

青泥蓮花

Lotus Flowers Rising from the Dark Mud:
Late Ming Courtesans and Their Poetry

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February 2007

A thesis submitted to McGill University in partial fulfillment of the
requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Your file Votre référence

ISBN: 978-0-494-32253-6

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ISBN: 978-0-494-32253-6

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Acknowledgements

I wish to thank many people who helped to make it possible for me to finally complete this dissertation. I am most grateful to my supervisor Professor Grace S. Fong for her scholarly guidance and encouragement throughout the many years of my graduate study at McGill. She always provided me with detailed comments at various stages in the writing of this dissertation. The issues she raised were very challenging for me, but this dissertation greatly benefited from them. I would also like to express my sincere thanks to Professors Kenneth Dean and Robin D. S. Yates for being my advisors in the fields of Ming-Qing religion and history. Their insights have led me to look at women's culture in its larger historical and intellectual contexts. I thank them also for reading and commenting on my thesis proposal. I also wish to thank some other McGill staff members: Ms. Melaine Campbell and Ms. Suan Ong for their practical help.

For archival assistance, my gratitude goes to Ms. Bick-har Yeung, East Asian Librarian at the University of Melbourne, Australia. She kindly allowed me to have access to their sources, including the electronic version of the Wenyuange edition of the *Siku quanshu*, one of the primary sources used in this study. I am heavily indebted also to my husband's friends in China: Professors Wang Rongming, Xu Chengming, Yan Jia'an, and Yang Hailiang for their unfailing support to make it possible for me to consult some essential documents, including the rare poetry collections of the courtesan Yang Wan. I also want to thank the staff in the Interlibrary Loan Office at the University of Waterloo where I am teaching, for their assistance to get the materials that I requested.

I wish to thank my fellow students and friends for their contributions: Kim Trainor, Sara Neswald, and Jim Bonk provided editorial help for the dissertation successively. In particular, Kim Trainor proofread most of the items in the dissertation and helped me to correct many infelicitous expressions in the English. Mihaiela Despau translated the abstract of the dissertation into French (Résumé). Xiaorong Li, a friend ever since we started to study together at McGill, shared with me her source materials as well as her perspectives. Fan Lin and Margaret Ng sent me the copy of an article that they thought would be useful for my subject. To them all, I wish to express my warmest thanks.

My particular thanks go to my family for their patience and support. My husband took most of the opportunities during his trips to China to collect the materials that I needed. He took hours to "draw" those "characters" when he was not allowed to photocopy them. My son often played my favorite old movie songs on the piano—these moments were refreshing.

I would also like to convey my heartfelt gratitude to Dr. Gail Cuthbert Brandt and Dr. John Crossley for providing me with the teaching opportunity at Renison College. Their encouragement and support became an important source of motivation for me to complete this dissertation and seek an academic career.

Finally, I wish to acknowledge the financial support provided by the *Max Binz McGill Major Fellowship*.

Abstract

The dissertation examines the close but overlooked relationship between male poetry societies and the sharp rise of literary courtesans in the late Ming. I attempt to identify a particular group of men who devoted exclusive efforts to the promotion of courtesan culture, that is, urban dwellers of prosperous Jiangnan, who fashioned themselves as retired literati, devoting themselves to art, recreation, and self-invention, instead of government office. I also offer a new interpretation for the decline of courtesan culture after the Ming-Qing transition.

Chapter 1 provides an overview of the social-cultural context in which late Ming courtesans flourished. I emphasize office-holding as losing its appeal for late Ming nonconformists who sought other alternative means of self-realization. Chapter 2 examines the importance of poetry by courtesans in literati culture as demonstrated by their visible inclusion in late Ming and early Qing anthologies of women's writings. Chapter 3 examines the life and poetry of individual courtesans through three case studies. Together, these three chapters illustrate the strong identification between nonconformist literati and the courtesans they extolled at both collective and individual levels.

In Chapter 4, by focusing on the context and texts of the poetry collection of the courtesan Chen Susu and on writings about her, I illustrate the efforts by both male and female literati in the early Qing to reproduce the cultural glory of late Ming courtesans. However, despite their cooperative efforts, courtesans became inevitably marginalized in literati culture as talented women of the gentry flourished.

This dissertation as a whole explores how male literati and courtesans responded to the social and literary milieu of late Ming Jiangnan to shed light on aspects of the intersection of self and society in this floating world. This courtesan culture was a counterculture in that: 1. it was deep-rooted in male poetry societies, a cultural space that was formed in opposition to government office; 2. in valuing romantic relationship and friendship, the promoters of this culture deliberately deemphasized the most primary human relations as defined in the Confucian tradition; 3. this culture conditioned, motivated, and promoted serious relationships between literati and courtesans, which fundamentally undermined orthodox values.

Résumé

La présente thèse analyse l'étroite relation, ignorée pour autant, entre les sociétés poétiques masculines et l'ascension fulgurante des courtisanes instruites, de la fin de la dynastie Ming. Nous allons essayer d'identifier un groupe d'hommes qui avaient consacré leurs efforts exclusifs à la promotion de la culture des courtisanes, à savoir des citoyens de l'époque prospère de Jiangnan, formés en hommes de lettres retraités, dévoués à l'art, au divertissement, à l'invention de soi - plutôt qu'aux fonctions gouvernementales. Nous allons proposer une nouvelle interprétation du déclin de la culture des courtisanes après la transition Ming-Qing.

Le chapitre 1 offre une vue d'ensemble sur le contexte socioculturel de l'épanouissement des courtisanes, vers la fin de la dynastie Ming. Nous allons insister sur la perte de l'intérêt pour les titres d'autorité chez les non-conformistes à la recherche d'autres moyens de réalisation de soi. Le chapitre 2 porte sur l'importance que la culture littéraire reconnaissait à la poésie des courtisanes, à travers leur inclusion explicite dans les anthologies de littérature féminine, vers la fin de la dynastie Ming et le début de la dynastie Qing. Le chapitre 3 propose une analyse de la vie et de la création poétique individuelles des courtisanes, à travers trois études de cas. Dans leur ensemble, les premiers trois chapitres démontrent la forte identification des intellectuels non-conformistes et des courtisanes révérees, au niveau individuel et collectif.

En analysant, dans le chapitre 4, le contexte et le texte de la création poétique de Chen Susu et les documents sur cette courtisane, nous allons illustrer les efforts des hommes et des femmes de lettres du début de la dynastie Qing, de réitérer le prestige culturel des courtisanes de la fin de la dynastie Ming. Toutefois malgré leurs efforts concertés, la marginalisation des courtisanes dans la culture littéraire était inévitable, vu l'affirmation des femmes talentueuses de la haute société.

Dans son ensemble, cette thèse examine la réponse des hommes de lettres et des courtisanes en réaction au milieu social et littéraire de la fin de la période Ming Jiangnan, dans le but d'éclairer certains aspects de l'entrecroisement de l'individuel et du social dans ce monde fluctuant. Cette culture des courtisanes s'était constituée en contre-culture dans le sens 1. de son profond enracinement dans les sociétés poétiques masculines, formées comme espace culturel en opposition aux fonctions gouvernementales; 2. de la valorisation des relations et de l'amitié romantiques par les promoteurs de cette culture, ceux-ci ayant délibérément déplacé l'accent mis sur les relations humaines de base - telles que définies par la tradition confucianiste 3. de la subversion des valeurs conservatrices, par le conditionnement, la motivation et la promotion des relations sérieuses entre les hommes de lettres et les courtisanes.

Introduction

To anyone working on women's culture in Chinese history, it is obvious that the study of women's literary practices in late imperial China (roughly 1500-1900) has been a productive area of scholarship in the past decade. This can be attributed to the development of feminist critical theories where gender is used as a category of analysis and women are taken as historical subjects. One significant effect is that many previously neglected literary texts by women of late imperial China have been excavated, interpreted, and analyzed. Therefore, stereotypical views of the passive, suffering, illiterate Chinese woman have been greatly challenged and changed.¹

Moreover, scholars interested in Ming-Qing women's literary culture have begun to pay particular attention to late Ming courtesans as a social and cultural phenomenon. They have rediscovered the many roles that these courtesans played and recognized their significance in the creation of a unique cultural atmosphere in the late Ming literati world. However, compared to ground-breaking studies on gentry women's writing and their literary practices in the past decade, little research has been conducted on the writings by late Ming courtesans. Because of the relative inaccessibility of sources for writings by courtesans, scholars have depended heavily on the few nostalgic accounts of courtesans by contemporary male literati who survived the Ming-Qing dynastic transition, such as Yu Huai 余懷 (1616-96), author of *Banqiao zaji* 板橋雜記 (Miscellaneous records of the

¹ For recent and in depth book length studies of Chinese women in history before the modern period, see books by Patricia B. Ebrey, Dorothy Ko, Francesca Bray, and Susan Mann. For literary studies of Chinese women's writings, see the work conducted by Kang-i Sun Chang, Grace S. Fong, Maureen Robertson, and Ellen Widmer. Their major works are listed in the bibliography. For critical reviews of Western scholarship on Chinese women in the past including Ming-Qing writing women, see Ropp, "Women in Late Imperial China;" and Teng, "The Construction."

Wooden Bridge)² or by male writers in later periods, such as Chen Yinke 陳寅恪 (1890-1969) who wrote the biography of the most celebrated courtesan of the Ming-Qing transition, Liu Rushi 柳如是 (1618-64), the *Liu Rushi biezhuàn* 柳如是別傳 (Biography of Liu Rushi). Accordingly, the images of late Ming courtesans presented in these studies are largely reflections of the tastes of the male literati producing them rather than courtesans' self-representations.

Willard J. Peterson is one of the earliest historians to bring up the cultural importance of courtesanship during the late Ming period. In *Bitter Gourd: Fang I-chih and the Impetus for Intellectual Change*, Peterson informs the reader in passing of “a tendency” in many late Ming writings to “romanticize the liaisons between prostitutes and literati.”³ This book is essentially a study of an essay by the late Ming and early Qing literatus Fang Yizhi 方以智 (1611-71), entitled “Seven Solutions” 七解. In the essay, Fang created a fictional character Baoshuzi 抱蜀子, a veiled reference to Fang himself, who sought ways of escaping from the depression he felt when he struggled in vain to find a proper alternative to government service. What is most relevant to this study is the fact that Fang included the men who were “ambitious and aloof” but chose to remain out of office, such as “men of the mountains” (*shanren* 山人), “immortals” (*xianren* 仙人), and “profligates” (*‘zong le’ zhi ren* ‘縱樂’ 之人)⁴ in the category of

² The *Banqiao zaji* is reprinted in *Siku quanshu cummu congshu* 四庫全書存目叢書, *zibu* 子部, vol. 253: 904-17. For an annotated English translation of it, see Levy, *A Feast of Mist and Flowers*.

³ Peterson, *Bitter Gourd* 143-44. The point was also made in Robert van Gulik, *Sexual Life in Ancient China* 308-13.

⁴ According to Peterson, *shanren* refers to hermits, but in reality, these people “often sought to have contact with society” on their own terms. Another way to withdraw from ordinary society was to become a *xianren*, a term used by Fang here to refer to men who devoted themselves to Daoist esoteric practices. The “*‘zong le’ zhi ren*” refers to the profligates who indulged in wine and courtesans. But very

“useless men” (*wu yong zhi ren* 無用之人).⁵ As Peterson has noted, it is precisely this group of “useless” men who “represented untrammelled independence and freedom from society’s demands” and who romanticized the relationship between literati and courtesans.⁶ It is also the spirit of being so “useless” that motivated Chen Yinke, the great Chinese historian of the twentieth century, to write a biography for Liu Rushi over three hundred years after the fall of the Ming. Chen states, “Yet if I do not do that which is useless, how can I take pleasure in this life that does have a limit” (不爲無益之事, 何以遣有涯之生).⁷ As Wai-ye Li points out, “Only the category of useless can establish the individual’s freedom to define a private realm of significance, which is in turn a response to morality.”⁸

Most influential in shaping our understanding of the life and literary practice of late Ming courtesans, particularly of Liu Rushi, has been the book by Kang-i Sun Chang, *The Late-Ming Poet Ch'en Tzu-lung: Crises of Love and Loyalism*. The focus of this work, however, is “the meaning of love and loyalism”⁹ in the poetry of Chen Zilong 陳子龍 (1608-47), Liu Rushi’s lover, who died as a martyr for the Ming. Chen was one of the founders of the Ji Society 幾社, the Songjiang branch of the Fu she 復社 (Restoration Society), the largest and most influential political organization that flourished at the end

often in late Ming texts, “*shanren*” was a term commonly used to refer to the unrestrained literati. See Peterson, *Bitter Gourd* 128-45. For my discussion of *shanren*, see Chapter 1.

⁵ In Fang’s original text, the sentence is: “Since you are not in accord with the times and the times do not make use of you” 子既不合時而時又不用子—hence the subtitle of “useless men.” Peterson has elaborated upon this sentence. See Peterson, *Bitter Gourd* 120; Quotation of Chinese text on 182.

⁶ Peterson, *Bitter Gourd* 131.

⁷ Chen Yinke, *Liu Rushi biezhuàn* 7. The quotation is originally from Xiang Hongzuo’s 項鴻祚 (1798-1835) preface to his lyrics (“Yiyunci binggao xu” 憶雲詞丙稿序). In the beginning of his *Liu Rushi biezhuàn*, Chen Yinke cites this sentence to show his attitude towards his writing of the biography of Liu Rushi. The English translation of the quotation is by Wai-ye Li, in “The Late Ming Courtesan” 52.

⁸ Wai-ye Li, “The Late Ming Courtesan” 52.

⁹ Chang, *The Late-Ming Poet* xi.

of the Ming.¹⁰ Chang stresses the importance of female talent, romantic love, and courtesan culture of the late Ming in shaping late imperial literati culture. She also emphasizes the significance of the cult of *qing* 情 (feelings or love) to the close but often neglected relationship between love and loyalism in the development of the loyalist poetic tradition and cultural life of the Ming-Qing transition period. According to Chang, the powerful sense of identification between the Chinese literatus and the elite courtesan remained strong even after the dynastic transition. Chang argues that “after the fall of the Ming, the courtesan became a metaphor for the loyalist poets’ vision of themselves.”¹¹ Chang is the first to offer a serious study in English of Liu Rushi’s poetry and life. As her frequent notes indicate, she relies greatly on Chen Yinke’s biography of the courtesan, the *Liu Rushi biezhuàn*.

The first contemporary scholar who has offered an important extensive study in English of late Ming courtesans as a collective group is Dorothy Ko. In *Teachers of the Inner Chambers: Women and Culture in Seventeenth-Century China*, Ko extends the term of “teachers of the inner chambers” (*guishu shi* 閨塾師) to include all literary women of the era, from gentry wives to professional writers to elite courtesans. Ko devotes the last chapter of her book to an examination of courtesans, women whom she thinks to be the “harbinger of a new womanhood that gentry wives found attractive.”¹² According to Ko, despite the polarized social status of these two groups of women as

¹⁰ On the Fu she, see Atwell, “From Education to Politics.” See also Xie Guozhen 謝國楨 (1901-82), *Ming Qing zhiji dangshe yundong kao* 明清之際黨社運動考 145-86. On the Ji she, see Xie Guozhen, *Ming Qing zhiji dangshe yundong kao* 187-203.

¹¹ Chang, *The Late-Ming Poet* 17.

¹² Ko, “The Written Word” 78.

defined in Confucian normative texts, courtesans and gentry women shared a basic gendered position in imperial China—they were women and they served men.¹³

Ko cites Peter Stallybrass's statement that "To emphasize gender is to construct woman-as-the-same: women are constituted as a single category, set over against the category of men."¹⁴ She thus demonstrates with several cases the "commonalities" among courtesans and gentry women: they were in fact members of much the same literary culture regardless of their class; they formed "transitory" friendships with each other in their "transitory communities" through reading, writing, and the exchange of poetry. The friendship networks in these "transitory communities" demonstrate that late Ming courtesans enjoyed a high degree of respectability.

Ko's book as a whole, through the examination of gentry women's domestic communities [such as Shen Yixiu's 沈宜修 (1590-1635)] and social communities [such as Shang Jinglan's 商景蘭 (1605-ca. 1676)] and courtesans' "transitory communities," provides a vital picture of the lives of Chinese educated women (courtesans and gentry wives alike) in the floating world of the most culturally and economically advanced region of seventeenth century China, known as Jiangnan. According to Ko, within a given patriarchal gender system, these women successfully "crafted" an "intellectual and emotional" space through writing, which provided their lives with meaning, comfort, and dignity, without envisioning radical changes in their society. The dynamic between ideological strictures and practical realities in these women's lives suggests to Ko that

¹³ Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers* 258-61.

¹⁴ As quoted in Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers* 259.

gender relations were “the most essential, volatile, and dynamic aspect of the Confucian tradition.”¹⁵

The most recent collective efforts in studying the shift of the image of the courtesan from the Ming to the Qing have been the articles included in *Writing Women in Late Imperial China*, edited by Ellen Widmer and Kang-i Sun Chang and the chapter “Entertainment” in *Precious Records: Women in China’s Long Eighteenth Century* by Susan Mann. The focus of these studies has shifted from the heyday of courtesan culture in the late Ming and the Ming-Qing transition to its demise in the Qing. In these studies, scholars pay attention to both courtesans and the men who wrote about courtesans. Wai-ye Li’s seminal article likens early Qing cultural nostalgia for the late Ming courtesan to the modern historian Chen Yinke’s romanticized portrayal of Liu Rushi, arguing that the idealized images of late Ming courtesans sometimes related to the “self-perception of the authors producing them” and “the perception of contemporary historical crisis.”¹⁶ In other words, in constructing the cultural image of the late Ming courtesan, male authors also invented their own selves.

Notably, most of the contributors of these works have shown a strong sense that images of the courtesan changed over time from considerably positive images in the late Ming and Ming-Qing transition to considerably negative ones in the time that followed the transition. During its heyday, courtesanship was associated with glamour, refined taste, and nostalgia. However, by the High Qing period of the eighteenth century, after the survivor generation of the Ming had passed away, the courtesan was more frequently

¹⁵ Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers* 296.

¹⁶ Wai-ye Li, “The Late Ming Courtesan” 71-72.

linked to negative images, vulgarization, and feelings of pity.¹⁷ While late Ming and early Qing anthologists mingled the poetry of courtesans with that of gentry women in their anthologies, their counterparts in the High Qing attempted to preserve only writings by respectable gentry women. The gentry woman Wanyan Yun Zhu 完顏惲珠 (1771-1833) excluded courtesan poetry from her anthology *Guochao guixiu zhengshi ji* 國朝閨秀正始集 (Correct Beginnings: Collected Poetry by Women of Our Dynasty, 1831).

Susan Mann attributes this shift mainly to the classical revival of the High Qing and elite women's conscious efforts to morally distinguish themselves from courtesans and thus to marginalize this group of women.¹⁸ In his review of Mann's *Precious Records*, Paul Ropp attributes gentry women's changed attitudes towards courtesans more to the blurring of class lines and resultant status anxieties than to the classical revival.¹⁹

However, Yun Zhu's criteria for selection were well situated within larger anthologizing trends of the High Qing. In the first years of the High Qing, Shen Deqian 沈德潛 (1673-1764, style name Guiyu 歸愚) and Zhou Zhun 周準 (courtesy name Qinlai 欽萊) strictly insisted on social status and moral conduct as guidelines for poem selections and they completely excluded poetry by Ming courtesans from their anthology, the *Mingshi biecai ji* 明詩別裁集 (Poetry anthology of the Ming, 1739). As one of the most influential scholar-officials in the Qianlong 乾隆 reign (1736-95), Shen Deqian's selection criteria had created a new precedent for later anthologists of both genders in the Qing. After all, while female entertainers in the High Qing no longer enjoyed the high

¹⁷ Ropp, "Ambiguous Images" 18; Ko, "The Written Word" 74-75; and Mann, *Precious Records* 121-22.

¹⁸ Mann, *Precious Records* 53, 122-25, 136, and 142. The point has also been made in passing in Chang, "A Guide to Ming-Ch'ing Anthologies" 119-20.

¹⁹ Ropp, Rev. of *Precious Records* 593.

status of their counterparts in the late Ming, the Qing gentry writing women continued to flourish, finally becoming the only dominant figures in female literary culture of late imperial China.²⁰

My own study of late Ming courtesans is greatly indebted to these pioneering studies, especially the works of Chang and Ko.²¹ However, my dissertation also questions some of the arguments in recent scholarship on late Ming courtesan culture, particularly Chang's implication of "love and loyalism" in the poetry and cultural life of the Ming-Qing transition period and Ko's description of "transitory communities"—the courtesan sphere where they built "transitory" friendships with gentry women. To better explain my approach and framework, I will define the following key terms used in this study before proceeding further: (1) late Ming, (2) courtesan, and (3) literati, scholar-official, gentry, elite.

(1) Late Ming

Historically, "late Ming" refers to the period from 1573 to 1644, the long Wanli 萬曆 reign (1573-1620) onward. But texts produced in the eras of Jiajing 嘉靖 (1522-66) and Longqing 隆慶 (1567-72) or those of early Qing up to the Kangxi 康熙 reign (1662-1722) will also be used in this dissertation to show the prelude to and continuation of the late Ming period.²²

²⁰ While Western scholarship has begun to offer a new perspective on late Ming courtesans, Chinese scholarship remains largely impervious to feminist influence. Therefore, my literary review focuses largely on recent English scholarship on this subject.

²¹ Precursors of my study of late Ming courtesans can also be found in recently published articles by such scholars Marsha Weidner, Ellen Johnston Laing, Tseng Yu-ho, and James Cahill. I have also listed their major studies in the bibliography.

²² Xie Guozhen uses the term "late-Ming-early-Qing" 明末清初, viewing the early Qing, the early rule of the Manchus up to the fortieth year of the Kangxi reign as an extension of the late Ming in terms of

(2) Courtesan

The courtesan enjoyed a striking textual visibility and respectability in late Ming literati culture. Prior to this period, the term *qingni lianhua* 青泥蓮花 (literally, lotus flowers in dark mud) was used to denote people with noble characters in difficult circumstances. It is well known that the great historian Sima Qian 司馬遷 (ca. 145-ca. 85 BCE) in his *Shiji* 史記 used the lotus flower as a metaphor to praise the patriotic poet Qu Yuan 屈原 (ca. 340-278 BCE) for his pure and upright personality.²³ The Song Neo-Confucian philosopher Zhou Dunyi 周敦頤 (1017-73) claimed he loved only the lotus flower, referring to it as “a gentleman among flowers” (花之君子者也).²⁴ However, only in the late Ming was the term commonly used to refer to cultivated courtesans. Qian Qianyi 錢謙益 (1582-1664), a celebrated literary and political figure of the Ming-Qing transition period, to whom Liu Rushi eventually married, referred to famous courtesans such as Wang Wei 王微 (ca. 1600-ca. 1647) as lotus flowers.²⁵ Mei Dingzuo 梅鼎祚 (1549-1618) named his courtesan collection *Qingni lianhua ji* 青泥蓮花記 (A record of lotus flowers in dark mud; 1600)—hence, the dissertation title of “Lotus Flowers Rising from the Dark Mud.”

the larger literati traits and social tendencies. See Xie Guozhen, *Ming mo Qing chu de xuefeng* 明末清初的學風 1-2. I adopt this idea, but for the convenience of my analysis, I extend the end year from the fortieth year of Kangxi (1701) to the last year of Kangxi's rule (1722).

²³ See Sima Qian, “Qu Yuan Jia sheng liezhuan” 屈原賈生列傳, in *Shiji* 84.2482.

²⁴ See Zhou's “Ai lian shuo” 愛蓮說, in He Fuzheng 賀復徵 (1600-46+), comp., *Wenzhang bianti huixuan* 文章辨體彙選 428.11a-b. In this study, some materials such as this are taken from the electronic version of the *Wenyuange* edition of the *Siku quanshu* (*Wenyuange Siku quanshu dianzi ban* 文淵閣四庫全書電子版); hereafter *SKQS-dianziban*.

²⁵ See the entry on “Caoyi daoren Wang Wei” 草衣道人王微, in Qian Qianyi, comp., *Liechao shiji xiaozhuan* 列朝詩集小傳 760. For Wang Wei's literary life, see the case study of her provided in Chapter 3.

Following Dorothy Ko, by the English word “courtesan,” I mean the refined and high-placed female entertainers who were skilled in various artistic fields previously dominated by men, such as poetry, painting, and calligraphy. They are customarily called *mingji* 名妓 in Chinese, meaning literally “famous prostitute.”²⁶ But occasionally, especially when I review works by other scholars, I may follow their practice and use this term for female entertainers who were not “famous.”

Other scholars such as Victoria Cass prefer the Japanese term “geisha” to “courtesan.” Cass believes the former better conveys the sense that these women were first and foremost performing artists.²⁷ However, the extant sources suggest that performing was no longer the most essential aspect of the persona of the courtesan in the late Ming. Compared with their counterparts of the Yuan dynasty recorded in Xia Tingzhi’s 夏庭芝 (fl. fourteenth century) *Qinglou ji* 青樓集, who were essentially good at singing *qu* 曲 (drama lyrics), late Ming courtesans were brilliant in many artistic fields, particularly in poetry.

The Ming relied exclusively on the “eight-legged essay” (*bagu wen* 八股文) to select officials. Consequently, poetic endeavour was explicitly a political statement of withdrawal for many male literati. This was a sharp contrast to the case in the Tang (618-907) and some time in the Song (960-1279), when poetic composition was an essential part of the civil examination and thus closely connected to political power. This historical change regarding the status of poetry in the civil examination of the Ming provides useful clues that can help us to identify the particular group of men behind the valorization of poetry, including that by courtesans or literary women in general. It also

²⁶ Ko, “The Written Word” 78.

²⁷ Cass, *Dangerous Women* xii.

helps explain why so many women of the Ming devoted exclusive efforts to the writing of poetry. The Suzhou woman poet Lu Qingzi 陸卿子 (fl. 1590) explicitly claimed, “Poetry is definitely not the calling of men; it is really what belongs by right to us women” (詩固非大丈夫職業, 實我輩份內物也).²⁸

Under the influence of the larger literati trends, writing poetry became a fashionable practice among courtesans as well.²⁹ As the famous literatus Feng Menglong 馮夢龍 (1574-1646) stated, he heard from the elderly people that courtesans in Wuxia (Suzhou) of his day were different from those forty years before because they were no longer good at singing and performing (娼不唱, 妓不伎). Feng writes, “If they are capable of writing one or two words to respond to a rhyme, people would be very surprised, considering these words as precious and rare as sounds of the phoenix” (曲中稍和一兩字, 相詫以爲鳳鳴鸞響).³⁰ Feng’s somewhat exaggerated remarks suggest that during last decades of the late Ming, composing poetry had replaced singing and dancing to become the most essential defining aspect of the elite courtesan.³¹

²⁸ See Lu Qingzi’s preface to *Yongxue zhai yigao* 詠雪齋遺稿 by Xiang Lanzhen 項蘭貞 (fl. 1623), in Hu Wenkai 胡文楷, *Lidai funü zhuzuo kao* 歷代婦女著作考 176. Translation by Grace S. Fong, in Chang and Saussy, *Women Writers of Traditional China* 686.

²⁹ The importance of poetry by courtesans in late Ming literati culture was evidenced by their visible inclusion in late Ming and early Qing anthologies. This will be discussed in detail in Chapter 2.

³⁰ Feng Menglong, “Chen ji” 嚙妓, in *Guazhir* 掛枝兒 148-49.

³¹ To be sure, there were still many female entertainers being good at singing and acting in the late Ming. But these singing girls or actresses joined a separate professional group although there was never a clear-cut division between courtesan and actress. Feng’s remarks suggest that at least for some Ming literati, literary courtesans were still expected to have traditional performing skills. In her study of Ming stages, Wang Anqi 王安祈 observes that the new professional division between courtesans and actresses had come into formation by the late sixteenth century. She argues, “Although there were many Ming courtesans being skilled in dramatic singing and play-performing, these were only supplementary talents for them. In this regard, courtesans were different from professional actresses whose occupation was performing on stage.” See Wang Anqi, *Mingdai chuanqi zhi juchang jiqi yishu* 明代傳奇之劇場及其藝術 87. For a recent study of the courtesan song in the seventeenth century, see Zeitlin, “Notes of Flesh” (forthcoming). I wish to thank Professor Judith Zeitlin for kindly sending me her paper.

Although poetry-composing at literary gatherings was highly “performative” as Beverly Bossler has noted,³² many late Ming courtesans were actually professional writers and artists, just like literary men. As my study will show, for courtesans, the functions of poetry were multifaceted: they did not merely “perform” poetry at parties.³³ To conclude, courtesans of the Ming discussed in this dissertation are first and foremost writing subjects who produced poetic texts.

(3) Literati, scholar-official, gentry, elite

The term “literati,” was first used by Max Weber to denote the close relationship between Chinese education and political power.³⁴ A similar and commonly used term with this implication is “scholar-official.” However, Chang Chung-li prefers to use the word “gentry” because he thinks it conveys the complexity of the role of the Chinese local leaders. By the word “gentry,” Chang means the degree-holders and officials who had prestige, influence, and wealth in society. According to Chang, once a degree-holder held governmental office, he was no longer regarded as gentry in the place where he held the post (he thus joined a separate status group), but he was still considered as gentry in his hometown.³⁵ But scholars such as Ho Ping-ti criticize the word “gentry” because it may lead people to think of the landed-gentry of Europe.³⁶

In *Chinese Local Elites and Patterns of Dominance*, Joseph W. Esherick and Mary B. Rankin prefer to use the term “elite,” for it is flexible enough to refer to all kinds

³² Bossler, “Shifting Identities” 7.

³³ If courtesans were considered “performing” poets, male literati too were performers in this sense as they often wrote poems at literary gatherings in the presence of courtesans.

³⁴ C. K. Yang, introduction, *The Religion of China: Confucianism and Taoism* xxviii-xxix.

³⁵ Chang Chung-li, *The Chinese Gentry* 3-5.

³⁶ Ho, *The Ladder of Success* 40.

of people regardless of class—gentry, merchants, military leaders, community leaders. Whoever dominates in a particular “arena” and uses his strategies to gain or retain his dominance can be described as “elite.”³⁷ For my study, the term “literati” is preferable if not perfect, because it denotes the importance of literary talent for the persona of the late Ming elite man. But I will be careful when using the term “scholar-official” or “gentry” to refer to late Ming educated men, especially those who devoted particular effort to the valorization of late Ming courtesan culture, as I am fully aware that many of them no longer held degree or office, whether by choice or not.

Because of the limited scope of their studies—while Kang-i Sun Chang’s book focuses on one particular courtesan, Dorothy Ko’s devotes only one chapter to courtesans, both Chang and Ko have not been able to sufficiently take into account the significance of the role that men played in the process of valorizing late Ming courtesans. Nor have they been able to describe and categorize the men who devoted exclusive efforts to the promotion of courtesan culture. In attempting to stress the importance of the image of the courtesan in establishing more equalized gender relations, Chang writes,

In *response* [emphasis mine] to this altered image of courtesans and of women in general, Ming literati *naturally* [emphasis mine] developed relationships with women that reflect, if not true equality, at least compatibility and mutual respect.³⁸

Romantic love did seem to have emerged between talented men and courtesans with beauty, talent, and refined taste in the late Ming, yet one cannot help but wonder why this

³⁷ Esherick and Rankin, eds., *Chinese Local Elites* 10-11.

³⁸ Chang, *The Late-Ming Poet* 15.

phenomenon occurred only in the late Ming. Moreover, even during the late Ming, many other literati, especially those who were famous for their moral integrity, such as Huang Daozhou 黃道周 (1585-1646) and Huang Zongxi 黃宗羲 (1610-95), would “naturally” keep a distance from courtesans and distinguish themselves from the “unrestrained” literati who indulged in romantic liaisons with these women.

Like Chen Zilong, Huang Daozhou died as a martyr for his sovereign during the Manchu conquest. However, unlike Chen Zilong, Huang Daozhou’s loyalist character and his decision to die for his country had nothing to do with romantic love with courtesans. Prior to the fall of the Ming, Huang’s society friends, such as Tan Yuanchun 譚元春 (1586-1637),³⁹ a famous poet, once used the courtesan Gu Mei 顧媚 (1619-64), a courtesan of great beauty (國色), as bait to convert him from a Confucianist to one of them, the pleasure seekers, but he remained unmoved by Gu Mei’s feminine charm.⁴⁰ Gu later became concubine to Gong Dingzi 龔鼎孳 (1616-73),⁴¹ a poet, painter, and an official active in the Ming-Qing transition.

Another prominent example is Huang Zongxi. He chose to live after the fall of the Ming, but he never served in the Qing. Like Huang Daozhou, he held a negative attitude towards courtesans and the free-style of nonconformist literati. He once seriously criticized Hou Fangyu 侯方域 (1618-55), a friend in his literary circles, asking

³⁹ For Tan Yuanchun’s English biography, see Goodrich and Fang, eds., *Dictionary of Ming Biography* 1246-48. See also Qian Qianyi, *Liechao shiji xiaozhuan* 571-74.

⁴⁰ See the entry “Shizhai Huang gong yi shi” 石齋黃公逸事, in Fang Bao 方苞 (1668-1749), *Fang Bao ji* 方苞集, *juan* 9: 239-40.

⁴¹ For Gong Dingzi’s English biography, see Hummel, ed., *Eminent Chinese of the Ch’ing Period* 2431.

Hou not to indulge himself in relationships with courtesans.⁴² Both Huang Daozhou and Huang Zongxi were Ming loyalists in the sense that Chang has identified through the descriptions of Chen Zilong and Qian Qianyi, but apparently, they were not willing to get involved in relationships with courtesans. Strictly speaking, these loyalist courtesans, such as Liu Rushi, spent a significant portion of their adult lives under the Qing dynasty and are classified in Hu Wenkai's 胡文楷 catalogue of Chinese women's writing as Qing dynasty women.⁴³ In this sense, the loyalist courtesans were not "true" late Ming courtesans. In fact, the privileging of the most well-known love relationships of Liu Rushi with leading loyalist poets Chen Zilong and Qian Qianyi, members of the most influential political organization of their time, the Fu she, has led to the simplification or neglect of complicated gender relations in the larger cultural and historical context of male poetry societies (*shishe* 詩社) in the late Ming.

Ironically, once the lover of Chen Zilong, Liu later became concubine/wife to Qian Qianyi. Qian did not die for the Ming as did Chen Zilong, Huang Daozhou, and many others. He surrendered to the Qing and served in the Qing, but later asked for retirement and became involved in loyalist activities to resist the Manchu invaders. It seems to me that most of Kang-i Sun Chang's favourite examples of Ming loyalists who enjoyed romantic relationships with courtesans, such as Qian Qianyi, Gong Dingzi, Hou Fangyu, and Wu Weiye 吳偉業 (1609-71), either took examinations, or held appointments, or did both in the new regime. Particularly, Gong Dingzi, whom Gu Mei

⁴² Xie Guozhen, *Ming mo Qing chu de xuefeng* 11; He Guanbiao 何冠彪, "Lun Ming yimin zidi de chushi" 論明遺民子弟的出仕 23-31. Hou Fangyu later became the husband of the famous courtesan Li Xiang 李香 [also Li Xiangjun 李香君]. Their love story was retold in Kong Shangren's 孔尚任 (1648-1718) famous drama *The Peach Blossom Fan* 桃花扇 (1699).

⁴³ See Appendix 1.

eventually married, served three regimes in Beijing during the Ming-Qing transition: the Ming, the regime of the rebel Li Zicheng 李自成 (1605?-45), and the Qing, successively.⁴⁴ Their loyalist sentiments reflected in their writings had little to do with their loyalty to the Ming but had much to do with the late Ming ideal of untrammelled nonconformists, the *fengliu wenren* 風流文人, who were deeply concerned with freedom, individuality, and the meaning of creating a self.⁴⁵

In her studies of late Ming courtesans, Dorothy Ko considers that “the late Ming courtesan” continued to be “integral to the operation of the civil-service examination, the process that reproduced the empire’s political and cultural elites,” as was the case in earlier dynasties, such as the Tang.⁴⁶ Accordingly, she attempts to situate the courtesan culture, part of the urban culture of late Ming Jiangnan, within mainstream Confucian tradition, disagreeing with the use of the term “counterculture”⁴⁷ suggested by Charlotte Furth to refer to the late Ming floating world.⁴⁸ But as I will demonstrate, many promoters of late Ming courtesan culture, those who associated and exchanged poems with courtesans or anthologized and valorized poetry by courtesans were commoner literati without degree or office. Moreover, while Ko attempts to identify the “commonalities” shared by both courtesans and gentry women, her women-centered

⁴⁴ See Hummel, ed., *Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period* 431.

⁴⁵ Historians who have studied the history of the Ming-Qing transition have emphasized elements on the Ming side that are to blame for the Manchu’s takeover of the Ming. In her case study of the local elites of Tongcheng of Anhui and their response to the Manchu conquest, Hilary Beattie points out that even though many of the local Tongcheng elites had been involved in Donglin party and its successor, the Fu she, they did not show much loyalism for the Ming as they did not organize much resistance to the Manchu invaders. Some of them chose retirement while most of them became collaborators with the new regime. See Beattie, “The Alternative to Resistance” 239-76. Lynn Struve also argues that if there was no hair-and-dress decree from the Qing state that forced Ming people to adopt the Manchu style, Ming people might not have been irritated enough to resist the Manchu invaders. Struve, *The Southern Ming* 60-61.

⁴⁶ Ko, “The Written Word” 82-83.

⁴⁷ Furth, “The Patriarch’s Legacy” 206.

⁴⁸ Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers* 67.

approach and her focus on a separate sphere exclusively for women prevent her from further investigating the “commonalities” between the cultural spheres of women and men, and more specifically, the roles men played in the courtesan sphere. But if we consider gender as a valid tool of analysis, when studying courtesans, we have to place them in relationships with men. Within a restrictive, hierarchical gender system, it is unlikely that late Ming courtesans, women who were “the most dependent on men,” as noted by Ko, could enjoy freedom, fame, respect, and friendship with gentry women if male literati did not act as conduits between these two groups of women.

In a pioneering study, “The Epistolary World of Female Talent in Seventeenth-Century China,” Ellen Widmer investigated the important networks of literate gentry women in the Hangzhou area during the Ming-Qing transition. Widmer examines three collections of literati letters, a small portion of which were written by women. In these letters, Widmer finds that many prominent gentry women kept in touch by means of letter-writing and they often exchanged poetry, painting, or calligraphy. Some of them sometimes formed poetry societies across great geographical distances. Although the social network of courtesans was not the focus of her study and the friendship network between courtesans and gentry women remained “rather obscure” to her,⁴⁹ Widmer has provided useful clues for further investigation into women’s literary practices within the larger picture of male literary societies where late Ming courtesans interacted with both literati men and gentry women.

If we trace the friendship networks among courtesans and gentry women Ko describes, we will soon find that the “transitory communities,” communities where courtesans formed “transitory” friendships with gentry women through reading and

⁴⁹ Widmer, “The Epistolary World” 7.

writing were in fact the literary societies dominated by men. Gentry wives' access to these "transitory communities" was largely by means of the fashionable, so-called companionate marriages in which husband and wife shared intellectual interests and social and cultural activities. All the gentry women and courtesans Ko mentions in her chapter were loosely connected to the circles of the famous literatus-merchant Wang Ruqian 汪汝謙 (1577-1655), known by his courtesy name Ranming 然明, the great patron of many literati men and women of the late Ming and the Ming-Qing transition.⁵⁰ If we examine the guidelines for membership of Wang Ruqian's literary societies, we will find that courtesans and gentry women were equally welcomed in Wang's poetry clubs and both were subsumed under the category of "Beauty" (*meiren* 美人). As Wang's writings reveal, literary courtesans played a more important part than gentry women in his literary circles before the Ming-Qing transition, or more precisely, in the late Wanli and Tianqi reign-periods, while after the fall of the Ming, the cultural role of courtesans in literati circles was taken over by respectable gentry women poets.⁵¹

In order to situate late Ming courtesan culture in a larger historical process, below, I trace the earlier history of this culture in the pre-Ming periods. As textual evidence suggests, official prostitution in China emerged as early as the ancient Spring and Autumn period (722-481 BCE) when Guan Zhong 管仲, the minister to Duke Huan of Qi

⁵⁰ Among the many male and female literati financially assisted by Wang Ruqian were the famous playwright Li Yu 李漁 (1610-80); the pleasure-quarter musician Su Kunsheng 蘇昆生; courtesan poets, such as Wang Wei, Liu Rushi, Lin Tiansu 林天素, and Yang Yunyou 楊雲友; and gentry women, such as Huang Yuanjie 黃媛介, Wu Shan 吳山, and Wu Shan's daughter Bian Mengjue 卞夢珏.

⁵¹ In a poem written in 1654, Wang Ruqian inserted an interlineal note that states: "In the old days, I became acquainted with the lady scribes: Wang [Wei], Yang [Yunyou], Lin [Tiansu], and Liang 梁 [Yuwei 喻微]. Now I meet ladies of the inner chambers: Wu Yanzi [Wu Shan], Yuanwen [or Xuanwen, Wu Shan's daughter Bian Mengjue], Huang Jieling [Huang Yuanjie], and Wang Duanshu" (昔逢王, 楊, 林, 梁諸女史, 今遇吳巖子, 元[玄]文, 黃皆令, 王端淑諸閨閣). See Wang Ruqian, et al, *Chunxingtang shiji* 春星堂詩集 5.75a.

齊桓公 summoned seven hundred prostitutes and settled them in lanes and streets in the hopes of increasing tax revenue for the state.⁵² During the Western Han (206-194 BCE), the Emperor Wu 漢武帝 began to establish the so-called barracks prostitutes (*ying ji* 營妓) for military officers and soldiers who had not brought their families.⁵³ But it was during the Tang dynasty that official prostitution became more institutionalized and the particular connection between “men of culture” (*wenren* 文人) and official prostitutes began to develop.

The Tang used poetry to select officials. Customarily, successful candidates of the *jinshi* 進士 examinations held celebrations with friends in the pleasure quarters of the capital city of Chang'an 長安.⁵⁴ Romances between scholars and courtesans were frequently portrayed in the mid-Tang *chuanqi* stories.⁵⁵ Poetry and romance became identified with courtesan culture. Stephen Owen has interpreted this culture of romance as “Mid-Tang attempts to represent spheres of autonomy,” an interest in the creation of a “private sphere” independent of the “public world.”⁵⁶ However, in reality, a serious relationship such as that of marriage between a literatus and a courtesan was unlikely and impractical.⁵⁷ In his *Beili ji* 北里志 (The records of the northern quarters), the Tang literatus Sun Qi 孫棨 records one of his own personal experiences with courtesans. Sun

⁵² Wang Chutong 王初桐, *Lianshi* 舊史 21.299. See also Wang Shunu 王書奴, *Zhongguo changji shi* 中國娼妓史 25.

⁵³ Wang Shunu, *Zhongguo changji shi* 37.

⁵⁴ Wang Shunu, *Zhongguo changji shi* 79-83.

⁵⁵ For Tang *chuanqi* stories, see Wang Pijiang 汪辟疆 (1887-1966), comp., *Tangren xiaoshuo* 唐人小說. For a discussion of love stories of the mid-Tang from historical and socio-cultural perspectives, see my paper, “Cong anqing chuanqi kan zhong Tang yihou shimin yishi de mengfa” 從愛情傳奇看中唐以後市民意識的萌發.

⁵⁶ Owen, “Romance” 131, 141.

⁵⁷ See my paper, “Cong aiqing chuanqi” 32-33.

Qi was impressed by a talented courtesan named Yizhi 宜之. Very often he presented her with poems and enjoyed spending time with her. One day, Yizhi wrote Sun a poem on a red card and handed it to Sun. In the poem, she indirectly asked him to marry her. But Sun refused, regretful yet determined, saying “I know exactly what your secret request is, but this is not correct behaviour for a candidate. What choice do I have” (甚知幽旨, 但非舉子所宜, 何如)?⁵⁸

As in the Tang, official prostitution in the Song (960-1279) was also institutionalized.⁵⁹ As Bossler has demonstrated, the institution of courtesanship became an important part of Song society. It affected “politics and government, family and social life, and moral discourse.”⁶⁰ Although personal involvement with prostitutes in the Song was not a violation of the legal codes for officials as was the case in Ming-Qing periods, it was repeatedly depicted as “debauchery, emblematic of the evil or irresponsible official.”⁶¹ General attitudes towards prostitutes were rather negative during the Song. For example, Zhou Gongshu 周恭叔, a student of Cheng Yi 程頤 (1033-1107), the prominent Song Neo-Confucian philosopher, once defended his relationship with a prostitute, arguing his behaviour “did not hurt righteousness” (此不害義理). His mentor exclaimed, “This behaviour is even inferior to that of birds and animals. How could it not hurt righteousness” (此禽獸不若也, 豈得不害義理)?⁶² Cheng also said, “Your parents bequeathed you your body, but you pair it with a depraved prostitute. Is that

⁵⁸ See the entry on “Wang Tuan’er” 王團兒, in Sun Qi, *Beili zhi* 535.

⁵⁹ In her study of the Song prostitutes, Bossler uses the term “courtesan” to refer broadly to government prostitutes (*guan ji* and *ying ji*) and even household concubine-servants (*shi’er*).

⁶⁰ Bossler, “Shifting Identities” 6.

⁶¹ Bossler, “Shifting Identities” 31.

⁶² See the entry for “Zhou Gongshu,” in Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130-1200), *Yi Luo yuanyuan lu* 伊洛淵源錄 14.6b (*SKQS-dianziban*).

right” (父母遺體, 以偶賤倡, 可乎)?⁶³ To maintain class distinctions seems to be the fundamental concern for Neo-Confucians such as Cheng Yi. This may explain why fewer detailed narratives about the lives of individual courtesans in the Song than in the Tang can be found despite the fact that prostitution did play an important role in Song society.⁶⁴

Official prostitution continued to play an integral part during the Yuan dynasty (1206-1368). Scholars who have studied the history of Chinese theatre have emphasized the importance of the pleasure quarters to the development of several forms of theatrical entertainment such as the Northern drama of the Yuan, known as *zaju* 雜劇.⁶⁵ During the Ming, after Zhu Yuanzhang 朱元璋 (1328-98) made Jinling 金陵 (Nanjing) his capital, he established an entertainer compound for the purposes of hosting public functions. Entertainment houses were accordingly established side by side along the banks of the Qinhuai 秦淮 River. The formal aspects of the courtesan's role were maintained. However, Zhu Yuanzhang decreed that if his officials were caught sleeping with female entertainers, they would be sentenced to a severe penalty only one degree below the death penalty (官吏宿娼, 罪亞殺人一等).⁶⁶ This was later legislated and the clause of “Officials sleeping with prostitutes” 官吏宿娼 appeared in the “Criminal Law” 刑律 of

⁶³ Zhu Xi, *Yi Luo yuanyuan lu* 14.6b.

⁶⁴ Scholars who study *ci* (song lyric) poetry observed that the development of the *ci* genre was originally associated with pleasure quarters in cities of the Five Dynasties and the Song. See Kang-i Sun Chang, *The Evolution of Chinese Tz'u Poetry*. But the reason Song male literati felt at ease writing *ci* poetry, poetry that was associated with prostitutes, was rooted within the generic conventions of the genre which could be interpreted as fictional rather than empirical. See Fong, “Persona and Mask.”

⁶⁵ See, for example, Idema and West, *Chinese Theater*.

⁶⁶ Wang Qi 王錡 (1433-99), *Yupu zaji* 寓圃雜記, *juan* 1, reprinted in *Siku quanshu cunmu congshu, zibu*, vol. 239: 689. See also Levy, *A Feast of Mist and Flowers* 19.

the *Da Ming lü* 大明律 (the Great Ming code).⁶⁷ This clause was adopted by the Qing legal codes but with more concrete substatutes.⁶⁸ Even though it was sometimes the case in imperial China that common practice flouted legal regulations, we have significant evidence that officials in the late Ming lost or quit their posts because of their nonconformist lifestyles.⁶⁹ Yuan Hongdao 袁宏道 (1568-1610), the founder of the Gong'an school 公安派,⁷⁰ withdrew from his post as the magistrate of Wuxian (modern Suzhou), one of the most culturally and economically advanced urban centers in the late Ming because his official status ["black gauze hat" *wusha mao* 烏紗帽] prevented him from freely pursuing sensual pleasure with women ["red skirt" *hongqun* 紅裙 or "red sleeves" *hongxiu* 紅袖]. In the section of "stylish words" 韻語 in the *Shehua lu* 舌華錄 (A record of flowers of the tongue), the compiler Cao Chen 曹臣 (fl. in the Wanli era) recorded Yuan Hongdao's words regarding his attitude towards office-holding and pleasure-seeking:

⁶⁷ See Liu Weiqian 劉惟謙 (fl. 14 century) et al, comp., *Da Ming lü*, *juan* 25, reprinted in *Siku quanshu cunmu congshu, shibu* 史部, vol. 276: 701. See also Sommer, *Sex, Law, and Society* 220-21.

⁶⁸ Bodde and Morris, *Law in Imperial China* 435-36; Staunton, *Ta Tsing Leu Lee* 118; Zhang Xuecheng 章學誠, "Fu xue" 婦學, in *Wenshi tongyi jiaozhu* 文史通義校注 536, 551.

⁶⁹ For example, Zang Maoxun 臧懋循 (1560?-1621, courtesy name Jinshu 晉叔), lost his post in the Imperial Academy (Guozijian 國子監) of Nanjing because of his nonconformist behaviour. He then lived a colourful life as a retired literatus, spending his time traveling, forming poetry societies, writing poetry, and anthologizing literary works and having them published. See the entries on Zang Maoxun, in Zhang Huijian 張慧劍, *Ming Qing Jiangsu wenren nianbiao* 明清江蘇文人年表 328, 333, 352, 366, 371, 375, 382, 388, 410, 432, 436, 449. Feng Mengzhen 馮夢禎 (1548-1605, courtesy name Kaizhi 開之) was dismissed from office in 1587 because he was accused of being frivolous and unrestrained. See Zhang Huijian, *Ming Qing Jiangsu wenren nianbiao* 339. Feng had poems addressed to courtesans, such as Xue Susu 薛素素 (ca. 1564-ca. 1637) and Hao Wenzhu 郝文珠. For a study of the libertine life of nonconformist literati epitomized by Li Yu, see Hanan, *The Invention of Li Yu*.

⁷⁰ For Yuan Hongdao's biographical information, see Qian Qianyi, *Liechao shiji xiaozhuan* 567-68. The Gong'an school emphasized spontaneity and self-expression in writing. On the Gong'an school and the literary theory of the Yuan brothers and their supporters, see Chih-p'ing Chou, *Yuan Hung-tao and the Kung-an School*. See also Chaves, "The Panoply of Images."

When Yuan Zhonglang [Yuan Hongdao] served as the magistrate of Wuxian, he often climbed Tiger Hill with Fang Zigong. Whenever he saw the “red skirts” [pretty women], he avoided them. He then said to Fang: “As for officials keeping company with the “red sleeves” [pretty women] when climbing mountains, only those in the past enjoyed this refined lifestyle; nowadays an official cannot have both [his post and romance with women]. This makes me feel that the “black gauze hat” obstructs me.”⁷¹

袁中郎作吳令，常同方子公登虎丘，見紅裙皆避去。因語方曰：“烏紗帽挾紅袖登山，前人自多風致。今時不能竝，便覺烏紗礙人。”

To be sure, the association between literati and cultivated courtesans was not a new phenomenon in the Ming. Nor did Ming scholar-officials have more freedom to indulge themselves in romantic liaisons with courtesans: they were in fact legally forbidden to have sex with courtesans. The works of Wilt Idema have shown that the faithful courtesan became a popular subject in early Ming drama. In his “loyalty plays,” the early Ming prince Zhu Youdun 朱有燾 (1379-1439) celebrated courtesans who committed suicide in order to demonstrate their loyalty to chosen literati.⁷² But it was definitely in the late Ming that cultivated courtesans were highly extolled and the courtesan culture reached its zenith. Many graceful terms such as *guixiu* 閨秀 (boudoir

⁷¹ See Cao Chen, comp., *Shehua lu*, in *Siku quanshu cunmu congshu, zibu*, vol. 143: 614.

⁷² Idema, *The Dramatic Oeuvre of Chu Yu-Tun* 137-43. See also Idema and West, *Chinese Theater*, Chapter VIII “Theater in the Time of Chu Yu-Tun” 347-50. But Idema also points out that not all the plays by Zhu Youdun described courtesans in positive terms. For example, “Fo-lo-chang” is an exception. See *Chinese Theater*, Chapter VIII, 352.

talents), *nǚshi* 女史 (lady scribes), or *mingyuan* 名媛 (famous ladies) were used in the late Ming to refer to not only gentry women writers but also courtesans.⁷³

Dorothy Ko pointed out that the late Ming courtesan Lin Tiansu 林天素 (fl. 1620s) received praise for her artistic talent from the leading scholar-official and literatus painter Dong Qichang 董其昌 (1555-1636), who referred to Lin as a *guixiu* (short for *guifang zhi xiu* 閨房之秀), meaning literally “elegance from the inner quarters.” Ko found Dong’s reference to Lin as “lady” (*guixiu*) curious, because the term was “commonly used in the late Ming to denote a gentry woman with artistic talent.”⁷⁴ However, in my research, I have discovered that many late Ming writings apply the term *guixiu* to both gentry women and courtesans. Lin Tiansu was not the only courtesan to have received such an honour.

In his “Ti Ma ji hua lan” 題馬妓畫蘭, the prominent commoner literatus Chen Jiru 陳繼儒 (1558-1639), a friend of Dong Qichang, combined the two obviously contradictory terms—*guixiu* (boudoir talent) and *mingchang* 名娼 (famous courtesan)—together, using the phrase “*guixiu mingchang*” to address the well-known, multitalented courtesan Ma Xianglan 馬湘蘭 (1548-1604).⁷⁵ Qian Qianyi was very impressed by the courtesan-calligrapher Sun Yaohua 孫瑤華 (fl. early seventeenth century), praising her as

⁷³ As Fong has pointed out, these terms had graced the titles of many anthologies of women’s poetry produced in the late Ming. See Fong, “Gender and the Failure of Canonization” 131-32. It is noteworthy that these anthologies also included poetry by courtesans. For a detailed discussion about late Ming and early Qing anthologies of women’s poetry, anthologies often with such terms as *guixiu*, *nǚshi*, or *Mingyuan* in their titles, see Chapter 2 of this dissertation.

⁷⁴ Ko, “The Written Word” 79-80.

⁷⁵ Chen Jiru, “Ti Ma ji hua lan,” in *Chen Meigong ji* 陳眉公集, *juan* 11, reprinted in *Xuxiu Siku quanshu* 續修四庫全書, *jibu* 集部, vol. 1380: 159. For a useful study of the life and works of Ma Xianglan, see Eileen Grace Truscott, “Ma Shou-chen: Ming Dynasty Courtesan/Artist.” For an introduction to a number of Ma Xianglan’s paintings that are extant today, see Catalogue 4-9, in Marsha Weidner, ed. *Views from Jade Terrace* 72-81. For a more recent discussion of Ma Xianglan’s life and painting, see Ellen Johnston Laing, “Wives, Daughters, and Lovers,” in Weidner, *Views from Jade Terrace* 31-39.

“a real flourishing talent of the woman’s quarters” (真閨房之秀也).⁷⁶ In his poem “Ti Xue Su hua lan” 題薛素畫蘭, another late Ming literatus Xu Teng 徐燾 (1561-99) praised the famous courtesan Xue Susu 薛素素 (ca. 1564-ca. 1637) for her outstanding talent in painting by pairing her with the famous Tang courtesan poet Xue Tao 薛濤 (ca. 770-ca. 832).⁷⁷ He addressed the two as “Xue jia guixiu” 薛家閨秀, meaning “ladies from the Xue family.”⁷⁸ In another poem under the title “Xianggui qi diao shi” 香閨七弔詩 (Mourning songs for the seven ladies from the fragrant boudoirs), Xu Teng grieved for talented women poets who had experienced misfortune, such as Su Xiaoxiao 蘇小小, Xue Tao, Huo Xiaoyu 霍小玉, Cui Yingying 崔鶯鶯, [Bu 步] Feiyan 非煙, Li Yi’an 李易安 [Li Qingzhao 李清照 (1081-ca. 1141)], and Zhu Shuzhen 朱淑真 (fl. 1095-1131).⁷⁹ Of the seven poets that Xu Teng wrote about, only Li Qingzhao was a historical woman of the gentry class.⁸⁰

This tendency continued to be in vogue during the early Qing. Zou Yi 鄒漪 (1615-?, courtesy name Liuqi 流綺) included Liu Rushi in his *Shiyuan ba mingjia xuan*

⁷⁶ See the entry on Sun Yaohua, in Qian Qianyi, *Liechao shiji xiaozhuan* 759.

⁷⁷ For a case study of Xue Susu’s life and poetry, see Chapter 3. On Xue Susu and her painting, see Tseng Yu-ho, “Hsüeh Wu and Her Orchids.” For reproductions of Xue Susu’s paintings and a short introduction, see Catalogue “Xue Susu,” in Weidner, *Views from Jade Terrace* 82-88. For an annotated edition of Xue Tao’s poetry, see Zhang Pengzhou 張逢舟, ed., *Xue Tao shi jian* 薛濤詩箋. On Xue Tao and her poetry, see also Idema and Grant, *The Red Brush* 182-89.

⁷⁸ Xu Teng, *Manting ji* 幔亭集 14.26a (*SKQS-dianziban*).

⁷⁹ Xu Teng, *Manting ji* 14.34a-35b. For discussions of the lives of Li Qingzhao and Zhu Shuzhen and English translations of their writings, see Idema and Grant, *The Red Brush* 204-56.

⁸⁰ Su Xiaoxiao and Xue Tao were famous courtesans; Huo Xiaoyu, Cui Yingying, and Bu Feiyan were fictional characters. Huo was a courtesan while Feiyan was the concubine of a low military officer. Cui Yingying was the heroine of the *chuanqi* story *Yingying zhuan* 鶯鶯傳 by the Tang poet Yuan Zhen 元稹 (779-831). The story was believed to be a veiled reference to Yuan’s own experience. Yingying was presented as a woman from a noble family, but according to the study of Chen Yinke, she was a courtesan. See Chen Yinke, “Du Yingying zhuan” 讀鶯鶯傳 in Chen Yinke, *Yuan Bai shi jianzheng gao* 元白詩箋證稿 106-16. For the stories of Huo Xiaoyu, Cui Yingying, and Bu Feiyan, see Wang Pijiang, comp., *Tangren xiaoshuo* 77-82, 135-40, and 292-95, respectively. The authenticity of Zhu Shuzhen as a historical figure has been questioned in recent studies. See Idema, “Male Fantasies and Female Realities.”

詩媛八名家選 (Selected works of eight famous women poets), praising her to be “the best of the famed poets from the women’s quarters” (冠冕閨閣諸名家).⁸¹ In “Diao Dong Shaojun [Dong Bai] shi xu” 弔董少君 [董白] 詩序 (Lament for Dong Shaojun, the courtesan-turned-concubine), Wu Qi 吳綺 (1619-94), a leading scholar of the early Qing, states that “a lovely courtesan would become a perfect wife if brought home to the inner quarters” (可人金屋偕歸汧國遂成佳婦).⁸² In fact, many famous courtesan-poets/artists eventually married into gentry families, becoming wives and concubines of prominent scholars, a cultural phenomenon unique only to the late Ming (extending to the early Qing) in Chinese history.⁸³ The courtesan-painter Gu Mei, concubine of Gong Dingzi, even received the title of Lady (*furen* 夫人) from the early Qing court.⁸⁴

⁸¹ Zou Yi, “Liu Rushi shi xiaoyin” 柳如是詩小引 1b. Zou Yi’s “Liu Rushi shi” is reprinted in several series. I have used the edition of Zhang Nanjie 張南臧, comp., *Yicong jiaji* 佚叢甲集 (preface dated 1907).

⁸² Cited by Yu Huai in the postscript to his *Banqiao zaji*. See Yu Huai, *Banqiao zaji* 916. In the quoted sentence, “Qianguo” 汧國 refers to courtesans. The allusion is taken from a Tang dynasty *chuanqi* story, *Li Wa zhuan* 李娃傳 by Bai Xingjian 白行簡. In the story, the courtesan Li Wa 李娃 was known for her self-cultivation as a woman (婦道甚修) and eventually recognized by the emperor (天子) who entitled her Lady Qianguo 汧國夫人. The story of Li Wa is reproduced in Wang Pijiang, *Tangren xiaoshuo* 100-07.

⁸³ Prominent examples include Yang Wan 楊宛 (1602-45?) who married Mao Yuanyi 茅元儀 (1594-1641), Liu Rushi who married Qian Qianyi, Gu Mei who married Gong Dingzi, Wang Wei who married Xu Yuqing 許譽卿 (1586-1662), Dong Bai 董白 who married Mao Xiang 冒襄 (1611-93), and Li Xiang who married Hou Fangyu. See Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* for specific entries. An earlier case was Xue Susu, who married the well-known scholar Shen Defu 沈德符 (1578-1642) as a concubine, but this marriage did not last very long. See the entry on “Ti Xue Susu huace” 題薛素素畫冊, in Zhu Yizun 朱彝尊 (1629-1709), *Pushuting ji* 曝書亭集 54.14a-15a (*SKQS-dianziban*). A later example was Chen Susu 陳素素, a Yangzhou courtesan who became the concubine of Jiang Shijie 姜實節 (1637-1709), known by the name Jiang Xuezai 姜學在 or Jiang Zhongzi 姜仲子 in the Kangxi era. For a discussion about the love story of Chen Susu and Jiang Xuezai and the early Qing literati’s responses to their romance, see Chapter 4.

⁸⁴ See Wanyan Yun Zhu and Wanyan Miaolianbao 完顏妙蓮保, eds., *Guochao guixiu zhengshi xuji* 國朝閨秀正始續集 (1836), “Fulu” 附錄 20a-b. Gu Mei was addressed as “Hengbo furen” 橫波夫人 in many early Qing writings by prominent literati of the early Qing, such as Wu Qi, Mao Qiling 毛奇齡 (1623-1716), Xu Qiu 徐鉉 (1636-1708), and Li E 厲鶚 (1692-1752). See, for example, Li E’s song lyric, entitled “To the tune *Xiao tao hong*: Hengbo furen hua lan shan jing shen suo fu” 小桃紅: 橫波夫人畫蘭扇敬身索賦, in *Fanxie shanfang ji, Xuji* 樊榭山房集, 續集 10.11a-b (*SKQS-dianziban*). Liu Rushi was addressed by literati men and women as “Hedong furen” 河東夫人. See, for example, Gong Dingzi’s poem

Besides *guixiu*, *nüshi*, *mingyuan*, and *furen*, a few other graceful terms that were commonly used to address respectable men, such as *jun* 君 and *qing* 卿, seem even more unlikely when used to address courtesans. For example, *jun*, a polite term of address or a title was often used for talented courtesans in the late Ming.⁸⁵ Comparably, *jiaoshu* 校書, meaning collator, was a well-established term that had been used only for cultivated courtesans since the Tang.⁸⁶ However, during the late Ming, it was used to address talented gentry women poets as well. Wang Ruqian addressed in his writings the gentry woman poet Wu Shan 吳山 (fl. seventeenth century; courtesy name Yanzi 岩子), as “Yanzi, Collator Wu” (*Yanzi Wu Jiaoshu* 岩子吳校書).⁸⁷

Why did Ming literati begin to mix women from the two categories *liang* 良 or the respectable (gentry women) and *jian* 賤, or the lowly (courtesans), and to idealize courtesans? How could they turn the earlier literary romance in fiction and drama into a late Ming reality? What caused the change of attitudes towards this group of women? How did the valorization of courtesans intersect with other cultural and social circumstances? Did the fashions and values of non-official urban elites of Jiangnan who valorized courtesans shape a new definition of the elite courtesan in the late Ming? How did courtesans take new opportunities given by the social and literary trends of late Ming times to negotiate a space in which to define and renew their place both in literati culture

entitled “Wan Hedong furen” 挽河東夫人, in Gu Huizhi 谷輝之, comp., *Liu Rushi shi wei ji* 柳如是詩文集 270.

