National Historian Affairs: "Dedication Record" and the Fate of Wujiang Huangxi Shi's Family

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Introduction

During the Ming Dynasty, there were two palace coups, namely the "Renwu Incident" that occurred during the Jianwen reign and the "Nangong Restoration" that occurred during the Jingtai reign. Despite the significant differences in the nature of the two incidents, they directly led to the end of the Jianwen and Jingtai reigns, and the two periods of history were deliberately altered or even erased. After Emperor Xianzong of Ming ascended the throne, he restored the historical status of his uncle, Emperor Jingtai, and posthumously named him "Emperor Gongren Kangding Jing". However, after Emperor Chengzu of Ming ascended the throne, he deliberately adopted measures such as eradication, distortion, and concealment to completely erase the Jianwen era and its achievements. The Jianwen reign, which was erased, was therefore referred to as the "Ge Dynasty" by later generations. Until the Chenghong period, the Jianwen reign was still a forbidden area for official historical compilation. Not only were the records of the reign's political affairs seriously missing, but the Jianwen monarch and his ministers were also long portrayed as negative figures. With the loss of official history, folk tales and legends about the Jianwen reign continued to be passed down privately among the people. During the Zhengjia period, works such as Song Duanyi's "Ge Chu Lu", Zhang Qin's "Bei Yi Lu", Huang Zuo's "Ge Chu Yi Shi", and Jiang Qing's "Jiang Shi Mi Shi" unearthed and compiled the deeds of the loyal ministers who died during the Jianwen reign. The legend of Emperor Jianwen's exile also appeared in Zhu Yunming's "Ye Ji", Wang Ao's "Shou Xi Bi Ji" and other unofficial historical records, and from then on it became uncontrollable, gradually replacing the conclusion of the burning theory and becoming the main theme of Emperor Jianwen's whereabouts. During the Wanli reign, with the general amnesty of the Jianwen reign's ministers and relatives and the restoration of the Jianwen era, related documents were even more numerous. Tu Shufang's "Jianwen Chao Ye Hui Bian" and Zhu Lu's "Jianwen Shufa Ni" were the most comprehensive. Books such as "Zhi Shen Lu" and "Cong Wang Bi Ji" that were published after the late Wanli reign pushed this trend to its peak.

"The Record of Devotion" was written by Shi Zhongbin of Wujiang, and it is said to have been first discovered by Jiao Hong, a Hanlin scholar, in Maoshan, and then passed down to the world after being sorted out by Shi's descendants such as Shi Ce and Shi Zhaodou. The book uses Shi Zhongbin as the first person to narrate the process of Zhongbin serving in the court and fleeing with 21 other ministers during the reign of Emperor Jianwen from the 31st year of Hongwu (1398) to the first year of Hongxi (1425). As soon as the book appeared, it was controversial. Shen Defu was the first to attack, directly denouncing "The Record of Devotion" as a fake book, not only questioning the possibility of Emperor Jianwen freely traveling between the southwest and the south of the Yangtze River, but also sharply pointing out: "The person who faked the book does not understand the original system, and the official ranks mentioned are all non-existent in the early days of the country." As a historical work that can stand the test, if there are major problems in the system, it is intolerable in the eyes of serious scholars. Later, Qian Qianyi, Pan Lei and others conducted a deeper analysis of the text of "The Record of Devotion". They provided specific evidence for the problems in the book's system, and based on the actual deeds of Shi Zhongbin recorded in Wu Kuan's "Pao Weng Family Collection" published during the Zhengjia period and Shi Jian's "Xicun Collection", they determined that the so-called "Shi Zhongbin" was actually "Shi Bin", whose identity was not a minister of the Jianwen court, but a grain chief in Wujiang at the beginning of the Ming Dynasty. Not only was Shi Bin's official achievements in the Jianwen court completely false, but the story of his escape was also completely unfounded. However, not all literati and scholars were skeptical of "The Record of Devotion". Chen Renxi, Chen Jiru, Wen Zhenmeng, Chen Yidian, Qian Shisheng, Li Rihua and other famous scholars in the south of the Yangtze River wrote prefaces and postscripts for the book, highly recognizing Shi Zhongbin's loyal deeds and the value of "The Record of Devotion", which greatly promoted the spread and influence of the book. The descendants of the Shi family also used "The Record of Devotion" as a weapon, and successfully enshrined their ancestor "Shi Zhongbin" in the local temples of Jiaxing Prefecture and Suzhou Prefecture during the Ming and Qing Dynasties.

In the early Qianlong period, with the finalization of the "History of Ming", the authenticity of the "Zhi Shen Lu" was finally recognized by the official history as "authoritative", stating that "Zhong Bin has never been a court scribe, and the record was produced late, so it is not credible". Since the 20th century, apart from a very small number of scholars, there has been a consensus in the historical community on the authenticity of the "Zhi Shen Lu". Hu Shi believed that the "Zhi Shen Lu" is "completely in the tone of a novel, with no historical value"; Meng Sen believed that "if the 'Zhi Shen Lu' and other books are considered fake, then the plots they describe are also fake, and there is no need for further discussion"; Huang Yunmei also asserted: "Zhi Shen Lu is a fake book, not credible".

Recent years have seen a new shift in research trends. Some scholars, regardless of the authenticity of the text of "Zhi Shen Lu", have turned to examine how later generations have compiled, reconstructed, and reinterpreted the history of the Jianwen era from perspectives such as text generation, historical narrative, historical memory, reader response, and commercial culture. At the same time, due to the historical fact that the deeds of the officials of the Jianwen era were constantly excavated by fellow countrymen and local officials during the Ming Dynasty, the perspective of local history has gradually become another important research orientation outside of national history compilation. Ding Xiuzhen is the first scholar to use the Wujiang Huangxi Shi family's documents "Shi's Family Chariot" to study "Zhi Shen Lu". He started from the perspectives of scholar interaction, regional families, and the spread and evolution of Jianwen legends, and conducted valuable discussions on the historical background of "Zhi Shen Lu" and the regional factors presented in its circulation process. He believes that the special needs of the Shi family to modify their family history using local legends to seek new development opportunities are the main motivations for the production and circulation of "Zhi Shen Lu". In addition, some descendants of the Shi family, out of clan affection, continue to intervene in the research of Shi Zhongbin and Jianwen history from the perspective of family history, becoming another force in the collection and research of related documents of "Zhi Shen Lu". They may lack the necessary professional literacy, and the issues they discuss may not necessarily be important academic issues, but their ability to discover key clues is often not to be ignored.

The full name of the "Shi's Family Chronicle" cited by Ding Xiuzhen is "Wuzhong Faction Shi's Family Chronicle", a Qing Dynasty copy, now housed in the Historical Literature Department of Nanjing Library, compiled by Shi Jizhong. The original book had 40 volumes, with 24 volumes remaining, and the cover is stamped with "Gift from Mr. Liu Yazhi". The details of Shi Jizhong's life are unknown. According to the genealogy and generation information in the Qing Dynasty version of "Shi's Wuzhong Faction Family Tree", Jizhong is the 54th generation, two generations later than Shi Biannian and Shi Wei, who were active in the middle and late Kangxi period. Therefore, it can be inferred that Shi Jizhong probably lived in the Qianjia era. The 24 volumes of the Family Chronicle that currently exist, from the 11th to the 40th volume, the genealogy and preface content before the 10th volume are not preserved, and the existing parts mainly include poetry, biography, and miscellaneous notes. Among them, volumes 11 to 13 contain biographies, tomb inscriptions, shrine tablets, tomb tables, etc., totaling more than a hundred pieces, which are important clues to fully understand the Shi family of Wujiang Huangxi. Ding Xiuzhen's aforementioned text only used 9 of them, and there are still many mysteries about the development of the Shi family since the Yuan and Ming dynasties. The complex relationship between different factions within the family has not been deeply explored. The latter is an indispensable link to unravel the mystery of the compilation and circulation of "Zhi Shen Lu". Volume 22 of "Wuzhong Faction Shi's Family Chronicle" contains the full text of "Zhi Shen Lu", and Volume 23 contains Shi Wei's rebuttal to Qian Qianyi's "Ten No Theory" and Pan Lei's "Four False Three False Theory", which can be regarded as the "encyclopedia" of Shi's literature. Chen Naiqian, a modern famous bibliographer, inscribed on the back cover of the book: "The 'Shi's Family Chronicle' has forty volumes, with twenty-four volumes remaining. The collected poems and essays are quite overflowing from the anthology, and there are many differences in words and sentences. I want to gather them from various family engraved editions, but I haven't had time." The so-called "anthology" here should refer to Shi Jian's "Xicun Collection". Considering the intense textual conflict between "Xicun Collection" and "Zhi Shen Lu", the rich poetry and prose of the Shi family members, including Shi Jian, collected in "Wuzhong Faction Shi's Family Chronicle" may become a key to unlock the birth certificate of "Zhi Shen Lu".

In addition to this, the Historical Literature Department of the Nanjing Library also preserves several other important documents related to the Shi family, which have so far hardly attracted the attention they deserve from the academic community. The first is the "Shi's Wu Zhong Pai Literature Spectrum" (copy), totaling 5 volumes. The authors of the first and second volumes are named "Wu Zhong Yi Sun Peng Sheng Shu, Ce Zong Ji, Zai Xiang Zhong Ding, Zai Mei Can Jiao", and the authors of the third to fifth volumes are named "Forty-nine generations of Ce Zuan Shu, Fifty-one generations of Zai Xiang Zhong Ji, younger brother Zai Mei Can Ding, son Feng Lai, nephew Kui Guang Tong Jiao". Shi Pengsheng lived during the Jia Wan period and died in the eighteenth year of Wanli (1590); Shi Ce was Pengsheng's eldest grandson, who died in the twelfth year of Chongzhen (1639), and was a key figure in the discovery, organization, and dissemination of the "Zhi Shen Lu"; Shi Zai Xiang and Shi Zai Mei were both grandsons of Shi Ce, mainly living during the Kangxi period, and Zai Xiang once re-engraved and proofread the "Zhi Shen Lu" in the eighth year of Kangxi (1669). Feng Lai was the third son of Zai Xiang, and Kui Guang was the son of Zai Mei, and they were cousins with Shi Biannian and Shi Wei, who actively operated to enshrine Shi Zhongbin in the Suzhou Prefecture Xiangxian Temple during the Kangxi Dynasty. The content of the "Shi's Wu Zhong Pai Literature Spectrum" overlaps with the "Wu Zhong Pai Shi's Family Ride", but it has its own characteristics. The first volume mainly records the deeds of Shi's distant ancestor, the Eastern Han Dynasty Liyang Marquis Shi Chong, and the related inscriptions of later generations visiting the Liyang Shi Marquis Temple; the second volume collects the biographies, poems, and essays of Shi Chong's descendants, especially those who moved to Jiaxing during the Five Dynasties; the third volume is dedicated to the biographies of Shi Zhongbin and his father Shi Juren, the official documents, household tickets, imperial edicts, imperial orders, and important documents such as exemption tickets for Shi Zhongbin's enshrinement in Jiaxing and Suzhou Prefecture Xiangxian Temples; the fourth volume is miscellaneous, mainly prefaces, inscriptions, and poems written by literati and scholars for the "Zhi Shen Lu" and Shi Zhongxian Public Temple, as well as a few biographies of Shi's clansmen; the fifth volume mainly collects the biographies of Shi Zhongbin in the county annals and contemporary Jianwen Dynasty documents, the family temple inscriptions written by Zhu Guozhen, Chen Renxi and others, and the prefaces written by Wang Tingzai, Chen Jiru, Qian Shisheng, Zhang Pu, Ding Peng, Gu Qian, Du Zhen and others for the "Zhi Shen Lu" and "Liu Fang Lu" (i.e., the revised version of the "Zhi Shen Lu"). Among them, the prefaces of the "Liu Fang Lu" are missing in other versions of the "Zhi Shen Lu" and Shi's family documents, so they are extremely precious. The lengthy process of writing the "Shi's Wu Zhong Pai Literature Spectrum" coincides with the process of the "Zhi Shen Lu" from discovery, engraving to dissemination. Comparing the two will undoubtedly help to understand the motivation for the creation of the "Zhi Shen Lu" and the pulse of the fate of the Shi family in Wujiang Huangxi.

The second is the Chongzhen "Wujiang County Annals" (manuscript copy), compiled by Shi Ce and supplemented by Shi Zai Xiang. This annals consists of ten volumes, with twenty-two volumes and one volume at the beginning, recording events up to the early Qing Dynasty, and belongs to the same period of literature as the "Shi's Wuzhong Faction Literature Spectrum". Among them, Volume 2 "Market Towns", Volume 10 "Gardens", Volume 12 "Customs", Volume 14 "Ancestral Halls", Volume 15 "Biographies (with Local Talents Discussion)", Volume 20 "Collected Works", have many records related to the Huangxi Shi family temple, clan property, family, celebrities, etc., which can supplement the "Shi's Wuzhong Faction Family Ride" and "Shi's Wuzhong Faction Literature Spectrum". The predecessor of the Chongzhen "Wujiang County Annals" was the Chenghua "Wujiang County Annals" compiled by Shi Jian, also known as the "Songling Annals", which still existed during the Daoguang period. The political and administrative parts of the Chenghua "Wujiang County Annals" were excerpted in the "Taxation Annals" from Volume 12 to 17 of the Qianlong "Wujiang County Annals" in the form of "Shi Jian said", which has extremely high historical value, involving high insights into tax levies, corvee labor, tribute handling, miscellaneous taxes, etc. Mr. Mori Masao, a great scholar of Ming and Qing history in Japan, referred to it as the "Shi Jian Memorandum", and based on it, he explored the process of Suzhou's reform from "discussing grain consumption" to "discussing land consumption".

The third type is the "Collection of Mr. Xicun" (manuscript), twenty-eight volumes, six books, authored by Shi Bin's great-grandson, Shi Jian. Compared with the most popular eight-volume version of "Xicun Collection" in the Siku Quanshu, the content is richer. The Siku version of "Xicun Collection" states: "Wang Shizhen's 'Xiangzu Notes' says: Xu Hanlin's telegraph (that is, Xu Jue - note by the author) sent the twenty-eight volumes of the Xicun Collection, which was a famous ancient work by his local predecessor Shi Jian. ... This collection of twenty-eight volumes is not complete, but there is no selection by the Confucian scholars seen today, so this version is still recorded, and the differences and similarities of the volumes are attached for verification." It can be seen that when the Siku Quanshu was collecting the "Xicun Collection", it did not see a more complete twenty-eight volume version, and therefore did not dare to confirm whether the twenty-eight volume version in Xu Jue's hands was the same version as the one passed down by Chen Jiru. The twenty-eight volumes of "Collection of Mr. Xicun" held by the Nanjing Library are titled on the first page: "Written by Songling Shi Jian, edited by Yunjian Chen Jiru, read by his disciple Wen Zhengming, and compiled by his grandson", confirming that it is undoubtedly the version selected by Chen Jiru. After the catalog, there is also a handwritten appraisal by Xu Weiren, a famous book collector in the late Qing Dynasty: "This is indeed the twenty-eight volumes selected by Chen Meigong (that is, Chen Jiru - note by the author), with the seal of Xu Hongting Taishi (that is, Xu Jue - note by the author), both before and after, the sixth volume even has a handwritten biography of poets from various dynasties by Hongting, which is the version not seen in the Siku mentioned in 'Random Talks North of the Pond'." The rediscovery of the "Collection of Mr. Xicun" is of significance in terms of version cataloging, and its value in determining the authenticity of the "Dedication Record" should not be underestimated, because it contains the biography written by Shi Jian for his great-grandfather Shi Bin. The main evidence for Qian Qianyi and Pan Lei's identification of Shi Zhongbin's identity comes from Wu Kuan's tombstone and Shi Jian's biography. The Siku version also deeply perceives the connection between the two, directly stating: "The collection contains the biography of his great-grandfather, Mr. Wenzhi, who only talks about the incident of arresting corrupt officials during the Hongwu period, without mentioning the Jingnan incident." This reveals the basic attitude towards this case.

Although the above four types of literature have a profound connection with the Shi clan, they do not record important information such as family lineage and branches. Fortunately, the Shanghai Library's genealogy reading room has a copy of the "Shi Clan Genealogy of Wu Zhong" published during the Qianlong period. This genealogy was first created by Shi Bin's son, Shi Sheng, and then gradually formed its current basic structure, which adopts both European and Su genealogy methods, through the efforts of several generations of people including Shi Jian, Shi Pengsheng, Shi Zhongjing, and Shi Ce. The biggest change was that, starting from the seventh year of the Chongzhen era (1634), Shi Ce successfully "restored" the identity of Shi Bin as a courtier of the Jianwen era in the family genealogy, "Zhong Bin, styled Wen Zhi, also known as Qingyuan, was a scholar of the Hongwu Wuyin Mingjing, a bachelor of the Hanlin Academy, and a book attendant of the Wenyuan Pavilion."

Another important historical work, "Huangxi Zhi", has been lost. During the Daoguang period of the Qing Dynasty, Qian Chi, a native of Huangxi, once had the wish to compile this book for reference, but he could hardly find the original manuscript. He only found one volume recorded in his family's collection, which was hardly the complete version. Qian's book was revised five times before it was completed, preserving a large amount of information about the Shi family's characters, biographies, poetry, houses, and anecdotes. Moreover, since it was written relatively late, it can supplement the lack of Shi family's literature from the Kangxi to Daoguang periods.

By comparing and sorting out the relationships among the above texts, it is not difficult to clarify the intricate connection between "Zhi Shen Lu" and the Shi family, and many mysteries about the creation and circulation of "Zhi Shen Lu" may be solved. In the past, scholars either placed "Zhi Shen Lu" in the system of Jianwen historiography to discern its authenticity, or tried to construct a genealogy of the Shi family using the rich "sub-texts" (prefaces and postscripts) in it. Although this can partially trace the clues in the process of the creation of "Zhi Shen Lu", if we do not return to the layers of documents and daily life of several or even dozens of generations of the Huangxi Shi family, it is somewhat like scratching an itch through a boot. The Shi family's documents mix Shi Zhongbin's deeds, prefaces and postscripts of "Zhi Shen Lu", poems and texts of the clan members, biographies, tomb inscriptions, and official documents, which opens a unique window for us. If we follow this clue, it will not only help to understand the real motive for the creation of "Zhi Shen Lu" and the basic context of its reprints, but also allow us to glimpse some structural scenes of universal significance in the socio-economic changes in the Jiangnan region during the Ming and Qing dynasties through the microcosm of a family history.

Hidden family book

As previously mentioned, there is a deep connection between "Zhi Shen Lu" and "Xi Cun Ji". Qian Qianyi and Pan Lei once made extensive use of the historical facts recorded in "Pao Weng Jia Cang Ji" and "Xi Cun Ji" to debunk "Zhi Shen Lu". The author of "Pao Weng Jia Cang Ji" is Wu Kuan, whose courtesy name is Yuan Bo and pseudonym is Pao An. He was from Changzhou County, Suzhou Prefecture, and was the top scholar in the imperial examination in 1472. He was appointed as a compiler and eventually promoted to the Minister of Rites. His collected works were printed during the Zhengde period and were reprinted based on "Si Bu Cong Kan Chu Bian". Among them, "Qingyuan Shi Fu Jun Mu Biao", written based on the historical record "Zeng Zu Kao Qingyuan Fu Jun Xing Zhuang", clearly states his position as a grain official, making the historical facts of Shi Bin more authentic. Wu Kuan was well-known in Jiangnan, and his collected works were widely circulated. The "Mu Biao" he wrote is a work that the Shi clan could not ignore. "Xi Cun Ji" was printed in the early Jiajing period and consists of eight volumes, but this edition is now rarely circulated. Shi Kaibi said in the postscript of the reprinted edition of "Xi Cun Ji" in the 11th year of Qianlong: "The eight volumes of Xi Cun Gong's poetry and prose collection were published by his great-grandson Nan Hu Gong during the Jiajing period of the Ming Dynasty. After the war, the edition was lost." Among the many versions of "Xi Cun Ji" held by the Shanghai Library, there is indeed a Jiajing eight-year edition compiled by Huang Chang, with the format of "black grid, white mouth, double edges, no fishtail", divided into eight volumes, with one additional volume. At the end of the book, Huang Chang wrote: "This Jiajing edition of 'Xi Cun Ji' is also a rare edition among the separate collections of the Ming people... This was published by the great-grandson Bi in the eighth season of Jiajing." However, the sixth volume of this edition, which includes "speeches, sacrificial texts, biographies, tomb inscriptions, tomb tables, and cover stone texts", does not include "Zeng Zu Kao Qingyuan Fu Jun Xing Zhuang", the original text of "Qingyuan Shi Fu Jun Mu Biao", as people expected. This somewhat unusual move has somewhat hindered the path for later generations to restore the historical facts of Shi Bin through "Xing Zhuang". Pan Chizhang, a historian from the late Ming and early Qing dynasties who had personally seen the printed edition of "Xi Cun Ji", also keenly observed the important clue that "Xing Zhuang is not included in Xi Cun Ji".

The most popular version of "Xicun Collection" is the Siku Quanshu version, which was adopted from the collection of Ma Yu from Lianghuai. The number of volumes is consistent with the edition published in the eighth year of Jiajing, but the content is slightly different. The collection not only includes "The Conduct of the Lord of Qingyuan Prefecture, My Great Grandfather", but also changes "Shi Bin" in "Tomb Inscription" to "Shi Zhongbin", and there are minor changes in other contents. Pan Lei revealed this in his "Re-engraving of Zhishenlu Bian". The aforementioned 28-volume "Collection of Mr. Xicun" held by the Nanjing Library is rarely circulated and has long been monopolized by the Shi family, and is kept secret as a private collection. The reason for this, as Pan Lei said: "If the complete works of Xicun are circulated, the falseness of 'Zhishenlu' will be self-defeating. Therefore, with the numerous descendants of the Shi family, they have the power to engrave this but not to engrave it for its harm to the deceased." From this, it can be seen that the main reason why the "Xicun Collection" has not been fully engraved is that the Shi family is restricted by the description in Wu Kuan's "Tomb Inscription", and they dare not completely overturn the deeds of Shi Zhongbin in "Conduct" according to the statement of "Zhishenlu".

According to the revised version of "Zhishenlu" in the eighth year of Kangxi by Shi Zai Xiang, "Zhishenlu" has been printed nine times since the end of the Wanli period, and this statement has not caused any doubts from predecessors. However, upon careful analysis, the three printed copies before Taichang are all questionable. The reason why Shi added these fictitious printed copies before the family's own copies was to cover up his unspeakable secret. This is highly consistent with the logic of keeping the complete collection of "Xicunji" out of circulation. In this sense, without clarifying the source of the various family-owned versions of "Xicunji" and "Zhishenlu", it would be difficult to truly understand the early history of the Shi family and the life of Shi Bin.

Section One "West Village Collection"

In his "Postscript to the Collection of Xicun", Pan Lei mentioned that the "Xicun Collection" was first engraved in the early years of the Jiajing period: "Before Cheng Hong in our town, the only one who was famous for his literary talent was Mr. Shi Minggu (i.e., Shi Jian - note by the author). He was knowledgeable about ancient and modern times, enjoyed debating, was eloquent in writing, and was afraid of being too sharp. He followed the ancient authors, and his poetry was also outstanding and recitable. The collection was engraved in the early Jiajing period, with a total of eight volumes, and there are still many that have not been engraved." However, he did not provide more information on this basis. The first volume of the "Collection of Mr. Xicun" in the Nanjing Library has a sticker that reads: "This volume was first engraved with the old prefaces of Lu Xiang and Zhou Yong, and then engraved with the preface of Liu Feng, the Imperial Inspector of Pei State." It can be seen that in addition to the 28-volume edition, there were two other editions of the "Xicun Collection", the first one was the Jiajing edition, and the second one may be the Wanli edition.

The Siku Quanshu was collected from the Ma Yu family collection in Lianghuai, only retaining the preface by Zhou Yong, but missing the preface by Lu Xiang. This characteristic is the same as the aforementioned original Jiajing edition. Zhou Yong, styled Xingzhi, also known as Bochuan, was a native of Wujiang. He became a Jinshi (a successful candidate in the highest imperial examinations) in the fifteenth year of the Hongzhi era (1502), served as the Minister of Works and Supervisor of River Channels, and was promoted to the Minister of Personnel, posthumously known as Gong Su. His preface reads: "Mr. Shi, taboo Jian, styled Minggu, a native of Wujiang, is known as 'Mr. Xicun' among scholars. Duke Ding of Wu inscribed his tomb, and his family's deeds can be verified. ... After Mr. Shi's death, his grandson, a Jinshi named Chen Pou, compiled his manuscripts into a collection. I say: This collection is concise yet comprehensive, diligent yet restrained, thoughtful yet evidential. It is not only about water conservancy, but can also be passed down." Shi Chen was the eldest grandson of Shi Jian, became a Jinshi in the second year of the Jiajing era (1523), and was promoted to the position of Yunnan Councillor. Lu Xiang and Shi Chen were Jinshi of the same class, a native of Wuxian, and served as the Right Councillor of Shaanxi. He compiled the "Shihu Zhi Lue". He obtained the "Xicun Collection" from Shi Chen's son, Shi Bi, and highly praised it. His preface reads:

Mr. Shi's grandson, Chen, and I were both selected as Jinshi (imperial scholars). The son of Jinshi, Bi, often visited our family, and he asked for Mr. Shi's works. All the works I had seen in the past were carefully given to him, shining like the moon in the night. The merchant knew it was a treasure, but he couldn't get it. However, one day he got it all, and he was overjoyed. He read day and night, reading his prose, his words, which were elegant but not obscene, embodying the full essence; reading his ancient poems, his words were rich and never tired of their profoundness; reading his recent works, his words were steep and neat, concise and clear, beyond the comparison of sounds; reading his records, his words were thorough and the events were prominent, which were called good records; reading his epitaphs, they were factual and not close to flattery, comforting the living and leaving no regrets for the dead; reading his miscellaneous writings, their styles were different, their words were orderly and worth watching, the inscriptions of Shang, Yi and Han tripods were different. When reading his discussions on water conservancy and county administration, and his articles on punishing false accusations and removing corruption, he sighed and said, "These are not the words of a wordsmith!" He was indignant at the world, fearing that the customs were corrupt and the authorities did not care, the government was deficient and the people were getting sicker every day, he had no choice but to speak out.

From the above, it can be seen that the first publication of "Xicun Collection" was facilitated by Shi Jian's grandson Shi Chen and great-grandson Shi Bi, which is the version mentioned by Pan Lei. Shi Jian was a prolific writer, and this edition was hastily compiled under the drive of the bookseller, with many omissions, a point that has been discovered by Zhou Yong: "I have always wanted to see the 'Li Zuan' written by the teacher, but it is not included in the collection." Under such circumstances, it is understandable that important chapters such as "Ancestral Examination of Qingyuan Prefecture Lord's Conduct" were not included.

During the Wanli period, Shi Zhaodou of the Shi family from Wujiang, Suzhou, wanted to reprint the "Xicun Collection". Therefore, he asked his fellow townspeople Liu Feng and Xu Yinglei for prefaces. Liu Feng, styled Ziwei, was a native of Changzhou. He was born in the twelfth year of Zhengde (1517) and was still alive in the twenty-fourth year of Wanli (1596). His death year is unknown. He passed the imperial examination in the twenty-third year of Jiajing (1544) and was promoted to the position of Imperial Censor and Henan Inspector. Shi Zhaodou once studied under him and could be considered Liu Feng's disciple. Although Xu Yinglei was an ordinary scholar, he had proposed to build a special temple for Hai Rui in the sixteenth year of Wanli (1588), so he was not an ordinary person. The year when Xu wrote the preface was the thirty-first year of Wanli (1603), and the year when Liu Feng wrote the preface should not be later than this year. According to the information revealed by the two prefaces, Shi Zhaodou's reprint of the "Xicun Collection" should have added a lot of new content. Liu Feng's preface said: "The great-grandson of Minggu, named Bi, I have seen him several times, but I have not had the chance to ask him. Now his great-grandson Zhaodou, who lives in the north of the river, whenever he talks about his ancestor, I know that there are descendants of Minggu! ... This collection has not been easy to change for a long time. Seeing it now coming out from the north of the river, and engraving it for circulation, like jade on a tablet, its brilliance is heard, can it be completely covered?" Xu Yinglei's preface also said: "The great-grandson of the master, named Chenbo (that is, Shi Zhaodou - note by the author), visited the deep mountains, collected the master's published and unpublished collections, and wrote a preface for them." Anyway, at this time, it was still more than ten years before the "Zhi Shen Lu" began to circulate in the forty-seventh year of Wanli (1619). If the "Biography of the Ancestor of Qingyuan Prefecture" was included in the collection, it would have retained its original flavor, which is closer to Wu Kuan's "Tomb Inscription". Shi Mo of the Huangxi room also once "recompiled the collection left by his fifth-generation ancestor, Xicun Gong, to show his virtues" during the Wanli period. Unfortunately, this book, like Zhaodou's rich collection of books, "all scattered and lost".

Since the publication of "Zhi Shen Lu", Liang Changshi Bin transformed into the "Hanlin Shishu" of the Jianwen Dynasty and a loyal minister who followed the deceased. The fierce collision of new and old texts and deeds was unexpected to Shi Zhaodou himself. As one of the two main contributors to the spread of "Zhi Shen Lu", along with the Wujiang Huangxi Shi's Bangdong House Historical Records, Zhaodou naturally knew the contradiction between "Xi Cun Ji" and "Zhi Shen Lu". The second edition and the first edition were not widely circulated. If it were not for the prefaces of Liu Feng and Xu Yinglei that are still preserved today, later generations would hardly know the existence of this edition. The Shi clan took some emergency measures to protect "Zhi Shen Lu" from damage, and the reorganization of "Xi Cun Ji" was gradually put on the agenda. Despite this, since there are not a few people who have read the historical mirror "Xi Cun Ji", and "Pao Weng Jia Cang Ji" is also easy to search, a group of "intentional people" have taken out "Tomb Inscriptions" or "Biographies" to verify the authenticity of "Zhi Shen Lu".

As one of the first to debunk the "Zhi Shen Lu", Qian Qianyi did not refer to Shi Jian's "Xing Zhuang" when writing "Zhi Shen Lu Kao", but solely relied on Wu Kuan's "Mu Biao", and "decided that there must be no ten". Of course, Qian Muzhai did not ignore the existence of "Xi Cun Ji". In "Zhi Shen Lu Kao", he also quoted the biographies of Yao Shan, Zhou Shi Xiu, Huang Guan and Zhao Bingwen's painting postscript in the collection as evidence for debunking. The reason why he relied solely on the tombstone, or because of the "table of the text, based on the ancient behavior of the Ming Dynasty", was not deeply investigated. In fact, Qian Qianyi not only read "Xi Cun Ji" thoroughly, but also borrowed and copied the Shi family's collection from Zhao Dou's hands. On the first page of the "Xi Cun Xian Sheng Ji" collection in the Nanjing Library, there is an inscription by "Yu Shan Meng Sou Qian Qianyi": "Ming Gu lived in Xi Cun, known as Mr. Xi Cun, and there is a collection of Xi Cun in the world. I got his poetry and prose collection from his descendant Chen Bo, and recorded and collected it."

The first scholar to use the "Ancestral Biography of Qingyuan Prefecture Lord" from the "Xicun Collection" to thoroughly debunk the "Dedication Record" was Xu Yuanpu, a native of Fuli, Changzhou County, in the late Ming and early Qing dynasties. Yuanpu entered the Fuxi Society in the second year of the Chongzhen era (1629), and was recognized in his hometown in the third year. In his "Wu Cheng's Stolen Pen", he said: "Xicun has an old collection, which is rarely passed down in the world. I got to see the family's handwritten copy from his great-grandson, Wen Xuechen Bo, which is even more than the printed copy. Among them is the 'Qingyuan Biography', which came from Wu Wending's tombstone, so I dare to correct the mistakes, waiting for historians to pick it up." He may be one of the few lucky ones who have seen both the old printed copy and the handwritten copy from the Shi family's collection. In the "Ancestral Biography of Qingyuan Prefecture Lord" he quoted, Shi Jian's great-grandfather was still called "Shi Bin", and had not yet been directly changed to "Shi Zhongbin" like the Siku version, and his identity was still a grain chief: "The prefecture lord's name is Bin, his courtesy name is Wenzhi, and Qingyuan is his pseudonym. He was chivalrous and liked to help people in need. ... He encouraged himself to be loyal and diligent, and started his family by farming, and became a tax chief, praised by the county officials." This preserved the more original state of the "Biography". It was precisely because the Shi family's handwritten copy and the old printed copy did not keep up with the rapid spread of the "Dedication Record" that the latter was frequently challenged. Xu Yuanpu can be said to be another main debunker at the time of the great change, besides Qian Qianyi. He was well versed in the common practice of debunking, "a book comes out late but is more detailed". After introducing the outline of the "Qingyuan Biography", he bluntly stated: "Xicun was a poet during the Hongzheng period, famous at the time. If his ancestors were commendable, they would not have to wait until the Wanli period to start embellishing them by others. It is known that the fact is nothing more than being a tax chief and being greedy and indulgent and dying in prison, and having a son, which has nothing to do with the decline of the country and the disappearance of the wind and shadow. Who is the forger, every word is like a dream, if it weren't for the descendants to have left behind texts, and the doubts would be passed down for thousands of years." He used the Shi family's own text to correct the "Dedication Record", which can be described as hitting the nail on the head.

The descendants of the Shi family gradually understood the mystery, attempting to control the probability of the continued spread of the "Xicun Collection". On one hand, they strictly limited the casual borrowing of the family collection, and on the other hand, they made some necessary textual processing on the conduct of Shi Bin in the "Xicun Collection". Pan Chizhang, a fellow villager who was "not far from the Shi family of Huangxi and had the most authentic knowledge", was already well aware of the content of the conduct record, and of course knew the consequences of this behavior, so he directly issued a warning: "The descendants of Shi cannot abandon the tombstone and conduct records, there must be other verifications."

By the middle of the Kangxi era, the two Ming Dynasty editions of the "Xicun Collection" had become increasingly rare. Pan Lei successfully borrowed another family's collection from the descendants of the Shi family through marital relations, and "copied it, totaling twelve volumes, four times more than the engraved collection." Only Pan Lei had seen this twelve-volume version, which has not been passed down to this day. Although the length of the text is four times larger than the engraved version and the number of volumes is less than the twenty-eight volumes selected by Chen Jiru at the end of the Ming Dynasty, the content seems to be richer, and it should be a version re-edited by the Shi family at the beginning of the Qing Dynasty. Both were collected by the Huangxi House in Wujiang, the former was seen by Pan Lei, and the latter has the collection mark of Xu Jia. Both Pan and Xu not only contributed to different degrees to the transcription of the "Xicun Collection", but also deeply involved in the public case of the descendants of the Shi family asking for ancestral worship in the middle of the Kangxi era. This is a story for another time, and will not be discussed here.

Pan Lei, who was as familiar with the deeds of Shi Bin as his brother Pan Chengzhang, quickly discovered that the book had been deliberately altered. For example, "The fact that Shi Bin was the tax chief during the Jianwen period and continued until the beginning of the Hongxi period was added with the words 'Hongwu era', presumably to avoid conflict with his service in the Jianwen court. However, the text also mentions that 'after the Hongxi period, the emperor ordered the abolition of the tax on deserted fields. Other tax chiefs dared not report it, but the prefect alone said: "The emperor's benevolence, how can we fear disaster and harm the people? Everyone followed him and the tax was reduced by a certain amount." This is obviously the work of the former tax chief. The words 'we' and 'everyone followed him' were deleted to cover up the traces." The addition of "Hongwu era" and the deletion of "we" were both aimed at reconciling the textual conflict between Shi Bin's identity as a grain chief and his service as a minister in the Jianwen court. The altered text "successfully" positioned Shi Bin's tenure as grain chief in the Hongwu era, and he entered the court as a scholar after Jianwen ascended the throne. If it were not for the inability to alter Wu Kuan's epitaph, the closely related text would probably have been completely unrecognizable. Pan Lei also discovered that a letter from Shi Jian to Wu Kuan had been forged in the newly engraved collection. The gist of the letter was that Wu Kuan's epitaph originally contained the words "other hidden virtues and extraordinary deeds, not easy to exhaustively describe", which implied the profound meaning of Shi Bin's entry into the court. Shi Jian, in order to avoid disaster to his family, specifically wrote to Wu Kuan asking him to delete the phrase "hidden virtues and extraordinary deeds", so the epitaph did not reveal Shi Bin's loyalty and extraordinary deeds. If this were true, the traces of Shi Bin's entry into the court in the epitaph could be easily explained. Pan Lei obviously could not tolerate this kind of deception, and metaphorically compared it to the fraud of a litigant and a clerk: "Can the unengraved letter be trusted if the engraved epitaph can still be changed? ... Just like a litigant who is insincere will collude with the clerk, adding a word or two at the crucial point of the document to cover up the truth. Once discovered, the crime is even more obvious, and the effort to deceive is in vain. This is what I mean." The descendants of the Shi family, who held the right to publish and distribute the "Xicun Collection", knew that this move could not shake the established text in the "Paoweng Family Collection", so they flatly denied the letter: "There is no such letter asking for deletion, Lei must have seen this and the letter of text determination in his dream?" However, in the "Qingyuan Shi Fugong Tomb Inscription" recorded in the "Shi Family Wuzhong Branch Literature Genealogy", there is indeed the phrase "other hidden virtues and extraordinary deeds, not easy to exhaustively describe", which is not in the "Paoweng Family Collection", which indirectly proves that Pan Lei's words are not false.

In the rarely circulated 28-volume "Collection of Mr. Xicun", the "Biography of the Ancestor of Qingyuan Prefecture" was included for the first time, becoming the "earliest" clue of the "Biography" left in the world. However, this biography not only added the "era of Hongwu", but also deleted the sentences "our generation" and "everyone follows it", which is no different from the 12-volume version seen by Pan Lei. The "Xicun Collection" has long existed and circulated in the form of "transcripts". Due to the repeated copying, many private collections including the one selected by Chen Jiju have gradually lost the authority of the original version. Because there is a very complex and interesting story behind the "Xicun Collection", although Qian Qianyi, Xu Yuanpu, Pan Lei, Xu Jin and others have witnessed more complete private collections, when the Siku Quanshu collected this collection, they could only use the two Huai Ma Yu's private collection with unknown origin to make up the number.

From the information currently available, it seems that there are two circulation systems for the family manuscript of "Xicun Ji". One is the Wanli edition led by Shi Zhaodou, which has been scattered, and the other is represented by the twelve-volume manuscript borrowed by Pan Lei from the descendants of the Shi family in Huangxi and the twenty-eight volumes selected by Chen Jiru in Xu Qu's collection. The former mainly spread within Suzhou city, while the latter has a traceable circulation, mainly spreading in the border area of Wujiang and Jiaxing with Huangxi as the radius. In the eleventh year of Qianlong (1746), Shi Kaibi, a descendant of Shi Ce, joined forces with Lu Kuixun of Pinghu and Li Guo of Suzhou to re-read and engrave "Xicun Ji". This re-engraved edition is another important version besides the twelve-volume and twenty-eight-volume editions. Currently, only the Shanghai Library has collected this engraved edition. The library also has a manuscript copied by the Liu family of Wujiang in the tenth year of the Republic of China, which is also based on this edition. Shi Kaibi explained the source of this engraved edition in the "Preface" and "Postscript": "The original manuscript corrected by hand by Zunyi Weigong (i.e., Shi Ce - note by the author) is in order, and all the old engravings and the poetry selections of Mr. Qian Muzhai and Mr. Zhu Zhutuo are complete, which is more perfect than the previous engraved editions"; "(I) have borrowed more than twenty volumes of manuscripts from my uncle Mei Yan, and presented them to Mr. Lu Lutang of Danghu for proofreading". The so-called original manuscript corrected by Shi Ce is a twenty-one volume manuscript with uneven quantity and many errors in position. Although it is different from the manuscripts seen by Pan Lei and Xu Qu, all three come from the Shi family's Huangxi room, and it is hard to say that there is no connection.

