

# The Quest for Gentility in China

Negotiations beyond  
gender and class

Edited by Daria Berg and Chloë Starr



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# The Quest for Gentility in China

The quest for gentility has shaped Chinese civilization and the formation of culture in China until the present day. This book analyses social aspirations and cultural practices in China from 1550 to 2000, showing how the notion of gentility has evolved and retained its relevance in China from late imperial times until the modern day. Gentility denotes the way of the gentleman and gentlewoman. The concept of gentility transcends the categories of gender and class and provides important new insights into the ways Chinese men and women lived their lives, perceived their world and constructed their cultural environment. In contrast to analyses of the elite, perceptions of gentility relate to ideals, ambitions, desires, social capital, cultural sophistication, literary refinement, aesthetic appreciation, moral behaviour, femininity and gentlemanly elegance, rather than to actual status or power. Twelve international leading scholars present multi-disciplinary approaches to explore the images, artefacts and transmission of gentility across the centuries in historical and literary situations, popular and high culture, private and official documents, poetry clubs, garden culture and aesthetic guidebooks. This volume changes the ways we look at Chinese cultural history, literature, women and gender issues and offers new perspectives on Chinese sources.

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# **The Quest for Gentility in China**

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# Preface

Gentility denotes the way of the gentleman and gentlewoman. It describes the perceptions, social aspirations and cultural ideals that the image of the gentleman or gentlewoman evokes. The concept of gentility transcends the categories of gender and class by probing beyond: this volume analyzes social and cultural aspirations both in traditional and modern China. This concept has its roots in ancient Chinese thought and has shaped Chinese ideals, aspirations and ambitions until the present day.

This volume is concerned with the exploration of perceptions of gentility in both modern China and the late imperial period, in particular the Ming (1368–1644) and Qing (1644–1911) eras. In the context of late imperial China, the concept of gentility relates to attributes that mark the status of gentlefolk, i.e. the literati and scholar-officials (*shidafu*) and gentlewomen (*shunü*, *guixiu*), office holders and their descendants legally distinguished from the commoner (*liang*) people.

The focus on gentility presents a different way of looking at Chinese sources. It breaks new ground in providing the modern reader with new insights into the ways Chinese men and women lived their lives, perceived their world and constructed their cultural environment. The period under investigation in this volume extends from around 1500 to 2000, showing how the notion of gentility has evolved and retained its relevance from imperial times until the end of the twentieth century.

This volume brings together twelve contributions by scholars from the US, Europe and East Asia who show how the focus on gentility crosses the traditional boundaries between disciplines, changing the ways we look at aspects of Chinese cultural history, literature, and gender, while offering new perspectives. The contributions in this volume rethink the uses of orthodox sources, tap into unofficial materials as well as the officially recognized cultural output in imperial and modern China, and call into question the classification into conventional schemes and analytical categories.

In this sense, the book presents an interdisciplinary forum that invites the modern reader to take a new look at China's past and present and see beyond the traditional confines of more conventional approaches to Chinese sources and the cultural discourse. The contributors to this volume, too, follow in the footsteps of the circles of Chinese writers who gathered to celebrate and



exchange their ideas from the time of Wang Xizhe and his friends in the fourth century, and the Banana Garden poets of the early Qing period, to the twentieth-century literary salons, endeavouring to present new ways of defining culture and looking at their world.

Daria Berg and Chloë Starr

# The quest for gentility in China

## An introduction

*Chloë Starr and Daria Berg*

In the ninth year of the Yonghe reign of Emperor Mu, in 353 AD, a group of friends out on a late spring excursion met up in a pavilion in the mountains, near the town of Kuaiji. They sat admiring the scenery, breathing in the fresh air, laughing, drinking and reminiscing together, then composed poems to mark the occasion and celebrate their friendship. This brief trip into the countryside left a remarkably profound legacy in China, expressing and shaping the contours of a genteel ideal for dynasties to come.

The friends' picnic was both event and record: enjoying the scenery and convivial company, reflecting on that enjoyment, and transmitting a record of both processes for the next generation. Wang Xizhi's famed 'Preface to the Orchid Pavilion Collection' describes the excursion and introduces the collection of poems that his friends, including Xie An and Sun Chuo, wrote to mark the trip. It is not the event, nor the description, however, that have made the greatest impact, but the material artefact recording the event: Wang's preface is recognized as a masterpiece of running script calligraphy, and Wang is looked to as one of the greatest calligraphers in Chinese history.

The trip to the pavilion, the record, and the artefact together begin to give some pointers towards the concept of gentility. The elevated language of Wang's prose, the pictorial aesthetic of the scene, and the sentiments of those present all reinforce the genteel epitome. Wang Xizhi was, as it happens, from one of the great clans of the Jin dynasty. He held both civil and military office during his career, and is renowned for his statesmanship as well as literary and calligraphic pursuits. The microcosm of this spring gathering brings out an aspect germane to notions of gentility: the status, education and background of individuals. The friends had gathered at the time of the spring rite of purification; and the cathartic function of the outing is echoed symbolically in the description of streams and rapids and the tall bamboos, washing away defilement and cultivating moral good. Having withdrawn to the refuge of the mountains, emotions and intellect are fully engaged: the companionship of *qun xian*, a group of like-minded worthies, is the setting for celebration of an extraordinary harmony between humans and nature. To a backdrop of lofty mountains and fresh breeze, a goblet is floated on water and poetry spontaneously recited at each resting point. As the ear and eye are delighted, the correlation between the heavens and material things on earth is

## 2 Chloë Starr and Daria Berg

apparent, as Wang looks up to the great universe, and down towards the categories of the world. The heightening of emotion and sense of the connectedness of phenomena provokes a tone of elegiac lament, as the weight of life and death suffuses the friends' awareness of the moment. In their verse, they attempt to capture the traces of these emotions.

The act of writing transmits text, values and self, passed on 'as if speaking face to face' across the generations. The cosmic and the particular are brought together. *Wen*, literary patterning, is both the mode of transmission and the quality of the writing, provoking a spiritual resonance in readers. As the friends reflect together on their gathering in the light of the ancients' records of similar gatherings, a series of paradoxes strikes: the conjunction of the ephemeral and the lasting, self and others, enlightenment and the inexplicable. Life, death and immortality are a lie, a paradox. In writing and recording, the friends take part in an ongoing transmission of sentiment, aligning themselves with the ancients, drawing on and re-creating the same emotions.

Several of the essays in this volume on gentility take the circumstances of literary gatherings as their theme: enthusiastic writers self-consciously relating to the tradition of Wang Xizhi's early gathering, to its commemoration of sentiment and celebration of those present. Other essays trace the act of enjoyment itself – the refinement of pleasure in one's garden, for example – while others address the exquisite material record as the site of celebration. The motif of aligning oneself with noteworthy figures – by actions, words, or possessions – is a recurrent theme, as is reflection on the moral preoccupation of recording and transmitting.

The theme of self-cultivation and of inner rectitude links Wang Xizhi and his friends back with an older tradition, on which later would-be gentry draw: that of the *junzi*. The term is often translated as 'gentleman', but with wider connotations than a class-bound English version. The *junzi* was a man of virtue who practised self-cultivation, honing his moral personality to bring tranquillity to all.<sup>1</sup> These two aspects – the moral perfecting of the self, and the ordering of family and society – endure as Confucian ideals from the time of the Master through until the late Qing. Prior to Confucius, the term *junzi* referred to one's social status, but the sage made an important amendment. As Raymond Dawson writes, 'A man could be a gentleman without benefit of high birth, so in the *Analects*, as in our use of "gentlemen," chün-tzu implied either superior social status or superior moral accomplishment or both.'<sup>2</sup> Later commentators, even when birth no longer governed aspiration to such a degree, would make much of the sense that one could be fit for office without attaining it.

If the *junzi* was the embodiment of the ideal male, explanations of the term that run through the *Analects* (and likewise that of the *da ren*, or 'great man' in Mencius) are worth pondering, since subsequent writings on the élite, and what is good, worthy and noble in a person stand in apposition to this text, studied by all educated Chinese. The *junzi* was a generalist rather than a specialist, skilled in leadership by dint of his well-rounded morals; moreover, he did not care if others did not recognize his worth (*Analects* 1.1) but delighted in values for their own sake. The sense of virtue being its own reward recurs throughout

the *Analects*; the *junzi* is not cowed by others' opinions; he 'does not worry that he has no status, he worries about the means by which he obtains status; he does not worry that no-one knows of him, but seeks rather to be worthy to be known. (4.14). In food, he does not seek to gratify his appetite, and in living does not seek for ease (1.14); careful of speech, he is cheerful even when poor, and obeisant to ritual even when rich. The *junzi* was not an instrument of others, a utensil (2.12), but was 'sociable, but not a partisan' (15.21).<sup>3</sup> Benevolence was his trade mark. Four virtues that Confucius ascribes to his disciple Zichen, and commends as characteristic of the *junzi*, are care in deportment; respect in affairs; quick-wittedness in nurturing others and righteousness in serving others. While the concept of gentility may be used to trace changing aspects of the role and regard of the *junzi*, some traits remain constant. Of these, the high moral perfection of benevolence remains strong in late imperial values. As late as 1898 the radical thinker Liang Qichao penned a courtesy preface to his friend Tan Sitong's *Ren xue* (*Exposition on Benevolence*).<sup>4</sup>

As the paragraph above highlights, many of the qualities that a *junzi* nurtures are interior ones, and this points to one of the strengths and weaknesses of a study of gentility. Values which are internal have to be perceived and ascribed by others; when expressed and externalized they are in danger of being flaunted and destroyed in the process. Gentility, unlike other discourses, attempts to describe or quantify these interior perspectives, opening itself up to the possibility of generalizing on the basis of the specific, or giving too much weight to the ephemeral. The importance of interior development and moral righteousness in Chinese cultural discourse can be seen in the parallel tendency throughout imperial history to valorize the arts and intellectual accomplishments over any practical skills – whether engineering, mercantile or scientific, with the possible exception of the military – well documented in studies of status. The roots of this may be traced back to the *Analects*' view of the *junzi*.

While Confucian rationale placed state service as the goal of every right-minded male, and Confucian norms are prominent in any discussions of value, the theme of veiled, or unperceived goodness, independent of its recognition by the conferral of honours or office, finds echoes in other traditions, particularly Daoism. Here, the figure of the recluse, shunning office out of a sense of higher call, finds numerous exemplars. Those who have reneged on traditional markers of the élite, or who have refused power or the trappings of power, can also be genteel (though they might not be élite): admired, set forth as models, and invested with a sense of worth. The tradition of Zhuangzi, the morally worthy one outside of state systems of power or prestige, finds a place in the Chinese psyche alongside more socially-minded philosophic colleagues.

This volume argues that there are important differences between the categories of 'gentility' and 'élite'. At one level, gentility describes the changing attributes of the élite, those characteristics which make the élite élite, but the term is not limited to these. Questions of 'real' status, whether termed 'aristocracy' in earlier dynasties, or 'élite' when state-sponsored examinations conferred power from the centre, have been discussed by historians and scholars of China for centuries. The

questions formulated, and the answers produced, feed very much into the studies in this volume. Gentility presupposes connections with studies of ‘real’ status: who’s who in imperial China, which lineages, households, and individuals are on the up, or on the way out, and why. But it also critically looks at those who are not among the in crowd, but in relation to whom the élite are defined as élite, and asks: To what do they aspire? What marks of distinction (whether of local or national élites) do they recognize in others? What shapes opinions? What can confer status other than wealth or office, and what emulative trappings did the aspirant genteel adopt? As a concept, Gentility recognizes complexities of distinction and status, and permits the contradictions apparent in social beliefs.

Gentility allows a way of theorizing differences that studies of the élite have highlighted between power and status – both in early periods when aristocratic families might retain prestige even when real power was held by those below, and in later eras when families basked in the glory of an office holder for as many generations as they could spin out. The notion of the overlooked genius, the victim of what Carlitz has termed the ‘literati double-bind’; that ‘feeling of many disappointed literati that their attempts to live up to the highest ideals of their *ru* or Confucian education was more likely to see them punished than rewarded’ finds full expression within the value scale of gentility.<sup>5</sup> Tensions between different notions of ideal behaviour that individuals aimed to fulfil (raising money for local projects versus studying for office; sharing the spoils of office with affines versus maintaining a large enough estate to garner prestige etc.) point to the complex question of value and the requirement of the answering subject first to define him- or herself (I/we ought ...). Tensions in the acquisition and ascription of gentility are a constant feature in social life: wealth, for example, can be vulgar, and trade has always been base in the eyes of a majority of educated Chinese, but both provide the purchasing power for genteel artefacts and status markers.

Two important foci emerge from studies of élites in China: the changing nature of power structures; and changes in terminology to describe those shifts. Since, as shown, notions of élite derive much of their resonance from pre-imperial moral philosophizing, briefly tracing the debates surrounding earlier dynasties gives useful background to the essays. Back in the 1960s, Michael Loewe argued that it was ‘difficult to define precise social distinctions’ in early China from available source materials. Descriptions of rights and duties existed, rather than discussions of social hierarchies, with no fixed criteria for distinguishing between aristocrats and commoners. The ‘traditional Chinese view of privilege is by no means so sharply defined and is not wholly concerned with a relationship between social status and political consequence’, he writes.<sup>6</sup> Prior to the imperial age, birth and wealth constituted the criteria for privileged status; occupation was added to these age-old markers only during the Warring States Period. In early China what conveyed distinction was bureaucratic rank, but privileges also persisted from the age when great aristocratic families had ruled swathes of China. Robert Hymes has characterized these changes in the structure of society and the élite as a shift from a ‘great clans’ oligarchy or aristocracy, to a system from the Song onwards

where status derived from holding office within the state bureaucracy. Arguments over the extent of the discontinuity into the later dynastic eras have persisted.

Alongside, and eventually superseding, the early framework of distinctions, another meta-framework developed: that of regional versus national prestige. Hymes, Ebrey, Hartwell and Kuhn have all discussed whether individuals' and groups' prestige came from national office or from local power, and how the division worked out in practice.<sup>7</sup> Ebrey's early study posits two major divisions in social stratification: the Han to Tang period, and the Song to the Qing.<sup>8</sup> In the earlier dynasties, what made a family aristocratic (and, as Ebrey notes, these 'families' could include several hundred adult males, and questions of status are closely tied with those of lineage) was its hereditary high status, independent of the court. The questions that a study of gentility asks are not so much the data-dependent ones of social scientists, formulated to assess and categorize, but ones which seek to discover what it was that constituted the attributes of prestige and how they operated. In Ebrey's study, the power of her case-study Cui family 'never seems fully commensurate with their reputation'. This was in part a result of the double bind of region and centre; and the tensions of trying to balance 'ascriptive and achieved status'. Gentility, as depiction of aspirational attributes as well as real ones, need not distinguish between sources of prestige, and allows for both localized discourse, and national patterns and trends.

Hymes' study of Jiangxi élites in the Northern and Southern Song similarly demonstrated the need for a local frame, one where social power is not reducible to holding national office, but sees an élite divided between a nationally oriented 'professional' élite and a 'locally oriented "gentry" pursuing a diversified strategy of local success'. Studies of the élite based on socio-political power in a nexus of study, office and governance inevitably focus on male élites, and Hymes is no exception. (By contrast, studies of female élites tend to be precisely that: studies of females, rather than the concept itself. The gender-inclusive aspect of gentility is one of its most important theoretical contributions to the debate, and is discussed further below.) Hymes' definition of élite moves beyond immediate economic or power factors and gives useful pointers towards an understanding of gentility, and its differences from indices of the élite. Being a member of the Fuzhou 'élite' entailed privileged access to wealth, power or prestige, viz. those 'whose control over material resources, hold over men's actions and decisions, or special place in the regard of their contemporaries, set them apart from Fu-chow society as a whole and made them people to be reckoned with'.<sup>9</sup> Both Hymes and Ebrey have toyed with the notion of 'élite' as a combination of the wealthy, the well-known and the influential, placing office-holders as a separate stratum within the élite. Frederick Wakeman similarly wanted an élite that would count either office holders or local worthies as members.<sup>10</sup> Hymes iterates seven categories of men and women as members of the élite, but all seven represent office, money, or relationships with those who have either office or money.

Gentility presupposes that those excluded from power and all of its trappings, but deemed morally worthy of exercising that power can join in the debate. Gentility is to a large extent virtual; it is also cumulative. Its intellectual sources

were the whole of Chinese society, adherents and would-be genteel could sift the past for whatever values and associations suited their present purpose. In political terms, Gentility is neither the wielding of power nor the ability to influence others in power, but the recognition of what constitutes the right to wield that moral authority, an appreciation of right use of rank. Knowledge of different values in the past, and nostalgic re-enactment, was one of the markers of a genteel movement. Just as intertextuality shows a common trained mind, and intermateriality (shared hair pins, ink stones or petrophiliac hobbies etc.) demonstrates a common field of aesthetic appreciation and desire, so interadulation showed applause for shared values. Gentility is all about positioning and interrelationships. In studying genteel texts, for example, it is not so much the texts as the relations of the writers to their texts and through the texts to their peers, that counts.

In terms of dynastic divisions, Gentility provides a new way of *not* seeing a cataclysmic shift with the fall of the imperial system. Gentility is not linked to the imperial system alone but to deeper veins of norms and belongings, which had no need to disintegrate with the collapse of the imperial system. The four chapters in this volume which broach the Qing/Republican divide demonstrate precisely the continuation and endurance of aspects of traditional cultural norms. There were still literati gatherings, reconfigured and renamed, sometimes relocated to coffee bars; there were still gentlewomen writing, and new explorations of genteel femininity under a greatly changed political, and gender system. The persistence of classical writing forms into the twentieth century has been long noted (witness Mao), but these have usually been analysed in terms of narrative style, or genre categories, rather than as an example of stability of esteem, a means of purchasing social capital in an older currency still in circulation. This fits with Theodore Hutters, R. Bin Wong, and Pauline Yu's analysis of the 'continuing strength of social morality even in times of state weakness' in the second half of the Qing. It is clear that a higher morality than the state-enjoined culture persisted, as it had throughout the long years of Qing decline, that reasserted itself after the fall of the dynasty. Genteel values *had* been taken over, and adopted by the state as its own, but could be seen, by those who chose, as pre-existing, and separate 'Chinese' philosophical norms. The re-Confucianizing of beliefs in present-day China, is a parallel example: these values are not being touted as 'imperialist,' but pertaining to earlier traditions.

The state-élite debate moved on significantly from its focus on the conflictual or complementary relations between local and state officials, with the publication of studies such as the collection edited by Hutters, Wong and Yu, *Culture and State in Chinese History*. One theme of this volume is the accommodation between the gentry or élite as a whole and the values that the state wishes to form among its subjects. Commenting on Prasenjit Duara's contention that both the state and élite are held in a common cultural framework, the editors write:

But this 'cultural nexus of power' appears to have no particular physical or institutional location. The absence of material loci makes it difficult to track relationships between state and élites, especially those of a cultural nature.

In terms of gentility, we would not expect an institutional location, since the concept is internalized, inbred, and inculturated through texts and traditions, reproducing itself on an individual material level in such personal items as inkstones or hairpins. Unlike Hutters, Wong and Yu's volume, this volume is less interested in the force of the state in inculcating the morality of the populace, and its ability to permeate discourse or 'the repertoire of tools available for officials and élites to create desired moral conditions among the people.' The essays in this volume look rather at individuals' engagements with, and self-conscious appropriation of these 'tools' – not, primarily, as passive submission to a programmatic state aim of raising the cultural level, but as self-directed searchings, drawing on a range of state and non-state sources of inspiration.

The agency of the individuals in these studies of gentility seems to be not so much a function of a devolved state largesse, but of a considered choice, formulated from a range of possibilities, both contemporary and inspired by examples from previous dynasties. There were certainly elements of contemporary fashion in vogues for garden design, but an oppositional stance towards public service or state-blessed norms was just as likely to be regarded as worthy of praise or emulation, when elected for the right reasons. This volume looks at the valorized habits and practices of the élite, not in terms of the relation of gentility to the state, as a state-sponsored exercise, nor from the external perspective of tensions between individuals' genteel practices and the state, but from the perspective of the individuals: their own writings and feelings on their own, and others' values. The degree of complicity of interest of the state in the choices made is of much less interest than the expressions of aspiration of the individuals. The contention of the introduction to the volume by Hutters *et al.*, that in late imperial China there was no autonomous realm for poetry or religious practices outside the state purview, and that the interests of the élites and the states were essentially uniform, cannot be contested directly by a volume which is not looking explicitly at state relations in the formation of ideals. A volume on gentility does raise some avenues of challenge to this discourse, however, particularly in the light of the surprising continuity of values once the imperial state had fallen.

Gentility allows the tracing of changing tastes, both in fashions and intangible moral goods. In Gernet's analysis of distinctions between 'barbarians and aristocrats', he notes that in the first half of the Tang the upper classes were enamoured of anything 'barbarian': the dances, music, games, cooking clothes of Central Asia, Persia and India. In Tu Wei-ming's study of Wang Yangming, we see the young Ming neo-Confucianist, in exile among 'barbarian' tribes people, discovering that 'by Confucian standards the honesty and straightforwardness of the tribesmen is superior to the hypocrisy and wickedness of many highly civilized southerners', and gathering disciples to himself to commit themselves to 'a new realm of meaning'.<sup>11</sup> Gentility precisely allows for a broad historical sweep, since the retroactive ascription of genteel values to a person is just as valid as contemporary approval. Being defined as the acceptance and acclaim by others of an individual's worth (either through achievement, possessions or interior moral values), whether at the time or by later acclaim, gentility is a more flexible



concept than ‘élite’, which can only deal with ‘real’ values, measurable in acreage of land, number of library volumes or number of kin with second degrees.

A volume on ‘gentility’ invites criticism, of the sort already encountered by studies of the élite, by use of an English term with no immediate comparator in Chinese. Even where a Chinese term exists for a concept such as ‘élite’, there are problems: as Ebrey has written, the constancy of the term used to describe aristocratic families ‘belies considerable and almost constant change’.<sup>12</sup> The title *shi* was used in the southern dynasties by hereditary aristocrats, but remained ambiguous, also open to those of the highest social stratum. ‘Unless the aristocrats could prevent others from imitating their ways, reference to their cultural excellence was an inadequate source of legitimacy, others could also claim to be shih’, she notes.<sup>13</sup> Hymes likewise notes that although there is no single term for ‘prestige’, the categories he used in his study are implicitly recognized in Song sources, and the category of *shi*, ‘gentleman literatus’ corresponds well to the term élite. Gentility is more easily defined by what it is not. It is not *su*, vulgar, nor *jia*, false. It is the expression of the cardinal Confucian virtues of loyalty, trust, benevolence, and so forth. It is not necessarily a surface reading of values, events or course of action, but is one which is able to be recognized by others (who by their recognition identify themselves as cognoscenti). It can encompass oppositional choices, such as writing in the vernacular – but only where this makes a point about artifice, or the didactic role of literature, or some higher aim.<sup>14</sup>

While expressions of gentility evolved continuously with times and fashions, perceptions of what constituted the genteel underwent significant change during the late Qing and early twentieth century. New ideals and aspirations formed in tandem with the changing political and intellectual landscape, and particularly the demise of the class that had embodied the term.

Gentility introduces questions of status, of social hierarchies and social capital, as well as connotations of femininity and gentlemanly elegance. The term denotes social superiority as shown by manners, appearance, behaviour, perceived cultural sophistication or membership of polite society. In contrast to analyses of the ‘élite’, perceptions of gentility need not be tied to actual status or power, but relate to ideals and desires. These play a crucial role in value formation, in social interactions and in people’s perceptions of life.

This volume presents the first detailed investigation into those perceptions within Chinese cultural discourse, past and present. The discourse emerges as a distinctly Chinese project in the matrix of interests and expressions presented. Some traits are culturally and historically specific to China, the retention of *guixiu* identity within a westernizing modernity offers one such example; others are recognizably East Asian, such as the connoisseurship of inkstone or hairpin collections, or the calligraphic arts; yet further indicators would be appreciated by universal intellectual or élite communities. These latter include many forms of scholarship, of poetry clubs and literary salons, certain aesthetic features of clothing or garden design, or aspects of morality such as feminine modesty. Individuals daily negotiate these intersecting levels of intellectual and cultural

heritage, and through detailed studies of individuals and communities the rich hue of gentility is given texture.

Gentility describes those attributes, real and imagined, which raise its adherents above the populace. A glance at the social background to the period suggests why it was so difficult to raise oneself above the masses, and so important to be seen to do so, to *create* gentility through action and accoutrement. A recent précis of gentry status expounds the particularly flat stratification of society, and raises obliquely many of the issues addressed by contributors here:

By the eighteenth century, all but a tiny percentage of the population could be considered free commoners. Aristocracy had disappeared entirely (except for a miniscule layer of élite Manchus). Instead, the dominant social class was a landlord gentry that could claim nothing as birthright and feared downward mobility through property division. This gentry sought wealth and prestige through competition in civil service examinations (now requisite for office-holding), which had been introduced by centralizing emperors in order to break down independent aristocratic power. Gentry were treated as ordinary commoners, except for office-holders and higher level degree-holders; even this upper gentry could not reproduce its legal privileges except through new examination degrees.<sup>15</sup>

Peasants, tradesmen and merchants could all rear sons to compete for government posts with the sons of traditional office-holding families, and raise the status of the entire family. Susan Mann writes that as in Europe, the élite in the High Qing ‘struggled for material wealth, honor and power’, and several of the studies here reflect those exertions. ‘But in China’, she argues, ‘no class system offered a safety net to catch those who found wealth and power slipping away’.<sup>16</sup> Gentility did not of course provide a material safety net, or guarantor of examination success, but it does provide a way of construing the strategies by which individuals and families sought to inscribe their moral and social superiority beyond the vagaries of family capital or occupational authority. Social capital invested in genteel status could tide a family over for several generations, or maintain respect among peers or the individual self.

Gentility is a club with no membership form, whose rules are known and understood by insiders: it signifies the moral, social and aesthetic codes by which adherents choose to live, and which they regard as status-enhancing. It has intellectual and material aspects. Virtue, integrity, and the ability to act in an appropriate manner are prime concerns of characters within the literary and historical studies presented here, and the first three chapters of the volume explore this search for right conduct. The mutual appreciation of an intellectual community forms a microcosm of gentility, cutting across time and space, recognizing each other’s contributions and right to make them. What scholars choose to study may be as indicative of their genteel inclinations as the act of research itself, and the social aspect of literary and library life is focal to the project. While material culture may seem inherently less genteel a subject matter than moral and

intellectual worthiness, the apparel and accoutrements of high society also proffer themselves for inclusion, and their owners feature prominently in analyses.

Many, if not all, of the chapters in this volume could have been incorporated into other projects: women's literature, material culture, intellectual history. The gain of the genteel lens is that the sum provides a depth of focus: a means of looking at human longings and desires, self-perception and presentation, which precisely cannot be contained within our disciplines. The authors each write from within their intellectual traditions, presenting studies from historical or literary perspectives, but strong links are revealed between chapters, while recurring themes echo and find development across the volume. The wide range of literary and non-literary sources contributors explore provides a forum for the debate and critical analysis of methodological approaches to such texts.

Gentility is predicated on perception. It tracks changing traits of idealized manners, and different sets of mores prevalent at different times and places. The notion of capturing stills of an evolving process of change is important, since through subtle shifts in values previously cherished beliefs become more visible. (Witness, for example, how film studies degrees, once the Mickey Mouse course of Western universities, are now mainstream academia, having ceded their place to fields such as turf science and degrees in decision-making.) Patterns emerge among different groups of people studied in imperial and modern China: the educated scholar class both in and out of office, educated gentry women, educated non-gentry, merchants and courtesans. Gentility may be problematic to elucidate, since its subject is not usually the topic of considered discourse – which would require a rare level of introspection coupled with a developed and disciplined analytic distance from the self – and is often a set of values shaped slowly throughout childhood and adolescence. The soul-searching that would-be genteel women put themselves through in attempting to create and adhere to a new morality for the new twentieth century provides ample testimony to the deep-rootedness of beliefs incorporated in the term. The papers of Ellen Widmer, Barbara Mittler and Jeesoon Hong all address this transitional angst.

A notion more subtly nuanced than gender, gentility enhances our understanding of women's culture and gender relations in China. As Daria Berg notes, women entered the cultural elite in their writing or painting through the status or support of males in their family. Gentility allows the intersection of class and gender to be re-considered: Ping-chen Hsiung's chapter in particular considers this exchange. While there is shared ground between the sexes in what constitutes gentility, it is the gendered differences that provoke interest. Recent scholarship has focused on the culture of elite women in China, with modern historians rediscovering the image of the talented woman (*cainü*) as a model of education and refinement. A focus on gentility takes us further: while providing perspective on the emergence of a women's culture, it includes also such issues as the tensions and compromises between the established elite and the *nouveaux riches*. The late Ming period, for example, setting for many of the chapters here, witnessed striking changes in the perceptions of gentility as certain men began to valorize women's voices.

Gentility is difficult to describe from the inside, and rarely articulated, precisely because it concerns itself with internalized attitudes and beliefs: if one has to ask if a person, act or object is genteel, then the appropriate discernment to make the judgement has not yet been acquired. Although the didactic project is a minority aspect, the chapters by Yasushi Ōki on textbooks for an aesthetic life produced by a Ming dynasty hermit, and of Ellen Widmer on Qing female travelogues, look at texts which set out to instruct their readers in the arts of gentility, as conceived by the authors, and to foster enthusiasm for bettering the self. The industry of aesthetic textbooks that Ōki describes demonstrates Ming enthusiasm for, and a willingness to invest money in, taste.

Since gentility can only be ascribed through common consent (although to seek such recognition and affirmation may itself be vulgar), the shared nature of genteel pursuits features in several chapters. Gentility marks an individual pledge towards, and meticulousness in, worthy causes, but these must be socially recognized to garner prestige. Vicarious gentility is considered by Gerritsen through the male obsession with talented young women, especially those who die tragically young. The cult of clever women and the theme of tragic early death sound throughout the chapters as ongoing interests of males who considered themselves educated and sensitive. Reflected gentility through shared concerns finds a modern exemplar in the China historian Paul Ropp, whose 2001 work *Banished Immortal* charts precisely one such gentlemanly search, to establish the oeuvre and biography of the poet Shuangqing. Ropp is amusingly self-conscious about the connotations of his project:

We joked about being latter-day literati ourselves, still poking around in the eighteenth century and imitating Shi Zhenlin and his literati friends in their obsession with the beautiful peasant woman poet<sup>17</sup>

he writes, having been told ‘Professor Ropp ... you are the American Shi Zhenlin, still looking for that beautiful peasant poet and trying to make her name famous!’ Long live gentility! As several commentators in this volume note, choosing a genteel text on which to compose a commentary or essay reflects esteem back to the editor. In this context the question of textual transmission and of filters is raised: our own studies are inevitably conditioned by what generations of editors and publishers have thought worthy of preserving. The obsessions of scholars such as Ropp, his model the literatus Shi Zhenlin, or any of Shi’s subjects, determine the records later students possess on which to base their own ideals.

Breeding is clearly a factor in gentility, although it is ultimately learnable or pliable. Whole clans of genteel womenfolk emerge from the studies of Daria Berg and Anne Gerritsen, and the notion of gentility through association becomes apparent. Some, such as Kenneth Hammond or Alison Hardie, have taken gentility to refer exclusively to those of noble or gentle birth, and the concept has to be primarily associated with the nature and attributes of this élite sector of the populace, and those on its periphery. We can know little of the aspirations of those with no lasting means of expressing them. Hardie’s chapter on garden cultivation

as a genteel pursuit for both genders is highlighted by frequent garden references throughout the volume.

Moral integrity is the pre-eminent quality that Hammond finds in Trollope's novels, the epitome of gentlemanly fiction. This integrity is displayed in his narrative on Yang Jisheng in his 'taking the stand', and exhibiting moral courage against corruption and evil officials. The cost of this self-sacrifice and of maintaining gentility is noticeable – as is the power of the ideals that drive such action. In Hammond's tale of political intrigue another aspect of gentility becomes apparent: that of careful manipulation of one's image, including that of martyrdom. Separating the 'spin' out in accounts, discerning outcome from intent, is near impossible at a distance, and not necessarily evident to the participants themselves. Spin-doctoring of image demonstrates that gentility was of prime concern to those who sought to model and sell themselves as paragons of moral or Confucian goodness. Whether such managing of perceptions is necessarily genteel is a moot point.

As a concept, gentility reflects a set of values associated with aspirational status. It implies subscription to superior moral values, especially in their external expression, a knowledgeable interest in material culture and concomitant refinement in taste. It suggests consumption, but not to excess. The fashion industry is a clear example of a structure which exists to satisfy people's aspirational needs in regard to how they are viewed by others. Sarah Dauncey's chapter on Ming fashion opens up this topic from a female perspective, noting that as soon as 'lower' classes adopt the fashion culture of their superiors, the model inevitably evolves out of reach. Simplicity remains a touchstone of feminine gentility through much of the Ming, as Dauncey and Berg both describe. Appearances mattered. As the increasing displays of luxurious wedding goods transported between residences in the late Ming and early Qing show, all were affected by the need to display, but those who aspired to elegance understood the time and place for conspicuous parading of wealth.

The project of gentility encompasses the imaginary ideal. In Yasushi Ōki's chapter we see the mountain dwelling eremitical ideal of Ming city dwellers, and in Chloë Starr's chapter the outline of gentility viewed from the drudgery and bitterness of Qing courtesans' lives. The unattainable becomes an ideal. The self we would like to be, the persona we would wish to project finds its depiction in literary and historical records alongside descriptions of the lives of those more widely recognized as embodying the term. Gentility tells us much about what was revered in a society, what was believed to be important in the moral or ideological mindset of a people, but not necessarily about what was practised. It is, of course, a long and finely graded scale from the unattainable moral ideal to the actual possession of an elegant inkstone – or an inkstone more elegant and desirable than one's neighbour's. Gentility as a concept has a theoretical value in giving shape to an internal perspective, the desires of individuals and groups defined, however indirectly, by themselves. Expressing the desire to own a given historical artefact may be as telling as actual possession, and gentility allows this effect to be quantified.

The ideal changes. In Michel Hockx' account of literary salons we see again careful construction of public image, but here Hockx demonstrates how a new moral superiority in the twentieth century was demonstrated in an affinity with the underdog, and contempt for all former expressions of elitism. Hockx notes, however, that cultural sophistication might pertain even among those who disavow its value. The limitations of restricting gentility to classes of women such as *guixiu* become more acute in twentieth-century studies. For the women that Widmer studies, negotiating a gentility that allowed a broadening of education horizons and political awareness but retained *guixiu* values and dignity was a prime concern. Jeesoong Hong's study of Ling Shuhua likewise captures a woman caught between 'defiance and compliance, Western-style education and traditional Chinese social mores'. In Mittler's illuminating study of the New Woman in late Qing magazines, the alternative gentility proposed in the pages of *Linglong (Elegance)* is an extreme countering of misogyny with a new breed of misandry. Men are unmasked as the representatives of an old gentility and women the superior avatars of the new, called to become educated professionals and assets to society. It was not a gentility that immediately took hold.

Part I, *Event*, presents four chapters which capture the moment of the genteel act or gathering, or present first-hand discussion of genteel conduct. Ellen Widmer compares three works of literature: Shan Shili's *Guimao lixing ji*, a travelogue written by a woman in 1903; *Nü yuhua*, a novel by the woman writer Wang Miaoru written in 1904; and a novel from 1907, *Zhongguo xin nühao* by the male writer Siqi Zhai, written for an intended audience that included women. Widmer compares the one 'real' travelogue, and its associated ideas about correct behaviour for women, with the two novels, which also deal with travel and women's correct conduct. The distinct differences within this cluster of works can be used to show how late-Qing writers of a reformist cast of mind were conceptualizing the 'new woman'. All three works see women and women's education as crucial to a newly successful China, but differ over the question of how much independence and freedom a woman ought to have. The struggles of the heroines and protagonists demonstrate the difficulties of treading an appropriate path without socially agreed markers, and of newly creating and assenting to worth in troubled times.

At the beginning of this discussion we noted the import of appreciating scenery to the project of gentility, as seen in Wang Xizhi's fourth-century excursion to the countryside. The role of garden culture in the self-representation of élite men is well recognized. The ownership and connoisseurship of gardens in the Ming dynasty helped validate claims to gentry status in a society in which the number of aspirants to a career in government greatly outnumbered the positions available. At a practical level, individually-owned gardens provided a more liquid form of investment than family-owned agricultural property. The role of women in Ming garden culture has, however, been little noticed. Alison Hardie's chapter discusses the part played in garden culture and the uses made of it both by élite women and courtesans. Hardie's examination of documented cases such as those of the poet Shang Jinglan and the wife of Gui Youguang, and courtesans such as Liu Rushi

or Gu Mei, suggests that gentrywomen's practice of garden culture mirrored certain aspects of male garden culture and reinforced their class rather than gender identity, while courtesans' deployment of gardens shared the economic as well as the cultural and status aspects of elite male practice.

Michel Hockx' chapter takes us to the heart of the literati gathering, in an essay which describes and analyses the practices of a group of writers and artists who met in Shanghai on a weekly basis during the 1930s at 'Literature and Art Tea Talks'. Through an investigation into the self-avowed aim of the group to engage in 'sophisticated entertainment', a description of the contents of their meetings and publications, and an analysis of their gender norms, Hockx shows how traditional Chinese as well as Western notions of gentility were incorporated into modern Chinese literary life. The chapter tries to reconcile the relationship between gentility as a social phenomenon and the literary phenomenon of 'taste'. Hockx also touches briefly on the activities of another, similar organization, namely the first-ever Chinese branch of the International PEN.

The Banana Garden poetry club (Jiaoyuan shishe) in late seventeenth-century Hangzhou presents a case study for investigations into perceptions of gentility in early modern China. As a formal, public literary society founded by a woman and for women, the Banana Garden club was among the very first of its kind: a public institution to connect women across different families and backgrounds. Daria Berg's analysis focuses on the social network of negotiations and exchanges involved in the establishment of this club in the early Qing. She analyses the literary constructions of gentility in the Banana Garden poetesses' works, and traces the image of the lady scholar as seen through comments about the club by other writers. Contemporary and later generations of observers' portrayal of the Banana Garden poetesses and their works reveal how perceptions of gentility differed according to gender, class and time. The tension between gentility and commercialization in discourse about the club is explored through the role of the Jiangnan publishing industry.

Part II, *Reflection*, presents four studies which consider the construal, justification and acting out of 'right' behaviour. Ping-chen Hsiung looks at diaries and letters written between mothers and daughters, notably those of the famous seventeenth-century courtesan Liu Rushi and her young daughter, and of Zeng Guofan's daughter Zeng Jifen. Hsiung documents the tenderness and joyful pride mothers display in their daughters, countering prevalent impressions of such relationships. Enthusiasm for daughters, and homely teasing about children, deepen our understanding of the writings of elite women and the expressions of gentility they provide. Daughter to mother scripts are shown to be more formulaic and restrained than those written by mothers, informed, argues Hsiung, more by patriarchal expectations. Female-authored perceptions of mother-daughter relationships are contrasted with examples of male texts on the same theme, gentility giving fresh insight into gender and class analyses of women's writings and relationships.

Kenneth Hammond presents us with an exquisitely written narrative showing the human outworking of notions of right action. Taking a dictionary definition

of gentility as concerned with manners and chivalrous instincts, but centrally with virtue and integrity, he demonstrates the cost of upholding genteel values in the lives of three sixteenth-century friends. Hammond traces the life and career of Yang Jisheng, who rose from relatively humble beginnings to a position at the Board of War in Beijing by 1551. After attacking a minister by memorializing the throne, Yang is exiled, but later recalled and promoted when proven right. At his wife's instigation, he again attacks the corrupt minister, and is sentenced to death. His wife petitions to be permitted to exchange her life for his. Wang Shizhen, a friend of Yang, pens the memorial for her, and later pays for Yang's burial after their appeal fails. Posthumously rehabilitated, Yang becomes the subject of a contemporary drama detailing the rise and fall of his career. Yang, his wife and Wang are linked by their moral and political actions, gestures designed to signify their upholding of proper Confucian values and commitment to integrity.

In Chapter 7, Sarah Dauncey investigates perceptions of female sartorial behaviour in the late Ming, especially the clothing habits of gentry women as depicted in contemporary histories, gazetteers, informal essays, didactic works, literature and painting. During a period of intense political, social and economic upheaval, women from the lower classes were reported to be emulating the accoutrements of status traditionally associated with the genteel classes. In order to differentiate themselves from such women, argues Dauncey, gentry women had two choices: they could either make their own clothing more elaborate, or reinvent the symbols of genteel clothing practices, by simplifying their dress and ornamentation. The latter was portrayed as the more appropriate response for such woman. Increased attention on widow chastity further boosted the appeal of simple ornamentation, as women were respected for their modesty and frugality in mourning, a habit that could endure long after the stipulated period of mourning was over. Educated courtesans, too, were influenced by such trends in clothing as they admired and emulated the gentry women with whom they came into contact.

In the final chapter of Part II, Chloë Starr traces the patterns of female longing that form a discourse on aspiration to gentility in a series of fictional works from the late nineteenth century. The narratives of many of the late Qing red-light novels are predicated on the tension between a romanticized ideal, and images of fleeced, cheated and syphilitic males. In the longings of the women, and in male fantasies of the perfect courtesan we see an outline of the ideal emerge; in character assassinations of the despised and in the lives of the brutish males, we see the genteel individual in negative. Poetry, music and elegant gatherings construe the ideal in shared pursuits for courtesans and clients. But while talent and beauty were subject to endless testing, competition and ranking in the earlier novels, by the end of the nineteenth century both talents and their literary representation have taken a downturn. In their place, in at least one novel, traces of a new gentility can be discerned among the much-maligned courtesans, seen in a gentle but steely self-worth.



In Part III, *Transmission*, the recording of genteel events and artefacts connoting a genteel existence begin to create their own record. Male aesthetic culture plays a more prominent role in this section. Yasushi Ōki discusses the popularization of the literati lifestyle in late imperial China. In the late Ming Jiangnan area publishing flourished and among the most important works produced were guidebooks to the aesthetic lifestyle of the literati. Ōki discusses the example of Chen Jiru, a typical hermit, who gave up taking the civil service examinations at twenty-nine years of age, to live as a hermit on Mount She. Chen edited and published manuals for a literati life, including a collection of biographies of hermits, as well as textbooks on calligraphy and painting. Collating various kinds of books with the assistance of poor intellectuals, his name became famous throughout Jiangnan society. Chen's business was to sell knowledge about elegant literati life: the publication of such manuals demonstrates the appearance of a new type of customer, one who had achieved economic power and sought social acceptance.

Anne Gerritsen explores the legacy of the famous but tragic poet Ye Xiaoluan (1616–1632), and why the young woman continued to fascinate readers for so long, in a study of the refracted behaviour of later generations. Into the early twentieth century, men (and women) have read her work, republished her poems, visited and restored her grave, and written extensively to each other about her. Why were they interested in a woman, who lived so briefly at the end of the Ming dynasty? The answer is multi-faceted, but, as Gerritsen demonstrates, a key part of the answer lies in the transmission of gentility. In recognizing Ye's literary talent and preserving her fragile legacy, which represents the high cultural values under threat in their current environment, and most importantly, in writing to each other about their involvement in these activities, readers manifest their own high cultural status. In other words, remembering Xiaoluan is for later readers a way to stake their own claims to gentility.

Barbara Mittler describes *Linglong* (*Elegance*) as the Chinese *Vogue* of the 1930s in Chapter 13. A polyphonic, sometimes internally contradictory journal, *Linglong* contained editorials about a woman's duty to stand up against the Japanese invaders, accompanied by pictures of admirable beauties in Japanese silk attire; featured question-and-answer sections on how to prove to a lover that one is a virgin, next to articles accompanied by explanatory pictures on how to kiss. The New Woman depicted in *Linglong* was markedly different from her counterpart in earlier women's magazines. The question 'How to be a perfect woman?' was transformed into 'How to be a perfect woman and thus superior to men?' *Linglong's* New Woman was defined by her ironic stance vis-à-vis the male gaze and by her spiteful attitude toward traditional gentility on two counts: gender, and class. In an analysis of the multiple texts (cartoons, songs, editorials, fiction and advertising) presented on the pages of *Linglong*, Mittler illustrates *Linglong's* creation of an alternative gentility in shaping the image of a new 'New Woman' for the 1930s.

The final chapter provides an exciting new reading of Ling Shuhua, hailed as a representative *guixiu* (gentlewoman) writer. Jeesoong Hong's investigation of Ling's life and writings invites us to see the complex interplay between domesticity

and transgression, between the cherished social mores of old-style women and the cultural progressiveness of new-style women, between gentlewomanly amateurism and the professionalism of a modern writer. The chapter includes an investigation of thirteen unpublished letters from Ling Shuhua to Virginia Woolf, and explores Ling Shuhua's relationship with Julian Bell, seen as fundamental to understanding the cross-cultural exchanges that Ling engaged in from the beginning of her career. Hong's reflections bring us up to the present: a recent lawsuit by Ling Shuhua's relatives against Hong Ying's novel *K* can be seen, she argues, as reflecting the puzzling relationship between genteel femininity and commercial value. The body of the gentlewoman has become the field of commercial and legal battles, and the site where Chinese and Western perspectives on the private and the public cross.

Chloë Starr and Daria Berg  
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## Notes

- 1 See Dawson 1981: chapter on gentlemen and knights.
- 2 Dawson 1981: 5.
- 3 Legge 1972: 300.
- 4 English translation available in Chan 1984: 51–53.
- 5 Carlitz 1997a: 208; Carlitz 1997b.
- 6 Loewe 1966: 120.
- 7 Hartwell 1982: 365–442; Kuhn 1970.
- 8 Ebrey 1978: 1.
- 9 Hymes 1986: 6.
- 10 Wakeman 1975: 25.
- 11 Tu Wei-Ming 1976: 93.
- 12 Ebrey 1978: 116.
- 13 Ebrey 1978: 119.
- 14 Cf. Carlitz' discussion of Langxian's writing in the vernacular, but as a literatus, in the Ming, creating 'a new avenue of *shi* self-realization.' Carlitz 1997b: 212.
- 15 Sommer 2000: 8.
- 16 Mann 1997: 14.
- 17 See Ropp 2001: 5. The social networks which enabled Ropp to complete this project are also illuminating, drawing on the academic interests and delight of other scholars to obtain texts and information, and *guanxi* to provide for practical needs in China.



**Part I**

**Event**



# 1 Gentility in transition

## Travels, novels, and the new *guixiu*

*Ellen Widmer*

It is common knowledge that the late Qing was a time of rapid social and intellectual transformation. Whether inspired by foreign or domestic leaders, new ideas about the roles of women were one important feature of the period, as were new configurations in terms of genre. Not surprisingly, some of the strongest support for a more central role for women in the strong and successful China envisioned for the future could be found in works whose stylistic features or mode of authorship were also new. The ‘new novel’ is but one example of the way this era used new forms to give voice to new concerns.

Before the late Qing, genres such as the travelogue and the novel were virtually never authored by women in China. Women did travel, and they even wrote about their travels, but as far as we know their writings mainly took the form of vignettes in poems, not prose travelogues.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, travelogues were not explicitly written for female audiences. Women did write fiction for other women, but these were mostly *tanci* (prosimetric narrative); hardly any novels (*xiaoshuo*) had feminine authors until just before the fall of the Qing. The few novels before then that we can point to were either destroyed by the author, lost, or in one unique case, published but with no clear indication of who the author was.<sup>2</sup> When these conventions start to erode in the late Qing, it stands to reason that the content of women’s writings, too, begins to evolve.

Even in the changed circumstances of the late Qing, the proud traditions of the *guixiu*, or gentlewoman, did not immediately disappear. For a woman to take up authorship in a new genre was no easy matter particularly when, as with fiction, the very name *xiaoshuo* had been associated with rambunctiousness and vulgarity for so long. Similarly, narratives calling for increased education, travel, and free choice in marriage, whether by men or by women, did so with ambivalence. Wholeheartedly though the author may have seemed to embrace such changes, a close examination yields many signs of doubt, hesitation, or worry over what the new state of affairs would mean. The new *guixiu* was asked to broaden her educational horizons, but what would her education include, how did it reconcile with marriage, and how might she best conduct herself in answering its call? These were questions with which the previously cloistered woman writer now had to be concerned. Asked to take stock of the world beyond the household, she might be moved to travel, but how could she do so without compromising the

genteel values she held dear? Could she go alone to strange parts? Did she need a male escort? Would one or two servants suffice to keep her reputation clean?

There was then the question of free choice in marriage. How could this be construed so as not to give rise to unseemly aggressiveness or flirtatiousness, thus compromising the chaste image with which she still had to be concerned? In other words, how could the *guixiu* adapt to rapidly changing circumstances and remain a proper *guixiu*? Such questions rarely come up directly in the literature considered here, but it is obvious how deep they run.

In demonstrating these matters, I rely on four works of narrative. The first is a travelogue, the woman Shan Shili's *Guimao lüxing ji* (*Travels in the Year of Guimao*) of 1903, published in 1904. The other three are novels: the woman Wang Miaoru's *Nü yuhua* (*Female Flower of the Prison*) of 1904 and another by the man Siqi Zhai, *Zhongguo xin nühao* (*China's New Heroine*), to be supplanted occasionally by references to Siqi Zhai's other vernacular novel, *Nüzi quan* (*Power for Women*) of the same year.<sup>3</sup> *Nü yuhua*, *Nüzi quan* and *Zhongguo xin nühao* are rather similar in length, type of heroine, and the highly focused nature of their concerns.<sup>4</sup> As well, these three show some affinity to the views of Shan Shili, particularly in their thoughts about how a decent woman should behave.

This cluster of works is not intended to represent all women's literature of the late Qing. For example, the woman writer Shao Zhenhua's *Xiayi jiaoren* (*Fair Knights Errant*) of 1909–11 is far longer and more diffuse than any of these three works, and differs in the wider variety of reformist heroines it celebrates and the way it celebrates them. Its huge array of female protagonists are rarely students and are often married, in contrast to the single students who serve as the protagonists in the other three. A number of other differences can be found.<sup>5</sup> Yet in *Xiayi jiaoren*, too, gentility is of major concern.<sup>6</sup>

Against the spectrum of late-Qing literature as a whole, the novels investigated in this chapter stand out as a particularly coherent cluster, both in formal terms and the way gentility is construed. The attitudes of *Guimao lüxing ji* are rather similar and help ground the concerns of fiction in a non-fictional world. Taken together, these four works present a picture of how one segment of society and of writing strained to accommodate themselves to a changing world.

We know far more about Shan Shili than about any of the other authors. Like Shan, Wang Miaoru is said to be a woman, but we know little else about her. Siqi Zhai, the pen-name of author Zhan Kai, is like Shan Shili and Wang Miaoru in using women as the principal subject and has designed works with female audiences in mind.<sup>7</sup> Several among the male writers involved in this type of literature are known to have used feminine sounding pen names when they wrote for female audiences.<sup>8</sup> However, as Siqi Zhai does not imply one gender or the other, such overt manipulation is not at issue here. Siqi Zhai's novels are like others written by men for women at the time.<sup>9</sup> This is seen in their respect for certain gentlewomanly mores even as they spur women toward reform. Thus, they complement writings by actual women in providing evidence of how an imagined audience of *guixiu* might have negotiated the challenges of the late Qing.

### *Guimao lüxing ji*

Shan Shili's travelogue *Guimao lüxing ji* is a record of the author's trip through China, Japan, Korea and Manchuria *en route* to Moscow and Saint Petersburg between March 15 and May 26 of 1903. The wife of the diplomat Qian Xun (1853–1927), Shan was among the first Chinese women to travel outside of China, leaving it initially in 1899. Her 1903 voyage predates the revolutionary martyr Qiu Jin's trip to Japan by one year.<sup>10</sup> Written in classical Chinese, it was first published by Dōbun insatsusha in 1904 in Tokyo; the Chinese reprint of 1981 is 97 pages long.<sup>11</sup>

Shan was born in 1858 and died in 1945.<sup>12</sup> Her date of birth means that she was a whole generation older than such luminaries as Qiu Jin (1879–1907) and Lu Xun (1881–1936). A native of Haining, Zhejiang, Shan was from a great family of the area, but one whose fortunes had declined somewhat in the aftermath of the Taiping Rebellion. Her maternal uncle Xu Renbo took a special interest in her education. Xu was an important editor and writer in his day.<sup>13</sup> Along with lessons in reading and painting, Shan was instructed in a full range of *guixiu* values – filial piety, meekness, gentleness, self-effacement, chastity – which she honoured until the end of her days. Yet she was receptive to the reformist educational currents of the late Qing. Credit for this receptivity must in part be granted to her husband, who was five years her senior. To this couple, it was intolerable that the women in the family not be allowed to go to school. Qian's duties as a diplomat, and his belief in women's importance, led him to bring his family to Japan for schooling and to ask his wife to accompany him on several of his trips abroad.

The international reach of this journal is one of several points at which it departs from women's writings of earlier in the dynasty and anticipates the May Fourth movement. Not only does it involve a journey outside of China, it depends in important respects on the author's command of Japanese and her several years' residence in Japan. Moreover, Shan is supremely aware of the changing international balance of powers that was threatening China's very status as a nation. Admiring Japan, she is at the same time somewhat worried by its incursions into Taiwan and Korea; yet in contrast to Japan, Russia is seen as boorish and inefficient, sometimes even menacing. France and Germany enter her consciousness, but only barely, representing a distant, if still more challenging modernity with which China must ultimately come to terms.

Shan's stance is equally transitional in its address to women readers. Essentially, it is designed to accommodate women of the upper classes to the new horizons that lie before them as citizens of an international world. Prefaces by both Shan and her husband make it clear that the intended readership includes those male Chinese who support the enlightenment ideal of female education, but most especially, educated women themselves. Qian Xun's preface states that he sponsored publication in the hope that the diary's call for women's learning would lend encouragement in the right quarters. Shan's preface voices the additional hope that her work might inspire other wives to think of travelling themselves.



(At the time it was more common for wives to call on a concubine if a woman was needed to accompany a husband on a trip abroad.<sup>14</sup>)

Within the diary proper, Shan makes it clear that she views the barriers to female mobility as social and psychological rather than physical. Her work is designed to overcome these barriers. Education, international awareness and travel are presented not just as opportunities but as inevitabilities for women in years to come. The challenges they pose open new questions about propriety, to which *Guimao lüxing ji* offers answers. Seeing a new woman in the making, Shan seeks to show her how to keep her wifely dignity as she comes to terms with the new age.

The adventurous side of *Guimao lüxing ji* is heralded in Shan's unconventional childhood reading, which included a heavy dose of travel narratives. When she reached adulthood, this interest led her to Marco Polo and Japanese travel writings, in addition to more easily accessible accounts in classical Chinese. In view of this background, it becomes apparent that *Guimao lüxing ji* was not an accidental happening; or rather, that it was accidental only in the sense that she happened to marry the right man. That Shan herself could write a travel narrative obviously built on an interest of many years.

Yet *Guimao lüxing ji* represents Shan at her most modern and forward-looking. Her other publications are more traditional in their subject matter. The most important is her continuation of Yun Zhu's *Guochao guixiu zhengshi ji* (*Correct Beginnings for Gentlewomen*) of 1831, a major anthology of writings by women poets of the Qing, which is noteworthy for its twin emphases on good writing and correct female behaviour.<sup>15</sup> Entitled *Qing guixiu zhengshi zaixu ji* (*Sequel to the Continuation of Correct Beginnings for Gentlewomen*), Shan's continuation came out section by section in approximately 1918.<sup>16</sup> Like the parent work, the focus of the sequel is on the literate gentlewoman. Thus, both readers and contributors were for the most part *guixiu*. The imitation Song font and traditional binding underscore the antiquarian spirit in which this work was conceived. It is one of a number of antiquarian publications, some edited by women, that attempted to collect and thus preserve the writings of Qing *guixiu* just as this type of writing was coming to an end.<sup>17</sup> Shan's other titles include *Yifan wenjian lu* (*Accounts of Model Women I have Known*), a short work extolling the virtues of her *guixiu* ancestors and others, published in 1933;<sup>18</sup> *Qing guixiu yiwen lüe* (*A Brief Account of Literary Writings of Qing Gentlewomen*), a work on later *guixiu* writing published in 1944;<sup>19</sup> and *Shoucishi shigao[chao]* (*Draft Writings of Shouci House*), a collection of poems written over her lifetime.<sup>20</sup> It appears that these volumes, too, were published by the Qian family. Looking only at her late work, one would be tempted to describe Shan as a woman who never quite shed her *guixiu* identity, though she lived until the end of World War II.

### Three novels

A new configuration arises as we move now to consider the three novels. Whereas Shan Shili's biography is rather detailed, the authors of these novels have left rather fewer traces, apart from what can be gleaned from the works themselves.

Wang Miaoru's biography is the fullest. According to her husband Luo Jingren's postface to the 1904 edition of *Nü yuhua*,<sup>21</sup> she was a precocious young woman from Hangzhou, who wrote a work of drama and one of poetry in addition to her novel. She married at age 23–24 and died four years later. Both in her precocity and in her early death she is reminiscent of a certain type of frail but talented woman writer of before the late Qing.<sup>22</sup> As the novel seems to have been published just after her death (the publisher is unknown), we can deduce that she was born in around 1880. This would make her younger by a generation than Shan Shili and approximately Qiu Jin's age. The same postface strongly implies that without her husband's involvement, the novel would never have been published and circulated, in part because she was very ill when she wrote it. Moreover, Luo Jingren was the author of the commentary. Thus, although the authorship is indeed female, female initiative comes across as somewhat dependent on the support of feminist males.

This dependence accords with the rhetoric of the novel itself, which, on balance, disapproves of a feminism too drastically separated from the world of men. The point is inferred from the way the novel unfolds. In the fashion of the late Ming novel *Shuihu zhuan* (*The Water Margin*) (the organisational similarity of the novel to *The Water Margin* is noted in the commentary to Chapter 9), it disposes of the introductory heroine (Wang) Sha Xuemei, and eventually passes over to another one, Xu Pingquan, who becomes central. Xuemei is so upset by her husband's misbehaviour that she kills him, albeit accidentally, an action she takes after reading Herbert Spencer's 'Women's Rights', which had come out in Chinese translation just one year before *Nü yuhua*.<sup>23</sup> For this crime she does a stint in jail – hence the title *Nü yuhua*; but she is well trained in martial arts and soon escapes. After several chapters, the narrator abandons Xuemei, introducing other women who are like Pingquan in their involvement in worthy careers such as education, journalism, and medicine. Their careers lead these women to study in Japan, Europe, and the United States. When in France Pingquan picks up a newspaper and discovers, to her horror, that Xuemei and a cohort of like-minded women have perished in a fire after an attempt at revolution failed. Pingquan eventually takes over as the centre of attention and will marry a companionate man. She had first come to her fiancé's notice when both were studying in Japan.

The fates of these heroines appear to mean that a woman who can contemplate marriage even as she studies medicine, writes for a newspaper, or starts a school, is a more appropriate role model for readers than the athletic and activist Xuemei. Somewhat surprisingly, Buddhist pacifism is not completely marginalized by this rhetoric, for Pingquan is very interested in Buddhism and even takes a Buddhist name (Fobei, p. 740<sup>24</sup>), albeit temporarily. Wang Miaoru herself appears to have been a Buddhist, and, according to her husband's postface, she sees her novel's

broad circulation as analogous to the actions of a Bodhisattva, who can perform good deeds in many places at the same time.

Throughout, *Nü yuhua* focuses on an audience of women. One of its two prefaces (both by women) refer to it as a women's novel (*nüjie xiaoshuo*). Within the work Pingquan expresses her view of how novels infiltrate the less highly literate reading public and turn its collective mind from sheer entertainment to something more worthwhile:

There is nothing better for changing customs than novels. There are perhaps people who don't read orthodox books, but there is no one that doesn't read novels. Because orthodox books are written profoundly and abstrusely, people with little learning cannot read them, or even if they do read them they soon get bored and tired. But because novels are written in vernacular language, everyone understands them. And because they touch on all manner of emotions, they're most enjoyable, and before you know it, they help [the reader] to improve her qualities (p. 758).

This is not to say that *Nü yuhua* excludes male readers. It welcomes any male that wants to join the case. But the ideal intended reader is clearly female, and one reason this novel ends up with a relatively well socialized heroine might be to keep the allegiance of mainstream Chinese women of the day. At the same time, the treatment accorded the radical Xuemei is rather respectful, and in the long discussion over strategy between Xuemei and Pingquan in Chapter 8, as well as the 'future perfect tense' in which this couple contemplate prospects for Chinese womanhood, the novel may betray a certain degree of equivocation about the inevitability of marriage as the proper outcome for all *guixiu*.<sup>25</sup>

The vernacular language in which this novel is written and its support for rather activist heroines are points of departure from *Guimao lixing ji*. Unlike Shan's work, Wang Miaoru's was not necessarily written for *guixiu* specifically, but rather a principled female readership that needed direction as to where the future for women lay.

Siqi Zhai's *Zhongguo xin nühao* (*China's New Heroine*) was published in Shanghai in the sixth month of 1907 by Jicheng tushu gongsi.<sup>26</sup> We cannot supply the author, Zhan Kai, with a full biography, except to say that he was a younger brother of the writer Zhan Xi (1850–1927).<sup>27</sup> Zhan Kai is known to have written a number of sketches of Shanghai courtesans which came out under the titles *Rouxiang yunshi* (*Romantic History of the Tender Land*, 1900–02), *Huitu haishang baihua zhuan* (*Illustrated Biographies of One Hundred Shanghai Courtesans*, 1903), and *Hua shi* (*History of Courtesans*, 1906, *Xubian*, continuation, 1907) in the early part of the twentieth century.<sup>28</sup> The fact that both brothers wrote a sketch of the same courtesan was one clue as to the relationship between Zhan Kai and Zhan Xi.<sup>29</sup>

The preface to *Zhongguo xin nühao* is dated fall of 1906. It is written in classical Chinese, unlike the novel proper, which is in the vernacular. The novel revolves around the theme articulated in the preface, which builds on a quotation

from the work of the missionary Young J. Allen. The basic idea is that if women are shut up indoors without education and without the means to work, it is bad for the nation. Not only will China not be strong, it will become the laughing stock of foreigners if its women are not treated properly. The time of this novel is not set precisely, but it is some time in the future, in the 4650th year of the emperor Huang di. The trip of five learned men around the world to study other countries (that of the five Manchu princes in 1905?)<sup>30</sup> had taken place fifty years before. By the time the novel gets underway, China has a constitution but is still deficient in rights for women. Other important forces in the political arena are the emperor and the parliament. The emperor's wife also plays an important role.

At a nationwide athletic contest for young talent in Beijing, the top female student Huang Renrui (Yingniang) develops a crush on the top male student Ren Zili who returns her interest. The two go out for dinner together in Beijing, with Yingniang's servant present most of the time. Ren encourages Yingniang to devote herself to overturning centuries of misogyny in China. After her return home (to Shandong), Huang's servant reveals Yingniang's tryst with Ren to her parents. They are shocked but willing to check out Ren's background and arrange a formal engagement. Yingniang resists, on the grounds that it is time China modernize by allowing young people to make matches on their own.

Soon Yingniang wins a scholarship to Japan and before long establishes herself as a leader among female students there. She enrolls in a girls' school affiliated with Waseda University. Here again, she is accompanied by at least one servant, often two. Yingniang has no trouble with the language, which she has learned at school in China. It seems that her English is fluent as well. By this time, there are many Chinese students in Japan, two to three hundred female students from Shandong alone. Yingniang is among the most outstanding, hence her admission to a particularly fine school.

Some of the female students are more militantly feminist than Yingniang, but it is she who galvanizes opinion by writing a manifesto about how badly off women are. Among other points, this manifesto compares Chinese women to African slaves (p. 45). Subsequently, an organization, the Huifu nüquan hui is formed by overseas women students in Japan, with the goal of improving the status of women back home. Even some of the Japanese teachers join the organization, and much money is raised. Yingniang is not completely happy with every one of the society's ideas, because they sometimes pit women too stridently against men, nevertheless she supports majority rule. Ren Zili, now in Germany on a scholarship, sends a letter to Yingniang suggesting that she take up the cause of all Chinese women, not just those in the educated classes. (On this as on other occasions Ren and others find out about Yingniang's whereabouts and activities by reading about them in the newspaper.)

A crisis arises when Chinese government officials become alarmed at the activism of the women. The most activist woman of all, Hua Qixing, escapes to China, while another leader, Xin Jiyuan, agrees to take all the blame. The authorities hustle Xin out of Japan. Insulted by her shoddy treatment and ever protective of her *guixiu* virtue, she becomes still more distraught when an overly

boorish guard tries to enter her chambers inappropriately. Though she keeps her clothes on through the entire ordeal, she feels her virtue has been compromised. The upshot is that she jumps into the sea and drowns.

Back in China, the society's influence is extensive but worrisome. For example, some wives go so far as to follow the example of a fringe faction in the United States, setting a daily time limit on their wifely duties, demanding that their husbands cook meals, limiting the number of nights out their husbands may have, and so forth (p. 68). Alongside these developments, Hua Qixing plots revenge on behalf of Xin. She decides to adopt the model of Russian revolutionaries and attempts to assassinate Xin's foes (p. 70). Returning to Japan with the help of a Chinese secret society, she eventually murders the officer responsible for Xin's death, yet dies in the process. Yingniang praises her after the fact as a 'female Nie Zheng' after the assassin retainer from the *Shi Ji* (p. 75). One of the women Hua relies on in carrying out her deed, Lin Dajie, has set up a girls' school in Hankou. Lin herself is not militant. She is a *guixiu* (the text actually uses the term *guinü*, which means, we are told, that her father was an official), but modern-minded enough to be impressed by activist women like Madame Roland. It is for such reasons that she is willing to aid and shelter Hua Qixing.

After all the violence, Yingniang's more pacifist, less anti-masculine approach to women's rights begins to dominate the scene. The Huifu nüquan hui eventually changes its name to Funü zizhi hui (Self-Governing Women's Association) (p. 91) and elects Yingniang president. Yingniang and the society together advocate literacy for all women and the right to a vocation. They also lead movements against concubinage, prostitution, the buying and selling of wives, and other ills. Copies of a manifesto they compose are mailed to every school in China, thus bringing a halt to the destructive battle of the sexes to which the Huifu nüquan hui had given rise and eliminating absurdities like cooking duties for males. The society further decides to invest in the girls' school headed by Lin Dajie, in order to have a showcase for its ideas about vocational training. Eventually, thanks to the intercession of several female ambassadors from European countries, the emperor himself agrees to set an example by giving up concubines, eunuchs, and other indulgences and showing respect for women's leadership potential outside the home.

The emperor sends Yingniang on a trip around the world to explore how foreign countries handle such matters as education, vocational training, and women's suffrage. Ren helps in this project by writing letters to well-placed contacts. Yingniang's excellent English serves her well during her stint in the United States, which by now has abandoned anti-Chinese immigration laws. After leaving the United States, she makes productive visits to several European countries, as well as to Persia, a country whose veiled women are even worse off than those in China. Persia's backwardness gives Yingniang another opportunity to articulate her ideas. After hearing what Yingniang has to say, the Queen of Persia consents to grant China full diplomatic representation, which it has not had before.

Laden with notes on foreign customs, Yingniang finally returns to her native land. Here she learns that Lin Dajie has been arrested in Hankou in a convoluted

case that takes unfair advantage of Lin's previous support for Hua Qixing. On her way back to Beijing, Yingniang tries to visit Lin, but she too is arrested and goes to jail. The press faithfully covers these outrageous turns of events and even people in Japan and elsewhere find out about them and send supportive telegrams. Finally the emperor intervenes and sets Yingniang's party free. Yingniang can then deliver all of the information she has collected to the emperor, who is delighted at her news of developments on foreign shores.

At this point, Yingniang receives a telegram from Ren stating that he is going to Beijing and that the legislature is about to take up the question of free marriage, as well as other issues involving women. She drops everything to proceed to Beijing. Ren himself returns via Russia, a route Yingniang had previously avoided because of civil unrest there. The empress approves of Yingniang's plan to marry Ren and the two families make haste to Beijing in order to attend the ceremony. Other guests, as well as telegrams from around the world, contribute to the festive mood. When word arrives by telegram from Hankou that commemorative statues of Hua Qixing and Xin Jiyuan will be set up,<sup>31</sup> Yingniang gets permission from Ren for their Western-style honeymoon to include a stop in Hankou. While in Hankou, the couple receive another telegram, this time from the emperor, with the happy news that the legislature has passed a whole slate of provisions upgrading the status of women.

Like *Guimao lixing ji* and *Nü yuhua*, *Zhongguo xin nühao* is clearly intended to reach women readers, along with supportive males. As with *Nü yuhua*, the level of language and interest in foreign women like Madame Roland suggests that the *guixiu* to whom *Zhongguo xin nühao* is intended to appeal is younger, less conservative and perhaps less well-educated than Shan Shili's intended audience. Yet the focus on women is the same. Although Ren is a major player in the background, narration focuses almost exclusively on Yingniang and other women, whose calls for social improvements are entirely focused on women's needs. Even the idea that eunuchs should be done away with, which is discussed in Chapter 12, is linked to the issue of concubinage. It comes up when the foreign women, in conversation with the emperor's wife are startled to hear how many concubines the emperor has. Like *Nü yuhua*, *Zhongguo xin nühao* admires the athletic woman, whom it honours with a statue, even though it sidelines the more strident side of feminism, as represented by the Huifu nüquan hui. Another similarity is the ubiquity and importance of newspapers. Not only do Ren and other fellow feminists follow Yingniang's activities through this medium, even her mother and father keep track of their daughter by this means. And given the level of media attention that Yingniang attracts wherever she goes, it is impossible that she could ever be wrongfully jailed for long.

*Zhongguo xin nühao* can be contrasted with *Nüzi quan*, Siqi Zhai's other vernacular novel, which it greatly resembles. This novel was published in Shanghai by Zuoxin she, also in the sixth month of 1907.<sup>32</sup> The great similarities in plot, characterization, episode and detail make it likely that this author worked on both novels at the same time. Taken together, they give the impression of a kaleidoscope that was shaken ever so slightly, giving rise to virtually identical

– but minutely rearranged – plots, characters, and details. Because of the degree of similarity, we will not summarize the plot but merely mention a few differences between the two. From imperial interventions to the future tense of the action, to the central role of the city of Hankou, to the ridicule at the antics of the American women, detail after detail confirms that the two works emerged from a single hand. Yet these works are not without their differences. One novel emphasizes writing, the other oratory; in one, the heroine circumnavigates the globe in an easterly direction, beginning with Japan, in the other, she crosses Russia and Europe before proceeding to the USA. These patterns of travel are related to the issue of civil war, which in one case makes Russia a place to be avoided, in the other shows it accommodating travel very well. Perhaps the most essential difference is Yingniang's greater intellectual dependence on her fiancé. By comparison, *Nüzi quan*'s heroine Zhenniang's ideas are more her own.

*Zhongguo xin nühao* can also be contrasted with *Nü yuhua* on several grounds. As far as content goes, both works set up a decision between revolutionary and evolutionary approaches, but in *Zhongguo xin nühao*, the former course is ruled out more emphatically. Indeed, *Nü yuhua*'s Xuemei is far more radical in her thinking, if not necessarily in her actions, than *Zhongguo xin nühao*'s Hua Qixing. Furthermore, although *Nü yuhua* is more interested in Buddhism, it is less inclined to view marriage as antithetical to a woman's work in the public sphere. There are also contrasts in terms of style. With the exception of Sha Xuemei's opening dream about male oppression, Wang Miaoru develops her episodes in bare bones fashion, whereas Siqi Zhai is consistently more detailed in the way he fills out scenes. In addition, Wang's work makes only occasional use of the stylistic markers of traditional vernacular fiction, whereas Siqi Zhai addresses the reader and accounts for the passage of time in more traditional ways. Finally, Wang Miaoru is far less inclined to preach than Siqi Zhai. The entire first chapter of *Zhongguo xin nühao*, for example, is a disquisition on how Chinese women's lack of progress contributes to the national weakness and turns China into a laughing stock in foreigners' eyes. Yet except for certain differences like these, the three novels are remarkably similar. This leaves open the possibility, as yet unproven, that *Nü yuhua* directly influenced Siqi Zhai's two ventures in this style.

### ***Guimao lüxing ji* and the late-Qing novels compared**

Despite many obvious contrasts, our two sets of works betray their common late-Qing origins. Trains, telegrams, and steamers are fixtures in the lives of Pingquan, Yingniang, Zhenniang, just as they are with Shan Shili. Relatedly, all four works see China as part of a larger world. All but *Nü yuhua* have foreign characters, and even *Nü yuhua* offers a gallery of portraits of such foreign women as Mary Lyon, Madame Roland, and Stowe (p. 733). The way these works relate to female audiences is another point of similarity. The deliberate appeal to women readers is clearly stated in *Guimao lüxing ji*'s preface, and it is explicit in *Nü yuhua*'s prefatory materials as well. With Siqi Zhai's two works, the appeal to women

readers is obvious, even if it is not spelled out explicitly. In its interest in rescuing women from torpor and ignorance, Siqi Zhai's projects are remarkably congruent with that of Huang Zongxiang, Pingquan's husband-to-be. Chapter 11's statement that he is sympathetic to women's issues and 'writes a few novels to rouse the feminine community' ('zhu xie zhenxing nüjie de xiaoshuo', p. 752) would seem to fit Siqi Zhai very well.

Moreover, the texts are meant not only to rouse their audiences but also to instruct them in the new scheme of things. Thus, *Guimao lüxing ji* has a number of educative passages, such as one describing what the Red Cross does (p. 28); another section demonstrates how even women whose feet were once bound can learn to hike if they put their minds to it (p. 36). In a similar vein, *Nüzi quan* and *Zhongguo xin nühao* give rather detailed information about the routes their heroines take abroad.<sup>33</sup> These itineraries appear to have been intended to enlighten readers about world geography, a goal that *Guimao lüxing ji* also shares. *Nü yuhua* is less determinedly educative than the other works in these respects. From the lack of detail about place and time we may, perhaps, infer that Wang Miaoru never travelled abroad. Conversely, it seems likely that Siqi Zhai had been to Japan in some capacity, or at least had read and absorbed accounts of others who knew Japan well.

The central role played by Japan in three of the four works offers another point of similarity. In *Zhongguo xin nühao*, the heroine begins her trip abroad with a long period of study in Japanese schools. This correlates quite directly with *Guimao lüxing ji*, at least one third of whose action takes place in Japan. In the travelogue, Japan is presented as Shan's long-term place of residence, although she does visit home and the Shanghai area just before the trip to Russia begins. In contrast to Pingquan and Yingniang, Shan's student days are well past her when she reaches Tokyo, yet she is much involved with the education of her daughter-in-law, Qian Fengbao. As it turns out, Qian Fengbao was a student in the famed Jissen School for (Chinese) Women, which was run by Shan's good friend and near contemporary Shimoda Utako (1854–1936).<sup>34</sup> Shimoda was widely known in China for advocating education in the service of familial and patriotic goals. The slogan 'good wives, wise mothers' (ryoosai kenbo/liangqi xianmu) encapsulates Shimoda's educational goals. Shan herself translated Shimoda's seminal text *Kasei gaku* (*Domestic Science*) into Chinese.<sup>35</sup>

Coincidentally, Siqi Zhai's two vernacular novels, too, bear traces of Shimoda's influence. *Nüzi quan*'s publisher is Zuoxin she, a Shanghai firm which Shimoda founded, and it carries the publishing date Meiji 40, as well as Guangxu 33. This Japanese educator is actually mentioned by name in *Zhongguo xin nühao*. (Yingniang's teacher at Waseda high school had been Shimoda's student long ago – p. 36.) It is no wonder, then, that the ideological affinities between Shan's work and Siqi Zhai's seem strong.

Finally, foreign travel is an important link between all the novels, and it connects them as well with *Guimao lüxing ji*. Even *Nü yuhua*, in which the theme is least developed, sends Pingquan to Japan for study, and it takes her on a tour of Europe, though not the rest of the world. Meanwhile, one of Pingquan's friends



spends a large amount of time in America acquiring education, though her sojourn there is not described.

Turning now to differences, the most obvious contrast between the travelogue and the novels is that *Guimao lüxing ji* is not a work of fiction. This means that it does not have a fictionalized narrator but rather revolves around the daily doings of the biographical Shan. Only occasionally does it break away from this format into disquisitions on such subjects as the new Western calendar, the fifth (1903) Japanese national exposition in Osaka, and the stages of evolution of mankind. Moreover, its arrangement of time is according to the diary format. Days are duly noted in both Chinese and Western calendrical systems, and every day is accounted for. If nothing happened on a given day, Shan merely states this fact and moves on to the next day. In these arrangements, *Guimao lüxing ji* gives every indication of reproducing notes taken while the trip was in progress. It does not anticipate events before they take place, and it makes no other effort to give artistic shape to the flow of time. This would suggest that the diary underwent no significant reshaping after the journey came to an end. In obvious contrast, *Nü yuhua*, *Nüzi quan*, and *Zhongguo xin nühao* all have fictionalized narrators, and the arrangement of time, while on the whole straightforwardly linear, employs predictions of a sort not used by Shan.

Another obvious contrast lies in the far greater idealism of the novels. Set in the future for all or some of the action, they are able to gloss over issues, such as discrimination against Chinese, that were sources of considerable resentment to Shan. Similarly, the discomforts of train travel, which occupy a good deal of Shan's attention, are virtually never at issue in the novels, whose heroines proceed from spot to spot as if such vexations as missed connections, missing luggage, or inappropriately low-class seating were either nonexistent or of little concern. Thus, when *Nüzi quan* takes its heroine to Russia along the very Trans-Siberian Railroad traversed by Shan, it acknowledges that the trip was not pleasant but refrains from detailing what went wrong (p. 48).<sup>36</sup> Along these same lines, the novels' heroines have so little trouble with foreign languages that they can travel virtually unimpeded around the globe. Pingquan, Yingniang and Zhenniang are all fluent at Japanese, the second two have also mastered English, and Zhenniang has excellent Russian as well. As we have seen, Shan Shili's Japanese is good, but she and her husband are reassuringly down-to-earth in their occasional linguistic struggles, as when Shan confesses she is not adept at Cantonese (p. 52).

Language separates Shan's work from the others in another sense: whereas hers is written throughout in classical Chinese, the other three are in vernacular language, except for occasional prefaces and manifestos. It would appear that Siqi Zhai deliberately 'writes down' in his two novels, using a language he regards as suitable for women readers of lesser reading ability.<sup>37</sup> *Zhongguo xin nühao* actually raises the subject of simplified characters, emphasizing their value for women readers (p. 94). Although the character making the point is neither important nor widely respected, we may still infer that the idea of simplifying language as a means of reaching women had occurred to Siqi Zhai.

One final contrast concerns the presence or absence of an international network involving women. *Guimao lüxing ji* has nothing to say about such a network. Shan's point of reference is always her husband and his national and international contacts. In contrast, each of the three novels maps the world according to where accomplished Chinese women are. Thanks to this network, it is less surprising for women to travel widely than it might otherwise be. Thus, education is not only a matter of institutions but also of communities of female students overseas. This is especially the case in Siqi Zhai's two works, but a similar sense of global womanhood can also be found in *Nü yuhua*. Pingquan and her friends choose their destinations in part because of this factor; and wherever Yingniang and Zhennieng go, they are always met and helped by groups of Chinese women, all of whom share a commitment to education, medicine and journalism as methods of effecting change.

The persistence of this pattern in these novels raises the possibility that they were influenced, in part, by Western missionary culture. This possibility seems especially strong in Siqi Zhai's two works, not only because of the quote from Young J. Allen with which *Zhongguo xin nühao* begins but also because of Yingniang's and Zhennieng's abiding interest in women's suffrage, a live issue among missionary women at the time.<sup>38</sup> Furthermore, the model for the two societies with which Yingniang gets involved could have been missionary women's organizations. If this speculation is correct, we could break down our generalized notion of modernization's stimulating effects into more specific elements. Whereas Shan is moved by the well educated Japanese 'good wife and wise mother', the three novels take at least some of their inspiration from Western missionary women, indeed from unmarried missionary women, a relatively recent addition on the Chinese scene.<sup>39</sup> This model influences the depiction of the less revolutionary, more evolution-minded heroines of which all three novels most approve. When it comes to revolutionaries, at least with *Zhongguo xin nühao*, it is a Russian model that prevails.<sup>40</sup>

### Gentility in transition: three case studies

When viewed through the lens of gentility, these three works appear to be transitional, in terms both of their formal features and their attitudes towards women. I shall approach this subject via three case studies: narrative style (by which I mean the extent to which the narrator appears to be self-sufficient); the marriageable (or newly married woman); and the amazon (or athletic, activist woman).

I begin with narrative. *Guimao lüxing ji* is, on the one hand, a brave new foray into travel writing by a woman intent on educating other women about the world. The point is made both in the text itself and in the preface by Shan's husband Qian Xun. At the same time, Shan's habit of quoting her husband at every turn gives the impression that she can only write as she does (and of course take the trip that she does) because she is escorted by her husband. Thus, deference to her husband is

woven into the fabric of her travelogue. One can point to numerous instances of how what she says does not quite stand forth on its own.

I said that although Youleng [Shan's brother-in-law] was sick and never managed to graduate, as far as the accomplishment of importing civilization was concerned, Youleng was the pioneer, not my husband. My husband stroked his beard and agreed (p. 34).

We saw the [Osaka] exposition. My husband had the benefit of the hospitality of the Japanese foreign affairs ministry, which gave him the status of guest visitor, and he had a pass granting him special privileges. I went along with him. My husband said that although it's not as grand as the exposition in Paris, France, last year, it is still not small in scale... (p. 24).

My husband is always saying that the reason Chinese people have not achieved excellence is solely due to the education they have received from their mothers (p. 36).

This deferential style of writing makes a striking contrast to that of Shan's younger and far more radical contemporary Qiu Jin, whose famous trip to Japan took place in defiance of marriage, rather than in conjunction with it, and who stands completely on her own when she addresses audiences of women.<sup>41</sup> Shan's diary was written just four years before Qiu's execution for sedition, yet despite many points of similarity between their messages, including their mutual concern with helping women, the refined and deferential spirit of Shan's writing puts it in a completely different world. Likewise Shan's other work on travel, *Guiqian ji*, is less than fully self-sufficient, in that several of its sections were written by her husband and son.<sup>42</sup> Rhetorically speaking, whereas Qiu stands squarely on her own two feet, Shan appears to need an escort when she sets forth her ideas.

Something of the same ambivalence about self-sufficient feminine narration can be found in *Nü yuhua*. As previously mentioned, Wang Miaoru's text is presented throughout as the result of a rescue operation on the part of her husband. Luo Jingren is said to have seen to its publication after his wife's death, and his commentary frames the action with his ideas. Although this act of rescue could well have been genuine, in the sense that Wang Miaoru may indeed have been too ill to see her project through to completion, there was no compelling need for this piece of background to find expression on the printed page. Adding to the picture of feminine helplessness, as we have seen, is Wang Miaoru's fragility and early death, which conform to a cliché of traditional literature, that the talented woman writer is too weak to endure this world for long. *Nü yuhua* is far bolder in its feminism than Shan's travelogue, but the appearance of a supportive husband in the background conveys a degree of tentativeness about the female narrator like that of *Guimao lixing ji*. Additionally, the desultory and understated qualities of Wang's narration itself suggest a conflict over how vigorously to advance

images and ideas. The *guixiu* ethos calling for ‘meekness and gentleness’ (*wenrou dunhou*), as well as the newness of novel writing as far as women are concerned, make plausible reasons for these seeming inhibitions in Wang’s use of the novel form.

