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# Reculsion And "The Chinese Eremitic Tradition"

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Review: Reculsion and "The Chinese Eremitic Tradition"

Reviewed Work(s): *Men of the Cliffs and Caves: The Development of the Chinese Eremitic Tradition to the End of the Han Dynasty* by Aat Vervoorn

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## REVIEW ARTICLES

### RECLUSION AND “THE CHINESE EREMITIC TRADITION”\*

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Aat Vervoorn's *Men of the Cliffs and Caves* is a groundbreaking study of attitudes held by the scholar-official class concerning the issue of service vis-à-vis reclusion, retirement, and withdrawal. Written primarily in terms of the perspectives of the individual and the ruler, it focuses on the intellectual and political aspects of withdrawal. It treats the “eremitic tradition,” but fails to distinguish between the practice of reclusion and reclusion in the abstract, between men in reclusion and scholar-officials. Thus, even while duly treating men in reclusion and topoi of reclusion, the study really is of a much broader and more pervasive topic: the development of political and intellectual notions about withdrawal in the scholar-official culture of China through the Han.

PAINTING AND POETRY HAVE IMMORTALIZED the image of reclusion in China as a solitary retreat in a tranquil and beneficent wilderness, a timeless moment beyond the dust and din of the mundane world. This ubiquitous image has suffused the tapestry of traditional China, and indeed adorns the tasteful dustjacket of the book here under review; but is it verisimilar? Will a study of the “Chinese eremitic tradition” reinforce this familiar stereotype, or will it compel us to reevaluate our perceptions about reclusion, challenge us even about what we thought was a straightforward, commonplace portrayal in painting or poem? Aat Vervoorn's *Men of the Cliffs and Caves* is a critical study of a phenomenon that was, *prima facie*, concerned with politics and personal integrity, at least during the period encompassed in this study.

Reclusion has played a significant role in China for well over two millennia, and Vervoorn's broad utilization of both primary and secondary writings, coupled with generally perceptive analysis, provides readers with the best published introduction to the subject in any language to date. His study should be of considerable value to students of early and early medieval China, as well as to a broader audience of students of

Chinese history, thought, culture, and institutions. One might not agree with all of his conclusions, and indeed with some of his most basic assumptions, but, criticisms notwithstanding, his investigation and presentation of the subject will bring discussion of reclusion in China away from generalized cliché and vapid romanticism, to a level of critical discourse befitting an aspect so important in the Chinese cultural tradition.

Vervoorn brings together advantageously, in a basically historical and chronological framework, most of the relevant but disparate data on reclusion in China from the earliest times through the Han, and clearly articulates most of the political and philosophical rationales that underlie the ethos of reclusion in traditional China. To a disconcerting degree, however, his study conflates two distinct phenomena: *bona fide* reclusion and topoi of reclusion conspicuous in the political and intellectual culture of the scholar-official. Vervoorn writes about “hermits” and “eremitism,” in his terminology, but most of his conclusions are in terms of officialdom and the role of the “eremitic tradition” in political culture; indeed, a very substantial number of the “hermits” he treats, in point of fact, were office-holders. I do not fault his approach so much, for he actually is treating a topic much broader and more pervasive than reclusion itself and indeed most of his conclusions are considered and worthy of attention. However, I am uneasy that readers will believe that they are being brought to an understanding of reclusion in traditional China: *caveat lector*, this is not so.

\* This is a review article of: *Men of the Cliffs and Caves: The Development of the Chinese Eremitic Tradition to the End of the Han Dynasty*. By AAT VERVOORN. Hong Kong: THE CHINESE UNIVERSITY PRESS, 1990. Pp. xii + 356. \$29.

My point is not merely semantical. The study does not disambiguate reclusion *per se* from virtuous withdrawal on an occasional or purely noetic basis, its consanguineous counterparts, and thus does not differentiate between: a) practitioners of reclusion, and b) scholar-officials who at particular junctures in their careers might be envisaged within one or more of the many abstract topoi of reclusion. If this is a study of reclusion (this ostensibly is its *raison d'être*), it has a major flaw; for it fails to perceive that the practice of reclusion in traditional China is a phenomenon unto itself, that it has a real and essential nature, that it is distinct from, even antithetical to, the taking up of office.

This study has blurred the distinction; men in reclusion and men who take up office are commingled in the "eremitic tradition." In so doing, the study undermines the very *raison d'être* of reclusion and its practicing individuals. It was conduct and personal integrity manifest in the unflinching eschewal of official capacity which constituted the cause for public acclaim: men in reclusion did not surrender their integrity, nor did they compromise their resolve. Approbation of men in reclusion led many of the scholar-official class to assume, simulate, or affect the conduct and rationale of such exemplars, and led to the recognition of "exemplary eremitism" (see below) within the official recommendatory system; the sanctioning of "exemplary eremitism" in turn fostered the entrenchment of topoi of reclusion in the scholar-official ethos. Vervoorn's homogenizing of reclusion and officialdom in the "eremitic tradition" is the most subtle problem with *Men of the Cliffs and Caves*, but not the most visible problem. There are several, though of lesser consequence. Vervoorn refers to reclusion (*yin* 隱 or *yinyi* 隱逸) as "eremitism" and men in reclusion (*yinshi* 隱士) as "hermits," and devotes several pages justifying his choice of words, in order to "mollify those terminological watchdogs" (p. 7). Still, while China certainly has had its hermits, and while there is a considerable amount of poetry portraying the eremitic life, these are profoundly misleading terms when applied to the general phenomenon of reclusion in China, especially so when applied to occasional withdrawal. Even qualified usage cannot but reinforce misapprehensions of the stereotypical relationship between reclusion and the idyllic life. Yet it is evident from Vervoorn's reasoning and from his focus on the philosophical and political bases of reclusion that the terms "hermits" and "eremitism" are being used as expedients, even while being *faux-amis*.