Out of an "instinctive" sense of caution, Shi Kaiki followed the tradition of his ancestors and did not publish all the original manuscripts of the historical records. Instead, he "slightly reduced the social texts, selected five out of ten poems, seven out of ten essays, combined and discussed them in order, and compiled them into eight volumes." In terms of the overall length, the historical manuscripts selected by him "reduced one-third of the stored manuscripts and increased two-thirds of the old engravings." The remaining unpublished parts were "modeled after the collection of Mr. Zhenchuan, named as the remaining collection, and stored in the family school." It should be pointed out that the eighth volume of this edition also includes "The Biography of the Lord of Qingyuan Prefecture, My Great-Grandfather." The references to "the era of Hongwu," "our generation," and "everyone follows it" are exactly the same as those selected by Chen Jiru and the Complete Library in Four Branches, but there are slight differences in some irrelevant expressions, reflecting the common phenomenon of "multiple systems coexisting" in the process of manuscript circulation.

Chapter 2 "Record of Devotion"

According to popular saying, "Zhi Shen Lu" was first printed in the 47th year of Wanli (1619). The reason why predecessors made such assertions is twofold: firstly, they followed the statements of Shen Defu and Qian Qianyi. Shen Defu's "Wanli Ye Huo Bian" states: "Recently, there are people who have printed 'Zhi Shen Lu'", and Qian Qianyi also said: "During the Wanli period, 'Zhi Shen Lu' was widely circulated in Wu Zhong", hence the beginning of the spread of "Zhi Shen Lu" was set during the Wanli period; secondly, it comes from the overall review of the past editions of "Zhi Shen Lu" by Shi Zai Xiang in the eighth year of Kangxi, which clearly identified the first printing of the book as the Jiaomo (1619) edition printed by Jiao's family in Moling.

Upon careful scrutiny, the above statement may be open to discussion. "Wanli Ye Huo Bian" was written between the 34th and 35th years of Wanli (1606-1607), and was then "abandoned in the waste bin" by Shen Defu, who "stopped writing for more than ten years". In the 47th year of Wanli, Shen added to the original draft, "regardless of old or new, he recorded as he pleased, and also completed the volume", supplementing it into "Continued Compilation". After the book was completed, "it was a pity that it was not printed. By the end of Chongzhen, Changxi was a place of exile for the reeds, and the generations of precious gems had all been wiped out. Only four or five out of ten of this compilation remained". In the 25th year of Kangxi (1686), Qian Fang rearranged the book based on the copied version by Zhu Yizun, "cutting and arranging, all into thirty volumes, divided into forty-eight categories," Qian's classification was indeed convenient, but it disrupted the order of the initial compilation and the continued compilation, obscuring Shen's process of writing the book. Not only was the original appearance of the book impossible to glimpse, but it also caused unnecessary reading difficulties. The 47th year of Wanli was exactly the year when the historical records obtained "Zhi Shen Lu" from Jiao Hong and had it printed by Jiao Hong, which was the same year when Shen Defu completed the "Continued Compilation". There seems to be no contradiction between the two, and they seem to be seamlessly connected. However, considering that Shen Defu died in the 15th year of Chongzhen (1642), there were still more than 20 years left before the "Continued Compilation" was drafted. Given Shen's writing habit of "recording as he pleased, regardless of old or new", it is not ruled out that he continued to supplement after the 47th year of Wanli. In fact, in the 52nd year of Kangxi (1713), Shen Defu's fifth-generation grandson, Shen Zhen, "collected from various families, looked at what was missing from Qian's version and copied it", striving to "complete this book" and inevitably making inappropriate selections, incorporating some items that were not originally in the main compilation and the continued compilation, further disrupting the original structure of the book. Therefore, whether the "recent day" in "Wanli Ye Huo Bian" refers to a certain day in the 47th year of Wanli, it is hard to confirm.

As for what Qian Qianyi said about the widespread circulation of "Zhishenlu" in Wu during the Wanli period, it originated from the background of Ouyang Diaolu, the Nanjing Household Department in the fourth year of Tianqi (1624), who wanted to posthumously confer a title on Shi Zhongbin and build a shrine for him. Qian Qianyi was eager to debunk the "Zhishenlu". Qian completely believed the mainstream view at the time and did not deliberately question the upper limit of the first appearance of "Zhishenlu", so it is not enough to serve as definitive evidence that "Zhishenlu" was first circulated during the Wanli period. In addition, what Qian Qianyi referred to as "Zhishenlu" was not a printed version, but a copied version. According to Shi Zai Xiang, before the Shi family printed it, there were three printed versions in circulation. The first was the Jiao family's version from Moling at the end of Wanli, the second was the Sun family's (Ying Kun) version from Songjiang in the Gengshen year of Wanli (1620), and the third was the Wang family's (Ting Zai) version from Songjiang in the Gengshen year of Taichang (1621). Here, let's temporarily set aside the Jiao family's version from Moling and focus on a simple analysis of the two Songjiang versions.

Sun Yingkun, a native of Dayu, Jiangxi, served as the Tongzhi of Songjiang in the 47th year of Wanli (1619). He was one of the earliest people to come into contact with the "Zhi Shen Lu". In his preface to the "Shi Hanlin Zhi Shen Lu", he specifically mentioned that he obtained this record from Zhao Fanfu in Loujiang. Zhao Fanfu, also known as Zhao Huanguang, was a scholar from Taicang who was skilled in calligraphy and poetry, and chose to live in Hanshan in his later years. Around the Dragon Boat Festival in the 48th year of Wanli (1620), Sun Yingkun and his friends visited Zhizhi, Hanshan, and Tianping, and took the opportunity to visit Zhao's residence. His friends "consulted him about several major events of the national dynasty, starting with the reform and removal. Fanfu said: I recently obtained this record, which is very accurate and well-founded for the people of Zhi. The details recorded are slightly different from the books I studied on statecraft, which is indeed a record." Sun Yingkun, out of his interest in the events of the Jianwen era, "asked for a copy and paid for it to be engraved". However, the main text of the "Zhi Shen Lu" is only over 5,000 characters, which is very convenient to copy. Sun Yingkun copied the entire text from Zhao Huanguang, and even if he intended to print the book, it seemed a bit rushed to complete it in about half a year. When Mr. Sun recalled this past event in the early years of Tianqi, he only said: "Before this, I assisted the county in Yunjian, visited Zhao Fanfu, the hermit in Hanshan, and the hermit gave me the Shi Gong Zhi Shen Lu. I was overjoyed after reading it and paid for it to be printed", but he did not specify the exact year of the printing of the "Zhi Shen Lu".

Wang Tingzai was originally from Huating, Songjiang, and once served as the county magistrate of Yuanjiang. After seeing the "Zhi Shen Lu", he "loved it and transcribed it by hand, and collated it with the records in the books, tying it under each item". In other words, he meticulously compared and annotated the "Zhi Shen Lu" with the previous Jianwen Dynasty literature. However, he did not immediately publish his results. In the third year of Chongzhen (1630), Tan Zhenmo, a native of Jiaxing, "considered Zai's annotations to be worthy of transmission, and urged Zai to engrave and publish them", indicating that Wang Tingzai had not yet made any moves to publish. The so-called Taichang Gengshen Songjiang Wang's edition should be non-existent.

Jiao Hong passed away in the 48th year of the Wanli period (1620). According to popular belief, he re-examined the "Zhi Shen Lu" that he had obtained from a Taoist priest in Maoshan more than 50 years ago, one year before his death, and published it to the world. The preface says:

In the past year of Wuchen, I traveled to Maoshan with two or three friends. We were trapped in a room for days due to the continuous heavy rain. The old Taoist provided us with various books from his collection to read, but none of them caught our interest. Finally, we found the "Zhi Shen Lu" written by Shi Hanlin. After reading it, we clapped our hands and said, "This book dispels many doubts and resolves the sadness of those who are indecisive about history. It's a great find." When we asked how he got the book, he said it was stolen from a descendant of Cheng Hongjian, who once brought it with him on a trip. We took the book home, but soon lost it. Now, after more than fifty years, I found it in my old box, still in good condition. I sighed that Ge Chu was full of righteousness, but his story was not well known. Reading this record, his integrity and frugality were consistent. Emperor Jianwen could have benefited from him, he was no less than a heroic warrior. However, the descendants of the historian lost it before, and I also lost it later. If there are those who are reluctant to reveal the many doubts about Ge Chu, they are fortunate that the current emperor has already vindicated many, and in this era of openness, it is necessary to print and distribute it. In the autumn of Wanli Jiwei, Jiao Hong wrote this in the Xinxuang Studio.

The "Wuchen" year in the preface refers to the second year of Longqing (1568). From that year to the forty-seventh year of Wanli (1619), a full 51 years of silence, it is indeed a bit strange. The Wanli Dynasty was a key period for the rehabilitation of the Jianwen Dynasty's officials. The original taboos no longer constituted any obstacles. Moreover, before Jiao Hong, there was a precedent for Zhang Chaorui to compile the "Zhongjie Lu" of Jianwen, which did not reject the history of the Jianwen Dynasty. However, he kept the "Zhishen Lu" unpublished for a long time, which inevitably aroused suspicion. Qian Qianyi judged that "the preface is crude and not written by a professional writer", which may not be an exaggeration. In addition, Jiao Hong's preface was written in the early autumn of that year, close to the end of the year, and it was almost impossible to publish it that year. From the postscript written by Shi Ce, a descendant of the Shi family, it can be seen that in the forty-seventh year of Wanli, he "brought his son to visit Master Jiao in the Dan Garden, presented the 'Zhishen Lu' to him, and read it. All the doubts that had not been dared to be based on the lack of details were completely dispelled. He then asked for a detailed account of the gains and losses, which Master Jiao immediately provided. Before the book was printed, Master Jiao had passed away." In other words, at least according to Shi Ce, the "Zhishen Lu" had not been published by the time Jiao Hong died the following year, so the so-called Wanli Ji Mo Fenling Jiao's edition simply did not exist.

Various signs indicate that when "Zhi Shen Lu" was first published, it was mainly spread through handwritten copies. This mode of copying not only fits the volume of the text of "Zhi Shen Lu", but also meets the reading needs of those who were interested in the history of the Jianwen era at that time. The reason why the descendants of Shi made three early engraved editions in addition to their own family edition was mainly to cover up their real purpose of "coveting". Shi Wei once defended in "Bian Qi Shu Zhi Shen Lu Kao Hou": "The engraving of this record did not start from Shi's family. It started with Jiao Taishi Ruo Hou in the Wanli Jiwei period, followed by the Sun family in Songjiang, and the Wang family in Songjiang. Finally, the eighth generation grandson of Zhong Xian Gong engraved it in the early Taichang Gengshen period. It was not a forgery by his descendants out of covetousness, but only a clear statement by our Shi family." The intention is nothing more than to cover up, once the initial engraving of "Zhi Shen Lu" did not start from Shi's family, it can ensure the relative objectivity of the record.

From the first year of Changtai (1620) to the second year of Tianqi (1622), three editions of the book were successively published by Shi Shucheng, Shi Ce, and Shi Zhaodou, making it the most intensive period for the publication of the "Zhi Shen Lu". This led to a common criticism at the time that every person and every family was "recklessly" producing their own versions. Shi Shucheng, also known as Yinghu, moved from Huangxi, Wujiang to Jiaxing. He was a tribute student and once served as the county magistrate of Pingyuan. He and Shi Ce both belonged to the Huangxi Bangdong room and he was Shi Ce's uncle. Shi Zhaodou, styled Chenbo, belonged to the Suzhou room. This room started its business in the silk weaving industry. By the time of Zhaodou, the family was in decline, but Zhaodou still had a substantial family background. He was particularly fond of collecting books, most of which were rare editions. He would personally transcribe some of them, accumulating thousands of volumes. He lived a simple life, focusing on proofreading and collating texts. Occasionally, he would make notes in small regular script in the margins of the books, a practice he maintained for every volume. "Since the Tianqi and Chongzhen periods, young people have been fond of plagiarizing unfounded theories, bundling books without reading them, and often gathering to laugh and talk. When they see Zhaodou coming, they are always surprised and avoid him." It can be seen that in addition to his love for collecting books, Shi Zhaodou had a certain level of proofreading and collating skills, which may be one of the main reasons why Pan Lei insisted on identifying "Shi Chenbo's generation as the forger of 'Zhi Shen Lu'". However, the book engraved by Zhaodou was not originally called "Zhi Shen Lu", but was renamed "Qi Zhong Zhi" after revising and explaining the original engraved version, and adding a study of deceased ministers that had not been previously included.

Although the engraved version of "Qi Zhong Zhi" no longer exists, the copied version has surprisingly been preserved to this day and is now collected in the Historical Literature Department of the Shanghai Library. Perhaps it was due to the misleading of the same book with different names, it was completely overlooked by researchers before. The author also discovered this long-dusted "strange book" due to a chance opportunity. In addition to the three characters "Qi Zhong Zhi", the cover of the book also has a subtitle - "Jian Wen's Death". The main content includes three prefaces by Jiao Hong, Wen Zhenmeng, and Chen Jiru, a postscript by Qian Yunzhi, Qi Zhong Zhi (18 items), the self-narration of the book's first servant (5 items), the examination of the ministers of Jian Wen's death (6 items), and other parts. Among them, Qi Zhong Zhi (18 items) is the full text of "Zhi Shen Lu", and the external compilation includes the "Poem of Crossing Wujiang River" by Emperor Jianwen, "Fu Zou Ji Shi" by Huang Yue, "Shi Shi Shu Qi Zhong Jia Ci Ji" by Chen Renxi, and poems written by Lu Chunru, Sun Yingkun, and Tan Zhenmo for "Zhi Shen Lu" and "Qi Zhong Zhi". Judging from the time of the prefaces and postscripts of the copied version of "Qi Zhong Zhi", the latest limit is the first year of Tianqi (1623), and it is not too much to regard it as the mother version of the engraved version of Shi Zhaodou in the second year of Tianqi. As an advanced version of "Zhi Shen Lu", this book not only includes the full text of Jiao Hong's preface, but also adds the sentence "Therefore, the public Jiuye grandson Wenxue Zhaodou corrected the true and false, examined the similarities and differences of the ministers, and annotated and implemented it" at the end. The original intention was nothing more than to increase the authority of the text, but this extended text contradicts the aforementioned "Small History of the Discovery of 'Zhi Shen Lu'" in the historical version. Various signs indicate that there is a relationship of both cooperation and competition between the representative Shi Ce of the Wujiang Shi family's Huangxi room and the representative Shi Zhaodou of the Suzhou room, which is not only reflected in the organization and dissemination of "Xicun Ji", but also in the production and dissemination of "Zhi Shen Lu".

According to historical records, the actual proofreading work of the Huangxi version of "Zhishenlu" in Wujiang was jointly completed by him and Shi Zhaolin, the eldest son of the Huangxi Shi family in Wujiang. Shi Zhaolin, styled Laihuang, was a student. His father, Shi Mo, was a deputy list in the year of Yiwei (1595) during the Wanli period, and once served as the push official of Nanxiong Prefecture. Among all the descendants of the Shi family in Huangxi, Shi Mo's fame is second only to Shi Chen. According to Zhao Huangguang, "Zhaodou, Ce, Zhaolin each engraved a copy, spread among the people", indicating that in addition to the engraved copies of Shi Ce and Shi Zhaodou, there is also an engraved copy of Shi Zhaolin. This engraved copy was not mentioned when Shi Zai summarized the past editions, but it was fortunately preserved in the Shanghai Library and became the earliest existing engraved copy of "Zhishenlu". The actual publication time of this edition was in the second year of Chongzhen (1629), and it was roughly divided into five parts: the first part included five prefaces by Qian Longxi, Jiao Hong, Chen Jiru, Chen Yidian, and Qiao Gongbi; the second part was the main text of "Zhishenlu"; the third part was "Appendix One", which included four poems by "Qingyuan Gong"; the fourth part was "Appendix Two", which included tomb inscriptions, biographies, and related poems and essays written by officials and scholars for Shi Zhongbin; the fifth part was "Postscript to Zhishenlu" written by Shi Ce. Although the length is much simpler than the version of the eighth year of Kangxi, it has initially established a text structure where the content of the preface, postscript, and appendix far exceeds the main text, from which one can glimpse the original appearance of the text of "Zhishenlu" and the trend of textual accumulation.

If the Shi family's carved edition is considered as one of the earliest editions of the "Zhi Shen Lu", combined with the Shi family's documents and the rich prefaces and postscripts included in the "Zhi Shen Lu", the basic context of the book's circulation can be further sorted out. In the first year of Changtai (1620), it was first brought to Jiaxing by Shi Shucheng and his nephew. Li Rihua said in his "Preface to Hanlin Shi Gong's Zhi Shen Lu": "Yinghu Xiansheng's nephew also passed it to me, showing me a volume of the events of his ancestors' removal from office during the period of disappearance." Yixuan is another name for Shi Dan, a student, and it is still uncertain whether the "Zhi Shen Lu" he showed to Li Rihua was a carved edition. In the same year, the book was passed to Songjiang and Suzhou respectively through Shi Zhaodou, Wang Tingzai and Chen Jiju. Later, it was passed to Qian Longxi, a Songjiang native, through Chen Jiju. As the carved editions became increasingly popular, the distribution lines gradually became disordered. For example, Zhang Pu once "got the 'Zhi Shen Lu' of Shi Hanlin from Mr. Bai Songtang (Chen Renxi - note by the author)". Sun Yingyue, an assistant teacher at the Imperial College in Nanjing, obtained the "Zhi Shen Lu" from his uncle and brother Sun Yingkun, and recorded all the names, places of origin and official positions of the 22 deceased people in his book "Jinling Xuan Sheng". Other routes of dissemination are not specifically mentioned. Xu Xun, a famous book collector from Fuzhou in the late Ming Dynasty, saw the Fujian copy of "Zhi Shen Lu" in the third year of Tianqi (1623), "This 'Lu' is collected by Ye Shi Xiang's grandson Jun Xi, I saw it from Zheng Ru Jiao, so I borrowed it and recorded it as one of the relics of the Jie Dynasty." This is an early example of it being passed to places outside the Jiangnan region.

In the early years of the Chongzhen era, in addition to the edition published by Shi Zhaolin, three other editions appeared one after another. They were the Chongzhen Wuchen (1628) edition carved by Tan Zhenmo of Jiaxing, the Chongzhen Gengwu (1629) edition carved by Yu Yan of Taicang, and the Chongzhen Xinwei (1630) edition carved by Qian Shisheng of Jiashan. In Chongzhen Jiashen (1644), Qian Shisheng re-engraved the "Zhi Shen Lu" into the "Xun Guo Yi Shu". Tan Zhenmo once wrote a poem titled "Ti Zhi Shen Lu": "The elder is the old man of Yinghu, the eighth generation of Shi. The family was obliterated in that year, and it was issued by the Yiyuan official. I want to enter the history book, the holy is not taboo", which shows that there should be a certain inheritance relationship between the Jiaxing Tan's edition and the Shi Shucheng's edition. In addition, Pan Lei once quoted Yu Yan's postscript: "The Shi family has already been in the board, and the recent Zhejiang West re-engraving is quite a lot of embellishment", which once again confirmed the fact that the Shi family's edition was earlier than the various editions.

The "Xun Guo Yi Shu" compiled by Qian Shisheng in the seventeenth year of the Chongzhen era includes four kinds of Jianwen Dynasty documents: "Zhi Shen Lu", "Cong Wang Bi Ji", "Yuan Bao Lu", and "Fu Xi Lu". Among them, "Zhi Shen Lu" only records the main text, except for the preface written by himself in the Chongzhen Xinwei year. The main text retains the "Shi Fu" of the historical book in the form of "double-line notes", and is personally reviewed by Qian Shisheng. The versions read by Wu Guisen, Qian Qianyi and others, and those that flowed into the "Ming History" Museum, are all this version. The "Guang Bai Chuan Xue Hai" (Ming Dynasty edition) edited by Feng Kebin is similar to this, "only records Jiao's preface and a few words from his son Xi Yin Gong Sheng", "the three prefaces of Mr. Mei Gong, Ru Gang and Mr. Qian of Ji Shan, are all original, and are not included in Xue Hai". From this format, we can roughly glimpse the initial appearance of the early Ming Dynasty edition of "Zhi Shen Lu", which not only does not have the Qiao Gongbi preface recorded in the Chongzhen two-year edition, but also the compiled part may not have been inserted yet.

Due to the continuous questioning by Shen Defu, Qian Qianyi and others, the Shi clan was constantly revising the content of "Zhi Shen Lu". "When 'Zhi Shen Lu' first came out, scholars and officials competed to publish it. Shi Zhaodou, the ninth generation descendant, was appointed to revise and interpret it in detail." Shi Ce died in the twelfth year of Chongzhen (1639), and Shi Zhaodou, who lived until the sixteenth year of Shunzhi (1659), contributed the most. This can be seen in the prefaces written by Li Weizhen and Hu Ruchun for "Zhi Shen Lu". The former said: "Previously, there were printed versions in Yunjian and Songling. Scholar Zhaodou revised and interpreted it again, and added 'Examination of the Deceased Officials', which was unprecedented, and renamed it 'Qi Zhong Zhi'." The latter said: "My brother-in-law, Mr. Shi Zhaodou, revised and interpreted it for the world, and compiled 'Examination of the Deceased Officials' to supplement it."

Various signs indicate that Shi Zhaodou's re-interpretation of "Zhi Shen Lu" was due to his dissatisfaction with the historical records and Shi Zhaolin's work. In order to resolve the textual conflicts between "Zhi Shen Lu", "Pao Weng Jia Cang Ji", and "Xi Cun Ji", and to enhance its authority, he not only based on "Zhi Shen Lu" to write biographies for the deceased ministers, but also claimed that there were secret family collections that could corroborate with the "Zhi Shen Lu" passed down by Jiao Hong. He once told Wen Zhenmeng, "At that time, there were still private records, named 'Ge Chu Shu', which recorded the emperor's whereabouts in the most detail. However, due to the strict prohibition order, they have been destroyed by water and fire and cannot be examined." Shi Zhaodou's real purpose has been undoubtedly revealed in Qian Qianyi's "Zhi Shen Lu Kao".

After the historian, Zhusheng Zhaodou, revised and recorded it as "The Chronicles of Extraordinary Loyalty", he cited many sources. People generally prefaced it, thinking that there was a secret version hidden in the family, which was consistent with what was passed down from Maoshan. Last year, Zhaodou visited me and asked about the authenticity of the bookkeeping matter. I told him frankly, "It's fake." and explained why. Zhaodou was taken aback, but then said, "What the teacher said is true." When asked about the secret version he had hidden, he humbly denied having it.

Under the relentless questioning of Qian Qianyi, Shi Zhaodou finally did not dare to admit the existence of the secret book hidden in his family. Qian vividly recorded Shi Zhaodou's embarrassment, aiming to confirm the fact that the descendants of the Shi family deliberately forged it. However, it is undeniable that during the Qizhen period, a large number of documents related to the "Zhi Shen Lu" were produced and fiercely debated, and in various forms, either included in the appendices and prefaces of various versions of the "Zhi Shen Lu", or preserved in the "Shi's Wuzhong School Literature Spectrum", "Wuzhong School Shi's Family Records" and other Shi family documents. If we want to further understand the mechanisms of the production and circulation of these texts, including prefaces and postscripts, we need to place them in the context of the Shi clan's efforts to seek posthumous honors for Shi Zhongbin during the Ming and Qing dynasties. As Shi Wei said: "In the late Ming Dynasty, the worship was vigorous, so the officials of the Taiwan Constitution carefully checked the documents, and the words of Yang Guan were recommended, so the gentlemen's pens were like forests." This point is still to be detailed in the following text.

The historical record of the eighth year of Kangxi in the Xiangke edition is the last important publication of the "Zhishenlu" during the Ming and Qing Dynasties. The reason for this publication was because "the descendants of the Shi family sought to worship Zhong Bin as a local sage, and re-engraved this book for the world." For this reason, Pan Lei specifically wrote an article "Re-engraving Zhishenlu Bian", summarizing various errors in the re-engraved edition as "four mistakes and three delusions" to expose them. Although it was not successful in preventing the worship of local sages, this article has been recognized as another heavyweight rebuttal article besides Qian Qianyi's "Zhishenlu Kao".

Overall, the Kangxi eight-year engraved edition has a higher proportion of appendices and postscripts, with the overall length exceeding several times that of the early versions represented by the Chongzhen two-year engraved edition of "Zhishenlu" and the Tianqi manuscript of "Qizhongzhi", further deepening the encroachment on the main text. Shi Zai Xiang specifically explained the process of engraving and sorting in "Re-engraving the Preface to the First Loyalty to the Public Zhishenlu".

In the year of Wushen, at the beginning of the plum rain season, my father ordered me to take out the books he had collected and air them. Among the collected records of the county annals of my grandfather's Wujiang, I found the original handwritten manuscript of the "Record of Devotion to Duty". I gathered them together and read them. The preface and postscript, which were not included in the previous engraving, accounted for about sixty to seventy percent. The section on the posthumous title given to the abdicated emperor was also obliterated and not highlighted. I thought it should be fully printed. So I recorded another volume as evidence. My two elder brothers said, "This is the unfinished aspiration of our predecessors." It should be published without delay, but there are still many omissions in the compilation. When I was sorting out my grandfather's belongings, I got the complete volume and kept it in the box for nearly thirty years. Unexpectedly, it has been repeatedly insulted and not yet printed. Therefore, I was given the task to collate the differences, correct the mistakes, and plan how to print it.

The "family lord" in the text refers to Shi Zai's father, Shi Zongqin, and "the former king's father" refers to his grandfather, Shi Ce. After comparing the original manuscript of "Shi Fu Zhi Shen Lu" handwritten by Shi Ce with the engraved version of the first year of Tianqi, Shi Zai found that Shi Ce only selected a small part of the preface and postscript from the original manuscript for printing, and did not adopt the posthumous title "Zhongxian" given to Shi Zhongbin by Emperor Jianwen. These "alternative materials" that were deleted, whether it's the many controversies caused by the style of the preface and postscript, or the absurdity of the exiled emperor's posthumous title, all pose greater challenges and risks than the main text of "Zhi Shen Lu", so they were decisively discarded by Shi Ce. After the Qing Dynasty, with the changes in current affairs, these previously cautious practices no longer need to be overly cautious. Even if Pan Lei continues to expose the suspicion of "forging preface" in the re-engraved version of "Zhi Shen Lu", it cannot stop the pace of the Shi family's worship. In the end, even Pan Lei himself had to sigh, "Those who engraved the original version did not realize it, if the deeds are true, there is no preface, it does not harm the truth, even if there are hundreds of prefaces, it is useless, what is the point of pretending!" This is a self-mocking comment on his futile efforts.

As time goes by, when people today re-examine the publication and dissemination history of "Zhi Shen Lu", the entanglement of interests and even the standpoint of historiography no longer become the focus of debate, and it may be possible to take a different path and change the perspective of observation. Lun Ming believes that, "The book of Zhi Shen Lu has the original engraved version and the re-engraved version by Shi. The re-engraved version has many additions and deletions. The original engraved version only has one preface by Jiao Ruo Hou, while the re-engraved version has more than thirty prefaces and postscripts, which is a major difference. ...The various versions have not been collated, so their differences and similarities are unknown. Only the family engraved version of Shi has additions and deletions, and the additions and deletions are not only once." Collating the initial engraved version, the re-engraved version, and related copied versions is indeed a feasible path. As mentioned earlier, in addition to the main text, Qian Shi Sheng's "Xun Guo Yi Shu" also includes the "Shi Fu" of the Shi Ce engraved version, preserving the basic appearance of the initial engraved version by Shi. However, the "Shi Fu" in this edition, with small characters in double lines, has extremely limited content, totaling only 199 words. In the "Qi Zhong Zhi" edited by Shi Zhao Dou, the number of words in the attached explanation part has increased to more than 500. In addition to briefly explaining some characters and rules to a limited extent, it also cites "Xun Guo Chen Ji", "Ge Chao Zhi", "Jian Wen Shu Fa Yi Zheng Bian", Lu Yan Zhi's "Shuo Ting" and other Jian Wen dynasty documents. By the eighth year of Kangxi, in the version engraved by Shi, the content of "Shi Fu" has expanded to more than 1100 words. Not only are there specific annotations added after most characters, but also important events and official systems are not spared. Based on Zhu Lu's "Jian Wen Shu Fa Yi", each one is carefully examined. In addition, large sections of "Xi Cun Ri Chao", "Xi Cun Diary", and Emperor Jianwen's "Two Poems on Crossing Wujiang" are cited. It can be seen that in addition to the preface and postscript, the "Shi Fu" section, which is closely tied to the main text, has also been greatly expanded in the re-engraved version.

The increase and decrease in the "Shi Fu" seems to be a significant increase in the text content, but it actually involves the choice between the historical records and the history in the two times of publication. There are two possibilities here: the first is that Shi Zai Xiang "deliberately increased or decreased for the sake of the canon", resulting in the disorder of official ranks and political achievements; the second possibility is that Shi Zai Xiang did re-engrave based on the original "Shi Fu Zhi Shen Lu" in the historical records. The historical records, out of various considerations, did not dare to make all the prepared information public at the first engraving. But no matter which possibility, it is difficult to escape the questioning of "teleology". The former is related to the grand plan of Shi Zhongbin's entry into the Suzhou Prefecture Xiangxian Temple, and the latter involves the authenticity of the "Zhi Shen Lu" and the basis of Zhongbin's mourning. Shi Zhaodou's revision work in "Qi Zhong Zhi" can be seen as the intermediate link between the two.

In addition to the version engraved by Shi Zai Xiang, there is also a copy of the "Zhi Shen Lu" from the early Kangxi period that has survived, but it has not yet attracted enough attention. The cover of the book is titled "Shi Zu Xue Shi Zhong Xian Gong Zhi Shen Zi Xu", and the compiler is Shi Ming, from the Huangxi Shi family's Suzhou branch, which was included in the third volume of "Chinese History Series" edited by Liu Zhaoyu in Taiwan. The main content is roughly the same as the version engraved by Shi Zai Xiang, starting with "Hui Zong Rang Huang Di Yu Zhi Wen", followed by prefaces by various famous officials. Except for the prefaces by Li Weizhen and Zhang Pu, which were denounced as fabrications by Pan Lei, the rest overlap significantly with the version by Shi Zai Xiang, but the order of arrangement is different. Many pages of the main text are missing, making it difficult to see the original appearance. Judging only from the existing parts, the supplementary content is slightly less than the version by Shi Zai Xiang, and the poems of Emperor Jianwen during his visit to Wujiang are not included, but are compiled separately with "Qing Yuan Gong Shi Ci". In the appendix section, the two books differ greatly. Shi Ming's copy specifically includes the inscriptions on the "Zhi Shen Lu" by the descendants of the main branches of the Shi family from the late Ming and early Qing dynasties, as well as the "Chang Men Gao Li Zong Zhi Pu" from the Suzhou branch, leaving a deep imprint of family documents.

Shi Ming, styled Chuiqing, also known as Shuping, was a student of Fuxue. In the "Shi's Wu Zhong Clan Genealogy", he also had the name "Tongheng". He was of a very high generation, the same as Shi Ce and Shi Zhaodou. In the second year of Kangxi (1663), at the age of 71, he began to revise the "Zhishenlu", which was finalized when he was 85 years old in the sixteenth year of Kangxi (1677). The specific process of compilation can be seen in his postscript: "In the Ming Dynasty, there were those who liked to use it privately, so it was re-engraved. If the name Shuo praises, changes the original text of the brother's acceptance, and is proud of it, how can it be used to show the loyalty of the scholar and the filial piety of the descendants? The name is widely sought after, and the original engraving is removed to return to the truth, and the final version is formed, and the handwriting becomes a book. In that year (referring to the second year of Kangxi - note by the author) in October, the ancestors of Huangxi were worshipped in the ancestral temple, and they went together. After the sacrifice, they visited their nephews and compared the records in their sleeves, without error." Strictly speaking, Shi Zai Xiang should be considered as Shi Ming's grandnephew, and the nephews Shi Ming met in Huangxi should be Shi Zongqin, the father of Shi Zai Xiang. At that time, the original copy of "Shi Fu Zhishenlu" handwritten by Shi Ce had been unearthed by Shi Zai Xiang and his son. Shi Ming carefully compared the copy handed down from Suzhou with the original copy of Shi Ce in his hometown of Huangxi, strengthening the deep exchange between the two transmission systems. Although Shi Ming's copy was not officially printed, its value cannot be ignored. If it is carefully compared with the engraved copy of Shi Zai Xiang, which is similar in volume and era, it can not only initially clarify the connection between the two major transmission systems of "Zhishenlu" in Suzhou and Huangxi, but also further reveal the inheritance lineage from the original copy of Shi Ce to the engraved copy of Shi Zai Xiang.

During the Ming and Qing dynasties, some large-scale collected works or classified books often included "Zhi Shen Lu". In addition to "Guang Bai Chuan Xue Hai" (Ming Dynasty edition) edited by Feng Kebin, "Shuo Fu Xu" (Shunzhi three years Li Ji period Weishan Tang edition) compiled by Tao Ting, "Xue Hai Lei Bian" (Daoguang eleven years Liu'an Chao's wooden movable type printed edition) edited by Cao Rong and Tao Yue, and "Qian Kun Zheng Qi Ji" (Daoguang 28th year Jing County Pan's Yuanjiang Festival Office engraved Guangxu first year reprinted edition) edited by Yao Ying, Gu Yuan, and Pan Xien also adopted the full text of "Zhi Shen Lu". The publication form is similar to Qian Shisheng's "Xun Guo Yi Shu", with only simple annotations and case language outside the main text, without as many prefaces and appendices as the Shi family's private collection.

The previous text has examined the versions and circulation of "Xicun Collection" and "Zhi Shen Lu", and the history of Huangxi Shi's family is hidden in these documents. In the long river of history, these documents are constantly being created, rewritten, and overlapped, with history turning into stories and stories constantly changing their plots. Before the 47th year of Wanli, the engraving of the "Xicun Collection" had its own context. With the emergence of "Zhi Shen Lu", the rich content of the "Xicun Collection" family collection could no longer stand in the academic forest in its complete form. The descendants of the Shi family, represented by Shi Ce, Shi Zhaodou, and Shi Zai Xiang, turned to be keen on the production and dissemination of "Zhi Shen Lu" and its sub-texts. Whenever there is a textual conflict between "Xicun Collection" and "Zhi Shen Lu", they often sacrifice the existing records of the former to maintain the authority of the latter. However, the existence of Wu Kuan's "Qingyuan Shi Fu Jun Tomb Inscription" always influences the textual direction of "Ancestor Examination Qingyuan Fu Jun's Conduct" in "Xicun Collection". The super stable resume of "Grain Chang Shi Bin" cannot match the deceased meritorious official "Shi Zhong Bin" in "Zhi Shen Lu". The above dilemma once became a huge obstacle that the Shi family could not overcome in their pursuit of mourning and establishing sacrifices. After nearly eighty years of effort, by the middle of Kangxi, the established goals of the descendants of the Shi family were finally achieved one by one. The many texts produced in this process, either inconsistent or contradictory, should not be seen as a mirror reflecting the history of the Shi family, but rather as old words left by different narrators in different eras.

Chapter 2: The Rise of Liti

To tell the story of "Zhi Shen Lu" and the fate of the Shi family in Huangxi, Wujiang, we should first take the 47th year of the Wanli era as the boundary, and restore the Shi family's documents from different periods to their corresponding years as much as possible. Although "Xicun Ji" has some flaws in its version and minor adjustments in its content, it still maintains its original appearance overall. The compilations of documents such as "Wuzhong Pai Shi Jia Cheng" and "Shi Shi Wuzhong Pai Wenxian Pu" cover texts from various eras, and it is not uncommon to see additions or deletions of words and changes in the meaning of the text for various purposes. If we want to extract useful information from these, we should first pay attention to distinguishing the relationships between key figures and ordinary figures. The deeds of key figures such as Shi Bin and Shi Jian certainly need necessary comparison, while the biographies of other figures are generally reliable unless they are supplemented by people who lived long after the main character, and can be directly used. Secondly, for any records related to social economy, codes, rituals, and cultural customs, we should refer to the relevant records of the same era or neighboring regions as much as possible, and fully absorb the research results of contemporary people, in order to minimize the negative effects of the accumulation of documents.

Huangxi, also known as Muhe Creek, is located 53 miles southeast of Wujiang County. It borders Zhejiang Province and the Grand Canal, and although it is in a remote corner, it is actually a vital passage between the north and the south, serving as an important junction between Pingwang and Wangjiangjing towns. According to legend, during the Song Dynasty, Huang You, the Minister of Punishments, built a separate estate here. His descendants multiplied and named the tail of Muhe Creek "Huangjiaxi", also known as "Huangxi". Before the Ming Dynasty, the place was named after the village, with only a few hundred households. By the Ming and Qing Dynasties, it gradually developed into a commercial town known for its silk weaving industry. After the Qing Dynasty, one of the most distinctive features of the town was that during the peak silk weaving season, people would set up Changchun and Taian bridges to wait for people to hire weavers, a practice known as "walking the bridge" or "finding work". This employment relationship within the silk weaving industry became a hot topic for academic research on the emergence of capitalism in the Ming and Qing Dynasties. In the tenth year of Xianfeng in the Qing Dynasty (1860), the town was destroyed by war, and this dazzling pearl along the canal gradually dimmed, eventually becoming a marginal village in the northeast corner of Shengze Town with a relatively weak economic foundation. At the end of April 2019, the author made a special visit to the village and learned from the village committee's bulletin board that there are currently 111 households and 402 people in Huangjiaxi Village. Along the river, apart from a few ancient relics such as Taian Ancient Bridge and Xijingfang City God Temple, the past glory has been almost completely erased.

In 2008, Shi Honglu, the author of "Shi Zhongbin and Emperor Jianwen," once visited the relics of the Shi family in Huangxi. At that time, there was no highway from Shengze Town to Huangjiaxi, and it was necessary to cross the river by ferry to get there. There was only one household called Shi Jinguan who claimed to be a descendant of the Shi family in Huangxi. If time could go back five or six hundred years, in that era, "The Shi family was the prominent surname in Huangxi, and among the officials of the Ming Dynasty, only the Shi family was prosperous," and successively produced famous people such as Shi Jian, Shi Chen, and Shi Mo. With the spread of "Zhi Shen Lu," Shi Bin, Shi Ce, Shi Zhaodou, and Shi Biannian also successively appeared on the historical stage. However, the Shi family was not originally from Huangxi, Wujiang. At the time of the Yuan and Ming dynasties, Shi Juren from Jiaxing Shijia Village married into the Huang family and acquired the Huang family's substantial property, and his descendants began to settle in Huangxi. Zhou Zongjian once gave a comprehensive summary of the Shi family's settlement in Jiangnan:

The Shi family is a prestigious clan in the city. Their founding ancestor, surnamed Gong, was from Duling in Jingzhao. He was ennobled as the Marquis within the Pass for his contributions in protecting Emperor Xuan of Han. Five generations later, a man named Chong assisted in the revival of the Guangwu era, working diligently and making great contributions. He was rewarded with the land of Liyang, and thus his descendants became the people of Liyang. Twenty-two generations later, a man named Weixiao moved the family to Zhongnan. Eight generations after that, a scholar of the Imperial Academy named Huaize moved the family to the region of Wu.