Siqi Zhai’s novels present a more complex picture in this regard. In the first place, since Siqi Zhai is male, we are no longer talking about a female author or narrator tentatively stepping into the public arena. In the second place, whether they orate for other women (as in *Zhongguo xin nühao*), or write for them (as in *Nüzi quan*), Siqi Zhai’s heroines are not meek and gentle, nor do they mince words. Yet in both cases, they are guided and supported by their fiancés. In *Zhongguo xin nühao*, it is Ren Zili who first alerts Yingniang to the close relation between feminine inequality and China’s weakness internationally, just as it is he who first suggests that she take up the cause of non-élite women. This second suggestion leads her to amend her programme for reform to include vocational education. Thus, even if Ren is scarcely ever the centre of attention, he is still the chief source of inspiration for most of Yingniang’s plans. With *Nüzi quan*, Ren’s counterpart Deng Shuyu is somewhat less domineering in an intellectual sense. His supportive role is generally confined to emotional nurturing, as when he comforts Zhennieng during moments of discouragement, not to mention fishing her from the river when she nearly drowns. Yet even though his intellectual influence is weaker, he is still presented as crucial to Zhennieng’s ability to lead. Here, too, the pioneering woman is enveloped in a context which makes her appear helpless without a supportive male.

At this juncture, the boundary between our first and second topics becomes rather thin. Is the issue of the fiancé one of narrative style, or does it fit better under the rubric of content – here, how to protect the marriageable or newly married woman? No more than a decade before the four writings on which we focus, the standards for the genteel woman were rather clear. As a member of what could be termed the older generation (from a late Qing standpoint), Shan negotiates the transition into the modern world with her opinion that almost all of the old *guixiu* virtues must still be honoured. It is only bound feet and female cloistering that have to change. The limited nature of her concession to the new morality, as well as the fear which causes her to limit her concessions, is seen in this address to her daughter-in-law Qian Fengbao, following an outing they made together to the Osaka Exposition of 1903:

Today’s trip was only to expand our knowledge. Although we tramped about in the rain, we did not trespass against the rules of decorum. Moreover, you were waiting upon your mother-in-law. But when we go back to Tokyo, you must scrupulously obey the rules of your school. Do not go out frivolously. I say, China has a superior sense of womanly virtue; what is regrettable is its [lack of emphasis on] women’s learning. Japanese women are able to hold to the rules of wifely virtue while increasing their learning. In this they are admirable. I often hear your father-in-law say that, whereas western women do not lack a sense of virtue, those who break the rules are numerous. In

public, such women's conversation is elegant. When they play music, paint, and dance, they display their excellence and beauty. Yet, whereas the display may be excellent and beautiful, inwardly they are the opposite. Beware of following their example! Contemporary discussions slander the East and praise the West. Feminine virtue is no exception. Please take pains not to be deluded by this. (p. 31)

Throughout, this quotation illustrates the importance of intellectual curiosity and propriety, both basic for Shan Shili. On the one hand, it chastises Chinese women for their lack of interest in the outside world. On the other, it denigrates Western women for pursuing learning, but with no sense of how to behave. It implies that only Japanese women, who combine an interest in education with proper wifely virtue, have achieved the proper balance. Here Shan opens the door to a few, limited changes, but there is a world of temptation to which the proper *guixiu* must not succumb.

A second issue in this picture is the role of the chaperone. Qian Fengbao was already married by the time Shan writes, so she differs from our three fictional heroines in not needing to find a fiancé. Yet as this disquisition tells us, even in her newly married state, she was far from free to roam about the globe. Just as the female writer must not venture forth unescorted in a rhetorical sense, so the marriageable or newly married woman must be chaperoned when she travels outside the home.

To a somewhat lesser extent, the three novels betray worries along these lines. The issues of chaperoning and courtship are examples of this trend. Until she meets her husband-to-be, *Nü yuhua*'s Pingquan is seen only in the company of other women; and she never steps out on a public stage the way Siqi Zhai's heroines do. Yet Wang Miaoru still found it necessary to give Pingquan a marital prospect, even though she shrank from letting her actively seek a man. These needs are inferred from the end of the novel when a suitor materializes, almost out of thin air. Pingquan is on a steamer headed back from France to China when Zongxiang first introduces himself, explaining that he had long ago encountered his beloved while the two were students in Japan. In practical terms, it seems odd that he did nothing to communicate these feelings to Pingquan until long after he first conceived his passion, and that Pingquan never noticed him at all. But rhetorically speaking, Zongxiang's sudden, almost miraculous appearance solves a problem that Wang Miaoru apparently needed to solve: how to demonstrate Pingquan's essential marriageability through her most activist moments and how to spare her the indignity of seeking a man.

Similar anxieties surface in Siqi Zhai's two novels, although they are resolved in a different way. Both of his fictions are somewhat more explicit than *Nü yuhua* in overtly calling for free choice in marriage. In order to reconcile this call with the reality that too much freedom could lead to an inappropriate choice of a partner (by traditional standards), Siqi Zhai reverts to the conventions of the *caizi jiaren* (scholar-beauty) novel, in which the choice of a mate is shown to be heaven-ordained. *Zhongguo xin nühao* makes the point explicitly when it says:

Reader: When other novels talk about love between men and women, what kind of young woman is attracted to what kind of young man, generally speaking? It will certainly be a stylish young man with the talent of Song Yu and a face like Pan An. Later on, this girl and boy will no doubt carry on flirtatiously, giving rise to all manner of disgraceful behaviour. You should know that these are all the novelist's excuses for encouraging licentiousness. But the girls of an enlightened country definitely do not act this way. When Yingniang is attracted to Ren Zili, although she is attracted to his talent and beauty, yet his talent is not a talent for chanting *shi* and writing *fu*, and his beauty is not a coquettish, feminine type of beauty. Thus for her suddenly to fall in love is by no means an excuse for [the author] to display disgraceful behaviour. (p. 13)

Moreover, the sequence early in *Zhongguo xin nühao* where Yingniang meets and is attracted to Ren contains other direct addresses designed to assure the reader that the couple's courtship is under tight moral control, as in the following example:

Reader: It so happens that Beijing at this time is a maze of streets, just as like in the foreign concession in Shanghai, and the camel carts of Beijing are like the horse carriages overseas in that they can seat three or four people. They're not the old-fashioned narrow and clumsy ones. Now Ren Zili wants to invite Yingniang to sit with him. China didn't use to have this practice, but today our customs have begun to change. And since the couple have already declared a brother-sister friendship, [their sitting together is] nothing out of the ordinary. [It's just that they're in] the same cart with adjoining cushions. This is not to be considered strange. (pp. 21-2)

Soon afterwards, Ren's background is fully introduced, and the reader learns of his family's impressive social credentials. In the end, he turns out to be as good a match for Yingniang as if traditional engagement rituals had been employed. Moreover, Yingniang's maid is ever at her side throughout all but a fleeting moment of her first date with Ren.

As we have seen in Shan Shili's admonition of her daughter-in-law, the question of how to deal with the unescorted female is not solved merely by providing her with a husband or fiancé. Whereas *Nü yuhua* solves the problem by never letting its marriageable heroine out in public, Siqi Zhai's far more activist heroines need added security to save them from shame, even after their fiancés have been ascertained. This could be the reason that Yingniang's travels around the globe are always shown to take place in the company of two maids. Even during her short stint in jail the maids are incarcerated at the same time. The same is true of *Nüzi quan*'s Zhennieng. Her trip around the world might have been more threatening to *guixiu* values, were it not for the ever-present domestic by her side. Even so, it is not likely that Shan Shili would have approved of Yingniang's and Zhennieng's wide-ranging travel plans.

Siqi Zhai's greater boldness in allowing his heroines out in public must be balanced against a seemingly greater reluctance to let them continue with their public activities once they take on the role of wives. This appears to be the reason that his two plots end with the marriage of the heroines. In both cases, the heroines ask their husband's permission for one last voyage, each time to attend a commemorative event left over from their heroic phase. Both husbands agree to these gestures, but it appears that the wives have lost authority over their own comings and goings with this change in their lives. Thus it seems all but obvious that neither Yingniang nor Zhenniang will continue the writing or orating that have been the mainstay of their existence since they first launched their careers. A similar concern may have been on the mind of Wang Miaoru, when she introduces Pingquan to her husband but delays the marriage indefinitely. For once, Shan Shili appears less conservative than these others, not only by writing forward looking narratives after her own marriage to Chen Xun, but also by supporting the education of her daughter-in-law.

Our third case study has to do with the treatment of 'amazons', which is to say, women for whom marriage is unlikely, or at least not of primary concern. Such women are less inclined to provoke worries about escorts and fiancés, presumably because they take so little interest in men. To whatever small extent their political radicalism might flout convention in a sexual sense, it is contained by the implication that they are married to a cause, such as the nation, rather than to a man. Yet their outspokenness and visibility can still pose a challenge to time-worn *guixiu* ideals. This kind of activism does not come up in *Guimao lixing ji* directly. It is telling, however, that Qian Fengbao is known to have participated in an anti-Manchu demonstration in Japan, presumably against the wishes of Shimoda Utako, whose discouragement of public activism was widely known.<sup>43</sup>

In contrast, the issue of the amazon comes up directly in two of the three novels under review. As we have seen, *Nü yuhua*'s Xuemei is presented very sympathetically. The victim of an intolerable marriage, she is influenced by Herbert Spencer's 'Women's Rights' to stand up for what she needs. The fact that one well-placed kick manages to dispatch her oppressive husband is shown to be unintentional, so that she does not lose the narrator's respect either in this act of killing or when she breaks out of jail. Similarly, the scene in Chapter 8 where she debates revolution versus evolution with Pingquan not only gives Xuemei equal time but presents her position in a rather reasonable light as one possible means of remedying China's intolerable backwardness. Yet she is soon thereafter whisked off stage only to die several chapters later, enabling the more marriage-minded Pingquan to take centre stage.

*Zhongguo xin nühao* resembles *Nü yuhua* in offering a sympathetic portrait of an amazon. This is the character Hua Qixing, who assassinates a Chinese official residing in Japan. It is interesting that Hua takes this drastic step in defence of her friend Xin Jiyuan, who is equally loyal to the cause of Chinese women but much more marriageable. It is Xin's strict construction of *guixiu* virtue that leads her to suicide after a night spent fully dressed in the company of a disreputable man. Through this character, *Zhongguo xin nühao* presents the issue of revolution and

evolution in terms quite similar (sometimes almost identical) to those put forth in *Nü yuhua*.<sup>44</sup> Despite her early death, Hua Qixing is presented sympathetically, and in death she is honoured by a statue, just as Xin is. Yet it is quite clear in this novel that the evolutionary alternative is again preferred. Even before the debacle that ends Hua's and Xin's lives, we know from Yingniang's sighs and reservations that she does not favour the policies of the Huifu nüquan hui. Only when she takes over the leadership, and the name of the organization is changed, are women shown to be engaged in bringing about the right kind of change. Yingniang's compromising brand of meliorism is apparent in a list of points made by her new organization, the Funü zizhi hui. This list combines provisions new to China, such as pushing for women's ability to support themselves, but with holdovers from the old order, such as suppressing jealous feelings if one's husband has affairs (pp. 87–8).

Another indication of where the author stands is found in the attitude of the narrator. Under Hua's and Xin's leadership, the Funü zizhi hui gives rise to various forms of activism and violence back in China, all of which are either ridiculed or decried. In this respect, *Nüzi quan* is very similar to *Zhongguo xin nühao*. The former novel has no amazon character, but it follows the latter almost word-for-word in its distaste for the Chinese imitators of an American fringe group (the one which tries to limit the hours housewives spend on duty) or at the folly of spin-offs of the Huifu nüquan hui, whose poor judgement leads women to violent ends.

This elaboration of our three case studies turns up one final example of how Shan's work and the three novels proceed along slightly different lines. Except on the issue of narration, Shan makes her standards of propriety perfectly clear. With the three novels, on the other hand, one has to second guess the narrator in order to get at the conflicts posed by the very changes for which that same narrator seems to call. Do these narrators favour drastic actions? Judging only from what the characters say, revolution is not unreasonable, and they are stricken with grief when their amazon friends die. Only by probing certain silences and juxtapositions do we get a clear idea of where the narrators' true sympathies lie. The conflict is most in evidence in the question of free marriage in Siqu Zhai's two novels. Do these novels really favour free choice in marriage, as they seem to, or only when heaven guarantees that the 'free choice' will work out well? The answer is emphatically the latter, which is to say that free choice in marriage is so controlled by ideas of gentility that it is anything but free. *Nü yuhua* is quite similar in its profession of respect for freely chosen partners, yet the heavy use of coincidence simultaneously ensures that Pingquan's future marriage will be genteel enough to suit her needs.

## Contexts and conclusions

As we have seen, the idea of a literature for, about, and even by women was not new to China in the first decade of the twentieth century. But three important differences separate *Guimao lixing ji*, *Nü yuhua* and *Nüzi quan* and *Zhongguo xin nühao* from the *tanci* and women's poetry collections that figured so prominently in women's writings of earlier decades and dynasties. The first is the sense of



crisis. Women must be educated if China is to survive. Following Darwinist logic, the general idea is to avoid the plight of India and Korea, which were swallowed up by foreign powers because of their benighted attitudes, especially those toward women.<sup>45</sup> A second important difference is the reformist cast to this literature. Readers, viewed as female, are exhorted to learn to walk, learn to read, teach and practise medicine, join societies, and travel around the world. This literature is not only about China's problem with women, it is construed as one of the means for overcoming this problem. In this it is true to the sense of fiction's burden as put forth by Liang Qichao.<sup>46</sup>

Finally, and somewhat paradoxically, the strong voice of male writers in this literature is an important change. Whereas men were often the financial and emotional support behind traditional women's writings, they were rarely portrayed within the text as propping up the woman writer, nor does one find them using feminine pen names or addressing audiences of women readers on their own. In these works, however, the support and influence of male writers is critical. This is so both in the help they provide aspiring women writers and in their efforts to reach out to women readers on their own. It is almost as though the task of rousing women is so important that men must step in as leaders, since women are as yet incapable of managing this task on their own.

Other differences have more to do with content and less with form. The figure of the amazon is hardly new to Chinese literature, but there is something new about the way Sha Xuemei and Hua Qixing are portrayed. The name Qiu Jin has come up repeatedly in this essay, mainly as a point of reference for the life and work of Shan Shili. Qiu's experience with Shimoda Utako, at whose school Qiu studied, is another means of showing her tangential relationship to the world inhabited by Shan.<sup>47</sup> Qiu's high level of activism, as previously noted, would not have been favoured in Shimoda's world.<sup>48</sup> Their confrontation over the question revolution versus education as the better path for Chinese women makes it evident that this was no mere conceit of fiction but a very live topic in its time. That Wang Miaoru and Siqi Zhai should both have built fictionalized Qiu-like characters almost on the eve of Qiu's most dramatic revolutionary act seems eerily prescient as we look back at it today. Although Hua Qixing's assassination was said to be inspired by Russian antecedents, *Zhongguo xin nühao's* publication and Qiu's execution for sedition took place in the same month and year.<sup>49</sup> Nor did the debate between evolution and revolution die out completely in later fiction, despite Qiu's tragic end. Ida Kahn's English-language tale, which appeared in a missionary journal in 1910 presents the same conflict, but with a Christian spin.<sup>50</sup>

Concerns about free choice in marriage and the unescorted female, too, mark works by Shan, Wang, and Siqi Zhai as typical of their time. The issue of how to guarantee that free choice in marriage would produce a fiancé(e) of compatible social background comes up in other late Qing novels, such as the novel *Ziyou jiehun*, and it persisted into the May Fourth era, as well.<sup>51</sup> As for unescorted female travel, we know that even Qiu Jin (whose *guixiu* credentials were once impeccable) often travelled with a maid.<sup>52</sup> Issues of free travel and free marriage

were new in the late Qing, but the ways in which our three novelists and Shan Shili resolve them betray the strong hold of tradition, even when much is new.

*Guimao lüxing ji*, *Nü yuhua*, *Zhongguo xin nühao* and *Nüzi quan* are but one small corner of a much larger picture of literature written for women at the end of the Qing. What makes them interesting is their take on a dilemma affecting would-be women leaders, not just in China but around the world. In cultures emphasizing meekness and modesty, how could a woman travel widely or proclaim her views and still maintain a genteel pose? At the same time, in China of the early twentieth century, when rousing women was deemed indispensable to national survival, the voices of adventurous women could be a powerful, even a crucial, tool. Each of the four works under consideration displays a compromise between proper *guixiu* identity and the exigencies of the time. Shan Shili had a broadening experience and, through her husband's help, sought to pass this on to other women, all the while extolling the *guixiu* virtues to which she could still lay claim. Through Xuemei, Wang Miaoru boldly fantasized about the inhumanity wrought upon women, yet her combination of brilliance and an early death are reminiscent of old paradigms, as is the companionate husband by her side. A man creating women characters, Siqi Zhai is in a different position from either Shan or Wang. His own claim to authorship did not compromise his claim to virtue; on the contrary, it answered a desperate national need. Moreover, his Zhenniang and Yingniang go well beyond Shan's self-portrait or Wang's Xu Pingquan in standing up for women's rights and forging links around the globe. Yet even these two heroines have limits they will not trespass. Their voices as writers and orators sound forth in ways that leave gentility unimpaired. Idealized though they may be in many respects, their vestigial *guixiu* virtues are a striking measure of the stresses and strains real women faced as they sought to step genteelly onto the modern stage.

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## Notes

- 1 For an example of a seventeenth-century woman who travelled, see the entry on Huang Yuanjie in *WWTC* 1999: 357–63.
- 2 This is Gu Taiqing's *Honglou meng ying*, published in 1877. See my 'Ming Loyalism and the Woman's Voice in Fiction after *Honglou meng*', in Widmer and Chang 1997: 393–6.
- 3 The only other novel by Siqi Zhai that I have found is a long (for a *wenyan* tale) account of love among courtesans and their patrons entitled *Bihai zhu*, reprinted in Ban Zhenghao 1996, Vol. 38.

- 4 *Nü yuhua* is 12 chapters in length, as is *Nüzi quan*. *Zhongguo xin nühao* has 16 chapters.
- 5 For example, it is much less idealistic than the other three and much more negative about Western influence. I have used the edition reprinted in *Zhongguo jindai xiaoshuo daxi* 1993.
- 6 Another novel, Yi Suo's *Huang Xiuqiu* of 1905 differs from all of the above in its interest in freeing the heroine of her dependencies – whether on her husband or her imaginary interlocutor Madame Roland. Jilin: Wenshi chubanshe, 1992. See also Hu Ying 2000: 152–96. Among the works mentioned so far, *Huang Xiuqiu* is the least interested in gentility per se.
- 7 The various manifests and newspaper articles in Siqi Zhai's two novels are always addressed to women. In contrast the audience for his courtesan sketches would appear to be mainly men.
- 8 For example, the author of *Nüyingxiong duli zhuan*, Chen Qian, was a close friend of Qiu Jin. When he wrote this novel, he used the pen-name Wanlan Nüshi. See *Zhongguo tongshu xiaoshuo zongmu tiyao* 1990: 993. See also Wang 1997: 166, on the authorship of *Dongou nü haojie* of 1902. This novel is said to be authored by Lingnan yuyi nüshi but is probably the work of Luo Pu. And if, as seems likely, the supposed translator of *Ziyou jiehun* (1903) Zhendan nüshi, is really the author Zhan Zhaodong, it would be a third instance of a feminine-sounding name being introduced into a work of fiction that was actually by a man. On this last link, see *Zhongguo tongshu xiaoshuo zongmu tiyao* 1990: 861.
- 9 See *Zhongguo tongshu xiaoshuo zongmu tiyao*. Other novels that seem to be directed at women from this period are *Ziyou jiehun* (p. 861, claimed – probably spuriously – to be translated by a woman); *Nü haojie* (p. 894; the author is not known but the commentator is said to be female); *Nü juren* (p. 895); *Niangzi jun* (p. 900); *Nü yuhua* (p. 906); *Nü yingxiong duli juan* (p. 993); *Zhongguo xin nühao* (p. 1015); *Nüzi quan* (p. 1118); and *Xin Jin Ping Mei* (p. 1197). Some of these 'female' authors are known to be men, for example that of *Nü yingxiong duli juan*, Chen Qian, a close friend of Qiu Jin, as noted above.
- 10 For more on Qiu Jin see note 49 and discussion below.
- 11 The Japanese publisher, Dōbun insatsusha, worked in conjunction with Guoxue she of Shanghai. A copy may be found in the Academy of Social Sciences Library, Beijing. The modern edition was published together with *Guiqian ji*. See Yang Jian 1981.
- 12 A good account of Shan's life is found in Chen Hongxiang 1986, preface to Shan's *Shouci shi shigao*. For an interesting analysis of how the *nei/wai* distinction figures in Shan's account, see 'Would that I Were Marco Polo. The Travel Writing of Shan Shili (1856–1943)', *The Journal of Travel Literature* 5/1 (2004): 119–41.
- 13 Chen Hongxiang 1986: 3.
- 14 Eva Hong, Introductory note to Shan Shili, 'Selections from Travel in the Year Guimao'. Translation in *Renditions* 53 and 54: 215. Hu Ying 2000 gives some fictional and other examples of this principle in operation.
- 15 This anthology is discussed in some detail in Mann 1997.
- 16 Some bibliographic information on Shan can be found in LFZ 838. *Qing Guixiu zhengshi zaixu ji* is held in several libraries, including the Harvard-Yenching Library.
- 17 Many of these are listed in LFZ 827–42.
- 18 Copy in Qinghua University Library.
- 19 LFZ 838.
- 20 The manuscript copy in the Fudan University Library has a slightly different title from the published version: 'Shoucishi shichao'. I am indebted to Wu Ge of the Fudan University Library for pointing this source out to me.
- 21 According to *Zhongguo tongshu xiaoshuo zongmu tiyao*, there were two editions from 1904 and altogether three different titles. The second and third titles are *Honggui lei* and *Guige haojie tan*.

- 22 See for example, Zeitlin 1997: 242–63. See also Ko 1994: 160 ff.
- 23 See Hu Ying 2000: 190.
- 24 Page references are to the edition reprinted in *Zhongguo jindai xiaoshuo daxi* 1993.
- 25 David Wang discusses this novel in Wang 1997: 170–4. The term ‘future perfect’ is found on p. 173. I find myself disagreeing with his interpretation of the story as one that offers equally favoured alternatives in the form of Xuemei and Pingquan. In my view, the commentary encourages the interpretation that Xuemei’s strategy for achieving equal rights for women is too disruptive, as does the way she vanishes from the scene. Yet Pingquan and her fiancé do not rush to marry, perhaps because the author does not quite know how to reconcile her heroine’s marriage with her more public ambitions.
- 26 I am indebted to James Cheng and Shen Jing of the Harvard-Yenching Library for obtaining copies of the original editions of both *Zhongguo xin nühao* and *Nüzi quan* for me. The originals are in the Shanghai Library. Page references to *Zhongguo xin nühao* are to the original edition. As far as I know, there is no reprint edition.
- 27 Zhan Xi was a multi-talented figure of the late Qing. He passed the *xiucai* examination late in the Qing but then became involved in ‘new learning’. After an official career under the Qing, he went on to pursue a career in educational administration during the Republic. He was also an artist and art connoisseur. He wrote a novel, *Hualiu shenqing zhuan* that came out in 1901. See *Quxian zhi* 1992: 487; Sun Kaidi 1974: 209; and Anonymous [Patrick Hanan], ‘The New Novel before the New Novel: John Fryer’s Fiction Contest’, in Zeitlin and Liu 2003: 330–2.
- 28 *Huitu hanshang baihua zhuan* is held in the Nanjing Library; the publisher is Wenhan ge, n.p.? A preface by Shen Jingxue is dated 1903. An edition of *Rouxiang yunshi* published in 1914 by Zhenmin bianji she, Shanghai, and held in the Shanghai Library, gives the date of the preface as 1907 and the publication date is listed as winter, 1907; the same preface is found in *Huitu haishang baihua zhuan* dated 1903, and the first collection of *Hua shi*, dated 1906, refers to *Rouxiang yunshi* as an earlier collection (see Zhan’s preface). The edition I have of *Rouxiang yunshi* must be a re-edition. From internal evidence, it seems that the collection was completed in 1900, as Zhan refers to 1900 as ‘this year’ on p. 25, a practice he does not use for earlier years. It was probably not published until 1902. Photographs in the collection bear the dates 1901 and 1902. *Hua shi* came out in two collections. The first, dated 1906, fourth month, was published by Zuoxin she (for more on this publisher see below). The second, dated 1907, tenth month, was published by Shangwu yinshuguan. Both are held in the Zhejiang library.
- 29 See *Youxi bao*, tenth month, fifth day (Chinese calendar) 1897. This sketch is referred to in Zhan Xi’s novel. See also Zhan Kai’s *Hua shi*, p. 107, where he says that he and his elder brother interviewed the same woman.
- 30 Spence 1990: 246.
- 31 This detail may have been influenced by the Boxer Protocol of 1901, one of whose provisions was that China erect monuments to the memory of the foreigners who were killed. See Spence 1990: 235.
- 32 It is difficult to say whether it was published before or after *Zhongguo xin nühao*.
- 33 For example, when Yingniang travels between Washington and New York, she passes through Montana, North Dakota, Wisconsin, Michigan, Lake Erie and Pennsylvania. Here Siqi Zhai may have confused the two Washingtons. When Yingniang’s friends come to Washington to have dinner with her, it appears as though they are visiting a state rather than a city. See p. 110.
- 34 Shan’s friendship with Shimoda is established by her poem in *Shouci shigao* in which she speaks of six years of friendship. The poem, written in 1906, is entitled ‘Bingwu qiu liubie riben Xiatian gezi’ [‘A souvenir for Shimoda Utako of Japan in the fall of 1906’]. See Shan 1986: 45. Shan’s note to this poem mentions that her daughter-in-law, whom she refers to as ‘Baofeng’, had graduated from Shimoda’s school. Together,

- Joan Judge and I have ascertained that this is the woman normally referred to as Qian Fengbao, whose husband is named Qian Daosun. The fact that Daosun is Shan's son is established in several poems in *Shoucishi shigao*, for example see p. 76, as well as in Shan's other writings.
- 35 Shan's claim to have made this translation is found in her note to 'Bingwu qiu liubie riben Xiatian Gezi'.
- 36 Zhenniang's trip from Beijing to Saint Petersburg takes about thirteen days. In contrast, Shan's trip from Tokyo to St Petersburg takes about seven weeks, but with stops along the way.
- 37 That Siqi Zhai's only other known work, *Bihai zhu*, dates from the same year as *Zhongguo xin nühao* and *Nüzi quan* but is written in classical Chinese suggests that he adjusted the level of language to suit the ability of his intended readership.
- 38 Hunter 1984: 87.
- 39 Hunter 1984: 52–89.
- 40 The assassination of Alexander II by Sophia Perovskaya in 1881 being the prime example.
- 41 See for example *Zhonghua shuju*, Shanghai bianji suo 1960: 4–6.
- 42 Shan 1981: 140–50.
- 43 Judge 2001: 793.
- 44 For example, both novels refer to women as living in 'the eighteenth hell'. Cf. *Nü yuhua* p. 709 and *Zhongguo xin nühao* p. 45.
- 45 For one example of this argument, see Hua Qixing's speech in *Zhongguo xin nühao*, pp. 49–50. Cf. Shimoda Utako's very similar logic for educating Chinese women, on which see Judge 2001: 776.
- 46 In the journal *Xin xiaoshuo* (*New Fiction*), founded in 1902.
- 47 Judge 2001: 763.
- 48 Judge 2001: 794.
- 49 Qui was executed on July 15, 1907. *Zhongguo xin nühao*'s date of publication was the sixth month of 1907. Rendered in the Western style, this date coincides with the seventh month. However, the date on the preface, 1906, appears to mean that the book was actually written before Qiu's demise, though of course it could be a false date. *Nü yuhua*, which also features an assassin, was published in 1904.
- 50 Hunter: 257–65.
- 51 For example, an essay by Chen Hengzhe entitled 'Fumu zhi ming yu ziyou jiehun' was written in 1935. It, too, suggests that if you let people choose their partners freely, they will automatically choose someone appropriate. See *Duli pinglun* 143 (1935): 9–12.
- 52 The escort issue came up among single women missionaries, as well. See Hunter: 66.

## 2 Washing the *wutong* tree

### Garden culture as an expression of women's gentility in the late Ming

*Alison Hardie*

#### Introduction

In the late Ming period, garden culture was an important aspect of literati culture, especially in the cultural heartland of Jiangnan. Although garden culture had been important to many literati since at least the Song dynasty, there were a number of reasons why interest in it became ever more widespread during the Ming, and especially in the sixteenth and early seventeenth century: economic growth meant that garden ownership came within the means of increasing numbers of people; the expanding numbers of aspirants to government office were not matched by any increase in the number of official posts, and there was therefore an increasing number of unemployed literati who had to fill in their leisure time one way or another; the rise of the merchant class was felt by the literati as a threat to their social position, and in response they devised ways to assert their cultural superiority by defining the criteria of 'taste', and found gardens to be an area in which these criteria could readily be deployed. At the same time, a flourishing publishing industry encouraged the spread of information and comment on all aspects of culture, including gardens;<sup>1</sup> descriptions of actual and ideal gardens and different views on various aspects of garden culture circulated widely. Book illustrations also provided the reading public with a wide range of images of garden scenes.<sup>2</sup>

Naturally, most surviving literature on gardens was written by and for men. It is therefore difficult to establish how much of a role women played in garden culture. This aspect of life in the Ming has often been overlooked or underestimated, especially by contrast with the Qing dynasty. The unforgettable descriptions in *The Dream of the Red Chamber* (*Honglou Meng*) of Prospect Garden (Daguanyuan) and the women who live and socialize there have made it impossible to ignore the participation of women in garden culture at that period.<sup>3</sup>

The conventional view of Chinese gardens as masculine spaces is challenged in Francesca Bray's study, *Technology and Gender: Fabrics of Power in Late Imperial China*, where she reconsiders the role of women in the deployment of technology, in which she includes domestic architecture; she concludes that women played a much larger part in the construction of social space than has generally been recognized. In her consideration of domestic space, she includes the

garden. Disappointingly, though, she does not point to any particular involvement of women with the space of the garden.<sup>4</sup>

### **The concept of gentility in the late Ming**

This chapter will look at the role of women in garden culture in the late Ming, especially in the context of the part played by gardens in the construction of gentility. For the purposes of this discussion, I regard gentility and gentry status as meaning slightly different but closely allied things. I understand gentry status to mean membership of the scholar-official class, whether or not the person in question had actually taken the civil service examinations or held a government post. Women's membership of this class was dependent on that of their father or husband. Given that the governing class in China after the Tang was, at least in theory, a meritocracy, the boundaries of the scholar-official class were always permeable to some extent, and never more so than in the late Ming, when economic growth and the expansion of the merchant class meant that increasing numbers of people aspired to gentry status (which could be obtained by the purchase of an official title), while a decreasing proportion of examination candidates was successful in obtaining government positions.<sup>5</sup> There was therefore an expanding number of people whose family background meant that they felt themselves to be members of the *élite*, but who did not actually hold the government position which would publicly validate such a claim. Other, less formal ways of confirming one's gentry status therefore had to be sought, so, as indicated above, matters of 'taste' became very important in the late Ming as a way for the *élite* to distinguish themselves from people whom they felt to be their social inferiors, even when these people might have not only the cash but the official titles which the self-styled gentleman lacked.<sup>6</sup> This was where the pursuit of gentility came into play: 'gentility' can be conceived as the qualities possessed by an ideal member of the gentry or scholar-official class, thus the display of 'gentility' could serve to qualify one as a member of the gentry whether or not one was strictly speaking entitled to this social status.

An understanding of gentry status (and its moral counterpart, gentility) in the Chinese context involves various different inter-related aspects. The gentleman is expected to serve his sovereign and his society by becoming an official; even if he is out of office for some reason such as being in mourning for a parent, he should be socially *engagé*, support and advise the local magistrate, and carry out good works in his local area. Under certain political conditions, however, – conditions which were amply fulfilled in the late Ming – the gentleman could also be justified in going into retirement. Gentry status is also closely allied with the possession of economic power; it was economic power which allowed members of the gentry the leisure to study for the civil service examinations, and official position also brought tax-breaks which could be of economic benefit to the office-holder's entire family. At the same time, this economic power was supposed, ideally, to be used for the benefit of the whole community. The gentleman was also supposed to be a moral exemplar for his social inferiors, and in this connection the right ordering of

his family life was important. Another aspect of this moral authority was cultural authority; ‘taste’ was a moral issue, in that gaudiness and extravagance were signs of moral failing (and particularly, as far as the gentry were concerned, ‘proved’ the moral inferiority of merchants). The gentleman was the interpreter and the exemplar of both moral and cultural standards. Gentry status is therefore not just externally determined by factors such as wealth and official status, but also has a moral and cultural dimension: someone who is poor and does not have official status may nevertheless have moral qualities and qualities of cultural refinement that qualify him as one of nature’s gentlemen. It is these qualities which can be defined as gentility, and gentility can be aspired to, at least in theory, by members of any social class.

### **Garden culture and self-representation**

The part played by garden culture in the self-representation of élite men is now generally recognized.<sup>7</sup> The garden, represented either as a site of reclusion and detachment, or as a site of social engagement and responsibility, helps to support claims to gentry status by its owner. Timothy Brook shows a commercial publisher laying claim to gentility by publishing an idealized self-portrait of himself in a garden.<sup>8</sup> In late Ming garden literature, the garden owner often claims to be a recluse in his garden,<sup>9</sup> although in other cases the garden may be represented as a means for the owner to benefit his friends and neighbours through the use of its produce, such as fish, fruit or medicinal herbs.<sup>10</sup> In practical, economic terms, gardens were also a convenient form of investment in a society which was rather lacking in satisfactory investment vehicles, especially for those unwilling to be seen going into business.<sup>11</sup> Agricultural and residential property was usually held by a family rather than an individual, and could not be disposed of without consulting the entire family, if then. Ming sources, however, indicate that gardens, which were not necessarily regarded as part of the family patrimony, frequently changed hands in the event of financial misfortune or their owner’s death.<sup>12</sup> They were therefore a conveniently liquid embodiment of economic capital as well as of social and cultural capital. The right ordering of family life could also be expressed through the garden if, for example, the owner or his sons were involved in directing the garden servants in growing economic crops for family consumption, or the women of the family were involved in rearing silkworms and spinning the thread themselves. Most obviously, the design of a garden is a very public statement of one’s cultural standards and aesthetic preferences.

Garden culture is a matter of more than just ownership, however. The connoisseurship of gardens in general was also important. The leisure to visit private gardens, and the ability to gain access to them, either through acquaintance with the owner or through being obviously the right sort of person, all helped to validate claims to gentry status. And once within the garden, it was essential to react to it in the right sort of way, as with the connoisseurship of all kinds of other arts, on which there are such voluminous writings in the late Ming. Writing of the time betrays great sensitivity to questions of ‘vulgarity’ in garden design,



nomenclature etc.<sup>13</sup> This is all part of the project of élite self-definition by defining the criteria of ‘taste’.

### **Women and garden culture**

Above are some of the ways in which élite men deployed garden culture to express their gentility and justify (or enhance) their social status. To what extent did women do the same? Did they wish to do so, and were they able to? The evidence for women’s deployment of garden culture is rather random, and it is hard to build up a full or clear picture. Moreover, we have little or no evidence for the majority of ‘ordinary’ women in China, and we have to concentrate on women who in one way or another were ‘extraordinary’, whether because they were gentry women of high status who were distinguished in some way, for example as writers, or because they were glamorous, trend-setting courtesans whose lives were thought worthy of record. I will therefore look at the part played by garden culture in the lives of a random and limited sample of these women, and how it related to their actual or desired social status.

#### ***Shang Jinglan: social activities in gardens***

First, I will focus on the poet Shang Jinglan (1605–c.1676)<sup>14</sup> as an example of a gentry woman who was deeply involved in garden culture. It is difficult to know how typical Shang Jinglan was of gentry women in general, since we know so much more about her than we do about many others, but because of the relative abundance of evidence for her life and activities, she forms a particularly interesting case study. Her life and literary activities have been closely studied by Dorothy Ko,<sup>15</sup> but here I want to look at her garden-related activities.

Shang Jinglan was the wife of Qi Biaoqia (1603–1645),<sup>16</sup> a brilliant scholar and gifted administrator who belonged to a distinguished family from Shanyin in Zhejiang. Shang Jinglan’s family was also from the Shaoxing area and was equally distinguished; her father Shang Zhouzuo (*jinshi* [Presented Scholar] 1601) was Minister of Works in Nanjing in 1627.<sup>17</sup> Shang Jinglan did not, of course, own a garden herself, since women could not officially own property in their own right.<sup>18</sup> But this was no hindrance to her participation in garden culture. Her husband’s family owned several gardens: there were the Secret Garden (Miyuan) of her father-in-law, the bibliophile Qi Chenghan (1565–1628),<sup>19</sup> the Axe-haft Garden (Keyuan) of Qi Chenghan’s brother, both near Shaoxing, and the villa called the Occasional Dwelling (Ouju) owned by the family on the shores of the West Lake outside Hangzhou. Then in the mid-1630s her husband Qi Biaoqia, home on official leave from government service, spent a considerable time developing his own Yushan Garden near Shaoxing.

Shang Jinglan and Qi Biaoqia had a very close and loving relationship; theirs is an example of the companionate marriage which, as Dorothy Ko has shown, became an admired ideal in the late Ming.<sup>20</sup> She was involved with her husband’s garden from an early stage, visiting the site with him when it was still being

planned.<sup>21</sup> Later, as it developed, she spent increasing amounts of time there with him, sometimes even staying overnight in the garden, although it was at some distance from the family's residence.<sup>22</sup> Francesca Bray's assumption that gardens were always 'constructed not outside the house but within its walls'<sup>23</sup> was not in fact the case, but this did not prevent the involvement of women even with gardens at a distance from their residence.

Indeed, visits to gardens appear to have provided an acceptable arena for activity outside the house on the part of gentry women, and presumably of other women who had the leisure for such enjoyments. There are allusions in Qi Biaoqia's diary to his garden being visited by groups of women; these were evidently neither lower-class women nor members of his own family, since he mentions leaving the garden in order to avoid meeting them, evidently for reasons of propriety.<sup>24</sup> The garden was apparently also visited by the distinguished courtesan Liu Rushi (1618–1664);<sup>25</sup> I will discuss this visit further below. Qi and his wife made a number of visits together to gardens in the neighbourhood, in much the same way as he would visit gardens with his male friends.<sup>26</sup>

In addition, as Qi's diary shows, Shang Jinglan participated in garden culture not just as a companion to her husband, but also together with the other women in the family: her mother-in-law, sisters-in-law and various aunts, both her own and her husband's. Their activities in the gardens of family and friends – holding drinks parties, which probably also involved poetry composition, watching theatrical performances, enjoying lantern displays and so on – paralleled the activities of elite men. Qi describes a birthday celebration for his mother:

When the snow stopped all my brothers and I took Mother to view the snow in the Axe-haft Garden, and invited Aunt [Qi Chenghan's brother's wife] to join us. We went via Yushan, moored the boat below the South Hill on the lake and went to Dai Wenwo's house. All his female relatives came out to greet Mother at the mooring. Mother looked very happy today; it really was a joyful family occasion.<sup>27</sup>

On another occasion, 'Mother brought all her daughters and daughters-in-law to view [the garden]'.<sup>28</sup> Later the same year, 'My wife and all her sisters-in-law held a party for Mother on the hill [Yushan]'.<sup>29</sup> Early in 1637, 'Mother and her daughters-in-law plus my sister Mrs He came to the hill [Yushan]';<sup>30</sup> Qi's brother-in-law He Zhitian was a keen gardener, who contributed plants to the Yushan Garden,<sup>31</sup> and his wife may have shared his interest. The following month, 'I entertained Mother to the opera in Yushan'.<sup>32</sup>

These gentry women therefore had a social and cultural life of their own, modelled on (and sometimes shared with) that of their male relatives. By participating in these activities, privileged women such as those of the Qi and Shang families not only enhanced group solidarity but identified themselves as members of an economic and cultural elite which included both men and women. They were not necessarily rejecting 'womanly' activities such as weaving and embroidery – which they would have shared with women lower in the social

scale – but making it clear that there was more to their lives than ‘women’s work’ (*nügong*). They were identifying themselves as members of a class rather than a gender.

There was one way, however, in which gentry women at this period do not seem to have participated in garden culture in the same way as men. We have no evidence that they were ever involved in devising names or producing calligraphic inscriptions for garden features, nor were they invited to include their poems on garden subjects in the collections which might be published by garden owners. There is no sign of Shang Jinglan having named any of the features in her husband’s garden, nor did she have any poems included in the collection of poems by friends and relatives which he published together with his *Yushan zhu* (*Notes on Yushan*). Presumably this would have been equivalent to appearing in public, which was generally unacceptable. However, the fact that gentry women did not publish poems about gardens in male collections does not mean that they did not write them; a number of Shang Jinglan’s poems relating to the family’s gardens survive, though most of them seem to date from after Qi’s death.<sup>33</sup>

Although no poem by Shang was included in the original edition of Qi’s *Notes on Yushan*, which presumably circulated fairly widely among his large acquaintance, the text does mention her involvement in the agricultural activities associated with the garden, tending silkworms and taking refreshments to the farm labourers:

Whenever I go to encourage the farm-workers, and sometimes get my wife and children to take flasks and food-containers with refreshments for them, and collect left-over wine and food to feed the old rustics, we sing working songs together, responding to each other with cries of ‘hey-ho!’. Behind the hall is the threshing-floor. In the tenth month we harvest the grain, which the neighbours help each other to thresh by torch-light, and winnow the chaff from the new grain to add some mouthfuls to my old mother’s meals. When it comes to the silkworm season, I take my wife to live there, and she picks mulberry-leaves and *fan*-plants according to the procedures for women’s work.<sup>34</sup>

These virtuous activities, to be expected of a traditional Confucian wife, would enhance the status of the family as a whole, in a way that gadding about visiting gardens purely for pleasure certainly would not. The claim that Shang Jinglan was engaged in such virtuous pursuits in the garden is intended to enhance Qi Biao’s own status because it shows that he is ordering his own family in the proper way.

### ***Fruitfulness and fertility***

In other Ming writing, there appears to be a similar association between traditional female virtue, as embodied in the gentry woman, and fertility or fruitfulness, represented by the planting and tending of fruit trees. There are a number of cases of women being particularly associated with the planting of fruit trees. A case of

a gentry woman planting a tree with her own hands, from the fifteenth century, is recorded by Wen Zhengming (1470–1559)<sup>35</sup> in a poem entitled ‘The hall of the Gu family’s Fragrant Shadows Hall has a prunus planted by my grandmother with her own hands’. Madame Gu, who was actually Wen’s step-grandmother, lived from 1433 to 1463, so she died before he was born. In the poem he seems to identify her, or at least her influence on the family, with the old but still flourishing prunus:

This fine tree, a hundred years old, has still not withered;  
The nourishment bestowed by her hand has somehow preserved Grandma’s spirit.<sup>36</sup>

After a description of the fragrance and brilliant whiteness of its blossom, he ends with a reference to ‘the words of [Lin] Bu’, the famous Song-dynasty hermit who ‘took the prunus to wife and the crane as his son’;<sup>37</sup> this reminder of a classic personification of the prunus tree as a beloved woman seems to be another way of suggesting an identification between Madame Gu and the prunus tree.

The touching and much anthologized essay by Gui Youguang (1507–1571)<sup>38</sup> on the building which formed his study, Nape of the Neck Gallery (Xiangji xuan) gives a portrait of three generations of women in his life, his grandmother, mother and wife. The final sentence of the essay reads, ‘There is a loquat tree in the courtyard, which my wife planted with her own hands the year she died; already it has grown to a great height and spreads like a roof.’<sup>39</sup>

This suggests not only that many years have passed since Mrs Gui’s death, but that through the medium of the loquat tree, her spirit is still overseeing and guarding the household, as in the case of Wen Zhengming’s grandmother.

### ***Calligraphic inscriptions***

We have seen that gentry women at this period do not appear to have had a role in naming garden features. However, the ability of aristocratic women to impose their personality on a garden through naming and inscription may have been greater than that of gentry women. The guidebook *Dijing jingwu lüe* (*Summary of the Sights and Objects of the Imperial Capital*), published in 1635, records that in the garden of the Marquis of Wuqing, the maternal grandfather of the Wanli Emperor (r. 1572–1620), ‘To the north of the [Decanting the Sea] Hall is a pavilion, on which are placed the words ‘Pure Elegance’ in the handwriting of the Ming Empress Dowager Su’.<sup>40</sup>

The garden was to the north-west of Peking, on the present site of Tsinghua University. The Empress Dowager, the Marquess of Wuqing’s daughter, had died in 1614. She was an exceptional woman, and took an active role in government during her son the Wanli Emperor’s minority (he succeeded to the throne at the age of nine). It was also very exceptional that she was given the title of Empress Dowager, since she was a concubine and not the official consort of the Longqing Emperor.<sup>41</sup> So it is perhaps not surprising if she is an exception to the rule that women are not involved in naming garden features.

*Courtesans and garden culture*

Another category of women about whose involvement with gardens we have some information is the courtesan. Although courtesans of course had no claim to gentility in terms of social status, they always had the hope of being able to marry a member of the gentry as his concubine, in which case any recognized children of the union would enjoy their father's social status. It was therefore extremely important for a courtesan to be seen to 'fit in' to gentry culture, so that a potential husband would not have to worry about whether she would let him down. In fact some of these women were highly intelligent and, if not very widely or profoundly educated, could at least hold their own in gentry pastimes, such as poetry, painting and calligraphy. Participation in garden culture was obviously a good way to advertise one's level of elegance and refinement. For a high-class courtesan, an elegant house and garden could be an investment which, by highlighting her culture and fashionability, would form a vital showcase for the attractions on which she was dependent to make a living. We find a variety of ways in which courtesans participated in garden culture.

An instance of a courtesan behaving in a way that exactly parallels elite male practice, by organizing a literati gathering in a garden, is the seventieth birthday party organized in 1604 (the last year of her life) by Ma Shouzhen (1548–1604),<sup>42</sup> one of the leading courtesans of Nanjing in the late sixteenth century, for her friend and former lover Wang Zhideng (1535–1612)<sup>43</sup> in the Flying Catkin Garden (Feixu yuan).<sup>44</sup> This was a garden which belonged to someone else and which she borrowed for the occasion; borrowing someone else's garden to give a party was normal practice for literati who did not have gardens of their own.

A working courtesan could participate in garden activities with men, but once she had married and turned respectable, she would not directly participate in a garden party, even one given in her honour. An instance is described by Yu Huai (1616–1696)<sup>45</sup> in *Banqiao zaji* (*Miscellaneous Reminiscences of Plank Bridge*), his nostalgic memoir of the Nanjing entertainment quarters prior to the fall of the Ming (although this incident actually took place in the early Qing). Gu Mei (1619–1664), another celebrated Nanjing courtesan of the late Ming, eventually (in 1643) became the concubine of the poet and official Gong Dingzi (1616–1673).<sup>46</sup> Much later, in 1657, the couple revisited Nanjing, where they stayed in the Garden of Urban Reclusion (Shiyinyuan).<sup>47</sup> For Gu Mei's birthday, Gong Dingzi held a banquet in the garden for a large number of people, with performances by the most famous surviving opera singers and musicians. Yu Huai says that Madame Gong 'let down a pearl curtain' and invited a number of her old colleagues who were still living in Nanjing to join her;<sup>48</sup> in other words they were able to watch the opera and participate in the party without actually being seen by the male guests. This modest behaviour seems to represent a claim to gentility.

However, a real gentry woman would not even be present at a celebration of her own birthday if there were non-family males there. Qi Biaoqia held a meeting at Yushan of a society for releasing living creatures (*fangshengshe*), of which he was a member, to celebrate his wife's birthday in 1636; at this meeting a record number of

the members showed up, presumably with the effect that his wife gained unusually large amounts of merit from the numbers of animals released. One might assume that since it was his wife's birthday she would be present on this occasion, but he lists the participants (all men) and she is not included, even though she seems to have been staying in the garden at the time; however, she enjoyed looking at the lanterns which were hung in the garden in her honour that evening.<sup>49</sup>

The courtesan Liu Rushi, briefly mentioned above, published a poem on one of the buildings in Qi Biaoja's Yushan Garden, entitled 'On Mr Qi Youwen's [Biaoja's] Yushan Thatched Hall', in her collection *Hushang cao* (*Grass on the Lake; Lakeside Jottings*).<sup>50</sup> Writing a poem about a garden feature does not necessarily mean that one has actually seen it: the scholar-official and top metropolitan graduate of 1595, Zhu Zhifan (b. 1564),<sup>51</sup> wrote a sequence of one hundred and ten poems on the Garden of Sitting in Reclusion (Zuoyinyuan) of Wang Tingna (fl. early seventeenth century) without having visited it.<sup>52</sup> However, it is likely that Liu Rushi did actually visit Qi's garden and see the Yushan Thatched Hall: Qi Biaoja included in the original publication of his *Notes on Yushan* a poem on a building called Inhaling Rainbow Canopy (Hu hong huang) by Wang Ranming (1577–1655),<sup>53</sup> with whom Liu Rushi was closely associated at the time of her sojourn in Hangzhou, the period to which her poem belongs, and one on the Yushan Thatched Hall by Lin Yunfeng,<sup>54</sup> who was a friend of Wang Ranming and apparently of Liu Rushi also, and to whom Wang later gave a copy of Liu's poems;<sup>55</sup> this suggests that Wang, Lin and Liu may have made a joint visit to the garden, and the last couplet of Liu's poem seems to imply this also:

He and I have both made songs to commemorate the garden;  
Dark vapours blown from the magic flute obscure our parting sail.<sup>56</sup>

'He' (or 'they') is presumably Wang Ranming or Lin Yunfeng or both; the 'magic flute' is an allusion to a building in the garden named the Flute Pavilion (Di ting), itself named in allusion to a local legend.<sup>57</sup> Although Wang's and Lin's poems appear in Qi's publication, Liu's does not; it would evidently not have been acceptable for her work to be published alongside that of eminent men (though for rather different reasons from those applicable to the non-appearance of poems by Qi's wife in the same publication).

Unlike gentry women, it appears that courtesans could actually own property, including gardens, in their own right, though this may have been something of a legal grey area. One of the courtesans described by Yu Huai in *Miscellaneous Reminiscences of Plank Bridge* was Li Xiangzhen, known as Tenth Lady Li (Li Shiniang). Yu Huai describes Tenth Lady Li's residence as follows:

In the winding rooms and secret buildings where she lived, there were screen-curtains and the finest antique vessels everywhere. Within, she had built a long gallery; to the left of the gallery was planted a single old prunus tree. When it was in flower, fragrant snow [i.e. prunus blossom] drifted over table and couch. To the right of the gallery were planted two *wutong* trees and ten or so

stems of giant bamboo. Morning and evening she washed the *wutong* trees and wiped the bamboos; their viridian colour was positively edible. People who visited her house wondered whether they had left the world of dust.<sup>58</sup>

The superficially rather strange action of washing the *wutong* trees was done in emulation of the painter Ni Zan (1301–1374)<sup>59</sup>, who had an obsession with cleanliness. By performing this ‘obsessive’ action, Tenth Lady Li was identifying herself with this distinguished, if eccentric, literatus painter. The restrained planting of the garden – just one prunus, two *wutong* trees and a dozen stems of bamboo – is already the *dernier cri* in garden aesthetics at this period. The fashion for a very restrained style of garden design ultimately derived from the aesthetic theories propounded by Dong Qichang (1555–1636)<sup>60</sup> in relation to landscape painting. Ni Zan was one of the painters most admired by Dong and promoted by him as a model for literati painting.<sup>61</sup> Tenth Lady Li’s identification with Ni Zan therefore indicates that she is placing herself at the ‘avant-garde’ end of the cultural spectrum. Additionally, the cultivation of ‘obsession’ was a fashionable pose at the time.<sup>62</sup> It may be relevant that one of the best-known anecdotes about Ni Zan’s obsessive-compulsive disorder was that on an occasion when his friends clubbed together to pay for the impoverished painter to enjoy the favours of a top courtesan, he spent so long making her take repeated baths that no time was left for any other activity. It is possible that in the courtesans’ world this story could be interpreted to support the point that the provision of sexual services was not necessarily part of a courtesan’s job description; this would constitute a claim to greater respect from clients or potential clients who might visit the garden and witness the washing of the trees.

We find that late Ming courtesans used gardens not only as a repository of social capital but as an actual form of investment. Shen Defu (1578–1642),<sup>63</sup> the author of *Wanli yehuo bian* (*Private Gleanings of the Wanli Era*), recounts an incident which took place in 1612. Shen was in the capital, Beijing, to take the highest level of the civil service examinations, when a friend and another acquaintance insisted that he accompanied them on an expedition out of town. About three miles outside the western suburbs, they came to a grand house with an imposing gate. After entering, they were served tea by a maidservant, who then showed them into her mistress’s boudoir. She had a willowy figure and sparkling eyes, and Shen put her age at about twenty; in terms of a courtesan’s working life, this was getting on a bit.

Then she led us through a door in the western corner, where there was a path shaded by tall trees, and an artificial mountain which already appeared antique. Then we came to an even bigger reception room, overlooking a pond to the front, which extended for about three *mu*. The lotuses were in full bloom.<sup>64</sup>

The scale of this property by comparison with Tenth Lady Li’s can be explained by the fact that it was in the countryside rather than the city, and a more expansive style was therefore appropriate. When the woman went to see

to their lunch, Shen's friend explained that she had recently spent her savings on buying this mansion, and was now looking for a man to support her; the friend thought Shen would be just the person, but Shen was not so sure. After a meal and some drinks, he made his excuses and left. Once the examinations were over and he was about to leave for home in the south, he asked his friend about the woman but the friend gave a vague reply, implying that she had taken up with someone else. Several years later, he happened to meet up with this friend again and, talking of the past, the friend unexpectedly accused him of ruining the woman's life. As Shen had been so uncooperative, she had taken up with the other visitor, Fan. As the friend related:

Fan was an inveterate gambler, and was also scheming to get back his old official position. He used up all her resources, even her land and gardens, several tens of thousands of taels of silver altogether. The mansion where we had the drinks party was sold, too, for three thousand taels. Fan wasted everything.<sup>65</sup>

When Fan abandoned her for another woman, she hanged herself (and we learn that Fan later came to a bad end).

The use of the figure of the courtesan as a self-image by male Ming loyalists after the fall of the Ming has been pointed out by Kang-i Sun Chang.<sup>66</sup> In this light, it is interesting that we should find that the deployment of garden culture by courtesans seems to have more in common with that of élite men than of élite women; the latter may have been more limited in what they could do with gardens, because of their lack of ownership and the greater pressure on them to conform to a stereotype of respectable female behaviour.

## **Conclusion**

In general, as we have seen, gardens and garden culture were used by men to demonstrate their social status and membership of an élite class, and were used in a similar way by gentry women for activities which, experienced in the company of close male relatives or a variety of female relatives and friends, served to enhance group solidarity and underline membership of the élite. Courtesans, who certainly did not originate in an élite group, also used garden culture in ways which mirrored its use by their élite male associates (or those élite males with whom they wished to be associated), and also demonstrated a desirable level of cultural refinement. But courtesans could also use property in the form of gardens as an investment, which acted both as a demonstration of cultural capital and as a repository of actual capital. In this, their practice was actually closer to that of élite men than was the practice of élite women.



**Notes**

Traditional Chinese names (in imperial China, pre-1911) normally consist of a family name (*xing*) and personal name (*ming*), and may also have a courtesy or formal name (*zi*), and pen name or cognomen (*hao*). In some cases a person is better known by their courtesy name (*zi*) than their personal name (*ming*).

- 1 Brook 1998: 167–71.
- 2 On the growth in illustrated books during this period, see Hegel 1998. Many Ming woodblock prints of garden scenes are reproduced in Chen Tongbin, Wu Dong and Yue Xiang eds 1996.
- 3 On the ‘feminization’ of aspects of imperial garden culture in the Qing, see Wu Hung 1997: 306–65.
- 4 Bray 1997: 83–8.
- 5 Ho Ping-ti 1962, esp. Ch.V.
- 6 On ‘taste’ as a marker of social status in the late Ming, see Clunas 1991a, esp. Ch.6 ‘Anxieties about things’.
- 7 Clunas 1996, esp. 55–9, 97–103.
- 8 Brook 1998: 213 and fig. 32.
- 9 This claim is made by Qi Biaoqia in his *Notes on Yushan*, e.g. ‘Within my three paths [=hermitage], I can summon the clouds and get drunk in the snow’ Qi Biaoqia 1983: 261 [text corrected by reference to the Chongzhen edition], and by Dong Xuan (*Yushan she*, 2) on his behalf, but it is clear from Qi’s diary (Qi 1937) that his Yushan garden was the site of much social activity, often directed towards the furtherance of local community projects.
- 10 Yuan Hongdao 1981: 527; Yuan Huang c.1608: 345a.
- 11 Clunas 1996: 46–9.
- 12 For example, the Artless Administrator’s Garden (Zhuozhengyuan) in Suzhou was lost at the gaming table by its original owner’s son shortly after his father’s death (Xu Shupi 1916–21: 4.24a–b; cf. Clunas 1996: 90).
- 13 See for example, on vulgarity in garden nomenclature, Xie Zhaozhe 1971: 242–3. At a slightly earlier date, Wang Shizhen made fun of an acquaintance whom he considered over-sensitive to vulgarity in nomenclature: *Yanshanyuan ji*, in Chen Zhi and Zhang Gongchi 1983: 147. The garden designer and theorist Ji Cheng makes disparaging remarks on vulgarity in garden design: Ji Cheng 1981: 188–9 (decorative paving); 201 (courtyard rockeries); 211 (meanders); 227 (failure to appreciate *huang* rocks).
- 14 Shang Jinglan (*zi* Meisheng).
- 15 Ko 1994: esp. 226–32.
- 16 Qi Biaoqia (*zi* Youwen, *hao* Shipei, Yuanshan zhuren), *ECCP*: 126.
- 17 *DMB*: 219.
- 18 Bernhardt 1999; see chs 1–2 for the imperial period.
- 19 Qi Chenghan (*zi* Erguang, *hao* Yidu), *DMB*: 216–20.
- 20 Ko 1994: 86–90, 179–90.
- 21 Qi Biaoqia 1937: 27th day of 10th month, 1635.
- 22 From the 8th month of 1636, Shang Jinglan frequently accompanied Qi to Yushan. She stayed overnight on the 7th of the 10th month, 1636, the night before her birthday (Qi Biaoqia 1937).
- 23 Bray 1997: 84.
- 24 Qi 1937: 6th day of 10th month, 1636; 7th day of 2nd month, 1637.
- 25 Alias Liu Yin (*zi* Rushi, *hao* Wowen jushi).
- 26 Qi’s diary records visits to gardens in the Shaoxing area with his wife in 1635 on the 28th day of the 7th month, the 24th day of the 10th month, and the 8th day of the 11th month (Qi 1937). Once their own garden was more or less complete they seem to have made fewer visits elsewhere.
- 27 Qi 1937: 13th day of 11th month, 1635.

- 28 Qi 1937: 6th day of 2nd month, 1636.
- 29 Qi 1937: 24th day of 8th month, 1636.
- 30 Qi 1937: 6th day of 3rd month, 1637.
- 31 Qi Biaoja 1960: 220–1; Qi 1937: 26th day of 2nd month; 6th and 26th days of 9th month, 1636.
- 32 Qi 1937: 20th day of 4th month, 1637.
- 33 Shang's poems are included in her husband's collected works: Qi 1960: 258–89.
- 34 Qi Biaoja 1983: 288.
- 35 Wen Zhengming (original *ming* Bi, *zi* Zhengming, later *zi* Zhengzhong), *DMB*: 1471–4.
- 36 Wen Zhengming 1987: 177–8.
- 37 Franke 1976: 613–15.
- 38 Gui Youguang (*zi* Xifu, *hao* Zhenchuan), *DMB*: 759–61.
- 39 Gui Youguang 1991: 192. In their translation (in Panda Books 1986: 39), Xianyi and Gladys Yang translate this sentence as: 'The loquat which *I* planted in the courtyard the year that my wife died has grown up now to give shade' (my emphasis); although grammatically feasible, this seems an unnatural reading of Gui Youguang's sentence, and it is not followed by the editor of Gui 1991, in his rendering into modern Chinese.
- 40 Liu Tong and Yu Yizheng 1996: 320. I do not understand the naming of the Empress Dowager as *Mingsu taihou*, which was never one of her official titles. Since Liu Tong and Yu Yizheng were writing during the Ming dynasty, it does not seem likely that the character *ming* refers to the dynasty, but on the other hand the character, unlike *su*, was not part of her official title, which was in full *Xiaoding zhenchun qinren duansu bitian zuosheng huang taihou* (Zhang Tingyu 1974, vol. 12: 3535).
- 41 *DMB*: 856–9.
- 42 Ma Shouzhen (*hao* Yuejiao, Xianglan).
- 43 Wang Zhideng (*zi* Bogu or Baigu), *DMB*: 1361–3.
- 44 Clunas 1991b: 203, quoting *DMB*: 1362. I believe the source of this account is Wang Zhideng's biography of Ma Shouzhen, which I have been unable to locate. Ma Shouzhen was a painter; information on her life and paintings can be found in Laing 1988: 31–9, with reproductions and commentaries on pp. 72–81.
- 45 Yu Huai (*zi* Wuhuai), *ECCP*: 942.
- 46 Gu Mei (*zi* Meisheng, *hao* Hengbo); Gong Dingzi (*zi* Xiaosheng, *hao* Zhilu), *ECCP*: 431.
- 47 On this garden, see Zhou Hui 1955, vol.1: 142b.
- 48 Yu Huai 1998: 72. Yu Huai's memoir is translated into English in Levy 1966.
- 49 Qi 1937: 8th day of 10th month, 1636.
- 50 Liu Rushi 1989: 7b. Huang Shang 2001: 68 speculates that the Yushan Thatched Hall was in the Qi family's Hangzhou villa, but it must have been the building of that name in the Yushan Garden.
- 51 Zhu Zhifan (*zi* Yuanjie or Yuansheng), *DMB*: 304–5.
- 52 Wang Tingna c.1608: 339a–340b.
- 53 Wang Ranming (*zi* Ruqian).
- 54 Lin Yunfeng (*zi* Ruofu).
- 55 Huang Shang 2001: 64.
- 56 Liu Rushi 1989: 7b.
- 57 Qi 1983: 280.
- 58 Yu Huai 1998: 66.
- 59 Ni Zan (*zi* Yuanzhen, *hao* Yunlin).
- 60 Dong Qichang (*zi* Xuanzai, *hao* Sibai), *ECCP*: 787–9.
- 61 Cahill 1982a: 13–14, 27; Cahill 1982b: ch. 2; Nelson 1983: 200–12.
- 62 Zeitlin 1991: 7–11.
- 63 Shen Defu (*zi* Jingqian), *DMB*: 1190–1.
- 64 Shen Defu 1980: 602. 3 *mu* is about 0.2 ha.
- 65 Shen Defu 1980: 603.
- 66 Chang 1991: 17–18.

### 3 Gentility in a Shanghai literary salon of the 1930s

*Michel Hockx*

I like Shaw. This is not because I have read his works or his biography, have come to admire him and therefore like him. It is only because I heard a warning somewhere, somebody saying that he often tears off the masks of the gentlemen. That is why I like him. And it is also because there are often people in China who imitate western gentlemen, and most of them dislike Shaw. If someone annoys those who annoy me, I sometimes feel that he is a good person.<sup>1</sup>

In the canonical version of modern Chinese literary history, so often based on the likes and dislikes of Lu Xun, the concept of gentility does not have much currency. In Lu Xun's essays of the 1930s, the terms 'gentleman' (*shenshi*) and 'gentlewoman' (*shunü*) are invariably used in a negative sense. Both the faddish imitation of European high society and the decadent habits of traditional literati were objects of Lu Xun's scorn. He was equally suspicious of the attempts by the self-styled 'third category people' (*disan zhong ren*) to separate literary and artistic excellence from bourgeois class status. In short, any type of 'social superiority as shown by manners, appearance, behaviour, perceived cultural sophistication or membership of polite society' was suspect to Lu Xun and other leftist critics. They claimed, instead, a moral superiority based on a strong affinity with the fate of those not allowed into polite society. At the same time, Lu Xun's own writing was highly literary and erudite and was definitely perceived as culturally sophisticated. His own preferred perception of his style, however, was anything but 'gentle' and his dismissal of genteel ideals such as 'fair play' (*fei e po lai*) is well known.

In recent years, scholarship has begun to affirm the cultural relevance of some literary writers and works disapproved of by Lu Xun, especially those associated with the 'third category' and the New Sensation School. The work of Leo Ou-fan Lee (1999), especially, has described in great detail the modernist and exoticist elements in the fiction of authors like Shi Zhecun, and placed them in the context of the unique metropolitan culture of Shanghai in the 1930s. Arguably, it is their affiliation with Western modernism and their insistence on an autonomous aesthetic that has made it possible to revive these writers so successfully. Their works appeal to standards of literary excellence that are fairly common not only in the Western world but also in China nowadays.

Other Shanghai authors and groups of the same period, some of them moving in the same circles as the New Sensationalists, have not had such good fortune. Typical is the way in which Wu Fuhui, in his pioneering study of Shanghai culture (1995), deals with the works of Zhang Kebiao and Zeng Jinke, two of the more colourful figures on the 1930s Shanghai literary scene. Wu dismisses Zhang Kebiao's work as 'tasteless' and 'making one want to throw up' (*ling ren zuo ou*).<sup>2</sup> Zeng Jinke is categorised under the 'early sex fiction writers' (*zaoqi xing'ai xiaoshuo zuojia*).<sup>3</sup> Wu claims that Zeng and others were the *precursors* of the real, completely new and more tasteful *haipai* (Shanghai Style), represented by the New Sensation School and the Modernists. However, Wu's suggestion of a chronological development is less than convincing since, for instance, Zeng Jinke's journal *Xin shidai* (The New Era) and Shi Zhecun's journal *Xiandai* (Les Contemporains) were contemporaries. In fact, judging by the evidence, they were two of the three most popular Shanghai journals of the 1930s, the third being Lin Yutang's *Lunyu* (*The Analects*), a journal that advertised most explicitly the genteel lifestyle, yet whose literary and aesthetic values remain marginal to contemporary criticism.

The relationship between the idea of good taste and the idea of gentility is difficult to grasp. What is considered sophisticated or superior in literary terms is, at least in the modern era, often at odds with some or all of the values of polite society. This is as true of the leftist aesthetic advocated by Lu Xun as it is of the autonomous aesthetic advocated by the 'third category' and affirmed by contemporary scholarship on Shanghai culture. It is debatable, however, to what extent either of these aesthetics were already well-established on the Chinese literary scene of the 1930s. From an historical perspective, it is possible to perceive other literary styles and aesthetic ideals that may have been as meaningful to the literary community of the time. One such aesthetic ideal is the style of a group of writers and artists holding regular 'literature and art tea talk meetings' (*wenyi chahua hui*) in Shanghai in the early 1930s. The gatherings and practices of this group are well documented, but have so far rarely been touched upon in scholarship. Moreover, they allow for an integrated discussion of questions of gentility and questions of aesthetics.

The discussion in this chapter is divided into three parts. In the first part, I look at the ideal of gentility expressed by the founding members of the group. In the second and longest part, I look at records of some of their meetings, as documented in the group's journal. In the third part, I make some specific comments on the topic of gender. Finally, in my conclusion, I shall return to Lu Xun's comments quoted at the beginning, and demonstrate the pervasiveness among all modern Chinese literary producers of the genteel literary style discussed in this chapter.

### **Sophisticated entertainment**

In 1932, a group of people from Shanghai's literature and art circles, including a number of (art) students returned from France, began holding meetings in Shanghai every Sunday under the name 'literature and art tea talk meeting' (*wenyi*

*chahua hui*). After the seventh meeting, the group came out with its own journal, entitled *Wenyi chahua* (*Literature and Art Tea Talk*; hereafter *Tea Talk*). The first editor of the journal was Zhang Yiping (1902–1946), but his involvement with the group was relatively short-lived.<sup>4</sup> From all accounts it appears that the three main motivators of the group, which continued to meet weekly and publish its journal monthly for the next two years, were Xu Zhongnian (Sung-nien Hsu; 1904–1981), Hua Lin (Walling; 1889–1980) and Sun Fuxi (1898–1962). All three of them had studied in France, Hua and Sun specialising in art, whereas Xu obtained a PhD in literature from the University of Lyon.<sup>5</sup> Perhaps the most respected and revered member of the group, however, was Liu Yazhi, former manager of the Southern Society (Nan she). His contributions to the journal, however, appear to have ceased after a few months.

The reason behind the organisation of the tea parties is explained in Zhang Yiping's editorial in the first issue of the group's journal. Zhang refers not only to the tradition of such meetings in China itself, but also to British literary clubs and, especially, to the French salons<sup>6</sup> where, says Zhang, 'there are beautiful ladies present'. All the writers involved in such gatherings in past and present are, assures Zhang, 'our comrades and friends'. In a later passage in the same article, Zhang explains in more detail the function of the tea parties:

When the sun is sinking in the West, or under the clear moon and in the cool wind, we drink a cup of tea or two and eat a few snacks. Some of us tell a few stories, others crack a few jokes or draw a few cartoons. We do not need to be all seriousness and discuss literature and art; that's what university professors are good at. The atmosphere of our literature and art floats among unwittingly uttered words and laughs, like drifting clouds and streaming water, moving as it pleases (*dongjing ziru*). We are all busy people, we are spiritual labourers, we have jobs. Our everyday life is always too dreary and too mechanical. Only the literature and arts tea parties can give us comfort, peace and happiness. It is a sophisticated (*gaoshang*) form of entertainment (*xiaoqian*), which benefits knowledge and emotions. Some people are better at speaking than at writing, others better at writing than at speaking, yet others better at painting than either writing or speaking. All that does not matter, because speaking and writing and painting are all *expression*<sup>7</sup>, they are all good ways of expressing individual thoughts and feelings. We would like the spoken tea talk to show some results (*you dian chengji*), therefore we are publishing this little *Tea Talk*. This is the only forum for our associates (*tongren*) to express themselves freely – but we also hope that we can attract the attention of literary and artistic friends all over the country and all over the world, and that they accept or grasp our free expression and artistic taste (*quwei*). This we would enjoy and be thankful for.<sup>8</sup>

I have quoted Zhang Yiping at length because his comments provide a succinct introduction to the aesthetic values of the members of this group, values which centre around friendship and communication, combined with the urge

to reach out to an audience and, of course, to show some results. Noteworthy is the suggestion that the tea talks are a form of *sophisticated entertainment*, which appears to be an attempt to distinguish the group's activities from more common forms of popular culture and can, I think, justifiably be considered as an expression of gentility. Similarly, Zhang's comments about 'university professors', presumably a veiled reference to the literary scene in Beijing, can be seen as an act of distinction.

In the second article of the opening issue, Hua Lin takes the same argument a step further, by approaching the matter from a nationalist angle. According to Hua, Chinese people at the time were overindulging in 'low level entertainment' such as gambling, whoring and smoking. It would be the mission of the Tea Talk group to correct these bad habits by advocating 'the sophisticated enjoyment of literature and arts' (*wenyi de gaoshang yule*). Hua goes on to note that in Europe, there are already many places where such enjoyment can be found, especially in coffeehouses. He then introduces a number of famous European coffeehouses that were frequented by writers and artists, also providing some pictures as illustrations.<sup>9</sup>

Finally, yet a different approach is taken in another article in the first issue, by Sun Fuxi. Sun emphasizes the fact that the tea talks are meant as a nice Sunday activity for people who are already in literary and artistic occupations. Apart from entertainment and relaxation, he also sees more practical advantages:

If you are an editor and are short of some stories or plays or similar goods (*huose*), you can solicit them at the tea talk meeting. If you have poems you want to sell, you can bring the goods to the meeting to get them off your hands. Since literature is your occupation, you must of course market your writings as best you can. There is nothing funny about that.

Day in, day out, we work hard in our jobs. On Sundays, we can look for some entertainment. The best thing is to interact with colleagues from literary and artistic circles, because we all have similar tastes.

People who are involved in literature and arts all have very sophisticated tastes. Entertainment is not the only goal. As we drink our tea and enjoy ourselves, perhaps a great work will be created. That would be a fortunate achievement.<sup>10</sup>

The Tea Talk meetings appear to have been relatively informal gatherings, where members could read or show new work to each other, engage in discussion, or give humorous speeches. The three founders, in their statements, put these activities in various meaningful contexts (competition with other styles, national values, literary production) but the underlying value that they all share is captured in the notion of 'sophisticated entertainment'. From a literary perspective this is remarkable, because 'entertainment' (*xiaoqian*) was, at least since the Literary Revolution of 1917, a value that no practitioner of serious literature wanted to be associated with. From the perspective of gentility, it raises the question what exactly went on during the Tea Talk meetings.

**Elegant gatherings**

Although difficult to ascertain, it is likely that part of the content of the journal *Tea Talk* consisted of texts and of reproductions of paintings produced during or for the meetings. In a few cases, records of meetings, illustrated with pictures, were published in the journal. A good example is the record of the 59th tea talk meeting, held on 6 August 1933, published in the August 1933 issue of the journal. The meeting in question was dedicated to the work of the artist Zhou Bichu, who was showing landscape paintings made in Suzhou during the summer. Rather than translate the whole account, I paraphrase below the contents of the proceedings:

Sun Fuxi opens the meeting. Hua Lin introduces Zhou Bichu as one of his most hard-working friends. He comments on the use of colour in the new paintings, and adds that, now that Mr Zhou has found stable love, his paintings have become more cheerful.

Wang Yachen comments on Mr Zhou's strong physique, which has enabled him to continue working under the scorching summer sun. He invites the organiser, Sun Fuxi, to comment.

Sun Fuxi explains that not he, but Xu Zhongnian, who is taking minutes, is the organiser of the meeting. He also comments on Mr Zhou's hard work under the hot sun and lays a link to the use of colour in his paintings. Explains how today's little exhibition was organized, and expresses the wish that other painters among the members will exhibit their work as well. Introduces Chen Yada, who has just returned from abroad.

Chen Yada explains he knows nothing about painting and would not know what to say. (In a note to the article, Xu Zhongnian explains that Mr Chen, before the meeting, had highly praised Zhou's work.)

Wang Yachen explains that Mr Chen has never attended the Tea Talk meetings before; that he had run into him earlier that day and persuaded him to come along; that Mr Chen has been educated in Beijing and in France, where he studied art. He invites Mr Chen to report on the situation of Chinese art students in Paris.

Chen Yada says he is sad to say that, due to economic pressures, very few of his fellow students are able to devote all their time to studies. The less said about this the better.

Wang Yachen remarks that Mr Chen is like all great scholars: the more they know the less they say. He invites Mr Chen to bring along his works to a later tea talk meeting.

Lang Luxun returns to the topic of Mr Zhou's paintings. Says he at first did not believe that Zhou was going to Suzhou to paint. (Hangzhou would have been the logical option.) In response to Hua Lin's romanticized theory of art (*aiqinghua huihua lun*), he notes that Mr Zhou went to Suzhou alone, and therefore has kept love and art separate.

Miss Rong Junli agrees with Lang and invites Mr Zhou to comment on the development of both his art and his love life.

Zhou Bichu says he is not good at talking and begins to blush.

Peng Rongzhen says that Mr Zhou's work expresses his individuality. Art is like literature: there are many schools, and one of them is the expression of the author's individuality. In art, the use of red, for instance, indicates the painter's fiery nature (*huoxing*). In Mr Zhou's work, the colours are bright, therefore his character is optimistic, and his works give the viewer a feeling of pleasure.

Li Xiangrong says he has been to Suzhou and seeing Mr Zhou's work makes him think of that experience.

Miss Xu Huifang professes not to know much about art, but to enjoy viewing landscape paintings and imagining the scenery of places she has never visited. Although she is familiar with Suzhou, she thanks Mr Zhou for giving her the opportunity to roam through its scenery once more.

Miss Yu Xiuwen apologises for not daring to speak, as it is the first time she attends.

Sun Zhigong does not understand art, but Mr Zhou's works make him happy and he believes the artist is an optimist.

Li Lianggong gives a short, humorous speech. It is his first visit to the Tea Talk (he does not live in Shanghai). There is 'tea' and 'talk' but he has not prepared any 'talk'. Apart from tea and talk there is also famous art, which makes him very happy. Although he has nothing to say, he enjoys listening to the very literary and artistic talk of the others. He returns to the theme of the possible influence of Mr Zhou's love life on his art, and asks Mr Zhou to either confirm or deny that.

Miss Fang Yuanshan is not a good speaker and refuses to talk.

Miss Liu Xueya says her own paintings are vastly inferior to Mr Zhou's. Mr Zhou's paintings are good, just as good as his lover's.

Chen Chengyin is an outsider when it comes to art. To him, there are two types of art. The kind you understand and the kind you don't understand. The kind of art that you can understand gives the viewer a feeling of 'necessity'. Viewing such a piece of art, one feels a connection between one's own experiences and those of the artist, or one is deeply impressed by the artist's experiences, even though one has not had such experiences oneself. He compliments Mr Zhou on his work, and especially likes the bright colours.

Xu Zhongnian refuses to comment on the paintings, as he does not really understand art and, moreover, he has commented on Mr Zhou's work on a previous occasion. He does want to comment on Mr Zhou's hard-working attitude, which clearly shows that he engages in art not for money nor for fame, but only for art itself. It is this attitude that distinguishes him from some so-called 'artists' on the Shanghai scene who are only after fame and money.

Zhou Bichu thanks everybody for their comments. At first he was uneasy about agreeing to Sun Fuxi's request to exhibit his paintings, but because everyone present is familiar to him, he feels less uneasy. As for the interest in



his love life, he does not dare to say that it is stable, for love is a mysterious thing. The future will tell.

Hua Lin says that Mr Zhou's paintings show that he is completely carefree (*xin kuang ti pang*). He represents light in the darkness of China. He clearly observes the darkness, but does not mingle with it, and gives us light.

Lang Luxun says that, recently, every time he asked Mr Zhou about his love life he had commented that it was 'stable'. His denial just now was just politeness, and everybody should wait for some good news in two months' time.

Sun Fuxi says that Hua Lin's words sum up the artist's character. As for Mr Zhou's blue skies, perhaps they are meaningless, perhaps they are related to his love life, perhaps it is a bit of both. Sun thanks Mr Zhou and thanks all those who spoke.<sup>11</sup>

Although the summary above does not do justice to the rhetorical qualities of the original, it does convey what must have been the typical atmosphere of the Tea Talk meetings. Members would engage in a mixture of comical banter and friendly criticism. Their critical statements would be predominantly concerned with the personality and personal life of the author or artist.

Attendance to the meetings would vary, one of the largest meetings probably being the 73rd Tea Talk of 12 November 1933, which was commemorated with an official group picture of the 34 participants, published in the December 1933 issue of the journal. Art exhibitions took place at several more of the meetings and many of the regular participants were artists who had trained in France. In the example above, apart from Hua Lin and Zhou Bichu, Wang Yachen and his partner Rong Junli also fall into this category. It is likely that other participants were also each other's relatives or partners. The above-mentioned Xu Hui-fang, for instance, was Xu Zhongnian's younger sister.<sup>12</sup>

Other references to and records of Tea Talk meetings found in various issues of the journal confirm the general image sketched above, while adding some more detail. In the December 1933 issue of the journal (Vol. 2, No. 5), Sun Fuxi and others report on a visit of several of the 'tea talkers' to Suzhou, where they gave lectures at a normal school for girls and visited several scenic spots. Shortly thereafter, on 12 November, there was another Tea Talk meeting in Shanghai, attended by people from Suzhou. One of these, Huang Juesi, commented on the experience in a piece published in the same issue.<sup>13</sup> Huang wrote that he was most impressed by the different styles of orating of the various participants, which he saw as reflections of their respective personalities. He ended by noting that the three 'managers' (*laoban*) of the Tea Talk meetings had recently been given the gifts of love: Hua Lin was already bringing his partner to the meetings, Xu Zhongnian was about to get married and Sun Fuxi was about to become a father.

Three months later, in Vol. 2, No. 8 of the journal, we find a short report on the 87th Tea Talk meeting, held on 18 February 1934. Guest of honour at the meeting was the Italian artist Carlo Zanon.<sup>14</sup> After Hua Lin opened the meeting, Xu Zhongnian introduced Zanon's 'thought' and 'view of life', singling out two

aspects. First, Zanon's work was strongly influenced by Chinese painting. Zanon had spent twenty years doing research on Chinese art. Second, Zanon's view of life was that of the aestheticist (*wei mei de*). He recognized that society had its ugly sides, but chose to focus on its beauty. Sun Fuxi added that the best point of Zanon's works was that they were close to nature. Nature was beautiful, nature was the mother of all life, and all true artists and writers ought to cherish her. None of Zanon's works were exhibited during the meeting, as noted by another speaker, Tang Jun, who instead chose to comment on the tea talk meetings in general:

This is the first time I meet Mr Zanon. I have not yet seen his work, so I have nothing to say about it. However, Mr Xu's introduction has been sufficient to arouse our sympathy and admiration. What I do want to say, has to do with the Literature and Art Tea Talk itself. I am a relatively new 'tea talker' (*huayou*) and I feel the need for such meetings. Life in China is too dull, especially the spiritual side of life. As for China's associations, even those that claim to be artistic usually have a political or some other background. Only the Literature and Art Tea Talk meetings are real tea talk meetings. They have no organization, no president or secretary or titles like that. We all get together to chat, we all settle our own bills. It is all quite free and quite straightforward. It has the style of a Parisian literature and arts salon.<sup>15</sup>

Tang Jun's comments are worth quoting in this context for two reasons. First, they confirm the group's tendency to consider personality as an aesthetic category. Xu Zhongnian's introduction to Zanon is sufficient to arouse Tang's sympathy. Zanon's work is not a necessary element of this kind of communication. Second, Tang's remarks about the group's lack of political affiliations is important and, as far as I can tell from the content of the journal, absolutely correct.<sup>16</sup> Although there were certainly no communists among this group, it is fair to say that their idea of gentility and sophistication included not only rising above the cultural level of the common people, but also rising above political quibbles. The comment about 'settling our own bills' is a subtle reminder that no organisation was backing the meetings financially and that all participants were financially independent.

In the same report of the meeting with Zanon, Xu Zhongnian lists the names of those who had sent apologies for the meeting, including two Frenchmen, one of them the principal of the French secondary school in Shanghai. This is the only reference I have found to possible foreign participation in the Tea Talk meetings. It is not clear if these people were only invited to the meeting with Zanon, or if they were invited to attend on other occasions as well. Xu Zhongnian also responded to Tang Jun's comments, as follows:

Just now Mr Tang Jun said that spiritual life in China is too boring. We need the Literature and Art Tea Talk meetings to add some spice to it. The reason why all of you, old and new friends, attend and the reason why the Literature and Art Tea Talk meetings, which are neither for fame nor for fortune (*bu wei*

*ming bu wei li*), have already been held eighty-seven times and will continue to be held, is that all of you feel the same need as Mr Tang Jun.<sup>17</sup>

The expression ‘neither for fame nor for fortune’, like the denial of any political backing, can be found in the journals of many literary groups of the Republican period. Normally it is used to emphasize strongly a group’s total commitment to Art and Creation. Here, however, it seems to carry again more of an elitist connotation: the tea talkers are above petty concerns about fame and fortune, not because they would rather be poor and unknown than relinquish their aesthetic ideals, but because they belong to an upper class that is above such things. Or at least so they perceive themselves.