⁸⁵ See, for example, Ma Xiangjun 馬湘君 (Ma Xianglan), Xue Sujun 薛素君 (Xue Susu), Changyang jun 長揚君 (Wang Manrong 王曼容), Li Xiangjun (Li Xiang), Dong Shaojun 董少君 (Dong Bai), and Hedong jun 河東君 (Liu Rushi).

⁸⁶ The term *jiaoshu* was originally the name of a civil official post. It was said that the Tang military officer Wei Gao 韋皋 (745-805) wanted to apply for this title for the courtesan Xue Tao because of her poetic talent, but he was dissuaded from doing so. See Ji Yougong 計有功, *Tang shi jishi* 唐詩記事, 79: 4b-5a (*SKQS-dianziban*).

⁸⁷ Wang Ruqian, “Xihu jiyou” 西湖記游, in *Xihu yunshi* 西湖韻事 115.

and society? What caused the decline of late Ming courtesan culture? These are the basic questions with which I am concerned.

In pursuing these issues, I will draw upon the theories of power developed by the French thinker Michel Foucault to investigate the survival strategies of literati men and courtesans in late Ming Jiangnan and their perceptions of self and society. The late Ming courtesans' shifting identities reflected the shifting identities of a particular group of men, male literati who were "ambitious and aloof,"⁸⁸ but preferred to remain out of office, fashioning themselves as "useless" nonconformists. It is my contention that the valorization of talented courtesans and literary and literate women in general has to be understood as part of the larger celebration of the power of *wen* 文 (literature, civility, culture) in the context of late Ming male poetry societies, which had been "organized as diversion from, or an alternative to, official life."⁸⁹ To study late Ming courtesans by locating them in male poetry societies is to complicate some of the presuppositions and conclusions of current scholarship on late Ming courtesan culture.

As suggested in Michel Foucault's theory of power, power does not consist of a binary opposition between rulers and ruled. On the contrary, it is "exercised from innumerable points, in the interplay of nonegalitarian and mobile relations."⁹⁰ In order to exist, the centre requires the margins. Power is necessarily accompanied by resistance. As Marie Florine Bruneau, the historian of seventeenth-century France, has summarized, there is always the possibility that the relations of power will be overthrown: "For, if power needs opposition in order to operate, and if it spreads to the social body through

⁸⁸ Peterson, *Bitter Gourd* 130.

⁸⁹ See Atwell, "From Education to Politics: The Fu She" 335.

⁹⁰ Trans. by Robert Hurley. See *The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction* 94.

these points of opposition, it is also true that it is by these very oppositions that power is upset and maintained in a state of constant disorder.”⁹¹

Foucault’s theories of power and resistance help us to conceptualize the unofficial power that both nonconformist literati and courtesans enjoyed in the floating world of late Ming Jiangnan. In his study of the role Buddhist institutions played in the formation of gentry society in the late Ming, Brook suggests that monastic patronage served as an opportunity for gentry to associate with each other in a public context and to publicize their common identity as the privileged elite of gentry society.⁹² Craig Clunas’s studies on material culture in the late Ming show that the literati’s hobbies such as antique-collecting, book-printing, and other lavish consumption of various forms of art were not just personal hobbies; on the contrary, they were collective forces to express their social distinctions “through things.”⁹³

Drawing insights also from these studies, I attempt to demonstrate that when government service was not desirable or approachable, poetry societies served as an even more accessible “opportunity” than “monastic patronage” for Confucian educated men to associate with each other to publicize their common identity as the traditionally privileged elite in society. The valorization of courtesan culture or women’s culture in general can be viewed as cultural consumption by which the literati could “express their social distinctions” while women’s participation injected new life into the literati psyche, which enmeshed men in sexuality, desire, and self-invention. The late Ming *shishe* gathered marginal and unofficial power together, establishing a large collective force that

⁹¹ Bruneau, “Learned and Literary Women” 157.

⁹² See Brook, *Praying for Power*. But I do not completely agree with his use of the term “gentry” in the late Ming context.

⁹³ Clunas, *Superfluous Things* 160.

changed power relations and power structures in society in late Ming Jiangnan and created margins necessary for the center to exist. However, during the last years of the Ming and the Ming-Qing transition when the dynasty was in decline, the educated men at large became concerned about the political situation of their time. This was the context of the rise of the political-literary society—the Fu she and its branch Ji she at the very end of the Ming. Some of the members of these societies such as Chen Zilong and Qian Qianyi became officials and Ming loyalists during the troubled times of the Ming-Qing transition, but the defining aspects of the persona of the late Ming nonconformist literatus, such as pleasure-seeking and freedom-seeking, were maintained.

In sum, this dissertation explores how male literati and courtesans responded to the social and literary milieu of prosperous Jiangnan in the late Ming (extending to the early Qing) and thereby sheds light on aspects of the intersection of self and society in this floating world. I attempt to identify a particular group of men who dedicated themselves to the promotion of courtesan culture. These men, dwellers of late Ming Jiangnan cities, such as Nanjing, Suzhou, and Hangzhou, fashioned themselves as retired literati, devoting themselves to art, recreation, and self-invention, instead of government office. I suggest that this courtesan culture should be read as essentially a “counterculture” for the following reasons: First, it was deeply-rooted in male poetry societies, a cultural space that was formed in opposition to government office; second, in valuing romantic relationship and friendship, the promoters of this culture deliberately deemphasized the most primary human relations as defined in the Confucian tradition, such as the ruler-subject relation;⁹⁴ third, in particular, this culture conditioned, motivated,

⁹⁴ The famous Suzhou literatus Zhao Yiguang 趙宦光 (1559-1625) retreated only with his wife (夫妻偕隱) to Cold Mountain 寒山, where they wrote poetry and entertained friends. As a literatus, Zhao

and promoted serious relationships, such as marriage between literati and courtesans, which fundamentally undermined orthodox values by breaking down the traditional class distinctions. For this reason, Yu Huai, author of the *Banqiao zaji*, was severely criticized by Qing *Siku* editors—the classical evidential scholars of the High Qing—to be the “offender of Confucian principles” 風雅之罪人.⁹⁵

The main body of the dissertation is structured in four chapters: Chapter 1 provides an overview of the socio-cultural context in which late Ming courtesans flourished. I emphasize office-holding as losing its appeal for late Ming nonconformists who sought other means of self-realization and show that many courtesans were intimately connected to poetry societies formed by these unconventional literati. This late Ming attitude towards office-holding can be traced back to a lifestyle exemplified by those in Yang Weizhen’s 楊維禎 (1296-1370) Hangzhou poetry societies in the late Yuan. By situating courtesans in male poetry societies, I then explore how the promotion of courtesan culture in the late Ming was used by nonconformist literati as opportunities or strategies to satisfy the male desire for self-fashioning and how courtesans took this opportunity to negotiate a space in which to define and renew their place both in literati culture and society. In particular, I will pick up where Dorothy Ko has left off with the social networks in Wang Ruqian’s literary circles in Hangzhou as case study.

Chapter 2 attempts to reveal the importance of poetic production of late Ming courtesans in literati culture as demonstrated by their visible inclusion in the late Ming

disregarded the most important human relations, such as the one between ruler and subject and turned the bland Confucian husband-wife relation into a romantic companionship. For a discussion of the five human relations (father-son, ruler-subject, husband-wife, brother-brother, and friend-friend) in the late Ming society, see de Bary, “Individualism” 197-99.

⁹⁵ The terms “feng” and “ya” taken from *Shijing* 詩經 (Book of odes), meaning literarily “cultivated elegance.” Here, they refer to orthodox values. For the comments of the *Siku* 四庫 editors on *Banqiao zaji*, see Yu Huai, *Banqiao zaji* 917.

and early Qing anthologies of women's writings. It examines how literati of the late Ming (extending to the early Qing) promoted courtesan culture through the means of anthologizing poetic writings by late Ming courtesans. It also investigates how late Ming literati used prefaces as sites for the first time to legitimize and promote courtesan poetry as a legitimate part of literati culture. It became commonplace for late Ming preface-writers to compare their efforts in preserving poetry by courtesans to Confucius' compilation of the *Shijing* 詩經 (Book of odes), a collection that, as many literati had argued, also contained "debauched odes" or "licentious songs" (*yin shi* 淫詩).

Chapter 3 consists of three case studies of individual courtesans to illustrate how courtesans exercised personal agency, enacted through the writing of poetry to shed light on one aspect of the intersection of self and society in the late Ming from the courtesan's point of view. I have selected Xue Susu, the courtesan as entertainer; Wang Wei, the courtesan as nonconformist; and Yang Wan 楊宛 (ca. 1602-ca. 1645?), the courtesan as concubine/wife. Each represents one particular type of courtesan from or active in one of the three best-known urban centers of late Ming Jiangnan discussed in Chapter 1 (that is, Suzhou, Hangzhou, and Nanjing). Together, the first three chapters illustrate the strong identification between nonconformist literati and the courtesans they extolled at both collective and individual levels.

In Chapter 4, by focusing on the context and texts of the poetry collection of the courtesan Chen Susu 陳素素 (fl. second half of the seventeenth century) and on writings about her, I illustrate the efforts by both male and female literati in the early Qing to reproduce the cultural glory of late Ming courtesans. This demonstrates the sense of cultural continuity provided by the representation of late Ming courtesans and sought by

the literati class after the Ming-Qing transition. However, despite their cooperative efforts, courtesans became inevitably marginalized in male literary circles as talented and “romantic” (*fengliu* 風流) women of the gentry flourished and replaced courtesans. Certainly, changes in male literati culture, such as the promotion of gentry women’s direct participation in literati circles and the prevalence of companionate marriages, also contributed significantly to the decline.

My arguments are founded on a rich set of primary sources. I concentrate on accounts of courtesans by contemporary Ming literati as well as the courtesans’ own writings—in both individual literary collections and anthologies. I do not focus on the nostalgic literary discourse of male writers in later periods. By so doing, I attempt to emphasize elements of courtesan culture in the Ming and also to properly evaluate the roles that both nonconformist literati and courtesans played in the process of the valorization or “romanticization” of this courtesan culture.

The Qing dynasty is notorious for its literary inquisition. It is well-known that many literary collections by Ming loyalists or by those officials who surrendered to the new regime but had anti-Manchu sentiments became special targets of censorship during the Qianlong reign. The most prominent case was that of Qian Qianyi. Qian was severely condemned and his works were ordered to be burned. The *Liechao shiji* 列朝詩集 compiled by Qian, which includes a section on women poets, a section that is believed to be compiled by Liu Rushi, was among the victims. Also, writings that contained

“heterodox opinion on the Confucian canon”⁹⁶ or concerned such political parties as the Donglin party 東林黨⁹⁷ and Fu she were also targeted.

However, in many other cases, individual literary collections became targeted simply because they did not address serious moral concerns. Fang Chengpei’s 方城培 writing was presented for burning merely because he once wrote drama which came to be considered inappropriate in the High Qing period.⁹⁸ Although the reasons for prohibition of works by individual writers were more varied and complicated, it is not surprising to see the names of many famous unconventional literati of the late Ming who actively promoted courtesan culture and women’s culture in general, men such as Xu Wei 徐渭 (1521-93), Tu Long 屠隆 (1542-1605), Wang Zhideng 王穉登 (1535-1612), Mei Dingzuo, Zhong Xing 鍾惺 (1574-1625), Tan Yuanchun, Chen Jiru, Fan Yunlin 范允臨 (1558-1641), and Mao Yuanyi 茅元儀 (1595-1641), on the list of people whose works were considered worthy of destruction.⁹⁹

My choice of sources was also dictated by feasibility as the accessibility of writings about and by late Ming courtesans has greatly improved during recent years. Numerous individual collections by contemporary male literati, many banned during the literary inquisition of the Qianlong reign, as well as anthologies of women’s writing including poetry by courtesans, have been reprinted in the *Siku* series.¹⁰⁰ These sources have enabled me not only to examine how late Ming courtesans were perceived by

⁹⁶ Goodrich, *The Literary Inquisition of Ch’ien-Lung* 49.

⁹⁷ For a study of the Donglin party, see Dardess, *Blood and History in China*.

⁹⁸ Goodrich, *The Literary Inquisition of Ch’ien-Lung* 53, 60 (note 124).

⁹⁹ Goodrich, *The Literary Inquisition of Ch’ien-Lung* 50-53. Many of their works are now reprinted particularly in *Siku jinhui shu congkan* 四庫禁燬書叢刊, *jibu* 集部 or *zibu* 子部.

¹⁰⁰ *Siku quanshu cummu congshu*, *Siku jinhui shu congkan*, *Siku weishou shu jikan* 四庫未收書輯刊, and *Xuxiu Siku quanshu*. See also Fong, “Gender and the Failure of Canonization” 130.

contemporaries in contrast to men of later ages, but also to investigate courtesans' own self-perceptions and how the poetry of courtesans was woven into the intricate fabric of literati culture of the late Ming.

Chapter One

Male Poetry Societies and the Rise of Late Ming Courtesans

The “men of the mountains” group appeared in the Jia[jing] and

Long[qing] reigns,

In the end, their fashions reached the “red skirts” [women].

Huang [Yuanjie] 黃媛介 accompanied the courtesan Liu [Rushi] while

Wu [Shan] accompanied Gu [Mei]—¹

As if they had been [Wang] Baigu 王百穀 and [Chen] Meigong 陳眉公.²

[Author's note]:

Huang Yuanjie often accompanied Hedong jun [Liu Rushi] in [Liu's] Jiangyun lou while Wu Yanzi [Wu Shan] often traveled with Lady Hengbo [Gu Mei]. [Both Huang and Wu] were the so-called women of the mountains. Compared to “men of the mountains,” these women were even more stylishly romantic and worth being recorded.

山人一派起嘉隆，未造紅裙慕此風。

黃伴柳姬吳伴顧，宛然百穀又眉公。

[注] 黃媛介常在絳雲樓伴河東君，吳岩子常與橫波夫人遊，所謂女山人也。較之山人尤風韻可傳。

—By a Qing poet. As quoted in Xie Xingyao 謝興堯 (1906-), “Tan Mingji shanren” 談明季山人.³

¹ Huang Yuanjie, courtesy name Jieling 皆令 and Wu Shan, courtesy name Yanzi, were well-known gentry women poets of the Ming-Qing transition period, who mingled with not only male literati but also courtesans. “Hedong jun” was the style name of Liu Rushi while “Lady Hengbo” refers to Gu Mei, concubine of Gong Dingzi. As mentioned in the Introduction, Gu received the title of Lady (*furen*) from the early Qing government. See the biographical entry on Gu Mei in Wanyan Yun Zhu and Wanyan Miaolianbao, eds., *Guochao guixiu zhengshi xuji*, “Fulu” 20a-b.

² Baigu was the courtesy name of Wang Zhideng and Meigong was that of Chen Jiru. They were both the most famous *shanren* literati of the late Ming, who achieved great reputation outside office as nonconformist literati.

³ Xie Xingyao, “Tan Mingji shanren” 談明季山人 (On the “men of the mountains” of the late Ming), *Gujin* 古今 15 (1943), reproduced in Xie Xingyao, *Kanyin zhai suibi* 堪隱齋隨筆 238-42, quotation on 241.

Although its main focus is gentry women's "romantic" unrestrainedness, the above poem offers valuable insights into the relationships among the rise of late Ming courtesan culture, that of women's culture in general, and the development of contemporary literati culture, a culture that Charlotte Furth astutely terms an "artistic and hedonistic counterculture."⁴ The poem states that the "men of the mountains" (*shanren* 山人) as a social category emerged in the Jiajing and Longqing reign-periods. As this type of unconventional literatus continued to flourish throughout the long Wanli era and even into the Ming-Qing transition, their fashions and values extended to women. This means that women's "romantic" unrestrainedness was originated from and identified with the unconventional lifestyle of the "man of the mountains" of the Ming. Huang Yuanjie and Wu Shan, two notable gentry women poets of the Ming-Qing transition period, were viewed as romantic "women of the mountains" (*nü shanren* 女山人). They frequently mingled with courtesans, just like male literati, such as Wang Zhideng (courtesy name Baigu 百穀)⁵ and Chen Jiru (courtesy name Meigong 眉公).⁶ It is well-known that these "men of the mountains" fashioned themselves as nonconformist literati, the "*fengliu wenren*," devoting themselves to art, recreation, and self-invention, interests independent of official concerns. Although they were unsuccessful in officialdom, they enjoyed great fame, or sometimes "notoriety," outside office. They were at the core of unconventional

⁴ Furth, "The Patriarch's Legacy" 202-06.

⁵ For Wang Zhideng's biography in *Mingshi* 288.6a. See also Qian Qianyi, *Liechao shiji xiaozhuan* 481-82. For his English biography, see Goodrich and Fang, eds., *Dictionary of Ming Biography* 1361-63. For a reproduction of a calligraphic work by him and a short introduction, see Tseng Yu-ho Ecke, *Poetry on the Wind* 56-57.

⁶ For Chen Jiru's biography, see *Mingshi* 298.10a-11a; for his English biography, see Hummel ed., *Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period* 83-84. For reproductions of a calligraphic work and a painting by him and a short introduction, see Tseng Yu-ho Ecke, *Poetry on the Wind* 64-67.

poets (including courtesans), whose poetry societies were clustered in the southern capital Nanjing and other Jiangnan cities such as Suzhou and Hangzhou.

Scholars have aptly argued that the sudden and sharp rise of women's literary culture and appearance of more equalized literary gender relations were related to a late Ming literati lifestyle that emphasized refined taste, romantic male-female companionship, and other unconventional fashions and values.⁷ However, they have attributed this nonconformist lifestyle largely to urban developments such as commercialization and printing⁸ and/or to the strong influence of the Taizhou sect, the radical wing of the Wang Yangming 王陽明 (1472-1529) school of Neo-Confucianism.⁹ There is no doubt that each of these factors contributed an important part to the formation of late Ming counterculture. But publishing booms and commercialization were not entirely new phenomena of the Ming and they were already underway as early as the Song dynasty,¹⁰ while the multitalented and unrestrained political outsiders of the Ming, who clustered in the major urban centers of prosperous Jiangnan and promoted women's active participation in literati culture, could find their precedents in Yang Weizhen's Hangzhou poetry societies in the late Yuan, a time long before the rise of the Wang Yangming school. As we will see below, the period during which talented courtesans were greatly appreciated and romanticized coincides with the late Ming—extending from Jiajing reign-period and throughout the Ming-Qing transition, a period when the *shanren* literati became widely influential and their poetry societies were flourishing. It is my

⁷ Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers*, Chapter 1; Robertson, "Voicing the Feminine" 100.

⁸ See Ropp, "Seeds of Change;" Furth, "The Patriarch's Legacy;" and Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers*, Chapter 1.

⁹ Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers*, Chapter 1, 79. For a study of thought of Wang Yangming and his followers, see de Bary, "Individualism."

¹⁰ See Gates, *China's Motor*. See also Cherniack, "Book Culture and Textual Transmission in Sung China."

contention that the valorization of courtesans and literary and literate women in general has to be understood as part of the larger celebration of the power of *wen* (literature, civility, culture) in the context of late Ming male poetry societies, a cultural space that was formed in opposition to government office.

To illustrate this close but almost entirely overlooked relationship between male poetry societies and the sudden and sharp rise of literate and literary courtesans, in this chapter, I first provide a brief summary of the late Ming socio-political conditions and literati's idealization of withdrawal from government office. I trace this late Ming attitude towards office and reclusion back to a lifestyle exemplified by those in the Yuan scholar Yang Weizhen's Hangzhou literary societies to show eccentric literati of the Ming, who rejected public service in favour of an independent, refined, and hedonistic life, could draw upon influential forerunners from former generations. I then situate courtesans in male poetry societies to explore how the promotion of courtesan culture in the late Ming was used by nonconformist literati as opportunities or strategies to satisfy the male desire for self-fashioning and how courtesans took this opportunity to negotiate a space in which to define and renew their place both in literati culture and society. In particular, I will pick up where Dorothy Ko has left off with the social networks in Wang Ruqian's literary societies in Hangzhou as case study. By doing so, I demonstrate that in times such as the late Ming when government service was not desirable or even possible, male poetry societies provided an attractive compromise, a romantic and refined middle ground between government office and complete reclusion in which "men of culture" could make known their identification with the traditionally privileged social elite. At the same time, the participation of talented courtesans injected new life into the literati

psyche, drawing these men further into sexuality, desire, and self-invention. I conclude that the late Ming “artistic and hedonistic counterculture,” of which courtesan culture was an important part, was deeply rooted in male-dominated poetry societies, a cultural space open for negotiation, accommodation, and resistance for both men and women.

The Late Ming Idealization of Withdrawal¹¹

The late Ming, what has been labelled by Furth and Ko as a “floating world,”¹² was a singular period in Chinese history in which radical political, economic, social, and intellectual changes occurred. Emperors’ neglect of the government affairs combined with eunuchs’ nefarious activities resulted in government corruption.¹³ Political insecurity turned the commitment of the educated elite men to their local society and thus enhanced the local authority.¹⁴ With the rapid growth of commerce, more and more rural people (both rich landlords and poor tenants) swarmed into the great cities. The preexisting rural landlord-tenant relationship broke down, but the urban economy and culture flourished.¹⁵ Education and printing ensured greater literacy among people from lower socio-economic status. However, the increased number of literate men intensified examination competition.¹⁶ The widespread questioning of Neo-Confucian orthodoxy,

¹¹ I draw on Peterson’s concept of withdrawal. He defines three common characteristics of a literatus who has withdrawn from government office: such a man “has not taken any examinations (and such cases were rare among the highly educated in most periods); he has, or has sought, a degree but never served in office; or he accepted appointment, but not for a significant portion of his adult career.” See Peterson, *Bitter Gourd* 3.

¹² Furth, “The Patriarch’s Legacy” 203; Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers*, Chapter 1.

¹³ See Ray Huang, 1587, *A Year of No Significance*, Chapter 1 “The Wan-li Emperor.” In this chapter, Ray Huang provided a sympathetic portrait of the Wanli emperor, but he did not minimize the problem the emperor caused to the Ming dynasty.

¹⁴ See Brook, *Praying for Power*; Brook, *The Ledgers of Merit and Demerit*.

¹⁵ Brook, *The Confusions of Pleasure*.

¹⁶ For a general study of the history of Chinese civil examinations, see Elman, *A Cultural History*. Naquin and Rawski examined the expansion of educational system and popular literary in the eighteenth

such as in the teachings of the Wang Yangming school, caused ideological confusion, but aroused a literati self-consciousness which was less state-centered and less orthodoxy-centered.¹⁷ As Brook has observed, the late Ming was a time in which “state and society had been decisively separated.”¹⁸

For many high-minded men in the Ming, participating in the civil examinations and serving in office were no longer their favourite choices; instead, withdrawal from government office became a prevalent phenomenon in the literati world. For the state, literati withdrawal was a serious disturbing problem; for individuals, it opened up many other possibilities for both men and women to play an important role in society and culture. During the early Ming, refusal to serve was significant enough that Zhu Yuanzhang, the founder of the Ming dynasty, issued a special edict regarding the punishment for those who did not serve in office (不爲君用之罰).¹⁹ It was not unusual that there were always some people who did not want to serve the new regime during a dynastic transition. However, the problem of withdrawal continued from the disordered early Ming to the relatively peaceful time of the mid-Ming. By the mid-Ming, more and more people were willing to get involved with friends and community, instead of serving in office. To withdraw from office in a peaceful time like the mid-Ming should be considered as a signal of a “new” orientation in intellectual endeavour. Among these people being fond of withdrawal many were high officials or sons of rich families. Wang Wei 王韋 (courtesy name Qinpei 欽佩, *jinsi* 1505) was regarded by his contemporaries

century China. But as they have pointed out, this had already begun in the late Ming. See Naquin and Rawski, *Chinese Society in the Eighteenth Century*, Chapter 3, 55-64.

¹⁷ de Bary, “Individualism.”

¹⁸ Brook, *Praying for Power* 330.

¹⁹ “Yinyi zhuan” 隱逸傳, in *Mingshi* 298.1b.

as one of three outstanding talents from Nanjing (*Jinling sanjie* 金陵三傑).²⁰ He was a *jinshi* degree holder and official as well. However, he was reluctant to teach his son to follow in his footsteps. He openly claimed, “In bearing a son, what should be valued the most is his inherent quality; he does not have to serve in the office” (生兒貴佳不必仕宦). His son Pangyuan 逢元 [or Fengyuan 逢元] was very skilled in poetry but never took any of the civil examinations.²¹

Other officials or potential officials abandoned the civil career path in favour of the pleasures of beautiful mountains and waters. The famous scholar Huang Xingceng 黃省曾 (1490?-1540, style name “Man of the Five Mountains” 五岳山人) was about to set out for the spring examination. But when his friend Tian Rucheng 田汝成 (1500-63+) came over, informing him of the beautiful scenery of Xihu 西湖, the West Lake of Hangzhou, he immediately changed his mind, and followed Tian to Hangzhou.²² Zhu Shitai 祝時泰 quit his official post when he recalled the spectacular lakes and mountains of Hangzhou. He and some like-minded people formed eight poetry societies in

²⁰ See *Mingshi* 286.23b. The other two people were Gu Lin 顧璘 (courtesy name 華玉) and Chen Yi 陳沂 (courtesy name Lunan 魯南). Noteworthy is that Chen Yi was the husband of the famous woman poet, Ma Xianqing 馬閒卿, one of the few mid-Ming women whose poetry collections are extant (Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 154). Her poetry collection entitled *Zhiju ji* 芷居集 contains fourteen poems. It is included at the end of the “Hou ji” 後集 in Yu Xian 俞憲 (1508-72), comp., *Sheng Ming baijia shi* 盛明百家詩. Yu Xian was one of the most important pioneers in anthologizing women’s poetry in the late Ming. The entire *Sheng Ming baijia shi* is reprinted in *Siku quanshu cunmu congshu, jibu* 集部, vols. 304-08. The *Zhiju ji* is in vol. 308: 800-01. Chen Yi also exchanged poems with the famous courtesan Zhu Dou’er 朱鬥兒. He was her mentor who taught her painting (Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 94).

²¹ Gu Lin, “Nanyuan Wang xiansheng zhuan” 南園王先生傳, in Huang Zongxi, comp., *Ming wenhai* 明文海 393.4b-6b; quotation on 6a (*SKQS-dianziban*).

²² See Tian Rucheng 田汝成 (1500-63+), *Xihu youlan zhi* 西湖遊覽志, *Xihu youlan zhi yu* 西湖遊覽志餘 20.25b-26a (*SKQS-dianziban*). For Huang Xingceng’s English biography, see Goodrich and Fang, eds., *Dictionary of Ming Biography* 661-65.

Hangzhou, the “Xihu bashe” 西湖八社 (Eight Societies of Xihu).²³ The famous *shanren* literatus Wang Yin 王寅 (courtesy name Zhongfang 仲房; style name “Man of the Ten Mountains” 十岳山人) came from Xin’an (in Anhui) to join Zhu, taking charge of one of the eight societies, the “Dongxiao shishe” 洞霄詩社.²⁴ The Eight Societies of Xihu were the early societies formed mainly by retired officials, in which “men of the mountains” also played an important part.²⁵ She Xiang 佘翔 (courtesy name Zonghan 宗漢), member of the famous poetry society of Nanjing in the Ming, the “Qingxi she” 青溪社 (the Green creek society), quit his post in order to travel mountains and rivers for the rest of his life.

This mid-Ming withdrawal from office was observed by Liao Ji 廖記, the Minister of Personnel in the third year of the Jiajing era (1524). In his memorial to the Jiajing emperor, Liao Ji complained:

During the reigns of earlier Ming emperors, those qualified to hold office were not as numerous as they are today, and their customs were simple and pure. They were devoted to their proper vocation, not fraudulently clever or pursuing empty fame. The state could rely on them, and so political affairs were properly handled and the people were at peace. As of the Zhengde era [正德 (1506-22)], however, many gentry sought empty reputations. Few have actually been meritorious officials. They affect a

²³ For the participants of the Eight Societies of Xihu and their society poetry collection, see Zhu Shitai, et al, *Xihu bashe shitie: Chun sheshi yi juan, Qiu sheshi yi juan* 西湖八社詩帖一卷春社詩一卷秋社詩一卷, reprinted in *Siku quanshu cunmu congshu, jibu*, vol. 315: 596-622.

²⁴ For Wang Yin’s biographical information, see Qian Qianyi, *Liechao shiji xiaozhuan* 510-02.

²⁵ Of the eight society members, five were retired officials while three were commoners. See *Xihu bashe shitie* 598-99.

calm disdain and yet scramble for shortcuts. Whether it is because they judge office to be inconsequential, or will not work hard at their vocation, or feel that established authority gives them no elbow room, they all make excuses about having to return to private life on grounds of ill health. Even more of those who have taken up office foolishly ask to abandon their posts.²⁶

The new attitudes towards government service Liao Ji condemned came into great vogue during the late Ming. In devaluing office-holding, men often romanticized and idealized the life of a literatus living in retirement. The case of Yuan Hongdao exemplifies this trend. Yuan obtained his *jinshi* degree in 1592 and was appointed the magistrate of Wuxian in 1595, but resigned from this post in 1597. In a letter to his friend Qiu Tan 丘坦 (courtesy name Changru 長孺), Yuan Hongdao describes his extreme dissatisfaction about his duty:

The ugliness of being a magistrate is beyond description. In general, when I encounter a superior, I am a slave; when entertaining visitors, a prostitute; when managing the government treasury, I am merely a granary keeper; while governing the people, I am only an old maid.”²⁷

Contrary to his complaints about his job as the magistrate of Wuxian, Yuan Hongdao passionately extolled the secular and hedonistic life of ordinary people in the city Suzhou. In a letter to his uncles Lanze and Yunze (蘭澤雲澤叔), he writes,

²⁶ Yu Jideng 余繼登 (*jinshi* 1577), *Diangu jiwén* 典故記聞 300. Quoted and translated by Brook, in Brook, *Praying for Power* 313.

²⁷ Translation by Chih-p'ing Chou, in *Yuan Hung-tao and the Kung-an School* 94.

Jinchang (Wuxian, i.e., Suzhou) is flourishing alone by itself and the magistrate is miserable by himself. Why? The painted boats and music of drums; singing boys and dancing girls, are all affairs of men of character, not the magistrate's. Rare flowers and strange plants; lofty mountains and deserted hills, are all views of the recluse, not the magistrate's. Wine circles and poetry societies; vermillion gates and purple roads; brushing dust off clothes on the peak of Moli Mountain or washing feet in the river beside Tiger Hill, are all happy things of travelers, not the magistrate's. Those the magistrate confronts are only grain suppliers dressed in rags, tricky commoners who make clever talk like reeds in wind-instruments, and prisoners who are covered by lice all over their bodies. If that is the case, what does Suzhou matter in the life of the magistrate and the magistrate to do with Suzhou? Gathering in a village, a cup of wine will be sufficient to make me happy. My body is neither wood nor rock. How can I bend my waist and bow my head all day, leaving what I like and going for what I hate? All of my words are genuine and none of them beats about the bush. If you still do not believe me, please wait and see if there will be any trace of the Magistrate Yuan in the court of Wuxian next spring.²⁸

金閶自繁華，令自苦耳。何也？畫船蕭鼓，歌童舞女，此自豪客之事，非令事也。奇花異草，危石孤岑，此自幽人之觀，非令觀也。酒壇詩社，朱門紫陌，振衣莫釐之峰，濯足虎丘之石，此自游客之樂，非令樂也。令所對

²⁸ Chinese text in Yuan Hongdao, *Yuan Zhonglang quanji* 袁中郎全集, *juan* 12, reprinted in *Siku quanshu cunmu congshu, jibu*, vol. 174: 602-03.

者，鶉衣百結之糧長，簧口利舌之刁民，及蟣蝨滿身之囚徒耳。然則，蘓何有于令，令何關於蘓哉？聚首邨中，一樽一杓，便足自快，身非木石，安能長日折腰，俯首去所好而從所惡？語語實際，一字非迂。若復不信，請看來春吳縣堂上，尚有袁知縣腳跡不[否]。

In 1597, after he had resigned his post, Yuan Hongdao wrote a letter to Huang Lanfang 黃蘭芳 (*jinshi* 1592) describing how happy he was: “After I had left my post, I felt like a huge fish who had jumped into a great pond...Not only did I regret accepting the magistrate’s post, but I also wondered why on earth I should go through the toil and trouble of pursuing those bloody *juren* and *jinshi* degrees (*niao juren jinshi* 鳥舉人進士), when I could sit peacefully at home.”²⁹ Yuan clearly documented how he viewed office and withdrawal, how he finally abandoned his post, and how happy he was after he retired.

The trend of withdrawal in the Ming was much fuelled and accelerated by the popularity and influence of successful “men of the mountains.” Scholars such as Wang Zhideng and Chen Jiru completely abandoned all political ambitions but achieved great reputation and wealth, too, as retired literati. As I mentioned in the introduction, although late Ming was the heyday of courtesan culture, visiting the courtesan’s quarters in the Ming was considered a violation of the legal codes for officials. For many late Ming men of letters who pursued sensual pleasure and freedom from the state’s demands, withdrawal from office was a natural choice.

²⁹ Translation by Chih-p’ing Chou, in Chou, *Yuan Hung-tao and the Kung-an School* 103. I have changed his Wade-Giles spellings into *pinyin* and added Chinese characters.

Wang Zhideng, a native of Suzhou, was a multitalented literatus who was skilled at many artistic fields such as poetry, calligraphy, and painting. He played a leading role in the Suzhou literati circles for almost thirty years.³⁰ Wang Shizhen 王世貞 (1526-90),³¹ leader of the Latter Seven Masters of the Archaist School (後七子), included Wang Zhideng on the list of Forty Masters of contemporary literati of the Ming (四十子).³² As he became influential in the literati world, Wang Zhideng was recommended to participate in the compilation of the national history, but he declined the offer. He spent the rest of his life pursuing his literary work.³³

Wang Zhideng was a patron of courtesans and a keen promoter of their poetry. He was known by his legendary romantic love relationship with the well-known multitalented courtesan Ma Shouzhen 馬守貞, known by her courtesy name Xianglan 湘蘭, who was brilliant in poetry and painting. But likely because of personal circumstances, Wang declined to marry her. Nevertheless, the two maintained a good friendship that lasted a life-time, and their relationship became a recurring theme in a late Ming drama.³⁴ It was said that on Wang's seventieth birthday, Ma arranged a big celebration to fete him in Feixu yuan 飛絮園, where drinking, writing, and partying

³⁰ For his English biography, see Goodrich and Fang, eds., *Dictionary of Ming Biography* 1471-74.

³¹ For Wang Shizhen's English biography, see Goodrich and Fang, eds., *Dictionary of Ming Biography* 1399-1405.

³² Goodrich and Fang, eds., *Dictionary of Ming Biography* 1361. See also Guo Shaoyu 郭紹虞, "Mingdai de wenren jituan" 明代的文人集團, in Guo Shaoyu, *Zhaoyushi gudian wenxue lunji* 照隅室古典文學論集 526.

³³ See his English biography in Goodrich and Fang, eds., *Dictionary of Ming Biography* 1361-63.

³⁴ The Wang-Ma love story was partially reproduced in a play entitled *Bailian qun* 白練裙 by the contemporary literatus Zheng Zhiwen 鄭之文. The drama also describes the romance between the noted unrestrained literatus Tu Long and the courtesan Kou Si'er 寇四兒 [Kou Wenhua 寇文華]. See Goodrich and Fang, eds., *Dictionary of Ming Biography* 1362.

lasted a month.³⁵ The preface Wang wrote for Ma's poetry collection, the *Xianglanzi ji* 湘蘭子集 (preface dated 1591) is still extant.³⁶ In the preface, Wang was very generous with his complimentary words to praise Ma's beauty, talent, and romantic and knight-errant temperament:

There lives a beauty of unsurpassed talent and charm. Her family name Ma recalls the priceless stallions on the market of Yan; her given name Xianglan evokes the fragrant grasses gracing the River Xiang. She regards money as dirt—when aiding friends in need she is as generous as Zhu Jia. Yet she considers a promise as weighty as a mountain—in keeping her word she is a female Ji Bu. ... Her writings would put Sima Xiangru to shame, but she would not have responded to his seductive playing on the green zither. Her talents would enable her to turn down [the Tang general] Li Jing, and [his lover] Red Feather Duster would have envied her sedentary comforts.³⁷

This preface presents a plausible and fashionable image of the courtesan in the late Ming literati world.

Wang Zhideng also wrote a preface for Xue Susu's poetry collection entitled *Nanyou cao* 南游草 (Drafts of Going to the South). Although neither the preface nor the collection is extant, Xue Susu's poem of thanks presented to Wang for writing a preface for her collection has been included in several poetry anthologies of women's poetry

³⁵ Goodrich and Fang, eds., *Dictionary of Ming Biography* 1362.

³⁶ Wang Zhideng's preface to the *Xianglanzi ji* is reproduced in Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 152-53, and translated by Dorothy Ko, in Chang and Saussy, *Women Writers of Traditional China* 737-39.

³⁷ Translation by Ko, in Chang and Saussy, *Women Writers of Traditional China* 737.

produced in the late Ming and early Qing.³⁸ He also wrote a poem dedicated to another famous courtesan Jing Pianpian 景翩翩 to praise her poetic talent.³⁹ In addition, Wang was responsible for bringing about the marriage of Lü Junsheng 呂雋生 and the courtesan Zheng Yuji 鄭玉姬. In commenting on the Zheng-Lü romance, the celebrated female literatus Wang Duanshu 王端淑 (1621- ca.1706), who compiled the anthology of Ming women, the *Mingyuan shiwei* 名媛詩緯, praised Wang Zhideng highly, saying that “Yuji and Scholar Lü have formed an ideal match while Baigu, a scholarly ‘knight in a yellow cloak,’ is even more stylish” (玉姬與呂生可謂佳耦矣, 百穀以才子作黃衫客更韻).⁴⁰

Another prominent “man of the mountains” is Chen Jiru. He burned his own student gown and hat at the age of twenty-nine to show his determination to abandon all his political ambitions. In 1600, when he was approached by Gu Xiancheng 顧憲成 (1550-1612), he declined to join Gu’s Donglin party, a political party that aimed to fight against the corrupt officials and abusive eunuchs.⁴¹ Chen was a core member of Wang Ruqian’s Hangzhou literati circles that involved many famous unrestrained talented literati such as Dong Qichang, Zhong Xing, Tan Yuanchun, and young Li Yu 李漁 (1611-80); courtesans such as Wang Wei, Liu Rushi, Lin Tiansu, and Yang Yunyou 楊雲

³⁸ See Xue Susu’s poem entitled “Xie Wang zhengjun xu shi” 謝王徵君敘詩, in Zhang Mengzheng 張夢徵, comp., *Qinglou yunyu* 青樓韻語 (1616), *juan* 1: 12. This poem also appears under the title “Xie Wang zhengjun Baigu xu shi” 謝王徵君百穀敘詩, in Shen Jiyu 沈季友, comp., *Zuili shixi* 樛李詩繫 34.44b (*SKQS-dianziban*).

³⁹ See Idema and Grant, *The Red Brush* 364-67.

⁴⁰ See the entry on “Zheng Yuji” in Wang Duanshu, comp., *Mingyuan shiwei* 19.10a-b. The “Knight in a yellow cloak” is an allusion taken from the Tang *chuanqi* story “Huo Xiaoyu zhuan,” where the “Knight in a yellow cloak” brings the unfaithful scholar Li Yi to the bedside of the dying courtesan Huo Xiaoyu. For the story of Huo Xiaoyu, see Wang Pijiang, comp., *Tangren xiaoshuo* 77-82.

⁴¹ Regarding his refusal to Gu’s summons, see Zhang Huijian, *Ming Qing Jiangsu wenren nianbiao* 378. See also Chen Jiru’s biography in *Mingshi* 298.10a-11a. For Gu Xiancheng’s English biography, see Goodrich and Fang, eds., *Dictionary of Ming Biography* 736-44.

友; and gentry women such as Huang Yuanjie, Wu Shan, Wu Shan's daughter Bian Mengjue 卞夢珏, and Wang Duanshu.

Like Wang Zhideng, Chen Jiru was also an enthusiastic supporter of talented courtesans. He commented on the paintings by the courtesan Ma Xianglan, praising Ma for her outstanding artistic talent.⁴² He exchanged poems and maintained close friendships with Wang Wei and Yang Wan. In particular, Chen Jiru not only wrote inscriptions dedicated to writing by Wang Wei and made comments on her collections, but also wrote her biography to honour both her writing and character.⁴³

Also like Wang Zhideng, Chen Jiru was called by his contemporaries a “summoned scholar” (*zhengshi* 徵士),⁴⁴ a respectable term used to refer to those who were virtuous and erudite but with no official ranks. The great Jin dynasty poet Tao Qian 陶潛 [Tao Yuanming 陶淵明] (365-427) received such a title.⁴⁵ As a “man of the mountains” who did not hold degree and office but managed to successfully achieve a great reputation, Chen became very influential in the late Ming literati world. Zhong Xing, founder of the poetic school of Jingling 竟陵派, a school that is often assumed to have emerged from the Gong'an school of Yuan Hongdao, claimed that he felt so

⁴² See “Ti Ma ji hua lan,” in Chen Jiru, *Chen Meigong ji* 159.

⁴³ Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 88-89. For Chen Jiru's biography of Wang Wei, the “Wei daoren sheng kuang ji” 微道人生壙記, see Song Cunbiao 宋存標, comp., *Qing zhong* 情種, *juan* 6, reprinted in *Beijing tushuguan guji zhenben congkan* 北京圖書館古籍珍本叢刊, vol. 65: 826. In addition, Chen Jiru also produced a preface for *Yuyuan ge shiji* 玉鴛閣詩集, a poetry collection by the contemporary gentry woman poet Yao Shao'e 姚少娥, the wife of Fan Junhe 范君和, a friend of Chen's. For Yao Shao'e and her poetry collection, see the entry on *Yuyuan ge shicao* 玉鴛閣詩艸, in Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 132. According to Hu Wenkai, Tu Long wrote a preface for the *Yuyuan ge shi cao*. For Chen Jiru's preface to the poetry collection, the “Yuyuan ge shiji xu” 玉鴛閣詩集序, see He Fuzheng, comp., *Wenzhang bianti huixuan* 356.2a-3a.

⁴⁴ See the entry on “Chen Zhengshi Jiru” 陳徵士繼儒 in Qian Qianyi, comp., *Liechao shiji xiaozhuan* 637.

⁴⁵ See Yan Yanzhi 顏延之 (384-456), “Tao Zhengshi lei” 陶徵士誄, in Xiao Tong 蕭統 (501-31), comp., *Wen xuan* 文選, *juan* 57, reproduced in He Fuzheng, comp., *Wenzhang bianti huixuan* 738.3a-5b.

fortunate to have met Chen Jiru but regretted not having met him sooner (相見甚有奇緣似恨其晚).⁴⁶ Many prominent scholar-officials such as Wang Shizhen and Dong Qichang also held him in high regard. In evaluating the influence of Chen Jiru on the late Ming literati world, the Qing *Siku* editors even compared Chen to the extremist Li Zhi 李贄 (1527-1602), leader of the Taizhou sect, whose iconoclasm had greatly shaken the entire intellectual world: “Those who learned the Way admired Zhuolao [Li Zhi] and felt obligated to discourse on Chan Buddhism while ‘men of the mountains’ lost no time to talk about Meigong [Chen Jiru] and feigned being fond of a life in isolated retirement” (道學侈稱卓老務講禪宗; 山人競述眉公矯言幽尚).⁴⁷

The anti-office/orthodoxy position was so widely adopted by the intellectual elites in the late Ming that they could no longer be understood as a group of outsiders, as was the case in previous dynasties. In his *Nian'er shi zhaji* 廿二史劄記, the High Qing historian Zhao Yi 趙翼 (1727-1814) examines the educational background of people who were included in the “Wenyuan zhuan” 文苑傳 (Biography of literary scholars) in the official history of the Ming dynasty, the *Mingshi* 明史. He observes that during the Tang and Song, men included in the “Wenyuan zhuan” who were known for their artistic talents had always been members of the Hanlin yuan 翰林院, the highest circle of literary scholars who achieved this status through civil examinations; however, during the Ming, the most talented literary men recorded in the “Wenyuan zhuan” had often been

⁴⁶ See Zhong Xing, “Yu Chen Meigong” 與陳眉公, in *Yinxu xuan ji* 隱秀軒集, *juan* 28: 475. For Zhong Xing's biographical information, see Qian Qianyi, *Liechao shiji xiaozhuan* 570-71. For his English biography, see Goodrich and Fang, *Dictionary of Ming Biography* 408-09.

⁴⁷ See the entry on *Xu Shuofu* 續說郛, in *Qinding Siku quanshu zongmu* 欽定四庫全書總目 132.10b-11a (*SKQS-dianziban*).

commoners and retired literati.⁴⁸ Zhao Yi compares three groups of people included in the *Wenyuan zhuan* in the *Mingshi*: Hanlin scholars, lower level degree holders, and non-degree holders. He found those who managed to have become the Hanlin scholars were already forgotten in his day. On the contrary, the multitalented poets and artists of great fame that people remembered were either those who had never obtained a high degree⁴⁹ or those who had held no degree at all.⁵⁰ These *zhusheng* 諸生 (candidates in schools of the level of county or prefecture), *buyi* 布衣 (commoners), and *shanren* (men of the mountains) were the main producers and consumers of late Ming literati culture.

Remaining out of office seemed to have provided literary commoners sufficient leisure, motivation, and sometimes pressure too, to devote themselves to art and recreation and thus enabled them to negotiate and sustain their cultural dominance through other unofficial trajectories. As we have seen and continue to see, it is precisely this category of talented and eccentric “commoner” who valorized poetry, including that by courtesans and literary women in general. They represented “untrammeled independence and freedom from society’s demands”⁵¹ and the spirit of late Ming “artistic

⁴⁸ See the entry on “Mingdai wenren bu bi jie Hanlin” 明代文人不必皆翰林, in *Nian'er shi zhaji* 廿二史劄記, *juan* 34: 782-83.

⁴⁹ Zhao Yi lists the following people who only obtained the *juren* 舉人 degree: Zhu Yunming 祝允明 (1460-1526), Tang Yin 唐寅 (1470-1524), Huang Xingceng, Qu Jiusi 瞿九思 (1546-1617), Li Liufang 李流芳 (1575-1625), Tan Yuanchun, Ai Nanying 艾南英 (1583-1646), Zhang Shichun 章士純 (1575-1644), Luo Wanzao 羅萬藻 (fl. 1627-40).

⁵⁰ Zhao Yi lists many Ming commoner literati who achieved high literary reputation and so were included in the “Wenyuan zhuan” but never took the civil examinations: Wang Fu 王綏 (1362-1416), Shen Du 沈度 (1357-1434), Shen Liang 沈梁, Liu Pu 劉溥, Wen Zhengming 文徵明 (1470-1559), Cai Yu 蔡羽 (1457-1541), Wang Chong 王寵 (1494-1533), Chen Chun 陳淳 (1483-1544), Zhou Tianqiu 周天球 (1514-95), Qian Gu 錢穀 (1508-ca. 1578), Xie Zhen 謝榛 (1495-1575), Lu Chan 盧禔[檐], Xu Wei, Shen Mingchen 沈明臣 (fl. sixteenth century), Yu Yin 余寅 (1519-95), Wang Zhideng, Yu Yunwen 俞允文 (1512-79), Wang Shucheng 王叔承 (ca. 1536-ca. 1599), Shen Zhou 沈周 (1427-1509), Chen Jiru, Lou Jian 婁堅 (1567-1631), and Cheng Jiasui 程嘉燧 (1565-1643).

⁵¹ Peterson, *Bitter Gourd* 131

and hedonistic counterculture.”⁵² However, during the High Qing, the late Ming *shanren* as a social category were collectively depreciated and criticized by the *Siku* 四庫 editors.⁵³ Their literary collections were banned and destroyed during Qianlong’s literary inquisition.⁵⁴

The Predecessors of Late Ming *Shanren*

Withdrawal from official life was, of course, not solely a late Ming phenomenon. Reclusion had long been identified with religious eremitism of Buddhism and Taoism. But eremitism could be also discussed in the Confucian tradition and a Confucian practice of withdrawal can be traced back to the classical age. As Frederick W. Mote has pointed out, reclusion was a common reaction for Confucian educated men in disordered times. The Confucian classical canons gave sufficient sanctions for withdrawal from official life: in fact, withdrawal from public office was the only way to preserve a man’s moral integrity if he could not successfully find an upright prince to serve.⁵⁵ However, the immediate precedents of the late Ming “men of mountains” who withdrew from office but retreated to poetry, wine, and women, are found among those in Yang Weizhen’s Hangzhou poetry societies during the late Yuan. I believe a close look at Yang Weizhen and his poetic societies will certainly not only enable us to see in what

⁵² Furth, “The Patriarch’s Legacy” 202-06.

⁵³ Some of the critical comments made by the *Siku* editors on *shanren* and their works can be found in the following entries: entries on *Zhangwu zhi shi er juan* 長物志十二卷 by Wen Zhenheng 文震亨, the great-grandson of Wen Zhengming 文徵明 (1470-1559), *Xue’an qing shi* 雪菴清史五卷 by Yue Chun 樂純, *Yanqi youshi yi juan* 巖棲幽事一卷 by Chen Jiru, *Tianchi miji shi er juan* 天池秘集十二卷 by Xu Wei (attrib.), and *Yimen guangdu yi bai er shi liu juan* 夷門廣牘一百二十六卷 by Zhou Lüjing 周履靖 (1542-1611+), in *Qinding Siku quanshu zongmu* 123.8b-9a; 128.24b; 130.8b; 131.25b-26b; and 134.12a-b, respectively.

⁵⁴ Many of their works are now reprinted particularly in *Siku jinhui shu congan*.

⁵⁵ See Mote, “Confucian Eremitism” 206-12.

direction the late Ming cultural trend of *shanren* developed, but also afford us better understanding of the close association between the rise of eccentric literati and the appearance of female literati of the late Ming, who picked up the writing brush to produce artistic works, just like their male associates.

Yang Weizhen (*jinshi*, 1327), known by his courtesy name “Lianfu” 廉夫 and style name “Tieya” 鐵崖, was a poet and also an eccentric literary figure.⁵⁶ He was a minor official for some time in the late Yuan. When he received the transfer to Jiangxi province, an area disrupted by rebel activities, he chose instead to take early retirement. He was later approached by the bandit-rebel Zhang Shicheng 張士誠 (1321-67), but he refused to join Zhang’s retinue.⁵⁷ After the fall of the Yuan, he was summoned by Zhu Yuanzhang, the first emperor of the Ming dynasty. But he declined to serve the new regime as well.⁵⁸

As a Han-Chinese literatus, Yang Weizhen did not refuse to serve the Ming in order to remain loyal to the Mongol ruler: he already withdrew from office during the Yuan. It is obvious that Yang’s refusal to serve the new regime was more a matter of personal predilections, and a penchant for freedom and individuality. His case offers valuable insight into the decisions made by many late Ming literati not to serve the Qing while they did not serve in the Ming either. Many late Ming literati likewise preferred freedom and individuality.

⁵⁶ For Yang Weizhen’s biographical information, see *Mingshi* 285: 2b-4b. For his English biography, see Goodrich and Fang, eds., *Dictionary of Ming Biography* 1547-53.

⁵⁷ Goodrich and Fang, eds., *Dictionary of Ming Biography* 1550.

⁵⁸ Yang wrote the emperor a poem under the title “Lao guafu yao” 老寡婦謠 (Song of an old widow), in which he likened his refusal to serve the Ming to that of an old widow who did not wish to remarry. See Wang Shizhen, *Yanzhou sibu gao* 兗州四部稿 149.2b-3a (*SKQS-dianziban*).

Yang lived in retirement but he did not cut himself off from friends and community. He actively engaged in literary discussions and in poetry contests in the local poetry societies near Xihu, the West Lake of Hangzhou. Hangzhou was one of the most culturally and economically advanced urban centers in late imperial China with a long history as an attractive site for literary gatherings. Yang's literary engagements were often accompanied by wine, women, and carousals. In his *Xihu youlan zhi* *Xihu youlan zhi yu* 西湖遊覽志 西湖遊覽志餘, a book of anecdotes about the West Lake, the late Ming literatus Tian Rucheng records the poetry societies of Hangzhou in the Yuan period,

During the Yuan, the heroic figures who were not willing to serve in office all poured their feelings into poetry and wine. At that time, there were many poetic societies in Hangzhou: *Qingyin she*, *Baiyun she*, *Gushan she*, *Wulin she*, and *Wulin jiu you hui*. The learned and the refined gathered together in crowds. They divided themselves in groups to write poems, competed against one another, and exchanged poetic experiences with one another. How flourishing the moment was! This continued in the early years of our dynasty. Therefore, scholars esteemed each other on the basis of poetic training.⁵⁹

元時豪傑不樂進取者,率托情於詩酒。其時杭州有清吟社,白雲社,孤山社,武林社,武林九友會。儒雅雲集,分曹比偶,相覩切磋,何其勝也。國初猶有餘風,故士人以詩學相尚。

⁵⁹ Tian Rucheng, *Xihu youlan zhi* *Xihu youlan zhi yu* 21.23a.

As one of the best-known literati in his region, Yang Weizhen played a leading role in the literary discussions and poetry contests in the Hangzhou poetry societies. As Wang Shizhen observes,

In early period of our dynasty, the state's laws were tolerant and scholars did not have to serve in office. There were literary gatherings every year in the poetry societies of Zhejiang. One or two famous doyens such as Lianfu [Yang Weizhen] were invited to take charge of the poetry contests. The best poems would be published as model poems.⁶⁰

當勝國時法網寬，人不必仕宦。浙中每歲有詩社，聘一二名宿如廉夫輩主之，刻其尤者爲式。

A model for many Ming literati later who were unsuccessful in officialdom but enjoyed great reputation outside office, Yang was held in high regard as a talented and somewhat eccentric literatus. He was a writer of various literary genres and he wrote broadly. His writing subjects covered many categories of trivial matters such as beauty, tea, wine, and dice.⁶¹ He was also a calligrapher, a painter, and a compiler of writings by his contemporaries. But what made Yang Weizhen an apt model for the late Ming *shanren* literati is not only his retirement from office and his artistic talents, but also the fact that his literary coterie included also some gifted women such as Cao Miaoqing 曹妙清 and Zhang Miaoqing 張妙淨, whose participation in literati culture certainly helped transform the male literary societies to a refined and romantic refuge, outside

⁶⁰ See Wang Shizhen, *Yanzhou sibu gao* 149.2b-3a.

⁶¹ See Yang's biography in Goodrich and Fang, eds., *Dictionary of Ming Biography* 1552.

officialdom.⁶² Cao Miaoqing was brilliant in many artistic fields such as poetry, calligraphy, painting, and music. She chose not to marry in order to devote herself to care for her mother.⁶³ Zhang Miaoqing lived as a Daoist nun. Neither of them were married women, which may help explain why they had so much freedom to write and travel outside their families.

When Yang compiled poems of exchange by his friends and associates in the local literary circles, he included those by Cao Miaoqing and Zhang Miaoqing. In his preface to the *Xihu zhuzhi ci* 西湖竹枝詞 (Bamboo branch songs of the West Lake; preface dated 1330) compiled by Yang Weizhen, He Wei 和維 writes,

Tieya [Yang Weizhen] lived in Xihu in his later years. He was very enchanted by poetry and wine everyday with people like Tan Shao (courtesy name Jiucheng 九成, style name Tiaoxi yuzhe 苕溪漁者). He gave up the conventional words to attend to pure and fresh diction. He was the first to write several poems under the title *Xihu zhuzhi ci*. Hundreds of people responded to his rhymes and he compiled all of the poems together, even including those written by women.⁶⁴

⁶² For the biographical information about Cao and Zhang, see the entries on Cao Miaoqing and Zhang Miaoqing in Wang Duanshu, comp., *Mingyuan shiwei* 2.1b-2b.

⁶³ For a background note in English on Cao Miaoqing, see Yu-shih Chen's entry on Cao in Chang and Saussy, *Women Writers of Traditional China* 732. Chen follows what Hu Wenkai records to suggest that "Cao served her mother devotedly. Married at the age of thirty, she was a paragon of womanly conduct" (事母孝謹, 三十嫁, 而風操可尙). See Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 72. However, all the extant sources on Cao Miaoqing that are available to me suggest that Cao lived unmarried in order to serve her mother with full devotion and that she was a paragon of womanly conduct (事母孝謹, 三十不嫁, 而風操可尙). See Tian Rucheng, *Xihu youlan zhi* *Xihu youlan zhi yu* 11.20b. See also Xu Boling 徐伯齡, *Yin jing jun* 蟬精雋 15.11a-b; and Ni Tao 倪濤, *Liuyi zhi yi lu* 六藝之一錄 359.35b (*SKQS-dianziban*). Wang Duanshu also recorded Cao Miaoqing in her anthology, saying that Cao lived unmarried (老不適人). See Wang Duanshu, comp., *Mingyuan shiwei* 2.1b.

⁶⁴ See Cao Xuequan 曹學佺 (1574-1646), *Shicang lidai shixuan*, 石倉歷代詩選 262.25a-31b (*SKQS-dianziban*).

鐵崖晚歲寓居西湖，日與郊韶輩留連詩酒，乃舍泛語更爲清唱。首賦西湖竹枝詞若干首，一時從而和者數百家，雖婦人女子詩作亦爲收錄。

Yang not only included women poets in his anthology of contemporary writings of his literary coterie, but also compiled writings by individual women associates. He edited and compiled Cao Miaoqing's poetry into the *Xiange ji* 弦歌集, to which he also wrote a preface. In the preface, Yang defended her literary engagement and presented her as a model of a virtuous and talented woman.⁶⁵

The promotion of women's direct participation in literati culture was the very epitome of late Ming male poetry societies in the Jiangnan region. But like many literati in the late Ming, Yang Weizhen, a talented and eccentric literary figure, already in the Yuan-Ming transition period fashioned himself as a nonconformist, the *fengliu wenren*, living life independently as a retired literatus in cities with beautiful scenery such as Hangzhou and spending his time on poetry, women, and parties. What is the significance of Yang's choice with regard to the shift in intellectual orientation of the late Ming when withdrawal from office became a fashion? What were Yang's motives behind the compilation and promotion of women's poetry—a personal favour to his women associates; a gesture to demonstrate his eccentric, unique taste; a means by which to distance himself from official expectations; an alternative way to earn a living and gain authority outside government office; or all of the above?

Yang Weizhen's fame as an eccentric literary figure was unlikely of any value in advancing his career in officialdom, but significantly, it marked a beginning in new interests, attitudes, and tastes in terms of elite self-fashioning in the late imperial period.

⁶⁵ For a discussion about the preface to Cao Miaoqing's poetry collection *Xiange ji*, see Chapter 2, 149-53.

The Japanese scholar, Maeno Naoki 前野直彬, has found Yang Weizhen to be an “unconscious precursor” to such Ming poets as Li Mengyang 李夢陽 (1473-1530) and He Jingming 何景明 (1483-1521), members of the Former Seven Masters of the Archaist School, who, like Yang “harked back to the spirit and models of Han and pre-Han poetry.”⁶⁶ I would argue that Yang’s influence on the late Ming literati world was more general and multifaceted; it extended beyond the archaist poets. In particular, Yang’s choice of remaining out of office to develop his art, in the process creating an alternative unrestrained personality contrary to the traditional scholar-official ideal, provided a charming precedent for literati of the late Ming when withdrawal from office came into fashion.

However, Yang Weizhen was judged unfavourably by some of his contemporaries, such as Wang Yi 王彝 who criticized Yang of being a “literary devil” (文妖) because of the “debauched” women Yang kept in company. In the eyes of Wang Yi, these women were not human (非人); they were not the women who had moral consciousness about their proper place and roles in the family (非婦女而有室家之道).⁶⁷ But Wang Yi’s accusation does not seem to have had any influence on the “men of the mountains” of the Ming, who determined to follow in Yang’s footsteps.

⁶⁶ Cited in Goodrich and Fang, eds., *Dictionary of Ming Biography* 1551. But the *kanji* name of the Japanese scholar Maeno Naoki 前野直彬 appears here to be 前野真彬, which is obviously a typographical error.

⁶⁷ Wang Yi accused these women of being foxes because they remained unmarried but made their way out of the inner chambers to seek out men. See the entry for Wang Yi’s *Wang Changzong ji si juan, Bu yi yi juan, Xu bu yi yi juan* 王常宗集四卷補遺一卷續補遺一卷, in *Qinding Siku quanshu zongmu* 169.24a-25b, quotation 25a. See also *Mingshi* 285.16b. But the biography of Yang Weizhen by Edmund H. Worthy suggests otherwise: it was Wang Hui 王禕 (1323-74) who accused Yang Weizhen of being a “literary devil.” See Goodrich and Fang, eds., *Dictionary of Ming Biography* 1553. For the biographical information about Wang Hui, see Goodrich and Fang, eds., *Dictionary of Ming Biography* 1444-47. But the second character of the name of Wang Hui is incorrectly pronounced as “Wei.”

There is no evidence that suggested Yang Weizhen ever called himself a “man of the mountains,” but he was obviously regarded as such by late Ming eccentric literati. He was popular throughout the Ming, even among some prominent scholar-officials who were willing to associate with and to be seen as “men of mountains.” The prominent scholar-official Wang Shizhen referred to Yang Weizhen as “Tao Jingjie” 陶靖節 [Tao Qian] to highlight Yang’s aloof independence from worldly business,⁶⁸ even though Yang’s libertine life in the city Hangzhou in the late Yuan had little in common with Tao Qian’s farm life in villages of medieval Jiangzhou (Jiangxi province). Yang’s writings were collected, edited, and compiled by Ming literati.⁶⁹ His collections were reprinted in the late Ming, especially those of light literature; an edition of Yang’s *Lüchuang nüshi* 綠窗女史, the encyclopaedia of “women’s matters” even received illustrations.⁷⁰ Episodes regarding his eccentricity, nonconformity, and hedonism, such as the one about how he used a woman’s shoe as a wine cup (*xie bei* 鞋杯) to drink wine and composed poems on the subject, were repeatedly told with appreciation by Ming eccentric literati.⁷¹

Qian Qianyi included Yang Weizhen in the *Liechao shiji*, an extensive anthology of Ming poetry that he compiled. Qian referred to Yang as a “*yimin*” 逸民 (the untrammelled), rather than “*yinshi*” 隱士 (recluse) or “*yimin* 遺民 (loyalist). Wang

⁶⁸ See Wang Shizhen, *Yanzhou sibu gao* 149.2b-3a.

⁶⁹ According to Cao Xuequan, Feng Kaizhi 馮開之 [Feng Mengzhen] obtained the *Xihu zhuzhi ci* from Xu Maowu 徐茂吳 [Xu Gui 徐桂]. Later, Xu Bo 徐 [火+勃] (courtesy name Xingong 興公) selected twenty-nine poems to make a new collection. When Cao Xuequan compiled the huge poetry anthology, the *Shicang lidai shixuan*, he attached the *Xihu zhuzhi ci* to the end of Yang Weizhen’s writings. See Cao Xuequan, *Shicang lidai shixuan* 262.26a-32a.

⁷⁰ See Goodrich and Fang, eds., *Dictionary of Ming Biography* 1552; Zurndorfer, “Women in the Epistemological Strategy of Chinese Encyclopedia” 373-74, especially note 83. See also Fong, “Female Hands” 22-23.

⁷¹ See Tian Rucheng, *Xihu youlan zhi* *Xihu youlan zhi yu* 11.14b-15a; see also the poem entitled “Xiebei ge” 鞋杯歌 by Chen Qianshan 陳潛山 (*juren*, 1564), in Shen Jiyu, comp., *Zuili shixi* 13.48a-49a.

Duanshu followed Qian's practice by including Cao Miaoqing and Zhang Miaoqing, two women who exchanged poetry with Yang, in the Front Collection (Qianji 前集) of her anthology of Ming women, the *Mingyuan shiwei*. She referred to them as “*nü yimin*” 女逸民 (unfettered women).⁷² Apparently, these nonconformist poets of both men and women were valued in the late Ming literati world.