In fact, although Shi Chong was granted the fiefdom of Liyang, he did not settle there, and his descendants still lived in the north for many years. It was not until the Five Dynasties period that Shi Huaize moved to Sixian Township in Jiaxing, marking the beginning of the Wu Zhong branch of the Shi family. During the Song and Yuan dynasties, "there were dozens to hundreds of families in the village, all of the same surname, hence it was called Shi Family Village." According to the "Shi Family Wu Zhong Branch Literature Genealogy", three generations after Huaize, there was Shi Yanzhe, who "passed the imperial examination, was indifferent to fame and fortune, did not enjoy official advancement, was recommended for promotion, served as a writer in the imperial court, but declined the appointment. He was later appointed as the magistrate of Wucheng." His son, Xunwu, served as "Vice Minister of Rites, Secretary of the Privy Council, was granted the title of Marquis of Yanguan County, and posthumously honored as Zhuangjing", and his grandson Zhengzhi served as "Minister of Rites, was granted the title of Taibao, Marquis of Jiahe County, and posthumously honored as Zhongke". Zhengzhi's son Mengying was "a graduate of the Zhejiang Canal, a teacher in Yiwu", and his grandson Dan "was of extraordinary talent, exceptionally intelligent, passed the child prodigy examination at the age of seven, became a Jinshi in the seventh year of Xianchun, was appointed as a compiler in the Privy Council, and later promoted to the position of imperial censor in the palace". Five generations in a row held prominent positions. Among them, the career of Shi Zhengzhi is particularly intriguing. Zhengzhi was indeed a real person. In the early Southern Song Dynasty, he presented three strategies to Emperor Gaozong: establishing the capital, defending against the enemy, and appointing officials. He also wrote "Jiankang Records". However, the "History of Song" did not include a biography of Zhengzhi, and later generations often attributed his hometown to Jiangdu, not Jiaxing. Comparing the records of Zhengzhi's deeds in the two places, there are significant discrepancies, which inevitably raise doubts about the prominent status of the Shi family during the two Song dynasties. Shi Dan's son, Shi Ke, lived in the Yuan Dynasty. Over the course of more than 300 years spanning the two Song dynasties, only seven or eight generations were recorded, which is seriously inconsistent with common sense. Even if the "Shi Family Wu Zhong Branch Genealogy" records Shi Mengying's age as 102 years old, there are still many gaps that need to be filled in the historical positioning of the Shi family as a prominent family in Jiaxing.

Shi Dansheng had two sons, the eldest was Shi Keyi, and the second was Shi Youwei. Shi Keyi "once served in the Yuan Dynasty, managed the water in the south of the Yangtze River, and made contributions to the world." In the sixth year of Yan You (1319), there was a great flood in the west of Zhejiang. The Jiangzhe provincial government issued an order to seek water conservancy and widely recruited those who knew about water conservancy. Shi Keyi and Zhou Zihua each wrote a "Discussion on Water Conservancy" and submitted it to the provincial government. The report was heard in the court, stating that "the lives of the people are of utmost importance, and agriculture is the foundation. We should not be too stingy with titles and honors, so all those who are experienced in water conservancy are appointed as leaders of ten thousand men to dredge the rivers, so that they can be seen along the coast, and to divide the dredging of the white reed, salt and iron areas. After more than a year, the project was successfully completed, and they were promoted to Chengzhi Lang." The details of Shi Youwei's life are even less known. In the main text of "Zhi Shen Lu", there is a document claimed to be a "Memorial on the Equalization of Taxes and Labor in Jiangzhe" submitted to Emperor Jianwen by Shi Zhongbin, which mentions his clan member "Shi Youwei", who was a wealthy man in the south of the Yangtze River, as famous as Shen Wansan. In short, in the historical memory of the Shi clan, although the brothers Shi Keyi and Shi Youwei did not come from a distinguished lineage, they were also wealthy landowners in the south of the Yangtze River.

Shi Rong, styled Yizhi, also known as Nanzhai, lived during the transition period between the Yuan and Ming dynasties. He never held an official position in his lifetime. He married the daughter of Gu Ying, a famous wealthy merchant and scholar at the end of the Yuan Dynasty. He led a leisurely life in his hometown, spending his days maintaining family discipline and educating his descendants. Despite the devastation caused by the war at the end of the Yuan Dynasty, the Shi family in Jiaxing remained unscathed. The local saying goes, "Out of every ten houses with thick pillars and heavy beams, only one survived. The residence of the Shi family in He County stood tall and alone. The inscriptions on the beams date back to the beginning of the Zhihe era in the Song Dynasty," which had been more than three hundred years. In the early years of the Hongwu era, Zhu Yuanzhang vigorously cracked down on the wealthy in the south of the Yangtze River. The branches of the Shi family in Jiaxing were scattered and moved to other places. After that, the descendants of Shi Kewei in Jiaxing gradually split into two branches. Shi Rong's eldest son, Zizhen, served as the county magistrate of Leling by virtue of his knowledge of the classics, and his descendants continued to live in Shi Village. His second son, Juren, also known as Dongxuan, was the father of Shi Bin. He married into the family in Huangxi, Wujiang, marking the beginning of the Shi family in Muxi.

Section One: Long Grain Storage

Yuan Ji had an old man named Huang, who lived in Muxi Village, Fanyu Township, Wujiang River. "Although Shi and Huang were from different prefectures and counties, their residences were both on the border of the two territories, and they had frequent interactions. Huang had no son, only a daughter, so the Lord of Nanzhai Prefecture married his second son to her, who was actually the Lord of Dongxuan Prefecture." After the Ming Dynasty, Shi Juren registered in Huangxi, Wujiang, and became a Wujiang resident. Soon after, a nationwide household registration survey was conducted. The household of Shi Juren, who lived in the twenty-three cities of Fanyu Township, Wujiang County, was also included in the survey. The "Shi's Wujiang Genealogy" retains important evidence of Shi Juren's settlement and registration - the household registration slip:

A man named Shi Juren, from the 23rd Du West 13th Tu of Fanshu Township, Wujiang County, Suzhou Prefecture.

Teaching and reading books at home, a family of three.

Cheng Dingyi: 39 years old this year.

Not yet an adult: Male Bin, ten years old.

Woman's profile: Huang Suqiong, 38 years old.

In the fourth year of Hongwu era of the Ministry of Revenue, on the day of the month, the right historian Ju Ren took over and approved this.

In the Yuan Dynasty, there indeed existed a "Confucian household" in the various color household system, which had the privilege of exemption from labor and military service. However, after examining the existing original and copied household registers of the Ming Dynasty, the majority of them were civilian, military, craftsman, and stove households, and there was no category of "teaching Confucian household". Moreover, from the general format of the household register, this one lacks the phrase "two males in the family" after "three people in the family", and there is no record of property. Although such incompleteness in content is not uncommon in the surviving copied household registers of the Ming Dynasty, for each household register, it is better to regard it as a strong evidence of the ancestors' settlement history in the early Ming Dynasty rather than a human omission. As a tool for constructing ancestral memory and pursuing practical interests, the embellishment behind the household register embodies many practical issues related to identity confirmation. If we put aside the authenticity of this household register, the ages of Shi Juren and Shi Bin are an important part of determining Shi Bin's identity. Shi Bin was only 10 years old in the fourth year of Hongwu (1371), this information is very crucial, but it is often overlooked by later generations.

The identity of "Grain Chief Shi Bin" has been widely recognized due to the "Ancestral Examination of Qingyuan Prefecture Lord" written by Shi Jian and the "Tomb Inscription of Qingyuan Prefecture Lord" written by Wu Kuan. The impression this creates is that Shi Bin was the first person from the Shi family of Huangxi to serve as the Grain Chief during the Ming Dynasty. However, according to the "Tomb Inscription of Shi Dongxuan" written by Shen Du from Songjiang, his father Ju Ren died in the year of Yi Hai (1395), which is the 28th year of the Hongwu era, at the age of 62. It has not attracted enough attention whether he, who was a household head at the beginning of the Ming Dynasty, had personally served as the Grain Chief before his death. But one thing is certain, at the beginning of the implementation of the Grain Chief system in the Ming Dynasty, Shi Bin was still in the stage of childhood and had no chance to serve as the Grain Chief.

The epitaph written by Shen Du can directly solve this doubt: before marrying into his wife's family, Ju Ren lived in Sixian Village, Jiaxing. After moving to Huangxi, he "inspected farming, studied the art of original field tree cultivation, and eventually expanded his family through hard work in the fields; he paid taxes to the local government, had an audience with the supreme ruler, and received praise for his honesty and the gift of banknotes."

The official establishment of the Liangzhang system was in the fourth year of the Hongwu period of the Ming Dynasty (1371). It was mainly responsible for the collection, receipt, and transportation of taxes and grains, and sometimes also served as the role of encouraging agriculture and managing rural politics. The specialized research on the Liangzhang system was initiated by Mr. Liang Fangzhong. Japanese scholars such as Kawase Tomoko, Nishino Masatsugu, and Koyama Masaaki continued his work, focusing on the Jiangnan region, covering important topics such as the origin, evolution, function, and grain area division of the Liangzhang system. According to the trend of the evolution of the Liangzhang system summarized by Liang Fangzhong, from Hongwu to Xuande, the Yongchang system (Changchang system) dominated. After Jingtai, the rotation system and the friend system gradually prevailed.

In the era of Zhu Yuanzhang, it was not a luxury for the grain chief class to have an audience, be granted money, or even be appointed to an official position. The "Shi's Wuzhong Faction Documentary Spectrum" contains a decree issued by Ming Taizu to Shi Juren, which is very interesting:

On the fifteenth day of the first month of the fifth year of Hongwu, Shi Juren attended the early morning court at the Fengtian Gate, and respectfully received the imperial edict, which said: "Each of you should return home and abide by your duties. You must not rely on wealth and power as in the Yuan Dynasty, use wealth to commit crimes, collude with officials, defraud the common people, insult officials, be unclear about grain taxes, and violate the law in expenses. Offenders will not be spared according to the law. Now the world is in peace, each of you should love your family and protect your property." Shi Juren kowtowed and accepted the decree. The emperor said: "I see you are also an honest man." He was rewarded with twenty ingots of banknotes. On the fourteenth day of the second month of the fourteenth year of Hongwu, Shi Juren attended the early morning court at the Fengtian Gate, and respectfully received the imperial edict: "Shi Juren, a wealthy man from Jiangnan, is appointed as the tax chief. He must deliver 3,800 stones of autumn grain annually on time, and he is not allowed to defraud the common people. The Ministry of Households should give him a notice and check and balance with him. Respect this."

In terms of content, this imperial edict undoubtedly detailed the phrase "received an audience with the emperor, was praised for sincerity, and was granted banknotes" in the tomb inscription. However, in the first month of the fifth year of Hongwu (1372), only a few months after the grain chief system was officially implemented in September of the fourth year of Hongwu, even if Zhu Yuanzhang granted an audience, the timing was somewhat rushed, and it was also against common sense to deliver grain in January. Moreover, there are no other documents to corroborate this, so there are many doubts. The most suspicious part of this imperial edict is that it combines the events of the fifth year of Hongwu with those of the fourteenth year of Hongwu, showing obvious signs of artificial manipulation, and it is clearly no longer the original. According to the "Ming Shilu", in February of the fourteenth year of Hongwu (1381), Zhu Yuanzhang did indeed meet with grain chiefs from Zhejiang and Jiangxi provinces who had delivered grain to the capital, but there were as many as 1,325 people. Whether Shi Juren, a major household, received the emperor's exclusive decree is another question. However, according to Liang Fangzhong's research, Zhu Yuanzhang's main purpose in setting up the grain chief was to prevent officials from embezzling, to ban the collection of households, and to facilitate the government and the people, which does not contradict the expression of the Hongwu-style official document in the above imperial edict, and even quite fits. In the Jiangnan region, known as the country of literature, there are countless official documents and case files left over from past dynasties, and the phenomenon of copying is not uncommon. If we want to understand the truth of history from these, rather than overly entangling with the authenticity of such materials themselves, it would be better to glimpse the details of the operation of various local systems that are not recorded in ordinary documents from their circulation and use. From this perspective, although the above imperial edict may not have been specifically issued to Mr. Shi Juren, the text itself may not be without basis, but has simply undergone a deliberate makeover.

In addition to this imperial edict, the "Shi's Wuzhong School Literature Compilation" also contains a piece written by Xie Xun to Shi Juren called "Sending to Beijing for Discussion", which is also quite interesting to read.

...In the imperial dynasty, the ancient teachers were concerned with the urgent affairs of the people. They used tax collectors to manage tens of thousands of stones, divided and classified them, and by winter, they were distributed in the capital, so that both officials and people were not worried and everything was in order. My friend Dongxuan (also known as Juren - noted by the annotator) was in charge of this matter and was about to distribute tokens in the capital. He asked me for advice before his departure, saying, "I am about to set off, what advice do you have for me?" I replied, "Now the holy emperor is ruling the extreme, generously reducing taxes, and the heaven and the people are in harmony. The good grains are spread all over the fields, and there is a great deal of special books. The position you hold is straightforward and simple, why would you refuse it? However, there is still something to be said. In ancient times, scholars came from farmers, they became rich and then educated, they were selected by the villages and towns, and became the place for nurturing talents. Now there are schools in the counties, but the recitation of strings in the villages and towns is almost extinct, and there may be some loss in the intention of the ancient sages and kings' education. Respectfully following the emperor's rule of the world with virtue and literature, there is nothing more urgent than this. When you go to the court, if you are granted the opportunity to ask questions, you must use this as your answer." Dongxuan said, "Yes, yes." Then I wrote this as a farewell note. Written on the first day of the seventh month of the autumn of the sixteenth year of Hongwu (1383) in Conggui Pavilion.

Xie Xun, also known as Xie Chang, styled Yanming, was a native of Wujiang. He was born in the early years of the Zhiyuan era and studied under Yang Weizhen. In the fifteenth year of the Hongwu era (1382), he was selected as a scholar and wrote the "Guixuan Poetry Collection". The poetry collection is included in the fifth volume of the seventeenth volume of "The Unpublished Books of the Four Libraries", and the original copy is a Qing Dynasty manuscript held by the Chinese Academy of Sciences. This narrative does not appear in it, and his other work "Dongxi Collection" has been lost, so its authenticity is no longer discernible. However, Xie Xun and Ju Ren were of similar age and from the same hometown. The latter sought advice from local scholars and friends before going to Beijing for an audience, which may not be a fabrication.

If it is true that Shi Juren is the first generation grain chief of the Shi family, then what is his son Shi Bin doing now? According to the records in Shi Jian's "Ancestral Examination of Qingyuan Prefecture Lord's Conduct":

During the Hongwu period, the legal system was not yet established, and many indulgent people exploited the common people for their own benefit, causing the people to resent and suffer. The prefect, in response to the people's desires, joined forces with several young men to arrest the ringleader and presented him to the imperial court. The detailed and astute report was praised by the emperor, who ordered the execution of the criminal. He also granted food and money, and provided a post boat for the return home. This was applauded near and far, and the powerful and cunning began to restrain themselves, daring not to commit any wrongdoing.

Wu Kuan's "Inscription on the Tomb of the Lord of Qingyuan Prefecture" is based on the "Biography" of Shi Jian, and also records this:

At the beginning of the country, the legal system was strict, but the officials in the counties and prefectures still followed their old habits, indulging in corruption as if it was normal. The prefect, because of the people's hatred for this, joined with the young men to arrest the ringleader, presented him to the imperial court, and executed him. The whole county was overjoyed. The prefect was then rewarded with food and money, and was provided with a post boat to return home.

At the beginning of the Ming Dynasty, severe punishments were strictly enforced, and the people were encouraged to bring corrupt officials and local officials to the capital for trial and punishment. Shi Bin, in his youth, was quite chivalrous. He and his friends successfully used the method of petitioning to bring the corrupt and indulgent officials in the county to justice. However, when he returned home in glory, his brave act did not receive his father's praise. On the contrary, Shi Juren expressed deep concern and said to Shi Bin, "Our family has a long and solid history, what you have done is not a blessing for the Shi family." After hearing this, Shi Bin also deeply regretted his recklessness and said to his father, "I am young and impulsive. When I grow up, I will change." From then on, he restrained his previous high-profile behavior, "thanked and dismissed his old friends, changed his behavior and encouraged himself, striving to be respectful." After some effort, "he was able to start a family by farming, ranked first in his town, and was selected as the tax chief," replacing his father as the second generation grain chief of the Shi family.

"The Record of Devotion to the Body" states that Shi Bin's corruption and indulgence as an official was exposed in the court in the 24th year of the Hongwu era (1391). By that year, Shi Bin was already 30 years old, so it was impossible for him to use "childishness" as an excuse to respond to his father's questioning. However, this detail did not attract enough attention from previous generations. The historical record "Shi Fu" even used Huang Yue's "Fu Zou Ji Shi" to reinforce the reliability of this event:

Zhongbin was highly respected by the emperor for his straightforward advice. He was honored above the nobles and officials, and his glory was celebrated by all. The next day, Zhu Jishining, a royal relative, held a farewell party for him on the Qinhuai River, and ordered Yue Ji to record the event and draw a picture of it. Scholars Wang Zongchang, Zhang Laiyi, Chen Eryi in plain clothes, and Jie Dashen wrote poems to commemorate the event.

Qian Qianyi did indeed notice serious problems with this text, but his main argument was that Zhu Ji, Wang Yi, Zhang Yu, and Xie Jin, who were either deceased or not in court in the 24th year of Hongwu, could not have written poems specifically for Shi Bin's farewell. Because Qian did not compare this year's events with the chivalrous deeds of Shi Bin in the "Tomb Inscription" and "Biography", and still focused on the authenticity of the "Chronicle of Events", he failed to further discover the intense textual conflict between the "Dedication Record" and the "Biography" and "Tomb Inscription". If the records in the "Dedication Record" are true, the chain reaction caused by the age issue of Shi Bin will inevitably lead to a complete collapse of the logical structure of the "Biography" and "Tomb Inscription". And it is absolutely impossible for such an oversight to occur with literary masters like Shi Jian and Wu Kuan.

Not only that, Pan Lei also found that the modified "Biography of the Ancestral Examination of Qingyuan Prefecture" specifically added the phrase "end of the Hongwu era" in order to strictly distinguish between the identities of Shi Bin, a minister of the Jianwen era, and the grain chief of the Hongwu era. If this is true, then due to the longevity of Shi Juren, Shi Bin only served as the grain chief for a few years.

During his tenure as the grain chief, Shi Bin's achievements far exceeded those of his father:

In times of continuous drought and flood, coupled with military conscription, the burden on the people was severe. Many people were impoverished, some even rebelled and left. Many fields were left uncultivated, taxes were not paid, and officials often failed in their duties. The prefect said: "How can we expect to collect taxes if the fields are not cultivated? Therefore, the policies we implement should prioritize the people's welfare. Considering that agriculture depends on human labor, we should care for and nurture the people, so that they do not falter, and can give their best effort. We should restrict all officials within our jurisdiction, from ourselves down, from exploiting the people for personal gain. The people, feeling appreciated, spread the word to each other, and those who had fled returned. In spring, we should order the farmers to inspect and cultivate their fields, checking on them every five days, and personally assessing their work. If there are those who have not cultivated their fields, we should summon them and hold them accountable. If they lack farming tools or manpower and seeds, we should help them, and further advise their relatives to lend them what they need. They should repay the loan by autumn. If they are lazy and disrespectful, they should be publicly punished. As a result, people encourage each other to cultivate their fields, and the amount of cultivated land greatly increases. The prefect, tirelessly working, personally inspects the fields and pastures, instructs on the methods of planting trees, the ways of fertilizing, and the timing of harvest, resulting in a double yield in autumn. The people all have surplus, and tax revenue is at its highest.

Masaki Koyama regards Shi Bin's deeds as a typical example of grain chiefs encouraging farming, and believes that this kind of encouragement is aimed at maintaining and ensuring the reproduction of farmers who are subject to tax and labor levies. Therefore, it also involves coercion and punishment of those who have not yet started farming and those who are lazy and disrespectful. This is entirely a summary from the perspective of the grain chief's duties. On the other hand, Shi Bin made his first fortune by reclaiming wasteland, and achieved the goal of getting rich by farming. The "Wu Zhong Faction's Account of the Shi Family" provides a different explanation of the above situation:

In the early Ming Dynasty, after the war, taxes and penalties were heavy, and many people rebelled. The lord of Qingyuan Prefecture was skilled in agricultural management, so there were particularly many paddy fields. From Xinan to Shengze, there were no other ethnic groups. Later, fearing that disaster would strike, he gradually shared the land with others.

Here, "甸" can be interpreted as "佃" (tenant farming). From the above two historical records, it is not difficult to see that Shi Bin actually adopted the method of tenant farming, occupying a large amount of newly reclaimed wasteland, and then completing the task of grain tax submission by collecting high rents. From this perspective, his coercion and punishment of the "unopened" and the "lazy and disrespectful" are more justified. Although in the view of Mori Masafu, the number of landlords who relied on private rents to establish their households in the early Ming Dynasty was far less than that after the 16th century, Shi Bin, who "managed taxes as if managing household affairs," cannot be said to be an exception of that era.

It was precisely because Shi Bin had accumulated a very substantial family fortune that his son Shi Sheng and grandson Shi Heng were still under his influence when they successively took over as grain chiefs, and they never forgot his contributions. In the epitaph written for them by Zhou Ding, phrases such as "Starting from a total of ten wells, the policy of levying and laboring started from far away", "The family is growing, it started from Bin; as the local tax chief, his reputation fills the whole village" frequently appear, which may be clear evidence. However, Shi Bin, who achieved success at a young age and became wealthy in middle age, did not have a good end. He was first falsely accused, and then ended up in prison where he died.

There was a cunning man who was in charge of transporting grain. He tried to bribe the local governor with all his might, but the governor refused. The man was angry and felt humiliated, so he falsely accused the governor of illegal activities. The imperial censor in charge of the current term arrested the governor and put him in jail without immediate trial, and the governor eventually died. When the imperial censor arrived later, he investigated the accusations and found no evidence. He then sentenced the accuser to death. The governor... was sixty-seven years old. He died on the tenth day of the third month in the second year of the Xuande era.

Based on the above historical materials, it can be seen that Shi Bin was still serving as the grain chief until he was imprisoned, which is why he was framed while in office. From this, it can be inferred that the earliest time he could have taken up the position of grain chief was in the second year of Xuande (1427). Mr. Liang Fangzhong has long pointed out that the biggest difference between the grain chief system and the local militia system is that the former is a "household service", appointed by the government at any time, while the latter is a "personal service", with a certain order of service; personal service requires personal attendance, while household service can be replaced by members of the individual's family. According to this logic, in the era when the grain chief system was prevalent, there was no strict division between active and retired grain chiefs as summarized by Koyama Masaki. The practice of a son taking over his father's duties after his death was strictly enforced, at least in the Shi family of Huangxi.

The plot of Shi Bin being falsely accused to death does not appear in Wu Kuan's "Tomb Inscription". It only mentions his death in the sentence "The prefect always keeps his word and acts accordingly, regardless of gains and losses. Therefore, many people admire him, but the villains do not like him. However, the prefect does not regret it even to his death." Therefore, Qian Qianyi's fourth point of "arguing that 'Dedication Record' must be unfounded" is questioning this: "The record says that he was targeted by the enemy's family because of his loyalty, and died in prison. But in reality, Shi Bin never died in prison. To say that he died in prison because of his loyalty is a very far-fetched statement."

Shi Bin's eldest son, Shi Sheng, was born in the 24th year of Hongwu (1391) and died in the second year of Jingtai (1451), at the age of 61. During his lifetime, a significant portion of his time overlapped with Shi Bin, especially in the years before he turned forty. His main job was to help his father manage household affairs, as he said, "As the lord's house grows larger, the work becomes more burdensome, and I am constantly occupied with official duties, leaving no time for home. The family's responsibilities all fall on the lord." He officially took over the position of grain chief only after Shi Bin's wrongful death. By this logic, the age difference between Shi Juren and Shi Bin is also close to 40 years, and there may have been a similar transition period. Without more information, it is feasible to speculate on the succession of the grain chiefs based on individual lifespans. Of course, the actual situation is much more complicated. Even during the period from Hongwu to Jingtai when the Yongchong law was prevalent, there were several policy adjustments regarding the Yongchong and the chief and deputy grain chiefs. According to the "Wujiang County Annals" recorded in the Chongzhen era:

The system was established during the Hongwu period, with one district being defined as an area that could produce ten thousand stones of grain. There were forty-six districts in total. Each district had one chief grain officer and two deputies. It was allowed for fathers, sons, and brothers to succeed each other in these positions, and they were given the title of "permanent grain officer". During the Yongle period, the system was changed to have nine officers in each district, divided into three shifts, each shift serving for one year, and they were called "three-year grain officers". In the first year of the Hongxi period, the system was reverted back to "permanent grain officers". In the eighth year of the Zhengtong period, it was changed back to "three-year grain officers", with two officers serving each year. In the eleventh year, it was changed back to three "permanent grain officers". In the third year of the Jingtai period, one deputy was removed from each district, leaving two officers, totaling ninety-two officers.

This phenomenon is by no means unique to Wujiang County. Mr. Liang Fangzhong had already keenly discovered that from around the Hongwu period to the early Jingtai period, the Yongchong system and the regular and deputy grain transport system were alternately used, with the Yongchong system being more dominant. However, in practical operations, it is not easy to handle the alternating relationship between the Yongchong system and the regular and deputy grain transport system. Most of the later records about grain transport come from various biographies, tomb inscriptions, and conduct records, which greatly exaggerate the succession of father and son within the family, and completely overshadow other possibilities during the so-called "Yongchong Law" stage.

During his tenure as the grain chief, Shi Sheng's main focus was still on farmland irrigation and reclamation of wasteland:

The pine hill is on the left, the lake on the right, and the river is nearby. The people farm on the riverbank, but they suffer from the flooding caused by the turbulent river, which prevents them from having a regular autumn harvest. You teach the people to build high embankments, and then the fields rely on them for irrigation. The taxes are collected for the benefit of the state, and the polluted and barren land is transformed into fertile fields, with the runoff returning to the river.

In this sense, Shi Sheng basically continued the existing work of Shi Bin. His son, Shi Heng, was born in the twelfth year of Yongle (1414) and died in the third year of Chenghua (1467), at the age of 54. He also "devoted himself to his profession, was granted the title of Changxiang, ... took over the family affairs at a young age." The era in which Shi Heng lived was just when the Yongchong system was transitioning to the Lun Chong system, and the burden of various taxes and services had greatly exceeded that of his ancestors. This is fully reflected in the biographies written by Shi Jian for his father and in the tomb inscriptions of Shi Heng written by Zhou Ding and Xu Yougong:

The counties were often burdened with heavy responsibilities, and the imperial court sent officials to supervise them. The officials were so numerous that the government buildings could not accommodate them all, so they were scattered in temples, all of which were filled to capacity, and there was no day when the supplies were not in short supply. The town was also located at a crucial crossroads, and there was never a peaceful day for the passers-by, who were constantly asking for things without considering whether they were available or not. All these demands were placed on the local officials, who in turn squeezed the people to meet them, causing unrest in their homes and many to flee. The tax revenue was increasingly insufficient, and the supervising officials kept coming. The clerks and soldiers were busy with official documents, shouting and making a fuss on the roads every day, arresting people and filling the prisons. Those who served as local officials often ended up with their families ruined.

The filial piety and friendship are also long taxed. The lord is in office, and the envoy supervises the overdue taxes. The public offices and temples are moved to narrow places, and the collection is like a prison. The people are not at peace in their homes. All the leaders are embarrassed and can't bear it. The lord should respond to it kindly. The deputy county chief said: Bin has a grandson.

When the city was first built, it was supplied with billions from all over the country, but the Wu meeting was extremely huge, causing the messengers to be overwhelmed with anxiety and distress. Both public and private demands were so numerous that they were indistinguishable. The people could not bear the orders, and the officials could not bear the tasks. Only you, my lord, were superior and took on the responsibility.

Facing such a cruel reality, the reason why Shi Hang could manage things was due to his generous strategy of "preferring to harm himself rather than the people". This enabled him to complete the tasks assigned by the government office without causing hardship to the people. This rare act of righteousness received high praise from the county magistrate, who wanted him to "continue to be in charge of the grain supply". However, the increasingly heavy burden did not make Shi Hang choose to persist, and he eventually resigned, saying "it's not what I like, so I quit".

When it came to Shi Heng's son, Shi Jian, he was not only unwilling to take on the position of Chief of Grain, but he was even unwilling to manage household affairs. His father once tried to hand over the family affairs to him during a gathering with the clan, but Shi Jian declined. The clan members encouraged the father to respect his son's decision, but he insisted on handing over the responsibility. Thus, the four generations of the Shi family's tradition of serving as the Chief of Grain came to an end.

Section 2: The Son Leads the Sacrifice

Starting from Ziju Ren's marriage into the Huangxi family, to the time of Shi Heng, the Shi family has held the position of Grain Chief for four consecutive generations, making it one of the best cases for studying the role of Grain Chief. What's more noteworthy is that all those who held the position of Grain Chief were the eldest legitimate sons, and there was not a single case where it was passed on to other sons. This is as stated in Zhou Ding's "Inscription on the Tomb of Mr. Shi Yougui".

Your great-grandfather Ju Ren came from Jiahe, married into the Huang family, and gave birth to your grandfather Bin. Bin had five sons, and your father Sheng was the legitimate heir of the family, making you a grandson of the Bin family. You were quiet and not a little wise, Bin loved you and gave you twice the inheritance, not equal to his other sons. The family grew larger, starting from Bin, who was the head of the village tax, and his reputation filled the whole village. Your father inherited this (Heng), and was also the head of the tax due to his filial piety and friendship.

As a kind of "household service", it is very common for brothers and nephews to serve as the grain chief, and it is not exclusively enjoyed by the eldest son in the system. The special arrangement of Huangxi's Shi family to pass on to the eldest son and then to the eldest grandson naturally has deeper reasons behind it, which has been revealed in the epitaph of Shi Heng. Shi Sheng, as the eldest son, enjoyed special privileges different from other sons when Shi Bin divided the property, "double the property, not to all sons". It is also clearly written in the biography written by Shi Jian for Shi Bin and the tombstone written by Wu Kuan:

The lord once said: In terms of etiquette, the legitimate and illegitimate sons have different ranks, and I will implement this in my family. Therefore, when dividing the property, all sons should not be equal to the eldest son. He also said: Future generations should uphold this rule without fail.

The lord once said: "In terms of etiquette, the legitimate and illegitimate sons have different ranks, and I should implement this in my family. When dividing the property, the other sons should not be equal to the eldest son. Moreover, he said: "The descendants in the future can uphold this rule without abolishment."

Shijian also deliberately emphasized the status of Shisheng and Shiheng as the eldest legitimate sons in other occasions, "(Shibin) had five sons, and the lord of Xiyinfu was the eldest legitimate son," "The late lord Heng was the eldest legitimate son." In the biography written for his father Shiheng, he even pointed out that Shibin's last words were specifically for Shiheng:

The late king was quiet and serious from a young age, not engaging in affairs, and was often regarded as unintelligent. Qingyuan, who alone saw his uniqueness and loved him, would often hold him on his lap and proudly tell his guests, "He will be a fine vessel in the future, but I may not live to see it." On his deathbed, he divided his property among his sons, instructing that it should not go to the eldest son. He intended for it to be passed down in order of succession, and he also said that future generations should uphold this rule and not change it.

In the late period of ancient Chinese society, the division of property often adopted the system of equal division among all sons, and the system of primogeniture was generally only adopted in the noble class. Under the system of equal division, the father could not normally deprive any son of his qualification as an heir, which somewhat limited the father's arbitrary power. However, Shi Bin emphasized the practice of "differentiating between legitimate and illegitimate sons" and "ordering all sons not to be equal with the eldest son" in the division of property, which seemed to show a typical trend of the nobility's etiquette becoming popularized. However, once combined with other historical family documents for analysis, the mystery can be discovered:

In the early days of the country, corvee labor was hard. My family had many fields, all of which were given to the eldest son. The younger son only got a hundred acres of land, and was not involved in labor services. This then became a family rule.

In the early days of the country, the corvee labor was very heavy. Therefore, the lord of Qingyuan Prefecture established a family rule, stipulating that the common sons could only be granted a hundred acres of land, and they were not involved in other matters, which were only managed by the eldest branch of the family.

From the above historical materials, it can be seen that Shi Bin left the vast majority of his property to the eldest son, and only gave a hundred acres of land to the younger son, with a gap of more than a hundred times between the two. This is actually determined by the consideration of the joint relationship between the burden of taxes and duties and property, not purely the result of the popularization of clan law. According to the family law established by Shi Bin, the eldest son needs to bear the responsibility of the grain chief, while other branches can be exempted from most of the heavy burden of taxes and duties. The fact that the position of grain chief was succeeded by the eldest son for four generations in the Shi family is the best embodiment of strictly implementing this family law. As for why only a hundred acres of land were given instead of more, one can refer to the relevant records in the "Wujiang County Annals" of the Chongzhen era.

In the past, there were households in the fields that suffered from labor services. How much was the rent per acre, and in addition to the autumn grain, there were many more labor services. In the past, there were a number of mouse hairs (commonly known as sharp points), those who had more fields were in the front, and they ended in order. Those who had more labor services were also in the front, and they ended in order. Therefore, most of the men with a hundred acres were free from labor burdens. Recently, there is no field without labor services.

The term "corvée labor" here specifically refers to various miscellaneous services outside of the regular duties of the Li Jia system, which primarily focused on the collection of autumn grain. In the tax system of the early Ming Dynasty, the method of assigning miscellaneous services was to first correspond the specific tasks to the corresponding households, and then assign them to the people corresponding to the households. More precisely, it was mainly through measures of levying miscellaneous services from wealthy households with capabilities to ensure the operation of the tax system. Accordingly, not all households in the system had to undertake this kind of corvée labor. If implemented at a specific operational level, powerful wealthy households were often assigned to handle miscellaneous services irregularly, rather than using a rotational distribution method like the Li Jia system. It was not until the establishment of the equal corvée law that the method of assigning miscellaneous services on a household basis formally appeared. According to this principle, it is indeed possible for those with less than a hundred acres of land to be exempt from various miscellaneous services. However, Japanese scholar Hisashi Tsurumi discovered another type of case where only miscellaneous services were assigned without the regular duties of the Li Jia system: in the Li Jia system established during the Hongwu period, in addition to the head of the Li, the head of the Jia, and the "odd households" who did not have enough grain and could not afford to pay taxes, there were also some "managed households" who had enough grain but only served as miscellaneous services. These were the "small households" left over after selecting households with more grain to form a Li Jia. They could also be exempt from the regular duties of the Li Jia system, but had to perform appropriate miscellaneous services. However, the conditions for becoming a managed household were very strict. In Wujiang County, only those with less than ten acres of land could be classified as managed households. Those with a hundred acres of land fully met the conditions to serve as the head of the Li or the head of the Jia, and obviously could not be equated with the "small households", "lower households" or "managed households" often mentioned in the literature. Therefore, the situation described in the Chongzhen "Wujiang County Records" that "families with land suffer from miscellaneous services, and men with a hundred acres often have no labor burdens" is closer to the method of selecting wealthy households to independently handle miscellaneous services in a dispersed and disordered manner before the implementation of the equal corvée law. Specifically for the Shi family of Huangxi, the tax community centered on the eldest branch established by Shi Bin, which divided the family property based on a hundred acres, was actually trying to reduce the scope of responsibility. The eldest branch would completely handle the tax duties, bear the tax responsibilities of "families with land" alone, and exclude the smaller branches from the rotational system of bearing tax duties according to a certain proportion, thus seeking a balance between the ability to bear tax duties and the corresponding population and property. For this unique phenomenon, it is more appropriate to understand it as the logic of "wealthy households bear duties, small households are exempt from duties", which does not contradict the basic principle of seeking fair burden sharing in the Li Jia system of the early Ming Dynasty.

According to the "Tomb Inscription" written by Wu Kuan, Shi Bin had five sons: Sheng, Min, Hao, Chang, and Ang. Apart from Sheng, who inherited the family property and the position of grain chief as the eldest son, Min, Hao, and Chang moved out one after another, engaged in various industries, and became the founders of Wanli House, Louxia House, and Suzhou House, without sticking to the hundred acres of family property given by Shi Bin. Among them, the second son, Shi Min, "made farming and reading his profession" and "never entered the public office in his life"; the fourth son, Shi Chang and his descendants "moved to Wuchang, engaged in the silk industry", achieved great success in Suzhou city through business; the youngest son, Shi Ang, became a hereditary military household in Nanjing Shence Gate, his descendants successively served as the total banner in Yunnan Anning Qianhu. By the time of his great-grandson, Shi Yonggui "inherited the call to Shaanxi Yulin Guard, accumulated military merits, and successively promoted to the hereditary command of the capital."

Shi Chengsheng had two sons. In addition to his eldest son, Shi Heng, who served as the grain chief, he also had a younger son, Shi Huang. Unlike his elder uncles who left their homeland, Shi Huang chose to make a living by farming and planting trees. On his days off, he would dig canals to irrigate his garden, plant pines with a hoe, fish and hunt, and enjoy himself in leisure. People thought he had the demeanor of Pang De Gong, so they called him "the gentleman of farming". Shi Huang's son, Shi Tang, was good at managing life. Although he inherited his father-in-law's property, he expanded his fields and houses, and his assets were enormous. He became wealthy through his own efforts and the substantial family wealth of his wife, Mrs. Zhang.

By the time of Shi Hang, the Shi family had grown large and prosperous, with thousands of members, all governed by the principle of public welfare. They gradually shifted their focus to investing in cultural construction. Behind this transformation, there is an interesting story recorded in Shi Jian's "Biography of the Late Lord Yougui". One day, "the Minister of the Ministry of Rites, Xie Langzhong, was inspecting the southeast and asked about the benefits and drawbacks of studying. The late lord answered all his questions thoroughly. When asked about his studies, he replied that he did not study. Xie said, 'You are a rich man's son, young, why don't you study now?' Upon hearing this, the late lord was deeply moved and began to study diligently every day, even when he was extremely busy." Under the guidance and advice of Xie Langzhong, Shi Hang was no longer satisfied with just being a grain chief, but turned his heart to learning. "As a result, he became more and more diligent in his studies, studying the books of Confucius and Mencius. Although he did not focus on the details, he practiced the profession of a scholar, and there was nothing he did not understand," marking the beginning of a glorious transformation of generations of farming and reading in the family. However, Shi Hang himself did not achieve any official titles, but during the Zhengtong and Jingtai periods, he was twice awarded the titles of Di Gong and Xuan Yi Lang for his contributions to famine relief by donating grain.

When Shi Heng passed his substantial family property to his son Shi Jian, Shi Jian was initially somewhat reluctant. According to his written "Biography of the Late Lord Yougui", it is recorded:

One day, he suddenly summoned those who had been visiting him to have a drink, and announced that he would entrust his family affairs to Jian. Jian wept and refused, but everyone else insisted on his behalf. The old lord said, "Allow me to amuse myself in my old age." Thus, Jian dared not refuse.

Shi Jian, also known as Xicun, was born in the ninth year of Xuande (1434) and died in the ninth year of Hongzhi (1496). Unlike the early heads of the Shi family, he was a person who "learned from his teachers and understood worldly affairs", and was able to "compile books on rites and doubts, revealing what the virtuous scholars have not yet had; manage water and taxes, considering what should be done according to the times". Although he himself was unable to serve in the government, and had never even been a grain chief, he used his family's wealth to entertain guests from all over, becoming a famous hermit in the Wu region, and was known as one of the "Four Great Commoners of Jiangnan" along with contemporaries like Shen Zhou. Wu Kuan, who was of a similar age to Shi Jian, was a famous official of the Ming Dynasty, serving as the Minister of Rites, and had a good reputation in the Suzhou area. He and Shi Jian "were friends for forty years", and after Shi Jian's death, he specifically wrote a tomb inscription for him, which has become an important source of information about Shi Jian.

According to Wu Kuan, Shi Jian was "majestic in appearance, with a bristling beard; he loved socializing in his life, and because of his integrity, scholars from all over the world never stopped visiting him. He was generous to those he favored, and particularly liked to confront people directly, so he was especially known for his honesty," "His footprints did not extend beyond a hundred miles, but people in Jiangsu and Zhejiang knew his name. Even the officials of the counties and prefectures all respected him," He gained the appreciation and trust of senior officials such as Xu Youzhen and Wang Shu, and offered advice on local affairs many times, "He was capable of managing the country, reforming customs, water conservancy, money and grain, considering changes and difficulties, resisting pressure and correcting will, he could surely bring peace to the country, pacify the four directions, adapt to the situation, plan for security, and implement strategies for wealth and strength, he was truly a vessel of both literary and martial virtues, a pillar of integrity and responsibility." Shi Jian was very close to the celebrities in Suzhou, he often gathered with a few old friends, either to appreciate antiques, admire calligraphy and paintings, or to travel in the mountains and rivers, and made friends in these elegant activities. Many years after his death, when his friends visited the place where he used to live, there were still many elegiac poems.

