Wang Yangming took no credit for the peaceful conclusion to the conflict in Tianzhou, which for him demonstrated instead the “authority and virtue of the [Ming] court.” According to his analysis, the court, concerned that justice had not been served and those natives “obstructing change (geng hua 梗化)” might rightly be aggrieved, had appointed him supreme commander. His duty had thus been to investigate the circumstances behind the rebellion and possibly open up a path by which the native headmen might come forward with sincere intentions, surrender, and offer allegiance, thereby obtaining a pardon for their crimes. All of this had been achieved. In a memorial submitted on March 3, 1528, drawing amply upon the standard rhetoric praising the all-encompassing Jiajing emperor, Wang stated that such an ideal outcome to this conflict was the result of these natives (man yi 蠻夷) realizing the emperor was greatly concerned for their wellbeing. In a bid to win their voluntary submission, he had let it be known to the headmen that the emperor “has extended the most pious humanity, loving the people as he would his own children, and out of fear that even just one thing might not find its due place.” Indeed, “even should it be the sentence of just one man, yet concerned that he has been wronged, [the emperor] personally presides and judges.” Given such extraordinary concern for one, Wang asked, “should thousands be involved, how could [the emperor] lightly annihilate all of you?”

So pleased was Wang Yangming with the outcome that he left testimony in Tianzhou in the form of a commemorative stone inscription:

During the summer of the bingxu year [1526] of the Jiajing emperor’s reign, imperial armies attacked Tianzhou, and then clashed with the peoples of Sien, inciting resistance. Troops from four provinces were assembled and the turmoil carried on for years. At the time the emperor, out of pity and concern, asked, “Is it acceptable to permit the innocent among

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1 WYMQJ, vol. 1, 14:493.
2 Ibid., 14:474.
3 For a study of this universalist rhetoric as it appeared in the Ming Veritable Records, see Wade, “Ming Shi-lu,” 43–56.
4 WYMQJ, vol. 1, 14:474.
5 Ibid., 14:474–5.
the people to die?” So he commanded the Marquis of Xinjian Wang Shouren, “Go forth and oversee the armies! Placate with virtue, don’t slaughter with the military instrument.” Troops were withdrawn and good faith generously proclaimed. The native peoples were touched with admiration and, within ten days, bound themselves and came forward to surrender, numbering seventy-one thousand. They were all freed and returned to their fields, and security was therefore restored to the two provinces.⁶

The only task that remained now, he stated in a March 3 memorial, was to appoint competent officials “thoroughly familiar with the local customs and conditions of the people” to oversee the implementation of his measures for reconstruction and resettlement in the now devastated regions of Tianzhou and Sien.⁷ For this, Wang turned to Lin Fu 林富, a provincial administrative commissioner he had long known, and petitioned the court to grant him the discretionary powers necessary to “comfort and settle” the area. As he would later inform Commissioner Lin, “After Si[en] and Tian[zhou] came forward to surrender, and I was making plans for settling and bringing peace, I knew full well that I must find someone magnanimous, generous, benevolent, and empathetic, and whose virtue and authority had for long earned the confidence of the natives, to approach them as a father and nurture them as a mother, knowing [they] could not be controlled for an extended period of time by force and cunning without in the long run causing an uprising. In this regard, there was no one more qualified then [Lin] Xingwu.”⁸

Such were the events of spring 1528, after which time Wang Yangming might very well have once again petitioned for leave on account of his ongoing illness, which, judging by his symptoms, was probably pulmonary tuberculosis. As he would inform his friends in letters dispatched from Guangxi, he had become so weakened from his disease that he could hardly breathe and could barely get out of bed. Nevertheless, the supreme commander chose to remain in the region and address other chronic disturbances in Guangxi about which he had been receiving repeated reports. “Because the suffering in this region had reached extremes,” he explained to a colleague, “I had no choice but to act to rescue the people from adversity.”⁹ This adversity was banditry, specifically the rampant plundering by what he referred to as “Yao bandits (Yao zei 瑤賊)”

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⁶ Ibid., 25:948.
⁷ Ibid., 14:466–67.
⁸ Ibid., 22:883.
⁹ Ibid.