Early and medieval sources are rather discriminating in the use of the terms *yinyi* and *yinshi*: these terms vir-

tually never were applied to situations other than substantive reclusion. (On the other hand, even while usually referring to men in reclusion, the terms "men of the mountains and forests" 山林之士 and "men of the cliffs and caves" 巖穴之士, and to a degree *chushi* 處士 as well, were also often applied to soon-to-be scholar-officials of lofty mien, including both the temporarily withdrawn and the aspiring candidate.) While the word "reclusion" also is in many senses a misnomer, I would suggest rendering *yinyi* as "reclusion"<sup>1</sup> and *yinshi* as "men-in-reclusion," or, when referring to an individual for whom reclusion was a way of life, "practitioner of reclusion." *Yinshi* in earlier times usually stood for *yin de zhi shi* 隱德之士, as in the *Zhuangzi* 莊子, implying that the virtuous worthiness of such a man was not overtly manifest in worldly conduct within the public, political sphere—hidden, as it were, from appropriation by temporal authority: these were men in reclusion. Vervoorn has opted for the terms "disengaged scholar" and "men in retirement" for *chushi* and *yimin* 逸民, respectively; these are apt choices.<sup>2</sup>

Other minor problems concern translation. On the whole, Vervoorn is a good translator. But occasionally his translations also are *faux-amis*, in that they seem to reflect what is written in the original even while misconstruing the purport, if not the words, of the text. This sometimes leads to faulty conclusions. An obvious

<sup>1</sup> While *yinyi* usually is used as a blanket term for reclusion, Shen Yue 沈約 (441–513) carefully distinguishes men in reclusion as being either *yin* ("in reclusion") or *yi* ("disengaged"); see his discriminating essay which prefaces his "Accounts of Reclusion and Disengagement" 隱逸傳, ed. Shen Yue, *Song shu* 宋書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974), 93.2275–76. See also Kaguraoka Masatoshi 神樂昌俊, "In to itsu: Rongo o tōshite" 隱と逸: 論語お通して, in *Mori Mikisaburō hakushi shōju kinen: Tōyōgaku ronshū* 森三樹三郎博士頌壽紀年: 東洋學論集 (Kyoto: Hōyū shoten, 1979), 145–60.

<sup>2</sup> Without too much quibbling, I would suggest that "disengaged persons" might be appropriate for *yimin*, because of the breadth of connotations in both Chinese and English (see also Shen Yue's discussion referred to above), while "scholar-at-home" might be a suitable rendering of *chushi*. "Disengaged scholar" may inadvertently give the impression that *chushi* were latter day "wandering scholars" 游士 (on which, see pp. 33, 41–45, 52) when, as Vervoorn clearly indicates, their *métier* was practiced "at home." *Chushi* were politically "disengaged," although for many of them this disengagement lasted only until they took up office.

example concerns the Former Han worthy Li Hong 李弘 (written 宏 in the *Gaoshi zhuan* 高士傳) of Shu (byname Zhongyuan), who earned the praises of Yang Xiong 揚雄 (53 B.C.E.–18 C.E.). Vervoorn misconstrues both the point and the syntax of a passage (as well as the meaning of a particular word) from Yang's *Fa yan* 法言, wrongly assigning as attributes of Li Hong the reactions of others. And in missing a literary allusion or two, he is led to assert that Li Hong was a teacher of Yang Xiong, which is totally without support. The passage reads:<sup>3</sup>

仲元,世之師也。見其貌者,肅如也。聞其言者,愀如也。觀其行者,穆如也。鄴聞以德誦人矣,未聞以德誦於人也。仲元畏人也...非正不視,非正不聽,非正不言,非正不行。夫能正其視聽,言行者,昔吾先師之所畏也。

Vervoorn (pp. 111–12) translates:

[Li] Zhongyuan is a teacher to the age. See his bearing and it is dignified, listen to his speech and it is solemn, observe his conduct and it is majestic. I have heard of him bending others to his virtue, I have never heard of him, in the name of virtue, bending to others. Zhongyuan fills men with awe. . . . He will not look upon what is not correct, will not listen to what is not correct, will not say what is not correct, will not do what is not correct. It is this ability to correct his sight and hearing, speech and conduct, that fills me with awe for my former teacher.

In the first part of this passage, what Yang Xiong is describing is the effect on observers of (not the nature of) Li Hong's bearing, words, and conduct. The second part of the passage actually is part of a separate response in *Fa yan*'s interlocutor format, meant to elucidate the nature of 畏. Instead of referring to Li Hong, Yang is asserting that correctness in sight and hearing, speech and conduct, is something that awed "that former teacher of ours from the past," i.e., Confucius. I would suggest the following translation:

Zhongyuan is a teacher to the age. Those who see his bearing are respectful; those who hear his words change expression (i.e., are moved); those who observe his conduct are solemn. I have but heard of his subduing

<sup>3</sup> From Wang Rongbao 汪榮寶 (1879–1933), *Fa yan yishu* 法言義疏 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1987), 17.491.

others with his virtue; I have not heard of his yielding to others on account of virtue. Zhongyuan inspires awe in people. . . .

Unless correct, one does not look on it; unless correct, one does not listen to it; unless correct, one does not say it; unless correct, one does not do it. Being able to keep one's sight and hearing, speech and conduct correct was what awed that former teacher of ours from the past (Confucius).<sup>4</sup>

As *Men of the Cliffs and Caves* actually is an important, groundbreaking study, I do not wish to give undue attention to its shortcomings. Criticism should not be construed as disparagement, and readers will be treated in this book to much cogent discussion and analysis of the historical settings in which "eremitism" evolved. Vervoorn's scholarship is, for the most part, meticulous; and his ranging comments cover the intellectual, political, social, and economic history of the period. He also provides much bibliographic information for reference, as well as offering his own judgments on the conclusions of scholars in various fields.