During Shi Jian's lifetime, the Shi family of Huangxi became increasingly wealthy. With substantial financial support, Shi Jian quickly became a famous collector in the south of the Yangtze River. According to the "Wuzhong Renwu Zhi" written during the Longqing period, Shi Jian "especially liked to collect artifacts from the three dynasties of Qin and Han, and Tang and Song calligraphy and paintings", such as "Chu Sui Liang's Tang Emperor's Mourning Text" and "Tang Zhao Mo's Collection of Jin People's Thousand Texts". Shi Jian also built a large number of buildings. The Xiaoya Hall he built in the first year of Hongzhi (1488) was "ten feet high and made entirely of paulownia and cypress". In addition, he built a series of recreational places and a large house in the east of the river for his second son. All of these reveal the economic strength of the Shi family of Huangxi during Shi Jian's time from different perspectives.

Under such circumstances, Shi Jian, as the eldest son of the Shi family, began to use the discourse system of the ritual system, renovating the family temple, compiling the family tree, establishing the sacrificial system, and personally or inviting friends to organize and write various biographies of his ancestors. According to the "Xi Cun Ji" recorded by Shi Jian, the Shi family temple was started to be renovated during Shi Sheng's time. He arranged four niches in the family temple, "respecting from the great-grandfather Nan Zhai Wen Xue to the father Qing Yuan Gong", which means that according to the small clan sacrificial law, the three generations from Shi Sheng's great-grandfather Shi Rong, grandfather Shi Ju Ren to father Shi Bin were worshipped. Among them, Shi Rong represents the main branch of the Shi family in Jiaxing, and is the ancestor. Although Shi Ju Ren has moved to Huangxi, he is still only considered as a small branch of the Jiaxing Shi family.

Shi Heng inherited the will of Shi Sheng, and made improvements to the shrine system designed by his father, which was arranged in a single line with the "ancestral path to the right" for the father, grandfather, and great-grandfather. He added what was lacking and removed what was inappropriate according to the rites. According to the minor ancestral rites, "from the great-grandfather onwards, the ancestral hall also has four shrines standing side by side. Those who succeed the great-grandfather can prepare four generations of main coffins. Those who succeed the great-grandfather leave the easternmost shrine empty. Those who succeed the grandfather leave two shrines empty. Those who succeed the father leave three shrines empty. If the number of generations in the main lineage is not full, the shrine of the respected one is also left empty according to the rules of the minor lineage." Shi Heng probably followed the principle of respecting the east, moved Shi Rong to the originally vacant easternmost shrine, and moved his great-grandfather Ju Ren and grandfather Shi Bin to the right in turn, placing his father Shi Sheng in the shrine on the far left, forming a shrine system arranged in a single line for the father, grandfather, great-grandfather, and great-great-grandfather. He also opened up sacrificial fields, built family schools, and stipulated the management of the sacrificial fields, which were to be "led by the clan's sons, and established under the ancestral hall." He engraved this rule in stone.

In the beginning, Xi Yin once built a shrine... Our ancestors made sacrificial vessels according to rituals... They chose a plot of land of more than eighty acres for regular cultivation, to provide for the sacrificial ceremonies. They not only set an example for their descendants through their literary works, but also established several rules, which were engraved on the stone under the shrine. The main teachings were to respect the distinction between legitimate and illegitimate children, to be sincere and respectful, and to strive for abundance and cleanliness. They were particularly earnest in warning against negligence and forgetfulness.

The management of the Shi family ancestral temple was passed down from Shi Sheng and Shi Heng to Shi Jian, all under the control of the eldest legitimate son. They also paid great attention to the principle of "strictly distinguishing between legitimate and illegitimate" in sacrificial affairs, which reflects the special status of the eldest legitimate branch in clan sacrifices. The four generations of Shi Bin and his descendants served as grain chiefs, accumulating a large amount of family wealth. Compared with other clan members, they had an absolutely superior economic strength. The fact that the Shi family ancestral temple was established and has been managed by the eldest branch of the Shi family confirms this point.

According to the "Wujiang County Annals" completed during the Chongzhen period as recorded in historical documents, Shi Jian began the renovation of the Shi Family Ancestral Temple in the fifth year of Chenghua (1469), and it was completed two years later. Zhou Ding's "Record of the Shi Family Ancestral Temple" provides a detailed account of this.

This summer, the Songling Historical Temple was completed. I went to see it, it was not just built, but also renewed from the old... Since the first great examination, the hidden public niche of Xi Creek was slightly more splendid, and the missing examination friend Gui Gong removed the algae paintings as a ceremony, especially the four niches still retain their old appearance. The mirror... thus created three niches... In the autumn of the seventh month of the seventh year of Chenghua.

The main reason for the renovation of the family temple in the historical record was the issue of the niche system. When Shi Sheng established the family temple, he set up four parallel niches to worship three generations of people from Shi Rong to Shi Bin. By the time of Shi Heng, the worshippers also added his father, Shi Sheng. From Shi Heng's perspective, this complies with the relevant regulations on the worship of ancestors by officials in the "Ming Ji Li", which is based on Zhu Xi's family rituals:

Inside the ancestral hall, there are four niches arranged from north to south, each with a table. The great-grandfather is placed in the first niche on the west, followed by the great-grandmother; the great-grandfather is in the second niche, followed by the great-grandmother; the grandfather is in the third niche, followed by the grandmother; the father is in the fourth niche, followed by the mother.

However, for ordinary people, they could only worship their ancestors up to two generations according to the regulations. In the seventeenth year of Hongwu (1384), under the suggestion of Hu Bingzhong, the county magistrate of Xingtang, Zhu Yuanzhang changed the rule for commoners to worship their ancestors from two generations to three generations, and tacitly allowed commoners to worship their ancestors up to four generations in the "Teaching the People's Proclamation". In Wujiang during the Ming Dynasty, many scholar-official families "used pillars to worship three generations, and also worshipped four generations according to the system established by Hu Bingzhong, the county magistrate of Xingtang at the beginning of the country". The reason why the ancestral temple of the Shi family, created by Shi Sheng, adopted this "rightward divine path" niche system to worship three generations of ancestors, can be said to be a flexible blend of the rituals of commoners and scholar-officials, wavering on the boundary of clan law between commoners and nobles. However, Shi Sheng's understanding of the clan law of the minor clan was still at a preliminary stage, and the four niches he made were "slightly too luxurious", which somewhat overstepped the mark. Shi Heng, a scholar who had read widely, when renovating the family temple, "studied the rites to make sacrificial vessels, striving to conform to the ancient, not detailed preparation is not only", has already deeply realized the operability of the "rightward divine path" niche system, if it is out of the consideration of only worshipping three generations, even if the niche of the first generation Liang Changshi Juren is removed from the family temple, it is acceptable. More importantly, this niche system can be coordinated with the family law of primogeniture established by Shi Bin.

Shi Juren was not the eldest son of Shi Rong. He had an elder brother, Shi Zizhen, in Jiaxing. After he moved to Wujiang, he was considered a concubine's son compared to the Shi family in Jiaxing, but for the descendants of the Shi family in Huangxi, he could be considered the founding ancestor. By the same token, Shi Bin, as the only son of Shi Juren, could become the head of the branch family according to the saying "the son of another is the ancestor, and the successor of another is the clan" in the ritual system, in Huangxi. However, due to the deep-rooted attachment to the ritual system of the branch family, even by the time of Shi Bin's great-grandson, Shi Jian, Shi Bin had not completely shed his identity as a concubine's son of the small branch under the Jiaxing main branch. In the biography written by Shi Jian for Shi Bin, he positioned his great-grandfather's identity in this way: "He belongs to the succession of the small branch of the prefecture lord, but he is not like the incompetent, so that Jian can be prominent and make it known to the time." Shi Jian, who was proficient in the ritual system, understood very well that if he did not change the ritual method of the small branch that his father and grandfather had always used, especially if he continued to insist on the niche system of "the divine path to the right", with the succession of generations, one day he would inevitably invite the beloved great-grandfather, the lord of Qingyuan Prefecture, out of the family temple. As mentioned earlier, Shi Bin's special status in the Shi family was unshakeable: "My great-grandfather is indeed the head of our family, and he shows that the ancestral property will not be split for a hundred generations, enlightening the ignorant world of his descendants, and then burying him in order, what can I do? How can I set up a separate temple to show constant respect and not change?" The death of Shi Heng made Shi Jian's worry inevitably imminent:

The mourning and funeral rites have been conducted according to the rituals and family traditions, and the ancestral worship has been announced. It was previously decided that the late Qingyuan Duke would be moved to another shrine, and your late father would be moved into this shrine, this is a gradual process. However, the thought of moving the ancestral tablets again after just a few years is unbearable to express, but isn't this the usual practice of the rites? When the ancestral tablets are moved, all the family heads are affected. If we do not worship our ancestors, isn't this against the usual teachings?

In order to prevent Shi Bin's migration from becoming a reality, Shi Jian decided to adopt the major clan law. He first repositioned Shi Juren's identity, changing him from a minor clan son to an alternative son, that is, the ancestor who began the migration without disaster. In this way, Shi Bin immediately succeeded as the major clan after the alternative. Then, in order to comply with the major clan sacrificial law, he deliberately renovated the niches in the family temple, hoping to change the four-niche system of "the divine path to the right" to the three-niche system of "left brightness, right solemnity", and find the sacrificial rules that meet his wishes. However, he soon found that, according to the current system of "left brightness, right solemnity", the biggest change was to change the worship of Shi Juren as an alternative son. Accordingly, Shi Rong no longer needed to be specifically worshipped. As the second-generation ancestor Shi Bin of the major clan, he will still be moved out of the east niche when the sixth-generation ancestor enters the temple.

Three niches were made, the central niche was dedicated to the first ancestor who migrated, known as Dongxuan; the eastern niche was dedicated to the great-grandfather, representing the distant past; the western niche was dedicated to the ancestor who lived in seclusion by the stream. When the auspicious sacrificial ceremony was about to be held, the offerings were placed on the left of the central niche, following the tradition of the ancient Zhaomiao Temple. The master of the Yougui was placed in the eastern niche, representing the fourth generation. The master of the central niche always held the highest honor and remained unchanged, until the fifth generation, when the succession would take place. The offerings for the secluded ancestor by the stream were placed on the right of the central niche, following the intention of the respectful master. The master of the sixth generation would then succeed the master of the eastern niche and enter the central niche, following the ritual of the second generation. The master of the second generation would be buried in the tomb after the succession ceremony.

So, after repeated discussions with his mentor, Zhou Ding, a good man from JiaShan, Shi Jian, who is fond of antiquity but not stuck in it, invented a compromise strategy that resembles the system of Zuo Zhao and You Mu, but can keep Shi Bin in the family temple for a long time. Through this revision of the shrine system, Shi Jian permanently honored Shi Bin as the unburied ancestor.

If the ruler of the fourth generation is moved to the position of the second generation in the south, then the second generation will always be worshipped and not buried. When the ruler of the fifth generation should move to the position of the third generation, then the third generation ruler should be buried as per the ancient law. It is appropriate for the ruler of the fifth generation to reside in the south of the third generation, and to be in harmony with the fourth generation, not advancing to face the ruler of the second generation, so that the position of the third generation is always empty in the north of the middle right. When the sixth and seventh generations should be worshipped, then the rulers of the fourth and fifth generations should be buried again. And the first and second rulers, who are always respected, receive the constant rites, and those who are always worshipped receive the changing rites. Those who are moved and worshipped and then buried again, all do not lose their constancy. Private favors are extended to uphold public righteousness, so that the order of honoring the past and present is not confused. The reduction of the four niches to three is hereby established.

The issue of ancestral burial is one of the most sensitive topics in the clan system. It is not as simple as where to place the ancestral tablets, and often involves many interests of the living in real life. If handled carelessly, it will be heavily criticized. After much effort by Shi Jian, the small clan worship method created by Shi Sheng and the "Shinto to the right" four-niche system were finally transformed. Under the new grand clan worship method, Shi Bin was often enshrined in the north of the eastern niche, gaining a status as high as the founding ancestor Ju Ren. Shi Ju Ren was revered as a constant respecter in the identity of a different son, and Shi Bin was revered as a constant enshriner in the identity of the grand clan son. However, the generations below the third generation Shi Sheng could no longer follow the example of Shi Bin, and had to follow the strict Zhaomu system, "ancestral burial as the ancient law". The three generations of the Shi family persistently worked on the niche system, indicating that rituals are selectively followed according to human affairs, which is the so-called "the peace of ritual meaning arises from righteousness". More importantly, Shi Jian handled the contradiction between the constant enshrinement and the ancestral burial well. From then on, he, who had a wide range of contacts, could not only no longer be accused by his peers of "overstepping the ritual system", but also solved the status issue of Shi Bin, the greatest contributor of the Shi family, in the clan law, "Jian's feelings are at peace". Regarding this point, as Zhou Ding lamented:

Alas! It is easy to build a temple, but it is difficult to change the established rules of the shrine. Once the rules of the shrine are established and the ancestral tablets are buried, it is even more difficult to change the rules without burying the tablets. It is said that the temple of the historian is made by the secluded stream, not by the original creator. It is appropriate to say that the creator's indirect expression of filial piety and sincerity through the balance of power and righteousness is more than twice as effective as the original creator. Therefore, it is said: it is not a new creation.

Zhou Ding completely denied the construction of the ancestral temple by Shi Cheng and his son, and then commented that Shi Jian's renovation was not as simple as "making the old new", but was the real initiator of the Shi family's clan system practice. This indirectly shows the deep fear of the gentry in Wu Zhong towards Zhu Zi's family rituals and the Great Ming Collection Rituals in the practice of clan rituals. Even though the restriction of "rituals not reaching the common people" had been largely broken at that time, those rituals that did not conform to the ritual system were still despised by the scholars. By timely and flexible reform of the niche system, Shi Jian indeed felt much more at ease. Four years after Shi Jian changed the niche system, in the eleventh year of Chenghua (1475), Zhou Hongmo, the sacrificial wine of the Imperial College, proposed to rectify the system of ancestral halls, replacing "Shen Dao facing right" with "left Zhao right Mu". From the beginning of the Ming Dynasty to this era, the wealthy class like the Shi family in Huangxi had experienced about a hundred years of development, and had proliferated for four to five generations. The various systems and arrangements for ancestor worship that were introduced at the beginning could no longer meet their actual needs for clan law. As a result, Shi Juren transformed from a minor clan member to a separate son, and Shi Bin was accordingly promoted to a major clan son. Zhou Hongmo's proposal was just to follow this trend and retrospectively recognize various bottom-up clan law reform practices.

From Shi Sheng to Shi Jian, they have always adhered to the family rule set by Shi Bin that the eldest son should inherit all the family wealth, instead of adopting the most popular system of equal division among all sons at that time. Shi Heng's second son, Shi Duo, and his son Shi Yongji also had to find another way out, going to serve in the royal palace, respectively serving as a companion reader in the Prince Qin's Mansion and a food supervisor in the Prince Yi's Mansion. However, when it came to Shi Jian himself passing on the family property to his son, he encountered some troubles. Shi Jian had two sons, the eldest son Yongxi, also known as Nanyuan, and the second son Yongling, also known as Songqiu. "The Lord of Xicun Mansion favored the Lord of Songqiu Mansion for his cleverness and good writing skills." According to the "Tomb Inscription of Lord Songqiu Shi" written by Lu Nan, it is recorded:

Mr. Shi, whose given name is Yongling and courtesy name is Dezheng, also goes by the alias Songqiu. ... Mr. Shi is a man of extraordinary character, standing tall and proud, his eyes as bright as lightning, his beard as long as a foot, resembling a halberd, giving him an ethereal appearance. He is calm and straightforward, occasionally showing his sharp wit. Even as a child, he lacked the innocence of youth, every word and step he took was disciplined and orderly. His birth mother passed away early, and his cries of grief shook the heavens and earth, accompanied by the sorrowful rain and wind. Despite his young age, he showed great maturity. As he grew older, he devoted himself to his family's scholarly tradition, aiming to become a scholar, and read so many books that they could fill a cart. He was a close friend of Mr. Xiwang, who was acquainted with many famous people, such as Mr. Wu of Paoan, Mr. Du of Xuanjing, Mr. Li of Fanan, and Mr. Wu of Lizhai. Mr. Shi was dedicated to his studies and showed great proficiency. Mr. Xiwang was pleased and said, "This is the dragon of my family."

From this heartfelt text, it can be inferred that Shi Jian himself must have been extremely fond of his second son, Yongling, even going so far as to build a new house in Hambang outside of the main family residence, to give Yongling his own independent household. At the time of the house's completion, he specifically wrote an article titled "Sacrifice to the New Gate of East Hambang", showing his special attention: "The family's departure from the interior is only governed by the gods. My son Yongling will live here, and I dare to announce to your great gods with the ceremony of clear wine and common shame, may the gods witness it, and enjoy it." This shows his special favoritism towards Yongling. However, in his later years, he still passed on the management rights of the family business and sacrificial fields to his eldest son, Yongxi, "dividing the family business according to ancestral laws", thus practicing the concept of respecting the eldest son. In the family temple, he announced this decision to his ancestors, showing a very contradictory mentality.

In the twenty-eighth year of his succession, he has been frivolous and unproductive, bringing no benefit and only shame to his ancestors. Now tired of his diligence, he will pass on the family affairs to his eldest son, Yongxi, on the day of Gui Si. His second son, Yongling, will move to a new residence in the east of the river. He dares not to keep this a secret. This is a careful announcement.

Despite this, the primogeniture system could not persist indefinitely. By the time of Shi Chang, the great-grandson of Shi Jian, the family law of Shi Bin, which had been upheld for over a hundred years, was completely changed. Shi Chang and his two brothers, Shi Lun and Shi Duan, adopted a method of evenly dividing the family property, with each of the three brothers receiving 4,000 acres of land. In fact, as early as the generation of Shi Jian, the position of grain chief was no longer exclusive to the Huangjiaxi clan. For example, Hong Kui, the son of Yong Ling, once served as the grain chief in his capacity as the head of the Bangdong room. However, Shi Hong Kui was not proficient in this field. He entrusted the management to his cousin Xu Huaicha, who was addicted to gambling and squandered the family property, which amounted to over 10,000 taels of gold. Due to his mismanagement, this fraudulent behavior was reported, and Hong Kui had to rely on his wife Tu's dowry to barely avoid punishment. From a broader social perspective, by this time, the position of grain chief had lost its previous profitability: "The tax is a heavy burden, and only those with physical strength and careful calculation can bear it. Public benevolence is certainly not their duty, and some even resort to deceit, filling their pockets, increasing the cost of customs, borrowing more money, and accumulating poverty, causing the family to decline day by day." In the era of Shi Hong Kui, with the popularity of the rotation system and the friend system, the trend of merging grain and li was inevitable.

For the Huangxi Shi family, the decline of the grain chief system corresponded to the abandonment of the eldest son inheritance system. As explained earlier, the original intention of implementing the latter was to complement the former. By the time of Shi Chang's eldest son, Shi Xueshi, the system of the eldest son leading the worship could still barely be maintained. However, Xueshi's second son, Zai Shi, and his eldest brother, Zai Dao, had serious disagreements over the issue of ancestor worship. At that time, "the ancestral graves had long been neglected in their worship, (Zai Shi) gathered the clan to worship once a year, although it was not satisfactory to the elders, the knowledgeable praised his filial piety." The two sons completely abandoned the ideal of the eldest son leading the worship by worshipping separately. By the middle of the Wanli period, the Shi family temple was abandoned, and the "eldest son also disappeared." At the same time, the Bangdong branch adopted the method of "four sons taking turns to worship" and took over the responsibility of worshipping the ancestors from the eldest branch. The head of the Bangdong branch, Shi Ce, expressed deep dissatisfaction with the long-term inaction of the eldest branch: "Since the middle ages, the family has been divided into two: one living on the left, as the major branch, and one living on the right, as the minor branch. The major branch does not follow the rules, and neglects the great traditions."

Section Three: Decline of the Family Fortune

Starting from the early Ming Dynasty, historians, in addition to undertaking the duty of grain chief, also had to "serve as the post duty in Dongguang, Shandong, costing hundreds of gold each year," which became an additional heavy burden. Japanese scholar Shimizu Yasuji summarized this unique phenomenon as the assistance of Jiangnan to the postal transmission of North China. As early as the 1950s, he conducted specialized research on this topic and was the first to point out that during the Hongwu period, North China was sparsely populated and there was a severe shortage of horses for transportation duties. Therefore, a method was born where wealthy farmers or rich households in the market from southern provinces like Jiangsu and Zhejiang were selected to raise horses and deliver them to various places in the north, while those who heavily taxed official farmland were not included. The horses that were assisted to North China were specifically called "southern horses" and had a relatively independent management system. However, because "the southern people are not accustomed to the local conditions and do not understand the nature of horses, they often hire local people to raise horses, which not only costs wages but also does not return to farming," it became a heavy duty. The Huangxi Shi family was just selected for the "horse head duty" because they farmed civilian farmland and paid a lot of grain. To cope with this duty, the Shi family first sent "family member Shi Ren to raise horses in Dongguang, still living with the surname Shi." During the Yongle period, Shi Bin also "used the word 'Nian' to support this duty with one thousand acres of paddy fields," it was unbearable to bear this duty. The Chongzhen "Wujiang County Annals" compiled by historians specifically depicted this painful memory:

In the early days of the state, those who paid the water-horse tax were divided into two categories: the ones who paid more were called "horse heads", and those who paid less were called "watermen". The burden of the "horse head" was the heaviest, usually three times the regular amount. Those who couldn't afford this were assigned to a lower category, called "horse vests"; and those who couldn't afford the "horse vests" were assigned to the "horse households". The "horse vests" and "horse households" had to provide rice annually to support the workers and cover the cost of fodder, which was called "horse grain". Sometimes, they also had to collect money to buy horses and equipment, which was called "horse price". All these were calculated based on the size of the land, and generally exceeded the grain tax. The "horse heads" were responsible for breeding horses in the northern post stations, and their expenses were not small.

From the above, it can be seen that the "Southern Horse" official includes many titles, among which the horse head official is the most important, followed by the horse vest, horse door, horse grain, horse price, etc., all of which are attached officials, with the importance decreasing in order. The eldest son of the Shi family alone took on the role of the horse head official, and the cost was not small, which shows the large number of farmland cultivated by the people. At the same time, the heavy burden also added another important chip to the practice of primogeniture. As for why the Shi family has so many farmlands, some clues may be found in an edict issued in the first year of Hongxi (1425): "The edict orders all households to join the army, all families to die out, and the deserted farmland left by the confiscated households to be reclaimed by the local officials, and the taxes on official and civilian farmland are all based on civilian farmland." According to the record of "Ancestral Examination of Qingyuan Prefecture" in Historical Mirror:

In the early years of the Hongxi era, an imperial edict was issued that those who had abandoned their households and left their fields fallow should be exempted from taxes, and the people were encouraged to reclaim these lands with reduced taxation. However, the laws were strict, and if there were any discrepancies, both the officials and the elders would be held accountable and face death. The lower-ranking officials manipulated the laws, making countless demands, and those who made noise held the power to decide their fate, while others were too afraid to report any violations. The prefect was deeply moved and said, "This is the benevolent intention of the emperor, can we allow it to bring disaster to the people?" He then submitted a proposal to reduce the taxes by a certain amount, and his family did not benefit from this privately. The old and the young wept in gratitude, saying, "Without you, we would not have received this imperial favor."

Shi Bin led his fellow villagers to actively arbitrage from the system, reclaiming a large amount of deserted land from extinct households. The pattern of "no other clans from the south of the stream to Shengze" may have formed under this opportunity. With such a keen sense of smell, Shi Bin not only enabled the Shi family of Huangxi to rapidly develop into one of the leading landlords in Wujiang, but also established his lofty status in the family history. Regardless of whether the newly reclaimed fields were originally official or civilian fields, they were all treated as civilian fields with lighter taxes, effectively avoiding the risks borne by the heavily taxed official fields. However, the Ming Dynasty's corvée system followed the principle of "heavy taxes, light labor; light taxes, heavy labor". The corvée burden rate of official fields was much lower than that of civilian fields, especially the labor force used for transportation, communication, and civil engineering were all levied on "civilian fields". Official fields were not included, and the Shi family, which owned more civilian fields, therefore undisputedly met the heavy "horse head labor" service conditions.

The wealthy households responsible for the postal service often could not serve in person, and they adopted the method of "hiring others to serve" very early on. This was done by hiring contractors, servants, adopted sons, and other pseudo-relatives to serve. Shi Ren took on such a role. Even so, the Shi family still spent hundreds of taels of silver each year on raising horses in Shandong. To commend Shi Ren's special contributions, after his death, Shi Sheng specially "erected a pillar in the east of the ancestral hall to worship him". It was not until the Hongzhi period that Li Bing, the governor of Ying Tian, converted all summer taxes and other public duties into rice, which was paid differently from the autumn grain. The water and horse station posting service was no exception, all were "included in the autumn grain item, silver was collected and sent to the government, then transferred to various post stations, used to buy and supplement horses". The system of southern horses aiding the north in name only ceased to exist, which allowed the Shi family of Huangxi to take a deep breath, hence "the main branch was the richest in Jiangnan during the Zhengjia period".

From the early Ming Dynasty to the Chenghong period, the Shi family's main branch had accumulated substantial wealth through four or five generations of farming. Shi Jian not only built gardens and houses on a large scale, but also collected a large number of "artifacts from the Three Dynasties, Qin and Han, and books, paintings, and famous utensils from the Han, Tang, and Song Dynasties", becoming one of the most famous collectors in the Wu region. Collecting was indeed a refined hobby of the literati, but in the Jiangnan region during the Ming and Qing Dynasties, it was also a common form of investment. Scholars have found that in the Jiangnan region, some wealthy families organically integrated industries such as rice, silk weaving, and art pawn through the establishment of pawnshops, and the art used as collateral also became an important source of collection for pawnshop operators. Famous figures such as Xiang Yuanbian and Wang Shizhen were both pawnshop operators and collectors active during the Jiawan period. The pawnshop business not only brought substantial profits to the operators, but also made the ways of wealth accumulation and investment more diversified. In this sense, the Shi family's investment in calligraphy, painting, and antiques was not purely for the purpose of collection. At the same time, it was also an important means for them to accumulate wealth besides managing land.

In the first year of the Hongzhi era (1488), the Huangxi Shi residence unfortunately caught fire, "all the utensils, toys, books, calligraphy, famous paintings, hanging scrolls, steles, etc. that had been collected over generations, a total of eighteen rooms, were completely destroyed without a trace." The ancient artifacts, toys, calligraphy, and famous paintings lost in the fire could not be fully accounted for. Shi Jian's good friend Du Mu once selected the main ones in his "Yuyi Compilation" and specifically made a statistical record:

Cai Duanming's Eight Pieces (with comments by Hong Xingzu, Fan Danian, Hu Gui, etc.); Lu Huang's Portrait of Zhaojun; Monk Juran's Landscape (large size); Han Xizai's Night Banquet Painting; Li Longmian's Nine Songs Painting in one volume; Song Xian's Various Pieces in one volume; Wang Yi's Two Pieces (in large script); Song Dynasty's Painting of Wenji Returning to Han; Zhao Qianli's Painting of the Three Stars of Fortune, Prosperity and Longevity (long size); Zhu Kaoting and Liushilang's Pieces (with comments by Yang Tieya, the tribute scholar); Song Xiaozong's Handwritten Edict to Prime Minister Yu; Waiting for the Ferry by the Spring River a Thousand Miles Away (small size); Guo Xi's Painting of Pine Trees for Longevity; Zhao Ziguo's Three Poems on Plum and Bamboo; Zhao Ziang's Calligraphy (with comments by Dong Kai); Chen Juzhong's Five Horses Painting; Yuan Zhang Shidao's Mulan Flower Curtain Poem in one volume (with inscriptions by people from the Later Yuan Dynasty); Shunju's Painting of Weeping Begonia (with poem); Shunju's Painting of Ban Ji with a Fan (with poem); Zi Ang's Copy of the Great Commandment; Zi Ang's Self-written Poem in one volume; Zi Ang's Going Home Poem in one volume; Wen Riguan's Self-written Poems and Prose on Grapes and Fresh Yu Beiji in one volume (in small script, with comments by Deng Wensu and Gong Zijing); Zi Ang's Painting of a Man and a Horse (with his own comments, and poems by people from the Yuan Dynasty); Huang Dachi's Mountain and River Painting (with Wang Guoqi's words, and comments by Ni Yunlin); Zi Ang's Autumn River Misty Painting; Wu Zhonggui's Painting of Ni Fan, Xuan Xuefeng and Xiao Temple (long size); Zhou Bowen's Four Styles of Thousand Characters in one volume (with a small portrait of painter Bowen at the beginning, his student Jiang Mian standing by his side, with self-praise, it is said that Zhou Gong presented this to Mian, who was also from his hometown and was good at seal script).

Experiencing such a painful loss indeed made the daily life of the eldest branch of the Huangxi Shi family strained for a while. Yongxi, the son of Shi Jian, "led his family to be more frugal and diligent, living simply without indulging in luxury," but it did not fundamentally shake the wealth accumulation of the Huangxi Shi family over the years. On the one hand, because Shen Zhou had appreciated some of Shi Jian's collections in the Shuiyue Temple a few days before the fire, a box of valuable Tang Dynasty paintings and calligraphy and a box of Ming Dynasty paintings and calligraphy were fortunately spared. These included "twenty volumes of Xue Shanggong's copies of Zhong Ding's suspected authentic works, ... and Ou Lu's dream banquet posts, Zhao's copies of Jin's thousand characters, Chu Sui's Emperor Wen's mourning album," "Tang's right army's Orchid Pavilion Preface, Song's Zhiyong's Thousand Character Classic, Yan Zhenqing and Zhang Xun's writings, Chu Sui's copy of the Orchid Pavilion Preface, Shen Du, Song Ke, Xu Tianquan and others' writings, Dai Wenjin, Shen Shitian and others' paintings," and a number of key family documents were also rescued by Shi Jian's brother Shi Duo and Shi Yi, which was a blessing in disguise. On the other hand, the family strategy of managing both land and pawnshops gave the Shi family a strong ability to heal from trauma, and instead, "the more fires there were, the more prosperous they became." The huge profits from the pawnshop business should not be underestimated. The Shi family's pawnshop not only accepted paintings and calligraphy as collateral, but also accepted cash or other valuable items as collateral. However, in the Jiangnan market flooded with low-grade silver and counterfeit silver, one could easily be deceived if not careful. Shi Yongxi, due to his lack of experience, was once deceived by a foreign merchant, "One day, a man claiming to be a Guangzhou merchant pawned 600 taels of silver, but in reality, there were many fakes, (Yongxi) lent him 400 taels of silver. A year later, he came to redeem it, claiming to exchange the original item, and cheated another 600 taels of silver." The phrase "a year later, he came to redeem it" directly reveals that in the pawnshop business of the Huangxi eldest branch, pawning cash has become the norm; and the Guangzhou merchant pawned 600 taels of silver in his shop at once, indicating that the capital of his pawnshop has reached a considerable scale.

According to the "Xicun Diary", in the great fire of the first year of Hongzhi, the rooms that were burned included "three rice warehouses, five old machine rooms, and sixty stone mill rooms", indicating that in addition to the grain processing industry, the Shi family had been involved in the silk weaving industry at least by the Chenghong period. This was precisely the critical period when the production center of Suzhou's silk weaving industry shifted from Suzhou City and Wujiang County to the towns in the south of Wujiang. The strong intervention of the Shi family in Huangxi was by no means a historical coincidence.

Meanwhile, the academic and social network accumulated by Shi Jian began to exert its influence. His beloved second son, Shi Yongling, who "devoted himself to the family's academic tradition and was determined to become a scholar, was so engrossed in his studies that his books almost filled a carriage." He carried the expectations of several generations of his family, who had been devoted to farming and studying, and was expected to make a breakthrough in the imperial examination. "After entering the academy, he ranked first in the annual examination and received extra rewards. When he was taken to other counties for examination, he always ranked first." However, "despite taking the imperial examination eight times and ranking second five times, this uncut jade from Lingyang never got the chance to shine."

The son of Shi Yongxi, Shi Chen, finally became the first person in the Huangxi Shi family to pass the imperial examination in the second year of Jiajing (1523). Shi Chen was a bookworm from a young age, and during the Hongzhi period, "his family suffered from depression, he cared about nothing but books, and he fled with books in his arms". He successively held positions such as the principal of the Ministry of Works, the deputy minister of the Henan Department of the Ministry of Punishment, the Qing affair of Shandong, and the counselor of Yunnan. Due to his upright character, he was repeatedly frustrated in the officialdom, not only did he not rise rapidly, but he offended a certain Zhou, the imperial inspector, during his tenure in Shandong, and was dismissed before he took office as the counselor of Yunnan, and returned to his home in Huangxi, "he devoted himself to the study of wealth and fate, talked tirelessly every day, built a hut on the south of Ying Lake, hence the name Nanhu". Shi Chen's unsuccessful official career was quickly forgotten by later generations, as can be seen from the preface written by Xu Yinglei for the "Xicun Collection": "The teacher has a grandson named Chen, who became a Jinshi, a minor participant, but I have known the teacher (referring to Shi Jian) since I was a child, but I didn't know about the minor participant." Shi Chen died in the 34th year of Jiajing (1555), at the age of 83, he was the last patriarch of the Shi family's main branch.

Shi Chen's eldest son, Shi Changben, was a scholar. However, due to his father's wrongful accusation, he was implicated in a lawsuit against the imperial censor Zhou, and was "reprimanded, unable to showcase his literary talents," losing his promising future. As a result, he "closed his doors to the outside world, occasionally interacting with public figures such as Shen Jiangcun, Wu Fengjiang, Peng Longchi, and Xu Gaoyang." His second son, Shi Lun, served as the judge of Lijiang Prefecture after being selected in the imperial examination, and later "was promoted to the same rank as the prefect of Baochang Prefecture for his achievements in pacifying unrest." His third son, Shi Duan, only held the status of an ordinary student. The most significant action Shi Chang took in his life was to formally abolish the family law of Shi Bin, which had been upheld for over a hundred years, and to handle the family property in an equal distribution manner. The mansion "Duanzi House," which was personally built by Shi Chen with "the energy of his whole life," was also sold to others. The Shi family's wealth, which was once the richest in the south of the Yangtze River during the reigns of Emperor Zhengde and Emperor Jiajing, was finally depleted through generations of equal distribution. Of course, there were other factors influencing the decline of the main branch of the family. First, in the 33rd year of Emperor Jiajing's reign (1554), the family's collection of books and paintings were all burned and looted when the Japanese pirates invaded Huangxi for the third time. They "smashed countless ancient porcelain pieces and took away all the imperial edicts from previous dynasties." The "Emperor Wen's Mourning Album" by Chu Suiliang, which had survived the great fire in the first year of Emperor Hongzhi's reign, was also "damaged by a footprint," greatly affecting its value. It was sold by Shi Chang's second son, Shi Shiben, to Wang Fengzhou at a low price of 400 taels. Later, Shi Chang's eldest son, Shi Xueshi, "opened a canal in front of the main gate," cutting off the earth mound behind the residence and destroying the feng shui layout carefully arranged since Shi Bin's time. The main branch of the family "declined from then on," and the branch of the family living east of the canal gradually gained control of the discourse power of the Shi family in Huangxi.

In contrast, the family of Shi Xiang, the younger brother of Shi Chen, managed to carry on the cultural legacy left by Shi Jian, showing some signs of recovery. Although Shi Xiang himself was only a scholar and once served as a ceremonial officer in the mansion of Prince Yi, his eldest son Shi Tian also "entered the Southern Supervision by chance, and was not sold despite his oddities". However, his grandson Shi Mo, originally from Zhejiang, first passed the imperial examination in 1582 and then ranked second in the 1595 examination, becoming the second most successful descendant of the Shi family. Shi Mo served as the magistrate of Nanxiong Prefecture and the chief judge of Wumeng Prefecture. His son, Shi Zhaolin, together with Shi Ce, proofread the "Zhi Shen Lu" and had it printed in the second year of the Chongzhen era. This edition became the earliest existing version of the "Zhi Shen Lu".

Chapter 3: The Advantage of Silk

After the mid-Ming Dynasty, the official weaving bureau located in Suzhou city, in order to meet the increasing additional demand for silk from the court, adopted the system of "civilian looms" on a large scale. This directly led to the core technology of the silk industry gradually spreading from Suzhou city to ordinary towns. Towns in the southern part of Wujiang, including Huangxi, gradually rose, and a large amount of commercial capital poured in. People of all kinds in the towns and their surrounding areas relied on looms for their livelihood, taking full advantage of the profits from silk.

This process coincides with the gradual decline of the main branch of the Shi family in Huangxi. Meanwhile, the Bangdong branch, founded by Shi Yongling, the second son of Shi Jian, quietly rose in Huangxi city, gradually moving to the forefront of history. After five or six generations of attempts, their livelihood shifted from purely farming and studying to also engaging in trade. They, along with the Gaoli branch that had earlier moved to the vicinity of Changmen in Suzhou city, were deeply involved in the booming silk industry in Jiangnan. Through the Shi family documents such as "The Family History of the Shi Clan in Wuzhong", "The Shi Clan Wuzhong Branch Documents" and "The Self-Introduction of the Scholar Zhongxian of the World Ancestor", not only can we find some important clues about the family's involvement in the sericulture and silk industry in Huangxi city of Wujiang and the western Jin Chang area of Suzhou city from the mid-Ming Dynasty to the early Qing Dynasty, but also help to understand the deep social mechanisms of why the Suzhou branch and the Bangdong branch would actively participate in the production and dissemination of "Zhishenlu".

Section 1: Huangxi Prosperous Market

As previously mentioned, Huangxi was still an ordinary village with hundreds of residents in the early Ming Dynasty. In the Hongzhi "Wujiang Zhi" compiled by Modan, it was still referred to as "Huangjia Village", belonging to the western second district of the twenty-three cities of Fanyu Shangxiang. The famous "Shengze" was also listed among the villages at this time, located in the first district of the twenty cities of Chengyuan Shangxiang. The only decent town south of Pingwang in Wujiang County is Xinhang City along the canal, which is "in the twenty-one cities, with a large population, forming its own market". Xinhang City is separated by a river from Wangjiangjing Town in Jiaxing, Zhejiang. The latter "makes a lot of profit from weaving silk", and is even more prosperous than Xinhang City. In the Ming Dynasty, "there were more than 7,000 households, not engaged in farming". Although the two towns belong to two provinces, they are economically integrated. The Taiping Bridge is built between them. "The shady side of the water is Wangjiangjing Town, and the sunny side is Xinhang City. The people of Zhejiang call it Hebei Dai." If we ignore the factors of administrative affiliation and call the two towns one town, there would be nothing wrong.

Although the cultivation of mulberry in Wujiang made significant progress in the early Ming Dynasty, there were only 18,033 mulberry trees planted in the county during the Hongwu period. By the seventh year of Xuande (1432), the number had increased to 44,746. However, this was far from comparable to the nearby Zhejiang Jia and Hu prefectures. Scholars have found that since the Ming Dynasty, places such as Changxing, Deqing, Gui'an, Wucheng in Huzhou, and Chongde, Jiaxing, Tongxiang in Jiaxing, have generally planted mulberries and raised silkworms. Accordingly, Linghu, Shuanglin, Puyuan and other towns have also developed into important centers for the production and sale of silk and silk products. In Wujiang County, apart from the slightly earlier rise of Zhenze Town, most of the more famous silk weaving towns did not gradually appear until after Jiawan. The "Wujiang County Annals" during the Jiajing period first listed Shengze as a town:

Shengze, located in the twenty cities, is sixty miles southwest of the county seat, with a hundred households, known for its silk market.