In the last ever issue of *Tea Talk* (Vol. 2, No. 10), Sun Fuxi reported on his attending the first ‘Hangzhou City Writers Party’ (*Hangzhou shi zuojia lianhuanhui*), apparently a gathering of Hangzhou literary figures inspired by the Shanghai Tea Talk meetings. Invited to address the party, Sun Fuxi talked about how important personal contact was for the literary experience. He said that, at tea talk meetings or writers’ parties, one could become acquainted with authors whose work one had read, or find out who was hiding behind which pseudonym. This would ensure that, in the future, when one read the works of those authors in journals, one would have a sense of great intimacy and be well disposed towards them. Sun Fuxi’s talk at the literary party also contained another gibe at university professors. Commenting on the painting he brought as a gift, he mentioned that it took him four hours to paint, which, according to a university professor’s salary, made it worth twenty *yuan*.

Several collective identities were presented and intertwined as the members of the group, and the editors of the journal, positioned themselves and their organ within the cultural world of its time. They distinguished themselves from vulgar entertainment and from any form of utilitarianism in the service of fame, fortune or ideology. Yet they did not deny the value of entertainment as such but indulged in the pursuit of sophisticated leisure. They characterized themselves as professionals with high cultural status, yet polarized against other, wealthier members of the cultural élite of the time, namely university professors, perhaps because that profession was associated with Beijing and they wished to represent the ‘Shanghai style’. They frequently referred to foreign examples, especially the French salon, for their type of gathering and most of them had lived in France. Yet their way of gathering, in public places such as restaurants and coffee houses rather than at private mansions, seemed much more indebted to the long Chinese tradition of literati’s ‘elegant gathering’ (*yaji*). The aesthetic principle dominating their discussions, that ‘to know the person is to know the work’ (*wen ru qi ren*) also clearly had traditional roots, as has their predilection for certain poetry genres, about which more below.

From the materials presented in this section it can be concluded that this group of cultural producers perceived itself to be in many ways superior to other people. So superior, in fact, that they felt justified to record what they did in their spare time and assumed that other people, namely the readers of their journal, would want

to read those records. It is also clear that they did not perceive their superiority to be the corollary of any real social, economic or political power that they might possess. It seems to me that this can be considered a form of gentility.

This collectively established image of gentility, however, did not do away with other types of hierarchies within the collective. The role of gender discourses within the group's writings and activities is especially worth looking at, since it reveals the gentility ideal to be a predominantly male preoccupation.

## **Gentility and gender**

As we have seen above, a relatively large number of women would usually be present at the Tea Talk meetings. The female membership of the group was, in my estimation, larger than that of any other literary group at the time. Zhang Yiping's comment on the French salons ('where there are beautiful ladies present') shows that some male members considered female presence as part of the necessary atmosphere for their gatherings. In their writings they often referred to the pleasure of having ladies around, though not always in as flattering a manner as Zhang Yiping had done. In Vol. 2, No.2, Li Liangong from Beijing, who had been present at the 59th meeting, described his experience, ending with the following lines:

As I was sitting on the ninth floor of the building of the Youth Association<sup>18</sup> and looking out the window at the red and green lights, I felt I was a 'modern' person. But at the same time I thought, if these friends were to sit near the lake outside the cave of the Temple of Spiritual Light in the Western Hills [outside Beijing] and drink sour plum soup from the Xinyuan Studio, their talking and joking might be even more interesting. And if there were some flirtatious [*daqing maqiao*] women writers around (sorry!), that would be fine as well.<sup>19</sup>

Earlier in the same piece, Li also described Shanghai as 'a world of foreign money and women' (*yangqian nüren de shijie*).

Although the women members of the Tea Talk group appear to have spoken little during the meetings, their presence was far from cosmetic. Many of the female participants were themselves active as writers and/or artists, and the contributions by female authors and artists to the journal *Tea Talk* were numerous and varied. Nevertheless, male members tended to emphasize gender roles and distinctions in the context of the meetings, and their attitude towards the female members was one of lingering superiority, mixed with chivalry and defiance of gender-related social conventions.

First of all, as we have seen, the men liked to dwell on the topic of love and on the creative inspiration it could provide. I have seen no examples, however, of this being applied to a female artist. Second, and most significantly in the present context, the male members of the group showed an overwhelming interest in challenging the traditional taboo on social intercourse between men and women.

Although this had been an item on the Chinese reformist agenda from the late Qing onwards, it is probably fair to say that open interaction between men and women in public places continued to be frowned upon by polite society throughout the 1910s and 1920s. Gatherings like those of the Tea Talk group therefore contributed to affecting a change in social decorum. The male members appear to have been aware of this and were often quite excited by it.

A good example is a short text published in Vol. 1, No. 3, entitled ‘Kafei’ (‘Coffee’), by a male author signing as Mojia (Mocca).<sup>20</sup> The author reminisces on his time in Europe in the early 1920s, where he developed a taste for coffee, especially for German mocca. He recounts a meeting with a girl on a tram somewhere in Germany. He explains that in foreign countries it is quite alright for young men and women to chat with each other. He continues to describe how he invited her for mocca and cake, then for a walk in the park, then for dinner, and how he ended up sharing a hotel room with her for the night. The piece ends by directly addressing the audience, showing that it was definitely meant to be read out loud during one of the Tea Talk meetings:

I was granted all this because of the mocca! Normally I am reluctant to drink coffee, especially mocca. Although today I am not drinking mocca, because there is no sugar in it, still, unfortunately, it has set my dead ashes alight again, making me sad, but also anxious.

Those of us here in China who can drink coffee are modern people. As we are sitting here today we are all New People. However, China’s coffee and Germany’s mocca are totally different. Our coffee makes us connect in spirit, German mocca makes us wallow in yearning for the past.<sup>21</sup>

Mojia’s implied statement that modern Chinese men and women should do more than just ‘connect in spirit’ finds a more pessimistic echo in a short story by Lu Yinquan in Vol. 2, No. 1.<sup>22</sup> The story starts with the protagonist, a male university student, at home in the countryside during his holidays. He receives a surprise visit from one of his former classmates from Shanghai and his girlfriend, who is a young widow. During dinner, the protagonist notices approvingly that the woman enjoys the simple countryside food, i.e. that she is not a pernickety city lady. He thinks the couple are perfect for each other and will surely be very happy together. However, during a walk later that day, his friend tells him that his family are totally opposed to his marrying a widow and are putting much pressure on him to break up the relationship. The story then moves on. Over the next few years, the protagonist moves to various places and occasionally hears news of this friend. First he hears that he has broken with his family and married his girlfriend. Later he hears that his family has forgiven him and he has moved with his wife back to Shanghai. Shortly thereafter the protagonist decides to visit his friend in Shanghai. Expecting to find him happier than ever before, he is surprised to discover that he has become sad and dejected. The reason for this soon becomes clear as his wife enters the room. She has changed into a typical female Shanghai socialite, wearing heavy make-up and interested only in shops, restaurants and

dance halls. The story ends with the protagonist's friend coming to see him to borrow money to support his wife's extravagances.

The male members of the Tea Talk group considered polite public interaction with women an important part of their genteel lifestyle. They tended to aestheticize this interaction, making it also an important part of their literary and artistic style. As a result of this, they had specific expectations of the women's behaviour. On the one hand, they disapproved of worldly, independent, 'immoral' women. On the other hand, they wanted women to share their courage in challenging certain other morals, by being seen with them, and perhaps even being courted by them in public. As Wu Fuhui perceptively observes, however, the social critique was often mere veneer for the male urge to write about sex,<sup>23</sup> as in the following lines from a poem by He Deming, entitled 'Dangfu qu' ('Ballad of the Loose Ladies'). The poem is written in the form of a doggerel, and may well have been read at one of the tea talk meetings.

... 'Lust' has long been exclusive to men,  
Women only show tenderness and shyness;  
Men cannot be cursed for this,  
It just means we have not yet figured it out.  
Today I perform the 'Ballad of the Loose Ladies,'  
I want to set 'love' and 'lust' free.  
Let women no longer blindly observe chastity,  
Let them enjoy it just as much as men.<sup>24</sup>

I have not found similarly explicit texts by women in the pages of *Tea Talk*. It is fair to say that in this aspect of its gentility, the group was dominated by male conceptions and preoccupations.

The journal *Tea Talk* folded, for unknown reasons, after two *juan* of ten issues each, in the early Summer of 1934. In the final issue, Xu Zhongnian promised that something new and 'big' would come in its place, but it is not clear what that was, and whether it ever materialized. There is also no indication that the Tea Talk meetings continued in changed form after the demise of the journal.

## **Conclusion**

During the 1930s, the Tea Talk group was certainly not the only literary group in Shanghai promoting an understanding of literature as a genteel social activity. The most significant similar group was the Chinese branch of the International P.E.N., established in 1930 with active support from especially the poets Xu Zhimo and Shao Xunmei.<sup>25</sup> The membership of the branch consisted by and large of literary figures associated with four better-known collectives, some of which were no longer in existence at the time. They were: the Literary Association, represented by its former key members Zheng Zhenduo, Zhao Jingshen, and Luyin; the Crescent Moon Society, represented by Xu Zhimo and Hu Shi; the group around the journal *Lunyu* (*The Analects*), most notably Lin Yutang himself; and the Truth, Beauty

and Goodness group, including Zeng Pu and Zeng Xubai. The branch meetings were also attended by members of the Tea Talk group and other Shanghai literary figures such as Wang Lixi, Zhang Kebiao, Zhang Ruogu, Zhang Yiping, Zeng Jinke and Yu Xiuyun.

Before his untimely death in 1931, Xu Zhimo was the main motivator of the branch, and was even planning to publish a branch magazine. In accordance with its constitution, the branch held monthly dinner parties in Shanghai, and pledged not to discuss politics, an attitude which it maintained even after the Japanese invasion of Manchuria. Both its political stance and its way of gathering at dinner parties were scorned by members of the League of Left-Wing Writers, which was founded in the same year and considered the branch a 'bourgeois organization'. When the branch entertained fellow P.E.N. member George Bernard Shaw at dinner in February 1933, however, the chairman of the Left League, Lu Xun, did make an appearance. Lu Xun's report of the event, the opening lines of which I quoted at the beginning of this paper, was highly satirical and placed the P.E.N. branch in the negative category of 'gentlemen and gentlewomen'.

Nowhere in his account did Lu Xun provide a convincing reason why he chose to attend the gathering on this occasion, nor did he display awareness of the fact that Shaw was himself a P.E.N. member. What he did inadvertently display, however, was an aesthetic standard characteristic of the style he disliked so much. By admitting to not having read Shaw, but claiming to like him because he unmasked the gentlemen, he made an aesthetic judgement on the basis of the personality and ideas of the author, not on aspects of the literary text.

Lu Xun's little slip shows how widespread continuities with tradition are in modern Chinese literary thought and practice. By researching groups like the Tea Talk group, these continuities can be described in more detail and their influence can be more clearly measured, thereby rescuing them from continued marginalization as one aesthetic is replaced by another as the guiding principle of modern Chinese literary studies. Moreover, research on these groups and their practices can shed light on the sense of superiority among culturally active members of polite society in the Republican era. In the end, it even raises the question to what extent avowed anti-gentility writers like Lu Xun were themselves more submerged in traditional literary practice than they would like to think.

The Tea Talk members, especially the male members, were nostalgic for an era in which membership of the cultural *élite* almost automatically meant membership of the social *élite*, an era when *wenren* were always gentlemen and vice versa, or so they thought. They were, at the same time, opposed to certain restrictions of traditional *wenren* practice, especially in the area of male/female interaction. By adding touches of foreign influence and by challenging selected taboos, they created a traditionalist cultural style that was nevertheless distinctly modern, and that appealed to many, as the example of the P.E.N. gatherings has confirmed. It was a genteel style that cherished literature and art as important social activities, whose products cannot be judged solely by intrinsic (textual) or extrinsic (political) standards. In modern Shanghai there was room for practising

such styles only in one's spare time. Busy publishers and professional artists only had Sunday afternoons to engage in 'sophisticated entertainment'. The printed results of their entertainment, however, became in turn part of their professional life, as commercially marketed publications, like the journal *Tea Talk*. And so these paradoxical *wenren* of the metropolis, who drank coffee at Tea Talks and read naughty poems to virtuous ladies, managed not only to embody gentility, but also to turn it into a commodity, market it and sell it, inspiring similar practices and similar ideals in many other places in China.

## Acknowledgements

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## Notes

- 1 Lu Xun 1981, vol. 4: 494.
- 2 Wu Fuhui 1995: 113.
- 3 Wu Fuhui 1995: 71.
- 4 Zhang soon went on to launch a similar journal of his own, entitled *Wenyi chunqiu* (*Literature and Art Spring and Autumn*).
- 5 Under the name Song-nien Hsu, Xu was famous in France for his translations of classical Chinese poetry. I have also seen claims that he was the first to translate stories by Lu Xun into French, but have not yet been able to confirm this.
- 6 For descriptions of another, slightly earlier, Shanghai group with a strong French connection, namely the circle around father and son Zeng Pu and Zeng Xubai, see Fruehauf 1993: 143–5 and Lee 1999: 18–20.
- 7 In English in the original.
- 8 Zhang Yiping 1932: 1.
- 9 Hua Lin 1932: 2.
- 10 Sun Fuxi 1932: 12.
- 11 Xu Zhongnian 1933a.
- 12 Cf. Xu Zhongnian 1933a: 5.
- 13 Huang Juese 1933: 12.
- 14 I have been unable to find any information about this person.
- 15 Lu Manying 1933: 18.
- 16 It contradicts, however, the recollection of Shi Zhecun who, when I interviewed him in 1998, stated that the Tea Talk group members were all Guomindang members. He did qualify this by saying: 'They were all our friends in literary and artistic circles. But politically speaking we had nothing to do with them.'
- 17 Lu Manying, 1933: 18.
- 18 The place where many of the Tea Talk meetings were held.
- 19 Fugong [Li Lianggong] 1933: 10.
- 20 Despite the Tea Talk group's avowed interest in tea, many of the members appear to have preferred coffee. The typical modern 'chronotope' of the coffeehouse appears often in their writings. For more on Shanghai coffeehouses and their role in literary culture, see Lee 1999: 17–23.
- 21 *Wenyi chahua* 1.3: 12.
- 22 [Lu] Yinquan 1933: 23–9.



23 Wu Fuhui 1995: 72.

24 *Wenyi chahua* 2.2: 28.

25 For a superb overview article on the history of the Chinese P.E.N. branch, see Chen Zishan 1998: 404–51. For a full-length article on Shao Xunmei, which touches upon his involvement in the Chinese P.E.N., see Hutt 2001: 111–42. For Shao see also Fruehauf 1993 and Lee 1999: 241–57.

## 4 Negotiating gentility

### The Banana Garden poetry club in seventeenth-century China

*Daria Berg*

#### A literary society for gentlewomen

The Banana Garden poetry club (Jiaoyuan shishe) in late seventeenth-century Hangzhou serves well as a case study of the social network of negotiations and exchanges involving perceptions of gentility in late imperial China. The club was one of the first public literary societies founded by a woman and for women.<sup>1</sup> The Banana Garden poets were all gentry women (*guixiu*), ruling-class ladies or ‘gentlewomen’ from elite families whose fathers, brothers and husbands were higher degree holders, well-known poets, and scholar-officials. Their mothers and sisters also counted many highly educated gentlewomen, female teachers, reputable poets and painters among their number.

The Banana Garden club existed in two stages: at first the Banana Garden Five (Jiaoyuan wuzi) included Qian Fenglun (1644–1703), her sister-in-law Lin Yining (1655–after 1730), Chai Jingyi (d. 1680), her daughter-in-law Zhu Rouze (fl. late 17th century) and the Grand Secretary’s wife Xu Can (c.1610–after 1677).<sup>2</sup> Chai Jingyi came from a family whose social status ranked slightly below that of the others – her father was only a provincial (*juren*) degree holder, whereas the others were daughters of metropolitan (*jinshi*), or highest, degree holders. The other club members nonetheless recognized Chai Jingyi’s literary talent as superior and acknowledged her as their leader.<sup>3</sup> Chai Jingyi counted among the more senior members and her home also became its physical base where the poets gathered.

After a period of inactivity when Zhu Ruoze and Xu Can were no longer with the club, Lin Yining reorganized it into the Banana Garden Seven (Jiaoyuan qizi) which included four new members: Gu Si who had kinship ties with the Gu, Qian and Lin families in Hangzhou; her niece Feng Xian; Mao Ti who was the daughter of the famous poet Mao Xianshu (1620–88); and Zhang Hao who lived only to the age of twenty-five but was known among the literati in the Yangzi delta not only as a poet but also as a novelist.<sup>4</sup> Apart from the nine main members who counted among the Banana Garden Five and the Banana Garden Seven, other women such as Li Shuzhao and later on Xu Deyin (c.1680–c.1749) were also associated with the society.<sup>5</sup>

Table 4.1 *The Banana Garden Five Poets*

| <i>Name</i>                                 | <i>Dates</i>            | <i>Major Works</i>   | <i>Hometown</i>           | <i>Relation</i>                       |
|---|-------------------------|--|---------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Qian Fenglun<br><i>zi</i> : Yunyi           | 1644–1703               | <i>Sanhua tan ji</i> ,<br><i>Guxianglou ji</i>                     | Qiantang<br>of Lin Yining | Sister-in-law                         |
| Lin Yining<br><i>zi</i> : Yaqing            | 1655–after<br>1730      | Mozhuang<br><i>shuwenji</i> ,<br><i>Fengxiaolou ji</i>             | Qiantang<br>Fenglun's     | Married Qian<br>brother               |
| Chai Jingyi<br><i>zi</i> : Jixian           | d. 1680                 | <i>Ningxiangshi<br/>shichao</i> , <i>Beitang<br/>shicao</i>        | Qiantang                  | Mother-in-law<br>of Zhu Rouze         |
| Zhu Rouze<br><i>zi</i> : Shuncheng          | fl. late 17C            | <i>Xiufu yuyin</i> ,<br><i>Siyinxuan<br/>shichao</i>               | Qiantang                  | Daughter-in-<br>law of Chai<br>Jingyi |
| Xu Can<br><i>zi</i> : Xiangpin,<br>Mingshen | ca. 1610–<br>after 1677 | <i>Zhuozhengyuan<br/>shiji</i> ,<br><i>Zhuozhengyuan<br/>shiyu</i> | Suzhou                    |                                       |

Sources: LFZ; WWTC; BDCW; Ko 1994.

Table 4.2 *The Banana Garden Seven Poets*

| <i>Name</i>                       | <i>Dates</i>       | <i>Works</i>   | <i>Hometown</i> | <i>Relation</i>                            |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------|--|-----------------|--|
| Qian Fenglun<br><i>zi</i> : Yunyi | 1644–1703          | <i>Sanhua tan ji</i> ,<br><i>Guxianglou ji</i>   | Qiantang        | Sister-in-law<br>of Lin Yining             |
| Lin Yining<br><i>zi</i> : Yaqing  | 1655–after<br>1730 | Mozhuang<br><i>shuwenji</i> ,<br><i>Fengxiaolou<br/>ji</i>                                     | Qiantang        | Married Qian<br>Fenglun's<br>brother       |
| Chai Jingyi<br><i>zi</i> : Jixian | d. 1680            | <i>Ningxiangshi<br/>shichao</i> ,<br><i>Beitang<br/>shicao</i>                                 | Qiantang        |  |
| Gu Si<br><i>zi</i> : Qiji         | fl. late 17C       | <i>Jingyutang ji</i> ,<br><i>Youquancao</i> ,<br><i>Dangcuiyuan<br/>ji</i> , <i>Weiqiongji</i> | Qiantang        | Sister of Lin<br>Yining's<br>sister-in-law |
| Feng Xian<br><i>zi</i> : Youling  | fl. late 17C       | <i>Heming ji</i> ,<br><i>Xiangling ji</i>  | Qiantang        |  |
| Mao Ti<br><i>zi</i> : Anfang      | fl. late 17C       | <i>Jinghao ji</i>  | Qiantang        |  |
| Zhang Hao<br><i>zi</i> : Chayun   | fl. late 17C       | <i>Qutingyong</i> ,<br><i>Qinlou he gao</i>  | Qiantang        |  |

Sources: LFZ; WWTC; BDCW; Ko 1994.

The club members lived and met in the Hangzhou area probably from the late 1660s onwards until the 1680s. The Banana Garden poets contributed colophons to the drama *Qinlou yue* (*Moon at Qin Pavillion*) by Zhu Suchen, which was published in or after 1669 and no later than 1680.<sup>6</sup> This tells us that some of the Banana Garden poets, including Qian Fenglun, Lin Yining and Feng Xian were actively participating in the literary community by 1669, composing poems, commenting and contributing colophons to a drama. It is likely that they had already formed a society by then. The famous poet Shang Jinglan (1605–c.1676) commented on the early death and literary fame of Zhang Hao, one of the Banana Garden Seven.<sup>7</sup> This means that the club in its second incarnation as the Banana Garden Seven must have been active in the years before Shang Jinglan's death in 1676. By 1688 the Banana Garden Seven had certainly become a noted part of the literary and artistic landscape in the Yangzi delta region.<sup>8</sup>

The poets hailed from Qiantang in Hangzhou Bay, except for Xu Can from Suzhou who did not appear to have participated in their gatherings. At first, as long as the poets were still unmarried and lived in close vicinity to each other, they would meet several times a month to compose poetry together. Their meetings later became more sporadic after marriage and family duties took them away from each other and from Hangzhou.<sup>9</sup> As the club's social and cultural network extended beyond Hangzhou and spanned the economically prosperous Jiangnan region, the cultural heartland of late imperial China, this study looks at sources from across the Yangzi delta.

What interests us today is what the Banana Garden poetry club can tell us about perceptions of life and the cultural history of late imperial China. In order to explore the way the concept of gentility influenced cultural activities and social negotiations, this study applies to the Chinese context an approach inspired both by Stephen Greenblatt's exploration of the Shakespearean world and also by Catherine Gallagher's study of eighteenth-century women's writings in England, *Nobody's Story: The Vanishing Acts of Women Writers in the Marketplace, 1670–1820*.<sup>10</sup> This chapter seeks to address the following questions: What were the negotiations and exchanges involved in the making of the club in the literary world of the early Qing period? How did the Banana Garden poets acquire meaning and significance in their world? How did others perceive them and portray them? What were the cultural goods that were traded in the making of their success? What were the dynamics of the social network that exchanged their stories? What impact did they have and what legacy did they leave?

### The circle of poets

The voice of Qian Fenglun in her poem entitled 'A Winter Day Feast at Chai [Jingyi] Jixian's Place' leads us straight into the midst of the circle of poets known as the Banana Garden club:

The stars record that the year is soon over,  
The weather is icy, the air cold and desolate.

Shrubs and flowers wither in severe frost,  
     Heavy dewdrops evaporate in the dawn sun.  
 Overjoyed to meet with people of pure and simple minds,  
     We sit together in a beautiful mansion of iris and orchid.  
 Our merry words and laughter give rise to pleasant countenance and speech,  
     In harmony we devote ourselves to literary pursuits.  
 Illustrations and books lie scattered around the chamber,  
     A table made of yew displays our zithers and lutes.  
 As the birds disperse the hall becomes subdued,  
     As the clouds gather the curtains acquire dark shadows.  
 A life in seclusion keeps the hurly-burly of the world far away,  
     Standing aloof, our thoughts are idle and carefree.  
 Time flies like a shuttle on the loom,  
     I worry that our happy get-together will be over too soon.  
 Now that we're tipsy we break into long songs,  
     Having enjoyed to the full such excellent hospitality!<sup>11</sup>

Qian Fenglun's mother Gu Yurui founded the Banana Garden poetry club for her daughter and female companions.<sup>12</sup> Gu Yurui herself did not formally take part or count among its members but she too wrote and published her poetry. Gu Yurui was the niece of the Hangzhou matriarch Gu Ruopu (1592–c.1681), a 'virtuous widow', renowned poet and writer on statecraft and economics, who wielded considerable impact on the literary scene in Hangzhou and its women's culture.<sup>13</sup> Gu Ruopu in particular made her voice heard advocating the importance of women's literary education.<sup>14</sup> In a piece entitled 'Written in Jest to Explain Things Away when Someone Made Fun of Me for Engaging a Teacher to Educate the Girls', Gu urges:

I feel so sorry for my contemporaries who [care about] make-up and dressing up,  
     But fail to arrange early training for their youngsters,  
     And add shame to their families' reputation!  
 Let scholarship make the [girls] join in with each other,  
     Let them engage in debate and investigate things thoroughly!  
 Let the four womanly virtues, the thrice following  
     And the way of the ancients become the standard!  
 Let them learn style and elegance in composition  
     And cultivate their persons to become good and graceful (*shu*) women.<sup>15</sup>

Gu defines her vision of gentility for the girls in terms of acquiring womanly virtue and gracefulness (*shu*) by means of education, scholarship and learning. The Banana Garden poet Qian Fenglun married Gu Ruopu's second grandson Huang Shixu, a tribute student (*gongsheng*), when she was only fifteen.<sup>16</sup> Qian Fenglun would console her husband every time he failed in the higher examinations

and she would sit and study with him deep into the night. One volume of Qian Fenglun's poetry *Guxianglou ji* (*Works from the Pavilion of Antique Fragrance*; preface 1680) was published in 1702.<sup>17</sup>

In showing the Banana Garden poetry club in action, Qian Fenglun's poem conjures up the vision of literati gentility. Since the establishment of the meritocratic examination system under the Sui dynasty (589–618) until its abolition in 1905, the concept of gentility in China was linked less with noble birth and primarily with entry into the scholar élite (*shidafu*) by virtue of learning, success in the examination system and employment in the imperial bureaucratic service – as far as men were concerned. Women, however, excluded as they were from examinations and office, would acquire élite status (marking them as *guixiu* or gentlewomen) by birth or marriage.<sup>18</sup> Here we see how women also sought to acquire the air of gentility – perceived gentility in the eyes of their contemporaries – by virtue of participating in élite activities and the literati arts, in particular the composition of poetry.<sup>19</sup>

The activity of composing poetry and the imagery of books, paintings, fine furniture and musical instruments depicted in Qian's poem epitomise gentlemanly elegance and cultural sophistication. The meeting place of the club displays all the trappings of literati power and élite status – but here the poem transposes the male scholars' world and their tradition of gathering in literary circles into a female context.

Men's poetry clubs existed in China at least since the days of the Jian'an period (196–220) and proliferated in Ming/Qing times;<sup>20</sup> some had a more artistic orientation while others primarily served social and political networking.<sup>21</sup> The late Ming first witnessed the formation of informal networks of writing women in Jiangnan such as Shen Yixiu's (1590–1635) domestic and Shang Jinglan's social communities that largely connected women from related families.<sup>22</sup> As a formal literary society the Banana Garden club appeared among the very first of its kind in the early Qing – a publicly visible institution to connect women across different families and backgrounds. Dorothy Ko calls the club the first 'public' poetry society of women.<sup>23</sup> Although access seems to have initially been restricted to the gentlewomen and their relatives and friends, the Banana Garden poetry club appears among the first literary societies to transcend the boundaries of the family and native place.

The image of the beautiful mansion of iris and orchid in Qian Fenglun's poem alludes to the ancient poem 'Xiang furen' ('The Lady of the Xiang').<sup>24</sup> By comparing the meeting place of the poetry club, the residence of Chai Jingyi, to the abode of the Xiang River Goddess, the poem links the pursuit of scholarship with the world of immortals – a realm that women tended to invoke in their poetry. In this way Qian's poem endows the world of learning with the aura of femininity. Another writer to make explicit the link between women, immortals and literati learning was the seventeenth-century woman poet Wu Xiao from Changzhou.<sup>25</sup> In the preface to her poetry collection *Xiaoxue an'gao* (*Manuscripts from Howling Snow Studio*, publ. 1659) she writes:

It is not so long ago that I flicked through the pages of *The Record of the Immortals of Yongcheng*. I read there the story of how female feathered immortals succeeded in the official examinations. I also read the story of *Hermit Tao* and the *Zhen'gao* revelation texts, I recited the story of imperial concubine An from Jiuhua, who excelled in terms of literary talent, and in my humble mind I was filled with admiration.<sup>26</sup>

Her words toy with the vision of women – however imaginary or unreal – succeeding in a man's world. This success happens in the context of the traditional examination system but women succeed there only in the shape of immortals, not as female scholars or examination candidates. Wu Xiao moreover distances herself from that vision by assigning it to narrated memory, as an image remembered from reading a different book by another author.

The Banana Garden poets were girls of high ambition who had been educated in the spirit of Gu Ruopu, one of late imperial China's most eminent teachers of the inner chambers. And yet, their ambitions remained literary and artistic as their gender excluded them from competing in the examination system and imperial service. Although men wrote literary works for artistic purposes and aesthetic pleasure too, their literary training primarily served them as the means by which they could succeed in the examination system and gain entry into the scholar elite. Women had to put their craft to different use.

Women had been writing poetry for centuries. Through the act of writing, the female poet became empowered to enter the domain of *wen*, literary high culture, which since Confucius' time had been predominantly the sphere of men.<sup>27</sup> The traditional literati of Qing China reacted by reducing writing women to two classical types, as modern historian Susan Mann has shown: one was the moral instructress derived from the female Han historian Ban Zhao (c. 48–c. 120), the author of *Nüjie (Instructions for Women)* who initiated the classical tradition of women's learning. The other type was the child prodigy modelled after the 'willow-catkins poet' Xie Daoyun (fl. 399).<sup>28</sup> A gentry daughter famed for her intelligence and wit, Xie Daoyun came up with the brilliant line 'Not so good as willow catkins that the wind has tossed up' in a poetry contest on how to describe snowfall.<sup>29</sup> The clever woman who takes pleasure in competing with men and does not fear insulting them poses a potential threat that male literati rhetoric can defuse by reducing her to being 'only a child'.<sup>30</sup> The modern sinologist Wilt Idema has noted that the dominant male attitude towards writing women in Qing China was one of 'stern condescension'.<sup>31</sup> The celebration of clever women in the male literati's discourse poses a paradox. We shall see below in the analysis of the image of the gentlewoman scholar and its link with the cult of emotions how this paradox developed in late Ming literary discourse and became a popular phenomenon in the seventeenth century.

Qian Fenglun's sister-in-law and fellow Banana Garden poet Lin Yining talks about her education in the preface to her collected works. She states that she received her literary education from her mother and developed a special interest in the classics. Her ambition centred on becoming 'a "great scholar" *daru*, not a

Ban Zhao'.<sup>32</sup> She thus explicitly distances herself from the tradition of writing women and instead models herself on successful literati such as her father, a *jinshi* degree holder, and her husband who held high office as a censor. Another member of the club, Mao Ti, requested her father Mao Xianshu to instruct her in the art of poetry.<sup>33</sup> Mao Xianshu was a Ming loyalist and member of the literary club called the Ten Poets of Hangzhou (Xiling shizi) who also ranked among the outstanding 'Three Mao of Zhejiang'. When he told his daughter, 'Poetry is not your business', as Confucianists had done since the days of the Song dynasty (960–1279),<sup>34</sup> Mao Ti dared to disagree.<sup>35</sup> Her father not only relented but later even composed a preface to her published work. Lin Yining thus rejected being reduced to either the stereotype of the moral instructress or that of the catkins poetess, while Mao Ti insisted on being taught by her famous father. Both aspired to a place in an artistic tradition dominated by male scholars.

### The Banana Garden

In another poem entitled '[To the Tune of] *Man ting fang*: At the Villa by the Lake I Watch a Group of Girls on a Trip', Qian Fenglun also evokes the image of gentlewomen as immortals and literally sketches the imagery of a banana garden paradise:

Green as dye, the banana leaves  
 Red as fire, the peony  
 Each sight looks more lush and beautiful than the other  
 Having completed my make-up I sit in a small pavilion  
 All alone and silent, not uttering a single word  
 I draw water myself from the gushing spring to make tea  
 How delicious the aroma! How refreshing and soothing!  
 I roll up the screen to have a look  
 At high noon the mist seems keen  
 To obliterate the pale spring mountain scene.  
 On the embankment, a group of girls on a trip,  
 How elegant and graceful!  
 Slender like willows in the wind  
 Swept away by the waves their reflections in the water blur  
 Just like immortals flying through the air  
 How very extraordinary! The slanting rays of the sun are sinking in the west  
 The view ends at the horizon  
 Beyond the expanse of water and the vastness of the sky  
 I wish I were, in the luxuriant fragrant grass,  
 The plain one of a pair of mandarin ducks.<sup>36</sup>

In this poem banana leaves create the illusion of a lush and luxurious pastoral idyll as the setting for literary activities – and of course they allude to the name of



the club.<sup>37</sup> Modern scholars have failed to locate the Banana Garden but conjecture that it must have been one of the many private gardens in Jiangnan that served as the site for literary gatherings and involvement in the genteel arts.<sup>38</sup>

In the centre of the pastoral banana garden idyll in Qian Fenglun's poem sits the author's persona, a gentlewoman scholar. Solitude, serenity and simplicity dominate the imagery. But how would the vision of a garden have acquired meaning and significance in her world? How did it appear in the contemporary discourse?

During the days of the Tang dynasty the poet Wang Wei (701–761) elaborated on the vision of a garden with beautiful scenery for painting and composing poetry.<sup>39</sup> In the late Ming the concept of the garden had come to epitomise gentility. Retired and local gentry indulged in garden-mania:<sup>40</sup> they created, redesigned and competed in owning grand gardens that were to be used for socializing, entertaining and artistic activities such as poetry contests, scholarly lectures and dramatic performances.<sup>41</sup> Their gardens would also display status and wealth. In most cases gardens were visible status symbols open to the public, and even obscure hosts would be able to use the power of their gardens to attract illustrious guests.<sup>42</sup>

Some gardens included grand libraries, the most visible symbols of learning, but also collections of antiques and writing instruments, material tokens of gentility.<sup>43</sup> The garden of Shang Jinglan's husband, the scholar-official Qi Biaoqia (1602–45),<sup>44</sup> stored one of the largest and most renowned libraries in late Ming times. In her study of Qi's garden modern historian Joanna Handlin Smith notes that 'its purpose was not scholarly solitude but social solidarity with a local elite that shared an aesthetic appreciation for property with prize scenery and entertainment in beautiful settings'.<sup>45</sup> Scholarship and solitude thus may have appeared as the façade of the image of the garden but they did not rank among its prime purposes.

Those without élite status but with cultural aspirations, such as the wealthy Huizhou merchant and *bon viveur* Wang Ranming (1577–1655) who settled in Hangzhou in the 1630s, also attempted to join in the discourse on the literati garden. Wang Ranming provided lavish entertainment and literary exercises in scenic settings for the literati, thus gaining access to and wielding influence over their circles.<sup>46</sup> In another sense he effectively *created* literati culture by the very act of trying to *emulate* it. In claiming the image of the Banana Garden as their site, our poets similarly establish a visible symbol – even if only visionary or imaginary – of their existence and carve out a place for themselves in literati culture. In contrast to the merchant, the gentlewomen poets already belonged among the social élite by virtue of birth and marriage. However their gender marked them as outsiders just like the merchants, relegating them to the status of observers of the literary and political élite. Poetry composition and participation in poetic societies appeared as a means to become a *producer* of culture, enabling the gentlewoman to share in and shape the very activities that had been the prerogative of the male élite.

By the 1620s to 1630s 'writing about gardens' had become part of the cultural discourse.<sup>47</sup> Chen Jiru (1558–1639), the late Ming author of literati lifestyle

books, once composed a laudatory piece on Huizhou merchant Wang Ranming's garden in Hangzhou. Aficionado and arbiter of literati taste Chen Jiru shared with his readers his connoisseurship on tasting tea, watching mountains, and sitting quietly<sup>48</sup> – the very activities that Qian Fenglun makes her own in her poem. Like Qian Fenglun, he associated them with solitude, calling them 'pleasures to enjoy when one is alone'.<sup>49</sup>

In Chen Jiru's opinion the creation of a garden expressed the owner's 'cultured mind' (*wen xin*) – a view many of his contemporaries shared.<sup>50</sup> One early Qing scholar echoed this claim when asserting the 'cultured mind' as the key to a fine garden.<sup>51</sup> The association with the image of the garden also takes our Banana Garden poets to the very heart of gentility.

The 'cultured mind' gave the garden its most treasured fruits: the literary compositions and poetry that the gatherings in a garden would inspire. Chen Jiru composed an inscription for a scenic site in another famous literati garden, the Shadow Garden (*Yingyuan*) owned by Zheng Yuanxun (1604–1645) in late Ming Yangzhou.<sup>52</sup> In a recent study the modern Japanese scholar Yasushi Ōki has shown how this garden in the spring of 1640 served as the site for a poetry contest on the theme of the portentous appearance of a rare yellow peony that had wide-scale reverberations as the event encapsulated the political climate of the day.<sup>53</sup> Although the elegant activities in the Shadow Garden ceased with the collapse of the Ming dynasty, the yellow peony poetry contest exemplifies the spread and growing impact of the publishing industry in seventeenth-century China. The owner of the garden, Zheng Yuanxun, published a collection of poems on the yellow peony party. The volume achieved wide distribution and inspired further publications on the topic not only in Jiangnan but also as far south as Guangdong.<sup>54</sup> The author, editor and publisher of books on literati lifestyle Chen Jiru, too, sold handbooks and guides to the gentility that others might seek to acquire or emulate.<sup>55</sup>

In Qian Fenglun's poem the image of the garden shifts its focus from the ambience of gentility, literature and politics normally associated with the male scholar to the image of young women enjoying the scene. In her vision the banana garden almost literally produces the woman poet sitting in a pavilion amidst the scene. As soon as the first-person narrator of the poem appears, she becomes active, making tea and looking outside. She proceeds to survey the scenery outside and the spectacle of nature that unfolds before her eyes. The scenery instantly produces a group of girls, multiplying the image of the woman poet who perceives the roaming girls as elegant and graceful. The girls appear in yet another reflection mirrored in the river, conjuring the image of immortals in the poet's mind. Ultimately the poem links the image of the girls with the vision of female immortals, and thus, by implication, the scholarly gatherings of the Banana Garden poetry club.

Another Banana Garden Five poet inscribed the image of the ultimate literati garden in Ming/Qing times onto the front page of her collected works: Xu Can used the name of the garden as the title of her two poetry collections *Zhuozhengyuan shiji* (*Poetry Collection from the Artless Administrator's Garden*) and *Zhuozhengyuan shiyu* (*Lyric Collection from the Artless Administrator's Garden*). The modest name

of the ‘Artless Administrator’s Garden’ (Zhuozhengyuan) in Suzhou disguises the fact that it became the ‘representative type of the Jiangnan classic garden’, as the modern art historian Craig Clunas notes in his in-depth study of this site.<sup>56</sup> This famous garden frequently changed hands and at one point in the mid-seventeenth century belonged to the Grand Secretary Chen Zhilin (*jinshi* 1637; d. 1666) from Haining, Hangzhou Bay – the husband of the eminent Banana Garden Five poet Xu Can. Chen Zhilin held the titles of Junior Guardian and Grand Guardian of the Heir Apparent under the Ming dynasty, and also served as Minister of Rites and in the Office for the Advancement of Literature in the early years of the Qing period. The emperor granted Xu Can the title of dame-consort of the first rank, making her one of the highest-ranking gentlewomen of her time.<sup>57</sup>

The poet Xu Can lived with her husband in Beijing at the end of the Ming, then moved south – perhaps to their garden in Suzhou – and returned to Beijing after the Qing conquest of China. She followed her husband into exile when he was banished to Shenjing (present-day Shenyang), Manchuria, in 1656 on the charge of conspiracy. He was pardoned, but only two years later was charged with bribing a palace eunuch and stripped of his property and office. Again he was exiled to Manchuria, this time the garrison station Shangyang Ford (Liaoning) where he died in 1666. He probably owned the Artless Administrator’s Garden in Suzhou sometime between c.1640 and 1658 when Xu Can was in her thirties and forties. In 1671 the Kangxi Emperor (r. 1661–1722) granted Xu Can permission to bury her husband’s remains in his native place. Xu Can returned to Haining, became a Buddhist nun, styled herself Ziyan and specialized in painting images of Guanyin. We do not know whether Xu Can ever lived in the Artless Administrator’s Garden but she named her two volumes of poetry after it. In using the name of a residence in the title of her poetry collection she also followed a literary convention often adopted by the literati.

### **Simple, solitary and serene: the image of the gentlewoman scholar**

The following section analyses the origins of the gentlewoman scholar’s attributes that the Banana Garden poet Qian Fenglun celebrates when portraying her poetic alter ego as simple, solitary and serene. What were her models, where did those values come from and why did they seem desirable? How do these values and ideas tie the works of the Banana Garden poets into the contemporary discourse and the social network around them?

The figure of the woman scholar who personifies simplicity, solitude and serenity had already sparked a literati cult almost a century before the Banana Garden poetry club: in 1580 the leading writer of the day Wang Shizhen (1526–1590, *jinshi* 1547) produced the best-selling biography of Tanyangzi (1558–1580), the Grand Secretary’s daughter and self-styled chaste widow from Suzhou.<sup>58</sup> Tanyangzi chose a solitary life, had visions of deities, preached serenity and simplicity and was celebrated as a saint and immortal. Wang Shizhen depicts her in the tradition of the catkins poetess as a child prodigy highly skilled in classical

Chinese. His portrayal of Tanyangzi combines the rhetoric of the late Ming cult of chaste widows, the Neo-Confucian interest in epiphany and enlightenment, the search for authenticity and spirituality and the literati's attempts to rationalize female talent with explanations of sainthood.<sup>59</sup>

The publication of the drama *Mudanting* (*Peony Pavilion*) by Tang Xianzu (1550–1616) in 1589 placed the literary heroine centre-stage in late Ming discourse.<sup>60</sup> Tang's heroine epitomised the late Ming cult of emotions (*qing*) that extolled the concept of innocence and celebrated the child-like mind, a concept inspired by the iconoclastic philosopher Li Zhi (1527–1602).<sup>61</sup> Male critics in seventeenth-century China perceived women writers as particularly suited to expressing the ideal of child-like innocence in poetry.<sup>62</sup> In their eyes, women's poetry responded to the search for the genuine voice, or authenticity, a term that also belonged to the discourse on the cult of emotions.<sup>63</sup> Tang Xianzu too belonged to the circle of Gu Ruopu and her family: he was a friend of Gu's father-in-law.<sup>64</sup> The fictional character Du Liniang became the model for generations of women who aspired to both romance and literary fame, including the poets of the Banana Garden club.

Hangzhou prefecture, in particular Qiantang county, produced the highest number of women writers in Ming/Qing China, with the other Jiangnan cities closely following suit.<sup>65</sup> Both Xiaoqing and Du Liniang continued to exercise the imagination of the Banana Garden poets who grew up in an ambience steeped in West Lake lore.<sup>66</sup> Three members of the Banana Garden club contributed to the *Sanfu heping mudanting* (*Three Wives' Commentary on the Peony Pavilion*, 1694): Lin Yining, herself a playwright,<sup>67</sup> composed a preface while Feng Xian and Gu Si wrote colophons.<sup>68</sup> Gu Si in particular noted how Xiaoqing's story and Du Liniang's drama fascinated the female reading audience: 'For more than a century now a good number of women readers, among them Miss Yu and Xiaoqing, have been the ones who displayed a true understanding of this book [*Peony Pavilion*].'<sup>69</sup>

The female commentators on the *Peony Pavilion* moreover suggested that Tanyangzi had inspired the creation of Du Liniang, although seventeenth-century male literati did not agree. In the view of early Qing women the discourse on Tanyangzi, Du Liniang and Xiaoqing – as well as their own literary efforts – belonged to the same continuum. In commenting on these heroines and in contributing to the *Three Wives' Commentary* our poets assert their place within an active network of women writers among Hangzhou's literary circles – they do not write in solitude but are part of an interactive discourse linking families, friends and neighbours.<sup>70</sup> As commentators on men's writings, these women also enter into a dialogue with the male literati. Like the vision of the ideal garden, the image of the solitary gentlewoman scholar reveals itself as literati rhetoric telling us more about the fantasies of both the literati and the gentlewomen than about female realities.<sup>71</sup>

### The Banana Garden girls in the male gaze

The genteel image of girls on a trip in Qian Fenglun's poem resonates with a Hangzhou male scholar's sketch of the Banana Garden poets on a boat trip:

In those days the citizens of Hangzhou indulged in extravagant habits. When the weather was warm and bright in spring, pleasure boats with brocade screens would crowd the lake; both tourists on the water and on land would vie with each other in showing off their finery. Everyone would wear glittery earrings, jade jewellery in the shape of feathers, and silk robes trailing with pearls. Only Chai [Jingyi] Jixian would go out in a small boat with Feng [Xian] Youling, Qian [Fenglun] Yunyi, Lin [Yining] Yaqing, and Gu [Si] Qiji, all of them gentlewomen. Wearing simple outfits made of raw silk and their hair tied in a bun, they would busy themselves with ink brush and paper. When the women on pleasure trips in the other boats around them saw them, they lowered their heads with shame, realizing that they could not live up to them.<sup>72</sup>

This early Qing scholar perceived simplicity as the key to their gentility. The concept comes straight from official Confucian rhetoric: in 1605 the motto 'simplicity' (*danjian*) appeared as a stern reminder on a newly erected screen on Huating district yamen<sup>73</sup> – in close proximity to the place where Tanyangzi lived and lectured on this very term, as her biographer, the eminent late Ming scholar Wang Shizhen, informs us.<sup>74</sup>

Another scholar from Hangzhou Bay, Gu Ruopu's brother Gu Ruoqun, comments on the prominence of women writers in his native Qiantang in the 1630s:

In the past I asked [Gu Ruopu] to transmit the tales of extraordinary women in order to give them their due place in history. In recent times women scholars have authored many works. Just speaking of our Hangzhou, over the past decades the place has produced women writers such as Mr Tian [Yiheng] Ziyi's daughter Yuyan who wrote the *Jottings Left behind from Jade Tree Pavilion*, Mr Yu Changru's daughter Jingfang who wrote the *Songs Left behind from the Garden of Mirrors*. Speaking of living women, we have Zhang Qiongru's calligraphy, Liang Mengzhao's paintings, and Zhang Siyin's poetry. Their works are all ladylike and elegant, leaving behind a gorgeous legacy like a lingering fragrance. The words of Mr Ma are most appropriate: 'The splendor of the landscape of Qiantang with its winding river and rolling hills cannot be the monopoly of the sashed and gartered male scholars.'<sup>75</sup>

Gu Ruoqun here concedes to the women writers the privilege of sharing the public arena traditionally reserved for men.

The literati continued to discuss the merits of the Banana Garden poets throughout the Qing dynasty. One of the most influential and prolific lyric (*ci*)

poets of the seventeenth century, Chen Weisong (1626–82),<sup>76</sup> commented on Xu Can's lyrics:

Her works display grace and beauty and she produced great lyrics. As a matter of fact she ranks as the best woman writer of song lyrics since the Southern Song dynasty. Her lyrics surpass those of [Zhu] Shuzhen and are comparable to those of [Li] Qingzhao.<sup>77</sup>

In his eyes Xu Can ranks alongside the two most famous women poets from the Song dynasty. His judgement places her writings firmly in the female literary tradition while avoiding comparison with men's works of the same genre.

The Qing poet and critic Shen Deqian (1673–1769) praised Chai Jingyi's poetry primarily for its moral value:

[Chai Jingyi's] works include her *Collected Poems from the Studio of Condensed Fragrance* (*Ningxiangshi shichao*). [Her writings] originate in the purity of her mind and develop from the correctness of her education. Her poetry is full of admonitions and does not seek to go into matters related to themes such as wind, clouds, moon and dewdrops.<sup>78</sup>

In 1801 the renowned classicist Ruan Yuan (1764–1849) who became Governor of Zhejiang province also praised the Banana Garden Seven poet Feng Xian and her husband for their filial piety: 'As the advanced years of the husband's mother, the couple looked after her day and night. In their spare moments they composed volumes of harmonized verse.'<sup>79</sup> In sum, the Banana Garden girls continued to fascinate the literati throughout the Qing.<sup>80</sup> What these traditional male scholars found most praiseworthy were both academic achievement and moral excellence.

### Through female eyes

The poet and painter Shang Jinglan from Shaoxing, widow of the garden-lover and Ming loyalist martyr Qi Biaoqia, came across a manuscript by the Banana Garden Seven poet Zhang Hao who had died aged twenty-four. Shang Jinglan was so impressed by the depth of Zhang Hao's emotions that she composed a preface for the girl's posthumously published works.<sup>81</sup>

When Shang Jinglan commended Zhang Hao's literary talent and filial piety to her own informal poetry club of daughters and daughters-in-law, one of them asked why Heaven had not given Zhang Hao a few more years to live if she was really so talented and filial. Shang Jinglan replied:

The premature death of women who possess literary talent is not due to the will of Heaven but rather to exhaustion in the composition of poetry. Had Chayun [i.e. Zhang Hao] enjoyed longevity without leaving behind any works of poetry, then who would remember her name in the course of history?<sup>82</sup>

Shang Jinglan echoes the male literati's interest in the poet's moral as well as academic achievements. It is likely that Shang would have known about Zhang Hao's affiliation with and the existence of the Banana Garden poetry club. Shang stresses the importance of fame more than one would expect for that time. Female modesty and the cloistered life do not rank among Shang's priorities when celebrating the young poet's achievements. She stresses fame and public visibility at the expense of traditional ladylikeness. The perceived gentility of the woman writer here rather takes its defining features from male elite culture.

By perceiving the talented but tragic poetess in the image of Xiaoqing, Shang Jinglan includes the Banana Garden club in the discourse on the cult of emotions. Zhang Hao's fate would have reminded Shang Jinglan of the talented but tragic daughters of Shen Yixiu, Ye Wanwan (1610–32) and Ye Xiaoluan (1616–32), both accomplished poets whose early deaths seemed to vindicate common views about the fatality of literary females. Late Ming male literati apotheosised the Ye sisters, as they did with Tanyangzi, Xiaoqing and other talented women who had suffered similar fates.

Depictions of these girls appear to foreshadow a change in beauty ideals from the rotund depictions of women in the mid-Ming to the slender, oval and ephemeral figure of the educated but ill-fated child-woman that dominates the Qing era.<sup>83</sup> In the early Qing writers' eyes the Banana Garden poets embodied the new concept of beauty linked with talent and tragedy that became popular at the end of the Ming era. The image of the Banana Garden poets perhaps illustrates a change of attitudes during the early Qing as the native Chinese elite eschewed the athletic prowess associated with the Manchu conquerors, which they perceived as vulgar, while embracing the frailty and sentimentality of the sophisticated, literary and ultimately tragic type, which they associated with homegrown and native Chinese ideals. The female figure appeared particularly suited to convey this new, and native, concept of gentility with its emotional and tragic overtones. In this respect the early Qing discourse on the Banana Garden club anticipates the depiction of the protagonists in the *Honglou meng* (*The Dream of the Red Chamber*).

In the early nineteenth century another woman poet from Qiantang, Shen Shanbao,<sup>84</sup> a sought-after teacher renowned for her filial piety, praised the Banana Garden club leader Chai Jingyi and likened her works to those of a man.<sup>85</sup> This shows that women still drew inspiration from the club a century and a half later.<sup>86</sup>

## Women and publishing

The reason we today can still hear the voices of the Banana Garden poets – chatting, laughing, and composing verses – and visualize them on a trip is because their voices belong to the story of publishing and the marketplace that revolves around issues such as 'authorial personae, printed books, scandalous allegories, intellectual property rights, literary reputations, incomes, debts, and fictional characters', as Catherine Gallagher notes in her study of women writers in early

modern England.<sup>87</sup> In the Chinese context we might add to these issues cultural aspirations, the search for gentility, and the desire for transcendence.

Women's books were in most cases published by their menfolk, sometimes posthumously. But the Banana Garden women seem to have embraced public authorship eagerly, vying with each other to compose prefaces and commentaries for each other's works. It is not clear whether they made money out of their writings or whether they would ever have needed to. As daughters of Jiangnan's most prominent families this may not have been on their minds. Some seventeenth-century women, however, did not shy away from remunerative authorship.<sup>88</sup>

Writings by, about, and for women came into fashion during the seventeenth century.<sup>89</sup> The modern scholar Yasushi Ōki detects the beginnings of 'mass communication society' in the late Ming printing culture of Jiangnan.<sup>90</sup> The vast reading public and thriving publishing industry provided a profitable environment for women writers and the editors of their works. When the late Ming editor and commercial publisher Zhao Shijie from Hangzhou described women's poems as 'whispered conversations' and 'private laughter',<sup>91</sup> he was actually advertising his anthology of women writers entitled *Gujin nüshi* (*Lady Scholars Past and Present*, 1628). Ellen Widmer has noted that some Hangzhou literary editors in the 1660s were 'unusually supportive of creative women'<sup>92</sup> – but they too must have profited by the very act of catering to the craze for women's writings.

In his recent study of women's poetry Wilt Idema has reminded us that in publishing her writings, a woman 'presented herself to the public gaze in her most intimate moments'.<sup>93</sup>

As Charlotte Furth has put it:

For a woman's writing to be seen or known was for her to be perceived sexually by outsiders. The Chinese woman who was published and read by an impersonal public of readers unknown to her occupied space more like that of a Muslim woman who walks the city street without a veil.<sup>94</sup>

The problem here derives from the perceived conflation of the author and her persona. In publishing her works, a woman appeared to make part of her available to the public in exchange for money or reputation and fame. As we have seen in the discourse on the Banana Garden poets, both the male literati and the élite women emphasized the moral purity of the published gentlewoman writer. In their discourse they prevented her from becoming a 'public woman' and preserved her gentility.<sup>95</sup>

### **The legacy of the Banana Garden club**

What goals did the gentlewomen poets pursue? Susan Mann suggests that Qing women wrote for the sake of transcendence.<sup>96</sup> The Banana Garden poets reached transcendence in ways they probably never imagined. When they were gone, many more public women's networks and poetry clubs came into being. In eighteenth-century Suzhou, for example, the poet Zhang Yunzi (b. 1756),



the wife of the literatus Ren Zhaolin (fl. 1776–1823), founded the Clear Brook Poetry Club (Qingxi yinshe) for herself and another nine of her husband's female disciples. They were also known as the Ten Poets of Suzhou (Wuzhong shizi), an allusion to the prestigious seventeenth-century male poetry club of the Ten Poets of Hangzhou (Xiling shizi) who, as noted above, included Mao Ti's father. Ren Zhaolin taught these women music and poetry and acted as their patron. In 1789 he published their writings under the title *Wuzhong nüshi shichao* (*Selected Verses of Suzhou Lady Scholars*).<sup>97</sup>

At the same time in Nanjing, the poet and essayist Yuan Mei (1716–98), another native of Qiantang, gained notoriety for gathering twenty-eight poets as female disciples at his Sui Garden (Suiyuan).<sup>98</sup> He also published an anthology of their poems entitled *Suiyuan nüdizi shixuan* (*Selected Poetry by the Female Disciples from the Sui Garden*) in 1796.<sup>99</sup> The Sui Garden with its twenty-four pavilions and a miniature imitation of Hangzhou's West Lake functioned as a literary meeting place and helped establish Yuan Mei's literary fame.<sup>100</sup> The garden probably once belonged to Cao Yin (1658–1712), an ancestor of the novelist Cao Xueqin (1715–63), and Yuan Mei believed it to have inspired the creation of the most famous of all imaginary gardens – Prospect Garden (Daguanyuan) in the novel *The Dream of the Red Chamber*.<sup>101</sup>

The discourse on the clever women of the Banana Garden poetry club thus can be seen as culminating in the main female protagonists, the girls from the Jia family, founding the Crab-flower poetry club (Haitang shishe) in Prospect Garden together with the main male protagonist Jia Baoyu. *The Dream of the Red Chamber*, however, confines the artistic activities and literary output of its poetry club to within the walls of the family garden – whereas the Banana Garden club seems to free its poets from the confines of the inner chambers, leading them out into the public arena and lending them visibility before a wider audience.<sup>102</sup> One might wonder whether during the decades that lie between the Banana Garden and the Crab-flower poetry clubs, the cult of the simple, solitary and serene lady scholar became submerged and silenced within the state-sponsored restoration of Neo-Confucian moral order that would have emphasized women's more traditional roles.<sup>103</sup>

### **Whose story is it anyway?**

Much to the chagrin of many a modern scholar,<sup>104</sup> and in contrast to Catherine Gallagher's findings of women writers in early modern Europe,<sup>105</sup> it is difficult to find any scandalous allegories in our case study of the Banana Garden poetry club. The voices of the poets from the past remain difficult to analyse as they have come down to us transmitted through the filter of many other voices – those of their editors, publishers, anthologists, and observers, male and female. As is true of many works, their transmission has undergone certain processes of selection and silencing according to the criteria of later writers with other goals living in different times. When the eminent gentlewoman scholar Wanyan Yun Zhu (1771–1833), for example, set out to compile her monumental anthology of women's writings

*Guochao guixiu zhengshi ji (Correct Beginnings: Collected Women's Poetry of Our Dynasty)* she chose to omit all poems she considered erotic and therefore not decent or genteel enough, and she also excluded all poetry by women she did not regard as proper gentlewomen.<sup>106</sup> The voices of the Banana Garden poets as they reach us today thus tell only part of the story.

### Concluding remarks

To sum up, we have seen how the Banana Garden poets left behind self-representations that portray them as cool, aloof and beautiful while publishing their works and becoming visible on the literary landscape. Yet they also managed to escape criticism of appearing self-promotional or overly visible.

A reading of literary and non-literary source materials in context shows how late imperial Chinese citizens engaged in a network of social negotiations and exchanges involving works of art and acts of self-fashioning.<sup>107</sup> Analysis of the cultural discourse reveals how the dreams, desires, aspirations and ideals surrounding perceptions of gentility in currency at that time set such negotiations and exchanges in motion. This study has traced how the poets constructed images of gentility in their works and promoted themselves as both members and producers of mainstream elite culture. The poets drew on the contemporary literati discourse to construct their literary self-portrayals. Their values and role models derived from famous literary figures created by male authors. Male readers and observers praised the Banana Garden poets for combining academic achievement with moral excellence. Female readers and commentators stressed the importance of their fame, public visibility and masculine characteristics, at the expense of a more traditional image of ladylikeness that would include modesty and cloistered living.

The perceived gentility of the woman writer here takes its defining features from male elite culture. This construct of the writing woman's gentility also helped to overcome the threats to the gentlewoman as an outsider of mainstream literary culture who remained excluded from the examination system and official life. In the realm of poetry, however, the gentlewomen found themselves able to compete and construct their identities and elite consciousness. In their poetry they dreamt of becoming immortals and participating in the official examinations. Their imagination and literary activities gave them wings to transcend the traditional boundaries and enter the cultural circle of the scholar gentleman by virtue of their learning, knowledge and literary accomplishment. Their literary output gave them public recognition, fame and immortality, without diminishing their veneer of gentility.

The booming publishing industry and the early Qing vogue for women's writings also helped propel them into literary stardom. Although the Banana Garden poets may not have vied for profit, their literary craft helped them construct and participate in a network of social negotiations and exchanges. This network involved the circulation of poems, printed books, literary reputations, idealized images of the gentlewoman poet, and carefully constructed representations of

the female self. Through this network the woman writer in late imperial times re/created, manipulated and negotiated perceptions of herself and those of the writing woman's gentility.

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## Notes

- 1 The Banana Garden club has received some scholarly attention in recent Chinese literary histories of women poets from the early Qing period (e.g. Liu Zhenkai 1995: 86; Liang Yizhen 1932: 23–34; Shi Shuyi 1987: 81–132; *DKWJT* 9: 904; Tan Zhengbi 1984: 350–2; Tang Qun 2002; Hu Ming 1995: 100–2; Zeng Binglan 1994; Guo Mei 1994; Xia Xiaohong 1996). Dorothy Ko's pioneering work *Teachers of the Inner Chambers* provides an in-depth study of the club, comparing it to other formal and informal women's networks in seventeenth-century China (Ko 1994). Wilt Idema and Beata Grant have recently devoted one chapter of their monumental anthology of Chinese women's writings *The Red Brush* to the history of the Banana Garden club and the translation of selected poems (Idema and Grant 2004). Ellen Widmer has elucidated some aspects of the club and its legacy in her recent study of women and fiction in nineteenth-century China, *The Beauty and the Book* (Widmer 2006).
- 2 Qian Fenglun (*zi*: Yunyi), Lin Yining (*zi*: Yaqing), Chai Jingyi (*zi*: Jixian), Zhu Rouze (*zi*: Shuncheng), and Xu Can (*zi*: Xiangpin, Mingshen). On Qian, see also *LFZ* 756–8; on Lin, *LFZ* 542–3; on Chai, *LFZ* 434–5; on Zhu, *LFZ* 278; on Xu, *LFZ* 481; Wong Yin-lee 1999.
- 3 On Chai Jingyi and her artistic talent (including a reproduction of a painting by Chai), see Marsha Weidner *et al.* 1988: 108–9.
- 4 On the Banana Garden Seven, including Gu Si (*zi*: Qiji), Feng Xian (*zi*: Youling), Mao Ti (*zi*: Anfang), and Zhang Hao (*zi*: Chayun), see Ko 1994: 234–50. On Gu, see also *LFZ* 802; on Feng, *LFZ* 655; on Mao, *LFZ* 229; on Zhang, *LFZ* 514, Deng Hanyi 1672: 12.32a; Widmer 2006: 8.
- 5 Cf. Mann and Cheng 2001: 174–5. On Xu (*zi*: Shuze), see Widmer 2006: 163–7.
- 6 The play includes colophons by Qian Fenglun, Feng Xian, and Lin Yining, but also others such as Shang Jinglan and Gu Si and the famous dramatist Li Yu. The drama must have appeared by 1680, the year Li Yu died, as Li also added notes to it. On the dating of the play see Xu Fuming 1987: 213. Here I am indebted to Ellen Widmer.
- 7 *Qinlou hegao*; see *LFZ* 514. This is discussed in detail below.
- 8 Cf. Xu Shumin and Qian Yue 1934: *liji* 39a.
- 9 Idema and Grant 2004: 472; Widmer 2006: 163.
- 10 Greenblatt 1988; Gallagher 1994.
- 11 *GGSC* 2:4.2a (p. 464).
- 12 On Gu Yurui (*zi*: Zhiqiong), see Ko 1994: 236–7; *LFZ* 800; Shi Shuyi 1987: 2.23b.
- 13 On Gu Ruopu, see Ko 1994: 139; 163–4; 236–40; 245f; 248; 281; *WWTC*, 302–13.
- 14 Cf. Ko, 1994: 164.
- 15 *WYXG* 1898–1900: 2.1b–2a.
- 16 Or sixteen *sui*; cf. *LFZ* 757.

- 17 Extant. Qian also published another volume of poetry entitled *Sanhuatan ji* (*Collected Works from the Sanhua Beach*), cf. LFZ 756–8.
- 18 On women in traditional China, see Ebrey 1993; Ko 1994; Mann 1997; Widmer and Chang 1997. On the term *guixiu*, short for *guifang zhixiu*, literally ‘elegance from the inner quarters’, see Ko 1997: 80.
- 19 See also Robertson 1997 for a brief discussion of Qian Fenglun’s poetry.
- 20 Confucius already pointed to the link between friendship and learning; see *Lunyu* 12/24. On the Jian’an poets, see e.g. Cutter 1985: 228–62. On poetry clubs, see also Angele 1987.
- 21 Late Ming literary societies included: the Wangshe, Kuangshe c.1620; Nanshe c.1620; Yingshe 1624; the Fushe with its political movement (cf. Wakeman 1985: 137; Atwell 1975: 333–67); in the early Qing (late 1640s) three major literary societies appeared in Jiangnan: Yuanshe in Songjiang; Shenjiaoshe and Tongshengshe in Suzhou prefecture, cf. Dennerline 1981: 308. Many literary societies were forbidden during the Shunzhi era for fear of political unrest, cf. Struve 1982: 257ff.
- 22 On Shen and Shang, see Ko 1994: 179–250.
- 23 Ko 1994: 234ff.
- 24 In ‘Jiuge’ (Nine Songs), *Chuci* (Songs of Chu, 3rd century BC). Tan Jiefu 1978: 346–7.
- 25 *WWTC* 375–82. See also *WWTC* 690.
- 26 LFZ 106.
- 27 Cf. Mann 1997: 119.
- 28 For Xie Daoyun’s official biography, see *Jinshu* 96.2516. For a discussion, see Mann 1997: 78–82.
- 29 *Shishuo xinyu jiaojian*, 1:2.113.
- 30 See Mann 1997: 83.
- 31 Idema 1999: 46.
- 32 *WWTC* 406.
- 33 On Mao Xianshu, a licentiate under the Ming who became a literary recluse under the Qing, see *ECCP* 564. The two other Mao were Mao Qiling (1623–1716) and Mao Jike (1633–1708).
- 34 Ebrey 1993: 120ff.
- 35 Ko 1994: 242.
- 36 *ZXC* 1.42a. Also in *GXLJ* 5a-b.
- 37 Banana leaves – a symbol of self-discipline and teaching oneself – belong among the Fourteen Treasures (*bao*), the emblems of the scholar (*shi*); cf. Eberhard 1985: 33, 161–2.
- 38 On garden culture in Ming/Qing times, see Weidner *et al.* 1988; Handlin Smith 1992: 55–81; Clunas 1996.
- 39 Hardie 1988: 125n5.
- 40 Handlin Smith 1992: 57.
- 41 Handlin Smith 1992: 66.
- 42 Handlin Smith 1992: 68, 94.
- 43 For example, the gardens of Zhang Dai (1599–c.1684) and Qi Biaoja; see Handlin Smith, 1992: 66, 68, 70.
- 44 On Shang and Qi, see Handlin Smith 1992; Ko 1994: 226–32.
- 45 Handlin Smith 1992: 66.
- 46 Handlin Smith 1992: 73–4; Widmer 1996: 82–3. Wang Ranming sponsored writers and artists such as Li Yu and befriended several of the leading women writers such as Huang Yuanjie (Jieling, c.1620–c.1669) and Wu Shan (fl. mid-seventeenth century); see Widmer 1989: 13.
- 47 Discourse in Foucault’s sense of the word as ‘practices that systematically create the objects of which they speak’ (Foucault 1972: 49). For the discourse on gardens, see Wang Shizhen’s *Gujin mingyuan shubian*; Wen Zhenheng’s (1585–1645)

- Zhangwuzhi* (written c. 1615–20); Ji Cheng's *Yuanye*; Wen Zhengming's (1470–1559), 'Zhuozhengyuan ji' (Record of the Artless Administrator's Garden, 1533); cf. Clunas 1996: 138–9.
- 48 See Yasushi Ōki's chapter in this volume.
- 49 Chen Jiru 1936.
- 50 Jin Xuezhi 1990: 51; cf. Clunas 1996: 165; *ECCP* 83–4. Chen Jiru was also a friend of Wang Shizhen and Wang Xijue, the biographer and the father of Tanyangzi (see below).
- 51 Jin Xuezhi 1990: 51.
- 52 Chen also composed a preface to Zheng Yuanxun's short essay (*xiaopin*) collection named after the garden's scenic site, *Meiyouge wenyu*.
- 53 Ōki 2000: 33–46.
- 54 Ōki 2000.
- 55 See Ōki's chapter in this volume. On Chen Jiru and his publishing activities, see also Ōki 1990.
- 56 Clunas 1996: 31; on its history see *ibid*, 23.
- 57 Chen Zhilin (*zi*: Yansheng, *hao*: Su'an). Cf. *BDCW* 248–50.
- 58 Wang Shizhen 1970: 78.1a–31a. On Tanyangzi, see Waltner 1987.
- 59 Cf. Berg 2004.
- 60 On Tang Xianzu and his play, see Hsia 1975: 249–90; for a discussion of Tang Xianzu and emotions, see Ko 1994: 68–112.
- 61 See his treatise 'Tongxin shuo' (On the Child-like Mind), in Li Zhi 1975; for discussions, see Wai-ye Li 1995: 32–52; Huang 2001: 39.
- 62 Huang 2001: 40; Ko 1994: 59ff.
- 63 On Li Zhi and the concept of authenticity, see Epstein 2001: 74–9.
- 64 Cf. Ko 1994: 238.
- 65 See Mann 1997: 229–32.
- 66 Ko 1994: 88; Zeitlin 1994: 148.
- 67 Lin is credited with the authorship of a southern drama entitled *Furong xia qulu* (of which seven scenes are extant); cf. Xu Fuming 1987: 270–1.
- 68 *TXZHB* 2: 889–90.
- 69 *TXZHB* 2: 906. The late Ming woman critic Miss Yu, or Yu Erniang, from Suzhou (Taicang) was depicted as devoted to literature and doomed to an early death. Yu describes herself as following in Du Liniang's footsteps and praises *Mudanting* for its pure expression of emotions. Her story was first recorded by a male friend of Tang Xianzu's and later retold by other women, in particular Li Shu and Gu Si; see Lin Yining 1986: 1ab, 2b. Tang Xianzu himself composed poems lamenting Yu Erniang's death. Yu Erniang's story was merged with that of Xiaoqing in the 1625 play *Chunbo ying* which makes Xiaoqing comment on Yu Erniang.
- 70 Cf. Zeitlin 1994: 148.
- 71 On male fantasies and female realities in traditional Chinese poetic discourse, see also Idema 1999.
- 72 Wu Hao 1874: 30.10b–11a.
- 73 Cf. Meskill 1994: 147.
- 74 Wang Shizhen 1970.
- 75 *WYXG xu*: 5a.
- 76 On Chen who also served under the Qing, see Nienhauser 1986: 238–9.
- 77 Chen Weisong 1833–44.
- 78 Shen, Wong and Zhou 1975: 31.7a.
- 79 Ruan Yuan 1995–2000: 40.13a (Vol. 1684, p. 475). Feng Xian's husband was Qian Tingmei.
- 80 Another Qing critic praised Qian Fenglun's poetry as possessing the pure style of the ancients, and for lacking any references to kerchiefs and graceful eyebrows (*ZSJ* 2:4/6a). Wu Hengzhao (1771–?) praised Xu Can's lyrics as innovative and unique

- in its vitality, counting them among the best lyrics authored by women (*LJC* 4.1a–b (p. 39)). Wu Qian (1733–1813) commended Xu Can for having abandoned the traditional ornate style of writing while developing her own new style (Wu Qian 1922: 4.17a/b).
- 81 *Qinlou hegao*; see *LFZ* 514.
- 82 Shang Jinglan 1960: 289.
- 83 See van Gulik 1974: 294ff.
- 84 On Shen Shanbao, see *LFZ* 366–7; *BDCW* 189–90.
- 85 See Shen Shanbao 1995–2000: 1.8b–9a (pp. 551–2).
- 86 In 1680 the eminent matriarch Gu Ruopu commented on Qian Fenglun in her preface to *Guxianglou ji*. She compared Qian’s poetry to ‘beautiful birds singing in spring, and the sun shining upon the new blossoms.’ Gu continued: ‘Though her academic attainment has not reached the top she excels in intelligence and imagination’ and expressed the hope that her granddaughter-in-law would continue writing to transmit Gu’s literary legacy to future generations (*BDCW* 170; *LFZ* 757–8).
- 87 Gallagher 1994: xiii.
- 88 Huang Yuanjie earned a living by selling poetry, painting and calligraphy; Wu Shan also sold her paintings for a living; cf. Weidner 1988 *et al.*: 14; Yu Yingshi 1987: 154. Some women were also known as publishers in the eighteenth century – among them a Huizhou merchant’s wife (*LFZ* 542–3).
- 89 Ellen Widmer has noted a ‘minor boom in the publishing of women poets’ around 1612, the alleged date of Xiaoqing’s death (Widmer 1992: 125).
- 90 Cf. Ōki 1991.
- 91 *WWTC* 750.
- 92 Widmer 1989: 29.
- 93 Idema 1999: 25.
- 94 Furth 1992: 6.
- 95 See also Idema 1999: 25.
- 96 Mann 1997: 119.
- 97 On the Clear Brook poetry club, see Ko 1994: 198–216; Robertson 1997; Grant 1999: 286–307.
- 98 Yuan Mei named the garden after a previous owner called Suihede, a textile commissioner of Nanjing. On Yuan Mei, see *ECCP* 955–7; Schmidt 2003. The ‘Younger Daughter’ (*dui*) trigram of the *Yijing* (Book of Changes) has the gloss ‘learning among friends’; the eighteenth-century poet Yuan Mei and his circle interpreted this as showing that Confucian tradition appeared to have sanctioned the idea of women joining in literary activities; see Yuan Mei 1913: 32/14b; cf. *WWTC* 777–81; *LFZ* 934.
- 99 On the female disciples of the Sui Garden, see Chang 1997a: 163–4; *WWTC* 777–81.
- 100 Cf. Waley 1956: 48.
- 101 Nienhauser 1986: 957.
- 102 Compare Widmer 1989: 1–3. On *The Dream of the Red Chamber* and the Banana Garden poetry club, see also Mo Lifeng 2001; Xue Haiyan 2002.
- 103 Cf. Idema 1999: 46.
- 104 Cf. Idema 1999.
- 105 Cf. Gallagher 1994.
- 106 Cf. Mann 1997: 94–8. The female anthologists of women’s poetry even outshone men in their eagerness to rank women poets according to their virtue; cf. Chang 1997a.
- 107 On the concept of female self-fashioning in late imperial China, see Berg 2007.



**Part II**

**Reflection**





## 5 Female gentility in transition and transmission

### Mother–daughter ties in Ming/Qing China

*Ping-chen Hsiung*

The word or concept of ‘gentility’ as might be found in so many European or English lexicons has no perfect counterpart in literary Chinese. Yet the idea is useful enough in comparative perspective to warrant some overall consideration. First of all, in terms of related issues, three pairs of references or associations come to mind. First, in terms of class, the designation of a gentry (*shi*) status in contrast to that of commoners (*su*) connotes the social background or sociological indicator often connected to the collective character of class. Second, in terms of style, the elegant (*ya*) as opposed to the vulgar (*shu*) reminds people of a certain outward expression expected of members of the gentle class. Third, in terms of mannerisms, the literary, gracious, or cultivated (*wen*), the opposite or contrast of the uncouth, untamed, wild, even barbaric (*ye*), hints perhaps at some hidden quality often found embodied by those of gentle breeding.

As the question of class, style and mannerism could hardly be exemplified without some discussion of the question of gender, the following is an exercise to examine how, in the conduct of mother–daughter relations of educated women in the late imperial period, their acts and the texts they left behind may give us some clues as to how this issue of gentility may be engaged in the Chinese historical context. The chapter falls into four sections. The first considers the actions and narrative record recounting the tragic suicide of the courtesan Liu Rushi (1618–1664) following her husband’s death, played out in Liu’s relationship with their young daughter. Section two looks at autobiographical writings from the hand of the young Zeng Jifen (1852–1942) detailing episodes in her life and within her family. Sections three and four consider literary texts left behind by elite, literate women: first mothers writing to, and of, their daughters, followed by the corollary, daughters writing about their mothers. The differences between these modes of expression are striking.

Gender studies, since their earliest development, have often brought to mind the intellectual provocation that class used to inject into the world of letters. Investigation and reflection on gentility provides an opportunity for us to confront these two problems together. The following study, on mother–daughter ties as revealed or presented in historical and literary sources from the late imperial period, looks at this cluster of questions with writings from and about educated gentry women of the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries.

### **Cultural production through bio-social reproduction**

The female genealogy of parent–child relations is a text deeply buried, made of winding, broken lines and blurry characters. Mothers and daughters surely existed in most Ming-Qing households, just as did fathers and sons. But due to the way patri-regimes (patri-archal, patri-lineal, patri-local) operated, traces of their existence had an unlikely chance of survival, and left little evidence through the conventional vehicle of communication that historians depend on to pierce through the thick wall of patriarchal constructions. Their text is unlikely to reveal any signs of ‘the human story’ with the ups and downs of individual lives, unlikely to attract much attention or to raise any interest. This was the case despite (some would argue exactly because of) the undeniable role the mother–daughter tie played in production and reproduction. Women produced labour and materials and they reproduced human lives, yet as generations of mothers and daughters did so the production of information, of views, and the reproduction of knowledge was rarely in their hands.

If we look for biographical and autobiographical data produced on historical female characters from this era (a measure of methodological persistence and intellectual consistency calls for this, even for diminished rewards), we are faced with two kinds of texts. There are first the narratives produced about women, or by women, which yield traces of life, presumably as they occurred, and were perceived to be between mothers and daughters, including mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law. These were stories about the lives of women under men’s roofs, glimpses of matrilineal existence as seen in, and perceived through, the patrilineal context. Such accounts, which assist the construction or re-construction of a feminine genealogy in the domestic sphere, are rare, as biographical or autobiographical materials about women (as the main protagonists) or by women (as the self-representing author) are unusual to begin with. As such, the style often follows a patriarchal logic consistent with the socio-cultural norms of the day. This will become clear from the examples that follow.

Second, there exist in much larger numbers (though still a minority in gross cultural terms) accounts *about* men or *by* men that refer directly or indirectly to incidents and relationships as they took place between a mother and a daughter, or a mother-in-law and a daughter-in-law. These male writings about their mothers and their sisters, or remembering their own daughters and wives, may be sidelines branching out from the main theme in biographies and autobiographies. Yet a historian cannot overlook their hidden value, for the presence and character of this ‘female genealogy’ as reported by or filtered through male literary lenses leaves much room for reflection and comparison. The peculiar linguistic, textual, and cultural puzzles that both kinds of narratives present for a later period reveal how the gender effect may be understood through a new look at both social practice and cultural representation, not as two separate questions, but as interactive, mutually participatory forces.

## Mothers and daughters in action

One way to recover the matriline within the normative patrilineal order of late imperial China is to examine direct or indirect traces in historical records, even if only present by accident. The record in words and deeds between the famed seventeenth century courtesan Liu Rushi and her daughter is an example of such a rarity. They record mother–daughter interaction under tragic circumstances, yet the social scene in which they found themselves, especially the cultural expression that their voices were given (whether in the original or in the re-play) tell us a lot about the matrilineal possibilities under a husband’s or father’s roof.

Nine years into her marriage with the Jiangnan literatus Qian Qianyi (1582–1664), Liu gave birth to a daughter, their only one to survive, at the age of thirty-two. That year, 1649, marked the sixth of the unstable new Manchu dynasty (1644–1911). Within their own house, domestic bliss flourished as the two exchanged many lyrics of affection. Qian gave himself whole-heartedly to amorous songs composed for her eyes, entitled lovingly *Shi nei shi* (*Poems for my Wife*). Intellectually and culturally, too, there was much to celebrate, as the acclaimed anthology of Chinese poetry *Liechao shixuan* (*Selected Poetry from Successive Reigns*) edited by the gifted couple had gone to press.<sup>1</sup>

As parents, Qian and Liu took great pleasure in this newest addition to their family. When their girl took her first wobbly steps, Qian adored her tender look by the pine-fed fireplace in their new residence in Nanjing, in the company of equally youthful grandchildren from his children of an earlier marriage.<sup>2</sup> In her newly acquired role as a mother, Liu too appeared all but consumed by her closeness with her daughter. When the time came to betrothe her at the tender age of eleven *sui* in 1660 to a local man, the third son of Zhao Yuetan, who had once served at the Hanlin Academy, the attachment proved too intense for Liu and Qian to let go. Instead of the usual patri-local marriage, they arranged for the young Zhao boy Guan (courtesy name Yusen) to ‘marry in’ (*zhui*) with their teenage girl in an uxorilocal marriage.<sup>3</sup> From that year on the newly-wed adolescent couple dwelt in her parents’ residence in the Vermilion Bean Village (Hongdou cun) that their writings often celebrated. Liu, the mother (and mother-in-law) retained this domestic arrangement even as, two years later in 1662, Qian was welcomed by his adopted son when he moved out temporarily into the city.<sup>4</sup>

Reconstruction from accounts of others, male narratives, Liu’s and Qian’s friends, their associates, local historians, and from Qian’s own writings, pale in comparison with direct accounts of the ‘female lineage’ of Liu’s role as a mother, and her daughter’s as a girl, when both were caught up in tragic events unfolding within the clan. For, in the early summer of 1664, on the twenty-fourth day of the fifth month, Qian Qianyi passed away at the age of eighty-three, a mere two years after his move to live with his son in the city.<sup>5</sup> The kind of family feud that followed suit was perhaps not unusual, although Liu’s dramatic handling of the affair and their fame before this rendered it a prominent event. According to their sympathizers, junior ‘rascals’ from the Qian clan arrived on the doorstep

demanding cash from Liu soon after Qian's death. Her old status as a courtesan no doubt invited contempt and threats, as well as the enticing property. Reports claim that hundreds of clansmen were there arguing, creating a scene in the hall that drove the widow and her inexperienced young daughter to desperation.

At first, Liu Rushi was said to be willing to compromise, allegedly ceding one thousand taels of silver to pacify the crowd. Murmuring that although as Qian's formal widow (*wei wang ren*) with a male heir (not of her own birth, but considered hers), she should really suffer no exploitation or oppression from her late husband's family, but given the uproar, Liu had to disburse a little money if only 'to bribe the violent among them with the contribution'.<sup>6</sup> This initial gain, according to some, only whetted the mob's appetite for more, as a larger number of them arrived later demanding the auction of half of the family estate, to be distributed among the underprivileged of the clan. Faced with this, and Qian's easily intimidated son Sun'ai, Liu determined to act.

Inviting all parties to a family banquet where the clansmen's demands would be met, Liu had supportive relatives, disciples, and servants lined up, swearing to follow her to the end. The noisy crowd arrived at the feast that Liu threw for them, and were seated by the widowed lady of the house. She then calmly sent her guards to seal the front gate, and disappeared up the stairs leading to the inner chamber. Waiting in vain for Liu to re-emerge, the servants broke down her door, only to discover her body hanging from the ceiling.<sup>7</sup> The widow had hanged herself, after dashing out big characters on the wall pleading: 'Tie up the vicious gang, and bring the case to the court'.<sup>8</sup>

The direct 'hands-on' documentation we have of Liu and her fifteen-year-old daughter comes in the form of the last will (*yizhu*) from Liu the despairing mother on the eve of her suicide, and her girl's litigation petition (*xiaonü jie*) on behalf of her mother afterwards. Liu's last words addressed directly to her surviving daughter give a full account of their trouble with the clansmen as well as clear instructions for future action:

At first, after your father's death, this [clansman] *so and so* showed no sign of making any trouble. As others [clansmen] like Kuan came to me with their open request, he simply said that I had [plenty of] silver, and that they would send people like Zunwang to press that out of me. This Zunwang *so and so* was among the closest of your father's associates, yet he approached me with such treachery. When Qian Tianzhang committed a crime, it was I who talked your father into rescuing him. Now he has managed to link up with Zhang Guoxian in cheating us out of official money and official deeds. They conversed with *so and so* that all those old matters might be resolved, yet who would have guessed that they would continue to press for your brother's land to be presented to this other *so and so*? They first robbed me of my silver, then composed a fraudulent statement, and finally caused me to take my life. None have had any respect for your father. The rest of our family have all been detained by them. You are still of such a young age and may not understand my pain. They will come asking for three thousand in silver even if you do

not have three taels yourself! They will deprive you and your husband of any escape from this. What great pain and how much to be resented!

I am thinking that [faced with such adversaries] you and your elder brother will have no means left to live on. I have been in this house of yours for twenty-five years now, during which time I have never had to sustain unwanted pressure from anybody. And yet today they have arrived to insult and offend me to my face. I have no choice but to die.

Yet as I die, you should serve your elder brother and your sister-in-law as if they are your own father and mother. For the grievance I have suffered, you should go to plead with your elder brother and your father's friends for help. I, on my part, shall see to it that the case is brought to court from underground. Your father too would never have let go of any single one of them lightly.

