First a small note on why this chapter places the late-Ming and early-Qing periods together. The proximate answer is that the material examined here dictated such a division. The longer answer lies in the different speeds of political and cultural change. There is no doubting that for most people who lived through the seventeenth century the dynastic change was the most troubling event of the time. The larger political rupture was settled quite quickly in much of the empire; but the cultural coordinates did not completely shift their position nearly as quickly. The Manchu occupation certainly served to concentrate many minds on the rule and legacy of the previous foreign incursion, that of the Mongols, yet much of the late-Ming literary style and attitudes persisted until late in the seventeenth century. In his fine essay on the reaction of Chinese scholars to the Manchu state, Lawrence Kessler noted that by 1684 the Kangxi Emperor (r. 1661–1722) had largely: “...dissipated the anti-Manchu hostility of a large group of Chinese scholars”, and that he did this through sponsoring activities such as the special boxue examinations but more particularly through the official Ming history project which: “...decisively ended the holdout of significant elements of the Chinese scholar-gentry class and restored their confidence in the court’s commitment to respect their traditional values and prerogatives...”¹ This grudging acceptance of Manchu rule brought with it a re-assessment of the activities and attitudes of the late-Ming period. For Chen’s posthumous reputation this change would prove decisive.

The Grand Councillor in the Mountains

Introductions to Chen’s works by other writers, and comments on him, are full of flattery. There is nothing unusual in that, yet the praiseful

formulations used by his peers to describe Chen has a wealth not found in any subsequent period, and indicates a complex and variegated understanding. The terms used need to be understood in their late-Ming context, especially as some of them would be pressed into service as pejorative descriptions of Chen later in the seventeenth century. The most complicated expression of the time was undoubtedly that of the shanren recluse, and this and related terms were applied to Chen.

The blatant hostility of the first Ming emperor to those who had the potential to serve but not the inclination added a further layer of deception to the concept of the recluse. The first layer, of course, is the very pretence itself. By the late Ming this situation was further confused by economic and social developments, which among other things added the category of the urban recluse to the variant traditional forms. Hermits of the shanren type first made their appearance during the Jiajing period (1522–1566). That hermits, or those who referred to themselves as shanren, were numerous in the late Ming is beyond doubt. A glance through a list of the styles that various literati chose provides ample proof of the widespread popularity of the term. ‘Shanren’ ostensibly operated as an umbrella term for different styles of reclusion, including the traditional designation yinshi 隱士 which was rarely used, on account of Zhu Yuanzhang’s original injunctions against hermits. In distinction to yinshi, however, the term shanren could be used by those holding office, just as it could be employed by those who wished to refuse service without openly exposing themselves to dynastic precedent. During the seventeenth century the term shanren further became tied up with conceptions of the morality of engagement with, or disentanglement from, the affairs of the empire. This

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2 Shen, Defu Private Gleanings from the Wanli Reign, p. 585. Also in Qian Qianyi, “Wu shanren kuozhuan” 吳山人擴傳 “Extended Biography of the Hermit of Wu” in Brief Biographies from Poetic Collections through the Dynasties, 4A, quoted in Chen Wanyi, Late-Ming Xiaopin and the Lifestyle of Ming Dynasty Literati, p. 105. For other late-Ming texts discussing the ‘hermit’ question see Chen Wanyi, Late-Ming Xiaopin and the Lifestyle of Ming Dynasty Literati, p. 107, n. 51.

3 A quick glance through the index of courtesy names [zi] and styles [hao] in the Index to Materials on Ming Biographies indicates that the terms Buddhist layman [jushi] and hermit [shanren] were the two most common combinations in courtesy names and styles with eighty-two and seventy-two uses respectively. Those totals are far ahead of other combinations such as mister [xiansheng], disengaged scholar [chushi] and others. A modest list of the more famous Ming figures to use the term shanren includes: Xu Wei, Xiang Yuanbian 項元汴 (1525–1590), Hu Yinglin, Lu Shusheng, Tu Long, Wang Zhideng 王稚登 (1535–1612), Wang Shizhen, and Yang Shen. The famous intellectual prince, Zhu Zaiyu, also had shanren as his style.