The town only had a hundred households, so its prosperity and scale obviously could not be compared with the contemporary New Hangzhou, which was known as a "city of a thousand households". The Chongzhen "Wujiang County Records" once made a more vivid analogy for this town: "Next to the prosperous Ze Lake, the old small village, in the early Wanli period, the households were not even connected, and a pig could be raised in a day." According to this statement, Shengze at the time of Jiawan was still in the initial stage of transitioning from a village to a town, and it was somewhat forced to categorize it as a town.

Huangjiaxi became a city later, and it was not until the Kangxi "Wujiang County Chronicles" that it was added as a new town. Although according to the description in the Daoguang "Huangxi Chronicles", the local population increased daily during the Mingxi Xuan period, and gradually pursued the benefits of the machine silk thread latitude, this is after all a retrospective by later generations. Later generations tend to believe in a more cautious statement, represented by the Daoguang "Huangxi Chronicles":

In the past, (Huangxi) was a village with only a few hundred households. During the Kangxi period of the Qing Dynasty, it grew to over two thousand households. The trade of goods was quite prosperous, so it was then referred to as a market.

The author of "Huangxi Zhi", Qian Chiming, clearly stated that the original source of this information came from the "Wujiang County Annals" compiled by Shen Tong during the Qianlong period. The earlier historical book, the "Wujiang County Annals" compiled during the Chongzhen period, used the phrase "two li of frugal land, with hundreds of old houses, now four to five thousand houses" to describe the leapfrog development of Huangxi into a town. The key to determining when Huangxi became a town lies mainly in judging what the "now" in the Chongzhen "Wujiang County Annals" refers to. If it is not the end of the Ming Dynasty, then when exactly is it? First of all, this passage from the Chongzhen "Wujiang County Annals" does not come from the mouth of the historical book, but from the supplement of its grandson Shi Zai Xiang, which can be determined from the original text of the annals introducing Huangxi Town. After the words "now four to five thousand houses", there are also the words "the historical book has 'Huangxi Zhi', supplemented by grandson Zai Zhu and Zai Xiang", indicating that this introduction about Huangxi Town has indeed been revised and processed by Shi Zai Xiang. Shi Zai Xiang, whose birth and death years are unknown, was mainly active during the Kangxi period of the Qing Dynasty. From the documentary chronology of another historical book he supplemented, "Shi's Wuzhong Clan Literature Spectrum", it is speculated that his peak creative period should be around the 37th year of Kangxi (1698), before his ancestor Shi (Zhong) Bin was enshrined in the Suzhou Prefecture Xiangxian Temple.

Developing from hundreds to over two thousand and even four to five thousand is not an overnight achievement, but requires a long historical process. The currently available documents, if we set aside the special case of the Wujiang County Annals, which was supplemented and processed during the Chongzhen period, only the Shunzhi Wujiang County Annals compiled by Chen Jiyan and Dong Erji remain between the Jiajing and Kangxi periods. Unfortunately, this annals is a typical continuation, only recording the content of the continuation, basically not repeating the previous annals, not only does it not have separate volumes, but also does not contain any content about the county's towns. Fortunately, some important information is revealed in the tomb inscription of Shi Zongqin, the son of Qian Jiang, a native of Jiaxing:

At the beginning of the revolution, ... the Inspector General of the Army, Wu Yi, was suspicious and wanted to slaughter the people of the creek. He had already arrived at Pingwang, and everyone was terrified, not knowing what to do. The Lord (referring to Shi Zongqin - note by the translator) alone knocked on the camp to ask for a meeting, and strongly argued that there were many good people in the area, and assured that there would be no other problems, repeatedly explaining. The Inspector General was very pleased, and went with the Lord to the creek, comforted and advised them, and then dismissed them. All the houses and huts of the creek people were preserved, and their descendants are still protected to this day, thanks to the Lord's efforts.

The "Wu, the Military Supervisor and Imperial Censor" mentioned here refers to "Wu Shengzhao, the General of Suzhou". This man was known for his "brutality and inhumanity", and it was not easy for Shi Zongqin to persuade him. Shi Zongqin was born in the year of Dingwei in the Wanli period (1607) and died in the year of Renxu in the Kangxi period (1682). He was once a county student in his early years. At the time of the Ming and Qing dynasties, he "gave up the idea of advancement, ... in his spare time from fishing and hunting, he planned and strategized, and his wealth reached tens of thousands of gold". This shows that after he joined the Qing Dynasty, he mainly engaged in business. The late Ming and early Qing was a critical period when Huangxi developed from several hundred households to more than two thousand. His choice to engage in business at this time was not accidental, and it reflects the historical fact of the emergence of local business opportunities. In the eyes of people like Wu Shengzhao, Huangxi could be on par with Pingwang Town and become the target of their looting and killing under the pretext of suppressing rebellion. Small villages are generally difficult to attract the attention of these wolf-like soldiers. If it were not for Shi Zongqin's reasoned argument, Huangxi might have been hard to preserve.

After Huangxi escaped this disaster, the commander of the Qing army in Suzhou increasingly understood the importance of Huangxi's position, and successively sent several town garrison officials to station in Huangxi. The town garrison officials were responsible for important tasks such as catching thieves and handling disputes, and they had great power. They often disturbed the people, causing the townspeople to repeatedly strike, until the thirteenth year of Shunzhi (1656), when the inspector Li Sen first dismissed the town garrison officials, which brought an end to the chaotic situation at the time of the reform.

In the towns of Jiangnan, the waterway with the most prosperous businesses and the highest concentration of shops is generally referred to as the "town river". The banks of the town river often become the place where ships dock and trade. If there is more than one bridge on the town river, it indicates that the daily contact between the residents on both sides is becoming increasingly close. Therefore, the time of bridge construction can be used as one of the important indicators of the town's development from its inception to gradual integration. By the latest in the Daoguang period of the Qing Dynasty, there were five bridges on the Huangxi town river from east to west, respectively:

Anxi Bridge was originally made of wood. It was replaced with stone in the 16th year of Emperor Qianlong's reign during the national dynasty. The local people rebuilt it in the second year of Emperor Daoguang's reign.

The Changchun Bridge was built by Shi Sheng in the fourth year of Xuande of the Ming Dynasty, and was rebuilt by Lu Shiyu in the 23rd year of Qianlong of the Qing Dynasty.

Tai'an Bridge, built in the fifth year of Chongzhen in the Ming Dynasty.

San Yuan Bridge, commonly known as Xi Mu Bridge, was built during the Ming Dynasty and rebuilt during the Qianlong period of the Qing Dynasty. In the 13th year of the Jiaqing era, the locals rebuilt it again.

The Wufu Bridge was built in the 31st year of Emperor Qianlong's reign during the Qing Dynasty by Monk Zijue through fundraising. It was constructed with seven wooden arches, spanning across the mouth of the North Angle Bay, resembling a long rainbow. However, it collapsed in the 56th year of Emperor Qianlong's reign.

Among them, Changchun Bridge and Taian Bridge were built at the beginning and end of the Ming Dynasty respectively, witnessing the significant historical transformation of Huangxi from a village to a city. The two bridges hold an important position in Huangxi City. In the middle of the Qing Dynasty, "those who hire people to build Changchun and Taian bridges, wait for people to hire weavers, known as walking bridges, also known as finding work", became a special place for employers to find workers. In addition, Anxi Bridge and Sanyuan Bridge already had wooden prototypes in the Ming Dynasty. Among the five bridges over the Huangxi River, four were initially built before the end of the Ming Dynasty. From this, it can be inferred that the development of Huangxi in the late Ming and early Qing Dynasties had reached a considerable scale.

The biography of Shi Zongqin and the year of bridge construction on both sides of the Huangxi River did not perfectly fill the time gap before and after Huangxi became a city. However, in the "Wujiang County Annals" of Kangxi 24, the neighboring Shengze Town has been promoted to be the first in the county:

Today, merchants from far and near gather here, with more than ten thousand resident families. The atmosphere is prosperous and among all towns, it is considered the first.

Although the prosperity of Huangxi cannot be compared with that of Shengze, due to their geographical proximity, the two towns have a surprising synchronicity in the development of the sericulture and silk weaving industry. The "Wujiang County Records" during the Qianlong period stated: "After Chenghong, there were also locals who excelled in their industries, and it became a custom. Therefore, between Shengze and Huangxi, about forty to fifty miles apart, the residents all pursued the profits of silk weaving." From this, it can be seen that by the mid-Ming Dynasty at the latest, the overall development trend of the silk weaving industry had already appeared in the Shengze and Huangxi areas of southern Wujiang, with only the degree of development and the time of town establishment varying. Nearby towns such as Zhenze, Shuangyang, and Yanmu are all within this range. In the early Qing Dynasty, in the area south of Pingwang in Wujiang County, with Shengze Town as the leader, and towns such as Huangxi City and Yanmu City as guards, the largest silk trade center in the country was formed.

The silk industry in Shengze is the most prosperous, gathering merchants from all directions for trade. Every day, hundreds of gold are exchanged, the streets are bustling, and the goods are abundant. It was once known as Jinchang, but now it is the thriving town of Shengze. Even in places like Yanmu, Zhenze, Pingwang, and Huangjiaxi, where the silk industry also exists, it does not reach one-fifth of Shengze's scale, yet they are also considered prosperous. People there have already gotten used to luxury and extravagance.

Driven by this trade network, "from the fourth to the twentieth city on the southwest road of the city, all planted mulberry trees and raised silkworms." By the Qianlong period, "the price of silk and cotton was high, the profit of raising silkworms was substantial, and the number of people planting mulberry trees increased, leaving almost no vacant land in the villages. At the turn of spring and summer, the green shade was everywhere, with hundreds of thousands of trees in a city." In Huangxi, "the locals did not practice sericulture during the Ming Dynasty. In the early Qianlong period of the national dynasty, there were quite a few silkworm farmers in the areas of Diaozixu and Wuzixu." The large amount of mulberry leaves and silk produced locally undoubtedly provided a sufficient supply of raw materials for the silk industry towns centered on Shengze, but it did not foster a new silk weaving center in Wujiang. "Those who pursue the profit of silk weaving, only Shengze, Huangjiaxi, and Zhenze are the best in the city, and the others are less than one-tenth." The reason why the silk weaving towns are still concentrated in the southern part of Wujiang is that the technical threshold for pursuing the profit of silk weaving is much higher than that of the cotton industry. The latter can be basically completed in ordinary small farming families, while the silk weaving industry, unlike ordinary rural sideline industries, requires a higher technical content. According to the Qianlong "Wujiang County Annals" records: "The silk weaving industry, before the Song and Yuan dynasties, was only done by the people of the county. During the Hongxi and Xuande periods, the people of Wujiang gradually started to weave silk by hiring skilled workers from Suzhou. After Chenghua and Hongzhi, the locals also mastered the core technology of silk weaving, which led to the unstoppable development of the silk weaving industry in Wujiang." In other words, before the Ming Dynasty, the silk weaving technology was mainly controlled by skilled workers in Suzhou city. During the Hongxi and Xuande periods, the people of Wujiang gradually started to weave silk by hiring skilled workers from Suzhou. After Chenghua and Hongzhi, the locals gradually mastered the core technology of silk weaving, which led to the unstoppable development of the silk weaving industry in Wujiang.

If we want to trace the historical background of the shift of silk weaving technology from cities to towns, it may be closely related to the large-scale official distribution of silk products in the Jiangnan region. In the early Ming Dynasty, the annual production quota was set, and the "annual production was sufficient to cover the expenses". However, since the middle of the Ming Dynasty, with the increase in royal demand and the rampant rewards, the annual production quota could no longer meet the growing official needs. Therefore, in addition to the annual production, there was an additional distribution, and the number increasingly exceeded the annual production and the fixed supply quota. Among the dyeing and weaving bureaus across the country, Nan Zhili and Zhejiang were the key areas for annual changes and additional distribution. To cope with this complex situation, the existing urban official weaving and dyeing bureaus could not only expand their production scale, but also due to the dilemma of the artisan registration system, the number of bureau-registered mechanics had greatly shrunk compared to the early Ming Dynasty, and the production capacity of the weaving and dyeing bureaus had also greatly reduced. Apart from recruiting a large number of civilian households to lead the weaving, there was no other way. Fan Jinmin found that as early as the 19th year of Chenghua, the eunuch Wang Jingwei had used the method of leading weaving in Suzhou Prefecture, digging potential from civilian households, and collecting high-grade silk everywhere; by the 14th year of Jiajing, the criminal department gave Wang Jing the order to go to Suzhou and Hangzhou to inspect the satin, officially making the method of civilian households leading weaving to the prefecture as a "rule". The Hangzhou Weaving and Dyeing Bureau also established a new bureau on the basis of the old one as early as the Longqing period, with "civilian machines" recruited from the counties and prefectures to weave the annual change of satin. Various signs indicate that the Wujiang mechanics gradually grew and mastered silk weaving technology after Chenghong, which coincides with the time point when the system of civilian machine leading weaving was officially established, and it is hard to say that this is just a historical coincidence.

In the Kangxi "Wuqing Literature", there is an important historical material that can be further verified: "Silk, there are two times for the head silkworm and the second silkworm. ... When the silkworms are finished, merchants from all over the big counties come to buy, and at ordinary times, there are towns like Zhenze, Shengze, Shuanglin and other places where the machine households buy the warp and weft and weave themselves. There are also silk traders who go to various towns and sell to machine households, called peddlers. The four townships in this town produce a lot of silk, but there are no machine households, so the price is always lower than in other towns." Here, "big county merchants" should refer to silk merchants living in big cities like Suzhou and Hangzhou. They come to Jiaxing, Huzhou, Wujiang and other places to buy a large amount of silk goods every time the new silkworms come to market, and then take them back to the city to weave into silk. At the same time, with the rapid development of spinning and weaving technology in the southern part of Wujiang and its surrounding areas, the machine households in towns like Zhenze and Shengze also responded accordingly. They can both weave the official satin and sell the woven goods directly on the market. Therefore, peddlers who specifically supply them with reeled silk came into being. However, not all towns with developed sericulture have skilled machine workers who master silk weaving technology. Wuqing Town, because it does not have its own machine workers, has become a "price depression" in the silk industry. From this, it can be further inferred that the smooth transfer of official manual technology from Suzhou Prefecture to ordinary towns is a kind of response to the implementation of the civilian machine weaving system. Some scholars have set the starting point for the rapid development of the folk silk weaving industry in Jiangnan around the Jiajing period, which seems reasonable.

With the increasing prevalence of the system of receiving silver for weaving, it has become less important where and by whom the weaving is done. Craftsmen "weave and dye in their own homes", no longer concentrating production. Scattered craftsmen and mechanics, unable to keep up with various market trends, have created a space for brokers who operate between the government and private weavers. These brokers are not only active within Suzhou city, but also seize opportunities to profit widely. In the Ming and Qing dynasties, there was a special profession of brokers in Shengze Town, known as "silk leaders". They either went to various villages to collect silk, or stayed in the town, selling the silk pieces of the surrounding four townships to all parts of the country. As recorded in the "Huangxi Records" of the Daoguang period: "Those who sell silk are called silk leaders. They collect silk daily from Shengze and Wangjiangjing to sell it. The patterns and weights must meet the preferences of the northern customers, otherwise they will be returned." The emergence of these silk leaders is not only due to the single demand for silk trade, but also closely related to the weaving system established since the mid-Ming Dynasty. Some scholars estimate that by the middle of the Qianlong period, the rural areas around Shengze Town already had more than 8,000 looms, making them potential "service" targets for the silk leaders.

The prosperity of rural handicraft industry is not only limited by the commercial capital that controls it, but also depends on the dispersed labor force capable of producing a large amount of medium-quality silk products. Accompanying the spread of textile technology from the prefectural city to the southern towns of Wujiang is the southward shift of the privately-owned silk weaving industry trade center. The phrase "once known as Jinchang, now only thriving town" in the previous materials depicts this situation.

Section 2: House in Gusu Gao Li

In the Ming Dynasty, the production base of Suzhou's silk weaving industry was mainly concentrated in the east of the city, "all kinds of silk, satin, and brocade were produced in the workshops of the county city, and the production was spread over two towns, with the east of the city being the most prosperous, where almost every house was engaged in weaving." The commercial center of the silk industry was located in the area around the two gates of Jin Chang in the west of the city, hence the saying "all the fine and dark silk from all over the country gathers in Jin Chang." At least during the Xuande and Zhengtong periods, the Shi family of Huangxi had a branch that moved to the Gaqiao area near Changmen in Suzhou city, and for several generations, they made a living from the silk weaving industry, also known as "Changmen Gaoli Fang."

As mentioned in the previous chapter, in order to deal with various difficulties that his descendants might encounter in the process of serving as the grain chief, Shi Bin established a strict family law of primogeniture, intertwining the inheritance of property with the responsibility of taxation. According to the family law established by Shi Bin, the eldest son who inherited most of the property had to take on the responsibility of the grain chief, while the other branches could only receive a very meager share of the property and did not have to worry about the heavy burden of taxation. As a result, Shi Sheng, as the eldest son, inherited the family property and the position of grain chief, while the other sons, Shi Min, Shi Hao, Shi Chang, Shi Ang, and others, sought their own paths, becoming the founders of the Wanli, Louxia, Suzhou and other branches. Looking at the rise and fall of each branch later, "the five sons of Shi Bin, only the descendants of Shi Sheng and Shi Chang were the most prosperous."

Shi Chang was the fourth son of Shi Bin, and little is known about his life. According to the "Tombstone Inscription of Mr. Shi of Xiyin" written by Zhou Ding, Shi Chang died young, and his eldest brother Shi Sheng "raised Chang's orphaned son Shi Gui (later renamed Shi Kui), married a wife, bought land, and built a house." After Shi Kui grew up, he "began to move to Wuchang, and engaged in the silk business," becoming the actual founder of Gaolifang in Suzhou. As Zhou Chen said, "People from other places have nowhere to go when they leave their hometown, but people from Suzhou can sell their skills when they leave their hometown." Gaolifang in Suzhou also has a natural business mind. "Kui gave birth to Shi Xie, ... Xie gave birth to Shi Yongzhen, Yongzhen gave birth to Shi Yue," several generations were engaged in the silk industry, accumulating a lot of wealth. Shi Kui's second son, Shi Quan, moved to Huayan Street and also made a living from the silk industry. By the time of his son Yongji, the family had "accumulated a lot of wealth, ... attracting people from all directions, and the door was never empty for more than thirty years."

After the death of Shi Gui and his son Shi Mao, they were both buried in Weibi Xu, Wujiang, and their descendants would go there to offer sacrifices every year during the summer and winter solstice, maintaining a fairly close connection with their old home in Huangxi. By the time of Shi Yongzhen and Shi Yongji, they had their tombs in Wushan, Wuxian and Hengshan Camp respectively, gradually weakening their ties to their hometown and taking a crucial step towards localization.

Binmei Gong Shiyue is a key figure in the Gao Li house in Suzhou. With his unique business philosophy, he elevated the business of the house to a new peak. It is said that his business characteristic is "known for his integrity, and his business is prosperous", making him the most important contributor to the prosperity of Suzhou's houses. Under his promotion, the business scope gradually expanded to pawnshops and warehouses, and even official stores were opened in Yangzhou. It is said that Nanhu Gong Shichen discovered his rare business potential when Shiyue was young, "saying that his fortune is very similar to Wu Ruqi, commonly known as Wu Qiangyao, that is, Nanhu Gong's uncle, and later became extremely wealthy". In the epitaph written by Yang Cheng for Shiyue, it says: "His surname is Shi, his name is Yue, his style is Zhanzhi, and Binmei is his nickname. ... He made a living from silk and brocade, he was clever and thrifty, and he was wealthy and humble." Binmei was born in the 14th year of Hongzhi (1501) and died in the 45th year of Jiajing (1566). During his lifetime, he happened to encounter the Japanese invasion, and he "spent his own money to help the military". More importantly, although his sons did not advance in their careers, he was able to get them into official positions through donations due to his substantial family background. His eldest son, Shi Guoxian, served as the supervisor of the Guanglu Temple, his second son, Shi Guoji, served as the Tongpan of Zhaoqing, and his third son, Shi Guoshu, did not enter the officialdom, but he also had the name of a scholar in the Ministry of Rites.

However, the rise and fall of the Binmei family both owe to Shi Yue. His dominance also laid a major hidden danger for the internal conflicts of the Gaoli House in the future. Because his eldest son, Shi Guoxian, and his wife, Gu, had not been able to have a son for a long time, Shi Yue even ordered him to "adopt his fourth younger brother as his heir, named Bidach, educate him in the academy, and arrange his marriage and supervision", forcing Guoxian to adopt his younger brother as his son, which seriously violated the norms. Behind this, there is a family secret that cannot be revealed. Shi Yue's legally married wives were only two, one was his main wife, Fang, who gave birth to his eldest son Guoxian, and the other was his concubine, Chen, who gave birth to his second son Guoji and third son Guoshu. As for the mother of Bidach, it is not mentioned in either the "Changmen Gaoli Clan Genealogy" or the "Shi Clan Genealogy of Suzhou". Therefore, it is highly likely that Bidach was Shi Yue's illegitimate child. If true, the mystery of Shi Yue ordering Guoxian to adopt his younger brother as his eldest son can be easily solved. After Shi Yue's death, unlike the Huangxi Chang House, which passed on most of its property to the eldest son, he chose to divide his property equally among all his sons. This can be seen from the biography written by Yao Ximeng for Shi Guoji: "The respected man divided his property to give to the public, and the public must push it to his eldest brother and his brothers to share it, and he did not benefit from it." He depicted the equal division among the sons of the Shi family from the perspective of his second son, Shi Guoji. Although it is true, it seems somewhat deliberately flattering. The equal inheritance system has always been a fatal wound to the capital accumulation of ancient Chinese merchants, and the Gaoli House of the Huangxi Shi family could not escape this trap.

Shi Guoxian, also known as Lujiang, was the "elder brother of two younger brothers". In his early years, he focused on his career, but he "failed repeatedly in the examinations". In his middle age, he was "adept at handling affairs and managing his family, though not strictly". At the age of 48, he married Mrs. Chen as his concubine and had two sons (Bishu and Biyu) and one daughter. He passed away due to illness in the fifteenth year of the Wanli period (1587) at the age of 69. His two sons were still young, and Shi Bida continued to enjoy special rights in the inheritance of family property as the eldest grandson of Shi Yue, "dividing the inherited property, pawnshops, and business shops among the sons, favoring the eldest son. He sold his house in Gaoli for two thousand gold pieces and moved to Qianwanli Bridge, which was also part of the property given to him by Lujiang".

After the successive deaths of Shi Yue and Shi Guoxian, Shi Guoji temporarily became the eldest in the Gao's family. Like his brother, he didn't achieve much in his career, only obtaining the title of a scholar in the imperial examination. However, he did not yearn for a life of "seeking wealth and status", and successively held practical positions such as the military advisor of Ganzhou, the county magistrate of Yangjiang, and the judge of Zhaoqing Prefecture. During his tenure, he was known for his integrity, "serving in Yan and Qin and twice in Yue, all without corruption", but he needed to fill a huge financial deficit, "serving in four positions, the debt piled up like a mountain, his son and grandson spent more than ten years to repay it, and there was still a lot left", even his wife Mrs. Bian often "took off her hairpin and earrings to help him in his official duties, and donated her dowry to repay his debt".

The reason why Gaoli House can continue to maintain is entirely due to the unremitting efforts of Shiguo Shu, the third son who always sticks to "neither leaving Jia nor Tao Zhu". It is recorded that:

The Shi family had three brothers, who lived by the Rong River in their youth, with the eldest being the most talented. In addition to managing his own affairs, he also took care of his two younger brothers. The younger brothers were often busy with their own affairs, with the eldest brother serving in the government and the second brother studying in Yong. The eldest brother took care of their nephews at home, waiting for the two brothers to return, and the family was as prosperous as before. ... When it comes to being a county merchant, it's not difficult to start a business, but it's difficult to provide services. The two brothers died on the way, and the eldest brother always took on three roles by himself. The nephews were inspired and competed to help. The eldest brother refused their help, bravely took on the responsibility alone, and provided the two families with a peaceful upbringing. When the nephews studied, he protected them with his own body, not allowing worldly affairs to distract them. As a result, many of the Shi family's descendants were well-educated and had a good reputation in the national academy.

Shi Guoshu, styled Daoqing, also known as Rongjiang, was the third son of Shi Yue. Under his careful management, not only were the industries of his eldest and second brothers preserved and well-ordered, but his nephews were also willing to invest under the influence of his personal charm, continuing to enjoy the legacy left by Bin Mei Gong. By the time of their children and grandchildren, there was a lack of business talents like Shi Yue and Shi Guoshu. Bi Xuan, the son of Shi Guoji, was chosen to supplement the local scholars. His father was an official abroad, and Bi Xuan "served the queen mother at home", but he did not have the business acumen of his third uncle. Shi Guoji once "crossed the river and over the ridge in Henan, fell ill and returned, and handed over his empty bag to the public (referring to Bi Xuan - note by the translator), the public comforted him and repaid his debts, and the family owed more than a thousand gold, not letting the other driver (referring to Guoji - note by the translator) know", indicating that he, like his father, was not good at business and could not fill the gap left by his father's generation. Due to his repeated setbacks in his early years, Shi Bi Xuan in his later years "often recalled the gains and losses of his youth, so when someone became famous, he would not respond to their invitations, even when the local lord wanted to see him, or when the newly appointed prime minister summoned him, he would not respond", his character became increasingly eccentric, even going so far as to "disrespect his ancestors and privately destroy the tombstone of his legitimate uncle Lu Jiang Gong, arbitrarily ordering Bi Da to mourn for three years, changing his name to Fu Zong, and becoming the 'old fourth room'". At that time, the mothers of Shi Yue, Shi Guoxian and Shi Bida passed away one after another. Although Bi Xuan's actions had the intention of rectifying the chaos, they caused even greater disputes within the clan, "the discord within the clan started from this".

The chosen son, Shi Zhaodou, had even less talent for business. After he took over the family business, he was not satisfied and abandoned it. He was good at telling anecdotes and was particularly knowledgeable about ancient history and the classics. He knew everything from the stories of old families to the customs of the past, and was always ready to share them with others, tirelessly talking day and night. He spent all his savings on collecting books, most of which were rare editions, some of which he copied by hand, accumulating thousands of volumes. Book collecting is a very expensive hobby, and it is almost impossible to make a profit from it. Even rare and secret editions are hard to sell quickly, and the wealth accumulated by his ancestors was quickly squandered by him. In his later years, Zhaodou, who was poor and childless, adopted his nephew Yang as his heir. He lived with Yang's family in his old age. After his death, all his collected books were scattered and lost. The substantial commercial capital of the Suzhou Fang family also gradually declined with each generation's equal division of property. On the other hand, the Shi family members who stayed in Huangxi were swept up in the tide of commerce with the rise of Huangxi city.

Section Three: East House of Huangxi Beach

Just as the main branch of the Shi family in Huangxi was gradually declining, the Bangdong branch founded by Shi Yongling, the second son of Shi Jian, quietly rose along with the city of Huangxi, gradually moving to the forefront of history. Shi Yongling, known as "Songqiu", was a "deputy list of the fifth middle school, a special grace scholar, a servant of the Hanlin Academy, a great guest of the countryside". He married the daughter of Shen Zhou and had two sons, the eldest son Hong Kui and the second son Hong Pan. After five or six generations of attempts, the livelihood of the Bangdong branch changed from purely farming and reading to also engaging in trade. As mentioned earlier, Shi Jian had a special preference for Yongling. Although he passed the position of the clan son to Yongxi, he specifically built a new house on the opposite bank of the river from the main branch's residence and gave it to Yongling to establish his own household. Although Yongling lived in Bangdong, he was still under the close supervision of Shi Jian. Yongling once "ordered his servant to plant several orange trees, but when the lord of Xicun saw it, he said that it was not reported and blamed it incessantly", which shows the strictness of Shi Jian's family management during his lifetime.

Furthermore, Pengsheng and his wife had many children, which added to their financial difficulties. For a time, their private affairs were in chaos, and they were on the verge of bankruptcy, leading to extreme poverty. By the time of Pengsheng's son, Shi Zhongjing, the family was in such financial straits that it was difficult to maintain their household. This even severely affected Zhongjing's career advancement. After obtaining the status of a county doctoral student, Zhongjing was repeatedly disappointed in the provincial examination.

Hong Kui, Hong Pan and Bin Mei Gong of Suzhou Fang are of the same generation, while Peng Sheng and Yang Sheng are of the same generation as Guo Xian, Guo Ji, and Guo Shu, the three brothers. The Bangdong Fang family emphasizes farming and studying, while the Gaoli Fang family excels in business, suggesting a lack of intersection between the two families. However, according to the historical family documents, the well-managed Guo Shu not only "remembers his ancestors like building a tomb, even if the ancestors are far away, he must visit once a year", but also specifically set up a charity field in Huangjiaxi according to the character Wei, "supporting the service of the twenty-three cities in the west thirteen map li", indicating that from Shi Gui to Guo Shu, after five generations, the Gaoli Fang family has not completely cut off contact with the old home in Huangxi. If we count the move of Yang Sheng, the brother of Peng Sheng, and his family to Suzhou Fengmen, this may be another clue to the interaction between Suzhou and Huangxi, but unfortunately there is no more direct material to corroborate this. By the time of Peng Sheng and Guo Ji's grandchildren, Shi Ce and Shi Zhaodou, the fate of the two families was more closely linked. They worked together, running around and contacting each other, striving to change Shi Bin's status from a grain chief to a meritorious official of the deceased Emperor Jianwen. Without the previous generations of contact between the two families as a foundation, this golden combination would probably not have formed.

Shi Ce, also known as Yiwei, was a county scholar who died in the year of 1639 during the Chongzhen period, at the age of 65. Despite his humble background and lack of wealth, he dedicated his life to the construction of his clan and the welfare of his ancestors. Even without wealth or fame, he was able to maintain his family's status and was respected by his clan, being honored as the "tomb son" and "family leader", becoming a key figure in the Haimdong room. Shi Ce enjoyed socializing and writing, and traveled extensively throughout the country. He wrote about his travels, describing the mountains, rivers, fields, and customs he encountered. He wrote several books, including "Jianwen Century", "Sanrun Century", "Longping Chronicles", "Songling Elegance", "Huangxi Records", "Wujiang County Records", etc. His younger brother, Shi Jian, despite having lost his education due to family decline, later taught himself and became a scholar. He was recognized for his talent and potential, but unfortunately died early due to illness. Shi Ce's eldest son, Shi Fa, was a prodigy who began studying at the age of six and was considered a wonder child by his peers. However, he also died suddenly at the age of nine, causing Shi Ce great grief.

For several generations in a row, the "always trapped in a thorny house" situation forced the Huangxi Bangdong House to change its strategy. In addition to farming and studying, they did not reject engaging in the business of clothing and commerce. The third son of the historical record, Zizong Qin, was also wholeheartedly engaged in his career, but he repeatedly failed to sell, so he abandoned literature and turned to business. "In his spare time from fishing and hunting, he made plans and strategies, and his wealth reached tens of thousands of gold, all of which were used to restore his ancestors' old business." The grandson of the historical record, Shi Zaicai, in the early years of Shunzhi, "went out to take a small test, but it was not profitable... occasionally asked about the business of planning, and then gradually rose."

The era in which Shi Zongqin and Shi Zaicai lived happened to be the key period for the rise of towns in the southern part of Wujiang, including Shengze and Huangxi. "At that time, the price of silk was eight or nine cents per tael, and the price of raw silk was two or three cents per tael. Those who engaged in this business gradually became rich, and it became a custom." They were just two representatives of the Shi family who were involved in the business trend at that time. The layout of Huangxi Market was "the stream divides the north and the south, and the market river is sandwiched between the two banks." The shops were evenly distributed on both sides of the market river. The four sons of Shi Ce, Zongcheng, Xiaoji, Zongqin, and Zongqing, respectively lived in the east and west of Huangxi, Jinma Alley, and the west of the river, no longer sticking to one house in the east of the river. Apart from the need for population growth to live separately, it was also due to the consideration of occupying advantageous positions in the rapid expansion of Huangxi Market. In addition to the Shi family, other surnames such as Qian and Xu also rushed to engage in the silk business. According to the "Huangxi Records" Volume 6 "Other Records" in the Daoguang period, Qian Zhao made a living by "selling silk", Qian Jingfu "traded silk in Wujiang", and Xu Fengbao also "wove flowers for the weaving family". From this, we can glimpse some clues that the local people were generally involved in the silk weaving business from the late Ming and early Qing dynasties.

By the middle of the Kangxi era, Huangxi had developed into a large town with "shops lining both sides of the river and boats moored one after another under the river".

In the past, there were only a few hundred households in Dijian Erli, but now there are four to five thousand. There used to be only a few trading places, but now there are shops lining both sides of the river, with boats lined up like scales under the bridge. It's easy to make a small fortune here with a little bit of hard work. Many people from other places have settled here, but the local customs are extravagant and deceitful, which has become the norm.

A large number of people from Suzhou city and Jiahu, Zhejiang, live here, which not only means that Huangxi Market has developed into an important link between Suzhou silk weaving center and Jiahu silk weaving center, but also shows the active degree of foreign commercial capital. Zhu Dingji from Haisalt, Jiaxing Prefecture, "came to Huangxi, was good at business, and thus started his family", is a successful representative of Zhejiang merchants living in the town. The silk industry towns in the southern part of Wujiang are just under the dual stimulation of the advanced development of the two major silk weaving industries in Suzhou and Jiahu, becoming the rising stars of the industry. With the influx of a large amount of commercial capital, ordinary townspeople also rely on looms for a living, "poor women weave silk, some even spend the whole day at home, children as young as twelve or thirteen are sent to the flower building to learn weaving", thus creating a large number of potential skilled laborers for wealthy families to select and hire from Changchun and Taian bridges. By the Daoguang period, Huangxi Market had transformed into a professional silk weaving town: "Silk and thread, also produced in the town, and eight or nine out of ten households in Huangxi are engaged in this." The machine-woven silk satin produced by this town, "is sold daily to Shengze and Wangjiangjing brokers, the patterns and weights must meet the preferences of northern customers, otherwise they will be returned", through the increasingly mature silk weaving sales channels in southern Wujiang, it further steps out of Jiangnan and is incorporated into the national silk trade network.

Hence, Huangjiaxi also transformed from a purely agricultural settlement based on farming to a specialized silk weaving town where "people live and weave, farm and read without distinction". From the perspective of technological history, the emergence of private silk weaving trade centers represented by Shengze and Huangxi is the result of artisans in Suzhou city teaching textile technology to towns in Wujiang County. However, if we place the rise of the town groups in the southern part of Wujiang in the context of the Jiangnan region or even the whole country, a more complex explanatory system must be introduced. In a specialized town where over 80% of the population make a living from silk weaving, it is inevitable to fall into the predicament of "people without monthly grain". Lu Shiyu, a resident of Huangxi Town, started his business by trading grain. He once carried more than 3,000 taels of silver and sent rice boats to the north of the river, keenly capturing the business opportunities. Many rice and grain business towns along the canal, such as Fengqiao, Pingwang, Lili, etc., are just the life supply stations dotted in the network of these specialized silk weaving towns. And supporting these supply stations is the large amount of rice and grain continuously transported from along the Yangtze River and the canal. Whether it is merchants from Dongting or those based in Jiangnan, they are all involved to varying degrees in this nationwide commodity circulation system.

Chapter Four: The House of Literature

Since the Shi family of Huangxi settled in Wujiang, they have undergone eight or nine generations of development. Known as a family of literature and a business of rank, they have achieved great success in both economic and cultural fields. On some occasions, they have even been considered one of the "four prominent surnames" in the town, and have been recognized as a prestigious family in Wujiang. However, the difficulties of the imperial examination system have always restricted the family's reputation from reaching a new level. Although Xicun Gong was known for his literary talent in Wujiang, he was always just a commoner in Jiangnan. The abrupt end of Nanhu Gong's official career left only negative memories in the minds of the Shi family members. On the contrary, the painful lesson of "failing the exam repeatedly" made the descendants of the Shi family exclaim more than once, "Why doesn't heaven want to glorify our clan when there are no outstanding successors?" What's more serious is that with the relaxation of the primogeniture system, the substantial wealth accumulated by the eldest son's family was gradually depleted through equal division among all sons generation after generation. The dual dilemma of the imperial examination and livelihood is not only a problem that the Shi family of Huangxi had to face after Jiawan, but also the direct motivation for the production of "Zhi Shen Lu" and some Shi family documents.

Chapter One: Making "The Body Record"

In the twelfth year of the Wanli era (1584), Tu Shufang, who had a marital relationship with the historian, submitted a memorial during his tenure as the imperial censor in Guangdong, requesting leniency for the relatives of the loyal ministers of the Jianwen Emperor. Besides Qi Tai and Huang Zicheng, he asked for the descendants of the relatives who were exiled during the early years of the Yongle Emperor and were still on the military register to be allowed to return to their hometowns. Those who had died were to be removed from the register. This was approved by the Wanli Emperor. From then on, praising the loyal ministers of the Jianwen Emperor was no longer taboo. Temples were built all over the country to worship the martyred loyal ministers and to record their descendants. There was also a surge in the creation of legends about the Jianwen era among the people. Because the main promoter and propagator, Tu Shufang, was from Jiaxing, these legends were particularly prevalent in the Jiangnan region. Tu Shufang compiled these into the "Compilation of the Jianwen Era", which was passed down through the generations.

At the beginning of the Ming Dynasty, official historical records claimed that Emperor Jianwen died by self-immolation, and a burnt corpse was identified as him, which left a lot of room for later generations to imagine. In the fifth year of Zhengtong (1440), an old monk named Yang Xingxiang impersonated Emperor Jianwen, providing material for people to further embellish the story of Jianwen's abdication. The theme of "fleeing" in the legend of Jianwen originated from the "Record of Loyalty and Virtue" during the Chenghua period. This book has now been lost, but it mentioned "more than 20 ministers and officials fled", including nine identifiable individuals such as Liang Yutian, Guo Liang, Liang Zhongjie, Liang Liangyong, Song He, Guo Jie, He Zhou, Liang Liangyu, He Shenfan, and more than ten others whose names have been lost. This statement itself is unremarkable, but it opened up new space for the creation of the legend of Jianwen in later generations. Zheng Xiao's "Record of the Ministers of the Abdicated Kingdom" was the first to quote this statement, and it was followed by the "Record of Loyalty" and "Imitation of Jianwen's Calligraphy". During the Wanli period, "Record of the Ministers of the Abdicated Kingdom" was included in Li Zhi's "Continuation of the Collection of Books". At the end of the Ming Dynasty, book merchants revised it and sold it under the false name of Jiao Hong's "Record of Famous Ministers of the Xi Dynasty", and the "fleeing" theory may have been promoted as a result. The characters mentioned in the "Record of Loyalty and Virtue" may have actually existed, or they may have been invented to bring honor or real benefits to the descendants of the related families by associating them with the stories of the loyal ministers of the Jianwen period. Under the influence of this trend, later historians regarded the more than 20 people recorded in the "Record of Loyalty and Virtue" as those who fled with Jianwen, and they also identified the eleven unverifiable people, forming a complete picture of the group of ministers who followed Jianwen in his abdication. The "Record of Devotion", which was published in the 47th year of Wanli (1619), is a representative of this. This book, based on the aforementioned books, completed the names of the 22 "ministers who fled", added their stories of traveling around southern China after escaping from Jinling with Emperor Jianwen, and created a new character "Shi Zhongbin" to narrate the story of "fleeing". The story of Shi Zhongbin and the "fleeing" theory quickly became popular.