These final words I write to be left to my dear daughter.<sup>9</sup>

This domestic tragedy took place on the twenty-eighth day of the sixth lunar month of the year 1664, one full month plus four days after Qian's death in the fifth month of the same year. For her part, Liu's teenage daughter did bring the case to the attention of the district magistrate. The small vignette of life coming directly from the saddened girl regarding her mother we have in the form of a 'court petition from a daughter in mourning' (*xiaonü jie*) which she supposedly composed herself for legal purposes.<sup>10</sup> Being the only literary work from Ms Qian's hand, we have no other sample to check the style against, as was the case with Liu's last will, though there is no obvious reason why this should be a forgery. For the familial relations that concern us here, the document can certainly serve as a primary source, with a value significance to be deciphered. In this regard, it is interesting to read Ms Qian as she describes, for instance, the circumstance of her mother's marriage, and how that led to her own birth as she understood it: 'My mother had been wedded to my father for nine full years before I was born', the petition reads, 'Mother, however, was destined to such a pitiable fate that I remain the only girl she had'.<sup>11</sup> After this she describes the parental love she enjoyed as their only child, 'as my father could not bear to marry me off, they made the third son of the former Hanlin official Zhao Yuetan marry in. I thus was able to spend four tender winters and summers clinging to their affectionate indulgence'.<sup>12</sup> Much of this was of course to set the stage for the trauma that befell the family. Still, the statement carries enough information to help us get a glimpse of domesticity viewed from a young daughter's perspective.

The value of such rare surviving documents from the seventeenth century lies not with the celebrity status of their producers, in this case the talented courtesan Liu Rushi, but on the contrary, as the celebrity-turned-nonentity aged, and as the brutality of events set in, what the suicide of Liu and her litigant daughter have preserved for us in this family drama are the sounds and scenes of any struggling mother and daughter that we might encounter at that time. The practical and pragmatic attitude they had toward everyday matters, against the bleak background of real adversaries; or finding themselves in the midst of long entrenched Confucian patriarchal design, the mutual trust and tough reliance

they had for one another; the silent, unswerving commitment that tied everybody together in moments of life, and especially when facing the test of death. The distinguished status this mother–daughter pair enjoyed, either because of Liu’s earlier fame or the social stance of the Qian family she married into, along with other circumstantial information from old associates and local records may have enhanced the profile of their surviving papers, yet does not diminish the significance of their experience.

### **In the words of a daughter**

Other historical narratives voicing mother–daughter ties represented by female authors appear in two categories. The first are direct autobiographical accounts from women’s hands, which remain rare yet need to be considered for this period. The second are prefaces to women’s creative writings or other references from their poetic and lyrical compositions which, though valuable, may not always be as forthcoming in revealing their personal circumstances, as these are often as much rhetorical devices offering scattered shadowy pictures in the manner of ‘flowers in the mirror or the moon upon the lake’ (*jing hua shui yue*) as depictions of their daily lives. Other autobiographical information left by Qing women comes from a later period and, closely read, may provide interesting comparisons.

One such mid-nineteenth century case comes from the hands of the youngest daughter of the late-Qing viceroy Zeng Guofan (1811–1872).<sup>13</sup> In her later years Zeng Jifen famously composed in the male literati tradition a chronological autobiography (*ziding nianpu*). Among the annual entries in this self-compilation of her life are included anecdotal references about assorted mother–daughter ties under the family roof. These include mostly casual memories of mundane events, like the lines she stuck in for the entry on the first year of the Tongzhi reign (1862). On the seventh day of the second lunar month, Jifen noted, the wife of her uncle, who had been raising her, all of a sudden ‘gave up on me [passed away]’ due to a plague. ‘I was thus returned to the Golden Hall to serve Madame Ouyang’.<sup>14</sup> She addressed her own mother formally, just as she would refer to her father by his official title: Duke Wenzheng (Wenzheng gong). The family that Jifen came from, the Zeng’s from the Xiangxiang district of Hunan Province in the nineteenth century was no ordinary household. The strict morals and rigid behavioral code her father and others were determined to instill as part of their late-Qing local Neo-Confucian revival dictated a domestic life and ‘private affairs’ regulated in the extreme.<sup>15</sup> In this context the respectful names she used to address her mother and father were but a small example of the etiquette demanded. What we should be surprised at instead is how much, or rather what sort, of a common parent–child relationship could still be wrung from this solemnity filled with meticulously orthodox *lixue* (Neo-Confucianism) mannerisms. A few sentences in the same entry for 1862 tell of the successive weddings of her three sisters, of her difficult beginnings in taking formal classroom lessons together with her second brother, and of how she learnt to make shoes and stockings under her mother’s supervision. Jifen wrote:

Though [my mother] Madame Ouyang herself came from a noble background, our house cannot be considered well-off. Few maids or old ladies were hired for service. All of us, therefore, have to make shoes and socks ourselves. For this reason I can find even less time to myself.<sup>16</sup>

She was at the time eleven *sui*, by the Chinese count.

Her entry for the year after that, 1863, recorded her mother's journey in taking the entire family – sons, daughters, daughters-in-law, grandchildren, and even the maternal uncle and her children's tutors – to join their father in his headquarters in Anqing city, Anhui province. She describes Zeng's official boat that conveyed them there, with bleached silk on all four walls of the boat bearing plum flowers painted by Zeng's close staff, and a tiny pagoda at the very end of the boat allowing an elevated view as they traveled down the wide open Yangzi river. Quite an elegant vehicle compared to those ordinary boats, Jifen reported, 'it is known as the Number One boat on the Yangzi'.<sup>17</sup> In addition to the exciting glimpse of the magnificent Yueyang or Huanghe (Yellow Crane) towers that evoked much of the history which she had by then learned, this twelve-year-old girl also gives her own take on her mother and her father. Her first impression of her father's office as the viceroy and governor of Liangjiang (lower Yangzi region), which she believed was mostly of his design, is as follows; 'As we arrived in Anhui,' she remembered:

[I discovered that] the headquarters of the governor of the Lower Yangzi Region (Liangjiang zongdu) was actually converted from the residence of [the old Taiping rebel leader] Chen Yucheng, nicknamed 'the four-eyed dog' (*si yan gou*), then the so-called Prince Ying's Mansion (Yingwang fu). As you enter this residence, there is but one courtyard and house, with the bureaucratic and litigation office to the front and a yard at the back. On the left hand side, there is a small square of additional land, upon which [my revered father] Duke Wenzheng added three modest houses to accommodate his second daughter and her husband. A separate gate was constructed so that they might come and go using a different path.

Duke Wenzheng [my father] is also known for his love of planting bamboo wherever he goes. So there we found bamboo surrounding our entire residence. He is fond of building high towers to climb up to gain a good look-out. Thus upon this set of houses, a little look-out tower (*wanglou*) was added. He has the habit of ascending the tower every evening to pray to Heaven (*dao tian*). There is no candle lit as he does this, only a kneeling pad (*bai dian*).

All the expenses for remodelling and construction were taken out of his own 'Integrity Nourishing Allowances' (*yang lian yin*), never did he touch a single piece of silver from public funds.<sup>18</sup>

Here a careful balance was drawn between Jifen's wish to preserve their tightly-guarded family reputation and her girlish thrill to want to observe and take in everything with wide-open eyes. In the same light she writes of her mother:



Madame Ouyang [my mother] as she travelled east from our hometown [in Hunan] took with her but one maid, salaried at eight hundred copper cash per month. In addition, my eldest sister married to the Yuan house had a young maid, while my third sister married to the Luo's had none.<sup>19</sup>

All the hard chores in the house have to be done by the country woman who is serving my mother. [Later on] an extra maid was purchased with a dozen strings plus of copper cash.<sup>20</sup> Once discovered by [my father] Duke Wenzheng, this resulted in a severe scolding. After that she [the maid] was sent away to my second sister-in-law's house, the Guo's.<sup>21</sup>

Due to the strictness Zeng Guofan required in his family management, Jifen continued, none of her elder sisters or sisters-in-law dared ask maids or old servants to help them with their hairdos or daily make-up.

I myself, on the other hand, often had lice in my hair while young. That's why I did not get to grow my hair until later years. As I began to keep my hair after the age of eleven, however, my hair was so short and I was still fairly young, so I used to rely on old lady Ding to comb my hair for me. At the time a certain style, the 'grab knot' (*zhua ji*) was in fashion which required a frame formed of iron wire to be built before one's hair could be wound and tied around it. I had just heard of the style and was inclined toward trying it. Yet the iron wire frame was made too big. Father saw that and teased me: 'Now this frame is so big that we'll need to call the carpenter to remodel our door [before you can pass through it]!<sup>22</sup>

The anecdote was meant to show the amicably humorous side their father was occasionally capable of in his otherwise serious dealings with his children. Jifen throws in another vignette of the domestic scene, through which her situation in dealing with her aging mother, as the youngest girl, can be seen. For roughly about this time, she tells us:

My father, Wenzheng, once made this comment to [my mother] Madame Ouyang that 'This darling littlest girl (*man nü*) of ours has really a Buddha-like face (*Amitofu xiang*)'.<sup>23</sup>

This 'Buddha-like face' in their hometown slang, as Jifen was quick to point out, was a term referring to a person with the look of a straightforward and honest character. The anecdote jotted down by a daughter in reminiscence of homely talks between parents in her early years discloses a casual warmth between the parents, and between them and their darling youngest girl, even in this clearly solemn household.

The inclination to create a sense of normalcy and order in domesticity in an unusual environment runs through Jifen's entire narration. Thanks to her diary-like writing style and the meticulous attention she gives to the details, we are given a special account of mother-daughter ties from an élite conservative gentry

family of the Lower Yangzi in the second half of the nineteenth century. As many social norms for the landed class from the region were thrown into deep doubt – the Zeng family standing at the centre of the storm of the Taiping uprising – Jifen told the tale of her mother's handling of her three sisters' marriages, of how at the same time she managed to take the children to join their father in one office after another as he was waging losing battles in the southern provinces. Jifen recalls the hardship her mother went through: first taking the children and their maids to the capital to meet with the head of the family some twenty years earlier in 1840; riding on mule carts in the deep winter, when the air was so cold that your breath froze solid on reaching the quilt cover in the morning. Mother often wept together with her young children as they cried day and night. Now, her mother notes, this time as they were making yet another long trip north to join Zeng Guofan in his headquarters as the governor-general of Zhili province, she could be carried in a bridal chair occasionally, or ride on a cart. Although the rest of the family still had to 'ride rough' with mule carts on bumpy roads on dusty hot summer days, her mother assured the eighteen-year-old Jifen that 'this time around, it's been a lot more comfortable'.<sup>24</sup>

As she gained in years, Jifen noted more frequently in her autobiographical chronicle her mother's aging process, getting one illness after another, plagued year in and year out by this sore or that pain. And when her mother's father (Jifen's maternal grandfather) passed away at eighty-four in the fifth month of 1869, in the fall, she (the mother) herself was struck down with a severe disease, her head swollen and coughing hard.<sup>25</sup> If we turn back the pages and examine her writing for the year before, we realize that her mother's health problems were by no means new. The winter before, on the fourth day of the eleventh month, when he first received the appointment as governor-general of Zhili, her father was left alone without the family, because as Jifen saw it, her 'mother was suffering from a bad cough and asthma'.<sup>26</sup> The summer before, in fact, one day in the eighth month as Jifen recalled, when they followed their father's instruction to gather vegetables from their backyard garden to provide for family meals, a cucumber picked and served caused their mother to come down with a bad chest pain. The medicine administered later not only brought no relief whatsoever, but she soon spoke of a certain 'wormy thing' appearing in her eye, after which she lost her sight in the right eye. She began to have difficulty walking as well. A Doctor Hao from Baoding applied needles to her left eye, 'his practice was really not so good, so (mother) lost her ability to see anything in both eyes'.<sup>27</sup>

Close observations such as these arrive as a result, we may assume, of a certain physical and emotional intimacy. They document the socio-psychological journey a girl took as she made the steps from a light-hearted young child to maturing woman, with growing concerns and understandings of her mother's mental and bodily state as included in her autobiography. From this point onward, such daily notation of her mother's condition continued until the old lady passed away. In the spring of 1871, for instance, Jifen writes, 'Mother developed a serious spring fever'.<sup>28</sup> One year after that, in 1872, on the twenty-ninth day of the fifth month, her father Viceroy Zeng died.<sup>29</sup> A little over two years later, on the thirteenth day

of the eighth month of 1874, her mother was noted to have taken leave of her children, at the age of fifty-nine *sui*. They were jointly buried in a site close to home.<sup>30</sup>

Narratives of this nature and quality, still a rarity at this time, provide much to muse over in comparative studies. They can be compared with Jifen's later writings about her mother-in-law (a second wife to her husband and, in the words of her daughter-in-law, a capable woman often dressed in men's garments, who 'knew no letters, yet no one dared to take any advantage of her').<sup>31</sup> Or they may be read against her observations about her own children, her daughter in particular (the eldest with the child name Yingu (Silver Maid) was born in the ninth month of 1877 when Jifen was twenty-six, and died at the age of two from a 'feverish disease').<sup>32</sup> Moving through the later stages of her life course, as a contentedly married woman and then a concerned mother, Zeng Jifen was shifting socially and emotionally from ties with her natal kin to those of her conjugal family. Such records can also be considered, perhaps more significantly, against observations on mother–daughter ties as noted by men in late imperial China.

### **Versing and conversing on their own**

Texts and the forces that produce them, modern researchers are increasingly aware, pose a problem of interpretation as researchers re-approach a historical site of human interaction. Representations are 'revisited', 'uncovered', or even 'relived' to capture the layers of methodological barriers one needs to cut through, and the various levels of distortion or manipulation to be dealt with. The intellectual and cultural journey an investigator and his or her audience have to embark upon in the process necessitates the learning or unlearning as an intellectual exercise. The attempt to re-examine mother–daughter ties in Ming/Qing China, likewise, begins with revisiting historical sources produced out of, or about, feminine bonds themselves. Letters, last wills, testimonies and litigation papers show how those female generational ties might have functioned, and what they might have meant at times of personal or family crises. Study then turns to male representations, as an intellectual detour, to see what additional or contrasting light may be shed on the same relationships. The result, not surprisingly, is as much a revelation on the social and emotional world of late-imperial Chinese men as reporters and listeners as on the world of mothers and daughters claiming to be known by them. Now, we shall turn and disclose some different voices, unfolding additional studies of life, this time subjectively, from the angle of women again.

In literary forms and in everyday circumstances, the few elite women who used to write have preserved for us what was both familiar and unfamiliar. Viewed as a whole, the mothers' writings for and about their own daughters appear 'cheerful' and 'positive', whereas the lyrics from daughters for and about their mothers, though not devoid of joy, appear a lot more subdued. The reason for such disparity could lie both in the socio-cultural expectation of motherhood (or parenthood) and in the social etiquette and literary conventions of expression, as opposed to the nature of 'daughterhood' (or childhood) in the late imperial Chinese environment.

The conversation between writing mothers and daughters through their exchange of letters and poems affords us a rare foray into particular means through which females exercised and exhibited their sentiments in subjective terms. The 'feminine voice' thus uncovered also allows us an important comparison between motherhood, girlhood, and womanhood from the female side, as opposed to the more familiar reporting from male writings.

First, from the mothers, in terms of quantity and substance, there had always been, at least subjectively, more joy and happy words for and about their girls than any sad moments or unhappy thoughts, which serves as a powerful contrast to the sacrificial character Chinese men loved to commemorate in their honouring of virtuous mothers, or the self-effacing sufferings in the construction of a good woman.

Among the literary pieces that late imperial Chinese elite mothers used to write of their daughters, the majority were about the great pleasure, wonderful satisfaction, and sheer pride they had in raising these girls. So they left behind lyrics telling people their joy and sense of achievement as mothers in teaching their daughters (*jiao nü*), in appreciating their girls' quick wit and bright talents, and in the mundane delights of going out on excursions with them, even when struck down by illness. Wang Duanshu's (1621–ca. 1706) famous collection of women's poetry *Mingyuan shiwei* (*The Famous Ladies' Apocryphal Book of Songs*, 1664) from the early Qing presents a good sample of these mothers' verses in praise of their cute, smart and adorable daughters. In a poem entitled 'Jiao nü' ('Instructing My Daughter'), Zhang Demao likens her daughters to the 'moving about of rainbow coloured sleeves' in days of peach and apricot blossom.<sup>33</sup> Their lovely figures bow deeply to people, old and young, Zhang notes of her girls, in a learned manner derived from her training, and according to the proper social etiquette expected of them. As day turns into night, however, to their mother's amusement, these youthful sisters could hardly refrain from chasing one another, having fun and running about in the shadows of the moon amidst flower bushes.<sup>34</sup>

The Huguang scholar Chen Yuanxiang's wife, née Tu,<sup>35</sup> similarly composed a well-known poem called 'Sannü yin' ('A Hymn for My Three Daughters') that spoke of her girls in unabashed terms. 'We have three girls, all of whom are endowed with a rose-like beauty', it begins. 'The eldest of whom is especially gifted, whose hand flies with a brush and out flow lyrics and poetry. The second and third daughters, though still small, are also devoid of any silly pretension.'<sup>36</sup> Their mother Tu could hardly contain her pleasure in showing off the talents of her three little women. Delightedly she describes the peacock in full glory under her eldest daughters' brush, or the silk thread of bright red moving through the two younger girls' embroidery figures, contesting, 'so who said that giving birth to a boy was necessarily a better deal (*shei yan sheng nan hao*)?'<sup>37</sup> At the close, she presents her happy admission that 'bearing a girl to me seems just as magnificent to the family. It feels in any event a lot better than the old man close-by who had to console his declining days with nothing but the sorrow of a lonely spirit.'<sup>38</sup>

Such self-debasing and severely critical views about children that modern anthropologists like Margery Wolf have reported of a typical Chinese mother

could be a far more limited phenomenon (specific to region and class) in Chinese parenting or family norms.<sup>39</sup> Indeed for the late imperial élite, in mothers' writings about their daughters, just about every single piece consists of words of appreciation, if not outright songs of euphoria. The Kuaiji man Yang Zhongsu's wife, née Shen, for example, left for us remarks (not in the usual style of poetry) about her daughter Juan telling of the unabashed happiness of motherhood: 'My child (here referred to in the gender-generic term of *er*, not specifically as a daughter) stands up now quite dandily as a fair lady, with all the calm beauty in fashion yet completely devoid of an overly feminine air [lit. the smell of make-up powder (*zhi fen qi*)].' Shen continues, 'some other day though she will, I am sure, make a fine virtuous woman (*duan zhen fu*),' on account of which, according to the source, her mother Shen wrote lyrics and poems.<sup>40</sup>

Many a mother, by Ming/Qing times, felt that her affection and high regard for young daughters was entirely justified, not simply because of self-aggrandizement or parental bias. Ding Junwang's biographical account in *Mingyuan shiwei* was preserved in the form of a note from her mother, which reads:

Ding Junwang, nicknamed Wangsheng, from Wanping of Shanyin, is my daughter. At twelve, she authored a short poem called 'A Response to Lady Meng' ('He Mengzhen nü'). Though not without clumsiness in writing and certainly with room for improvement, it was nevertheless genuine and frank in expression, for which reason I believe it was worthy of keeping for the consultation of whoever may come to read it in the future.<sup>41</sup>

To prove to others that Junwang was an understanding spirit from early childhood, her mother composed 'Zhi nü shi' ('A Poem about Little Girl') to explain her gratitude:

My love for this girl of mine is not really  
 about a mother's compassion in particular,  
 For she has this brightness that understands  
 how to follow you around.  
 Whenever food arrives in front of her, too, she always pushes it aside  
 Just as when guests come she knows how to peek  
 through the doors that set people apart;  
 She acts out her bowing as if she had  
 taken in the myriad forms of etiquette,  
 Like when she turns the leaves of the books  
 as if to gather the most elegant of styles;  
 Occasionally she may indeed appear in girlish giddiness,  
 Which simply expands a gentleman's  
 time for the attention of one single poem.<sup>42</sup>

These blissful words from a mother, on her daughter, in the adoring tone of a third person, a literary sub-convention in itself, display intimacy in the domestic

milieu. They speak of parents in touch with their growing daughters, and women old and young in joyful daily living, where other historical and literary sources used to lead us to believe the contrary.

Late-imperial Chinese mothers also spoke of, or rather wrote about, the excursions, and the pleasure of physically hiking over hills, that they enjoyed in their daughters' company, as Tian Yuyan reports, in 'Xi Ruyu Rujin ernü you banshan' ('Taking My Two Daughters Ruyu and Rujin on a Journey to the Half Mountain'). The poem, though not of the most profound or elegant language, speaks volumes about a mother's joy in going up the mountain with her two girls. Bathed in morning sunshine and early dew, met by singing birds and distant drums, Tian tells her readers how at first she had to force herself to go on this journey to visit the famous peak that she had long adored. Mulberries and hemp were somehow missing from the villages they passed, even cherries and peaches did not decorate the paths that they walked along. It was in the midst of this and with many other travelling ladies that Tian and her daughters took the twisting and bumpy road. As they finally approached the top, incense smoke was visibly issuing forth from the temple halls, twirling out to be wedded and become one with the fog and clouds mid-way in the empty sky.<sup>43</sup>

Even for mothers expressing themselves in mundane circumstances, giving their daughters a few words of advice as they were betrothed, or seeing them off with good wishes as they accompanied their husbands on business trips, their tone in speaking was always one of positive expectation and hope. The alleged suffering of adult womanhood, presumably fed by chronic suppression and long toil, are nowhere to be found among the writings of these gentry women. A Ms Chen (Chen shi), for example, composed a typical poem on marital 'Jie nü' ('Advice for My Daughter') that tells of the emotions of many in her position:

Work well and diligently  
serve your father- and mother-in-law,  
And in your daily words remember not to brush  
against the ears of your man.  
Be careful in the soups and food you prepare in the  
morning, or at night,  
For another year you too  
shall sit as matriarch in the hall.<sup>44</sup>

The first wife of the district magistrate Qian from Renhe, a certain lady Sun,<sup>45</sup> authored another poem sending her youngest daughter away to accompany her husband Zhong to Nanjing for his civil service examination. The verse tells the happy thoughts of a mother fully confident of her daughter's good fortune in marriage and of her warm regard for the talented son-in-law whom she believed to have a bright future: 'It has always been hard seeing my dear daughter off,' Sun began, 'Yet this trip she is about to embark on poses no worries whatsoever in my mind.'<sup>46</sup> For in front of the young couple, the mother saw a beautiful dragon getting ready to go on a magnificent journey, as if surrounded by the fragrant orchids and

fine grass in the lovely marshes. Watching the waves broken apart by the elegant boat, and seeing the clear streams perfect for setting sail,<sup>47</sup> Sun continues, ‘I am quite sure that like the verses in the book of Odes, of the rooster crowing for dawn [to a gentleman ready for early rising], they will keep you company as you set out on the road.’<sup>48</sup>

Naturally, there were other mothers writing differently about their daughters, at times expressing sadness. One Lady Sun composed such a poem entitled ‘Cheng nan bie nü’ (‘Parting with my Daughter on the South Side of the City’), in which she rehearsed old sentiments of men seeing off their friends or relatives, and of the sadness that departures for distant journeys bring forth, now falling upon a girl of her own. ‘I am so heart-broken that words can hardly tell it all’, Sun laments, ‘in this hour when even songs sound so scattered and the days so short of spirits, I cannot but look back as I tread the path, allowing tears to stream down my face with nothing to wipe them off’.<sup>49</sup>

Compared with these laments in parting, the lyrics late-imperial mothers wrote about or to their deceased daughters carry, of course, a much heavier weight. Assuming a penname, a Buddhist name, and at least two courtesy names (*zi*), Shen Yixiu (1590–1635) from Wujiang had probably the best of times as an educated gentry lady. Being the daughter of a local official and wife to a minister in the imperial bureaucracy, her biographer assures us that she was ‘born with special intelligence’, studied with a woman scholar (*nüshi*) and ‘could grasp immediately ten times the knowledge she was made to absorb any time’.<sup>50</sup> Married at 16, she followed the gentlewoman’s lot in ‘serving her mother-in-law’ faithfully while she continued with her writings and brushwork whenever a spare moment could be found.<sup>51</sup> Shen’s status as an accomplished author did not spare her the pain of ordinary tragedies. She lost a daughter, about which she composed a poem ‘Chongwu daonü’ (‘In Memory of my Daughter on the Double Five Day’):

In the manners of lingering wheat or millet plants, missing out on life was like an event which took place some time back yet lingered on, a heart-broken affair that remains forever. Humming rivers or slender, waving trees could never be a comfort. As a broken self can hardly be patched up again, neither can severed silk be glued back together. Now that the girl’s room is emptied, all the days can but be filled with endless sorrow. Regardless of devastation, flowers and grasses will go on blooming and withering in the many springs and autumns to come.<sup>52</sup>

The uncertainty of life at a time when child and adult mortalities were high ought not be a surprise for survivors, though for those inflicted with such a pain, statistics could hardly be any comfort. Zhang Demao, the mother quoted earlier in celebration of her instruction of accomplished daughters, also left a poem mourning the passing of their youthful lives. The verse, called ‘Bingzhong kunü’ (‘Weeping for My (Deceased) Daughter in Sickness’) was a lament that spoke of crickets and diminishing fragrance as all there to remind a bereaved mother of the sadness of lives unnecessarily lost. ‘My own bones are soaked by chilling rain

and wrapped up in the sorrows of late,' Zhang sang; 'in the less than one hundred years allotted for any human, I alone am to swallow this bitterness of being unable to keep a single daughter.'<sup>53</sup> Then all of a sudden, this wretched mother turns her voice to address her daughters so abruptly taken away: 'Constantly there is this lonely lantern that wishes to approach you with its tender heart, whose fulfillment one supposes can only be sought after in a dream.'<sup>54</sup>

## Daughters to mothers

Compared with the mothers who wrote about, and to, their daughters, Ming/Qing daughters who expressed themselves in literature regarding their mothers appear to have done so with more conventional restraint and emotional control. Among the poems and random notes that late-imperial daughters wrote, almost all were about thoughts of missing their mothers (*yi mu*); about their longing for maternal warmth and compassion after they had parted, usually as they were married off (*bie mu*); and oftentimes about their unfulfilled wishes to serve their mothers in filial piety (*xiao mu*). Compared with their mothers' revelation of abundant joy, these younger female authors had a tendency to commit to paper other affairs in their lives, such as discrepancies between ideals and ethics (whether regarding love, marriage, or friendship). The Ming/Qing daughters' recording and representation of their emotional ties and sentimental debts to maternal bonding is both impressive and bewildering.

For the daughters who remembered their mothers in words, their thoughts are often expressed in elegant, graceful idioms of gratitude and longing. For example, in the poems of Chao Linzheng and Ms Fan included in late-imperial anthologies of women's poetry, they speak of the softly fragrant washing waters that reminded them of their mother's teachings, and of boring hours sitting under glittering lights when intense missing of maternal warmth led their wondering minds to mistake the sound of the wind blowing as rain falling.<sup>55</sup> When womanly teaching was so depicted, whether going back to the legendary story of Zengzi's filial adherence to his mother's instruction in *Lunyu* (*The Analects*), or alluding to the late-Ming Restoration Society's (Fushe) model of referring to the sound of wind blowing and rain falling as agitated reminders of family affairs and state business in crisis, it carried an unmistakable gentility. This genteel tone presents a more conservative and conventional voice than the impression given either in mothers' or fathers' words about daughters, or in daughters' writings about their fathers.

There were naturally occasions when daughters did seem more expressive and 'personable' in referring to their mothers. Examples include Wang Jingshu writing about her late mother coming to her in her dreams, or Wang Wei's letter-like poem talking about her 'Ganhuai' ('Feelings') for her *Amu*. Wang Jingshu, the elder sister of the famed poet and editor Wang Duanshu, included in her literary creation the *Qingliangshan ji* (*Green Breeze Mountain Collection*), penned as an educated woman widowed early in life and after entering a Buddhist monastery,<sup>56</sup> a poem entitled 'Meng xian ci Yao taijun' ('Dream of My Late Mother Lady Yao'). In this she wrote of how one evening she had to move her pillow several times, as her ears



felt strangely hot, and someone seemed vaguely to be coming to her in a dream. This dreamy figure was none other than her deceased mother Lady Yao, ‘who, as soon as I took a single look before uttering any words, was hushed away by the voices of the wild geese.’<sup>57</sup>

Wang Wei, born to a gentry official house in Taicang,<sup>58</sup> was another female writer with a reputation in the world of letters. In her poem entitled ‘Feelings,’ Wang Wei revealed a number of despondent circumstances in her life that caused her to express her longing for her mother, connected, too, via words and dreams. ‘It has been more than four years since I left my dear mother,’ she said, ‘in which time my brow seems to have folded into a hundred folds, appearing harder than ever to open up.’<sup>59</sup> Her affection for the old motherly intimacy could only be palliated by the images in her dreams, since in everyday life constant moving about had not yet led to any residence that she could consider home. Familiar scenes from her old parental home continued to surface in the midnight hours under the bright moon, bringing to mind the stacks of scrolls and books her husband kept close in his struggling for a livelihood. ‘Endless sadness breaks my heart that I can no longer return,’ she concluded, ‘As I can only rise to fill another cupful of wine to face this lover (Xiangru) I ran away with in life.’<sup>60</sup>

China’s patriarchal family order and patrilocal marriage system were the structural baseline for the experience of any adult daughter. Nine out of ten entered into marriage shortly after twenty.<sup>61</sup> In this regard, the verses of missing, dreaming about, parting with, or writing to mothers that Ming/Qing elite women composed represented a different voice both from their brothers who had the fortune (or burden) to remain behind with their parents and live out the demands of filial piety, and from their non-Chinese counterparts under different family structures. Some of these factors are evident in the writings of late-imperial Chinese daughters as they brooded over partings with their mothers. Zhang Youxiang from Huating in Anhui province published a poetry collection called *Chengxintang shi* (*Poems from the Hall of a Clear Heart*) prefaced by her friend Hou Jingyun.<sup>62</sup> The verse on ‘Bie mu’ (‘Leaving My Mother’) comprised the following lines:

I am about to leave my country.  
 After today I shall also part  
 from my loving parents.  
 With no way to keep her girl,  
 She [my mother] can not but let her tears drip  
 and wet her own blouse.<sup>63</sup>

Allusions old and new appear in a poem like this, as well as words chosen to give a specific character to the depictions, as opposed to the generic mood of mother and daughter poems. The old country (*guguo*), as she refers to her maiden house, is a classical term men used to call their homes, which surfaced anew around this time among culturally sensitive women. The loving mother, or parents, she sang of come across as a conservative gesture, since other indulgent elders at the time assumed increasingly sensible ways to maintain an active relationship with their

married daughters, short of physically keeping them at home through uxori-local marriages. The sadness she expresses comes thus from the choices her mother and her family have made in casting the relationship into the distance.

In the same poetry anthology from Wang Duanshu which we have just quoted, there are examples of elite women who allegedly declined marriage in order to be with their mothers and were accorded admiration for doing so. Cao Miaoqing (second half of the fourteenth century) from Qiantang was one such author, whose biography reported her as a daughter who used to 'serve her mother with the utmost care in filial piety.'<sup>64</sup> In addition to her fondness for playing the zither, composing poetry, practising calligraphy, and painting pictures, she also 'remained unmarried at the age of thirty', which people thought was commendable.<sup>65</sup>

In this context, when we encounter sentimental voices from Ming/Qing daughters like Gu Shi who spoke of the sadness in solitude as she contemplated, as a married woman, the long years and prohibitive distance at which she found herself as she left her old mother,<sup>66</sup> or others like Ms Wu from Wu district in Jiangsu who wrote warmly about her memories of her mother whom she still hoped to entertain in the years to come,<sup>67</sup> we know the social measure and emotional scale under which we may read and better place these daughterly feelings *vis-à-vis* their mothers. Gu's reference to the long and winding paths up green hills and under white clouds that separated her from home made even her, a woman 'capable of holding up a brush and flipping through book leaves', sigh with bitter regret.<sup>68</sup> This educated woman could hardly fight back 'the teary drops that came to invade on gorgeous flower pads.' With her eyebrows tightly closed, she asked her readers, 'even if I succeed in finding the verse that conveys my loss, where or to whom should I dispatch my glittering words on paper?'<sup>69</sup>

The rather more light-hearted Ms Wu, on the other hand, entitled a poem depicting similar longing 'Ji mu' ('Dispatch to My Mother'), in which she uttered the usual regrets of having to leave the warmth of 'parental knees' and thereby depriving her mother of the pleasure of service by her children.<sup>70</sup> The letters she tried sending home were completely inadequate, Wu lamented, in asking after the well-being of her mother from such a long distance. Mother, she supposed, had probably had to make do by taking things easy and talking herself out of expecting otherwise from her daughter. Wu poses for herself the question: 'When will the day come when I get to travel south again, to dress up and play tricks for her amusement?'<sup>71</sup> Upon which occasion, she murmured, 'I would want to surround her with all the chrysanthemums there were to celebrate the blissfulness due this mother-daughter bond.'<sup>72</sup>

Certainly not all mothers or daughters from this period can be placed in the same affective category as these elite ladies, whose writings confirmed Confucian mythology as a heritage of gentility. And it need not take the extreme cases such as those from the criminal law records to prove otherwise. Within the pages of the same poetry collection, the *Mingyuan shiwei* we have consulted, indeed among the very same gentry group trying their best to uphold orthodox ethics and maintain their collective reputation, there exist records of treacherous mothers and imperfect family ties. The mother of the published author and famed Suzhou lady

Suzhen, had enough power to not only breach the marital agreement that sealed Suzhen with her cousin Yulang, but also to force the daughter to be betrothed to another man.<sup>73</sup> This family feud soon ended with the tragedy of a double suicide, first of the determined and devoted fiancé Yulang, then his vehemently chaste bride-to-be Suzhen. At this point both families were brought to their senses, her biography has it, and buried them as a couple by the scenic Tiger Mount park on the outskirts of Suzhou city. Nothing is known of the aftermath, nor of the fate of her unnatural mother, Lady Ni (Ni furen).<sup>74</sup>

For those who know something of the social milieu of late-imperial China or the dynamics of Ming/Qing families, the incident should not come as much of a surprise, let alone scandal. Similar tales abound in both Jiangnan elite literature and through the sinister inquisition records. We may give one additional example from the same literary collection just to show the ‘multifaceted’ nature of such a presumably orthodox source of information. Kan Yu was a woman from Qiantang who in the year when the Ming dynasty collapsed in 1644 had just turned thirteen. Said to be born of fair appearance and fine character, she was treasured by both her father and her mother. Thrown into indigent circumstances, however, she had no choice but to eke out a living with her older brother and sister-in-law. Soon the news came that the fleeing southern Ming court wanted to select for themselves some palace ladies. Like all parents confronted with such abhorrent ‘imperial favours,’ her mother adamantly argued against her going. At which juncture an old servant had the wit to first bribe her ‘stupid’ elder brother with pork and wine before seducing and kidnapping the girl to his own house, and waiting for the opportunity to take her in as a wife. Discovering herself in such a predicament, Lady Yu, we are told, vowed to keep her chastity and ‘refused to be offended’. Within less than a year, the story continued, she fell ill, perishing after another month. At which point, our biographer concludes, the wife and two sons of her wicked brother Kuang were met by her corpse.<sup>75</sup>

## Conclusion

Gentility is a complex idea whose interlocking with the issue of gender can be read from many angles. In this, the ties between mothers and daughters among the educated elite and the literary traces of such can be useful for their self-appointed interest in culture and cultivation, and for the conscious effort that had gone behind the record and the execution of such a commitment. The literary evidence that they left behind, whether in the form of biographies, autobiographies, historical notes, letters, poems, or prose, is therefore part of a practice and documentation. This they did, albeit in different manners, on uneventful days, just as they wrote from deep distress or in great adversity. Over the three centuries that this essay touches upon, we witness the gradual transformation of this tradition as it was transmitted from person to person, from one generation to the next. Since in the past women transmitted their genteel status both through their words (whether in verbal or written form) and in their deeds, the analytical difference between social reality (in the form of people’s practices) and literary representation (in the form

of their descriptions) is ultimately limited when used to guide our investigation on how best to interpret the sources. For a group whose writing is not just a way of life but also a social participation (not merely the reflection or left-over traces of these acts), the separation between acts and works seems artificial. If literature is representational and therefore performative, as indeed we admit it is, are daily practices less so? In other words, when mothers and daughters saw one another off with lyrics, when women expressed their longing for one another through verse, what makes us assume that their words did not actually consist of their acts and that something else, something more genuine had happened but escaped the words? When Liu Rushi and her daughter took part in the tragic act of suicide in protest, Liu by means of hanging herself but also with a last will, her daughter with the litigation but also with a letter from a filial girl, what part of their act was history and what literature? These incomplete traces of mother–daughter relations from the late-imperial period may be used to frame the question for us in discussing the problem of gentility, posed in the lives and works of Ming-Qing women: was it about culture, literature, and therefore the written word? Or does it denote a certain appreciation and practice of graciousness? One way to help us search for answers may begin with the breakdown of modern disciplinary walls, as attempted in this chapter.

## Notes

- 1 *LFZ* 1981: 19–20. On the life of Liu, see Chen Yinke 1975; Sun Kangyi 1992.
- 2 *LFZ* 1981: 21; Qian Qianyi 1989: 10.
- 3 Wolf 1968.
- 4 *LFZ* 1981: 23.
- 5 *LFZ* 1981: 24.
- 6 *LFZ* 1981: 24.
- 7 *LFZ* 1981: 26.
- 8 *LFZ* 1981: 25.
- 9 *LFZ* 1981: 25.
- 10 Qian Ruyi 1978: 5b–6b.
- 11 *LFZ* 1981: 19–20.
- 12 *LFZ* 1981: 22.
- 13 Qu Xuanying 1971: 1b.
- 14 Qu Xuanying 1971: 3a.
- 15 Zhou Wanyao 1993: 13–38.
- 16 Qu Xuanying 1971: 3b.
- 17 Qu Xuanying 1971: 3b.
- 18 Qu Xuanying 1971: 3b.
- 19 Qu Xuanying 1971: 3b–4a.
- 20 Qu Xuanying 1971: 4a.
- 21 One string equals a thousand copper cash, roughly the value of one tael of silver, Qu Xuanying 1971: 4a.
- 22 Qu Xuanying 1971: 4a.
- 23 Qu Xuanying 1971: 4a.
- 24 Qu Xuanying 1971: 7b.
- 25 Qu Xuanying 1971: 7b.
- 26 Qu Xuanying 1971: 7a.
- 27 Qu Xuanying 1971: 7a.

- 28 Qu Xuanying 1971: 8a.  
 29 Qu Xuanying 1971: 8a–8b.  
 30 Qu Xuanying 1971: 9a.  
 31 Qu Xuanying 1971: 9b.  
 32 Qu Xuanying 1971: 11b.  
 33 Zhang Demao, ‘Jiao nü’, *MYSWCB* 10.17a.  
 34 Zhang Demao, ‘Jiao nü’, *MYSWCB* 10.17a.  
 35 *MYSWCB* 16.21a.  
 36 Tu Shi, ‘Sannü yin’, *MYSWCB* 16.21a–21b.  
 37 Tu Shi, ‘Sannü yin’, *MYSWCB* 16.21b.  
 38 Tu Shi, ‘Sannü yin’, *MYSWCB* 16.21b.  
 39 See Wolf 1970: 37–62, and 1972: 32–41.  
 40 See *MYSWCB* 16.19b.  
 41 *MYSWCB* 17.14b.  
 42 Ding Junwang, ‘Zhi nü shi’, *MYSWCB* 17.15a.  
 43 See Tian Yuyan, ‘Xi Ruyu Rujin er nü you Banshan’, *MYSWCB* 4.18b.  
 44 See Chen Shi, ‘Jie nü’, *MYSWCB* 4.19b.  
 45 *MYSWCB* 8.22b.  
 46 Sun Yiren, ‘Song Jin nü sui Zhong xu Jinling fushi’, *MYSWCB* 8.23a.  
 47 Sun Yiren, ‘Song Jin nü sui Zhong xu Jinling fushi’, *MYSWCB* 8.23a.  
 48 Sun Yiren, ‘Song Jin nü sui Zhong xu Jinling fushi’, *MYSWCB* 8.23a–23b.  
 49 Yang Wenli 1983: 513.  
 50 See *MYSWCB* 8.2a.  
 51 *MYSWCB* 8.2a.  
 52 Shen Yixiu, ‘Chongwu daonü’, *MYSWCB* 8.3a.  
 53 Zhang Demao, ‘Bingzhong kunü’, *MYSWCB* 10.16b.  
 54 Zhang Demao, ‘Bingzhong kunü’, *MYSWCB* 10.16b.  
 55 Chao Linzheng, ‘Shi ge yi mu’, *MYSWCB* 12.20a; Fan Shi, ‘Yi mu’, *MYSWCB* 6.1b.  
 56 *MYSWCB* 15.5b.  
 57 Wang Jingshu, ‘Meng xian ci Yao taijun’, *MYSWCB* 15.7b.  
 58 *MYSWCB* 13.31a.  
 59 The Xiangru Wang Wei refers to in the last stanza of her poem is Sima Xiangru (179–118 BC), the early-Han literary genius who in his earlier years eloped with the daughter of an innkeeper, he thus established himself as a Romeo-like character in the tradition of Chinese romance literature; see Wang Wei, ‘Gan Huai’, *MYSWCB* 13.33b.  
 60 Wang Wei, ‘Gan Huai’, *MYSWCB* 13.33b.  
 61 Lee and Wang 1999: 97–9.  
 62 See *MYSWCB* 13.9b.  
 63 Zhang Youxiang, ‘Bie mu’, *MYSWCB* 13.12a–12b.  
 64 See *MYSWCB* 2.1b.  
 65 *MYSWCB* 2.1b.  
 66 Gu Shi, ‘Jiubie laomu yu chuang gan fu’, *MYSWCB* 16.24b.  
 67 Wu Shi, ‘Ji mu’, *MYSWCB* 6.22a.  
 68 Gu Shi, ‘Jiubie laomu yu chuang gan fu’, *MYSWCB* 16. 24b.  
 69 Gu Shi, ‘Jiubie laomu yu chuang gan fu’, *MYSWCB* 16. 24b.  
 70 Wu Shi, ‘Ji mu’, *MYSWCB* 6.22a.  
 71 Wu Shi, ‘Ji mu’, *MYSWCB* 6.22a.  
 72 Wu Shi, ‘Ji mu’, *MYSWCB* 6.22a.  
 73 See *MYSWCB* 4.13a.  
 74 *MYSWCB* 4.13a.  
 75 *MYSWCB* 18.7b–8a.

## 6 Virtuous surrogates

### Moral action and substitution in the case of Yang Jisheng

*Kenneth J. Hammond*

#### **Defining gentility**

In engaging with the theme of this volume, the concept of gentility, it may be worthwhile to reflect on its cultural embeddedness in the West before embarking on a consideration of the particular applicability of it to a set of people and events in sixteenth century China. One way to initiate such a consideration is to look the word up in the *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)*, where one finds, among a range of entries, what seems perhaps the most appropriate definition relating to the themes and issues with which we are concerned,

The manners, bearing, habits of life, etc., characteristic of a gentleman or gentlewoman; polish of manners, politeness.<sup>1</sup>

This of course leads on to looking up the definition for a gentleman (presumably relevant as well for the above-mentioned gentlewoman), which includes the following,

A man in whom gentle birth is accompanied by appropriate qualities and behaviour; hence, in general, a man of chivalrous instincts and fine feelings.<sup>2</sup>

This clearly leaves open the question of just what those chivalrous instincts and fine feelings might be. The gentleman also, in these dictionary definitions, remains historically imprecise. To clarify this situation it may be best to consider gentility and the gentleman in a more specific cultural matrix, for while gentlemen have been referred to in English since at least the time of Chaucer, the fully developed idea of gentility, as it may be possible to fix it for purposes of testing its cross-cultural relevance to late-imperial China, may perhaps best be grasped in the discourse of the nineteenth century. One avenue into the discursive construction of gentility is the novel, and one particularly apt subset of this genre for purposes of defining the gentleman and gentility, is the work of Anthony Trollope who, between 1842 and 1882 wrote over forty widely read novels dealing with British society, culture and politics.<sup>3</sup>

In her 1982 study *The Gentleman in Trollope: Individuality and Moral Conduct* Shirley Robin Letwin noted that, ‘to understand what a gentleman is we must make explicit the grammar of a language which has been spoken without being identified’.<sup>4</sup> Letwin develops a synthetic portrait of the gentleman through an analysis of Trollope’s novels, and provides points of definition which may be useful in the present inquiry. She posits the gentleman, in contrast to other men, as one who is not ‘self-divided’, by which she means that the gentleman is not, ‘torn between reason and passion’, but is rather able to create and maintain a persona the core of which is the sensibility to and practice of moral integrity.<sup>5</sup> This integrity is itself socially embedded, it is the product of human experience, and is acquired not through religious transcendence, but through education and self-cultivation. Letwin writes, ‘A man is what he learns to be ... [Learning] is ... the making of selfhood’.<sup>6</sup> This self is part of a larger social fabric, ‘There is a clear distinction between the social and the private but no incompatibility because social life is the context within which the private flourishes’.<sup>7</sup> There is, as well, an imperative link between the cultivated self and action in the world, ‘A gentleman’s self-awareness is, in other words, a delicate sense of responsibility for the coherence of all his thoughts, words and actions’.<sup>8</sup>

Letwin emphasizes that in Trollope this is not a gender-specific phenomenon. She writes, ‘The most perfect gentleman in Trollope’s novels is Madame Max Goesler’.<sup>9</sup> Men and women can fulfil the ideals of virtue and integrity, can personify the values of gentility, by acting in specific situations in ways which are appropriate. By ‘doing the right thing’, whatever that may prove to be, they give direct expression to the subtle instincts and feelings implied by the *OED* definitions given above. This is a kind of situational morality which gives precedence to the appropriateness of the action to the circumstances, and thus valorizes individual moral choice and agency over simply following a set of predetermined rules.

In exploring the perception of gentility in late-imperial China, comparable ways of thinking and acting become apparent. One particular set of events and behaviours which provide an example of how these ideals of gentility could be played out in the context of literati political culture will be set out below. This is not, however, simply a straightforward story of someone acting in ways which gave immediate expression to the values of gentility. Rather, it is a narrative of substitution, of virtuous surrogates, and of the complexity of the social construction of the ideals and values of morality and integrity, and gestures of sacrifice and solidarity.

## **The protagonists**

There are three protagonists in this tale. First is Yang Jisheng, a *jinsi* of 1547 who, after a very positive beginning to his official career, twice submitted scathing memorials attacking the dominant political figure at the court of the Jiajing emperor, the chief grand secretary Yan Song, as a result of which he was executed in November 1555. Second is Yang’s wife, Ms Zhang. Third is the prominent literary figure Wang Shizhen, from the same 1547 *jinsi* cohort as Yang. I will first

briefly recount the case of Yang Jisheng and his role as an exemplar of Confucian morality and integrity. Next I will consider Ms Zhang, her relationship with her husband, and her actions during the difficult years leading up to Yang's death, on the eve of which she sought to offer her own life in his place. I will then turn to the part played in this by Wang Shizhen, who sought to save Yang in various ways, and who assisted Ms Zhang in her efforts to replace her husband on the execution ground. Finally I want to reflect a bit on how each of these individuals sought to 'do the right thing', and in so doing gave specific instantiation to at least some aspects of the ideals of gentility as set out above.<sup>10</sup>

Yang Jisheng was born in 1516 in Rongcheng county, Zhili, about 120 kilometres south of Beijing. He grew up in relatively straitened circumstances. He was raised initially by his mother after his father broke up the family home to form a new one with a concubine. Yang's mother died when he was six, and after that he endured a tense relationship with his older brother, sometimes supporting himself by tending cattle around the village of Beihezhaoyuan, where he lived. According to his autobiography, one day when he was seven he passed the local school and heard the students reciting their lessons.<sup>11</sup> He was so taken with the idea of studying that he managed to talk his father and brother into providing him with the means to begin attending lessons. His education proceeded in a rather on-and-off fashion, but by 1533 he was able to pass the lowest level of the imperial civil examinations. In 1540 he passed the provincial level, but failed the metropolitan exam the next spring. He failed again in 1544, but finally succeeded in 1547, placed 38th in a field of 301, and becoming only the 6th *jinshi* from Rongcheng county since the founding of the dynasty in 1368.<sup>12</sup>

His career got off to a good start, with a posting in the auxiliary capital at Nanjing, where he was assigned to the Office for Examining Accomplishments. He performed well, establishing a reputation for moral scrupulousness and an enthusiasm for the minutiae of administrative regulations and precedents. He received positive personnel reviews at the end of his initial three-year term of service, which led to promotion and an appointment to the Board of War in Beijing in the early spring of 1551.

This was a difficult moment for the Ming dynasty, which faced the twin security challenges of coastal raiders in the Jiangnan area and renewed Mongol incursions across the Great Wall near the capital. A strategic debate had been underway for several years concerning how best to deal with the threat along the northern frontier.<sup>13</sup> This debate was embedded in the intense rivalries within the Grand Secretariat which lay at the heart of political life in the Ming. In 1547 the chief grand secretary Xia Yan had fallen victim to the dangers of court policy disputes and been executed.<sup>14</sup> This in turn brought a new chief grand secretary to power, Yan Song.<sup>15</sup> Yan was an advocate of a conciliatory approach to border security, and was, in the winter of 1550–51, supporting a proposal by Qiu Luan for opening horse markets on the northern frontier as a way of drawing the Mongols into an ongoing trading relationship and deflecting them from raiding around Beijing.<sup>16</sup> Yang Jisheng, upon arriving in Beijing in the spring of 1551, took a position opposing the opening of horse markets. In doing so he was following in



the steps of Shen Lian, who had submitted a vigorous critique of the proposal in the fall of 1550.<sup>17</sup> Shen had been sanctioned for this, which only spurred him on to submit a stronger memorial early in 1551 directly attacking Yan Song. This led to Shen's arrest and demotion to a minor post in Bao'an, beyond the Great Wall. On April 20, 1551, Yang submitted his own memorial setting out ten reasons why the markets should not be opened and five fallacies in the arguments of the proposal's advocates.<sup>18</sup> The emperor sent the memorial to a special committee of senior officials, which included both Yan Song and Qiu Luan, for discussion. The committee rejected Yang's memorial.

The result was that Yang was himself impeached, briefly imprisoned and beaten, demoted in rank and sent off to serve as a minor local judicial officer on the remote western edge of the empire, in Didao, Shaanxi, now Lintao, Gansu. He spent a year there, performing very well in his official duties and leaving a lasting legacy by founding an academy for the instruction of local youth, specifically including Tibetan and Islamic boys who he felt were in serious need of education in the Confucian way. According to his autobiography, when he departed Didao at the end of his service there, more than a thousand people saw him off on his way.<sup>19</sup>

Meanwhile, the horse-market policy proved to be ineffective just as Yang had forecast. Qiu Luan died, and Yan Song subsequently disavowed both the markets and his erstwhile protégé, blaming the failed border policy solely on Qiu and acting to bring Yang Jisheng back from his internal exile. From the fourth month of 1552 to the end of that year Yang was recalled from Didao and promoted four times, finally being summoned to return to Beijing at the New Year of 1553. Yang never acknowledged Yan's role in his rehabilitation, but Zhang Xianqing, in his biography of Yan Song, indicates that Yan advocated bringing Yang back from internal exile and calculated that this might help recruit him as a future supporter.<sup>20</sup> On his way to the capital, at an overnight stop along the Grand Canal, Yang sat up in the early hours of the morning, reflecting on the latest turn of his career, and, according to his autobiography, 'resolved to embark on the path of recompensing the empire'. His wife, Ms Zhang, joined him, asking what was on his mind. Yang said, 'I am so grateful for the benefice the emperor has granted me, I am contemplating how to devote my life to repayment'. Ms Zhang replied that, 'With a corrupt official such as Yan Song in power, how will he allow you to recompense the empire? At a time like this it is not possible to be an [honest] official'. Yang later wrote, 'When I heard these words, I knew what was fundamental to serving the country... So I resolved that at the New Year I would submit a memorial impeaching the grand secretary Yan Song'.<sup>21</sup> He did this in a memorial on January 31, 1553, in which he set out Yan Song's 'ten crimes and five evil [ways]'.<sup>22</sup> Two days later he was arrested and imprisoned.

For over the next two and a half years Yang languished in jail, being beaten severely, and not knowing what his ultimate fate would be. The emperor saw Yang as a loyal official with perhaps intemperate views, but Yan Song sought to eliminate Yang as a potential future threat. Finally in the fall of 1555 Yan was

able to obtain the emperor's approval for a death warrant on which Yang's name appeared in the third position, and the sentence was quickly carried out.

In this account of how Yang came to submit his second attack on Yan Song, which is based on Yang's autobiography, his wife Ms Zhang plays a critical role. It is she who precipitates Yang's fatal decision, and she does so by making a quintessentially Confucian comment on the moral bankruptcy of the political realm. While affirming her husband's desire to repay imperial favour, she questions Yang's willingness to take up office under Yan Song's corrupt leadership, and propels him towards his decisive gesture of moral condemnation.

Ms Zhang was the daughter of Zhang Gao, Yang's half-brother's uncle, from a family of modest means in the same rural region of north China that Yang came from. They were married in 1534, when the 18-year-old Yang had already passed the first level of the examinations and was seen to be on his way to a promising career. He notes in his autobiography that, 'when the people of the county saw I was advancing in my studies, the wealthy households began to make offers for me to marry one of their daughters. I said, "How could a young lady from a wealthy home come and live with my older brother and his wife?"' By contrast, Zhang Gao's 'family was one which farmed and wove cloth. They were not very rich. Their way of life was compatible with a rural village. I had also heard that their daughter was grown, yet remained virtuous. I was pleased that she quickly became like a sister with my elder brother's wife'.<sup>23</sup>

Their married life seems to have been a generally contented one, with a mix of good times and bad. They had several children, including two sons who lived to adulthood. Interestingly, the first of Yang's children was not born until January 1541, more than six years after Yang and Ms Zhang were married. Yang had passed the middle-level examination in the spring of 1540, and the timing of the birth of this first child suggests there may have been an element of family planning involved, with childbearing forestalled until this threshold of examination success had successfully been crossed.<sup>24</sup> A second child, a daughter, followed in October 1542, and a third, another son, in March 1545. A third son was born in March 1549. Yang took two concubines into the household, but only one at a time, acquiring the second only after the death of the first. Again, this domestic action seems to have been linked to career success, as the first concubine, a Ms Liu, was acquired when Yang was home in Rongcheng in the fall of 1547, having passed the highest examination and attained the status of *jinshi* the previous spring. Ms Liu died in 1549. Yang acquired his second concubine, a Ms Huai, in 1551, on his way to Beijing after successfully completing his initial period of service in Nanjing. Both women were purchased during visits home. Yang also took advantage of his stopover in Rongcheng in 1551 to make marriage arrangements for his son Jingwei, not yet six years old, with the family of Li Hefeng, a former fellow student of Yang's. Once again Yang emphasized a link between economic status and moral character, noting, 'A go-between for an illustrious family first tried to raise the idea of my son marrying there. But I said, "Your family is rich, while mine is poor. Our habits are very different. Our expectations are not well matched.

I dare not agree". Li Hefeng, on the other hand...was upright and noble, and his heart and mind were in accord with my own.<sup>25</sup>

These bits of domestic history suggest that Yang Jisheng was very conventional in his family life, managing his affairs carefully and exercising restraint in his home economy. He was comfortable with the acquisition of concubines, yet highly respectful of his wife's moral character. According to his autobiography all his children were borne by his wife Ms Zhang, so his acquisition of concubines was not due to problems with the production of male children. There is no indication in Yang's writings of marital difficulties of any kind, and indeed his portrayal of his wife is consistently positive and affectionate. To at least some extent they seem to have had the kind of 'companionate marriage' which Patricia Ebrey has suggested was idealized in Confucian thought.<sup>26</sup> The sale of her jewellery to raise funds for the school Yang wished to found in Didao thus may have been an indication of her role as a partner in his actions. Her response to Yang's long imprisonment and ultimate condemnation further reinforces this impression.

### **The memorial of 1555**

When Yang was finally sentenced to execution in the fall of 1555 a memorial was submitted to the throne in Ms Zhang's name, in which she offered to take her husband's place on the execution ground. This kind of offer was a well-established moral gesture, at least on the part of one man offering himself up to save another. To cite one prominent early Ming precedent, the scholar-official Fang Xiaoru, who would himself be murdered by the usurping Yongle emperor in 1402, had earlier, in 1376, offered to submit himself to the punishment decreed for his father, who had fallen afoul of the Hongwu emperor in the famous case of the pre-stamped documents. Fang's plea was not accepted, and his father was executed, but the act of offering to be a surrogate for his father contributed to the development of Fang's reputation as a moral exemplar.<sup>27</sup>

The memorial submitted in Ms Zhang's name first sets out the facts of the case, placing them in the best possible light, but carefully not challenging the correctness of the imperial judgment.

Your servant's husband was previously vice director of the Bureau of Military Appointments. Because in this position he was responsible for matters concerning the Imperial entourage, he remonstrated in opposition to the policy of opening horse markets, and became a victim of the schemes of Qiu Luan. Owing to your Imperial grace he was merely demoted. Soon, because Qiu Luan was purged, my husband was cleared of false charges, and received four promotions in one year, regaining his former rank.

Yang's initial criticism of the horse market policy is linked to the now disgraced Qiu Luan, with Yan Song's name never appearing. His midnight agitation is noted, but no mention is made of her own advice or Yang's resolution before reaching Beijing to once again attack Yan Song.

After your servant's husband bowed to the Imperial edict [of his last promotion] he was greatly agitated, and shed tears of gratitude, and was resolved to serve and repay the kindness he had received. He rose in the middle of the night, and forgot to eat. This I observed myself.

Indeed, Yang is said to have, '... not listen[ed] to the vulgar chatter of the streets and markets, [but] continued with his scholarly pursuits.' But then, 'in a moment of darkness he...wrote a mad, wild tract'.<sup>28</sup>

The memorial then recounts Yang's imprisonment and torture,

Your servant's husband was beaten, and then placed in prison. During the beatings he repeatedly lost consciousness and revived. Two sections of flesh from his buttocks were chopped out, and the tendons in his legs were snapped in two places. He lost five or six bowls full of blood, so that his whole body and his clothing were soaked and stained with it. He was held in a cage day and night, and suffered severely. [Since his imprisonment] our family has had years of scarcity and poverty, from which we have had no relief. For three years now your servant has worked spinning and weaving to earn enough to supply basic needs.

A political note is injected with the observation that, 'The appropriate board has twice memorialized asking that the sentence be mitigated ... But I have heard that recently several officials met together and have submitted a joint memorial urging that my husband be put to death'. The contrast between the recommendations of clemency from 'the appropriate board' and the actions of 'several officials' who 'met together' to urge Yang's execution suggests a conspiratorial subversion of the imperial prerogative on the part of these unnamed luminaries.

The memorial closes with a dramatic appeal for imperial clemency,

Your servant can only depend upon Your Majesty's magnanimity to preserve [my husband's] life. All the creatures of the world find their humble place; how could I not seek a glance from Your Majesty to bestow pity [upon us] and forgive an irredeemable wrong? If it should be that a lowly subject like your servant should find a slight lightening of [my husband's] punishment, this would be the greatest of good fortune. But if [his] crime is too weighty to allow for pardon, [I] beg then to have my own head cut off in the marketplace, to take the place of my husband in death.

Throughout this memorial the tone is humble and contrite, while dignified and restrained. Ms Zhang is presented as a strong defender of her husband, attributing his situation to a single moment of madness, evidently induced by his great agitation and stress over the honours he had received and his anxiety about adequately recompensing this imperial favour. Mention of her family's travails is made in the most circumspect way.

Ms Zhang's offer to be executed in her husband's place is in line with Confucian moral precepts in a number of ways. As noted above, the gesture of seeking to be a surrogate for another's punishment was already established and associated with moral paragons like Fang Xiaoru. In the case of a wife, it also can be seen as part of the Confucian discourse around issues of widow chastity and remarriage, and praise for women who committed suicide to preserve their honour.<sup>29</sup> As Katherine Carlitz has argued, in the middle Ming there was a dramatic increase in the valorization of female suicide. And while 'the discursive practices constituting male Confucian worthies were not the same as those for the heroines of fidelity ... [W]omen's fidelity was understood as the domestic analogue of male loyalty.'<sup>30</sup> Carlitz is concerned with cases of women who killed themselves, which is something of another matter from offering to be executed in place of one's husband. None the less, the memorial submitted in Ms Zhang's name proposes a kind of surrogate suicide.

While this memorial purports to be an expression of Ms Zhang's views and wishes, the 'voice' which is heard here is largely that of the male world of Confucian official discourse, as with the 'male-constructed heroine[s] of fidelity' discussed by Carlitz.<sup>31</sup> This alerts the reader to the second level of surrogate action involved, which is that the true author was not Ms Zhang, but the junior official and literary notable Wang Shizhen.<sup>32</sup> Wang was from a prominent, wealthy literati family in Jiangnan. Born in 1526, Wang became a *jinshi* in the same year as Yang Jisheng, and they seem to have come to know each other fairly well, though Yang was working in Nanjing while Wang's early career was in Beijing. Wang quickly became part of the literary circles at the capital and emerged as an advocate of *gu wenci*, or Old Phraseology, a particular version of the *fugu*, or Archaist, literary movement which reached a second 'high tide' in the mid-sixteenth century as the Later Seven Masters, under the leadership of Wang and his friend Li Panlong.

### **Wang Shizhen and anti-Yan Song partisan activities**

While Wang and Yang had some initial links by virtue of their shared *jinshi* cohort, it seems likely that their friendship was further strengthened by a shared antipathy for Yan Song. As Liao Kebin has noted,

The members of the Later Seven Masters Archaist faction all took part in the anti-Yan Song struggle. Their movement was fundamentally a literary movement, but it also had a deeply political aspect. In the early period of their activities they were intimately linked to the group opposing Yan Song. Indeed, it can be said that without the group opposing Yan Song, there would not have been a Later Seven Masters Archaist movement.<sup>33</sup>

Wang was concerned for Yang's prospects, and seems to have been fearful that Yang did not take the dangers of confronting Yan Song seriously enough. As Yang was making his way back to Beijing in December 1552, Wang, who was in

Jiangnan at this time, sent him a letter urging him to be cautious when he returned to the capital. Wang wrote,

This evening I received the *Beijing Gazette* and saw the news of your promotion. I know this is already old news, but all the gentlemen I meet agree that this is excellent. You have the capacity to become a real man of accomplishments. ... The man you formerly antagonized with your strong opinions has fallen from power and suffered the ultimate punishment. Still, your reputation is too lofty; you are like a peacock or kingfisher, who all the hunters compete to capture. It would be better to fly up to hide out 8,000 feet high and keep a watch until it is safe to come down. Clearly you should forget about the past and not nurture a grudge. Meanwhile I shall devote my humble energies on your behalf.<sup>34</sup>

Wang refers here to the fall of Qiu Luan, the ‘man you formerly antagonized’. His admonition to forget the past and not nurture a grudge anticipates exactly the denunciation of Yan Song that Yang was about to submit. This letter did not reach Yang until three days after he had been arrested.

Once Yang was imprisoned, Wang Shizhen, along with other friends, provided material assistance to Yang’s family. Over the two and a half years during which Yang’s ultimate fate remained unresolved various officials lobbied for a reduction in his sentence or for better treatment for him in prison. In the fall of 1555, when it began to appear that Yang would indeed be executed, Wang Shizhen went in person to visit Yan Song, and made a direct appeal for clemency. Yan was apparently moved by this, perhaps for political reasons, and agreed to perform a divination concerned Yang. However his son Yan Shifan and one of his chief followers Yan Maoqing argued strenuously against any leniency towards Yang. According to Yang’s account of this episode in his autobiography they said,

What use is divining in something like this? Jisheng has far-reaching vision. He is a follower of Xu Jie. One day Jie may emerge as the empire’s leading official, and then Jisheng would come to assist him. What would our lives be worth then? This is what is called raising a tiger and reaping disaster.<sup>35</sup>

Yan Song abandoned the idea of sparing Yang. In the event, when Yang was executed, Wang Shizhen organized a group of friends who had Yang’s body retrieved from the execution ground, and paid for his burial. Wang continued to provide financial support to Yang’s family in the following years, until Yang’s two sons came of age.<sup>36</sup>

Seven years after Yang Jisheng’s execution Yan Song fell from power. As predicted, Yan’s fall led to the rise in power of many of the men who had long opposed him, led by the new chief grand secretary Xu Jie. In 1566 the Jiajing emperor died and was succeeded by the Longqing emperor. This set the stage for a ‘reversal of verdict’ on Yang Jisheng and others, and Wang Shizhen played a prominent role in this process, writing a highly charged biography of Yang,

which carefully constructed his image as a righteous martyr who gave his life to defend the moral virtues of Confucian propriety. In addition he promoted the circulation among the literati of Beijing and Jiangnan of copies of Yang's autobiography, written in prison while he awaited execution. In his account of Yang's life Wang noted that even during the years when Yang was in prison, 'Gentlemen within the seas secretly reproduced and circulated [Yang's] writings in such volume that paper rose in price'.<sup>37</sup> During the later 1550s Wang continued to promote the circulation of Yang's memorials and his autobiography. Finally, in November 1567 the Longqing emperor restored Yang's official rank and bestowed posthumous honours on him, including providing funds for the building of shrines in his memory in Baoding, Rongcheng, and his natal village of Beihezhaohao.

Even after this, Wang continued to promote the image of Yang as a righteous martyr, and to attack Yan Song as the embodiment of evil. In the 1570s a play appeared with the rise and fall of Yan Song as its focus. The *Mingfeng ji* (*Cry of the Phoenix*) was one of the first contemporary topical dramas in China, using not allegories from antiquity but current, or at least recent, events to set out its moral narrative.<sup>38</sup> This play was attributed by many to Wang Shizhen, and although this is not generally accepted by modern scholars, it is clear that Wang was linked to the play in several ways.<sup>39</sup> The actual author appears to have been one of the many young intellectuals who sought out Wang as a patron. The Qing theatre historian Jiao Xun reports that Wang paid for troupes of actors to perform the play in various locations around Jiangnan.<sup>40</sup> The purge of Yang Jisheng is the subject of three pivotal acts. The portrayal of Yan Song as the embodiment of evil and of Yang Jisheng as the epitome of the righteous Confucian martyr is certainly consistent with Wang Shizhen's presentation of Yang in his biography.

It is evident that Wang Shizhen's authorship of the memorial for Ms Zhang was part of a larger campaign directed against the political dominance of Yan Song. Indeed, Wang's antipathy towards Yan went far beyond the case of Yang Jisheng. Wang's clashes with Yan led to his own departure from Beijing for provincial service in the mid-1550s, and to the death of Wang's father Wang Yu in 1560 as a result of military problems on the northern frontier.<sup>41</sup> In providing a 'stand-in brush' for Ms Zhang in her effort to substitute herself for her husband on the execution ground, Wang was acting both as a friend of Yang's and in furtherance of his own political agenda. Indeed, it is impossible to be certain whether Wang's writing of the memorial submitted in Ms Zhang's name was in response to an initiative on her part, or whether the idea originated with Wang and Ms Zhang was simply the particular vehicle for his political objective.

### **The fate of Ms Zhang**

To return to Ms Zhang, it remains to consider her situation after this effort to offer her as a virtuous surrogate for her husband failed. We can gain some understanding of this through two texts from late 1555. The first is a set of 'final instructions' written by Yang and dated November 9, 1555, just three days before his execution. The other is a sacrificial prayer (*jiwen*) by Ms Zhang offered ten

days after her husband's death, perhaps at his burial in his home village.<sup>42</sup> In his 'final instructions' Yang invokes Sima Qian's dictum that 'death can be as weighty as Mt. Tai or as light as swan's down'.<sup>43</sup> He expresses strong concern that Ms Zhang will react to his imminent execution by taking her own life. As has been noted above, the middle Ming was a period when suicide by widows was increasingly praised. Yet Yang is quite explicit that this is not the course of action he wishes Ms Zhang to follow. He argues that she must remain alive to look after their children and maintain his ancestral sacrifices. He wrote,

If she dies, she is abandoning her husband and master's ancestral sacrifices, letting his work degenerate, turning her back on the important affairs with which her husband and master has entrusted her, causing him endless posthumous distress. In this case not only is her death more trivial than swan's down, it will also be cursed by the multitude. Such a woman does not understand Principle.<sup>44</sup>

He then goes on to give explicit instructions about how to carry on with the kind of careful household management characteristic of their life together. An additional text is addressed to Yang's two sons, and provides similar instructions for their conduct after his death.

At least one modern biographical source indicates that Ms Zhang did not heed Yang's instructions. A brief entry in the *Mingren zhuanji ziliao suoyin* states that, 'Jisheng was executed in the Western Market; on the same day Ms Zhang hanged herself'.<sup>45</sup> There is, however, no mention of such an action in the contemporary or late Ming biographical accounts by Wang Shizhen, Xu Jie, or Li Zhi or in the biographies of Yang in the Baoding and Lintao gazetteers of the Wanli era.<sup>46</sup> The existence of the sacrificial prayer of Ms Zhang, included as an addendum in Yang's collected works, and which is dated 22 November 1555, ten days after Yang's death, also seems to call the suicide of Ms Zhang into question. Given the strong admonition by Yang in his 'final instructions' that she not take her own life, and her previous conduct as a model of domestic companionship, such an act would seem quite problematic.

In this ritual text Ms Zhang refers to herself as lost, or left behind (*wang*). She 'respectfully gathers the ferns of Shouyang', and offers them to the spirit of her departed husband.<sup>47</sup> She then invokes the memory of another martyr to loyalty, the Song official Wen Tianxiang.<sup>48</sup> She refers to her husband's 'two instances of "upright spirit"', a reference to Wen's famous 'Song of Upright Spirit' ('Zhengqi ge') written when he was imprisoned and awaiting execution by the Mongols. Wen's poem is the immediate source for several images of loyal self-sacrifice with which Yang is then praised, including the Jin dynasty minister Ji Shao and the Tang martyrs Zhang Xun and Yan Gaoqing.<sup>49</sup> Finally Ms Zhang laments, 'Eternal separation; how vast! ... Alas, please accept this sacrifice'.

It is possible that this text represented a farewell to her own life, yet this does not seem to be indicated in the prayer itself. There is no suggestion of an imminent reunion in the underworld. Nor is there any effort to address the clear prohibition



on taking her own life which Yang had given her, or to justify such a course of action in defiance of his will.

On the other hand, scene sixteen in the *Mingfeng ji* presents a dramatic rendition of Ms Zhang's suicide. On the day set for Yang's execution several officials loyal to Yang, who had striven to aid him, arrive on the scene and lament his impending death. Yang remains unmoved and fearless. Finally Ms Zhang appears and, after bitterly denouncing the corruption at court which has led to her husband's condemnation, she reads out the text of the prayer referred to above. Having done so, she slits her own throat, to the further distress of all assembled.

The *Mingfeng ji* is not, however, a reliable documentary source. In scene fourteen, which shows Yang Jisheng writing the memorial which leads to his arrest in 1553, the story is portrayed using events from a famous martyrdom at the beginning of the Zhengde reign in the early sixteenth century. Jiang Qin was an official in the Censorate who was condemned for impeaching the powerful eunuch Liu Jin. Despite repeated beatings Jiang refused to relent in his criticism, and submitted renewed denunciations of corruption after each round of punishment. Finally, when he was about to endure a probably terminal flogging, a spirit appeared to him, sent by his ancestors to urge him to desist from further antagonizing the powerful eunuch. But Jiang refused to dishonour his ancestors by compromising his moral principles, and accordingly went ahead with his final attack on Liu Jin, after which he was beaten to death.<sup>50</sup>

The use of Jiang's story to lend drama to Yang Jisheng's tale indicates that the author of the *Mingfeng ji* was not strictly bound by actual events in his effort to render the evils of Yan Song and his clique as theatre. Thus the account of Ms Zhang's suicide is itself not necessarily an indication that she in fact ended her life in this way. Indeed, in the play she is portrayed as slitting her own throat, while in Chang Bide's modern biographical note he says she hanged herself. It should also be mentioned that the version of the sacrificial prayer which appears in the *Mingfeng ji*, while textually identical to that appended to Yang Jisheng's collected writings, bears a different date, a full month earlier, and in fact several weeks before Yang's actual execution.

One final indication of the ambiguity of the evidence about Ms Zhang's fate is that the descendants of Yang Jisheng now living in his natal village in Hebei, who have rebuilt his shrine and continue to observe the Qingming commemorations at his grave, are not themselves clear about this question. In an interview in April 2003 Yang Sihe, a sixteenth-generation descendant and leader of the shrine association, responded to a question about Ms Zhang's possible suicide by saying that he did not believe this had happened, but that he did not possess clear information one way or the other. The separate shrine to her memory which had existed as part of the village ritual complex since Qing times was destroyed in 1967.<sup>51</sup> In the absence of a contemporary record of her suicide, a final resolution of the question of Ms Zhang's conduct after Yang's execution remains difficult to achieve.

### **Surrogates and substitutes: the nexus of gentility**

We have, then, three people linked together by a set of moral and political actions, gestures designed to signify their upholding of proper Confucian values and their commitment to righteousness and integrity, enacting cultural expressions of gentility even in a context of conflict and violence. Yang Jisheng played the leading role in the real-life drama, taking a public stand not once, but twice: repeating his performance as the defender of virtue in the face of corruption, and bringing upon himself the ultimate sanction, but also the definitive inscription of his name among the ranks of righteous martyrs. Why he chose this path, or whether he in fact realized that prison and death were to be the results of his actions, is hard to determine with certainty. In his autobiography he presents a self-portrait which emphasizes his moral stringency, and situates his actions in the context of his overall sense of self and socio-political values. His aversion to the wealthy and powerful families which sought marital links with him is the private side of his value system, as his public stand against Yan Song manifests his social conscience. It is also possible to see his actions as instances of a conventional career strategy, positioning himself as an upright and honest official and thereby attracting imperial attention and political patronage. That certainly was the result of his first memorial. Yan Song, once he was able to deflect the blame for the failed horse markets onto Qiu Luan, saw Yang as a rising star whose support would be useful, and tried to recruit him through his rehabilitation and successive promotions. Yang himself was not blind to the pragmatic side of political life. In 1551, during the conflict over horse markets, he wrote a letter to Wang Lin, who had been in the same 1547 examination cohort with Yang and with whom he had become good friends, urging Wang to exercise caution in his career, and to avoid involvement with the horse-market policy not on the basis of its propriety, but on the grounds that it would be bad for his bureaucratic future.<sup>52</sup> If Yang's actions were a calculated career move they certainly went seriously awry. It is impossible to clearly disentangle Yang's motivations from the web of self-construction and political advocacy in which his story has become embedded.

This tension between selfless sacrifice for the empire and self promotion in the imperial bureaucracy would have been nothing new. As David Nivison pointed out long ago, there was a 'conflict, between devotion to higher ideals and the practical necessity of coming to terms with the world', which pervaded literati life.<sup>53</sup> The resolution of this tension in Yang's actions can be seen as reflecting, in the Chinese context, the ideal construction of the gentleman presented by Letwin: 'There is a clear distinction between the social and the private but no incompatibility'.<sup>54</sup> To maintain his own integrity, the subjective unity which he sought to cultivate and which he carefully elucidated in his autobiography, Yang could not act other than in the way he did, particularly once the moral implications of accepting office in a capital dominated by Yan Song were posed to him by his wife.

Ms Zhang thus played a critical role in precipitating Yang's decision to submit his second memorial. Were her remarks sitting up late at night with her husband merely a passive trigger to his decision, or did she seek to influence his actions?

Yang's references to her in his autobiography emphasize her moral sensibility and how compatible he found this. The sale of her jewellery in Lintao to help fund Yang's educational activities may indicate a degree of shared participation in her husband's career and ambitions. On the other hand the anxiety evident in Yang's 'final instructions' seems to indicate Yang may have feared her to be headstrong and impulsive. It is impossible to tell at this remove. It is also difficult to know precisely her role in the submission of the memorial proposing that she replace Yang on the execution ground. While we know the memorial was actually written by Wang Shizhen, how this came to pass is unclear. Did Ms Zhang ask him to write it on her own initiative, out of her sense of the proper conduct of a faithful wife, or perhaps from a sense of responsibility stemming from her role in precipitating Yang's actions? Did Wang suggest it as a strategy to elicit imperial clemency, as part of his overall efforts to aid his friend? If so, how might he have broached such a proposition to Ms Zhang? We cannot know with certainty.

Certainly Wang Shizhen was sincerely concerned about Yang. Wang's opposition to Yan Song was deep and long-lasting. Ultimately Wang's own father was one of Yan's victims, at least in part as a result of Yan's hatred for Wang stemming from his defence of Yang Jisheng. Wang's antipathy to Yan Song extended far beyond this particular case, and encompassed fundamental disagreements about the nature of literary creativity as well as political philosophy. The specifics of these issues need not concern us here. What is important is that Wang, like Yang Jisheng and Ms Zhang, saw the power of Yan Song as a poison which had thoroughly corrupted the political order of their time. Each in his and her own way, they took stands which they felt were imperative if they were to maintain their own moral integrity. In each instance we can understand their actions in part through basic Confucian concepts like the 'five great relationships'.<sup>55</sup> These constituted the paired relations between ruler and minister, father and son, elder and younger brother, husband and wife, and friends. In each of these there is a dynamic of hierarchy and mutuality, with both parties obliged to fulfil certain performative expectations.

In submitting his memorials attacking Yan Song, and incurring the risks attendant upon that action, Yang Jisheng was fulfilling his role as an official in the relationship of ruler and minister. It was necessary to enact the performative aspect of this relationship by a public gesture of loyalty to the emperor in order to maintain the legitimacy of Yang's position within the imperial system. It seems unlikely that Yang anticipated his actions would result in the fall of Yan Song. Rather it was a matter of demonstrating his own integrity in the face of intolerable political circumstances. His actions were also embedded in a broader stream of political action, forming part of an ongoing conflict between the partisans of Yan Song and his opponents. Yang articulated his actions in terms of his individual moral imperative, yet the presence of the broader social grouping within which he was situated, and which included Wang Shizhen, is evident in the references in his autobiography to those who aided him in prison, who sought to reduce or reverse his sentence, or to whom he looked to carry on the struggle once he was gone. In this sense Yang can also be seen as enacting the relationship between friends.

Ms Zhang situated herself in the relationship of husband and wife, offering support and counsel when Yang was struggling with the question of how to respond to his impending return to the capital and proximity to his new would-be patron Yan Song, then offering to submit herself to the executioner to save her husband's life. Interestingly, in the memorial submitted in her name she is presented as referring to herself with the term *chen*, the word used by officials to refer to themselves in communications with the emperor. It was a common trope in Chinese poetry and literati discourse to use the husband–wife relationship as a metaphor for the ruler–subject link, and here the distinction between these categories collapses entirely, as Ms Zhang is at once constructed as both good wife and loyal subject. Her gesture in seeking to become a surrogate for her husband fulfils the demands of Confucian morality in multiple ways.

Wang Shizhen embodies the bond of friend and friend. This is true both in his relationship with Yang Jisheng and in his actions on behalf of Ms Zhang. In writing to Yang to warn him before his return to Beijing Wang seeks to protect his friend, and in working over the following years to ease Yang's imprisonment, and to lighten or ameliorate his punishment, he persists in this loyalty even while incurring the enmity of the most powerful official in the empire. Wang's own career had been developing smoothly, and his support for Yang served to some extent to derail it into provincial appointments away from the centre of political action in Beijing, which Wang lamented in his writings. Wang's support for Yang Jisheng was not merely a matter of loyalty to a friend, of course. It also expressed Wang's own views of the corruption and decadence of China's political centre in the 1550s. In this way Wang, too, acted out the role of the loyal subject.

These three individuals, then, can be seen as personifying Confucian ideals of virtue, morality, and integrity, a specific set of instantiations of gentility. Clearly, it was Yang Jisheng who most dramatically acted out the role of moral paragon. His public defiance of Yan Song, whom Yang saw as corrupt and decadent, led to his martyrdom, and eventually to his canonization as a moral exemplar. His wife Ms Zhang acted as a virtuous surrogate first in pointing out the problematic morality of serving under Yan Song and then in seeking, or at least allowing, her own life to be offered in place of his. Wang Shizhen then served as another virtuous surrogate in writing the memorial in which she made this offer to the emperor. He continued this role in providing support for the family after Yang's execution.

The power of the ideals which drove the actions of these people in placing themselves at risk was great indeed. For all three it was not sufficient to hold certain values and feelings; it was imperative to put them into action. Their actions thus express the 'qualities of behavior ... chivalrous instincts and fine feelings' (Murray 1971), and the 'coherence of ... thoughts, words and actions' (Letwin 1982), associated with the concept of gentility as encountered in the discursive world of nineteenth-century Britain. Trollope would no doubt have found their story a worthy one.

**Notes**

- 1 Murray 1971: G.117.
- 2 Murray 1971: G.119.
- 3 For a biography of Trollope see Glendinning 1992. My use of Trollope to illustrate the English cultural construction of gentility is not intended to suggest that Victorian society or political life was directly equatable with that of Ming dynasty China. Rather, I hope to suggest that the sense of commitment to moral values and the imperative to bear the consequences of one's moral choices may make the concept of gentility relevant and applicable even in quite distinct cultural environments.
- 4 Letwin 1982: 57.
- 5 Letwin 1982: especially Chapters 3–5.
- 6 Letwin 1982: 62.
- 7 Letwin 1982: 63.
- 8 Letwin 1982: 65.
- 9 Letwin 1982: 74.
- 10 For brief biographies of Yang Jisheng, Yan Song, and Wang Shizhen see *DMB* 1503–4; 1586–91; 1399–405. Little can be said of Ms Zhang beyond information included in accounts of Yang's life. For these, see Note 11.
- 11 *ZZNP*. The original of this autobiography, written while Yang was in prison awaiting execution, is reported by Yang's descendants to be held in the county archives in Rongcheng, Hebei. This is the principal source for Yang's life. It served as the basis for the two most important contemporary accounts of Yang Jisheng by Wang Shizhen and Xu Jie, both of which appeared in 1568, and are regularly included as appendices in editions of Yang's collected writings. See, *inter alia*, Wang Shizhen, 'Yang Zhongmin xingzhuan' and Xu Jie, 'Ming bingbu wuxuansi yuanwailang zeng Taichang xiaoqing yi Zhongmin Yang gong muzhiming' in *YJSSWJ* 133–52; 152–7.
- 12 *HMJSDK*.
- 13 For a full discussion of the security issues and the ongoing debates about them in the middle and late Ming see Johnston 1995.
- 14 *DMB* 527–31.
- 15 *DMB* 1586–91; Zhang Puqing 1992; Cao Guoqing 1995.
- 16 *DMB* 252–5.
- 17 *DMB* 1182–5.
- 18 *MSL* 86.6628–33.
- 19 *ZZNP* 475.
- 20 Zhang 1992: 234.
- 21 *ZZNP* 477.
- 22 *MSL* 87.6905.
- 23 *ZZNP* 459.
- 24 This would be consistent with élite fertility practices in China as delineated by James Lee and Wang Feng. Though primarily a study of Qing and modern China, Lee and Wang argue that fertility control and some forms of family planning can be documented as far back as the thirteenth century. Lee and Wang 1999: 83–99.
- 25 *ZZNP* 469.
- 26 Ebrey 1993: 158–60.
- 27 *DMB* 426; Ditmanson 2001: 114–43.
- 28 *YJSSWJ* 125–26.
- 29 See the special issue of the journal *Nan nü* 3.1. Leiden: Brill, 2001.
- 30 Carlitz 1997a: 612–40.
- 31 Carlitz 1997a: 613.
- 32 The memorial appears in most editions of Yang Jisheng's collected writings, and most commonly has the notation, *Wang Shizhen dai bi* (Wang Shizhen provided a stand-in brush).