Defining the Late Ming *Shanren*

In a pioneering study of the late Ming *shanren* as a social group, the Japanese scholar Suzuki Tadashi 鈴木正 observes that there was a sharp increase in the use of the term *shanren* and its variants as a style name in the Ming as compared to previous periods.⁷³ Indeed, late Ming unrestrained literati who preferred an independent life to government service often called themselves *shanren* (men of mountains), *kuangfu* 狂夫 (madmen), *daoren* 道人 (Daoist person), *zhui ren* 贅人 (the useless person), *feiren* 廢人 (the cripple), *jiren* 畸人 (the eccentric), *buyi* (commoners), *ciren* 詞人 (poets), or *caizi* 才子 (the talented). Many leading literati of the late Ming used these terms as their style names. For example, Wang Yin styled himself “Man of the Ten Mountains,” Huang Xingceng “Man of the Five Mountains,” Zhou Tianqiu 周天球 (1514-95, known by his courtesy name Gongxia 公瑕) “Man of the Jade Mountains” 群玉山人,⁷⁴ and Hu Yinglin 胡應麟 (1551-1602) “The Mountain Man of Shaoshi” 少室山人.⁷⁵ The famous literatus-painter

⁷² See Wang Duanshu, comp., *Mingyuan shiwei*, the Front Collection (Qianji 前集).

⁷³ See Suzuki Tadashi, “Mindai sanjin kō” 明代山人考 358-63.

⁷⁴ For his biographical information and a reproduction of a calligraphic work by him, see Tseng Yu-ho Ecke, *Poetry on the Wind* 50-51.

⁷⁵ For his English biography, see Goodrich and Fang, eds., *Dictionary of Ming Biography* 645-47.

Xu Wei used “*Shanyin buyi*” 山陰布衣, “*Qingteng shanren*” 青藤山人, and “*Jiren*” 畸人 as his style names.⁷⁶ Chen Jiru, the most celebrated “man of the mountains” in the Ming, called himself *zhui ren* 贅人 and *dao ren* 道人. Tang Yin 唐寅 (1470-1523, courtesy name Bohu 伯虎) called himself the “Number One Free Romantic Talent of Jiangnan” 江南第一風流才子.⁷⁷ These men completely abandoned all political ambitions but achieved great reputation as accomplished writers and artists. Regardless of the differences among these terms, these eccentrics can be subsumed under the common category of “men of the mountains.” They shared much in common: they were essentially 1) “useless” (in terms of not serving in government office); 2) self-indulgent; and 3) talented. The sudden and sharp rise of literate and literary courtesans was closely connected to a lifestyle of men of letters of this kind.

(1) *Shanren and Reclusion*

According to Suzuki, the term *shanren* originally appeared in the *Zuozhuan* 左傳.⁷⁸ It referred to the low-ranking officials who administered “mountains and forests” (山林). It was not until the Tang and Song that the term started to be used to refer to those who held no office and official ranks. The biography of Yang Zhi 楊真 (*jinshi* 1042) in the *Songshi* 宋史 contains an explicit statement that “‘men of the mountains’ was a title for

⁷⁶ For Xu Wei’s biography, see Goodrich and Fang, eds., *Dictionary of Ming Biography* 609-12. See also Qian Qianyi, *Liechao shiji xiaozhuan* 560-62.

⁷⁷ For his English biography, see Goodrich and Fang, eds., *Dictionary of Ming Biography* 1256-59. For a reproduction of a painting by him and a brief introduction, see Tseng Yu-ho Ecke, *Poetry on the Wind* 18-19.

⁷⁸ Suzuki, “Mindai sanjin kō” 385 (note 1).

those who had no official salary or position” (山人無祿位之稱).⁷⁹ Therefore, by *shanren*, they meant “commoners,” set against the category of serving officials.

However, compared to the lofty hermits of the past such as Xu You 許由, Chaofu 巢父, Boyi 伯夷 and Shuqi 叔齊, who really lived in the mountains of the Qi 箕, Ying 穎, or Shouyang 首陽 to cultivate their moral self, late Ming “men of the mountains” were commonly the literary descendants of Yang Weizhen, the unconventional literatus who withdrew from office but actively engaged in a sort of libertine life in urban areas to maintain only the spirit of being the “man of the mountains.” It is noteworthy that late Ming literati consciously separated “*yi*” 逸 (the unfettered) from “*yinyi*” 隱逸, the more general term for recluses or hermits used in historical writings, to idealize the untrammelled aspect. To situate the late Ming retired literati in the longstanding traditions that associated eccentricity with religious eremitism, Chen Jiru collected the unfettered people of the past up until the late Yuan together into the *Yimin shi* 逸民史 (preface dated 1603). In the preface to the book, Wang Heng 王衡 (1564-1607) emphasized the difference between “*yin*” (reclusion) and “*yi*” (being unfettered), saying that reclusion was a matter that occurred in the era of decadence (衰世之事) while being unfettered is comparable to an unruly god or an immortal. He states, “It is like the flying cloud or the rising rainbow—people can see it with their eyes, but they cannot control, grasp, and fetter it” (如雲飛虹起, 有目者何嘗不見? 第不得而控揣之, 繫之, 羈之云耳).⁸⁰ It is obvious that this group of people did not want to serve in office, but did not want to live in isolation either. On the contrary, they wanted to live as a visible and

⁷⁹ “Mindai sanjin kō” 385 (note 1).

⁸⁰ Chen Jiru, comp., *Yimin shi* 274.

active cultural community. The sense of community and friendship was an essential part of their lifestyle which coalesced in the development of myriad literary circles.

This flexible and hedonist mode of withdrawal was romanticized and commonly called “*shiyin*” 市隱 (reclusion in the marketplace),⁸¹ *seyin* 色隱 (reclusion in the arms of pretty women)⁸² and *liyin* 吏隱 (reclusion in office).⁸³ Although they actively engaged in a wide range of secular enjoyments in town with friends (including women), spiritually, they were all “men of the mountains.” But this kind of withdrawal was criticized by contemporaries for it opened the way for pretence. As Shen Defu 沈德符 (1578-1642) points out:

The reputation of *shanren* was originally sound.... However, during recent decades, those commoners that send their poetry scrolls out everywhere to impress those in power also call themselves *shanren*. It appeared in the early years of Jiajing and flourished in recent years of our emperor [Wanli].⁸⁴

山人之名本重....不意數十年來出遊無籍輩,以詩卷遍贄達官,亦謂之山人. 始於嘉靖初年. 盛於今上之近歲.

⁸¹ Some Ming literati used the term “*shiyin*” to name their private gardens or their literary collections to express their unique taste and intent. For example, Yao Zhe 姚淞, courtesy name Yuanbai 元白, used “*shiyin*” to name both his garden (*Shiyin yuan* 市隱園) and the literary collection by him and his son (*Shiyin yuan shiwen* 市隱園詩文). See the entry on *Shiyin yuan shiwen* 市隱園詩文, in *Qinding Siku quanshu zongmu* 192.52b-53a. The garden was located in the east side of the Qinhuai River of Nanjing with the courtesan’s quarters in its neighbourhood. Many leading literati such as Wang Shizhen and Zhou Tianqiu, a famous painter from Suzhou, visited and wrote about it. Some years later, Gong Dingzi and Gu Mei also had a garden named “*Shiyin yuan*” where they entertained friends. I cannot determine if it was the same garden.

⁸² For a discussion of the association of literati’s obsessions with women and their career setbacks, see Martin W. Huang, “Sentiments of Desire” 163-64.

⁸³ Wang Heng claimed he “hid” himself in office. See his preface to *Yimin shi* compiled by Chen Jiru, reprinted in *Siku quanshu cunmu congshu, shibu*, vol. 115: 274-656; the word “*li yin*” appeared on 276.

⁸⁴ See the entry on “*Shanren minghao*” 山人名號 in Shen Defu, *Wanli ye huo bian* 萬歷野獲編, *juan* 23: 585.

Criticism also came from “men of the mountains” themselves. Xue Gang 薛岡 (*jinshi* 1464) was called a “man of the mountains” by friends, but he declined such a title:

Those that consciously cultivated the self often called themselves “men of the mountains,” a worthy title. However, nowadays in the capital city of Chang’an,⁸⁵ commoners all call themselves “men of the mountains” regardless of the gap between them and “men of the mountains” of the past, a gap that is as huge as the one between oxen and good horses. Other people also call them “men of the mountains” regardless of the gap between them and “men of the mountains” of the past, a gap that is as huge as the one between oxen and good horses. They really do not know what they are talking about.⁸⁶

清修之士常號山人，美稱也。今長安中無位而遊者，不分牛驥皆自稱山人；人亦不分牛驥從而山人之。誠不省其何說。

In spite of various criticisms, the “men of the mountains” and their lifestyle became idealized and fashionable in the late Ming. Some officials also used the term *shanren* as their style names, which indicates their willingness to be seen as men of letters of this kind. He Jingming was styled “Dafu shanren” 大復山人, Wang Shizhen “Yanzhou shanren” 弇州山人, and Li Weizhen 李維楨 (1547-1626, courtesy name 本寧) “Dabi shanren” 大泌山人.⁸⁷ Suzuki refers to this type of *shanren* as the “officials of the mountains” (*guandai shanren* 冠帶山人), set against the “unfettered men of the

⁸⁵ The term Chang’an is used to refer to the capital city Beijing.

⁸⁶ Xue Gang, *Tianjue tang bi yu* 天爵堂筆餘, *juan* 3. As quoted in Chen Wanyi 陳萬益, *Wan Ming xiaopin yu Mingji wenren shenghuo* 晚明小品與明季文人生活 47 (note 25).

⁸⁷ For Li Weizhen’s biographical information, see *Mingshi* 288.1b-2b.

mountains” (*yimin shanren* 逸民山人).⁸⁸ In commenting on the collection *Eryou wei tan* 二酉委談 by the scholar-official Wang Shimao 王世禱, brother of Wang Shizhen, the Qing *Siku* editors sighed with pity that “the lifestyle of the ‘man of the mountains’ gradually polluted scholar-officials” (山人習氣漸染及於士大夫也).⁸⁹

Yuan Zhongdao 袁中道 (1570-1623), brother of Yuan Hongdao, attributed this problematic attitude towards office and withdrawal to literati’s excessive emotions. According to him, literati did not want to seek high office because they had “hard bones” 骨剛 (moral integrity). But they could not completely forget this world either, because they had excessive feelings (情膩). “Hard bones” made them have no choice but to seek ways of escaping from worldly business while excessive feelings prevented them from truly living in isolation. That was why withdrawal was on their lips while their bodies were still in the office (於是口常言隱, 而身常處宦). Nevertheless, they were also one kind of celebrity (*mingliu* 名流) because they followed their true hearts.⁹⁰

Nevertheless, the “officials of the mountains” are not the focus of this study. The reason for this lies in the fact that although their special attention to or association with the *shanren* group greatly added much to fuel the rapid rise of the *shanren* culture, generally, they were not the keen supporters of courtesans and poetry of this group of women. The “black gauze hat” (*wusha mao*) obstructed them just as it obstructed Yuan Hongdao.⁹¹

⁸⁸ Suzuki, “Mindai sanjin kō” 365.

⁸⁹ See the entry on *Er you wei tan* in *Qinding Siku quanshu zongmu* 144.14b; see also the entry on *Xie shi ji* 諧史集 by Zhu Weifan 朱維藩, in *Qinding Siku quanshu zongmu* 144.37b-38a.

⁹⁰ Yuan Zhongdao, “[Dongyou] ji shi” [東遊] 記十, in *Kexue zhai ji* 珂雪齋集, vol. 2: 572-73.

⁹¹ See my discussion in the Introduction, 22-23.

Maybe because of the pretence of the late Ming “men of mountains,” the “Yinyi zhuan” 隱逸傳 (biographies of recluses) in the official history of the Ming dynasty, the *Mingshi*, includes only twelve men throughout the entire dynasty. Among the twelve men recorded in the *Mingshi* as recluses, only three lived in the mid- and late Ming, the high point of literati withdrawal in the Ming.⁹² The three men are Sun Yiyuan 孫一元 (courtesy name Taichu 太初), Shen Zhou 沈周 (1427-1509, courtesy name 啓南),⁹³ and Chen Jiru. Even though these men are recorded as the “genuine recluses,” they all actually dwelled in prosperous cities and enjoyed companionship of refined friends and even courtesans.⁹⁴ Sun Yiyuan and Chen Jiru lived in Hangzhou while Shen Zhou was a native of Suzhou. As the earliest model of the Ming “men of the mountains,” Sun Yiyuan was remembered by many late Ming *shanren* literati. Visiting his tomb in Hangzhou became a habitual practice for not only literati but also courtesans, as evidenced by their poems.⁹⁵

(2) *Shanren and Nonconformity*

Late Ming “men of the mountains” were commonly eccentrics. They often claimed to be eccentric or liked to be seen as eccentrics. Chen Jiru had an obsession with flowers (花

⁹² *Mingshi* 298, “Mulu” 14a-b.

⁹³ For his English biography, see Goodrich and Fang, eds., *Dictionary of Ming Biography* 1173-77.

⁹⁴ As I have mentioned, Chen Jiru exchanged poetry with the courtesans Wang Wei and Yang Wan. Although I am not very certain if Shen Zhou had an intimate relationship with specific courtesans, his song lyric entitled “To the Tune *Linjiang xian*: Inscribed on a Painting by the Courtesan Lin Nu’er” 臨江仙: 題妓林奴兒畫 indicates his appreciation for Lin Nu’er’s talent. For the song lyric, see Shen Zhou, *Shitian shiyu* 石田詩餘 1239.

⁹⁵ See, for example, Wang Wei’s poem entitled “Chu dong bai Sun Taichu mu tong Youxia zhu zi” 初冬拜孫太初墓同友夏諸子, in Zhong Xing, comp., (attrib.) *Mingyuan shigui* 名媛詩歸, *juan* 36, reprinted in *Siku quanshu cunmu congshu, jibu*, vol. 339: 416.

癖)⁹⁶ while Yuan Hongdao was obsessed with beautiful women (青娥癖).⁹⁷ Zhang Dai 張岱 (1597-1679) praised Qi Zhixiang's 祁止祥 (*juren* 舉人 1627) "deep feelings" (深情) and "genuine quality" (真氣) on the basis of Qi's obsessions with calligraphy and painting (書畫癖), ball-playing (蹴鞠癖), *bo*-instrument playing (鼓鉞癖), ghost plays (鬼戲癖), dramatic performances (梨園癖), and so forth.⁹⁸ The Suzhou eccentric *buyi* literatus Bu Shunnian 卜舜年 placed a poster on his door, advertising himself as "an unmatched scholar hated by all my countrymen" (鄉人皆惡國士無雙).⁹⁹ Distancing themselves from the business of the world, they ignored everything outside of developing their personal and unique selves.

These nonconformist literati gave up seeking for office but they never gave up the effort to seek for fame and create a unique self. As Yuan Hongdao admitted, "It is easy for people to resign an official post but it is difficult to get rid of the desire for fame."¹⁰⁰ Engaging in romantic relationships with pretty women was often claimed by literati to be a means by which to overcome their career setbacks and achieve "immortality." As the late Ming writer Wei Yong 衛泳 declared, "When a man cannot find anyone to appreciate his talent and when he cannot find any opportunity to fulfill his genuine desire

⁹⁶ See Chen Jiru, "Hua shi ti ci" 花史題辭, in He Fuzheng, comp., *Wenzhang bianti huixuan* 363.11a-b.

⁹⁷ See Yuan Hongdao, "Yu Pan Jingsheng shu" 與潘景升書, in He Fuzheng, comp., *Wenzhang bianti huixuan* 265.27b-28a.

⁹⁸ See the entry on "Qi Zhixiang pi" 祁止祥癖, in Zhang Dai 張岱 (1597-1679), *Tao'an mengyi* 陶庵夢憶, *juan* 4, reprinted in *Xuxiu Sikuquanshu, zibu*, vol. 1260: 350-51. "Zhixiang" was the given name of the famous late Ming painter and calligrapher Qi Zhijia 祁豸佳 who studied painting under Dong Qichang. He was the younger brother of Qi Biaojia 祁彪佳 (1602-45), a Ming loyalist, husband of the noted woman poet Shang Jinglan.

⁹⁹ See the entry "Bu xiucai Shunnian" 卜秀才舜年, in Shen Jiyou, comp., *Zuili shixi* 18.9a-b. Bu wrote a poem to the famous late Ming woman painter Xu Ansheng 徐安生, entitled "Hua zhu ge ji nülang Xu Ansheng" 畫竹歌寄女郎徐安生, in Shen Jiyou, comp., *Zuili shixi* 18.10a-11b.

¹⁰⁰ As quoted in Chih-p'ing Chou, *Yuan Hung-tao and the Kung-an School* 96.

(*zhenqing* 真情) of seeking glory and success in public service, he will seek compensation in love for a pretty woman.”¹⁰¹ This point of view was shared by many literati in the late Ming and the Ming-Qing transition. In his preface to Li Yu’s *Xianqing ouji* 閒情偶記, You Tong 尤侗 (1618-1704) explicitly stated that “frustrated men of talent seek solace in pursuits of sensual pleasure” (聲色者才人之寄旅).¹⁰² In his preface to Xu Shijun’s 徐士俊 (1602-81) *Shimei yao* 十眉謠, Zhang Chao 張潮 also claimed,

If a man cannot rapidly reach the high official positions with pride and integrity, he should be sitting in front of the green window and talking intimately with beautiful women. Everyday in the morning to make them up by painting their eyebrows with the *luozi* kohl is not bad at all.¹⁰³

大丈夫苟不能干雲直上，吐氣揚眉，便須坐綠牕前，與諸美人共相眉語。當曉妝時日爲染螺子黛，亦殊不惡。

Feng Menglong, one of the most famous Ming advocates of love, even insisted that the achievement in romantic love should be considered a fourth in addition to the three established kinds of cultural immortality of men (三不朽): namely, establishing their virtue, establishing their deeds, and establishing their words (立德, 立功, 立言).¹⁰⁴ The identity of the Confucian educated man shifted from the traditional scholar-official ideal to that of a nonconformist personality. They lost office, but they found an untrammelled self.

¹⁰¹ As quoted and translated by Martin W. Huang, in “Sentiments of Desire” 163.

¹⁰² See Martin W. Huang, “Sentiments of Desire” 164, note 37. I have used Huang’s translation of this statement.

¹⁰³ See Zhang Chao, “Shimei yao xiaoyin” 十眉謠小引, in *Xiang yan cong shu* 香艷叢書, vol. 1: 11a.

¹⁰⁴ See Feng Menglong, “Qingxian qu xu” 情仙曲序, as quoted in Martin W. Huang, “Sentiments of Desire” 165.

(3) *Shanren and Poetry*

Like Yang Weizhen, late Ming “men of mountains” were often multitalented literati being skilled in many artistic fields such as poetry, calligraphy, and painting. But poetry writing held a special position in the *shanren* ideology. Poetry writing in literary gatherings formed an important part of the everyday life of retired literati. Unlike Yang Weizhen, whose collected works included a small portion of poetry, late Ming *shanren* devoted particular efforts towards poetry, and in many late Ming writings, the term *shanren* itself became exclusive to poets, *shiren* (詩人). In the *Liechao shiji*, Qian Qianyi recorded over fifty *shanren* poets, the largest number of *shanren* poets ever recorded in anthologies.¹⁰⁵ Huang Zongxi 黃宗羲 (1610-95) also pointed out the category of poets had long been constituted by “men of mountains” and recluses (自來所謂詩人者, 多山人處士).¹⁰⁶ When satirizing the late Ming pretentious “men of mountains” and fake “sages,” Li Zhi writes,

If one has good fortune and is able to compose poetry, then he calls himself a “man of the mountains.” If he is not fortunate and is unable to write poetry, then he shirks being a “man of the mountains,” but is known as a “sage.” If one has good fortune and is able to discourse on “innate good knowledge,” then he calls himself a “sage.” If he is not fortunate and is unable to discourse on “innate good knowledge,” then he declines to be a “sage, but is called a “man of the mountains.” They turn things

¹⁰⁵ Suzuki, “Mindai sanjin kō” 362.

¹⁰⁶ See Huang Zongxi, “Dong Shunzi muzhiming” 董巽子墓志銘, in *Huang Lizhou wenji* 黃梨洲文集 250.

topsy-turvy in order to snatch some advantage for themselves. They may be known as “men of the mountains,” but their mind is the same as a merchant’s. They may speak of the Way and its virtue, but their aim is that [of a burglar who] bores a hole [in a wall].¹⁰⁷

Regardless of the validity of Li Zhi’s accusation of pretence against his contemporary literati, it is obvious that “men of the mountains” was identified with men of poetic talent.

Why was the writing of poetry in the Ming identified so closely to withdrawal from government office? The late Ming literatus-calligrapher He Sanwei 何三畏 (courtesy name Shiyi 士抑, *juren* 1582), a friend of Dong Qichang and Chen Jiru, explains:

The Tang used poetry in the examination system. Therefore, many scholars devoted exclusive efforts to it. However, in our dynasty, the examination system valued exclusively the art of prose. If people are not willing to put their efforts into prose writing, that means they are determined to block their gateway to officialdom. Accordingly, they start talking about poetry and practicing the four rhymes. It is likely that prose composition is the badge of scholar-officials while poetry writing is that of the *shanren*.¹⁰⁸

唐以詩賦制科, 故士必攻詩. 我朝之制科也, 則以文藝. 士勿攻文者, 絕意登庸之道, 于是, 始言詩, 而習四韻矣. 蓋文者士人之羔雉, 而詩者山人之羔雉 [雉] 也.

¹⁰⁷ Li Zhi, “Fu Jiao Ruohou” 復焦弱侯, in *Fen shu* 焚書, *juan* 2, quoted in Suzuki, “Mindai sanjin kō” 379, translation by Peterson, in *Bitter Gourd* 131.

¹⁰⁸ He Sanwei, “Jizhu cao xu” 擊築草序, in *Shuliu zhai ji* 漱六齋集, *juan* 18. The Chinese text is quoted in Suzuki, “Mindai sanjin kō” 364.

It is common knowledge that poetry was the most primary among the orthodox and dominant genres in Chinese literature. In the Tang and at times during the Song, poetic composition was an essential part of the civil examination. From Yuan times, this element was eliminated from civil service examinations, allowing poetic talent to develop as a value outside of official interests. During the Ming, the so-called eight-legged essay (*bagu wen*) was exclusively used to select officials,¹⁰⁹ for educated elite men who chose to remain out of office, poetic endeavour was explicitly a political statement of withdrawal rather than merely a matter of a literati amateur hobby.

Indeed, the concept of amateur is not wholly consistent with Ming educated elite ideals. Their approach to aesthetics emphasized cultivated appreciation or Epicureanism that went beyond anything conveyed by the English term, “amateur.” In this regard, I question some of the conclusions of Joseph R. Levenson.¹¹⁰ In the pioneering study of the amateur ideal in the late Ming and early Qing, Levenson examined some Chinese intellectual traditions, such as anti-intellectualism and anti-professionalism, as reflected in painting in the Ming and the early Qing. He attributed these traditions to Confucian education and the civil examination system. According to him, because of the close connection between examination system and bureaucracy, high degrees equated high political power and social status. Officials were trained academically and brilliant in many fields, such as classics, literature, calligraphy, and painting, but they did not have particular special knowledge. Levenson terms this all-rounded Confucian literati model

¹⁰⁹ According to Benjamin A. Elman, an examination essay style that was specifically called the “eight-legged” style appeared for the first time in the early years of the Ming Chenghua 成化 reign (1465-87). See Elman, “Classical Reasoning” 374.

¹¹⁰ For a detailed discussion about the so-called amateur ideal of literati in the Ming and early Qing from the painting point of view, see Joseph R. Levenson, “The Amateur Ideal in Ming and Early-Ch’ing Society,” in John Fairbank, ed., *Chinese Thought and Institutions* 320-41.

an “amateur ideal.” He concludes that “Chinese officials were amateurs in office” and this amateur culture reached its high point during the Ming and the early Qing.¹¹¹

Levenson’s conclusions were based on assumptions that “[a]rtistic style and a cultivated knowledge of the approved canon of ancient works” were “mainly the qualities tested in the state examinations” in the Ming and that late Ming literati-artists were also those who held power in *office* [emphasis mine]. But this assessment is both perceptive and partial. In particular, his “amateur” ideal of the all-rounded “gentry-literati-officials”¹¹² fails to account for those multitalented literati who chose to remain out of office, devoting themselves fully to the production of artistic works. Many of these individuals were professional artists who depended on their artistic works for a living.¹¹³

Nevertheless, it was precisely because of the lost privileged status of poetry in civil examinations that writing poetry was considered by some people a “womanly” work. The Suzhou woman poet Lu Qingzi, wife of the *shanren* literatus Zhao Yiguang explicitly claimed, “Poetry is definitely not the calling of men; it is really what belongs by right to us women.”¹¹⁴ This view on poetry helps us understand why late Ming women wrote *shi* poetry¹¹⁵ or occasionally, other lighter literary genres such as *ci*, *qu* lyrics, and *chuanqi* drama. Women’s culture was indeed defined by and defined the fashions and values of contemporary literati culture.

¹¹¹ “The Amateur Ideal in Ming and Early-Ch’ing Society” 320-325, quotations on 320, 321.

¹¹² “The Amateur Ideal in Ming and Early-Ch’ing Society” 338.

¹¹³ For example, Chen Jiru earned a living by being a private tutor. He received fifty *mu* 畝 of land from the father of one of his disciples. See Zhang Huijian, *Ming Qing Jiangsu wenren nianbiao* 348. Xu Wei earned a living by selling his essays. See Kai-wing Chow, “Writing for Success: Printing, Examination, and Intellectual Change in Late Ming China,” *Late Imperial China* 17.1 (1996): 120-57.

¹¹⁴ See the preface by Lu Qingzi to *Yongxue zhai yigao* by Xiang Lanzhen. Translation by Fong, in Chang and Saussy, *Women Writers of Traditional China* 686.

¹¹⁵ For a detailed discussion about the late Ming and early Qing anthologies of women’s poetry including that by courtesans, see Chapter 2 of this dissertation.

Shanren, Courtesans, and Poetry Societies

Guo Shaoyu 郭紹虞 (1893-1984) investigated the development of literati circles that appeared during the Ming.¹¹⁶ He recorded one hundred and seventy-six literati societies distributed mostly in Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Fujian, and Guangdong. He has made two observations. First, participants in poetry societies were unconcerned about official and political matters while those who participated in prose societies commonly were. The reason for this trend, as I discussed above, lies in the exclusion of poetry and the rising importance of classical prose in civil examinations during the Ming. Second, participants in societies organized in earlier periods of the late Ming were concerned about personal enjoyment instead of political issues while during the very end of the Ming when the dynasty was on the verge of imminent collapse, educated elites started to use their networks in literary societies to influence political situations in the court. This was the context of the rise of the political-literary societies—the *Fu she* and *Ji she*.¹¹⁷

From Guo's study, we can see there were various kinds of organizations for social gatherings during the late Ming. Some were exclusively for prominent officials who retired from office while others were organized for examination candidates. In some societies, writing poetry was a very important aspect while in some others it was not. Some societies had clear membership guidelines and strict regulations while people in other societies were loosely connected.¹¹⁸ In some societies, the time, location, and the

¹¹⁶ For information on late Ming literati societies including the poetry societies of the *shanren*, see Guo Shaoyu, "Mingdai wenren jieshe nianbiao" 明代文人結社年表 and "Mingdai de wenren jituan," in Guo Shaoyu, *Zhaoyushi gudian wenxue lunji* 498-512, 518-610.

¹¹⁷ See Guo Shaoyu, "Mingdai de wenren jituan" 585-96.

¹¹⁸ Many membership guidelines (社約) are included in Tao Ting 陶珽, comp., *Shuofu xu* 說郭續, reprinted in *Xuxiu Siku quanshu, zibu* 子部, vol. 1191: 374-91.

number of their meetings in a certain period of time were recorded in the membership guidelines while others kept irregular schedules.¹¹⁹

Guo Shaoyu provided a general overview of male societies in the late Ming. But as with Suzuki, he did not have in mind courtesans or literary women in general when he undertook the investigation into Ming literati circles. Nor did he pay special attention to poetry societies of the “men of the mountains” who closely identified with talented courtesans. Compared to their counterparts in the Yuan recorded in the *Qinglou ji* who were essentially good at singing the *qu* drama, late Ming courtesans were more the descendants of Cao Miaoqing, the multitalented gentry woman who actively participated in Yang Weizhen’s literary circles in Hangzhou. Indeed, male poetry societies of the Ming were instrumental in this change, for they formed a venue where talented courtesans were taught, cultivated, and promoted by unrestrained literati.

It is striking, but not surprising, that the “men of the mountains” of the late Ming all clustered in the cities of Jiangnan, where the courtesan quarters were located, even though not all of the *shanren* literati were natives of this region. As Zou Diguang 鄒迪光 (1550-1626), a friend of Chen Jiru, notes, “Nowadays, the ‘men of mountains’ flourish like forests. However, they all swarmed into San Wu [Jiangsu] and Liang Yue [Zhejiang]. There are few in other regions and almost none in Guangdong and Guangxi” (今之爲山人者林林矣, 然皆三吳兩越, 而他方殊少, 粵東西絕無一二).¹²⁰

This regional distribution of “men of mountains” of the Ming also can be observed from the biographies of Ming poets provided by Qian Qianyi. In his *Liechao*

¹¹⁹ For this summary, I have also consulted the unpublished master thesis of Huang Zhimin 黃志民, “Mingren shishe yanjiu” 明人詩社研究.

¹²⁰ “Yu Chen Xiaohe” 與陳小翮, in Zou Diguang, *Shiyu zhai ji* 石語齋集, *juan* 23, reprinted in *Siku quanshu cunmu congshu, jibu*, vol. 159: 365.

shiji, Qian recorded twelve *shanren* poets from the early Ming, of which six were from Jiangbei (North of the Yangzi River) and six from Jiangnan. However, during the mid and late Ming, the heyday of the *shanren* culture, a total of forty-four *shanren* poets were recorded, forty-two of whom were from Jiangnan. These figures demonstrate that the time and place in which “men of the mountains” of the Ming flourished coincides with the period and region in which courtesan culture and women’s culture in general flourished.

Suzhou was one of the most advanced urban centers in the Ming and Qing. Particularly, Suzhou played a leading role in the early Ming developments in literati culture. The first poetry society of the Ming recorded in Guo Shaoyu is the “Beiguo shi she” 北郭詩社 organized in Suzhou by Gao Qi 高啓 (1336-74) in the first year of the Hongwu 洪武 era (1368-98). During the mid- and late Ming, Suzhou continued to play a leading role in opening new fashions. Leading literati-artists who were natives of Suzhou include luminaries of poetry, painting, and calligraphic arts, such as Shen Zhou, Wen Zhengming 文徵明 (1470-1559),¹²¹ Tang Yin, Zhu Yunming 祝允明 (1461-1527, known by his style name Zhishan 枝山),¹²² Wang Chong 王寵 (1494-1533),¹²³ Zhou Tianqiu, Zhang Fengyi 張鳳翼 (1527-1613),¹²⁴ Zhang Xianyi 張獻翼 (1531?-1601, known by his courtesy name Youyu 幼玉, brother of Fengyi),¹²⁵ Wang Zhideng, and Fan Yunlin.¹²⁶

¹²¹ For his English biography, see Goodrich and Fang, eds., *Dictionary of Ming Biography* 1471-74.

¹²² For his English biography, see *Dictionary of Ming Biography* 392-97.

¹²³ For his English biography, see *Dictionary of Ming Biography* 1368-69.

¹²⁴ For Zhang Fengyi’s biographical information, see Qian Qianyi, *Liechao shiji xiaozhuan* 483-84.

¹²⁵ For Zhang Xianyi’s biographical information, see Qian Qianyi, *Liechao shiji xiaozhuan* 452-53.

¹²⁶ For an introduction of a catalogue of fan paintings including those by some Suzhou artists, see Tseng Yu-ho Ecke, ed., *Poetry on the Wind*.

The Suzhou literati circle as a whole had great influence on the literati societies in other cities of Jiangnan, especially neighbouring cities. The well-known scholar Zhang Dai, a native of Hangzhou, was disturbed by the fact that people in his native home blindly followed Suzhou fashions: “We people of Zhe[jiang] have no judgment of our own. We spare no effort to imitate whatever is fashionable in Suzhou (吾浙人極無主見, 蘇人所尚, 極力摹仿).¹²⁷ Fan Lian 范濂 pointed out that the Suzhou literati trend had a profound influence on its neighbour city Songjiang. He wrote:

Learning poetry, painting, and calligraphy flourish the most in Suzhou. Recently, the practice has gradually spread to Songjiang. Accordingly, friends all form poetry societies. As soon as a topic is assigned, they would start to write poetry.¹²⁸

學詩, 學畫, 學書, 三者稱蘇州爲盛. 近來此風沿入松江. 朋輩皆結爲詩社, 命題就草.

Yuan Hongdao, a former Suzhou magistrate, also reports, “In the city of Wu [Suzhou], poems and paintings are as numerous as trees; the “men of mountains” are as numerous as mosquitoes; and officials are as numerous as clouds” (吳中詩畫如林, 山人如蚊, 冠蓋如雲).¹²⁹ Apparently, the prosperous and beautiful city attracted not only “men of the mountains,” but also serving officials. Yuan Hongdao quit his post exactly because non-officials in Suzhou enjoyed a more refined and pleasant lifestyle than did the local magistrate.

¹²⁷ Zhang Dai, “You yu Yiru ba di” 又與穀儒八弟, in *Langhuan wenji* 瑯嬛文集, *juan* 3: 142.

¹²⁸ Fan Lian, *Yunjian jumu chao* 雲間據目抄, *juan* 2, reprinted *Biji xiaoshuo daguan* 筆記小說大觀, vol. 6: 511.

¹²⁹ Yuan Hongdao, “Wang Yiming” 王以明, in *Yuan Zhonglang quanji* 606.

However, Suzhou *shanren* were not confined in Suzhou. To the contrary, they often traveled to join poetry societies in other cities of Jiangnan, such as Nanjing and Hangzhou. For example, Wang Zhideng was the leading figure in the literati circles of Suzhou, his native place, but he also stood at the core of the “Jinling she” 金陵社, that attracted hundreds of poets from all over. His lover Ma Xianglan was a courtesan in Nanjing. Moreover, Wang Zhideng also joined the Nanping she 南屏社 in Hangzhou, of which many famous unconventional figures such as Wang Daokun 汪道昆 (1525-93) and his brothers Wang Daoguan 汪道貫 and Wang Daohui 汪道會, Wang Shizhen, Tu Long, Xu Gui 徐桂 [Xu Maowu 徐茂吳], and Pan Zhiheng 潘之恆 (1556-1622, courtesy name 景升),¹³⁰ were members. Almost all of them were untrammelled literati commoners who had connections with courtesans.

As with men, courtesans of Suzhou also traveled for meetings with literati in other regions. The famous Suzhou courtesan Xue Susu was so attracted to the scenic villa of Feng Kaizhi 馮開之 [Feng Mengzhen 馮夢禎] (1548-1605), the “Kuaixue tang” 快雪堂 in Hangzhou that she came from a great distance to visit him.¹³¹

Nanjing, as the southern capital of the Ming, was the most important center for literary gatherings, especially for the *shanren* literati. After Zhu Yuanzhang founded the Ming dynasty in Jinling (Nanjing), he established an entertainer compound for the purposes of hosting public functions. Entertainment houses were accordingly lined up side by side along the banks of the Qinhuai River. Zhu Yuanzhang could never have foreseen that one day these courtesan quarters would become more attractive than

¹³⁰ For Pan Zhiheng's biographical information, see Qian Qianyi, *Liechao shiji xiaozhuan* 630-31.

¹³¹ Wang Ruqian, “Xihu ji you,” in *Xihu yunshi* 113-14. For Feng Mengzhen's biographical information, see Qian Qianyi, *Liechao shiji xiaozhuan* 620-21.

government office. Literati gatherings and literary activities were often hosted in the Qinhuai courtesan quarters. One of these great events was organized in 1604, by Zhu Chengcai 朱承綵 (courtesy name Guohua 國華), an imperial family member. His gathering in Jinling included one hundred and twenty famous literati like Zhang Youyu 張幼玉 [Zhang Xianyi] and forty courtesans from Qinhuai such as Ma Xianglan. Both men and women guests engaged in writing, drinking, and revelry.¹³²

In the “Jinling sheji shi xu” 金陵社集詩序, Qian Qianyi described the development of male poetry societies in Nanjing from Hongzhi 弘治 (1488-1505), Zhengde, and Jiajing in the mid-Ming to the Wanli reign-period and the mutual reinforcement of untrammelled literati and talented courtesans.¹³³ From Qian’s description, we see that the early society of Nanjing in the Ming, the “Qingxi society” 清溪社, was organized by retired officials such as Gu Huayu 顧華玉 [Gu Lin 顧麟], and Wang Qinpei 王欽佩 [Wang Wei 王韋].¹³⁴ Both Gu and Wang were high officials and what they attempted to do was to have some private moments after government office. However, the “Qingxi she” became much more influential during the Wanli reign as many “men of the mountains” joined it. Among them many names are very familiar to us as they have been mentioned earlier. Zhang Youyu, Wang Yin, Shen Mingchen 沈明臣 (courtesy name Jiaze 嘉則),¹³⁵ Wang Zhideng, Pan Zhiheng were *shanren* poets who constantly exchanged poetry with famous courtesans such as Ma Xianglan, Xue Susu,

¹³² See the entry on “Qi wang sun Chengcai” 齊王孫承綵 in Qian Qianyi, comp., *Liechao shiji, Dingji* 丁集, *juan* 7; reprinted in *Siku jinhui shu congkan, jibu*, vol. 96: 341.

¹³³ See the entry on “Jinling sheji zhu shi ren” 金陵社集諸詩人, in Qian Qianyi, comp., *Liechao shiji xiaozhuan* 462-63.

¹³⁴ Guo Shaoyu, “Mingdai de wenren jituan” 554.

¹³⁵ For Shen Mingchen’s biographical information, see Qian Qianyi, *Liechao shiji xiaozhuan* 496-97.

and Zhao Caiji 趙彩姬 (also Zhao Jinyan 趙今燕).¹³⁶ Mei Dingzuo was the compiler of the *Qinglou lianhua ji* while Mao Yuchang 冒譽昌 (d. 1633)¹³⁷ was the compiler of the *Qinhuai siji shi* 秦淮四姬詩.

Besides the Qingxi she, there were other famous poetry societies in Nanjing such as the Jinling she and the Baimen xinliu she 白門新柳社. Like the Qingxi she, these societies also had many unrestrained literati as members, who valorized courtesans and their writings. Some of these men were involved in the compilation of the famous anthology of women's poetry, the *Gujin mingyuan huishi* 古今名媛彙詩 (1620) compiled by Zheng Wen'ang 鄭文昂. For example, Zhu Zhifan 朱之藩 was the preface-writer while Cheng Han 程漢 (courtesy name 孺文) was a proofreader of the anthology.¹³⁸ They were both members of the Baimen xinliu she.

Hangzhou had been an attractive city for literati gatherings since the Song.¹³⁹ But the fashion of male literary societies involving women poets began with Yang Weizhen's literary societies in the late Yuan. During the Ming, Hangzhou continued to be one of the most favourite centers for literary gatherings. Early societies such as the "Hunan chong

¹³⁶ Some of the poems exchanged between literati and courtesans are still extant. For example, Zhang Youyu's poem entitled "Qixi tong Zhao Jinyan fu" 七夕同趙今燕賦, is included in *Dingji*, *juan 7* of *Liechao shiji* compiled by Qian Qianyi; reprinted in *Siku jinhui shu congkan, jibu*, vol. 96: 321. Zhao Jinyan's poems presented to Shen Jiaze [Shen Mingchen] ("Seeing off Shen Jiaze on his travel to Guangling" 送沈嘉則遊廣陵), Wang Zhongfang ("Seeing off Wang Zhongfang on his return to Xin'an" 送王仲房還新安), and Zhang Youyu ("Seeing off Zhang Youyu on his return to Wumen" 送張幼玉還吳門) are included in *Qinglou yunyu*, *juan 2*: 55-56. For translation of these poems, see Chang and Saussy, *Women Writers of Traditional China* 232.

¹³⁷ Mao Yuchang lived in the late Ming and died in 1633. See Zhang Huijian, *Ming Qing Jiangsu wenren nianbiao* 514. For Mao's biographical information, see Qian Qianyi, *Liechao shiji xiaozhuan* 632. But Hu Wenkai records him as a Qing anthologist. See Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 844.

¹³⁸ See Chapter 2, 123. For Cheng Han's biographical information, see Qian Qianyi, *Liechao shiji xiaozhuan* 464.

¹³⁹ See the entry on "Shehui" 社會 in Wu Zimu 吳自牧 (fl. 1276), *Meng liang lu* 夢梁錄 19.9a (*SKQS-dianziban*).

ya she” 湖南崇雅社 of which Sun Yiyuan was a core member and the “Xihu bashe” organized by Zhu Shitai, Wang Yin, and their friends, were all in Hangzhou. But what makes literary societies of Hangzhou so unique compared to those in Suzhou and Nanjing discussed above is not because of the interactions between free-styled literati and courtesans. It is because in poetry societies of Hangzhou, such as Wang Ruqian’s, more sophisticated gender relations emerged: the female participants in male poetry societies were not limited to courtesans but also included gentry women. However, Wang’s poetry clubs will be treated as a special case in a separate section below.

Although these poetry societies were dominated by men and male tastes determined certain trends in the courtesan culture, talented courtesans also played a significant part in the formation of literati culture. They were active participants in male poetry societies. In order to participate fully in this culture, they often accommodated themselves to the fashions and values of the prevalent literati culture. They all devoted themselves to the learning of male talents and virtues. Zhu Dou’er 朱鬥兒 learned painting from Chen Yi.¹⁴⁰ Wang Manrong 王曼容 learned calligraphy from Zhou Gongxia 周公瑕 [Zhou Tianqiu], poetry from She Zonghan 余宗漢 [She Xiang 余翔], and *qin*-playing from Xu Taichu 許太初.¹⁴¹ Xue Susu learned Buddhist practice from the

¹⁴⁰ See the entry on *Yue bo ci* 月波詞 by Zhu Dou’er, in Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 94.

¹⁴¹ See the entry on Wang Shaojun 王少君 in *Quzhong zhi* 曲中志 by Pan Zhiheng, in Tao Ting, comp., *Shuofu xu*, *juan* 44: 315. See also the entry on *Changyang jun ji* 長楊君集 by Wang Manrong, in Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 87.

shanren literatus Yu Xianchang 俞羨長 [given name Anqi 安期]¹⁴² and poetry from Wang Xingfu 王行甫.¹⁴³

Ma Xianglan was one of the most celebrated courtesan-artists in the Ming, whose artistic works are partially extant. Her active participation in male poetry societies is evidenced by her poems entitled “On a spring day, four society doyens passed by my small garden to appreciate peony flowers and each of them composed a quatrain to present to me. I followed their rhymes, composing four poems to reply” 春日諸社長過小園賞牡丹各賦絕句見投, 用韻和答四首. These poems are extant because they were selected to be included in Ming-Qing anthologies of women’s poetry.¹⁴⁴ In her inscription of a hanging scroll of orchids which she presented to her lover Wang Zhideng (1592), Ma Xianglan wrote: “During the Wanli reign in the Renchen year [1592] on a long summer’s eve sitting in the Qinhuai water pavilion, I painted this to present to my elder brother of the society, Baigu for correction. Xianglan, female younger brother, Ma Shouzheng” (萬曆壬辰長夏坐秦淮水榭畫呈百穀社兄正湘蘭女弟馬守貞).¹⁴⁵ She addressed Wang as her “elder brother of the society” while she referred to herself as “female younger brother.”

More strikingly, famous courtesans were more than just participants. They were approached as famous celebrities. The *shanren* literatus Wang Ye 王野 (courtesy name

¹⁴² For Yu Xianchang’s biographical information, see Qian Qianyi, *Liechao shiji xiaozhuan* 630.

¹⁴³ See the entry on “Xue jiaoshu” 薛校書 in Hu Yinglin, *Jiayi shengyan* 甲乙剩言, in Tao Ting, comp., *Shuofu xu*, reprinted in *Xuxiu Siku quanshu*, zibu, vol. 1190: 450.

¹⁴⁴ See Zhang Mengzheng, comp., *Qinglou yunyu*, juan 1: 21-22. Two of four poems are also included in Qian Qianyi, comp., *Liechao shiji*, *Runji* 377-78 and Zhang Yuzhang 張豫章, et al, comp., [Kangxi] *Yuxuan Mingshi* [康熙] 御選明詩 116.3a-b.

¹⁴⁵ See Weidner, ed. *Views from Jade Terrace* 78.

Taigu 太古; grandson of the *shanren* Wang Yin's brother)¹⁴⁶ proposed to convince the noted courtesan Zhou Wen 周文 of Jiaxing (Zhejiang) to join his society, the Huainan she 淮南社 of Yangzhou. He openly claimed that Zhou's participation would enhance the reputation of their society (以張吾軍). His idea was applauded immediately by his society members, such as Lu Bi 陸弼 (courtesy name Wucong 無從) and Li Weizhen. They helped prepare for the trip, buying a boat and clothes for him. Each of them composed four quatrains to see him off (諸公大喜, 相與買舟具裝, 各賦四絕句以祖其行).¹⁴⁷ In the preface to the poetry collection by Zhu Taiyu 朱泰玉, the *Xiufo zhai shi* 繡佛齋詩, Pan Zhiheng states, "During the fall to winter of the year Jiyong [1610], five societies invited Taiyu to join them as their member. All those that clustered around her were the most well-known celebrities in the world" (所集皆天下名流).¹⁴⁸ These famous figures whom Pan Zhiheng referred to as "celebrities" included Zhong Xing, Ling Mengchu 凌濛初 (1580-1644),¹⁴⁹ Yu Xianchang, Wu Zhao 吳兆 (courtesy name Feixiong 非熊),¹⁵⁰ Lin Gudu 林古度 (courtesy name Maozhi 茂之), and others.¹⁵¹ Interestingly, some "celebrities" joined certain societies only because of the presence of famous courtesans. Wang Manrong, a multitalented courtesan, attracted many admirers.

¹⁴⁶ See the entry "Wang shanren Ye" 王山人野, in Qian Qianyi, comp., *Liechao shiji xiaozhuan* 605-06.

¹⁴⁷ See the entry on "Jiren Zhou Wen" 佞人周文, in Shen Jiyong, *Zuili shixi* 34.46a-b.

¹⁴⁸ See the entry on *Xiufo zhai ji* 繡佛齋集 by Zhu Taiyu, in Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 97.

¹⁴⁹ For Ling Mengchu's biography, see Goodrich and Fang, eds., *Dictionary of Ming Biography* 930-31.

¹⁵⁰ For Wu Zhao's biographical information, see Qian Qianyi, *Liechao shiji xiaozhuan* 604-05.

¹⁵¹ Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 97.

But after she developed a more serious relationship with a Mr. Zhang, other society members became disappointed and the society fell apart (社客稍稍星散).¹⁵²

Although late Ming “men of the mountains” did not deny the fact that they pursued sensual pleasure, other relationships such as friendship were also developed in male poetry societies, an example is Yu Huai’s friendship with the Nanjing courtesan Tenth Maiden 十娘 as described in his *Banqiao zaji*:

Every time I had a meeting with fellow writers and poets, I always went to her home. Tenth Maiden employed a clever maid-servant for each guest, to attend the stone (for writing needs) at his mat, to rub the ink for him, to burn orchid incense, and to supply fruits and tea. When night fell, everyone joined in delighting at the banquet, dispersing after pleasure had been enjoyed to their utmost. However, the guests and the hostess remained properly mannered without licentious behaviour.¹⁵³

Obviously, courtesans of the Ming with their talent, beauty, and character won the hearts of literati who held not only feelings but also respect for these talented courtesans. Yu Huai was severely criticized by Qing *Siku* editors to be the “offender of Confucian principles.”¹⁵⁴ But the reason why Yu Huai and literati like him were attacked by Qing scholars lies not in their “licentious behaviour” but because they developed serious relationships with courtesans.

It is noteworthy that during the late Ming and the Ming-Qing transition when the dynasty was in decline, the educated men at large became concerned about the political

¹⁵² See the entry on *Changyang jun ji* by Wang Manrong, in Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 87.

¹⁵³ See Yu Huai, *Banqiao zaji* 908. I have used Howard S. Levy’s translation, but modified the last sentence. See Levy, *A Feast of Mist and Flowers* 51.

¹⁵⁴ See their comments on the *Banqiao zaji*, in Yu Huai, *Banqiao zaji* 917.

situation of their time. This was the context of the rise of the political-literary societies—the Fu she and Ji she. As Zhang Pu 張溥 (1602-41), the leader of the Fu she claimed in his proposed program for literati learning:

Since the teachings of the world have declined, educated men are not familiar with classical canons. They are merely good at drama and painting. By luck, some became officials, but those serving in court cannot help the emperor while those serving in local districts cannot provide for the people. Their ability declined steadily and official administration became daily less effective. All these problems are due to the above. Overestimating my own moral standards and abilities, I hope to work with scholars from all four directions to revive the classical learning, to make it useful for the future. Therefore, it is named “Restoration Society.”¹⁵⁵

自世教衰，士子不通經術，但劇耳繪目，幾倖弋或于有司，登明堂不能致君，長郡邑不能澤民，人才日下，吏治日偷，皆由於此。溥不度德，不量力，期與四方多士共興復古學，將使異日者務為有用，因名曰復社。

The Fu she was a prose society, set against the *shanren* poetry societies. It became so influential during the late Ming that many leading political and literary figures of the late Ming were members of it. Under the influence of the Fu she, *shanren* who formerly preferred to live independently as retired literati came to serve in officialdom. Some courtesans eventually married members of the Fu she.¹⁵⁶ Influenced by their male

¹⁵⁵ Chinese text is quoted in Guo Shaoyu, “Mingdai de wenren jituan” 604.

¹⁵⁶ For example, Wang Wei married Xu Yuqing and Liu Rushi married Qian Qianyi. Both Xu and Qian were members of the Fu she.

associates, courtesans also became more concerned about political affairs. As the preface to *Taohua shan* indicated, “During the late years of our dynasty, even women became attracted to the Donglin scholars (勝國晚年雖婦人女子亦知向往東林).¹⁵⁷ During the cataclysmic Ming-Qing transition, the talented courtesan and romantic love became primary elements informing loyalist sentiments. This literati trend was epitomized by the love relationship between Chen Zilong who died as a martyr for the Ming, and the courtesan Liu Rushi, a love relationship that forms the subject of Kang-i Sun Chang’s book.¹⁵⁸

The Case of Wang Ruqian’s Hangzhou Literati Circle

Wang Ruqian’s Hangzhou literati clubs were not discussed by Guo Shaoyu in his investigations of Ming literati societies, but they deserve the most attention in this study. If we do not understand the cultural life of people in Wang’s literati circles, we would probably never adequately understand the history of women’s culture in the late Ming and the Ming-Qing transition period. First, Wang’s literary circles continued from the late Ming to the early Qing, lasting for many decades. In particular, after the Ming-Qing transition, Hangzhou became even more important than it was in the Ming for literati gatherings, as Nanjing, the former southern capital, was physically destroyed during the Manchu conquest. Many famous free-styled literati, cultivated courtesans, and even gentry women were more or less connected to Wang’s clubs. Second, sources about Wang’s societies such as the guidelines for membership are still extant. These guidelines

¹⁵⁷ “Taohua shan xu” 桃花扇序 by Liangxi Menghe jushi 梁溪夢鶴居士, *Taohua shan* 桃花扇 5. Here, “Donglin” refers to the Fu she.

¹⁵⁸ Chang, *The Late-Ming Poet*.

offer us a better understanding of the interrelations of the courtesan culture, women's culture in general, and the literati culture in the late Ming and the Ming-Qing transition.

Wang Ruqian, known by his courtesy name Ranming 然明, was a famous literatus-merchant.¹⁵⁹ His father died when he was three. He was a native of Shexian (Xin'an, Anhui), but he lived in Hangzhou for his adult career. He was remembered as a poet and a great patron of many literati men and women in the late Ming and the Ming-Qing transition. He sponsored the publication of paintings by the courtesan Yang Yunyou and the letter collection by Liu Rushi, the *Hedong jun chi du* 河東君尺牘.¹⁶⁰ He built the future tomb (生壙) in Xiling (西泠) for Wang Wei.¹⁶¹ Not only courtesans, many other people also received his aid. Among them were the famous playwright Li Yu, the pleasure-quarter musician Su Kunsheng 蘇昆生, and gentry women such as Huang Yuanjie, Wu Shan, and Wu Shan's daughter Bian Mengjue.

Wang's being generous in money won him the reputation of a romantic knight-errant.¹⁶² Being a romantic knight-errant was greatly valued in late Ming *shanren* culture. Wang Duanshu used the term "knight in a yellow cloak" 黃衫客 to praise the great *shanren* Wang Baigu for his romantic and knight-errant temperament. Wang Ruqian addressed himself with pride as "the person in a yellow cloak" 黃衫人.¹⁶³ He was a rich merchant, but he also styled himself a *shanren*: remaining out of office, engaging in literary societies to associate with friends, and indulging in what was by some people of

¹⁵⁹ For Wang's biographical information, see Mengsou 蒙叟 [Qian Qianyi], "Xin'an Wang Ranming he zang muzhiming" 新安汪然明合葬墓誌銘, in *Xihu yunshi* 115-17.

¹⁶⁰ See Lin Xue 林雪 (courtesy name Tiansu 天素), "Liu Rushi chidu xiaoyin" 柳如是尺牘小引, in Liu Rushi, *Hedong jun chidu* 河東君尺牘 561.

¹⁶¹ Wang Ruqian, "Xihu jiyou," in *Xihu yunshi* 114.

¹⁶² Mengsou [Qian Qianyi], "Xin'an Wang Ranming he zang muzhiming," in *Xihu yunshi* 116-17.

¹⁶³ Wang Ruqian, "Chong xiu Shuixianwang miao ji" 重修水仙王廟記, in *Xihu yunshi* 107.

his day and later time regarded as rather bizarre frivolity. His poetry collection entitled *Qiyong* 綺詠 (Flowery songs, prefaces dated 1621 and 1622 for the Former collection; 1631 for the Latter Collection) exemplifies his lifestyle characterized by tastes and values of the *shanren*.

The collection was prefaced by Huang Ruheng 黃汝亨 (1558-1626, courtesy name Zhenfu 貞夫), Chen Jiru, and Dong Qichang. All of them were leading figures in the literati world of Wang's time. Chen Jiru was also the compiler of the collection.¹⁶⁴ According to Huang Ruheng's preface, the title "Flowery songs" was taken from Lu Shiheng's 陸士衡 [i.e., Lu Ji 陸機 (261-303)] famous statement, "Poetry becomes flowery because of feelings [of the poet]" (詩緣情而綺靡).¹⁶⁵ Dong Qichang referred to Wang's poetry collection *Qiyong* as the *Xianqing fu* 閒情賦 (Rhapsody on idle feelings) by Tao Yuanliang 陶元亮 (i.e., Tao Qian).¹⁶⁶ As we have seen, the reference to Tao Qian was a cliché employed by people in the late Ming to praise *shanren* literati, such as Wang Zhideng and Chen Jiru, who were aloof from office-holding. However, in commenting on Wang's *Qiyong*, Qing *Siku* editors had something different to say:

This collection was generally a ranking of songs and courtesans. However, the Former Collection is prefaced by Chen Jiru while the Latter Collection was also edited and compiled by [Chen] Jiru. Imperceptibly influenced by what he constantly learned from Chen for long, his poetry assimilated to

¹⁶⁴ Wang Ruqian, *Qiyong yi juan, Xuji yi juan* 綺詠一卷續集一卷, reprinted in *Siku quanshu cunmu congshu, jibu*, vol. 192: 807-24.

¹⁶⁵ Wang Ruqian, *Qiyong yi juan, Xuji yi juan*, "Xiao xu" 小序 807.

¹⁶⁶ See the preface by Dong Qichang, in *Qiyong yi juan, Xuji yi juan* 808.

Chen's. Zhu Yizun (1629-1709) did not include in the *Ming shi zong* even one character of these poems. He must have had his reasons.¹⁶⁷

是集大抵徵歌選妓之作。然其前集陳繼儒序之，後集又繼儒所選定，濡染薰蒸，久而與化。朱彝尊〈明詩綜〉不錄一字，蓋有由矣。

In this collection, Wang Ruqian mentioned many names of famous courtesans: Wang Wei, Liang Yuwei 梁喻微,¹⁶⁸ Lin Tiansu, Yang Yunyou, Sha Wanzai 沙宛在, to name a few. Interestingly, in criticizing Wang's poetry for a lack of moral concerns, these Qing scholars blamed Chen Jiru for his bad influence on Wang's poetry.

Wang Ruqian sponsored and organized several literary clubs during the many decades of his life in Hangzhou. According to some sources, Wang joined Zhang Cen 張岑 to take charge of the Xue she 雪社.¹⁶⁹ In his "Xihu jiyou" 西湖記遊, an essay written in his late years, Wang also recalled that he had organized a society named "Xiangyan she" 香岩社 (fragrant rock society) which was graced with the calligraphy of Huang Ruheng. Wang particularly mentioned that this society attracted the noted scholar-

¹⁶⁷ See their comments on the collection in *Qiyong yi juan*, *Xuji yi juan* 824.

¹⁶⁸ According to Chen Yinke, Liang Yuwei was Liang Mengzhao 梁孟昭, courtesy name Yisu 夷素. See Chen Yinke, *Liu Rushi biezhu* 369. Wife of Mao Jiureng 茅九仍, Liang Mengzhao was a poet and playwright who wrote *Xiangsi yan chuanqi* 相思研傳奇. For the entry on Liang Mengzhao, see Hu Wenkai *Lidai funü* 164. Her poetry collection *Shanshui yin* 山水吟 was prefaced by Ge Zhengqi 葛徵奇 (?-1645), husband of Li Yin 李因 (1616-85). But from poems written by Wang Ruqian to Liang Yuwei, poems under the title "Qiuri hushang feng Yan ji Liang Yuwei chudong jihuai" 秋日湖上逢燕姬梁玉微初冬寄懷, we learn that she was a courtesan in Wang Ruqian's circle, because Wang referred to her as an "exiled immortal" (謫仙) in the courtesan's quarters (青樓). For the poems, see Wang Ruqian *Qiyong* 綺詠, reprinted in *Siku quanshu cunmu congshu, jibu*, vol. 192: 809. Chen Yinke was right that Liang Mengzhao was most likely Liang Yuwei as evidenced by both poems of Liang Yuwei and Wang Ruqian's other writings in the *Chunxingtang shiji*. But the limited space here does not allow me to discuss this matter any further. A copy of Liang's poetry collection *Shanshui yin* is held in the National Library of China 中國國家圖書館 (Beijing).

¹⁶⁹ See Wang Ranming's poem entitled "Ru Xue she he yun" 入雪社和韻 and Zhang Cen's original rhyme, in *Xihu yunshi* 111-12. See also Guo Shaoyu, "Mingdai de wenren jituan" 573.

official Wu Benru 吳本如,¹⁷⁰ a friend of Yuan Hongdao and Dong Qichang. They were all officials who had penchant for a life of withdrawal.

The most influential society that Wang organized and sponsored was the “Buxiyuan” 不繫園 (literally, unmoored garden). Chen Jiru provided the calligraphy of the name “Buxiyuan.” Although called a garden, it was actually a painted boat built in 1623. Wang Ruqian describes the boat in detail:

It is six *zhang* and two *chi* in length¹⁷¹ and one fifth of its length in width. Inside the boat, near the door, several wine containers had the capacity as much as hundreds of *hu* of wine. Further inside, there is room of one *zhang* square that is enough to set two dinner tables. There was a small resting room where guests could lie down, chanting poems. The closets hidden in the wall were designed for storing calligraphies of the drunken. After going out and taking a turn, there was a corridor. Going up along the corridor, there was a platform...¹⁷²

計長六丈二尺，廣五之一。入門數武，堪貯百壺。次進方丈，足布兩席。曲藏斗室，可供臥吟。側隱壁廚，俾收醉墨。出轉爲廊，廊升爲臺...

The Buxiyuan was not as big as the famous boat of Bao Hansuo 包涵所, the first storied boat built in the Ming,¹⁷³ but it was considered sufficient to have provided a refined space for a group of cultivated and stylish people to fashion themselves as

¹⁷⁰ Wang Ruqian, “Xihu jiyou,” in *Xihu yunshi* 114.

¹⁷¹ 1 *zhang* equals to 3.3333 meter. 1 *zhang* equals to 10 *chi*. See *Xiandai Hanyu cidian* 現代漢語詞典 1558.

¹⁷² See Wang Ruqian, “Buxiyuan ji” 不繫園集, reprinted in *Congshu jicheng xubian, jibu*, vol. 122: 953.

¹⁷³ For a detailed description of the boat of Bao Hansuo, see the entry on “Bao Hansuo” 包涵所, in Zhang Dai, *Tao'an mengyi*, *juan* 3, reprinted in *Xuxiu Sikuquanshu, zibu*, vol. 1260: 340.

carefree literati.¹⁷⁴ In the poem entitled “Zuo Buxiyuan” 作不繫園, Wang Ruqian further provides a sketch of an unfettered poet accompanied by cultivated friends and beauties in the unmoored boat on the beautiful West Lake:

I have lodged in lakes and mountains for years,
Everyday, coming and going were wild monks and famous celebrities.
On occasion, lutestrings and flutes are played together,
In the spring breeze, everybody's face is beaming with happy smiles.
Half drunk in front of the flowers [beauties], I am an emotional fool.
An obsessive lazybone, I deeply understand the meaning of enlightened
leisure.

Declining all kinds of worldly fortunes,
In old age, I am addicted to a boat amidst water and cloud.¹⁷⁵

年來寄跡在湖山, 野衲名流日往還。
弦管有時頻共載, 春風何處不開顏。
情痴半向花前醉, 懶癖應知悟後閒。
種種塵緣都謝卻, 老耽一舸水雲間。

All the poems written by society members, including courtesans such as Wang Wei, on the occasions of gatherings were compiled into the “Buxiyuan ji” 不繫園集.¹⁷⁶ In 1628, several years after he built the “Buxiyuan,” Wang Ruqian also built a storied boat (樓船) with larger capacity, named “Suixi'an” 隨喜庵 (Carefree cottage). The calligraphy of the

¹⁷⁴ See Wang Ruqian, “Buxiyuan ji” 953. See also Huang Ruheng, “Buxiyuan yue” 不繫園約, reprinted in *Congshu jicheng xubian, jibu*, vol. 122: 954.

¹⁷⁵ Wang Ruqian, “Buxiyuan ji” 953.

¹⁷⁶ The collection was reprinted in *Congshu jicheng xubian, jibu*, vol. 122: 953-60.

characters “Suixi’an” was written by Dong Qichang. All the poems of society gatherings in this boat were compiled into a new collection entitled “Suixi’an ji” 隨喜庵集.¹⁷⁷

Besides the “Buxiyuan” and “Suixi’an,” Wang also had several small boats, each of which was graced with a nice name such as “Viewing Leaf” 觀葉, “Little Round Gourd” 小團瓢, “Rain-strands-wind-slices” 雨絲風片. Sometimes these boats were likely lent out at requests of friends.¹⁷⁸

All the poems included in the two society poetry collections were written between 1623 and 1641. Both the *Buxiyuan ji* and *Suixi’an ji* were compiled before the fall of the Ming. But literary gatherings continued in the “Unmoored garden” even after the dynastic transition. But after the fall of the Ming, the female members in Wang’s literary circle were largely gentry women. In a poem written in 1654, the year he died, Wang Ruqian inserted an interlineal note that states: “In the old days, I became acquainted with the lady scribes: Wang [Wei], Yang [Yunyou], Lin [Tiansu], Liang [Yuwei]. Now I meet ladies of the inner chambers: Wu Yanzi [Wu Shan], Yuanwen [or Xuanwen, Wu Shan’s daughter Bian Mengjue], Huang Jieling [Huang Yuanjie], and Wang Duanshu” (昔逢王, 楊, 林, 梁, 諸女史, 今遇吳巖子, 元文, 黃皆令, 王端淑諸閨閣).¹⁷⁹ Apparently, during the Ming-Qing transition, the female participants in Wang’s literary circle were largely gentry women. Poems by these gentry women are largely extant.¹⁸⁰ For example, Wu

¹⁷⁷ The collection was reprinted in *Congshu jicheng xubian, jibu*, vol. 122: 961-67. The poems included in the collection were written in 1628-1633.