This book began to circulate around the forty-seventh year of the Wanli period (1619). The author, Shi Zhongbin, claimed to be a scholar of the Hanlin Academy during the reign of Emperor Jianwen. The book is written in the first person, recounting the events the author personally experienced and witnessed from the end of the Hongwu period to the first year of the Hongxi period, in a style similar to a self-written chronicle. The book is divided into eighteen sections, with additional notes by Shi Zhongbin's son, Shi Sheng. The first 11 sections record the events of the Jianwen period, the 12th section records the process of Emperor Jianwen and his ministers fleeing, and the 13th to 18th sections record Shi Zhongbin's visits and tributes to Emperor Jianwen after his disappearance. According to his account, Shi Zhongbin was appreciated by Zhu Yuanzhang for his efforts in punishing corrupt officials during the Hongwu period, and was "appointed to govern the Ministry of Household" but declined. Emperor Jianwen granted him the title of Mingjing, appointed him as a book attendant in the Hanlin Academy, and he served in the government until the Yan King captured Nanjing, participating in major events during Emperor Jianwen's reign. When Emperor Jianwen reformed the official system, he submitted a remonstrance; when the war broke out between the north and the south, he denounced Yin Changlong and recommended Xu Huizu; when Emperor Jianwen ordered the frontline generals not to harm the Yan King, he pointed out their mistakes; when the Yan King stationed troops in Yangzhou, he and Fang Xiaoru jointly advised Emperor Jianwen to hold Nanjing and execute Xu Zengshou and Li Jinglong. In addition, he also proofread books, transported grain and money, and requested tax reductions in response to the heavy taxation in the south. In summary, although Shi Zhongbin held a low official rank, he actively participated in the government. When Emperor Jianwen fled, he was one of the twenty-two "ministers who fled" who left the city through the water gate. He hid Emperor Jianwen in his home, saving him from a disaster. When Emperor Jianwen traveled in southern China and occasionally returned to Suzhou, Shi Zhongbin hosted him several times and even personally visited him in the southwest. All of these show his great contribution to Emperor Jianwen, who graciously named his great-grandson after him. Shi Zhongbin died during the Xuande period. This book claims to have been obtained by Jiao Hong in the second year of the Longqing period from a Taoist book in Maoshan. Shi Zhongbin's descendants also published "Qi Zhong Zhi" and other family secret books, which were used to "verify and correct" each other. During the Qizhen period, "Zhi Shen Lu" was printed many times, and the stories of the twenty-two "ministers who fled" expanded the framework of the Jianwen legend. The above is a summary of the "Zhi Shen Lu" we see today.

Before the official circulation of "Zhi Shen Lu", in addition to the Jiao Hong version of the text, the Shi family was also said to have a secret family copy. Shi Ce revealed in the postscript of "Zhi Shen Lu" written in the first year of Taichang:

For twenty years, I have been painstakingly searching and compiling, sparing no effort. However, the great deeds of the Duke have not yet been fully recorded.

According to historical records, he learned some clues about his ninth-generation ancestor, Qingyuan Gong, who had made remarkable achievements during the Jianwen era, from his grandfather "Wuchuan Gong" Shi Pengsheng during his adolescence. However, he did not hear the details because his father passed away before finishing the story. Afterward, he began to consciously collect anecdotes and literary works related to Shi Bin, including common ones like "Tomb Inscription" and "Biography", as well as the controversial "Chronicle of Petitions". Although the plot of Shi Bin's petition to the emperor in Huang Yue's "Chronicle of Petitions" does not contradict the "Tomb Inscription" and "Biography", the inclusion of details about the farewell of court officials inevitably leads to inconsistencies such as different names and ranks, and contradictions between residence and official position. Therefore, it has been criticized by later generations. Even Shi Wei, a descendant of the historical records, had to admit that this text was "also a product of friendship at that time" and should not be taken seriously.

As the historical records say, "After twenty years of searching and scrutinizing, with no words left and no effort spared," but with little to gain, the "eroded to the point of unreadability" fragment of the autobiography of Qingyuan Gong found in the ruined books of the ancestral school, "seven out of ten characters are gone, to the point where not a single sentence can be read," is completely unusable. Its value is less as a powerful evidence of a completely new biography of Shi Bin, but more as a necessary preparation for the sudden emergence of the "Dedication Record". However, whether it is through the hand of Jiao Hong or the secret family collection offered by Huang Xi's Shi family, the "Record of State Affairs" can be seen as an indispensable link between Shi Bin's early biography and the "Dedication Record" that began to circulate during the Wanli period. Its special significance is self-evident, and even under the aggressive debunking of Qian Qianyi, the Shi family still ignored the fact that "records and chronicles do not confuse each other," and did not completely abandon the "Record of State Affairs," a document full of loopholes.

On the surface, the biggest frustration for historians in obtaining the deeds of their ancestors is the inability to touch the core content of the family's secret books. However, this is not entirely the case. For the Shi clan at that time, the more urgent task was to find a big figure who controlled the discourse of history to spread the self-narration of their ancestors without controversy. Jiao Hong, who had served as a historian in the Hanlin Academy and had entered his twilight years, undoubtedly became the most suitable candidate. Jiao Hong had once requested to establish a record for Emperor Jianwen, and had written prefaces for Zhu Lu's "Jianwen Calligraphy Imitation" and Zhang Chaorui's "Loyal and Righteous Record", which were very influential in the related fields. If Jiao Hong could be invited to write a preface for the self-narration of Qingyuan Duke, it would greatly highlight the reliability of the text. In the 47th year of Wanli, the historian visited Jiao Hong on his sickbed with his son, received the complete text of "Zhi Shen Lu", solved the confusion that had been lingering for many years, and successfully asked Jiao Hong to write a preface, and smoothly announced the "Zhi Shen Lu" and its discovery process to the public. Jiao Hong's preface shaped the process of the "Zhi Shen Lu" coming into the world, turning it into a rediscovery of a "lost book", and linked it with the famous historian Jiao Hong, not only enhancing the authority of the text and raising its value, but also becoming unverifiable due to Jiao Hong's death the following year. Afterwards, even Qian Qianyi could only verify the authenticity of Jiao Hong's preface based on its literary style. Ironically, as one of the compilers of the Jianwen Chronicle, Jiao Hong has always been deeply disgusted with the misconceptions caused by the spread of "wild history novels", insisting that the opportunity to use official history books should be used to correct the absurd claims of the people. How could he violate his own principles and promote a "lost book" of unknown origin?

The "Zhi Shen Lu", written by Shi Zhongbin, an ancestor of the Shi family, organically combines the two narrative threads of the previous exiled monarch and the hidden loyal officials. It not only inherits the previous Jianwen legend, but also creates a new version of the story. In particular, the experiences of the twenty-two officials who followed Emperor Jianwen into exile, including Shi Zhongbin, become an important part of the book. It shows a different purpose from the previous Jianwen historiography, so it stands out among the many texts of the late Ming Dynasty's history of the Jianwen period, winning a place. For a time, "those who do not read books and do not understand affairs are often confused, even among the literati, there are those who know its falsehood, but pity its begging, and make prefaces and discussions for it." With the spread of "Zhi Shen Lu", the deeds of the exiled officials first centered on Jiangnan and then spread throughout the country. The Shi family ancestor "Shi Bin" transformed from a grain chief with no official title to the loyal and courageous official "Shi Zhongbin" close to Emperor Jianwen, which has always been surrounded by voices questioning the authenticity of its story.

Compared to the controversy over the authenticity of the "Zhi Shen Lu" text, there has never been any dispute that the text came from the hands of the Shi clan. Starting from this point, at least two questions need to be further pursued: First, why did the Shi clan insist on bypassing the existing resume of Shi Bin to rewrite the early memories of the family? Second, the Shi clan of Huangxi gathered the efforts of three or four generations, successively devoted to the engraving and dissemination of "Zhi Shen Lu", what kind of real interest relationship is behind this? In the past, scholars often considered from the perspectives of court policies, social customs, reader needs, etc., and it is rare to find the motivation for the spread of "Zhi Shen Lu" from within the Huangxi Shi clan. Even if there is, it only stays at the level of the Shi clan's descendants using the promotion of their ancestors' deeds to enhance the family's reputation, and does not involve the complex relationship between different factions within the family and the social and economic changes in the Jiangnan region at the end of the Ming and the beginning of the Qing Dynasty. This inevitably seems like scratching an itch through one's boot.

The Suzhou Prefecture, where the Huangxi Shi family resided, has always been a stronghold for the writing and dissemination of the history of the Jianwen era. As early as the early years of the Wanli period, the imperial inspector Song Yiwang and the prefect of Suzhou, Wu Shanyan, among others, built the Biaozhong Temple on the right side of the West Bridge of Yongxi Temple in Wuxian County, to worship loyal officials of the Jingnan rebellion such as the prefect of Suzhou, Yao Shan, and the minister of the Taichang Temple, Huang Zicheng. This provided fertile ground for some literati in the Jiangnan region, represented by the Huangxi Shi family, to participate in the creation and promotion of the story of Emperor Jianwen. On the other hand, the Shi family and the descendants of Yuan Shun, a loyalist of Jianwen from Jiashan, as well as early recorders of the story of Jianwen's death, Wang Ao and Zhu Yunming, maintained long-term and close exchanges, familiar with various different sources of the narrative system of the Jianwen story, possessing rich materials to further create a logically more rigorous and narratively more complete account of the death. For the Huangxi Shi family, it was not difficult to use the existing resources of the Jingnan wild history to piece together a historical work on the Jianwen era with their ancestors as the protagonists. Qian Qianyi pointed out incisively: "Those who write the 'Zhi Shen Lu' delve into and eliminate wild history, borrow the process of escaping from danger after death, combine current affairs, and fabricate the traces of Bin and Ji's exchanges, in order to deceive the world."

The authoritative statement on the publication and circulation of "Zhi Shen Lu" comes from the preface of "Zhi Shen Lu" written in the name of Jiao Hong. It is said that Jiao Hong discovered the book "Zhi Shen Lu" written by Shi Zhongbin while visiting Maoshan with his friends in the second year of Longqing. The reason why the book was hidden in the Taoist temple was that "during the Chenghong period, Shi's descendants once carried it with them for a tour, and the Taoist priests peeped and stole it". Later, Jiao Hong took the book out and kept it privately for more than 50 years before returning it to the descendants of the Shi family. According to the modern scholar Lun Ming, the "descendant of Shi" here refers to Shi Jian, who lived during the Chenghong period. Shi Shucheng also said when he first engraved "Zhi Shen Lu": "During the Chenghong period, he carried it with him at that time, and there is no doubt that it was lost in Xicun." If this is true, there is a stark contrast between the careless attitude of Shi Jian and the cautiousness of Shi Pengsheng towards "Zhi Shen Lu". During the era when Shi Jian lived, the historical topic of the Jianwen Dynasty was still a political forbidden zone that could not be touched. The loss of a work revealing the specific whereabouts of Emperor Jianwen could still be severely punished or even lead to death for the Shi family in Huangxi. It is doubtful that Shi Jian could carry it out for a tour and casually lend it to Taoist priests to read, and even if it was lost, he did not persistently pursue it. Shi Pengsheng, who died in the eighteenth year of Wanli (1590), lived in a beautiful era when Emperor Jianwen and his ministers were gradually recognized. Not only did he not loudly proclaim the loyalty of Qingyuan Gong, but he was also extremely secretive about his ancestor's identity. He did not even give his grandson Shi Ce any further opportunity to inquire before his death, which is even more unreasonable.

At the beginning of the circulation of "Zhi Shen Lu", in addition to the commonly seen Jiao Hong version, the secret version kept by the Shi family as another major circulation system was often deliberately emphasized. For example, Chen Jiru said in his "Preface to Zhi Shen Lu": "The Shi family's secret version coincides with what Mr. Jiao obtained from Maoshan, without a hair's difference", intending to highlight the common origin of the two versions, thereby enhancing the integrity of the "Zhi Shen Lu" text, and preventing it from being regarded as a work attributed to outsiders. However, Huang Xibang's Dongfang obviously did not have the ability to provide this secret version. The previous historical records had been exhausted in the family documents, and only some "eroded to unreadable" fragments were obtained, which could not be used to complete the comparison work with the Jiao Hong version. Therefore, the heavy responsibility of presenting the secret version fell on the Gaoli room in Suzhou. Shi Zhaodou of this room once used the so-called "secret version" as the basis to supplement the first engraved version of "Zhi Shen Lu" into "Qi Zhong Zhi". According to Shi Zhaodou, the secret version he provided not only "coincides with what was passed down from Maoshan", but also has more reference value. For a time, many famous scholars wrote prefaces for "Qi Zhong Zhi", which became popular in the literary world of Wu. Qian Qianyi, who had just written "Zhi Shen Lu Kao", expressed deep doubts about this and urgently wanted to compare it with his secret version to distinguish its authenticity. Zhaodou, under the prestige of Qian Gong, finally did not dare to provide it. Since then, many rumors about the Shi family's secret version have gradually disappeared.

Apart from the "Zi Sun Shu" in Shi Ming's "Shi Zu Xue Shi Zhong Xian Gong Zhi Shen Zi Xu", which retains the related inscriptions of Shi Zai Dao, Shi Zhao Feng, Shi Zhao Can and others, the Huangxi legitimate eldest branch has almost become the silent party in the process of the circulation of "Zhi Shen Lu". This reflects the actual situation of the eldest branch gradually losing its family discourse power, and on the other hand, it highlights the earnest efforts of the Bangdong and Suzhou branches to promote the circulation of "Zhi Shen Lu" for several generations. In order to obtain more celebrity prefaces and postscripts, they would not even let go of any relatives related by blood or marriage. Shi Ji Xie, the Grand Scholar of Wenyuan Pavilion from Yuezhou, and the Minister of the Ministry of Personnel, as well as Hu Ru Chun, the grandson of Shi Guo Xian who was then in charge of the Jingzhou Factory of the Ministry of Works, were all involved by Shi Ce and Shi Zhao Dou.

Section 2: The Person Shi Zhongbin

The character of Shi Zhongbin only appeared late in the Jianwen legend system. Regarding this point, Qian Shisheng's "Zhi Shen Lu Xiao Xu" written during the Chongzhen period serves as evidence. He said, "The names of all the gentlemen have been obliterated for more than two hundred and thirty years, and now they suddenly shine from the remnants of the famous mountains." Before this, whether it was Shi Jian's "Zeng Zu Kao Qingyuan Prefecture Jun Xingzhuang" or Wu Kuan's "Qingyuan Shi Prefecture Jun Tomb Inscription", they all referred to him as "Shi Bin", a grain chief from the Hongwu to Xuande period, who "started his family with hard work in the fields" and did not achieve any fame. As for why the name "Shi Bin" needs to add a "Zhong", Shi Zhaodou has made a special explanation, saying that "Shi Zhongbin" is the real name, and Shi Jian deliberately "removed a 'Zhong' from the public name to avoid disaster for his descendants" when writing "Xingzhuang". The difference in names can be technically handled, but the huge difference in identity is indeed not easy to resolve. Therefore, as soon as "Zhi Shen Lu" was published, Shi Zhongbin's brand new identity immediately attracted the attention of the people at that time:

During the Hongwu period, the punishment for corruption was extremely severe. Wujiang tax collector Shi Zhongbin was summoned to the court along with several young men who had arrested six corrupt officials. They reported the truth at the Fengtian Gate, and the six officials were handed over to the judicial department for execution. The people of the town were overjoyed. The emperor rewarded them with food and wine, and provided a boat for them to return home. When the Hongwu era was renamed Hongxi, an edict was issued that any household that had become extinct and whose fields had become wasteland should be exempted from tax, but some local officials did not implement this. Zhongbin said with emotion: This is the benevolent intention of the court. Fearing disaster, he submitted a report and succeeded in reducing the tax by a certain amount. This is how Zhongbin's deeds are recorded on the tombstone of Wu Wending. By the end of the Wanli period, his ninth-generation descendant had inscribed a biography stating: Zhongbin served as a secretary for Emperor Jianwen. After Emperor Jianwen abdicated, he visited Zhongbin's home several times, and his grandson named him after the gifts he had received. Zhongbin and twenty-two others, including a pot repairer, a cloth-dressed old man, and a monk from Xuean, agreed to follow him into exile, a story that has been widely circulated.

The "Tomb Inscription" and "Biography" contain quite a lot of information about Shi Bin's life, but can be summarized into three distinctive personal episodes: First, when he was young, he arrested a local tyrant and sent him to Nanjing, earning the reward of Zhu Yuanzhang; Second, as the grain officer, he implemented clever methods to ensure tax collection, and requested the government to reduce taxes; Third, he was falsely accused and died in prison due to his role as the grain officer. After the late Wanli period, the Huangxi Shi family gradually abandoned the historical record "Ancestor's Biography of Qingyuan Prefecture Lord", and instead cited the "Dedication Record", transforming Shi Bin, the grain officer, into Shi Zhongbin, a loyal minister of Jianwen. Even the details of the historian himself were accordingly changed to "initially named Keming, Emperor Huizong visited, bestowed the name, styled Minggu, and titled Xicun", associating with the Jianwen story. The "Dedication Record" used the story of Shi Bin as the basis, and reprocessed the above three episodes, giving Shi Zhongbin a completely new resume.

Firstly, regarding the matter of going to the palace to ask for orders, the "Dedication Record" added the plot of Zhu Yuanzhang "ordering to govern the Ministry of Households" but being declined: "Earlier in the 24th year of Hongwu, Zhong Bin was summoned to prosecute corrupt officials in the court and saw the Emperor Gao. He presented several statements, all of which were handed over to the judiciary for death sentences at that time. The Emperor Gao ordered him to govern the Ministry of Households, but Zhong Bin, fearing the heavy responsibility of money and grain affairs, bowed his head and firmly declined, and sought a more satisfactory way of governance. He was rewarded with wine and food in the court, and four hundred ingots of money. He returned by post boat." The matter of going to the palace to ask for orders was set in the 24th year of Hongwu, which was obviously influenced by the "Record of Events". This treatment certainly laid a good foundation for Shi Bin to serve as a Beijing official in the Jianwen Dynasty, avoiding the abrupt change of identity, but it moved the reckless behavior of Shi Bin in his youth to his middle age in the "Tomb Inscription" and "Conduct". If this were true, Shi Juren's severe reprimand for the young Shi Bin would become completely untenable, constituting a huge loophole in the new resume of Shi Zhongbin.

Secondly, the matter of handling the collection of grain taxes and proposing tax reductions, in the "Tomb Inscription" and "Biography", Shi Bin defended himself to local officials in his capacity as the grain chief. However, in the "Record of Devotion", Shi Zhongbin changed his identity to that of a Hanlin attendant scholar and directly appealed to the emperor on matters such as the collection of grain taxes in Jiangnan.

In the spring of the second year, in March, I was assigned to oversee the taxation and labor services in Jiangsu and Zhejiang provinces. At that time, Emperor Jianwen was in the process of reforming the system. I submitted a memorial to the throne, saying: "The state should have a fair system of taxation and labor services. If these are not evenly distributed, it is not conducive to good governance. Jiangsu and Zhejiang have traditionally been heavily taxed, and in Suzhou, Songjiang, Jiaxing, and Huzhou, the taxes are even higher due to the additional levies imposed on Shen Wansan (of Songjiang), Shi Youwei (of Jiaxing), Huang Xu (of Suzhou), and Ji Ding (of Huzhou). This was originally intended as a punishment for their stubbornness, but can it be taken as a rule? I beg for a complete reduction to alleviate the hardship of the people. According to the tax rates in other places, it should not exceed one dou per mu. Even if the land in the south of the Yangtze River is fertile, how can it be doubled? There are even cases where it is as high as more than a stone. In previous years, I reported to the late emperor that the taxes were too heavy, and he kindly increased the labor services. However, as I am originally from Suzhou, and Shi Youwei is also my relative, I was afraid of being accused of favoritism and did not dare to speak out fully. Fortunately, the current emperor is wise and benevolent, and always lenient in his affairs. I dare to express my humble loyalty and await your decision." The memorial was submitted, and the emperor approved it.

Although this decree was adopted by the "Chronicles of Emperor Gongmin" in the "History of Ming", it is not recorded in the Ming Dynasty's official records. According to Ding Xiuzhen's research, the historical source of the decree in the second year of Jianwen came from "Zhu De Bian" written by Yuan Hao from Jiashan (collected in "Yuan's Family Teachings Anthology", with a version printed during the Wanli period). "Zhi Shen Lu" further associated influential legends and characters such as Shen Wansan, a wealthy man from Jiangnan, with this decree, representing from one side the profound historical memory of the people of Jiangnan towards Jianwen's benevolent governance. The request for tax reduction, as a footnote to the power struggle between local and central interests, has always been a part of the history of Jiangnan during the Ming and Qing dynasties. Adding this plot to "Zhi Shen Lu" can easily win more people's favor and effectively enhance the acceptance of "Zhi Shen Lu".

Thirdly, regarding the matter of dying in prison, historical records interpret it as a result of false accusations by cunning people. The "Dedication Record" associates it with dying in prison for protecting Emperor Jianwen: "There were those who accused him of being part of a treacherous faction. Although he was pardoned by the superior officials, he was always fearful... From the point of his disappearance, he was sued by his enemies seventeen times, and eventually died because of this." This shows the expected integrity of a loyal minister of Emperor Jianwen.

The above is a simple comparison of the "Dedication Record" with the historical records and the deeds of Shi Bin as described by Wu Kuan. The biggest difference between the two resumes is that Shi Bin was a grain chief, while Shi Zhongbin was a loyal minister of Jianwen, and their identities are obviously different. This change somewhat reflects the purpose of the text creator's modification. In other words, the Huangxi Shi family's active approach to the "Dedication Record" is an attempt to seek some practical benefits by borrowing the identity of the loyal minister of Jianwen, and this motive in turn profoundly affects the creation of the "Dedication Record" text.

During the Wanli period, officials repeatedly proposed to restore the sacrifices to Emperor Jianwen and to rehabilitate the loyal officials of the Jianwen era. Under such circumstances, telling ancestral stories about Emperor Jianwen could bring some immediate benefits to those who were interested. In the previous legends of Jianwen, the stories of the "martyred" officials were already quite detailed. However, Shi Bin, the ancestor of the Huangxi Shi family who was associated with the Jianwen era, died during the Xuande period, and could not be recklessly included in the list of martyrs. Therefore, his clan found the theory of "following the deceased" under the framework of Jianwen's legend, and sought a different way out.

"The theme of 'escaping from death' was not commonly seen in the deduction before the Wanli period, and it was basically an undeveloped theme. This statement was inherited from Zheng Xiao's 'Records of Loyalty and Mysterious Virtue'. Zheng Xiao compiled 'Records of Humble State Servants', stating that there were 'Records of Loyalty and Mysterious Virtue' during the Chenghua period:

Wang Zhao, a native of Songyang, visited Zhiping Temple and observed the rotating sutra cabinet. He heard a faint sound coming from the cabinet and found it strange. He ordered someone to climb to the top of the cabinet, but nothing was seen. However, they found a scroll, which recorded the affairs of more than twenty ministers who fled during the Jianwen period. The paper was damaged and many characters were illegible. After reading for several days, they gradually transcribed the recognizable parts, and identified nine people: (Liang) Tianyu, Guo Liang, Liang Zhongjie, Liang Liangyong, Song He, Guo Jie, He Zhou, Liang Liangyu, and He Shen. Only a few words were recorded for each person. Wang Zhao admired their loyalty and found it extraordinary. He praised each of them with a few words and titled the record "The Mysterious Record of Loyal and Virtuous Officials".

Judging from the citation, the origin of this book is absurd, and it is unknown whether it was fabricated by Zheng Xiao and Wang Zhao. The nine named individuals have already appeared in earlier Jianwen legends, but the phrase "more than twenty officials and subordinates fled during the Jianwen period" established the term "fleeing", and left more than ten unnamed individuals to be supplemented. During the Zhengde period, the loyal officials of Jianwen recorded in texts such as "Bei Yi Lu" and "Ge Chu Yi Shi" were all described as "martyred officials". It was not until the Jiajing period that books such as "Ge Chao Yi Zhong Lu" and "Ge Chao Zhi" included "hidden officials". After Zheng Xiao, "Xun Guo Chen Ji", "Zhong Jie Lu", and "Jian Wen Shu Fa Ni" all have a section on "fleeing". Although it has not yet become a trend, the scattered information has become the object of association and imitation, and has provided a narrative tradition for the new narrative structure represented by "Zhi Shen Lu" to inherit.

"The Record of Devotion" and "The Mysterious Record of Loyalty and Virtue" have a great relationship in terms of text, and even the specific environment in which they were discovered and their unrecognizable preservation conditions are strikingly similar, adding a touch of mystery. In the ninth year of Chongzhen (1636), Xu Changzhi's "Zhao Dai Fang Mo" mistakenly thought that the two were actually one book, but in the writing of the "following the deceased" story, the two have quite different styles. Although key figures such as Liang Liangyu have already appeared in "The Mysterious Record of Loyalty and Virtue", the "following the deceased" event is almost like a strange talk, and the relationship between him and Emperor Jianwen is not detailed, and it is even more impossible to know who his descendants are. This of course cannot be used as evidence for his descendants to seek practical benefits such as requesting sacrifices and posthumous titles. However, "The Record of Devotion" turns Shi Zhongbin from an ordinary person whose name is not passed down into the chief of the ministers who followed the deceased of Emperor Jianwen, making the "following the deceased" theme almost true. The specific methods are as follows:

Firstly, Shi Zhongbin's official position was designated as the Shu Shi of the Hanlin Academy, and his official experience from the Hongwu to Jianwen periods was described in nearly two thousand words in chronological order, regardless of the amount of ink used, making his courtier identity seem real. During the Chongzhen period, the "Wuxing Beizhi" mentioned the local water conservancy and cited the relevant content of the "Zhishenlu".

Secondly, the legend of Jianwen's exile originally had two themes: "leaving the city from Shuiguan" and "traveling in South China". The "Zhi Shen Lu" spans these two themes, adding the plot of hiding in Shi Zhongbin's house and changing his appearance, and escaping with him. It also names 22 people, describing their ranks, official positions, and events during the "exile", which enhances the credibility of the "exiled ministers" theory. Based on this, Shi Zhongbin's merit of saving the emperor is easier to be recognized.

Soon Yang Yingneng, Ye Xixian and thirteen others arrived, making a total of twenty-two people. ...They arrived at Wujiang, went to Huangxi, ...After three days, all the disciples gathered at Bin's house. ...The prefecture of Suzhou sent Wujiang's magistrate Gong to Bin's house to search, saying: "Emperor Jianwen is rumored to be in your house." Bin replied: "Not yet." He left with a slight sneer. The next morning, the master, along with two monks and a Taoist, entered Yunnan.

In the eighth month of the year of JiaShen, the master came to my house with Yang, Cheng, and Ye. Seeing that the master's clothes and shoes were very worn out, I insisted on him staying for three days. I ordered my servants to make new clothes for the master, totaling sixteen pieces of cotton and silk; Yang, Cheng, and Ye all received cotton clothes, totaling thirty-six pieces; I also gave them ten taels of white gold as funds. On the morning of the thirteenth day, I accompanied the master on his journey to Hangzhou in the two Zhejiang provinces, planning to travel for twenty-three days. We planned to visit Tiantai and Yandang for thirty-nine days.

In the third month of the spring of the year of Dinghai, Zhong Bin and Hezhou went to Yunnan to pay respects to their teacher.

In the autumn of the Gengzi year (in the lunar calendar), Zhong Bin went to Yunnan to pay respects to his teacher.

Thirdly, it tells about Emperor Jianwen's various rewards to Shi Zhongbin. If Emperor Jianwen holds a sacrifice, Shi Zhongbin, as a loyal minister, should rightfully participate in it.

The teacher's residence is located to the west, called Qingyuan Pavilion. ... The next morning, it was renamed Shuiyue Pavilion, with the inscription written by himself in seal script.

The master said: I owe much to those who have followed me into oblivion, who have clothed me, fed me, and navigated me through perilous situations. For twenty years, they have been constantly on guard. I am deeply grieved.

Fourthly, it specifically mentions the clan members and residence of Shi Zhongbin, and allows his family to participate in the "following the deceased" event, thereby implementing the shared benefits into the Shi clan.

On the eighth day, I arrived at Wujiang, went to Huangxi, and stayed at the west side of my teacher's residence, called Qingyuan Pavilion.

There was a man named Hong from the Shuzu family, who was from Jiajia Village in Jiaxing County... Hong asked, "Where are you going, teacher?" He replied, "I want to visit the various victories of Tiantai." Hong said, "I will prepare for a day's journey to accompany you."

Bring ten pieces of clothing, and carry the grain, for a trip to Kuaiji.

From this, the story of Emperor Jianwen's exile becomes complete, and the deeds of the related ministers are difficult to distinguish between true and false. At the end of the Ming Dynasty, Li Qing, who was in charge of the rehabilitation of the ministers who had resisted the rebellion, once sighed, "If it were not for the detailed records of the tomb inscriptions of the late minister Wu Kuan, how would we know about the story of the exile, and how would we know that dozens of people who followed the exile were all fake?" Through the elaboration of "Zhi Shen Lu", Shi Zhongbin, who was listed as one of the "ministers who followed the exile", became the first meritorious minister when Emperor Jianwen was exiled. The book further explains that the reason why the Huangxi Shi family had no official titles for a long time was to conceal their "exile" identity by imperial decree.

(Teacher) asked, "How old is your son?" He replied, "He is sixteen years old. Can he handle affairs?" He replied, "He is still in school." He asked, "Does he want to be an official?" He replied, "He wouldn't dare." They both sighed for a long time.

(Zhong Bin) warned his son, saying: Although your father's official rank is low, he is favored by the court. ... If there is any difficulty, you should follow the teachings of the previous emperor's filial piety and hard work in farming, in order to establish a family and protect yourself.

The late emperor said: ... The eighteen articles of the "Dedication Record" are preserved to summarize a lifetime, warning descendants not to despise (show) others. Although the current emperor is benevolent and generous, this matter cannot be known, for fear of the disaster of the entire clan. If descendants mention this, they will be considered unfilial.

Another famous figure from the Shi clan, Shi Jian, was born during the Xuande period. Although he had nothing to do with the "from death", the "Dedication Record" also linked him to Emperor Jianwen.

In April of the ninth year of Jiayin, ... a boy was born. The teacher mourned the death of the former monarch, but soon rejoiced at the birth of the boy, naming him Wen. He then said: I am Wen, but not the end, will there be any doubt? There happened to be a "History of Song" on the case, so he changed his name to Jian. The teacher was proficient in destiny, and carefully examined Ziping, saying: This boy will be noble. Sheng said: I do not seek nobility, knowing how to read and establishing a family is enough. The teacher said: Even if he is not noble, he should be named Wen for generations.

He Xingzhen discovered that there was no such passage in the engraved version of "Zhi Shen Lu" from the second year of Chongzhen's reign. However, Shi Zhaodou's "Qi Zhong Zhi" does contain this record of Emperor Jianwen naming Shi Jian, showing the characteristic of "multiple systems coexisting" in the early spread of the "Zhi Shen Lu" text.

With the above background, the identity of Shi Zhongbin as a "meritorious official of the Jianwen era" becomes increasingly clear. Various types of ceremonies and commemorative activities revolving around his illustrious career have been initiated. What followed was a series of efforts to incorporate him into the local sacrificial system. As Pan Lei said, "During the Wanli period, there was a discussion about rewarding and consoling the ministers of the fallen country. The Shi family was not without envy, so they fabricated the 'Record of Devotion' to deceive the world." There were several reasons for enshrining local talents in the Ming Dynasty, such as founding the country, tragic death, filial piety, literature, etc. The story of Shi Zhongbin created by the 'Record of Devotion' was to provide a textual basis for his enshrinement. At the end of the Ming Dynasty, the culture in the south of the Yangtze River was flourishing, the printing industry was prosperous, and the legend of Jianwen was popular. Those who took advantage of the situation to profit were not only booksellers and literati, but also clan elders. Xu Yuanpu's "Wu Cheng Stolen Pen" states, "In September of the Jia Shen year of the Hongguang era, Guan Chengzhai's junior clan chief requested a posthumous title, and thus Shi Bin was crowned among the deceased ministers and was enshrined." The creation of the 'Record of Devotion' was to attract the attention of the viewers, using the "deceased" theme in the Jianwen legend that had not been fully exploited, and integrating and expanding various related rumors. The purpose was nothing more than to hope to put Shi Zhongbin on the list of posthumous titles.

Section 3: Please Worship and Posthumously Confer

After the "Battle of Jingnan", although the issues related to the Jianwen reign were always "political taboos", since the Xuande period, there have been sporadic activities to commemorate the martyrs of the Jianwen reign initiated by literati or officials from their original places, places of service, or places of martyrdom. From the Chenghua and Hongzhi periods onwards, in order to praise and educate, and to inspire the spirit of scholars, more and more martyred ministers, like ordinary loyal ministers and filial sons, also had the opportunity to be enshrined in the temples of county and township sages, and even a considerable number of people usurped the title of "private posthumous name". By the Wanli reign, the official commendation and condolence for the loyal ministers of Jianwen became more open, and once it extended to in-laws and relatives, many could receive a series of special treatments that glorified their family. The promotion and popularization of the "Zhi Shen Lu" by the Huangxi Shi family was for the same purpose. Both the historical records and Shi Zhaodou spared no effort to enshrine their ancestor Shi Zhongbin, who had a new identity, in the temple of township sages.

If we were to discuss who among the Shi family of Huangxi is most qualified to be enshrined in the local temple of worthies, Shi Zhongbin would not be the first choice. Shi Jian, who holds a place in the literary circle of Wuzhong, better meets the basic criteria for selection. Even Pan Lei, who cannot tolerate the slightest bit of sand in his eyes, agrees: "None of the Shi family's ancestors are more virtuous than Minggu, who has also written many works. Who would say it is inappropriate to list him among the local worthies? ... Please enshrine Minggu in the local temple, which is truly the duty of a filial son and a loving grandson." In fact, as early as the Jiajing period, the Shi family had indeed made efforts in this regard, but unfortunately, they fell short of success.

At that time, with Shi Chen being promoted to the court as an official after passing the imperial examination, the chances of Shi Jian being enshrined were not low. "At that time, Yang Yi, the educational commissioner, and Nanhu Gong were old acquaintances, and they got along very well." In the Ming Dynasty, in the administrative procedure of local elections of village worthies, the educational commissioner had the final decision. Under normal circumstances, as long as the key figure, the educational commissioner, supports, at least half of the success is guaranteed. However, the process of electing Shi Jian as a village worthy in Wujiang County in the ninth year of Jiajing was not as smooth as imagined. According to the procedure, first, the representatives of the people, such as Li Xuan, Mei Yuxi, Qian Qian, and Shen Han, who were attached to the Confucian school, selected the candidates for the public election. After detailed investigation by the county magistrate Zhan Wenguang, he believed that Shi Jian's virtue, business, and learning fully met the conditions of "applying to enter the village worthy temple, and worship together", and agreed to report to the educational commissioner. The next procedure is extremely complicated, requiring multiple public transfers between Wujiang County, Suzhou Prefecture, and the educational commissioner's office, repeated reviews, before it can be completed. The straightforward Shi Chen did not realize the huge variables he might encounter, and took advantage of his special relationship with Yang Yi to clear all the joints in advance. In the end, "due to a slight slack in emotions, it was not successful." There was another episode in this, Shi Chen's brother-in-law Zhu Yunming had a conflict with the Shi family over the arrangement of his nephew's marriage. Not only did he not help with the issue of discussing Shi Jian's entry into the village worthy temple, but he also added insult to injury at a critical moment, "continuing to slander to discourage it." This eventually led the matter, which was already a done deal, to develop in the completely opposite direction. It is said that the approval documents from various yamen during the application process were once preserved by the Shi family, but were eventually lost in the hands of Shi Mo. Important documents such as the conclusion of the students' investigation and the review and inspection of officials at all levels were destroyed, leaving only the "Application for Village Worthy" at the beginning of the "Xicun Collection" as the only clue.

The experience of failing to enshrine in the local worthies' temple as recorded in historical annals, though seemingly a matter of human affairs, actually has deeper reasons behind it. Although the phenomenon of indiscriminate enshrinement of local worthies became increasingly common after the mid-Ming Dynasty, such criticized situations rarely occurred in Wujiang County. The situation of local worthies' enshrinement before the Jiajing period was recalled in the "Discussion on Local Worthies" written in the historical records.

The local gentleman was worshipped in his local temple, a tradition that has been followed by the local virtuous people. There were once forty-two people who were worshipped in the morning and evening. During the Ming Dynasty, the prefect Kong Kechong gathered the elders to discuss and eliminate, leaving only ten people. A hundred years later, Chen Dixue sent a letter to Wang Yindi to consult the public opinion, and added five more people. The people listed by Mo Zhi were Zhang Han, Gu Yewang, Lu Guimeng, Wei Xian, Wang Ping, Chen Changfang, Yang Bangbi, Lu Shiqi, Wang Fen, Shen Yifu, Wang Yuanjie, Mo Yuan, Zeng Quan, He Yuan, and Ma Kui. Xu Zhi listed the three high-ranking officials in the special temple, retired Lu, Mo, Zeng, and He, and promoted Xu Chen, Wu Zhang, Mo Dan, and Zhao Kuan, making a total of thirteen people. At that time, the public opinion was that the historian Jian should be included, but he was not. He Yuan, who had been included, was lost. Xu Chen, Shen Qi, and Du Wei, who were still alive and had typical characteristics, were the three. The predecessors were so cautious. After more than fifty years, only Xu and Du were selected. In the recent thirty years, fourteen people have been selected. The new master was selected, and the previous master was greatly suppressed and abandoned, and finally the golden and splendid ones occupied the top. Can the master be abandoned, and can the previous repairs be abandoned? Please discuss it.

At the beginning of the Hongwu era, Kong Kezhong, the governor of Wujiang, set a strict tone for careful selection. Although there were occasional increases and decreases in the following hundred years, the number of local talents in the whole county was always controlled between 10-15 people. If new candidates were to be added, it must be based on the premise of eliminating the old ones. Faced with the harsh reality of "new masters entering the election, surpassing the previous masters", the difficulty of entering the local talent shrine in Wujiang County is far greater than other regions. In order to solve this "century" problem, the historical records proposed a backup plan based on 27 people:

These twenty-seven people are all respected figures from the past. Whether they served in the court or in the wilderness, each of them left an indelible mark on the world, coexisting with the virtues and goodness that have lasted for thousands of years. They are placed in the highest rank, unchanging for hundreds of generations. Since the time of the Mu Temple, there have been those who have been promoted to fill the lower ranks. By dividing them into upper and lower ranks according to the number of generations, it is not intended to disrespect the old by overshadowing the revered.

The historical records divide local worthies into two categories, using the Jiajing and Longqing dynasties as the boundary. The 27 people before the Jiajing dynasty were placed in the "upper rank, unchanging for hundreds of generations", while those after the Longqing dynasty were placed in the "lower rank" to avoid the inconvenience of "old disrespecting the honored". Strictly speaking, the addition of the lower rank in the historical records is somewhat reckless, which is consistent with the overall evolution trend of the local worthies temple system in the Ming Dynasty. However, the reason why the irregular operation continues despite repeated prohibitions is closely related to the actual needs of the people, which is similar to the popularization of the clan ethics that appeared almost at the same time. Among the 27 people listed in the historical records, Shi Jian and Shi Zhongbin are both included, the purpose of which is obviously to meet the practical needs of the Shi family. Although the "Discussion on Local Worthies" in the historical records was not adopted by local officials, considering that the chance of two people from the Shi family applying and succeeding at the same time is really small, a careful choice must be made. Shi Jian, who had a failed experience, was obviously not the first choice. More importantly, Shi Jian himself did not have any academic honors and was only known as a commoner in Jiangnan. Even if he was recommended, he should be enshrined as a "scholar", but some scholars in the Ming Dynasty pointed out that it was relatively rare to enshrine local worthies as "scholars". In addition, the "promotion" of local worthies due to the academic honors of their descendants generally appeared after the Wanli period, which was not a necessity in the early Jiajing period. Therefore, it was too optimistic for Shi Chen to recommend his ancestors for enshrinement without actively guiding public opinion. As a result, Shi Zhongbin, who was gradually accepted by the literary circle in Wuzhong, became the top choice due to the trend of enshrining those who served the dynasty during the Jingnan period. At least in the eyes of scholars in the middle and late Ming Dynasty, "those who are not Jinshi (imperial examination graduates) cannot enter the Hanlin (imperial academy)" was an iron rule. Although Shi Zhongbin's career in the Hanlin was controversial, once it was believed, the chance of being selected was much greater than that of Shi Jian.