The book is divided into four chapters ("The Origins of Eremitism and Its Development in the Warring States Period," "The Former Han and the Wang Mang Period," "The Later Han," "Eremitism at Court"), plus an introduction and conclusion. The scholarly apparatus is excellent: the endnotes are copious (sixty-eight tight pages) and replete with information; the twenty-five page bibliography is carefully compiled (although missing a number of noteworthy Japanese articles); and there are indices for names (exhaustive, and complete

<sup>4</sup> The last sentence refers to *Lun yu* 論語 12.1 and 16.8 (trans. James Legge, *Confucian Analects*, in *The Chinese Classics*, vol. 1 [rpt., Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1970], 250 and 313): "The Master replied, 'Look not at what is contrary to propriety; listen not to what is contrary to propriety; speak not what is contrary to propriety; make no movement which is contrary to propriety'" (12.1). "Confucius said, 'There are three things of which the superior man stands in awe. He stands in awe of the ordinances of Heaven. He stands in awe of great men. He stands in awe of the words of sages'" (16.8). See also *Fa yan* 5.108: "Confucius was in awe of those who in speech were not ashamed and in conduct were not remorseful"; in other words, he respected men of correct speech and conduct. Li Gui 李軌 of the Eastern Jin comments: "when speech does not transgress correct principle, the person is not ashamed; when conduct is not aberrant, the heart is not remorseful. Those capable of speech and conduct such as this were venerated by Confucius."

with dates!) and subjects (the subject index, while serviceable with a number of subheadings, is rather too restricted at merely two pages in length). The helpful "Chronology of Dynasties and Reign Periods" (from the Shang Dynasty through the Wei Dynasty) will be a quick and accurate reference for students of the period, as well as for non-specialist readers, for it contains exact dates, when available, for the rule of emperors from the Qin through the Wei, with succinct historical notes on the advent and/or demise of a number of rulers.<sup>5</sup> Readers will also appreciate the Chinese University Press' production of the book: Chinese characters are used liberally throughout, thus eliminating romanized ambiguities, and there are few proofreading errors.

As a guidepost for his study, Vervoorn cogently defines eremitism as involving

the realization of particular ideals of personal character and conduct derived from the highest moral authorities of a culture,

and entailing

psychologically, a lack of regard for those things of the world which are the common objects of human action, such as wealth, power and fame, with correspondingly greater importance being attached to goals which in a philosophical or moral sense are conceived to be

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<sup>5</sup> Individual reign-titles are listed from the Han through the Wei, nearly all of these "stated in terms of their first complete calendar year and the calendar year in which they ended." This is apt phrasing, but it should not be inferred that the portion of the year between the time when an emperor took the throne and the beginning of the "first complete calendar year" of his first reign-period was actually a portion of his first designated reign-period, for Han emperors began their reigns before they began their reign-periods: beginning with Emperor Wu (the first to have designated reign-periods), the first reign-period of new emperors began on the first New Year following accession to the throne. For instance, the Han Emperor Ming 明 is listed (correctly) as reigning from 29 March 57–5 September 75 (C.E.), yet his Yongping 永平 reign-period (his only reign-title) is listed (correctly) as 58–75. Specialists will know that he ruled for nearly a year without inaugurating a new reign-title; the situation is analogous for nearly all of the Han emperors. The dates of three of the reign-periods of the Han Emperor Wu 武 should be emended to reflect the six years of each of these reigns: his Jianyuan reign should be 140–135 (B.C.E.), the Yuanguang reign should be 134–129, and the Yuanfeng reign should be 110–105.

'higher', for example, personal integrity and unwavering devotion to what is right, or the eradication of desire and complete identification of the self with the principle of order in the cosmos; behaviourally, this is manifested in a tendency to withdraw, either physically or mentally, from the types of social involvement likely to result in the violation of those higher goals—in particular, involvement in the realm of politics and state affairs (pp. 3–4).

Further,

[w]e can go some way towards understanding eremitism by considering it as a series of strategies for reconciling conflicting ideals in such a way as to make those ideals attainable. But more important still for an understanding of Chinese eremitism is the conflict, not between the various ideals themselves, but between those ideals and social reality. . . . Eremitism represents the greatest achievement possible for a man of principle in adverse circumstances; it represents the accommodation of high moral ideals to a harsh, refractory reality (p. 73).

In a number of places Vervoorn astutely points out parallels between reclusion in China and reclusion in the Western tradition; Chinese eremitism, however, is predominantly non-religious in character. In pre-Buddhist Chinese society,

religion played a relatively minor role in providing norms and ideas to guide the conduct of individuals. . . . [and] the highest principles and ideals of educated Chinese tended to have a secular rather than a religious foundation. . . . The characteristic feature of Chinese eremitism . . . is that from earliest times it was primarily a secular affair, like the ideals of individual perfection the hermits embodied (pp. 2–3).

As a universally moral response, even those hermits of the modern world "will find that their actions have been fully prefigured by the Chinese hermits of long ago" (pp. vii–viii).

The book is a chronological, developmental study of the evolution of the "eremitic tradition" in China, and Vervoorn believes that while the Wei-Jin period (220–420) might be called "the golden age of Chinese eremitism," "most of the essential developments in Chinese eremitism occurred before the end of the Han dynasty" (p. viii). In fact, according to Vervoorn,

by the end of the Han dynasty most of the major aspects of the Chinese eremitic tradition had already taken

shape: the varieties of eremitism and their philosophical rationales, the place of eremitism in the scholarly culture and its integration in the imperial system, as well as the high social standing of hermits and their political influence, were all well established before the Han dynasty came to a close (pp. 236–37).<sup>6</sup>

Most of Vervoorn's information is derived from historical and philosophical texts, with very occasional reference to purely "literary" works. The nature of the sources for the pre-Han period leads him rightly to focus discussion not on the lives or motives of individual legendary "hermits" (whose historicity is all too problematic), but on the philosophical and socio-political circumstances that gave rise to the various philosophies of eremitism; the pre-Confucian period, then, is sort of a pre-history of eremitism (p. 19; see also p. 229). For the Han, and especially the Later Han, sources allow consideration of both "the emergence of new ideas and the transformation of old ones in the context of socio-political change," and "how those ideas went into action in the lives of individuals" (p. ix).

