concerned about his mother's preferences and want to bring back fruits for her in such an event, which was already exemplary filial behavior and worth praising. If not been raised in a large clan with a good family education and been influenced by the importance of filial piety, he probably wouldn't have been able to react in such a short period and give such a thorough answer calmly and comfortably.

As to whether Lu Ji was playing smart or being truly sincere, through the analysis of his whole life, it could be deduced that the most possible situation was that he was behaving from his whole heart, considering the influence of his family environment. Lu Ji was a very straightforward person who had his principles and stuck to them resolutely, abiding by what he thought was right. This was very similar to what his father did. Should he been a sophisticated person, he would not have been so bold as to stand up and shout his views at Sun Ce's symposium, even though he was young and sat at the end of the order, his opinion was to the surprise of Zhang Zhao and others (S. Chen, 2011).

The fact that Lu Ji replied by quoting Confucius's words and advocating appeasement, which meant using noble morality to convince and rule the people rather than through force, was also a reflection of his family's upbringing. What he revered for was the most traditional ideals of what literati and scholars pursued, and everything he said and did was in accordance with the most ideal standards promoted by the Han Dynasty. Unfortunately, during that chaotic period at the end of the Eastern Han Dynasty, how to survive better and benefit oneself became the most important issue, and the consistent practice of the traditional ideals and virtues did not fit in with the current situation at that time, which led to his unpopularity in the Sun's power. Lu Ji, on the other hand, was a scholar who insisted on his ideals and was unwilling to submit to the current situation. The death of Lu Kang and the calamity that the Lu family endured in Lujiang brought a great shock to the Clan. Facing such a dismal state, Lu Xun, who was Lu Ji's nephew but ordered him, chose to cooperate with Sun Quan, the Clan's enemy, for practical reasons of survival. If Lu Ji was a smooth person, he wouldn't have chosen to compromise with Sun Quan for the Clan's benefit. On the contrary, he was not such a person, serving under Sun Quan's power was already the biggest compromise he could make for the family's sake. His insistence and straightforwardness offended Sun Quan. Otherwise, Sun Quan would not have sent him to the distant Yulin Commandery, and he would not have had to endure such hardships. Even the death of Lu Kang did not allow him to learn to compromise for the sake of his Clan's interests. The evidence presented indicated that Lu Ji possessed a strong sense of moral integrity. It is plausible that he exhibited genuine behaviour during his childhood as well.

For other guests, regardless of Lu Ji's real thoughts, his behavior of serving his mother at such a young age was rare, at least on the surface, worth praising. There was no point and meaningless that someone should speculate on his original intentions. For the adults, Lu Ji's behavior was a practice of filial piety, and they, who were deeply influenced by the core values of how to be an excellent scholar in the Eastern Han Dynasty, naturally wanted to promote such a practice of filial piety, which was a very honorable thing to do. Therefore, in the most possible situation, they stopped questioning a six-year-old child's original intentions. They wanted to make good use of this opportunity to speak up for him, proving that they adhered to the core values and political virtue of a

scholar who was loyal to the Dynasty. This was both the ultimate value of Yuan Shu's banquet and a possible explanation of why Lu Ji's story was widespread and well-known in later generations.

### FINDINGS: TWO CLANS REVISITED

It is disputable that not individuals but the scholar-official clans are true agents and direct beneficiaries of moral cultivation. The fact that the two brothers struggled hard on their virtues and reputations, expanding their force is a key factor that modified the unstable family condition. This extension came to a sudden pause after Yuan Shu's great loss in the Battle of Kuangting (S. Chen, 2011). His development ceased, and even worse, this failure brought the clan a great crisis. Nanyang, the place which he originally relied on, was lost. He was forced to escape and leave. The prime mission was to find another place which could be occupied without too much force. This new place was the harbor for his temporary rest and reorganization, as well as the base for his future extension. That was why he had to take Jiujiang Commandery later. However, occupying Jiujiang did not mean he could rest easily from then on. He accumulated infamous fame previously, which was a big barrier to his setting a foothold around Huainan, for this bad reputation could not make him receive respect and support from the scholar clans who lived there, like Lu Kang. This potential pitfall could undermine his settlement here at any time. While settling down, he also urgently required local recognition, eliminating the disgrace of not being able to get a foothold because of his terrible reputation. To achieve this goal, there was nothing more proper than holding a banquet to which he invited celebrities and scholars. The Banquet provided a platform to establish a relationship with the locals and to promote the legitimacy of his occupation. It was also a good opportunity to seek potential cooperators and advertise his fame. Holding this banquet benefited him and helped to mitigate the current crisis.