In the second year of the Apocalypse (1622), Shi Zhaodou, who had accumulated a certain network in the literary world of Suzhou, seized the opportunity to organize and publish "Qi Zhong Zhi", which marked the beginning of his long journey to seek a memorial for Shi Zhongbin. He first collaborated with Shi Ce to build a room in the northwest corner of Huangxi's former residence to "worship his former scholar at home", and named it "Qi Zhong Ci". Then, taking the integration of the worship of loyal ministers in the counties under Suzhou Prefecture as the entry point, he planned to follow the example of the Biao Zhong Ci in Jinling and the joint memorial of the two Pan martyrs in Qin and Fujian, and to jointly worship four people, Liu Zheng of Changzhou, Qian Qin of Wuxi County, Huang Yue of Changshu, and Gong Xu of Kunshan, with Shi Zhongbin of Wujiang, and to establish a county and five loyal temples in Suzhou. Apart from Shi Zhongbin, the other four have all been listed in the Wanli Dynasty's sacrificial canon, and their deeds are also remarkable. To highlight the false legacy of the Shi family with the true loyalty of the Jianwen Dynasty, it can be said that they have put a lot of thought into it.

Shi Zhaodou, who preferred to take the high road, also planned to further "send the book to the public wood master in the (Nanjing) Biaozhong Temple". The Nanjing Biaozhong Temple, established in the fourth year of Wanli (1576), was the first temple of the Ming Dynasty to jointly worship the martyrs of Jianwen, and it had the meaning of a "national temple". The criteria for enshrinement were relatively more relaxed than other temples dedicated to the loyal ministers of Jianwen. However, in the second year of Tianqi, among the 117 people enshrined in the temple, "only Ye Xixian, Niu Jingxian, Wang Liang (31), Cai Yun, He Shen, and Liang Liangyong, who died, the rest were attached, ... in addition, there were still 21 former book servants" who were not enshrined. This situation really made Zhaodou dissatisfied, and he hoped that "those who are in charge will do it without leakage" to make up for the regret of the deceased ministers. The reason why he did not take the lead in the enshrinement of the prefecture-level hometown temple was because the selection criteria of Suzhou Prefecture were as strict as those of Wujiang County: "In the middle of the Ming Dynasty, Lu Can and others held clear opinions below, and Hu Zanzong and others confirmed the discussion above, and they were never not detailed and cautious." Since this road is not feasible, apart from expressing the sigh of "my hometown has old people, the neighboring county's hometown temple is noisy, this year a certain prominent person will enter, next year a certain official will enter, tired of it, ... can't appeal to the court, and disdain to be with the dirty", the insignificant Shi Zhaodou had to step back. In addition, due to power and financial constraints, the idea of a county's five loyalty temples and enshrinement in the Nanjing Biaozhong Temple could not be realized. Despite this, the basic tone set by Shi Zhaodou, "the public should be enshrined for their diligent service in death", has become a historical legacy that cannot be bypassed in the two subsequent applications for enshrinement in the hometown temple.

Since it is not feasible in Suzhou, it may be a good strategy to make efforts in neighboring counties where policies are relatively relaxed. Huangxi, which has a deep connection with Jiaxing, has become the best breakthrough. This is not only because Shijia Village in Jiaxing is only separated by a canal from Huangxi, but more importantly, as the second generation of the Shi family who moved to Wujiang, Shi Zhongbin can still be considered a native of Jiaxing.

During the Chongzhen period, the trend of local talents in Jiaxing Prefecture becoming more and more rampant was becoming increasingly serious. As Chen Longzheng said: "There were very few people who entered the local talent temple 50 or 60 years ago, and people respected it. Recently, few people have not entered after the first rank. Either because their son is talented, or because their disciples used to be officials in that place. Even if they are tactful about it, the people who get in are mixed, and no one respects it." The historical records of Jiahe, a neighboring county, naturally would not miss this rare opportunity, and they "generously took it upon themselves to request commendation and posthumous titles." The purpose of the historical records is very clear: "Requesting temples, posthumous titles, and relief, recorded for future generations, like the examples of dealing with the dead, then they hope more from the high-ranking clans", requesting temples is just the first step of their many plans. On the operational level, Shi Zhongbin's status as a "deceased minister", his fame and official position, and his good governance of local affairs such as taxes and water conservancy, all fit into the name of requesting a temple. The historical records took the initiative to make friends with Zheng Xuan, the then prefect of Jiaxing, and quickly gained the latter's trust. Zheng Xuan "respected the prefect for his righteousness, and also allowed the prefect to handle the affairs of the local talent temple. Because the prefect was poor, he also prepared his own sacrificial offerings, and his sincerity was even greater", which got the request for a temple off to a good start. Afterwards, the historical records "reported to the governor for several months, reported to the inspector for several months, and reported to the scholar for several months. By the time they entered the temple and announced the completion of the matter, they had traveled a total of 300 miles, rushing through the smoke and post stations", after much hardship, they finally cleared all obstacles in the eleventh year of Chongzhen (1638), and Shi Zhongbin successfully entered the Jiaxing Prefecture local talent temple.

The "Shi's Wu Zhong Faction Literature Compilation" and the "Dedication Record" edited by Shi Zai Xiang both include the records of Shi Zhongbin's worship of the Jiaxing Prefecture's local worthies. If we remove the bureaucratic jargon from the official documents, it is nothing more than the county Confucian school, county magistrate, prefect, and education officials, according to Shi Zhongbin's loyal experience from death and the outcome in Yu Siyuan, confirming that it meets the various approvals for the worship of local worthies who "serve diligently with death". However, in the approval of Liu Linchang, the deputy envoy of Zhejiang's education, there is a sentence "choose a day to set up the master, send the local worthies to the temple, and discuss the special temple", which implies a mystery. The so-called "special temple" is relative to the general temple. A very important feature of the new rules for local worthies formed in the middle of the Ming Dynasty is the attachment of local worthies to schools (that is, the establishment of a general temple in the prefecture and county school to worship local worthies). Although after the general temple of local worthies was attached to the school, some places still retained or established special temples for a few particularly outstanding local worthies, the total number greatly reduced, and official approval was required. During the Jiajing period, the three high special temples built in Wujiang were specifically set up to commemorate the Song Dynasty Confucian scholars Wang Pin, Chen Changfang, and Shen Yifu. Apart from this, there are no other examples of official special temples. Shi Ce and Shi Zhaodou once had a special worship of Zhongbin in the Xia Ya Hall of the Shi's old house, "properly arranging the ancestral spirits of generations, re-creating the public image of the scholar, offering sacrifices at the time of the year, and donating a certain amount of land according to the characters, as the capital for the branch to enjoy". Although after Wanli ascended the throne, he immediately pardoned the world: "All the ministers who were guilty during the pacification and reform, ... ordered local officials to check their hometowns, either to build a special temple, or to attach to the local famous loyal and righteous temple, and to offer sacrifices with rituals at the time of the year", but strictly speaking, the behavior of privately worshiping Shi Zhongbin still has the suspicion of "usurping" the ritual system. Therefore, the so-called "discussing the special temple" in Liu Linchang's approval is mainly to issue a "permit" for the previous private worship. The "Wujiang County Records" Volume 15 "Biographies" in the Chongzhen period recorded: "In accordance with Yu's order, in the eleventh year of Chongzhen, Liu Linchang, the deputy envoy of Zhejiang's education, worshipped (Zhongbin) in the Jiaxing Prefecture's local worthies temple, and moved the text to the imperial historian Zhang Fengpi of the South Direct Education to build a special temple in Huangjiaxi", which is the practice of Liu Linchang's suggestion. The "Shi's Wu Zhong Faction Literature Compilation" includes Zhang Fengpi's approval of Jiaxing Prefecture's move to request a special temple for the ceremony:

Imperial Envoy, Admiral, and Education Commissioner Zhang Pi, who was in charge of inspecting the provinces of Zhili, Suzhou, Songjiang, and other places, was a former scholar of the Hanlin Academy and served in the Wenyuan Pavilion. He was also known as the Qingyuan historian, a man of great integrity and loyalty, who braved the frost. He was originally from Zhejiang. He was highly respected, and his absence would be deeply felt in our three Wu regions. His achievements were numerous and detailed, and the ancestral temple was newly built in his honor. The prefecture commissioned a plaque with the inscription "Integrity Supports Heaven," followed by the date and the full name of our academy. The plaque was sent to the temple and hung up for display.

The official document from Liu Linchang, along with the approval from Zhang Fenghe, not only made the indirect strategy recorded in the history books achieve substantial results, but also provided a legal cover for the private worship of Shi Zhongbin by the Shi clan at their ancestral home in Huangxi. In the 21st year of Kangxi, the "Jiaxing Prefecture Records" Volume 7 "Local Heroes Worship" and the 60th year of Kangxi "Jiaxing Prefecture Records" Volume 5 "Schools" both listed the name "Shi Zhongbin", further proving that the enshrinement of Shi Zhongbin in the Jiaxing Prefecture Local Heroes Temple was not a false claim. Another point to note is that the number of local heroes in the seven counties under Jiaxing Prefecture before the Ming Dynasty was 230, averaging nearly 33 per county, which is about twice as high as that of Wujiang County, indicating the prevalence of false claims in the area.

As previously mentioned, between the Zhengde and Jiajing periods, the Bangdong branch gradually replaced the Changfang branch in controlling the Huangxi Shi family. However, the Bangdong branch never made any substantial breakthroughs in the imperial examinations. Even though their family business expanded, they were at most considered as "commoner" landlords, without the privilege of exemption from taxes and corvee labor. It was during this period that the gentry in Jiangnan unscrupulously evaded corvee labor, causing the burden of corvee labor to shift downwards, resulting in a serious "labor crisis". The commoner landlord class, who lacked the ability, were burdened with the labor crisis, leading to their successive bankruptcies. The reforms of limiting exemptions and allocating corvee labor carried out in various places during the Longqing and Wanli periods, except for Jiaxing Prefecture, ended in failure in Suzhou, Songjiang and other prefectures. The "equal labor" policy implemented by Liu Shijun, the magistrate of Wujiang in the 29th year of Wanli, was also strongly resisted by the local gentry. In order to escape the "labor crisis", the Huangxi Shi family either had to wait for a major turning point in the reform of limiting exemptions, or they had to strive to join the privileged class that enjoyed exemptions. According to the exemption rules at that time, not only current officials and scholars, but also descendants of former officials and clerks had corresponding exemption measures. Therefore, by vigorously promoting the "Zhi Shen Lu", and associating Shi Zhongbin with the followers of Jianwen during his exile, the descendants of the Shi family obtained the corresponding exemption rights as "descendants of former officials". This became the biggest motivation for the Huangxi Shi family to produce, reprint, and circulate the "Zhi Shen Lu". The "Shi's Wuzhong Genealogy" once included an "exemption notice", which was obviously to declare the exemption rights that the former official Shi Zhongbin should have.

The current official of the Xu Wangfu Guest House and the Hanlin Academy in Xihuangjiaxi, Twenty-three Du, Wujiang County, Zhong Bin, is ordered by the imperial edict. His official merit is in the imperial court, and he owns 2,250 mu of land, which is permanently exempted from corvee labor. Now, according to the family members of this official, the land is divided according to the characters, root characters, grain characters, small ten-day periods, spear characters, Wei Bi, Miao characters, and Da Chen, etc., only 1,900 mu. The rest are all in Jiaxing County. This county will exempt the current 1,902 mu from corvee labor and give a notice for reference.

The ninth day of the ninth month in the third year of Jianwen

If we carefully compare the historical background of the relevant system, this "exemption certificate" obviously does not come from the Jianwen era. Firstly, in the early Ming Dynasty, only miscellaneous services were generally recognized for exemption, and even local gentry could not enjoy this privilege for regular services in the Li Jia system. It was only in the middle and late Ming Dynasty that regular services in the Li Jia system could possibly be exempted. Secondly, the complete transfer of the burden of corvee labor to the area of land ownership is also a new phenomenon that emerged after the "equal field and equal service" reform. Various signs indicate that, with the characteristics of the era such as "according to the field and the division" and "permanent exemption from corvee labor", this so-called "exemption certificate" of the "third year of Jianwen" is more likely to correspond to the late Ming period when the exemption rights were continuously expanded rather than the early Ming Dynasty. In the era when exemption rights were not restricted, the land exempted in the name of official households not only included the land owned by the officials themselves, but also often included the land that had been inherited by the uncles and brothers within the family for several generations. The term "official family members" used exclusively in the "exemption certificate" is intended to emphasize that the land of different branches of the Huangxi Shi family can all share the privilege of exemption from corvee labor enjoyed under the name of Shi Zhongbin. It is for this purpose that how to get rid of the "labor trouble" is the original motivation for the Shi family of different factions to actively engage in the spread of the "Dedication Record" and the worship of Shi Zhongbin with the full strength of the whole family. Although most of the land of the Shi family, who are mostly located in Wujiang, did not completely get rid of the predicament because of Shi Zhongbin's successful entry into the Jiaxing Xiangxian Temple, they can still use special names such as "Jizhuang" to avoid the heavy burden of corvee labor in Wujiang County where the implementation of "equal field and equal service" is not thorough enough. This is the substantial practical benefit that the identity of "descendants of loyal officials" can bring to them, rather than as previously thought by scholars, that by spreading the book "Dedication Record", the Wujiang Shi family gained cultural prestige and the right to speak in the local area, and they also continued to use this prestige and power to expand the influence of the book through clan power.

During the Qizhen period, another important event held almost simultaneously with the request for sacrifice was the posthumous title for Shi Zhongbin. The decision-making power of the former mainly lies in the academic officials; the latter involves the attitude of the central government, and its success or failure requires the assistance of the speech officials such as the six departments and the imperial historians of the Metropolitan Procuratorate. In the late Ming Dynasty, not only was the progress of the issues related to Emperor Jianwen mainly promoted by the speech officials, but the drafting of the posthumous title was also initiated by the speech officials: "The ancestral laws are mostly restrained, ... to the posthumous title, the speech officials draft two, and also make a posthumous discussion to the Ministry of Rites, the Ministry of Rites also presents the cabinet, the cabinet is fully unveiled, the emperor points, the Ministry of Rites, outsiders rarely see." In the second year of Tianqi (1622), Ouyang Diaolu, the middle official of the Nanjing Household Department, asked to restore the temple of Jianwen and sympathize with the death of Shi Zhongbin and other ministers, which started the journey of posthumous title for Emperor Jianwen and his ministers. This memorial was "discussed by the Ministry of Rites and the nine ministers and officials", and then there was no more text. Later, Li Ruoyu, the middle official of the Ministry of Works, Li Bing, the inspector of Zhejiang, and Zhou Ang, the main official of the Nanjing Ministry of Rites, also successively submitted memorials, begging to grant posthumous titles to the ministers who died for Emperor Jianwen, all of which ended without any result. There are two obstacles in this: first, Jingnan involves the legitimacy of the reigning royal family of the Ming Dynasty. Since the Wanli period, the court's discussion on this has gradually opened, but whether Emperor Jianwen and Jingnan's ministers should be granted posthumous titles has always been a crucial issue for the royal family. The participation of speech officials, on the one hand, means that the Ming court attaches importance to the identity of Jingnan's ministers, and on the other hand, it also means that the recipients of the posthumous titles are people who have already entered official documents. In other words, the "Record of Devotion" must face the verification of these speech officials who use words as political power, and gain their recognition, in order to truly become a cultural resource for granting posthumous titles.

Secondly, from the perspective of the literati, the Shi family of Huangxi was not considered mainstream, which limited their interaction with officials. The relationship among the official group involved factors such as county status, background, education, mentorship, and reputation, with money playing only a minor role. The Shi family was considered "local scholars", and their writings were deemed crude. They produced a large amount of literature, but received few inscriptions from other literati, indicating their limited social circle. Shi Zhaodou's situation was slightly better. He lived in Suzhou and was known for his unrestrained lifestyle and lack of pretentiousness. Even Wang Shizhen in his youth could call himself a "little friend" in front of him, and it was said that Shi "had few interactions with Liu Ziwei (Liu Feng) and Wang Baigu (Wang Zhideng)". Wang Wan wrote a biography for him, stating that he was "well-versed in the classics of the former Ming dynasty, down to the anecdotes of old families, and was familiar with all of them... In his youth, officials were already competing to be his guests." It was through Shi Zhaodou's tireless efforts that the "Zhi Shen Lu" received some prefaces from Suzhou literati. However, his supporters were only people like Chen Renxi, who had not yet made a name for himself, and Qian Shisheng, who had retired. Influential officials in the court, such as Qian Qianyi and Li Qing, had no deep connection with the Shi family. When Shi Zhaodou paid a visit to Qian Qianyi, the latter, knowing that Shi had a special purpose of "following the example of the southern official Ouyang's submission of his book to the court, and wishing to ask for posthumous titles and build temples, following the example of Fang and Tie", did not show any favor, but wrote a critique of the "Zhi Shen Lu" and directly pointed out Shi Zhaodou's real purpose: "A reckless man, wishing to recommend his ancestors, writes casually, presumptuously following the example of Fang, Tie and others, if such things are allowed to pass and be preserved, I fear that books of reform and abolition will fill the buildings, and their temple sacrifices will be everywhere."

After the establishment of the Hongguang regime, in order to encourage loyalty and comfort the people, the historical status of Emperor Jianwen was fully restored, and an order was issued to deal with the ministers who had been involved in the death of the emperor, "distinguishing between the severity of their crimes and granting them posthumous titles". The entire process of granting posthumous titles only took two months to complete. The process was not overseen by the ministers of rhetoric, nor were the ceremonies overseen by the cabinet, but were simply requested by the ministries, inevitably leading to omissions and excesses. Li Qing, the official in charge of granting posthumous titles to the ministers and their sons who had resisted the usurpation, had difficulty verifying and verifying the identities of the relevant individuals. He basically used Zhou An's "Records of Loyalty to the Abdicated State" as the standard for listing names and granting posthumous titles. However, he, who had once received Qian Qianyi's personally granted "Record of Devotion" and was familiar with its content, immediately pointed out that the "Record of Devotion" was the "most fictitious" when he saw Shi Zhongbin on the list of those to be granted posthumous titles. His words were fierce and left no room for negotiation:

In the first year of Hongguang (1645)... ordered the repair of Huizong and the real records of the previous emperor. Before that, Li Qing, the head of the engineering department, said: ... Stop because of the ministers who were holding pens at that time, shaking their hands and removing them, so the national book was transformed into a family book, and Zixu and Wuyou were all helping with the pen, then Shi Bin's "Zhi Shen Lu" is the best. If it weren't for the detailed records of Bin's tomb in the collection of the former minister Wu Kuan, how would we know the theory of extinction, and how would we know that dozens of people who followed the extinction were all fake?

Under the insistence of Li Qing and others, a total of 75 civil officials, 17 military officials, 6 women, and over 140 other officials who died during the Jianwen reign or committed suicide, were purged, went into hiding, or fled after the Jingnan War, were all posthumously honored, but did not receive posthumous titles. Among them, the officials who fled were led by "Shi Bin", and their names all came from the books "Zhi Shen Lu" and "Cong Wang Bi Ji". It is worth noting that calling him "Shi Bin" instead of "Shi Zhong Bin" represents Li Qing and others' doubts about "Zhi Shen Lu" and their respect for Wu Kuan's "Tomb Inscription". Regardless, the fact that "Shi (Zhong) Bin" did not receive a posthumous title is undisputed. In fact, Li Qing did not always follow the principles in the process of posthumous conferment. For example, Gong Xu, who initially did not receive a posthumous title as a soldier of the Jinchuan Gate, was deeply aggrieved by Zhang Cai, a fellow townsman and a member of the Ministry of Rites. Zhang appealed to Guan Shaoning, the Minister of Rites in charge of the matter, but was politely refused on the grounds of "inconvenience to continue the request". Li Qing, however, cited the example of Rui'an native Zhuo Jing "making private posthumous titles public", arguing that Gong Xu had been privately honored by his fellow townspeople as "An Jie", and "it is acceptable to make it a public posthumous title", thus enabling Gong Xu to receive his posthumous title.

The Huangxi Shi family's activity of seeking rewards based on the Jianwen legend as a cultural resource must be predicated on affirmation in the public opinion of Jiangnan and the central government. However, the "Zhi Shen Lu" is poorly written and full of errors, reflecting the weak influence of the Huangxi Shi family in the cultural field. Shi Zhaodou sought the help of literati with his wealth and power. However, the official rhetoric on the topic of Emperor Jianwen has its political authority. After examining the writings of predecessors accumulated in the Jiangnan area, the "Zhi Shen Lu" was heavily questioned due to contradictions in the literature. In a special period, Shi Zhongbin did receive recognition that should not have belonged to him, but the further posthumous conferment by the Huangxi Shi family was suppressed by the national will.

Chapter 5: Chaos in Black and White

In the early morning, the authorities have always been afraid to directly touch the history of the Jianwen era. Although there has been a gradual relaxation trend after Hongxi, due to the deep concern that it may shake the historical status of Emperor Chengzu of Ming, the related topics have been a political taboo, which has continued until the end of the Chongzhen era. During the Southern Ming period, the historical commentary on the Jianwen era once had the opportunity to be completely lifted. However, due to the practical needs of serving the legitimacy of the Yongle regime throughout the ages, the standardized historical narrative has long dared not to cross the line, while the folk historical memory represented by anecdotes and unofficial history has been popular. Li Qing's "Transforming the national book into a family heirloom" is an apt summary of this unique phenomenon. Due to the inertia of time, the historical materials of the Jingnan era are extremely scarce, and it is not easy to establish a relatively true and fair Jianwen historiography in a short period of time. With the stabilization of the Qing regime's status, the work of compiling the history of the previous dynasty was fully launched, and re-examining the history of the Jianwen era became an unavoidable matter. One of the prerequisites for restoring history to its original appearance is to let the "national book" and "family heirloom" each have their own place.

Chapter 1: The Coffin is Sealed

After the Battle of Jingnan, the Ming Chengzu, who had gained control of the interpretation of history, dealt with the documents and memorials of the Jianwen reign on the one hand, "destroying the regulations of the documents and burning all the memorials except for those related to the military and finances, leaving historians in the dark"; on the other hand, he compiled the "Record of the Pacification of Heaven and Jingnan" and the "Real Record of the Ming Taizu" (including the "Real Record of the Ming Taizong" compiled during the Xuande period), protecting his own actions at every turn and slandering the Jianwen Emperor, resulting in serious distortions of related historical events. This one-sided historical narrative gradually aroused resentment in society, and various anecdotes and stories sympathetic to the Jianwen Emperor emerged in abundance, becoming more complex and clearer as time went on. Many literati even combined official documents, local memories, and anecdotes to create a wave of privately written histories of the Jianwen period. During the Jiajing period, represented by Yu Guan's "Record of Loyalty Left by the Reform Dynasty", Xu Xiangqing's "Annals of the Reform Dynasty", and Jiang Qing's "Jiang's Secret History", the selection and identification of historical materials became more rigorous, even making extensive use of official original archives, in an attempt to more accurately restore the historical appearance of the Jingnan and Jianwen periods. After the Jiajing and Wanli periods, the "Ming Real Record" gradually circulated in the form of private copies, and some historians began to try to use the records in the Real Record to correct the content of unofficial histories and anecdotes.

Given the serious shortcomings in both official orthodox records and folk historical memories, many knowledgeable people have suggested that instead of perpetuating errors, it would be better to timely revise the history of the Jianwen era, correcting the mistakes in previous official and unofficial records, to set the record straight. During the Hongzhi period, Yang Shouchen, a compiler in the Hanlin Academy, called for the compilation of the history of the Jianwen era, but his call fell on deaf ears. In the twenty-second year of Wanli (1594), court officials took the opportunity of the government organizing the compilation of official history to once again propose the revision of the history of the Jianwen era and the restoration of the Jianwen reign title. Emperor Shenzong of Ming finally agreed to restore the Jianwen reign title in the compilation of history books, placing the Jianwen era at the end of the reign of Emperor Taizu, but the project was once again abandoned halfway due to the illness and death of the main compiler, Chen Yubai. The shelving of this plan, on the contrary, stimulated the emergence of a batch of privately compiled historical works. The Jianwen era, which was not officially recognized, was often regarded as orthodox in private historical works. Among them, the "Jianwen Calligraphy Model", which established a set of writing and evaluation standards for the history of the Jianwen era, and the "Jianwen Chaoye Compilation", which tried to integrate all previous relevant historical materials, are of great significance for the reconstruction of this period of history. In addition, the "abdication theory" that reconciles the conflict between Emperor Jianwen and Emperor Chengzu was increasingly accepted by the public during this period. Some of the main elements of the abdication theory, such as Emperor Taizu foreseeing that the imperial grandson's throne was not secure and leaving him a box containing a razor and other items; Emperor Jianwen fleeing and passing through Hunan, Henan, Yunnan, Guizhou, Sichuan, Guangxi and other places, and later returning to the capital and being welcomed into the palace for support; and throughout this process, people like Cheng Ji and Ye Xixian were always with him, etc., had all appeared by this time. Through the embellishment of legends and the dramatization of historians, the story of Emperor Jianwen's abdication and death continued to accumulate and became increasingly detailed. The "Zhi Shen Lu", a strange book that connects the legend of Emperor Jianwen's exile with the deeds of hidden officials, was born against this background.

"Zhi Shen Lu" has played a completely different role from the previous historical works of the Jianwen Dynasty since its inception. Firstly, the book is named after the meaning of "devoting oneself to serving the monarch" to commend the loyal deeds of those who died: "This book is called Zhi Shen, and what is described in it is the ability to devote oneself to serving the monarch." The focus is on commending those who died, so on the basis of the original theory of the fallen country, some of the ministers who were unwilling to be loyal to the new regime and had names and surnames were also added to the list of loyal ministers who died, creating a complete map of the ministers who died in the Jianwen Dynasty. More importantly, the "surnames, titles, and places of these ministers who died are all recorded in detail, all of which are not included in the records of the previous books." Qian Shisheng "once read the biography of the ministers of the fallen country, and when he came to people like Buguo and Xuean, he could not find their surnames, so he closed the book and sighed, thinking of those people", but "Zhi Shen Lu" has the advantage of being "more detailed and accurate than other books", "completely washing away the previous rumors". The disclosure of information such as surnames and titles can easily resonate and be recognized on a nationwide scale, not only being popular, but also being of great importance. There was even a lawsuit over whether the hometown of Cheng Ji, one of the twenty-two ministers who died, was Jixi or Chaoyi. No wonder Chen Yidian, who had participated in the compilation of the official history with Chen Yubai, commented: "This compilation by the historian is the last to come out but the most accurate... it is indeed the way heaven rewards loyalty and reveals hidden light."

Secondly, in terms of content, the book not only emphasizes that Shi Zhongbin participated in most of the decisions during Jianwen's reign, but also records in detail the route and date of Emperor Jianwen's travels after the Jingnan incident. On the surface, it is Shi Zhongbin's self-compiled chronicle, but in reality, through the frequent interactions between Emperor Jianwen and Shi Zhongbin, it has become a variant of the "Jianwen Actual Records". Doing so not only does not enhance the credibility of the text as some scholars believe, but instead invites the suspicion of "plagiarizing the politics of Jianwen and attributing it to Bin". However, it is precisely because of the existence of the huge loophole of "the eradication of deeds has no actual records to refer to, and the true and false of unofficial history are wrong, and there is no way to verify" that prompted the "Zhi Shen Lu" to take the same huge risk, integrating the originally independent official history and unofficial history into a single text to cope with the established fact that there are no actual records of the Jianwen Dynasty. This rather radical choice inevitably leads to mixed reviews. As Zhang Pu summarized, "half believe and half doubt, meaning that the historian must have actual records to compare", perhaps only such eye-catching methods can win a place among the many historical works of the Jianwen Dynasty! Zhao Huanguang was the first to propose the idea that "Zhi Shen Lu" could temporarily replace the actual records of Jianwen: "The actual records have not been revised, and what is recorded today is all supplementary grass, so the public not only describes its outline, but also makes up for the loss of the former master." In the biography of Shi Zhongbin in the history books, it simply admits: "Zhi Shen Lu, hidden in Maoshan for two hundred years, Jiao Wenzhen began to preface and publish it, and it is the actual record of a dynasty." In addition, after reading the "Qi Zhong Zhi" supplemented by Shi Zhaodou, Sun Yingkun also regarded it as a "real record".

Thirdly, "Zhi Shen Lu" describes a story of exile based on conflict, rather than the story of uncle and nephew's mutual respect and concession from the beginning as described in other historical books, which is slightly different from the main theme of harmonizing the relationship between Emperor Chengzu and Emperor Jianwen in the late Ming Dynasty. There are often bleak descriptions in the book, such as "The court spies are secret and strict, with Hu En and Zheng He frequently traveling between Yun and Gui", and "The teacher's face is haggard and his appearance is withered. He suffered from dysentery in summer, and because of the curfew, he could not go out of the mountain from time to time, and his meal was in a mess." These descriptions show that the contradiction between the uncle and nephew has not been resolved. However, it is interesting that the authors of the preface and postscript system of "Zhi Shen Lu" often deviate from the main text in the issues they care about. A considerable part of them still follows the statement that Emperor Chengzu and Emperor Jianwen are not opposed to each other, aiming to highlight that Emperor Jianwen's abdication not only does not damage Emperor Chengzu's wisdom, but also complements Emperor Chengzu's achievements. For example, Qian Longxi's preface says: "Before the Jingnan army rose, Emperor Jianwen ordered the generals 'not to let me have the name of killing my uncle', but Jinchuan did not defend, Emperor Wen cried from the ashes and pointed to the corpse, buried with the rites of the emperor, or was it because he cared about the name of killing his nephew? It is the family law of our dynasty that brothers and uncles and nephews inherit each other's loyalty and kindness, and surpass the previous generations like this"; Chen Jiru's preface also says: "When 'Zhi Shen Lu' came out, not only did Emperor Jianwen get the reward of the scholar, but Emperor Chengzu also got rid of the name of killing his nephew. Its relationship with the official history of our dynasty is very huge, so the great scholars of the grass and the wild, narrate its record and pass it on." The reason for this deviation is probably because "Zhi Shen Lu" emphasizes more on the heroic act of the exiled ministers "devoting themselves to the monarch". The more difficulties the exiled monarch and ministers face, the more fully the "loyalty and hidden virtue" of the exiled ministers can be demonstrated; Qian and Chen focus on the historical status of Emperor Jianwen and Emperor Chengzu, specifically, how to handle the inherent contradiction between the uncle and nephew more prudently at the levels of ancestral temple, social stability and historical writing. The phrase "its relationship with the official history of our dynasty is very huge" mentioned by Chen Jiru implies this meaning.

Regardless, the publication and dissemination of "Zhi Shen Lu" added more fog to the already confusing and difficult to distinguish history of Jianwen, especially for those scholars who praised loyalty and firmly believed in the exile of Jianwen's ministers. They eagerly read and strongly recommended it, and some scholars even used it as a basis to compile new works. For example, the book "Jianwen Calligraphy Ni" was completed in the 22nd year of Wanli (1594). In the early years of Tianqi, when the author Zhu Lu saw "Zhi Shen Lu", he specifically revised and added the section "Fu Bian·Jianwen Exile Real Record" into the original book. Cao Canfang's "Xun Guo Zheng Qi Ji" Volume 2 "Let the Emperor's External Records" specifically records the deeds of Emperor Jianwen after his exile, and later attached "From the Lost Ministers", basically based on "Zhi Shen Lu", "Jing Nan Ji", "Xun Guo Ji" and other books. At the same time, works such as "Xun Guo Zhong Ji" by Zhou Ang, "Huang Ming Biao Zhong Ji" by Qian Shisheng, "Jianwen Nian Pu" by Zhao Shizhe, and "Shi Kuai Shu" by Zhang Dai also drew a lot from "Zhi Shen Lu".

In the first year of Hongguang (1645), an official order was issued to compile the historical records of the Jianwen era. As this matter gradually progressed, the authenticity of the "Zhishenlu" became a focus of scholarly attention. Li Qing and Zha Jizuo, based on the foundation of Qian Qianyi, respectively summarized the "four slanders" and "sixteen doubts" to further identify the contradictions in the text. Huang Zongxi also clearly stated: "The matter of reform is simply compiled and mixed, with many errors. ...As for the 'Zhishenlu' and 'Cong Wang Notes', they are all untrustworthy forgeries. Many court officials still follow them. The 'Zhishenlu' is attributed to the historian Bin, and Wu Kuan inscribed the tomb of the historian Jian, stating that his great-grandfather Bin had never entered the officialdom, so the forgery is self-evident." Pan Chaizhang even directly exposed its intention to take on the authenticity of the "Jianwen Historical Records": "Those who are descendants of people, if their ancestors have good deeds but do not pass them on, it is a contradiction, and if they have no good deeds but force their names, it is a slander. Therefore, the author of this book not only slanders Zhong Bin, but also slanders the ancient Ming. I dare not believe it as a historical record." It can be seen that once the real compilation of the history of the Jianwen era is to be undertaken, the spirit of doubt among historians still prevails.

In the eighteenth year of Kangxi (1679), the Qing court opened a library to compile the "History of Ming", widely opening the way for book donations, "All national book houses can be trusted, and the edict is issued to collect them, without letting them go." As a historical reserve for the compilation of the Jianwen Dynasty, "The Record of Devotion" is mixed with books such as "My Learning Compilation" and "Famous Mountain Collection", which has sparked a new round of debate. Xu Jia and Pan Lei, as fellow townspeople of Wujiang from the Huangxi Shi family, were both selected as historians for the "History of Ming" due to their extensive knowledge and scholarship. However, their attitudes towards "The Record of Devotion" were completely opposite. The former was a staunch supporter of "The Record of Devotion": "The righteousness of the festival is in the heaven and earth, like our town's loyal and dedicated public from the Ming Hui Emperor's exile, the book "The Record of Devotion", Jiao Gonghong, Qian Gong Shisheng, Li Gong Weizhen, Chen Gong Renxi, Wen Gong Zhenmeng, Zhou Gong Zongjian, Zhang Gongpu are all known as upright gentlemen by the world, all of them recite and recite, as if they were from their own mouths." The latter, on the other hand, wrote a series of articles such as "Re-engraving the Record of Devotion", "Writing to Xu Hongting", "Writing to Xu Hongting Again", "After Writing the West Village Collection", "Asking from the Lost Guest", etc., mercilessly criticizing "The Record of Devotion" from all angles, and revealing the deep-seated reasons why literati are keen on reciting and reciting: "Literati like strange and righteous things, and they are more happy to praise, and the Shi family is good at asking for it, so there are many who should." In addition to analyzing and stating the authenticity of "The Record of Devotion", the two also involved many disputes over the descendants of the Shi family applying for Shi Zhongbin to be enshrined in the Suzhou Prefecture Hometown Temple. This point will be detailed later.

According to recent research by Meng Sen, "Among the officials in the Ming History Museum, many were skeptical about the Jianwen incident. Only Shao Jiesan (i.e., Shao Yuanping - note by the author) firmly believed in the theory of the lost. His words were not adopted, so he wrote a separate record of the post-Jianwen period." Indeed, the majority of the officials in the museum were cautious about whether to include the lost history books such as "Zhi Shen Lu" in the Ming History. As Xu Qianxue, one of the chief editors of the "Ming History", said: "The story of Jianwen's exile is in the unofficial history, but I fear it is not reliable. The most absurd ones are the two books, "Qi Zhong Zhi" and "Zhong Xian Qi Mi Lu". History values doubt, so we include their theories, but we completely remove the names of the lost, so as not to mix unofficial records with official history." Zhu Yizun, who was responsible for compiling the chronicles of Emperor Chengzu of the Ming Dynasty, also wrote a special letter to the chief editor Wang Hongxu, highlighting the historical value of the real records in the compilation of the "Ming History", while belittling the absurdity of the books of the Xun Kingdom: "Those who discuss the world, regard the removal of the Jingnan incident, recorded in the real records, are all biased, rather than taking it from the unofficial history. However, the loss of the real records lies in the unfairness of right and wrong, but the characters can be traced, and the years are without error, and it is not difficult for later generations to judge. As for the books of the Xun Kingdom, they often use the ghosts of Liqiu to dazzle people's eyes and ears, to turn falsehood into reality, to confuse truth with falsehood, and few are not confused by it." Wang Hongxu, who strongly advocated the theory of Jianwen's self-immolation, was even more resolute than Zhu Yizun: "He firmly refutes the false books, arguing that there is absolutely no reason for Jianwen to go into exile." On the other hand, Qian Qianyi's attitude subtly changed in his later years. Although he still refuted books like "Zhi Shen Lu", he increasingly believed in the Xun Kingdom theory that could balance "the inner thoughts of Emperor Wen and the supreme virtue of Emperor Rang".

In the fourth year of Emperor Qianlong's reign (1739), the palace edition of the "History of Ming" was published. Although it gave a place for the theory of the abdicated emperor, the falseness of the "Zhi Shen Lu" was also confirmed: "During the Wanli period, there was another 'Zhi Shen Lu' in Jiangnan, which was said to be obtained from the Taoist scriptures of Maoshan. During the Jianwen period, the events after the emperor's exile were very detailed as described by Wu Jiang, a court scribe. Wu Jiang, Cheng Ji, Ye Xixian, and Niu Jingxian were all ministers who followed the exiled emperor. There were also names like Liao Ping and Jin Jiao, as well as the monk Xue An and the pot repairer. They all had names and official titles, and all the scholars and officials at that time believed in them. Ouyang Diaolu, a censor, presented this book to the court, intending to ask for posthumous titles and the establishment of a shrine. However, it was found that Wu Jiang had never been a court scribe, and the record was probably made later, so it was not credible." The work of reconstructing the history of the Jianwen period finally came to an end.

Section 2: Enshrined in the County Temple

At the end of the Ming and Qing Dynasties, the Huangxi Changfang and Suzhou Fang families declined one after another. Although the population of the Bangdong Fang was thriving, they had "no grand mansions to distinguish their dwellings, nor great wealth to dominate the crowd", and there was no significant breakthrough in their business. They still considered themselves as a "family of literature and history". The eldest son of Zong Qin, Shi Zai Zhu, began to "seek the ancestral ink from friends" in the eleventh year of Shunzhi (1654). He soon heard that the plaque of his family's Xia Ya Tang had been lost in the mansion of the Shen family from the same town. The plaque was rumored to have been inscribed by Emperor Jianwen himself, and its value was of great significance to the Shi family of Huangxi. At that time, the Shen family was renovating their old house, and "many famous scholars came to watch and write poems in admiration". Shi Zai Zhu, who only had the status of a student, was not on the invitation list. Regretting that he had no way to retrieve the important cultural relic of his family, he couldn't help but sigh, "Firstly, I admire the loyalty of the former reader (referring to Shi Bin), and secondly, I admire the prosperity of the former ruler (referring to Shi Jian). In just a few years, who can express and illuminate this?"

Several years later, the Qing court successfully restricted the privileges of the gentry in Jiangnan by using the "Zouxiao Case" as an opportunity, thereby reducing the gap between the gentry landlords and the "commoner" landlords at the local level. The long-standing problem of "labor difficulties" faced by the "commoner" landlords was finally somewhat alleviated. As the famous scholars of Wuzhong, who previously had a strong sense of cultural and economic superiority, gradually lost their voice, the Shi family of Huangxi became one of the biggest beneficiaries. At the same time, the political taboos of the previous dynasty regarding the Jianwen theme no longer played a role, allowing the descendants of the Shi family to no longer worry about the harsh criticism of Qian Qianyi, Li Qing and others, and began to reorganize and publish the "Zhi Shen Lu". This work was still mainly presided over by Shi Ming from the Suzhou branch and Shi Zai from the Bangdong branch. Shi Ming, who was of the same generation as Shi Ce and Shi Zhaodou, had the desire to reorganize the "Zhi Shen Lu" as early as the second year of Kangxi (1663). He was moved by the current situation where "those who were good at private use in the late Ming Dynasty reprinted it, and if the famous scholars praised and changed the original version of the brother's acceptance, they would be proud to deceive the world". He "searched for the original engraving, removed the fake and returned to the truth, and then formed the final version". In October of the same year, he took the organized manuscript to Huangxi and carefully checked it against the already published and unpublished manuscripts handed down from Shi Ce, until there were no errors. The significance of Shi Ming's trip to Huangxi cannot be overstated. It realized the full exchange and integration of the two major transmission systems of the "Zhi Shen Lu" since the late Ming Dynasty, and thus laid the basic structure and appearance of the version engraved by Shi Zai in the eighth year of Kangxi.