- 33 Liao Kebin 1994: 193.
- 34 Wang Shizhen 1983a: 124.8a; *SKQS* 1281.95.
- 35 *ZZNP* 488.
- 36 Xu Jie, ‘Ming Bingbu wuxuansi yuanwailang zeng taichang xiaoqing yi Zhongmin Yang gong muzhiming’, *YJSSWJ* 156.
- 37 Wang 1983a: 99.21a; *SKQS* 1280.593.
- 38 *Mingfeng ji*. 1959. On the place of the play in the development of topical theatre see ‘Mingfeng ji: shishi ju de faren’ in Guo Yingde 1998: 124–30; ‘Mingfeng ji yu shishi de chansheng’ in Wu Xida 1991: 342–47.
- 39 Su Huanzhong 1980: 82–5; Zhang Junde 1986: 50–1.
- 40 Jiao Xun 1957: 60.
- 41 For a discussion of Wang Yu’s career and his conflict with Yan Song see Hammond 1994: Chapter 2.
- 42 Yang’s ‘Final Instructions’ has been translated by Beverly Bossler in Mann and Cheng 2001: 119–32.
- 43 Sima Qian, ‘Letter in Reply to Ren An’ translated in Owen 1996: 136–42.
- 44 Bossler, in Mann and Cheng 2001: 122.
- 45 Mingren zhuanji ziliao souyin. 2 vols. National Central Library, comp. Taipei, Guoli zhongyang tushuguan, 1965.
- 46 *BDFZ*; *LTFZ*. I have not been able to review all eighteen sources cited by Chang, but none of the sixteenth- or seventeenth-century sources I have examined include mention of Ms Zhang committing suicide. The most likely origin of this seems to me to be the scene in the *Mingfeng ji* entering into popular accounts of her story. Yang Jisheng’s descendants in Beihezhaos also reject the claim.
- 47 *YZMJ* 2.41b–42a; *SKQS* 1278.650–1. The reference to the ferns on Mt Shouyang is to the biography of Bo Yi and Shu Qi in Sima Qian’s *Shi ji*. Bo Yi and Shu Qi were loyal to the fallen Shang dynasty, and refused to accept the new Zhou regime. They retreated to Mt Shouyang, where they lived for a while by gathering ferns, but starved to death before long. They became archetypes of loyalty to a lost cause. Translated in Owen 1996: 142–4.
- 48 For a biography of Wen Tianxiang see Franke 1976: 1187–201.
- 49 For Ji Shao see *Jin shu* 89.2298. For Yan Gaoqing and Zhang Xun see *Xin Tang shu* 192.5529 and 5534.
- 50 Luo Jintang 1982: 78.
- 51 Sihe, interview with author, Beihezhaos, Hebei, 5 April 2003.
- 52 *YJSSWJ* 38–40.
- 53 Nivison, David S., ‘Protest Against Conventions and Conventions of Protest’ in Wright 1960: 178.
- 54 Letwin 1982: 63.
- 55 The *locus classicus* for the Five Relationships is *Mencius*. See Legge 1935: 2.251–2.

## 7 Sartorial modesty and genteel ideals in the late Ming

*Sarah Dauncey*

Historian Gu Qiyuan (1565–1628) observed that from the Zhengde period (1506–1521) onwards the local customs of his native Nanjing were becoming more extravagant by the day.<sup>1</sup> Stranger still, this was particularly the case with women.<sup>2</sup> He cites the assertion of a certain Mr Zhang that before this time the customs of the women of Nanjing had been quite prim and proper:

As a rule, women did not show their faces outside of the inner quarters; they devoted themselves to culinary affairs and spent their time spinning and weaving. Few bothered themselves with pearls, kingfisher feathers, silks and gauzes. Those ornamented prostitutes and matchmaking old women, who go in and out acting no differently from men, would not have counted for one or two in every hundred.<sup>3</sup>

Yet, by the Jiajing (1522–1566) and Wanli (1567–1620) periods, the situation had, according to the much aggrieved scholars commenting on the customs of the time, spiralled out of control. Scholar-official Lü Kun (1536–1618)<sup>4</sup> highlighted the increasingly opulent clothing of women from rich households and condemned their behaviour in no uncertain terms:

Those living in wealthy homes are licentious, arrogant and extravagant. Their heads are covered with gold and pearls, their bodies are clothed from head to toe in fine silk gauzes. Although clever enough to study, they are flippant and practised in artful speech. They neither speak good words nor perform good deeds.<sup>5</sup>

His criticism, however, was not limited to the rich. He suggested that women in poor villages also now preferred gathering to discuss ornaments and clothing than attending to their household duties.<sup>6</sup> Gu Qiyuan lamented that even religious women were not immune to such temptations, alleging that rich nuns were to be found busying themselves with fancy silk clothing, full sets of jewellery, fragrant tassels, scented belts and even fornication!<sup>7</sup>

Despite their traditional confinement to the family home, women appear to have been adapting to the economic and social changes that were affecting every area

of Chinese life from around 1550 onward.<sup>8</sup> More and more women are reported to have been emerging from sequestration in the home to enjoy the flourishing social and religious life of the time and, as a consequence, increasing attention was being paid to clothing and ornamentation. Women's fashions began to change as the up-and-coming merchant classes competed visually and materially with each other and the established élite. Social mobility and aspirations to gentility could potentially be manifested in clothing choices.<sup>9</sup>

In this volume, the term 'gentility' has been generally associated with the gentry class and their culture. Nobility, status and distinction are certainly important aspects of how this quality is conceived. However, the term is also more widely associated with concepts such as respectability, propriety, etiquette, civility, refinement and stylishness. All of these are traditionally classed as qualities of the gentry, but need not necessarily be restricted to this class. It will be argued here that sartorial choices were central to the expression of gentility in late Ming China and that the expression of female gentility through clothing and ornamentation was very much linked not only to notions of status and distinction, but also to notions of propriety and respectability.

This chapter examines perceptions of the clothing habits of women who were traditionally considered genteel (the scholar-gentry) and those women who aspired to be genteel (the merchants and base women, predominantly courtesans, but also lower-class prostitutes) as depicted in contemporary histories, gazetteers, informal essays, didactic works, painting, and literature such as the *Jin Ping Mei* (*The Plum in the Golden Vase*).<sup>10</sup> While many gentry women felt compelled to make their own clothing more elaborate to maintain a sense of superiority over the socially mobile, others, by contrast, embraced the sartorial simplicity promoted in didactic and other works. This was in spite of the fact that legal codes theoretically determined genteel status through an increased use of more luxurious clothing and ornamentation. Increased attention to widow chastity further boosted the appeal of plain dress, as women could be respected for their modesty in mourning. The ultimate motives for adopting or rejecting certain types of attire were certainly not uniform and merely demonstrate that the concept of gentility was a highly subjective one.

The clothes people choose to wear or are portrayed in can reveal much about their status, career, ethnicity, personality, aspirations, degree of social inclusion and political or religious affiliation. This not only aids projection of an identity, but also enables others to place and react appropriately to the individual concerned.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, women are judged by their appearance more often than men and their dress can be considered a barometer of social norms and values.<sup>12</sup> By looking at historical materials related to their clothing and ornamentation, we are able to fathom a more detailed understanding not only of how such objects were used and appreciated, but also how the employment (or avoidance) of specific items were related to contemporary events and concerns.<sup>13</sup>

Many late Ming commentators certainly linked changes in female clothing habits to the issue of proper female deportment and the place of women in society. Those women who deviated from idealized (as opposed to legally stipulated)



female clothing and ornamentation were derided by literati such as Lü Kun and Gu Qiyuan as scandalous and licentious, while those who rejected such materialistic beautification were extolled as virtuous and genteel. But, all the while, the pervasive nature of fashion continued to thwart attempts to create marked moral differences in female clothing choices, to the extent that even the most frugal of dress – mourning dress – could be altered to reflect the style of the day and could be appropriated by those who failed to recognize its inherent propriety.

### Sartorial distinction in the face of fashion

It is now more widely accepted that from the sixteenth century onwards China witnessed a burgeoning fashion consciousness.<sup>14</sup> However, Chinese clothing and ornamentation had never been wholly static. At each dynastic change the incoming ruling élite would establish new legal codes of dress not only to demarcate the political power shift, but also to preserve the hierarchical distinctions perceived to be necessary for the smooth running of society. Regulations from the Ming dynasty set out in minute detail the requirements for men and women from every social class, to ensure a system of sartorial distinction,<sup>15</sup> and the advantage of such a system was not lost on contemporary scholar Ye Mengzhu (fl. mid–late 17th century): ‘You could tell at a glance whether someone was noble or base’.<sup>16</sup>

More elaborate clothing was, theoretically, a visible marker of gentility.<sup>17</sup> Yet, by the late Ming, traditional symbols of female status, such as the robe emblazoned with symbols of rank or the headdress ornamented with pearls and phoenixes, were no longer the reliable indicators of gentry status they once had been. Even women from the lowest classes were reported to have been seen dressed in such items as they attempted to substantiate their claims to upward mobility and genteel status using such forms of projecting authority. The late Ming novel *Jin Ping Mei*, written under the pseudonym Lanling Xiaoxiaosheng ‘The Laughing Scholar of Lanling’, is one text to take a satirical look at this phenomenon.<sup>18</sup> Throughout the novel, the female protagonists regularly dress up in clothing designated for the imperial family and highest ranks of officialdom and traipse around town, despite the fact that they belong to the household of Ximen Qing, a low-ranking merchant-official.<sup>19</sup>

In his analysis of contemporary clothing behaviour, Ye Mengzhu cites the opinion of an earlier Ming writer who identifies how fashions may have been transmitted from the gentry to commoners, such as merchants, through female members of the household:

This seems to have all begun in gentry households. Their maids and concubines copied their styles and then spread it to their relatives and thence to the neighbourhood. At first the rich and powerful marvelled at the novelty, but afterwards they had to go further to achieve a more glamorous look. Those who acquired [such clothing] did not consider themselves extravagant but splendid, and those who were unable to [acquire it] were not satisfied but shamed by the lack of it.<sup>20</sup>

He also emphasized how, once styles had spread beyond gentry circles, the sartorial distinction of the gentry had become imperilled. This blurring of boundaries gives a strong indication as to why some women and their families felt compelled to innovate, namely, to stay one step ahead of the competition.<sup>21</sup>

An increase in quality and a greater variety and wider availability of textiles,<sup>22</sup> coupled with a more pronounced social mobility and affluence,<sup>23</sup> led to conditions in which competitive fashion could begin to emerge more prominently. Women were no exception to this and contemporary reports detailing their outfits employ phrases such as ‘the look of the moment’ (*fengshi zhi zhi*), ‘the latest style’ (*shiyang*), ‘the current look’ (*shizhi*), ‘fashionable attire’ (*shishi zhuang*) to describe the new styles of clothing and ornamentation that were appearing. For example, even in a poetic description of ‘A picture of a beauty carrying a *qin* zither’ (‘Bao qin meiren tu’), painter Xu Wei (1521–1593)<sup>24</sup> expounds: ‘Her embroidered clothing sports the new-style (*xinyang*) collar’.<sup>25</sup>

Gu Qiyuan noted that in his native city of Nanjing alterations in clothing styles speeded up during the late Ming. Women’s fashions, he argued, had changed only once during ten years in the late sixteenth century, but in the early seventeenth century women’s fashions were changing every two or three years.<sup>26</sup> Chen Jiru (1558–1639)<sup>27</sup> remarked that even hair-styles were getting gradually taller and taller,<sup>28</sup> as did the author of the *Sangang zhilüe* (*A Brief Record of Sangang*):

When I was a *xiuca* degree holder, I saw women with chignons about three *cun* high and this was called a new style. Over the years, they have crept up to six or seven *cun*. These are called ‘peony heads’ and are made with false hair wrapped around a frame. They hang down so much that the women cannot raise their heads. Moreover, some women from the gentry households tie their hair up into ‘conch chignons’ and decorate them with all sorts of pearls and gems and the sable headband popular in the inner quarters. I cannot bear to look at them, yet they consider them the look of the moment.<sup>29</sup>

But while the author of the *Sangang zhilüe* found the new female fashions displeasing seemingly on aesthetic grounds, other writers such as Chen Jiru charged that any such deviation from idealized clothing behaviour was tantamount to immorality and even promiscuity:

Recently, they have been sporting dazzling adornments and resplendent dress; they love to make themselves beautiful. Their looks are flirtatious and their language is suggestive; they love behaving in a licentious manner.<sup>30</sup>

For Chen Jiru and others, the increased attention some women were paying to clothing and materialism in general was not just the epitome of vulgarity, it was also very much linked to a perceived decline in female morals and propriety.

Fashion changes and increasing opulence were not, of course, peculiarly female phenomena, but the emphasis placed by contemporary male observers on female sartorial conduct (and this includes extremely detailed literary descriptions

and more general discussions of changing styles) reflects increasing concern over the effect that socio-economic development in the world at large could have on the behaviour of women who were traditionally confined to the inner quarters of the household. And, taken at face value, they reveal a rather negative view of the situation. A closer reading of the voices that emerge from the texts themselves, however, strongly suggests that the subjects of their criticism felt quite the opposite. The new clothing styles were an exciting and positive development, particularly for those women and their families for whom materialistic display was a manifestation of their perception of gentility. Whether a look was considered appropriate or not seems to have been a very subjective matter.

### **Sartorial simplicity as a marker of dignity and refinement**

Clothing and ornamentation played a crucial role in the Confucian conception of dignity, propriety and civility.<sup>31</sup> To be *wen* (cultured/civilized) meant to be well-dressed, as Confucius himself is said to have argued:

When meeting people one must be properly adorned; to be unadorned is to be lacking in manners; to be lacking in manners is to be disrespectful; to be disrespectful is to be without propriety; and without propriety one cannot stand up in society.<sup>32</sup>

In more stable times, dignity, propriety and civility may have been conferred in the wearing of symbols of status appropriate to one's rank; however, in the minds of many contemporary commentators, conspicuous consumption was the hallmark of the age and excessive attention to sartorial status symbols was a sure indicator of moral degeneration from which only the most upright in society were immune. In this changing climate, therefore, the values of dignity, propriety and civility became much more linked to modesty, simplicity and even frugality, particularly for women. Women held up for acclaim in didactic works and local gazetteers were portrayed as distancing themselves as much as possible from the competitive sartorial elegance of the time.

Middle-class temperance was certainly displayed by Mme Yuan, a 'Lady of Nurture' (*Yuan ruren*)<sup>33</sup> who, unlike the other honoured ladies of rank who dressed in pearl-strewn head-dresses and fancy silks, was the only one to wear plain, coarse clothing.<sup>34</sup> Other reports of virtuous women made the connection between frugality and propriety unambiguous. Official and historian He Qiaoyuan (1558–1632),<sup>35</sup> for example, records the following tale of a virtuous woman from the Zhengde period who was peculiar among the women in her extended family in her avoidance of more ornamented clothing:

Deng Guixiu from Xin'gan was married at the age of 15 *sui* to Zeng Jingzhao. She served her parents-in-law well and, as a wife, she maintained good relations with her sisters-in-law. Living as they did in a merchant area, the family had amassed a small fortune. The women of this family would make

themselves up and wear fine silk and had become accustomed to indolence and extravagance. Guixiu, on the other hand, dressed in cloth and toiled at her weaving without rest.<sup>36</sup>

In both cases, attention to appearance is unequivocally linked to female morals: the frugal sartorial behaviour of Ms Deng and Mme Yuan is equated with dignity and refinement, whilst the opulent dress of the women around them is suggested to be either something less than admirable (as in the case of Mme Yuan's upper-class peers) or downright indecent (as in the case of Ms Deng's base merchant relatives). Both instances, however, emphasize the unusualness of such behaviour, even among women who were related by blood or marriage.

Despite traditionally acting as a foil to the more genteel behaviour of the upper classes, merchant women are actually shown to be capable of less ostentatious behaviour. The Shexian (southern Huizhou) gazetteer is one of the very few sources to extol the virtues of such merchant women. Women in this area were reported to be able to keep the households in good shape while their husbands were away on business, perhaps for many years, due to their extreme industriousness and frugality, and the fact that they did not busy themselves with dressing up in fancy clothing.<sup>37</sup> But, yet again, it is their extreme rarity that makes them exemplars for acclaim.

The merchant women of the novel *Jin Ping Mei* resemble the appearance-obsessed relatives of the genteel exemplar Ms Deng, rather than the frugal merchant women of Shexian county. Both the novel and such didactic sources reveal Confucian anxieties over the behaviour of merchant women with regard to extravagance and enjoyment of the fruits of economic success.<sup>38</sup> For these women the adoption of such frugal clothing would certainly not have been an easy choice, as their families may have felt that an outward appearance of wealth was essential in making a good marriage match. The *Zheng shi guifan* (*Zheng Family Instructions*), for example, highlights the pressure such families were under in this regard by making a particular point of condemning commoners who drowned their daughters for fear that no-one would want to marry a poor girl dressed in 'hairpins of thorn and skirts of linen'.<sup>39</sup>

For the literati, by contrast, it was generally less of an imperative to make a financially good marriage match based on the material appearance of a daughter (whatever her motivations), although the new economic climate meant that many scholarly families could find themselves in financial difficulties and without the resources necessary to compete materially with the households of the most successful urban retailers. Compelled to discover new sartorial ways to express their gentility, therefore, simplicity in dress and its associated moral qualities would have held its own rewards for those households eager for their women to be extolled in the local community for their virtuous behaviour. Furthermore, rather than putting off potential suits, it may have actually had a positive effect in contributing towards a favourable marriage match with a like-minded family.

Another reason why some educated women from scholarly or official households may have chosen less ornamented clothing was that scholarship was

their primary concern and, consequently, they paid less attention to (or wished to portray themselves as paying less attention to) their appearance. The Banana Garden poetry club provides several high-profile examples of scholarly women known for their simple attire.<sup>40</sup> Although evidence suggests that this behaviour was atypical of women in general, these highly educated women, their conduct and their way of life were revered in literati circles and, as a consequence, became an object of emulation for the talented courtesan in particular.

Yu Huai (1616–1696)<sup>41</sup> noted that simplicity was quite fashionable among many well-known courtesans of the late Ming:

People model themselves after the dress and ornament of the Southern gay quarters where plain and simple rather than fine and exquisite things are considered elegant.<sup>42</sup>

Of course, it is difficult to tell whether the simple and plain clothing referred to here has the same connotations as referred to in the didactic texts. However, in a painting by Wu Wei (1459–1508) entitled ‘A painting of Wu Lingchun’ (‘Wu Lingchun tu’), we see an earlier illustration of unadorned dress. Here the erudite Jiangnan courtesan Qi Huizhen (Wu Lingchun) is clothed in a plain robe and is surrounded by the tools of her trade, namely writing and musical implements (see Figure 7.1).

For women who considered themselves virtuous, a decrease in the amount of attention paid to outward appearance also indicated their avoidance of overt sexuality and demeaning physical display. Ms Deng’s response to those women who mocked her self-induced hardship emphasizes this aspect quite clearly. She states: ‘Although cloth is unrefined and commonplace, extravagance makes you wanton; hemp is woman’s work and indolence is not the way of the ideal woman’.<sup>43</sup> Similar sentiments from the late Ming are echoed in the tale ‘Hejian fu’ (‘The woman from Hejian’) by Feng Menglong (1574–1646),<sup>44</sup> in which the female protagonist states: ‘Boasting of one’s carriage and clothing, showing off one’s ornaments, going out to feasts, pleasure seeking and sightseeing in a rowdy group, are all improper activities for a woman’.<sup>45</sup> It was certainly clear to some scholars in the late Ming that an increased amount of attention paid to physical display was very much connected with a lack of virtue, and vice versa.<sup>46</sup> The seventeenth-century Confucian magistrate, Huang Lihong (ca. 1633–after 1705),<sup>47</sup> was very much concerned that men were encouraging such behaviour and even likened such men to pimps and their women to prostitutes.<sup>48</sup>

No wonder, then, that some concubines and courtesans are reported to have dressed more simply in an attempt to emulate the noble conduct of genteel exemplars and distance themselves from their traditionally less virtuous position. One pertinent illustration from the period can be seen in the portrait of concubine Dong by Qian Gu (1508–1578),<sup>49</sup> the aim of which, as stated on the accompanying calligraphy, is to portray a ‘true likeness’ (*zhenrong*) (Figure 7.2). Regardless of whether this was indeed a true representation of her appearance, the image of Ms Dong in an unornamented beige robe, simple hairpins and plain pearl earrings



Figure 7.1 'A painting of Wu Lingchun', by Wu Wei (courtesy of The Palace Museum, Beijing).

exudes a sense of the most extreme modesty and restraint rare in other portraits and paintings of the time.

The *Banqiao zaji* (*Miscellaneous Reminiscences of Plank Bridge*) relates the affairs of some of the most well-known courtesans in late Ming Nanjing and suggests that they, too, could be praised for attributes more usually associated with exemplars from the inner quarters. For example, although a certain Wang Jie was a courtesan, she was said to have the demeanour of one who wore 'hairpins of thorn and skirts of linen'.<sup>50</sup> A situation dreaded by many commoner families as revealed in the *Zheng shi guifan* appears to have become an ideal for courtesans wishing to emulate the demure, genteel behaviour promulgated in didactic and other texts.

Nevertheless, not all courtesans are reported to have conducted themselves in this modest way. Many more, particularly the less scholarly, are said to have joined in the trend for opulent dress. Lü Kun was particularly concerned over the sartorial distinctions between women of ill-repute and women from genteel households in his time:



Figure 7.2 'A true likeness of concubine Dong', by Qian Gu (courtesy of The Palace Museum, Beijing).

Prostitutes are not allowed to dress the same as women from respectable households. As for those who wear figured clothing emblazoned with symbols of rank embroidered with gold and head ornaments of gold, pearls and kingfisher feathers, they will be taken to court.<sup>51</sup>

Another contemporary scholar, Fan Lian (fl. 17th century), however, noted quite the opposite – that women were emulating the styles of dress from the entertainment quarters to the extent that those from noble families could not be distinguished. He laments: 'When ladies copy the fashion of prostitutes, they find it hard to be virtuous!'<sup>52</sup> Unsurprisingly, perhaps, the most sexually active women of the Ximen household in the novel *Jin Ping Mei* are frequently likened to prostitutes in terms of their sartorial behaviour.<sup>53</sup>

The world of the *Jin Ping Mei* and the historical sources discussed reveal the anxieties of observers over a perplexing disorder among female hierarchies.

Sartorial boundaries between women of different classes were blurring as courtesans emulated the modest dress of women from the higher classes in the name of gentility, while members of these classes copied aspects of dress from the entertainment quarters in the name of fashion. Concepts of virtue, gentility and clothing were inextricably entwined, but how these were manifested depended very much on personal background or aspirations. However, given that the majority of criticism is directed towards groups of women, whereas most exemplars are referred to in the singular, we can assume that, on the whole, conscious economy in dress was not the most popular of choices for the majority of women during this period, regardless of rank or class.

### **The respectability and propriety of mourning dress**

Throughout Chinese history, women who exemplified the Confucian ideals of womanhood had been praised for virtuous behaviour in biographies, official or unofficial histories or even by the erection of monumental arches in their local districts. By the Ming dynasty, however, was there a dramatic increase in the number of these commemorations, with a total of nearly 36,000 records.<sup>54</sup> Many of these pieces pay tribute to women who remained widows or who committed suicide after the death of their husband or fiancé.<sup>55</sup> Heightened pressure upon women not to remarry but to maintain the state of mourning for as long as possible meant that the social cachet accorded to mourning dress increased considerably. Furthermore, the relative uniformity of mourning garments across the different classes had the potential to have a more far-reaching effect on the clothing choices of a wider range of women than any other factor discussed thus far.

The state of mourning was perhaps the most symbolic of all the Chinese rituals (*li*). *Li* signified the highest sense of morality, duty and social role as well as more everyday etiquette and good manners.<sup>56</sup> The wearing of mourning garments was the very symbol of morality in the context of bereavement. Wives mourning for their husband and concubines for their master were expected to wear the *zhancui* or ‘unhemmed mourning’, which was the heaviest mourning grade. According to the *Jiali yijie* (*The Ceremonial Usages and Rules of the Family Rituals*) by Qiu Jun (1420–1495),<sup>57</sup> this clothing comprised an unhemmed wide-sleeved top in coarse hemp that reached down to the knees and a long skirt that trailed on the ground, an unhemmed veil of slightly finer hemp, a twisted girdle, and hemp shoes. The hair could be decorated with a bamboo hairclasp five or six *cun* (Chinese inches) in length, and a hairband which would be made from a strip of slightly finer cloth, eight *cun* in length.<sup>58</sup> This is demonstrated in an illustration to the tale ‘*Ji nū que qian*’ (‘*Ms Ji refuses money*’) from Lü Kun’s *Guifan* (*Exemplars from the Inner Quarters*) which shows a mother and daughter in full mourning (Figure 7.3).

We often find, both in China and in the West, that mourning garments are unprovocative in colour, are made of unrefined material and tend to cover most of the body. Psychologist J.C. Flügel suggests that such clothes are therefore ‘symbolic of inflexibility of character, severity of moral standard, and purity of





Figure 7.3 'Ms Ji refuses money' from Lü Kun's *Guifan* [1590] 1994: 3.96b.

moral purpose'.<sup>59</sup> Linda B. Arthur describes how, in a religious context, clothing can be seen as the visible restraint of the external body:

Strict dress codes are enforced because dress is considered symbolic of religiosity. Hence, dress becomes a symbol of social control as it controls the external body. While a person's level of religiosity can not be objectively perceived, symbols such as clothing are used as evidence that s/he is on the right and true path.<sup>60</sup>

This also seems to be the case in Chinese mourning ritual, where a woman's appearance was generally used to determine her character,<sup>61</sup> and numerous late Ming examples show the importance of such judgements, by peers and outsiders alike, on the lives of the women. Perhaps one of the most memorable examples of female mourning that can be found in literature popular at the time is associated with the character Yingying in the drama *Xixiang ji* (*Romance of the Western*

*Chamber*) by Wang Shifu (fl.1250–1300). Both Yingying and her maid are clad in white mourning garments following the death of her father when she is spotted by scholar Zhang. The vision of her reminds him of the goddess Guanyin,<sup>62</sup> the goddesses of the Xiang River and the goddess of the moon, Chang'e.<sup>63</sup> Whilst the overwhelming image is one of romance, a strong sense of virtue and propriety is also evoked.

Purportedly historical texts reveal similar associations of plain white clothing with female virtues. The local gazetteers from this period are filled with commemorations of women who are praised for their fidelity and genteel behaviour precisely because of their adoption of such mourning garments. Many of them were prepared to go further than the ritual works prescribed and so are held up for acclaim. For example, the wife of Wang Run and daughter of an Assistant Minister at the Court of Official Review, Mme Chen, remained in plain white clothing for the rest of her life after the demise of her husband.<sup>64</sup>

Other women were determined to go even further to demonstrate their commitment. For example, following the death of her fiancé, Sun Dengming, Pan Shenggu from Zhejiang was determined to serve as his widow. Denied this by her parents, she dirtied her face and donned white silk as a show of mourning. She then refused to eat meat and locked herself in her quarters when the family wanted to marry her off to a wealthy family.<sup>65</sup> The late Ming female visionary Tanyangzi (1558–1580)<sup>66</sup> also assumed the status of widow when her fiancé died despite resistance from her father. She had made a plain white silk garment and straw shoes which she wore, telling her parents, 'Although I was to have been his wife, out of concern for my parents, I will not seek death. Nonetheless, I wish to serve as his widow'.<sup>67</sup> Whether this idealized behaviour was as widespread as suggested is debatable; however, these reports do demonstrate a literati desire to inspire on a wider scale similarly virtuous behaviour that was outwardly demonstrated by the adoption of mourning garments.

Despite their generally immoral behaviour, many of the female characters in the novel *Jin Ping Mei* who lose their husbands usually do wear mourning garments to varying degrees, and their use of mourning garments is frequently used by others to assess their moral character and respectability. In Chapter 84, for example, the principal wife Wu Yueniang makes a pilgrimage to Taishan following the death of her husband, and while fleeing villains who had attempted to rape her, is captured by bandits. Song Jiang, who later becomes the bandit leader, sees Yueniang:

wearing a mourning chignon on her head and clothes of plain white silk, of dignified bearing and refined manners. She certainly was not the wife of a commoner and had to be from the inner quarters of a rich household.<sup>68</sup>

Yueniang introduces herself as 'a chaste widow'. From this first glimpse of Yueniang, Song Jiang pretends to know her and her husband. He asks for her release and even vows to avenge Yueniang's maltreatment.<sup>69</sup> It appears that Yueniang's state of mourning has the power to incite Song Jiang, a man well-

versed in the Confucian code, to jump to her defence even though he has never previously set eyes upon her.<sup>70</sup>

Another character in the *Jin Ping Mei* with apparently more honourable intentions in wearing mourning is Han Aijie, erstwhile prostitute-lover of Chen Jingji. She is wearing a mourning outfit complete with head-dress when visiting Chen Jingji's grave and is seen by the two women who formerly lived with him – Pang Chunmei, his wealthy keeper and lover, and Ge Cuiping, his widow.<sup>71</sup> The fact that she is mourning startles the two women and it is the sincerity of her mourning that forces Chunmei and Cuiping to accept her into their home. Ironically, a former prostitute displays the devotion and purity of moral purpose one would expect from a wife. Yet, historical courtesans were similarly concerned with creating self-images of virtue in mourning. In a strange anecdote from the earlier Tianshun (1457–1464) period, a singing girl is praised as 'righteous' (*yi*) for appearing in the plain white of mourning shortly before the death of a former client.<sup>72</sup> Such an account suggests that prostitutes could be credited with more positive moral motives if they conformed to the accepted mode of clothing behaviour during mourning. Evidently, such displays were a widely used measure of a person's conduct, and clothing expectations were supposedly translated into corresponding clothing behaviour.<sup>73</sup>

Many women could not, though, expect to complete the prescribed mourning period due to financial reasons, and others may not have wanted to for personal reasons. In the *Jin Ping Mei*, both Li Ping'er and Pan Jinlian are guilty of abandoning their mourning garments before the three years of mourning are up, in order to remarry as quickly as possible. For Pan Jinlian it is the temptation of a better standard of living in the arms of an infinitely more appealing man.<sup>74</sup> For the already wealthy Li Ping'er, Ximen Qing is clearly the more attractive husband.<sup>75</sup> Women who were able to wear their mourning garments for the required period, and even beyond, would have been perceived as upholders of the moral tradition; however, they were also probably more financially secure than most. Those who were unable to complete the mourning period for their husband were liable to be perceived as immoral and/or dependent on others. As such, virtue was in practice the privilege of the financial élite and this alone may have made the use of simple and unadorned mourning-style clothing a more appealing method of displaying one's gentility.

### Gentility by association

Though the adoption of mourning clothing by women became a dominant symbol of female chastity and morality, and thereby gentility through dignity and respectability, more public displays of mourning could also link the aspiring genteel to practices that were often the prerogative of the wealthy. Just as sumptuary laws theoretically regulated the clothing and ornamentation people wore, the way in which people performed rites also varied according to rank. Ritual reinforced and reaffirmed social differences and status differences through the way in which participants wore special forms of dress and acted in special ways.<sup>76</sup>

In the *Jin Ping Mei* Li Ping'er's elaborate funeral typifies the Ximen household's attitude to ostentatious behaviour. First there is the rush to make the ladies' mourning outfits of hemp cloth.<sup>77</sup> Then, the funeral procession creates a stir in the whole of the town:

There was a great din of carriages and horses and the streets of the town were packed with people. More than one hundred sedan chairs carried the female relatives of the household and there were several tens of chairs just for procuresses and singsong girls.<sup>78</sup>

And this was all for a low-ranking concubine excluded from the classical mourning grades. Although many scholars dismiss the descriptions in the novel as exaggerated or ironic, there is support for such large-scale events in information from contemporary observers. Literatus Zhang Dafu (fl. late 15th–early 16th century) noted that over 1200 mourners were present for the funeral of his wife in 1606.<sup>79</sup> The late sixteenth-century missionary Matteo Ricci (1552–1610)<sup>80</sup> reports:

There really is nothing in which these people are more religiously scrupulous than in their devotion to the details of parental funeral rites, in wearing mourning garments ... and in furnishing a casket or a funeral bier of costly material. In general one would say that their obsequies are *too pompous and frequently surpass their means*.<sup>81</sup>

Death ceremonies, as well as marriage ceremonies, became increasingly elaborate during the sixteenth century. Shen Bang (fl. 1550–1596),<sup>82</sup> a Beijing magistrate, noted in the early 1590s that the cost of funerals could run into thousands of taels,<sup>83</sup> while Lü Kun asserted that such conspicuous consumption and partying at funerals in an attempt to forget one's sorrow was 'an evil crime!'<sup>84</sup>

In the *Jin Ping Mei*, not only immediate family, friends and household servants of the bereaved wear mourning dress, but prostitutes also compete to display the greatest mourning, as they process along the streets of the town. Following Ping'er's death, for example, the prostitute Zheng Aiyue appears at the Ximen household wearing 'a robe of white cloud-silk which opened down the front, a blue silk tabby skirt, and on her head a pearl headband and white drawnwork kerchief'. The next day, she makes an offering and Wu Yueniang gives her a bolt of thin silk to be made into a mourning outfit. Two other prostitutes also make small offerings and Yueniang presents them all with a bolt of thin silk designed to be made into mourning headbands and belts. Later, the singing girls all troop to the funeral wearing the same 'white damask robe which buttoned up the front over a blue satin skirt'.<sup>85</sup> Scholar-official Lü Kun strongly advised against inviting people such as prostitutes to funerals, for their presence would only made a mockery of the sentiments embodied in the ritual,<sup>86</sup> the very sentiments expressed in the highly satirical *Jin Ping Mei* as the singing girls try to profit by association from the funeral.

Collective display was an important part of ritual and in Chinese society this was especially true with mourning rites. Funerals and weddings were public events which involved elaborate processions that were watched and judged by others. Furthermore, the gathering of a group of kinsmen and associates served as a public display of solidarity and power.<sup>87</sup> Historical geographer Wang Shixing (1547–1598),<sup>88</sup> in his comments on popular customs in Henan province, observed that it was more likely that gentry families could gather as kinship groups, while the commoners would be restricted to close-knit family groups.<sup>89</sup> Therefore, public participation in mourning ritual could theoretically be adopted by social climbers who wished to associate themselves with those traditionally considered superior to them.

Women may also have contributed to the collective presence. The to-ing and fro-ing of the women of all classes in the *Jin Ping Mei* as they pay visits of condolence becomes quite frenetic. While it had generally been assumed that only men went out to pay condolences, according to the 1579 gazetteer it appears to have been a Hangzhou custom that the women, too, entertained those who had come to pay respects. This was considered acceptable if it was between relatives of the five mourning grades, but these women were also doing it for other relatives and friends. Whole groups of them would go out in their full attire, acting ‘just like the wives of ministers’. The compiler of the gazetteer was so concerned with this state of affairs that he urged for it to be prevented.<sup>90</sup>

Mourning ritual was clearly linked to status; but how this was manifested appears to have differed according to perceptions of gentility. The pressure for some women to demonstrate status materially using symbols of rank or restricted materials, either during mourning proper or while paying condolences like the women from Hangzhou, must have been great. In the *Jin Ping Mei*, Wu Yueniang wears clothes according to her rank in order to celebrate the remarriage of her deceased husband’s concubine Meng Yulou, despite being in the latter stages of mourning for her husband. Her head is described as being decorated with a full set of pearl and kingfisher feather ornaments; she is clad in a scarlet gown and skirt decorated with the ‘hundred flower motif’ with a gilt belt.<sup>91</sup> Later on in the novel, Yueniang resumes her mourning garb, described as a five-arch gold head-dress, a smattering of gold and kingfisher feather ornaments, white damask robe on top and kingfisher blue satin skirt on the bottom, and she maintains such mourning for the remainder of the novel.<sup>92</sup>

Those in mourning were supposed to restrict their activities for the entire mourning period. However, the late Ming writer Xie Zhaozhe (1567–1624)<sup>93</sup> reported that few in Jiangnan were sticking to the restrictions on festivities for the first 100 days of mourning, and instead were going to parties, birthdays and festivals. Xie questioned their motives as they changed out of mourning robes into more auspicious clothing.<sup>94</sup> The Zheng family instructions also reveal that some may have been tempted to wear more auspicious dress during mourning.<sup>95</sup> But the regulations did not force women to remain in the same clothing throughout the mourning period. Those who faced three years of mourning could, after one year, cut their long skirt so it did not drag on the ground. After two years, they could

wear post-mourning garments that entailed head-dresses, combs and chignon frets. Their shoes could be yellow, blue, black or white, but they could not wear red, gold, pearls or embroidery.<sup>96</sup>

Furthermore, mourning garments were not immutable. One commentary to the prescriptions on female ornaments elucidates a new aspect to Ming practice:

Nowadays it is the custom for women in mourning to use a white cloth on top of bound hair; this is called a 'filial band' and it has the same significance. However, others add it on top of a chignon without either binding up the hair or letting the rest hang down behind.<sup>97</sup>

We can assume, therefore, that mourning garments may not have been in strict accordance with the prescriptive guidelines in this period and that concepts of fashionability were creeping into this most regulated of rituals – the more frequent mention of white silk over hemp cloth in many contemporary sources, even those more didactic in intent, for example, is indicative of the increased availability of silk textiles at this time.

Although the *Jin Ping Mei* satirizes the behaviour of its female protagonists, it is not inconceivable that it reflects more general perceptions of the changing sartorial behaviour of women in mourning during the late Ming. In Chapter 75, for example, the ladies of the Ximen household go to visit an acquaintance. From the dialogue at this point in the narrative, it appears as if the women feel that by this time the mourning period for Li Ping'er should be over. However, Ximen Qing insists that the women still wear pale colours for her as a mark of respect. The women agree on an outfit comprising:

white chignon frets and pearl headbands, covered with a kerchief of kingfisher-blue damask washed with gold. On their heads were full sets of pearl and kingfisher feather ornaments. They wore pink button-up robes in satin woven with gold, and blue satin skirts.<sup>98</sup>

As principal wife, Yueniang is singled out for attention:

a white crepe head-dress with gold arches, a sealskin cap, pearl headband and pearl hoop earrings. On top she wore brown figured brocade robe decorated with a badge of rank, and below a sand-green brocade skirt.<sup>99</sup>

These outfits are highly reminiscent of the more 'auspicious clothing' condemned by Xie Zhaozhe and are not dissimilar to the descriptions given of everyday wear in the novel – we only know that these are considered a form of mourning here due to the stated aim of the women to wear these colours as a mark of respect.

By the late Ming, contemporary reports suggest that pale colours such as pink, peach, and even white, were popular, not just for mourning purposes, but for everyday wear too.<sup>100</sup> The *Jin Ping Mei* and other sources reveal that clothing usually associated with the latter stages of the mourning period may have actually

become considered stylish by those for whom the most frugal of clothing held little or no social reward, but for whom the pursuit of gentility through material means was significant. We can assume, therefore, that despite the very best efforts by some women, and those who wrote about them, to refashion the concept of sartorial gentility in the direction of simplicity, the emulative nature of fashion continued to blur the boundaries between them and the aspirational genteel from whom they wished to be differentiated.

## **Conclusion**

The late Ming sources considered here reveal a more active role for women in the creation and definition of clothing culture than had generally been assumed and the pursuit of gentility was a significant motivator in clothing selection. There are no extant writings authored by women dedicated, in whole or in part, to the subject of female clothing and, therefore, it is difficult to discern female attitudes to gentility as expressed through clothing. Moreover, those writings by men that focus on this subject were often composed with a didactic agenda in mind. Even the most general of descriptions are often followed by a criticism of the general trend for changing styles or of certain items in particular. Although both men and women are targeted for criticism, discussions on women are very much related to a decline in virtue. In the minds of such observers, virtue was a concept intimately linked with genteel female clothing behaviour.

In theory, the status of the husband gave a woman the right to wear certain types of clothing that conveyed gentility; however, the link between status and gentility as expressed through clothing and ornamentation was being eroded by the dual forces of fashion and a perceived moral decline. Those aspiring to gentility appear to be under the impression that the adoption of dress associated with the gentry class could result in the accrual of an equal amount of social cachet. Not so, argued contemporary writers such as Gu Qiyuan, Lü Kun and Chen Jiru, who perceived gentility as something more than outward appearance alone.<sup>101</sup> Those women attempting to distance themselves from such social climbers through the use of increasingly luxurious dress were condemned equally, for their morals now resembled those of the lower classes.

In the minds of observers and commentators, inner beauty became linked to plain, modest attire and those women who adopted such clothing were extolled as exemplars in the local and wider community. However, the appeal of more frugal dress was limited to those who would gain socially from its use. It was only through mourning ritual that women of less secure status could gain social benefits from the use of less ornamented wear, though their behaviour could still be tempered by both considerations of status projection and fashionable influences. Whether certain modes of clothing were considered genteel or not was certainly a matter of perception.

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## Notes

- 1 On Gu Qiyuan, see *DMB* 734–6.
- 2 Gu Qiyuan 1987: 2.67.
- 3 Gu Qiyuan 1987: 1.25–6.
- 4 On Lü Kun, see *DMB* 1006–10.
- 5 Lü Kun 1994: preface 1a–b.
- 6 Lü Kun 1995: 2.14a.
- 7 Gu Qiyuan 1987: 2.68.
- 8 For a detailed and informative study on the economic and social changes occurring during this period, see Brook 1999: 153–237.
- 9 For a more detailed analysis of bourgeois attempts to adopt or adapt the more lavish and often legally restricted clothing of the upper classes during the late Ming and the reasons behind this, see Dauncey 2003. This chapter follows on from that article by focusing on the counter-phenomenon.
- 10 Literature can be particularly useful here as not only can it reveal nuanced or even contrasting perceptions of social behaviour, it can also illuminate the more mundane aspects of life that are often overlooked by texts traditionally considered more orthodox. Paola Zamperini, for example, discusses the way in which the depiction of clothing in late Qing vernacular novels reveals and assists in the construction of ‘social, gender, national, and racial identities’ (Zamperini 2003: 302).
- 11 Barnard 1996: 31–43; Rosenfeld and Plax 1977: 24–31; Kuper 1973: 348–67.
- 12 Currie 2000: 157–78; Craik 1994: 4–5, 46. Marilyn J. Horn argues that, as values and goals are not directly observable, people reveal these through clothing choices (Horn 1968: 68).
- 13 For art, see Ribeiro 1998: 315–26; Hollander 1978: 454. For the novel and other texts, see Roche 1994: 118.
- 14 The eurocentric notion that the term ‘fashion’ refers exclusively to capitalist societies where clothing behaviour is highly economic in nature and linked to issues of production, circulation and distribution has now been rejected (see, for example, Cannon 1998: 23–9; Ko 1997: 7). Although it is clear that an extensive fashion system did not appear in China during the late imperial period, possibly due to the lack of a social environment in which women were on display (Elvin 1984: 267–8; Adshead 1997: 75), a burgeoning fashion consciousness was visible as early as the late-sixteenth century (Brook 1999: 219–22) and this became more pronounced down the centuries with increased industrialization and contact with the West (Finnane 2003: 400–5).
- 15 *Da Ming huidian*, *juan* 60–61. Also detailed in the later *Ming shi*, *juan* 65–8.
- 16 Ye Mengzhu 1981: 8.175.
- 17 In societies where wealth is a way of gaining power and respect it is generally the case that the higher the rank the more elaborate and expensive is the ornamentation. Appearance and investment are closely connected, as is most clearly demonstrated by the fact that expensive ornamentation such as jewellery can be easily carried and displayed. See, for example, Ebin 1979: 74; Flügel 1950: 29–33.



- 18 On authorship and dating of *Jin Ping Mei*, see Plaks 1987: 55–72.
- 19 For further information on the specifics of female symbols of status, see Dauncey 2003. For one prominent example, see Lanling Xiaoxiaosheng, *Jin Ping Mei cihua* 15.4a [hereafter *JPMCH*]. A contemporary writer Tian Yiheng (1524–74?) also reports that even servant girls were dressing or being dressed in fine silks and tussorees, and that singing girls considered brocade and embroidered clothing quite mediocre (Tian Yiheng 1985: 20.9b).
- 20 ‘Neizhuang’, in Ye Mengzhu 1981, 8.178. This is also argued by Adshead, who suggests that female servants and their mistresses were in a much better position to exchange information about fashions (Adshead 1997: 25). For other possible methods of transmission between women, in particular, see Dauncey 2003; Wu Renshu 1999: 74–9.
- 21 The pattern emerging was strikingly similar to what had happened in Europe some years before. There, as the bourgeoisie began to emulate the styles of dress and ornamentation popular among the nobility, the upper classes had to develop new styles in an attempt to maintain sartorial distinctions (Breward 1995: 131). The more ostentatious the display in dress and ornamentation, the more power they were perceived to hold. See, for example, Lipovetsky 1994: 22, 30–1; Wilson 1995: 23–6. Wu Renshu outlines the reactions of the Chinese gentry to such phenomena (Wu Renshu 1999: 79–94).
- 22 For examples of Ming silk textile developments, see Chen Juanjuan 1986: 79–86; Chen Juanjuan 1987: 78–87.
- 23 For a discussion of the changes in merchant status and influence, see the comprehensive study by Angela Hsi (Hsi 1972).
- 24 On Xu Wei, see *DMB* 609–12.
- 25 Xu Wei 1983: 8.309.
- 26 Gu Qiyuan 1987: 7.293.
- 27 On Chen Jiru, see *ECCP* 83–4.
- 28 Chen Meigong 1936: 2.15
- 29 Cited in Qu Xuanying 1985: 1.111.
- 30 Chen Meigong 1936: 16.285–6. Sentiments echoed in Ye Mengzhu 1981: 8.178, and Gu Qiyuan 1987: 1.26.
- 31 Elvin 1989: 266.
- 32 *Kongzi jiyu, xia*. 1b.
- 33 This was the title for mothers and wives of civil officials of the seventh grade. It was also a more general term of respect for women.
- 34 Chen Meigong 1936: 16.286.
- 35 On He Qiaoyuan, see *DMB* 507–9.
- 36 He Qiaoyuan 1971: 2.12b–13a.
- 37 ‘Fengtu,’ in *Shexian zhi*. Cited in Tang Lixing 1991: 6. See also Wang Daokun 1986: 83.16a.
- 38 For similar criticisms of the merchant classes in Europe, see Breward 1995: 28.
- 39 Zheng Dahe 1994: 25a.
- 40 On the Banana Garden poetry club, see Chapter 4 in this volume.
- 41 On Yu Huai, see *ECCP* 942.
- 42 Yu Huai 1980: 166.
- 43 He Qiaoyuan 1971: 2.12b–13a.
- 44 On Feng Menglong, see *DMB* 450–3.
- 45 Feng Menglong 1986: 587.
- 46 Chen Meigong 1936: 16.291–2.
- 47 On Huang Liuhong, see Djang 1984: 4–12.
- 48 Huang Liuhong 1997: 31.11a.
- 49 On Qian Gu, see *DMB* 236–7.
- 50 Yu Huai 1980: 176.

- 51 Lü Kun 1995: 4.88a.
- 52 Fan Lian 1984: 2.2a.
- 53 *JPMCH* 11.2a.
- 54 Carlitz 1991: 117–52; T'ien Ju-k'ang 1988: 39; Elvin 1984: 111–52.
- 55 See 'Lienü', in *Ming shi, juan* 301–3.
- 56 Knoblock 1994: 49.
- 57 On Qiu Jun, see *DMB* 249–52.
- 58 'Sangli', in Qiu Jun, 1996–7: 4.57a–59a. Garment also set out in Ming encyclopaedia; see, for example, 'Yifu' in Wang Qi 1970: 3.15a.
- 59 Flügel 1950: 75.
- 60 Arthur 2000: 1.
- 61 Although men also wore mourning garments for prescribed periods, much less attention is paid to their appearance in contemporary texts. This may be due in part to the increased number of writings on female mourning habits during this time, but it is also due to the fact that women were more often identified and judged by their choice of clothing in general, hence the frequent and often copious descriptions of female clothing and ornamentation in other types of text, literature in particular.
- 62 West and Idema 1991: 87–9.
- 63 West and Idema 1991: 204.
- 64 *Huzhoufu zhi* 81.4a. See similar sentiments in *Huzhoufu zhi* 81.3b.
- 65 'Lienü ji', in He Qiaoyuan 1971: 2.14a–14b.
- 66 On Tanyangzi, see *DMB* 1425–7.
- 67 'Tanyang dashi zhuan', in Wang Shizhen 1970: 78.4a.
- 68 *JPMCH* 84.9a.
- 69 *JPMCH* 84.9b.
- 70 Clearly Song Jiang is working from the same set of ritual references, whereas the villains who attempted to rape Yueniang had no respect for her state of mourning and saw it more as a sign of weakness. For perceiver variables, see Horn 1968: 122–6.
- 71 *JPMCH* 99.11a.
- 72 'Yichang', in Lang Ying 1959: 51.748.
- 73 Horn 1968: 143–8.
- 74 Jinlian changes into colourful clothes to meet Ximen Qing. *JPMCH* 6.5a–b.
- 75 Ping'er changes into a lighter grade of mourning ahead of time. *JPMCH* 14.8b.
- 76 Leach 1976: 53–54. Ebrey 1991: 4–5.
- 77 *JPMCH* 63.7a.
- 78 *JPMCH* 65.5a.
- 79 'Jian guce', in Zhang Dafu 1935: 14.295.
- 80 On Matteo Ricci, see *DMB* 1137–44.
- 81 Gallagher 1953: 72. Emphasis my own.
- 82 On Shen Bang, see *DMB* 1183–7.
- 83 Shen Bang 1980: 194.
- 84 Lü Kun 1995: 3.34a–b.
- 85 *JPMCH* 63.9a–10b.
- 86 Lü Kun 1995: 4.87b.
- 87 Ebrey 1991: 68–77.
- 88 On Wang Shixing, see *DMB* 1405–6.
- 89 Wang Shixing 1981: 3.43.
- 90 'Fengsu zhi', in *Hangzhoufu zhi* 19.8a.
- 91 *JPMCH* 91.10a.
- 92 *JPMCH* 96.2a. The arch head-dress worn by Yueniang is an unusual item of head ornamentation and is only worn by those women of the highest or wealthiest status in the novel; see, for example, *JPMCH* 91.9a and 95.13a. As far as the prescriptive texts are concerned, this type of head-dress was used for men, the number of arches indicating status. However, in Wang Shizhen's biography of Tanyangzi 'Tanyangzi

dashi zhuan', it is reported that she dreamed of the Supreme Perfect One: 'Her beauty was extraordinary. On her head she wore a seven-ridged cap; on her feet were embroidered slippers' (Wang Shizhen 1970: 78.2b). This indicates that this head-dress may have been worn by men and women alike as an indication of status.

93 On Xie Zhaozhe, see *DMB* 546–50.

94 Xie Zhaozhe 1935: 14. 265.

95 Zheng Dahe 1994: 14b.

96 Qiu Jun 1996–7: 6.16b–19b.

97 Qiu Jun 1996–7: 4.57a–59a.

98 *JPMCH* 75.9a.

99 *JPMCH* 75.9a.

100 Li Yu 1985: 3.123.

101 On Chen Jiru and his manuals of literati life, see Chapter 9 by Ōki in this volume.

## 8 The aspirant genteel

### The courtesan and her image problem

*Chloë Starr*

The nineteenth century is not an obvious stamping ground for genteel courtesans. Dorothy Ko writes of the vulgarization of courtesan culture in that era, when ‘not only did the courtesan turn out to be a shadow of her glamorous past, [but] the Scholar himself was at best an impersonator of a literatus’.<sup>1</sup> Yet, in the series of nineteenth-century texts that Lu Xun labelled *xiaxie xiaoshuo*,<sup>2</sup> and we might term red-light fiction, a rich vein runs which celebrates the high-brow, looks back to the past, and beyond towards the ideal. It is not the only reading, but even in the world of protection money, loan sharks and opium raids of the more realist works we see glimpses of longings, and of genteel desires. This vein needs exploring: were the women aspiring to commoner (*liang*) morality, a gentry lifestyle, or some imperial vision of ideal womanhood? Expressions of gentility within the courtesan profession might, perversely, delineate more sharply the values of mainstream society.

Qing courtesan houses are ostensibly the polar opposite of gentility, purveyors of *xu qing jia ai*, empty emotions and false love, but this proves to be as stereotypical a view as the fleeced and the jilted lover whose constant lament it is. Celebration of the beauty and talent of procured women – and one’s relationship with them – may be, by the nineteenth century, cultural nostalgia born of frustration and fear, but provides a sustained view of the (unattainable) ideal. This ideal reveals the fictional epitome of gentility: for males, a beautiful, talented woman companion at a feast of wit and food, for women, appreciation, and a secure, secluded relationship with a teacher-muse.

Female longing and male connoisseurship form a complementary discourse on the genteel in novels depicting the world of brothels. Women abound who seek to escape, to better themselves, to model themselves on wives and virtuous women. Through their clients the courtesan women were in contact with the parallel world of wifely finery, and time spent in public on pleasure-boat outings and at garden parties made the disparity acute. Males searching for their poetic muse and aesthetic beauty are plentiful in the more romantic strain of courtesan novel.<sup>3</sup> I have written elsewhere of the characterization of male clients in red-light novels, and this essay concentrates on the changing notions of gentility in the life of the courtesan herself. Across the range of works, the appreciation of courtesan women by men is a constant device, though the content of the evaluation may

shift from lute playing and poetic composition to more visceral criteria over the nineteenth century. The play between male and female voices with their differing aspirations provides much of the interest and narrative tension within the works, a tension often paralleled within a novel by the split between frame and narrative, between the voice of the prologue condemning brothel alliances and the much more understanding portrayal of women within the works.<sup>4</sup>

The text echoes these tensions: while historical studies have contended that courtesan culture was in terminal decline by the early nineteenth century, its literary representations in red-light novels began to alter significantly only at the turn of the twentieth. There had certainly been negative depictions of the women, their industry, and their patrons prior to this, but in the 1890s low-life became the prime focus of red-light fiction. The elegance of the physical text of these novels (with fine line drawings and fragrant paper) was lost in tandem with the demise of the poetry, song, and riddles that had formed an integral part of more gentrified earlier works.

David Der-wei Wang has written in another context that a body of late Qing texts including sexual fantasies and chivalric romances (which between them cover most of the novels discussed here) served ‘as an incubator for the political ideas, behavioural codes, emotive output and epistemological notions that would enrich the discourse of the modern in subsequent ages’.<sup>5</sup> Though he is making the point to argue for an earlier, and more native, modernity in Chinese literature, the notion that these ‘low-brow’ novels both formed, as well as reflected, changing behavioural and emotional codes is germane to gentility. Novelists played on the expectations of inverted social norms for courtesan women to provoke surprising insights into new gender roles. To stay abreast with social mores, one had to be up with latest trends, and if the emerging social scene towards the end of the century meant that highbrow culture now took form in once-despised media or forms of behaviour, then adaptation might prove necessary. This essay argues that certain novelists accomplished this feat for their readers: while turn of the century red-light novels have been read as parading a cast of ‘true to life’ women, cheating and duping their lovers, subtle new forms of genteel behaviour emerge in their relationships.

### **Genteel settings**

Elegance and gaiety are best displayed in public contexts: at festivals, on pleasure boats, at banquets, and such group gatherings fill many a chapter in red-light novels. The banquet scenes which fill mid- to late nineteenth-century courtesan novels display a high level of similarity and repetitiveness, with stock features and even phrases repeated verbatim.<sup>6</sup> They involve drinking, lute playing, and forfeit games, where the courtesans usually end up imbibing on behalf of their half-stewed clients. Poetry abounds in the earlier, more ‘romantic’ novel settings, as most of the drinking games require poetic composition, usually on the theme of Tang verse or quotations from the Four Books.<sup>7</sup> The mode of narrative itself is often highly ornate; these static scenes of high pursuits are set off from the other

chapters of works by the form of language used. A large birthday party for one of the boy actors in *Pinhua baojian* (*A Precious Mirror for Judging Flowers*), Chen Sen's (c.1796–1870) crypto-courtesan novel of 1849,<sup>8</sup> begins:

The Yingzhou men of letters first assemble at the Dragon Gate  
On Jade Island the crowds of Immortals  
Together faced the Golden Towers;  
With elegant thoughts and flowery speech,  
Pearls of the Nine Heavens all in profusion,  
Round faces and blossom cheeks:  
All around the caps and robes of office clear and distinct.<sup>9</sup>

Given that this is a gathering of young high-born boys and their boyfriends, bent on eating, drinking and flirting, the language is both poetic and ironic. The boys do nothing more active than lie around enjoying the atmosphere, being carefree and letting their emotions engage with the surrounds: the ability to delight in leisure pursuits is itself a marker of superior status. Those present inevitably decide that such a wonderful scene should be commemorated in verse, and commission one of the élite boys to paint a picture and pen an inscription to commemorate the *yaji*, elegant gathering. This suggestion is then overturned in favour of a group poetry effort, and couplets fill the next pages of text.

The writing of verse by the group and describing the group is an important feature of leisured gatherings. Poetry has various functions in red-light fiction, several of which are related to characterization, such as demonstrating intelligence in females, or emotional capacity in males. As a 'high' pursuit, it distinguishes characters, and is often used to frame gatherings and narrative depictions of a genteel nature.<sup>10</sup> Verse acts as a means of communication between characters, a distancing technique in narration, and allows characters to display erudition. In the earlier works, this is a clear aspect of gentility for both genders. Chapter 38 of *Pinhua Baojian*, for example, is sustained by an extended discussion of literary topics in a question and answer session chaired by a scholar introduced late in the novel, and is almost entirely incidental to plot. The suggestion has been repeatedly made that Wei Xiuren's (1818–1873) novel *Huayue hen* (*Traces of Flowers and the Moon*, printed 1888) was written around the poetry he wished to publish, with the number of poems in the work deemed 'excessive' by critics.<sup>11</sup> While much verse was created to fit the narrative of red-light works, citation from extant poetry texts is also woven into the plot of a novel such as *Fengyue meng* (*Dream of Romance*, printed 1886), and characters often quote from contemporary lyrics. Although one modern critic has said that verse in a selection of red-light works is 'of low interest, vulgar in thought, negative, pessimistic and cynical ...'. the authors of a selection of novels still believed poetry to be an uplifting enhancement to their works.<sup>12</sup>

The two terms used in poems in *Pinhua baojian* depicting genteel gatherings are *ji qun xian* and *hui qun xian*: the boys and boy actors are metaphorically depicted as flocks of immortal birds, or as worthies, fairy crowds. They are raised

in stature by analogy, beautified and glorified in their corporate splendour. This contrasts markedly with nineteenth-century Western crowd terminology, with its lowering of the status of the individual, its dark forces and animal metaphors.<sup>13</sup> It also contrasts strikingly with the social and legal status (as opposed to fictive ideal) of boy actors in Qing China. Following the Yongzheng (1723–36) reforms of 1723, which removed legally denigrated status from prostitutes, entertainers and actors, and upgraded them to commoner status – and the requirements of commoner morality – anyone continuing to act in these professions was committing a criminal offence, along with their clients and pimps.<sup>14</sup>

Such matters rarely concern the truly genteel. As has been noted for earlier historical figures who consorted with actors, only those who were secure in their status could risk the association – which made fraternization ‘a mark of distinction that signalled their membership in a cosmopolitan stratum of the mid-seventeenth century *élite*’.<sup>15</sup> While it was illegal for officials to entertain boy actors or sleep with prostitutes throughout the Ming and Qing, such acts were prohibited for all status groups in the eighteenth century. As Sommer notes, however, *élite* courtesans and clients are notable for their absence in the legal records of such cases.<sup>16</sup> The social mixing that large groups permit is seen as a blessing for the lower classes in *Pinhua Baojian*, something for them to aspire to, the aura of the elect encompassing them through their presence. At one great gathering of amassed flowers, one of the guests in self-congratulatory mode explains how good it is that the boy actors can ‘fly on the tail of the steed’, that is, attach themselves to the good and great.

Elegant Chinese gatherings require detailed planning and preparation, and the guest lists, seating plans and setting of a party can take several paragraphs to describe. When Meixiang, a young actor and the delight of the central protagonist Ziyu, is about to celebrate his birthday, the owner of the garden where the gathering is to take place is pleased and relieved that there is an abundance of orchids in flower, and the peonies and crab-apples are in blossom.<sup>17</sup> Those present would appreciate such things.

Gathered elegance and beauty can, if not contained, create undesirable effects, as the following description of a pleasure-boat outing from the novel *Fengyue meng*, written around the same time in the 1840s, shows:

If you take a look at the pleasure boats coming through the sluice barriers at the Tianni gate, among them are those bringing courtesans, those with coiffured hair as well as women dressed up as men. With red dresses and green jackets, they powder their faces and apply lipstick. Some play tunes and some sing ditties, the lonely notes of the flutes spreading abroad, with a few happier tones emanating gracefully. All of this causes the youths’ hearts to itch in a way that is difficult to scratch. And so everyone agrees to hire a pair of pleasure boats and follow on behind. This at least is just passive gazing, and does no greater harm than wasting money on boats, drinking and food. What is most to be feared is that one of the group will be familiar with some of the household, and lead everyone else in, where they will drink a few rounds

of tea, gradually become familiarized, spread out banquets and brocade. No matter if someone is habitually a complete miser, those prostitutes inside the opium dens will entice you with their flowery talk and cheat your money into their pockets, duping you until you view your wife and children as strangers, and you suspect that these places can outlast heaven and earth.<sup>18</sup>

Gentility is a matter of perception, particularly where the artifice of the courtesan elegance is concerned. Tension arises in all but the most romantic strain of novel from the dual possibilities of the fallen woman as imperial ideal, or despised leech. This paradox works on several levels: before the eighteenth century, when the sex and entertainment industry was still run and regulated by the state, courtesans were of legally low status but moved among those of socially high status. By the nineteenth century, they were illegal, unchaste commoners, with a divided social position: high for individuals in the right circles above the reach of the law, glowing with a lingering aura of genteel entertainment, but also visible in court case records as poor, abducted, pimped and punished prostitutes.<sup>19</sup> Where once they had received *more* lenient treatment for their sex acts than would have commoners for the same offences, now their livelihoods were punished in terms of acts of adultery, with statutory divorce for proven offenders. The contradiction of elite males refusing to acknowledge the vulgar origins of their objects of desire has already been noted for the eighteenth century; a refusal which played into clients' visions of themselves as rescuing heroes.<sup>20</sup>

Males in red-light fiction are trapped in this foolish bind, wanting women to be beautiful, talented and desirable, and at the same time vilifying them for extortion and betrayal. Women are both unattainable in their beauty, worthy of monetary sacrifice, and anti-filial seductresses out to ruin and destroy. The tension points to disparity between imagination and experience, the mythic ideal of the courtesan lover versus the perceived reality of entrapment and snaring, the desire to associate oneself with the lifestyle of a Li Bai versus the fear of syphilis or legal reprisal. Throughout the course of novels such as *Fengyue meng* it becomes apparent that the fictive frame allows each to find what he seeks: those who show women affection and seek love find respect and commitment, those who perceive the women to be rogues find themselves seduced and cheated.

In the 1892 novel *Haishanghua liezhuan*, scenic description of an outing to a Shanghai park, the Ming Yuan, appears to take its cue from earlier red-light works, albeit in a more modern, mixed-sex fashion:

Everyone was sitting or standing around, relaxing and enjoying themselves. The park lawn was as if embroidered; the double-flowered peaches were just beginning to blossom, and listening to the yellow linnets, every sound seemed to evoke the essence of spring in Jiangnan. On this pleasant Sunday with its clear skies, fresh air and gentle breezes, some had come to walk on the grass, some to stroll among the greenery, others to take part in purification rites, and yet others were out to admire the courtesans. Carriages rumbled past, horses neighing, thirty or forty rolling along in succession, their owners



all occupying seats in the pavilions and terrace restaurants. All you could see were hairpins and fine caps fluttering past, with guests coming and going in great numbers. As the fog of alcohol started to dissipate, the steaming tea fumes were beginning to rise: this was even busier than the quinquennial assembly in a Buddhist Paradise.<sup>21</sup>

Han Bangqing's prose echoes the elevated gatherings of earlier decades, taking in the landscape, conspicuous consumption, and the fine arts of the teahouse. The hyperbole of the last line gives the game away: this is parody. The self-congratulatory enjoyment of the genteel scene is rent asunder a few moments later, when one courtesan assails another in an unprovoked attack. The ensuing fight, which wrecks tables and chairs in the teahouse as well as leaving one of the girls bruised and bloodied, is not a skirmish, but a serious kicking, biting and punching, the pummelling raining 'blows to kill'.<sup>22</sup> Spectators, initially enthralled by the spectacle, rush to call waiters and police to intervene before the bloodshed escalates to murder. The description of scenic beauty has lulled the reader: it is now revealed as a passage to contrast with the *mêlée* that follows. The surface veneer of gentility among courtesans, suggests the writer, demands a closer look in the last days of the Qing.

### **Traditionally esteemed qualities**

Depictions of female courtesans in Qing fiction derive much from the Ming values of talent, virtue and beauty set on women's education.<sup>23</sup> It is not just in the 'romantic' stream of courtesan novel that Patrick Hanan describes<sup>24</sup> that the women are able to sing, play the lute and compose, but in these works they are more so; their talents praised and their worth dependent upon artistic ability. These women are the textual descendants of the *caizi jieren* ('scholar and beauty') females, the bold, erudite and resourceful women of the seventeenth-century novella who gain their perfect male match through intellect and canny ability, and of earlier scholar-courtesan sentimental literature.<sup>25</sup> In red-light novels such as *Qinglou meng* (*Dream of Green Mansions*, 1878) or *Pinhua baojian*, scenes of music and mirth-making recur every few chapters, with performances from all present to allow the display of talent.

Poetry and beauty are determinants of moral worth, as the courtesan provides the ideal companion for the man with aspiration but no inheritance.<sup>26</sup> In terms of beauty, the appreciation and ranking of courtesans is a major pastime for the males of mid-nineteenth-century novels. Even in a more 'realistic' work such as *Fengyue meng*, where the intellectual talents of the women were not their prime selling point, beauty is still a marker of esteem. In initial descriptions of each courtesan, the narrator of *Fengyue meng* notes their foot sizes. With bound feet ranging from three to four and a half inches, size is a clear index to desire. The young courtesan Yuexiang's first appearance in the novel illustrates the author's attention to detail in dress and adornment. She is stunningly beautiful, yet the description is one of artifice, an artifice which characterizes her and, as her client

Jia Ming would have it, her industry.<sup>27</sup> The repeated narrating of physical beauty shows desired qualities in the male imagination: foot size, hair design, elegance of ornament, and manner of walking all figure prominently. The competitive ranking of ‘flowers’ and the annual publication of ranked lists of beauties have been analysed by various commentators writing on historical as well as literary courtesans.<sup>28</sup> The jealousy and bitterness that the lists can provoke (usually among the women rather than their lovers, for whom the practice is more sport than cause for identity crisis) is amply demonstrated in sub-plots of the novels *Huayue hen* and *Qinglou meng*.

A caricature of the ideal leisured life with its constant female talent show is seen in the ultra-romantic *Qinglou meng*, where the main protagonist supports thirty-six courtesans before they begin to desert him or fade through illness or death. *Qinglou meng* may provide an extreme example of disparity in gender relations among the courtesan novels, but similar appreciation of genteel talent, such as the ranking of females in verse according to their beauty or talent, is seen in works like *Huayue hen* or *Pinhua baojian*. Song and dance performances affect league tables: in one banquet scene in Chapter 7 of *Qinglou meng* each courtesan is required to perform in turn, consuming several pages of text. In their initial contact with males, the women of the novel appear particularly self-effacing, especially as regards intellectual ability, but are later looked to as arbiters of literary composition. All but one or two of the courtesans in *Qinglou meng* can produce regulated classical poetry on demand. There are good grounds for questioning the closeness to reality of this fictional representation of literacy among courtesans, but from the standpoint of gentility, the correlation of representation with extratextual reality is relatively unimportant: the fictional ideal still stands.<sup>29</sup>

The presence of female characters who choose not to ascribe to these models of expected behaviour multiplies in novels from the 1890s onwards, and is seen clearly in such works as *Haishang hua liezhuan* or *Jiu wei gui* (*Nine-tailed Turtle*, 1906–10).<sup>30</sup> The reduction in talent and beauty quotient points to changing norms and representation: differing social circumstances and a shift in the locus of fictional gentility away from courtesans, even in their most idealized representations. Catherine Yeh has characterized the courtesans of pre-Qing literature as ‘being “sensitive and full of feelings”, or *duoqing*, intelligent, courageous, and imbued with sound judgment’, and of being associated with ‘the extraordinary’ (*qi*). The image was shattered in the nineteenth century by Shanghai novels which portrayed the courtesan as ‘neither fantastic nor romantic, neither sentimental nor idealistic’, but ‘a cunning, unscrupulous, at times base, and forever scheming woman with her eyes fixed only on her business enterprise and her own sense of power and fulfilment’.<sup>31</sup> While the generality of this character assassination might be contested, one certainty is that undesirable character traits contrast with, and reinforce, the notions of ‘good’ behaviour of earlier works, and highlight the moral probity of those players who maintain their dignity despite their circumstances. If gentility no longer implies silk and chiffon, poetry and lute-playing in the changed political world on the eve of the Boxer War, there is still the sense that morally right and decorous behaviour is discernible.

What that behaviour is not, is more easily defined and demonstrated. The traditional shrew finds its incarnation in several female figures in *Haishang hua liezhuan*, a novel which first appeared in serialized form in 1882 in a journal edited by its author, Han Bangqing.<sup>32</sup> Some women are truly demanding and unreasonable. Xuexiang, for example, demands instant attention and obedience from her lover Zhongying, retaining him at her beck and call. She insists on a constant veto over his movements, until he points out that even his wife is less attentive to him.<sup>33</sup> In the strident attitude of this young woman and in her speech we see the levels of bitter contempt that a reflective and uncowed courtesan can develop towards her enforced companions. In her aspirations for her own offspring, Xuexiang's vehemently anti-brothel stance is revealing: 'If a son that I'd brought up came and dallied in the brothels just like them – it would kill me!'<sup>34</sup> Though another courtesan present treats this as a joke and uses Xuexiang's outburst to goad her amour, the force of the insult derives from its implicit truth. It is difficult to construe Xuexiang's bossy and obstreperous attitude as stemming from anything other than her profound despising of the men around her. Her mixture of wheedling and pleading, coyness and adamancy demonstrate skilful manipulation of traditionally feminine wiles to her own ends.

Whether helping each other with their hair, engaged in mutual praise and self-modesty, or trying to save their sisters from having to deal with drunken males, women's dealings can have an altruistic quality which sets them apart from the male characters. Both female–female and male–female relationships have the potential for moments of equality, friendship and tenderness but also for power play, jealous rivalries and victimization, but relations among women have additionally in the novels a capacity for spontaneous and genuine friendship. Insecurity, however, breeds jealousy. The insecurity that characterizes women's relationships with men in red-light fiction goes a long way towards explaining patterns of behaviour in fragile relations. The jealousy displayed by female characters can have violent outworkings, such as the fight in the tea garden described above in Chapter 9 of *Haishang hua liezhuan*, provoked by one courtesan taking over the client of another. In such a public attack, a courtesan risked reputation among both groups. The power imbalance between courtesan and client exasperates the situation in all but the most tender long-term relationships where the male partner abnegates his perceived right to terminate the union at any point.

Justice meted out by male friendship groups towards female acquaintances can be fairly arbitrary, though a non-appearance at a previous party and an ill-temper are primary reasons for dropping a woman from the list. Not only did women have to submit to this rule, they had to do so graciously: 'If a courtesan has a temper, what sort of business is she going to do!' comments one old hand.<sup>35</sup> Condemnation of a courtesan extended to physical looks: one courtesan provokes extended comments and mirth by her sagging face and missing teeth.<sup>36</sup> The truism of the disparity in women wanting to be loved and respected for their feelings and intellect, and men assessing them in external physical terms, is borne out repeatedly in the novels. While its consequences may be unpalatable, the deep-seated fear of women is at least rational: if a woman loses a long-term client to a

rival, she loses her means of subsistence. The later works of red-light fiction from the turn of the century have forced a virtuous circle into a vicious one: violent and uncouth behaviour reinforces the impression that brothels are places to be avoided by genteel men and women, just as earlier novels had sold courtesan life as a genteel occupation through the lifestyles and airs of the protagonists.

### The genteel and the vulgar

The brief discussion above suggests that gentility should be seen as a trope of earlier red-light works, or confined to those of a more romantic nature, where poetic and musical talent were entwined with narrative structures. A more nuanced ideal, however, is presented in turn-of-the-century discussions, and is seen particularly in attitudes to behaviour and belongings, those twin facets of gentility as presented throughout this volume of essays. The novel *Haishanghua liezhuan*, studied by critics from contemporaries Hu Shi and Lu Xun through to Catherine Yeh and David Der-wei Wang in the present, presents a case study for exploring how subtle changes in representation take place to set up a dialectic between former ideals and new morality.

Both Yeh and Wang speak indirectly to the theme of gentility. For Yeh, the transformation of the courtesan and her fiction is a function of the new surrounds, and predicated on her symbiotic relationship with the urban space. Yeh has criticized David Wang for not appreciating the degree of characterization of Shanghai itself in the Shanghai-based red-light novels of the last decades of the Qing, but in highlighting the break with prior fiction that the new topos of the city brought, and the emergence of the scheming-businesswoman model of courtesan, risks obscuring greater continuities with previous red-light fiction. In terms of gentility, the city is best read not in terms of its anthropomorphism, but as the generative environment for emergent patterns of behaviour; the backdrop for the slight shifts – a hardening of attitudes, greater public visibility – against which the new ‘good’ is slowly defined. For David Wang, the narrative of a courtesan novel is itself pitted against ‘the forms of decent social and literary discourse’, characterized as it is by a rhetoric of excess, an exaggeration of the erotic and the ethical, as well as an exaggeration of textual form in lengthy narratives resistant to closure.<sup>37</sup> Within this schema of excess, *Haishang hua* stands out for Wang for the ordinariness of its characters, and for its subversion of excess. In noting that the courtesan cannot embody virtue, since she is trained to embody fickleness, and that a desiring love would jeopardize her livelihood, Wang foregrounds the crippling impossibility of red-light mores. Yeh and Wang’s assessments both assume that exaggeration and the parodic are the main modes of literary representation in red-light fiction. In *Haishang hua liezhuan*, any general trend to lyrical excess is not countered just by an anticipated surfeit of nastiness and anti-heroism, but by its constant disruption. The saccharine descriptions of earlier fictive courtesans are much tempered in Han’s work, but the countering of excess verve and beauty with an excess of mediocrity in males and of sullenness in females hides another facet, and in this is seen the kernel of genteel resistance.

The juxtaposition of the genteel and the vulgar has become the norm in late nineteenth-century Shanghai. Early on in *Haishang hua liezhuan*, Hong Shanqing visits Shuangzhu in one of his regular haunts. The girl comes in to serve, walking gracefully towards him:

Shuangzhu was also smiling, as she sat on a small stool in front of the couch, preparing a water pipe to give to Shanqing to smoke. Shanqing put out his hand to take it, and she said: ‘Don’t – I’m giving it to you.’ She put the mouth-piece of the hookah into his mouth, and he drew on it in one deep breath. Suddenly a burst of shouting and cursing came from the entrance, swarming into the sitting room, followed by thudding sounds of a fight breaking out.

Shanqing, startled, asked “What’s that?”

Shuangzhu replied ‘It’s A Jin and her lot – shouting all day and night without a break. Mind, it’s A Debao too’. Shanqing went over to the window to take a look out. The maid A Jin had seized her husband’s queue and was trying to pull him over, but could not get him to move. He clamped his hand on her chignon and leant on her, and she toppled straight over. She fell prostrate to the ground, and was struggling to get up, but was still shouting breathlessly ‘You’d hit me, would you?’ A Debao didn’t make a sound, but stood with his knee crooked, pressing down her shoulders, and, raising his fist, beat her like a drum from her shoulders down to her backside, hitting her so hard she squealed like a pig.

Shuangzhu couldn’t take any more, and shouted out of the window: ‘What are you playing at? For crying shame...!’

Downstairs others also chimed in, shouting at them to stop, and at that point A Debao finally released his foot. Shuangzhu guided Shanqing’s arm around and turned him away, saying with a smile: ‘Don’t worry about them’, as she handed over the hookah for him to smoke.<sup>38</sup>

The passage deftly exposes certain of the tensions inherent in urban brothel life. In earlier novels such as *Pinhua baojian*, the only characters to indulge in public fisticuffs were the low-born, a socially distinct group separated in the flow of the narrative from the main protagonists. In *Qinglou meng*, published just a decade earlier than *Haishang hua*, such a breach of the peace would be unthinkable in the sheltered setting of the household; the most threatening scene in that novel is the suicide threat of one of the girls. Hong Shanqing’s shock at the aural disturbance, and the intrusion of the outside world into his relationship with Shuangzhu, parallel the reader’s surprise at the scene, and point to a disruption in expectations of the new-era red-light novel. That Shuangzhu tries to steer him away from the window, and encourages him to ignore the tiff reveals one of the main ways characters deal with the unpalatable eruption of new vulgarity: by studied obliviousness.

By the 1890s, it is not only fighting that has slipped into the public arena: sexual horseplay too has been driven down the character scale to the central protagonists of novels, no longer aspirant scholars, but middle men preoccupied with money

and pleasure. In *Haishang hua*, second-class courtesans are now frequented by characters with less cash than their friends, and shady alleys obscure entrances to street-walker establishments. Expectations of behaviour are a far cry from the norms of both the higher establishments and of earlier texts, and serve to highlight the mores of those not from the upper echelons:

Zhang Shou saw lamplight coming out from a side room, so without any hesitation barged straight into the room, with Lai An following on. Someone was boring their way out through the curtain of the great bed, clapping his hands and stamping his feet with hoots of laughter. They saw that it was Xu Maorong. Zhang Shou and Lai An said in unison: 'We're disturbing you – very sorry!' The maid behind them also laughed out loud: 'I knew that Master Xu had disappeared, but here he is in bed'.

Xu Maorong lit the opium lamp on the couch and invited Zhang Shou to smoke. Zhang Shou told Lai An to go ahead and smoke, while he pulled apart the curtains round the bed and climbed straight up. There was a sound of a mass of twisting and squirming, and a voice shouted from within: 'What you playing at? Don't you ever stop?' The maid hurried over and warned him, 'Mr Zhang, don't.'<sup>39</sup>

The breakdown of the courtesan ideal at the end of the nineteenth-century reflects back onto the literature of the whole prior system, questioning its representation. Where genteel arts are maintained, this is now despite the situation, not as emblematic of it. Self-conscious awareness of the genteel has largely gone from characters' lives; what remains are the habits and outward form of a life dedicated to the muses. The absence of poetry and self-reflexive scribblings on temple walls that characterized the plots of earlier novels signal not just a changed mode of characterization, but of life, too. In this sense, a work like *Haishanghua liezhuan* presents the demise of gentility in society. In the scene following the fight between the maid and her husband Worth, a servant prepares tea and hot towels for the guest. The ceremonies of courtesan life continue, while all around are wife-beating and curses. Clients and courtesans are complicit in maintaining the front of gentility. In the lower-class establishments, rituals might be even more marked, formality a substitute for genuine graces. When one first-class courtesan visits her elder sister in a second-class establishment, she is irritated and embarrassed by the level of attention her sister pays to the client she has taken along for company:

Aizhen had offered Xiao Yun some snacks and fruit, and wanted to heat up some opium for him. Xiao Yun said, 'There's really no need. I'm not smoking.' Aizhen went and pulled out a drawer in her dressing table, and took out a bowl of rose preserve. She plucked out a silver hair pin and inserted it into the bowl, inviting Xiao Yun to eat. Xiao Yun felt very ill at ease, and Qiaozhen also said: 'Sis, don't fuss over him – let him sit on his own a bit. You come and chat to me!'<sup>40</sup>

The more distant the relationship, the more meticulous the service. The ability to act rightly in context is still important as the twentieth century beckons – but the ability to make appropriate distinctions between contexts is a more notable sign of gentility.

A formal elegance in material surrounds contrasts with the girls' attitudes towards the fine goods and clothing of their profession. Attention to detail, and a veneer of elegance, is noticeable even in *Haishang hua liezhuan*. When a courtesan moves from one residence to another, especially where she is installed by a client, the décor is important. A residual knowledge of propriety informs proceedings. Even where a client has paid for the furnishings, unless he has chosen the hangings himself, he might find his sensibilities too refined. Wang Liansheng comes to inspect his new patronage:

Liansheng then ordered his sedan chair into East Hexing Lane, and from the sedan he could see the four characters 'Zhang Huizhen's Residence' daubed in gold on black lacquer, hanging high over the door lintel. When he got down and went in through the gate, he saw in the courtyard a small group of entertainers putting together a minute stage, decorated in brilliant colours: gold, jade, cinnabar and viridian. A newly-hired servant saw him, and came across to greet him with a 'Mr Wang', dropping his left knee to the ground. A new serving woman standing on the stairs invited him to go up.

Zhang Huizhen also came out of her room to greet him, dressed in an entirely new outfit from tip to toe, and when Liansheng saw her, he was even more beside himself than usual. Huizhen saw that Liansheng couldn't take his eyes off her, and was embarrassedly trying to stop herself laughing. She pulled at his sleeve and pushed him into her room. The room was all arranged perfectly, with smart new furnishings. Liansheng was delighted, although he thought that a couple of the painted scrolls were rather manufactured, and not very elegant.<sup>41</sup>

Taste and ritual are mutually reinforcing. The admixture in this passage of formality, rituals taken from the parallel world of master–servant relationships, a desire to please aesthetically and a certain pride at tasteful possessions, serves to underline that the courtesan house was still associated with refinement, and enjoyed because of residual ritual formulae.

The formality of evening parties is strictly adhered to in the world of Shanghai courtesan houses, even if guests are only staying for a quick round of drinks and a snack before heading off to their next engagement of the evening. A sequence of inviting and deferring precedes each banquet.

Zhao Puzhai raised the wine pot up high, and deferentially called formally on Hu Zhushan to take the highest seat. Zhushan was startled, and protested vigorously. Even when Hong Shanqing joined in to persuade him, he still declined. There was nothing for it but to invite Wu Song to take the top seat,

and Zhushan the next one down. The others all deferred to each other briefly, before the placings were settled.<sup>42</sup>

The seating plans are more than a glance towards propriety: they also display the subtle exertion of power, and a socially sanctioned manipulation of hierarchies. The talent of the females present is scarcely commensurate with the elegance of the room furnishings and the ritual deference of the menfolk. The disparity reveals yet again the distance between imagined and real high society. At the same party the narrator notes:

Since Xiulin and Xiubao could not sing opera tunes, there were just two music teachers sitting outside the curtain playing a few pieces on the flute and the zither. By the time the musicians had finished, the girls who had been summoned had all arrived, one by one. Ma Guisheng, who had been summoned by Zhang Xiaocun, couldn't sing either...<sup>43</sup>

The extreme leisure pursuits of these lower-middle-class functionaries who populate the novels of the last decades of the Qing debase their literary forebears' gatherings. Drinking and banqueting are now peripatetic feasts: scarcely have the last guests turned up to one party than the entire company disperses to regroup at the next location. The girls are expected to attend six or seven functions in an evening, drinking and entertaining at each. Gone is an appreciation of fine food, leisurely conversation, and in particular, poetry composition or traces of traditional gentry pursuits. Gone is the narrative style where an entire *hui* records the poetic couplets and riddle answers of a drinking evening. There is little semblance of social prestige at nightly parties in urban brothels: the music is mediocre, and the finger guessing games that had been the preserve of women and maids are now the stock amusement for dinner guests, whose main occupation is to 'break the bank' or outdrink the alcohol banker in each round.