¹⁷⁸ Liu Rushi once borrowed a boat from Wang. See Liu Rushi, *Hedong jun chidu* 564.

¹⁷⁹ See Wang Ruqian, *Chunxingtang shiji* 5.75a.

¹⁸⁰ In 1654, a courtesan named Zhang Wan 張婉 came from Yunjian (Songjiang) to visit Wang Ruqian in Hangzhou. Wang well prepared for her stay: a bed finely made from the purple sandalwood, a jade pillow inlaid with mandarin ducks, patterned bamboo mat, and incense burner. Wang held a gathering in the Buxiyuan. He composed four poems on the four objects. Many literati such as Qian Qianyi, Feng Yunjiang, and Li Yu harmonized with Wang. Interestingly, Huang Yuanjie and Wang Duanshu also wrote poems to match Wang Ruqian’s rhyme. These poems were included in Wang Ruqian’s poetry collection,

Shan's poems were written under the title "Two days before the Clear-Bright Day, at the society gathering in the "Unmoored garden," inspired by what we saw, we wrote eight poems on rhymes with *yu* [rain], *si* [trace], *feng* [wind], *pian* [piece], *yan* [mist], *bo* [wave], *hua* [picture], and *chuan* [boat], to harmonize the rhymes of the gentleman Wang Ranming" 清明節前二日社集不繫園用雨絲風片煙波畫船爲韻各即事八首和汪然明先生韻.¹⁸¹ Wang Ruqian was very impressed by Wu Shan's poetic talent and pleased by her presence. But interestingly, Wang in his writings referred to Wu Shan as "Yanzi, Collator Wu" (*Yanzi Wu Jiaoshu*).¹⁸²

Wang Ruqian did not call the "Buxiyuan" a "*she*" (社 society). Nor did he call it a "*shi she*" (詩社 poetry society). But from the general guideline for membership, the "Buxiyuan yue" 不繫園約¹⁸³ and the poetry collection, the *Buxiyuan ji*, we can determine that "Buxiyuan" refers not only to a painted boat on the lake, but also the literary circle in Hangzhou. The general guideline for membership in Wang's society, the "Buxiyuan yue" was formulated by Huang Ruheng, a former official but a core member of Wang's literary circles. In this guideline, Huang Ruheng described people or things that were considered suitable for the society, the "*shi er yi*" 十二宜:

the *Mengxiang lou ji* 夢香樓集 (1655). Wang Ruqian died in the same year when the collection was published. For Huang Yuanjie's poem, see Wang Ruqian, *Chunxingtang shiji* 5.28b. Wang Duanshu's poem was mentioned by the editor of the *Chunxingtang shiji*, but not included. See *Chunxingtang shiji* 5.33b. For Zhang Wan, see Wang Duanshu, *Mingyuan shiwei* 21.10a-b.

¹⁸¹ According to Deng Hanyi 鄧漢儀 (1617-89), after the Ming-Qing transition, Wu Shan traveled with Gu Mei to Suzhou and Hangzhou. See Deng Hanyi, comp., *Mingjia shi guan chu ji* 名家詩觀初集, *juan* 12, reprinted in *Siku quanshu cunmu congshu bubian* 四庫全書存目叢書補編, vol. 39: 453. The second, fourth, fifth, and the sixth of the eight poems were included in Wang Duanshu, comp., *Mingyuan shiwei*, *juan* 11: 4b-6a. The eight poems were included in "Wu Yanzi shi" 吳嚴子詩, in Zou Siyi 鄒斯漪 [also Zou Yi 鄒漪 or Zou Liuqi 鄒流綺] (1615-?), comp., *Shiyuan ba mingjia xuan* 詩媛八名家選 2a-4a, but under the title of Hufang 湖舫.

¹⁸² Wang Ruqian, "Xihu jiyou," in *Xihu yunshi* 115.

¹⁸³ See the "Buxiyuan yue," in *Congshu jicheng xubian, jibu*, vol. 122: 954-55.

mingliu (famous celebrities), *gaoseng* 高僧 (cultivated monks), *zhiji* 知己 (intimate friends), *meiren* 美人 (beauties), *miaoxiang* 妙香 (good incense), *dongxiao* 洞簫 (bamboo flute), *qin* 琴 (string music instrument), *qingge* 清歌 (pure songs), *mingcha* 名茶 (famous tea), *mingjiu* 名酒 (famous wine), *yaohe buyu wugui* 餞核不踰五簋 (no more than five dishes or fruits), and *que zoucong* 卻騶從 (no servants).

and nine taboos that should be avoided, the *jiu ji* 九忌:

shasheng 殺生 (killing), *zabin* 雜賓 (inferior strangers), *zuo shi xuan mian* 作勢軒冕 (pretentious officials), *keli* 苛禮 (vexatious ceremonials), *tongpu linli* 童僕林立 (servants as numerous as trees), *paiyou zuo ju* 俳優作劇 (vulgar entertainment), *guchui xuantian* 鼓吹喧填 (deafening sound of drums), *qiang jie* 強借 (forced borrowing), and *jiu jie* 久借 (long term borrowing).

The main ideas presented as plausible and fashionable in these guidelines were quite cliché in late Ming *shanren* literature. They were almost identical to the “eight virtues” 八德 of living in the mountains described by Chen Jiru:

One does not bear vexatious ceremonial; one does not see strangers; one is not mixed up with banqueting; one is not engaged in contentions over real estate; one does not ask about changing political circumstances; one does

not get into wrangles about what is right and wrong; one is not involved in debts; one does not discuss office-holding.¹⁸⁴

However, these clichés should not blind us from seeing their important implications. The freestyle of nonconformist *shanren* literati had actually become a marker of conformism. In one sense, the poetry society displays an extremely disordered state: officials were out of office, monks did not stay in the temple, courtesans were highly promoted, and gentry women sought out male literati. However, the poetry society also represents a refined world in perfect harmony. Here, officials, commoners, and even monks are defined in the same category of famous celebrities or friends while courtesans and gentry women could be also subsumed by one single term of “beauty.” Therefore, it is not surprising to see that Dong Qichang, a member of Wang’s literary circles, referred to the courtesan Lin Tiansu as a “*guixiu*,” a term commonly used for gentry women with artistic talent, meaning literally talents of the women’s quarters¹⁸⁵ or that Wang Ruqian addressed the gentry woman poet as a “*jiaoshu*,” a well-established term used only for cultivated courtesans.¹⁸⁶ Indeed, as we have seen, the male poetry society had become a productive space that generated power for all of its participants—power not derived from official and orthodox principles.

Conclusion

This chapter examines the rise of the courtesan culture and women’s culture in general in connection with what we may refer to as the *shanren* culture, an “artistic and hedonistic

¹⁸⁴ As quoted in Suzuki, “Mindai sanjin kō” 373. Translation by Peterson, in *Bitter Gourd* 130-31.

¹⁸⁵ Ko, “The Written Word” 79-80.

¹⁸⁶ Wang Ruqian, “Xihu ji you,” in *Xihu yunshi* 115.

counterculture” characterized by the fashions and values of *shanren* literati. As we have seen, male poetry societies not only provided a fertile ground for unrestrained men to fashion the self, express taste, and adjust to maintain their cultural dominance in society, but also created new space for courtesans to play a significant role in literati culture. Male poetry clubs conditioned, motivated, and consumed the cult of elegant living among the new “men of culture” who remained aloof from office-holding, while the company of cultivated courtesans was a symbol of such elegant living for literati. The rise of courtesans was the very fruit of the increasing influence and popularity of the late Ming “men of the mountains.”

In the context of poetry societies, both male and female participants were very “similar” to one another in terms of their literary engagement and lifestyle. Gender and class seem to have ceased to be problematic categories in the world of letters. The fluidity of social boundaries was a striking symbol of the late Ming floating world. Scholars have noted that late Ming social relations were complicated in a monetary economy.¹⁸⁷ But we have seen a different picture in male poetic societies, in which usual social relations were actually being simplified: the emotional bonds between friends regardless of gender and class overshadowed all other primary human relations as defined in the Confucian tradition such as the ruler-subject or father-son relation. In extreme cases, some Ming literati of a *shanren* style completely abandoned all human relations in life but the friend-friend relation¹⁸⁸ while some others retreated to the mountains with

¹⁸⁷ Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers* 31.

¹⁸⁸ Prominent examples include Sun Yiyuan, He Xinyin 何心隱 (1517-79), and Lu Qi 陸圻 (1614-ca. 73). Lu Qi was the author of *Xinfu pu* 新婦譜 (Instructions for the new wife), popular reading for young women in the early Qing. For a discussion of the renewed five human relations (father-son, ruler-subject, husband-wife, brother-brother, and friend-friend) in the late Ming society, see de Bary, “Individualism” 197-99.

their wives (夫妻偕隱), turning the bland Confucian husband-wife relation into a romantic companionship.¹⁸⁹

Under the new fashion of the cult of literary and artistic talent, the late Ming saw an unprecedented rise of literate courtesans. Courtesan writers, critics, and artists wrote poetry, painted, traveled, and compiled writings by others, just like literati men.¹⁹⁰ Most strikingly, many courtesans, in the process of participating in literati culture, became professional writers and artists who produced lucrative artistic works of great market value. Ma Xianglan's paintings were treasured by prominent men in her day¹⁹¹ and used as valuable gifts in later generations.¹⁹² The well-known literatus Pan Zhiheng was very impressed by the courtesan-calligrapher Yang Shuqing 楊叔卿, saying that one of her calligraphies could exchange for one hundred *pi* of brocades (得其一染齊紈可易百錦).¹⁹³ Yang Wan exchanged her calligraphy for a skirt painting by the contemporary male painter Du Shiliang 杜士良.¹⁹⁴ In discussing women who engaged in men's professions (婦人用男子事), the Qing scholar Li E 厲鶚 (1692-1752) illustrated this

¹⁸⁹ For example, the case of Zhao Yiguang and Lu Qingzi. See Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 170.

¹⁹⁰ For a prominent example of courtesan-anthologist, see entry for Liang Xiaoyu 梁小玉 in Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 160-63. Liang was not one of male literati's favourite courtesans likely because of her bold criticism of writings by leading contemporary literati such as Yuan Hongdao, Li Weizhen, Tang Xianzu 湯顯祖 (1550-1616), Chen Jiru, and many others. See Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 161.

¹⁹¹ See the introduction of Ma Xianglan by her contemporary Zhou Tianqiu. See Weidner, *Views from Jade Terrace* 72.

¹⁹² See Wu Qi's poem, entitled "Yi pu shi cheng xie Jiang Xuezai song ming jian Ban guan Wu cao Lu yan Ma Xianglan hua lan qi" 藝圃詩成謝姜學在送名牋班管吳草盧研馬湘蘭畫蘭啓, in *Linhuitang quanji* 林蕙堂全集 7a-b (SKQS-dianziban).

¹⁹³ Quoted from "Yutai hanmo yu fang," 玉臺翰墨餘芳, in Wang Keyu 汪珂玉, *Shanhu wang* 珊瑚網 433.

¹⁹⁴ See Yang Wan's poem entitled "Zuo caoshu huan Du Shiliang hua qun" 作草書換杜士良畫裙, in *Zhongshan xian si juan* 鍾山獻四卷, *juan* 3 (early Qing edition). Copies of Yang Wan's *Zhongshan xian si juan*, *Xu yi juan*, *Zai xu er juan* 鍾山獻四卷續一卷再續二卷 are held in the Nanjing Library. I cannot provide specific page numbers, because the collections are not paginated.

cultural phenomenon with the case of the late Ming courtesan-painter Xu Jinghong who engraved seals like men to show her identity as a professional painter.¹⁹⁵

This chapter serves as a means to contextualize the examination of the rise of late Ming literary and literate courtesans. We have seen how open society like the late Ming literati world affected class and gender. In the following chapter, I will take courtesans as writing subjects that produced texts to examine the importance of their poetry in literati culture as demonstrated by their visible inclusion in late-Ming-early-Qing anthologies of women's writings. It became a commonplace that in late Ming and early Qing anthologies of women's poetry, poems of courtesans were mingled with gentry women's verses. I also investigate how late Ming anthologists used prefaces as sites to promote poetry by courtesans as a legitimate part of literati culture.

¹⁹⁵ See Li E's poems "Xu Pianpian shu shan zi cheng Jinling dangzi fu" 徐翩翩書扇自稱金陵蕩子婦, in Li E, *Fanxie shanfang ji* 樊榭山房集 9.9a (SKQS-dianziban).

Chapter Two

Rediscovering the Importance of Writings by Late Ming Courtesans in Late Ming and Early Qing Anthologies

The previous chapter provides a social-cultural context in which late Ming courtesans flourished. In it, I emphasized office-holding as losing its appeal for late Ming nonconformists who sought other alternative means of self-realization. I showed that many courtesans were intimately connected to male dominant poetry societies of which these unconventional literati were a crucial part. In this cultural space, an alternative nonconformist personality for educated men of the late Ming emerged, a personality contrary to the traditional scholar-official ideal. This chapter goes on to locate the rise of late Ming courtesans in a specific literary milieu by examining the importance of their poetry in literati culture, an importance demonstrated by their visible inclusion in late Ming and early Qing anthologies of women's writings. In other words, this chapter examines how late Ming (extending to the early Qing) literati promoted courtesan culture through the anthology-making of poetry by this group of women. As we will see below, the late Ming trend of anthologizing women's poetry in incorporating contemporary courtesans continued even after the fall of the Ming; however, it suddenly went out of fashion during the High Qing reign-periods of Yongzheng 雍正 (1723-1735) and Qianlong. This indicates that an orthodox Confucian approach that characterized the Qing scholarship had come into force during the High Qing either as a reaction to or as a departure from the late Ming nonconformist paradigm.

This chapter begins with an introduction and investigation of a list of important anthologies produced from the late Ming to early Qing, in which poetry and writing by

Ming courtesans are recorded. Based on the investigation of these anthologies, the second half of the chapter focuses on prefaces to these anthologies. Preface-writing is an important aspect in anthology-making. Prefaces often contain rich and valuable sources regarding the specific circumstances under which the anthologies are produced. What I will investigate is how late Ming anthologists used their prefaces as sites to defend and promote poetry by courtesans as a legitimate part of literati culture as this poetry was increasingly included in women's poetry anthologies in this period. I also explore how this late Ming rhetoric differed from that in prefaces to women's poetry collections produced before the Ming so as to identify rhetorical changes. By revealing poetry by courtesans in anthologies of women's literary productions and the importance of this poetry in the development of late Ming anthology-making of women's writings, I demonstrate that late Ming courtesans were not only famous as personae constructed in male nostalgic discourse, as shown by current scholarship, but also because they were writing subjects that produced texts. Writing became the most essential aspect of the late Ming *mingji*'s persona.

Part One

Anthologizing Poetry by Contemporary Courtesans in the Late Ming and Early Qing¹

With the recent rediscovery of women's poetry in the Ming and Qing, scholars in Chinese studies have paid increasing attention to the dramatic rise in the compiling and

¹ Most of late Ming and early Qing collections of women's poetry discussed in this section are anthologies, but I also include three collections that are not anthologies in the usual sense because they were important in the development of valorizing poetry by courtesans. These three collections are *Qingni lianhua ji* by Mei Dingzuo, *Furen ji* 婦人集 by Chen Weisong 陳維崧 (1626-82), and *Shi yuan ba mingjia xuan* 詩媛八名家選 by Zou Siyi.

publishing of women's literary productions in the Ming and Qing.² As Kang-i Sun Chang has pointed out in her essay, "No nation has produced more anthologies or collections of women's poetry than late imperial China."³ In this pioneering investigation of women's poetry anthologies, Chang introduces a "preliminary" list of twelve anthologies of women's poetry produced in the Ming and Qing periods. She describes and contrasts these anthologies with regard to their authorship, emphases, and selection strategies. Although Chang's principal concern is to provide a general introduction to these anthologies, rather than to study literary works by courtesans, she does refer to the inclusion of specific Ming dynasty courtesans in several late Ming and early Qing anthologies such as the "Runji" 閨集 of the *Liechao shiji*, compiled by Qian Qianyi and Liu Rushi. She also mentions in passing the inclusion of poetry by Ming courtesans in several other anthologies: Zhao Shijie 趙世杰, comp. *Gujin nüshi* 古今女史 (1628), Zhong Xing, comp. (attrib.) *Mingyuan shigui* 名媛詩歸, Chen Weisong 陳維崧 (1626-82), comp. *Furen ji* 婦人集, Mao Yuchang, comp. *Qinhuai siji shi*, and the *Nüzhong qi caizi lanke ji* 女中七才子蘭咳集 by the late Ming and early Qing anthologist Zhou Zhibiao 周之標, who devoted two *juan* to the famous courtesan Wang Wei, one of the Seven Female Talents recorded in Zhou's collection.⁴ In her study of the anthology-making of women's writings and the issue of canon formation, Grace S. Fong focuses on anthologies produced in the late Ming. She examines important formats of anthology-making in terms of temporal scope, selection criteria, and organizing principles. She also

² See Chang, "Ming and Qing Anthologies"; Fong, "Gender and the Failure of Canonization."

³ Chang, "Ming and Qing Anthologies" 148. According to Chang, in the *Lidai funü zhuzuo kao*, the comprehensive catalogue of women's writings in pre-modern China, Hu Wenkai records over three thousand titles of collections and anthologies produced in the Ming and Qing periods.

⁴ Chang, "Ming and Qing Anthologies" 154.

gives details about the inclusion of courtesans in several Ming anthologies. In particular, she mentions Zhong Xing who included a large number of poems by Wang Wei, a member of his literary circle.⁵

The accessibility to courtesan poetry has greatly improved during recent years. In particular, many women's poetry anthologies that contain writings by courtesans have been reprinted in the *Siku* series.⁶ With this newly improved accessibility, I believe a reinvestigation of Ming-Qing women's poetry anthologies with a focus on courtesan poets should bring new insights on the developments of late Ming anthology-making culture, women's culture, and on contemporary literati culture. Below, I provide a list of anthologies that contain selections of writings by Ming courtesans.⁷ My list covers anthologies produced in the period from the Ming to the early Qing in order to show continuity in terms of literati traits and social-cultural tendencies in the Ming-Qing transition. However, as mentioned in the introductory chapter, the complete absence of courtesan poets in Shen Deqian's influential anthology of Ming poetry, the *Mingshi biecai ji* (1739) marked with a strong signal that a new era emphasizing Confucian orthodox values had begun. Therefore, my list will not cover anthologies coming after it.⁸

⁵ In my descriptions and discussions of women's poetry anthologies where late Ming courtesans are included, I am greatly indebted to studies of Ming-Qing anthologies conducted by Chang and Fong as some of these anthologies have been well described and examined by the two scholars although their focuses are not on courtesans.

⁶ See my Introduction, 34-35. See also Fong, "Gender and the Failure of Canonization" 130.

⁷ Most of these anthologies are available. I will provide notes to indicate the sources of this information in the hope it will be helpful for future studies.

⁸ Courtesans were largely absent in anthologies produced in the High Qing periods of Yongzheng and Qianlong. As a matter of fact, there were not many general women's poetry anthologies produced in these periods either. But starting from the end of the Qianlong's era, this was about to change. For example, Wang Qishu's 汪啓淑 *Xiefang ji* 攬芳集 (preface dated 1785) already resumed the place for the "Qinglou" (courtesans). This became even more common in some of the anthologies produced after the Qianlong reign: Wang Chang 王昶, comp., *Ming ci zong* 明詞綜 (preface dated 1802; reprinted in Zhao Zunyue,

I have arranged these anthologies chronologically: the mid-Ming periods of Jiajing and Longqing (1522-1572); the late Ming periods of the Wanli reign onward (1573-1644); and finally, the early Qing periods of Shunzhi and Kangxi (1644-1722). I do not place these anthologies in an Appendix because I believe the list itself gives the reader a strong sense of the rapid development of the anthologizing of poetry by courtesans in these periods extending from Jiajing reign-period and throughout the Ming-Qing transition.

1. Tian Yiheng 田藝衡 (1524-74?), comp. *Shinü shi* 詩女史, 1557.⁹
2. Li Hu 酈琥, comp. *Gusu xinke tongguan yibian* 姑蘇新刻彤管遺編, 1567.¹⁰
3. Yu Xian 俞憲 (1508-72),¹¹ comp. *Shuxiu zongji* 淑秀總集, in Yu Xian, comp. *Sheng Ming baijia shi* 盛明百家詩 (his own preface dated 1571).¹²
4. Hu Wenhuan 胡文煥, comp. *Xinke tongguan zhaiqi* 新刻彤管摘奇.¹³

comp., *Mingci huikan*), Xu Kuichen 許夔臣, comp., *Xiangke ji* 香咳集 (preface dated 1804), Yun Zhu, comp., *Guochao guixiu zhengshi ji* (1836), and Zhou Shouchang 周壽昌 (1814-84), comp., *Gonggui wenxuan* 宮閨文選 (1843). As mentioned previously, Yun Zhu's conscious efforts to keep courtesans out of her anthology have drawn much scholarly attention, but compared with Shen Deqian's *Mingshi biecai ji* that completely excluded courtesan poetry, the *Zhengshi ji* actually included writings by quite a few courtesans living from the Ming to the Qing, more precisely, courtesans-turned-concubine or nuns. Among them were the famous Liu Rushi, Wang Wei, Xue Susu, Li Xiang, Bian Yujing 卞玉京, and Dong Bai. Yun Zhu's exclusion of courtesans was in keeping with the mainstream literary trends of her time.

⁹ Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 876-78. It is reprinted in *Siku quanshu cunmu congshu, jibu*, vol. 321: 686-796. See also Fong, "Gender and the Failure of Canonization" 134-36.

¹⁰ Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 878-80. The collection is reprinted in *Siku weishou shu jikan*, Di liu ji 第六輯, 30: 399-650. See also Fong, "Gender and the Failure of Canonization" 136-37.

¹¹ Yu Xian (courtesy name Rucheng 汝成), was a native of Wuxi. A *jinshi* of 1538, he became prefectural judge of Huguang (Huguang an cha shi). See the entry on *Sheng Ming baijia shi* in *Qinding Siku quanshu zongmu* 192.30a-b (*SKQS-dianziban*). On his life span, see Zhang Huijian, *Ming Qing Jiangsu wenren nianbiao* 297.

¹² Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 880. The anthology is reprinted in *Siku quanshu cunmu congshu, jibu*, vol. 306: 662-69. For a discussion of this anthology, see Fong, "Gender and the Failure of Canonization" 139.

¹³ Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 880. I am not able to determine its exact publication date. I list it here because it has the same selection criteria as the anthology compiled by Li Hu.

5. Gu Qilun 顧起倫 (1517-87), comp. *Juan 19 of Guo ya* 國雅, 1573.¹⁴
6. Chishang ke 池上客 (pseudo.) comp. *Mingyuan jinang* 名媛璣囊, 1595.¹⁵
7. Mei Dingzuo 梅鼎祚 (1549-1618), comp. *Qingni lianhua ji* 青泥蓮花記, 1600.¹⁶
8. Zhang Mengzheng 張夢徵, comp. *Qinglou yunyu* 青樓韻語, 1616.¹⁷
9. Qu Juesheng 蘧覺生, comp. *Nü sao* 女騷, 1618.¹⁸
10. Mao Yuchang, comp. *Qinhuai siji shi*.¹⁹
11. Zhou Gongfu 周公甫, comp. *Gujin qinglou ji xuan* 古今青樓集選.²⁰
12. Zheng Wen'ang 鄭文昂, comp. *Gujin mingyuan huishi* 古今名媛彙詩, 1620.²¹
13. Zhong Xing, comp. (attrib.) *Mingyuan shigui*; c. 1625.²²
14. Ma Jiasong 馬嘉松, comp. *Huajing junsheng* 花鏡雋聲, published in the era of Tianqi 天啓 (1621-27).²³

¹⁴ Reprinted in *Siku quanshu cummu congshu bubian* 15: 651-59.

¹⁵ Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 893. Ko provides the publication date of this anthology (1595) and the number of Ming women poets included (23). See Table 2 in Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers* 60. According to Ko's bibliography, a copy of the anthology is held in the Naikaku Bunko. For a brief discussion of it, see Fong, "Gender and the Failure of Canonization" 137.

¹⁶ Strictly speaking, the *Qingni lianhua ji* as a whole is not a poetry anthology, but a collection of biographies of courtesans. But four *juan* (*juan* 9 to 12) are basically devoted to writings by talented courtesans under the category of "Ji zao" 記藻 (Records of flowery words). Ming courtesan poets are recorded in *juan* 12. For the entry on *Qingni lianhua ji*, see Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 889-90. It is reprinted in *Siku quanshu cummu congshu, zibu*, vol. 253: 723-903.

¹⁷ Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 892.

¹⁸ Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 884-85. For an introduction to the selection criteria of this anthology, see Fong, "Gender and the Failure of Canonization" 141-42.

¹⁹ Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 844.

²⁰ See Yang Liying 楊麗瑩 and Ye Hui 葉輝, "Cong Mingren nüzi shiji de bianzuan kan Mingdai funü wenxue xianxiang" 從明人女子詩集的編纂看明代婦女文學現象 35.

²¹ Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 881-82. See also Fong, "Gender and the Failure of Canonization" 142-44.

²² Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 883-84. The *Mingyuan shigui* is reprinted in *Siku quanshu cummu congshu*, vol. 339: 1-421. For studies of the anthology, see Chang, "Ming and Qing Anthologies" 151-52; Fong, "Gender and the Failure of Canonization" 144-46.

15. Jiang Yuanxi 江元禧, comp. *Yutai wenyuan* 玉臺文苑, published in the era of Tianqi (1621-1627).
16. Jiang Yuanzuo 江元祚, comp. *Xu Yutai wenyuan* 續玉臺文苑, 1632.²⁴
17. Zhao Shijie, comp. *Gujin nüshi*, 1628.²⁵
18. Shen Yixiu, comp. *Yiren si* 伊人思, 1636.²⁶
19. Zhuo Fangshui 卓方水, comp. *Gujin cihui er bian* 古今詞匯二編²⁷
20. Zhou Zhibiao, comp. *Nüzhong qi caizi lanke ji*, published in the early Qing.²⁸
21. Liu Rushi, comp. *Juan 4* of “Runji,” in Qian Qianyi, comp. *Liechao shiji*, 1649.²⁹
22. Ji Xian 季嫻 (1614-1683), comp. *Guixiu ji* 閨秀集, 1652.³⁰
23. Zou Siyi 鄒斯漪 (1615-?), comp. *Shiyuan ba mingjia ji* 詩媛八名家集, preface dated 1655.³¹

²³ See Yang Liying and Ye Hui, “Cong Mingren nüzi shiji de bianzuan” 34. The *juan* 96 of *Ming shi zong* 明詩綜 compiled by Zhu Yizun, included an erotic poem “Ta hua ci” 踏花詞 by an anonymous poet. Zhu informs us that the poem is from *Huajing junsheng*. The *Siku quanshu zongmu tiyao* recorded Ma Jiasong, comp., *Shi ke bian shi juan* 十可編十卷 (*SKQS-dianziban*). It is noteworthy that Chen Jiru wrote a preface for the collection. Wang Duanshu also mentioned that she used the *Huajing junsheng* as a reference when she compiled her anthology, the *Mingyuan shiwei*. See the entry on Shen Qian 沈倩, in *Mingyuan shiwei* 4. 22a.

²⁴ See the entries of *Yutai wenyuan* and its sequel *Xu Yutai wenyuan*, in Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 885-88. The two anthologies are reprinted together in *Siku quanshu cunmu congshu, jibu*, vol. 375: 275-509.

²⁵ Chang, “Ming and Qing Anthologies” 152-53.

²⁶ Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 115, 894. Modern reprint in Ye Shaoyuan 葉紹袁, comp., *Wumengtang ji* 午夢堂集 [Ji Qin ji jiao 冀勤輯校] 527-90. Dorothy Ko mentions that Shen Yixiu failed to include courtesan poets in her short anthology *Yiren si*. In fact, The anthology does contain the poems by one courtesan, the noted courtesan Zhou Qisheng 周綺生 [Zhou Wen]. See *Yiren si* 580. For Ko’s remarks, see Ko, “The Written word” 87.

²⁷ Reprinted in Zhao Zunyue, comp., *Mingci huikan*. Zhuo Fangshui was the younger brother of Zhuo Renyue 卓人月 (1606-36), the famous poet and playwright of the late Ming.

²⁸ Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 844.

²⁹ Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 433-34. For a detailed study of this anthology and its authorship, see Chang “Ming and Qing Anthologies” 153-56.

³⁰ The *Guixiu ji* is reprinted in *Siku quanshu cunmu congshu*, vol. 414: 330-82.

24. Zou Siyi, comp. *Hongjiao ji* 紅蕉集, early Qing edition.³²
25. Wang Shilu 王士祿 (1626-73), comp. *Ranzhi ji* 然脂集, preface dated 1658.³³
26. Wang Duanshu 王端淑 (1621-ca.1706), comp. *Mingyuan shiwei* 名媛詩緯, completed 1664, printed 1667.
27. Zhou Ming 周銘 comp. *Linxia cixuan* 林下詞選, 1671.³⁴
28. Deng Hanyi 鄧漢儀 (1617-89), comp. *Juan* 12 (on women writers) of *Mingjia shiguan chuji* 名家詩觀初集, 1672; “Guixiu bie juan” in *Shiguan er ji* 詩觀二集閨秀別卷; “Guixiu bie juan” in *Shiguan san ji* 詩觀三集閨秀別卷.³⁵
29. Liu Yunfen 劉云份, comp. *Cuilou ji* 翠樓集, 1673³⁶
30. Chen Weisong, comp. *Furen ji*.³⁷

³¹ Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 849. Copy of the collection is held in the Beijing Library.

³² Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 897.

³³ The *Ranzhi ji* was never formally published. Most of the collection was lost. Today, only 9 *juan* are preserved in the Shanghai Library. See Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 906-11. On the collection, see also Zeitlin, “Disappearing Verses” 99. The one *juan* *Ranzhi ji li* 然脂集例 (Principles of the *Ranzhi ji*) by Wang Shilu is reprinted in the *Siku quanshu cunmu congshu, jibu*, vol. 420: 729-38.

³⁴ Reprinted in *Xuxiu Siku quanshu, jibu*, vol. 1729: 548-663.

³⁵ Reprinted in *Siku quanshu cunmu congshu bubian*, vols. 39: 445-72 and 40: 331-47. For “Guixiu biejuan” in *Shiguan san ji*, see *Siku jinhui shu congkan, jibu*, vol. 3: 343-50. For a discussion of this anthology, see Chang “Ming and Qing Anthologies” 159. For a recent study of the compilation of the anthology *Shiguan* by Deng Hanyi and its socio-cultural and historical implications in the early Qing context, see Meyer-Fong, “Packaging the Men of Our Times.”

³⁶ Reprinted in *Siku quanshu cunmu, jibu*, vol. 395: 156-239.

³⁷ *Furen ji* is a collection of miscellaneous records about women in the late Ming and the Ming-Qing transition. I list it here because it records many poems by courtesans. More importantly, it includes rich information about the courtesan culture in the Ming-Qing transition period. The version of *Furen ji* that I rely on is a modern reprint (Shanghai: Shanghai Zhongyang shudian, 1935). It does not offer any clue regarding its publication date. But all the episodes Chen Weisong recorded happened in the Ming-Qing transition up to the early Kangxi period. I estimate that it must have been completed and published before 1682, the year Chen died.

31. Xu Shumin 徐樹敏 and Qian Yue 錢岳, comp. *Zhongxiang ci* 眾香詞, 1690.³⁸
32. Zhu Yizun 朱彝尊 (1629-1709), comp. *Juan* 98 of *Ming shi zong yi bai juan* 明詩綜一百卷, 1702.³⁹
33. Kui Xu 揆敘 [奉敕編纂] *Lichao guiya shi er juan* 歷朝閨雅, Kangxi edition 康熙刻本⁴⁰
34. Zhang Yuzhang 張豫章, et al, comp. [Kangxi] *Yuxuan Mingshi yi bai er shi juan, fu xingming jue li ba juan*. [康熙] 御選明詩一百二十卷, 附姓名爵里八卷. Preface by the Emperor Kangxi dated 1709.⁴¹
35. Shen Jiyou 沈季友, comp. *Juan* 34-35 of *Zuili shixi* 櫟李詩繫, published 1710.⁴²

The anthologies listed above clearly show that the anthologizing of writings by Ming courtesans appeared as early as the mid-Ming, flourished in the late Ming, and continued to be in vogue in the early Qing up to the late years of the Kangxi era. Many of the compilers of these anthologies, especially those produced in the late Ming, were intimately connected to the Jiangnan literary circles, Wang Ruqian's in Hangzhou in

³⁸ Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 898-99. Modern reprint (Taipei: Fuzhijiang chubanshe, 1997). For a description of the anthology, see Chang "Ming and Qing Anthologies" 160-63.

³⁹ The publication date of 1702 is recorded in Zhang Huijian, *Ming Qing Jiangsu wenren nianbiao* 936. Modern reprint (Taipei: Shijie shuju, 1988).

⁴⁰ Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 906. Reprint in *Siku weishou shu jikan*, Di shi ji 第十輯 30:1-98.

⁴¹ Modern reprint (Taipei: Shijie shuju, 1988). But I have used the electronic version of this anthology in the *Siku quanshu* (SKQS-dianziban).

⁴² Copy in the Dalian Library. I have used the electronic version of it in the *Siku quanshu* (SKQS-dianziban).

particular.⁴³ Below, I describe ten essential anthologies to highlight major developments of anthologizing writings by late Ming courtesans from the late Ming to the early Qing.

1. Tian Yiheng, comp. *Shinü shi*, 1557.⁴⁴

Tian Yiheng, courtesy name Ziyi 子藝, was a native of Qiantang 錢塘. Extremely talented but unsuccessful in examinations and officialdom,⁴⁵ he held a minor office in Huizhou 徽州 and then retired to Hangzhou, spending much of his time on wine and poetry. His *Shinü shi* appears to be the first diachronic anthology that included writings by contemporary Ming women. He included a total of twenty-six women poets from the Ming. Of the twenty-six Ming women Tian recorded, only one is a courtesan, the “Courtesan from Huai’an” (*Huai’an ji* 淮安妓). Although this near anonymous courtesan sounds insignificant, the *Shinü shi* becomes relevant to my study because of it. Moreover, Tian Yiheng was the first Ming anthologist to address in his preface the inclusion of the courtesan in his anthology. This mode was later adopted by many other late Ming editors and compilers of women’s writing as courtesan poetry was increasingly included in anthologies of women’s literary works.

⁴³ Zheng Wen’ang, Ma Jiasong, Jiang Yuanxi, Jiang Yuanzuo, Zhong Xing, Zhao Shijie, Liu Rushi, Zou Siyi, Wang Duanshu, and Deng Hanyi all stayed connected to Wang Ruqian’s literary circle in Hangzhou.

⁴⁴ For a detailed discussion about this anthology, see Fong, “Gender and the Failure of Canonization” 134-36. For Tian’s biographical information, see the biography of his father Tian Rucheng, in Goodrich and Fang, *Dictionary of Ming Biography* 1287-88. See also Qian Qianyi, *Liechao shiji xiaozhuan* 504.

⁴⁵ In the entry on “Wenren qian yi di” 文人慳一第, Xu Bo lists seven outstanding late Ming literati who did not successfully achieve the *jinshi* degree: Wen Zhengming 文徵明 (1470-1559), Wang Chong 王寵 (1494-1533), Wen Peng 文彭 (1498-1573), Wen Jia 文嘉 (1501-83), He Liangjun 何良俊 (1506-73), Ou Daren 歐大任 (1516-96), and Tian Yiheng. See Xu Bo, *Xu shi bijing* 徐氏筆精 7.22a-b (*SKQS-dianziban*).

Several other early period Ming anthologies of women's poetry also appeared in the Jia[jing]-Long[qing] periods: Li Hu's *Gusu xinke Tongguan yibian*, Hu Wenhuan's *Xinke tongguan zhaiqi*, and Yu Xian's *Shuxiu zongji*. Yu Xian's *Shuxiu zongji* deserves particular attention here because it was a very important anthology in the development of Ming anthologizing trends. Although it was not the first to include courtesan poets, Yu Xian's *Shuxiu zongji* appears to be the first Ming anthology devoted exclusively to contemporary Ming women poets. It was well selected and edited and it included seventeen Ming women (from 16 families, 16 *jia* 家) with seventy-two poems. It was later placed at the end of the "Qian ji" 前集 in the *Sheng Ming baijia shi*.⁴⁶ In the "Hou ji" 後集, Yu Xian added four women with their individual collections. But of the four, the woman poet Pan *shi* was already recorded in the "Qian ji." Thus Yu Xian recorded a total of twenty Ming women successively. Of the seventeen (in the *Shuxiu zongji*) or twenty (in the *Sheng Ming baijia shi*) Ming women Yu Xian recorded, only one is a courtesan, the "Courtesan from Huai'an," the same courtesan recorded by Tian Yiheng. Yu Xian placed her at the very end of the *Shuxiu zongji*. Similarly, both Li Hu and Hu Wenhuan organized their anthologies according to moral categories, placing courtesans at the end in the separate collection of the humble concubines and literary courtesans (孽妾文妓 or 侍姬文妓), the "*Bieji*" 別集, which indicates an early anthologizing trend of the Ming that moral conduct was considered more important than literary talent.

Nevertheless, these early anthologies produced in the mid-Ming record only one poem by a contemporary courtesan, the anonymous Huai'an *ji*. This suggests that during

⁴⁶ For the *Shuxiu zongji*, see *Sheng Ming baijia shi*, "Qian ji," reprinted in *Siku quanshu cunmu congshu, jibu*, vol. 306: 662-69. Four individual collections are included at the end of the "Hou ji" in Yu Xian's *Sheng Ming baijia shi*, vol. 308: 799-808.

the mid-Ming when there were few women writing poetry as Yu Xian claimed in his prefaces to the *Pan shi shiji* and *Shuxiu zongji* that he compiled,⁴⁷ there were far fewer courtesans than gentry women writing poetry, if any. This may surprise many of us as courtesans are often assumed to have been an influence on gentry women if not the only literate women in pre-modern China in terms of women's literary pursuits, and not the other way around.⁴⁸

The Qing *Siku* editors often criticized Ming anthologists for "they plagiarized each other" and thus "reproduced one another's mistakes."⁴⁹ This charge might be valid in some cases, but there is no concrete evidence to suggest these early anthologies largely copied from each other even though the number and names of the women recorded are suspiciously similar. For example, both Yu Xian and Li Hu included poetry by the woman Pan *shi*, but their poem selections are not all the same. As a matter of fact, according to the short biographical entries provided by Yu Xian, almost all the poems of the women he recorded were selected from their individual collections, with the exception of a few single poem selections.⁵⁰ This suggests that these early Ming anthologists often included poetry to which they had easy access and they might have used the same limited but widely circulated literary collections of individual women. Thus, a single poem by an anonymous woman such as the Huai'an *ji* could be a common choice for anthologists if it was known to all.

⁴⁷ Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 197; 881.

⁴⁸ Ropp, "Ambiguous Images" 18; Ko, "The Written Word" 78.

⁴⁹ Quoted in Fong, "Gender and the Failure of Canonization" 146-47.

⁵⁰ Such as the poem by Huai'an *ji* and the poem by Yu Xian's mother. See Yu Xian, comp., *Shuxiu zongji* 669.

2. Gu Qilun (1517-87), comp. Juan 19 of *Guo ya* (1573)⁵¹

The first anthology produced in the Wanli era that included courtesan poets was the *Guo ya*, the general anthology of Ming poetry compiled by Gu Qilun.⁵² A native from Wuxi like Yu Xian, Gu Qilun obviously took Yu Xian's *Shuxiu zongji* and *Sheng Ming baijia shi* as important references for making his own anthology as he repeatedly referred to “*Shuxiu ji*” (i.e., *Shuxiu zongji*) or “the anthology that Yu Xian compiled” (*Yu shi suo zuan* 俞氏所纂 or *Yu shi suo ke* 俞氏所刻).⁵³

Gu devoted one *juan* (*juan* 19) to Ming women, placing them before the monks at the end of the *Guo ya*. There are some similarities between the two anthologies by Yu Xian and Gu Qilun. First, both slim collections on women's poetry were intended by the compilers to be part of their bigger projects—general anthologies of Ming poetry. Second, the time span of their anthologies was from the beginning of the Ming dynasty down to their own time. Third, both Yu Xian and Gu Qilun shared a common interest in including in their anthologies substantial works by many of their living contemporaries who might have connections with them, such as friends, acquaintances, or even family members. Yu Xian included poetry by Huangfu Fang 皇甫沄, one of the preface-writers for his *Sheng Ming baijia shi*. In the preface, Huangfu Fang expresses his thankfulness for being included with his brothers in this anthology. Yu Xian even recorded his two sons. As for women poets, Yu Xian included a poem that he thought to have been

⁵¹ Reprinted in *Siku quanshu cunmu congshu bubian* 15: 326-719.

⁵² On Gu Qilun's biographical information, see entries in Zhang Huijian, *Ming Qing Jiangsu wenren nianbiao* 164, 299, 303, 314, and 340.

⁵³ *Siku quanshu cunmu congshu bubian* 15: 351, 353.

written by his mother.⁵⁴ There were at least two other women he included in his anthology, with whom he had direct or indirect long term familial friendships.⁵⁵ Similarly, Gu included many *shanren* 山人 (men of the mountains) or *buyi* 布衣 (commoners) friends who exchanged poetry with him in his literary circles.⁵⁶

This late Ming selection practice in incorporating living authors including friends, relatives, and family members, was severely and repeatedly criticized by Qing *Siku* editors.⁵⁷ It is important to note that the *Siku* editors considered this late Ming anthologizing practice to be one rooted in poetry societies although they also admitted that late Ming literati had precedents from earlier dynasties. The comments made by the *Siku* editors on the *Guoxiu ji* 國秀集 compiled by the High Tang poet Rui Tingzhang 芮挺章 (fl. 744) clearly reveal what should be presented as plausible and just in anthology-making:

In the pre-Tang periods, the anthologizing practice in incorporating works of the compilers' own writings started from *Chu ci* compiled by Wang Yi (89-158).⁵⁸ It occurred again in the *Yutai xinyong* by Xu Ling (507-83).⁵⁹

⁵⁴ Yu Xian accidentally found the poem in his late father's drafts and he supposed it was written by his mother. See the entry on "Yu jiefu" 俞節婦 in *Shuxiu zongji*, reprinted in *Siku quanshu cunmu congshu, jibu*, vol. 306: 609.

⁵⁵ See Yu Xian's short prefatory remarks put before *Ma shi zhiju ji* and *Sun furen shiji*, in *Siku quanshu cunmu congshu, jibu*, vol. 308: 800 and 801, respectively.

⁵⁶ See the *Siku* editors' comments on the *Guo ya*, reprinted in *Siku quanshu cunmu congshu bubian* 15: 719.

⁵⁷ See their comments on the three-juan *Guoxiu ji* 國秀集 in *Qinding Siku quanshu zongmu* 186.15a-16a. See also their comments in the entries "Jin shishuo" 今世說, "Jibu zongxu" 集部總敘, "Jiangyou shigao" 江右詩稿, and "Chongshou tang shiji" 寵壽堂詩集 in *Qinding Siku quanshu zongmu*, 143.47b-48b; 148.1a-2b; 177.75b-76b; and 183.5b, respectively.

⁵⁸ Wang Yi was the Later Han period imperial librarian who included his own writings in *Chuci zhangju* 楚辭章句, an anthology he had compiled. For a general introduction of the "Chuci," see Hawkes, trans. & annot., *The Songs of the South*.

⁵⁹ Xu Ling was the Liang court poet who compiled the *Yutai xinyong*. This anthology was sponsored by the Liang Crown Prince, later known as Emperor Jianwen, Xiao Gang 蕭綱 (503-51). For a modern reprint of the anthology, see *Yutai xinyong jianzhu* 玉臺新詠箋注. For an English translation of

[Rui] Tingzhang also included two pieces of his own writings [in the *Guoxiu ji*]. He probably followed the examples of Wang Yi and Xu Ling. But one's writings should be judged only by [other] people under the heavens and by those in later ages in order to achieve just discernment. Why should people show off their talent and sing their own praises? There are examples to follow, yet ultimately these examples are not fit to be regarded as models.⁶⁰

唐以前編輯總集以己作入選者,始見於王逸之錄楚詞,再見於徐陵之撰玉臺新詠。挺章亦錄己作二篇,蓋仿其例。然文章論定自有公評,要當待之天下後世,何必露才揚己,先自表彰。雖有例可援,終不可爲訓。

Apparently, in the eyes of Qing scholars, Wang Yi, Xu Ling, and Rui Tingzhang were not wonderful precedents for Ming-Qing anthologists to follow. Rui Tingzhang not only included his own writings in the anthology he compiled, but also included poetry by Lou Ying 樓穎, the preface-writer for the *Guoxiu ji*. In contrast to these anthologists, the first literary anthology the *Wen xuan* 文選 by Xiao Tong 蕭統 (501-31), was considered to have been a good example of anthology-making:⁶¹

When the Liang Prince Zhaoming compiled *Wen xuan*, he excluded poems by He Xun (?-518?) because at the time of compilation, He Xun was still living. Probably this way he could exercise just discernment without being distracted by worldly customs. In the case of [Rui]

and introduction to the anthology, see Birrell, *New Songs*. For a study of songs in the anthology from a feminist perspective, see Robertson, "Voicing the Feminine" 68-72.

⁶⁰ See the entry on *Guoxiu ji* 國秀集 in *Qinding Siku quanshu zongmu* 186.15a-16a.

⁶¹ On *Wen xuan* and its contribution to Chinese genre theory, see Hightower, "The Wen Hsüan and genre theory." See also David Knechtges's introduction to his translation, *Wen xuan or Selections of refined Literature*, vol. 1.

Tingzhang and [Lou] Ying, one included living authors in his anthology while the other wrote the preface because the anthology contains his own writings... From these cases, we see that this late Ming inveterate practice of poetry societies came a long way gradually. It was not a change that occurred within one day from morning to evening.⁶²

梁昭明太子撰文選, 以何遜尤在, 不錄其詩. 蓋欲杜絕世情, 用彰公道. 今挺章與穎一則以見存之人採錄其詩, 一則以選己之詩爲之作序... 知明人詩社錮習其來有漸, 非一朝一夕之故矣.

From this quotation, we learn that, generally, especially under High Qing standards, anthologists should uphold two basic principles in their anthology-making. First, an anthology must not include living authors. Second, it must not include authors who have personal connections with the compiler, not to mention the compiler himself. Although late Ming literati had precursors from former dynasties, the literati trend of boosting and promoting each other in the context of poetry societies definitely furthered this anthologizing practice to its peak. Viewed in this light, the exclusion of all Qing works in some anthologies produced in the Qing such as *Gonggui wenxuan* 宮闈文選 (1843) by Zhou Shouchang 周壽昌 (1814-84) does not suggest that the compilers were Ming loyalists.⁶³

It is not surprising that Yu Xian and Gu Qilun were severely criticized by Qing *Siku* editors because they both recorded living authors including family members and

⁶² See the entry on *Guoxiu ji* in *Qinding Siku quanshu zongmu* 186.15a-16a.

⁶³ Chang, "Ming and Qing Anthologies" 165. It is interesting that while Shen Yixiu and Wang Duanshu included their own writings in the anthologies that they had compiled, Liu Rushi and Ji Xian did not.

friends in their anthologies.⁶⁴ But unlike Yu Xian's, Gu's anthology records for the first time the poetry of contemporary courtesans with names (rather than just the earlier anonymous "Courtesan from Huai'an"), such as Lin Nu'er 林奴兒, Shao shi, 邵氏, Zhao Yanru 趙燕如, Jiang Shunyu 姜舜玉, and Wang Wenqing 王文卿, names that appear repeatedly in later Ming anthologies. As the first anthology produced in the Wanli reign, *Guo ya* marked a new beginning in the development of anthologizing poetry by Ming courtesans by recording courtesans with real names.

One slim anthology of women's poetry produced in the early Wanli era that I want to note here is *Guixiu shiping* 閨秀詩評⁶⁵ by Jiang Yingke 江盈科 (1556-1605). I did not put Jiang's *Guixiu shiping* on the above list as it does not include any contemporary Ming courtesans. But it is still worth mentioning here because this anthology mingled poems of courtesans together with the gentry women's verses. Courtesans and gentry women were treated equally under the same category of *guixiu*, an approach that was different from that of Yu Xian, Gu Qilun, and other earlier anthologists, who put courtesans at the end of their anthologies. This approach would soon be widely adopted by many late Ming anthologists and remain popular for many decades to come.

Jiang Yingke was the most enthusiastic supporter of the influential literary school of Yuan Hongdao, the Gong'an school. It is well-known that under the influence of the Gong'an school, the expressive literary trend enjoyed a huge vogue in the late Ming. The Jingling school, formed later by Zhong Xing and Tan Yuanchun, continued to emphasize spontaneity and self-expression in writing. As Fong has pointed out, many late Ming

⁶⁴ See the comments at the ends of the *Sheng Ming baijia shi* and *Guo ya*. See *Siku quanshu cunmu congshu, jibu*, vol. 308: 811 and *Siku quanshu cunmu congshu bubian*, vol. 15: 719, respectively.

⁶⁵ Hu Wenkai records only the author and the title. See Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 893. The entire *Guixiu shiping* is reprinted in *Xuxiu Siku quanshu, zibu*, vol. 1191: 624-31.

anthologies of women's poetry were well located in or related to the developments in the larger literary trends.⁶⁶ Many literati who promoted courtesans were intimately connected to the Gong'an and Jingling schools.

3. Mei Dingzuo (1549-1618), comp. *Qingni lianhua ji* (1600)

Mei Dingzuo, courtesy name Yujin 禹金, a native of Xuancheng (Anhui), was a well-known unrestrained literary figure of his day.⁶⁷ He passed the district examination at the age of sixteen (Chinese *sui*), but because he disliked the strict regulations of the examination system, he gave up the pursuit of higher degrees immediately after. It is also unlikely that his official career was remarkable. In 1571, he became a member of the most well-known literary society of his day in Nanjing, the Qingxi she.⁶⁸ Like many Ming literati, Mei chose to remain out of office as a retired literatus in order to live life independently. He devoted most of his time to recreation such as gardening, but more importantly to writing. The *Siku* catalogue contains nineteen titles by him and most of his writings are lighter literature.

The *Qingni lianhua ji* was the earliest courtesan-specific collection produced in the Ming. It is arranged into categories according to dynasty and the different kinds of courtesan virtues such as religious pursuit, chastity, and poetic talent. Strictly speaking, the thirteen-juan *Qingni lianhua ji* as a whole is not a poetry anthology, but a collection of biographies of courtesans. But four *juan* (*juan* 9 to 12) are basically devoted to writings by talented courtesans under the category of "Ji zao" 記藻 (Records of flowery

⁶⁶ Fong, "Gender and the Failure of Canonization" 140-41.

⁶⁷ For Mei's biographical information, see Goodrich and Fang, *Dictionary of Ming Biography* 1057-59.

⁶⁸ See Zhang Huijian, *Ming Qing Jiangsu wenren nianbiao* 293.

words). Ming courtesan poets are recorded in *juan* 12. Thirty contemporary Ming courtesans are included in the collection, twelve of whom are known for their poetic words and lines. Of the twelve Ming courtesan poets, six are near anonymous. Of the six with names, only three are new names in relation to names recorded in Gu Qilun's *Guo ya*; namely Su Guiting 蘇桂亭, Shuo Zhaoxia 朔朝霞, Liu Jizhao 劉季招. In addition to these three, one new name recorded in the section of "Ji jie" 記節 (Records of the chaste) is Qi Jingyun 齊景雲, a name that repeatedly appeared in later anthologies of women's poetry.

Almost all of these "literary" courtesans recorded here appear with a single poem selection except for Wang Ruqing 王儒卿 (i.e., Wang Wenqing) who has two recorded poems. Mei Dingzuo actually doubted the authorship of some of the poems he recorded. In the entry for "Courtesan Yang," Mei Dingzuo informs us that he took the information on Yang and her poem from the *Daoting lu* 道聽錄 (A record of hearsays). According to Mei Dingzuo, the author of the *Daoting lu* suggested this poem might have been written by a male poet such as Chen Lunan 陳魯南, who taught Yang poetry, and that the author of the *Daoting lu* also indicates that he actually met the courtesan but did not see the poem by her. In the entry for "Su Guiting," Mei also made a note that he had never heard that Su could write poetry.⁶⁹ I would suggest that the paucity of poems by real courtesans and the disputed authorship of their writings in the first half of the Wanli era reflect male

⁶⁹ See *Siku quanshu cunmu congshu, zibu*, vol. 253: 888.

anxiety for literary courtesans to play a more important role in their social and literary life.⁷⁰

Despite all the undesirable “shortcomings” it might have in terms of a serious literary anthology, the appearance of the *Qingni lianhua ji* is significant in several ways. It was the first Ming collection exclusively devoted to courtesans. Also for the first time, the lotus flower, a metaphor with noble implications in Chinese literature, was used to refer collectively to courtesans who as a social group had a low social status. His unorthodox taste, nonconformist spirit, and his playful parody in dealing with orthodox cultural conventions all make this anthology an embodiment of the fashions and values of late Ming unrestrained male literati. The flaunting of orthodox values was one of the late Ming trends of heterodoxy and it was a means used by nonconformist literati to express their cultural distinctions.

4. Zhang Mengzheng, comp. *Qinglou yunyu* (1616)

Except for the anthology itself, we find no further information on the lives of Zhang Mengzheng, the compiler, Zhu Yuanliang 朱元亮, the commentator, and Huayin shangren 花烟上人 (pseudonym, Reverent Flower-Worshipper,⁷¹ referring to a visitor to the pleasure districts), the preface-writer. However, the appearance of Zhang Mengzheng’s *Qinglou yunyu* marked a sudden and sharp rise of literary courtesans during

⁷⁰ In contrast with the paucity of poems by courtesan poets, quite a few gentry women poets produced and circulated their collections. For example, Ma Xianqing, wife of Chen Lunan [Chen Yi], was one of the few mid-Ming women whose poetry collections are extant (Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 154). Her poetry collection entitled *Zhiju ji* is included at the end of the “Hou ji” in the *Sheng Ming baijia shi*. See Chapter 1, 42 (note 20).

⁷¹ I have used Ko’s translation for “Huayin shangren.” See Dorothy Ko’s entry in Chang and Saussy, *Women Writers of Traditional China* 744.

the late Wanli reign as demonstrated by the number of poets and number of poems recorded in the anthology.

It is arranged according to the contents in the *Piaojing* 嫖經 (Classic of whoring) by a Ming anonymous author, whose title is a parody of Confucian classics such as the *Shijing* 詩經 (Book of odes). Each section begins with a short citation from the *Piaojing*, followed by interpretative or evaluative comments by Zhu Yuanliang and Zhang Mengzheng. This commentary is then followed by poetic works (*shi*, *ci*, *qu*) of courtesans if any existed that were relevant to the topic, and finally by illustrations of scenes of courtesans and literati.⁷² Despite its extremely unorthodox tastes and an unconventional organization of the selections that is unique, the *Qinglou yunyu* appears to be one of the most important anthologies of courtesan writings. It marked the heyday of late Ming courtesan culture.

First, as an exclusive courtesan poetry anthology, it records over five hundred poems by one hundred and eighty writers, which was unprecedented. Of the total number of poets, one hundred-fourteen are those of the Ming.⁷³ Among them are the most famous Ming courtesans such as Ma Yuejiao 馬月嬌 (i.e., Ma Xianglan), Xue Susu, Jing Pianpian 景翩翩, Zhu Taiyu 朱泰玉, Zhao Yanru 趙燕如, Zhao Jinyan 趙今燕, Xu Jinghong 徐驚鴻, Zheng Ruying 鄭如英, Hao Wenzhu 郝文珠, Cui Zhongwen 崔重文, Kou Wenhua 寇文華, Zhou Wen 周文, and many others. These courtesans enjoyed great fame and textual visibility for their artistic talent, refined taste, and romantic liaisons with prominent late Ming literati. The *Qinglou yunyu* includes so many well-known

⁷² The version I use does not have illustrations attached to individual entries but a few illustrations are put at the beginning of the anthology before the “Fanli” 凡例, the Principles of selection.

⁷³ Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 892.

courtesans that these names form the majority of the Ming courtesans' with which we are familiar.⁷⁴

Second, it also includes for the first time poem selections for major courtesans in substantial numbers rather than the single poems previously recorded. For example, it contains poems by Jing Pianpian (24 titles, 33 poems), Xue Susu (17 titles, 21 poems),⁷⁵ Ma Xianglan (11 titles, 14 poems), and by Zhao Jinyan (9 titles, 9 poems). Some of the courtesans with substantial selections and some of the poems by famous courtesans appear only in this anthology.⁷⁶

Third, it includes for the first time poems by courtesans who had evident personal connections with the compiler. In this anthology, several poems are addressed directly to Zhang Mengzheng, the compiler.⁷⁷ From these poems we can detect the development of the unorthodox practice of anthology-making in which personal connections became a factor in the process of selection, a practice closely and notoriously related to poetry societies, as I mentioned before. Obviously, literati like Zhang Mengzheng were no longer afraid of or cared about placing their names together with those of courtesans into the historical record.

⁷⁴ The few exceptions are those who flourished at the very end of the Ming, such as Wang Wei, Yang Wan, Liu Rushi, and Gu Mei, who were obviously too young to be included here.

⁷⁵ Hu Wenkai collected twenty-nine poems by Xue Susu from *Ranzhi ji* and *Liechao shiji*. Given the fact that three poems of Xue were recorded in the latter, the former should include twenty-six of her poems. Hu Wenkai did not mention the inclusion of Xue's poems in the *Qinglou yunyu*. See Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 203.

⁷⁶ Eleven poems by the courtesan named Zhao Guan 趙觀 are included in the *Qinglou yunyu*, but her name only appeared again in Wang Duanshu's *Mingyuan shiwei* where one poem is recorded. But Wang Duanshu used the *Qinglou yunyu* as a reference and she obviously learned the name from the *Qinglou yunyu*. In addition, most of Ma Yuejiao's fourteen poems recorded here are not found in later important anthologies such as the *Mingyuan shigui*, *Liechao shiji*, and *Mingyuan shiwei*.

⁷⁷ "Zeng Zhang Mengzheng" 贈張夢徵 by Weiyang ji 維楊妓 (*juan* 1); "Xieshou qu ji Zhang Mengzheng" 攜手曲寄張夢徵 and "Ji Zhang Liulang" 寄張六郎 by Sun Juan 孫娟 (*juan* 3).

The *Qinglou yunyu* was widely circulated during the late Ming and even in the early Qing. Wang Duanshu, one of the most celebrated female poets and critics, copied many names from the *Qinglou yunyu* in the sequel of the *Yanji* 艷集 (the Erotic Collection) of her anthology, the *Mingyuan shiwei* (juan 25). Wang notes that her husband bought the *Qinglou yunyu* from a bookstore after she had already completed the section on courtesans. But she found the *Qinglou yunyu* “full of songs by courtesans of note” (皆名姬艷妓歌咏也), thus she compiled the sequel in which she included all the names recorded by Zhang except those that were already contained in her original courtesan section in the *Mingyuan shiwei*.⁷⁸ Given the free circulation of such an unorthodox anthology and Wang Duanshu’s tolerant and even positive attitude towards it, the Kangxi era seemed to continue to accommodate or tolerate nonconformist literati of the late Ming.

Another important courtesan collection I wish to emphasize is the *Qinhuai siji shi* by Mao Yuchang. A friend of Zhong Xing, Tan Yuanchun, and Mao Yuanyi, Mao Yuchang was one of the many unrestrained literary figures actively involved in literary societies in Nanjing in his day.⁷⁹ The *Qinhuai siji shi* is the only Ming-dynasty-specific courtesan poetry collection. It included works by Ma Shouzhen 馬守貞 (Ma Yuejiao or Ma Xianglan), Zhao Caiji 趙彩姬 (Zhao Jinyan), Zhu Wuxia 朱無瑕 (Zhu Taiyu), and Zheng Ruying (Zheng Wumei 鄭無美). The four courtesans included here already appeared in the *Qinglou yunyu*. From many late Ming writings, we see that they were

⁷⁸ See Wang Duanshu, comp., *Mingyuan shiwei* 25.1a.

⁷⁹ In 1619, Mao Yuchang, Pan Zhiheng, Zhong Xing, Tan Yuanchun, Mao Yuanyi, Fu Ruzhou 傅汝舟 (fl. 1620s), and Wu Dingfang 吳鼎芳, gathered together for a meeting in Wulong tan in Nanjing (Jinling). See Zhang Huijian, *Ming Qing Jiangsu wenren nianbiao* 448.

among the most popular ones in the literati circles of their time.⁸⁰ Like his contemporaries, Mao had intimate associations with some of these courtesans and the making of such an anthology was largely because of these associations.⁸¹ In the hands of Ming literati, especially these nonconformist literati who were actively involved in poetry societies, the anthology-making of women's poetry became an important means by which to amuse themselves and to associate with like-minded literati rather than to exercise genuine critical discernment.

5. Zheng Wen'ang, comp. *Gujin mingyuan huishi* (1620)

Like Mei Dingzuo, Zheng Wen'ang gave up his pursuit for degrees when he was young (早棄公車).⁸² In the anthology, Zheng recorded thirteen Ming courtesans, eleven of whom already appeared in previous anthologies such as the *Qinglou yunyu*. But this collection is still notable for several reasons. First, it includes for the first time the two young courtesan poets Wang Wei and Yang Wan, who became outstanding courtesan poets living at the very end of the Ming. As we will see, Wang Wei was the Ming courtesan recorded in anthologies with the largest number of poem selections while Yang Wan was probably the only Ming courtesan whose literary collections were carefully compiled and published before the fall of the Ming and are still extant.⁸³

Second, this anthology recorded as many as fourteen names of the proofreaders 同校姓氏 and most of them were literary commoners of the *shanren* or *buyi* type.

⁸⁰ See the entries, in Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü*.

⁸¹ Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 200. Zheng Ruying had a poem addressed to Mao Yuchang.

⁸² See Zhu Zhifan's preface to the *Gujin mingyuan huishi*. Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 881.

⁸³ Liu Rushi's writings are also largely extant, but a significant portion of her adult life was in the Qing rather than in the Ming. She was recorded in Hu Wenkai as a Qing dynasty woman. See Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 430-34. For Yang Wan's collections, see the bibliography.

Obviously, for these literary commoners, the recording of their names was an important way, if not the only way, for them to carve their names into the historical record. More importantly, if we check with selected courtesans in the anthology and those who were involved in the process of making this anthology, we will find the striking fact that some of the selected courtesans either had intimate relations with certain members involved in the production of this anthology or their selected poems were directly addressed to these male literati. For example, Mao Yuanyi was one of the proofreaders, and the two young courtesans, Wang Wei and Yang Wan, were his concubines at that time. Jing Pianpian's selected poem was addressed to Zhang Zhengyue 張正岳, the sponsor of the anthology, preface-writer, and proofreader while Hao Wenzhu's poem was addressed to Zhang Longfu 張隆父 (i.e., Zhang Shichang 張士昌), a proofreader. Ma Xianglan and Cheng Ruwen 程孺文 (Cheng Han 程漢) were old acquaintances. Ma had a poem addressed to Cheng, the doyen of a poetry society (*shezhang* 社長) at the time when the poem was written, now a proofreader for Zheng Wen'ang's anthology.⁸⁴

Third, Zheng Wen'ang's anthology boldly rejected social status or moral conduct as selection criteria and treated poetry by all women as equally valuable. The *Gujin Mingyuan huishi* was a general women's poetry anthology, but it was rooted in the same ground as those courtesan-specific anthologies discussed above. Under this guideline for selection, Zheng organized his anthology according to chronology as well as prosodic forms and genres of poetry regardless of the class or social status of the authors. The

⁸⁴ Ma Xianglan's poem to Cheng Ruwen was recorded in Zhang Mengzheng's *Qinglou yunyu*. See Zhang Mengzheng, comp., *Qinglou yunyu*, *juan* 1: 21-22.

nondiscriminatory attitude towards courtesans in selection was actually shared by all the women's poetry anthologies produced in the late Ming.⁸⁵

Finally, Zheng Wen'ang's *Gujin mingyuan huishi* seems to have served as an important reference for the poetry collection in Zhao Shijie's *Gujin nüshi* (1628), as the latter recorded exactly the same number of courtesan poets in the same order as the former did.⁸⁶ But in addition to a poetry collection, the *Gujin nüshi* also consists of a prose collection in which essays by courtesans are included. For example, Ma Xianglan's "Letter to Wang Baigu" 與王百穀書, was preserved in this section.⁸⁷ These writings are valuable for studies of Ming courtesans in terms of new generic access to the intellectual climate in the heyday of late Ming courtesan culture.

