

301/25/7700: “Wang Miaofeng, Tang Guimei, and Zhang Shi,” translated by Katherine Carlitz in “Ming Dynasty Martyrs and Monstrous Mothers-In-Law,” *Ming Studies* 68 (2013)
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THE STORIES

Here are the three stories as they appear in the *Ming shi*:

Wang Miaofeng

Wang Miaofeng was from Wu County. She was married to Wu Kui. Her mother-in-law engaged in licentious behavior. During the Zhengtong reign period [1436–50], Wu Kui’s merchant travels took him away from home. The mother-in-law and her paramour, drinking together, wanted to defile Wang Miaofeng, and ordered her to get them some wine; Miaofeng picked up the bottle, but did not bring it into the room. They pressured her repeatedly, until she had no choice but to enter. The paramour teased her by twisting her arm. Miaofeng, enraged, lifted her knife and hacked the flesh from her arm, but did not perish; she hacked the flesh from her other arm, and this caused her death.⁶ Her parents wanted to bring a lawsuit, but Miaofeng said: “If I die, I merely die. What principle could justify a lawsuit by a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law?” After ten days, she expired. (*Ming shi*, *juan* 301, 25: 7700)

Tang Guimei

Tang Guimei was a resident of Guichi county. She was married into the Zhu family of the same *li*. Her mother-in-law was carrying on an adulterous affair with a rich merchant, who caught sight of Guimei and was attracted

to her. Bribed by the merchant's gold and silk, the mother-in-law ordered Guimei to have sexual relations with him. The mother-in-law urged Guimei repeatedly, but she wouldn't obey; whipped her, but she wouldn't obey; forced her to walk on burning rods, but she still wouldn't obey. Thereupon the mother-in-law sued Guimei in court for being unfilial. A certain Assistant Prefect (*tongpan*), also bribed by the merchant, flogged her nearly to death numerous times. The merchant hoped that Guimei would give up her commitment to chastity, so he ordered the mother-in-law to act as guarantor and have her released. Guimei's friends and family urged her to tell the truth of what was happening, but she said: "If I do so, my own reputation will be safe, but what about the difficulty I will cause my mother-in-law?" That evening, she changed her garments, and hung herself from the plum tree in the back garden. At dawn, the mother-in-law arose, and went to beat her. When she reached the back garden she found that Guimei had died. Guimei's corpse hung from the tree for three days, her face unchanged from the way it had looked in life. (*Ming shi*, *juan* 301, 25: 7700)

Zhang shi

Following this, in the 23rd year of Jiajing (1545), was [the case of] Zhang *shi*, who was married to the son of Merchant Wang. Her mother-in-law had adulterous relationships with many men. Among the local young thugs was one Hu Yan, particularly cruel and crafty, from whom all the others took orders. He plotted with the mother-in-law to send her son [Zhang's husband] to the county seat to become a soldier, after which he and his comrades spent all of their time drinking with her. One day, they invited Zhang to join them; she refused. Hu Yan reached around her from behind, and grasped her shuttle; she broke it and threw it to the ground. Shortly thereafter, Hu Yan entered her chamber to rape her. She shouted "Murder!" and struck him with a pestle. Hu Yan left in a rage, and Zhang threw herself to the ground and wept all night, until she was barely able to breathe.

The next morning, Hu Yan and the mother-in-law worried that news of the affair would leak out, so they tied Zhang to the foot of the bed. On the following day, all of the young thugs were invited to drink. At the second watch of the night, they tied Zhang up and set upon her with axes and mallets. Writhing in pain, she said to them: “Why not just stab me?” Thereupon one of them slit her throat, another stabbed her in the ribs, and another struck her vagina. They tried to lift the corpse in order to burn it, but the corpse was too heavy, so they set fire to her chamber. The neighbors who tried to put out the fire saw the burned corpse when they entered, and fearfully reported it to the authorities. The authorities arrested and interrogated Zhang’s maid and all of the young thugs, and got at the truth of the matter. The culprits were sentenced appropriately. Zhang was nineteen years old when she died. The town had long had a Shrine to Chaste Martyrs (*zhen lie ci*), and for three days before Zhang’s death, those who lived near the shrine heard the sound of drums and music, and saw flames bursting from the rafters. People took this as verification [of her chaste death]. (*Ming shi*, *juan* 301, 25: 7700–01)

The *Mingshi* version cut out a lot of information, so please consult Carlitz’s *Ming Studies* article for those details and analysis.