Shi Zai Xiang was the fourth son of Shi Zongqin. Based on the family collection of historical records and the compilation of famous historical figures, he not only published all the "six or seven prefaces and postscripts that were not included in the previous editions", but also added a special episode of Emperor Jianwen bestowing a posthumous title on Shi Zhongbin during his abdication, to make up for the regret of not receiving a posthumous title during the Hongguang period. Pan Lei, who was well aware of the inside story, referred to the edition printed in the eighth year of Kangxi as the "reprint edition", distinguishing it from the editions of "Zhi Shen Lu" and "Qi Zhong Zhi" with fewer prefaces and postscripts during the late Ming period. After rigorous verification, he pointed out that the newly added prefaces of Zhou Zongjian, Li Weizhen, Zhang Pu and others in the reprint edition "may not necessarily be true", and questioned the absurdity of Emperor Jianwen bestowing the posthumous title "Zhongxian" with the powerful argument "The emperor has already put on a kasaya and hidden in the mountains and valleys, fearing people and still, solemnly making his own imperial edicts, to revise the canon of famous names, is it still like a small court in the mountains and valleys of Yishan Gongzhou?"

During the Kangxi period, the influential official system of the Ming Dynasty had become a sinecure, and civil officials lost some opportunities to manipulate the national will. The power of speech and literature was preserved to a limited extent. In the 18th year of Kangxi, including Pan Lei and Xu Jiu, literati from Jiangnan were summoned to the "Ming History" Museum, where they had the opportunity to participate in the construction of national discourse again. The Qing revision of the "Ming History" followed the text of several private histories written in the middle and late Ming period, reflecting the continuity of the traditional official historical writing of Jiangnan literati. The writing of Emperor Jianwen's chronicle also inherited the official viewpoint of the Wanli period under the textual context created by Jiangnan literati over more than a hundred years. It did not mention his life or death, leaving a place for the "abdication theory", but did not adopt the exile mentioned in books such as "Zhi Shen Lu". In other words, the Qing Dynasty's official attitude towards the legend of Jianwen's exile was basically consistent with that of the late Ming period. However, this did not prevent the Huangxi Shi family from keenly seizing the opportunity to collect "Zhi Shen Lu" into the "Ming History" Museum and continue to make a big fuss about their ancestor Shi (Zhong) Bin's resume: "Now the holy emperor is ordered to revise the Ming records, collect the remaining books, and it is the autumn of the lonely loyalty and brilliance, and the meeting of justice and clarity", actively responding to the local authorities' call to commend the loyal and righteous people of the former Ming, in order to seek Shi Zhongbin's entry into the Suzhou Prefecture Xiangxian Temple, and hope to be granted relief.

The descendants of Shi used the story of the loyal ministers of the former Ming Dynasty to ask for sacrifices to the Qing Dynasty authorities, which was closely related to the specific discourse atmosphere of the early Qing Dynasty. At the time of the change of dynasties, the Qing court intervened in the rule of Jiangnan by military means. The local literati gathered troops to resist in the posture of defending the Ming court, and the struggle for local control thus extended to the debate on the legitimacy of the dynasty. However, the Qing court had long understood how to use the existing order of Han people for local control and to rebuild the moral evaluation system. Asking for sacrifices in the identity of Zhu Ming's loyal ministers, as long as they emphasized their "loyalty" to the court and avoided sensitive topics such as the legitimacy of the regime, they could always maintain the space for further dialogue, which laid a more relaxed tone for the sacrificial activities in the early Qing Dynasty than in the Ming Dynasty. More importantly, at this time, the royal family had changed from the Zhu family to the Aisin Gioro family, and the Jingnan incident was thus decoupled from the legitimacy of the royal family's lineage. Therefore, the sacrificial offerings were less likely to be deliberately suppressed by the national will.

In the late Ming Dynasty, the Huangxi Shi family first used a roundabout strategy to successfully enshrine Shi Zhongbin in the Jiaxing Prefecture's local worthies temple. Then, with the special approval of the education officials from Zhejiang and Zhili provinces, they obtained the privilege to set up a special temple for Shi Zhongbin in Huangxi, Wujiang. Under the tolerant policy of the Southern Ming regime to "encourage loyalty and comfort people's hearts", Shi Zhongbin, as the leader of the deceased officials, received the treatment of being enshrined in the Nanjing Loyalty Temple. After the Qing Dynasty, the Qizhong Temple, which was transformed from the Xiaoya Hall, gradually became difficult to maintain. There were two reasons: one was that "the descendants were increasing, and their characters were different, the temple sacrifices were postponed, and they were abandoned and not held"; the second was that the sacrificial fields set up by the historical records were in name only, "those who like to do good things pooled money to supply it, but their strength was not equal, and it was difficult to unify". In response to the drawbacks of the sole responsibility for sacrifices and operating expenses by the Bangdong Room, Shi Wei, a clan member, combined the actual capabilities of each room, changed the daily operation of the special temple to joint-stock investment, and rotated management, "depending on the amount of food produced to determine the contribution, the rich and the stingy serve the field, each mu usually contributes a liter of grain, the righteous do not follow the example", to meet the common interests of the Shi family's various rooms. It was under the careful planning of Shi Wei and others that the special worship of Shi Zhongbin was successfully restored and operated normally. This laid the ceremonial groundwork for the Shi family's descendants to take subsequent memorial actions.

As previously mentioned, during the reigns of Tianqi and Chongzhen, the reason why Shi Zhaodou and Shi Ce did not make any substantial efforts to enshrine Shi Zhongbin in the Suzhou Prefecture's local worthies temple was mainly because there were too many people in Suzhou Prefecture who met the application criteria and the conditions for enshrinement were very strict. According to Pan Lei's statement: "The grand ceremony of local worthies was taken very seriously in previous generations. The enshrinement in the county school was particularly strict and only the most virtuous from the local ceremonies were selected. Only three people from our county, namely Wu's junior minister, Duke Gong of Zhou, and Duke Zhongyi, were enshrined in the prefectural school temple." Only three people from the entire Wujiang County were enshrined in the prefectural local worthies temple, and Shi Zhongbin could only be considered if his record was impeccable, which was clearly not the case due to his past controversies. In the mid-Qing Dynasty, there were significant changes in the management system of the local worthies temple. The role of the education official was relatively weakened, and those who wished to be enshrined had to be approved by the governor, the education minister, and the ministry. The descendants of the Shi family, who were always sensitive to opportunities, did not miss this chance.

The son of Shi Zhaizhu, Shi Biannian, upon learning that the Jiangsu governor, Song Luo, indeed had a proposal to commend the loyal ministers of the Jianwen period, decided to take the high-level route and directly apply to include the special temple for worshipping Shi Zhongbin in Huangxi into the national sacrificial ceremony. In the 35th year of Kangxi (1696), he submitted an official document to Song Luo:

The former Hanlin Academy attendant and scholar, Duke Zhongbin, who was loyal and dedicated, served in the government during the Hongwu period of the 31st year and the Jianwen period. He retired from the country and died in prison. During the Chongzhen period, a temple was built in Huangjiaxi, Wujiang County, but the spring and autumn ceremonies were not held. I beg for your grace to provide a plaque to honor the temple, and also order the county to carefully examine the ceremonies.

After reading the argument made by Du Xinjianwen about Song Luo, not only did he fully embrace the deeds of "loyalty to the country" by Shi Zhongbin, but he also had no doubt about Shi Zhongbin's ambiguous posthumous title. He further believed that the original special temple "let descendants prepare for tasting, the emotional text seems too simple", the level of sacrifice should be raised, "check the sacrifice of Zhou Zhongyi, within the original county compilation, all should be given". Zhou Zhongyi, also known as Zhou Zongjian, was a representative of the Donglin Party during the Tianqi period, who was later killed by the eunuch party, and his end was extremely tragic. He was hailed as a model of loyal ministers in the late Ming Dynasty. Shi Zhongbin was honored with the supreme honor of "special temple and sacrifice ceremony should be the same" with Zhou Zhongyi, which can be described as unprecedented.

With the establishment of the Shrine of Shi Zhongxian, "all the gentlemen and commoners of the time came to worship and lingered at the shrine, unable to bear to leave." Song Luo also feared that future generations would follow the unconventional practice of compiling annals, so he specifically emphasized, "others should not take this as an example to plead for." In addition, he, along with the Governor of the Two Rivers, Fan Chengxun, and the Minister of Education, Zhang Rongduan, separately inscribed plaques for the Shi family of Huangxi's shrine and tomb, and entrusted the prefect of Suzhou, Lu Tenglong, to implement it according to the specifications.

After the deeds of Shi Zhongbin were fully affirmed by the governor, in response to the call of the governor, the prefect, and the scholars to "express the difficulty of reform and removal", Lu Tenglong was not willing to lag behind, "he again sought public opinion, and asked the governor, the prefect, the scholars, and the four constitutional officials to worship the public in the Suzhou County School and the Xiangxian Temple." Lu Tenglong had previously revealed the information that "there is still an empty seat in the local government school's Xiangxian Temple" to the Shi Chronicle, who immediately understood and encouraged "all the gentry, commoners, and elders of the city to support the cause of death, and to support the special sacrifices of the two public figures, Wu Xiazi and Zhou Zhongyi." Afterwards, they "asked the government to state their case, and then asked the constitutional officials to review it." After more than two years of complicated application process, Shi Zhongbin finally succeeded in being enshrined in the Suzhou Prefecture Xiangxian Temple in the 37th year of Kangxi (1698) with a vague identity between the grain chief and the court official, and obtained the special right to worship in the special temple.

In order to gain broader support, Shi Biannian changed the defensive attitude adopted by the Ming Dynasty towards the same clan outside Suzhou and Jiaxing, and actively engaged in the activities of uniting the clan and collecting the clan. In the 32nd year of Kangxi (1693), he first went to the Shijiazhuang of Shence Gate in Jinling to visit the descendants of Shi Ang. The result was "after the upheaval and the sea, people all avoided living and were all burned; and crossed the Yangtze River, visited the Yangzhou branch, and there was no one to meet." Despite repeated setbacks, hard work pays off. He finally made significant gains on the journey of uniting the clan. In Zhenjiang, he established a relationship with Shi Mingkai, a descendant of the Shi family who claimed to have moved from Jiaxing Shijia Village, and added this branch to the genealogy he revised, named "Shiqiao Fang Branch". Shi Mingkai was friendly with his fellow townsman Zhang Yushu. It was under Mingkai's recommendation that Shi Biannian visited the famous Zhang Yushu, who was then the Grand Academician of Wenhua Hall and the Minister of the Ministry of Households, and asked Zhang Yushu to write a monument for Shi Zhongbin. Zhang Yushu, who once served as one of the chief directors of the "History of Ming", knew well the textual conflict between Wu Kuan's tombstone and the "Record of Devotion to the Body", so he initially expressed great difficulties:

It was during the reign of Emperor Chenghua of the Ming Dynasty that my ancestor's great-grandson, Zheng Shijian, invited the former Grand Academician, Duke Wending, to write the epitaph for the tomb. At that time, the strict prohibitions were being abolished, and not a word was mentioned about the past. ... With Duke Wending's text in existence, who would dare to compare with it? The name Kai and the annals record his praise: Duke Wending's concluding words say "hidden virtues and extraordinary integrity, not easy to exhaustively describe." When he says "hidden virtues," it implies that there are things that can be spoken of. When he says "extraordinary integrity," what in the world can be pointed out as extraordinary? And when he says "not easy to exhaustively describe," it clearly indicates that the great integrity of our ancestor was not something that could be spoken of at the time, but was left to be discussed in a future era when it would not be taboo. The person in charge (referring to Zhang Yushu - note by the translator), is the historian of today. I dare to firmly request this. I cannot refuse.

In the end, although Zhang Yushu reluctantly agreed to Shi Biannian's request, in order to avoid giving future generations a chance to criticize, he still used a writing style of "pretending to be confused while understanding clearly" to depict his conflicting emotions and doubts about the theory of martyrdom, allowing future generations to more or less perceive his dilemma at the time. According to Pan Lei's revelation, phrases such as "hidden virtues and extraordinary deeds, not easy to exhaustively describe" were all fabricated by the Shi family, and there was no so-called "concluding words of Wen Ding Gong" in the "Family Collection" of the Ming Zhengde edition reprinted by the Shanghai Commercial Press, which includes Wu Kuan's "Tomb Inscription". However, for the Shi family of Huangxi, the significance of this epitaph lies in not only tracing the history of Shi Zhongbin's martyrdom and the start and end of his relief, but also adding a "relief decree" based on the Kangxi eight-year edition of "Dedication Record". This decree is said to have been made by Gu Xichou, the Minister of Rites, in response to Emperor Hongguang's request, and its core content is to request relief for Shi Zhongbin, the "Second Class Official", posthumously titled "Loyal and Devoted", and it specifically adds after the citation that "wherever the decree is, officials should visit his descendants and grant them preferential treatment". From this, it can be seen that Shi Biannian's fundamental purpose in asking Zhang Yushu to write the epitaph was to put an end to the controversial issue of posthumous titles, and to provide more legitimacy for his ongoing efforts to seek posthumous recognition. Not only that, in the eyes of the Shi family, "the epitaph written by Zhang Gong, the Grand Academician and Wen Zhen, supplements what was not covered in the tomb inscription of Wen Ding Wu Gong, and describes the relief in great detail", which itself has enough authority, and its power can even make all the work of debunking the "Dedication Record" by Qian Qianyi using Wu Kuan's tomb inscription completely ineffective. In order to demonstrate the authority of this epitaph, Shi Biannian even carried it with him for many years and used it as a propaganda tool at any time. In the autumn of the 44th year of Kangxi (1705), he and his fellow townsman Shen Yongling stayed overnight at the Chongming Temple in Jurong, and showed the rubbings of the epitaph. Like Shi Zhaodou and Shi Ce, who widely invited local celebrities to write prefaces, their purpose was nothing more than to increase the credibility of Shi Zhongbin's "glorious career" through the effect of celebrities. This behavior would obviously not be recognized by scholars who are familiar with literature and good at textual research. Pan Lei, who is related to the Shi family by marriage, is one of the most vehement responders.

In the 18th year of Kangxi's reign, Pan Lei and his fellow townsman from Wujiang, Xu Qu, were admitted to the "Ming History" Museum for their extensive knowledge and eloquence. From then on, their fates were tightly intertwined and difficult to separate. The two first returned to their hometown for their outspokenness, and then were jointly involved in the case of the descendants of the Shi family asking for Shi Zhongbin to be worshipped. After the dissolution, Xu Qu, who was modest and indifferent, was enthusiastic about local affairs. When the Shi family asked for Zhongbin to be included in the local talents, Xu Qu, with his special experience of having been admitted to the "Ming History" Museum, was naturally the suitable candidate to preside over the local public election, so he was listed as the "first in the public presentation". He also wrote an article highly affirming the value of "Dedication Record" and the deeds of Shi Zhongbin's "loyalty and righteousness", making great contributions to the Shi family's goal of being enshrined as local talents. Pan Lei, on the other hand, continued his straightforward personality, unable to tolerate the work of distinguishing authenticity and verification from Qian Qianyi, Li Qing, and Pan Chengzhang being ruined overnight. He wrote a special letter to Xu Qu, advising him not to get involved in this muddy water: "The Shi family must want to ask you to be listed because you are the hope of the whole town, which is known to those involved. Once you are listed, those involved will say: This person is not a casual one, there must be a definite view. If you are involved in this matter, it will definitely happen." Little did he know that the Shi family had already cleared the way with the governor and the prefect of Suzhou had also been informed in advance, so whether Xu Qu presided over the local public election could no longer affect the outcome. In addition, he also advised the Shi family: "None of the Shi family's ancestors were more virtuous than Ming Gu", since Shi Zhongbin's deeds as a minister of the Jianwen Dynasty were all false, instead of continuing to do useless work, it would be better to "ask for the worship of Ming Gu in the town temple, which is the act of a truly filial son and a loving grandson." Little did he know that Shi Jian had missed the best opportunity to apply for enshrinement during the Jiajing period, and with Shi Jian's experience, it was a dream to squeeze a crack in the door of the academy in the notoriously strict Suzhou Prefecture and Wujiang County.

In terms of judging people and the world, Pan Lei certainly has his personal flaws, but in terms of textual research and discerning authenticity, he inherited the excellent "genes" of his family. In his article "Re-engraving the Record of Devotion to the Body", he focuses on the "many discrepancies and inconsistencies in the deeds of the officials" in the book, pointing out the "four absurdities" of "no signs of origin", "improper official ranks", "loss of imperial edicts", and "complete falsehood of official achievements" for strict dialectical analysis. For the particularly absurd new content, he summarized the "fabrication of words", "unauthorized changes to the table", and "forged prefaces" as the "three delusions" for ruthless exposure. The rigor and depth of his research and analysis are by no means inferior to his predecessors like Qian Qianyi. In the "fabrication of words", he directly criticized "Mr. Shi always called Zhong Bin as the loyal and dedicated duke, presumably to associate with the posthumous title granted during the Hongguang period. When he knew that the posthumous title was not actually granted, he changed to use the example of the emperor's compassion, and forged an article, which was placed at the beginning of the record", which particularly hit the most painful spot of the Shi family. As a result, the Shi family regarded him as a thorn in their side, and Shi Wei specifically wrote "Refuting Pan Lei's Four Absurdities and Three Delusions" to launch a fierce attack on him: "Four absurdities and three delusions, still continue after the ten non-existences, for the descendants to verify the books and facts, to break down their evil, to expose their falsehood, to write directly based on the facts, to pursue the right way, it is also inevitable emotionally, and logically unavoidable." He even directly revealed that Pan Lei had been expelled from the "History of Ming" Museum: "Pan Lei, a local, was expelled from the History Museum, wandering and plundering for private gain."

If we talk about the familiarity with the system of regulations and the rigor of textual research, neither Shi Wei nor Shi Biannian can match Pan Lei. The former can only make self-justifying amendments within many historical texts, which is not on the same level as Pan Lei, who has a deep family scholarly background. Because of their unwillingness to give in to each other, the two sides, who were originally related by marriage, ended up becoming enemies. This historical memory has been preserved in Wujiang. It is said that one day, "Shi and Pan both went to congratulate Shen Taichang's descendants on a happy event. During the banquet, they talked about Zhong Bin's affairs and ended up in a fight." According to Qian Chi's version, the actual situation was: "Shi Zhongbin's descendants, Pan Taishi Lei and Qian Zongbo from Yu Mountain, had a fierce argument, claiming that the 'Zhi Shen Lu' was a forgery. Zhongbin's descendants led their servants to beat them." Scholars really can't compete with fists and feet.

After the meticulous examination by historians of the Ming and Qing dynasties, the "Zhi Shen Lu" was gradually abandoned by the "official history" document system. Zhang Yushu and Xu Jiu, who had worked together in the "Ming History" Museum, of course, knew well that "there was a conclusion in the past years in the history museum and the discussions with the chief editors (referring to the forgery of the "Zhi Shen Lu" - note by the translator), but they still "followed the custom and pleaded for the pre-sacrifice ceremony, knowing that it was impossible, but they complied with it". The evidence from the text and reality could not shake their position. Why is that? Because the political significance of examining the legend of Jianwen in the early Qing Dynasty has been decoupled from the orthodoxy of the country. For Zhang and Xu, the core of the problem is no longer about distinguishing between true and false, but about the moral values and even local customs involved beyond the true and false.

In the preface to the "Liu Fang Lu" compiled by Xu Qu, he pointed out: "Scholars and gentlemen read books and discuss the world, study right and wrong, should not confuse black and white, and at the time of clarifying the obscure and revealing the subtle, they should especially be honest and kind-hearted, not be sharp and harsh, so as to indulge in their support." This includes the two keywords "black and white" and "honesty and kindness". Different understandings of these two words have become the main differences between Pan Lei and Xu Qu. For Pan Lei, "black and white" can be equated with "right and wrong, true and false". Such principled issues, whether they involve history or the secular world, do not allow any external interference: "If you do not ask about right and wrong, true and false, and generally say that you hide evil and promote good, then you are using indulgence as honesty and kindness. ... Zhong Bin, a talented man, was able to levy taxes for a long time, and those who died in prison, once he was promoted to the ranks of the three publics, I am afraid that Zhong Bin's spirit would also be uneasy, and the whole county's sacrificial ceremony would not be glorious." In contrast, Xu Qu's view is closer to the position of ordinary people. In their eyes, promoting "loyalty, righteousness and beauty" is related to loyalty and filial piety, which is more in line with local values than writing straight. Since the middle of the Ming Dynasty, the trend of reconstructing and reinterpreting historical events according to actual needs has already taken shape, and official historical works and folk anecdotes have thus formed their own systems. After the Qing Dynasty, the two writing systems gradually settled in their own positions. The issue of the orthodoxy of national history can certainly be decided by historians, but folk anecdotes, as a kind of unrestricted cultural resource or a means of local group competition, can often break through the limitation of "right and wrong, true and false" and exert unexpected great power. Zhu Heling, a scholar from Wujiang who experienced the Ming and Qing Dynasties, deeply understood the dialectical relationship between national history and anecdotes, and specifically wrote "Shu Shi Zhong Bin Shi" to elaborate: "The rise and fall of the Jianwen Dynasty, the actual records have no clear text, the ministers from the lost can only get it from the hearsay of the old people, the pen records of the unofficial history, there are many inaccuracies in it. The matter of Zhong Bin, those who believe it too much compare it to cutting their thighs and offering their liver, and those who strongly refute it simply regard it as a false and non-existent, and exaggerate it as an illusion, all of which are not the intention of the ancients to doubt and pass on doubts. ... However, in my town for the past two hundred years, the old people have passed on, saying that Jianwen once lived in the Shi family, and the plaque left by the Shuiyue Pavilion is Jianwen's seal script, which must have come from somewhere, and it is not something that can be fabricated out of thin air."

Various signs indicate that after the change of dynasties, the textual flaws of "Zhi Shen Lu" have gradually broken free from the constraints of textual criticism, and instead focus on the excessive consumption of cultural resources of the living towards the dead. The questioning tone in Gu Kuan's preface to "Liu Fang Lu", "What would it be like under the ground if the past was full of doubts?", is the best interpretation of this new value system. Once there is an opportunity to commend loyalty and integrity, "Zhi Shen Lu" and its related family documents could be redefined at any time, assigned various goals of pursuing practical benefits. The Shi family members, who are suspected of seeking fame and fishing for compliments, seized the specific psychology of local officials who "think long and hard, commend loyalty and integrity, and subtly shift the mindset of the world", and by vigorously promoting the loyalty of their ancestors, they successfully packaged Shi Zhongbin into a model of loyalty and integrity, successfully resolving people's doubts about Shi Zhongbin's identity as a minister of the Jianwen Dynasty, and also resolving many regrets accumulated by the clan members during the process of chasing and granting condolences at the time of the change of dynasties. For a time, "The Shi family basks in the glory of the rites and the repair of the tombs, and the joint worship with our county's school palace, which will be immortal in history." After witnessing the whole process of the Shi family's fictional matters being accepted by the world, Pan Lei could only sigh, "The record of praising loyalty is indeed the heart of all platforms, the political affairs are busy, there is no time for detailed examination, but it is said that the local evaluation is agreed, then follow it, without suspecting that it is a deception."

Conclusion

The Ming Dynasty historian Wang Shizhen once made a very insightful discussion on the relationship between national history, unofficial history, and family history: "Although the authors of national history are arbitrary and good at concealing the truth, their narration of laws and documents cannot be discarded; although the authors of unofficial history are speculative and often lose the truth, their judgment of right and wrong and their criticism of taboos cannot be discarded; although the authors of family history are flattering and often exaggerate the truth, their praise of clans and their records of official achievements cannot be discarded." Due to the deliberate distortion and concealment of official historical works, the construction of the history of the Jianwen era in the Ming and Qing dynasties was always accompanied by the continuous integration of local historical memories. As a masterpiece supporting the theory of Emperor Jianwen's exile, the book "Zhi Shen Lu", which appeared in the Jiangnan region in the late Wanli period, is a prominent representative. The book organically combines the two narrative threads of the previous exiled monarch and the hidden loyal officials, and narrates in the first person the experience of Shi Zhongbin serving in the Jianwen court and accompanying Emperor Jianwen in his abdication and exile. As soon as it was published, it was controversial due to the issue of authenticity. The reason for this is partly because the book is full of loopholes in terms of rituals and official achievements, and partly because previous generations had different degrees of understanding of the author's experience, which became a powerful tool for later generations to discern authenticity.

The diversified historical narrative of Shi Zhongbin is scattered in many family documents of the Shi family in Huangxi, Wujiang. These documents have been continuously created, rewritten, and overlapped in the long river of history, and the storylines have been constantly changing. With the popularity of "Zhi Shen Lu", the existing ancestral memory of the Shi family has undergone a thorough subversion. The Shi family renamed their ancestor "Shi Bin" as "Shi Zhongbin", and his status has also been promoted from a grain chief to a close minister of Emperor Jianwen. However, Jiangnan has a profound literati tradition. The forgery has to face too many "achievements" of the predecessors. Due to the early existence of another version of Shi Bin's biography in the collections of Wu Kuan and Shi Jian, the story recorded in "Zhi Shen Lu" was quickly exposed. Qian Qianyi wrote "Zhi Shen Lu Kao", listing ten reasons to confirm that "Zhi Shen Lu" was indeed a forgery. Li Qing also directly criticized it as a typical negative example of "transforming the national book into a family vehicle, and all the falsehoods are at the end of the pen", and these words have been passed down to future generations.

The Shi clan was clearly unwilling to miss this great opportunity to gain practical benefits. They turned to strictly control the circulation and publication of the "Xicun Collection", and modified the texts related to Shi Bin in the collection, in order to solve their dual dilemma in the imperial examination and livelihood. Whenever there was a textual conflict between the "Xicun Collection" and the "Zhi Shen Lu", they often sacrificed the existing records of the former at the expense of maintaining the authority of the latter. The processed documents no longer directly present their family history, but the clichés left by different narrators in different eras, which are inconsistent and even contradictory. However, due to the widespread circulation of Wu Kuan's "Qingyuan Shi Fu Jun Tomb Inscription" and Qian Qianyi's "Zhi Shen Lu Kao", the Huangxi Shi clan could never bypass Shi Bin's ultra-stable career as a grain chief for many years.

According to Wu Kuan's "Qingyuan Shifu Jun Tomb Inscription" and the records of the related family documents of the Shi family in Huangxi, it is Shi Zhong. "Qingzhi", Volume 14, "The Version Returns to Shi Jianfang's Record" to show his ancestors. The Shi family of Huangxi originated from the end of the Yuan Dynasty and the beginning of the Ming Dynasty. Shi Juren married into the Huangxi of Wujiang from Jiaxing and became rich because he acquired the Huang family's property. Later, Shi Juren and his descendants, Shi Shichong, served as grain chiefs. They started their business with "force field", and after four generations of unremitting efforts, they accumulated a lot of wealth. Among them, the second ancestor, Shi Bin, made an indispensable contribution to the process of becoming rich. He recruited tenants to repair water conservancy and reclaimed wasteland, becoming one of the few large landlords in the southern part of Wujiang who established a family with private rent. In order to maintain this hard-won industry for a long time, and to cope with the heavy miscellaneous services and horse head services that his descendants may encounter in the process of serving as grain chiefs, he established a strict family law of primogeniture. This inheritance system is closely intertwined with the Shi family's duty responsibility. In fact, it is intended to reduce the scope of responsibility, and the eldest son's room is fully responsible for the duty, and bears the tax responsibility of the "family with fields" alone, excluding the small room from the rotation system of undertaking duties according to a certain proportion, thus seeking a balance between the ability to bear duties and the corresponding population and property. At least until his great-grandson Shi Jian and the next generation, it was strictly implemented. Under this system, there is a huge imbalance in the distribution of property and the burden of service between the big room and the small room.

Accompanying the above process was the transformation of the Huangxi Shi family's clan principles and ancestral rituals. Although the Huangxi Shi family did not achieve any fame in the early Ming Dynasty, their social status was gradually rising. They still adhered to the principle of "strict primogeniture", and began to formalize the ritual forms from small clan sacrifices to large clan sacrifices. The creation of the Shi family's ancestral temple in the niche system not only reflected the influence of real needs on the ritual system, but also reinforced the primogeniture system that the Shi family has always respected. To avoid accusations of "overstepping the ritual system" from his peers, Shi Jian, who was among the famous people in Wu, changed the inflexible four-niche system in the ancestral temple and flexibly used the left-Zhao-right-Mu system. This allowed Shi Juren to be promoted from a minor clan member to a separate son, and made the family's meritorious official, Shi Bin, the unblemished ancestor of the Shi family. After the reigns of Zhengde and Jiajing, with the further decline of the grain length system, there was a huge shift from "small households not serving" to "no land not serving". The imbalance of responsibility division that originally existed between the large and small clans and between large and small households was gradually leveled. Under the new situation where the burden of taxes and services was becoming more uniform and simplified, the family law that Shi Bin personally formulated, which stated that "all sons cannot be equal with the eldest son" in the inheritance of family property, no longer had any room for operation. Correspondingly, the Huangxi clan's interest in managing family affairs was waning and gradually declining.

As the branches of Xiaozong in Bangdong and Suzhou, they managed to catch the express train of the increasingly prosperous Suzhou silk industry at this time, achieving a certain breakthrough in the economic field. However, in the field of culture, the Huangxi Shi family has never been able to gain a foothold in the dazzling Suzhou literary scene. Although Shi Jian is known for his literary works in Wu, he is still just a commoner in Jiangnan; the brief official career of Shi Chen has only left negative memories in the minds of the Huangxi Shi family members. The difficulties of the imperial examination and the resulting "labor difficulties" have almost suffocated the ambitious clan members.

In order to break free from the "conscription troubles" that had plagued them for many years, the Huangxi Shi family, who held a key position in the historical memory writing and dissemination of the Jianwen era, had to re-optimize the power of their ancestors to join the privileged class that enjoyed exemptions. They, who were familiar with various narrative systems of Jianwen stories, seized the important cultural resource of honoring Jianwen's loyal ministers, and timely changed the memory of their ancestors. The reconstructed ancestor "Shi Zhongbin" happened to live in an era that overlapped with the period when Jianwen abdicated, and despite the huge risk of being criticized, he still became a key minister of the Jianwen era through the "careful" packaging of the "Zhi Shen Lu". With the unremitting efforts of several generations of family members such as Shi Ce, Shi Zhaodou, Shi Zai Xiang, Shi Bian Nian, and Shi Wei, whether mediating between speech officials, educational officials and officials at all levels, or seeking help from famous scholars in Suzhou, Shi Zhongbin finally became a chip to solve the development dilemma of the "commoner" landlord family and expand cultural influence. With a vague identity between court officials and grain chiefs, he successively served in the local temples of Jiaxing Prefecture and Suzhou Prefecture, bringing huge practical benefits to the "descendants of loyal ministers". On the contrary, Shi Jian, a leading figure in the literary circle of Suzhou who wrote a biography that hindered the glorious image of Shi Bing, was blocked outside the door of the local temple.

The basis for selecting local worthies not only depends on local evaluations, but also refers to the character deeds in existing literature. In this sense, the "Zhi Shen Lu" is not just a static text. The enormous energy radiated by various subtexts created based on it has far exceeded the limitation of "right or wrong, true or false". In the late Ming Dynasty, due to the practical needs of encouraging loyalty and establishing writing standards, the "Zhi Shen Lu" was successively adopted by historical works such as "Xun Guo Zheng Qi Ji", "Huang Ming Biao Zhong Ji", "Shi Gui Shu", etc. The whereabouts of Emperor Jianwen provided by it even became the basis for people's mourning. Even Gu Yingtai's "Ming Shi Ji Shi Ben Mo" firmly believed in the escape route of Emperor Jianwen, so a death certificate discarded by national history turned into a missing person notice spread all over the world. As time went by, the "Zhi Shen Lu" no longer undertook the extra burden of supplementing the national history in the Qing Dynasty, but instead focused on the special effect of its family history, specifically devoted to the construction of the loyal and righteous image of Shi Zhongbin. To some extent, the reason why the historical chronicles can successfully open the door of the Suzhou Prefecture local worthies temple, which is known for its difficulty, is based on the premise that national history and family history each have their own place.

Postscript

The initial idea for this booklet came from a break during the mid-term meeting of the AOE project at the History and Anthropology Research Center of the Chinese University of Hong Kong at the end of 2015. At that time, I submitted a conference paper titled with the subtitle of this book, and received encouragement and recognition from Professor Zhao Shiyu. He believed that this new work explored some interesting topics, which were very different from my previous style and orientation, and should be expanded into a booklet of 50,000 to 100,000 words, to be included in the "History and Anthropology Mini Series" edited by Beijing Normal University Press. I had long intended to write it, and naturally assumed that with nearly 20,000 words already in place, adapting it should not be a difficult task, so I readily agreed.

Around 2005, when I first joined Sun Yat-sen University, I spent a year or two aimlessly browsing through all the township records of the Jiangnan region. When I came across the "Huangxi Records" of Wujiang, I first encountered the legend of Shi Zhongbin protecting Emperor Jianwen recorded in the records, which left a deep impression on me. Not long after, I browsed through the "Shi's Wu Zhong Lineage Documents" and "Shi's Wu Zhong Lineage Genealogy" and other Huangxi Shi family documents in the ancient books department of Nanjing Library and the genealogy literature department of Shanghai Library, and thus conceived the idea of doing some thematic research around the Huangxi Shi family and the Jianwen legend. At this time, Zhang Yanyan, a master's student I was supervising, wanted to explore the child image of Emperor Jianwen and examine the issue of the orthodox view in the subconscious of people in the Ming and Qing dynasties. Since there was no reliable historical material to support her, I gave her the topic of the Huangxi Shi family and its Jianwen legend to work on. Under my guidance, she completed her master's thesis "The Power of the Pen: The Construction of the History of the Huangxi Shi Family Before and After the Circulation of the 'Dedication Record'" in 2008.

In 2011, the Department of History at Sun Yat-sen University held a national doctoral forum. Ding Xiuzhen, who was then a doctoral student at Nanjing University, registered to participate with the topic "Scholarly Interactions, Local Families, and Jianwen Legends - Centered on the Emergence of 'Zhi Shen Lu'". He was grouped with Zhang Yanyan, who was also attending the forum. He used the "History of Wu Zhong Pai Shi Family" compiled by Shi Ji, which I had overlooked, and it gave us great insights. In the following years, whenever I had the chance to visit my parents in Nanjing, I would go to the Nanjing Library to transcribe this 20-volume work. As a result, the article "Zhi Shen Lu and the Fate of the Shi Family in Wujiang Huangxi" was born. This article was co-authored by me and Zhang Yanyan, and was later published in the 15th issue of "Ming History Research".

However, with my appointment in 2016 to establish the second Department of History at Sun Yat-sen University's Zhuhai campus, a series of administrative tasks followed one after another, leaving me less and less time to settle down for research. The revision and expansion work gradually became indefinitely postponed. Just when the manuscript might have been "aborted", I would like to express my special thanks to Professor Tang Lixing and Professor Xu Maoming from the Center for Modern Chinese Society Studies at Shanghai Normal University. In 2017 and 2018, they insisted on inviting me to attend the annual "Jiangnan Social History International Academic Forum", and asked me to submit a conference paper, which directly led to the birth of two papers: "The Inheritance of the Eldest Son in the Ming Dynasty and the Permanent Grain Chief - Based on the Investigation of the Historical Documents of the Shi Family in Huangxi, Wujiang" and "Technology Dissemination, Commercial Capital and the Profit of Silk: An Exploration of the Business Activities of the Shi Family in Huangxi, Wujiang". With these three papers as the foundation, the outline of the manuscript gradually became clear, and the revision finally became more operational.

Although Teacher Zhao Shiyu and the general planner of this book, Ms. Song Xujing, revealed to me when they formally commissioned the manuscript that even a "test the waters" work in the exploration process could have a place in the series, it was indeed not an easy task to actually "incubate" this little book. First, due to improper operation of my personal computer, tens of thousands of words of historical materials were turned into gibberish, and I had to re-enter them, which seriously affected the overall progress. The various problems associated with the manuscript, such as fiscal servitude, clan rituals, state sacrificial ceremonies, and the compilation of official histories, all challenged my existing knowledge boundaries to varying degrees. The Shi family's historical documents, full of "traps", also kept me constantly vigilant, and I even dared not step over the line. This book, with its strong case study color, may not be able to draw some overly macro or meso conclusions, nor can it become the culmination of academic thought since I entered the field. However, once it involves important academic topics that cannot be bypassed, I will carry forward the excellent tradition of "making a big deal out of a small issue" based on the existing research of predecessors, and do my best to express my basic views on the issues involved. Because there are too many "entanglements", during the drafting period, I kept showing Ms. Song Xujing my research progress on the one hand, and on the other hand, faced with her repeated urging, I had to prevaricate her with various reasons. Until the beginning of 2020, as the creation work gradually got on track, and coincided with the lockdown order caused by the COVID-19 epidemic, which allowed me to "close the door" at home for a considerable period of time, this gave me enough time to revise the manuscript.

During the process of revising the manuscript, I successively discovered different versions of "The Self-Preface of the Scholar Zhongxian of Emperor Shizu", "The Record of Extraordinary Loyalty", and other "Records of Devotion", as well as the Jiajing edition of "The Collection of Xicun" which I had previously thought was lost. This greatly enriched my understanding of the origins and transmission mechanisms of important documents such as "Records of Devotion" and "The Collection of Xicun". The more new materials I discovered, the more I felt the naivety of my initial article. The final manuscript has thoroughly overturned some of my previous conjectures, and can even be summarized as a "complete transformation". I would especially like to thank my colleagues from Taiwan in the department, Dr. Li Chaokai and Dr. Huang Shengxiu, who allowed me to obtain the research results of Taiwanese scholars Li Qiongyun and He Xingzhen in a timely manner. Associate Professor Zhou Jian from the History Department of East China Normal University provided me with the opening information of the Shanghai Library during the epidemic, and specifically copied the book shadow of the Chongzhen second year edition of "Records of Devotion"; Dr. Qi Gang from the School of Humanities of Wenzhou University provided the photocopy of "The Biography of Mr. Zengzu Qingyuan" in "The Collection of Mr. Xicun"; my graduate students Ruan Baoyu, Zhang Ye, Huang Xiao, and Tian Sichen either helped to check historical materials or helped to draw family genealogy charts; the responsible editor, Ms. Yue Lei, checked the historical materials cited in the book as much as possible, reducing unnecessary errors to a minimum. These helping hands were decisive in the final completion of the manuscript, and I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to all of them.

I would like to thank Professors Liu Zhiwei, Zhao Shiyu, Zheng Zhenman, Xia Weizhong, Zhang Yingqiang, Zhang Kan, Sato Hitoshi, Yu Wei, and Xie Shi for patiently listening to my immature ideas and providing me with detailed and subtle suggestions. Especially Professor Yu Wei, her expectations for my research on the Ming and Qing Dynasties in the Jiangnan region often exceed my capabilities. However, it is her every "pure academic interrogation" that gives me, who is not very convinced on the surface, a new direction to strive for. I am grateful to Professor Zhang Xiaochuan from Suzhou University of Science and Technology for accompanying me to Huangjiaxi Village to explore the historical sites and step into the historical scene. I would like to thank our young colleagues in the department for their attention to my research at the 2020 school anniversary report meeting. Without the help and encouragement of many teachers and friends, this book would not have been possible in its current form.

Finally, I want to thank my wife. For the past five years, I have been constantly traveling between Zhuhai and Guangzhou, neglecting my family. I owe her so much. During the most difficult times, she always encouraged me to stay true to my scholarly pursuits and silently supported my work without any complaints. As my parents are getting older, I can't always be by their side. I am grateful to my sister and brother for their thoughtful care, allowing me to continue my beloved career in the distant south.

May 1, 2021 at Jianzhen Garden Residence in Guangzhou