6. Zhong Xing, comp. (attrib.) *Mingyuan shigui* (c. 1625)

The *Mingyuan shigui* is one of the most influential Ming anthologies of women's poetry known for its extensive selection of Ming writers and their poems despite the fact that Zhong Xing's editorship has been in question since the early Qing.⁸⁸ Of the total thirty-six *juan*, a dozen (*juan* 25-36) are devoted to women poets of the Ming.

Zhong Xing organized his anthology chronologically according to dynasty and poet rather than according to moral and class categories. Twenty-four Ming courtesans are recorded. The two new names are Zhang Hui 張回 and Liang Yuji 梁玉姬 (i.e.,

⁸⁵ The exception to this is the earlier *Guo ya* which placed courtesans' poetry at the end of the anthology, before the "Immortals" (*xian pin* 仙品).

⁸⁶ In the *wenji* section, Zhao Shijie recorded another courtesan Liang Yu'er 梁玉兒 (i.e., Liang Xiaoyu). Therefore, Zhao Shijie recorded a total of fourteen courtesans.

⁸⁷ Wang Baigu (i.e., Wang Bogu 王伯穀, Wang Zhideng), the famous *buyi* literatus who played a leading role in the literary societies of Suzhou for almost thirty years, was Ma's lover.

⁸⁸ For general discussions of the *Mingyuan shigui* and its editorship, see Chang, "Ming and Qing Anthologies" 151; Fong, "Gender and the Failure of Canonization" 146.

Liang Xiaoyu 梁小玉).⁸⁹ Most of the courtesans recorded in the *Mingyuan shigui* are mingled with gentry women in *juan* 26, 27, 30, 31, and 35. But the final *juan* (*juan* 36) is devoted exclusively to the courtesan Wang Wei with an unprecedented selection of eighty-eight titles (98 poems), which makes the *Mingyuan shigui* an important anthology for the study of Wang Wei's poetry. The reason for Wang Wei to receive special consideration lies in her personal connections with literati in the Zhong [Xing]-Tan [Yuanchun] circles, which I will give more detail in the next chapter.

However, for other prominent courtesans, the numbers of their poems included in the *Mingyuan shigui* are not so impressive. For example, compared with the twenty-four titles (33 poems) from Jing Pianpian and seventeen titles (21 poems) from Xue Susu, titles already recorded in the *Qinglou yunyu*, only fifteen of Jing's titles (18 poems) and four of Xue's titles (4 poems) are recorded in the *Mingyuan shigui*. As for Yang Wan, Wang Wei's most intimate female friend, only one poem of Yang Wan is included in this anthology, a sharp contrast to the case of Wang Wei.

As I mentioned above, late Ming anthologists had an increased penchant for including poetry by their acquaintances. Given the fact that Wang Wei had poems addressed to both Zhong Xing (1 poem) and Zhong Xing's friend Tan Yuanchun (7 poems), founders of the Jingling school, I agree with Fong's speculation that Zhong Xing

⁸⁹ Liang was a very productive author. Wang Shilu's *Ranzhi ji* contains ten titles of her authorship. As I mentioned earlier, she was recorded in *Gujin nüshi* with the name of Liang Yu'er. She was also famous for her bold critical comments on contemporary male literati, including the most prominent ones such as Yuan Hongdao and Tang Xianzu. Probably because of her character, she was not welcomed but often criticized by male literati. Only a few of her writings are extant. See Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 160-64. Zhong Xing included ten poems by Liang Xiaoyu in this anthology. Interestingly, Wang Duanshu attempted to defend Liang Xiaoyu in the *Mingyuan shiwei*, although Wang included only one poem from Liang. See *Mingyuan shiwei* 24.10a-b.

possibly initiated the *Mingyuan shigui* which was later polished and completed by other people in his literary circles such as Tan Yuanchun.⁹⁰

7. Liu Rushi (1618-64), comp. *Juan* 4 of “Runji” in Qian Qianyi, comp. *Liechao shiji* (1649)

The *Liechao shiji*, an extensive anthology of Ming poetry, was compiled and edited by Qian Qianyi, one of the most influential literary and political figures in the Ming-Qing transition period. The section on women poets (*juan* 4 of the “Runji”) is believed to have been compiled and edited by Qian’s talented concubine, the famous courtesan Liu Rushi.⁹¹ As the first collection of women’s poetry after the fall of the Ming, the production of this anthology should have begun before the dynastic transition. Thus, this anthology was also situated in the larger late Ming anthologizing trends. But as a woman anthologist, and especially as a former courtesan, Liu Rushi obviously took a more cautious or more orthodox approach in arranging her collection.

Liu organized her selections of women poets according to social class and moral categories from highest to lowest rank. First came imperial women, rewarded chaste women, or gentry women of certain virtues, followed by ordinary gentry women and a few virtuous courtesans, and finally ordinary courtesans. However, she displayed no rigid moral or class discrimination towards courtesans. As a matter of fact, in her compilations, Liu preferred to include poetry by courtesans. She recorded a total of

⁹⁰ See Fong, “Gender and the Failure of Canonization” 146.

⁹¹ See Gu Ling 顧苓, “Hedong jun xiaozhuan” 河東君小傳 in Gu Huizhi, comp., *Liu Rushi shiwen ji*, “fulu” 226. Gu Ling was Qian Qianyi’s disciple and this biography of Liu Rushi was written only a few months after Liu’s suicide (1664). See also Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 433. But Wang Duanshu referred to the comments made on certain women included in the “Runji” as “Qian Qianyi’s comments” (Yushan ping 虞山評). This may have been because Qian Qianyi was the editor of the *Liechao shiji*. See the entry of Liang Yuji 梁玉姬, in *Mingyuan shiwe* 24.10a-b.

thirty-five courtesans; approximately ten of these are new. More importantly, she included a substantial number of poems for major prominent courtesans. She recorded sixty-one poems by Wang Wei, fifty-two by Jing Pianpian, twenty by Zhou Wen, nineteen by Yang Wan, seventeen by Hu Wenru 呼文如, fifteen by Liang Xiaoyu, and eleven by Zhao Jinyan.⁹² This is in contrast to the *Mingyuan shigui* that contained a substantial number of poems only by Wang Wei, a courtesan with whom the compiler had intimate personal connections.

The “Runji” of *Liechao shiji* is a well selected and edited project in terms of scholarly excellence. As we will see below, it became an important reference for the *Yuxuan Mingshi* commissioned by the Kangxi emperor. Liu Rushi did not simply copy from previous anthologies, such as the influential *Mingyuan shigui*, another bad practice of late Ming anthology-making that was often criticized by Qing *Siku* editors. Of the sixty-one poems (actually sixty poems) of Wang Wei included in the “Runji,” thirty-four poems are not recorded in the *Mingyuan shigui* while none of Liang Xiaoyu’s fifteen poems included in this anthology appeared previously in the *Mingyuan shigui*. Accordingly, these two anthologies, together with the earlier *Qinglou yunyu* by Zhang Mengzheng, contain the primary sources for poetry by Ming courtesans available in anthologies. For example, in the case of Wang Wei, from the *Mingyuan shigui* and “Runji” of *Liechao shiji*, I am able to gather together one hundred thirty-two poems written by her. As we will see below, the *Guixiu ji* compiled by Ji Xian also makes a good addition of nine more poems by Wang Wei to these two anthologies. These

⁹² Comparably, Liu Rushi included only eight poems by Lu Qingzi, and two poems by Xu Yuan 徐媛 (fl. 1590). Both Lu Qingzi and Xu Yuan were accomplished gentry women poets who already had their literary collections published in the late Ming.

anthologies together allow me to present a case study of writings by Wang Wei, especially as her literary collections are no longer extant (see Chapter 3).

It is also notable that as an accomplished poet herself, Liu did not include any of her poems in the “Runji” of *Liechao shiji* that she compiled. She probably attempted to avoid a violation of the anthologizing principles. As a courtesan-turned gentry family member, she seemed more consciously and anxiously to have adhered to traditional values. Her approach sharply contrasts with that of Wang Duanshu, gentry woman compiler of women’s poetry, who included a full *juan* of sixty-three poems of her own in the *Mingyuan shiwei*.

8. Ji Xian (1614-1683), comp. *Guixiu ji* (1652).⁹³

Liu Rushi did not include herself in the “Runji” of the *Liechao shiji*, but she was included and appreciated by other literati men and women of her day. She was first included in the *Guixiu ji* (1652) compiled by the gentry woman Ji Xian, one of the most famous female literary figures in the literati world in the Ming-Qing transition.⁹⁴

Ji Xian organized her anthology according to generic categories. Courtesan poets and gentry women are treated as equals under the same category “*guixiu*,” an open-minded approach initiated by Jiang Yingke and shared by almost all the anthologists of the late Ming. Ji Xian records eleven courtesans in her anthology and three poems by Liu Rushi are included. But it contains nineteen poems by Wang Wei and nine of them

⁹³ Ji Xian’s *Guixiu ji* is reprinted in *Siku quanshu cunmu congshu*, vol. 414: 330-82. For Ji Xian’s biographical information, see Fong, “‘Record of Past Karma’ by Ji Xian” 135-44.

⁹⁴ Ji Xian was a poet and anthologist. She also contributed poem to male literary societies. When Wang Shizhen 王士禎 (1634-1711) held office in Shandong, he called for poems for his newly founded “Autumn-willow society” (Qiuliushu 秋柳社), he was amazed that gentry women poets, such as Ji Xian and Wang Luqing 王璐卿 were able to respond to his rhyme from the distant Guangling (Yangzhou). See Wang Shizhen, *Gufu yuting zalu* 古夫于亭雜錄 4.16b-17a (*SKQS-dianziban*).

appear exclusively in this anthology. Thus, *Guixiu ji* makes a good addition to extant sources of writings by major courtesans (especially Wang Wei), the anthologies discussed above.

From Ji Xian's non-discriminatory attitude towards courtesans in selection, we see that the *Guixiu ji* was well situated in the prevalent anthologizing trend of the late Ming and early Qing. However, it is noticeable that Ji Xian's anthology is very selective and she was greatly concerned about the morality of the poems. For example, Zhong Xing included the long poem by Wang Jiaoluan 王嬌鸞, titled "Song of Everlasting Resentment" 長恨歌 in the *Mingyuan shigui*.⁹⁵ The autobiographical poem narrates the illicit romance between Wang Jiaoluan and her lover, a relationship that ended due to his betrayal. Before Wang committed suicide, she wrote this poem to her lover. But Ji Xian was very determined to keep it out of her anthology because it was "extremely vulgar and immoral (鄙穢已極)." Like Liu Rushi, Ji Xian did not include her own poems in the *Guixiu ji*. Her selection policy offers two insights into her work. First, as an individual compiler, Ji Xian may have had a greater concern with principles than her male counterparts or other more open-minded gentry women, such as Wang Duanshu who included this poem and her own poems in the *Mingyuan shiwei*. Second, Ji Xian's approach reflects her own value judgments, judgments that are carried out with independence, confidence, and authority as a woman critic.

⁹⁵ Translation of the poem by Paul F. Rouzer, in Chang and Saussy, *Women Writers of Traditional China* 188-94.

9. Wang Duanshu, comp. *Mingyuan shiwei* (completed 1664, printed 1667).⁹⁶

It took Wang Duanshu twenty-eight years to have the *Mingyuan shiwei* finally completed and published, from 1639 to 1667. In contrast to the anthologies by Liu Rushi, Ji Xian, and Zou Siyi, which are selective, Wang Duanshu's *Mingyuan shiwei* is comprehensive in its approach. The anthology was intended to include all women of the Ming dynasty extending from the late Yuan to the early Qing so as to give a sense of "completeness" of the Ming dynasty.⁹⁷ Born into a respectable gentry family and daughter of the prominent late Ming scholar Wang Siren 王思任 (1575-1646), Wang Duanshu seems to have had more loyalist sentiments for the Ming than other anthologists.⁹⁸ After the fall of the Ming, she wrote many loyalist poems.⁹⁹ In his preface to the *Mingyuan shiwei*, Wang Duanshu's husband Ding Shengzhao 丁聖肇 (1621-1700?) claimed that his wife felt obligated to "make an anthology of women's poetry for her own dynasty to show the feelings, tears, and blood of a generation (編一代之名媛一代之風詩...一代之情一代之淚一代之血)."¹⁰⁰ Ding repeated twelve times the word "yidai" 一代 (literally, a generation or a historical period, referring to the Ming).

In a manner similar to Liu Rushi, Wang Duanshu arranged her anthology of about one thousand women according to social status. She distinguished gentry women poets from courtesans. She even grouped courtesans into different categories based on their

⁹⁶ On Wang Duanshu's life and literary pursuits, see Widmer, "Ming Loyalism" 367-73, and "The Epistolary World" 10-11; and Chang, "Ming and Qing Anthologies" 157.

⁹⁷ Wang Duanshu included the late Yuan women poets Cao Miaoqing and Zhang Miaoqing in her anthology. These two women exchanged poems with the famous literatus Yang Weizhen in male literary societies of Hangzhou during the Yuan-Ming transition. Wang Duanshu followed the practice of Qian Qianyi who included Yang Weizhen in his *Liechao shiji*. See my discussion in Chapter 1, 60-61.

⁹⁸ For a discussion of Wang Duanshu's loyalist sentiments for the Ming, see Widmer, "Ming Loyalism."

⁹⁹ See Ding Shengzhao's 丁聖肇 preface to *Yinhong ji* 吟紅集 by Wang Duanshu, in Chang and Saussy, *Women Writers of Traditional China* 764-65.

¹⁰⁰ See *Mingyuan shiwei*, "Xu" 4.4b.

moral conduct. Those who were known for certain virtues or those who were courtesans-turned-concubine are placed in *juan* 19 and 20 of “Zhengji” 正集 (Proper collection) along with gentry women. Thirty-two courtesans are recorded. Those who were less “proper” are placed in the “Xinji” 新集 (New collection) and “Runji” 閏集 (Intercalary collection). Six courtesans are recorded and they are mingled with less respectable gentry women.¹⁰¹ However, the majority of courtesans are grouped into *juan* 24 and 25 of the “Yanji” 艷集 (Erotic collection). Two hundred and twenty-eight names are recorded in the “Yanji.” Of that number, one hundred and seven courtesans are recorded by name only. There were no poems recorded of these women.¹⁰² In *juan* 33 of the “Yiji” 遺集 (Left-out collection), she records a further thirty-two names to which no poems are attached. From *juan* 36 through *juan* 40, sections on *shiyu* (song lyrics), *qu* (drama lyrics), or *hui* (painting), Wang Duanshu mingles courtesans with gentry women and 31 courtesans are recorded. Thus, altogether, the *Mingyuan shiwei* contains two hundred and eighty-nine names of Ming courtesans, more than any other women’s poetry anthologies produced in Chinese literary history.

Wang Duanshu’s classification of women poets according to social status has drawn scholarly attention. Kang-i Sun Chang has observed that Wang Duanshu’s moral approach was to attempt to “establish proper literary credentials for gentry women poets, as opposed to courtesan-poets.”¹⁰³ On the one hand, I agree with Chang that there was a gradual rise of moral concerns in early Qing anthology-making. On the other hand, considering the all-inclusive nature of the anthology of one thousand women, this could

¹⁰¹ Judging from their behaviour, the women recorded in the “Xinji” and “Runji” could be counted as courtesans. But I only count those Wang Duanshu labelled as courtesans.

¹⁰² As I mentioned above, Wang copied many names from Zhang Mengzheng’s *Qinglou yunyu*.

¹⁰³ Chang, “Ming and Qing Anthologies” 158.

be more a practical choice than a serious moral statement. First, Wang Duanshu was not the first in the early Qing period (Liu Rushi was) to arrange women poets according to social status, from imperial women, gentry women and virtuous courtesans, down to ordinary courtesans. Second, Wang Duanshu does not follow this moral classification consistently. From *juan* 36 to *juan* 40, in recording women who were brilliant in song lyrics, drama lyrics, or painting, she arranges women either according to genre such as *shiyu* or *qu* song lyrics or artistic forms such as painting. In these sections, she mingles courtesans together with gentry women. Third, her comments on courtesans such as Liu Shi suggest that, far from discriminating against them, she had great admiration for them. She regarded Liu Rushi as a “real talented female giant of note” 真名媛巨擘也.¹⁰⁴

The *Mingyuan shiwei* is comprehensive. Compared to other anthologies that contained only *shi* poetry, the *Mingyuan shiwei* recorded *shi*, *ci*, and *sanqu*. Moreover, Wang Duanshu attempted to include as many women as she could find. Her anthology recorded the names of many Ming courtesans, including such famous courtesans as Xu Mei 徐眉 (i.e., Gu Mei) and Lin Xue 林雪 (i.e., Lin Tiansu).¹⁰⁵

However, because it is “comprehensive,” the number of poem selections for individual courtesans in this anthology is limited. For example, she recorded only nine poems by Wang Wei, one of the most productive courtesan poets in the Ming. Many famous courtesans are recorded with one or two poem selections while many other less famous courtesans are recorded by name alone.

¹⁰⁴ See *Mingyuan shiwei* 20.1b.

¹⁰⁵ As I already mentioned, Gu Mei was a famous poet and painter and she became a concubine of the prominent early Qing scholar-official Gong Dingzi. Lin Tiansu was a talented courtesan, an intimate friend of Wang Ruqian. In Li Yu’s famous play *Yizhong yuan* (Ideal Love Matches), Lin Tiansu married the well-known *shanren* literatus Chen Jiru, important member of Wang Ruqian’s Hangzhou literary societies, who exchanged poetry also with Wang Wei and Yang Wan.

Considering Wang Duanshu's role as an active literary figure engaging in male poetry societies in the Ming-Qing transition period,¹⁰⁶ it is not surprising that the *Mingyuan shiwei* was deeply influenced by Ming anthologizing trends. Her anthology is comprehensive yet quite lax in her selection principles. She included one full *juan* of her own poetry in the *Mingyuan shiwei*, not to mention her inclusion of writings by her sister, relatives, friends, and associates. She even called for her female contemporaries to send more poems to her for future publication.¹⁰⁷

Several anthologies published some time after the *Mingyuan shiwei*—Zhou Ming, comp. *Linxia cixuan*; Deng Hanyi, comp. *Mingjia shiguan*; Liu Yunfen, comp. *Cuilou ji*; Xu Shumin and Qian Yue, comp. *Zhongxiang ci*; and Zhu Yizun, comp. *Ming shi zong*—are also important anthologies that included writings by Ming courtesans. In particular, the *Mingjia shiguan* gives much detail about the life of the literati world in the Ming-Qing transition period through prefatory notes on individual poets or comments on their poems. But I do not intend to introduce them individually because of the limited space of this chapter.¹⁰⁸ Below, I will introduce the *Yuxuan Mingshi*, the anthology of Ming poetry sponsored by the Emperor Kangxi, to finish my investigation of writings by late Ming courtesans in women's poetry anthologies produced in the late Ming and early Qing periods.

¹⁰⁶ Wang Duanshu exchanged poetry with several prominent literati such as Mao Qiling 毛奇齡. See her poems addressed to Mao in *Mingyuan shiwei* 42.13b-14a; 14b-15a. She wrote a preface to Li Yu's play "Bimu yu" 比目魚 (Sole Mates). She was also a visitor to Wang Ruqian's Buxiyuan, writing to match Wang's rhymes. But her poems were excluded from Wang's collections by the compiler, Wang's grandson because of the limited space. See *Chunxingtang shiji* 5.33b and 5.75a. But Huang Yuanjie's poem was included. *Chunxingtang shiji* 5.28b. In addition to the *Mingyuan shiwei*, she edited and compiled several more works. See Widmer, "The Epistolary World" 10-11.

¹⁰⁷ See Wang Duanshu, "Zheng ke Mingyuan shiwei chubian xiaoyin" 徵刻名媛詩緯初編小引, in *Mingyuan shiwei* 3a-b. See also *Mingyuan shiwei* 40.1a. Shen Yixiu's *Yiren si* also included her own writings (see Ye Shaoyuan, comp. *Wumengtang ji* 586-90) while Liu Rushi and Ji Xian avoided doing this.

¹⁰⁸ For discussions of some of these anthologies, see Chang, "Ming and Qing Anthologies" 159-63.

10. Zhang Yuzhang, et al, comp. [Kangxi] *Yuxuan Mingshi*. 120 vols., *fu xingming jue li ba juan* (preface by the Emperor Kangxi dated 1709).

In the general anthologies (*zongji* 總集) section of his *Lidai funü zhuzuo kao*, the comprehensive catalogue of women's writings in pre-modern China, Hu Wenkai does not mention the large anthology of Ming poetry, the *Yuxuan Mingshi*, in which one hundred and fifty-three Ming women are recorded.¹⁰⁹ Commissioned by the Emperor Kangxi, this 120-juan *Yuxuan Mingshi* is an important source for studies of writings by Ming women including courtesans. But it remains unknown to recent scholarship.¹¹⁰

The anthology begins with eight-juan of "Xingming jue li" 姓名爵里, which recorded names of all the poets and their biographical sketches. These names are arranged according to Confucian social and gender norms from emperors (帝系), princes (宗室), scholars (諸家), monks (羽流衲子), and finally women (宮闈). The classification of women was also based on these orthodox norms, placing imperial women first, followed by gentry women, religious nuns, courtesans, and finally immortals and ghosts (仙鬼).

The anthology proper consists of 120 *juan* of poetry by Ming poets. The first two *juan* are devoted to poetry by the emperors 帝系 (1 *juan*) and princes 宗室 (1 *juan*) of the Ming. From the third *juan* on, the anthology is organized according to prosodic forms: four-character verse 四言詩 (1 *juan*), *yuefu* 樂府 (12 *juan*), five-character ancient-style

¹⁰⁹ I did not count the number of female ghosts recorded in the anthology.

¹¹⁰ The *Yuxuan Mingshi* is one of the *Yuxuan Song Jin Yuan Ming si chao shi* 御選宋金元明四朝詩. This anthology might have been overshadowed by the prominent anthology of Tang poetry, the *Yuzhi Quan Tang shi* 御製全唐詩 (preface dated 1707).

verse 五言古詩 (20 *juan*), seven-character ancient-style verse 七言古詩 (14 *juan*), five-character regulated verse 五言律詩 (18 *juan*), seven-character regulated verse 七言律詩 (24 *juan*), five-character linked regulated verse 五言長律 (3 *juan*), seven-character regulated long verse 七言長律 (1 *juan*), five-character quatrain 五言絕句 (5 *juan*), seven-character quatrain 七言絕句 (16 *juan*), six-character verse 六言詩 (2 *juan*), and multi-character verse 雜體 (2 *juan*).

The *Yuxuan Mingshi* is selective yet comprehensive. It contains thirty-eight Ming courtesans with generous poem selections for major courtesans.¹¹¹ It includes thirty five poems by Wang Wei, twenty-eight poems by Jing Pianpian, twelve poems by Yang Wan, eleven by Zhou Wen, and ten by Zhao Caiji.

If we compared the names of courtesans and their poem selections recorded in the *Yuxuan Mingshi* with those recorded in earlier anthologies, we would find that the *Yuxuan Mingshi* used the *Liechao shiji* and *Ming shi zong* as important references.¹¹² Take Wang Wei as an example. The *Yuxuan Mingshi* contained thirty-five poems by Wang Wei, but the actual number of Wang Wei's poems recorded in the *Yuxuan Mingshi* is thirty-four because one poem appeared twice in different generic sections.¹¹³ Of the thirty-four poems, thirty-one appeared in the *Liechao shiji* while three poems appeared in the *Ming shi zong*, but not in the *Liechao shiji*.

¹¹¹ The name of Qi Jingyun appears in an earlier part of the section on gentry women.

¹¹² In the section on Ming courtesans, the "Changji bu" 娼妓部 in the *Gujin tushu jicheng* 古今圖書集成, also commissioned by the Kangxi emperor and completed in 1706, the compilers frequently referred to the *Liechao shiji xiaozhuan* for biographical information on individual courtesans. See, for example, the entry on Yang Wan, in *Gujin tushu jicheng* 452.46b.

¹¹³ The poem entitled Yi Jiangnan 憶江南 appeared twice in *Yuxuan Mingshi* 15.20a and 116.11a-11b.

The *Yuxuan Mingshi* did not include Liu Rushi. As I mentioned before, Liu did not include herself in the *Liechao shiji* because she followed the traditional practice of anthology-making. But it is not clear to me why she was not recorded in the *Ming shi zong* and *Yuxuan Mingshi*, anthologies made by other compilers. Did later anthologies such as the *Yuxuan Mingshi* simply follow Liu's selections of women poets in the *Liechao shiji*? Or was Liu Rushi's poetry recorded but later extracted for destruction (*chou hui* 抽毀) during Qianlong's literary inquisition? As we know, the *Liechao shiji* was banned during Qianlong's literary inquisition in the High Qing when Qian Qianyi was specially targeted. Fortunately, however, the *Yuxuan Mingshi* did not suffer the unfortunate fate of the *Liechao shiji*. On the contrary, because of its imperial status, it was selected to be included in the *Siku quanshu* (the Complete Library of the Four Treasuries). The anthology might have been the only substantial source for writings by late Ming courtesans that was accessible to the public in the Qing when other anthologies such as the *Liechao shiji* were banned or unavailable. Even today, the *Yuxuan Mingshi* is still an important source for studies of late Ming courtesans in terms of its generous inclusion of late Ming courtesans—both for the number of courtesans and the number of their poems.

The Qing *Siku* scholars held the view that Qing anthologists produced better quality anthologies than their late Ming counterparts did. It is generally true in terms of scholarly quality. Compared to anthologies produced in the late Ming, especially those in the Wanli era, the Qing anthologies reflect more serious efforts from the compilers to make anthologies in a more conventional way. While the early Qing saw a continuation

of late Ming anthologizing trends in which courtesan poets were mingled with gentry women in anthologies, it also saw an increase of moral concerns in anthology-making. However, the categorization by moral conduct became more common in the late years of the Kangxi reign regardless of the gender of the compilers. For example, from Xu Shumin and Qian Yue's *Zhongxiang ci* (1690) and Zhu Yizun's *Ming shi zong* (1702), we see that the hierarchization or classification of women poets according to moral and class categories became more rigid and elaborate. Zhu Yizun separated gentry women and courtesans, placing them in different *juan* (*juan* 85 and *juan* 98, respectively). He held a negative attitude towards courtesans and a suspicious attitude towards the authorship of their poetry.¹¹⁴ He also harshly criticized Huang Yuanjie, one of the well-known women poets of the gentry class living in the Ming-Qing transition, as "having the appearance of a courtesan" 近風塵之色.¹¹⁵ From the *Yuxuan Mingshi*, we see that by the end of the Kangxi era, Confucian orthodox values had gained importance in anthology-making. One can predict that the morality-influenced approach of organizing women's poetry would be much reinforced during the High Qing when courtesans, after an unprecedented glamorous rise in the late Ming, resumed their old social station—the lowest rank in society.

Part Two

The Changing Rhetoric of Legitimation: Prefaces to Women's Poetry Collection from the Song to the Ming¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ See Zhu Yizun, comp., *Ming shi zong* 98.1a-b (*SKQS-dianziban*).

¹¹⁵ See the entry on Huang Yuanzhen 黃媛貞, sister of Huang Yuanjie, in Zhu Yizun, comp., *Ming shi zong* 85.21b.

¹¹⁶ The early Qing anthology-making largely continued the late Ming anthologizing trend. At this point, I will not discuss prefaces to anthologies produced after the Ming. For a more detailed discussion

Late Ming literati promoted poetry by courtesans as a legitimate part of literati culture through anthology-making of poetry by courtesans, as we have seen; they also used “prefaces” to their anthologies as sites to rationalize and valorize writings by this group of women. In other words, the importance of writings by late Ming courtesans can be learned from their visible inclusion in women’s poetry anthologies and from the rhetoric in male-authored prefaces to these anthologies.

To legitimize and defend their efforts to promote women’s writings, including those by courtesans who were defined as belonging to the “depraved” class or “mean” class in both Confucian didactic texts and official legal codes, late Ming nonconformist literati did not directly attack Confucian orthodox social and gender norms; on the contrary, they attempted to bend Confucian classical canons such as the *Shijing*, to suit new interpretations so that they claimed to “adhere” to Confucian ideology while they actually deviated far from it. In their attempt to valorize poetry by courtesans, late Ming literati often argued that Confucius also recorded the so-called debauched odes or licentious songs (*yin shi*) in the *Shijing*. In this way, they both defended and promoted poetry of courtesans on the one hand and their efforts to preserve writings by this group of women, on the other hand.

However, late Ming literati did not invent the strategy of associating women’s poetry with the *Shijing*, although they made it fashionable. Below, I attempt to place the idealization of courtesan poetry in the larger valorization of women’s poetry and trace the earlier history of preserving women’s poetry in the Song and Yuan times. By so doing, I

regarding the rhetoric of legitimizing women’s poetry from the Song to the Ming, see my paper, “The Rhetoric of Legitimation.”

attempt to identify continuity and change regarding the strategy of promoting women's poetry, including that of courtesans in the late Ming.

*"The Sage Records Women's Poetry": Male-Authored Prefaces to
Women's Poetry Collections before the Ming*

In her ground-breaking study of Ming-Qing anthologies of women's poetry, to which I have frequently referred, Kang-i Sun Chang sees the anthology-making of women's writings as co-operative efforts by both male and female editors and compilers to promote women's poetry. Chang notes the common Ming-Qing anthologists' strategy of associating their anthologies with classical canons such as the *Shijing* as attempts to valorize writings by women. Although it is often assumed that this strategy was pioneered by Yuan Mei 袁枚 (1716-97), the famous promoter of women's active participation in literary culture in the High Qing, Chang points out that this strategy was in fact first used by late Ming anthologists, such as Zhao Shijie, who compiled the anthology of women's writings *Gujin nüshi*.¹¹⁷

However, if we trace the argument back to prefaces to women's poetry collections produced in earlier times rather than focusing only on anthologies in the Ming-Qing period, the high point of women's literary culture, we will find that the strategy of claiming a discovery of women's poetry in the *Shijing*—"the Sage records women's poetry"—was not only a late imperial phenomenon, but a general approach in Neo-Confucian scholarship beginning in the Northern Song.¹¹⁸ To demonstrate my argument,

¹¹⁷ See Chang, "Ming and Qing Anthologies" 152-53.

¹¹⁸ In this section, I discuss the rhetorical evolution regarding the strategy of promoting women's poetry within the hermeneutical tradition of Song-Ming Neo-Confucianism, the so-called *Songxue* 宋學, Song learning, contrary to the *Hanxue* 漢學, evidential scholarship. Song-Ming Neo-Confucian scholarship adopted a flexible and subjective way of reading and interpreting Confucian classical canons, which greatly

I provide a critical summary of a group of male-authored prefaces to women's poetry collections produced before the Ming, most of which are examined for the first time in this study.¹¹⁹

1. Ouyang Xiu's 歐陽修 (1007-72)¹²⁰ "Xie shi shi xu" 謝氏詩序 (Preface to poems by née Xie, 1037)

The extant sources suggest that Ouyang Xiu was the first to use the strategy of associating a contemporary woman's poetry with that of ancient women recorded in the *Shijing*, supposedly compiled by the editor-sage Confucius. In 1037, the fourth year of the era of Jingyou 景祐 (1034-38) when Ouyang Xiu held the office of magistrate of Yiling 夷陵 district in Xiazhou 峽州 (Fujian), he wrote a preface to *Caipin shi* 採蘋詩 (Gathering duckweed, 1037),¹²¹ a poetry collection by the contemporary gentry woman poet Xie Ximeng 謝希孟. This was at the request of her elder brother Xie Jingshan 謝景山, a friend of his. Xie Ximeng's poetry collection was lost, but the preface survives because it was included in Ouyang Xiu's own corpus. Her name and the title of her poetry collection are recorded in *Songshi*.¹²² In his comprehensive catalogue of Chinese

departed from the Han traditional interpretations. For an examination of the evolution of the Chinese hermeneutical tradition from Confucius to Zhu Xi, see Van Zoeren, *Poetry and Personality*. On the shift in intellectual orientation of the Qing from Song-Ming scholarship, see Benjamin A. Elman, *From Philosophy to Philology*; and Kai-wing Chow, *The Rise of Confucian Ritualism*.

¹¹⁹ Of the six prefaces examined in this section, only the two by Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 (1007-72) and Yang Weizhen are mentioned and reproduced in Hu Wenkai's catalogue of Chinese women's writings. The rest are found in other sources, such as literati's individual collected works. For the Chinese texts of these prefaces that are not included in Hu Wenkai's catalogue, see Appendix 2.

¹²⁰ Ouyang Xiu's biography can be found in *Songshi* 319.1a-11b. For a comprehensive study of Ouyang Xiu's literary achievements, see Ronald Egan, *The Literary Works of Ou-yang Hsiu (1007-72)*. On Ouyang Xiu's contribution to Neo-Confucian scholarship, see Van Zoeren, *Poetry and Personality* 151-89.

¹²¹ The preface for Xie's *Caipin shi* is reproduced in Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 65-66, and translated by Ronald Egan in Chang and Saussy, *Women Writers of Traditional China* 725-26.

¹²² *Songshi* 280.37b.

women's writings, Hu Wenkai provided an entry on Xie Ximeng, the title of her poetry collection *Caipin shi*, and Ouyang Xiu's preface.

In the preface, Ouyang Xiu first narrates how he became acquainted with Jingshan, how excellent Jingshan was in writing poetry, and how admirable Jingshan's mother was for educating not only her son but also the daughter so ably. Ouyang Xiu further introduces Ximeng's moral character and poetry, explaining why he wrote the preface for her poems:

... Ximeng's words are more evocative and profound. She abides by decorum and does not indulge herself. Her poetry has the style of the secluded and virtuous young ladies of ancient times. She is not merely a woman who is able to express herself. Now, Jingshan has circulated among the world's most worthy and eminent men, and so he became famous in his time. Ximeng, however, had the misfortune of being a woman, and there was no one to make her prominent in the world. Long ago, the names of Lady Zhuang of Wei and the wife of Mu of Xu were recorded by Confucius, and their poems were placed among the "Airs of the States." Today, if there were a man of towering stature who could rank contemporaries, leaving a convincing account for posterity, once Ximeng had been acclaimed by him, her name would never perish....¹²³

Ximeng was portrayed as a paragon of Confucian virtue, the secluded woman who cloistered herself in the inner quarters. By associating Ximeng's poems with those by Lady Zhuang (known as Zhuangjiang 莊姜) of Wei and the wife of Mu of Xu (known

¹²³ Translation by Egan, in Chang and Saussy, *Women Writers of Traditional China* 726-27; quotations on 726.

as Xu Mu *furen* 許穆夫人) who were recorded in the *Shijing* by Confucius, Ouyang Xiu attempted to legitimize Ximeng's literary engagement, on the one hand, and to both defend and promote his writing of the preface, on the other hand. These words of Ouyang Xiu were cited frequently by promoters of women's poetry in later ages.

As a great Confucian statesman in his day and one of the most distinguished literary giants in Chinese literary history, Ouyang Xiu drew a great number of followers and admirers during his life and in later ages. This preface was selected to be included in *Tang Song badajia wenchao* 唐宋八大家文鈔 compiled by Mao Kun 茅坤 (1512-1601)¹²⁴ and in *Wenzhang bianti huixuan* 文章辨體彙選 compiled by He Fuzheng 賀復徵 (1600-46+).¹²⁵ Both were influential anthologies in the late imperial literati world and were easily accessible, even to women.¹²⁶

The Qing scholar He Zhuo 何焯 (1661-1722), courtesy name Yimen 義門, explicitly pointed out that all the late imperial rhetoric of promoting women's writing by associating women's poetry with that recorded in the *Shijing* originated from Ouyang Xiu's preface to *Caipin shi*. But He Zhuo held a rather negative attitude towards it: "This kind of essay was what Han [Yu] 韓[愈 768-824] and Liu [Zongyuan] 柳[宗元 773-819] would never write. The passage from 'Long ago, the names of Lady Zhuang of Wei and the wife of Mu of Xu' to 'her name would never perish' was too exaggerated and irrelevant. All the clichés produced after the Southern Song were actually based on

¹²⁴ Mao Kun, *Tang Song badajia wenchao* 45.16a-17a (*SKQS-dianziban*).

¹²⁵ He Fuzheng, *Wenzhang bianti huixuan* 299.4a-5a.

¹²⁶ The High Qing woman writer Xu Yezhao 徐葉昭 (1729-1794+) claimed that she took *Tang Song badajia wenchao* as a model to write prose and very much enjoyed reciting the pieces from the collection every day from morning to evening. Obviously, these anthologies were also available to women, at least in some families. See Xu Yezhao, "Preface to *Zhisi zhai xuewen gao*" 職思齋學文稿序, in Xu Yezhao, *Zhisi zhai xuewen gao* 職思齋學文稿, vol. 1: 1a-b.

this.”¹²⁷ In fact, most of the writers of the prefaces discussed in this section claimed Ouyang Xiu as an influence.

2. Master Ren Nai’s/Ren Gongnai’s 任公鼎 “*Wang Anzhi ji xu*” 王安之集序

(Preface to Wang Anzhi’s collection, 1168)

Hu Wenkai’s catalogue contained no information on Wang Anzhi and her poetry collection. In his *Zhizhai shulu jieti* 直齋書錄解題, the Song cataloguer Chen Zhensun 陳振孫 (c. 1190-1249+) provided a short entry on *Chushi nü Wang Anzhi ji* 處士女王安之集.¹²⁸ According to Chen, Wang Shangong 王尚恭 (courtesy name Anzhi 安之) was the daughter of Wang Kang 王亢 (courtesy name Zicang 子倉) and a native of Jianchi 簡池 (in Sichuan). Anzhi died unmarried when she was twenty (Chinese *sui*) in the year *wuzi* 戊子 (1168) of the Qiandao 乾道 era (1165-73). Wang Kang wrote the funerary inscriptions (*muzhiming* 墓誌銘) for her while Master Ren Nai wrote some prefatory remarks for her poems. Ren claimed that he did so on the analogy of Master Ou[yang Xiu]’s writing a preface for Xie Ximeng’s poetry. But Ren said the collection was no longer extant. However, when Chen Zhensun recorded this, he noted that he himself had a copy of the collection that Ren did not see.

¹²⁷ For the Chinese text of this quotation, see the entry on “Ou wen” 歐文 (Prose by Ouyang Xiu) in He Zhuo, *Yimen dushu ji* 義門讀書記 38.15b (*SKQS-dianziban*). Qing *kaozheng* 考証 scholars often held negative attitudes towards Song-Ming Neo-Confucian scholarship. For He Zhuo’s English biography, see Arthur W. Hummel, ed., *Eminent Chinese of the Ch’ing Period* 283-85.

¹²⁸ See *Zhizhai shulu jieti* 20.29a (*SKQS-dianziban*). The *Wenxian tongkao* 文獻通考 compiled by the Southern Song scholar Ma Duanlin 馬端臨 (1254-1323) included this entry taken from Chen’s *Zhizhai shulu jieti*, but under the title “Chunü Wang Anzhi ji” 處女王安之集. See Ma Duanlin, comp., *Wenxian tongkao* 245.37a (*SKQS-dianziban*).

3. Zhou Bida's 周必大 (1126-1207) "*Ba Xiaotai shi*" 跋蕭臺詩 (Postface to *Xiaotai shi* by Qian shi 錢氏, 1201)

We find no information on Qian shi and her *Xiaotai shi* in Hu Wenkai's catalogue. This postface is included in *Wenzhong ji* 文忠集¹²⁹ by Zhou Bida, a great scholar-official in the early Southern Song.¹³⁰ According to Zhou, Qian shi was the great-grandaunt of Qian Wenzi 錢文子, a native of Yongjia 永嘉 (in Zhejiang). When the three-juan *Xiaotai shi* was sponsored and published by the district government of Liling 醴陵 county, Qian Wenzi, most likely the magistrate of the county at that time, wrote the preface while he asked Zhou to write the postscript. Zhou did as requested:

...I have observed that among the three hundred poems in the *Shijing* were some composed by women. Literati in later ages might not be able to reach the heights because it is difficult to write poems that originate from human feelings while also meeting the standards of ritual and righteousness. In the era of Jingyou, Master Ouyang Wenzhong wrote a preface for Xie Ximeng's poetry, saying that "*Ximeng's words are more evocative and profound. She abides by decorum and does not indulge herself. Her poetry has the style of the secluded and virtuous young ladies of ancient times.*"¹³¹ [Ouyang] intended to promote Ximeng and add her to the ranks of Lady Zhuangjiang of Wei and the wife of Mu of Xu. Please attach these words to the end of the collection.

¹²⁹ See Zhou Bida, *Wenzhong ji* 49.22b-23a (*SKQS-dianziban*).

¹³⁰ Zhou's official biography can be found in *Songshi* 391.1a-9b.

¹³¹ Quoted from Ouyang Xiu's preface to *Caipin shi*; I have used Egan's translation for this quotation. See Chang and Saussy, *Women Writers of Traditional China* 726.

Written on the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month of the first
year of Jiatai 嘉太 [1201].¹³²

Zhou Bida, who helped finish the compilation of the *Collected Works of Ouyang Xiu* (歐陽文忠公集) for publication in 1196,¹³³ simply repeated some of Ouyang Xiu's words to finish his mission of writing a postface for *Xiaotai shi*.

4. Wang Bo's 王柏 (1197-1274) "*Ba Yizhai yingao*" 跋怡齋吟稿 (Postface to *Yizhai yingao* by Dai furen 戴夫人)

Again, Hu Wenkai had no information on the woman poet and her works. But we can locate her in time and place because the postface to *Yizhai yingao* is included in *Luzhai ji* 魯齋集¹³⁴ by Wang Bo (style name Luzhai 魯齋), a well-known Neo-Confucian statesman at the end of the Southern Song.¹³⁵ Born into a famous scholar-official family with a tradition of Neo-Confucian learning, he was identified with the school of Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130-1200), the great Song Neo-Confucian philosopher and founder of the school, whose interpretations of the Confucian classical canons were the basis of orthodox learning for several centuries.¹³⁶

¹³² For the Chinese text of this preface, see Appendix 2.

¹³³ A copy of the *Collected Works of Ouyang Xiu*, compiled in 1196 by Zhou Bida, held in the National Library of China (Beijing).

¹³⁴ See *Luzhai ji* 13.11b-12b (*SKQS-dianziban*).

¹³⁵ For Wang Bo's official biography, see *Songshi* 438.7b-10a. He was one of the famous Neo-Confucian worthies in the Song. See Chen Si 陳思, *Liang Song mingxian xiaoji* 兩宋名賢小集 214.1a-b (*SKQS-dianziban*).

¹³⁶ Wang Bo was a disciple of He Ji 何基 (1179-1269), whose mentor Huang Gan 黃榦 was the son-in-law of Zhu Xi. For this reason, Tuoketuo 托克托, editor of the *Songshi*, identified Wang Bo with the school of Zhu Xi, which, however, was criticized by the *Siku* editors for Wang Bo's deliberate rejection of the orthodox interpretations of classical canons. See the entry on *Shuyi jiu juan* 書疑九卷 by Wang Bo, in *Qinding Siku quanshu zongmu* 13.3b-6a.

In this postface, Wang Bo informs us that his father, Wang Han 王瀚 and Master Dai 戴公, the Erudite Scholar 博士, both natives of Wuzhou 婺州 (Jinhua 金華, Zhejiang), were very close friends. The two received the *jinshi* degree in the same year, died unexpectedly in the same year, and were buried on the same day. The two families remained close even after their deaths, and accordingly, Wang Bo had the opportunity to read *Yizhai yingao* by Mme. Dai. The postface was written at the request of Dai's grandson sixty years after Wang Bo first read the collection. He praised the long-time family intimate as follows:

...Her awe-inspiring chastity of character is reflected in her poetry through *bi* 比 (comparison) and *xing* 興 (stimulus). She was reverent and elegant without any of the rouge-and-powder habits of women. She cannot be matched even by the honourable and chaste women of ancient times....

I believe there will be gentlemen in later generations who love the *Ya* 雅 (poetry). Therefore, I am not worried about her poetry being passed on to later generations; instead, exactly because of this, I am sad she will bear no comparable successors in posterity. Nevertheless, among the three hundred and five poems many were by women. The Sage did not disregard them, for these poems could arouse the good will of people and lead their disposition to reach righteousness. These poems are indeed of supplementary benefit to help teach people in the world, and they are worth being promoted. Absolutely, they should not be hidden at home and

cherished privately. Therefore, I write these words at the end of her collection.¹³⁷

Wang Bo's postscript was written in his later years when he had been recognized by his contemporaries to be a Confucian worthy. It is unlikely that he intended to borrow any authority from Ouyang Xiu when he wrote this postface. In addition, because of the special connection between the two families, Wang Bo was very generous with his complimentary words. Dai *furen*'s virtue and talent could hardly have been exaggerated, but Wang's remarks sound empty and irrelevant.

5. Chen Lü's 陳旅 (1288-1343) "Jingfang shiji xu" 靜方詩集序 (Preface to *Jingfang ji* 靜方集 by Li Zhizhen 李智貞)

Hu Wenkai made a short entry on the woman poet Li Zhizhen and her poetry collection *Jingfang ji*.¹³⁸ According to Hu Wenkai, Li Zhizhen was the wife of Zheng Quan 鄭全, mother of Zheng Min 鄭旼. She was able to read when she was seven *sui*. After her husband died, she committed suicide by fasting. Accordingly, she became known for her chastity. Her name and the title of her poetry collection were recorded in the local gazetteers of Pucheng 浦城 (Fujian), but her collection has been lost.

Hu Wenkai did not mention the preface to Li's *Jingfang ji* by the prominent Yuan scholar-official Chen Lü (courtesy name Zhongzhong 眾仲). The preface was included in Chen Lü's collected works, the *Anyatang ji* 安雅堂集.¹³⁹ Chen Lü was a native of Putian 浦田 of Xinghua 興化 (also in Fujian). Born into a family with a tradition of Confucian

¹³⁷ For the Chinese text of this preface, see Appendix 2.

¹³⁸ Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 70.

¹³⁹ See Chen Lü, *Anyatang ji* 6.5b-6b (*SKQS-dianziban*).

learning as was Wang Bo, Chen became a well-known Confucian scholar in the Yuan dynasty. His biography can be found in the *Yuan shi* 元史.¹⁴⁰ In the preface, Chen Lü writes:

When I was in Min [Fujian], I often heard that Zheng Min's mother was clever and reverent. She displayed filial piety to her parents and was loyal to her husband. She was familiar with art and made Confucian teachings the guide of her inner chamber....

[Zheng] Min came to the capital to show me the *Jingfang ji* of his mother. I read it again. How beautiful, gentle, and proper her words were! Speech is the flower of virtue while poetry is the flower of speech. "Womanly virtue" and "womanly speech" can be told from their poetry. The beauty and purity of mountains and waters in Min impel even women, not to mention the gentlemen of virtue and literary talent who are flourishing and admired by people under the heavens. [Zheng] Min said to me, "My mother was rewarded by official distinction for her filial piety and chastity. I am only worried that her poems will not be known to the world, and I hope you can write a preface for her poetry." I replied to him, "Long ago, Master Ouyang Wenzhong wrote a preface for the poetry of Xie Ximeng, a woman from Min [Fujian], saying that '*Ximeng's words are more evocative and profound. She abides by decorum and does not indulge herself.*'"¹⁴¹ Accordingly, Ximeng became known to people. You go and find someone like Master Wenzhong to write a preface for the

¹⁴⁰ See *Yuan shi* 190.20b-22a (*SKQS-dianziban*).

¹⁴¹ The sentences in italics are quoted from Ouyang Xiu's preface. See Egan's translation in Chang and Saussy, *Women Writers of Traditional China* 726.

collection of your mother, and then she will become well known. My words are not sufficient to convince posterity.” But [Zheng] Min kept asking without giving up, and I then began to gather some reliable information at the beginning of the collection: Li *shi*’s name is Zhizhen 智貞; her poetry collection is called “Jingfang” 靜方 (quiet and upright), probably taken from the “Wenyan zhuan” of the *Kun* (坤之文言傳) [in the *Classic of Change*].¹⁴²

Both Li Zhizhen and Xie Ximeng were natives of Min (Fujian). Chen Lü, also a native of Min, pointed to this important connection and wrote the preface by reproducing Ouyang Xiu’s cliché.

6. Yang Weizhen’s “*Cao shi Xuezhai Xiangge ji xu*” 曹氏雪齋弦歌集序 (Preface to *Xiangge ji* by Cao Xuezhai, 1345)

This preface was included in the seventh *juan* of *Dongweizi ji* 東維子集 by Yang Weizhen.¹⁴³ As I noted in the first chapter, Yang Weizhen chose to live in early retirement in the late Yuan. After the fall of the Yuan, he was summoned by Zhu Yuanzhang, the first emperor of the Ming dynasty. But he refused to serve the new regime. He then actively engaged himself in literary societies near the West Lake of Hangzhou, living life independently as a retired literatus.

¹⁴² For the Chinese text of the preface, see Appendix 2. “Wenyan zhuan” was the name of a chapter in the *Yijing* 易經 (Classic of change). Women’s virtues, the so-called *kun de* 坤德, such as gentleness, obedience, quietness, and chastity (*rou, shun, jing, fang* 柔順靜方) are discussed in this chapter. See Zhu Xi, *Yuan ben Zhouyi benyi* 原本周易本義 9.1a-6a (*SKQS-dianziban*).

¹⁴³ This preface is also reproduced in Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 71-72, and translated by Yu-shih Chen in Chang and Saussy, *Women Writers of Traditional China* 732-33.

Hu Wenkai offered an entry on the woman poet Cao Miaoqing (courtesy name Xuezhai), her collection *Xiange ji*, and Yang Weizhen's preface to it. Of the six prefaces examined in this section, only the two by Ouyang Xiu and Yang Weizhen were reproduced in Hu Wenkai. The two prefaces shared some similarities while they also displayed some rhetorical differences. First, like Ouyang Xiu, Yang Weizhen was also much concerned with the morality of the woman poet, but his preface signalled changing definitions of ideal womanhood. To highlight the virtue of Cao Miaoqing, Yang criticized such famous Song women poets as Li Qingzhao and Zhu Shuzhen. In the eyes of Yang, both Li and Zhu "were of limited experience and narrow understanding, of vulgar temperament and custom," and therefore "they do not meet the standard of proper character,"¹⁴⁴ while Cao Miaoqing was the true successor to Ban Zhao 班昭 (ca. 49-ca. 120), the exemplar to writing women in late imperial China.¹⁴⁵

Second, like Ouyang Xiu, Yang immediately made the connection between poems recorded in the *Shijing* and those by the contemporary woman poet:

... I have heard that some of the three hundred poems of the *Book of Odes* were written by women. The lyrics of these poems can all be set to music. Confucius edited them, and they have since become canonical works. In later ages, established writers have not always been able to reach the same heights. Hence, we cannot disregard literary works simply because they have been written by women.

¹⁴⁴ Translation by Yu-shih Chen in Chang and Saussy, *Women Writers of Traditional China* 732.

¹⁴⁵ Ban Zhao was Ban Gu's 班固 (32-92) sister, a woman of talent and virtue. Ban Gu was assigned to compile the *Hanshu* 漢書, but he died prematurely. Parts of the work were completed by his sister Ban Zhao. She was also the author of *Nüjie* 女誡 (Admonitions for women). For a study of Ban Zhao, see Nancy Lee Swann, *Pan Chao: Foremost Woman Scholar of China*. See also Idema and Grant, *The Red Brush* 17-43.

In the case of Xuezhai, her writings are rooted in her character and informed by her learning. They spring from her inner feelings and are brought into harmony with music. Had she been born in the times of the three hundred *Odes*, her works would certainly have been recorded by the Sage. Therefore, I have edited her writings and selected those poems that follow the tradition of ancient poets and those lyrics for lute music that express the spirit of heroic and upright personages, to make up her *Xian ge ji*. ...

... Isn't it truly something to celebrate, to have discovered a second woman writer who can stand beside Ban Zhao?¹⁴⁶

However, compared to Ouyang Xiu and other famous scholar-officials in the Song and Yuan periods who did not participate in the actual compiling, Yang not only wrote the preface, but also compiled Cao Miaoqing's poetry, claiming the sage-editor Confucius to be his only precedent.¹⁴⁷

Third, both prefaces are important sources for the study of Chinese women's literary culture, from which we can identify two models of women with virtue and talent. Cao Miaoqing marked a great departure from the "model of Confucian virtue" proposed by Ouyang Xiu, as shown in Yang's preface:

¹⁴⁶ Chang and Saussy, *Women Writers of Traditional China* 732-33.

¹⁴⁷ Cao's *Xiange ji* has been lost, but one poem written by her to respond to Yang Weizhen's rhyme in the form of *Xihu zhuzhi ci* survives. Yang Weizhen compiled all of the hundreds of poems responding to his rhyme, including those by women such as Cao Miaoqing and Zhang Miaoqing 張妙淨 to make up a collection under the title *Xihu zhuzhi ci* 西湖竹枝詞 (Bamboo branch songs of the West Lake). But the original edition of the collection was no longer extant in the late Ming. For a Ming edition of some selected poems of the *Xihu zhuzhi ci*, see Cao Xuequan, *Shicang lidai shixuan* 262.26a-32a. From these extant poems, we can catch a glimpse of the world of a group of literary men and women in the late Yuan period.

When I was living at Qiantang, I heard of a literary lady named Cao Xuezhai, who was praised as clever and talented. She once sent me a number of her own poems and essays through her teacher Qiugong¹⁴⁸ and asked me for an interview. She said, “When I was young, Old Man Guan of the Bookish Studio¹⁴⁹ and Old Man Ban of the Forgiving Studio¹⁵⁰ both granted me an audience, but I have yet to meet you, and I hope that you will give me a word of encouragement.”

This year, while I was at Wuxing, Cao Xuezhai, together with her old nurse came again to visit me at Dongting in Lake Tai. She chanted poetry and played the melodies of the “Guan ju” and “Zhao zhi” to accompany the “White Snow” lyric, [expressing the sorrows of the desolate landscape].¹⁵¹ I know Xuezhai well as a good and moral person; her literary accomplishment is an extension of her character.¹⁵²

Even though we do not know much about Cao Miaoqing as a literary woman because her poetry collection has been lost, Yang’s description in the preface, together with some

¹⁴⁸ Translation by Yu-shih Chen in Chang and Saussy, *Women Writers of Traditional China* 732. I would prefer “Master Qiu” to “Qiugong” for the latter sounds like a given name.

¹⁴⁹ Suanzhai 酸齋 (The Bookish Studio) was the style name of Guan Yunshi 貫雲石 (1286-1324), a sinicized Uighur Mongolian known in Chinese sources also as Xiaoyunshihaiya 小雲石海涯 which is the Turkish Sewinch Qaya. He was the grandson of A’erhaya 阿爾哈雅 (Turkish Arigh Qaya), who contributed a great deal to the success of the founding of the Yuan dynasty. Because his father was named Gungegen 袞格根 or Guanzhige 貫只哥, he used Guan 貫 as his surname. Being good at *san qu* 散曲 (drama lyrics) and calligraphy, he was remembered as one of the multitalented and eccentric literary figures of the Yuan. His official biography can be found in the *Yuan shi* under the name of Su’eryuesuhaya 蘇爾約蘇哈雅. See *Yuan shi* 143.14b-16b. For a detailed study of the life of Guan and his literary works, see Richard John Lynn, *Kuan Yün-shih*.

¹⁵⁰ Ban Weizhi 班惟志, courtesy name Yangong 彥功, style name Shuzhai 恕齋 (Forgiving studio), was a poet and calligrapher living in the late Yuan and early Ming. See Tao Zongyi 陶宗儀, comp., *Shushi huiyao* 書史會要 7.12a-b (*SKQS-dianziban*).

¹⁵¹ Translation by Yu-shih Chen in Chang and Saussy, *Women Writers of Traditional China* 732. But Chen does not provide any notes on the noted Yuan literati mentioned in the preface such as Guan Yunshi and Ban Weizhi. This sentence is modified by me because Chen omitted the words “*yì xiè shān chuān huāng luò zhī bēi*” 以寫山川荒落之悲.

¹⁵² Chang and Saussy, *Women Writers of Traditional China* 732.

other sources, provide a sketch of the woman poet. Being brilliant in many artistic fields such as poetry, calligraphy, painting, and music, Cao was an active literary participant in the local literati clubs. Cao was praised as a paragon of womanly conduct because of her filial piety. However, she was no longer a kind of Xie Ximeng who cloistered herself in her private quarters to compose poetry, living a life of “the secluded and virtuous young ladies of ancient times.” On the contrary, Cao made her way out of the inner chambers to seek out male literati, living a life that was very much like that of late Ming courtesans and open-minded gentry women writers—responding to poems by the best-known literati in her region such as Yang Weizhen, Guan Yunshi, and Ban Weizhi, playing musical instruments for them, and even traveling to meet them—in brief, she mingled with men intellectually and socially. However, she is definitively presented not as a courtesan but as a respectable woman.¹⁵³ As discussed in Chapter 1, the promotion of women’s direct participation in male literati culture was the very epitome of late Ming male poetry societies in the Jiangnan region. Yang Weizhen provided an attractive precedent for late Ming eccentrics who preferred to be retired literati devoting themselves to writing and recreation.

*“The Sage Records Licentious Songs”: Male-authored Prefaces to
Late Ming Collections and Anthologies of Women’s Poetry*

¹⁵³ Among the hundreds of poems responding to Yang Weizhen’s rhyme of *Xihu zhuzhi ci* was a poem on Cao Miaoqing by the male poet Ouyang Yanzhen 歐陽彥珍, who writes in Cao’s voice, “I am indeed from a good family, not from a family such as that of Su Xiaoxiao” (妾身自是良家女, 不是當年蘇小家). See Tian Rucheng, *Xihu youlan zhi* *Xihu youlan zhi yu* 11.17b. Su Xiaoxiao was the best-known courtesan from Cao’s hometown of Qiantang in the Southern Qi period. In addition to the description in Yang’s preface and Cao Miaoqing’s own poem included in *Xihu zhuzhi ci*, Ouyang’s couplet confirms that Cao Miaoqing was approached by her contemporaries as a woman of the gentry, not a courtesan.

As demonstrated in the prefaces discussed above, the association of women's poetry with the *Shijing* was a common strategy used by male scholars long before the late imperial period. However, it was in the late Ming and Qing, when more and more women picked up the brush to compose poetry, that this strategy became a cliché, frequently appearing in prefaces not only to poetry collections by individual women,¹⁵⁴ but also to anthologies dedicated to writings by women. This section analyzes how the rhetoric of promoting women's poetry was transformed from Ouyang Xiu's model of Confucian virtue to the late Ming paradigm in which poetry by courtesans was increasingly included in anthologies of women's poetry and promoted by literati. Compared to the Song-Yuan scholars who promoted only gentry women's poetry as discussed in the previous section, the editors and compilers of women's poetry in the late Ming, especially the time between the last years of the Wanli era to the late 1620s—what Fong refers to as the second wave of Ming anthologies of women's poetry—valorized not only women poets of the gentry, the “respectable” (*liang*), but also courtesans, the “lowly” (*jian*).¹⁵⁵ In these anthologies, the editors often rejected social status or moral conduct as selection criteria. For example, Zheng Wen'ang, in the “General Principles” of his *Gujin mingyuan huishi* (1620) explicitly declared:

¹⁵⁴ See cases recorded in Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü*: Wang Xianji's 王獻吉 preface to *Fen yu cao* 焚餘草 by Wang Fengxian 王鳳嫺, 91-92; Zhao Yiguang's preface to *Kaopan ji* 考槃集 by Lu Qingzi, 169-70; Mao Yuanyi's preface to *Zhongshan xian* 鍾山獻 by the courtesan poet Yang Wan, 183-85; and Ding Shengzhao's preface to *Yinhong ji* by Wang Duanshu, 249-50.

¹⁵⁵ See, for example, Tian Yiheng, comp., *Shinü shi* (1557); Li Hu, comp., (*Gusu xinke*) *Tongguan yibian* (1567); Yu Xian, comp., *Shuxiu zongji* (1570); Chishang ke (pseudo.), comp., *Mingyuan jinang* (1595); Qu Juesheng, comp., *Nü sao* (1618); Zheng Wen'ang, comp., *Gujin mingyuan huishi* (1620); Zhong Xing, comp., (attrib.) *Mingyuan shigui* (ca.1625); and Zhao Shijie, comp., *Gujin nüshi* (1628). Besides those discussed by Fong, we may add the following two: Gu Qilun, comp., *Guo ya* (1574); and Ma Jiasong, comp., *Hua jing jun sheng*, published in the era of Tianqi 天啓 (1621-27). See Yang Liying and Ye Hui, “Cong Mingren nüzi shiji de bianzuan” 34.

When an anthology is called “classified,” it means to collect and classify the poetry. I only go according to the excellence and beauty of the writing and do not care whether their moral conduct is chaste or lewd. I search from antiquity to our enlightened age, whether they are palace women, gentry women, commoners, ghosts, immortals, Daoist nuns, female entertainers, maids and concubines, they are all equal.¹⁵⁶

As we have seen, not only did some anthologies include poetry by courtesans, but a few late Ming anthologies were devoted exclusively to this group of women poets: Mei Dingzuo’s *Qingni lianhua ji*, Zhang Mengzheng’s *Qinglou yunyu* and Mao Yuchang’s *Qinhuai siji shi*. Under the fashion of the valorization of courtesan poetry, how did editors and compilers of the late Ming rationalize and defend their efforts to promote women’s writings, including those by courtesans who were often categorized as “depraved” or “mean” in both Confucian didactic texts and official legal codes? To answer this question, I have selected three categories: 1) Ouyang Xiu’s model of Confucian virtue adopted by late Ming literati; 2) prefaces to anthologies that included both the chaste and the licentious (貞淫互記); 3) prefaces to collections devoted exclusively to courtesans, which should help us to identify continuity and change in rhetoric of prefaces to late Ming collections and anthologies of women’s poetry.

1. Ouyang Xiu’s model adopted by late Ming literati in the preface to *Bitian daoren yingao* 碧天道人吟稿 by Pan shi 潘氏 (preface dated 1524)

¹⁵⁶ See “Fan li 凡例,” in Zheng Wen’ang ed., *Gujin mingyuan huishi*, reprinted in *Siku quanshu cunmu congshu, jibu*, vol. 383: 10. Translation by Grace S. Fong. See Fong, “Gender and the Failure of Canonization” 143.

Hu Wenkai had two entries on writings by the woman Pan *shi*, one of which is her first poetry collection, the *Bitian daoren yingao*, and the other her second poetry collection, the *Pan shi shiji* 潘氏詩集 (The poetry collection by née Pan, preface dated 1570).¹⁵⁷

According to Hu Wenkai, Pan *shi*, known by her style name Bitian daoren 碧天道人 (Daoist master under the blue sky), was a native of Tiantai 天台 (in Zhejiang). The preface to the *Bitian daoren yingao* was written by Zhuang Qiaoxin 莊喬新 and Ye Shoupeng 葉壽彭, also natives of Tiantai like Pan *shi*.¹⁵⁸ The entire preface was quoted and reproduced by Yu Xian 俞憲 (1508-72) in his preface to Pan *shi*'s second poetry collection, the *Pan shi shiji*.¹⁵⁹ The old preface to the *Bitian daoren yingao* reads:

“Bitian daoren” was the daughter of Pan Liuhe and the wife of Qiu Xichuan, a tribute scholar. She was good at chanting and reciting [poetry] and *her words are more evocative and profound. She abides by decorum and does not indulge herself.*¹⁶⁰ We learned that in the era of Tiansheng 天聖 (1023-32) in the Song,¹⁶¹ Master Ouyang wrote the preface to the two *juan Xie Ximeng ji* by the lady, saying that ‘*she has the style of the secluded and virtuous young ladies of ancient times. She is not merely a*

¹⁵⁷ Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 197.