Vervoorn's greatest contribution, I think, is his considered examination of what he calls "the pivotal role of Confucius" (see esp. pp. 28–40) and "exemplary eremitism" (see esp. pp. 116–25). Confucius' basic principle was that "the gentleman serves in office as long as by doing so he can further the Way; once that becomes impossible he must resign to avoid moral compromise" (p. 30). Vervoorn writes that "before Confucius there were little more than proto-elements of eremitism" (p. 40; see also p. 229). He discusses feudalism in the Zhou, then notes that during the Zhou, because principles of heredity were central to

the official ideology and kinship was the basis of appointment to office, refusal to serve the ruler had no justification.

Justification of a refusal to serve the ruler required an alternative conception of personal morality. It was Confucius who formulated that alternative conception, and that is the reason why eremitism in China really began with Confucius. . . . It was Confucius who turned the question of qualification for office into a controversial issue by taking the stand that it was according to the integrity and self-cultivation of the individual . . . that appointments to office should be made. . . . It is with the concept of . . . a morally autonomous individual, whose ultimate measure of what can and cannot be done is his own moral sense, that the philosophical possibility of eremitism arises (pp. 28–29).

This in a nutshell is "the pivotal role of Confucius"; it gave rise immediately to the basic precepts of resignation from office to avoid moral compromise, and later to "exemplary eremitism."

Set in the context of the multi-state polity of the late Zhou period, a morally autonomous individual might resign from a particular post to avoid personal compromise, and go instead to another state where it might better be possible to help make the Way a reality. After the Qin unification of the empire, when one no longer had the option of moving from the domain of one ruler to another, the issue of "timeliness" took on major significance. Citing authority from a variety of pre-Qin and early Han writings, moral exemplars could fit justification for conduct and outlook, for service or withdrawal, to the circumstances of the moment and the changing disposition of things (see pp. 68, 82).

"Exemplary eremitism" basically was a demonstration of primarily Confucian moral precepts of reclusion and personal detachment from worldly concerns of wealth, status, and power, without judgment on political and social iniquity. Vervoorn writes that

[e]xemplary eremitism was Confucian in inspiration. It was based on the idea not so much of having encountered times so bad that to serve in office would result in moral compromise, as of having ideals of personal conduct so high that even participation in the relatively enlightened government of the present would make it impossible to remain true to those ideals (p. 233).

He argues persuasively that "exemplary eremitism" was fostered by public and official recognition of the high moral conduct of men "in reclusion," and was

<sup>6</sup> He continues: "What happened subsequently to that tradition could with some justification be described as little more than a filling out followed by gradual atrophy." This is a bit cavalier, for developments after the Han, especially during the Southern Dynasties, substantively contributed to the characteristic patterning of reclusion in China. This includes the pervasiveness of the Buddhist and Daoist religions, and the self-conscious attention to the topoi of reclusion that finds expression in intellectual and social attitudes, in historical literature, *belles-lettres* and art, and in what might best be termed an appreciation of nature and the private life. While it may be accurate that "most of the major aspects of the Chinese eremitic tradition . . . were well established before the Han dynasty came to a close," it is during the Six Dynasties that reclusion in China took on its enduring character.

incorporated into the imperial recommendation system during the Han: "It is this which accounts for the increase in the amount of information recorded about hermits from this time on, as well as the apparent increase in the number of hermits themselves" (p. 233). Thus exemplary eremitism was functional as well as abstract, and became a prevailing ideal of model conduct among most of the educated community. As a recognized route to officialdom (and thus no longer "reclusion" *per se*), however, exemplary eremitism often was no more than "an elaborate demonstration of lofty personal ideals designed to attract the world's attention" (p. 139). During the Six Dynasties, due to applicability and expedience in gaining official recognition and recommendation, we see many examples of the deterioration of exemplary eremitism into self-conscious, goal-oriented exhibitionism.

Textual authority derived from non-Confucian attitudes, in particular as expressed in the works attributed to Laozi and Zhuangzi, also provided some potential officials with justification for not serving any ruler at any time. "Zhuangzi . . . aside from Confucius is the single most important figure in the history of Chinese eremitism." For Zhuangzi, "eremitism, properly understood, was the highest ideal to which a man can aspire" (pp. 55–56). Yet Vervoorn's treatment of the writings of Zhuangzi is somewhat perplexing. He expounds the ostensibly true purport of the (original) "Inner Chapters," which in his view do not advocate physical withdrawal: "hiding . . . takes place within society rather than outside it . . . The best way to hide . . . is to be completely anonymous. . . . To be a hermit in Zhuangzi's sense is to be completely unknown. . . . Unfettered wandering . . . is to be understood above all as an affair of the mind" (pp. 58–63). This may be true, and certainly contributed to the rationale behind "hiding at court" 朝隱 (see below), but Vervoorn cuts his discussion short, saying, "The outer and miscellaneous chapters of *Zhuangzi* . . . contain a considerable amount of material relating to eremitism which cannot be examined in detail here" (p. 64). But it is precisely these chapters that contribute substantively to the portrayal of reclusion in later centuries, and Vervoorn's scant reference to them in his following discussions does not give them their due. He credits to the *Laozi* the influence during the Han and later times of the doctrines of selflessness and desirelessness, simplicity and quietude ("developed in the *Laozi* in relation to the ruler only"), but it is hard to accept his claim that "it was the *Laozi* rather than the *Zhuangzi* that became the most important source of such doctrines for any would-be hermits of later periods" (p. 67). Writings dealing with the topic

of reclusion in later periods, and especially accounts of men in reclusion, do not seem to bear this out.