If fine aesthetics and a formality of behaviour shore up traditional notions of gentility and a courtesan's role, the novels also present a new reading, of a more modern, 'true' gentility. If courtesan behaviour was traditionally expected to be informed by ritual, a second facet of gentility associated with courtesans, the possession of material goods (especially silk brocades and fine *objets d'art*) evinces a curious neutrality among the women of *Haishang hua liezhuan*. It is the women, rather than the clients, who maintain a degree of probity in this regard in the narrative. A sense of self, and of moral worth when all around are compromised, singles out those who are not tainted by their habitat. For many of the women, material goods are precisely not symbols of gentility, but of their trade, and act as transactional markers for males. When Wang Liansheng cannot meet with his new paramour for fear of the ire of his previous lover, Xiaohong (she of the fight in the park), he sends his friend Shanqing over to collect her broken jewellery, and take it to the repair shop. Just as the group of male friends who habitually meet up at evening parties cover for one another in hiding sexual exploits that they would not



wish to be common knowledge among their lovers, they also help one another in patching up and smoothing over relations with long-term women.

Shanqing sat down and told Huizhen in great detail about the things Liansheng had asked him to exchange or replace for her, and then asked: ‘Are there any other things that you want?’

She replied: ‘I’m not much bothered about material things, but the pair of rings off the list, engraved with my name on, should weigh eight mace of silver.’<sup>44</sup>

Later, when Shanqing reaches the jewellery store, we are given a lengthy description of the items available in stock, and those that had to be ordered specially:

There just remained the pair of rings: one of them with a ‘Double Happiness-Double Longevity’ pattern, which was available ready-made, and the other, to be engraved with ‘Huizhen of the Zhang family’ in a hollow square, which had to be ordered, and called for another day.<sup>45</sup>

Jewellery and gold goods literally weigh up a relationship: they are the security and the wages of a sing-song girl. For this reason, although their possession is assumed to be a marker of distinction, investment in them is not primarily emotional.

This seemingly paradoxical lack of interest in fine possessions is shared by several of the courtesans. Just as jewellery forms a deposit stash, often transacted to a madam, clothes are also materials of the trade, and not necessarily appreciated by the girls for their aesthetic value. When Shuangyu is getting made up for one of her first public appearances, the madam rummages for clothes, while the other girls help her with hair ornaments and style, carefully brushing water through her hair to hold it in place, and twisting up stray wisps. Clothes are held up by the madam for the courtesan to choose, and the other girls add their commentary:

Qiaonan stood to one side holding up clothes by their collar, helping Shuangyu try them on. There was a short padded jacket in Ningbo silk decorated with Zhijin potted orchids, with all of the edgings in aquamarine. Qiaonan looked at it and said: ‘That one – I don’t think I’ve ever seen before!’ Zhou Lan responded: ‘Where would you have seen it? Since we’re talking about it – it was the eldest girl’s. The three girls in this household were all a bit contrary. When it came to clothing or hair-piece accessories or whatever, they only wanted things that they had earned themselves; as for other people’s things, they wouldn’t want them even if they were being given away...’

When it was time for them to be married off, they just took a few things that they really wanted, and there were several suitcases of left-overs. I grabbed them all together and they’ve never been used – who else would want them?’<sup>46</sup>

Dress and elegance are traded in when a girl leaves the profession. In the superior stability of a marriage relationship, she has no need of finery, which is shown to be mere frippery for enticing glamour-struck males. In choosing not to take their fine goods with them, the girls are deliberately distancing themselves from their former lifestyles, at the expense of their wardrobes. While *Haishanghua liezhuan* has usually been read as a courtesan novel showing the seedier side of life, a ‘realist’ work to challenge the conventions of the more romantic red-light novels, in the supreme indifference to material goods that the female characters persistently show, another strain sounds: a gentility which is apparent in attitude, a defiance of societal norms and of the expectations held of its second-rate, brothel-dwelling subjects. Gentility is shown to be marked by attitude, rather than accoutrements. In this, Han Bangqing’s novel is a transitional text, moving out of its genre, promoting a new textuality in form and a new morality for a new age.<sup>47</sup>

A second aspect of the more nuanced version of late Qing gentility is seen in the worth accorded to self. The sense of being unavailable for purchase is another strong counter to systemic equation of monetary price with worth. It also, as the males acknowledge ruefully, tends to make a woman look bad-tempered and fickle. In Chapter 7 of the novel, Cuifeng has been cut off the guest list of a party because of her temper, but is re-instated by sleight of hand of one admirer. When it looks as though Luo Zifu may be willing to court her alone as his lover, she lets her more benign nature shine through, and when she breaks into a smile for him, he is enraptured. Unlike several of the girls, when she chooses so to do, Cuifeng can sing well, and sings a duet to *pipa* and fiddle accompaniment that has a notably rare effect: ‘all of the guests just sat listening, and didn’t care about drinking their wine’. Luo Zifu was left ‘in a daze, as if petrified’.<sup>48</sup> Cuifeng and others like her who refuse to abide by the rules of the system use their dignity to undermine the transactional nature of the system (even if, as with Cuifeng, she later traduces her own stance by fleecing her client). The new lover, Luo, has not yet grasped Cuifeng’s need to remain aloof and independent when he produces a gift of a pair of bracelets weighing two taels, calling her out of the room on a pretext to go and admire his offering. She pretends not to hear him at first, and then, in her own time, gets up to go and investigate. Later, as she explains to him in a passage that shows both vulnerability and strength, self-worth and manipulation:

‘My mother believed your stories; she listened to your idle words and really took heart! I knew that you were all just words ... My mother even brought the bracelets for me to see. I told her, “Bracelets aren’t exactly rare, and who knows how many bracelets he’s given to Yueqin! Even I have a couple of pairs of them, and they’ve never been taken out and used – what would I want them for?” You take them back with you. In a few days, if you really have decided to get rid of Yueqin and not visit her, and you want to come and visit me, then it would be fine for you to give them to me again.’ As Zifu listened, it was like a pail of cold water poured over his head...<sup>49</sup>

To Cuifeng, it is not the financial worth but the pledge of relationship that makes the bracelets valuable. She tries to force Luo to see this by suggesting he reside at her house continually for two months, since the servants of his previous courtesan's household could hardly come and drag him back if he were living at her place. When Luo points out he has business to attend to and cannot remain cloistered for two months, she asks for a guarantee.

'What sort of written guarantee can I possibly give you?' Cuifeng said 'If you were to write out a guarantee, what use would it have? You should go and get some precious things and deposit them here; they can count as a guarantee.'

'In terms of precious things, there's silver dollars.'

Cuifeng laughed coldly. 'What sort of person do you take me for? Do you think I'm after your foreign currency? You might think silver dollars count as a good thing, but I don't regard them as precious.'

They agree on his document box as a pledge, and Cuifeng stresses the seriousness of this relationship token:

'I'm telling you now: if you go once to Jiang Yueqin's, I'll take out everything in your blessed box and burn the whole lot.' Zifu stuck his tongue out and nodded his head. 'Blimey – you're really scary.'

Cuifeng laughed, 'If you think I'm harsh, then you're lacking in judgment. I happen to be a courtesan, but if you think you're going to buy me with foreign currency, then you'll find that I can't be bought. Forget your pair of bracelets: if you came with ten pairs of bracelets it wouldn't mean anything in my sight. So please take your bracelets back. If you want to give them to me, you can give them to me any day. But tonight I don't want you belittling me, as if it's your bracelets that attracted me.'<sup>50</sup>

Fighting, feminist talk. That author Han Bangqing has Cuifeng enunciate these words to the doltish Luo shows compassion towards the stance of this vilified courtesan. Han's implied sympathy accords to brothel women a deeper morality, one which harks back to earlier values. As Mencius famously held, only the person who grasps that there are things more valuable than life itself can understand its value; even a beggar would refuse a bowl of life-giving soup were it trodden on first. This attitude is seen in the 'jade among dirt' image of courtesans from Tang stories through to Ming and Qing novellas, but its form here is more modern. The genteel have always remained untouched by the moral lassitude of those around, but now pride and self-worth are tools which Cuifeng will parry with. David Wang writes of the 'stark realism' of Han Bangqing's work, and its 'amazingly ordinary women and men', but this ordinariness glosses over a feistier brand of gentility in evidence.

The representation of women in *Haishang hua liezhuan* conceals a double twist: in undermining the portrayal of courtesans as anything approaching genteel, and in creating a new mode of representation, author Han Bangqing points to the

ideal his readership wished to read of (and believe in) as a fictional construction, and in doing so highlights the imagined aspect of the courtesan business.<sup>51</sup> But at the same time as debunking this myth, he suggests ways in which the late-nineteenth-century courtesan was engaging in some counter-cultural expressions of self-worth and true gentility of spirit.

### Concluding remarks

The basic economic and social structure of late-nineteenth-century courtesan life was profoundly immoral in Confucian terms, with relationships formed in the public sphere, with direct contact between males and females, openly determined by economic values, non-procreatory, and outside the family structure. Nothing could be further from the ideal. However, although the genteel celebration of the cultural, literary and artistic values associated with courtesan life in the Ming no longer held power in Qing society, in the characters of these novels, socially valorized and vilified traits still shine through. These may not always coincide exactly with the qualities admired by those who had formerly celebrated their talents, but the genteel is a construct of the imagination for both groups.

Two frames of gentility emerge. The emulatory: modelling selves on wives, dressing in fine clothes and propagating good behaviour; and the defiant: undercutting norms, transcending myths about courtesan lives and reality. The representation of gentility in mid- and late-nineteenth-century red-light novels follows the pattern of earlier generations of courtesan novel: beauty, talent and wit featuring highly on scales of (male) assessment. There are some shades of dissonance and sentiments of mockery of this charade of beauty and its fanatical precision of measurement, but even the dissenters serve to shore up the norms. In a novel like Han Banqing's 1892 *Haishang hua liezhuan*, another view emerges, a means of charting the transition in values from a depiction of outer beauty and talent, to an inner beauty reflected in selfless actions, or a distancing from markers of social distinction such as fine clothes or material possessions. The critical emphasis *Haishang hua liezhuan* has always received, showcasing its 'realism' and negative depictions of low-life prostitutes, has occluded this strain of emergent gentility.

In the earlier works, the contours of the genteel can be traced by seeing in negative an outline of the ideal. Through the negative aspects of a courtesan's life in this 'debased' literature, in her laments and descriptions of treatment by madams, pimps and clients, in the rare articulation of longings, in the emulation of wives, and in the condemnation of certain personality features, the patterns of womanhood towards which courtesans strove emerge. Passive (attainable) gentility emerges as a form of detachment, of overcoming in the present, an air of superiority in living out lives, whatever the circumstances. These are the women who do not 'belong' where circumstances have led them. Those who retain their dignity, and qualities such as patience and compassion in trying circumstances, are held up as commendable characters, and, mostly, given happy endings. Conversely, women who show anger or displeasure at their work or life

are vilified in lower social climes as among those for whom acts of aggressions would be unthinkable.

Active gentility is here depicted in the ‘would-be’s,’ the things that an individual would do and be, how she would act and speak, if circumstances enabled her to be that which she desired. Definitions of gentility must be wide enough to encompass such aspirational behaviour, even where it leaves the suspicion that what the women are aspiring to is a highly conditioned ideal, a vision of a redeemed, stable and moral woman who knew her correct place in society as a secluded wife. The collusion in this project of the male clients and authors is a further aspect of the paradox of prostitution. A redeemed woman rounded off the story, but was lost for ever to the world of that story, where clients and author still dwell.

It is difficult to assess to what extent the genteel display in romantic courtesan works is a literary device: an idealized ideal, describing character traits that real-life counterparts would not consider subscribing to. Literary tropes of genteel writing do not, of course, necessarily accord with extratextual notions of gentility, but more with a recognized generic pattern. The literary heritage on which the novels draw elevates the works above their content matter. *Caizi jiaren* works, the earlier scholar-courtesan romances and *Honglou meng* are all populist forms of fiction, yet display characters who are themselves engaged in higher pursuits than fiction, such as poetry or painting. It is interesting in this respect that a later novel like *Haishang hua liezhuan*, which displaced many of the courtesan and client stereotypes with its more lifelike figures, was never as popular, except among critics, as the romantic red-light fiction.<sup>52</sup> The myth of the idealized romance, the triumph of the good and intelligent, or even the nemesis of the lascivious and self-centred, draws in readers in its appeal to indulge their sense of higher moral self.

Wang describes as the ‘paradox of depravity’<sup>53</sup> the dual emphases of red-light novels: a work such as *Huayue hen* (1850s), where an ideal love relationship is established, versus a *Jiu wei gui* (1890s), which operates as a cautionary tale of how to avoid the pitfalls and traps of brothel life. For Wang, the most intriguing cases revolve around desire, especially the desire of desirelessness, where abstinence and chastity form the aim and ambition of characters. Both fit within a frame of gentility: those within the courtesan houses who deny their surrounds and elevate themselves to the parallel morals of the outside world are lauded for their self-sacrifice and moral strength, but the series of amusing anecdotes about men caught out, poisoned and cheated by their lovers, or of women left stranded by feckless clients, also gives such a profoundly negative shape to brothel life as to render shining ‘ordinary’ life, with its more sedentary moral pleasures. In more ‘realistic’ works, including *Jiu wei gui* (whose hyper-depravity is no more real than the romantic excess), the demerits and ills of characters are so evident as to bring to mind their complementary virtues. The enduring popularity of red-light works as a group may lie in their extremes: the make-believe ideal or the amusing, bathetic evil; either way the moral vision is clear. *Haishang hua liezhuan* presents, as has been shown, a more complex vision of morality, with genteel traits which sometimes needs reading against the grain of the text. Its lesser success as a novel might not just be on account of its depiction of sleazy low life, but in the

demands it makes of readers in deciphering that base world with its rare gleams of gentility.

## Acknowledgements

With thanks to Fang Jing and Kan Shio-yun for help with Wu dialect terms. The second section of this chapter draws on earlier work in Chapter 3 of my book *Red-light Novels of the Late Qing*, Starr: 2007.

## Notes

- 1 Ko 1997a: 75. Whereas Ko argues that the courtesan was in terminal decline by the nineteenth century, her ongoing presence in novels shows this was clearly not so in the fictive imagination. Gail Hershatter has documented further changing perceptions of ‘prostitute’ in her description of prostitution in early twentieth century Shanghai, as she was transformed into a victimized, dangerous embodiment of social trouble, see Hershatter 1997. The dichotomy is prefigured in nineteenth-century novels where women are both talented entertainers of the idle rich, and transmitters of disease.
- 2 The term appears in Lu Xun, 1925: 295, translated by the Yangs as ‘novels about prostitution.’ Lu Hsun 1976: 319. *Xiaxie* has the connotation ‘wayward’, originally referring to the meandering alleys of the pleasure quarters where professional prostitution was contained: see Wang, 1997: 54. Lu Xun’s original list of *xiaxie* works includes *Pinhua baojian*, *Huayue hen*, *Qinglou meng* and *Haishang hua liezhuan*. These novels, with the occasional addition of *Fengyue meng*, *Haishang fanhua meng* or *Jiu wei gui* form the basis of, for example, lists of the genre by 1990s critics or literary historians such as Zhang Peiheng 1996; Guo Yanli 1990; and Tao Muning 1993. A fuller list of around fifty mid- to late-Qing *xiaxie* novels appears in Wu Liquan 1995.
- 3 The term *qing* connotes both sexual/sensual feeling and emotional feelings; it can be both a positive attribute and a sign of excessive or effeminate emotion. Among the novels discussed, the more ‘romantic’ include *Qinglou meng*, *Pinhua Baojian* and *Huayue hen*.
- 4 Our appreciation of the 1848 novel *Fengyue meng*, for example, depends on which voice we choose to follow with regards to the ‘women question’: that encapsulated in the first chapter and in a duped protagonist’s summation of the lives of female courtesans in Chapter 30 as ‘all is false’, or the narrative voice of the intervening chapters. This split frame is to a degree a stylized response to the bans and prohibition on grounds of content of several courtesan works at various points during the Qing. The didactic framework of the introduction or first chapter in many of these novels can be read as a means of avoiding censorship.
- 5 Wang 1997: 18.
- 6 See, for example, Chapters 6, 11, 17, 19, 21, 27 of *Huayue hen* for ‘drinking games’.
- 7 See, for example, Chapter 7 of *Fengyue meng*; Chapter 17 of *Huayue hen*; Chapter 35 of *Pinhua baojian*. Parallel games with easier texts for quotation for women or boys are seen in the latter example.
- 8 For a discussion of this work see Wang 1997: 61–71; and McMahon 2002: 70–109; see also my discussion of the work as a crypto-courtesan novel in Starr 1999.
- 9 Chen Sen 1993: 140.
- 10 For a concise discussion of some of the functions of verse in early literature – to denote a level of cultivation, express authority, express the self, question justice etc., see Lewis 1999: 147–61.

- 11 See e.g. Guo Yanli 1990: 505; Zhang Peiheng 1996: 611. The first printed edition of Wei Xiuren's *Huayue hen* is the 1888 Fujian Wu Yu Tian edition, punctuated and edited by Wang Songchen. The decision to publish was taken posthumously by a clansman of the author, possibly his son Wei Shao'an. Gu Qiyin's preface to the Zhonghua Shuju edition of *Huayue hen* (1996) provides a good analysis of publication history; cf. Guo Yanli 1990: 496, note 3.
- 12 Chen Liao is referring to *Pinhua baojian*, *Qinglou meng* and *Huayue hen*; in fairness, it is the lack of political content in the poetry that most excises him. Chen Liao 1997: 192. Lu Xun, on the other hand, echoed earlier critics' praise for the calibre of verse littering *Huayue hen*: it was the rest of the novel to which he objected. Lu Xun 1925: 299.
- 13 See, for example, such classic texts as Rudé 1981; Moscovici and Graufmann 1986; McClelland 1989.
- 14 See Sommer 2000: Chapters 6 and 7.
- 15 Volpp 2003: 144.
- 16 Sommer 2000: 220, 238.
- 17 Chen Sen 1993: 138.
- 18 Han Shang Meng Ren 1993: 16.
- 19 Cf. Sommer 2000: 237, discussion of the same paradox in Feng Menglong's Ming short stories.
- 20 Mann 1997: 138. On legal status paradoxes, see Sommer 2000: 246, 256.
- 21 Han Bangqing 1994: 49.
- 22 Han Bangqing 1994: 50.
- 23 For a fuller discussion, see Ko 1994: Chapter 4.
- 24 See Hanan 1998: 345–6.
- 25 Tian Hua Cang Zhuren [n.d.] 1994; Ti Qiu San Ren. [n.d.] 1994. On *caizi jiaren* novels see for example Hessney 1985; McMahan 1994.
- 26 Poetry as the ultimate test of talent and moral worth is a major theme of several *caizi jiaren* works, where bad characters cannot compose poetry. The correlation seen to exist between physical and spiritual beauty is a stock theme and allows characters who submit others' work to be detected and disasters averted. See, for example, Ming Jiao Zhong Ren 1995: 60.
- 27 Han Shang Meng Ren 1993: 49–50.
- 28 The literary trope of selecting the year's best courtesans in singing, deportment, poetry composition and such skills can be traced to Ming dynasty stories; on the ranking of singing girls see Hanan 1981: 89–90; also Rolston 1997: 205–7; on 'flower list' elections in the early twentieth century see Hershatter, 1997: 165–9.
- 29 On the educational level of courtesans see Henriot 1994: 42, 48.
- 30 Zhang Chunfan 1994.
- 31 Yeh 2006: 248–9.
- 32 On literature on shrewish women see e.g. McMahan 1995 Chapters 1 and 3, or Wu 1995: Introduction.
- 33 Han Bangqing 1994: 31.
- 34 Han Bangqing 1994: 32.
- 35 Han Bangqing 1994: 34.
- 36 Han Bangqing 1994: 88.
- 37 Wang 1997: 55.
- 38 Han Bangqing 1994: 14.
- 39 Han Bangqing 1994: 26.
- 40 Han Bangqing 1994: 65.
- 41 Han Bangqing 1994: 28.
- 42 Han Bangqing 1994: 16.
- 43 Han Bangqing 1994: 17.
- 44 Han Bangqing 1994: 69.

- 45 Han Bangqing 1994: 71.
- 46 Han Bangqing 1994: 55–6.
- 47 On changes in structure and textual form in novels at the turn of the nineteenth-century, see Starr 2007: Chapter 4.
- 48 Han Bangqing 1994: 40.
- 49 Han Bangqing 1994: 43.
- 50 Han Bangqing 1994: 44.
- 51 Cf. Wang 1997: 97–8.
- 52 See Wang 1997: 90.
- 53 Wang 1997: 58.





# **Part III**

## Transmission



## 9 Textbooks on an aesthetic life in late Ming China

*Yasushi Ōki*

The craftsmanship of producing beautiful swords and armour reached its zenith in the medieval ages of Europe and Japan. Armour now forms important collections in many museums of fine arts. Since ‘high society’ of Europe and Japan at that time was composed of warriors who prized military equipment highly, precious arms were produced. Conversely, arms as artistic handicrafts seem to have been less appreciated in China than in Europe and Japan, because the Chinese upper classes were occupied by intellectuals, not by warriors.

An old Chinese proverb says that times of peace alternate with times of war.<sup>1</sup> Looking at Chinese history, wartime was generally short and peaceful times were longer. Nobody who conquered the whole country by military power could rule as an emperor in the figure of a warrior. An emperor could not maintain political power on horseback, but needed support from government officials, scholars and literati. He exercised his authority at the head of a great number of scholar officials. Liu Bang (256–195 BCE), the founder of the Han Dynasty (206 BCE–220 AD), claimed that he realized the grandeur of an emperor for the first time when participating in a court ceremony under the leadership of Confucian scholars.<sup>2</sup>

To be a scholar was a pre-condition for being a member of the highest class in China. Emperors and high officials were interested in, or professed interest in, literature and art. One example shows the emperor’s love of art: Li Shimin (r. 627–649), the second emperor of the Tang Dynasty (618–907), loved the calligraphy of Wang Xizhi (321–379), the ‘Saint of Calligraphy’ in the Jin Dynasty (265–420), and many of Wang’s authentic writings were buried in Li Shimin’s tomb. *Tianshui bingshan lu* (*The Report on Rain and Icebergs* [i.e. fleeting power]) is a list of goods and chattels confiscated from Yan Song (1480–1567), the cabinet minister of the Jiajing era (1522–1566) of the Ming Dynasty. In it, we can find a great number of precious items such as paintings, calligraphy and books. This also shows us how eagerly the minister collected these things. It was natural that Chinese gentlemen were interested in their studio, garden and stationery, as the location and tools of their literary activities.

The Japanese scholar Arai Ken has commented on the Japanese translation of Wen Zhenheng’s (1585–1645) *Zhangwu zhi* (*Treaties on Superfluous Things*):

Chinese literati had long been interested in material objects as the basis for satisfaction in their daily lives. But it was in the Song Dynasty (960–1279) that they first consciously paid attention to them, and only in the Ming Dynasty that they respected and studied them in earnest.<sup>3</sup>

In this chapter, I shall examine the history of the aesthetic lifestyle of Chinese literati, focusing on the late Ming period, when a large number of manuals of an elegant lifestyle were published.

### **The appearance of books about studio and stationery**

Chinese intellectuals had long been interested in studios and stationery. However, it was in the Song Dynasty when monographs on studios, gardens and the tools of the study appeared for the first time. Inkstone, paper, brush and ink, were labelled the ‘four treasures of the studio’ and were indispensable tools for the literati. According to various Chinese and Japanese catalogues of Chinese books, the earliest monograph about the brush was Wang Xizhi’s (ca. 321–379) *Bijing* (*Book of Brushes*) in the Six Dynasties. However, the authenticity of this book has been questioned. The next book about brushes is the *Dongtian bilu* (*Record of Brushes of the Cavern Heaven*), part of the *Dongtian qinglu ji* (*Record of the Pure Registers of the Cavern Heaven*) by Zhao Xigu (fl. 1200) of the Song Dynasty. As for monographs on ink, the *Mojing* (*Book of Ink*), written by Chao Guanzhi (fl. 1160) of the Song Dynasty, is the earliest. The *Ping zhitie* (*Comments on Paper*) by Mi Fu (1051–1107), a famous painter and calligrapher, is the earliest book on the subject of paper.

Books on general surveys about stationery begin with the *Wenfang sipu* (*Catalogue of the Four Treasures of the Studio*) in the Northern Song (960–1126). This book mainly discusses the inkstone, paper, brush and ink. The *Dongtian qinglu ji* was the first important book on the aesthetic lifestyle of literati gentlemen, covering broader fields related to lifestyle. This *Dongtian qinglu ji* consists of ten chapters, entitled: ‘Old Harps’, ‘Old Inkstones’, ‘Old Bells’, ‘Old Bronzes’, ‘Inkstone Screens’, ‘Brushes’, ‘Small Water-Jars for the Inkstone’, ‘Calligraphy’, ‘Stones’, and ‘Old Paintings’.<sup>4</sup> All of these items are equipment for the studio. Zhao Xigu states in his preface to the *Dongtian qinglu ji* that:

Few people understand the joy of collecting and appreciating fine artefacts. I have collected old harps, inkstones, and bronzes. I have argued their merits and weaker points in ten chapters for gentlemen who have a noble mind and love old things.<sup>5</sup>

In theory, people who read this catalogue or manual could readily become a ‘gentleman’. In his book, Zhao Xigu focuses on how to tell false antiques from real ones, showing that by that time false antiques had started to appear.

Zhao Xigu also wrote the *Shanjia qingong* (*Pure Dinner at a Mountain House*), a book dealing with food and beverages of hermits in the mountains.

The *Dongtian qinglu ji* and the *Shanjia qingong* are both manuals for literati spending time in mountain studios. The character *qing* in the title is common to both manuals. The term *qing*, pure or quiet, refers to the virtue of both Confucianism and Daoism, but as the word *dongtian*, cavern heaven, stands for utopia in the cosmology of Daoism, the term *qing* here relates more closely to Daoism. For Chinese intellectuals, Confucianism was important in their public lives as officials, but in their private life, Daoism was often more important, and Daoism tends to be the leading philosophy underpinning this kind of book.

### Fashion and taste for Ming dynasty literati

Yoshikawa Kojiro states that consciousness of a pure lifestyle of the literati, or *wenren*, began to appear in the Yuan Dynasty.<sup>6</sup> He writes:

Yang Weizheng (1296–1370) considered literature and art to be the supreme. Because he thought the arts to be the supreme, he insisted the privilege of the artist and disregarded the common sense. This kind of person was called *wenren* after that. In Chinese civilization there had not existed this type of person.

It was quite early that they regarded literature as its essential element in Chinese civilization. However, it was rare that they only insisted its value exclusively. Literature was always along with philosophy or politics. The time when literature was under philosophy or politics was longer in Chinese history. Good man of letters or poets had had responsibility to philosophy or politics.

The attitude of Yang Weizheng or *wenren* in the south at the end of Yuan Dynasty was completely different from that. They had nothing to do with philosophy or politics. Or, they lived under the condition that they were excluded from politics.

The term *wenren* existed since the earlier time. But it was at this time when the term *wenren* meant this kind of person.

Because Chinese intellectuals were shut out from government in the Yuan while the civil service examinations were interrupted, they had little to do but devote themselves to their private lives, composing poems, painting, and following similar pursuits. In the Song Dynasty, literati such as Su Shi had been high officials, and had devoted themselves to their literary activities in their private time. They were thus both officials and *wenren*, literati figures. However, the literary activities of intellectuals such as those of Ni Zan (1301–1374), one of the four great painters in the late Yuan, for example, can be seen as comparatively independent of political activities.

After the Ming Dynasty the model of lifestyle which the textbooks of aesthetic lifestyle aimed at was this type of *wenren*. It is important that themes argued in these textbooks were only the arts, literature and private life, not official life.

The *Gegu yaohun* (*Essential Criteria of Antiquities*) was written by Cao Zhao (fl. 1388) in the early Ming. The title *gegu* means investigating old objects. The

word *ge* came from *gewu* of the *Daxue* (*Great Learning*), an important text in the teachings of Zhu Xi (1130–1200). Although this book was written in the Hongwu era (1368–1399) of the early Ming, its revised and enlarged edition was published in the late Ming and this new edition was widely circulated. Examples such as this show that the real high tide of books on an aesthetic life occurred in the late Ming.

We can list seventeen important monographs or textbooks of this kind published in the late Ming.<sup>7</sup> If we were to count books with chapters about literati lifestyle and monographs about tea, incense, furniture etc. as well, these would comprise many more titles. Two examples from the list give an insight into their contents. The *Zunsheng bajian* (*Eight Discourses on the Art of Living*) by Gao Lian (fl. 1573–1581) in the sixteenth century consists of the following eight parts: ‘General Remarks’, ‘Health Care’, ‘Daily Life’, ‘Long Life’, ‘Food and Beverages’, ‘Pleasure in Leisure Times’, ‘Medicine’, and ‘Short Biographies of Hermits’.<sup>8</sup> Its preface says:

It is a great joy that we are born into this world. So respecting living is important. People who think lightly of life are criminals before heaven and earth, and before their father and mother.<sup>9</sup>

The aim of Gao Lian’s book is to instruct how to live this precious life joyfully and satisfactorily. The love of stationery, a studio in the mountains, food and medicine (the latter usually connected with Daoist practices) are all directed towards this very purpose. Whereas previous manuals of literati life had specialized in brushes, ink, food and such, the *Zunsheng bajian* is a combination of all these books. This book can be said to be a complete textbook for a literatus’ private lifestyle.

The *Zhangwu zhi* (*Treatise on Superfluous Things*) written by Wen Zhenheng (1585–1645), a great-grandchild of the famous man of letters Wen Zhengming (1470–1559), is one of the most refined books in this category.<sup>10</sup> The book consists of the following twelve chapters:

- Buildings and Rooms
- Flowers and Trees
- Water and Stones
- Birds and Fish
- Paintings and Calligraphy
- Chairs and Beds
- Material Objects
- Clothes and Accessories
- Boats and Vehicles
- Room Arrangement
- Vegetables and Fruits
- Incense and Tea<sup>11</sup>

It was assumed that people who read this book and lived according to its instructions could live an aesthetic life. Such books notably taught people how to live like a mountain hermit. It was believed that the genuinely elegant life existed in the mountains, and real gentlemen were those who could enjoy life as a hermit. Many books of this kind were published in the late Ming, and this phenomenon shows an increasing interest in the literati lifestyle. We see numerous examples of scholars, including rich people who lived in the cities, longing for life in the mountains.

### Chen Jiru and Li Yu, hermits in the late Ming Jiangnan area

In the *Siku quanshu* collection, books on an elegant lifestyle were placed in the category of *zapin lei* (miscellaneous works) under the *zibu* (philosophers) section. The *Siku quanshu* has eleven entries of books in this category. Among them, there are only five books written in the late Ming period: *Gegu yaolun*; *Zunsheng bajian*; *Qing micang* (*Pure Treasures*); *Zhangwu zhi*; *Yunshi zhai bitan* (*Notes from Refined-stone Studio*). Although many books of this category were published in the late Ming, the editors of the *Siku quanshu* consciously omitted several of these. In the *Siku quanshu zongmu tiyao* (*Notes on Books in the Siku quanshu*), the entry on the *Zunsheng bajian* says:

This book only treats objects for leisure times. Most of the items are trivial things. This book was nothing but a product of the late Ming fashion of short essays and led to the works of Chen Jiru and Li Yu.<sup>12</sup>

The same note to the *Siku quanshu* further says on the *Zhangwu zhi*:

*Shanren* have rich knowledge about *qinggong*, the pure and quiet life of hermits. However, the louder their claims, the farther they part from elegance.<sup>13</sup>

It is known that a group of literati called *shanren* (literati living in the mountains) were active in late Ming Jiangnan society. Chen Jiru (1558–1639) and Li Yu (1611–1680) were two typical examples of such *shanren*.<sup>14</sup> They also published a fair number of textbooks on how to live as a hermit. These titles include, for Chen Jiru: *Taiping qinghua* (*Pure Talks in the Period of Peace*); *Yanqi youshi* (*Elegance of Living in the Mountains*); *Yiminzhi* (*Biographies of Hermits*); *Chahua* (*Talks about Tea*); *Jiudian bu* (*Expansion of the Stories on Wine*); *Meigong shuhua shi* (*Chen Meigong's History of Paintings and Calligraphy*); and for Li Yu: *Xianqing ouji* (*Random Notes on Leisure Time*). The editors of the *Siku quanshu* seem to have despised their works and did not enter them in the *Siku quanshu*. But why should the editors have omitted Chen and Yu's works about elegant lives?

Chen Jiru's name is often seen in publications of the late Ming as an author, editor or commentator. He was one of the most active publishers in the late



Ming Jiangnan area. Qian Qianyi's (1582–1664) *Liechao shiji xiaozhuan* (*Brief Biographies of Ming Poets*) includes Chen Jiru's biography. In it we read that:

Chen Jiru called together poor intellectuals and old monks of the Jiangsu and Zhejiang area, made them extract passages from books, put them in order and produced many new books. His books circulated widely. People who had little knowledge competed with others in buying his books and treasured them. The name of Meigong (Chen's pen name) became earthshakingly famous.<sup>15</sup>

Chen's publishing business was successful, but this biography reveals his way of making books. Most of his books were the results of his 'part-time assistants' scraping together materials from other books. In the biography of Chen Jiru in the *Mingshi* (Ming History), we read:

He was good at verse and prose. His short letters and essays were all refined. He was good at painting, too. He was erudite and well versed in the Chinese Classics. He produced books by extracting passages from other books. People competed with each other in buying and copying his books. People who asked him to compose verse and prose visited him every day.<sup>16</sup>

The scope of Chen Jiru's books was quite broad, but the most typical were those on the lifestyle of literati. His collection of short essays, *Taiping qinghua*, lists the joys of literati life as follows:

Burning incense  
 Tasting tea  
 Washing inkstones  
 Playing the harp  
 Revising books  
 Waiting for the moon  
 Listening to the rain  
 Watering the flowers  
 Midday nap  
 Making medicine  
 Chanting Buddhist sutras  
 Parting from the noisy world  
 Fishing  
 Appreciating pictures  
 Mouthwash by fountain  
 Walking around with cane  
 Praying before Buddha  
 Tasting wine  
 Sitting peacefully  
 Reading Buddhist sutras  
 Watching the mountains

Calligraphy

Watching bamboo

—These are all pleasures for when alone.<sup>17</sup>

This list of pleasures of the literati is actually a list of Chen Jiru's publications. Chen published the *Jiudian bu* as a textbook on wine, the *Chahua* as one on tea, the *Meigong shuhua shi* as one on calligraphy and pictures, the *Taiping qinghua*, the *Yanqi youshi*, general remarks on literati life, and the *Yiminzhi*, a collection of biographies of hermits. Books about literati lifestyle thus form the most important part of his oeuvre.

Chen Jiru gave up taking the civil service examinations at the age of twenty-nine and went into the mountains to be a recluse. That is why in the *Ming History* his biography was placed in the section on hermits. However, he still edited and published many books commercially. It may seem that his status as an eremite and his business as a publisher of books were contradictory, but this is less problematic when Chen's articles and books are read as textbooks of an elegant literati lifestyle. He thus popularized the elegant lifestyle through his flourishing publishing business in the late Ming Jiangnan area.<sup>18</sup>

Li Yu, a famous playwright and novelist in the early Qing period, wrote the *Xianqing ouji*, a well-known collection of essays on the aesthetic lifestyle of literati. The *Xianqing ouji* consists of eight parts: 'How to Write Dramas', 'How to Train Actors and Actresses', 'On Female Beauty', 'Room Arrangement', 'Material Objects', 'Food and Beverage', 'Gardening', 'Mental Health Care'.<sup>19</sup> Part One on how to write dramas is often quoted and discussed as an example of theoretical study on Chinese drama. Equally interesting is Part Three, from which we can elucidate Li Yu's opinion on female beauty. The important point, however, is that drama and female beauty were both part of his whole perception of an aesthetic life, along with antiques, flowers and such. Another of Li Yu's publications, the *Jiezi yuan huazhuan* (*Manual for Painting by Poppy-seed Garden*), a textbook on painting, was one of his 'bestsellers'. Like Chen Jiru in the late Ming, Li Yu also popularized the elegant lifestyle of literati through his commercial publishing activities.<sup>20</sup>

The authors of the *Siku quanshu zongmu tiyao* though seem to have seen impurities in Chen Jiru and Li Yu's works and characters and thus omitted their works from their compilations.

### The social background to literati lifestyle textbooks

As we have seen above, a lot of textbooks on literati lifestyle were commercially published in the late Ming Jiangnan area, indicating an increasing demand for this kind of book at the time. Qian Xiyan (fl. 1613) writes in his essay *Xixia* (*Notes for Fun with Mistakes*) about mountain dwellers:

Now to be a *shanren* is in fashion. Everybody, though living in a city, longs for a life in the mountains.<sup>21</sup>

High officials used the pen name *Shanren*, man of the mountains, or *Yuqiao*, fisherman and woodcutter. Rich people built gardens with artificial mountain landscapes in the city. The rich did not point to things that glittered, but pointed to the mountains. This is a complicated and sophisticated aspect of Chinese culture in the late Ming. Who then needed these textbooks for a literatus lifestyle? Real literati did not necessarily need this kind of manual. Qian Qianyi commented cynically that people who had a little knowledge competed with others in buying Chen Jiru's books and treasuring them. It was mainly the *nouveaux riches* who purchased these textbooks.

Shen Chunze's preface to the *Zhangwu zhi* says:

Recently the sons of the rich and one or two dullards and persons of mean status have elevated themselves to the status of 'aficionados'. At each attempt at connoisseurship they utter some vulgarity, besmirching anything that comes into their hands with their wanton fumbling and grabbing, to an utter pitch of vileness. A gentleman of true taste, talents and sentiment thus takes vows not to even mention 'elegance' Ah, it has already gone too far!<sup>22</sup>

Shen Chunze warned against 'false literati' from the standpoint of the 'real literati'. Shimada Kenji, a Japanese scholar of Chinese philosophy, states:

Chinese intellectuals were those who could become officials through passing the civil service examinations. As a rule, everybody could take the civil service examinations. For that reason, there existed no genuine culture for commoners.<sup>23</sup>

In the Tokugawa period (1603–1867) of Japan, social status was fixed. Even rich merchants could never become samurai, the governors of the time. So merchants could do nothing but create their own culture, a culture for common people. In China, on the contrary, 'literati' did not denote a rigid social class of its own. Common folk could become literati through passing the state examinations. And in the prosperous times of late Ming Jiangnan society, commoners gained economic power. They longed for high status more eagerly than before. But because there was no genuine common folk culture, they could only aspire to literati culture. Thus they needed manuals. This, I believe, is the reason for the increase in production of literati aesthetic lifestyle manuals in the late Ming.

## Notes

- 1 The expression *yi zhi yi luan* occurs in *Liu Tao*, *Mengzi* (Mencius) and *Hanfeizi*. See Liu Tao 1979: 3; *Mengzi* 1979: 52; *Hanfeizi* 1979: 89.
- 2 Biography of Shusun Tong, see Sima Qian 1975: 99/2723.
- 3 Arai Ken 1999: 16.
- 4 *Dongtian qinglu ji* 1849.

- 5 Original Chinese text: *Dongtian qinglu ji* 1849: 1. For a Japanese translation of *Dongtian qinglu ji*, see Nakada Yujiro 1961. About this book, see Yabuchi Takayoshi 1987: 43–51.
- 6 Yoshikawa Kojiro 1963: 103–9.
- 7 *Xinzheng gegu yaolun* by Cao Zhao; *Qing mi cang* by Zhang Yingwen; *Zhuyu shanfang zabu* by Song Xu; *Yunshi zhai bitan* by Jiang Shao-shu; *Zunsheng bajian* by Gao Lian; *Linxia qinglu* by Shen Shi; *Yiqing xiaolu* by Shen Shi; *Jiaochuang jiulu* by Xiang Yuanbian; *Kaopan yushi* by Tu Long; *Yun xuan qingbi lu* by Dong Qichang; *Yanqi youshi* by Chen Jiru; *Taiping qinghua* by Chen Jiru; *Qingwu zhai xinshang bian* by Wang Xiangjin; *Feifu yulue* by Shen Defu; *Zhangwu zhi* by Wen Zhenheng; *Qingxian gong* by Cheng Yuwen; *Qiuyuan zapei* by Chen Zhenhui.
- 8 Gao Lian 1988.
- 9 Gao Lian 1988: 1.
- 10 Craig Clunas' *Superfluous Things* (Clunas 1991a) is an important text on the subject.
- 11 Wen Zhenheng 1979.
- 12 *Heyin siku quanshu zongmu tiyao ji siku weishousumu jinhuishumu* 1978: 2576.
- 13 *Heyin siku quanshu zongmu tiyao ji siku weishousumu jinhuishumu* 1978: 2577.
- 14 Suzuki Tadashi 1962: 357–88; Ōki Yasushi 1990: 1233–52.
- 15 Qian Qianyi 1983: 637.
- 16 *Mingshi* 1974: 298/7631.
- 17 Chen Jiru 1985: 2/38.
- 18 Ōki Yasushi 1991.
- 19 Li Yu 2000.
- 20 On Li Yu, see Hanan 1988; Ito Sohei 1984: 191–206.
- 21 *Xixia* 3/26a in *Jieyue shanfang huichao* 1808: No.13.
- 22 Shen Chunze 1979: 141. Translated by Clunas 1991a: 74.
- 23 Shimada Kenji 1978: 250.

## 10 Searching for gentility

### The nineteenth-century fashion for the late Ming

*Anne Gerritsen*

#### Two parallel stories

In 1823 the poet Chen Wenshu (1775–1845) resigned from his post and returned home to mourn for his deceased father. For the next seven years, he lived in a residence on West Lake in Hangzhou.<sup>1</sup> During his time there, while he was engaged in the compilation of his collected works, he also embarked on another project: the restoration of the graves of three women who had been buried near West Lake.<sup>2</sup> These three women, the unknown Lady Juxiang of the Song dynasty (960–1279), buried on the island Gushan in the lake, the legendary late Ming poet [Feng] Xiaoqing (1595–1612), and the late Ming painter Yang Huiling,<sup>3</sup> became the focus of a collection of writings, published 36 years after Chen's death as *Lanyinji (Orchid Fate Collection)*.<sup>4</sup> The collection testifies to the collaborative nature of this project: apart from Chen Wenshu it involved his daughter-in-law Wang Duan (1793–1838), his concubines Guan Yun and Wen Jingyu, his daughter Chen Huaju, and woman poets like Wu Guichen (*fl.* late eighteenth century) and Liang Desheng (1771–1847).<sup>5</sup> Chen Wenshu asked these women, and many other male and female poets in his circle, to contribute some verses to the collection, which also included earlier writings associated with the three women and their graves.<sup>6</sup> Together, the writings in this collection illustrate the significance of these three women for Chen Wenshu and his social and literary circles.

Meanwhile, in the 1830s, a man named Ye Naiqin came across the name of the late Ming girl-poet Ye Xiaoluan (1616–32) in the Ye family records.<sup>7</sup> He became interested in this distant relative who had died so young more than 200 years before, and decided to visit the ruins of Xiaoluan's workplace, Shuxiang Pavilion, and Baosheng Temple near Lake Fen, southeast of Wujiang (Suzhou prefecture), where she had been buried. In 1854, Ye Naiqin joined forces with another admirer of Xiaoluan, the county magistrate of Wujiang by the name of Wang Shoumai (nineteenth century). His interest in her dated from 1849, when he had come across a small inkstone in a market. Only after Wang had returned home, and had scraped off the ink residue, had he realized that two quatrains (*jueju*) had been engraved on the back of the inkstone. When these revealed that Xiaoluan had once been the owner of the inkstone, Wang set out to collect other writings about her.<sup>8</sup>

When Ye Naiqin met Wang Shoumai, Wang was about to publish a collection of writings entitled *Yanyuan jilu* (*Collected Writings on the Fate of an Inkstone*), containing all the materials he could find about her, including the many poems that had been written by later admirers of Xiaoluan.<sup>9</sup> The two men decided to visit Xiaoluan's grave together, and in September 1855 erected a stele by the grave for Xiaoluan. Over the years that followed, they not only continued to write about Xiaoluan and her grave, but also solicited poems about Xiaoluan from male and female writers in their social circles. Eventually, in 1917, these writings were compiled and published as *Shuxiangge yilu* (*Posthumous Record of Shuxiang Pavilion*) by a descendant of the Ye family, the conservative politician and book collector Ye Dehui (1864–1927).<sup>10</sup>

### Parallels

The superficial parallels between these two stories are obvious. In both cases a man or several men became interested in the dilapidated grave or graves of women who died long before. The restoration of the graves and the compilation of a collection of writings became the main focal points for these men, whose careers seem otherwise undemanding of them.<sup>11</sup> Both *Orchid Fate Collection* and *Collected Writings on the Fate of an Inkstone* contain writings by the deceased women themselves as well as by men and women in the wider circle of the compilers. The deceased women all lived in, or were associated with, the late Ming.<sup>12</sup> Of course there are differences – Chen Wenshu was known for his sympathetic attitude to woman writers, Wang Shoumai and Ye Naiqin were not; Chen Wenshu was a famous poet himself, Wang and Ye were not; Ye Naiqin was a distant relative of the object of his interest, Chen was not<sup>13</sup> – but the parallels are worth noting. I am particularly interested, for the purposes of this chapter, in what motivated these three men to undertake the restoration of graves of women who had been dead for over 200 years.

### Female talent and tragic death

Three separate but related social developments or 'trends' seem relevant for answering these questions. Inevitably, the search for an answer to these questions leads to the issue of female talent and early death. As is well documented, from at least the seventeenth century onward, talented, ill-fated women form a prominent presence in literary and historical writings.<sup>14</sup> Du Liniang, heroine of the *Peony Pavilion*, and the tragic tale of Xiaoqing inspired male and female readers alike. As Dorothy Ko and others have demonstrated, from this era onward the combination of talent, beauty and premature death was considered inevitable.<sup>15</sup> The early death of a talented beauty aroused deep feelings of passion, pity and excitement in late Ming and Qing literati.<sup>16</sup>

Two of the three women at the centre of Chen Wenshu's *Orchid Fate Collection* were famous for their talent, Yang Huiling and Feng Xiaoqing. By the nineteenth century, the tragic story of Feng Xiaoqing (1595–1612) had

already appealed to poets, writers and intellectuals for several centuries, as Ellen Widmer has shown.<sup>17</sup> Ye Xiaoluan's precocious ability to write poetry, her talents as a painter and a musician, as well as her sudden illness and death just days away from her wedding were all important ingredients of Wang Shoumai and Ye Naiqin's attraction to her.<sup>18</sup> Chen Wenshu, Ye Naiqin and Wang Shoumai's interest in these women must thus, first and foremost, be understood in the well-documented context of centuries of literati fascination with female talent and early death.

### **The appeal of the past**

The near-obsessive interest in female talent alone, however, does not explain these two restoration and publication projects. Of the men involved, only Chen Wenshu had a reputation as a teacher of female writers; the extant writings by Ye Naiqin and Wang Shoumai remain silent on the topic of other woman writers.<sup>19</sup> Perhaps their interest in the dilapidated graves and the legacy of these writers should be understood as part of a general concern for the past? To see the past as the fount of wisdom for both current times and future events is, of course, central to the Confucian tradition, and the model of the scholar who recognizes the importance of the past, preserving and interpreting it, is emulated by many, not to mention Confucius himself.

Perhaps some of these men were turning to the past in an effort to escape the horrors of the present. While Wang Shoumai and Ye Naiqin concerned themselves with Xiaoluan's grave in Wujiang during the 1850s, less than 200 kilometres away, the leader of the Taiping Rebellion, Hong Xiuquan (1813–64), had established his Heavenly Kingdom of Eternal Peace (Taiping tianguo, 1851–63) in Nanjing.<sup>20</sup> During the years that followed, until the Taiping's final defeat in 1864, this bloodiest of civil wars raged on. Less than 75 kilometres east of Wujiang in Shanghai, the Triads staged an uprising, and held Shanghai until 1855.<sup>21</sup> Further from their homes, the British and other foreigners were negotiating their unequal treaties with China's much-humiliated government.<sup>22</sup> If it is perhaps possible that the devastating results of Qing foreign relations remained invisible to a county magistrate like Wang Shoumai, it would seem unlikely that Ye Naiqin and Wang Shoumai were not to some degree exposed to the devastation caused by the Taiping and Triad uprisings. Yet as far as I am aware, in the extant writings of these two men, the Taipings or the Triads are never mentioned.

One can easily imagine the reasons why these traumatic incidents were never mentioned, but the chances of finding evidence to turn such speculation to fact are slim. Equally speculative remains the link between the undoubtedly harrowing events in the immediate surroundings of these two men and their focus on a figure from the past. Nevertheless, it is plausible that a desire to escape from the disturbances of the present to a more civilized, genteel past partly explains Wang Shoumai and Ye Naiqin's focus on a female poet from the past instead of a contemporary figure.

## Ming nostalgia

While restoring relics of the past and editing and publishing literary writings of earlier times are perfectly ordinary activities for men of letters, that does not explain the connection to the late Ming that these women all share. One way to explain this fascination with the lives and deaths of Juxiang, Yang Huiling, Xiaoqing and Ye Xiaoluan may be to place it in the context of what Ellen Widmer and Kang-i Sun Chang have referred to as ‘Ming nostalgia’. With that term they refer to the early nineteenth-century revival of literary interest in the late Ming, and specifically in Ming loyalism, which occurred under the leadership of Chen Wenshu.<sup>23</sup> In many ways, the four women commemorated in these projects can all be understood as symbols of the fallen Ming. Xiaoqing has been described by Ellen Widmer as the ‘icon of Ming loyalism’, her suffering compared to that of the loyal Warring States’ minister Qu Yuan (338–278 BCE).<sup>24</sup> Xiaoqing’s refusal to remarry and her spurned talents were likened to Qu Yuan’s refusal to serve another ruler, a theme which featured in writings about loyalty throughout the ages. Both Xiaoqing and Ye Xiaoluan, who died in 1632, were cruelly denied a long life, and their abrupt endings were closely associated with the brutal demise of Ming rule. The second woman commemorated by Chen Wenshu, the painter Yang Huiling, was a famous landscape painter in Hangzhou during the waning years of the Ming, and had a following in loyalist circles under early Manchu rule.<sup>25</sup> The third, the unknown lady of the Song dynasty identified as Juxiang, has little direct relation to the Ming, but became associated with Ming loyalism in other ways. Her grave was on Gushan, a scenic spot in the middle of West Lake, where she lay buried next to the famous Northern Song poet Lin Bu (967–1028).<sup>26</sup> Her links with Ming loyalism stem from her connection to Hangzhou, where so many prominent Ming loyalists lived and worked, and from her proximity to Lin Bu, who never served the Song government but withdrew to Gushan, and spent his life as a hermit, raising cranes and growing plums.<sup>27</sup> Together, the women commemorated in these two projects are powerful reminders of Ming glory and its demise, and of loyalty to one’s own regime.

If the women featured in these nineteenth-century collections can be seen as symbols of the fallen Ming, the contributors, too, are linked to the Ming. Some of the names of authors whose work Chen included also conjure up images of the political fervour of Ming loyalists immediately after the fall, names such as the famed loyalist courtesan-poet Liu Rushi (1618–64) and her lover, the loyalist martyr Chen Zilong (1608–47),<sup>28</sup> Hangzhou playboy Wang Ranming (*zi* Ruqing) and the woman-poet Wang Duanshu (1621–ca. 1706).<sup>29</sup> Chen’s daughter-in-law Wang Duan wrote a work of fiction on Ming loyalist themes, and devoted an entire *juan* in the collection of poetry she edited to Chen Zilong and Gu Yanwu.<sup>30</sup> The involvement of Chen Wenshu and Wang Duan in *Orchid Fate Collection*, the inclusion of writings by Chen Zilong, Liu Rushi, and Wang Duanshu, combined with the focus on Ming loyalist female icons, place the collection squarely within the loyalist tradition.



Chen Wenshu's expressions of 'loyalism' are not exactly political; they do not imply the resurgence of a call for the restoration of the Ming ruling house. If Chen had an overt political agenda, he would not have missed obvious opportunities to highlight loyalist themes. See, for example, the description of his own visit to Gushan:

There has long been a small grave mound by the side of the grave of Hejing [i.e. the Song hermit and poet Lin Bu] on Gushan. On a stele was engraved that this was [the grave of] Juxiang, daughter of a scholar. I often used to see this when I was young. Between 1808 and 1809 the grave of Lin was restored. The steles were all broken and were taken away, which saddened me.<sup>31</sup>

The emphasis in Chen's comments is on the dilapidated nature of the grave itself, and makes no reference to the loyalist overtones of an earlier text about Juxiang's grave included in *Orchid Fate Collection*.<sup>32</sup> If Chen himself was not directly motivated by political ideals in establishing these connections, the Ming 'nostalgia' of the early nineteenth century does have political dimensions. James Polachek, who discusses this theme in his influential 1992 book *The Inner Opium War*, explains the political significance of Ming nostalgia.<sup>33</sup> He analyses the ways in which early nineteenth-century literati politics were reshaped, highlighting in particular the reappearance of factions on the political scene, until then taboo in Qing politics.<sup>34</sup> As Benjamin Elman has shown, in response to the severe crises of the late eighteenth century, such as the White Lotus rebellion (1796–1805) and the Heshen affair, literati regrouped in polarized factions.<sup>35</sup> Polachek's work shows that these early nineteenth-century literati connections were modelled on such late Ming ideals as aesthetic elegance (*fengliu*) and political purity, exemplified by the Donglin movement.<sup>36</sup> With the return of verse composition to the imperial examinations under the reign of Qianlong, poetry clubs also reappeared.<sup>37</sup> Ming-style poetry clubs began to function as locations of literati opposition, which initially focused on the Heshen debacle, but later developed into widespread literati activism.<sup>38</sup> Polachek's literati-activists form only a subsection of the empire-wide examination élite, namely the group 'capable of ongoing participation in any aspect of the political or intellectual life of the capital'.<sup>39</sup> His important argument for the existence of a nostalgia for the late Ming and early Qing is thus an argument about the revival of a political style among a relatively small group of political activists, not a political call for the restoration of Ming rule.<sup>40</sup>

The nostalgia for the Ming evident in early nineteenth-century literary writings, particularly in those of Chen Wenshu's coterie, and the nineteenth-century harking back to the political ideals of the late Ming as noted by Polachek, are not unrelated. When Chen Wenshu arrived in Beijing in 1800, where he would spend the next six years attempting to pass the imperial examinations, he became friends with eminent figures such as scholar-official Weng Fanggang (1733–1818), Hanlin compiler Hong Liangji (1746–1809) and Weng Fanggang's protégé, the provincial governor Ruan Yuan (1764–1849).<sup>41</sup> Weng Fanggang is one of the main protagonists in the Xuannan Poetry Club, which flourished during the 1810s and 1820s, and forms

the precursor of what Polachek terms ‘the resurrection of the late-Ming political style’, leading to ‘the full-blown revival of the late Ming model of literati political activism’ that followed in the 1830s.<sup>42</sup> Chen’s personal connection to men like Weng Fanggang and Ruan Yuan suggests that the expressions of Ming nostalgia in Chen’s writings may well be linked to what Polachek sees as the wider political developments of the day.

Interestingly, some of the men identified by Polachek as prominent leaders in the resurgence of Ming-style politics also visited the grave of Ye Xiaoluan. Take for example Wang Chang (1725–1806) and Wu Songliang (1766–1834), both prominent personages in Polachek’s narrative.<sup>43</sup> As Polachek shows, Wang Chang, a famous scholar-official of the Qianlong era, advocated the ideal of aesthetic elegance as the marker of the literati fellowship. His intellectual projects, the compilation of a history of the Donglin Academy and the creation of a register of the empire’s academies, clearly sprang from a commitment to late Ming ideals, and received widespread attention in the early nineteenth century.<sup>44</sup> Influenced by Wang Chang was the writer and painter Wu Songliang, one of the elders of the Xuannan Poetry Club. Both Wang Chang and Wu Songliang were interested in women writers, and both wrote about Ye Xiaoluan.<sup>45</sup> Wang Chang had visited the site of Ye Xiaoluan’s pavilion, and wrote a piece commemorating that visit.<sup>46</sup> His language has unmistakable nostalgic overtones in his description of a pavilion amidst overgrown weeds where the life of its beautiful and talented inhabitant was tragically cut short just as she was about to tie the marital knot. The poem he wrote for the occasion picks up the themes so important in seventeenth-century writings about Xiaoluan: the return of her spirit in séances, and her communication of several fragments of poems.<sup>47</sup> Clearly, it was not just the appeal of the talented beauty who tragically died young, but also the way in which her poetic voice continued to ‘speak’ across several centuries that touched him. Wu Songliang’s poem for Ye Xiaoluan focuses on the eyebrow-shaped inkstone that allegedly had belonged to Xiaoluan, evoking Xiaoluan’s ephemeral beauty, and asking wistfully where her inkstone might now be.<sup>48</sup>

The nostalgia for the cultural emblems of the late Ming identified by Widmer and Chang and the resurgence of Ming-style politics identified by Polachek may well have been largely embodied by the same people. It seems likely, then, that the intellectual climate of the early nineteenth century was dominated by a vogue for the late Ming. This fashion manifested itself in many different ways: not only in the political styles as described by Polachek, but also in the poetic expressions of the members of the semi-political poetry clubs. These men shared interests in topics like the woman writer, Ming loyalism, and cities associated with Ming loyalist writers like Hangzhou. Writers and collectors like Chen Wenshu, Ye Naiqin and Wang Shoumai, who spent considerable energy and resources on restoring the graves of these women writers and on protecting and preserving their legacies, may well in part have been motivated by similar interests.

From this discussion, then, it would seem that the activities of Chen Wenshu, Ye Naiqin and Wang Shoumai surrounding the graves of these four women were inspired by a combination of the three trends discussed above: the longstanding

literati fascination with the talented and tragic woman writer, the traditional predilection of the Confucian scholar for the preservation and transmission of the material and literary culture of the past, and the more specifically nineteenth-century fashion for the icons and themes associated with the late Ming.

### **The search for gentility**

These three developments still do not fully explain the motivations of these men. There is a fourth trend that might help in understanding these two projects: the perennial anxiety over and ambiguity of the self-identity of the literati.<sup>49</sup> In the remainder of this chapter I will discuss the hypothesis that writing about Juxiang, Yang Huiling, Feng Xiaoqing and Ye Xiaoluan offered these men the opportunity to strengthen and enhance their self-identities. Their involvement in these projects allowed them to manifest themselves as men of distinction, as gentlemen. Of course these four men went about such manifestations of gentlemanly identity, or ‘gentility’, in very different ways. Their interest in these female poets, however, can at least in part be explained by the need or desire of the men involved to display ‘gentility’, which I understand as symbols and expressions of social distinction and cultural sophistication. Each of the trends manifest in these writings – the fascination with the talented woman writer, the predilection for preserving and transmitting the past, and the obsession with the late Ming – can also be understood as expressions of literati anxiety over identity and status and their ongoing search for gentility.

Looking closely at the ways in which the men involved in these projects wrote about women, what strikes the reader is not their appreciation of female literary talent *per se*, but the emphasis on the men themselves. The men appear in a variety of leading roles: as guardians of the family morals, as connoisseurs and teachers of female talent. The collections feature most emphatically the men themselves, while the talented women, ostensibly the subjects of the collections, in effect play merely supportive roles. The concern for the preservation of the past, expressed by several of the men, was in part motivated by self-interest. Involvement in the preservation of the past cast these men in a desirable role: that of the scholarly gentleman who appreciates and protects a cultural legacy that is perceived to be under threat from its current environment.<sup>50</sup> To identify themselves and each other as one of a kind, these men establish associations with Ming loyalism. Their references to Ming loyalism appear less as expressions of their loyalty to the political regime that had fallen nearly 200 years earlier than as ways of creating and maintaining a fellowship of like-minded individuals, referred to as *tongren*. These *tongren* are united by their interest in the symbols of the late Ming, including the woman writer, Hangzhou, and the writings of Ming loyalists, by their efforts to preserve and transmit these fragile female legacies, but most of all, by their desire to acknowledge each other as gentlemen.

## Appreciating female talent?

All four men are to some extent drawn to the women because of their talent. Chen Wenshu, as is well documented, was a supporter of female talent who modelled himself on Yuan Mei (1716–1798) as patron and teacher of a coterie of woman writers.<sup>51</sup> Ye Naiqin and Wang Shoumai, on the other hand, are not known for their interest in woman writers. By closely looking at their interest in Ye Xiaoluan, it becomes clear that their interest in Xiaoluan was in part driven by a concern for their own social status. Of course Ye Naiqin first noticed Ye Xiaoluan because of her talent as a poet. Yet, in his writings about Xiaoluan, the main focus is not her talent. In the diary he kept between November 1855 and July 1858, where he records each visit to his great-great-aunt's grave, her poems are never mentioned.<sup>52</sup> Instead he fills a great number of pages with discussions on the exact location of her grave mound. It matters enormously to him that we know which of the three mounds in the field where she was buried might have been Xiaoluan's, although he sadly has to conclude that definitive evidence will never be found. 'Living in today's world, wishing to investigate a grave that is more than 200 years old is truly a difficult thing, and it is impossible to eradicate all doubt'.<sup>53</sup> He has to content himself with conscientiously seeking out all available evidence to support his case.

Ye Naiqin's motivation in all this, it appears, is the correct placement of this female 'ancestor' in the Ye family records. 'The realm of a grave is where the spirit dwells. Since the late Yuan my family has never neglected to guard the ancestral graves of all the generations'.<sup>54</sup> Ye is proud of the Ye family tradition, which yielded such prominent men as the distinguished poet Ye Shaoyuan (1589–1648), whose 'moral virtues and achievements are widely known'.<sup>55</sup> But the absence of a proper location for the expression of his admiration for his ancestral aunt (*xian zu gu*) causes him deep distress. 'Searching for the location of buried jade and interred fragrance [i.e. her grave] in the boundless and indistinct open fields is like going into the sea to look for a pearl'.<sup>56</sup> To rectify this situation, once the correct details concerning her grave have been established, Ye Naiqin arranges for a small memorial tablet to be erected.

His efforts, thus, are not so much aimed at making sure the world knows about the talents of Ye Xiaoluan, but more at creating a proper physical location for her memory. Once that location exists, her memory can be worshipped, and she can be given a place in the family records. He uses Xiaoluan's talent, in other words, to assist in the glorification of his own Ye family. Even though he feels in recent times the status of the Ye family has declined – he hints that the blossoming and withering of the 500-year-old camphor tree near the family grave symbolizes the rise and decline of his family – he expresses the hope that 'the cycle of luck will revolve and the Ye family will flourish again'.<sup>57</sup> Ye Naiqin does, at least on one occasion, express his feelings about the current status of his family. In his lament over the condition of the graves of the most illustrious ancestors in his extended family, he sighs:

Their own branches have no one to sweep the graves. Once [care for the graves] has not been carried out for a long time, we lose sight of their locations. It is said that the old graves have been ploughed for fields, pines and cedars have been cut up for firewood. Unable to overcome my sadness, I sigh deeply over this.<sup>58</sup>

His sadness over current conditions in which his family has lost the social grandeur and moral stamina that guaranteed the maintenance of graves in the past must also enhance his desire to look back at a previous, better era. Even though we know nothing else about his present circumstances other than these references to a decline in status, it seems clear to me that he is hoping the establishment of a proper location for Xiaoluan's grave will help to improve his perceived plight and reflect some of her elevated status on him.<sup>59</sup>

For Wang Shoumai, who is of course not related to Ye Xiaoluan, the focus of his interest lies closer to her poetry. But in his case, too, he uses her memory for his own purposes, and her talent is not necessarily central to that enterprise. In the same way that the title of Ye Naiqin's writings about Xiaoluan, *Fangmu shimo* (*Complete story of a visit to the grave*) indicates his main interest, Wang Shoumai's focus is also obvious from the title *Collected Writings on the Fate of an Inkstone*. 'The inkstone linked you to me, as I travelled to my new post', he writes in a long poem about Xiaoluan.<sup>60</sup> The fate (*yuan*) of the inkstone is what links Xiaoluan to him. It creates, for Wang, at least the possibility of a relationship that is more than just admiration for her abilities; it creates the potential for love. And while he clearly enjoys that possibility, as we see in a long poem full of sexual overtones and references, he also feels the burdens of this relationship. As he says in his own preface to *Collected Writings on the Fate of an Inkstone*, 'If I did not pass on the story of this inkstone, and make it flourish, I ought not to have taken on the responsibility of this fated relationship'.<sup>61</sup> The inkstone thus gives Wang Shoumai an active role, in the same way that Xiaoluan's grave gave Ye Naiqin an active role. In Wang Shoumai's case, the role is to preserve her legacy, and to continue it. He fulfils this role by publishing the *Collected Writings on the Fate of an Inkstone*, which includes not only Xiaoluan's poetry and prose included in Ye Shaoyuan's *Wumengtang quanji* (*Complete Works from the Hall of Meridian Dreams*), but also Wang's own descriptions of the trip to Xiaoluan's grave and a series of poems composed in memory of Xiaoluan.<sup>62</sup>

But Wang's role also has something to do with his own status. As he writes in the preface, over 100 years after her death 'refined gentlemen and men of letters often sang her praises'.<sup>63</sup> Although he does not specify to whom he refers here, it is conceivable that he means the interest of Yuan Mei in Xiaoluan. In *Suiyuan shihua* (*Poetry talks from Sui Garden*), published in 1790, Yuan Mei refers briefly to Xiaoluan. 'Xiaoluan was from Yue [Guangdong Province]. When she came of age, she became a nun. She was initiated by the Great Master of Yuelang (Yuelang dashi)'.<sup>64</sup> Elsewhere Ye Naiqin expresses his irritation over Yuan Mei's sloppy facts (of course she was not from Guangdong, nor did she become a nun),<sup>65</sup> but Wang Shoumai merely states, 'The story of her life contained many mistakes,

which were still not clarified by Suiyuan [i.e. Yuan Mei]'.<sup>66</sup> He writes that since these men of letters sang her praises much time has passed.

I know that this inkstone was at times well known but at other times dwelt in obscurity. [I also know] where it has been. If I had not gathered [these precious objects] and expanded their transmission, then perhaps no one would have taken on the responsibility for this predestined relationship.<sup>67</sup>

Here, then, he not only legitimates his own role as chosen collector and preserver of her legacy, but also places himself in the company of 'elegant gentlemen and men of letters'.<sup>68</sup> Perhaps it is not too far-fetched to think that his underlying hope in taking on the responsibility for the transmission of the story of this inkstone was that he, too, would belong to the ranks of refined gentlemen and men of letters.

Both Ye Naiqin and Wang Shoumai become aware of Xiaoluan's existence because of her poetry. Ye noticed her in the family records as a forgotten poet, Wang was struck by the author of the poems on his inkstone. But for both, I would contend, her poetry is not the only motivating factor in their attempts to construct her memory. Their interest in Xiaoluan is also, at least in part, fuelled by their own aspirations. For Ye Naiqin, the restoration of Xiaoluan's grave plays an important part in strengthening the family's heritage, and thereby the family's and his own current fortunes. For Wang Shoumai, she allows him to play the role of protector of her poetic legacy in the way that men like Yuan Mei had done before him.

### **Protecting fragile legacies**

If the focus on a woman writer allowed these men to play certain roles, the focus on a fragile legacy equally afforded them that opportunity. By looking to the past and by preserving what was vulnerable to decay, these men also aspire to give themselves the role of a connoisseur of the past, who distinguishes and preserves what is valuable, especially where others fail to recognize it. As Judith Zeitlin and Paul Ropp have shown, the pathos of one or two poems rescued from flames or scribbled on a flower petal touched a chord, and inspired literati such as Shi Zhenlin (1693–ca. 1779) to preserve and circulate their fragile legacies.<sup>69</sup> The aspiration to be known as a guardian of what might otherwise decay may well have been part of Wang Shoumai's motivation.

Qiongzhang's [i.e. Xiaoluan's] temporary grave is behind Baosheng Temple. For 200 years no one came past and asked after her. Last autumn in the seventh month [i.e. August 1854], I discussed with [Ye Naiqin's brother] Xishan the issue of restoring the grave. I once stayed there, but [the place] is dusty and [its memories] scattered and not preserved. I personally visited the lakeside and was the only mourner at the grave.<sup>70</sup>

In this description, Wang is alone in acknowledging the importance of this location, which for 200 years was ignored, and he alone mourns at her grave.

Throughout the narrative that follows, chronicling his visit to the location of the grave, the emphasis is on decay. Wang's words are pervaded by a sense of nostalgia, like the 'well that had been expansive and intricate but long fallen dry', and the 'pillars of the broken bridge which stood like a forest on the shoal'.<sup>71</sup> The road Wang and his companions travel is overgrown with weeds; many parts of the wall have collapsed and broken down. When they finally have battled their way along narrow paths through rampant weeds and have made their offerings of incense, they talk of restoration. Then one of the men sighs: 'This temple [i.e. Baosheng temple] has already seen over 200 years. Luckily it has not collapsed yet. It now depends on some guidance'.<sup>72</sup> Here, of course, is where they come in. Preserving the fragile legacy of this poet casts them in an attractive role: as connoisseurs of the past, who preserve of the past what might otherwise be lost amidst the ignorance of the present.

As Wang Shoumai puts it elsewhere, 'I prepared the details of her scattered story, which enabled me to illuminate what was obscure and restore what had collapsed'.<sup>73</sup> It is clear throughout his writings that he relishes this role. While he has the inkstone, and safeguards its continued existence, he can ensure that people still understand the significance of its previous owner, whom he compares to the night-flowering cereus that suddenly collapses and withers. In the inkstone, and thereby in Wang Shoumai's hands, Xiaoluan's legacy is safe. How important is this, especially, as he writes, in a 'time that brings great changes, where homes and families are scattered'.<sup>74</sup> Ye and Wang's focus on this poet from the past might thus be understood in this context. It allows them, albeit briefly, to escape the horrors of their current environment, but more importantly, it allows them to engage in an age-old gentlemanly pursuit: the preservation of a legacy of the past.

### **The Ming-loyalist voice**

The third context in which to understand the projects is the nineteenth-century retrospective on the late Ming. Part of the fashion for the late Ming might be seen in connection with the search for gentility. Expressions of nostalgia for the late Ming may have functioned as signals of social and cultural distinction, as markers of gentility. Ming nostalgia might even be understood as a cohesive force among a social group that goes beyond Polachek's literati-activists. Expressions of Ming nostalgia in the broader sense afforded those whose social positions were not secured in other ways the opportunity to identify themselves as belonging to a social group. Expressing nostalgia for the Ming signalled a desire to be identified as members of a distinguished and sophisticated group; it became the voice of the genteel.

Consider, by way of example, the publishing history of *Haoqiyin* (*Calls of a Noble Spirit*). This work contained poems and essays by the Ming loyalist Qu Shisi (1590–1651) written during the final days of the Southern Ming court.<sup>75</sup> The text existed only in manuscript until the early nineteenth-century bibliophile Zhang Haipeng (1755–1816) included *Calls of a Noble Spirit* in a collection of rare books and manuscripts from the Ming and Qing, entitled *Jieryue shanfang*

*huichao* (*Compilation from Mountain Hut Next the Moon*).<sup>76</sup> We know little about Zhang Haipeng, other than that he never had a successful career as an official, and that he hailed from Changshu, birthplace of both Qu Shisi and Qian Qianyi. In fact, Zhang Haipeng collected *Compilation from Mountain Hut Next the Moon* between 1807 and 1810, during which time Chen Wenshu served there as magistrate. Chen Wenshu's daughter-in-law Wang Duan also read *Calls of a Noble Spirit*, and referred to Qu Shisi in her poems.<sup>77</sup> Then, in the early 1830s, *Calls of a Noble Spirit* was reprinted by the scholar-poet Shen Qinhan (1775–1832) (Shen Qinhan 1974). Shen Qinhan, like Zhang Haipeng, was a descendant from a long line of literati, but had failed to pass the examinations or secure any kind of official position.<sup>78</sup> Publishing, and in particular publishing the work of Ming loyalist writers, may well have been a way for these men to attain the recognition for their status their examination record had failed to secure for them. This will not have been the case for Pan Xi'en (?–1868), who published *Calls of a Noble Spirit* in 1848.<sup>79</sup> Pan obtained his *jinshi* degree in 1811 and had a successful career.<sup>80</sup> His collection included besides Qu Shisi's *Calls of a Noble Spirit* also the writings of Ming loyalist Huang Daozhou (1585–1646), and those of Huang's wife Cai Runshi. For Pan, and for Zhang Haipeng and Shen Qinhan, the Ming clearly held an appeal, and they all shared a desire to be seen to promote the cultural ideals of the late Ming.

Ding Bing (1832–1899), who included *Orchid Fate Collection* in his collectanea of works dealing with his native Hangzhou, *Wulin zhanggu congbian* (*Collectanea of Legends from Hangzhou*), in 1881, may fall into a similar category.<sup>81</sup> His focus on Hangzhou inevitably led him to its heyday as the location of Ming loyalism, and to works like *Xihu mengxun* (*Dreamed Search for West Lake*) by the late Ming drama aficionado Zhang Dai (1597–1684), who retreated to the mountains and shaved his hair after the fall of the Ming.<sup>82</sup> Besides his interest in Hangzhou, women writers also featured on his list of publications. He printed, for example, the literary works of his second wife Ling Zhiyuan (1831–1852) entitled *Cuiluogē yigao* (*Posthumous Writings of the Pavilion of the Emerald Spiral*).<sup>83</sup> The themes in Ding Bing's work – Hangzhou, the late Ming, the woman writer – are themes that feature again and again in the records of these nineteenth-century gentleman publishers, and identify him as one of the same kind.<sup>84</sup>

We have no explicit evidence that these publishers saw themselves as belonging to a group or as one of a kind other than the prevalence of shared themes. But the evidence is explicit enough in other cases. See, for example, how Chen Wenshu used such shared interests to forge connections. After compiling *Orchid Fate Collection* between 1823 and 1830, Chen came across the collection of writings by Ye Xiaoluan named after her pavilion, Shuxiang Pavilion, and composed some poems inspired by her extraordinary talent and beauty. He ended his poems on Xiaoluan with the following: 'In idle moments I'm afraid to read [the collection by the female poet Yang Yun] *Qinqingji* (*Writings of Zither-like Clarity*), for the *Jade Clouds* poem evokes a desolate mood'.<sup>85</sup> This poem, *Jade Clouds*, was written in honour of Xiaoluan by the woman poet Yang Yun (*zi* Ruiyuan), whose father Yang Fangcan also wrote about Xiaoluan.<sup>86</sup> Chen Wenshu had written a preface for her



collection, *Writings of Zither-like Clarity*,<sup>87</sup> and clearly saw the links between Yang Yun and Ye Xiaoluan. His statement about the desolate mood refers most likely to Xiaoluan's tragic fate, which he hoped Yang Yun would be spared. What matters for our purposes is the connections and relationships Chen emphasizes: between himself as admirer of female talent in Xiaoluan and Yang Yun, between the two woman poets Xiaoluan and Yang Yun, and indirectly between himself and Yang Yun's father as fellow admirers of female talent.

Cheng Tinglu (1796–1858), whose poem 'Yidao xiansheng chongxiu Xihu sannüshi mu shi' ('For the gentleman Yidao [i.e. Chen Wenshu] upon his restoration of the graves of the three lady scholars of West Lake') was included in *Orchid Fate Collection*,<sup>88</sup> used the term 'like-minded fellows' (*tongren*) to refer to the 'like-minded' who contributed to both *Orchid Fate Collection* and *Collected Writings on the Fate of an Inkstone*.<sup>89</sup> In the preface he wrote for *Collected Writings on the Fate of an Inkstone*, Cheng writes that the significance of this collection is that it preserves the previously dispersed poems and dedications [to Ye Xiaoluan] of the past and the present in one place, 'thereby extending the predestined relationship to those with similar intentions' (*guang qi yuan yu tong zhi ye*).<sup>90</sup> With those words, Cheng Tinglu gives expression to the sentiment that underlies the two projects discussed here. Cheng Tinglu's comment refers only to *Collected Writings on the Fate of an Inkstone*, but it is equally relevant to *Orchid Fate Collection*. To preserve the writings of these talented women writers of the late Ming was considered a significant task, one to which they were bound by a linked destiny (*yuan*). The purpose of accepting that task was to extend the bond created by that linked destiny to a fellowship of the like-minded, the *tongren*.

### Gentlemanly connections?

Clearly, certain themes associated with the late Ming – woman poets, loyalism, Hangzhou – enjoyed great popularity within a fairly wide social circle around Chen Wenshu, which included both prominent statesmen and relatively unknown figures, and whose members referred to each other on occasion as 'like-minded fellows'. How do Ye Naiqin and Wang Shoumai fit into this picture? It is striking how many of the themes discussed above resonate with their writings, too. Their writing about Xiaoluan was perhaps also motivated by a desire to recognize each other as 'like-minded fellows'; the preservation of Xiaoluan's legacy can perhaps also be understood as a means to preserve and emphasize their own 'distinction'.

When Wang Shoumai was about to publish his *Collected Writings on the Fate of an Inkstone*, he solicited contributions from a number of friends and associates. Wang's friend, a certain Huang Junzai (*fl.* 1856) remarked in his collection of jottings how much Wang treasured his inkstone: 'Once in a market in Yuanpu, [Wang] obtained Ye Xiaoluan's eyebrow-shaped inkstone, which had two poems carved on the back. They corresponded to [the poems] recorded in *Autumnal Rain Cloister (Qiuyu an)*.<sup>91</sup> Wang deeply treasured this inkstone'.<sup>92</sup> According to Huang, Wang asked: 'You are good at composing song lyrics (*ci*). Could you write

a song lyric to the tune of ‘The Song of South and North (‘Nanbei qu’) for me to complete [my collection]?’.<sup>93</sup> Huang agreed, but his poem is put in the context of a description of what kind of person Huang perceives Wang Shoumai to be. He describes him as a filial and upright man, and a good calligrapher. ‘[Wang] could squeeze standard-script calligraphy (*kai*) into the space of an inch, correct in form and of outstanding elegance’.<sup>94</sup> With this description Huang is placing Wang within certain parameters: he is morally upright, and he is a cultured man who has perfected a sophisticated art form.

If that was not enough of a signal to us as to what sort of man Huang is dealing with, Huang also describes Wang as a connoisseur:

[Wang Shoumai] went to the capital and stayed at the residence of Military Staff Member Wang. To the left of the bed hung the portrait of his deceased concubine Jiang Yunqing, and on the shelf to the right was a bundle of failed examination papers. [Wang Shoumai] said: ‘These two are matters that cause us great heart-ache during our lives.’ From this one can imagine both his despondency and his candour.<sup>95</sup>

This background introduction to the kind of person Huang Junzai perceives Wang Shoumai to be must be there for a reason. It is part of Huang’s explanation to the song lyric he wrote for Wang Shoumai’s collection. Huang clearly feels the need to clarify the kind of man Wang Shoumai is. He is not only morally upright and a master in calligraphy, he also shares similar preoccupations: the company of women and examination success. Even without knowing anything else about Huang Junzai and Wang Shoumai, we can read such exchanges as discussions of status and social distinction. Elsewhere Huang Junzai writes that Wang compiled a collection entitled *Shuxiangge yigao* (‘Posthumous writings from Shuxiang Pavilion’). ‘He included also the poems written in dedication by like-minded fellows (*yi tongren tici fu zhi*). What has long been called a predestined relationship (*yuan*) is still evident’.<sup>96</sup> Significant here is not just the fact that he, too, mentions the continued importance of *yuan*, but the reference to these men like him, the like-minded fellows (*tongren*), who add their verses to Wang Shoumai’s. The men who contributed to Wang Shoumai’s collection saw each other as like-minded fellows, united in their admiration for women writers like Ye Xiaoluan.<sup>97</sup>

In a comment added to a poem about Ye Xiaoluan, Cheng Tinglu makes explicit the link between *Orchid Fate Collection* and *Collected Writings on the Fate of an Inkstone*:

The gentleman [Wang Shoumai] used the inkstone for the name of his retreat. He used to be magistrate of Wujiang, where he restored Xiaoluan’s grave and erected a stele for her. Previously, Master Chen Yunbo [i.e. Chen Wenshu] restored the graves of the three female scholars Huiling, Juxiang and Xiaoqing. He published the poems of fellow admirers (*tongren*) as *Orchid Fate Collection*. Now the *Collected Writings on the Fate of an Inkstone* compilation transmits everything together.<sup>98</sup>

Cheng Tinglu, like Huang Junzai, places Wang Shoumai in a distinct context, stressing the precedent for Wang's restoration project. The similarity between the two projects, highlighted by Cheng Tinglu, suggests that those involved in both projects are perceived as *tongren*: members of a fellowship of like-minded spirits, identified by their shared interest in woman writers associated with the late Ming.

Ye Naiqin's writings are much less clearly placed in a social context. Although he shares his interest with a group of men, which includes his brothers and members of the Fenhu branch of the Ye family – his diary makes frequent mention of correspondence exchanged between these men, although the letters themselves are not included – he seems less eager to receive recognition for his efforts outside the Ye family than Wang Shoumai. Perhaps his project of giving a member of the Ye family her rightful place in the records and creating a locus for honouring her memory needed less justification. The answer could also be one of social and/or economic class. Perhaps Ye Naiqin's position in society needed less confirmation than Wang Shoumai's. But since we have no indication of Ye Naiqin's social standing other than his references to the recent decline of his family, while in contrast we know that Wang Shoumai held a position as Wujiang magistrate, it may more likely be a question of aspirations. Perhaps Wang Shoumai aspired to belong to a group, the membership of which he did not immediately or automatically qualify for. His own references to like-minded people (*tongren*) who understand his enterprise and write poetry for his collection, combined with the references made by the men writing for him that identify Wang as belonging to their kind, certainly make it conceivable that belonging to this group mattered for Wang Shoumai.

## Conclusion

Cheng Tinglu makes explicit the implicit parallels with which we started this chapter.<sup>99</sup> More than mere parallels, they are in fact real connections. These connections, given expression in the term *tongren*, which appears with striking regularity in the writings of contributors both to *Orchid Fate Collection* and to *Collected Writings on the Fate of an Inkstone*, supply some of the motivation behind the two projects. Of course Chen Wenshu, Ye Naiqin and Wang Shoumai, like so many other literati throughout the late imperial era, were drawn to the likes of Ye Xiaoluan, Xiaoqing, Juxiang and Yang Huiling because they were female, talented, beautiful, and often associated with tragedy. Chen, Ye and Wang were all *rujia*, educated men for whom the cultural tradition that had shaped them was an important source of inspiration, and protecting and transmitting the legacy of the past would have seemed an obvious occupation. Moreover, Chen, Ye and Wang lived through a time when the cultural and political values of the late Ming were once again in vogue. But the evidence presented above points to the possibility that these men were motivated by a fourth trend: the perennial anxiety over and ambiguity of the self-identity of the literati. I have argued above that writing about these young ladies, collecting their materials and the writings about them, and

restoring their graves were also expressions of a gentlemanly identity. These men use the voice of the Ming loyalist as a way of identifying themselves and each other as one of a kind. Through their shared interests in the symbols associated with the late Ming, including the woman writer, Hangzhou, and the writings of Ming loyalists, they create and maintain a fellowship of like-minded individuals, who refer to each other as *tongren*. These *tongren* are united by their interest in and by their efforts to preserve and transmit these female legacies of the past, but most of all, by their desire to acknowledge each other as gentlemen.