¹⁵⁸ Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 197. From the preface itself, I cannot precisely determine if it was written by two authors as Hu Wenkai recorded because of the ambiguity of the first personal pronoun used in it.

¹⁵⁹ The preface to the *Pan shi shiji* was written by Yu Xian, also the compiler of this collection. Yu Xian's pioneering efforts in preserving poetry by contemporary Ming women is discussed in Chapter 2, 109-10. Yu Xian included in his *Shuxiu zongji* six poems by Pan *shi* from her first poetry collection, the *Bitian daoren yingao*. For these poems, see Yu Xian, comp., *Sheng Ming baijia shi*, vol. 306: 668-69. For the *Pan shi shiji*, see *Sheng Ming baijia shi*, vol. 308: 806-08.

¹⁶⁰ All the italicized sentences here in this preface are quoted from Ouyang Xiu's preface to the *Caipin shi*. Once again, I use Egan's translation of these lines to maintain consistency. See Egan's translation in Chang and Saussy, *Women Writers of Traditional China* 726.

¹⁶¹ It was in the era of Jingyou rather than Tiansheng that Ouyang Xiu wrote the preface for Xie Ximeng's poetry.

woman who is able to express herself.' Ximeng had the misfortune of being a woman, and she was not able to make herself prominent in the world. However, because of Master Ouyang, her poetry could pass into posterity. Alas! How is Bitian ranked lower than Ximeng? Had Master Ouyang lived in the present world, what would happen? Women's writings are not seen often nowadays; therefore, we collect a certain number of her poems that are available to us and have them compiled and published. Written in the mid-summer of the year *jiashen* 甲申 [1524] of the Jiajing reign.¹⁶²

This is a valuable source of information regarding the rhetorical strategy of promoting poetry by women in the Ming. It was the earliest datable Ming preface to women's poetry collections recorded in Hu Wenkai's catalogue. Like most of the pre-Ming preface-writers discussed above, both Zhuang and Ye followed Ouyang Xiu's example. The preface to the *Bitian yingao* is probably the only extant Ming preface that claims Ouyang Xiu as an influence. It suggests that during the first years of the late Ming (the early Jiajing era), when there were few women writing poetry, Ouyang Xiu's model of Confucian virtue was still very much influential and the boundary between the separate spheres of *nei/wai* 内/外 was still an important moral issue for literati. In fact, being concerned with the issue of women's cultural role was also something shared more or less by other pioneers who collected women's poetry in the Ming.¹⁶³

¹⁶² Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 197.

¹⁶³ For example, Tian Yiheng did not include the poetry of his daughter Tian Yuyan 田玉燕 in his *Shinü shi*, while Li Hu in his (*Gusu xinke*) *Tongguan yibian* organized women poets according to their moral quality. Yu Xian also placed courtesan poets at the end of the *Shuxiu zongji*.

Although late Ming preface-writers continued to situate women's poetic voice in the *Shijing*, the model of the "secluded" and "virtuous" woman proposed by Ouyang Xiu seemed to have soon gone out of fashion in this period. Many of the extant prefaces reveal that late Ming preface-writers were no longer concerned about whether women were cloistered in the private quarters to compose poetry. Instead, in promoting women's literary practice, they regarded women's participation in literary culture to be a legitimate part of women's work, set over against the age-old Confucian "womanly work" 婦功, such as weaving and embroidering. Under this fashion, traditional housework was even considered unimportant or unworthy of doing,¹⁶⁴ while talented women who felt contempt for womanly work (不屑事女紅) were highly appreciated.¹⁶⁵ "Engraving dragons and embroidering tigers" (雕龍繡虎) [that is, writing] seemed to have become the most refined engagement for women in the eyes of both literary men and women in the late Ming.¹⁶⁶

However, the valorization of poetry written by courtesans and the rhetorical strategy of such a valorization in prefaces marked a dramatic and subversive departure from the pre-Ming rhetorical paradigm. Below, I will examine prefaces to the most influential anthologies of women's poetry including poetry by courtesans, anthologies

¹⁶⁴ See, for example, Ge Zhengqi's 葛徵奇 (*jìnshi*, 1628) preface to *Shanshui yin* 山水吟 by Liang Mengzhao 梁孟昭, in Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 163-64.

¹⁶⁵ See Ding Shengzhao's preface to *Yinhong ji* by Wang Duanshu, in Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 249-50.

¹⁶⁶ In Chinese poetic tradition, the phrases "engraving dragons" and "embroidering tiger" refer to literary composition. For the quotation, see Tu Long's preface to *Liuxiang cao* 留香草, a joint poetry collection by his daughter Tu Yaose 屠瑤瑟, and daughter-in-law, Shen Tiansun 沈天孫 (Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 173). On the lives and poetic works of Tu Yaose and Shen Tiansun, see Ann Waltner and Pi-ching Hsu, "Lingering Fragrance: The Poetry of Tu Yaose and Shen Tiansun," *Journal of Women's History* 8 (1997): 28-53. The English translation of Tu Long's preface is on 33-34.

produced in the late Ming, anthologies examined by Chang and Fong, to identify rhetorical changes regarding the legitimation of poetry by all women in this period.

2. Prefaces to anthologies that included women poets of both the chaste and the licentious: Tian Yiheng's preface to his *Shinü shi*¹⁶⁷

As mentioned before, Tian was a talented and also an eccentric literary figure. In the preface, Tian openly claimed that literary talent was equally distributed between women and men. Women's writings had been neglected by historical records; therefore, his effort in collecting women poets was comparable to Confucius' compilation of women's writing in the *Shijing*. But since he included poetry by courtesans in his anthology, he defended himself by arguing that:

Poems of the inner courtyard and the boudoir all took their place in the *Book of Odes*; even words of the vulgar and songs of the licentious were not deleted by the pen Confucius held. For good and evil can be differentiated of themselves, and persuasion and admonition will both be present. Not only do such poems make the influence of kingly virtue manifest, but they are also useful in female education. Their merits being so great, how can one say that they are only of small supplementary benefit?¹⁶⁸

By asserting that the Sage included not only poems from the inner quarters, but also "words of the vulgar and songs of the licentious," Tian defended both women's poetry

¹⁶⁷ Tian Yiheng's preface for his *Shinü shi* is reproduced in Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 876-77 and translated by Zhang Longxi in Chang and Saussy, *Women Writers of Traditional China* 734-36. For Tian's biographical information, see the biography of his father Tian Rucheng, in Goodrich and Fang, *Dictionary of Ming Biography* 1287-88.

¹⁶⁸ Translation by Zhang Longxi in Chang and Saussy, *Women Writers of Traditional China* 734.

(including songs by the licentious, the courtesan) and his efforts in preserving the writings of all women.

Tian Yiheng appears to be the first Ming anthologist who used the strategy of associating women's poetry, including songs by the "licentious women," courtesans, with the *Shijing*. This strategy was later adopted by many other late Ming literati in their prefaces to the anthologies of women's poetry where courtesans were being recorded as well. Many of these prefaces are included in Hu Wenkai's catalogue. For example, Zheng Wen'ang's *Gujin mingyuan huishi* (1620) included fifty-four Ming women, some of whom were famous courtesans. In the opening of the preface to this anthology, Zhu Zhifan 朱之藩 (fl.1616) stated that "when compiling and editing *Shijing*, the Sage included both folk songs and women's poetry" and "Even if the songs recorded here are as lewd as 'Pu shang' 濮上 and 'Sang jian' 桑間, they could serve as a warning and admonition to posterity down to one hundred generations."¹⁶⁹ In the preface to his (attrib.) *Mingyuan shigui*, an anthology regarded by Chang and Fong as an essential source and model for later anthologies of women's poetry and writing, Zhong Xing also defended his inclusion of poetry by courtesans. He writes,

...Some may object to the printing of these poems for fear of
licentiousness, and some may object that not all these poems have their
origin in the Classics; but did not Lady Jiang, wife of Count Zhuang of
Wei, and Lady Ban all compose poems of rich color and beauty?¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁹ Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 881-82. "Pu shang" and "Sang jian" were names of places in the State of Wei, places where young men and women met and sang love songs. Here, they refer to erotic songs.

¹⁷⁰ Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 884. Translation by Zhang Longxi in Chang and Saussy, *Women Writers of Traditional China* 741. Here "poems of rich color and beauty" refers to poems that were about love and sex or poems that simply did not address moral concerns.

As previously mentioned, Lady Zhuangjiang was recorded in the *Shijing* by the Sage, while Lady Ban [Ban Jieyu 班婕妤 (ca. 48-ca. 6 BCE)] was well-known for her poetic talent and “strong sense of propriety,”¹⁷¹ but they all composed “poems of rich color and beauty.” Here, by claiming the Sage as a precedent, Zhong Xing successfully shook off the moral burden inevitably confronted by late Ming literati such as himself who promoted writings by courtesans.

A similar statement is found in the preface by Zhao Shijie to his *Gujin nüshi*, also noted by Chang and Fong as one of the most important late Ming anthologies of women’s literary works. In the preface, Zhao states:

Confucius surveyed the “Airs of the States” and said: “Poetry can stimulate; it teaches observation, sociability, and the expression of grievances.” In collecting and editing those rhymed sayings, he did not reject the songs of the “wandering girls” of the Han and Yangzi Rivers. Who will say that the Three Hundred Odes of the *Book of Odes*, the “Elegantiae” and the rest, can only have been composed by upright sages and scholars?¹⁷²

It is obvious that the preface-writers of the late Ming often associated not only women’s writings, but also folk songs or even lewd songs, with the *Shijing* to legitimize the unorthodox. In addition to Ouyang Xiu’s cliché that the Sage recorded women poets in the *Shijing*, the late Ming literati went one step further when they produced their own cliché, arguing that the Sage also recorded licentious women in the canon of poetry.

¹⁷¹ On Ban Jieyu’s biographical information and translations of her poems, see Chang and Saussy, *Women Writers of Traditional China* 18.

¹⁷² Zhao’s preface to *Gujin nüshi* is reproduced in Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 888-89, and translated by Haun Saussy in Chang and Saussy, *Women Writers of Traditional China* 748-50.

3. Prefaces to collections devoted exclusively to courtesans: Huayin shangren's 花烟上人 preface to *Qinglou yunyu* 青樓韻語 (Stylish words from the pleasure quarters, 1616) by Zhang Mengzheng 張夢徵.¹⁷³

Hu Wenkai provided an entry on the courtesan poetry anthology of *Qinglou yunyu* and its preface. As I mentioned, we find no further information on the lives of Zhang Mengzheng, the compiler and Huayin shangren, the preface-writer. Very possibly, the two were among the hundreds or even thousands of late Ming little-known literati who joined the carnival of their time and struggled against anonymity.

In the *Qinglou yunyu*, Zhang Mengzheng employs courtesan poetry, *yunyu* 韻語 (stylish words), in his commentaries on the *Piaojing*, Classic of Whoring, whose title is a parody of Confucian classics such as the *Shijing*, the Classic of Poetry. Obviously, this group of people had their own fashions and values with regard to the Way, canonical works, learning, and stylish people:

Hence the Daoist Adept Mengzheng has compiled this volume under the title *Stylish Words from the Pleasure Quarters*. Beginning with [a print of] *The Classic of Whoring*, he has added poetry, song lyrics, pictures, and evaluative comments...The comments are actually commentaries to *The Classic of Whoring*. Mengzheng is indeed the one with style! To those in posterity who are devoted to such a Way, isn't Mengzheng a Master Zhu [Xi]? If students pursuing the way of style honor Mengzheng as Master

¹⁷³ Huayin shangren's preface to *Qinglou yunyu* is reproduced in Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 892, and translated by Dorothy Ko in Chang and Saussy, *Women Writers of Traditional China* 744-46.

Zhu, perhaps in the future they will graduate to be erudite scholars and the Classic of Whoring will be magnified...¹⁷⁴

In their own coded language of fashion and connoisseurship, Zhang Mengzheng, the untrammelled literatus who indulged himself in pleasure quarters, could be a match to Master Zhu Xi, the great Song Neo-Confucian philosopher, whose Confucian syllabus, *The Four Books* 四書, was the basis of orthodox learning of literati for hundreds of years. In this context, the sacred status of Confucian classical canons had declined to the point where it could be satirized as little different from a guide to whoring.

Conclusion

How might we account for the anthologizing of poetry by courtesans and by women in general in the late Ming (extending to the early Qing)? What can we conclude from this chapter? First of all, the social standing of non-official urban elites, as I have attempted to argue and continue to show in this dissertation, played an important role in valorizing writings of women including courtesans. As we have seen, the writers of the prefaces to women's poetry collections in the pre-Ming periods, such as Ouyang Xiu, Wang Bo, Zhou Bida, and Chen Lü, were either influential scholar-officials or Neo-Confucian worthies. They wrote the prefaces (rather than participating in the actual compiling) as favours requested by friends or associates to lend prestige to the writings of specific women and thus to the women's families. The function of this kind of preface is similar to that of a Chinese funerary inscription. Most likely, the writer and the woman he wrote about were strangers to each other and by the time of the writing, she had already passed

¹⁷⁴ Translation by Ko in Chang and Saussy, *Women Writers of Traditional China* 745.

away. However, late Ming literati preface-writers and anthologists that I have examined were more commonly the descendants of Yang Weizhen, the retired literatus who devoted himself to art, recreation, and self-invention, interests independent of official concerns.¹⁷⁵ They had no degree or office. Many of them edited and compiled not only women's poetry but also various writings by men,¹⁷⁶ while some others made anthologies to valorize poetry by courtesans because of their personal connections with individual courtesans.

It is not surprising that as a social stratum, male "commoners" literati, such as the *buyi* and *shanren* exhibited somewhat unorthodox values and fashions. Without any academic aspirations, they were free to disregard the precepts of Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucianism; and rejecting the very goal of office-holding, they were also free to disregard official expectations, including certain legal regulations. The famous multitalented literatus Xu Wei, style names Qingteng shanren (The mountain man of Qingteng) and Shanyin buyi (Commoner from Shanyin), explicitly stated in his preface to the *ci* 詞 (song lyrics) collection by the woman writer Huang E 黃峨 that, after the many frustrations of examinations and office, he became unrestrained and was no longer trammelled by Confucian teachings (*shu zong bu wei ru fu* 疏縱不爲儒縛).¹⁷⁷ Tian

¹⁷⁵ One of the most prominent examples is Tian Yiheng. See Xu Bo's *Xu shi bijing* 7.22a-b. Besides Tian, Mei Dingzuo held no high degree or office (Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 878); Li Hu was a *shanren*, Zheng Wen'ang was a *buyi* (Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 881); Zhang Mengzheng and Zhao Shijie were little-known literati; and Jiang Yuanzuo was a *shanren* (Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 887).

¹⁷⁶ For example, Zhang Zhixiang 張之象 (1507-87), a talented but unsuccessful candidate of *jinshi* examinations, was not only the one who compiled *Tongguan xin bian* 彤管新編, an anthology of women's poetry, but also the editor and compiler of quite a few other anthologies including the twenty-juan *Shi tong* 史通, the six-juan *Chu sao qi yu* 楚騷綺語 (1577), the ten-juan *Wenxin diaolong* 文心雕龍 (1579), the 200-juan *Tangshi leiyuan* 唐詩類苑 (1585), the 120-juan *Gushi leiyuan* 古詩類苑, and the ten-juan *Shiji hui* 史記彙. See Zhang Huijian, *Ming Qing Jiangsu wenren nianbiao* 311, 316, 332, 337.

¹⁷⁷ Huang E was the wife of Yang Shen 楊慎 (1488-1559), a well-known literatus in the late Ming. In the preface to Huang E's writings, Xu Wei boldly expressed his great appreciation of her *ci* poetry and

Yiheng, an unsuccessful candidate of the *jinshi* examinations, also likely exempted himself from public expectations for proper conduct. It was said that Tian often took his wife with him to travel around, having visited all the mountains nearby. Sometimes, when it was getting dark and he couldn't find the proper way to get back, the two rode on one donkey, heading back home to the city.¹⁷⁸ The late Ming was indeed a heaven for *buyi*, *shanren*, and rakes. It is hard to imagine that such people lived in a time when the general morality conveyed separate spheres for male and female.¹⁷⁹

As mentioned earlier, the high point of anthologizing women's poetry in the Ming was centered on the long Wanli era which stands out in Chinese history in many ways. It was an era that not only produced the extremist Li Zhi, leader of the Taizhou sect, whose iconoclasm greatly shook the entire intellectual world, but also produced so many great writers, artists, and connoisseurs.¹⁸⁰ It was an era that legitimized love, passion,

his envy of Yang Shen for his marriage to such a talented woman. See the entry on Huang E in Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 180. The authenticity of any collection attributed to Huang E has long been questioned, as is any preface by Xu Wei to Huang E's writing. But the exact words of "shu zong bu wei ru fu 疏縱不爲儒縛" also appear in another essay of Xu Wei, the "Zi wei muzhiming" 自爲墓誌銘. For this essay, see Huang Zongxi, comp., *Ming wenhai* 468.12a. Nevertheless, whether authentic or not, the wide circulation of this work attributed to Xu Wei and Huang E reflects a popular theme in the late Ming. For information on Huang E, see Idema and Grant, *The Red Brush* 287-91.

¹⁷⁸ See the entry on "Lang Tian er xiansheng" 郎田二先生, in Xu Bo, *Xu shi bijing*, *juan* 7, 22b-23b.

¹⁷⁹ For example, Huo Tao 霍韜 (1487-1540), courtesy name Weixian 渭先, style name Weiya 渭厓 (*jinshi* 1514), Minister of Rites in the Jiajing era, was famous for his integrity. His family instruction *Weiya jiaxun* 渭厓家訓 was finished in 1529 and printed in 1530. In the *jiaxun* was a map of his house: the area marked in red (the front door of each apartment and the lane leading to it) was intended exclusively for men, while the area marked in black (the backdoor and the lane leading from it to the backyard) was used only by women. See the entry on Huo Tao in Goodrich and Fang, *Dictionary of Ming Biography* 679-83; on the *jiaxun*, 682. For a reprint of the Chinese text, see *Huo Weiya jiaxun* 霍渭厓家訓 (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 1967). For a detailed study of late imperial Chinese family instructions, see Charlotte Furth, "The Patriarch's Legacy."

¹⁸⁰ With the increasing popularity and influence of these nonconformist literati, genres of lighter literature such as fiction, drama, folk songs, and the writing of *xiaopin* 小品, a type of short and informal essay, flourished during the late Ming as never before. In fiction, the most celebrated classical Chinese novels, the "Si da qi shu" 四大奇書, were completed and published in this period. The vernacular fiction anthologies, the *San yan* 三言 edited by Feng Menglong 馮夢龍 (1574-1646) and *Er Pai* 二拍 edited by Ling Mengchu 凌濛初 (1580-1644), were published in the decades directly following the Wanli era. In

spontaneity, eccentricity, and even the drives and appetites.¹⁸¹ It was an era that celebrated *buyi*, *shanren*, literati rakes—who promoted not only women’s writing, but also folk songs, lewd songs, and even erotic fiction.¹⁸² Chinese literati had never been so nonconformist (*fengliu*) as in the late Ming, and Chinese society had never been so full of the power of *wen* as in the late Ming. Certainly, the promotion of women’s poetry was not a singular phenomenon in this period.

It is noteworthy that in valorizing women’s poetry, Zhong Xing attributed to women poets the quality of purity (*qing* 清), which to him was the very essence of ideal poetry. According to Zhong Xing, women are inherently untainted by the worldly affairs of men, and their poetry relies only on their nature; therefore, they produce perfect poetry. This argument has received much scholarly attention.¹⁸³ But as seen in many late Ming writings, the concept of *qing* was used by Zhong Xing and other late Ming literati to assign value not only to women’s writings, but also to writings by the *shanren*, *buyi*, and nonconformist literati who walled themselves off from worldly political and official

drama, the Wanli era produced the outstanding dramatist Tang Xianzu 湯顯祖 (1550-1616) and his well-known *Mudan ting* 牡丹亭 (The peony pavilion). The remarkable ten-juan Suzhou folk songs, the *Shange* 山歌, edited by Feng Menglong, was the fruit of this period as well. The overwhelming amount of miscellaneous writing on various trivial matters such as tea, wine, beauty, vases, furniture, ink, paper, inkstones, incense, and art objects by many unrestrained literati such as Tu Long, Pan Zhiheng, and Chen Jiru also emerged just as the time required. Harriet T. Zurndorfer has pointed out that the late Ming also witnessed an increasing interest in a subgenre of encyclopaedia, the so-called *tongsu leishu* 通俗類書 (popular encyclopaedia) as evidenced by the *Sancai tuhui* 三才圖會 (1607) compiled by Wang Qi 王圻 (fl. 1565-1614), a huge popular encyclopaedia that covers a wide range of subjects. In the entry on “human interest” 人事, the compiler listed various activities of refined recreation that contemporary literati had commonly pursued. See Harriet T. Zurndorfer, “Women in the Epistemological Strategy of Chinese Encyclopedia” 369-75. I have changed her Wade-Giles spellings to *pinyin* and added Chinese characters.

¹⁸¹ They were all regarded as aspects of essential moral nature of humans by the Taizhou school, especially as represented by He Xinyin. See de Bary, “Individualism” 178-83.

¹⁸² Noteworthy is the fact that the strategy of associating contemporary writings with the *Shijing* could also be found in prefaces to erotic fiction. See, for example, “Fengyue xuan Youxuanzi Langshi xu” 風月軒又玄子浪史敘, in Chen Qinghao 陳慶浩 and Wang Qiugui 王秋桂, eds., *Si wuxie huibao* 思無邪匯寶, vol. 4: 37.

¹⁸³ Chang, “Ming and Qing Anthologies” 152; Fong, “Gender and the Failure of Canonization” 145. See also Dorothy Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers* 61-62.

concerns. In fact, as Zhong Xing clearly stated in the very preface to *Mingyuan shigui*, the anthology of women's writings, he originally used the concept of *qing* in the foreword to his friend's collection, the *Jianyuan tang ji* 簡遠堂集 by Tan Yuanchun, to praise Tan's poetry.¹⁸⁴ Apparently, both these literati and the writing women they extolled shared something in common—literary excellence and freedom from the constraints of officialdom.

Second, the strategy of associating writings by women with the *Shijing* was a common approach in Neo-Confucian scholarship, and Ouyang Xiu was the first to use the strategy. Whether Confucius edited and compiled the *Shijing*, whether he included songs authored by women, and whether he recorded the licentious songs, the so-called *yin shi*, in the *Shijing* were basic issues debated in the commentaries on the Classic. But it was not until the late Ming when courtesan poetry was increasingly included in anthologies of women's literary works that literati began to argue that Confucius himself recorded licentious songs in the *Shijing*.¹⁸⁵

Of all the preface-writers mentioned above, Ouyang Xiu and Wang Bo were major figures in the history of Chinese hermeneutics.¹⁸⁶ Ouyang Xiu's *Shi benyi* 詩本義 (Original meaning of the *Shijing*) was the first commentary on the *Shijing* to reject the orthodox interpretations of the Mao-Zheng-Kong tradition, which was considered a starting point of Neo-Confucian scholarship.¹⁸⁷ Wang Bo's *Shi yi* 詩疑 (Doubts on the

¹⁸⁴ See Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 883. For Zhong Xing's preface to Tan Yuanchun's poetry, the "Jianyuan tang jin shi xu" 簡遠堂近詩序, see He Fuzheng, *Wenzhang bianti huixuan* 320.8a-9b.

¹⁸⁵ The debate over these issues was still ongoing during the Qing. See, for example, the entry on "Shengren lu yin shi" 聖人錄淫詩 in Wang Wan 汪琬 (1624-91), *Yaofeng wenchao* 堯峯文鈔 5 (preface dated 1693; reprint, Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 1965) 108.

¹⁸⁶ See Van Zoeren, *Poetry and Personality* 151-89.

¹⁸⁷ See Van Zoeren, *Poetry and Personality* 151-89. See also the entry on *Mao shi benyi shi liu juan* 毛詩本義十六卷 by Ouyang Xiu, in *Qinding Siku quanshu zongmu* 15.11b-12b.

Shijing) went even further than Ouyang Xiu. He not only rejected the traditional interpretations of the Classic, but also arbitrarily deleted such poems as “Jingnü” 靜女 from the *Shijing* for he regarded them as lewd songs which should not be included in the Classic by Confucius. Wang Bo was severely attacked by the *Siku* editors, the classical evidential scholars of the Qing.¹⁸⁸

Even though not all imperial Chinese literati were experts on the classics as were Ouyang Xiu and Wang Bo, it was a commonplace that they shared a commitment to familiarize themselves with at least some of the textual traditions. The *Shijing* was the most fundamental classical canon in literati learning. During the Ming, after Wang Shouren 王守仁 (1472-1529),¹⁸⁹ known by his style name Yangming 陽明, located the Way in the individual’s mind and claimed that everybody could become a sage through self-cultivation, there occurred a boom of new commentaries and expositions on the Confucian classics. In the century after Wang Yangming’s death, five to six hundred new commentaries on the *Shijing* were published, more than the total of the *Shijing* commentaries produced in the fifteen hundred years of the period from the Han to Yuan.¹⁹⁰ It seemed that every writer of these new commentaries presented himself to be the very one who truly understood the Sage. Zhong Xing was highly regarded in his day as a poet and founder of the poetic school of Jingling that promoted spontaneity and self-expression in writing. But he also produced a few commentaries on the *Shijing*, such as

¹⁸⁸ See their comments on Wang Bo’s *Shi yi*, in *Siku quanshu cunmu congshu, jingbu* 經部, vol. 60: 534-35. See also Van Zoeren, *Poetry and Personality* 160, 172.

¹⁸⁹ For a study of the thought of Wang Yangming and his followers, see William Theodore de Bary, “Individualism.”

¹⁹⁰ Liu Yuqing 劉毓慶, “Yangming xinxue yu Mingdai Shijing yanjiu” 陽明心學與明代詩經研究 52.

Shijing tushi hekao 詩經圖史合考 and *Shijing beikao* 詩經備考.¹⁹¹ For Confucian educated men, who knew the priorities and proprieties of their lives very well in terms of Confucian orthodoxy, claiming moral authority from the canonical classics was a viable strategy even though they might espouse somewhat heterodox values. The association of women's works with the *Shijing* was simply a handy rhetorical device employed by literati to serve their needs.

Third, the anthologizing of women's poetry in incorporating contemporary courtesans emerged in the mid-Ming, flourished in the late Ming, and continued to be in great vogue in the early Qing. Clearly, the catastrophe of the Ming-Qing dynastic transition did not stop Ming literati from doing what they used to do in the Ming. This had to do with the policies of the early Manchu state. The Emperor Kangxi consciously attempted to overcome the alienation between the Chinese literati and the Manchu government by accommodating Manchu rule to the native Ming rule. He held a special examination to recruit Chinese literati to government service—the *Boxue hongci* 博學宏詞 examination, what Etienne Balazs called “booby-trap examinations for literati.”¹⁹² He also started a project on a history of the Ming dynasty. Several huge publishing projects, including the prominent *Gujin tushu jicheng* 古今圖書集成 (as many as ten thousand volumes), *Yuxuan Tang shi* 御選唐詩 (i.e., *Quan Tang shi* 全唐詩), and *Yuxuan Song Jin Yuan Ming si chao shi* 御選宋金元明四朝詩, were all commissioned by the Kangxi emperor and completed in his reign. Therefore, it is not surprising that the anthologizing of poetry by late Ming courtesans could reach a high point again even after the fall of the

¹⁹¹ See the two entries in *Siku quanshu cunmu congshu, jingbu*, vol. 64: 870, and vol. 67: 506.

¹⁹² As quoted in Kessler, “Chinese Scholars” 191.

Ming. Kangxi succeeded in consolidating Manchu rule over China, not only because of his military achievements, but also due to his efforts to win scholar's hearts through these publishing projects. However, after the Manchu rule became well established in China, it was time for a change. The absence of courtesans in women's poetry anthologies and the paucity of women's poetry anthologies in general in the High Qing reigns of Yongzheng and Qianlong indicate the new Manchu state policies, different from Kangxi's, were now in operation.¹⁹³

¹⁹³ On the policies of the early Manchu state and the effects of these policies on the Han-Chinese literati, see Kessler. See also studies by Yang Qiqiao 楊啓樵, *Yongzheng di jiqi mizhe zhidu yanjiu* 雍正帝及其密折制度研究 and Feng Erkang 馮爾康, *Yongzheng zhuan* 雍正傳. See also Mann, *Precious Records* 126-28. On the criminalization of prostitution by the Qing legal system during the Yongzheng reign-period, see Sommer, *Sex, Law, and Society in Late Imperial China*, Chapter 7.

Chapter Three

Constructing the Self, Creating Her Space: The Voice of Courtesans

In the preceding chapters, I explored the role that men played in the anthologizing of women's poetry and the valorization of courtesan culture in the late Ming. Although the boundaries between social groups were fluid during the late Ming, I attempted to identify a particular group of men who devoted exclusive efforts to the promotion of courtesan culture, that is, urban dwellers of prosperous Jiangnan who fashioned themselves as retired literati, devoting themselves to art, recreation, and self-invention, instead of government office. I emphasized the importance of both the practice of poetry and the participation of courtesans in that practice. I showed how this contributed to the creation of an alternative nonconformist personality for educated men of the late Ming, a personality contrary to the traditional scholar-official ideal.

As recent scholarship has shown, after the Ming-Qing transition, in the eyes of loyalist poets, a number of prominent courtesans such as Liu Rushi, Gu Mei, and Li Xiang, came to symbolize "refinement, high culture, freedom, and the possibility of action."¹ The images of these heroic courtesans as cultural ideals presented both in nostalgic literature by male authors after the fall of the Ming and in recent studies, have shaped our knowledge and understanding of late Ming courtesan culture. But these loyalist courtesans are not the focus of this study. These courtesans spent a significant portion of their adult and married lives in the Qing and are recorded in Hu Wenkai's

¹ See Chang, *The Late-Ming Poet Ch'en Tzu-lung*; Paul Ropp, "Ambiguous Images;" Wai-yee Li, "The Late Ming Courtesan." Quotation from Wai-yee Li, "The Late Ming Courtesan" 47.

catalogue as Qing dynasty women.² In this sense, these loyalist courtesans were not “true” late Ming courtesans.

Although the Ming-Qing transition is often regarded as an extension of the late Ming in terms of larger literati trends, it was one of the most dramatic moments in Chinese imperial history. Many male literati died as martyrs for the fallen Ming, or, were actively involved in the resistance against the Manchus as Ming loyalists.³ The political turmoil of the dynastic transition could also have created new possibilities of heroic action for courtesans, possibilities not admissible during peaceful times in the late Ming. Moreover, the romantic relationships of a few cultivated courtesans such as Liu Rushi with leading loyalist poets such as Chen Zilong and Qian Qianyi, members of the largest and most influential political society of the late Ming, the Fu she, convey a strong sense of the link between romantic love and political commitment. However, the involvement of courtesans in political activities was by no means a common practice if examined in the larger historical and cultural context of the late Ming, especially when we trace the development of late Ming courtesan culture to its zenith in the Wanli era, the high point of anthologizing and valorizing courtesan poetry.

In this chapter, the focus of my discussion will be largely on individual courtesans and their writings. I will present three case studies. To delineate elements of courtesan culture in the Ming, I will focus on the life of Xue Susu 薛素素 (ca. 1564-ca. 1637), Wang Wei 王微 (ca. 1600-ca. 1647), and Yang Wan 楊宛 (1602-ca. 45). Each represents one particular type of courtesan from or active in one of the three best-known

² See Appendix 1.

³ For a detailed study of the Ming's effort to win battles against the Manchus after the fall of dynasty, see Struve, *The Southern Ming*.

urban centers of late Ming Jiangnan discussed previously (that is, Suzhou, Hangzhou, and Nanjing). Xue Susu, a native of Suzhou, represents the traditional type of courtesan, the courtesan as entertainer. She was famous for her exceptional feminine charms and entertaining skills, such as singing, dancing, playing musical instruments, walking on a high-wire,⁴ and archery.⁵ As Paul Ropp has noted, “[a] courtesan who wanted to win a client’s heart and to become his concubine had to rely first on her physical allure and entertainment skill to attract a client’s attention and favour.”⁶ However, as a courtesan from Suzhou, the center for late Ming literati fashion as shown in Chapter 1, she was also brilliant in many artistic fields previously dominated by men, such as poetry, calligraphy, and painting. Although many Ming courtesans were described as both beautiful and talented, Xue Susu, a beauty who was recorded to have as many as ten talents (十能), stands out from other Ming courtesans.⁷ She drew a huge number of admirers from various political and social backgrounds. However, her textual visibility and respectability were almost completely due to her association with nonconformist literati actively involved in literary communities.

A core member of Wang Ruqian’s Hangzhou literary circles in the 1620’s, Wang Wei is representative of courtesans who pursued an unconventional lifestyle typical of the *shanren* literati, the courtesan as nonconformist. Shi Shaoxin 施紹莘 (1588-1640), a friend of Chen Jiru, referred to her as “a prominent scholar of character in the courtesan

⁴ For an illustration of a female performer performing such an act, see Wang Qi, comp., *Sancai tuihui*, vol. 1, “Ren shi” (human interest). As quoted in Cass, *Dangerous Women* 11.

⁵ For an illustration of her performing mounted archery, see the frontispiece in Cass, *Dangerous Women*.

⁶ See Paul Ropp, “Ambiguous Images” 21.

⁷ See the entry on “Ti Xue Susu huace,” in Zhu Yizun, *Pushuting ji* 54.14a-15a.

quarters” (籍中名士也).⁸ Her unusual character can be seen in the way she viewed her body or feminine charms in general, her religious and spiritual pursuits, and her intimate friendships with gentry wives. As a young courtesan in her early twenties,⁹ she styled herself *Caoyi daoren* 草衣道人 (Daoist Master in Straw Garment). She seemed to have deliberately attempted to deemphasize her feminine charms—she did not wear make-up; she was fond of wearing coarse clothes; and she warned her sworn sister Yang Wan that beauty was transitory and undependable. She was called by Lin Tiansu and Liu Rushi “Xian lang” 纖郎 (The slim young man)¹⁰ and by Wang Ruqian “Xian daoren” 纖道人 (The slim Daoist).¹¹ The two terms are not marked explicitly as feminine. Although she called herself a Daoist, as Kang-i Sun Chang has pointed out, “her habits were more those of a Buddhist.”¹² Most strikingly, she traveled on her own to visit many famous mountains and waters and sacred peaks and temples. She traveled to meet the great Chan master Hanshan Deqing 憨山德清 (1546-1623) to seek Buddhist instruction.¹³ As we will see, she developed intimate friendships with many gentry wives, and she even stayed over night in a gentry family not as a courtesan entertaining her patrons, but as a family friend coming to share some refined moments with the wife.¹⁴ Wang Wei’s autonomy

⁸ See Ma Zuxi 馬祖熙, “Nü ciren Wang Wei jiqi Qishan cao ci” 女詞人王微及其期山草詞 225.

⁹ According to Wang Ruqian, he built a future tomb for Wang Wei in 1623, after Wang Wei had returned from her journeys to famous mountains and rivers in the south, which means that Wang Wei styled herself a Daoist person in her early twenties. See Wang Ruqian, “Huafang yue” 畫舫約, in Tao Ting comp., *Shuofu xu*, reprinted in *Xuxiu Siku quanshu, zibu*, vol. 1191: 370. According to the study of Ma Zuxi, Wang Wei’s poems were all produced before she turned thirty. See Ma Zuxi, “Nü ciren Wang Wei” 223.

¹⁰ See “*Hedong jun chidu*” 561, 563.

¹¹ Wang Ruqian “Xihu jiyong,” in *Xihu yunshi* 114.

¹² See her entry on Wang Wei, in Chang and Saussy, *Women Writers of Traditional China* 320.

¹³ See Wang Wei’s poem entitled “Can Han Dashi” 參憨大師, in *Mingyuan shigui*, juan 36: 414. On Hanshan Deqing, the great Buddhist master of the Ming, see Pei-yi Wu, *The Confucian’s Progress* 142-59.

¹⁴ See Wang Wei’s poem entitled “Yue ye liusu Feng furen chi shang” 月夜留宿馮夫人池上, in Qian Qianyi and Liu Rushi, *Liechao shiji*, *Runji* 374.

and rejection of conventional life made her quite similar to her *shanren* friends, such as Chen Jiru and Tan Yuanchun. She was obviously a favourite choice for anthologists in the late Ming and early Qing, as demonstrated by the number of her poems selected for their anthologies of women's writings.¹⁵ Her textual visibility and respectability came from her close association with several core members of Wang Ruqian's literary circles.

Yang Wan is representative of the courtesan-turned-concubine/wife. Although both Xue Susu and Wang Wei were also married for some time in their lives, Yang Wan, who married Mao Yuanyi 茅元儀 (1595-1641) at sixteen *sui* and whose marriage lasted for decades, developed fully her role as a family woman. Mao Yuanyi addressed her as “*nei zi*” 內子 (inner person), a term commonly used by a man to refer to his primary wife. Moreover, although several other prominent courtesans such as Liu Rushi and Gu Mei were also married to prominent scholars for many years, their marital lives were largely in the Qing, as emphasized earlier.¹⁶ But more importantly, they seem to have written little about their experiences of domestic life. As we will see, in her poetic representations, Yang Wan defined her roles in various family relations, such as wife, mother, stepmother, daughter, sister, and mistress. I am particularly interested in examining the contradictory voices—that of a virtuous wife who performed her proper gender roles in accordance with her renewed social status and that of a lonely and angry wife who often “improperly” complained about being left alone at home by her husband without the opportunities to travel around in mountains or to watch dragon boat contests (龍舟競渡) on the banks of the Qinhuai River.

¹⁵ See, for example, *Mingyuan shigui* and *Liechao shiji*.

¹⁶ For example, Liu Rushi married Qian Qianyi in 1641, less than four years before the fall of the Ming while their marriage continued in the Qing for over twenty years. See Liu Yanyuan 劉燕遠, “Liu Rushi nianpu” 柳如是年譜, in *Liu Rushi shici pingzhu*, 柳如是詩詞評注 284-92.

Yang Wan's fame as an accomplished poet had to do largely with one person—her husband—who not only taught and supported but also urged her to write more poetry. All of her writings were carefully edited and compiled by Mao Yuanyi during their lifetime before the fall of Ming. She was one of the very few Ming courtesans whose literary collections are extant. These collections contain about six hundred poems, some of which are song lyrics. They suggest that Yang Wan was likely the most prolific courtesan poet in the Ming.

In the three sections that follow, based on the accounts of her closest acquaintances, I first provide a reconstruction of the life of the specific courtesan under discussion with a focus on questions such as who recorded her life and preserved her poetry and how she was perceived by people around her. I then turn to examine the courtesan's individual voice as articulated in her poetry. I do not approach poems by these courtesans mainly as literary texts, nor do I attempt to evaluate the significant contributions they made to the male-dominant literary tradition. Rather, I pay particular attention to their preoccupations as reflected in their poems and the various voices that they employed to present them. I see in their poetry and actions attempts to improve their personal circumstances by responding to the social and literary milieu of late Ming Jiangnan. In other words, this chapter serves to shed further light on one aspect of the intersection of self and society in the late Ming from the courtesan's point of view.

Xue Susu, the Courtesan as Entertainer¹⁷

¹⁷ For a pioneering study of Xue Susu and her painting, see Tseng Yu-ho, "Hsüeh Wu and Her Orchids." For reproductions of Xue Susu's paintings and a short introduction, see Catalogue "Xue Susu," in Weidner, *Views from Jade Terrace* 82-88. For a brief introduction to her life and an English translation of her poems, see Jennifer Purtle, in Chang and Saussy, *Women Writers of Traditional China* 227-29.

No courtesan in the Ming had so many sobriquets and such a variety of regional identification as did Xue Susu. She was also known in contemporary writings as Xue Wu 薛五, Wulang 五郎, Xue Su 薛素, Sujun 素君, Suqing 素卿, Xue sheng 薛生, Runniang 潤娘, Runqing 潤卿, Qiaoqiao 巧巧, and Xuesu 雪素.¹⁸ The well-known late Ming literatus Hu Yinglin was a close acquaintance of Xue Susu. In his writings alone, six different names are used to address the courtesan. According to Hu, her given name, Susu, had Buddhist associations while her nickname, Qiaoqiao, had to do with her birthday on the seventh day of the seventh lunar month, known in the Chinese ritual calendar as Double Seventh Festival.¹⁹ Hu Yinglin also called her Xue Wu (Xue, the Fifth).²⁰ Like many late Ming literati who often stressed the masculine talent and intellectual interests of courtesans, Hu Yinglin used *sheng* 生, *jun* 君, and *qing* 卿 (literally, student, gentleman, and minister) to refer to Xue Susu. His use of these terms conveys strongly that he saw Xue Susu as an intellectual equal.²¹

In the *Gujin nüshi* by Zhao Shijie, *Liechao shiji* by Qian Qianyi and Liu Rushi, and *Mingyuan shiwei* by Wang Duanshu, Xue Susu is generally described as a native of

¹⁸ See also Tseng Yu-ho, "Hsüeh Wu and Her Orchids" 199-200.

¹⁹ See Hu Yinglin's poem, entitled "Xue sheng yi qixi chudu gu xiaozi Qiaoqiao you qing zhai xue fo fu you Susu zhi cheng. Xingfu la yu guo qu zhong, Xue chi jian suo ti, zou bi fu ci" 薛生以七夕初度故小字巧巧。又清齋學佛復有素素之稱。行父拉余過曲中，薛持箋索題，走筆賦此，in *Shaoshi shanfang ji* 少室山房集 59.3b (*SKQS-dianziban*). According to the legendary story of the love between the Weaving Girl 織女 and the Herd Boy 牛郎, the ill-fated lovers were ordered separated. Once a year on the seventh day of the seventh lunar month, they were allowed a reunion, which was celebrated on earth by several rituals, with a focus on women's lives and work. Women worshiped the Weaving Girl and it was a tradition on the Double Seventh eve to "beg her for skill" (*qi qiao* 乞巧) in the coming year. Susu's name Qiaoqiao was derived from this custom.

²⁰ See Hu Yinglin, *Jiayi shengyan* 450.

²¹ See my discussion in the Introduction, 27. See also Wai-yee Li, "The Late Ming courtesan" 59-61.

Wu (Suzhou, Jiangsu).²² But maybe because of her short marriage with the noted literatus Shen Defu, a native of Jiaxing (in Zhejiang), Zhu Yizun, in the *Ming shi zong*, wrote that she was a courtesan from Jiaxing.²³ In her earlier years, she was also referred to by Hu Yinglin and Binghua Meishi 氷華梅史 (fl. 1600) as Jingshi ji 京師妓 (a courtesan of Beijing).²⁴ Later, she was referred to by Zhong Xing as Jinling ji 金陵妓 (a courtesan of Jinling).²⁵ In his *Zuili shixi*, Shen Jiyou recorded her as a native of Wu, but a courtesan of Jinling.²⁶ The variety of names and regional identities reflects her exceptional popularity and high degree of social and physical mobility. Although she lived a long life extending from the Longqing era to the Chongzhen reign period,²⁷ Xue Susu flourished in the Wanli era, the high point of *shanren* and courtesan cultures. For this reason, she was also referred to as a “courtesan of the Wanli era.”²⁸

As a famous entertainer with beauty and talent, Xue Susu had many admirers. Many were men of influence, including a wide range of officials (civil or military), *shanren* literati, wealthy men, and even non-Chinese “barbarian” men from the [Southern] Man region.²⁹ However, her textual visibility was largely due to her social and literary interactions with men of letters, especially *shanren* literati active in literary circles. In this section, I first examine writings about Xue Susu by two of her male contemporaries: 1) writings by Hu Yinglin on her early life; and 2) an account by the contemporary

²² See Zhao Shijie, comp., *Gujin nüshi shiji*, “Xingshi” 姓氏 89a; Qian Qianyi, *Liechao shiji xiaozhuan* 770; Wang Duanshi, comp., *Mingyuan shiwei* 19.4a; and Shen Jiyou, comp., *Zuili shixi* 34.43a.

²³ See Zhu Yizun, *Ming shi zong* 98.7a.

²⁴ See Hu Yinglin, *Jiayi shengyan*; Binghua meishi, *Yandu jipin* 燕都妓品, in Tao Ting, comp., *Shuofu xu*, reprinted in *Xuxiu Siku quanshu*, zibu, vol. 1190: 450; vol. 1192: 303, respectively.

²⁵ Zhong Xing, comp., (attrib.) *Mingyuan shigui*, *juan* 31. Reprinted in *Siku quanshu cunmu congshu*, *jibu*, vol. 339: 357.

²⁶ Shen Jiyou, comp., *Zuili shixi* 34.43a.

²⁷ See Tseng Yu-ho, “Hsüeh Wu and Her Orchids.”

²⁸ Shen Jiyou, comp., *Zuili shixi* 34.43a.

²⁹ Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 203.

literatus painter Li Rihua's 李日華 (1565-1635) on her later life.³⁰ I then discuss a series of poems presented to Xue Susu by the gentry woman poet Xu Yuan 徐媛 (1560-1620). Xu Yuan was the wife of Fan Yunlin, an important member of the Suzhou literati circles of his day. By so doing, I attempt to give a sense of how contemporary men perceived and recorded Xue Susu in the different stages of her life, and how she was perceived by gentry women poets of her time.

One of the earliest accounts of Xue Susu was written by Hu Yinglin in his *Jiayi shengyan* 甲乙剩言, a collection of jottings published 1594-95.³¹ Hu met Xue Susu several times at literati gatherings when she was a young girl of sixteen or seventeen:

Xue Wu looks amiable and graceful. Her conversation is refined and her manner of moving lovely. Her calligraphy in the regular style is excellent, her painting of bamboo and orchids even better. Her brush dashes rapidly; all her paintings are full of spirit. They are superior to those of most professional painters in town. She is also a superb archer. While galloping on horseback she shoots two balls from her crossbow, managing to make the second ball hit the first one in the air. Or she puts one of two balls on the head of her maid, and the second ball strikes away the one from the maid's head without scratching her. Or she puts a ball on the ground at a distance, and while her body is turned and her arms are crossed backwards, she hits the one on the ground with another ball. She never misses a single shot in a hundred.

³⁰ For Li Rihua's biographical information, see Qian Qianyi, *Liechao shiji xiaozhuan* 638-39.

³¹ Goodrich and Fang, eds., *Dictionary of Ming Biography* 646.

She values herself highly, does not receive common people, but only learned and intelligent men. Her spirit is heroic and she loves originality. At that time she greatly admired Yuan Weizhi [袁微之]. I teased Yuan, and said: “Yuan-the-Sixth looks so black and cross, but wins the heart of Susu. Does it not make us die of jealousy?”

Susu was interested in Buddhism, which she studied with Yu Xianchang [俞羨長]. She was fond of poetry, which she learned from Wang Xingfu [王行甫]. People also call her “Collator Xue” [薛校書].³² Although her poems are slightly inferior to those of Hongdu [Xue Tao], she has a variety of talents, which makes her matchless when placed among famous women of the past (雖篇什稍遜洪度, 而眾技翩翩, 亦昔媛之少雙者).³³

Hu Yinglin, already an accomplished scholar when he wrote this, was obviously much impressed by Xue Susu’s looks, manner, talent, and spirit of learning. His remarks are full of heartfelt appreciation for such a charming and talented girl. It seems that a talented and lovely courtesan like Xue Susu was indeed a pleasant surprise for literati like Hu. As one of the best-known poets and theorists of poetry of the day, his comments on her poetry give us a sense that his compliments were not merely vacuous words.

³² As I mentioned previously, the “Collator Xue” commonly referred to the prominent Tang courtesan Xue Tao. Because Xue Susu was a courtesan and she had the same surname as Xue Tao, she was called “Collator Xue.”

³³ Hu Yinglin, *Jiayi shengyan* 450-51. Translation based on Tseng Yu-ho, “Hsüeh Wu and Her Orchids” 202-03 with modifications. Her Wade-Giles spellings have been converted to *pinyin*. The last two sentences from “People also call her the title of ‘Collator Xue’,” to the end of the quotation are my translation. “Hongdu” translated by Tseng as “freedom,” was in fact the courtesy name of Xue Tao. This mistake has been followed by other scholars. See Catalogue “Xue Susu,” in Weidner, *Views from Jade Terrace* 82-88; the entry on “Xue Susu,” in Chang and Saussy, *Women Writers of Traditional China* 227.

The source of Hu Yinglin's information and the people he mentions are significant as they offer particular information concerning her associates and the perceptions of her contemporaries. As shown in Chapter 1, Hu Yinglin, style name "Mountain Man of Shaoshi," was a talented literatus who achieved a *juren* degree. After failing many times in the *jinshi* examinations (數上公車不第), he gave up further attempts at pursuing high degree and office. He built a villa in the mountains, devoting much of his time to reading and writing.³⁴

Yuan Weizhi, whom Xue Susu admired, was a little-known literatus. From an elegy for him by Chen Jiru, entitled "Ji Yuan Weizhi" 祭袁微之, we learn that he was talented but died an unfulfilled man (世不識兄), having spent most of his time in the courtesan quarters (俠游紅樓素綃).³⁵ Yu Xianchang (given name Anqi 安期) was a famous *shanren* literatus who completely abandoned all his political ambitions.³⁶ As we have seen in Chapter 1, he actively engaged in several poetry societies, where he exchanged poems with friends, including famous courtesans such as Zhu Taiyu and Zhao Caiji.³⁷ He was particularly enchanted by Xue Susu's charms and talents. His excessive feelings towards Xue were known in the literati world. His friend Fan Rui 范汭

³⁴ See the entry on "Hu juren Yinglin" 胡舉人應麟, in Qian Qianyi, *Liechao shiji xiaozhuan* 446-47.

³⁵ Chen Jiru, "Ji Yuan Weizhi" in *Chen Meigong ji*, *juan* 17, reprinted in *Xuxiu Siku quanshu*, vol. 1380: 249-50.

³⁶ See the entry on "Yu shanren Anqi" 俞山人安期 in Qian Qianyi, *Liechao shiji xiaozhuan* 630. Yu Anqi joined the Bai yu she 白榆社 in 1580. The society was organized and participated by Wang Daokun and his two brothers, Pan Zhiheng, and some others. See Zhang Huijian, *Ming Qing Jiangsu wenren nianbiao* 320. In 1610, Yu, Pan Zhiheng, and others organized the "Great Society of the Romantic City" the Yecheng da she 冶城大社 in Nanjing. It included many famous courtesans such as Zhu Taiyu as its members. See the entry on Zhu Taiyu, in Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 97.

³⁷ Pan Zhiheng's preface to *Xiufo zhai shi* recorded that Yu invited Zhu to join his poetry society. See Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 97. For Zhao Caiji's poem entitled "Song Zhang Youyu huan Wumen" 送張幼玉還吳門, see Zhang Mengzheng, comp., *Qinglou yunyu*, *juan* 2: 56.

(courtesy name Dongsheng 東生), also a literary commoner,³⁸ wrote a poem to make fun of him.³⁹ Wang Xingfu was less well-known than Hu Yinglin or Yu Xianchang, but he was also an active member in literati circles during the late Ming. This group of men clustered around Xue Susu, without exception, fall into the category of “men of the mountains.”

Hu Yinglin’s portrayal of Xue Susu and her relationships with her admirers in the above narrative was enriched by many poems that he wrote for or about this courtesan. His *Shaoshi shanfang ji* 少室山房集 contains eighteen poems (nine titles) written for or about Xue Susu.⁴⁰ Some poems were written about social and literary gatherings held in Xue Susu’s abode. For example, the first three titles (three poems) included in Hu’s collection were written when Hu Yinglin first met Xue Susu in her quarters.⁴¹ Hu was invited by his friend Wang Xingfu to accompany him to meet Xue. The first poem was written at Wang’s request to compliment the young courtesan. In the poem, Hu Yinglin speaks for Wang. The second was a poem inscribed on letter paper at the request of Xue Susu. When Susu first saw Hu, she immediately praised Hu as “the number one poet in the literati world” (登壇第一人).⁴² Hu Yinglin was apparently inspired by the flattery uttered by this beautiful young courtesan as he composed a poem for Susu as if his brush were flying (走筆賦此). The third poem was written after they watched Susu performing archery.

³⁸ For his biography, see Qian Qianyi, *Liechao shiji xiaozhuan* 608-09. As we will see, he was a friend of Mao Yuanyi.

³⁹ See Fan Rui’s poem entitled “Song on Xue Susu’s little portrait composed to harmonize with Yu Xianchang” 薛姬小影歌和俞羨長, in Qian Gu 錢穀 (1508-ca.1578), comp., *Wudu wencui xuji* 吳都文粹續集 26.34a-b (*SKQS-dianziban*).

⁴⁰ Some of these poems are discussed by Tseng Yu-ho, “Hsüeh Wu and Her Orchids” 203-05.

⁴¹ *Shaoshi shanfang ji* 59.3a-4a.

⁴² This is mentioned by Hu in the third poem. *Shaoshi shanfang ji* 59.4a.

This drinking party was hosted by Li Benjian 李本建, brother of the famous literatus Li Weizhen, the “Mountain Man of Dabi” who was a core member of the Huainan Society.⁴³ The poem by Hu is quite conventional. Another *shanren* literatus Lu Bi (courtesy name Wucong), the founder of the Huainan Society, was also present at the party. He did a better job of vividly catching the joyful moments at the party. Widely circulated, Lu Bi’s poem entitled “The Song of Watching Susu Shooting the Ball” 觀素素挾彈歌 reads:

Inebriated with wine, we ask her to perform shooting the ball.

With her single-layer shirt tied, she sees no harm to have a try.

Rolling up slightly her red sleeves, her arm guard is half shown.

Tilting her cloudlike tresses to aim, she stretches both of her arms.⁴⁴

[...]

(As quoted in the entry on “Xue Susu,” in *Liechao shiji xiaozhuan* 770.)

酒酣請爲挾彈戲，結束單衫聊一試。

微纏紅袖坦半鞦，側度雲鬟引雙臂。

[...]

These sources and people provide examples to illustrate how late Ming *shanren* literati and courtesans worked together and reinforced each other to make courtesan quarters the space of a flourishing literati culture. They serve as further testimony, at the individual level, of the close relationship examined previously between the rise of

⁴³ See the entry on “Jiren Zhou Wen,” in Shen Jiyou, *Zuili shixi* 34.46a-b. For Li Weizhen’s biographical information, see *Mingshi* 288.1b-2b.

⁴⁴ For another translation of this poem, see Cass, *Dangerous Women* 39.

courtesan culture and the increasing popularity of eccentric literati who did not want to serve in government office.

Xue Susu married several times, but none of the marriages was a success. Among the men that she married, the most prominent was Shen Defu. A *juren* degree holder, Shen is the author of the famous book of miscellaneous reflections on the Wanli era, the *Wanli ye huo pian* 萬歷野獲篇. A hanging scroll of an upper-class lady playing the flute (吹簫仕女圖) by Xue Susu is housed in the Nanjing Museum.⁴⁵ The artist's seals on this painting read "Shen-Xue *shi*" 沈薛氏 and "Di wu zhi ming" 第五之名, which suggests the painting was done by Xue Susu after she married Shen Defu.⁴⁶ This painting reflects Xue Susu's changed social station as a member of a gentry family. Unfortunately, Shen was about thirteen years younger than Susu.⁴⁷ With such a great difference in age, Shen was mocked by another man of letters Tan Zhenmo 譚貞默 (courtesy name Liangsheng 梁生), the founder of the Yuan Society (鴛社).⁴⁸ Although this marriage did not last very long, the fact that Xue Susu attracted the attention of noted men of letters from a younger generation suggests that her popularity and reputation remained undimmed.

Xue Susu's later life as a courtesan can be gathered from the account of her by the contemporary literatus Li Rihua. Beginning in her middle age, Xue Susu devoted herself to Buddhist practice and had a particular interest in producing paintings of Guanyin. In

⁴⁵ The painting is reproduced in Wu Yangmu 吳養木, et al, eds., *Zhongguo gudai huajia cidian* 中國古代畫家詞典 396.

⁴⁶ Both the marriage and the painting are also evidenced by a poem entitled "Xue Su lin Zhao Chengzhi Chui xiao menren tu ge" 薛素臨趙承旨吹簫美人圖歌 written by Li Yingzheng 李應徵 (*juren* 1573) who exchanged poems with literati such as Tu Long, Shen Mingchen, and Hu Yinglin. In the preface to the poem, Li Yingzheng indicates that he had no chance to see Susu again because she had married Shen Defu; thus he composed the poem to express his sad feelings. See Shen Jiyou, comp., *Zuili shixi* 15.2b-3a.

⁴⁷ See Tseng Yu-ho, "Hsüeh Wu and Her Orchids" 206.

⁴⁸ Shen Jiyou, comp., *Zuili shixi* 34.43a. For a brief introduction to Tan Zhenmo and the Yuan Society, see Guo Shaoyu, "Mingdai de wenren jituan" 570.

his colophon on Xue Susu's "Guanyin among Flowers" (題薛素花裏觀音), Li Rihua states:

She is skilled in everything in the world that can please and entertain men.

However, a flower after many springs is old. People cannot help feeling that she was no longer young.⁴⁹ She is unable to force the situation.

Today, again, she uses the method of painting to finely sketch a

Bodhisattva to pray for all loving couples under heaven to have

descendants. This to her credit fills a big deficiency. Thus I happily

praise her, saying:

Clever girl with cultured hand nurtured by spring breezes.

A hundred flowers from your fingers blossom forth.

A Bodhisattva appears within a flower;

It naturally bears real fruit.⁵⁰

...人間可喜可樂, 以娛男子事, 種種皆出其手. 然花繁春老後, 人情不免有綠陰青子之思. 姬無可著力. 今又以繪法精寫大士, 代天下有情夫婦祈嗣. 此又是于姬已分上補一段大闕陷也. 乃歡喜以贊曰: 慧女春風手, 百花指端吐. 菩薩現花中, 自結真實果.

⁴⁹ Translation from the second sentence is based on the translation in Catalogue "Xue Susu," in Weidner, *Views from Jade Terrace* 82 with substantial modifications. The phrase "lüyin qingzi" 綠陰青子, literally, "young fruit in the green shade," is derived from the Tang poet Du Mu's 杜牧 (803-52) famous lines: Red petals have completely fallen off from the tree after the harsh wind, /Green leaves have become a shade with young fruit all over the branches 狂風落盡深紅色, 綠葉成陰子滿枝. See *Quan Tang shi* 全唐詩 527.6033. According to his preface to the poem, Du Mu in Huzhou saw a girl who was extremely pretty but too young to be married at that time. Fourteen years later, Du Mu held the office of the prefect in Huzhou. He searched for the girl but she had been married and was a mother of children. Very disappointed, Du Mu wrote this poem, entitled "On melancholy" 悵詩. Thus, the phrase "lüyin qingzi" alludes to a woman who has passed her youthful years.

⁵⁰ Wang Keyu, comp., *Shanhu wang* 1197. Translation is based on Catalogue "Xue Susu," in Weidner, *Views from Jade Terrace* 82, with modifications.

Apparently, Xue Susu never gave up the attempt to empower herself by teaching herself new talents and skills, even in later years when her youth and beauty had passed.

Less usual, and thus worthy of note, was that Xue Susu, as a charming and multitalented entertainer, was widely extolled not only by men, but also by the gentry woman poet Xu Yuan who composed five poems presented to the courtesan. Structured as a series, the poems entitled “Presented to Xue Susu, Five Poems” 贈薛素素五首 are included in Xu Yuan’s poetry collection *Luowei yin* 絡緯吟,⁵¹ a collection published in 1613 by her husband Fan Yunlin. Xu Yuan was one of the most famous women poets in the late Ming Suzhou. Her treatment of Xue Susu enables us to achieve a better understanding of the conjunction of courtesanship, social mobility, and poetic practices in the late Ming, from the perspective of a gentry woman. Translations of all five poems by Xu Yuan are provided here, since they are structured as a series to celebrate Xue Susu as a talented female entertainer.

Presented to Xue Susu, Five Poems

I

A famed courtesan of old, you were worth several cities.

Nourishing the paper, your fragrant lotus-powder is rare.⁵²

Your colourful brush produces clouds which are superior to brocades.

Who says that the girl of Shu [Xue Tao] is good at poetry?

II

⁵¹ See Xu Yuan’s poems entitled “Zeng Xue Susu wu shou,” in *Luowei yin shi er juan* 絡緯吟十二卷, *juan* 8, reprinted in *Siku weishou shu jikan*, *Di qi ji* 第柒集 369-70. For a discussion about the possible friendship between Xu Yuan and Xue Susu, see Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers* 170; 267-68.

⁵² The “furong xiang fen,” literally, “the fragrant lotus powder,” is a kind of powder used to temper the paper for better result of calligraphy-writing.

Your ink flowers into nine fields of secluded orchids,⁵³

Galloping on horseback across on Zhangtai Terrace,⁵⁴

you shoot down the golden balls.

But you bought a light carriage, riding on its canopy,

Binding a lover's heart beneath pines of West Mound.⁵⁵

III

Lotus blossoms as you move your pair of arches,

Your tiny waist, just a handful, is light enough to dance on a Palm.

Leaning coyly against the east wind,

Your pure color and misty daintiness fill the moon.⁵⁶

IV

A flower goddess with knight-errant bones—

you are so-spirited and vigorous.

Learning to put on Man [barbarian]-style make-up

you march towards Wei City.

⁵³ The term “jiu wan” 九畹, refers to the quantity of orchids that Qu Yuan had planted. Thus, “jiu wan you lan” 九畹幽蘭 has become an established term for the plant and a reference to Qu Yuan himself. See “Catalogue” 5, note 3, in Marsha Weidner, ed., *Views from Jade Terrace* 76.

⁵⁴ Zhangtai refers to the courtesan quarters. The allusion was derived from the Tang *chuanqi* story “Liu shi zhuan” 柳氏傳 by Xu Yaozuo 許堯佐. For the story, see Wang Pijiang, *Tangren xiaoshuo* 52-53.

⁵⁵ The last two lines of this poem elaborated on a poem attributed to Su Xiaoxiao 蘇小小, the best-known courtesan from Hangzhou in the southern Qi period. The original song entitled “Song of the West Mound” 西陵歌 reads: “I am riding in an oiled canopy carriage / While my young man sits on the back of a fine horse. Where to bind our two hearts together / Beneath pines and cypresses (妾乘油壁車, 郎乘青驄馬. 何處結同心? 西陵松柏下). For the Chinese text of this poem, see Guo Maoqian 郭茂倩, comp. *Yuefu shiji* 樂府詩集, IV, 85: 1203.

⁵⁶ This particular poem is translated by Ko, in *Teachers of the Inner Chambers* 170. I have only changed her third person pronoun to the second.

Carrying a dragon-patterned dagger and talking about tiger strategies,
You have in your chest the ten thousand soldiers of Xue Song.⁵⁷

VI

Reopening a separate mansion to house Wenjun,
Treasures and gold were delivered to exchange the “green skirt.”
Neither rain nor cloud, your fragrance fills the road.
You must have been Xue Lingyun in your past life.

(*Luowei yin* 369-70)

贈薛素素五首

連城聲價舊名姬，養紙芙蓉香粉奇。

綵筆揮雲誇濯錦，誰言蜀女擅稱詩。

其二

幽蘭九畹墨華淋，走馬章臺彈撲金。

却買輕車駕油辟，西陵松下結同心。

其三

雙孿嬌褓步蓮生，一束蠻腰舞掌輕。

乍倚東風力不勝，素華纖霧月中盈。

⁵⁷ This line alludes to the story of Hongxian 紅綫, a story told in *Gan ze yao* 甘澤謠 by the Tang literatus Yuan Jiao 袁郊. Hongxian was the maid of Xue Song 薛嵩, the governor-general of Luzhou 潞州. He was not an entirely fictional character but based on an actual historical figure. Xue Song was the grandson of the famous Tang general Xue Rengui 薛仁貴 (614-83). Hongxian, being skilled in martial arts, brought the enemy of her master under control. For the story, see Wang Pijiang, comp., *Tangren xiaoshuo* 260-63. For Xue Song's biography, see Liu Xu 劉昫 (887-946), comp., *Jiu Tang shu* 舊唐書 124.1a-2a, (*SKQS-dianziban*). For Xue Rengui's official biography can be found in Liu Xu, comp., *Jiu Tang shu* 83.10a-15a.