In treating the Han period, Vervoorn mentions Daoism all too briefly. He states that Huang-Lao Daoism ("the Daoism of the Han period") "did not necessarily lead to withdrawal from public life, but . . . neither did Confucianism necessarily lead to political participation" (p. 88; see also p. 236). This is absolutely true, but he tells us virtually nothing about the influence of Daoism on reclusion (except briefly in terms of a few examples of the Later Han; see pp. 184–89). Daoism's influence on reclusion during the Han would seem to be a good topic for further reflection.<sup>7</sup> Vervoorn has a lengthy note on Daoism (pp. 268–69, n. 31), replete with bibliographic references and containing a reference list to twenty-four "figures from the Former Han referred to as students of the teachings of Huang-Lao or described in ways which indicate they were advocates of those teachings." It may be significant that five of these figures merited accounts in the *Gaoshi zhuan* of either Huangfu Mi 皇甫謐 (215–82) or Xi Kang 嵇康 (223–62). Vervoorn later briefly discusses two of these five figures, in the context of being "eremitic advisors" (p. 102).

Vervoorn devotes a lengthy discussion to the Wang Mang period (pp. 125–38), for "not since the Warring States period has such attention, both political and intellectual, been focussed on hermits, and by bringing this about Wang Mang became perhaps the major single influence shaping the attitudes of Chinese rulers towards hermits for the next five hundred years" (p. 130). But in describing the circumstances, both political and intellectual, which shaped the contours of "eremitism," most of the examples given are of scholar-statesmen, not of "hermits." Surely these attitudes do reflect the ideological bases for withdrawal as far as the scholar-official was concerned. But does not the occasional, conditional withdrawal (withdrawal for a time, at a particular juncture, due to a particular set of circumstances) of statesmen at the advent of the "usurper" Wang Mang really pertain to retirement in terms of the conclusion or interruption of one's official career (with its attendant ups and downs), and thus more to office-holders than to "men of the cliffs and

<sup>7</sup> He notes that "it is the strong influence of Daoism under the Wei and Jin dynasties which account for the prevalence of eremitism among the intellectuals of that period" (p. 236). In a note to his chapter on the Warring States period (p. 257, n. 96), he mentions a theory that Daoist teachings of that period are owed to "hermits as a group," which he discounts.



caves?" A case in point is the example of Gong Sheng 龔勝 (68 B.C.E.–11 C.E.; correct the dates given for Gong in the "Name Index," p. 345), for he both epitomizes the development of attitudes toward withdrawal during the Wang Mang period and challenges the parameters of "eremitism."

After Wang Mang had taken *de facto* control of the government, Gong Sheng petitioned to retire from his position as Imperial Household Grandee on 1 July, 2 C.E., ostensibly on account of old age and poor health, after a prominent career in government. He was then sixty-nine years of age (seventy *sui*), and his retirement was officially sanctioned according to custom and precedent. When Wang declared himself emperor of a new dynasty a few years later (10 January, 9 C.E.), Wang sought legitimation by, among other acts, conferring office and honors on respected men of the former reign. On the pretext of illness, Gong did not comply to a summons for appointment as Chancellor of Academicians. But Wang Mang did not desist from enticing and pressuring Gong Sheng to acquiesce:

Two years later (11 C.E.), Mang again dispatched emissaries to present a document bearing the imperial seal, and the seal and seal-cord of the office of Academic Chancellor for the Preceptors and Companions of the Heir-Designate, and he sent a comfortable quadriga (outfitted with rush-padded wheels) to receive Sheng. They went forward to accord respect and to confer the rank of Superior Chancellor, presenting in advance the amount of six months' emolument to facilitate his transfer [to the capital]. The emissaries along with the Grand Administrator of the Commandery, the Senior Subaltern of the prefecture, the District Elders, the sundry officials and those known for their conduct and fealty, as well as their students, in all amounting to a thousand men and more, entered Sheng's hamlet to present the edict.<sup>8</sup>

But Gong Sheng kept to his bed and declined Wang Mang's invitation to court; when he concluded that continued refusal to acquiesce would be unavailing, he starved himself to death rather than serve a second dynasty.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Ban Gu 班固 (32–92), comp., *Han shu* 漢書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1962), 72.3084–85.

<sup>9</sup> Gong Sheng's extraordinary act was presaged by a similar act on the part of a certain Yu Jun 虞俊, not mentioned by Vervoorn. After holding high offices during the reign of Emperor Ai (reg. 7–1 B.C.E.), when appointed Minister of Education under Wang Mang's regency, "Jun looked up to heaven

Gong Sheng's retirement concluded a professional career in state government; and his retirement from high office, and especially his subsequent categorical refusal to accept an emeritus office, ending in his death by self-imposed starvation, was significant in the formulation of scholar-official attitudes toward resignation from office. First, he has been lauded for an extraordinary and exemplary act of conscience: the sacrifice of one's own life as a moral condemnation of an unjust ruler. For nearly two millennia he has been revered as a paragon of virtue and resolve, one who fit Confucius' axiom, "holding firm to death, seeking to perfect the Way."<sup>10</sup> And second, he exemplified the superior character of someone who will serve the state when the Way prevails, and retire when the Way is absent. Gong was portrayed this way by Ban Gu, writing only fifty years after Wang Mang's "usurpation" and his subsequent overthrow resulting in the reinstatement of "legitimate" rule. Centuries later, some scholar-officials also saw Gong Sheng's retirement in terms of professedly "Confucian" loyalty to a fallen dynasty: righteous adherence to ethical principles in refusing to serve—and thus sanction—a new dynasty.