The Mandarin Banquet was a success, enabling him to temporarily gain local trust without being quickly overthrown. Lu Ji's "Hiding Mandarins for his Mother" was a bonus. The Eastern Han Dynasty was a time when propriety and prestige were highly valued. Large clans spared no efforts to teach the family members about ritual and righteousness. These moral values were concretized practice in the Banquet via Lu Ji's actions and words, which was an extra harvest, for this practice occurring in Yuan Shu's Banquet was undoubtedly good for Yuan Shu's reputation. Lu Ji's actions and words transformed a feast that was originally more of greater political meanings and purposes into a venue for the promotion of ritual and edification. Taking this advantage, Yuan Shu would naturally spare no effort to promote such a glorious, filial motherly thing for the young gentleman of the Lu's Clan. The wide-spreading of Lu Ji's story was a reflection of the success of the Banquet. The fact that filial piety was able to be practiced at Yuan Shu's banquet accumulated fame for him. For Lu's Clan, the young gentleman of Lu's Clan's receiving recognition and praise also benefitted the Clan. Lu Ji's practice was a win-win situation for both Yuan Shu and Lu's Clan. This result satisfied Yuan Shu very much. He was able to get a firm base temporarily and continue his expansion. His political life continued.

However, Yuan Shu's expansion was restricted when he did not have enough resources to feed his military, that's why he later turned to Lu Kang to require grains (S. Chen, 2011). From Lu Kang's perspective, Yuan Shu's expansion was detrimental to the interests of the Eastern Han Dynasty and touched his moral bottom line. Lu Kang firmly rebuffed his request. When the two clans had no common interest and common moral identity, the Battle of Lujiang burst. The Lu's Clan suffered heavy losses in the battle. Although Yuan Shu has profited time and time again, this was not a long-term win after all. He would eventually pay for his bravado, when his ambition grew so overblown that it led him to usurp. His insane and bottomless desire eventually led to the end of his political career and drew him to a farewell of his life.

It is important to point out that although the central authority was not as strong as before, the emperor was a puppet at the mercy of others, and the real power was mastered by the large landowning clans, but it did not mean that the Dynasty was over (Roman, 2021). Nominally, everyone still had the Emperor as their common lord, they were still officials authorized by the Dynasty and doing things in the name of the Emperor. They all swore allegiance to the central government and were responsible to the emperor. If someone stood out and challenged the central authority of the Eastern Han Dynasty, even usurpation, this behavior was still seen as a great disrespect and would be condemned by the nation (C. Y. Hsu, 1965). That was why when Yuan Shu usurped later, many people strongly denounced him, Sun Ce cut off his relationship with him, and no one would want to work with him (S. Chen, 2011). This consensus was guided by morality and etiquette at that time. To be more precise, this consensus was mostly reflected in one's degree of loyalty to the Dynasty. However, loyalty was a moral issue. A moral issue might have an average or a most common sense. There were no solid restrictions and explicit limits as legislation or other substantive metrics where exact and accurate written regulations or rules were applied. As a result, the understanding of loyalty varied among people. Some people still maintained their faith and were loyal to the Emperor. While others were not as loyal as they ought to be, using the name of the Emperor and taking the opportunity to benefit themselves. They did not take any obvious and public actions to harm the Dynasty, such as



causing rebellion and chaos. It was also the morality and etiquette that restricted those people who were loyal and conscientious, to standing out and stopping the undermining, when the social situation was exacerbated at that time, for after all, everyone was under the rule and in the name of the Emperor. That's why the great clans were using the name of the Emperor for their benefit.