其四

花神俠骨氣縱橫, 學寫蠻妝向魏城.

手把龍文談虎略, 胸羅十萬薛嵩兵.

其五

重開別院貯文君, 寶絡千金換翠裙.

非雨非雲香滿路, 前身應是薛靈芸.

In these poems, Xu Yuan compared Xue Susu to the Tang courtesan poet Xue Tao (poem I), the fictional female hero Hongxian 紅綫 (poem IV), and the legendary beauty Xue Lingyun 薛靈芸 (fl. 220-26), known as the “needle goddess” 針神 (poem VI),⁵⁸ to celebrate Susu Xue’s extraordinary life as a female entertainer. The first poem gives an overall evaluation of Susu as a courtesan, with a focus on Susu’s accomplishment in painting and poetry. The second poem praises Susu’s talent in calligraphy, horse-riding, and shooting. In the third poem, Xu Yuan highlights Susu’s graceful manners, a combined effect of her bound feet, tiny waist, and pure complexion. The main idea of the fourth poem is to highlight Susu’s military interest and knight-errant character. The last poem celebrates Xue Susu’s extraordinary skill at needlework.

Due to the lack of further information, we can only depend on these poems themselves to determine when and under what circumstances these poems were produced. The term “jiu mingji” (a courtesan being prominent in the past 舊名姬) in the first line of the first poem suggests that when Xu Yuan wrote and presented these poems to Xue Susu,

⁵⁸ Xue Lingyun was a legendary beauty living in the Three Kingdoms period (220-280). Cao Pi 曹丕 (187-226), Emperor Wen of Wei, liked young women from the south. Xue Lingyun, a beautiful Jiangnan girl, was selected to be sent to the Wei court. She was particularly good at sewing in the dark. See Li Fang 李昉 (925-96), comp., *Taiping guangji* 太平廣記 272.2b-4b (*SKQS-dianziban*).

Xue was probably no longer a courtesan. Moreover, the last two lines of the second poem “But you bought a light carriage, riding on its canopy / Binding a lover’s heart beneath pines of West Mound” rework the poetic lines attributed to Su Xiaoxiao 蘇小小, the best-known courtesan from Hangzhou in the Southern Qi period, who had found a lover’s heart to bind together with hers (*jie tong xin* 結同心). This suggests a reference to one of Xue Susu’s marriages. Since the *Luowei yin* in which these poems were included was published in 1613, the poems could have been written earlier than 1613. Xu Yuan likely presented these poems to Xue Susu after she married Shen Defu, a marriage in Xue Susu’s middle age.

Nevertheless, Xu Yuan’s poems presented to Xue Susu provide important insights into the intersections of courtesan culture, women’s culture in general, and literati culture in late Ming Jiangnan from the perspective of a gentry woman. First, Xue Susu is portrayed in these poems as an androgynous ideal who had both male talent and female charm. This was also a fashionable image of the courtesan presented in late Ming writings on courtesans by male literati. If without the explicit indication of a female author, these poems could hardly be distinguished from those complimentary writings by men, such as Lu Bi’s poem on Xue Susu and Wang Zhideng’s writing on Ma Xianglan discussed earlier.⁵⁹ Second, to write a series of five poems on different aspects of Xue Susu indicates knowledge of the person. Although we don’t have concrete evidence that suggests their possible contacts, given the fact that Xu Yuan socialized with other singing girls, it is very likely that the two had contact. Third, Xu Yuan’s writing of these poems was likely influenced by her husband under the fashion of companionate marriages—her

⁵⁹ For Wang’s writing on Ma, see Chapter 1, 48.

husband Fan Yunlin also wrote a colophon for one of Xue Susu's flower paintings, where Fan praised Xue Susu for both her outstanding talent in painting and her character.⁶⁰ In any case, as Dorothy Ko has noted, these poems bespoke "an intrusion of courtesan culture into the domestic realm."⁶¹

The Poems and Her Individual Voice

Xue Susu's poetry collection *Nanyou cao* was compiled by a contemporary, Cai Bingbai 蔡秉白, a native of Nanjing, who was likely a patron of Xue Susu.⁶² The collection was prefaced by Wang Zhideng, but neither the collection nor Wang's preface is extant.⁶³ There are only twenty-odd poems by Xue Susu extant. Most are included in anthologies of women's poetry produced in the late Ming and early Qing, especially in the courtesan anthology *Qinglou yunyu* (1616).⁶⁴ Although poems by Xue Susu are limited, her individual voice as a popular courtesan is still sufficiently articulated because most of her poems were social exchanges with men at parties. This suggests that these poems were written during the heyday of her courtesan career. The title of the poetry collection and poems included in it suggest that these poems were written after Xue Susu began to reside in Nanjing.

⁶⁰ See Catalogue "Xue Susu," in Weidner, *Views from Jade Terrace* 85.

⁶¹ See Ko, "The Written Word" 91.

⁶² Among Xue Susu's extant poems, several are addressed to men surnamed Cai. I speculate that Cai Bingbai was likely the courtesy name of one among these. See, for examples, poems entitled "Zhongqiu ye tong Cai Youning ji Yang ji Shunhua guan zhong" 中秋夜同蔡幼凝集楊姬舜華館中; "Tong Cai Changqing Xiaolian yin yin zeng" 同蔡長卿孝廉飲因贈; "Bie Cai Youyi" 別蔡幼疑; "Guo Cai shi Yingyun lou" 過蔡氏影雲樓賦贈. See Appendix 3.

⁶³ Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 203.

⁶⁴ For titles of Xue Susu's poems recorded in the late Ming and early Qing anthologies and other collections, see Appendix 3. According to Hu Wenkai, there are poems by Xue Susu recorded in *Ranzhi ji* (preface dated 1658) compiled by Wang Shilu, but I have not been able to check with *Ranzhi ji*. Nine *juan* of it are preserved in the Shanghai Library.

Xue Susu defines her place as a public woman, a courtesan possessing outstanding beauty and talent, but a woman in a dependent position at the margins of society. This makes her quite different from Wang Wei and Yang Wan, whose courtesan identity, as we will see, became very vague. Some of Xue Susu's poems explicitly express her willing submission to male superiority. In the poem entitled "At the Peach Leaf ferry, I drink with Chief Recorder Wu Tanyu" 桃葉渡頭同吳中翰坦愚飲, she writes, "How could I, humble as the cattail / meet with the noble Crape Myrtle officer"⁶⁵ 何因蒲柳質, 邂逅紫薇郎. In another poem entitled "Shi Weibo, the imperial student visits me" 史太學微伯見訪, she writes, "If I am fortunate to be able to look up to your august airs / Dare I complain of your treading on my green lichens" 幸能瞻紫氣, 敢怨破蒼苔.⁶⁶

She sees her success as emerging through frequent social and literary interactions with men of influence, including officials, men of the mountains, and rich men. From the terms "Crape Myrtle officer" (*ziwei lang*) and "august airs" (*zi qi*) in the lines quoted above, we see that her addressees were officials or potential officials. This contrasts with what we have seen before: those who associated with her, and more importantly, wrote of her largely fall into the single category "men of the mountains," men who fashioned themselves as retired literati. This suggests that Xue Susu might have mingled with men of influence, but only the commoner literati had the leisure, motivation, or viable means to record her.

⁶⁵ *Qinglou yunyu*, *juan* 1: 23. The "crape-myrtle-man" refers to the chief recorder 中書舍人 in the Central Drafting Office 中書省. The Emperor Xuanzong of the Tang 唐玄宗 (712-756) liked the crape myrtle flowers. He ordered them planted in the palace. The name of the central drafting office was changed to "Crape-Myrtle Office" in the first year of Tianbao (742). See *Yuxuan Tang Song shichun* 御選唐宋詩醇 98.28b (*SKQS-dianziban*).

⁶⁶ *Qinglou yunyu*, *juan* 4: 117.

Xue Susu devoted her poems mainly to the depiction of her social and literary gatherings with men at parties. As shown by the titles of the poems listed below, parties were often held in a private residence or the study of a particular man:

On a summer day, drinking in the study of Wu Zaibo, the Imperial Student

夏日飲吳太學載伯齋中;⁶⁷

Drinking in the study of Lu Wucong, Man of the Mountains. I write this poem

to present to him 飲陸山人無從齋中因贈;⁶⁸

Passing by the Reflection and Cloud Building of Mr. Cai, I write to present to

him 過蔡氏影雲樓賦贈;⁶⁹

Recording things at the banquet of Censor He 何侍御席上書事.⁷⁰

Sometimes, parties were hosted in the courtesan quarters:

At the night of the Mid-Autumn Festival, I with Cai Youning gather together in

the courtesan Yang Shunhua's quarters 中秋夜同蔡幼凝集楊姬舜華館
中;⁷¹

On a spring day, drinking with friends in a boat on the Qinhuai River 春日

同友飲秦淮舟中;⁷²

At the Peach Leaf ferry, drinking with Chief Recorder Wu Tanyu 桃葉渡頭同吳

中翰坦愚飲.⁷³

⁶⁷ *Qinglou yunyu*, juan 1: 23.

⁶⁸ *Qinglou yunyu*, juan 1: 23-24.

⁶⁹ *Mingyuan shigui*, juan 31: 357.

⁷⁰ *Qinglou yunyu*, juan 1: 22-23.

⁷¹ *Qinglou yunyu*, juan 1: 22.

⁷² *Qinglou yunyu*, juan 1: 23.

⁷³ *Qinglou yunyu*, juan 1: 23.

Both the Qinhuai and Peach Leaf are in the pleasure quarters of Nanjing. On most occasions, she was invited by men. But occasionally, she asked men to come to her place for a drink:

On an autumn day, I invite Censor He for a drink. I obtained the rhyme word

hang [row] to compose a poem 秋日邀何侍御飲得行字.

The word “*yin*” (drinking) frequently appears in the titles of the poems, illustrating the pleasure-seeking aspects of late Ming courtesan culture. Her party poems also convey a strong sense of her popularity among men, signifying the high point of her career as a courtesan. The above poem addressed to Censor He is a case in point:

Within the stone city [Nanjing], the hometown of [the girl] No-Sorrow,⁷⁴

I am embarrassed to take all the praise.

River brimming, water clear, gulls bathe in pairs;

Sky empty, clouds pure, geese aloft from rows.

An embroidered robe half-borrow the hibiscus's color;

Green wine equals the water lilies' fragrance.

If not sharing deep affection with you,

Dare I offer soup and parties to Master He?⁷⁵

The late Ming period provided a stage larger than ever before for the courtesan to play a role in literature and society. Xue Susu obviously welcomed these new opportunities. She enjoyed associating with refined and stylish men and being the center

⁷⁴ Mochou was a legendary beauty from the Shicheng 石城 (literally, stone city) in Hubei. Nanjing was called Shitoucheng 石頭城 (also meaning stone city). Since the Song, people had mistaken Shicheng for Shitoucheng. Accordingly, Mochou was regarded as a girl from Nanjing. See Ma Duanlin, *Wenxian tongkao* 142.11b-12b.

⁷⁵ Translation based on Jennifer Purtle, in Chang and Saussy, *Women Writers of Traditional China* 228 with modifications in the first two lines.

of their attention. In one poem, she writes: “Luckily, I am meeting like-minded guests / It is not inferior to flying with immortals” 幸逢同調客, 不減挾飛仙.⁷⁶ In another poem, she likely declined someone’s offer of marriage by claiming: “I feel ashamed that in my fragrant years, my heart has not settled / Year after year I am like the willow catkins flying over Zhangtai Road” 自愧芳年心未減, 年年風絮舞章台.⁷⁷ She used the common allusion, the “willows of Zhangtai” (章台柳), to refer to her courtesan career.⁷⁸

Recent scholars have noted that Xue Susu “did not accept the prolonged tutelage of a single man and never formed a lasting bond with any of her lovers.”⁷⁹ This distinguishes her from many other Ming courtesans, who tended to focus their attention on one man, especially a talented literatus. The love relationship between Ma Xianglan and Wang Zhideng exemplifies this tendency. As I mentioned previously, although Wang Zhideng declined to marry Ma, Ma stayed loyal to him throughout her life. The famous *buyi* literatus Wu Mengyang 吳夢陽 (courtesy name Yunzhao 允兆)⁸⁰ attributed Xue Susu’s choice to her many artistic talents: “It is too bad Xue Wu did not marry earlier / Everyone knows that she has many talents” 薛五嫁人苦不早, 皆知娼家擅技巧.⁸¹

⁷⁶ See the poem entitled “On a spring day, drinking with friends in a boat on the Qinhuai River,” in *Qinglou yunyu*, *juan* 1: 23.

⁷⁷ See the poem entitled “Recording things at the banquet of Censor He,” in *Qinglou yunyu*, *juan* 1: 22-23.

⁷⁸ For the allusion, see Chapter 3, 187 (note 54).

⁷⁹ See Jennifer Purtle’s entry on Xue Susu, in Chang and Saussy, *Women Writers of Traditional China* 228. See also Catalogue “Xue Susu,” in Weidner, *Views from Jade Terrace* 82.

⁸⁰ Wu Mengyang was a noted *shanren*. He had intimate associations with courtesans such as Zhu Taiyu and Sun Yaohua and with famous literati commoners such as Pan Jingsheng [Pan Zhiheng] and Cheng Mengyang 程夢陽. For his biographical information, see Qian Qianyi, *Liechao shiji xiaozhuan* 605.

⁸¹ See Wu Mengyang’s poem entitled “Wei Zhong Qingshu ti Xue Wu lan juan” 爲鍾清叔題薛五蘭卷, in *Yuding lidai tihuashi lei* 御定歷代題畫詩類 75.13a-b (*SKQS-dianziban*).

In her poetic self-representation, Xue Susu often constructed a self-image for male interest. She was greatly concerned with how men viewed her. Although she incorporates men's praises into her self-representation, the coquettish tone and flattery in these poems precisely reveal her marginal social status as a courtesan who always depended on men. For example, having been praised by Cai Changqing for being as beautiful as flowers, she writes in her poem, "I feel ashamed to be compared with flowers / You are indeed a jade-like man" 儂慚花比貌, 君似玉如人.⁸² In another poem, the *shanren* literatus Lu Wucong [Lu Bi] praised her voice and song lyric, noting it was like the famous "White Snow" lyric. Her response was: "Clouds stop as my clear songs go across / But my lyric does not deserve your praise of "White Snow" 雲歇清歌度, 詞慚白雪誇.⁸³

Originally from Suzhou, Xue Susu apparently went to Beijing for some time, but she lived for many years in Nanjing. As the southern capital of the Ming, Nanjing was a city where the most famous courtesans of the dynasty clustered. Xue Susu was very proud to be recognized as a distinguished courtesan also in Nanjing, but she expressed her pride in a conventionally modest tone: "Within the stone city [Nanjing], the hometown of [the girl] No-Sorrow / I am embarrassed to take all the praise" 石頭城裏莫愁鄉, 深愧儂家得擅場.⁸⁴ Xue Susu's apologies for being prominent were false modesty. They were intended to accentuate, rather than belittle, her prominence. The interplay

⁸² See the poem entitled "Drinking with Cai Changqing the Xiaolian" 同蔡長卿孝廉飲因贈, in *Qinglou yunyu*, *juan* 1: 24. In the Ming-Qing period, "xiaolian" referred to *juren* degree holders.

⁸³ See the poem entitled "Drinking in the study of Lu Wucong, Man of the Mountains. I wrote this poem to present to him," in *Qinglou yunyu*, *juan* 1: 24. "White Snow" is an ancient tune title.

⁸⁴ See the poem entitled "On an autumn day, I invite Censor He to drink, writing poems on the rhyme with Hang [row], in *Qinglou yunyu*, *juan* 1: 22-23.

between modesty and self-promotion served her well in constructing a self-image as a cultivated courtesan.

As mentioned earlier, in evaluating Xue Susu's poetic talent, Hu Yinglin commented that her poems were "slightly inferior to those of Hongdu [Xue Tao]."⁸⁵ But if Hu Yinglin had lived long enough to read the poems written in her later years, he probably would not have made such a remark. Some of these poems demonstrate that, as a popular courtesan active in literati circles for years, Xue Susu had become very skilful in adopting the established conventions with regard to diction, prosodic form, and allusion. The following pentasyllabic regulated poem entitled "In Gratitude to Wang Baigu, the 'Summoned Scholar,' for Writing a Preface to My Poetry" 謝王徵君百穀敘詩, exemplifies these characteristics:

You take trouble to write a preface for me,
Every word carries mist and clouds.
I should not be included in the artists' garden,
You are definitely the incomparable one in poetry circles.
Occasionally I write a few unworthy lines,
Unexpectedly I receive your powerful writing.
How could I be like the man from Shanyin,
Who repaid [Wang] Youjun in kind with flocks of geese?
(*Qinglou yunyu*, *juan* 1, 12-13)
一篇勞見贈, 字字挾煙雲.
藝圃應無我, 詞壇獨有君.

⁸⁵ See Chapter 3, 180 (note 33).

偶曾吟拙句, 何竟辱雄文.

爭似山陰客, 鵝群報右軍.

Writing a note of thanks was a commonplace of social exchange among male literati. This poem was written to thank Wang Zhideng for writing a preface for her poetry. Her expertise in the use of appropriate language and the interplay of modesty and self-promotion served her purpose well. The opening couplet compliments the beautiful language of the preface written by Wang. Each of the two middle couplets forms perfect syntactic parallels. The concluding couplet alludes to the story of the famous calligrapher Wang Xizhi 王羲之 (309-ca. 365) who exchanged his famous calligraphy for flocks of geese raised by a man from Shanyin.⁸⁶ In this poem, the thankful geese keeper stands for Xue Susu herself while the talented Wang Xizhi refers to Wang Zhideng, the one to be thanked. The poem illustrates Xue Susu's craftsmanship and her ability to manipulate poetic conventions. For Xue Susu, writing poetry was like a performance: rules can be learned and applied skilfully.

As a famous courtesan in the heyday of her career, Xue Susu seldom wrote about her loneliness. She seems to have been much too busy socially. But the following two poems under the title "Pouring Wine Alone" 獨酌 are quite exceptional:

Fragrant taste of wine beneath the blossoms,

Kingfisher covers the door among bamboo.

Alone, watching gulls by myself,

⁸⁶ Wang Xizhi was known also by his official title "Youjun" 右軍, short for "You jiangjun" 右將軍. According to *Jin shu* 晉書, a Daoist man in Shanyin raised very good geese. Wang Xizhi liked those geese very much. The man told Wang that if he could write Laozi's 老子 *Dao de jing* 道德經 for him, he would give Wang all of his geese as payment for Wang's calligraphy. Wang Xizhi was very happy to do so to get those fine geese. Fang Xuanling 房玄齡 (578-648), *Jin shu* 80.9b (*SKQS-dianziban*).

Quiet and tranquil with no contention.⁸⁷

Fine birds sing on lofty trees,
The declining sun sets behind the remote mountains.
There are no visitors passing by the front door,
My face goes red after I drink cups of wine by myself.

(*Qinglou yunyu*, *juan* 1, 11-12)

香嘗花下酒, 翠掩竹間扉.

獨自看鷗鳥, 悠然無是非.

好鳥鳴高樹, 斜陽下遠山.

門前無客過, 數酌自酡顏.

These two poems as a series portray a self in tranquil seclusion, a rarity in Xue Susu's extant poems. Although good wine is served as usual, the speaker is no longer portrayed as a charming party girl. In fact, the gender of the speaker is not marked explicitly as feminine, particularly in the first poem. In these poems, Xue Susu skilfully "performs" the kind of "nature" poetry in the tradition of the prominent Tang poets Wang Wei 王維 (701-61) and Meng Haoran 孟浩然 (689-740), whose poems emphasize harmony, self-contentment, and tranquility. The images of wine, flowers, birds, the setting sun, and the remote mountains also remind the reader of Tao Qian's famous lines in one of his "Drinking Wine Poems" 飲酒詩:

⁸⁷ Translation of this poem is by Jennifer Purtle, in Chang and Saussy, *Women Writers of Traditional China* 229. Translation of the second poem is my own.

Picking chrysanthemums by the eastern hedge

I catch sight of the distant southern hill.

The mountain air is lovely as the sun sets

And flocks of flying birds return together.

[...] ⁸⁸

採菊東籬下, 悠然見南山。

山氣日夕佳, 飛鳥相與還。

These two poems of Xue Susu convey a strong sense of self-contentment and tranquility that transcend dichotomies (right and wrong 是非). Although these poems very consciously echo the tradition of nature poetry and poems on drinking in the manner of Tao Qian, living in tranquil seclusion was not just a textual tradition, but also a prevalent fashion in the late Ming literati world as we have seen much in this study. Under the influence of this literati fashion, some courtesans and unconventional gentry women also want to be seen as unworldly retired literati, just like men. Wang Wei called herself “Daoist person,” a term associated with the longstanding tradition of Daoist eremitism. While Liu Rushi named herself Yin 隱 or “recluse,” Huang Yuanjie styled herself Liyin 離隱 (separate seclusion). ⁸⁹ In this light, Xue Susu’s poems not only reveal her familiarity with the theme of seclusion in poetic tradition, but also illustrate how prevalent literati fashions shaped different self-representations of courtesans like Xue Susu.

⁸⁸ See Hightower, trans. & annot., *The Poetry of Tao Qian* 130.

⁸⁹ Chen Yinke, *Liu Rushi biezhuàn* 473.

Wang Wei, the Courtesan as Nonconformist⁹⁰

In Contemporary Poetry Anthologies

Wang Wei, one of the most distinguished courtesan poets of the Ming, was a native of Guangling [Yangzhou], but lived in Hangzhou for several years. An unusually large number of her poems were included in anthologies of women's writing produced in the late Ming and early Qing. Although she may not have been the most prolific courtesan of her time—Yang Wan's individual collections contain as many as six hundred poems and songs—she was obviously the favourite choice for contemporary or near contemporary anthologists who preserved one hundred and thirty titles (one hundred and forty-six poems) by Wang Wei in their anthologies.⁹¹ This had to do with her intimate relationships with literati circles, especially with those who were involved in the anthologizing of women's poetry.

As I have shown in Chapter 2, Wang Wei's debut as a poet was in *Gujin mingyuan huishi* compiled in 1620 by Zheng Wen'ang, an anthology that involved the contribution of many literati who actively participated in poetry societies. Wang Wei and Yang Wan were selected for inclusion in the anthology largely due to their relationships with Mao Yuanyi, to whom both were married as concubines at the same time. Mao Yuanyi was a proof-reader of the anthology. Several years later, Wang Wei was selected for inclusion in *Mingyuan shigui* attributed to Zhong Xing. The *Mingyuan shigui*

⁹⁰ On Wang Wei and her song lyrics in her *Qishan cao*, see Ma Zuxi, "Nü ciren Wang Wei." For a brief introduction to her, and an English translation of her poems, see Idema and Grant, *The Red Brush* 368-70.

⁹¹ This number does not include her song lyrics. It is more than twice the number claimed by Hu Wenkai. See Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 90. See also Idema and Grant, *The Red Brush* 369. For titles of Wang Wei's poems recorded in the late Ming and early Qing anthologies, see Appendix 4.

devoted one complete *juan* to Wang Wei's poems, and a total of ninety-eight poems under eighty-eight titles were recorded. Her intimate associations with Zhong Xing and particularly, his younger friend Tan Yuanchun, founders of the Jingling school likely earned her this place of honour in the *Mingyuan shigui*.⁹² Wang Wei sent her poetry manuscript to Tan Yuanchun, asking him to compile her collection. Tan compiled the *Qishan cao* 期山草 and wrote a preface to the collection. It is not clear whether the poems in the collection are the same as those included in the *Mingyuan shiwei* because the *Qishan cao* has been lost. But the preface to the *Qishan cao* by Tan Yuanchun (dated 1619) was included in his collected works. I will return to this preface below in more detail.⁹³

The *Liechao shiji* also included a generous selection of sixty of her poems (sixty-one as claimed), of which thirty-two appeared in it for the first time. She was included in the section "wives and daughters" rather than courtesans. Wang Wei, Qian Qianyi and Liu Rushi all belonged to Wang Ruqian's circle. Wang Wei and Liu Rushi were friends. Liu, in a letter written to Wang Ruqian, mentioned Wang Wei by her nickname "The slim young man."⁹⁴ Moreover, Wang Wei in her later life married Xu Yuqing 許譽卿 (1586-1662, courtesy name Xiacheng 霞城), a member of the Donglin party, a political party

⁹² She had poetic exchanges with both Zhong and Tan, one and seven respectively. See Fong, "Gender and the Failure of Canonization" 146. For the poems, see *Mingyuan shigui*, *juan* 36: 407-21. For the titles of these poems, see Appendix 4.

⁹³ See "Qishan cao xiaoyin" 期山草小引, in *Xinke Tan Youxia heji er shi san juan fu Zhizhai shicao yi juan* 新刻譚友夏合集二十三卷附旨齋詩草一卷, *juan* 10; reprinted in *Siku quanshu cunmu congshu, jibu*, vol. 191: 696.

⁹⁴ See Liu Rushi, *Hedong jun chidu* 563.

that aimed to fight against corrupt officials and abusive eunuchs.⁹⁵ Xu Yuqing and Qian Qianyi were close friends as they were both members of the Fu she.⁹⁶

In the *Liechao shiji*, Qian Qianyi and Liu Rushi provide a detailed biographical entry on Wang Wei with a focus on her unconventional lifestyle and religious pursuits:

Wei's courtesy name was Xiuwei and she was a native of Yangzhou. At the age of seven she lost her father and eventually she ended up in the courtesan quarters. When she grew up, her talent and temperament were extraordinary. She would travel back and forth between Suzhou and Shaoxing in a small skiff, accompanied by her books. The people she associated with were all famous gentlemen of a superior category.

Later she experienced sudden enlightenment and converted to the joys of Chan. Wearing a cloth robe and carrying a bamboo staff, she traveled throughout the Yangzi region. She climbed Dabieshan, visited the famous sights of Yellow Crane Tower and Parrot Isle, went on pilgrimage to Wudangshan, and climbed Heaven's Pillar Peak. Traveling up the Yangzi River, she ascended Mount Lu and visited the straw-thatched cottage of Bai Juyi [772-864], and at Wuru, she sought instruction from the great master Hanshan Deqing [1546-1623]. Upon her return, she had her future tomb built in Hangzhou,⁹⁷ calling herself the

⁹⁵ For a study of the Donglin party, see Dardess, *Blood and History in China*.

⁹⁶ Qian Qianyi had poems addressed to Xu Yuqing. See, for example, the poem entitled "Xiacheng [Xu Yuqing] zhijiu zuohou zuo" 霞城置酒醉後作, in Qian Qianyi, *Muzhai Youxue ji*, juan 7, "mulu": 6.

⁹⁷ The term "*sheng kuang*" means a tomb built for a living person. As I mentioned before, Wang Wei's future tomb was built by Wang Ruqian. See Wang Ruqian, "Huafang yue" 370. See also Wang Ruqian, "Xihu jiyou," in *Xihu yunshi* 114. Idema and Grant interpret the term "*sheng kuang*" as "a pond" for "live fish that had been released from captivity." I think they might have mistaken "*sheng kuang*" for "*fang sheng chi*" 放生池. See Idema and Grant, *The Red Brush* 368.

“Daoist Master in the Straw Garment.” She was prepared to live out her life in this manner [as a recluse].⁹⁸

The biography goes on to narrate how Wang Wei was eventually married to Xu Yuqing, and how they resisted the Manchu invaders and supported each other during the dynastic transition. Wang Wei died around 1647, three years after the fall of the Ming. Xu mourned her deeply. In concluding the biography, Qian and Liu extolled their long-standing mutual acquaintance as follows:

.... A gentleman might say: “Xiuwei was like a blue lotus rising high above the mud from which it has extracted itself, or like a white piece of jade from Kunlun Mountains, indestructible even by the fires that come at the end of a kalpa. This may be called ‘returning to one’s true home.’”
How fortunate!⁹⁹

Wang Wei’s high degree of textual visibility and respectability in all these anthologies further illustrates that personal connections did play an important role in the anthologizing of poetry by women, including courtesans in the late Ming, at least in some cases. Because of the influence of Qian Qianyi in the contemporary literati world and the importance of *Liechao shiji* for later anthologies of women poets such as the *Mingyuan shiwei*, this biography has become a standard source on Wang Wei’s life in recent scholarship.¹⁰⁰ In the next section, I will examine new sources on Wang Wei in writings

⁹⁸ Translation based on Idema and Grant with modifications. See *The Red Brush* 368. For the term “daoren,” I have used Kang-i Sun Chang’s translation. See Chang, in Chang and Saussy, *Women Writers of Traditional China* 320.

⁹⁹ Translation by Idema and Grant, in *The Red Brush* 369.

¹⁰⁰ See Chang’s entry on Wang Wei, in Chang and Saussy, *Women Writers of Traditional China* 320. See also the entry on Wang Wei in Idema and Grant, *The Red Brush* 368-69.

by her contemporaries that I have discovered. Through these, we can gain a better understanding of the courtesan and her character.

In Other Contemporary Writings

Although the *Liechao shiji* provides a relatively detailed biography of Wang Wei, other late Ming writings offer more information about her life and character. Wang Wei was actually first married to Mao Yuanyi. She was about two years older than Yang Wan, another concubine of Mao Yuanyi. She lived as Mao's concubine with Yang Wan in Nanjing for some time. This is evidenced by Mao Yuanyi's poem entitled "Yanxue newly married me. I took her to Baixia [Nanjing] to show Wanshu and Xiuwei" 燕雪新歸攜之白下示宛叔修微.¹⁰¹ But Wang Wei could not bear the fact that Mao Yuanyi favoured Yang Wan over her, and eventually ran away from Mao's home. The Ming *buyi* literatus Yao Lü 姚旅 in his *Lu shu* 露書 (preface dated 1622) recorded this story:¹⁰²

Wang Wei, courtesy name Xiuwei, nickname Wangguan, was a courtesan of Weiyang [Yangzhou]. She was married to Mao Zhisheng [Mao Yuanyi]. Later, after she realized that Mao favoured concubine Yang Wan over herself, she escaped. She hid herself in her relative Jin Qi's home for three days. Wang used to live in a grand mansion while Jin Qi's

¹⁰¹ Mao Yuanyi, *Shimin shangxin ji* 石民賞心集, reprinted in *Siku jinhui congkan, jibu*, vol. 110: 314. Mao also had five poems under the title "In Reply to Wang Xiuwei in Her Rhyme" 答王修微次來韻, in *Shimin shangxin ji* 304. Yang Wan had a poem addressed to Yanxue, entitled "Written to Show Yanxue" 示燕雪, in *Zhongshan xian si juan*, juan 1.

¹⁰² For Yao Lü's biographical information, see Qian Qianyi, *Liechao shiji xiaozhuan* 464.

house was very small. Still she sat by the well railing to read everyday.

Her breadth of vision was exceptional.¹⁰³

王微, 字修微, 小字王冠, 維揚妓, 歸茅止生, 後以止生視姬人楊宛厚於己, 遂逸去. 匿其戚金七家三日. 王素居廣廈, 金七屋如斗 猶日坐井欄讀書, 胸懷出人頭地矣.

Yao Lü was a friend of Wang Wei, as evidenced by his poem entitled “Sent to the Female Scribe Wang Xiuwei” 寄王修微女史.¹⁰⁴ What he recorded should be reliable.

Chen Yinke surmised that Wang Wei left Mao Yuanyi long before the thirteenth year of Chongzhen era (1641).¹⁰⁵ Yao Lü’s work was published in 1622, which means that Wang Wei had already left Mao by 1622, at the latest. In fact, Tan Yuanchun recorded that he first saw Wang Wei at literati gatherings in Hangzhou in 1619, which suggests that she was no longer with Mao in 1619 when she was around twenty (*sui*). This episode reveals that the young Wang Wei was a headstrong woman with surpassing determination and independence. It also provides useful clues for understanding Wang Wei’s life and poems, especially those addressed to Yang Wan. Wang Wei wrote at least nine poems to Yang Wan while also receiving several poems from her.

Wang’s rejection of her life as Mao Yuanyi’s concubine (out of jealousy as it seems), was indeed an important turning point that dramatically changed Wang Wei’s attitude toward life. However, possibly because of Wang Wei’s later marriage to Qian Qianyi’s friend Xu Yuqing, who was still living when the *Liechao shiji* was compiled, Qian Qianyi and Liu Rushi did not record her earlier marriage with Mao Yuanyi.

¹⁰³ Quoted in Ma Zuxi, “Nü ciren Wang Wei” 222.

¹⁰⁴ Ma Zuxi, “Nü ciren Wang Wei” 227.

¹⁰⁵ Chen Yinke, *Liu Rushi biezhuàn* 433.

It seems that after she left Mao Yuanyi, Wang Wei was patronized by Wang Ruqian, and began mingling with a group of nonconformist literati as a courtesan in the local literati circles until she married Xu Yuqing around 1625.¹⁰⁶ The image of Wang Wei that I focus on in this study is that of her as a courtesan before her marriage to Xu, in the period after she left Mao Yuanyi, approximately from 1619 to 1625, a period during which she was highly productive in writing poetry. A strong-willed woman, Wang Wei probably felt at home among these eccentric men; and, as indicated in their writings, these men welcomed her. Wang Wei's image as an unconventional courtesan was amply reflected and stressed in writings by her associates in Wang Ruqian's literary societies, men whom compilers of the *Liechao shiji* referred to as "famous gentlemen of a superior category":

"Wei Daoren sheng kuang ji" 微道人生壙記 by Chen Jiru;

"Ti Wang Xiuwei shijuan songxing xu" 題王修微詩卷送行序 by Dong Xuanzai

董玄宰 [Dong Qichang];¹⁰⁷

"Xiuwei daoren sheng zhi ming" 修微道人生誌銘 by Xu Jing 許經 (courtesy

name Lingze 令則, a disciple of Chen Jiru); and

"Qishan cao xiaoyin" 期山草小引 by Tan Yuanchun.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ According to the study of Ma Zuxi, Wang Wei's poems were written before she married Xu Yuqing. See Ma Zuxi, "Nü ciren Wang Wei" 223. From Wang Wei's extant poems, we see that her poems were largely written during her stay in Hangzhou from 1619 to 1625. Wang Wei had two poems under the title "Mourning Zhao Fanfu" 悼趙凡夫, written to mourn the death of Zhao Yiguang, husband of Lu Qingzi, who died in 1625.

¹⁰⁷ Song Cunbiao did not provide the title of this essay. I added the title after consulting Ma Zuxi's article. See Ma Zuxi, "Nü ciren Wang Wei" 226.

¹⁰⁸ Song did not provide the title of this essay either. I have added the title. The essay was included in Tan Yuanchun's individual collections. See "Qishan cao xiaoyin," in *Xinke Tan Youxia heji er shi san juan fu zhi zhai shicao yi juan*, juan 10; reprinted in *Siku quanshu cunmu congshu, jibu*, vol. 191: 696.

Wang Wei had poetic exchanges with these four men, a total of four, two, three, and seven poems, respectively.¹⁰⁹ More importantly, all the above essays by these four men were collected together by Chen Jiru's friend Song Cunbiao 宋存標 (fl. 1625), in his collection on love, *Qing zhong* 情種 (Passionate lovers).¹¹⁰ Song occasionally offered his comments at the end of the essays. This collection was prefaced by Chen Jiru in the Tianqi era (1621-28).¹¹¹ Here we see how a group of men worked together through writing and circulating these writings to promote a particular courtesan who was their female associate—they not only had the motivation and the leisure, but also the capability and viable means for doing so.

In these writings, Wang Wei was portrayed and celebrated as a like-minded friend who shared intellectual interests with male literati rather than as a courtesan who served men with her bodily charms and performing arts. As I mentioned before, Wang Ruqian built a future tomb in Hangzhou for Wang Wei in 1623, shortly after she returned from her journeys to famous mountains and rivers in the south.¹¹² At the time, Wang Wei was about twenty-four (Chinese *sui*). Dong Qichang offered his calligraphy for a colophon for the tomb: “This is the Future Chamber” (此未來室也),¹¹³ while Chen Jiru and his disciple Xu Jing wrote the funerary inscriptions for the living Wang Wei. They all celebrated Wang Wei's unconventional lifestyle with regard to her character, interests, and erudition. Chen Jiru emphasized her “obsessions with purity, books, and mountains and rivers (潔癖, 書癖, 山水癖) since she was young,” her independence, referring to her

¹⁰⁹ See Appendix 4.

¹¹⁰ See Song Cunbiao, comp., *Qing zhong*, *juan* 6, reprinted in *Beijing tushuguan guji zhenben congkan* 北京圖書館古籍珍本叢刊, 65: 826-28.

¹¹¹ *Qing zhong* 6: 731.

¹¹² See Wang Ruqian, “Huafang yue” 370. See also Wang Ruqian, “Xihu jiyou,” in *Xihu yunshi* 114.

¹¹³ Wang Ruqian, “Xihu jiyou,” in *Xihu yunshi* 114.

as a Tiansuizi 天隨子 (Master Whom Heaven follows),¹¹⁴ and her attitudes of equating life and death.¹¹⁵ Xu Jing highlighted Wang Wei's particular interest in a certain religious practice that mixed Daoist teachings with alchemical traditions (鴻黃筊窈之學).¹¹⁶ Dong Qichang's essay was written before Wang Wei's journeys to the south. While he celebrated her talent and spiritual pursuits, he also expressed his concerns regarding Wang Wei's adventures in the mountain wilds as a young woman.¹¹⁷ In Tan Yuanchun's essay, he provided a comprehensive introduction to Wang Wei's multiple identities with a focus on her "male" lifestyle:

In the late autumn of the year Jiwei (1619), I met Wang Xiuwei on the West Lake, and I thought she was a native of Hangzhou. Later, she wanted to return to Tiao [Gui'an], I then thought she came from Tiao.¹¹⁸ She did not wear scented powder, but she still had cloudlike tresses. I regarded her as a young lady. Everyday, she went out with us back and forth for the autumn waters and yellow leaves with not a care in the world, and I thought of her as a person of leisure. Among her words many had perfect understanding worthy of listening and I regarded her as enlightened. People all said that she cut cogon-grass to build a thatched

¹¹⁴ "Wei daoren sheng kuang ji," in Song Cunbiao, comp., *Qing zhong*, juan 6: 826. Tiansuizi was the style name of Lu Guimeng 陸龜蒙 (fl. ninth century), an unfettered poet in the Tang dynasty. See Ouyang Xiu, comp., *Xin Tang shu* 新唐書 196.22a-23b (*SKQS-dianziban*).

¹¹⁵ *Qing zhong* 6: 826.

¹¹⁶ *Qing zhong* 6: 828. Recent scholarship on late imperial Chinese religion has pointed out that in addition to Confucian and Buddhist teachings, Daoist philosophical and alchemical traditions also had a profound impact on Ming society. See Seidel, "A Taoist Immortal", in de Bary, *Self and Society in Ming Thought* 483-531. For studies of late imperial three teachings syncretism and intellectual trends, see Berling, *The Syncretic Religion of Lin Chao-en*; Ch'ien, *Chiao Hung*; and Dean, *Lord of Three in One*.

¹¹⁷ Song Cunbiao, *Qing zhong* 6: 826.

¹¹⁸ Tiao, referring to Gui'an, was Mao Yuanyi's hometown. After she ran away from the Mao family, Wang Wei occasionally (at least once) went back to visit Yang Wan at her request. As we will see below from Yang Wan's poetry, Mao Yuanyi was often absent from home. See Wang Wei's poem entitled "Wanshu zhao yin huaxia de kuang zi" 宛叔招引花下得狂字, in *Mingyuan shigui*, juan 36: 415.

hut and that she had thoughts beyond this world. I then regarded her as one who studies the Way. She once showed me a draft of her poetry and asked me to edit it. I then considered her a poet. In her poems, there were words of the world, words of the Way, and words of the boudoir. Whether profound or simple, detached or intimate, they are just like her person. Xun Fengqian said that “Women’s talent and wisdom were not worth discussing. They should be mainly judged by their beauty.” This remark is extremely shallow. As for such a person with such poetry, should she be judged only by her looks? Some in the world do not even know that she is a woman.¹¹⁹

已[己]未秋闈,逢王修微于西湖,以爲湖上人也.久之復欲還苕,以爲苕中人也.香粉不御,雲鬟尙存,以爲女郎也.日與吾輩去來于秋水黃葉之中若無事者,以爲閒人也.語多至理可聽,以爲真悟人也.人皆言其誅茆結菴有物外想,以爲學道人也.嘗出一詩草囑予刪定,以爲詩人也.詩中有巷中語,道中語,閣中語,縹緲遠近,絕似其人.苟奉倩謂婦人才智不足論,當以色爲主.此語淺甚,如此人此詩,尙當言色乎哉?而世猶不知爲婦人也.

Wai-ye Li has aptly observed that in inventing the images of courtesans, male literati also partly invented themselves.¹²⁰ Wang Wei’s multiple identities, as presented by male friends such as Tan Yuanchun, precisely reflect men’s own ideas of self-fashioning. As we have seen, the deconstructing of established dichotomies, such as

¹¹⁹ For the Chinese text, see *Xinke Tan Youxia heji er shi san juan fu Zhizhai shicao yi juan*, juan 10; reprinted in *Siku quanshu cunmu congshu, jibu*, vol. 191: 696.

¹²⁰ Wai-ye Li, “The Late Ming Courtesan” 64.

public/private, inner/outer, virtuous/depraved, orthodox/heterodox, and masculine/feminine, was a typical cultural phenomenon in the late Ming literati world. The terms *Daoren* (Daoist person), *xianren* (person of leisure), *shiren* (poet), were commonly used by literati to romanticize the “men of mountains” who chose to remain out of office. Like the term “*shiren*” discussed in Chapter 1, “*daoren*” was also an alternative term used to refer to the *shanren*. In fact, Chen Jiru, the most prominent *shanren* literatus, also called himself “Mei daoren” (眉道人).¹²¹ Chen Jiru explicitly claimed that:

Famous courtesans reading the classics, old monks brewing wine, generals soaring high in the world of literary writings, and scholars fighting in the battle fields—although they lack the original quality [of those who carry out these activities] they contain style in themselves.¹²²

名妓翻經，老僧釀酒，將軍翬文章之府，書生踐戎馬之場，雖乏本色，亦自有致。

These words of Chen Jiru are regarded as “stylish words,” included in the contemporary collection of fine words of celebrities, the *Shehua lu* (A record of flowers of the tongue) compiled by Cao Chen (fl. in the Wanli era).

In discussing Tan Yuanchun’s essay on Wang Wei, Dorothy Ko argues that, Tan Yuanchun “highlighted her femininity while trying to capture her multiple identity.”¹²³ My reading, however, differs from Ko’s. I believe that in writing about Wang Wei, her

¹²¹ This comes from Chen Jiru’s style name Meigong. Prominent examples also include Xu Lin 徐霖 (1490-1548), who styled himself Jiufeng daoren 九峯道人, Li Liufang called himself Liufu daoren 六浮道人, and Wang Duo 王鐸 (1592-1653), who called himself Xueshan daoren 雪山道人.

¹²² Cao Chen, *Shehua lu*, *juan* 5, “Yunyu,” reprinted in *Siku quanshu cummu congshu*, *zibu*, vol. 143: 615.

¹²³ Ko, “The Written Word” 80-81.

male associates, especially Tan Yuanchun, ascribed most weight to Wang Wei's "masculine" qualities and talent. In representing Wang Wei in their writings, they deemphasized conventional femininity and instead highlighted those literati qualities she possessed of taste and connoisseurship.

As already mentioned, Lin Tiansu and Liu Rushi refer to Wang Wei as "The slim young man" and Wang Ruqian refers to her as "The slim Daoist." After she died, Wang Ruqian asked Li Yu, a young member of the Hangzhou literati circles, to write an inscription on one of her portraits in celebration of her life. Li Yu composed a song lyric as requested. From this song, we can derive more information regarding Wang Wei's appearance and the sort of femininity that was plausible and fashionable within this specific social group. The song lyric, written to the tune *Xing xiang zi* and subtitled "Inscribed on the portrait of the late Wang Xiuwei at the request of Wang Ranming, the Titled Old Man"¹²⁴ 行香子: 汪然明封翁索題王修微遺照, reads:

This kind of elegant pose
Is not like a blossoming branch,
It is like a red magic *zhi* (mushroom),
On the jasper terrace.
Lovely without licentious looks,
Her charm is often hidden.
With two parts brocade, three parts painting, and seven parts poetry.

¹²⁴ The term "fengweng," meaning "titled scholar," was similar to "zhengjun," the "summoned scholar," used to refer to those who were famed and cultivated but with no official ranks.

The talented Master Shen had died from illness¹²⁵

While good-looking Master Wei had died from being stared at.¹²⁶

In this world, who else could you long for?

Resting your chin on your hand,

As if you want to toy with the moustache you do not have:

With seven parts sorrow, three parts illness, and two parts passion.¹²⁷

(*Quan Qing ci*, “Shun Kang juan” 675)

這種芳姿, 不像花枝, 像瑤臺, 一朵紅芝。嬌無淫態, 艷有藏時, 帶二分錦,

三分畫, 七分詩。 沈郎病死, 衛郎看殺。問人間, 誰可相思? 吟腮自

托, 欲撚無髭, 有七分愁, 三分病, 二分癡。

It is apparent that Li Yu does not represent Wang Wei as a conventional feminine beauty (not with the imagined moustache!). Li Yu's friend, Ding Peng 丁澎 (1622-86, courtesy name Yaoyuan 藥園), also offers a comment after this song lyric: “It is a picture of a heavenly beauty. But of her beauty, there is no powder and sensuality. She is definitely not of the kind that Zhou Fang and men like him could appreciate (天然一幅美人圖, 其中非香非色, 固非周昉輩所能知也).”¹²⁸ Zhou Fang was a famous Tang painter with a talent for painting upper-class women. Among his paintings is the famous “Zanhua shinü

¹²⁵ Shen Lang refers to the prominent Southern Qi statesman and poet Shen Yue 沈約 (441-513), courtesy name 休文, who created the Yongming style poetry 永明體 and compiled the *Song shu* 宋書. In the poem describing his poor health, he used the term “shouyao” 瘦腰 (slender waist). If used to refer to a man, the term was often associated with his sexual indulgence/excessive feelings. See Wang Shizhen, *Yanzhou sibu gao* 161.9b-10a. For Shen Yue's biography, see *Liang shu* 梁書 13.6a-20b (*SKQS-dianziban*). For a study of Shen Yue, see Richard B. Mather, *The Poet Shen Yue (441-513): the Reticent Marquis*.

¹²⁶ Wei Jie 衛玠 (285-312) was a very good-looking young man. Every time he went out, he was surrounded by people. He died at the age of twenty seven *sui*. Some people would rather believe that he was being stared to death. For his biography, see Fang Xuanling, comp., *Jin shu* 36.16a-18b.

¹²⁷ For the Chinese text of the song lyric, see also *Li Yu quanji* 李漁全集, vol. 2: 454.

¹²⁸ *Li Yu quanji*, vol. 2: 454. For Zhou Fang and his paintings, see Zhu Mouyin 朱謀壘 (fl. seventeenth century), comp., *Huashi huiyao* 畫史會要 1.62a (*SKQS-dianziban*).

tu”簪花仕女圖 (Beauties wearing flowers).¹²⁹ All the women in the painting are gorgeous and elegant, but full and round in looks as befits the feminine aesthetics of the Tang. Ding’s comment clearly states the change in what was considered the ideal feminine beauty that had occurred between the Tang and the Ming and the difference between ordinary men with “poor” taste and eccentrics with “unique” taste.

Writings by these contemporary acquaintances of Wang Wei are of great value in the study of Wang Wei’s poetic representations because as we will see below, Wang Wei consciously identified herself with the *shanren* literati, devoting herself to their fashions and values.

Daoist Person in Straw Garment: the Voice of Wang Wei

As already mentioned, both Wang Wei and Yang Wan were married to Mao Yuanyi as concubines. But because Mao Yuanyi favoured Yang Wan over her, Wang Wei ran away from the Mao family. She soon became disillusioned with love. Wang Wei styled herself a Daoist, and this became a turning point in her life trajectory. But, like her *shanren* friends who did not cut themselves off from their social communities, Wang Wei also chose not to live in seclusion. She keenly engaged in the activities of male literary societies. Wang Wei presented herself in literary gatherings and exchanged poetry with men.¹³⁰ She had poetic exchanges with twenty-odd men of letters,¹³¹ among whom many were the most prominent literary and social figures of the late Ming—Chen Jiru, Dong Qichang, Zhong Xing, and Tan Yuanchun—to name just a few. These men all clustered

¹²⁹ The painting is partially reprinted in Wu Yangmu, comp., *Zhongguo gudai huajia cidian* 10.

¹³⁰ See, for example, the poem entitled “On an autumn day, we gathered in Shihu to write poems. I received the word *zhuang* [as a rhyme] 秋夜集石湖分得粧字, in *Liechao shiji*, *Runji* 374.

¹³¹ See Appendix 4.

around Wang Ruqian in Hangzhou. She went with her male friends to visit the tomb of Sun Taichu, the predecessor of the Ming *shanren*, which suggests a kind of shared identification,¹³² and she joined male literati in her appreciation of a newly discovered poetry collection *Xianghun ji* 香魂集 by the woman poet Ma shi 馬氏.¹³³

Facing new opportunities brought about by dramatic social and cultural changes of the late Ming, Wang Wei adopted a strategy completely different from Xue Susu's. While Susu actively sought wide public acclaim, Wang Wei chose to style herself a Daoist, after the fashion of a specific group of nonconformist literati, such as Chen Jiru. On the one hand, her Daoist practice helped her avoid getting involved with fickle men; on the other hand, she enjoyed much freedom in interacting with men. Her Daoist identity also enabled her to mingle more freely with the wives of her male friends.

Wang Wei's self-definition shaped her poetic self-representations. Compared to Xue Susu, who celebrated her feminine charms with pride in her poems, Wang Wei refused to value the physical beauty of a woman. As a Daoist, she was fond of wearing coarse clothing and she did not use make-up. Zou Diguang stated that Wang Wei "had

¹³² See her poem entitled "In early winter, visiting the tomb of Sun Taichu with Youxia and others" 初冬拜孫太初墓和友夏諸子, in *Mingyuan shigui*, *juan* 36: 416.

¹³³ For the entry on the *Xianghun ji* by Ma shi, see Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 154. Ma shi was the wife of a general of Tiger Pass. The poetry manuscript entitled "Qiugui mengshu shi" 秋閨夢戍詩 was found in an old house of a deserted village in Zhejiang by Song Jue 宋瑀 (courtesy name 比玉). Song had it compiled and published and named it *Xianghun ji*. Tan Yuanchun wrote a preface. See Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 154. Mao Yuanyi also contributed a preface to the collection. The preface was included in Mao Yuanyi's collected works, entitled *Shimin sishi ji* 石民四十集, reprinted in *Xuxiu Siku quanshu*, *jibu*, vol. 1386: 214-15. Wang Wei wrote a poem entitled "On an autumn night of Gengshen [1620], I was sick and confined to bed in Gushan (The Lonely Mountain). Idly, I read poems of autumn dreams by the Lady of Tiger Pass. Sorrowfully, I am enchanted with her and could not sleep. Aimlessly, I wrote a quatrain and record my inner heart. I am already like wood and rock, but I still cannot be unfeeling [about her poems]. How can readers after me bear to read them?" 庚申秋夜予臥病孤山,閒讀虎關女郎秋夢詩。悵然神往不能假寐,漫賦一絕,併記幽懷。予已作木石人尚不能無情。後之覽者當如何耳, in *Mingyuan shigui*, *juan* 36: 419.

completely washed off powder and rouge” 鉛華盡洗。¹³⁴ Her apparent avoidance of a courtesan’s sensual beauty also enabled her to assume a critical distance toward romantic love between a man and woman. In the following poem entitled “Harmonizing with Wanshu” 和宛叔, Wang Wei uses flowers as a metaphor to warn her sworn sister Yang Wan that beauty and love are transitory and undependable:

The flowers that bloomed luxuriantly last night,

This morning, are already fallen.

Glory and decline, each has its moment,

The lord’s favour changes in its generosity.

(*Mingyuan shigui*, *juan* 36, 417-18)

昨夜花灼灼, 今朝花已落.

盛衰自有時, 君恩隨厚薄.

The opening couplet employs nature’s cycle as a metaphor for the impermanence of human passion, which is elaborated in the second couplet. The poem is not dated, but it shows a sense of disillusionment with fickleness of men’s love.

The poem “Pipa xing” 琵琶行 (Song of Pipa) by Bai Juyi 白居易 (772-846) narrates the story of a once-famed courtesan who ended up as the wife of a tasteless merchant and was left behind in solitude.¹³⁵ The poem became widely circulated right after it came out. But in another poem to Yang Wan, Wang Wei challenged the received view that the poem became well-known because of the poetic talent of the male poet. She attributed its widespread recognition to women’s tragic fate as women: “Not that the

¹³⁴ Zou Dihuang, “Wang Xiuwei Xian cao xu” 王脩微閒草序, in *Shiqing ge gao* 始青閣稿, reprinted in *Siku jinhui shu congkan, jibu*, vol. 103: 240.

¹³⁵ For Bai Juyi’s “Pipa xing,” see *Quan Tang shi* 435.4821.

one in the blue robe [Bai Juyi] is good at writing about resentment¹³⁶ / In this world, there are only abandoned women who sing the “White hair song” 不是青衫工寫怨, 世間只有白頭吟.¹³⁷ Compared to Xue Susu, who expressed her willing submission to male superiority, Wang Wei voices bold criticism of gender hierarchy.¹³⁸

Wang Wei’s uncommon attitude towards beauty and love was also reflected in her inscription for Wang Ruqian’s poem entitled “Youchuang jimeng” 幽窗記夢 (Dream by the secluded window) written in 1622.¹³⁹ Wang Ruqian’s poem is a seven-character quatrain with a long preface. In the preface, Wang Ruqian describes a romantic dream in which he meets a talented beauty, and talks with her about poetry and painting. However, when Wang attempts to reply to her poem, somebody wakes him up. According to Dong Qichang, after Wang Wei traveled to the south and Lin Tiansu left Hangzhou for her native home Sanshan 三山 (in Fujian) because she suddenly wanted to be a girl in the inner chambers (有閨閣態), Wang Ruqian created a romantic dream in order to console himself.¹⁴⁰ Chen Jiru, Han Jing 韓敬 (*jinshi* 1610),¹⁴¹ Xu Jing, and several others all

¹³⁶ “*Qingshan*” (blue robe) was the official uniform for district magistrates. Here the term refers to Bai Juyi who was the magistrate of Jiangzhou [Jiujiang] when he wrote the poem. The last line of this poem is “Tears wet the blue robe of the Jiangzhou magistrate” 江州司馬青衫濕. See *Quan Tang shi* 435.4821.

¹³⁷ See the poem entitled, “Jin qiu huai Wanshu” 近秋懷宛叔, in *Mingyuan shigui*, juan 36: 419. The “Baitou yin” alludes to the story of Zhuo Wenjun. Zhuo was a good-looking and rich widow who eloped with the talented and poor poet Sima Xiangru (179-118 BCE) 司馬相如. Their romance became a popular theme in Chinese literature. But, Sima Xiangru disfavoured her in her old age. He intended to take a concubine. Wenjun composed a poem entitled “Baitou yin” to break up with him. For a detailed account of the love story of Zhuo Wenjun and Sima Xiangru, see Idema and Grant, *The Red Brush* 108-12.

¹³⁸ Wang Wei also expressed her awareness of her limitations of being a woman in the prefaces to her poetry collections. See Chang and Saussy, *Women Writers of Traditional China* 688-89. See also Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers* 287.

¹³⁹ Wang Ruqian, *Chunxingtang shiji* 3.6b.

¹⁴⁰ See Dong Qichang, “Ti ci” 題詞, in *Chunxingtang shiji* 3.6b.

¹⁴¹ Han Jing wrote preface to *Yutai wenyuan* compiled by Jiang Yuanxi, see Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 885-86.

wrote something to celebrate the romance in Wang's dream.¹⁴² Wang Siren 王思任 (1575-1646), the father of Wang Duanshu, also composed four poems on Wang's dream record.¹⁴³

Wang Wei was the only courtesan who wrote comments on Wang Ruqian's dream poem. Her poem was written one year later in 1623 when she returned from her journeys to the south.¹⁴⁴ The poem, entitled "Inscribing a Poem on 'The Dream' for Wang Ranming" 爲汪然明題夢草, reads:

Emotion is the root of dreams;
The emotion may be real, but the dreams are most unreal.
Not that dreams can become indistinct,
For indistinctness generates even more shapes.
You, Master, are one who has forgotten emotion,
Alone awakened from where others are stuck.
Would you, for no reason in the spring,
Let a dream wander and flutter?
In the dream and in the heart—
Is it one or is it two?
Reading your "Dream" poem in the painted boat on the lake,¹⁴⁵
Makes me understand the reach of emotion.

¹⁴² See Dong Qichang, "Ti ci," in *Chunxingtang shiji* 3.6b.

¹⁴³ *Chunxingtang shiji* 3.11b.

¹⁴⁴ In *Chunxingtang shiji*, Wang Wei's poem was recorded under the title, "On a summer day of the year Guihai [1623]..." 癸亥夏日集水邊林下讀夢草賦此請政. See Wang Ruqian, *Chunxingtang shiji* 3.11b-12a.

¹⁴⁵ Translation based on Kang-i Sun Chang's with modifications. See Chang, in Chang and Saussy, *Women Writers of Traditional China* 321. I have changed "my boat" to "the painted boat." It should be Wang Ruqian's Buxiyuan.

At this moment the setting moon is here;
All around is a stretch of emerald drizzle.
The arousal and dispersal of the dream
Both depend on the pear blossoms.¹⁴⁶

Wang Ruqian had a dream because of the absence of his female friends. Wang Wei, the one for whom he longed, did not respond in kind with a love poem. Rather, she gave Wang Ruqian a discourse on love and true enlightenment from a religious perspective. Love was “the root of dreams.” Even though Master Wang was supposed to be an enlightened one able to forget *qing*, his dream reflected an ongoing entrapment in emotion. But dreams are as transient as the pear blossoms, and so is love in the dream. Unlike the direct criticism of men expressed in the poems to Yang Wan discussed above, this poem indicates the inversion of gender and class hierarchy between a courtesan and her client. As Wang Wei takes on a position similar to that of a teacher to Wang Ruqian, she is the one analyzing and expounding the relation of emotion and dream.

Wang Wei also displayed a particular interest in traveling and recording what she saw and felt during her journeys. This also differed strikingly from Xue Susu, who was more interested in writing about drinking parties. The only extant poem Wang Wei wrote containing the word “yin” (drinking) was the poem written to Yang Wan.¹⁴⁷ Instead, she described her visits to sacred peaks and temples, and expressed her taste for sojourning in the mountain wilds. As she claimed in the preface to the *Mingshan ji* 名山記, of which she was attributed with editorship, “By nature I belong to the wildness; I grew up to be as

¹⁴⁶ For the Chinese text of this poem, see *Mingyuan shigui*, *juan* 36: 411. See also *Chunxingtang shiji* 3.11b-12a.

¹⁴⁷ See Wang Wei’s poem entitled “Wanshu zhao yin huaxia de kuang zi,” in *Mingyuan shigui*, *juan* 36: 415.

unrestrained as a soaring eagle. Little did I know that such a fate would befall me.”¹⁴⁸

Several titles of her poetry collections had to do with traveling.¹⁴⁹ In a pair of poems entitled “The First Step” 起步, Wang Wei describes the lure of traveling: “My eyes and ears delight in new discoveries / As old sights blur into a haze.” In the second poem: “Every traveler takes in what she sees / Others hear of her experience only from a distance.”¹⁵⁰ Below, I list the titles of some poems on her journeys to show her interests in visiting scenic spots:

Waiting for the Moon on Parrot Isle 鸚鵡洲候月;¹⁵¹

Climbing Mount Dabie to view the famous sites Yellow Crane Pavilion and

Parrot Isle, I divided the rhymes to write poems with Wang Youdu, Zhu

Qiqin, Li Zongwen, Zhang Zhonghu, Wang Ziyun, Long Mengxian, and

Xiong Yuanjing 登大別山, 眺黃鶴樓鸚鵡洲諸勝, 同王右度, 朱其勤, 李

宗文, 張仲虎, 王子雲, 龍夢先, 熊元敬分韻;¹⁵²

Heaven's Pillar Peak 天柱峰;¹⁵³

Calling on the great master Hanshan Deqing 參憨大師;¹⁵⁴

Straw-thatched Cottage on Mount Lu 廬山草堂;¹⁵⁵

Xianjia zhuzhi ci: Climbing Wudang Mountain with Mme. Li 仙家竹

枝詞: 同李夫人登武當山¹⁵⁶

¹⁴⁸ Wang Wei, “Xiaoyin,” in *Mingshan jixuan*. As quoted and translated by Ko, in Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers* 286.

¹⁴⁹ See Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers* 286.

¹⁵⁰ Translation by Ko, in *Teachers of the Inner Chambers* 286. For the Chinese text of these two poems, see *Mingyuan shigui*, juan 36: 410.

¹⁵¹ *Mingyuan shigui*, juan 36: 410.

¹⁵² *Mingyuan shigui*, juan 36: 413.

¹⁵³ *Mingyuan shigui*, juan 36: 413.

¹⁵⁴ *Mingyuan shigui*, juan 36: 414.

¹⁵⁵ *Mingyuan shigui*, juan 36: 419.

Wang Wei's penchant for travel was not merely a personal hobby; it was also part of late Ming literati fashion. Travel in the late Ming context had profound cultural implications. For many literati who preferred to live life independently, travel was a good way to live as "a man of the mountains."¹⁵⁷ As Peterson has noted, whatever the motivation of travelers like the famous Ming traveler Xu Xiake 徐霞客 (1586-1641), their sojourns in the mountains served effectively to remove them from society's entanglements.¹⁵⁸ Therefore, it is not surprising to see that the late Ming produced many "men of the mountains" and great travelers as well. Yuan Hongdao was considered as such a traveler who "craved for mountains and lakes as a hungry and thirsty man would for food and drink."¹⁵⁹ Xu Xiake spent most of his adult career traveling to mountains, instead of preparing for examinations and office.¹⁶⁰ In 1624, Xu Xiake met the great *shanren* Chen Jiru, who thought Xu not only looked but acted like a wizened and aged Daoist priest who lived in the remote mountains.¹⁶¹ In the late Ming context, a journey could be taken as a metaphor of constant effort to achieve self-cultivation in Neo-Confucian terms or true enlightenment in terms of Buddhism and Daoism.¹⁶²

Wang Wei's love for travel was located in the larger picture of late Ming *shanren* literati culture, but her poems also record women's experiences about travel, reflecting women's subjectivity and perspectives. In the poem written to the tune *Xianjia zhuzhi ci*,

¹⁵⁶ *Liechao shiji*, Runji 372.

¹⁵⁷ Peterson, *Bitter Gourd* 132.

¹⁵⁸ Peterson, *Bitter Gourd* 132.

¹⁵⁹ Quoted in Pei-yi Wu, *The Confucian's Progress* 98. But in the footnote, Wu refers to the wrong book.

¹⁶⁰ *The Confucian's Progress* 98. See also Peterson, *Bitter Gourd* 132.

¹⁶¹ Quoted in Peterson, *Bitter Gourd* 132.

¹⁶² Pei-yi Wu discusses travel as a means for late Ming intellectuals to cultivate the moral self in terms of Neo-Confucian self-cultivation. See *The Confucian's Progress* 95-99. In the case of the Buddhist master Hanshan Deqing, travel was approached as a means by which to achieve self-enlightenment. See *The Confucian's Progress* 145, 151. But in Chen Jiru's eyes, Xu Xiake was a Daoist priest. See Peterson, *Bitter Gourd* 132.

subtitled “Climbing Wudang Mountain with Mme. Li,” Wang Wei takes the secluded and mysterious mountains to be a paradise for women:

In this secluded realm, who can tell this body is a woman's?