Gong Sheng was a retiring official, his moral resolve notwithstanding, but his conduct has had a role in the "eremitic tradition." According to Vervoorn, Gong Sheng "actually embodies [the] shift from the exemplary but rather theoretical Confucian eremitism of the last part of the Former Han to the equally exemplary but deadly serious Confucian eremitism of the Wang Mang period and its aftermath" (p. 125). This may be true, but Gong Sheng was not by any means a "hermit."

Wang Mang enticed and pressured Gong Sheng to acquiesce to an official summons to the capital for the formalities of imperial audience and public acceptance of office under the new rule, but he did not threaten or coerce him. This seems to be characteristic of Wang

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and sighed, 'it is my wish to be a Han ghost; I am unable to serve two different patronymics (i.e., two rulers).' He drank poison and died. When Guangwu ascended the throne, he decorated Jun's grave." See Zhang Shu 張樹 (*jinshi* 1799), "Shu Quan Xieshan 'Xi Han jieyi zhuan tici' hou" 書全謝山西漢節義傳題詞後 in *Yangsutang wenji* 養素堂文集 (Wuwei: Zaohua shuwu cangban, n.d.; preface dated 1837), 21.6a. The account of Yu Jun comes originally from the *Hou Han shu* 後漢書 of Xie Cheng 謝承 (fl. early 3rd c.), but no longer is found in remnants of that work. See also Liao Yongxian 廖用賢 (fl. 1617–1666) et al., eds., *Shangyou lu* 尚友錄 (n.p., preface dated 1666), 2.17b, where the account appears without attribution.

<sup>10</sup> *Han shu* 72.3097, referring to *Lun yu* 8.13.

Mang's general treatment of recalcitrant former civil officials. Rao Zongyi 饒宗頤 has compiled notices of 131 persons who denied Wang Mang their cooperation, and an examination of these accounts shows that, with few exceptions, only those who opposed Wang by force were dealt with by force.<sup>11</sup>

Vervoorn's discussion of persons known to have refused office under Wang Mang (pp. 131–36) is based almost entirely on one category of Rao's compilation (i.e., "those pure and principled scholars who did not serve Wang Mang"). Vervoorn astutely divides the names into "those who refused to take office under Guangwu as well as under Wang Mang" (seventeen in all); those "who refused to have anything to do with the latter but eagerly took office under the former" (twenty-five names); and "those about whom little more is known than that they refused to serve under Wang Mang" (thirty-seven names, including those who died before Guangwu gained control of the empire). He excludes three of the names from Rao's list, reasoning that they had died before Wang Mang took the throne, and raises doubts about two more for lack of explicit references to their refusal to Wang Mang; and he adds two others.<sup>12</sup> Inexplicably he leaves out Peng Xuan 彭宣, whose retirement did not please Wang Mang

even while he sanctioned it, and Wang Chong 王崇, who replaced Peng for a short time before retiring himself; both Peng and Wang were included in Rao's study. To the lists of Rao and Vervoorn can be added at least another seventeen names, and the brief notices of these men bear out the generalization that under Wang Mang, civil servants who withdrew but did not oppose Wang with force were not met with by force.<sup>13</sup>

While Wang Mang sought sanction of his rule by calling back withdrawn and retired former officials, he also gave imperial sanction to bona fide men in reclusion. Wang was approving of Xue Fang's 薛方 reasoning not to take office: "Yao and Shun occupied the high position, Chaofu and Xuyou the low. Now that our brilliant sovereign's virtue exceeds that of Tang (Yao) and Yu (Shun), this paltry subject wishes to retain his purity in the manner of [Xuyou of] Jishan."<sup>14</sup> Reasoning such as that of Xue Fang was later brought forward equally by men in reclusion and by their rulers (especially by the first Later Han emperor, Guangwu). The former found in it a patent justification from great antiquity, the latter a demonstration of their imperial virtue. The account of Xue Fang is central to the development of the practice of reclusion and its sanction by imperial authority. The account of Gong Sheng is important in the development of scholar-official attitudes about principled retirement and occasional withdrawal.

<sup>11</sup> See "Xi Han jieyi zhuan" 西漢節義傳, *Xin Ya xuebao* 新亞學報 1.1 (1955): 157–208. This is a supplement to the "Xi Han jieyi zhuan" of Li Yesi 李鄴嗣 (1622–80), himself a Ming loyalist who declined service to a new dynasty, and some additions to that work by Quan Zuwang 全祖望 (1705–55). Rao divides the notices into four categories: "loyal and forthright *shi* 士 who were dissatisfied with Wang Mang's grasping of power" (five names); "those punished or executed by Wang Mang" (twenty names); "those who raised forces against Wang Mang and died for their convictions" (twenty-six names); and "those pure and principled scholars who did not serve Wang Mang" (two divisions, eighty names).

<sup>12</sup> See especially Vervoorn's helpful finding lists on pp. 280–83, nn. 165, 169, and 180. The three excluded names are Zhuang Zun, Zheng Pu, and Gong She. The two uncertain entries are Zhang Zhongwei and Han Shun. The additions are Kong Fen and Yan (Zhuang) Guang. Vervoorn's lists contain several errors:

1: Guo Xianbo 郭賢伯, should be corrected to Guo Jian 堅: see Chang Qu 常璩 (4th c.), *Huayang guo zhi* 華陽國志 (Liu Lin 劉琳 ed., *Huayang guo zhi jiaozhu* 校注 [Chengdu: Ba Shu shushe, 1984]), 12.936 and 939, n. 5. *Hou Han shu* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1962), 26.908 misspunctuates the relevant passage; it should read: 祖父堅,伯父游君,並清節,不任王莽 .