Lu Kang was a typical loyal official of that era, who tried his best to defend the authority of the central and to consider the interests of the Eastern Han Dynasty throughout his life. At the same time, he was also a loyal official constrained by such loyalty and ideals, when the social situation changed dramatically and the original common sense in etiquette and morality was not applicable as before. That's why though he might be disgusted with what Yuan Shu's deeds, he did not have the means to put any comments on this. On the contrary, his insistence on traditional etiquette consensus could only make him accept the invitation because both Yuan Shu and he were under the name of the Emperor, and there could be no excuse to refuse the invitation from an official, who had a higher rank than himself. Yuan's Clan's prosperity was another restriction, for Lu's Clan did not have enough strength to counter such a large clan, both from the aspect of physical bases such as military force and public prestige. Facing such a dilemma, though resistant in his heart, he had to attend the Banquet. Facing Yuan Shu's question, his son Lu Ji answered reasonably. At that time, this praise was a huge benefit to Lu's Clan. For Lu Kang, his son's honor was a symbol of excellence literary nurturing of the Clan, which reflected Lu Kang's effective teaching and the Clan's loyalty to the court (Cao, 2008; Tian, 2015). The success of this banquet lead to the temporary consensus between the two Clans on the common perception of etiquette.

## CONCLUSION

The Clan's loyalty was emphasized in this event, which gradually turned into an ethical profiling of the Clan, which was demonstrated and recognized later. After Lu Kang died from defending the invasion and his effort to save Lujiang Commandery, the court was deeply moved by his integrity, so the court made Lu Kang's elder son, Lu Jun, an official as the Langzhong. The Clan's political virtue portrayal succeeded. For all his life, Lu Ji recognized himself as a follower of the Eastern Han Dynasty, even though his official position was appointed by Sun Quan. It is also important to notice that the Battle of Lujiang had brought significant impact on the Lu's Clan. While maintaining its consistent character of being loyal, a change sprouted in the Clan to adapt better in response to the drastic change in the social environment, as well as the survival of the Clan, which would be another story mainly reflected on Lu Kang's grandnephew, Lu Xun, and his younger brother, Lu Mao.

Lu Ji's smart and proper response was a reflection of his father's moral portrayal, which meant that the father's virtue was passed to his son and the Clan's education on etiquette was a success. In contrast to contemporary Confucian educational doctrines, which consider filial piety as an inherent concept that does not require manipulation through additional assumptions and sociological structures, the Lu's clan ethical practices during the Eastern Han Dynasty viewed filial piety as a principle that emerged from a power struggle. This reflection proved the Clan's emphasis on filial piety education, which was not only in line with Eastern Han moral values but also consists indispensable part of the spirituality in Chinese culture. Lu Ji's story was made into the Twenty-four Filial Exemplars later. The purpose was not only to set Lu Ji as one of the exemplars, using their stories to promote filial piety as spiritual weapons to guide the minds of the people, in order to better serve the ruling class and help consolidate their rule. More importantly, the action of putting Lu Ji on the list of filial exemplars was already a recognition of his behavior. He was recognized and set as an example for the later generation to learn as a reference. Though at his time his action might have had more political meanings for the adults, his filial piety to his mother still has a positive meaning today. This filial piety is a basic respect to parents, who give their children life and raise them. Filial piety is a virtue towards parents, in more extensive and general meaning, it is a moral practice to show basic respect to all the elders who raise children. It is this generation's mission to draw out the best of this virtue and to pass it from generation to generation.

**CREDIT AUTHOR STATEMENT**

Simeng Zhang: All work connected to this study and the writing of this article was carried out by Simeng Zhang. No other researchers were involved.

**DECLARATION OF COMPETING INTEREST**

The author declares that She has no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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