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## Notes

- 1 *ECCP* 103–4. Goyama 1987.
- 2 Chen's collected works, *Complete Writings of Yidao Hall* (*Yidaotang quanji*), which include both prose and poetry, were completed in 1828. See Widmer 1992: 122. Chen Wenshu's interest in restoring the graves of historical personages was well known. See, for example, Chen's biography in *Illustrious Biographies of Qing History* (*Qingshi liezhuan*), Wang Zhonghan 1987: 5995 or in Zhang Weiping [1830] 2002: 283.
- 3 *Zi Yunyou*.
- 4 Yang Huilin's painting was praised by the famous painter Dong Qichang (1555–1635). See Li 1997: 59. Wang Duan (1793–1838), daughter-in-law of Chen Wenshu wrote a poem about Yang Huilin; see *WWTC* 578–9. In *Orchid Fate Collection* Chen Wenshu combined a wide range of writings on the three women. In the first part of the collection, Chen included all extant writings; in the second part he included the poems written in response to his invitation to comment on the graves he had just restored.
- 5 On Wang Duan, see Widmer 1992: 140–2; *WWTC* 577–83; Widmer 1997a. On Wu Guichen, see *WWTC* 526–7. On Liang Desheng, see *WWTC* 574–7, Widmer and Chang 1997: 376, 379–80, 394. Guan Yun's works are included in *LFZ* 701–2; Wen Jingyu's work is also listed; see *LFZ* 222.
- 6 Chen Wenshu was known for the circle of female students around him. *ECCP* 104; Goyama 1987. For earlier examples of men teaching female students, see Ko 1993.
- 7 A detailed account of Ye's efforts on behalf of Ye Xiaoluan's grave appears on *SXGYL* 3/12b–26a.
- 8 *SXGYL* 4/50b–51b.
- 9 Wang Shoumai 1856. Both the Beijing and the Shanghai library have a copy of this collection, but I have not been able to consult these.
- 10 On Ye Dehui, see Boorman 1967–79: 35–7; Zhang and Du 1985. Ye was widely known for his conservative politics, but was also interested in, for example, bedchamber manuals. On this aspect of his writings, see Furth 1994: 130–1.
- 11 Ye Naiqin did not hold an official post, and little can be ascertained with regard to his personal circumstances, other than that he devoted a great deal of time and personal resources to the restoration project. See *SXGYL* 3/12a–28b. Wang Shoumai held a post as governor of Songling (Wujiang), which, according to Cheng Tinglu, gave him a certain amount of leisure time (*wei zheng duo xia*). See *SXGYL* 4/51a. Chen Wenshu was in Hangzhou for seven years in mourning for his father. See above.

- 12 Yang Huiling, Xiaoqing and Xiaoluan all lived during the late Ming. Juxiang's association with the late Ming will be discussed below.
- 13 Chen Wenshu's encouragement of female talent was widely known. *ECCP* 104. His publications bear witness to this encouragement; among his compilations is a text entitled *Chantings by Refined Ladies on West Lake (Xiling guiyong)*. See Chen Wenshu [1883] 1994. To my knowledge, neither Wang Shoumai nor Ye Naiqin left a record that indicates an interest in woman poets other than Ye Xiaoluan.
- 14 For examples of male fascination with female talent and death, see for example Waltner 1987; Zeitlin 1998; Ropp 2001; Berg 2006. Of course male interest in female literary talent dates from much earlier. See, for example, Idema 1999a and Ho 1999.
- 15 Ko 1994: 99–103; Zeitlin 1994.
- 16 Ko 1994. Widmer 1999: 137. Women were equally attracted by the combination of female talent and early death. See, for just one example, Zeitlin 1994.
- 17 Widmer 1992.
- 18 Idema 1999a: 334.
- 19 On Chen as a teacher of women, see Goyama 1987.
- 20 On Hong Xiuquan, see *ECCP* 361–7. On Hong's role in the Taiping Rebellion, see Spence 1996.
- 21 Ter Haar 1998: 24. As Ter Haar points out, the Triads only occupied the county capital of Shanghai, not the international sector.
- 22 Jonathan Spence's *The Search for Modern China* provides perhaps the best general introduction to this turbulent age. Spence 1990.
- 23 See Widmer 1997a: 367; Widmer 1992: 40; and Chang 1997a: 168.
- 24 Ko 1994: 101. The theme of Ming loyalism is discussed most fully in Chang 1991. On Qu Yuan and the 'myth of loyalty', see Schneider 1980.
- 25 *WWTC* 579. Her paintings were admired by Hangzhou poet and loyalist Wang Ruqing (*zi* Ranming) (1577–1655). Liu Rushi also knew Yang's paintings. Li Wai-yee 1997: 432n42. On Wang Ruqing's role in the Hangzhou circles of poets, loyalists, courtesans of the mid-seventeenth century, see Ko 1994, especially chapter 7.
- 26 On Lin Bu, see his biography by Wayne Schlepp in Franke 1976: 613–15.
- 27 The Ming-loyalist courtesan Liu Rushi lived and worked in Hangzhou, and famous scenic spots in Hangzhou feature in her poetry. See, for example, *WWTC* 356–7. The loyalist poet Wang Duanshu also lived in Hangzhou and was associated with the loyalist Zhang Dai (1597–1684). Ellen Widmer refers to Lin Bu as 'the Sung loyalist'. See Widmer 1992: 117.
- 28 On Liu Rushi, see *WWTC* 350–7. Chang 1991 is an in-depth study of the poetry, love, and life of Chen Zilong and Liu Rushi.
- 29 On Wang, see Ko 1994. For Wang Duanshu, see *WWTC* 363–6. On Wang Duanshu's loyalism, see Widmer 1997a.
- 30 Widmer 1997a: 367; Chang 1997a: 168.
- 31 Chen Wenshu [1881] 1994: 2a.
- 32 The text that inspired Chen's comment is 'Inscription for Juxiang's grave' (*Juxiang mu ming*), by Zhu Jiuding (seventeenth century), a friend of Ye Xie (1627–1703), the only surviving child of Ye Shaoyuan and Shen Yixiu, and Ye Xiaoluan's younger brother. Zhu Jiuding's inscription for Juxiang's grave was written after the accession of Kangxi, which must explain why there are no direct references to the fallen Ming. He writes of Juxiang's admiration for Lin Bu's pure spirit, a sentiment he feels only a truly great beauty could have felt, and of his own visits to this wild place where he discussed literature with his friends, and invited Juxiang's spirit to return to them. Chen Wenshu [1881] 1994: 1a–2b. In a time when overt Ming loyalism was punished brutally, these are strong hints, yet Chen Wenshu does not pick out this theme.
- 33 Polachek 1992.
- 34 The link between the political crises of the late eighteenth century and the reemergence of political factions is also discussed in Elman 1990: 276–90.

- 35 Heshen (1750–99) was the Qianlong emperor's favourite. When his corruption and other crimes came to light, he was allowed to commit suicide. During the trial under Jiaqing that followed his death, the phenomenal size of his personally amassed fortune became widely known. On Heshen, see *ECCP* 288–90 and Nivison 1969.
- 36 Polachek 1992: 28, 84–8. The link between literati critique of Heshen and the opposition to Wei Zhongxian in the 1620s that inspired the Donglin movement was established first by Elman. Elman 1989; Elman 1990. On the Donglin faction, see Dardess 2002.
- 37 Verse composition, a central feature of Tang examinations, had been replaced by the eight-legged essay during the late Ming. The Qianlong emperor reintroduced verse between 1751 and 1760. Polachek 1992: 27 and 294n14.
- 38 Polachek 1992. See also Elman 1990, especially Chapter 9.
- 39 Polachek 1992: 20–1.
- 40 Polachek 1992: 84.
- 41 Goyama 1987: 70. On Weng Fanggang, see *ECCP* 856–8. For Hong Liangji, see *ECCP* 373–5; for Ruan Yuan, see *ECCP* 399–402.
- 42 Polachek 1992: 65. The Xuannan Poetry Club was named for the southern part of Beijing, the usual residence for lower-grade officials. Polachek 1992: 21. The Xuannan Poetry Club was a politically influential gathering of high officials concerned with political reforms. Later members included statecraft reformers such as Lin Zexu (1785–1850) and Wei Yuan (1794–1856).
- 43 On Wang Chang and Wu Songliang, see Mann 1997. Wang's biography is on *ECCP* 805–7. Wu Songliang was a disciple of Weng Fanggang. See *ECCP* 858.
- 44 Polachek 1992: 28, 38–9.
- 45 Wang Chang's own circle included women; he knew the woman poet Xu Yingyu (ca. 1720–50), and wrote a preface to her work, where he praised the fact that she exchanged poems with other poets, and formed 'poetic relationships far outside [her] clan'. *WWTC* 443. The late eighteenth-, early nineteenth-century poet Luo Qilan considered herself a student of both Yuan Mei and Wu Songliang. *WWTC* 705–6. The woman poet Xi Peilan (1760–1820?), one of Yuan Mei's best-known pupils, was married to Sun Yuanxiang (1760–1829), a close friend of Wu Songliang. See *WWTC* 477–85; *ECCP* 685–6.
- 46 *SXGYL* 128.
- 47 For a more in-depth discussion of the seventeenth-century reception of Xiaoluan's writings, see Gerritsen 2005.
- 48 *SXGYL* 130.
- 49 For studies discussing the theme of literati anxiety over identity and status, see, for example, T'ien 1988; Martin Huang 1995; Roddy 1998; Plaks 1987.
- 50 The dialectic between a cultural tradition perceived to be under threat and the persistent survival of 'this culture of ours' (*si wen*, *Analects* 9.5) in the literary practices of Confucian scholars forms a motif in much of the writing broadly associated with the Confucian tradition. See, for example, Bol 1992.
- 51 Goyama 1987: 73. On Yuan Mei, see *ECCP* 955–7; Waley 1957; Mann 1992; Goyama 1985.
- 52 *SXGYL* 3/12b–26a.
- 53 *SXGYL* 3/15b.
- 54 *SXGYL* 3/5b–6a.
- 55 *SXGYL* 3/6a. On Ye Shaoyuan, see Goodrich and Fang 1976: 1576–9; *WWTC* 682–876, 755–62; Ko 1994.
- 56 *SXGYL* 3/6a.
- 57 *SXGYL* 3/13a.
- 58 *SXGYL* 3/6a.
- 59 Note the parallel here with Shen Minyuan, great-grandnephew of Shen Shanbao (1808–62). He reprints a set of materials 'to reconstruct and affirm lineage and

- prestige in a period of social change and political uncertainty by reclaiming past cultural capital. . . , through the literary works of a woman forebear. In Shen Minyuan's case, Shen Shanbao is firmly connected to the Shen lineage, and not to that of her husband.' Fong 2000: 265n18.
- 60 *SXGYL* 4/1b.
- 61 *SXGYL* 4/49a.
- 62 *SXGYL* 3/1b–4a; 4/1b–2a; 4/45b–49b.
- 63 *SXGYL* 4/48b.
- 64 Yuan [1790] 2000: 138–9.
- 65 Ye Naiqin writes: 'The talent of the Great Historian of Bamboo Studio [i.e. Yuan Mei] is great and his learning wide, but I do not know why he made the mistake to think that she is from Guangdong! How could he not have seen *Writings from the Hall of Meridian Dreams (Wumengtang ji)*? [He also suggests that] my great-aunt was initiated, but she did not become a nun when she came of age'. See *SXGYL* 2/13b–14a.
- 66 *SXGYL* 4/49a.
- 67 *SXGYL* 4/49a.
- 68 *SXGYL* 4/49a.
- 69 Judith Zeitlin has discussed the powerful attraction of 'the fragility and vulnerability projected onto women's writings'. See Zeitlin 1998: 116. Paul Ropp explains Shi Zhenlin's fascination with Shuangqing by referring to 'male efforts to pity, protect, publicize . . . the writings of talented women'. See Ropp 2001: 53.
- 70 *SXGYL* 3/2a.
- 71 *SXGYL* 3/2b.
- 72 *SXGYL* 3.3a.
- 73 *SXGYL* 4/48b.
- 74 *SXGYL* 4/48b.
- 75 Qu Shisi hailed from Changshu, and studied under Qian Qianyi as a young man. He obtained the *jinsshi* degree in 1616, and later became a Christian. After the fall of the Ming dynasty, Qu served in several Southern Ming courts. He was captured by the Manchus in 1650, and was executed in 1651. *Calls of a Noble Spirit* was written in the forty-one days of his captivity. See *ECCP* 199–201.
- 76 Zhang Haipeng [1807–1810] 1920: volume 6. The collection also includes the writings of Zhu Jiuding, who was a friend of Ye Xiaoluan's brother Ye Xie and fellow admirer of Juxiang. On Zhang Haipeng, see *ECCP* 36–7.
- 77 *WWTC* 580–1.
- 78 *ECCP* 640–1.
- 79 For Pan Xi'en's edition, see Qu 1881.
- 80 *ECCP* 347.
- 81 *ECCP* 726–7.
- 82 Zhang Dai was also a close friend of Ming loyalist Ding Shengzhao and his wife Wang Duanshu. See Widmer 1997a.
- 83 *LFZ* 453.
- 84 Ming loyalism and women's literature have been linked by Ellen Widmer. Widmer's important article clarifies how Ming loyalism inspired new directions in the women's voice in fiction. See Widmer 1997a: 366–96.
- 85 *SXGYL* 4/17a.
- 86 *LFZ* 672. The poem is included in *SXGYL* 129. Yang Fangcan's poem appears on *SXGYL* 4/18b–19a.
- 87 The preface is mentioned by Hu; see *LFZ* 672. Chen Wenshu's *Bicheng xianguan shichao* includes a preface to Yang Yun's poetry collection; see Chen [1805] 1936: 88.
- 88 Chen [1881] 1994: B5a.
- 89 *SXGYL* 4/35b.

- 90 *SXGYL* 4/51a.
- 91 *Autumnal Rain Cloister* or *Random Jottings from Autumnal Rain Cloister in Two Categories* (*Liangban qiuyu an suibi*) was written by Liang Shaoren (1792–<1837) from Qiantang. In ‘Eyebrow-shaped Inkstone’ (‘Meizi yan’), Liang Shaoren quotes these two poems. Liang [1878] 1982: 200.
- 92 Huang Junzai [1873] 1969: 6/3b.
- 93 Huang Junzai 1969: 6/3b.
- 94 Huang Junzai 1969: 6/3b.
- 95 Huang Junzai 1969: 6/3b.
- 96 *SXGYL* 2/17b.
- 97 Most of the poems in Wang Shoumai’s collection are undated, and their authors are not easily traceable. They include, for example, a certain Shen Tao (ca. 1780–1861) and a Tao Liang (*zi* Fuxiang). Their poems appear on *SXGYL* 4/27b. Shen Tao was from Jiaxing in Zhejiang, obtained the *juren* degree in 1810, and held a series of offices in provincial government. He is the author of *Random Notes from Joint Emerald Studio* (*Jiaocuiquan biji*), which contains several references to women writers. See Shen Tao [1845] 1968. Tao Liang’s poem for Xiaoluan was also mentioned by Liang Shaoren, author of a collection entitled *Random Jottings from Autumnal Rain Cloister in Two Categories* (*Liangban qiuyu an suibi*). He, too, knew of the inkstone, and the collection created in honour of it by Wang Shoumai, although if he himself also composed a poem for it, it was not included in the collection. See Liang [1878] 1982: 200.
- 98 *SXGYL* 4/35b.
- 99 *SXGYL* 4/35b.



# 11 In spite of gentility

## Women and men in *Linglong* (*Elegance*), a 1930s women's magazine

*Barbara Mittler*

In studying Shanghai women's magazines from the late Qing,<sup>1</sup> a new figure, a new woman emerges. When she appears on the pages of these magazines, especially in the earliest editions of these journals, she has almost masculine features. Depicted as an equal to men, she is independent, strong and self-confident – and thus able to solve China's problems and to save the country from oblivion. However, in successive issues of the same journals, this type of new woman, independent and in male attire, was to be replaced by a rather different type of new woman who appeared as a perfect 'femme', not a female citizen herself, but a most accomplished and modern mother for China's modern age citizens. Every one of these journals from the final years of the Qing<sup>2</sup> demanded acceptance in their early editorials of the new values of equality and female liberation from their (women) readers. Their explicitly feminist rhetoric was, increasingly over time, also concerned with the type of knowledge to be used in household affairs, the three 'C's of traditional female role performance: cooking, cleaning, and caring.<sup>3</sup> It appeared that if one were to live by the rules of women's magazines in the last decade of the Qing, one could easily be a new woman without changing that much after all. In these women's magazines, commonly held notions of femininity remained operative.

Why was the new woman more and more emphatically described as a useful germ-killing, beautiful and loving wife and mother preparing a nutritious meal for her family; why was she less and less enthusiastically depicted as the independent, learned, politically motivated woman, equal to men? I attempt to show that the competing but increasingly biased discourses in Chinese women's magazines betrayed a deeper-lying suspicion against and fear of the more 'masculine' or 'feminist'<sup>4</sup> new woman, a fear which was based on old and new forms of misogyny which were perpetuated by many of the male – and also many of the female – writers and intellectuals who wrote for these early women's magazines. This fear is quite obviously manifested in a *Shenbao* caricature of a huge warrior-woman-suffragette kicking a much smaller and frightened policeman who holds up his arms and falls (Figure 11.1).

While much of what has recently been described as characteristic of women's and household magazines in the early Republican period in scholarship by Constance Orlicki, Susan Glosser or Wang Zheng<sup>5</sup> seems to point to a general continuity of this trend,<sup>6</sup> I will demonstrate in this chapter that by the 1930s, and



Figure 11.1 'Frightening woman', *Shenbao* 30 March 1912

especially on the pages of the illustrated women's magazine *Linglong*,<sup>7</sup> quite a different type of new woman comes to the fore. With the emergence of this *new* new woman it appears that misogyny is replaced by, or at least finds a counterpoint in, something that could perhaps be called by analogy misandria: a distaste for men. It is true that *Linglong*, or *Elegance*, as one may tentatively translate it, this unique pocket-book size illustrated Shanghai women's magazine, is a polyphonic, sometimes even internally contradictory text, not unlike many of its late Qing or early Republican predecessors. It contains editorials about a woman's duty to stand up against the Japanese invaders<sup>8</sup> next to portrayals of admirable beauties in – most probably Japanese – silk attire; it features question-and-answer sections on how to prove to a lover that one is a virgin<sup>9</sup> as well as articles accompanied by explanatory pictures on how to kiss.<sup>10</sup> It contains comic-strip-jokes in which women always win out against their male interlocutors (see Figure 11.2) as well as serious articles on how to make sure that one's lover never stops loving one. It teaches the songs, shows the coiffure and attire, and explains the etiquette with which best to entice any attractive man. It contains practical information on how to rear children and decorate one's family home, but also articles explaining how happy one can be alone, or after a divorce – without the help of *man-kind*! In short: it teaches the aspirations a proper New Woman should go for.

And yet, however polyphonic, there is one particular feature which makes the new woman in *Linglong* markedly different from her counterpart in earlier women's magazines since the turn of the century. The question 'How to be a perfect woman?' reappears here as: 'How to be a perfect woman and thus – naturally – be superior to men?' *Linglong*'s new woman is defined at least in part by her ironic



Figure 11.2 'On how not to kiss', *Linglong* 1932.79/1355

and sometimes vitriolic stance *vis-à-vis* the male gaze and by her self-confidence in an ability to please this gaze (or not care in the least if she doesn't). Misandria – a distaste for men – in *Linglong* appears to be a powerful answer to the misogyny encountered in earlier women's magazines. *Linglong* manifests a new way of seeing and relating to the world of mankind. By subtle and humorous subversion the *new new woman* in *Linglong* becomes an alternative cultural icon, radically different from earlier models of womanhood.

What has this to do with gentility, however? Gentility, according to one definition proffered by the editors of this volume, describes the perceptions, social aspirations and cultural ideals that the image of the gentleman or gentlewoman evokes. It is the idea of cultural sophistication or social superiority manifesting itself in the manners, appearance and behaviour of certain elite groups generally accepted as such in and by society. I will argue that the *new new woman* whom one can meet on the pages of *Linglong*, and who is to be understood as an alternative cultural icon, can be read as the embodiment of an alternative gentility, too, a concept that is developed (albeit implicitly) on the pages of *Linglong*. This is done, so I

contend, *in spite of* traditional views of what gentility entailed. *Linglong* provides a genteel space where particular forms of self-cultivation and the adherence to peculiar (Confucian) values, such as loyalty, trust and benevolence, for example, all play an important role. Elevated language, pictorial aesthetic, the refinement of pleasure, the rejoicing in like-minded company all enter and in fact constitute the pages of *Linglong*: it creates an atmosphere of ‘appearance matters!!’, of aspiration, and reverence typical of genteel distinction.

The very name of the journal, *Linglong* – to be translated as ‘elegance’, that is, ‘distinct refinement’<sup>11</sup> – can be considered programmatic. I will argue that *Linglong* itself can be considered the term for a ‘(new/alternative/female) gentility’. Although nowhere explicitly accounted for, the name *Linglong* is certainly carefully chosen. The first editions of the journal do not contain explanatory statements or editorials, but repeat two short descriptive sentences. *Linglong* wants to create new social and cultural aspirations: it says that it hopes to contribute to the ‘[gracious] beauty (*youmei*) in women’s lives’ and to elevate ‘high-minded amusement (*gaoshang yule*) in [Chinese] society’.<sup>12</sup> It transpires that the name of the journal is in fact shorthand for these aims.<sup>13</sup> If one compares these openly spelled-out goals of the magazine *Linglong* with dictionary definitions for and literary citations of the term *linglong*, one finds that indeed grace (beauty, elegance and refinement), and high-mindedness (skill, intelligence and cleverness) are two important elements associated with the term. It refers first and foremost to a fine and pretty sound (*yasheng*), the tinkling of pendants, for example (*long* are gems in the form of a dragon). Thus, *linglong* describes exquisite sounds and splendid, fine and sophisticated objects, such as openwork, for example. In this sense, *linglong* is also used in poetry (prominently by Han Yu (768–824), for example) to capture the refined beauty of the plum blossom and the daintiness of snowflakes. Obviously, fragility and clarity, or ‘refined grace’ are part of the genteel concept of beauty that *linglong* stands for. Second, by homonymic association, *linglong* may also be written with a different character *ling* (ingenious, smart, intelligent). Some interpretations therefore also liken *linglong* to *linghuo* (lively, also and especially in terms of mental activities) and *jingqiao* smart and clever).<sup>14</sup> To be *linglong* is to be high-minded, then, even in the most literal sense of the word.

If *Linglong* is a journal advocating *linglong*, a ‘graceful highmindedness’, this *linglong* can be considered, I will argue, no less or no more than a new, alternative concept of ‘true gentility’. In the following pages, I will show that it is the particular discourse on misogyny and misandria on the pages of *Linglong* that forms the crux of the debate on what constitutes ‘true gentility’ and ‘truly genteel behaviour’. The field of negotiations between gentility in its old and in its new senses is captured in ambiguous descriptions of male and female behaviour. The definitions and redefinitions of what ought to constitute the ideal new woman are related to old and new ideas about what constitutes the nature of the ‘genteel’.

*Linglong*’s concept of gentility comes into being in spite of traditional views of what ‘gentility’ entailed. Indeed, *Linglong*’s new gentility is engendered in opposition to traditional restrictions of ‘gentility’ in terms of gender and/or class. On the one hand, *Linglong* dismisses the idea that to aspire to gentility should be

a male privilege – with the *junzi* as the ultimate hero. Indeed, the journal argues that many a so-called *junzi* is nothing but a fake. *Linglong* thrives in stripping old-style men of their gowns and new-style men of their foreign suits, thus uncovering them all as nothing but sex-maniacs, cannibals and profiteers, the very opposite of the ‘restrained gentlemen’ they pretend to be.<sup>15</sup> On the other hand, *Linglong* does not accept the idea that gentility should be restricted to an élite, and this is true for women also: the *new new* women in *Linglong* are from all classes, they stand up in spite of and not because of former *guixiu* and *nüshi* – that is, educated women from the traditional elites.<sup>16</sup> *Linglong* repeatedly castigates spoiled gentlewomen from rich and privileged households who do not use their education for a purpose and who are nothing but spendthrifts and fashion dolls. In the eyes of *Linglong*, they only posture as, but never truly embody, the figure of the real new woman. They are the very opposite of the hard-working, vivacious, strong (in body and mind) and well-educated working women, the veritable heroines on *Linglong*’s stage.<sup>17</sup> The alternative gentility created on the pages of *Linglong* is embodied in the figure of the ‘alternative icon’, the *new new* woman. She is high-minded in skill and eloquence and truthful in refinement and elegance – *linglong*, in short.

In order to substantiate these contentions, I will introduce in the first part of this chapter a few examples of this alternative icon, the *new new* woman, embodying the alternative gentility of *linglong*. This *new new* woman will be compared with her foil and lesser accomplished sister, the wannabe new woman, who only pretends to but does not quite master the rules of *Linglong*’s new gentility. In the second part of the chapter, this ideal new woman will then be contrasted with the men she encounters, who are unmasked as representatives of an old and despicable type of gentility. A short third section will illustrate how the *new new* woman holds her own against these men and forces her vision of gentility upon them, while the conclusion asks (and still needs to find answers to the question): ‘Can gentility à la *Linglong* prevail in 1930s China?’

### **The *new new* woman: gentility born out of misogyny**

My exploration begins with the journal’s very own definitions of the *new new* woman – the *xin nüxing*, *xin nüzi*, *xiandai nüzi* or *modeng nüxing*, as she variously appears in editorial articles on ‘How to become’ such a woman. The authors of these articles often begin with a diatribe against the old rites and conventions of genteelness that oppressed women in the ‘old society’<sup>18</sup> such as this one:

We all know the old rites and teachings of old China. As for restrictions on women, they were severe in the extreme. There are sayings such as ‘as for women they are subservient to men’, or ‘women may not talk about outside affairs’, ‘man and woman cannot talk to each other’, ‘men and women cannot sit with each other’, ‘from age seven, man and woman cannot share the same mat, and cannot eat with each other’ etc. Although some of these moral directives have been neglected in the cities, far away from the cities and especially in the countryside, they are still very influential and restrict every

woman's existence. Even though both man and woman belong to humankind, this kind of unequal treatment happens because of the differences between men and women. It is a pity indeed!<sup>19</sup>

Typically for *Linglong*, this article complains that a situation which originated in former times prevails to the present in spite of decades of attempted female liberation.<sup>20</sup> Many articles bewail that only for a very small number of women has anything actually changed over the preceding decades: most women still live in a situation approximate to the old conditions.<sup>21</sup> *Linglong* constantly evokes traditional models as negative foils in order to more effectively introduce its new type of gentility in spite of such traditional ideas of female genteelness.

A second argument that occurs frequently is that apart from those who are barred by the persistence of traditional barriers from leading a life of 'true liberation', even many who may at first sight be called 'new women (*xin nüxing*)', are indeed contradictory phenomena, or even worse, nothing but fakes (*wei*).<sup>22</sup> They only appear new on the surface but still think like their grandparents. The clothing, the furniture and food these women use is of course new, according to these articles; these women may venture out onto the streets, and no longer have bound feet; but are not high-heeled shoes and corsets just a new form of foot binding?<sup>23</sup> Such superficial changes are even more detrimental when in the realm of thought, and signify that no liberation has as yet taken place. According to these articles, for example, no real freedom to marry is granted to many of these women. Their parents still make the choice of partner for them. Moreover, since most of the supposedly new women have not achieved real economic independence, they have, if anything, only gained one freedom: that of becoming consumers outside, rather than inside the house.<sup>24</sup> To be a real new woman, one for whom the new code of gentility holds, is to be (quite in accordance with older traditions of gentility) truthful to the ideal, rather than false!

*Linglong* condemns the half-formed new women in harsh terms. Women are urged to develop professional skills in order to ensure their economic independence,<sup>25</sup> since otherwise they would remain dependent on men, and could easily be abused by them. In the final paragraphs, these articles usually call on women to build up their self-confidence and self-respect so that they would never be the 'playthings of men' again. One such article ends with an urgent call to go out and educate women, especially those most unfortunate of women such as prostitutes and workers, who have not had the privilege of a comfortable life and a good education. 'We need to wake these women up! Women have to become humans (*ren*), they have to become human beings'.<sup>26</sup>

This demand can be traced back to one of the major aims of the May Fourth Women's movement which set its goal on fighting the so-called *feiren zhuyi* (non-human-ism) of the old Confucian society, in order to retrieve a new humanity and self-hood (*ren'ge*) for women.<sup>27</sup> Thus, when women are called on to become new women on the pages of *Linglong*, they are asked to become such in spite of what used to be the practices of a 'gentlewoman' according to traditional values, and in spite of what the rules of fashion might make one believe, and especially in spite

of what men find attractive today. For all these men want, according to *Linglong*, are demure and submissive women who are mere toys, and need not even be granted the position of ‘human beings’ (*ren*).

In ‘How Indeed Does One Become a Modern Woman?’ the new values to be adhered to by the alternative new woman, the *linglong* gentlewoman who embodies a true gentility, are spelled out quite explicitly.<sup>28</sup> Typically, this article begins with the observation that the term ‘modern’ is often misunderstood, that a lot of people consider it to mean wearing stylish clothes, going out to dance halls and theatres, and having lots of boyfriends.<sup>29</sup> For *Linglong*, this is quite a ridiculous misunderstanding of the term. It asks: ‘What does it really mean to be a modern woman?’ A modern woman must first of all have modern thoughts, not just clothes. Second, a ‘real modern woman’ must have modern morals: modern women ought to know their responsibility *vis-à-vis* society. They should not just be interested in marriage, but indeed should know that there is more to life than that. Third, a modern woman must have ‘modern knowledge’. She ought to be well-versed in the sciences, medicine, and the social sciences. Thus, she would never simply be a plaything for men, but an asset to society, she would be *linglong*, graceful and refined, but clever and high-minded at the same time, too.<sup>30</sup>

Clearly in these articles women are not depicted as angels. Indeed, many of *Linglong*’s texts, as well as some of the comic-strips or illustrations dealing with similar topics, take up misogynist attacks on women familiar from earlier women’s magazines. They warn of deterioration in womankind, such as an exclusive interest in appearance, money or men. But with the help of such misogynist arguments the figure of the *new* new woman and her particularly attractive gentility rises all the more clearly. This is evident in a group of articles which use vocabulary related to traditional feminine gentility for new effect. In ‘The New Three Followings’,<sup>31</sup> for example, it is no longer father, husband and son whom women are said to follow, but clothes, beauty and money. The women who have taken to these new three followings are criticized harshly. The author also invokes a new set of ‘four virtues’ that had been discussed in an earlier article.<sup>32</sup> The traditional four virtues (established in Ban Zhao’s (c. 45–c. 115) *Nüjie, Lessons for Women*) of female gentility in morals, appearance, speech and work (*de, rong, yan, gong*) are replaced by:

- 1 *xin de* ‘new morals’ of pushing already married men (whom false new women are said to seduce preferentially) into divorce from their former wives;
- 2 *xin rong* ‘new appearance’, which is to dress up in all kinds of foreign attire;
- 3 *xin yan* the ‘new speech’, which is defined by the elaborate use of English words; and
- 4 *xin gong* ‘new types of work’ such as going out to dance or otherwise idling away one’s time.<sup>33</sup>

While thus reiterating familiar misogynist images, these articles primarily serve as cautionary tales, warning of the pitfalls both of the old gentility and of a

false new type of gentility, and calling on real and ideal new woman to practise a different and truthful form of gentility.

What this would entail is spelled out in ‘The New Woman’s Three Followings and Four Virtues’.<sup>34</sup> The first following for the new ‘gentlewoman’ à la *Linglong* is to follow her own ambition, to formulate a clearly defined goal which would determine everything she does. The second following is to abide by the rule of the majority, and thus ensure the stability of society, the third following is to follow common sense and natural laws. The new four virtues are defined as:

- 1 public virtue: honest and truthful women are expected to be able to set positive examples in view of the corruption of man-kind;
- 2 private virtue: women are said to be more honest than men and better capable of subduing their egotism than men;
- 3 thrift: women are often accused of being spendthrifts and this prejudice is to be proven wrong (which will have positive effects on the entire household);<sup>35</sup>
- 4 studiousness: only knowledge can ultimately strengthen the position of women in society and ensure their true liberation.

While the article takes up well-established misogynist complaints against women (such as their being spendthrifts, for example), it also openly fights back at men, calling them corrupt and profiteers. This type of combination of misogynous self-irony and misandriac attack is typical of *Linglong* and its mission to establish a new and true gentility.

While criticism is dished out to both men and women who do not comply with the rules of *linglong*, a certain bias, a particular ‘female gaze’ perhaps (which makes sense within the self-image of a journal whose editorial staff consists mostly of women),<sup>36</sup> can often be detected.

A comic-strip which shows a male lover made fun of for being willing to put up with waiting for two hours and, when his girl finally arrives, even pretending to have ‘just arrived’ as well (see Figure 11.3), finds its counterpoint in an article on ‘How to Handle Men’, describing a woman who is clearly overreacting to her lover’s late arrival at a date. The journalist writing this second article relates her visit to a fancy foreign-style coffee-house where she witnesses the following scene:

Next to me there was a young woman. The tea in front of her was almost finished, but she did not call the waiter to add more water. She would gaze at the doorway all the time and constantly check her wrist-watch. Under the table, her legs were shuffling constantly, and she was clearly waiting for someone impatiently.

Finally, the door of the teahouse opened and in came a very handsome young man, who called to her warmly, in a very happy and excited manner which attracted the attention of the people around. The girl answered him in a very low voice. Even I could hardly hear what she said. The man had already gone over to her table, and had sat down, his whole face in smiles:



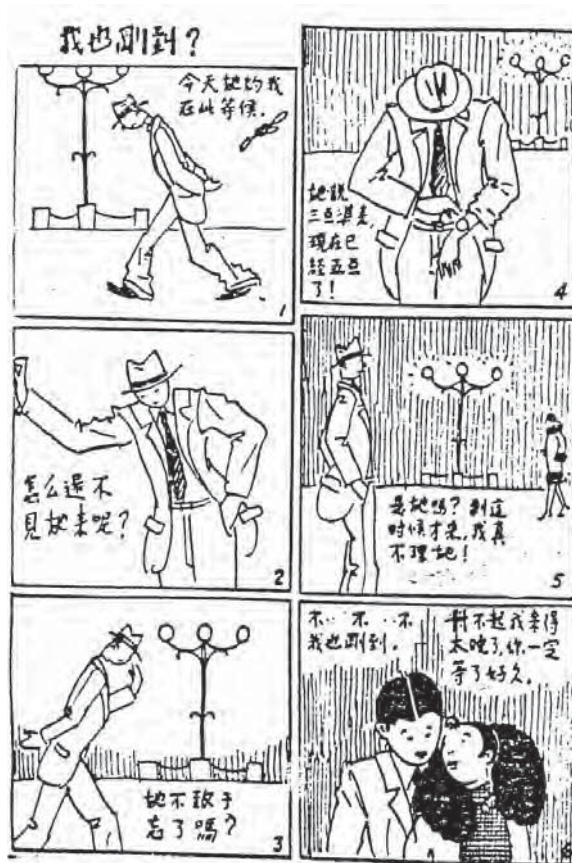


Figure 11.3 'I have just arrived, too', *Linglong* 1932.44/1790

'You haven't been waiting long?' The girl held her watch in front of his face and said angrily, 'You know exactly what time we were supposed to meet. How can you say that I have not been waiting long?' The man looked at the watch and said: 'I'm not late.' His voice was very soft, but the girl raised her voice, and with a wooden face she said: 'Didn't you say you would be here at quarter to seven?' She had not quite finished speaking when the waiter came over ... The man cautiously asked the girl: 'Would you like to eat a piece of cake, perhaps?'<sup>37</sup>

Instead of reacting in a friendly way at this point, the girl continues to sulk and insist that he was late, pointing out that she had kept a letter of his which proved her right. The author ends her article asking whether this kind of behaviour was not a little exaggerated. Was this indeed the best way of handling men? Read in juxtaposition with the caricature, which in turn ridicules the man's lenient behaviour, one has to admit that in both cases, and in spite of the ironies involved,

the clever, if not quite refined, women seem to win the day. This is true, too, for a series of comic pictures with commentaries which again feature both misogyny and misandria, with similar ironic juxtapositions and shifts. One such picture entitled 'National Affairs and New Clothes' makes fun of women's supposed lack of interest in politics.<sup>38</sup> One of the girls has heard her husband say that some important diplomatic affair had taken place recently. She asks the other two about it. The second answers that she has in fact never read a newspaper in her life, how could she know anything about these things, while the third had been seen reading the paper the day before. But, no, she, too, must admit that she had not actually read the paper either, but had only been looking for designing ideas for her new autumn outfit. The commentary complains that so-called 'modern women' are in fact more interested in clothes than in national affairs or politics.

A few issues later in the same series, however, two women, provocatively dressed in negligés, are seen harshly criticizing a man for being careless about national affairs as he continues to smoke Japanese cigarettes in spite of calls to boycott Japanese goods (see Figure 11.4). The commentary reviles men for being so addicted to smoking, and for thinking it a small matter to smoke whatever comes their way and not heeding such important national affairs as the anti-Japanese boycott. Here, then, the situation is a reversal of the first. Read in conjunction, the two comics convey the message that when it comes to important political matters, women, even those who obviously care about their looks and dress, do become the agents of national politics while men (whom we only see from behind, as the man in this caricature, for example, turns his back to the viewer) must be condemned for their ignorant and treacherous behaviour.

Thus, there is criticism and ridicule served out both to men and to women who adhere to the wrong kind of gentility on the pages of *Linglong*. Yet, when misogynist arguments are taken up in these articles, on pictures or in comic strips, they are more often than not embedded in cautionary tales dishing out advice, with the hope of improving womankind, cultivating it and making it more genteel. Misandriac (or man-hating) arguments, on the other hand, are much more direct, forming open attacks on man-kind, less with a view toward improving men, but of condemning them for ever in their viciousness or stupidity: men are not considered worthy of improvement. In the regular publication of a column entitled 'The Scandalous Conduct of Men',<sup>39</sup> men are exposed as false, cruel and heartless,<sup>40</sup> and in remarks on man-kind in 'The Three Ages in the Life of Men'<sup>41</sup> this type of misandriac vitriol finds a striking outlet. In the latter article, men are likened to different animals depending on whether or not they have a lover: when they cannot find a lover, they are like lost sheep; when they have a lover, they are like a tame cat, totally self-sustained; and when they are married, they become like a terrible wolf, cruel and brutal, always out to eat people. This type of rhetoric is reinforced most effectively in some of the caricatures and pictorial renderings of men throughout the pages of *Linglong*, ranging from a rather helpless and ridiculous-looking husband with baby who does not quite know how to handle it, to the fireman who is no use in saving a woman, but, so taken by her looks and skimpy dress, has to be saved by her in turn (she is shown carrying him down the



Figure 11.4 'Comparing the two sides', *Linglong* 1931 40/1559

ladder), and finally even a carnivorous 'eater-of-women'! (see Figures 11.5 to 11.7) Here, female abhorrence of men who prove themselves nothing but false 'gentlemen', finds its most open and outraged manifestation.

Whereas the women criticized on the pages of *Linglong* appear to be malleable and open to change, having been innocently suppressed (by traditional morals) or misled and spoiled (by their backgrounds and modern fashion), men, as will become clearer in the next section of this paper, are dogged and obstinate, unable to change. Thus, they become the veritable counterpart to the new and 'true gentility' (a female gentility) propagated by *Linglong*.

### Gentility's counterpart, the detested man: from mysogyny to misandria

Misogynist arguments are displayed on the pages of *Linglong* as cautionary tales addressed to women, but also serve, in a kind of boomerang effect, as powerful weapons to condemn men. Many of the attacks on men begin as responses to a misogynist argument. Thus, female jealousy and viciousness,<sup>42</sup> women's supposed love of money and their sexual powers (which, according to the official historiographers, are causes of the so-called 'female disaster', *nühuo*)<sup>43</sup> are at first introduced as negative attributes of women, only then to be shown to be much more frequently present in men. An article on 'Jealous Men',<sup>44</sup> for example, admits that it is normally assumed that women are jealous, proof for such fact being that women will make a fuss if men have extramarital affairs. Indeed, more often than not men will explain their extramarital affairs with the fact that their wives had started to become too fussy, making life difficult for them at home. The article contends that in truth, those who are really jealous are men. When they get married they act as though buying an object in a shop, they think they and they alone own what they have bought. While they are naturally allowed to have

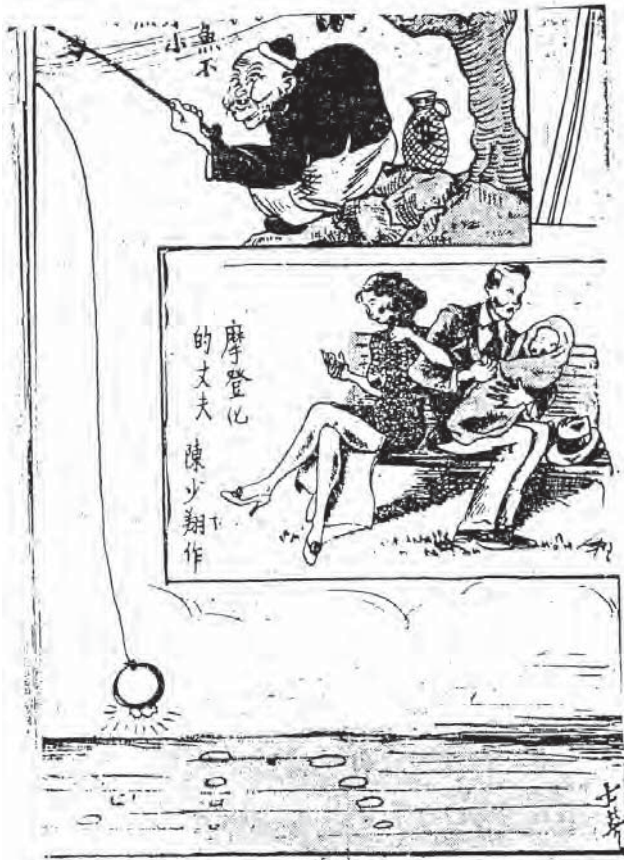


Figure 11.5 'Men and babies', *Linglong* 1932.73/(insert after 1066)

social contacts with women other than their wife (who can only really cry about it), a woman, as the unquestioned 'possession' of her husband, is not allowed to have male friends, and if she does, can justifiably be beaten and killed by her husband, or divorced with her reputation destroyed. It must be evident to anyone, the article concludes, on which side true jealousy lies hidden. In a similar manner, 'The Most Vicious Male Heart'<sup>45</sup> begins with a phrase acknowledging misogynist lore: yes, one always hears of the vicious hearts of women, never of those of men, but this is not because there is no such thing as a vicious male heart. Not all men are vicious. Yet, quite a few pretend to be nice but in fact are vicious inside. The author gives the example of her own father who did not send her and her two sisters to school, supposedly because they were too young and the way to school too dangerous. The author also talks of a cousin who pursued her against her will and then spread false rumours about her and a neighbour to whom she escaped from time to time, with the result that she was locked up by her parents: such was the malice of men.



Figure 11.6 'Courageous fire(wo)man', *Linglong* 1932.73/(insert after 1094)

When it comes to articles dealing with the love of money, the same rhetorical methods are used. In 'Today's Women Cannot be Compared to those of Old',<sup>46</sup> it is acknowledged that it has always been said that women like money, indeed they are attracted to money like children to sweets. While this may have been true in the past, the article argues, today, due to improvements in women's education, women no longer need be interested in men's money. The article ends up ridiculing those 'poor men' who are still 'dreaming traditional dreams', and who have no idea of the changes in women's minds, mocking them with questions such as: 'How would you know that I am no longer interested in your money? If I want money... I have my own talents to go and get money, ha, ha ...'.

As women are no longer interested in money, those who have always been the real profiteers, man-kind, are easily exposed. In parody of an old Chinese proverb about women ('For women to have no talent is a virtue'), *Linglong* advocates 'For Men to have no Wealth is a Virtue',<sup>47</sup> skilfully playing with the homonyms on *cai* (talent) and *cai* (wealth). The article states:



Figure 11.7 'Cannibal', *Linglong* 1932.54/176/(printed as 167)

'For men to have no wealth is a virtue', for so many terrible things happen ... especially if too much money is in the hands of men! This is so because men are creatures of their instincts and if they can make a profit they run wild without thinking of morals or any such important things any more. Thus, many of them are damaged by their own money. When wealth is in the hands of men, nothing good comes out of it. If a man has no money, then at least there is hope! But already the smallest amount of money corrupts their morals!<sup>148</sup>

Finally, when dealing with sexual matters, *Linglong* makes it clear again that the real culprits are not women as is traditionally assumed, but men, too, who have no other goal than that of having sex with a woman, however much they try to cover this up. One of the comical dialogues illustrates this. It deals with a man's 'first kiss'.

SHE: Have you ever kissed a woman other than myself?

HE: Never. I can truly say that this kiss with you is my virgin kiss. The first time in my life.

SHE: How come all the men who have kissed me have always said that?<sup>49</sup>

While the dialogue playfully suggests that this woman does not abide by traditional standards of chastity, it does not criticize her behaviour. It condemns male dishonesty rather than female lack of restraint. And this is the general tenor of many an article, comic strip or caricature on sex appearing on the pages of *Linglong*. One pictorial story, for example, shows a daughter returning home in tears after only a week of marriage, as she has discovered what an unreliable so-and-so her husband really is, finding himself a new girl in the first week of marriage.<sup>50</sup> The commentary to this pictorial story warns of such men, a warning reiterated many times throughout *Linglong*'s pages. In one article entitled 'Male Behaviour',<sup>51</sup> it is remarked that unfortunately even some of the more educated and knowledgeable women sometimes forget about the real nature of men when they keep getting presents and being treated nicely. More often than not, they will be cheated by men. For men always look down upon women, even if they try to hide this. The article addresses the reader directly, admonishes her to 'be careful', for 'whenever they talk of love, all they want is sex. They think that women are like little birds relying on others', – a point for which evidence can be found in an earlier illustration. It shows a man holding several women, each locked up in a cage, depicting how men would like women to be: caged up like little birds (see Figure 11.8). Men such as these think that 'women cannot live without them'. One ought to be warned: 'these types of men are indeed the arch-enemies of womankind!'<sup>52</sup>

'Indeed', so argues an article with the provocative title 'Are Men Reliable or not?',<sup>53</sup> only one or two out of a hundred men are truthful when it comes to the question of love. Everybody else leaves the minute they have attained their goal (i.e. sex). Unfortunately, many girls are still stupid enough to have themselves tricked by such men. Especially when they invite them out, and buy them everything, these girls feel obliged to do something in return, and that of course is a big mistake. For, as another even more outspoken article 'When it Comes to Love, Men are Not Reliable' states,<sup>54</sup> men are simply not capable of truthful feelings: they fall in love extremely quickly, and thus naturally, when they pursue a girl, it is not because they have strong feelings for her, but simply because they follow their bodily instinct. In fact, the male goal in love is never the soul but the flesh (and accordingly, they go for outer beauty, not for inner values) and therefore, all too many women have already become the victims of their reckless behaviour. For whenever their fleshly desire has been satisfied, men will change their minds and feelings and simply pass on to the next girl. Men have no moral queries about such behaviour, they cheat one woman after another this way, staying with one as long as there is happiness, but whenever a problem arises, abandoning her for someone else.



Figure 11.8 'How men would like women to be', *Linglong* 1932.53/129

Illustrations, too, focus on the lustful and deceitful behaviour of man-kind, exposing men as brutal animals, even when it appears that they are devoted admirers, kneeling in front of their beloved. Worse still, they are deadly cannibals, though dressed in stylish suits (see Figure 11.9).

In texts, comics and illustrations, *Linglong* sets out its attack against men. The journal becomes the mouthpiece of a virulent misandria. One article, which neatly sums up the different arguments mentioned above,<sup>55</sup> begins with the laconic statement that although the author has been thinking hard and for a long time, she simply could not come up with anything positive to say about men: 'I simply cannot fathom any good features of men', she contends, 'but I can think of a lot of bad features, so what I will do in this article, is simply talk about those'. Men, in her opinion, are first of all wavering, never faithful. This is why poor women will suffer time and again due to their reckless behaviour. Second, men are false and full of hypocritical morals. Third, they are greedy, always on the look out for girls. In this pursuit, their behaviour is more like that of devils than of human





Figure 11.9 'The brutality and false nature of men', *Linglong* 1932.78/(insert after 1306)

beings.<sup>56</sup> Fourth, men are profiteers, money their second nature:<sup>57</sup> to sum up, they are nothing but 'fake gentlemen' (*wei junzi*) – and thus the opposite of what has been defined as genteel – and worse even than the 'inferior men' (*xiaoren*) in the Confucian world order. In her view, it is 'better to be a true inferior man than to be a fake gentleman'. For this final bugle sound, and to bring home her point with authority, the author alludes to the Confucian *Analects*.

While misogyny on the pages of *Linglong* served to criticize false practices of female gentility, prevalent especially among women bound by a traditional environment or elitist backgrounds, these were contrasted with a positive image of gentility, embodied in the new woman in her ideal form which was simultaneously clever and refined. Such articles act as calls for reform and change. Misandria on the pages of *Linglong*, on the other hand, leaves us with a much more dismal picture: men and their 'gentility' are nothing but fake, their behaviour nothing but hypocritical pretence. The men are impostors, and there is no counter-image to offset this negative vision. If men, with their particular concepts of gentility

(embodied in the idea of the *junzi*) had once deprived women of attaining the status of a worthy human being, a *ren*, this is precisely what is being done to men on the pages of *Linglong*. No longer considered part of humankind, they are worse than ‘inferior men’ (*xiaoren*), indeed, no better than ‘devils’ (*gui*). It is no coincidence that these men are unmasked as cannibals or animals pictorially, too. Seen in this light, seemingly innocent debates questioning why one should talk of the ‘equality between men and women’ (*nannü pingdeng*) rather than between ‘women and men’ (*nünan pingdeng*) or why one should speak of parents as ‘father and mother’ (*fumu*) rather than ‘mother and father’ (*mu fu*)<sup>58</sup> take on greater significance.

In its description of the *new new woman*, *Linglong* sets out to create a new genteel model that is a spiteful answer to gentility as traditionally perceived, a gentility which is nothing but hypocritical and harmful to women and which is embodied mostly in men (apart from some preposterous women). *Linglong*’s project of introducing a new type of gentility and thereby establishing a new elite consisting of *linglong* (refined and clever) *new new women*, is a malicious attempt at rewriting the Chinese value system, breaking with former boundaries of class and, even more prominently, gender.

### **Misandria into action, or how to deal with man, the horrible: gentility regained**

Having exposed men’s version of ‘gentility’ as false and preposterous, *Linglong* turns pragmatic: it teaches how to deal with ‘Man, the Horrible’. In this it propagates its radically new, alternative notion of gentility. For this purpose, *Linglong* openly encourages women to voice their grievances about men. In one letter from the editor, for example, women are invited to send in articles and start writing about their encounters with ‘outlandish male behaviour’ as it is called.<sup>59</sup> The letter from the editor states that instead of always complaining about women, it would be as well to start writing about men. If the shortcomings of women can be discussed all over the press, why not the shortcomings of men? The letter concludes, in an open attack on Confucian concepts of female gentility, ‘Thus, we can finally show these men who write about our strengths and failures all the time that they can’t just say anything they want. Nowadays women actually do open their mouths’. Indeed, although ‘speech’ (*yan*) may have been one of the four classical womanly virtues, named in the *Zhouli* (*Rites of Zhou*), Confucian teaching insisted that women’s speech not be heard publicly, so as not to threaten the established order.<sup>60</sup> In the misogynist lore which remained prevalent in Republican times, women who talked ‘too much’ would still be called long-tongued women (*changshedu*).<sup>61</sup> Women’s talk and communication was still considered ‘gossip’ and was seen as a disturbance that ought to be suppressed. *Linglong*, on the other hand, suggests in its texts, illustrations and comic-strips that her *new new women*, armed with *Linglong*’s new gentility, are no longer keeping their mouths shut: they are elegant and eloquent, no longer acquiescent playthings for men. They have started to fight back.

*Linglong* provides plenty of concrete advice on how to ‘handle’, ‘tame’ and ‘domesticate’ men. It thus teaches how to translate misandria into action. In ‘How to Deal with Annoying Men’,<sup>62</sup> for example, women are given three methods to get rid of unwanted suitors. The article begins by stating that men can be like honey bees with honey in their pursuit of women. Just a short exchange of polite words makes them think they have got you, nailing you down and not letting you go any more. Every day, the author states, women encounter such men, and however much one tries, it is often impossible to get rid of them. What one should do in such a situation? The first piece of advice offered is always to talk of other men in his presence, and to have pictures of other men in one’s handbag, which one allows to fall out at opportune moments. The second method is to be extremely cold and dull all the time, to do everything with the suitor, go to the cinema with him, have coffee, but simply never to show any emotions and only answer ‘yes’ and ‘no’. The third method is to exaggerate: if he says he loves you once, say it three times. Talk straight away of what will happen after marriage, and he will back out immediately, for men do not really want to marry when they enter a relationship.

Similar advice mocking men is given in an article on how best to argue with one’s husband. The author is convinced that there is really no use in a woman attempting to retort openly in an argument, for traditionally, ‘what men hate most is that their women raise their voice to fight them’.<sup>63</sup> It does not matter whether what the women say is reasonable, it is simply impossible to get a man to listen to a woman, even less to gain his assent. All one will achieve by trying to get men to understand female reasoning is that they will start talking about the differences between women and men. Instead of achieving one’s goal by talking back, one will only risk being reviled: wives simply have no right to the Truth, and that is how it is. One must resort to different methods. It is useful to hint secretly at what one really wants, so that the husband is not aware of his coming over to the viewpoint of his wife. If, for example, one wants to put a sofa-table on the left, and the husband would prefer it on the right, it is better not to talk about one’s opinion openly. Instead, simply put the table on the left when the husband is not at home and when he comes back and sits down, wait till he himself says ‘This is a very nice arrangement’. The article concludes that there is really no use in arguing with men.

It is tiresome, just wasting your energy. Accordingly, in order to get what you want, it is always better simply to hint at it, and thus softly to transform his point of view through your behaviour: that way he will love you ever more, too.<sup>64</sup>

In order to bind one’s man to oneself, states another advisory article,<sup>65</sup> it is important always to keep cool, in arguments seemingly to give in and never to voice contrary opinions. All of this is done, of course, in order to get what the woman hoped for. Indeed, women must study some of the egotism of men. And one such matter (serving a good purpose, of course) would be to make one’s

husband pay for a subscription to *Linglong*. This, as the article ‘Exposing the Falseness of Men’ suggests, is a most efficient means to check a man’s valour:

There are so many men looking beautiful on the outside but with a venomous nature inside. If you want to uncover their hypocrisy you only need to ask them to order *Linglong* for you for a year. If they are not willing to do so, it reveals them as suspect, for *Linglong* specializes in exposing the well-kept secrets of men.<sup>66</sup>

Women, once condemned to being playthings of men, have become players in the game themselves. At a time when *Linglong*’s eloquent, high-minded but elegant and graceful gentility wins out the day, it is no longer self-evident who is playing with whom more successfully (see Figure 11.10).

### **Conclusion: *Linglong*, or gentility in spite of gentility**

Every female student had an issue of *Linglong* magazine in hand during the 1930s. On the one hand, *Linglong* imparted the beauty secrets of movie stars, and on the other hand instructed ‘beautified’ and ‘made up’ girls how to keep close guard against the attacks of men, because all men harbor bad intentions.

Zhang Ailing, ‘Talking About Women’ (1944)

In describing some of the misogynistic attitudes prevalent in the discourse of women’s magazines from the late Qing, I have in my earlier studies labelled the ‘feminine’ and the ‘feminist’ new woman in these magazines as a pleasant Mrs Jekyll and a frightening Mrs. Hyde respectively. The (primarily) male editors of late Qing women’s journals were enlightened enough and willing to support the useful, beautiful, knowledgeable new woman – a Mrs Jekyll – who would be a perfect house-keeper and mother of citizens. The new independent, critical woman (especially of men), a Mrs Hyde, was considered dangerous and had to be explained away. In the late Qing, Mrs Jekyll won out in women’s magazines, but it appears that on the pages of *Linglong*, Mrs Hyde has taken over.

*Linglong* considers itself the ‘one and only tongue (and voice) of women’, as a letter from the editor emphasizes.<sup>67</sup> It is indeed an outspoken magazine presenting an eloquent, forcefully intelligent, even rantingly aggressive female voice. It does so much more audibly than many earlier and also contemporary women’s magazines.<sup>68</sup> There is quite a lot of female muscle flexing on the pages of this magazine in which men are ridiculed (most visibly in the illustrations, such as the one showing a helpless father with his baby, or a woman carrying a fireman), men are criticized (for holding women in cages, or for smoking Japanese cigarettes), and, worst of all, men are even demonized (in several references to cannibalism and to their animal nature). Ironically, the editorial claims, men can only really



Figure 11.10 ‘Who is playing with whom?’, *Linglong* 1932.78/(insert after 1334)

prove their worthiness to the writers of *Linglong* by buying a subscription to this misandriac magazine for their wives.

But who are the journal’s readers and writers? The comparatively cheap price (although not substantially cheaper than the Commercial Press *Funü zazhi*) and its widespread circulation network including major treaty port cities as well as cities in southeast Asia, would have made it possible for a substantial number of readers to buy the magazine, and many of them would have been girl students and intellectuals as Zhang Ailing, too, suggests. Yet the question of who is in fact writing the readers’ letters, for example, a striking feature in *Linglong*, remains unanswered. A substantial portion of each issue was devoted to articles by readers, even including photographs of their daily lives. Yet who are those writing these letters? Who is drawing the caricatures and comic scenes (it is only a short interlude during which famous cartoonist Ye Qianyu serves as arts editor)? We cannot but speculate and must concede that we know very little about those who created *Linglong* except, perhaps, that they are not all women. Throughout

its publication, *Linglong* is edited and composed by two major figures, a man, Lin Zemin (or Lin Zecang) who appears as the one responsible for photography (and edited a journal specializing in photography, as well) in the first issues of the journal but who soon takes over executive work, and Chen Zhenling (female) who remained editor within different sections of the journal throughout the entire period of publication. Not much is known about either of them. What were their motivations to write or work for *Linglong*? To what extent do their own gender-bound biographies and experiences taint the manner in which they would write (and solicit) articles and illustrations for *Linglong*? These are questions that still need to be investigated but that may never be solved.<sup>69</sup>

It has been observed that even in late-twentieth-century America, ‘homemaker-oriented magazines ... systematically glorify traditional values and female role models at a time when women’s public roles are undergoing change; praise for the good wife and mother acts to reassure readers, to reaffirm their own moral values in the face of competing definitions of “reality”’.<sup>70</sup> In my study of women’s magazines from the late Qing a similar pattern seems to apply: while the Mrs. Hyde type of new woman was becoming more and more apparent on China’s streets, she was increasingly circumscribed on the pages of women’s magazines. I have argued previously that it was probably for hope of commercial success that women’s magazines refused to take into account the changing realities around them: because they intended to attract and sustain readerships, these early women’s magazines in China became increasingly unlikely proponents of changes which might threaten or alienate the majority of their readers, male and female alike.<sup>71</sup>

Nevertheless, with the appearance of *Linglong*, this situation seems to have altered dramatically. *Linglong* stages its star, the *new new* women, as an emblem of a newly defined cultural sophistication, embodying a revamping of values. The *new new* woman à la *Linglong* promotes a new, ‘real’, ‘intelligent’, ‘responsible’ and ‘truthful’ gentility.<sup>72</sup> On the pages of *Linglong*, horrible man becomes the emblem of the hypocritical and weak, the old gentility. It remains to be investigated whether the dominance of this *new new* woman on the pages of *Linglong* points in fact to a greater general acceptance of *new new* women in real life. It remains questionable whether indeed this independent new woman was still perceived as a Mrs Hyde. Did the *new new* woman in fact manage to serve as an alternative icon, becoming a model for the formation of a new and alternative gentility, and causing a fundamental transformation of values?<sup>73</sup>

Gentility is a concept which only works by consent. It is a concept connected with particular groups and classes in society and the set of values that they would like to propagate. It is an aspiration rather than a fact. Once generally accepted, gentility is imbued with cultural capital and the power to impose its values. Whoever is accepted within the circle of the ‘genteel’ has the power to judge others: thus gentility forms the social and cultural aspirations of a people. *Linglong*’s attempt to set up an alternative gentility, then, entails no less than the establishment of a new élite, a new type, the *new new* woman. But did the new type of gentility advocated through *Linglong* actually make it in Chinese society of the 1930s? Could this new élite – if ever it managed to exist – in fact survive?

Does the misandriac discourse on *Linglong*'s pages point to a general revolution of values? Is the spiteful gentility of *Linglong* a winning stratagem?

The personal fates of many women, such as those described in Wang Zheng's *Women in the Chinese Enlightenment*, in the literary works of the period,<sup>74</sup> and in some of the early films depicting the situation of women during this time (such as *Shennü*, *Xin nüxing*, *Malu tianshi*)<sup>75</sup> seem to speak a rather different language. Yet concerns for commercial success must have been on the minds of *Linglong*'s editors just as much as on those of the editors in the late Qing, who would surely not have ignored the question of audience. If nobody had believed in their mission, would they have published in the same vein for years on end? The question really is, then: why was *Linglong* successful, who actually read the magazine, and why did they do so? This chapter has only explored the implied readerships of this magazine, women who were confident enough to believe in the cheeky messages the magazine contained. Yet it is difficult to tell, for example, from what class these women were supposed to be, since rich and high-class women are attacked at the same time as those who are uneducated. And, in spite of all its misandriac contents, *Linglong* may even have appealed to men, too, who would feel tickled precisely because of these gestures of audacity; indeed, these very gestures might have been perceived as titillating and cute by male readers. In order to better understand the transformational force inherent in a magazine such as *Linglong*, the relationship between these implied readers and their actual counterparts needs to be addressed. Only further investigations into other press products, and especially women's magazines and the actual historical situation of this time, may provide answers to these questions. For the moment, and awaiting further evidence, one must perhaps conclude – albeit tentatively – that *Linglong* was in fact an exception<sup>76</sup> that would prove the rule of continued male dominance, the prevalence of misogyny over misandria and of differing concepts of gentility to the one proposed here.

## Notes

- 1 See Mittler 2004: ch. 4, Mittler 2003 and Mittler (under submission).
- 2 In Mittler (under submission) I studied the following women's journals: *Nüxuebao* (1898), *Nübao* (1899), *Nüzi shijie* (1904), *Zhongguo nübao* (1907), *Shenzhou nübao* (1907), *Funü shibao* (1911).
- 3 For the perpetuation of this ambiguity in a rather popular and successful publication, see the Commercial Press *Funü zazhi* of 1915.
- 4 I have put both of these expressions in inverted commas because neither actually covers the complexities and ambiguities contained in the descriptions of the figures mentioned.
- 5 See Wang Zheng 1999; Glosser 2002 and Orlicki 1998.
- 6 Repercussions of this trend can also be found in historic experiences such as those described in Mann 1994: 179–201, and in fictional works such as Shen Congwen's short story 'Xiaoxiao' of 1929. Shen lets male views tainted by misogyny appear in the words of the rural grandfather. See Mittler 2001: 83–102.
- 7 This chapter is based on a closer examination of *Linglong* (hereafter: *LL*) 1–83, published in Shanghai between spring of 1931 and spring of 1933 as well as all

extant issues from 1937 and more cursory readings of editions between 1934 and 1936, undertaken during a research seminar at the Institute of Chinese Studies in Heidelberg in the summer of 2001. I wish to thank my students for sharing their insights and enthusiasm in reading *Linglong*. I have learnt much from their comments and discussions.

- 8 See, for example, the pictures in *LL* 1931.40/1579 of a women's army, and of women giving speeches. Articles, pictures and advertisements taking up the topic of the Japanese threat appear increasingly from volume 30 onwards and then, of course, ever more frequently in 1937.
- 9 See, for example, *LL* 1931.32/1231, with an 'appropriate' picture of a woman posing in a bathing suit overleaf.
- 10 See, for example, *LL* 1931.36/1408/1409.
- 11 Unlike many other journals of the time, *Linglong* does not provide its own alternative English title. This is unfortunate in our case, but ties in with a perhaps related reticence as to the precise meaning of the Chinese name.
- 12 These two sentences first appear in *LL* 1931.1/13.
- 13 This reading is supported by another self-advertising remark in the first edition (*LL* 1931.1/24) which explains that whoever reads *Linglong* will realize how 'interesting' this 'beautiful and refined' as well as 'exceptionally *linglong*' journal is, however small in size.
- 14 The etymological description given in this and the preceding paragraph follows the *Hanyu Da Cidian*, Shanghai 1990.
- 15 See, for example, *LL* 1932.67/771–2 'What is so Particular about Men' which argues that men are really mostly false gentlemen who pretend they are gentlemen but in their treatment of women they are really the opposite, i.e. *xiaoren*. It concludes that it would almost be better to be a 'real *xiaoren*' than a 'false *junzi*'. The article is discussed in more detail in the third section below.
- 16 *Niushi* is a term in use at least since the late Ming, first for the respectable domestic woman, and then for the courtesan, crowning the latter as honorary men. It acknowledges that women have to somehow become men in order to do certain things. Whoever gained 'real acceptance' in the world of men by being able to talk and write poetry, could eventually be honoured with that name. On *niushi* and *guixiu* see Ko 1997a: 74–100, 80; Mann 1997: 67, 98, 122–5. See also Ko 1994: 117 and 139ff.
- 17 For a more or less glorifying depiction of such strong working women (in spite of all the difficulties they face) see *LL* 1937.269.91–4 'Family Chores of the Shanghai Woman'. For a critique similar to the ones to be found in *Linglong* and cited below of the other new woman, the fashion doll, see an article by a radical woman student in Tokyo cited in Judge 2001: 799. This article condemns them as 'Dolled-up toys with pierced ears and bound feet'. Maimed, useless, foolish and ignorant, responsible for China's current state of weakness because they contributed nothing to the nation. Given their selfishness, dullness, and vanity 'it was not at all strange that they were considered to be inferior beings'.
- 18 E.g. *LL* 1931.9.292: 'Today's Women Cannot be Compared to the Old'; *LL* 1931.23/826: 'How to Become a New Woman'; *LL* 1932.44/1797–1198: 'Settling Accounts With Men'; *LL* 1932.46/1850: 'Get Rid of The Inequalities Between Men and Women'; *LL* 1932.65/675–6: 'The New Woman's Three Followings and Four Virtues'.
- 19 *LL* 1931.23/826 'How to Become a New Woman'.
- 20 More examples for this type of rhetoric are seen in *LL* 1931.3/97: 'The Preparation a New Woman Needs'; *LL* 1932.58/339–42: 'How to Be a New Woman After All'; *LL* 1932.62/531–2: 'How to Be a New (Modern) Woman After All'. See also for the later period *LL* 1937.269/88–90: 'The New Family and the New Woman' and *LL* 1937.276/648–50: 'The New Woman, a Contradictory Phenomenon'.



- 21 See e.g. *LL* 1932.58/339–42 ‘How to Be a New Woman After All’ as discussed below.
- 22 See, for instance, *LL* 1932.58/339–42 ‘How to Be a New Woman After All’ on which the discussion that follows is largely based and also *LL* 1932.62/531–2 ‘How to Be a New (Modern) Woman After All’ and *LL* 1937.276/648–50 ‘The New Woman, a Contradictory Phenomenon’.
- 23 There are different views on high-heeled shoes within the pages of *Linglong*. One article (*LL* 1932.47/1897: ‘Men Also Want to Wear High-heeled Shoes’ argues vehemently that whatever women wear, men will make a fuss of it. With high-heeled shoes, they doubt how ‘hygienic’ they are, but indeed, their fears are completely groundless. That high-heeled shoes are supposed to hurt the back is unfounded, too. Doctors hardly ever advise against the wearing of high-heeled shoes and have in some cases even suggested that men, too, ought to wear them. An article in a (foreign) medical journal is mentioned as proof. Ironically, this outspoken article concludes in a very Chinese fashion, taking up an old sign of beauty for Chinese women, the small foot. It argues that of all the enlightened (*wenming*) women in the world, two-thirds wear high-heeled shoes, the reason being that they are indeed comfortable and make big feet look a little smaller.
- 24 Similar arguments also occur in *LL* 1937.276/648–50, esp. 649 ‘The New Woman, a Contradictory Phenomenon’.
- 25 See *LL* 1931.23/826 ‘How to Be a Modern Woman’. This article asks those women who have escaped the boundaries of the old rites and teachings how they feel. It reckons that it will still take years before women will be on equal terms with men when it come to matters of government and economics. For even with educated women, they often cannot eradicate the ideas of subservience to men in their hearts. Thus, the general practice is still such that a wife will in fact rely on the wealth of her husband and become his ‘sweet plaything’. The article therefore advises that all women ought to study some things that are useful and prepare to be economically independent in the future – even after marriage: ‘We cannot be weaker in anything than the men’, it continues (*LL* 1931:24/870). If the economic burden is shared, the author sees more hope for keeping up a loving relationship with one’s husband. If one cannot share the economic burden, then one has to make a comfortable and happy household one’s major task. One ought to make the husband feel the wealth and sweetness of his wonderful household. And when one has children, one ought to be a good mother, in order to gain the admiration of one’s husband for being a capable woman as well as slowly making headway for the rights of women in general.
- 26 *LL* 1932.58/339–42 ‘How to Be a Modern Woman After All’. For an echo of this latter phrase, which is repeated time and again, see for instance *LL* 1937.280/973–4: ‘Some Words on Women’s Liberation’. This article cites Luo Jialun (974): ‘Only when women become aware that they are indeed humans can they go out and liberate themselves’.
- 27 See Wang Zheng 1999: 11f. 18/19.
- 28 *LL* 1932.62/531–2: ‘How to Be a New (Modern) Woman After All’.
- 29 This view on women is typical of many articles dealing with the new woman in the earliest Shanghai women’s magazines, too; see especially the discussion of the ‘schoolgirl’ in Mittler 2003 which is echoed quite precisely in the grandfather’s lore on the girl students in Shen Congwen’s ‘Xiaoxiao’; see Mittler 2001: 89–92.
- 30 Responsibility, that is, one’s duty both to family and to society, remains one of the most hotly debated items on the pages of *Linglong* through to its last editions: see e.g. *LL* 1933.83/102–3: ‘What is the Ideal Model for the New Woman?’; *LL* 1937.276/648–50: ‘The New Woman, a Contradictory Phenomenon’ and again *LL* 1937.278/815–18: ‘The Russian New Woman and the Family’. Interestingly, the responsibility for children in case of divorce is one of the major topics in the debate, too.
- 31 *LL* 1931.31/1185–6 ‘The New Three Followings’.

- 32 LL 1931.24/861 'The New Four Virtues'.
- 33 These accusations are repeated well into the late 1930s, see for example LL 1937.269/88–90, esp. 90, 'The New Family and the New Woman' and LL 1937.276/648–50, esp. 649 'The New Woman, a Contradictory Phenomenon'.
- 34 LL 1932.65/675–6 'The New Woman's Three Followings and Four Virtues'.
- 35 For more articles admonishing women to be thrifty by referring to the argument that they are by nature spendthrifts, see LL 1932.44/1751: 'The Spouse's Purse' and LL 1932.50/2040–1 'Words Reviling Women'.
- 36 Further research needs to establish the historical veracity of this statement. Many earlier women's magazines have been known to have faked women's names while in fact being edited by men.
- 37 LL 1931.29/1059 'How to Handle Men'.
- 38 LL 1931.31/1192 'National Affairs and New Clothes'.
- 39 It first appears in LL 1931.31/1186 'The Scandalous Conduct of Men'.
- 40 See especially the series on the treatment of girls which appears in LL 1931.33/1282.
- 41 LL 1932.57/295 'The Three Ages in the Life of Man'.
- 42 For the traditional discussion of female jealousy see Ko 1994: 106ff.
- 43 See the elaborate discussion of this image in Raphals 1998.
- 44 LL 1932.68/819–20 'Jealous Men'.
- 45 LL 1932.55/197–8 (cont. LL 1932.56/248–9) 'The Most Vicious Male Heart'.
- 46 LL 1931.9/292 (cont. LL 1931.10/336–7) 'Today's Women Cannot be Compared to the Old'.
- 47 LL 1932.55/201–2 'For Men to Have No Wealth is a Virtue'.
- 48 Similarly, in an article on 'The Strange Psychology of Men' (LL 1932.47/1899) the author complains that for men – who cannot think but in terms of business and profit – marriage, too, is like the business of buying and selling, which is a tragedy for women. The article admits that it may appear strange to conceive that men do not know that real love and happiness cannot be bought by money. But while talking about happiness, men continue to use money to buy it: only they themselves can probably understand this contradictory psychology of theirs.
- 49 LL 1931.29/1064, no title given.
- 50 LL 1932.53/86 'Returning Home after Marriage'.
- 51 LL 1932.64/633 'Male Behaviour'.
- 52 LL 1932.64/633 'Male Behaviour'. For another apt illustration of this lustful behaviour of men, see the comic strip in LL 1931.32/1226 which depicts several men looking at a girl sitting leisurely on a chair wearing a short skirt. The men – blushing one after the other – talk about what she is wearing, and what might be under the skirt.
- 53 LL 1932.54/154–5 'Are Men Reliable or Not?'
- 54 LL 1932.44/1749 'When it Comes to Love, Men are Not Reliable'.
- 55 LL 1932.67/771–2 'What is so Particular About Men?'
- 56 The original reads: 'These kinds of people one would usually call devils. They can no longer be counted as humans'.
- 57 For a similar reading of mankind, exemplified in the figure of the rickshaw-puller Xiangzi whose elevated sense of self is gradually replaced and subdued by his love for money, see Lao She's novel *Luotuo xiangzi* in my interpretation 'Lao She's "Kamel Xiangzi" und das literarische und politische Erbe der 4. Mai-Bewegung'; Mittler unpubd. 2000/1: ch. 9.
- 58 LL 1933.99/910.
- 59 LL 1931.14: 507 (due to a printing error, in 1931.15 the pages again begin with 507).
- 60 See Mann 1997: 89, 101, 119. Moreover, Ban Zhao, already remarks that 'womanly speech' does not entail that she is argumentative. See the discussion offered in Ko 1994: 145. Accordingly, the 'deliberating women' appearing in the *Lienü zhuan* (esp. *juan 3*), are praised as great exceptions only.

- 61 See Dong 1995: 90. The heated discussion of women poets recorded by Susan Mann illustrates how speaking and writing women are always considered potentially disruptive: women's (poetic) discourses would uphold Confucian honour while voicing the very passions and sentiments that threatened to violate it (see Mann 1997: 77).
- 62 LL 1932.56/243–5 'How to Deal With Annoying Men'.
- 63 LL 1931.4/150 'How Wife and Husband Can Argue for Good Effect'.
- 64 LL 1931.4/150.
- 65 LL 1932.64/627–8 'How to Bind and Control a Man's Character'.
- 66 LL 1932.51/7 'Exposing the Falseness of Men'.
- 67 LL 1932.67/807 'Letter From the Editor'.
- 68 The only two journals comparable in tone to *Linglong* in the set of Republican newspapers I have examined are *Nüguang zhoukan* (1930) and *Nüxing texie* (1936). Both of these contain contributions by women, but unlike *Linglong*, they are not run and designed explicitly by women. I am currently engaged in the study of a number of contemporary and slightly earlier women's and family magazines from the Republican Period, including *Funü zazhi* (1915–31), *Xin funü* (1920–21), *Jiating zazhi* (1922), *Xin nüxing* (1927–29), *Nüguang zhoukan* (1930), *Xin Jiating* (1931–33), *Nüxing texie* (1936) and *Zhongguo funü* (1939–41).
- 69 Cf. Yen 2005: 167, who is also unable to trace more evidence than what is provided here.
- 70 Phillip 1978: 116–29, 124.
- 71 For the force of commercial viability over the contents of magazines, see Peterson 1964: 445.
- 72 The image of plum blossom, symbol of the literati, invoked by Han Yu's frequent use of the term *linglong* to describe it may evoke a forceful resonance here.
- 73 In order to answer this and the set of questions in the next paragraph, I need to find out more about both the authors and the readers, and the institutional and commercial set-up of *Linglong*. I am currently attempting to ascertain circulation figures for the journal and how they changed over time. I am also attempting to find information about the actual readers. These types of data are not easy to come by, but I am slowly piecing the mosaic together.
- 74 Ding Ling, Bing Xin and Xiao Hong are examples that come immediately to mind. See the analyses in Mittler 2001 and Mittler 2000/1 ch. 4 and ch. 8.
- 75 Zhang Yingjing 1994: 603–28 seems to point in this direction. He mentions, for example, misogynist arguments about the power of female sexuality (611), deals with the objectification and victimization of women in the three films he examines, and concludes that these films align themselves very clearly with a predominantly male discourse.
- 76 The only other women's magazine I examined that contains equally cheeky articles and, most of all, illustrations, is *Nüguang Zhoukan*.

# 12 The Chinese gentlewoman in the public gaze

## Ling Shuhua in twentieth-century China and Britain

*Jeesoon Hong*

### Introduction

Ling Shuhua (1900–1990) is a notable modern Chinese woman writer who is well known for her short stories such as ‘Jiu hou’ (After Drinking) and ‘Xiuzhen’ (Embroidered Pillows). She has been hailed as a representative *guixiu pai* (gentlewoman) writer in mainland China and Taiwan, and fits the description well: as an accomplished writer and painter, and a member of aristocratic society, she was a gentlewoman in possession of a privileged education, refined social manners and demure appearance.<sup>1</sup> Ling seems to have felt little discomfort at being seen as a gentlewoman; on the contrary, she actively cultivated a public image as one of gentlewomanly grace and kept it at a reasonable distance from commerciality. However, her enactment of gentility was edged with popular culture, both domestic and international. The term ‘gentlewoman,’ which incorporates the question of social class, is advantageous in particularizing the cross-cultural activities of Ling Shuhua, which also comprise her feminist and literary activities.

Ling Shuhua was born in 1900 into an exceptionally illustrious family in Republican China.<sup>2</sup> Her grandfather, Ling Chaogeng, was a man of great wealth in Guangdong province.<sup>3</sup> Her father, Ling Fupeng, passed the *jinshi* examination at the same time as Kang Youwei (1858–1927) and was appointed to the Hanlin Academy.<sup>4</sup> Ling Shuhua’s mother, Li Rulan, was Ling Fupeng’s third concubine. Ling Fupeng’s prestigious career included the position of *zhili buzhengshi*, a post comparable to that of governor of Beijing,<sup>5</sup> and he counted Kang Youwei and Yuan Shikai (1859–1916) amongst his more prominent friends. Ling Shuhua’s perspective on her father is ambiguous, recognizing him as not only a domineering patriarch who took in numerous concubines until his dotage, but also as a ‘Chinese gentleman’ with a refined taste in art and life. In Ling’s letter to Virginia Woolf (1882–1941), which outlines her plans to write her autobiography, she epitomises her father’s character thus:

He was a very charming man indeed. I hope I could give a real picture of him. He by all means, a type of a Chinese gentleman who never missed a chance of enjoying life, and he was lucky, he got all [sic].<sup>6</sup>

Ling Fupeng was a traditional, highly cultivated member of the literati who took pleasure in painting and calligraphy. In Ling Shuhua's autobiographical work of fiction *Ancient Melodies* she was depicted as the only child among Ling Fupeng's eleven offspring to inherit the artistic gift of Chinese painting from her paternal grandmother's father, Xie Lansheng (1760–1831).<sup>7</sup> Ling Fupeng, to his great delight, managed to appoint a painting tutor for six-year-old Ling Shuhua. Her name was Miao Suyun, and she had previously taught the Empress Dowager Cixi (1835–1908).

Ling Shuhua's genteel retreat is the old city of Beijing; she hated Shanghai. In fact, her husband, Chen Yuan states in a letter to Hu Shi: 'Shuhua detests Shanghai most'.<sup>8</sup> She enrolled at Yanjing Women's College of which the educational goal can be characterized as aristocratic biculturalism. While at the college, Ling Shuhua became an acknowledged female writer and associated with the *Xiandai pinglun pai* (Contemporary Review Group), which was led by literati with European, and in particular, English educational backgrounds, such as Chen Yuan (1896–1970).<sup>9</sup> In 1927, Ling married Chen Yuan, a professor at the National Beijing University.

In this chapter, I will explore the social perception of Chinese genteel femininity by investigating Ling Shuhua's (cross-)cultural activities in twentieth century China and Britain. I begin with a critical examination of the social articulation of the '(new-style) gentlewoman'. This articulation of Ling Shuhua as a gentlewoman is far more complicated than that of her father as a gentleman. During a period of transition in social hierarchy, public perception of gentility was fluid and ambiguous. The iconoclastic intellectual mainstream linked vested social privilege with national backwardness, and the absurdity of traditional gentry who failed to adjust to their twentieth-century surroundings was a popular motif of the 'new literature'.

Second, I will discuss how Ling Shuhua's genteel femininity was shaped, enacted and accepted in modern China. Institutions such as Yanjing University contributed to the social conception of gentility in modern China. I examine tensions between the new-style gentlewoman and the public media, vividly captured in the pages of *Chenbao fujian* (Supplement of The Morning Post). One of the main questions is how a woman's cross-cultural activities were accepted in China.

Finally, since Ling Shuhua throughout her career strove to be an intercultural mediator, particularly in Britain, the third section of this chapter explores the reception of Chinese genteel femininity in a foreign cultural field. An investigation of the gentlewoman's intercultural activities invites us to see the complex interplay between domesticity and transgression, masculine and feminine styles of art, old Chinese and modern Western cultures, and gentlewomanly amateurism versus the professionalism of a modern writer on an international, as well as a domestic, level. My archival investigation is predicated upon unpublished correspondence between Ling Shuhua and the Bloomsbury Group, including Ling's letters to Virginia Woolf.<sup>10</sup> An investigation of these materials indicates the significance of Julian Bell (1908–1937), nephew of Virginia Woolf and eldest son of Vanessa Bell (1879–1961), in Ling Shuhua's cross-cultural activities. The publication of

Hong Ying's (1962–) novel *K* (1999), the lawsuit against the book and Patricia Laurence's book *Lily Briscoe's Chinese Eyes* have brought the love affair between Ling Shuhua and Julian Bell to wider public knowledge.<sup>11</sup> The chain of events may epitomise the public gaze on the Chinese gentlewoman's cross-cultural activities. From this incident, I explore the contiguity between genteel femininity and stardom, which is based on the double image of a person's public and private lives.

### The new-style gentlewoman (*xin guixiu*)

Rey Chow, in her pioneering reading of Ling Shuhua's stories, rightly points out that when the term 'gentlewoman' is employed in the literary criticism of twentieth-century China, it is as a muted pejorative term which, to a great extent, depreciates the literary texts and gifts of the female author.<sup>12</sup> In particular, I think that as the artistic talent of traditional female literati (*cainü*) was abruptly dismissed as 'useless' by the reform-minded intellectuals at the beginning of the twentieth century in China,<sup>13</sup> physical beauty became a more decisive marker in denoting genteel femininity. When Chinese critics hail Ling as a *guixiu pai* writer, their criticisms invariably begin with praise of her elegant physical beauty. In fact, she was also called a *dongfang dianxing meiren* (typical oriental beauty) and one of *Beijing xuejie sida meiren* (the four beauties of Beijing academia).<sup>14</sup> *Guixiu*, a designation that is bound to class virtues, surreptitiously slipped into the appearance-centred epithet, *meiren* (beauty). This social articulation foretells the persistent public gaze on the gentlewoman's body.