2: Li Rong 李融 should be corrected to 栗融.

3: Man Rong 曼容 should be corrected to Bing 邴 Man-rong (correct the Name Index as well), being Bing Dan 丹, whose fame exceeded even that of his famous uncle Bing Han; see *Han shu* 88.3598. Vervoorn later mentions Man Rong (*sic*) again as a "rather obscure figure" (p. 215).

<sup>13</sup> Fourteen notices appear in another supplement to Li Yesi's compilation, apparently unknown to either Rao or Vervoorn: the "Shu Quan Xieshan 'Xi Han jieyi zhuan tici' hou" of Zhang Shu (noted above), 21.3a–9b. The names are: Yao Meng 姚孟; Li Shaogong 李邵公; Peng Zhen 逢真 (or 貞, also known as Wang 王 Zhen); Yu Jun 虞俊; Wang Tan 王譚; Liu Xiong 劉雄; Ying Yuli 應豫立; Qian Rang 錢讓; Qian Lin 錢林; Shiji Wu 侍其武; Wang Kui 王潰; Fang Hong 方紘; Zeng Ju 曾據; and Tian Hui 田恢 (name later changed to Gui 雋 Hui). Three others are: Ji Jun 紀遂; Wang Si 王思; and Xu Feng 徐鳳. These last three all are mentioned in a *Qingzhou fu zhi* 青州府志 quoted in Chen Menglei 陳夢雷 (1651—after Jan., 1723) et al., comp., *Gujin tushu jicheng* 古今圖書集成, "Xuexing dian" 學行典, 259.3.7a/b.

<sup>14</sup> *Han shu* 72.3095–96, trans. Vervoorn, p. 130. Xue Fang lived at home and gave instruction in the classics.

Vervoorn's treatment of the Later Han is less theoretical than that of earlier periods, corresponding to a greater amount of information concerning actual practitioners of reclusion. But again, there is virtually no distinction between men in reclusion and scholar-officials; while the lives of a number of practitioners of reclusion are treated in detail, discussion basically is framed around abstract ideals of "eremitism" held by scholar-officials. He writes that

[t]he imperial honors lavished on worthy men in seclusion enhanced their social standing and influence, and this further strengthened the role of eremitic ideals in the scholarly culture. . . . Particularly in the second half of the Later Han period, exemplary eremitism was fashionable, and the compelling power of fashion combined with other factors to make eremitism at times almost obligatory (p. 140).

His discussion of the political backdrop to the "eremitism" of the period is cogent, and his treatment of "hermits" of the Later Han is ample and reasoned;<sup>15</sup> the ranks of "men of the cliffs and caves," nevertheless, are peppered with "hermits of renown who took office."

For instance, in discussion of the ruthlessness of Dong Zhuo (pp. 165–66), Vervoorn mentions the "men renowned for their lofty conduct," Xun Shuang, Cai Yong, Han Rong, Chen Ji, and Lu Zhi, all of whom had disregarded a summons to office in 188. These were highly virtuous and moral men, to be sure, but, as former or future office-holders, they were not men in reclusion by any account. This distinction does apply to men such as Shentu Pan, Zheng Xuan, and a certain Li Kai,<sup>16</sup> whom Vervoorn mentions in the same para-

graph. Retrospectively, at least, it would seem that some men actualized a life of unconditional "eremitism," while others were withdrawn only as long as it seemed practicable.

Vervoorn mentions in passing Zhi Xun 摯恂 (fl. ca. 105; *Gaoshi zhuan* writes his surname 贇) in his role as the teacher of Ma Rong 馬融 (79–166). Zhi Xun, a famous practitioner of reclusion known for his Confucian scholarship, was the twelfth-generation descendant of Zhi Jun 峻 (fl. ca. 100 B.C.E.),<sup>17</sup> himself a practitioner of reclusion whose account appears in Huangfu Mi's *Gaoshi zhuan*.<sup>18</sup> While Zhi Xun "lived in seclusion and ignored imperial invitations with gifts to come to court," Ma Rong "was quite happy to accept a position at Emperor An's court, where he . . . cultivated the image of 'hermit at court.' His attraction to the role of disengaged scholar appears to have lasted only as long as it caused him no hardship" (p. 160). Clearly, the former was a man in reclusion while the latter was a scholar-official.

Ma Rong is mentioned again in Vervoorn's chapter on "eremitism at court," where he is one of a group of "hermits at court" (read: scholar-officials) posted in the Eastern Prospect 東觀 Library. This library had been the state repository for writings since the reigns of the Han emperors Zhang and He, and, according to Vervoorn, was a haven for men with a combination of scholarly and "eremitic" leanings, men who saw their appointment there in terms of "eremitism at court." At least during the Yongchu reign of Emperor An (107–13), the

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rectly following his mention in a summons to court in 188, is conflated with the account of Zhang Kai from the *Hou Han shu* (36.1242–43). Zhang Kai (an occultist and practitioner of reclusion, see Vervoorn, p. 191) died in or shortly after 149, at age seventy.

<sup>17</sup> See *Gaoshi zhuan* (Sbby) 3.5b.

<sup>18</sup> *Gaoshi zhuan* 2.9a/b. Vervoorn earlier (p. 114) discounted the veracity of Zhi Jun's very existence, postulating that the elder Zhi's account was fabricated by Huangfu Mi as a token to his disciple, Zhi Yu 摯虞 (d. 312). More likely, the account was derived from Zhi Yu's commentary to the *Sanfu jue lu* 三輔決錄 (the Zhi family hailed from the Chang'an area), or from one of the Zhi family registers extant at the time (one is quoted in *Shishuo xinyu* 世說新語 2.42). Zhi Yu was known for his extensive researches in genealogy; he wrote a lengthy treatise on the subject out of concern that, with the loss of family registers that had occurred during the disorder at the close of the Han, those born just a generation or two later no longer could tell about their ancestry; see Fang Xuanling 房玄齡 (578–648) et al., comp., *Jin shu* 晉書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974), 51.1425.