It seems that this label of *guixiu* for Ling Shuhua originated from the word *xin guixiu* (new-style gentlewoman), which was coined in 1933 by the Chinese critic Yi Zhen (Yu Yifu, 1903–1982) to describe the protagonists in her stories.<sup>15</sup> 'New-style gentlewoman' is a useful term which points to the enigmatic position of Ling Shuhua, between defiance and compliance, Western-style education and traditional Chinese social mores, public persona and private domestic life. Its original use by Yi also internalizes the problematics of the social perception of modern women.

Yi Zhen, in his discussion of contemporary women writers, places some representative women writers into three categories according to the types of female characters in their stories: *guixiupai zuojia* (gentlewomen writers), *xin guixiupai zuojia* (new-style gentlewomen writers) and *xin nüxingpai zuojia* (new-style women writers). The spectrum from 'gentlewomen' through to 'new-style women' hinges on the extent to which the female protagonists subvert traditional social norms, which have otherwise been simplified as feudal ethics and manners (*fengjian lijiao*) by Chinese critics. Yi takes Bing Xin and Su Xuelin as the archetypes of the gentlewomen group of writers, explaining that the authors depict a love that stays comfortably within feudal manners (*zai lijiao de fanwei zhi nei*).<sup>16</sup> Ding Ling (1904–1986) and Feng Yuanjun (1900–1974) are representative of the new-style women writers who portray free love (*ziyou lian'ai*), which was in fundamental conflict with old Chinese morality.<sup>17</sup> Yi selects only one example

of the new-style gentlewomen writers – Ling Shuhua. The lady-wife (*taitai*) characters in her stories are, in their conduct, ‘close to the new-style woman but in their mentality, cannot overcome the gentlewoman’s bad habits’.<sup>18</sup>

Ling Shuhua’s self-positioning of the ‘middle’ between poles such as ‘old’ and ‘new’ has been aptly characterized by Rey Chow as her ‘virtuous transaction’ with patriarchy, or by Shu-mei Shih as a ‘modern-but-modest’ attitude. For Ling, her position in the middle signified her familiarity with both traditional Chinese and modern Western cultures. The bicultural prestige enabled her to claim socio-cultural distinction throughout her life.

Conveniently obfuscating characters with authors, text with reality, Yi Zhen’s taxonomy also represents the implicit social supposition that women, either inside or outside the text, need to demonstrate their newness in their lifestyles. This is in sharp contrast to the fact that men’s proclamation of new ideas is enough to convince people of their newness. The gendered standards of ‘new’ can be observed in the semantic division of *xin qingnian* (new youth) and *xin nüxing* (new woman). While *xin qingnian* is primarily characterized by progressive ideas, *xin nüxing* is denoted by modern lifestyles, if not fashion-styles. This implies not only public interest in, but also tacit admission of the public right to inspect, women’s private lives. The relationship between ‘new’ and ‘woman’ was never stable in early twentieth-century Chinese discourses, being continuously controlled by intellectual discourses.<sup>19</sup> The uneasy relationship between ‘new’ and ‘woman’ also provides a useful insight for comprehending the problematic standing in Ling Shuhua’s cross-cultural activities. When the images of the ‘new woman’ and ‘modern woman’ came to be merged with commercial advertisements in the 1920s and 1930s, the tacit underlying assumption seemed to be that in the encounter between Chinese women and the ‘new’, ‘modern’ or ‘West’, it was Chinese women who were overwhelmed by the exigencies of ‘newness’.<sup>20</sup> The conceptual history of the ‘new woman’ foreshadows public unease about a woman’s direct contact with the new.

### **The new-style gentlewoman at Yanjing and the newspaper**

Yanjing University was often referred to as a ‘school for the aristocracy’ (*guizu xuexiao*).<sup>21</sup> This aristocratic image was derived from the beautiful Haidian campus in the gardens of the former imperial rulers, from the social backgrounds of the students, the high cost of tuition and a certain exclusiveness in terms of the predominantly Christian middle schools from which they came. Large numbers of Yanjing students came from prominent families in Republican China. They reportedly included seventeen great-grandchildren of Zeng Guofan (1811–72) and five grandchildren of Liang Qichao.<sup>22</sup>

Despite its various efforts in the instruction of vocational subjects and the natural sciences, Yanjing University remained strong in liberal arts throughout the Republican period. Yanjing’s general competence in character building and moral discipline – based on a superior education in the liberal arts – helped to attract students from prominent families. The college’s success in the liberal arts

was sometimes explained by a disdain for physical labour among the educated Chinese. In terms of prestige, the liberal arts had become a kind of twentieth-century substitute for the Confucian classics, but in terms of its content, the undergraduate curriculum closely resembled its Western liberal arts model for over thirty years.<sup>23</sup>

The broad and diffuse concept of gentility in the collective instruction at Yanjing was closely bound to American middle-class belief in the importance of academic austerity and religious observance. In the curriculum of Yanjing Women's College, what is noticeable in comparison with Yanjing Men's College is its emphasis on instruction in Western music.<sup>24</sup> The compulsory courses for women from the pre-freshman year to sophomore year include choir classes.<sup>25</sup> American Christian middle-class values of femininity were forging the social codes of modern Chinese gentlewomen.

Newspapers provided a double-edged opportunity to new style gentlewomen such as Ling Shuhua, enabling them to gain a non-domestic space through which they could engage in public discourse, and display gentility in public without their physical presence. However, as the essential definition of genteel femininity includes pretension and dedication to the moral high ground, and the concealment and treasuring of a private domestic world, it meant that even a small slur in print could easily damage a gentlewoman's social status. The relationship between the new-style gentlewoman and newspapers to some extent foreshadowed that of the contemporary celebrity and the mass media. We can observe the equivocal dialectics between desirability and vulnerability, between visibility and invisibility, and between aristocratic aloofness and popularity.

The sharp tension between new-style gentlewomen and newspapers is observed both in Ling Shuhua's story 'Nüer shenshi tai qiliang' ('The Desolation of Ladies' Lives') and in the external reality of the text in *Chenbao fujian*.<sup>26</sup> The fictional theme of the victimization of nubile gentlewomen by the male-dominated public sphere was interestingly about to be repeated in reality just after its publication.

Through this story Ling Shuhua gained her entrée into the literary scene, with Zhou Zuoren (1885–1967) playing a crucial role in this process.<sup>27</sup> On 6 September 1923, Ling Shuhua sent a letter to Zhou Zuoren, associate professor in the Department of Chinese at Yanjing University, to ask for private tutorials in composition. This letter clearly reveals her self-appraisal and ambition to become an international writer.

Although I am not clever, I am generally familiar with both old and new studies, and am not inferior to average students in Chinese, English and Japanese writing. I voraciously read various kinds of books in my leisure time: a weak point in female students, but a strong point in me. In recent years, I have firmly decided to be a female writer in the future. I have been making strenuous efforts in Chinese, English and Japanese literature, but when I try to find a tutor who is versed in all these three languages, I find but few. You must already know that at Yanjing there is no one except yourself. So, could I dare to ask you to accept me as your student? And also the number



of Chinese women writers is extremely small so that the ideas and lives of Chinese women have not been made known to the world. It might be said that they do the least to contribute to humanity.<sup>28</sup>

This letter also shows that Ling Shuhua was alert to the need to protect her reputation from the very beginning of her career. In the last part of this letter, Ling asks him to keep secret the fact that she had written to him.

If you regard my talent as promising enough to teach, please help me to work hard. If not, please keep this secret, because very few people, let alone women, ask for teaching as I do. Otherwise, I could be the butt of ridicule.<sup>29</sup>

Zhou Zuoren also remembers that she sent him a letter asking him not to entangle her name in the bitter contention between the *Yusi* group represented by Lu Xun and the *Xiandai pinglun* group fronted by her future husband, Chen Yuan.<sup>30</sup> After Zhou's reply to her first letter, Ling Shuhua sent him a collection of her own short writings. Zhou sent one of the stories, 'Nüer shenshi tai qiliang' to the editor of *Chenbao fujian*, and it was published in the issue of 13 January 1924.

The story takes as its topic the wretched destiny of nubile gentlewomen under the uncontrollable gaze of the public. It begins with delicate descriptions of the languid atmosphere of a late spring garden and the feminine appearance of a gentlewoman who has her boudoir there. The protagonist, Wanlan, is forced to marry a man, who has impregnated his maid, because her parents are afraid that their daughter will be unable to find another spouse as knowledge of the impending marriage has been widespread.

Late next spring while visiting her family after her marriage, she hears of the tragic death of her cousin, a rather 'new-style' woman who originally dissuaded Wanlan from getting married to the man, from her third mother, i.e. her father's second concubine. As the cousin had declined the marriage proposals of her three suitors, each of them had spread the rumour that she had already accepted his own proposal, and had then alerted a tabloid about the fabricated story in clumsy poetry form (*xiangyanwen*). When the cousin became sick with rage and was sent to hospital, the rejected suitors again spread the more vicious lie that she was pregnant. The cousin's condition deteriorated and she finally died of heart disease. After telling the cousin's story, the third mother starts to tell Wanlan of her own desolation. She got married to Wanlan's father without knowing he had already a wife and a concubine. She deplores the fact that women cannot retrieve anything once married. The two women sigh over their grief while looking at falling flower petals.

Apart from the vivid representation of the feminist subject, Ling Shuhua's aesthetic endeavours are conspicuous in this story. The gentlewomen's social destiny or the waste of their beauty and youth is rather touchingly hinted at by the imagery of flower petals falling. Their social predicament of being caught in a dilemma between old- and new-style women is represented by the cyclical structure

with the same textuality at the beginning and the end. This cyclical structure is also observed in another story by Ling that portrays a nubile gentlewoman's suffering, 'Xiuzhen' ('Embroidered Pillows').<sup>31</sup> The vulnerable position of gentlewomen under the somewhat shabby public gaze, which is the main theme of the story, unfolds in the textual unity of the suffocating softness and inertia of a slack late spring afternoon.

The boundary of the author's sympathy, together with the feminine literary style, reflects the social position of the author as a woman of high class. It is worthy of attention that the maid who has been impregnated by Wanlan's husband is portrayed as a malicious, ill-tempered woman who is harsh to Wanlan. However, the thematic contradiction is still more apparent between the three gentlewomen and gentlemen than between the women of different classes in this story. While the gentlemen wield a dominating power over public opinion, the gentlewomen are victimized by the public delusion. The subordinate nature of the relationship between gentlemen and gentlewomen who are subjected to the public view is, therefore, quite in parallel with the subject position of new youth and the object position of new women in intellectual discourse.

In this story, the three gentlewomen's desolate feelings are passed from one to another, and it soon becomes evident that the vulnerability of gentlewomen in the public sphere extends outside the text to the author. After 'The Desolation of Ladies' Lives' had been published in *Chenbao fujian*, an anonymous piece defaming Ling was sent to the editor. It remained unpublished, but was sent to Ling Shuhua through Zhou Zuoren. After reading it, Ling wrote to Zhou to express her appreciation to him and to vindicate herself.<sup>32</sup> Judging from Ling's letter to Zhou, the criticism must have mainly vilified her private life rather than the text itself, insisting that she was in fact a divorcée pretending to be an unmarried woman.<sup>33</sup> There are slight grounds for reading 'The Desolation of Ladies' Lives' as autobiographical in that the protagonists are nubile gentlewomen like the author. The third mother can be seen as a characterization of Ling's mother.

If such attitudes as this can be seen as public aversion to the privileged class, the ways of addressing and responding to them varied greatly, depending on the gender of the target. Chen Yuan and Xu Zhimo (1893–1931), both of whom lived up to English gentlemanly manners and culture after returning from Britain, were often entangled in public controversies.<sup>34</sup> This kind of cultural pretension created a rift with intellectuals who had only a domestic education. Examples include the row within new drama circles played out in *Chenbao fujian* in 1923. Xu Zhimo and Chen Yuan often evinced their criticism of Chinese intellectuals for their lack of academic ability to appreciate English literature and culture in works such as Shakespeare. When they were seen leaving the theatre in the middle of a performance of *Nora* (*A Doll's House* by Ibsen) put on by students of the National Beijing Women's Normal College on 6 May 1923, they faced a barrage of criticism.<sup>35</sup> The cultural gulf continued to widen when Xu Zhimo and Lin Huiyin (1904–1955) organized a violin recital by Fritz Kreisler in Beijing on 28 May. The new drama circles represented by Fang Xin expressed their discomfort at the exclusive high culture event. Public friction between the two

groups only ended when Chen Yuan wrote a 30,000-character-long criticism of Chen Dabei's translation of the play *Loyalties: A Drama in Three Acts* (1922) by John Galsworthy (1867–1933) which he said contained two hundred and fifty translation mistakes.<sup>36</sup>

In comparison with the ease and directness of the attack on Ling Shuhua which targeted her private life, animosity towards the gentlemen seems to have taken a long detour. The responses to these criticisms from the gentlewoman and from the gentlemen were different. While Ling Shuhua tried to avoid any entanglement where possible, as we have observed in her letters to Zhou Zuoren, Chen Yuan and Xu Zhimo chose to confront their critics by reasserting their academic hegemony. Ling Shuhua, particularly in view of her impending marriage, apparently chose the feminine genteel social code of reticence and invisibility in the public sphere.

The Chinese public gaze on cross-cultural activities of the gentlewoman is glimpsed in one of the newspaper disputes during the Indian Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore's (1861–1941) visit. This involved Ling Shuhua, then a college student at Yanjing Women's College, and Lu Maode, a college student at Qinghua University. Tagore's visit turned out to be a significant event in Ling Shuhua's life. Through it she met her husband Chen Yuan and became associated with intellectuals with Anglo-American backgrounds, such as Xu Zhimo.<sup>37</sup> Tagore was invited to visit Ling Shuhua's household, together with Lin Huiyin, Xu Zhimo and Hu Shi (1891–1962), among others. The students and some of the teaching staff at Yanjing Women's College also invited Tagore to the campus on 6 May 1924, on which occasion Ling Shuhua represented the college. In the 12 May issue of *Chenbao fujian* she published the article 'Wode lixiang ji shixian de Taige'er xiansheng' ('Mr Tagore in My Imagination and in Reality').<sup>38</sup> She described the meeting as being between an old, experienced foreign master of art and a young, versatile Chinese artist. However, a subsequent article by Lu Maode showed how other people's views on female intercultural activities were at odds with her own appreciation and presentation. Tagore stayed at Lu's campus at Qinghua University for approximately one week. In a miscellaneous column in *Chenbao fujian*, Lu tries to distance himself from both the supporters and the opponents of Tagore's visit to China.<sup>39</sup> He adopts a somewhat shallow approach to discussing the poet, using the four angles of character (*renwu*), thought (*sixiang*), aesthetic perception (*meigan*), and personality (*pinge*). Interestingly, he discusses the encounter between the foreign poet and Chinese women in the section entitled 'Taishi de meigan' ('The Aesthetic Perception of Mr Tagore').

Mr Tagore also likes ladies' company. Some say, 'Wherever he goes, he receives a welcome from ladies, a real welcome.' Others say, 'Regrettably since he is already very old, nobody among the female academics is willing to accompany him.' It seems that Mr Tagore, with his dark face and grey hair, attempts to get a welcome from the women of our country, but it is not easy. I have heard that there is only one real beauty (*qianjin lizhi*) associating with Mr Tagore, that is Miss Lin [Huiyin].<sup>40</sup>

This is followed by Lu's quotation of Tagore's words that 'Western people intentionally create works of art, but the daily necessities which Chinese people use unnoticed are all beautiful.' In the unfolding structure of the article, Chinese women are simply relegated to the status of aesthetic objects for the foreigner. In Lu's writing, both Tagore and Chinese women merely exchange 'aesthetic' gazes with each other and their meeting itself received Lu's or public observation of their bodies, being a visual spectacle. Lu's derogatory language also evinces the vigilance of a Chinese man concerning Chinese women's encounters with foreign men.

These deprecatory remarks unsurprisingly provoked a resentful response from Ling. She published a rebuttal of Lu Maode's piece in the same newspaper.

An article by Mr Lu about his reflection on Tagore has been published in *Chenbao fujian*. ... At first when I read this piece, I found it intolerable. Chinese women who socialized with Mr Tagore were not, of course, limited to Miss Lin only, but I do not know whether the others were beautiful or not. However, do they lose the position of women, because they are not beauties?<sup>41</sup>

The reception of Chinese genteel femininity by foreigners, as compared with the domestic perception of genteel femininity, provides an interesting counterpoint and is discussed in the following section.

### **The publication of *Ancient Melodies* in Britain**

The publication of *Ancient Melodies* and an exchange of letters with Virginia Woolf mark the climax of Ling Shuhua's cross-cultural activities. Among a few scholars who have touched upon the correspondence between the two writers, concentrating rather on the six letters by Virginia Woolf published in *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, Shu-mei Shih provides an incisive critical analysis of Woolf's letters to Ling Shuhua, pointing out the demand for exoticization and self-exoticization flowing through the communication between 'Third-World' and 'First-World feminisms'.<sup>42</sup> A scholar of Virginia Woolf, Patricia Laurence, in her book *Lily Briscoe's Chinese Eyes* has located the relationship between Ling Shuhua and the Bloomsbury Group in the larger historical context of the relationship between Chinese and British intellectuals. She used those unpublished letters between Ling and Bloomsbury that I have also examined in the course of my own research. Laurence's book has also contributed to redressing Shih's criticism of Woolf. For instance, as Laurence's more historical research shows, Woolf's thoughtless use of the name 'Sue' for Ling Shuhua can be vindicated. 'Sue' was in fact the name Julian Bell had given her, as he had told Virginia Woolf.<sup>43</sup> Laurence attempts to grasp the complexities and ambiguities of the group's communication. Yet I find Laurence's reading of the letters is too sympathetic, if not romantic, with a rather generalized understanding of modern Chinese history that highlights the leftist oppression of the liberal or modernist tradition. These unpublished letters do not

substantiate Laurence's argument that the artistic interchange between Chinese and British modernists, unlike economic and political relations between the two nations, can be exempted from the imperialist model. On the contrary, they bolster the imperialist model and make Shih's criticism of Woolf, the 'desire to remain unfamiliar as the necessary condition of appreciation' of the other culture, even stronger and to be applied to Ling's relationships with others, such as Julian Bell, Vanessa Bell and Vita Sackville-West. While the scholar of Chinese Studies, Shih, highlights victimization of the third-world female modernist from the viewpoint of semi-colonialism, the scholar of English literature, Laurence, celebrates the artistic exchanges of international modernism.

In this section, I will examine Ling Shuhua's intercultural relationship with Bloomsbury and Vita Sackville-West, focusing on the process of publication and reception of *Ancient Melodies*. In October 1928, Ling Shuhua and Chen Yuan moved to Wuhan University, where Chen Yuan was the Dean of the Department of Foreign Literature.<sup>44</sup> In this gloomy city she met Julian Bell, who arrived in September 1935 as a professor in the Department of English.<sup>45</sup> Ling Shuhua introduced Julian Bell to traditional Chinese poetic paintings and culture and taught him how to paint, and in return studied British literature with him, attending his lectures.<sup>46</sup> Julian Bell, from the very beginning, was attracted to Ling Shuhua's grace of mien and distinguished it from the middle-class sentimentality he found in other Chinese people surrounding him.

Bell endeavoured to publish her stories in Britain. In August of 1936, he sent three stories written by Ling Shuhua, translated into English by her with his help, to David Garnett, the editor of the *London Mercury*, a cultural-literary magazine that occasionally published articles about Chinese art and culture.<sup>47</sup> The stories 'Fengle de shiren' ('The Poet goes Mad'), 'Wuliao' ('What is the Point of it?') and 'Xie xin' ('Writing a Letter') had already been published in Chinese.<sup>48</sup> It is noticeable that for the foreign reader she did not select 'Jiuhou' ('After Drinking') or 'Xiuzhen' ('Embroidered Pillows') which, with their conspicuously feminist narrative voices, had brought her significant recognition in China. Considering Ling Shuhua's continuous assertions about her aesthetic taste and principles, these three stories might – in her view – be the crystallization of her aesthetic, which upholds a refined mind in simple, plain form. It is important to realize that, contrary to most critics' views which invariably recognize Ling's feminine aesthetics and voice, Ling's artistic taste is profoundly shaped by the artistic vision of traditional male literati, particularly the Zen (Chan) Buddhist paintings of Liang Kai (c. 1140–c. 1210) and Ni Zan (1301–1374), rather than by the literary tradition of women. The three stories translated into English were rejected and returned to Vanessa Bell in March 1937.<sup>49</sup> In a sense, Ling's attempt to impress the Western reader with Chinese modernist aestheticism had failed.

Julian Bell, who was generally ignorant about Chinese literature and arts, often celebrated Ling's literary and artistic talent in his letters to Vanessa Bell and Virginia Woolf. However, it is disturbing to find out that Ling Shuhua was, in the end, merely regarded as a remarkable 'mistress' by him: 'But then how many "old Chinese hands," etc., have had mistresses like K. Well, I hope I shall find a

Thibetan before I leave. They're really fascinating and much more handsome and dignified than the pretty Chinese.<sup>50</sup>

After Chen Yuan learned of the relationship between Ling Shuhua and Julian Bell, Bell hurried back to England in April 1937. Chen Yuan sent a few letters to Bell to discontinue their affair, believing that Bell had pursued Ling against her will. In one sentence he appealed to the 'honour' of an 'Englishman' in desperation, bitterly reflecting his colonial-style high regard for Englishness: 'I thought that whatever might be your moral principle in some matters, an Englishman still had to keep his word and to cherish his honour.'<sup>51</sup> Their relationship does not seem to have been made widely known. The Spanish Civil War had concerned Julian Bell deeply while he was in China and in June 1937 he volunteered as an ambulance driver. He was killed during service in July 1937.

Ling Shuhua's correspondence suggests that Julian Bell was the originator of the book. In Ling's early letter to Virginia Woolf, she explains how the idea of writing an autobiography was first generated: 'I'm thinking to choose all the stories I had told Julian and write them down would be something anyway to the Western people.'<sup>52</sup> In a letter written in 1979 to Nigel Nicolson, editor of *The Letters of Virginia Woolf* and son of Vita Sackville-West, she more openly confirms Julian Bell's active role in engendering the book:

He [Julian Bell] also said he was sure that Virginia Woolf would like it if I could bring about all the things we talked about. He believed it could be a wonderful book which Virginia would like to help me to publish.<sup>53</sup>

Ling and Bell had already placed Virginia Woolf, who was a part-owner of the Hogarth Press, at the centre of their plan to publish the autobiography in book form. What is more, the book was conceived as a way for Ling Shuhua to come to England, following Julian Bell: 'everyone would think it natural enough for you to go to England if your book were a success there', 'If only the family business runs out well and you can get your money, and if you will do your book and have your exhibitions.'<sup>54</sup>

Remembering that Bell had said that Virginia Woolf would help her to publish her autobiographical stories in Britain, Ling Shuhua wrote to the English writer in March 1938.<sup>55</sup> Woolf indeed replied immediately with warm and enthusiastic encouragement for Ling to write autobiographical stories. Ling Shuhua recalled that she received several letters and three books from Virginia Woolf.<sup>56</sup> Correspondence between the two women writers lasted from March 1938 to July 1939.

The correspondence first centred on the issue of Ling Shuhua's autobiographical stories. She ardently sought Woolf's guidance in every letter to her, honouring Woolf as her mentor. In addition to the issue of her autobiography, Ling Shuhua's letters often convey the war experiences of the Chinese and her personal sorrows. The communication meant much more to Ling Shuhua than to Virginia Woolf, not only because of the implicitly presumed hierarchical positions of the writers or the nations, but also because of her deep personal sorrow which, possibly over Julian

Bell's death, was added to the distress suffered in wartime. Ling brought up the issue of suicide in some of her letters to Woolf.<sup>57</sup>

Ling Shuhua sought to maintain an ostentatious dignity and had already broached the issue of suicide with Julian Bell, insisting that she would rather die than bear public disgrace if their love affair were ever made known to the public; but Bell, who led the bohemian life style of the Bloomsbury group, seemed unconvinced. Ironically, it was Woolf who actually committed suicide in the end. Sometimes mentioning the political situation, the women shared the view that Ling Shuhua's personal stories could hardly be seen as important at a time of war and impending war in both countries; however they worked with the idea of continuing with autobiographical stories.

Ling came to England in 1947, joining her husband who had come in 1943 and worked as the first Chinese representative to UNESCO.<sup>58</sup> She could not, of course, meet Virginia Woolf, but socialized with Vanessa Bell, Leonard Woolf (1880–1969) and Woolf's intimate friend, Vita Sackville-West, all of whom also helped her to publish her book. In the process of publishing the book, Ling Shuhua frequently exchanged letters with Leonard Woolf, who actually carried out the project. With Vanessa Bell and Vita Sackville-West, she shared a more casual friendship. Vita Sackville-West and Leonard Woolf played a significant role in publishing *Ancient Melodies* while Vanessa Bell assisted her in holding exhibitions of her paintings in Europe.<sup>59</sup>

Ling's autobiographical fiction, *Ancient Melodies*, was finally published in England in December 1953. Virginia Woolf's involvement loomed large in the reception of the book, both in China and England, and contributed to its success. Both the preface to the book, written by Vita Sackville-West, and Harold Acton's (1904–1994) review published in the *Times Literary Supplement* laud Virginia Woolf's literary influence on Ling Shuhua. The fact that Ling was a renowned writer in China was hardly made known to the English reader and her posture as an amateur writer seems to have helped her get a better reception. Sackville-West introduces Ling Shuhua as 'one of the many daughters of an ex-Mayor of Peking'.<sup>60</sup> In Harold Acton's review, the impression was scarcely given that 'Mrs Su Hua' was a notable writer in China.<sup>61</sup> Ling Shuhua herself, to a great extent, ignored or concealed her writing career in China. It is reasonable to suggest that she was not introduced or accepted as a professional writer from China, but as a Chinese lady with artistic gifts: in other words as a Chinese gentlewoman. She, in fact, neither fully devoted herself to the careers of writing and painting, nor completely neglected them. She left a sparse literary oeuvre during her ninety-one-year life and gained less fame as a painter than as a writer.<sup>62</sup>

Sackville-West contributed significantly to the publication and reception of the book, together with the editor and publisher, Leonard Woolf. Ling Shuhua asked Sackville-West to give the book a title and after some pondering, she replied as follows:

I have been thinking of a title of your book. I thought *Ancient Melodies*. This is from Arthur Waley's [1889–1966] translation '170 Chinese poems' page

125. Have you got this book? I thought you might give your book this title and then publish some further lines of the poem on the first sheet, to explain where the title came from:

Ancient Melodies, ...  
Not appealing to present men's taste.  
Light and colour are faded from the jade stops:  
Dust has covered the rose-red strings.<sup>63</sup>

The book's dedication was also discussed with Sackville-West before its publication: 'I think "To Virginia Woolf and Vita Sackville-West" is *very* nice, and I love the idea of being associated with Virginia in your friendship.'<sup>64</sup> Sackville-West's letters to Ling Shuhua reveal that she, drawing on her social influence, arranged for Harold Acton and Arthur Waley to write reviews, even before the publication of the book: 'I will tell Harold to review it in *The Observer*, because I know it is a book he will appreciate and a review in *The Observer* sells a lot of copies!'<sup>65</sup>

In her manuscript under the title of 'Memoir of Virginia Woolf', which in fact portrays her general relationship with the Bloomsbury Group rather than focusing on the short-lived epistolary relationship with Virginia Woolf, Ling, with subtle pride, talks at length about how cordially she was treated by them. She claimed to be writing the piece in order to 'let the reader see their [the Bloomsbury members'] novelty and kindness despite their high reputation'.<sup>66</sup>

While Ling Shuhua designated her relationship with the established British female writer, Woolf, as that of teacher and disciple, she developed a more informal and feminine friendship with Sackville-West. Some sentences from Sackville-West's letters to Ling may help us to configure their relationship: 'I love you dearly, you know, and have a great admiration for you as an artist – both in your painting and your writing.'<sup>67</sup> 'Darling Su Hua, you are too precious to go endangering your life in Korea.'<sup>68</sup>

Through this brief historical study of Ling's relationship with members of the Bloomsbury Group, we have seen how Ling Shuhua was positioned as a 'charming' Chinese gentlewoman *vis-à-vis* Bloomsbury rather than as a Chinese modernist writer.

### **The body of the gentlewoman and commerciality**

The dubious conflict between the decorous concealment of the private life and the public fascination with it is already immanent in the social articulation of the 'gentlewoman' in twentieth-century China. The public sphere of the newspaper was one centre where implicit but intense tension was evinced. The cross-cultural performance of genteel femininity and the foreign gaze on it was complicated by the hierarchical relationship between the two countries. Despite Ling Shuhua's manifest pride in her artistic talent and her endeavours to export it, her success in *Ancient Melodies* must also be related to the historical commercial success of non-



Western women's autobiographies in the Western print market, in other words, to the Western reader's fascination with non-Western women's private lives.

Ling Shuhua's self-positioning as a member of the female Chinese literati with distinctive intellectual and artistic ability on an international as well as a domestic level can be seen in relation to her dubious negotiations with the commercial public gaze pertinently directed at her female body and her private life. Ling Shuhua never totally freed or distanced herself from financial concerns, but acted throughout with the detached air of the gentry. Through the bitter strife surrounding her father's properties in 1937, she came to inherit art collections as well as artistic gifts from the prestigious family lineage. In 1991, one year after she died, Ling Shuhua's collections related to the Bloomsbury Group, such as correspondence and paintings, were put up for auction at Sotheby's. Her relationship with the Bloomsbury Group constituted not only symbolic but also material capital.

The lawsuit against Hong Ying's novel *K* can be interpreted as Ling's posthumous struggle for gentility carried forward by her daughter. Arguably, the erotic female protagonist of *K*, Lin, embodies Ling Shuhua and the plot centres on her love affair with Julian Bell. The fictionalized version of Ling's private life presents a stark contrast with her public image as a gentlewoman. We can find troubling conversations between the autobiographical fiction, *Ancient Melodies*, and the biographical fiction *K*. Their commonality lies in that both identifications hinge on male subjectivity, whether of old China or of the modern West. If the self-identity presented in *Ancient Melodies* is 'the gentleman father's daughter',<sup>69</sup> the primary identity of the protagonist Lin is the lover of Julian Bell. The lawsuit might also reflect the contiguity between genteel femininity and stardom. The definition of 'stardom' has been characterized by the double image of the 'performing presence' and what happens 'off-stage', or the public and private.<sup>70</sup> It is said that 'Princess Diana entered into the realm of stardom when knowledge of her unhappy private life could act as a counter to the glamorous public "work".'<sup>71</sup> The inconsistency between Ling Shuhua's public and private lives may be even more complex since it spans and is decoded in two different cultural languages. The mystification of the oriental woman's body from the Western white man's curious eyes, on which *K* is based, satisfies both exoticist and self-exoticizing desires.

The body of the gentlewoman has been brought to the centre of the gentlewoman's cross-cultural activities and become the field of commercial and legal battles. In this field, Chinese and Western perspectives on the private and public, and those on dignity, intertwine. The subtle relationship between genteel femininity and commercial value might have been anticipated in Ling's own lifetime.

## Notes

- 1 Ling Shuhua belongs to the *Jingpai* (Beijing School), in painting as well as literature. Her paintings are rarely mentioned in the history of modern Chinese painting, but where cited are included in *Jingpai*. For instance, Chu-tsing Li illustrates Ling's paintings under the section 'Traditionalism in Peking' (Li Chu-tsing 1979: 22–9).

- 2 Ling Shuhua (Ling Ruitang) fabricated her own birth year as either 1904 or 1908, but it is confirmed that she was born in 1900.
- 3 Chen Xueyong 2001: 128–43; Wang Yixin 1995: 78–85.
- 4 Ling Fupeng, (*zi* Runtai) passed the *yiwei* exam in the twenty-first year of *Guangxu* (1895); cf. Chen Yunlong 1981: 285–7.
- 5 Chen Yunlong 1981: 245–51.
- 6 Letter from Ling Shuhua to Virginia Woolf (25 May 1938, in Sussex University Library); I quote Ling Shuhua's letters throughout as they were written, without corrections.
- 7 Su Hua 1969. Ling Fupeng is known to have had fifteen offspring. Although Chinese critics often introduce Xie Lansheng merely as Ling Shuhua's *waizufu*, he is in reality Ling Fupeng's maternal grandfather; see Su Hua 1969: 116. *Ancient Melodies* was published in English first and translated into Chinese by Fu Guangming in 1994 as 'Guyun' (Beijing: Zhongguo huajiao chubanshe, 1994).
- 8 Letter from Chen Yuan to Hu Shi (31 July 1928) in Hu Shi 1994: 76.
- 9 On the Contemporary Review Group, see Ni Bangwen 1995a: 137–49, and Ni Bangwen 1995b: 254–69. Chen Yuan, whose pen name is Chen Xiyong and pseudonym is Tongbo, was born to an enlightened family of gentry. He went to Britain to study in 1912, and obtained a doctoral degree in social and political sciences at the University of London in 1922. However, as he was interested in English literature, he became a professor in the Department of English at the National Beijing University. Chen Zishan 2000: 1–3.
- 10 These manuscripts are located in the Modern Archives of King's College, University of Cambridge (hereafter MAKC), Special Collections of Sussex University Library (SCSUL) and New York Public Library (NYPL). Patricia Laurence's book was published in the winter of 2003 when the manuscript of this chapter had already been submitted. Significant parts of our archival researches of the letters in English between Ling Shuhua and the Bloomsbury Group coincide, although neither of us knew about the other's research before the publication of Laurence's book. In this study, I will try not to revisit the parts which were discussed in Laurence's book.
- 11 Hong Ying 1999. *K*, trans. as *K: The Art of Love*. For further details of the lawsuit filed by Chen Xiaoying, daughter of Chen Xiyong and Ling Shuhua, against *K*, refer to the postings by Li Xia and Hong Ying in *MCLC* mailing list dated 28 August 2001 and 12 May 2002 etc.
- 12 Chow 1988.
- 13 On *cainü*, see Hu Ying 2000: 6–8.
- 14 'The four beauties' were Lin Huiyin, Xie Bingxin, Han Xiangmei and Ling Shuhua.
- 15 Yi Zhen 1933: 1–36.
- 16 Yi Zhen 1933: 4.
- 17 'Zhe yu shu qiannian lai zhongguo de jiu daode shi genben hengtu de' (Yi Zhen 1933: 5).
- 18 'Tade xingwei shi yi ge xin nüxing, danshi jingshen shang nai tuobudiao guixiu xiaojie de xiqi' (Yi Zhen 1933: 5).
- 19 For the conceptual history of *xin nüxing*, see Barlow 1994: 173–96 and Armstrong 2000: 115–47.
- 20 Since the mid-1920s under the influence of the leftist discourses, the loan word *modeng* attached to *nüxing* took all the maleficence derived from the combination of 'new' and 'woman', while the nativist term *xin nüxing* was related to the image of the national or communist warrior.
- 21 West 1976: 137. As Ling Shuhua attended Yanjing Women's College from 1921 to 1924, her college life was based at the women's campus of Dengshikou.
- 22 West 1976: 91.
- 23 West 1976: 124 and 91.

- 24 In 1924 when Ling Shuhua was in her senior year, the women's college bulletin shows a list of the various fees, including the fees for piano and organ lessons at the college as follows: tuition per year \$50.00; room, light and heat \$10.00; board, first grade, per semester \$23.00 (second grade \$18.00); piano lessons, with use of instrument for one hour a day, per semester \$18.00 (without use of instrument \$12.00); organ lessons, per semester \$5.00; use of an organ for an hour a day \$2.00. *Supplementary Bulletin Regarding Courses at Yenching Women's College 1924–25, Bulletin 20*: 3.
- 25 *Supplementary Bulletin* 1925: 11.
- 26 Ling Shuhua [1924a] 1998: 3–13. Originally published in *Chenbao fujian* (13 January 1924).
- 27 Zhang Yanlin also says: 'Zhou Zuoren was the person who recommended Ling to the literary scene for the first time. The contribution cannot be erased.' (Zhang Yanlin 2001: 127–8).
- 28 Letter from Ling Shuhua to Zhou Zuoren (6 September 1923) cited in Zhou Zuoren 1998: 606–7.
- 29 Letter from Ling Shuhua to Zhou Zuoren (6 September 1923) quoted in Zhou Zuoren 1998: 607.
- 30 Zhou Zuoren 1998: 609.
- 31 Ling Shuhua [1925] 1998: 53–7. Originally published in *Xiandai pinglun* 15.1 (21 March 1925).
- 32 Zhou Zuoren, on the side of Ling Shuhua, described the anonymous critic's actions thus: 'A woman wrote a short story and published it in a newspaper. Not long after, a man contributed a piece of "criticism" (*piping*) which muckrakes through the author's life and wrenches many facts with evil intention' (Zhou Zuoren [Jing Sheng] 1924). Zhou Zuoren reprimands two males for their despicable responses to women's writings in this article, which he links to lack of respect for women as individuals.
- 33 'The most vicious is the part in the writing saying that I was already married and divorced...'. Ling Shuhua's letter to Zhou Zuoren postmarked 2 January 1924, quoted in Zhou Zuoren 1998: 608.
- 34 While Chen Yuan completed his PhD degree at London University, Xu Zhimo took a Master's course at the University of Cambridge after studying in the USA.
- 35 Han Shishan 2000: 148–56. The criticisms include Yin Tuo's 'Kanle nūgaoshi liangtian yanju yihou de zatan' ('Miscellany After Seeing the Play Put On by the Beijing Women's Normal College for Two Days'); Fang Xin's 'Kanle Nuola hou de lingsui ganxiang' ('Trivial Impressions after Seeing *Nora*'); Lin Rusu's 'You yi ci kanle nūgaoshi liangtian yanju hou de zagan' ('Miscellany After Seeing Once the Play Put On by the Beijing Women's Normal College for Two Days') and He Yigong's 'Nūgaoshi yan de Nuola' (*Nora* by the Beijing Women's Normal College).
- 36 Han Shishan 2000: 148–56.
- 37 Wang Yixin exaggerates the role of Tagore in their relationship as a go-between, saying 'the matchmaker was Tagore' (meiren shi Taige'er). Wang Yixin 1995: 78–85.
- 38 Ling Shuhua [1924b] 1998: 602–3. Originally published in *Chenbao fujian* (12 May 1924).
- 39 Lu Maode 1924.
- 40 Lu Maode 1924.
- 41 Ling Shuhua [1924c] 1998: 604. Originally published in *Chenbao fujian* (5 July 1924).
- 42 Woolf 1980. Shu-mei Shih 2001: 215–28. For instance, Wu Luqin seems to have investigated a few of Ling's letters with the Bloomsbury Group. See Wu Luqin 1983: 5–33.
- 43 Letter from Julian Bell to Virginia Woolf (15 November 1935) in Bell 1938.
- 44 Tang Dahui 1990: 174.

- 45 Seen from the letters of Chen Yuan and Ling Shuhua to Hu Shi, Ling Shuhua led a very unhappy, boring life in the city. 'Shuhua is as if buried alive in this place, she is bored to tears and I don't know how to comfort her.' Letter from Chen Yuan to Hu Shi (26 December 1929) in Hu Shi 1994: 93. 'Wuchang is a place in which all the weak points of Chinese cities are collected.' Letter from Ling Shuhua to Hu Shi (16 October 1929) in Hu Shi 1994: 512–13.
- 46 'She [Ling Shuhua] comes to my Shakespeare and Modern lectures, which has the good effect of making me lecture my best.' Letter from Julian Bell to Vanessa Bell (23 October 1935) in Bell 1938.
- 47 The magazine, whose chief editor was R.A. Scott-James, for instance published Basil Gray's 'Chinese paintings at Burlington House' (121–3) and Leigh Ashton's 'Ancient Bronzes of China' (127–9) in volume 33 (December 1935).
- 48 'Wuliao' was published in *Wenyi: Dagongbao fukan (Literature and Art: Supplement to Dagongbao)* (23 June 1934); 'Fengle de shiren' was published in *Xinyue* 2, no. 1, (10 April 1928), and as 'A Poet Goes Mad' in the English journal in Beijing *T'ien Hsia Monthly* 4, no. 4 (April 1937): 401–21, and 'Xie xin' was included in her book *Xiaoger lia* (Shanghai: Shanghai liangyou tushu, 1935). 'What is the Point of it?' also appeared in *T'ien Hsia Monthly* 3, no.1 (August 1936): 53–62.
- 49 Letter from David Garnett to Vanessa Bell (March 1937, in MAKC).
- 50 Letter from Julian Bell to Vanessa Bell (28 August 1936), in Bell 1938: 153–4. Judging from his letters and diary, 'K' must be inferred to be Ling Shuhua.
- 51 Letter from Chen Yuan to Julian Bell (16 March 1937, in MAKC).
- 52 Letter from Ling Shuhua to Virginia Woolf (25 May 1938, in SCSUL).
- 53 Letter from Ling Shuhua to Nigel Nicolson (16 June 1979, SCSUL).
- 54 Letter from Julian Bell to Ling Shuhua (30 March 1937, in NYPL).
- 55 Ling often mentioned that she did so because she was deeply impressed by Woolf's book *A Room of One's Own*. Wu Luqin, perhaps based on Ling's explanation, also corroborates the fact (Wu Luqin 1983: 14).
- 56 'There were several letters she wrote to me, but as you know during the war in China, the letters were naturally lost whenever there was a war broken somewhere or air raid in some towns. She also sent me some books but I only received 3 copies.' Letter from Ling Shuhua to Nigel Nicolson (16 June 1979, in SCSUL).
- 57 Letter from Ling Shuhua to Virginia Woolf (12 December 1938, in NYPL). Ling Shuhua to Virginia Woolf (no date, in NYPL).
- 58 'In 1943, Chen Yuan went to Europe since then they were separated for four years.' (Yang Jingyuan 1997: 146). Initially, Chen Yuan worked for the Sino-Britain Cultural Association and then was appointed as the Chinese representative to UNESCO; cf. Yang Jingyuan 1997b: 112.
- 59 'After her [Ling Shuhua's] move to the West, she held a number of exhibitions: the Adams Gallery in London in 1949, Musée Cernuschi in Paris in 1954, John Herron Art Museum in Indianapolis also in 1954, and possibly others in Singapore... Besides being a painter herself, she also maintains a collection of outstanding Chinese paintings of the Ming and Ch'ing periods, which was shown in both Paris and London during the 1960s' (Li 1979: 26).
- 60 Vita Sackville-West, 'Preface' in Su Hua 1969.
- 61 Acton 1954. Ling Shuhua, together with Julian Bell, met Harold Acton in January 1936 in Beijing and had a good impression of him. 'Well, Sue has taken a great fancy to Harold Acton, who, she says, has very good taste in both literature and painting: he's a very nice creature, and most amiable.' Letter from Julian Bell to Vanessa Bell (21 January 1936), in Bell 1938: 80.
- 62 Ling published around 44 short stories in Chinese excluding *Guyun*, the Chinese translation of *Ancient Melodies*.
- 63 Letter from Vita Sackville-West to Ling Shuhua (11 October 1952, in NYPL). 'The Old Harp', in Waley 1956.

- 64 Letter from Vita Sackville-West to Ling Shuhua (11 July 1953, in NYPL).
- 65 Letter from Vita Sackville-West to Ling Shuhua (11 October 1952, in NYPL).
- 66 Ling Shuhua, 'Memoir of Virginia Woolf' (Holograph draft, undated in NYPL).
- 67 Letter from Vita Sackville-West to Ling Shuhua (11 July 1953, in NYPL).
- 68 Letter from Vita Sackville-West to Ling Shuhua (5 October 1953, in NYPL).
- 69 'Ling's autobiography is therefore not about her self. It is a writing about herself as her father's daughter, and her coming into the recognition of her father.' Ng 1993: 244.
- 70 Geraghty 2000: 186.
- 71 Geraghty 2000: 186.

# Glossary

|                             |          |
|-----------------------------|----------|
| aiqinghua huihua lun        | 愛情化繪畫論   |
| Amituofu xiang              | 阿彌陀佛相    |
| Amu                         | 阿母       |
| Anqing                      | 安慶       |
| bai dian                    | 拜墊       |
| Ban Zhao                    | 班昭       |
| <i>Banqiao zaji</i>         | 板橋雜記     |
| Bao'an                      | 保安       |
| Baoding                     | 保定       |
| Baosheng Temple             | 寶生寺      |
| Beihezhaio                  | 北河照      |
| Beijing xuejie sida meiren  | 北京學界四大美人 |
| Bie mu                      | 別母       |
| <i>Biji xiaoshuo daguan</i> | 筆記小說大觀   |
| <i>Bijing</i>               | 筆經       |
| Bing xin                    | 冰心       |
| bing zhong ku nü            | 病中哭女     |
| bu wei ming bu wei li       | 不為名不為利   |
| cai (talent)                | 才        |
| cai (wealth)                | 財        |
| Cai Runshi                  | 蔡潤石      |
| cainü                       | 才女       |
| caizi jiaren                | 才子佳人     |
| Cao Miaoqing                | 曹妙清      |
| Cao Xuequan                 | 曹學佺      |
| Cao Yin                     | 曹寅       |
| Cao Zhao                    | 曹昭       |
| <i>Chahua</i>               | 茶話       |
| Chai Jingyi                 | 柴靜儀      |
| Chang'e                     | 嫦娥       |
| changshifu                  | 長舌婦      |
| Changzhou                   | 常州       |
| Chao Guanzhi                | 晁貫之      |

|                          |  |
|--------------------------|--|
| Chao Linzhen             | 巢麟徵  |
| Chen Chengyin            | 陳承蔭  |
| Chen Huaju               | 陳華媿  |
| Chen Jingji              | 陳經濟  |
| Chen Jiru                | 陳繼儒  |
| Chen Shi                 | 陳氏   |
| Chen Weisong             | 陳維崧  |
| Chen Yada                | 湛亞達  |
| Chen Yuan                | 陳源   |
| Chen Yuanxiang           | 陳元湘  |
| Chen Yucheng             | 陳玉成  |
| Chen Zhenling            | 陳珍玲  |
| Chen Zhilin              | 陳之遴  |
| Chen Zilong              | 陳子龍  |
| <i>Chenbao fujian</i>    | 晨報附捐   |
| Cheng nan bie nü         | 城南別女   |
| Cheng Tinglu             | 程庭鷺  |
| cheng xin tang shi       | 澄心堂詩   |
| Chongwu dao nü           | 重午悼女   |
| Chuci                    | 楚辭   |
| ci                       | 辭  |
| <i>Cuiluoge yigao</i>    | 翠螺閣遺稿  |
| da ren                   | 大人   |
| Daguanyuan               | 大觀園  |
| Dangfu qu                | 蕩婦曲  |
| danjian                  | 單簡   |
| dao tian                 | 禱天   |
| daqing maqiao            | 打情罵俏   |
| daru                     | 大儒   |
| <i>Daxue</i>             | 大學   |
| de                       | 德  |
| Deng Guixiu              | 鄧閨秀  |
| di ting                  | 笛亭   |
| Didao                    | 狄道   |
| <i>Dijing jingwu lue</i> | 帝京景物略  |
| Ding Bing                | 丁丙   |
| Ding Junwang             | 丁君望  |
| Ding Ling                | 丁玲   |
| disan zhong ren          | 第三種人   |
| Dong Qichang             | 董其昌, <i>zi Xuanzai</i> 玄宰, <i>hao Sibai</i> 思白 |
| Dong, concubine          | 董姬   |
| dongfang dianxing meiren | 東方典型美人   |
| dongjing ziru            | 動靜自如   |
| <i>Dongtian bilu</i>     | 洞天筆錄   |

|                           |                              |
|---------------------------|------------------------------|
| <i>Dongtian qinglu ji</i> | 洞天清祿集                        |
| Du                        | 杜                            |
| Du Liniang                | 杜麗娘                          |
| duan zhen fu              | 端貞婦                          |
| duo qing                  | 多情                           |
| er                        | 兒                            |
| Fan Lian                  | 范濂                           |
| Fan shi                   | 范氏                           |
| Fang Xiaoru               | 方孝儒                          |
| Fang Yuanshan             | 方宛珊                          |
| Fangmu shimo              | 訪墓始末                         |
| Fangshengshe              | 放生社                          |
| fei e po lai              | 費厄潑賴                         |
| feiren zhuyi              | 非人主義                         |
| Feixu yuan                | 飛絮園                          |
| female Nie Zheng          | 女聶政                          |
| Fen                       | 汾                            |
| Feng                      | 馮                            |
| Feng Menglong             | 馮夢龍                          |
| Feng Xian                 | 馮嫻                           |
| Feng Xiaoqing             | 馮小清                          |
| Feng Yuanjun              | 馮沅君                          |
| fengjian lijiao           | 封建禮教                         |
| Fengle de shiren          | 瘋了的詩人                        |
| fengliu                   | 風流                           |
| fengshi zhi zhi           | 逢時之制                         |
| <i>Fengyue meng</i>       | 風月夢                          |
| Fobei                     | 佛卑                           |
| fugu                      | 復古                           |
| fumu                      | 父母                           |
| <i>Funü zazhi</i>         | 婦女雜誌                         |
| Funü zizhi hui            | 婦女自治會                        |
| Fushe                     | 復社                           |
| Fuxiang                   | 鳧鄉                           |
| gan huai                  | 感懷                           |
| Gao Lian                  | 高濂                           |
| gaoshang yule             | 高尚娛樂                         |
| gaoshang                  | 高尚                           |
| Ge Cuiping                | 葛翠屏                          |
| <i>Gegu yaolun</i>        | 格古要錄                         |
| gong                      | 公                            |
| Gong Dingzi               | 龔鼎孳, <i>zi</i> Xiaosheng 孝升, |
|                           | <i>hao</i> Zhilu 芝麓          |
| gongsheng                 | 貢生                           |



|                                   |  |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| Gu Mei                            | 顧媚, <i>zi Meisheng</i> 眉生,<br><i>hao Hengbo</i> 橫波 |
| Gu Qiyuan                         | 顧起元  |
| Gu Ruopu                          | 顧若璞  |
| Gu Ruoqun                         | 顧若群  |
| Gu Shi                            | 顧諤   |
| Gu Si                             | 顧姒   |
| gu wenci                          | 古文詞  |
| Gu Yanwu                          | 顧炎武  |
| Gu Yurui                          | 顧玉瑞, <i>zi Zhiqiong</i> 之瓊                         |
| Guan Yun                          | 管筠   |
| guang qi yuan yu tong zhi ye      | 廣其緣於同志也  |
| guanxi                            | 關係   |
| Guanyin                           | 觀音   |
| Guguo                             | 故國   |
| gui (ghost)                       | 鬼  |
| Gui Youguang                      | 歸有光, <i>zi Xifu</i> 熙甫,<br><i>hao Zhenchuan</i> 震川 |
| Gui Zhuang                        | 歸莊   |
| <i>Guimao lüxing ji</i>           | 癸卯 旅行記   |
| guinü                             | 閨女   |
| <i>Guiqian ji</i>                 | 歸潛紀  |
| guixiu                            | 閨秀   |
| guixiu pai                        | 閨秀派  |
| guixiupai zuojia                  | 閨秀派作家  |
| guizu xuexiao                     | 貴族學校   |
| Gujin nüshi                       | 古今女史   |
| <i>Guochao guixiu zhengshi ji</i> | 國朝閨秀正始集  |
| Gushan                            | 孤山   |
| Guxianglou ji                     | 古香樓集   |
| Haining                           | 海寧   |
| Haipai                            | 海派   |
| <i>Haishanghua liezhuan</i>       | 海上花列傳  |
| Haitang shishe                    | 海棠詩社   |
| Han Aijie                         | 韓愛姐  |
| Han Yu                            | 韓愈   |
| Hangzhou                          | 杭州   |
| Hangzhou shi zuojia lianhuanhui   | 杭州市作家聯歡會   |
| Haoqiying                         | 浩氣吟  |
| He Deming                         | 何德明  |
| He Mengzhen nü                    | 和孟貞女   |
| He Qiaoyuan                       | 何喬遠  |
| He Zhitian                        | 何芝田  |
| Hong Liangji                      | 紅亮吉  |
| Hong Xiuquan                      | 洪秀全  |

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|------------------------------------|----------|
| Hong Ying                          | 虹影       |
| Hongdou cun                        | 紅豆村      |
| <i>Honglou meng</i>                | 紅樓夢      |
| Hou Jingyun                        | 侯靜雲      |
| Hu hong huang                      | 呼虹幌      |
| Hu Shi                             | 胡適       |
| Hua Lin                            | 華林       |
| Hua Qixing                         | 華其興      |
| Hua shi                            | 花史       |
| Huang Daozhou                      | 黃道周      |
| Huang Juesi                        | 黃覺寺      |
| Huang Junzai                       | 黃鈞宰      |
| Huang Liuhong                      | 黃六鴻      |
| Huang Renrui (Yingniang)           | 黃任瑞 (英娘) |
| Huang Shixu                        | 黃式序      |
| Huanghe                            | 黃鶴       |
| Huating                            | 華亭       |
| huayou                             | 話友       |
| <i>Huayue hen</i>                  | 華月痕      |
| hui qun xian                       | 會群仙      |
| Huifu nüquan hui                   | 恢復女權會    |
| <i>Huitu haishang baihua zhuan</i> | 繪圖海上百花傳  |
| huose                              | 貨色       |
| huoxing                            | 火性       |
| <i>Hushang cao</i>                 | 湖上草      |
| Ji mu                              | 寄母       |
| ji qun xian                        | 集群仙      |
| Ji Shao                            | 嵇紹       |
| Jia Ming                           | 賈銘       |
| jia                                | 假        |
| <i>Jiali yijie</i>                 | 家禮儀節     |
| Jiangnan                           | 江南       |
| jiao nü                            | 教女       |
| Jiaoyuan qizi                      | 焦園七子     |
| Jiaoyuan shishe                    | 焦園詩社     |
| Jiaoyuan wuzi                      | 焦園五子     |
| Jicheng tushu gongsi               | 集成圖書公司   |
| jie nü                             | 戒女       |
| Jieyue shanfang huichao            | 借月山房彙鈔   |
| <i>Jiezi yuan huazhuan</i>         | 芥子園畫傳    |
| <i>Jin Ping Mei</i>                | 金瓶梅      |
| jing hua shui yue                  | 鏡花水月     |
| jingqiao                           | 精巧       |
| jinshi                             | 進士       |
| <i>Jiudian bu</i>                  | 酒顛補      |

|                                |                         |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Jiuge                          | 九歌                      |
| Jiuhou                         | 酒後                      |
| Juan                           | 涓                       |
| jueju                          | 絕句                      |
| junzi                          | 君子                      |
| juren                          | 舉人                      |
| Juxiang                        | 菊香                      |
| <i>Juxiang mu ming</i>         | 菊香墓銘                    |
| Kafei                          | 咖啡                      |
| kai                            | 楷                       |
| Kang Youwei                    | 康有為                     |
| Kasei gaku                     | 家政學                     |
| Keyuan                         | 柯園                      |
| Kuaiji                         | 會稽                      |
| Kuang                          | 況                       |
| Lang Luxun                     | 朗魯遜                     |
| laoban                         | 老闆                      |
| Li Hefeng                      | 李鶴峰                     |
| Li Lianggong                   | 李亮恭                     |
| Li Panlong                     | 李攀龍                     |
| Li Ping'er                     | 李瓶兒                     |
| Li Rulan                       | 李如蘭                     |
| Li Shiniang                    | 李十娘                     |
| Li Shuzhao                     | 李淑昭                     |
| Li Xiangrong                   | 李向榮                     |
| Li Xiangzhen                   | 李湘真                     |
| Li Yu                          | 李漁                      |
| Li Zhi                         | 李贄                      |
| li                             | 禮                       |
| liang                          | 良                       |
| Liang Desheng                  | 梁德繩                     |
| Liang Kai                      | 梁楷                      |
| Liang Qichao                   | 梁啓超                     |
| liangjiang zongdu              | 兩江總督                    |
| <i>Liechao shiji xiaozhuan</i> | 列朝詩集小傳                  |
| <i>Liechao shixuan</i>         | 列朝詩選                    |
| Lin Bu                         | 林逋                      |
| Lin Dajie                      | 林大節                     |
| Lin Yining                     | 林以寧                     |
| Lin Yunfeng                    | 林雲鳳, <i>zi Ruofu</i> 若撫 |
| Lin Yutang                     | 林語堂                     |
| Lin Zecang                     | 林澤蒼                     |
| Lin Zemin                      | 林澤民                     |
| ling                           | 玲                       |
| Ling Chaogeng                  | 凌朝賡                     |

|                                  |  |
|----------------------------------|--|
| Ling Fupeng                      | 凌福彭  |
| ling ren zuo ou                  | 令人作嘔   |
| Ling Shuhua                      | 凌叔華  |
| Ling Zhiyuan                     | 凌祉媛  |
| linghuo                          | 靈活   |
| <i>Linglong</i>                  | 玲瓏   |
| Lintao                           | 臨桃   |
| Liu Rushi (see Liu Yin)          | 柳如是  |
| Liu Xueya                        | 劉雪亞  |
| Liu Yazhi                        | 柳亞子  |
| Liu Yin                          | 柳隱, <i>zi</i> Rushi 如是, <i>hao</i> Wowen jushi<br>我聞居士 |
| lixue                            | 理學   |
| long                             | 瓏  |
| Longqing                         | 隆慶   |
| Lü Kun                           | 呂坤   |
| Lu Maode                         | 陸懋德  |
| Lu Yinquan                       | 陸印荃  |
| <i>Lunyu</i>                     | 論語   |
| Luo Jingren                      | 羅景仁  |
| Luyin                            | 廬隱   |
| Ma Shouzhen                      | 馬守真, <i>hao</i> Yuejiao 月嬌, Xianglan<br>湘蘭             |
| Madam Ouyang                     | 歐陽太夫人  |
| Madame Ni                        | 倪夫人  |
| Malu tianshi                     | 馬路天使   |
| man nü                           | 滿女   |
| Mao Ti                           | 毛媿   |
| Mao Xianshu                      | 毛先舒  |
| Marquis of Wuqing                | 武清侯  |
| meigan                           | 美感   |
| <i>Meigong shuhua shi</i>        | 眉公書畫史  |
| Meizi yan                        | 眉字硯  |
| Meng xian zi Yao taijun          | 夢先慈姚太君   |
| Meng Yulou                       | 孟玉樓  |
| Miao Suyun                       | 繆素筠  |
| Ming                             | 明  |
| <i>Ming yuan shi wei chubian</i> | 名媛詩緯初編   |
| <i>Mingfeng ji</i>               | 鳴風記  |
| Mingsu taihou                    | 明肅太后   |
| Miyuan                           | 密緣   |
| modeng nüxing                    | 摩登女性   |
| Mojia                            | 莫佳   |
| <i>Mojing</i>                    | 墨經   |
| Ms Huai                          | 槐氏   |

|                             |                             |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Ms Liu                      | 劉氏                          |
| Ms Zhang                    | 張氏                          |
| <i>Mudanting</i>            | 牡丹亭                         |
| Mufu                        | 母父                          |
| nan she                     | 南社                          |
| <i>Nanbei qu</i>            | 南北曲                         |
| nannü pingdeng              | 男女平等                        |
| Ni furen                    | 倪夫人                         |
| Ni Zan                      | 倪瓚, <i>zi Yuanzhen</i> 元鎮,  |
|                             | <i>hao Yunlin</i> 雲林        |
| <i>Ningxiangshi shichao</i> | 凝香室詩鈔                       |
| <i>Nü yuhua</i>             | 女獄花                         |
| nüer shenshi tai qiliang    | 女兒身氏太淒涼                     |
| nügong                      | 女紅                          |
| nühuo                       | 女禍                          |
| <i>Nüjie</i>                | 女誠                          |
| nüjie xiaoshuo              | 女界小說                        |
| nünan pingdeng              | 女男平等                        |
| nüshi (gentlewoman)         | 女士                          |
| <i>Nüzi quan</i>            | 女子權                         |
| Ouju                        | 偶居                          |
| Pan Jinlian                 | 潘金蓮                         |
| Pan Shenggu                 | 潘聖姑                         |
| Pan Xi'en                   | 潘錫恩                         |
| Pang Chunmei                | 龐春梅                         |
| Peng Rongzhen               | 彭榮楨                         |
| <i>Ping Shan Leng Yan</i>   | 平山冷燕                        |
| <i>Ping zhitie</i>          | 評紙帖                         |
| pinge                       | 品格                          |
| <i>Pinhua baojian</i>       | 品花寶鑒                        |
| Qi Biaoja                   | 祁彪佳, <i>zi Youwen</i> 幼文,   |
|                             | <i>hao Shipei</i> 世培,       |
|                             | <i>Yuanshan zhuren</i> 遠山主人 |
|                             | 祁承燠, <i>zi Erguang</i> 爾光,  |
|                             | <i>hao Yidu</i> 夷度          |
| Qi Chenghan                 | 齊慧真                         |
| Qi Huizhen                  | 錢豐包                         |
| Qian Fengbao                | 錢鳳綸                         |
| Qian Fenglun                | 錢谷                          |
| Qian Gu                     | 錢謙益                         |
| Qian Qianyi                 | 錢孺飴                         |
| Qian Ruyi                   | 錢孫愛                         |
| Qian Sun'ai                 | 錢天章                         |
| Qian Tianzhang              | 錢恂                          |
| Qian Xun                    | 前進麗質                        |
| qianjin lizhi               |                             |

|                                      |                            |
|--------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Qiantang                             | 錢塘                         |
| qin                                  | 琴                          |
| Qing                                 | 清                          |
| qing (pure)                          | 清                          |
| qing (sentiment)                     | 情                          |
| <i>Qing guixiu yiwen lue</i>         | 清閨秀藝文略                     |
| <i>Qing guixiu zhengshi zaixu ji</i> | 清閨秀正始再續集                   |
| <i>Qing micang</i>                   | 清密藏                        |
| Qingliangshan ji                     | 清涼山集                       |
| <i>Qinglou meng</i>                  | 清樓夢                        |
| Qingshi liezhuan                     | 清史列傳                       |
| <i>Qingxi yinshe</i>                 | 清溪吟社                       |
| <i>Qinlou yue</i>                    | 秦樓月                        |
| <i>Qinqingji</i>                     | 琴清集                        |
| Qiu Jin                              | 秋瑾                         |
| Qiu Jun                              | 丘浚                         |
| Qiu Luan                             | 仇鸞                         |
| <i>Qiuyu an</i>                      | 秋雨庵                        |
| Qu Shisi                             | 瞿式耜                        |
| Qu Yuan                              | 屈原                         |
| qun xian                             | 群賢                         |
| quwei                                | 趣味                         |
| Ren Zhaolin                          | 任兆麟                        |
| Ren Zili                             | 任自立                        |
| ren                                  | 人                          |
| ren'ge                               | 人格                         |
| renwu                                | 人物                         |
| Rong Junli                           | 榮君立                        |
| rong                                 | 容                          |
| Rongcheng                            | 容城                         |
| <i>Rouxiang yunshi</i>               | 柔鄉韻史                       |
| ru                                   | 儒                          |
| Ruan Yuan                            | 阮元                         |
| Ruiyuan                              | 蕊淵                         |
| rujia                                | 儒家                         |
| Rujin                                | 如謹                         |
| Ruyu                                 | 如瑜                         |
| <i>Sanfu heping mudanting shi</i>    | 三婦合評牡丹亭詩                   |
| <i>Sangang zhilüe</i>                | 三岡識略                       |
| Sannü yin                            | 三女吟                        |
| Shan Shili                           | 單士嫠                        |
| Shang Jinglan                        | 商景蘭, <i>zi Meisheng</i> 媚生 |
| Shang Zhouzuo                        | 商周祚                        |
| <i>Shanjia qingong</i>               | 山家清供                       |
| Shanyin                              | 山陰                         |

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| Shao Xunmei                   | 邵洵美                        |
| Shao Zhenhua                  | 邵振華                        |
| Shaoxing                      | 紹興                         |
| shei yan sheng nan hao        | 誰言生男好                      |
| Shen Bang                     | 沈榜                         |
| Shen Chunze                   | 沈春澤                        |
| Shen Defu                     | 沈德符, <i>zi Jingqian</i> 景倩 |
| Shen Deqian                   | 沈德潛                        |
| Shen Jing                     | 沈景                         |
| Shen Lian                     | 沈連                         |
| Shen Minyuan                  | 沈敏元                        |
| Shen Qinhan                   | 沈欽韓                        |
| Shen Shanbao                  | 沈善寶                        |
| Shen Yixiu                    | 沈宜修                        |
| <i>Shenbao</i>                | 申報                         |
| shennü                        | 神女                         |
| shenshi                       | 紳士                         |
| Shexian                       | 歙縣                         |
| <i>Shi nei shi</i>            | 示內詩                        |
| Shi Zhecun                    | 施蟄存                        |
| Shi Zhenlin                   | 史震林                        |
| shi                           | 士                          |
| shidafu                       | 士大夫                        |
| Shimoda Utako                 | 下田歌子                       |
| shishi zhuang                 | 時世妝                        |
| shiyang                       | 時樣                         |
| Shiyinyuan                    | 市隱園                        |
| shizhi                        | 時制                         |
| <i>Shoucishi shigao[chao]</i> | 受慈室詩稿(鈔)                   |
| shu                           | 庶                          |
| shu                           | 淑                          |
| shunü                         | 淑女                         |
| Shuxiang                      | 疏香                         |
| <i>Shuxiangge yigao</i>       | 疏香閣遺稿                      |
| <i>Shuxiangge yilu</i>        | 疏香閣遺錄                      |
| <i>Si yan gou</i>             | 四眼狗                        |
| Siqi Zhai                     | 思綺齋                        |
| sixiang                       | 思想                         |
| Song Jiang                    | 宋江                         |
| Su Xuelin                     | 蘇雪林                        |
| su                            | 俗                          |
| sui                           | 歲                          |
| <i>Suiyuan nüdizi shixuan</i> | 隨園女弟子詩選                    |
| <i>Suiyuan shihua</i>         | 隨園詩話                       |
| Suiyuan                       | 隨園                         |

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| Sun Dengming                | 孫登名  |
| Sun Fuxi                    | 孫福熙  |
| Sun Yiren                   | 孫宜人  |
| Sun Zhigong                 | 孫治公  |
| Sun'ai                      | 孫愛   |
| Suzhen                      | 素貞   |
| Taicang                     | 太倉   |
| <i>Taiping qinghua</i>      | 太平清話   |
| Taiping tianguo             | 太平天國   |
| Taishi de meigan            | 泰氏的美感  |
| taitai                      | 太太   |
| tanci                       | 彈詞   |
| Tang Jun                    | 唐雋   |
| Tang Xianzu                 | 湯顯祖  |
| Tanyangzi                   | 曇陽子  |
| Tao Liang                   | 陶梁   |
| Tian Yuyan                  | 田玉燕  |
| <i>Tianshui bingshan lu</i> | 天水冰山錄  |
| tongren                     | 同人   |
| Wang Chang                  | 王昶   |
| Wang Duan                   | 汪端   |
| Wang Duanshu                | 王端淑  |
| Wang Jie                    | 王節   |
| Wang Jingshu                | 王靜淑  |
| Wang Lin                    | 王林   |
| Wang Lixi                   | 王禮錫  |
| Wang Miaoru                 | 王妙如  |
| Wang Ranming                | 汪然明, <i>zi Ruqian</i> 汝謙   |
| Wang Run                    | 王潤   |
| Wang Shifu                  | 王實甫  |
| Wang Shixing                | 王士性  |
| Wang Shizhen                | 王世真  |
| Wang Shoumai                | 王壽邁  |
| Wang Tingna                 | 汪廷訥, <i>zi Changzhao</i> 昌朝,<br><i>hao Zuoyin xiansheng</i> 坐隱先生 |
| Wang Wei (701–61)           | 王維   |
| Wang Wei                    | 王煒   |
| Wang Xizhi                  | 王羲之  |
| Wang Yachen                 | 汪亞塵  |
| Wang Zhideng                | 王稚登, <i>zi Bogu</i> 伯谷 or Baigu 百穀                               |
| wanglou                     | 望樓   |
| Wangsheng                   | 望生   |
| <i>Wanli yehuo bian</i>     | 萬歷野獲編  |
| Wanping                     | 宛平   |
| wei junzi                   | 偽君子  |



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| wei mei de  | 唯美的   |
| wei wang ren                                      | 未亡人   |
| wei zheng duo xia                                 | 為政多暇  |
| Wei Zhongxian                                     | 魏忠賢   |
| wei   | 偽   |
| Wen Jingyu  | 文靜玉   |
| wen ru qi ren                                     | 文如其人  |
| Wen Tianxiang                                     | 文天祥   |
| wen xin   | 文心  |
| Wen Zhengming                                     | 文徵明, <i>original ming</i> 名 Bi 璧, <i>zi</i> 字 <b>Zhengming</b> 徵明 |
| Wen Zhenheng                                      | 文震亨   |
| wen   | 文   |
| <i>Wenfang sipu</i>                               | 文房四譜  |
| Weng Fanggang                                     | 翁方綱   |
| wenming   | 文明  |
| wenren  | 文人  |
| wenrou dunhou                                     | 溫柔敦厚  |
| Wenyi chahua hui                                  | 文藝茶話會   |
| <i>Wenyi chahua</i>                               | 文藝茶話  |
| <i>Wenyi chunqiu</i>                              | 文藝春秋  |
| wenyi de gaoshang yule                            | 文藝的高尚娛樂   |
| Wenzheng gong                                     | 文正公   |
| Wode lixiang ji shixiang de<br>Taige'er xiansheng | 我理想及實像的泰戈爾先生  |
| Wu Fuhui  | 吳福輝   |
| Wu Guichen  | 吳規臣   |
| Wu Shi  | 吳氏  |
| Wu Songliang                                      | 吳崧梁   |
| Wu Wei  | 吳偉  |
| Wu Xiao   | 吳綯 <i>zi</i> : <i>Sugong</i> 素公, <i>Bingxian</i> 冰仙,              |
| Wu Yueniang                                       | <b>Pianxia</b> 片霞   |
| Wujiang County                                    | 吳月娘   |
| Wuliao  | 吳江縣   |
| <i>Wulin zhanggu congbian</i>                     | 無聊  |
| <i>Wumengtang ji</i>                              | 武林掌故叢編  |
| <i>Wumengtang quanji</i>                          | 午夢堂集  |
| <i>Wuzhong nüshi shichao</i>                      | 午夢堂全集   |
| Wuzhong shizi                                     | 吳中女士詩鈔  |
| Xia Yan   | 吳中十子  |
| xian zu gu  | 夏言  |
| <i>Xiandai</i>                                    | 先祖姑   |
| xiandai nüzi                                      | 現代  |
| Xiandai pinglun pai                               | 現代  |
|   | 現代評論派   |

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| <i>Xiandai pinglun</i>                 | 現代評論            |
| Xiang                                  | 湘               |
| Xiang furen                            | 湘夫人             |
| Xiangji xuan                           | 項脊軒             |
| Xiangru                                | 相如              |
| Xiangxiang                             | 湘鄉              |
| xiangyanwen                            | 香艷文             |
| <i>Xianqing ouji</i>                   | 閒情偶寄            |
| xiao mu                                | 孝母              |
| <i>Xiaoding zhenchun qinren duansu</i> | 孝定貞純欽仁端肅弼天祚聖皇太后 |
| <i>bitan zuosheng huang taihou</i>     | 孝女揭             |
| xiaonü jie                             | 消遣              |
| xiaoqian                               | 小青              |
| Xiaoqing                               | 小人              |
| xiaoren                                | 小說              |
| xiaoshuo                               | 嘯雪葦稿            |
| <i>Xiaoxue an'gao</i>                  | 俠邪小說            |
| xiaxie xiaoshuo                        | 俠一佳人            |
| <i>Xiayi jiaren</i>                    | 謝道韞             |
| Xie Daoyun                             | 謝蘭生             |
| Xie Lansheng                           | 寫信              |
| Xie xin                                | 謝肇淛             |
| Xie Zhaozhe                            | 西湖夢尋            |
| <i>Xihu mengxun</i>                    | 西泠閨詠            |
| <i>Xiling guiyong</i>                  | 西泠十子            |
| Xilingshizi                            | 西門慶             |
| Ximen Qing                             | 新德              |
| xin de                                 | 新功              |
| xin gong                               | 新閨秀             |
| xin guixiu                             | 新閨秀派作家          |
| xin guixiupai zuojia                   | 辛紀元             |
| Xin Jiyuan                             | 心曠體胖            |
| xin kuang ti pang                      | 新女性             |
| xin nüxing                             | 新女性派作家          |
| xin nüxingpai zuojia                   | 新女子             |
| xin nüzi                               | 新青年             |
| xin qingnian                           | 新容              |
| xin rong                               | 新時代             |
| <i>Xin shidai</i>                      | 新言              |
| xin yan                                | 新淦              |
| Xin'gan                                | 新樣              |
| xinyang                                | 秀寶              |
| Xiubao                                 | 秀才              |
| xiucai                                 | 繡枕              |
| Xiuzhen                                |                 |

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| <i>Xixia</i>             | 戲瑕      |
| <i>Xixiang ji</i>        | 西廂記     |
| Xu Can                   | 徐燦      |
| Xu Deyin                 | 徐德音     |
| Xu Huifang               | 徐蕙芳     |
| Xu Jie                   | 徐階      |
| Xu Pingquan              | 許平權     |
| xu qing jia ai           | 虛請假愛    |
| Xu Renbo                 | 許壬伯     |
| Xu Yingyu                | 徐映玉     |
| Xu Zhimo                 | 徐志摩     |
| Xu Zhongnian             | 徐仲年     |
| Xuannan Shishe           | 宣南詩社    |
| xubian                   | 續編      |
| Xuexiang                 | 雪香      |
| ya                       | 雅       |
| yaji                     | 雅集      |
| Yan Gaoqing              | 顏杲卿     |
| Yan Maoqing              | 鄒懋卿     |
| Yan Shifan               | 嚴世蕃     |
| Yan Song                 | 嚴嵩      |
| yan                      | 言       |
| Yang Fangcan             | 楊芳燦     |
| Yang Huilin              | 楊慧林     |
| Yang Jisheng             | 楊機盛     |
| yang lian yin            | 養廉銀     |
| Yang Yun                 | 楊芸      |
| Yang Zhongsu             | 楊仲素     |
| yangqian nüren de shijie | 洋錢女人的世界 |
| <i>Yannuan jilu</i>      | 硯緣記錄    |
| <i>Yanqi youshi</i>      | 岩棲幽事    |
| yasheng                  | 雅聲      |
| Ye Dehui                 | 葉德輝     |
| Ye Mengzhu               | 葉夢珠     |
| Ye Naiqin                | 葉乃溱     |
| Ye Qianyu                | 葉淺予     |
| Ye Shaoyuan              | 葉紹袁     |
| Ye Wanwan                | 葉紈紈     |
| Ye Xiaoluan              | 葉小鸞     |
| Ye Xie                   | 葉燮      |
| ye                       | 野       |
| yi mu                    | 憶母      |
| yi tongren ti ci fu zhi  | 以同人題詞附之 |
| Yi Zhen                  | 毅真      |
| yi                       | 義       |

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| <i>Yidao xiansheng chongxiu Xihu sannüshi mu shi</i> | 頤道先生重修西湖三女士墓詩           |
| <i>Yidaotang quanji</i>                              | 頤道堂全集                   |
| <i>Yifan wenjian lu</i>                              | 懿范聞見錄                   |
| <i>Yiminzhi</i>                                      | 逸民志                     |
| <i>Yingu</i>   | 銀姑                      |
| <i>Yingwang fu</i>                                   | 英王府                     |
| <i>Yingying</i>                                      | 鶯鶯                      |
| <i>Yingyuan</i>                                      | 影園                      |
| <i>yizhu</i>   | 遺囑                      |
| <i>you dian chengji</i>                              | 有點成績                    |
| <i>youmei</i>  | 優美                      |
| <i>Yu Huai</i>                                       | 余懷, <i>zi Wuhuai</i> 無懷 |
| <i>Yu Xiuwen</i>                                     | 俞秀文                     |
| <i>Yu Xiuyun</i>                                     | 虞岫雲                     |
| <i>Yuan Huang</i>                                    | 袁黃                      |
| <i>Yuan Mei</i>                                      | 袁枚                      |
| <i>Yuan Shikai</i>                                   | 袁世凱                     |
| <i>yuan</i>  | 緣                       |
| <i>Yue Xiang</i>                                     | 月香                      |
| <i>Yuelang dashi</i>                                 | 月郎大師                    |
| <i>Yueyang</i>                                       | 岳陽                      |
| <i>Yulang</i>  | 玉郎                      |
| <i>Yun Zhu</i>                                       | 惲珠                      |
| <i>Yunshi zhai bitan</i>                             | 韻石齋筆談                   |
| <i>Yunyou</i>  | 雲友                      |
| <i>Yusen</i>   | 玉森                      |
| <i>Yushan</i>  | 寓山                      |
| <i>Yushan zhu</i>                                    | 寓山注                     |
| <i>Yusi</i>  | 語絲                      |
| <i>zai lijiao de fanwei zhi nei</i>                  | 在禮教的範圍之內                |
| <i>Zang Demao</i>                                    | 張德茂                     |
| <i>zaoqi xing'ai xiaoshuo zuojia</i>                 | 早期性愛小說作家                |
| <i>zapin lei</i>                                     | 雜品類                     |
| <i>Zeng Guofan</i>                                   | 曾國藩                     |
| <i>Zeng Jifen</i>                                    | 曾紀芬                     |
| <i>Zeng Jingzhao</i>                                 | 曾景昭                     |
| <i>Zeng Jinke</i>                                    | 曾今可                     |
| <i>Zeng Pu</i>                                       | 曾朴                      |
| <i>Zeng Xubai</i>                                    | 曾虛白                     |
| <i>Zengzi</i>  | 曾子                      |
| <i>Zhan Kai</i>                                      | 詹塏                      |
| <i>zhancui</i>                                       | 斬衰                      |
| <i>Zhang</i>   | 張                       |
| <i>Zhang Dafu</i>                                    | 張大複                     |

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| Zhang Dai                          | 張岱  |
| Zhang Demao                        | 張德茂   |
| Zhang Gao                          | 張杲  |
| Zhang Guoxian                      | 張國賢   |
| Zhang Haipeng                      | 張海鵬   |
| Zhang Hao                          | 張昊  |
| Zhang Kebiao                       | 章克標   |
| Zhang Ruogu                        | 張若谷   |
| Zhang Xianqing                     | 張顯清   |
| Zhang Xun                          | 張巡  |
| Zhang Yiping                       | 章衣萍   |
| Zhang Youxiang                     | 章有湘   |
| Zhang Yunzi                        | 張允滋   |
| <i>Zhangwu zhi</i>                 | 長物志   |
| Zhao Guan                          | 趙管  |
| Zhao Jingshen                      | 趙景深   |
| Zhao Shijie                        | 趙世杰   |
| Zhao Yuetan                        | 趙月潭   |
| Zhao                               | 趙   |
| Zheng Aiyue                        | 鄭愛月   |
| <i>Zheng shi guifan</i>            | 鄭氏規範  |
| Zheng Yuanxun                      | 鄭元絢   |
| Zheng Zhenduo                      | 鄭振鐸   |
| Zhengqi ge                         | 正氣歌   |
| zhenrong                           | 真容  |
| zhi fen qi                         | 脂粉氣   |
| zhi nü shi                         | 稚女詩   |
| zhili buzhengshi                   | 布政使   |
| Zhong                              | 鐘   |
| <i>Zhongguo xin nühao</i>          | 中國新女豪   |
| Zhongying                          | 仲英  |
| Zhou Bichu                         | 周碧初   |
| Zhou Zuoren                        | 周作人   |
| <i>Zhouli</i>                      | 周理  |
| Zhu Jiuding                        | 諸九鼎   |
| Zhu Rouze                          | 朱柔則   |
| Zhu Suchen                         | 朱素臣   |
| Zhu Xi                             | 朱熹  |
| zhu xie zhenxing nüjie de xiaoshuo | 著些振興女界的小說   |
| Zhu Zhifan                         | 朱之蕃, <i>zi Yuanjie</i> 元介 or<br><i>Yuansheng</i> 元升 |
| zhua ji                            | 抓髻  |
| zhui                               | 贅   |
| <i>Zhuozhengyuan shiyu</i>         | 拙政園詩余   |
| <i>Zhuozhengyuan shiji</i>         | 拙政園詩集   |

Zhuozhengyuan

Zibu

ziding nianpu

ziyou lian'ai

Ziyu

*Zunsheng bajian*

Zunwang

Zuoyinyuan

拙政園

子部

自訂年譜

自由戀愛

子玉

遵生八箋

遵王

坐隱園

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- DKWJT* Morohashi Tetsuji. 1955–60. *Dai Kanwa jiten*. Tokyo: Taishukan shoten.
- DMB* Goodrich, L. Carrington, and Fang Chao-ying, eds. 1976. *Dictionary of Ming Biography 1368–1644* (2 vols). New York: Columbia University Press.
- ECCP* Hummel, Arthur, ed. 1943–44. *Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period, 1644–1912*. Washington: Government Printing Office.
- GGSC* Cai Dianqi, comp. 1844. *Guochao guige shichao*. 10 vols. n.p.: Langhuan bieguan cangshu. Repr. in Xuxiu siku quanshu. Vol. 1626.
- GXLJ* Qian Fenglun. *Guxianglou ji*. In *XTLS*.
- HMJSDK* *Huang Ming jinshi dengke kao*. 1970. Taipei: Taishan xuesheng shuju reprint.
- JPMCH* Lanling Xiaoxiaosheng. 1986. *Jin Ping Mei cihua*. Hong Kong: Taiping shuju.
- LFZ* Hu Wenkai. 1985. *Lidai funü zhuzuo kao*. Rev. edn Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe.
- LJC* Wu Hengzhao. 1995–2002. *Lianzi ju cihua*. Repr. in Xuxiu siku quanshu. Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe.
- LL* *Linglong (Linglong Magazine)*.
- LTfZ* Xing Zhoujun and Tang Moude, comps. [1605]. *Lintao fuzhi*. Reprint in *Xijian Zhongguo difangzhi huikan*. Vol. 9.
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- SKQS* Reprint 1983. *Wenyuan ge siku quanshu*. Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshu guan.
- SXGYL* Ye Dehui, comp. [1917] 1994. *Shuxiangge yilu. Congshu jicheng xubian* edition. Shanghai: Shanghai shudian.

- TXZHB Mao Xiaotong, comp. 1986. *Tang Xianzu yanjiu ziliao huibian*. Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe.
- WWTC Chang, Kang-i Sun and Haun Saussy, eds. 1999. *Women Writers of Traditional China: An Anthology of Poetry and Criticism*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- WYXG Gu Ruopu. 1898–1900. *Woyuexuan gao*. In Ding Bing, comp., *Wulin wangzhe yizhu*. Vol. 58. Qiantang: Dingshi jiahuitang.
- XTLS Xu Naichang, ed. 1895–6. *Xiao tan luan shi huike guixiu ci*. 28 vols. Nanjing: n.p.
- YJSSWJ Yang Peilin, ed. 1999. *Yang Jiaoshan shiwen ji*. Lintao: Longxi Lishi zuji Lintao lianyi yanjiuhui.
- YZMJ Yang Jisheng. n.d. *Yang zhongmin ji*. n.p.
- ZSJ Wanyan Yun Zhu, ed. 1831. *Guochao guixiu zhengshiji*. Hongxiangguan.
- ZXC Xu Shumin and Qian Yue, comps. [Ca. 1690] 1934. *Zhongxiang ci*. n.p. Repr. Shanghai: Dadong shuju.
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