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<sup>15</sup> Lists with textual references for 130 "men mentioned as having reputations as hermits, whether or not they ultimately took office" in the reigns of Later Han emperors are provided on pp. 289–92, n. 57 (see also n. 28). This information does give some quantitative evidence of the pervasive role of the "eremitic tradition" in Later Han scholar-official culture and the formulation of the character of men of the time; but a good many of these men hardly were "men of the cliffs and caves," as they passed a significant part of their adult lives in official careers (e.g., Fan Ying, Li Gu, Ma Rong, Cai Yong, Xun Yue, Zhuge Liang).

<sup>16</sup> A modern edition of the *Hou Han ji* 後漢紀 has mistakenly corrected Li Kai 李楷 to Zhang 張 Kai; see Zhou Tianyou 周天游 ed., *Hou Han ji jiaozhu* 校注 (Tianjin: Tianjin guji chubanshe, 1987), 710. This is probably because the notice concerning Li Kai inserted in the *Hou Han ji*, di-

Library was referred to as “Mr. Lao’s Archive” 老氏藏室 and “the Daoists’ Penglai Mountain” 道家蓬萊山 (see *Hou Han shu* 23.821–22). Vervoorn sees the importance of these epithets in terms of “their eremitic connotations” (p. 307, n. 50). This is correct, but only if we understand “eremitism” in the context of Vervoorn’s broad usage.<sup>19</sup> For many scholar-officials an appointment at the Library would have been a post where they could indulge their academic interests relatively free of politics and administrative tasks; but it was, ultimately, officialdom.

“Eremitism at Court” is “the ideal of eremitism as a state of mind” (p. 226), primarily derived from “Zhuangzi’s philosophy” (p. 230). Vervoorn’s discussion of this phenomenon is engaging, and in many places quite original. He argues that with origins in the jesting of Dongfang Shuo 東方朔 (2nd c. B.C.E.), many well-known scholar-officials, especially of the Later Han, espoused and practiced the role of the “salaried hermit,” where one might remain true to one’s “eremitic” ideals (such as inconspicuousness and/or detachment from worldly things) without the renunciation of a role in officialdom which those ideals ordinarily precluded.

Dongfang Shuo may not have taken the idea seriously, but, according to Vervoorn, others did. Vervoorn discusses Yang Xiong at length, for Yang’s example was the most influential: “It was in no small measure due to the deep respect leading intellectuals of the Later Han felt for Yang Xiong that the idea of eremitism at court gained some currency during that period” (p. 216). According to Vervoorn, “Yang Xiong marries the ideas of Confucius and Zhuangzi. In adverse times the sage does not retire ostentatiously to the wilderness; he remains inconspicuously among the people, where through his teaching and personal example he continues to work for the transformation of

the world” (p. 211). Yang may have interpreted his own position in the light of these principles, but he did not publicly acknowledge himself as a “hermit at court”; indeed, “he criticized the idea of being a salaried hermit *precisely because that was how he regarded himself*” (p. 211, Vervoorn’s italics).

As evinced in Vervoorn’s discussion, one sign of being a “hermit at court” would seem to be contentment with, or at least offering a justification of, a rather lowly position; Yang Xiong, as Dongfang Shuo before him and a number of scholar-officials after him, wrote a composition on this theme. Yang’s composition, as well as his intellectual achievements and his lifestyle, influenced among others Zhang Heng 張衡 (78–139) who, while “undoubtedly the most important example of a Later Han scholar taking up the idea of eremitism at court,” was “not as serious as Yang Xiong about being a hermit at court” (p. 216).<sup>20</sup> In fact, it would seem that many of the men in this section do not exemplify the ideal of “eremitism at court,” at least for long; many voiced or acted the role only as long as it was convenient. “Eremitism at court” was eremitism in the mind, so, as might be expected, the resolve characteristic of substantive reclusion is everywhere lacking. The so-called “eremitism” of the “hermits at court” Zhang Heng, Ma Rong, and their circle can be contrasted with that of Wang Fu 王符 (ca. 80-ca. 165). Wang Fu was anything but a “hermit at court,” for he was a man in reclusion: he “firmly adopted the position with which his friends merely flirted” (p. 218).

While “eremitism at court” is not properly within the realm of reclusion, its fitting investigation is perfectly within the scope of “the Chinese eremitic tradition,” in Vervoorn’s terminology. Vervoorn’s treatments of this rationale and of “exemplary eremitism,” as well as of many other topics, clearly show the true scope of his work: a comprehensive study through the end of the Han dynasty of the development of intellectual and political views of the scholar-official class concerning the issue of service vis-à-vis reclusion, retirement, and withdrawal.

<sup>19</sup> Still, at least to the Tang commentator Li Xian 李賢, the epithets merely indicated that: 1) there was a multitude of texts held there, all of the writings from all points being gathered there (as presumably had been the case for the archive where Laozi once worked), and that: 2) the library was akin to a Blessed Land, replete also with the totality of “arcane texts and confidential records” 幽經祕錄 (see *Hou Han shu* 23.822, n. 4). Far from arcane or idle pursuits, however, the official responsibilities for those posted at the Library primarily entailed the compilation of annalistic state histories from existing documents.

<sup>20</sup> Vervoorn mentions Zhang’s “Response to Criticism” 應問, written in justification of his lowly position, but discussion of Zhang Heng’s attitudes might have benefited from reference also to his “Rhapsody on Pondering the Mystery” 思玄賦, Zhang’s more optimistic resolution on coping with unrequited virtue.