Facing the Milky Way, it is easy to ask where the ferry is.

At this moment of leisure after worshipping the Lord of Yuchen,¹⁶³

I am willing to be the flower-sweeping girl by the altar.

(*Liechao shiji*, *Runji* 372)

幽蹤誰識女郎身，銀浦前頭好問津。

朝罷玉宸無一事，壇邊願作掃花人。

The poem records her visit to the Daoist sacred mountain, Wudang Mountain, with Mme. Li, probably the wife of Li Zongwen 李宗文.¹⁶⁴ Its focus is on the expression of her joy and freedom in the mountains. “*Yinpu*” refers to the “Milky Way,” commonly known in Chinese literature as *yinhe* 銀河 or *tianhe* 天河. This term first appeared in a poem titled “*Tian shang yao*” 天上謠 (Song from heaven) by the late Tang poet Li He 李賀 (790-816).¹⁶⁵ “*Wenjin*,” meaning literally “asking for the ford,” alludes to the story recorded in Tao Qian’s “*Taohua yuan ji*” 桃花源記 (Story of Peach Blossom Spring), in which Tao Qian described the Utopian paradise of a simple life in an inaccessible mountain valley and the fisherman’s effort to locate it. These two allusions are used to highlight the transcendent beauty of Wudang Mountain. In the second couplet, Wang Wei further expressed her willingness to escape from her milieu as a courtesan and retreat to the

¹⁶³ “Yuchen” was the title of the highest God in Daoist teaching.

¹⁶⁴ Li was a local literatus in Hubei. When Wang Wei traveled to Hubei, Li and several others accompanied her to visit some of local scenic spots. See Chapter 3, 220 (note 152).

¹⁶⁵ For the poem, see *Quan Tang shi* 390.4399. On Li He and his poetry, see Du Guoqing, *Li Ho* [Li He].

mountains, an idea shared by Xue Susu and Liu Rushi as mentioned earlier. Interestingly, in this ideal world, men are largely absent.

Wang Wei's unconventionality is also demonstrated by her intimate friendships with gentry wives. As discussed in Chapter 1, courtesans and gentry women were organized into the single category of *meiren* (beauty) in the guidelines for membership of Wang Ruqian's literary societies, the *Buxiyuan yue*. Wang Ruqian's writings mentioned four gentry women who had come into contact and exchanged poems with him at gatherings in the Buxiyuan mostly around or after the Ming-Qing transition: Wu Shan, Wu Shan's daughter Bian Mengjue [Xuanwen 玄文, also Yuanwen 元文], Huang Yuanjie, and Wang Duanshu.¹⁶⁶

However, Wang Wei's writings provide significant evidence for the social and literary interactions between courtesans and gentry women before the dynastic transition. As mentioned before, her poems were mainly written before 1625.¹⁶⁷ Therefore, her social poems addressed to gentry wives provide valuable information for an understanding of issues of gender and class in the context of poetry societies before the fall of the Ming.

Wang Wei's friendship with the gentry wife Xiang Lanzhen 項蘭貞 (courtesy name Mengwan 孟畹), evidenced by their poetic exchanges, has drawn much scholarly attention.¹⁶⁸ Dorothy Ko has discussed one poem written by Wang Wei to Xiang

¹⁶⁶ See Wang Ruqian, *Chunxingtang shiji* 5.75a.

¹⁶⁷ Ma Zuxi gives the year 1630 as the latest. See Ma Zuxi, "Nü ciren Wang Wei" 223.

¹⁶⁸ See Wang Wei's poems entitled "Hu shang ci yun da Huang Mengwan" 湖上次韻答黃孟畹 and "Ku Huang furen Mengwan" 哭黃夫人孟畹 in *Liechao shiji*, *Runji* 373. For a discussion of their friendship, see Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers* 287-90; "The Written Word" 89-90.

Lanzhen.¹⁶⁹ Other of Wang Wei's writings provide more information about when and how they became acquainted:

At the end of autumn in the year Guihai [1623], I was sick and returned to West Lake....I ran into Huang Maozhong [given name Maoxi 卯錫] who had brought his wife to pay respect to the Buddha in the Lingjiu Temple. Their place was close to mine. They came by a small boat to have a chat with me. When the moon rose, we listened to Lady Yu playing zither to the tune *Shuilong yin*. ...After I was drunk, I chanted the "Bamboo branch songs" with Madam Huang. We wanted to change the tune to wash out its decadence. Thus, we allotted rhymes to compose "Songs on the lake." We agreed to meet at my place again the following morning... Very soon, Madam sent me the new song lyrics she wrote. The words read just like a hundred strings of luminous pearls falling into my bosom and sleeves. I barely picked up the brush to harmonize with hers, just recording the time of and my feelings for our meeting. The world is vast, how can we get more unexpected meetings like this?¹⁷⁰

癸亥秋杪, 病歸湖上....適黃茂仲偕細君孟晚禮佛靈鷲, 寓與予近, 以輕舟就談, 至月上, 聽俞大家彈琴作水龍吟....醉後與夫人偶咏竹枝詞, 欲一變調, 以洗靡靡, 遂分韻爲湖上曲. 約曉煙初醒, 再叩蓬蘆....未幾夫人以新詞寄示, 讀之琅琅, 如夜光百串, 落我懷袖. 聊一拈筆勉和, 且記其時而感其遇, 宇宙雖大, 如斯邂逅豈可多得乎!

¹⁶⁹ Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers* 289.

¹⁷⁰ Wang Wei, "Hushang qu xu" 湖上曲序 in Jiang Yuanzuo, comp., *Xu Yutai wenyuan*, reprinted in *Siku quanshu cunmu congshu, jibu*, vol. 375: 476.

Obviously, Wang Wei and Xiang Lanzhen came into contact and became friends through Xiang's husband, Huang Maoxi, a tribute scholar (*gongsheng* 貢生), in the context of the late Ming fashionable style of companionate marriages. Besides Xiang Lanzhen, with whom she shared a devotion to poetry, Wang Wei enjoyed intimate friendships with quite a few other gentry women. Since she associated mainly with literary figures in Wang Ruqian's Hangzhou poetry societies, it is not difficult to identify who these ladies were—most were wives of Wang Wei's male friends and associates.

From the poem entitled “Mme. Wang showed me the poetry collection of *Buxiyuan*. I composed this poem to send to her” 汪夫人以不繫園詩見示賦此寄之,¹⁷¹ we understand that Mme. Wang was the wife of Wang Ruqian. As we have seen, the collection of *Buxiyuan ji* was named after a painted boat, the “Buxiyuan” (literally, unmoored garden) built in 1623. Wang Ruqian collected poems by society members on the occasions of literary gatherings on the boat into the *Buxiyuan ji* (Collection of the Buxiyuan). In his *Liu Rushi biezhuàn*, Chen Yinke simply denied the possibility that Mme. Wang could have had any contact with Wang Wei, the intimate female friend of her husband. Chen assumed that this must be a change made by Qian Qianyi who included this poem in his *Liechao shiji* after Wang Wei married Xu Yuqing:

The two characters *furen* could be “Ranming” originally. Qian Qianyi changed it probably because Wang Wei had married Xu Xiacheng [Xu Yuqing] and it was not convenient [to reveal her former association with Wang Ranming]. Although the wife of Wang Ranming may not be like

¹⁷¹ For the poem, see Qian Qianyi and Liu Rushi, *Liechao shiji*, *Runji* 373.

Duan *shi*, the jealous wife of Liu Boyu,¹⁷² who would have created wind and waves to endanger the crossing of the Buxiyuan, I am afraid that she cannot be so nice that she made nothing of hardships but to send poems to Xiuwei [Wang Wei].¹⁷³

...惟“夫人”二字，其原文疑作“然明”二字耳。此二字之改易，殆由修微適許霞城後，有所不便之故耶？其實汪然明之夫人，雖不如劉伯玉妻段氏之興起風波，危害不係園之津渡。但恐亦不至好事不憚煩，而寄詩與修微也。

But Chen Yinke was wrong. In fact, Wang Wei wrote more than one poem to present to Mme. Wang. In another poem to Mme. Wang, she referred to her not by her husband's name but by her natal name, as Mme. Wu.¹⁷⁴ The poem is entitled “Mme. Wu visited my mountain village, showing me her poems. I replied to match her rhyme” 吳老夫人出訪山莊以詩見示次韻賦答。¹⁷⁵ From these two poems, we can see that Wang *furen* was a literary woman and that she had a good relationship with Wang Wei. Huang Yuanjie, another noted woman poet whom Wang Ruqian supported financially, also produced a painting with an inscription to present to Mme. Wang. The inscription reads

¹⁷² According to legend, Duan *shi* was the wife of Liu Boyu, living in the Western Jin period (265-317). Liu once recited before her the famous rhapsody, entitled “Goddess of the Luo River” 洛神賦 by Cao Zhi 曹植 (192-232), saying that if he could marry a woman like the deity, he would have no regrets in life. His jealous wife became so angry that she drowned herself in the Luo River in order to become the water deity. She often created wind and waves to endanger pretty women crossing the river. For the story, see Li Fang, comp., *Taiping guangji* 272.8a-9a.

¹⁷³ Chen Yinke, *Liu Rushi biezhu* 376.

¹⁷⁴ For Mme. Wang's biographical information, see Qian Qianyi, “Xin'an Wang Ranming he zang muzhiming,” in *Xihu yunshi* 115-17.

¹⁷⁵ For the poem, see Qian Qianyi and Liu Rushi, *Liechao shiji*, *Runji* 373.

“On a winter day of the year Xinsi [1641], painted for the amusement of Mme. Wang; Huang Yuanjie” 辛巳冬日寫似汪老夫人博笑, 黃媛介.¹⁷⁶

Wang Wei also wrote a poem entitled “On a moonlit night, I stayed over at Madam Feng’s beside the pond” 月夜留宿馮夫人池上. The poem reads:

Loving the reflection in your pond,
I especially come to sleep beside it.
Falling flowers set off tall bamboos,
Serenely, mists rise from the blind.

(*Liechao shiji*, *Runji*, 374)

愛君池下影, 特來池上眠。
落花映修竹, 靜起一簾煙。

Who was Feng *furen*? Wang Ruqian had a series of poems entitled “On an autumn day, with friends, I passed by Kuaixue tang and visited Wang Xiuwei for a chat at night” 秋日同友人過快雪堂訪王修微夜話.¹⁷⁷ The first line of the first poem states that Wang Wei lived in Gushan 孤山 (Lone Mountain) and her place was close to Kuaixue tang (Kuaixue Hall), the famous villa built by Feng Mengzhen.¹⁷⁸

Known also by his courtesy name Kaizhi 開之 and style names Juqu 具區 and “Zhenshi jushi” 真實居士 (the Genuine Recluse), Feng Mengzhen was remembered by his contemporaries as a poet, official, and playboy.¹⁷⁹ He enjoyed great fame as an

¹⁷⁶ See the entry on “Yanshui shulin fu” 煙水疏林幅, in Wang Keyu, *Shanhu wang* 1198.

¹⁷⁷ Wang Ruqian, *Qi yong*, in *Siku quanshu cummu congshu, jibu*, vol. 192: 813.

¹⁷⁸ Shen Jiyou, comp., *Zuili shixi* 15.12a-13b. Feng Mengzhen named his hall “Kuaixue” because he had the precious original calligraphy titled “Kuaixue shiqing tie” 快雪時晴帖 by the famous Jin dynasty calligrapher Wang Xizhi.

¹⁷⁹ See the entry on Feng Mengzhen in Shen Jiyou, comp., *Zuili shixi* 15.12a-13b.

unrestrained literary figure inside and outside government office. As a nonconformist poet, Feng wrote and presented poems to prominent courtesans such as Xue Susu and Hao Wenzhu.¹⁸⁰ Because of his libertine lifestyle, he was dismissed from office in 1589. Thanks to this lifestyle, he maintained close friendships with many unrestrained multitalented literati such as Tu Long, Wang Zhideng, Pan Zhiheng, Zang Maoxun 臧懋循 (1560?-1621),¹⁸¹ Zhao Yiguang, Fan Yunlin, and Ling Mengchu,¹⁸² well-known literati who were associated with celebrated courtesans. Because of his fame as a literary figure, eight years after he was dismissed from office, he was appointed as libationer of the Imperial Academy 國子祭酒 in Nanjing for three years from 1595 to 1597. But he asked for a retirement from the post.¹⁸³ A significant portion of his adult career was devoted to an idle life outside office. Feng was a native of Xiushui, but because he married into the Shens, he moved to and lived in Wulin (Hangzhou), his wife's native home. He built his famous villa "Kuaixue tang" on Gushan by the West Lake, a place in which he wrote poetry and entertained his friends. Feng Mengzhen was greatly admired by his contemporaries and viewed as "one among immortals" (神仙中人).¹⁸⁴ Xue Susu once came to visit him in his family villa.¹⁸⁵

But Feng Mengzhen died in 1605. Thus, the new master of Kuaixue Hall was his son Feng Yunjiang 馮雲將 (1575-ca. 1661), a man believed by many late Ming literati to be the husband of Xiaoqing 小青 (1595-1612), a Ming concubine later made into a

¹⁸⁰ For the poetic lines to Xue Susu, see Wang Ruqian, "Xihu jiyou," in *Xihu yunshi* 114; for those to Hao Wenzhu, see Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 151.

¹⁸¹ For Zang Maoxun's biographical information, see Qian Qianyi, *Liechao shiji xiaozhuan* 465.

¹⁸² See Zhang Huijian, *Ming Qing Jiangsu wenren nianbiao* 339.

¹⁸³ Zhang Huijian, *Ming Qing Jiangsu wenren nianbiao* 366.

¹⁸⁴ See the entry on Feng Mengzhen in Zhu Yizun, comp., *Ming shi zong* 58.

¹⁸⁵ Wang Ruqian, "Xihu jiyou," in *Xihu yunshi* 113-14.

celebrated literary character in tales and plays in the late Ming and early Qing.¹⁸⁶ Feng Yunjiang maintained long friendships with Wang Ruqian, Qian Qianyi, and Li Yu. When Wang Ruqian died, Feng Yunjiang and Li Yu looked after his funeral.¹⁸⁷ Since there was not any other member with the surname Feng in Wang Ruqian's circle while Wang Wei's place was close to Feng's family villa Kuaixue tang, I suggest that this Madam Feng was the wife of Feng Yunjiang. The pond described in Wang Wei's poem was likely located in the villa.

Moreover, Wang Wei also had poems addressed to Xia *furen*,¹⁸⁸ the wife of Xia Changqing 夏長卿 (friend of Xu Jing),¹⁸⁹ and Han *furen*,¹⁹⁰ the wife of Han Jing, also a frequent visitor to Wang Ruqian's Buxiyuan.¹⁹¹ Obviously, Wang Wei had developed intimate friendships with individual gentry women. She was well received not only by men but also women. Her poems addressed to or about gentry women show that she interacted socially with some of them. For example, she traveled with Li *furen* and visited the private residence of Feng *furen*. She received poems in exchange from and was visited by Wang *furen* and Huang *furen* [Xiang Lanzhen]. She saw Xia *furen* off and mourned the death of Han *furen*.

¹⁸⁶ The authenticity of the story of Xiaoqing has long been questioned since the Ming. But it is not my concern here. On Xiaoqing's biographical information, see Wang Duanshu, comp., *Mingyuan shiwei* 10.17a. On the Xiaoqing story, see Widmer, "Xiaoqing's Literary Legacy." See also Chapter 2, in Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers*; and Deng Changfeng 鄧長風, *Ming Qing xiqujia kaolüe* 明清戲曲家考略 227-51.

¹⁸⁷ See "Li Yu nianpu," in *Li Yu quanji*, vol. 1: 35.

¹⁸⁸ See the poem entitled "Hanye song Xia *furen* cong Chu ru Luo" 寒夜送夏夫人從楚入洛, in *Liechao shiji*, *Runji* 373.

¹⁸⁹ Ma Zuxi, "Nü ciren Wang Wei" 227.

¹⁹⁰ "Ku Han *furen*" 哭韓夫人, in *Liechao shiji*, *Runji* 373.

¹⁹¹ See Han Jing's poems entitled "Liu ti er shi shou" 留題二十首 included in the *Buxiyuan ji*, reprinted in *Congshu jicheng xubian, jibu*, vol. 122: 954. See also Wang Ruqian, "Chong xiu Shuixian wang miao ji" 重修水仙王廟記 and "Cui Zhengzhong shijun chong qi Huxin ting, yu xi cong shi, he Han Taishi ji ti" 崔徵仲使君重葺湖心亭余喜從事和韓太史寄題, in *Xihu yunshi* 107, 108-109, respectively.

Wang Wei—neither quite feminine nor quite masculine, neither quite Daoist nor quite Buddhist, and neither quite courtesan nor quite gentry woman—presents a striking illustration of the many ways in which late Ming courtesans could fashion or redefine themselves. While Xue Susu attempted to draw the attention of men of influence from varied social and political backgrounds, Wang Wei sought acceptance within a specific group. Male literary societies provided a place for unconventional minds to associate with each other, including that of a nonconformist courtesan.

Yang Wan, the Courtesan as Wife

*Biographical Information*¹⁹²

The Nanjing courtesan Yang Wan was an accomplished courtesan poet of the Ming. She was particularly well known for her calligraphy, for which she received high praise from Dong Qichang and Chen Jiru.¹⁹³ Du Shiliang 杜士良, a contemporary male painter, exchanged his painting of a skirt for a calligraphic work by Yang Wan.¹⁹⁴ According to Mao Yuanyi's preface to her first poetry collection, *Zhongshan xian* (preface dated 1627), Yang Wan was married to Mao Yuanyi when she was sixteen *sui*, ten years before the writing of the preface.¹⁹⁵ Thus we can determine that Yang Wan was born in 1602 and married to Mao Yuanyi in 1617. Their marriage lasted for twenty-four years until Mao

¹⁹² For Yang Wan's biography, see *Liechao shiji xiaozhuan* 773-74. For the biographical information in English and translation of her poems, see Kang-i Sun Chang, in Chang and Saussy, *Women Writers of Traditional China* 333-36. See also Idema and Grant, *The Red Brush* 370-74.

¹⁹³ For Dong Qichang's comments, see the entry on Yang Wan, in Ni Tao, *Liuyi zhi yi lu, xubian* 14.21b; for Chen Jiru's, see Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 185.

¹⁹⁴ See Yang Wan's poem entitled "Zuo caoshu huan Du Shiliang hua qun," in *Zhongshan xian si juan*, *juan* 3.

¹⁹⁵ The preface for the *Zhongshan xian si juan* is reproduced in Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 184 and partly translated by Idema and Grant, in *The Red Brush* 371-72.

Yuanyi's death in 1641. She bore at least one son for the Mao family and taught him poetry.¹⁹⁶ Since Mao Yuanyi was not only her husband, but also a literary mentor,¹⁹⁷ an introduction to his life will be useful for the reader to understand better the life and poetry of Yang Wan.

Mao Yuanyi was born into a prominent and respectable scholar-official family with a reputation for literary accomplishment and military interest. His grandfather Mao Kun 茅坤 (1512-1601; *jinshi* 1538) was a noted Ming scholar, particularly known as the editor of the anthology of the works of eight great prose writers of the Tang and Song, entitled *Tang Song badajia wenchao*. Mao Kun was also known for his military interests and pursuits. He was a consultant to Hu Zongxian 胡宗憲 (1511-65), the supreme commander of several provinces in the late Ming.¹⁹⁸ Mao Yuanyi's father Mao Guojin 茅國縉 (1555-1607) was a *jinshi* degree holder (1583) as well as an official. The Mao clan owned a publishing house called Mao *shi* Xuanseju 茅氏玄穡居. All Yang Wan's poetry collections were originally woodblock editions printed by this publishing house.¹⁹⁹ This was a rich and influential family.

Mao Yuanyi was known as a multitalented but unrestrained literatus and as well as a man of character and great ambitions. According to Zhou Lianggong 周亮公 (1612-72), during a serious famine in Jiangnan in 1608, Mao Yuanyi initiated a relief assembly in the Qinhuai courtesan quarters of Nanjing. He was the first to donate ten thousand *shi* 石 (*dan* in modern Chinese) of grain for the disaster area, which was very impressive as

¹⁹⁶ See her poems, entitled "Huai Deng'er" 懷登兒 and "You huai Deng'er reng yong yuan yun" 又懷登兒仍用原韻, in *Zhongshan xian, Zai xu, juan xia*.

¹⁹⁷ See Mao Yuanyi's preface to *Zhongshan xian si juan*, in Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 184.

¹⁹⁸ See the entry on Mao Kun, in Goodrich and Fang, *Dictionary of Ming Biography* 1043-45.

¹⁹⁹ For the edition information of Yang Wan's poetry collections, see these collections held in the National Library of China (Beijing) and Shanghai Library.

he was then only fourteen *sui*. People from all around, including courtesans, responded to his call with generous contributions. The assembly was a great success and he became well-known throughout the empire.²⁰⁰ But Mao Yuanyi did not seem to have much interest in taking the civil examinations, the most common way for educated men to access power and influence.²⁰¹ In this, he is similar to the *shanren* literati. In fact, he associated with *shanren* and literary wanderers such as Wang Zhideng, Chen Jiru, Pan Zhiheng, Tan Yuanchun, and Mao Yuchang,²⁰² all lovers and promoters of courtesans and their writings. He also wrote prefaces to writings by commoner literati.²⁰³ According to Qian Qianyi, Mao “took himself to be a man of unusual talent, and seldom bothered to cultivate friendships with persons he considered ordinary or uncongenial.”²⁰⁴ He shared much in common with eccentric *shanren* literati.

Mao Yuanyi did not follow his grandfather and father in passing the *jinshi* examinations: he seems to have failed a certain exam held in 1621 and he gave up further attempts after.²⁰⁵ But Mao Yuanyi was influenced by his family’s tradition and showed both literary and military talents. He longed for military exploits. Engaging in military activities was a fashionable pursuit for late Ming eccentrics who did not want to take regular examinations. Both Xu Wei and Shen Mingchen, for example, joined the army led by Hu Zongxian. For Mao Yuanyi, it was only at age twenty-eight that he finally had

²⁰⁰ See Zhou Liangong 周亮公 (1612-72), *Shu ying* 書影, as quoted in Guo Shaoyu, “Mingdai de wenren jituan” 560.

²⁰¹ See his poem “Jiazi (1624) fangbang ri yi Xinyou (1621) shi ri” 甲子放榜日憶辛酉是日, in *Shimin yushui ji* 石民渝水集, reprinted in *Siku jinhui congkan, jibu*, vol. 110: 114-15.

²⁰² See Zhang Huijian, *Ming Qing Jiangsu wenren nianbiao* 448. See also Mao Yuanyi’s poems in *Shimin hengtang ji* 石民橫塘集, and *Shimin shangxin ji*, reprinted in *Siku jinhui congkan, jibu*, vol. 110: 231, 328.

²⁰³ Mao Yuanyi wrote prefaces for collections by many literary commoners. See, for example, “Fan Dongsheng [Fan Rui] shiji xu” 范東生詩集序, “Wu Ningfu [Wu Dingfang] shiji xu” 吳凝甫[父]詩集序, in *Shimin sishi ji*, reprinted in *Xuxiu Siku quanshu, jibu*, vol. 1386: 205, 215, respectively.

²⁰⁴ Quoted in Goodrich and Fang, *Dictionary of Ming Biography* 1054.

²⁰⁵ See his poem “Jiazi fangbang ri yi Xinyou shi ri,” *Shimin yushui ji* 114-15.

an opportunity to join Sun Chengzong's 孫承宗 (1563-1638) army as a military advisor in the defence of the northeast frontier. However, his service in Sun's army was terminated soon after Sun's resignation. In 1628, when the emperor Chongzhen took the throne, he was given a chance to present his famous work on military preparation, entitled *Wubei zhi* 武備志 (preface dated 1621). The emperor was impressed, and, as a result, he ordered Mao Yuanyi to be made a Daizhao 待詔 (Scholar to be summoned) of the Hanlin Academy. Because of unfavourable comments from other people on him, this proposed appointment was soon withdrawn.²⁰⁶

In 1629 and 1630, Sun Chengzong was reappointed to take charge of an army intended to meet the new threat from the Manchus. Mao Yuanyi was again called to serve in Sun's army. After several victories by the Ming troops, Mao Yuanyi was promoted to the position of regional vice commander. But he was soon dismissed from his appointment due to a troop mutiny. This time he was exiled to the southern coastal city Zhangpu 漳浦 (in Fujian). He was freed to come back in 1635, at the latest.²⁰⁷ Left without any means of action at a time when pressure from the Manchus became very intense, he took to too much drinking and soon died a tragic and unfulfilled man in 1641.²⁰⁸

Despite Mao Yuanyi's interests and participation in military missions, he was equally both a military strategist and a nonconformist poet. Like many literati of the late Ming who enjoyed "companionate marriages," Mao Yuanyi consistently exchanged

²⁰⁶ Goodrich and Fang, *Dictionary of Ming Biography* 1054.

²⁰⁷ Mao's preface reveals that he compiled and had published the second sequel of Yang Wan's *Zhongshan xian* after he returned home from the exile place while his preface to the third sequel was dated in 1635.

²⁰⁸ Goodrich and Fang, *Dictionary of Ming Biography* 1054.

poems with Yang Wan. There is no record of Mao Yuanyi's principal wife. It is not clear if she died and Mao Yuanyi married Yang Wan as a second wife. Nevertheless, Mao Yuanyi treated Yang Wan with exceptional love and respect, always referring to her as a wife (內人).²⁰⁹ In prefaces to Yang Wan's poetry collections, he repeatedly expressed how fortunate and proud he was to have a poet (詞人/詩人) as wife. He regarded Yang Wan's writing career as his salvation from career setbacks. In the preface to the second sequel to Yang Wan's *Zhongshan xian*, he writes:

...I had written these words earlier: 'By family tradition, I am a stubborn man with proud bones / God bestowed me a poet as my wife.'

The present emperor [Chongzhen] once mistakenly admired the fact that I could transmit my family learning. But in the end, this was not equal to his imprisoning and banishing me because of my pride. So I made Wanshu into the wife of a frontier soldier. But no one can prohibit me from having a poet as a soldier's wife. Heaven and man—who has power and who does not? What is favour and what is resentment? One can just turn around and have a laugh.²¹⁰

...余有語曰,“家傳傲骨爲迂[迂]叟,帝賚詞人作細君。”

今上曾誤賞臣能傳家學,而終不及禁臣以傲而戍余,方累宛叔爲戍人婦.而人不能禁余有詩人以爲戍婦.天人孰有權,孰無權,孰爲恩,孰爲怨,可輒然一笑矣.

²⁰⁹ See also Mao Yuanyi's poems entitled “Jian renjia geji shi neiren Wanshu” 見人家歌妓示內人宛叔, in *Shimin hengtang ji* 231, “Meng hou huai neiren Wanshu” 夢後懷內人宛叔, and “Ti neiren Wanshu zhen” 題內人宛叔枕, in *Shimin shangxin ji* 330, 357.

²¹⁰ “*Zhongshan xian, Zai xu er juan xu*” 鍾山獻再續二卷序.

Mao Yuanyi's independent spirit as well as his admiration for Yang Wan are clearly reflected in the preface. The following poem by Mao Yuanyi was written before he was sent into exile. In it, Mao Yuanyi gives a review of their marriage, expressing his tender feelings to Yang Wan and his pride for having her as a wife. The poem, entitled "Sent into exile to Zhang, I parted with Wanshu" 戍漳別宛叔, reads:

We have been together for nineteen years,
Year after year, we always deal with parting.
What will this separation be like in the end?
I laugh aloud, with nothing to say.
The year before last, I was not killed by barbarians,
Last year, I survived slanderous reports.
But torrential rain comes after blowing wind:
I will listen to your murmuring ten thousand *li* away.
What will you murmur about—?
You will again chatter about mountains and rivers.²¹¹
By nature, I am a man of the mountains and valleys,
I should have no regrets in going.
In bygone days, I was well armed with bow and dagger,
But my heart was lonely and gloomy.

²¹¹ Here "mountains and rivers" *shanshui* 山水, refer to seclusion. Mao Yuanyi promised Yang Wan that he would retreat to the mountains with her, just like Zhao Yiguang who retreated to the Cold Mountain with Lu Qingzi. Yang Wan was happy about that but worried that Mao could not keep his promise. See Mao Yuanyi's poem entitled "Hanshan dao zhong huai nei (Zhao Fanfu Zhao Luqing xie yin chu)" 寒山道中懷內 (趙凡夫趙陸卿偕隱處), reprinted in *Siku jinhui congkan, jibu*, vol. 110: 310. See also Yang Wan's poem entitled "My husband has intended to retreat to the mountains with me..." 外久有偕隱之志, 爲時事未遂, 奉詔而出. 即于公府間, 每寄箋什未嘗有忘其志. 今約歸期在小春時, 賦此寄之. 可使陌頭凝望耶? See *Zhongshan xian si juan, juan 3*.

I look forward to retiring together with you

Then I will be proud of myself even if I have to open up wasteland.

[...]

The southern Zhang is eight thousand *li* away,

Every step is a place where I long for you.

[...] ²¹²

相於十九年, 年年事離別. 此別竟如何, 大笑無復說. 前年不死虜, 昨年
不死讒. 風風復雨雨, 萬里聽呢喃. 呢喃所何語, 亦復饒山水. 本是丘壑
人, 自當無恨耳. 往日盛弓刀, 我心獨鬱陶. 與子期偕隱, 疏鑿自爲豪. ...
漳南八千里, 步步思君處. ...

This poem expresses the unfettered spirit of a “true” “Man of the Mountains” and the deep love of such a man for his wife in a bold and direct manner. This poem can be read autobiographically as a record of Mao Yuanyi’s love for Yang Wan. In the Confucian cultural and literary tradition, love between husband and wife was something that should be kept in the inner chambers. The only chance for a wife to be written about by her husband was in the mourning poems (悼亡) or funerary inscriptions after their death. But this was no longer the case in the late Ming, as evidenced by Mao Yuanyi’s poem addressed to Yang Wan.²¹³ As the early Qing scholar Zhu Yizun commented, Mao

²¹² Mao Yuanyi, “Shu Zhang bie Wanshu,” in *Shimin jiangcun ji* 石民江村集, reprinted in *Siku jinhui congkan, jibu*, vol. 70: 525-26.

²¹³ Among other examples, Ye Shaoyuan’s writings about Shen Yixiu also reveal the deep feelings of a husband to his wife. On Ye Shaoyuan and his autobiographical writings in the Ming-Qing transition, see Fong, “Reclaiming Subjectivity.”

Yuanyi's love for Yang Wan "can be said to have reached the extreme" (可云愛惜之至).²¹⁴

According to Yang Wan's biographical entry in major anthologies of women's writings produced after the fall of the Ming, after Mao Yuanyi died, Yang Wan tried to remarry.²¹⁵ She was eventually killed by a bandit around 1645, during the chaotic times of the dynastic transition. Because she did not stay faithful to her husband as a widow, Yang Wan was judged unfavourably by both male and female literati. Some of her biographers indicate her betrayal of Mao began even before Mao's death. The first negative comment on her was that in the *Liechao shiji*. Qian Qianyi and Liu Rushi contrast the way Mao Yuanyi respected and cherished her to her betrayal of him; the contrast makes her disloyalty even more unacceptable:

Zhisheng valued her literary talent and was extremely courteous toward her. But disloyal to her husband, Wan had a great number of extramarital affairs. Zhisheng considered himself a man of character: although he knew about it, he did nothing to stop her."²¹⁶

Moreover, Qian and Liu deliberately contrast the life trajectory of Yang Wan to that of Wang Wei. In promoting Wang Wei's moral character, they devalue Yang Wan as a depraved woman:

Yang Wan and the Straw-Coat Daoist [Wang Wei] called each other sister. The Daoist often urged her to change her way of life, but Yang Wan would not listen. The Daoist was bright and clean as the blue lotus

²¹⁴ Zhu Yizun, *Ming shi zong* 98.13a.

²¹⁵ See, for example, the entry on Yang Wan in *Liechao shiji*, *Mingyuan shiwei*, and *Ming shi zong*.

²¹⁶ *Liechao shiji xiaozhuan* 773. I have used Chang's translation for these lines. See Kang-i Sun Chang, in Chang and Saussy, *Women Writers of Traditional China* 333.

blossom, gracefully rising above the mud. But Yang Wan ended up being defiled by mud and became a laughingstock to all. Sad indeed.²¹⁷

The biography of Yang Wan in the *Liechao shiji* is unlikely a just depiction. Despite Yang Wan's betrayal of her husband after his death, the charge that she engaged in "a great number of extramarital affairs" during Mao's lifetime was likely a speculation without concrete evidence based merely on her remarriage after Mao's death. Influenced by Qian Qianyi and the *Liechao shiji*, Wang Duanshu also made very harsh comments about Yang Wan in her *Mingyuan shiwei*:

Zhisheng had a chivalrous spirit that could reach the clouds. His mind was as pure as snow. Although he was ranked in military terms, he was actually a talented scholar of the generation. Wanshu had eyes but could not see. She was unable to make a distinction between right and wrong. She served Qin in the morning but Chu in the evening. She betrayed Zhisheng in many ways. Later, she wandered about destitute and finally got killed, which was what she deserved. It is not worth having pity on her. [Some] literati have no moral character, and likewise [some] women.²¹⁸

止生俠骨凌雲，肝腸似雪。雖列戎間，乃一代才士也。宛叔雙目無珠，不辨賢肖，朝而秦暮而楚，有負止生多矣。其後流落被殺，一段情事，乃其自取，不足惜也。文人無行，女子亦然。

²¹⁷ *Liechao shiji xiaozhuan* 774. Translation based on Kang-i Sun Chang, in Chang and Saussy, *Women Writers of Traditional China* 333, with modification in the last sentence.

²¹⁸ See Wang Duanshu, *Mingyuan shiwei* 19.8b-9a.

Yang Wan was the only talented courtesan who received pointed attacks from both male and female literati. What I am interested in examining here is what made Yang Wan risk everything she had to leave the Mao family and what are the implications of such an unusual act. Her own poetic writings allow us a glimpse into her inner world—how she thought about herself, her husband, and the world around her within her inner chambers and beyond. As we will see below, in writing her own experiences in the inner chambers, her wifely perspective was often intertwined with that of a former courtesan, thus presenting contradictory voices.

The Contradictory Voices of a Courtesan-turned-Wife

Yang Wan's poetry collections were originally block-printed in the late Ming by the Mao's family printing house, Xuanseju. Her poetry collections include:

Zhongshan xian si juan 鍾山獻四卷. The preface was written by Mao Yuanyi,

followed by an introduction by Song Xian 宋獻, and inscription by Fu

Ruzhou 傅汝舟 (fl. 1620s), all dated 1627.²¹⁹ The collection contains

three *juan* of *shi* poetry and one *juan* of *ci* poetry.²²⁰

Xu yi juan 續一卷 (the first sequel, one *juan*), preface by Mao Yuanyi, dated 1631.

Zai xu er juan 再續二卷 (the second sequel, two *juan*), preface by Mao Yuanyi, undated (but between 1631-35).

²¹⁹ Mao Yuanyi did not give a date of his preface. But he mentioned it in the preface to the first sequel of *Zhongshan xian* (鍾山獻續序).

²²⁰ Yang Wan's song lyrics are reproduced under the title *Zhongshan xian shi yu* 鍾山獻詩余, in Zhao Zunyue, comp., *Mingci huikan* 292-99.

San xu er juan 三續二卷 (the third sequel, two *juan*), preface by Mao Yuanyi,
dated 1635.

Hu Wenkai's catalogue records *Zhongshan xian si juan* and its first and second sequels,²²¹ but he does not mention the third sequel.²²²

Yang Wan's poetry collections contain over six hundred poems. It is not possible for me to adequately evaluate this wealth of information about her life and inner world within the limited scope of this section. Therefore, I will focus only on an examination of the contradictory voices through which she presented herself. On the one hand, as a new member of a great gentry family, she attempted to construct a self-image defined in terms of normative ideological values. On the other hand, she often complained about her lonely life, damaging the image of a virtuous wife. As a courtesan-turned-concubine who was confined in the inner chambers while her husband was constantly absent, Yang Wan's textual position shifted between that of a respectable woman poet of the gentry class (*liang*), and one of a courtesan, the "lowly" (*jian*).

Below, I will first discuss her poems representing normative values. There are several poems in her collections that deserve special attention because they reflect Yang Wan's efforts to define her place according to traditional family values. On one occasion, having fallen sick and worried about an untimely death, she wrote a group of poems recording some of her unfinished affairs. It is entitled "In the year Guihai (1623), I was very sick. I composed three sad songs to tell Heaven. Who can escape from death in life?"

²²¹ See the entry on *Zhongshan xian si juan*, *Xu yi jian*, *Zai xu er juan*, in Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 183. Hu Wenkai mentioned a Ming *keben* (block-printed) edition of *Zhongshan xian si juan*, *Xu yi jian*, *Zai xu er juan*. At the end of the collection, there are dedicatory inscriptions by women poets. But I have not seen this edition. The Nanjing Library, National Library of China, and Shanghai Library have the *chaoben* (hand-copied) version of the edition.

²²² The *keben* edition of the third sequel is held in the National Library of China (Beijing).

I indeed regard it as a return. But it comes much too quickly and I have three sorrows.

Therefore, I write these songs to tell Heaven” 癸亥病篤有感, 賦此三悲歌告天. 人生誰無死, 我亦視如歸, 歸哉何太速, 而有三可悲, 故歌以告之.

The first poem records her first sorrow:

My first sorrow is for my father and mother,
Who gave birth to me.
Although they did not raise me morning and evening,
They expected me to live a long life.
If I die before them,
On whom will they rely in their twilight years?
How could this feeling not be terrible?
I especially tell this to Heaven.
一悲父與母, 生我如一兒.
雖未朝暮養, 而長千里期.
我苟先棄捐, 中道當望誰.
此情寧不苦, 特告蒼天知.

Yang Wan first defines her role as a filial child to her parents, one of the five primary human relations as defined in the Confucian tradition. It was often the case in imperial China that courtesans were brought up in the courtesan quarters without knowing their real father and mother, who would have sold their little daughters to the pleasure quarters. In the following poem, Yang Wan clearly thinks of Qinhuai, the pleasure quarters of Nanjing, as her home:

Thinking of my family 懷親

Every night, I gaze up at the clouds, my soul at ease in my dreams.

Woken up, I am still at the opposite end of the sky.

I entrust my sorrowful heart only to the bright moon.

Shining on Qinhuai—that is my home.

(Zhongshan xian si juan, juan 1)

夜夜瞻雲魂夢賒, 醒來依舊隔天涯.

愁心相託唯明月, 照入秦淮是妾家

Judging from her identification with the Qinhuai district, it is most likely that the father and mother she mentioned in the poem on her first sorrow were her foster parents in the Qinhuai courtesan quarters and not her birth parents. This of course complicates her self-representation as a filial daughter: Is her sense of filiality predicated on genuine emotion or is it merely rhetorical in a series of poems that is framed by a woman's proper family roles through her life phrase, as daughter, wife, and mother. In the second poem, Yang Wan portrays herself as a competent inner helper to her husband:

My second sorrow: I have met a gentleman,

Who is determined to be with me for a thousand years.

He devotes himself to the country,

I should take charge of the family.

With my unworthy self, I have not repaid him enough,

Am I willing to part in mid life?

How could this feeling not be terrible?

I especially tell this to Heaven.

其二

二悲遇君子,勵志千秋期.

他身已付國,閨闈我當持.

微軀未足酬,半途肯分離.

此情寧不苦,特告蒼天知.

In this poem, by emphasizing her husband's loyalty to the country and her sense of duty in taking charge of the inner chambers, Yang Wan portrays herself as a keen supporter of the normative gender ideology of separate spheres of *nei/wai*. Her third poem continues to elaborate on her role as the capable manager of a great family, caring for the welfare of the children and supervising servants.

My third sorrow: I have a young son,

Who is still an infant.

My daughter is fifteen, but she is not yet married.

Who will take charge of the maids and concubines?

If suddenly I met with some adversity,

My husband is still at the far end of the world

How could this feeling not be terrible,

I especially tell this to Heaven.

(*Zhongshan xian si juan, juan 3*)

其三

三悲有幼子,猶在強裸時.

女笄未及嫁,婢媵誰管之.

我忽有他虞,君子尙天涯.

此情寧不苦, 特告蒼天知.

Yang Wan's poem was written in 1623 when she was twenty-two. The fifteen-year old daughter she mentioned in the poem could be her stepdaughter. From other poems she wrote later, we know that she had an adopted son²²³ as well as her own son.²²⁴ Teaching sons, making marriage arrangements for children, and managing the whole family were the duties of the primary wife. This poem implies that Yang Wan saw herself as the primary wife. Gentry wives often developed close bonds with their personal maids and wrote poems on how they taught them, arranged for their marriage, and also to mourn their deaths when they died young. In this respect, Yang Wan conducts herself similarly. The following poem entitled "Lament for my maid Xiangyun" 哭侍兒湘雲, expresses her deep sorrow for her maid's early death:

The Xiang River is there for thousands of years.

But Xiangyun has gone, never coming back.

Her sewing kit beside the bed,

Now who will open it again?

(*Zhongshan xian si juan, juan 2*)

湘水千年在, 湘雲去不來.

床頭針線帖, 此後更誰開.

²²³ See her poems entitled "Liulang chu ji" 六郎初笄 and "Song ji'er Liulang bei shi" 送繼兒六郎北試, in *Zhongshan xian si juan, juan 2* and *Zhongshan xian, Zai xu er juan, juan xia*. Song Liulang 宋六郎 was the son of Mao Yuanyi's friend Song Xian, one of the preface-writers for Yang Wan's *Zhongshan xian*. For the relationship between Song Liulang and Mao Yuanyi, see Mao's poem entitled "At Shifeng, happily, I met Song Liulang..." 石封喜遇宋六郎漫成二百五十字貽之, in *Shimin youxian ji* 石民又峴集, reprinted in *Siku jinhui congkan, jibu*, vol. 110: 172.

²²⁴ See her poems, entitled "Huai Deng'er" and "You huai Deng'er reng yong yuan yun," in *Zhongshan xian, Zai xu er juan, juan xia*.

Since she was fifteen *sui*, Xiangyun had served Yang Wan. When she died at twenty-one, Yang Wan was heartbroken. Mao Yuanyi wrote the funerary inscription for Xiangyun. In it, Mao cited the poem by Yang Wan, referring to her as the Master of Dream Pavilion 夢閣主人.²²⁵

The voice constructed in these poems by Yang Wan is that of a competent and loving woman. As a courtesan, Yang Wan managed to become a member of a gentry family, an example of late Ming upward social mobility. She had achieved everything that a courtesan or any woman of the time, could possibly dream of: respectable marriage, male progeny, and wealth. More importantly, she had support and encouragement from Mao Yuanyi to develop her literary and artistic talents. She won a high reputation as an accomplished poet and famed calligrapher in her lifetime.²²⁶ However, in spite of all this, Yang Wan was an unhappy woman and her poems are full of disappointment, complaint, and anger, even during the early years of her marital life. Sometimes, when her husband promised to return home but broke his promise, she would register her displeasure: Reckless words and nonsense from a frivolous man / Every time you send a letter, you make empty promises 浪言浪語薄情兒, 每寄書來空指期.²²⁷ She also scolded him to be a “heartless lover” (薄悻兒) as he had not made it to watch dragon boat competition together with her for three years in a row (時三年不同觀競渡矣).²²⁸ The following is

²²⁵ Mao Yuni, “She’er Xiangyun muzhiming” 侍兒湘雲墓誌銘, in *Shimin sishi ji*, *juan* 26, reprinted in *Xuxiu Siku quanshu*, *jibu*, vol. 1386: 298.

²²⁶ For comments on her poetry, see prefaces to her *Zhongshan xian si juan* by Song Xian and Fu Ruzhou. For comments on her calligraphy by Dong Qichang, see the entry on Yang Wan, in Ni Tao, *Liuyi zhi yi lu*, *xubian* 14.21b; for those by Chen Jiru’s, see Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 185.

²²⁷ See her poem entitled “De lang shu you qi bu zhi hou you fu de shu” 得郎書有期不至後又復得書, in *Zhongshan xian si juan*, *juan* 2.

²²⁸ See the poem titled “Wang ri chao wai” 王日嘲外, in *Zhongshan xian si juan*, *juan* 2.

the fourth poem from a series describing the event of watching a woman flying a kite.

Yang Wan sees similarities between the kite and a fickle lover:

Five Poems on Watching a Beautiful Woman Flying a Kite

(Poem #4)

Paper-thin its love, its heart is of bamboo;

Never will it reward your deep affection.

Once in flight, it cannot be detained;

At sky's edge vanishing, it sends no word.²²⁹

Through the metaphor of the kite, the poem criticizes the unreliable movement of the lover in general and Mao Yuanyi in particular. But complaints like this are mild. They could be read as flirtatious poetic exchanges between husband and wife.²³⁰ The following poem written in her early years won Yang Wan a bad reputation as an unchaste wife who was unfaithful even when her husband was still alive:

Autumn Feelings

Solitary, I rest my chin on my hand, overcome by sorrow,

I'd like to tell of my passion, but am then filled with shame.

Since ancient times, life has been like this for the "poorly-fated,"

How dare I seek to be like mandarin ducks, growing old together?²³¹

The poem begins by projecting the image of a love-longing young girl who is passionate but shy to express her deep feelings. She had passion for love but was afraid of an

²²⁹ For the Chinese text, see *Zhongshan xian, Xu yi juan*. Translation by Kang-i Sun Chang, in Chang and Saussy, Chang and Saussy, *Women Writers of Traditional China* 334.

²³⁰ To write poems in a scolding or mocking tone was commonplace among courtesan poets. Paul Ropp has pointed out that "clever courtesan poems of flirtation served as lures or advertisements for courtesan culture." After such poems were anthologized, they might have inspired more women including gentry women to imitate them. See Ropp, "Ambiguous Image" 22.

²³¹ For the Chinese text, see *Zhongshan xian si juan, juan 1*. Translation by Idema and Grant, in *The Red Brush* 373.

unhappy ending because beautiful women have since ancient times been ill-fated. This poem was first included in Zheng Wen'ang's *Mingyuan huishi* (1620), a work for which Mao Yuanyi served as proofreader. This was the first time that Yang Wan's poem was included in a contemporary anthology. The poem was also included in Yang Wan's *Zhongshan xian* compiled by Mao Yuanyi. But the last line could be interpreted differently: not seeking to grow old together also opens the way for her possible betrayal. In his biographical introduction to Yang Wan in the *Ming shi zong*, Zhu Yizun cited this poem as testimony to Yang Wan's later betrayal of her husband (棘心已露矣).²³²

In many of Yang Wan's poems, her grief at being left alone was overwhelming. We can see that the marriage between her and her husband was not the ideal recorded by their contemporaries, such as Yang Wencong 楊文聰 (1596-1646)²³³ and Fu Ruzhou.²³⁴ It also might not be the marriage perceived by Mao Yuanyi and presented in his poems. The following poem is a case in point. Entitled "After I just arrived in Wumen [Suzhou], my husband went to Tiaoshang again. Living in solitude, I compose this poem to respond to what has stirred me" 初至吳門外復往苕上獨居感賦, the poem reads:

When I stayed in Baixia [Nanjing],

You liked Wu [Suzhou], Yue[zhou], and [Gui]Ji.

It's only been a short while since I came here,

²³² *Ming shi zong* 98.13a.

²³³ In a poem entitled "Yang Wanshu sishi shou" 楊宛叔四十壽, Yang Wencong praised Yang Wan as "female hero" (女英雄) and "female knight-errant" (娥眉劍俠), referring to her association with Mao Yuanyi's military talents and experience at the frontier. See Chen Yinke, *Liu Rushi biezhuàn* 767-73. See also Wai-yee Li, "The Late Ming Courtesan" 61.

²³⁴ In the "*Zhongshan xian tici*" 鍾山獻題詞, Fu Ruzhou regarded Yang Wan and Mao Yuanyi as an ideal match. He mentioned that Yang Wan presented an embroidered sword to see Mao Yuanyi off to the frontier (繡劍送茅郎出塞). He compared this act to Liang Hongyu's military endeavour. But in the eyes of Fu, Yang Wan was also a talented poet which made her much superior to Liang Hongyu. See Fu Ruzhou's "*Zhongshan xian tici*."

You are again going to Tiaoxi.
You say I can follow you,
I say you do not want to take me.
I really envy the wife of Liang Hong,
Who lived in seclusion with her husband as a couple.

(*Zhongshan xian si juan*, *juan 3*)

妾留白下日。君喜吳越稽。

妾來猶未幾。君復往苕溪。

君言妾可隨。妾道君不攜。

却羨梁鴻婦。雙雙隱自栖。

Because of his military missions in the frontier, Mao Yuanyi was often absent from home year after year. But Yang Wan's bitter feelings about her marriage probably had more to do with Mao's philandering. Like many late Ming unrestrained literati, Mao Yuanyi styled himself as a romantic poet and may have had many affairs. Yang Wan attempted to get him more concubines, probably in the hope that he would then spend more time at home.²³⁵ As mentioned before, Wang Wei left him because he favoured Yang Wan over her. The last line alludes to the story of Meng Guang 孟光, the wife of Liang Hong 梁鴻. She was short on looks, but with her wifely virtues, she eventually won her husband's equal respect. Yang Wan envied Meng Guang who lived a poor but happy life with her husband.²³⁶

²³⁵ Mao Yuanyi had quite a few concubines, some of whom were brought in by Yang Wan. See, for example, her poem titled "On the way..." 道中爲外聘侍姬青綃, 詩以遺之, 再用陳眉公贈綃韻, in *Zhongshan xian si juan*, *juan 3*.

²³⁶ For the story, see Liang Hong's biography in Fan Yu [Ye] 范曄 [曄] (398-445), comp., *Hou Han shu* 後漢書 113.10a-13b (*SKQS-dianziban*).

This poem reads as if she talked to her husband directly as in everyday life. Compared to Xue Susu's highly performative poems of literary conventions, Yang Wan's poems are highly expressive. The allusion in the last couplet does not change this trait because it was a rather common one. Mao Yuanyi was a close friend of both Zhong Xing and Tan Yuanchun. From Yang Wan's poems, we can see that the influence of the Jingling school that emphasized self-expression in writing poetry also reached women.

Yang Wan seemed to have a weak constitution. As Mao Yuanyi noted, "Whenever she wrote poetry, as soon as she had completed [even] a single stanza or single line, she would immediately fall ill. This eventually became a debilitating disease and although she was repeatedly warned by the physician [to refrain from writing], she never changed her ways."²³⁷ Mao might have exaggerated the seriousness of Yang Wan's poor health in order to highlight her dedication to learning. But Yang Wan's poetry collections do include many poems related to illness.²³⁸ In her lonely life, illness and poetry seemed to have been her only company:

During Illness

I lie within a closed hall;
A fragrant breeze circles the brush-stand.
Singing about flowers gives rise to amorous words;
Writing about willows leads to frivolities.
Matters are few, yet the body is weary;
Feelings are deep, but dreams do not last.

²³⁷ Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 184. Translation by Idema and Grant, in *The Red Brush* 371-72 with modifications.

²³⁸ For Ming-Qing women poets, illness became a common topic of their poetry. For a detailed study of the link between illness and poetry and its cultural implications, see Fong, "Writing and Illness."

Year after year I grieve through days of sickness,
Yet laugh at myself for making so much of poetry.²³⁹

When she was in solitude, she often recalled Wang Wei—despite the fact that they used to fight for their husband's favour. Wang Wei seems to have been one of the few people with whom Yang Wan had kept in contact. However, Wang Wei's freedom to travel and associate with other people made Yang Wan even more disappointed about her own life. Her envy and longing are apparent from a number of poems addressed to Wang Wei: "I envy you that you could climb the famous peaks / With *Sui* star (i.e., Jupiter) on high, you listen to the cicada singing" 羨君上名嶽, 高歲聽鳴蟬. She was also envious that when enjoying beautiful landscape, Wang Wei had women poets as her company: "The colourful scene is as beautiful as a painting / You have lady poets as your traveling companion" 物色堪爲畫. 詩人女伴邊.²⁴⁰ In a poem written in her later years, Yang Wan writes: "Many times, I scratch my hair and become gaunt / For as long as we have parted, my sorrow has continued" 幾回搔首成消瘦, 別到如今恨到今.²⁴¹

Although marriage into a gentry family was regarded as the best destiny for a courtesan, it was still an individual choice, especially in the relatively open late Ming society in which courtesans could have other alternatives. To conclude this section on Yang Wan, I quote a poem written in her later years to show how she really felt about her

²³⁹ Translation by Kang-i Sun Chang, in Chang and Saussy, *Women Writers of Traditional China* 335 with modifications. For the Chinese text, see Qian Qianyi and Liu Rushi, *Liechao shiji*, Runji 385.

²⁴⁰ See Yang Wan's poem "Jin qiu huai" 近秋懷, in *Zhongshan xian si juan*, juan 3.

²⁴¹ Yang Wan's poem "Huai Xiuwei" 懷修微, in *Zhongshan xian*, *San xu*, "juan shang" 4a. The term "sao shou" is taken from Du Fu's poetic line "White hairs scratched grow even shorter" (白頭搔更短). I used Pauline Yu's translation for this line. According to Yu, Du Fu provided an example how a small detail could convey "a complex cluster of emotions." See Yu, *The Reading* 197.

marriage so that we can better understand why she betrayed her husband eventually. It is entitled “Inscribed on the Flowers in the Vase” 題罇中花 reads:

I pity you being snapped off unfeelingly,
But I intend to keep you company.
Lovingly, I provide you with a gall-shape vase.²⁴²
With affection I craft good poems for you.
In my heart, I hope you will share the tranquility,
Forgetting words, you always look sorrowful—
By misty pools and leaf-covered islets,
We have not been able to wander carefreely together.
(*Zhongshan xian*, *San xu*, “*juan shang*” 3b)

惜被無情折，有心當爲留。
憐將膽瓶供，愛鍊好詩酬。
幽意期同靜，忘言總若愁。
煙潭與葉嶼，未得共優游。

This poem was included in the third sequel of the *Zhangshan xian*, which means that it was written in Yang Wan’s later years of her marriage with Mao Yuanyi. The poem falls into the category of poems “singing of objects” (*yong wu* 詠物), but it was not merely to sing of objects. Her grief, despair, and helpless acceptance of her confinement are expressed indirectly, but forcefully by her identification with the cut flower kept in a vase. There seems to have been an underlying discontentment in her marriage even when Mao

²⁴² The gall-shape vase had been famous as early as in the Song dynasty. Yang Wan used this metaphor to refer to Mao’s rich family background. She dwelled in it, just like a flower in the vase.

Yuanyi was still alive. We can perhaps understand better why Yang Wan, after his death, was willing to lose everything she had to seek remarriage.

Conclusion

As Way-yee Li has shown, late Ming courtesans continued to fascinate people in later ages after the Ming-Qing transition. In addition to the first boom of nostalgic accounts of late Ming courtesans right after the Ming-Qing transition, as evidenced by Yu Huai's *Banqiao zaji*, there occurred a second boom of new literature on the pleasure quarters of Qinhuai in the late nineteenth and twentieth century.²⁴³ The late Qing scholars Zhang Jingqi 张景祁 and Ye Yanlan 葉衍蘭 (*jinshi* 1856) selected eight courtesans that they thought to be the most famous courtesans of the Ming in their book *Qinhuai bayan tuyong* 秦淮八艳图咏.²⁴⁴ Seven of them were survivors of the Ming-Qing dynastic transition. The expression "The Eight Great Courtesans of the Ming" has been used by connoisseurs ever since. However, as Wai-yee Li states, "the abiding fascination" with these figures in the late Qing, had to do with "the perception of contemporary historical crisis."²⁴⁵

Based on primary sources from the late Ming, both accounts of courtesans by contemporaries and the courtesans' own writings, this chapter focuses on an examination of how courtesans were perceived by contemporaries and how they perceived themselves. While continuing to show men's role in the rise of late Ming courtesan culture, I pay special attention to the agency and subjectivity of individual courtesans as shown in the

²⁴³ Wai-yee Li, "The Late Ming Courtesan" 47.

²⁴⁴ Zhang Jingqi and Ye Yanlan, *Qinhuai bayan tuyong*. The eight courtesans include: Ma Xianglan, Liu Rushi, Gu Mei, Li Xiang, Bian Sai, Chen Yuanyuan, Kou Baimen 寇白門, and Dong Bai.

²⁴⁵ Wai-yee Li, "The Late Ming Courtesan" 72.

differing survival strategies that they pursued in reacting to the rapidly changing late Ming society. While Xue Susu used her physical allure, entertaining skills, and literary talent to attract men of influence, she did not choose one man as a focus for her attention. Wang Wei styled herself as a Daoist, and attempted to rely on her erudition and character alone to attract like-minded male friends. When she dwelled in Hangzhou as a courtesan, she mingled socially with men, but she refused to get emotionally attached to any of them. Yang Wan chose one man to serve. Although she attempted to construct a self-image as defined in traditional values, her interest was not in the inner chambers, but the larger world beyond. She envied Wang Wei who had the freedom to travel in the mountains. She dreamed that she could make her way out of the inner chambers with her husband or alone. But year after year, she lived in solitude in her inner chambers, unhappy and unfulfilled.

The significance of Yang Wan's tragic life is beyond the scope of the study of late Ming courtesans. Her sense of confinement, bitterness, and hopelessness, which comes with dwelling in the inner chambers, could be shared experience of many other women of the day. But living in the late Ming, an era of self-awareness and self-invention, Yang Wan did not merely live passively in sorrow. Rather, she constantly voiced her discontent with and even anger over her life through the writing of poetry. After Mao Yuanyi died, she took her ambitions beyond the written pages of the poetic work and put them into action, although she achieved little success in doing so. That Yang Wan urged her husband to withdraw in order to share time with her, also suggests the possible role that gentry wives played in the formation of late Ming gentry society, a significant topic that deserves a systematic study beyond the scope of this dissertation. As we have seen

in the cases of those who mingled with Wang Wei, in the name of companionate marriage, gentry women enjoyed many social freedoms in company with their unconventional husbands.

Examining how these individual courtesans defined themselves offers an idea of the wide range of possible identities available to them in the open society of the late Ming. The lives of these three individuals shed light on the circumstances of late Ming courtesans both at collective and individual levels. Despite their different definitions of themselves, all three courtesans consciously engaged in an exercise of self-fashioning characterized by the fashions and values of unrestrained male literati—writing for success and writing for the self.

Through the encouragement of male literati, late Ming courtesans successfully negotiated a space in which they defined and renewed their place both in literati culture and society. Their success strikingly marked the zenith of courtesan culture. However, the high point could also have been a turning point at which late Ming courtesan culture began to decline. At the very end of the Ming, the talented and empowered courtesans in Wang Ruqian's circle became much more independent than ever and they were no longer content with their profession, as had been the case with Xue Susu in the Wanli era.

Wang Wei styled herself a Daoist, traveling on her own to seek Buddhist instruction from Hanshan Deqing. Lin Tiansu suddenly wanted to become a woman in the inner chambers (*you guige feng*) and she returned to her native home Sanshan. It was ironic that Wang Ruqian who was self-styled and portrayed by others as a romantic “knight-errant in a yellow cloak” was left behind, longing for his absent intimate courtesan friends in

vain.²⁴⁶ This suggests that the decline of courtesan culture had begun during the late Ming, the heyday of the late Ming courtesan culture. I will develop this argument more fully in the next chapter.

²⁴⁶ About twenty years later in 1641, when Wang Wei was married to Xu Yuqing, Wang Ruqian made a trip to Sanshan to visit Lin Tiansu. He recorded his journey to Fujian in *Min you shi ji* 閩遊詩紀 [記], in *Chunxingtang shiji* 4.1a-35b.

Chapter Four

The Rise of the Gentry Writing Woman and The Decline of Courtesan Culture

To the Previous Tune [Bamboo Branch]

Why are women of the inner chambers jealous of singing girls?

Men really do not understand what romance means.

Where can we find the most enchanting site—

It is not in the green bower, but in the kingfisher tower.¹

—Zhuo Renyue 卓人月 (1606-36)²

前調 [竹枝]

怪道閨中妒曲頭，男兒真不解風流。

試看何處消魂最，不在青樓在翠樓。

¹ The term *qinglou* (literally, the blue building, here translated as “the green bower”) first appeared in the poem entitled “Meinü pian” 美女篇 by Cao Zhi. By “*qinglou*,” Cao Zhi means “high building.” See *Cao Zijian ji* 曹子建集 6.5a-b (*SKQS-dianziban*). It later became a conventional term used to refer to the courtesan’s quarters. In Chinese poetic tradition, the *cuilou*, the kingfisher-green building, refers to the woman’s inner chambers, set over against the category of *qinglou*, the courtesan’s quarters. For example, in the famous quatrain by the High Tang poet Wang Changling 王昌齡 (698-756) entitled “Boudoir Lament” 閨怨, the first couplet describes the movement of a young woman in the setting of the *cuilou*: “A young woman in her boudoir is unacquainted with grief / On a spring day, all dressed up, she climbs to the upper story” (閨中少婦不知愁，春日凝妝上翠樓), translated by Irving Yucheng Lo, who translates *cuilou* as “the upper story,” in Chang and Saussy, *Women Writers of Traditional China* 483. For the Chinese text of the poem, see *Quan Tang shi* 143.1446. As mentioned previously, the Yuan scholar Xia Tingzhi’s collection of courtesan biographies was named *Qinglou ji* (Collection of the blue building) while Liu Yunfen’s anthology of women’s poetry (preface dated 1673) was called *Cuilou ji* (Anthology of the kingfisher building). However, Liu’s *Cuilou ji* also included some Ming courtesans because he lived in the Ming-Qing transition period when courtesans and gentry women were treated equally in anthologies under the same category as *guixiu* with little class discrimination as was the case in the late Ming.

² This song lyric by Zhuo Renyue was quoted from *Xu Zhuo wu ge* 徐卓晤歌, a joint song lyric collection that contains the exchange of *ci* poetry by late Ming poets and playwrights Xu Shijun 徐士俊 (1602-81) and Zhuo Renyue. For the song lyric, see Zhao Zunyue, comp., *Mingci huikan* 1754. On Zhuo’s literary life as a playwright, see Deng Changfeng, *Ming Qing xiqujia kaolüe* 227-51.

In the previous three chapters, I attempted to account for the late Ming valorization of the poetic voice of courtesans and of women in general, by situating this phenomenon within the larger valorization of the power of literary talent in the context of male dominant poetry societies, the so-called *shishe*. We have seen that the *shishe*, as a sociable counterpart to traditional reclusion and a cultural space that was in opposition to government office, conditioned, motivated, and consumed the cult of elegant living among new “men of culture,” alienated literati who negotiated and sustained power and influence through trajectories other than government service. Being associated with a cultivated woman with literary talent (whether courtesan or gentry woman) became a logical necessity as well as a symbol of “elegant living.”

In this last chapter, my focus will shift to an examination of what caused the decline of late Ming courtesan culture. But it will not be a full-ranging investigation of all factors to which the decline of courtesans was attributed; instead, it will be a single case study to suggest one important factor—the decline of courtesans in the context of the rise of gentry writing women. By focusing on the love relationship between the courtesan Chen Susu and the literatus Jiang Xuezhai 姜學在 (1637-1709)³ and the textual responses of literati men and women to their love story in the context of the Ming-Qing transition, I attempt to illustrate the joint efforts made by literati men, gentry women, and courtesans in the early Qing to reproduce the cultural glory of late Ming courtesans. This demonstrates the sense of cultural continuity provided by the representation of late Ming courtesans and sought by the literati class after the Ming-Qing transition.

³ Jiang Xuezhai was the style name of Jiang Shijie. According to Zhang Huijian, Jiang Xuezhai died in 1709, at the age of 63. This would mean he was born in 1637, rather than 1647 as Zhang Huijian mistakenly claims in the same book. See Zhang Huijian, *Ming Qing Jiangsu wenren nianbiao* 623, 963. Given the fact that the Chen-Jiang love story occurred in the time of the Manchu conquest of the south, the year 1637 as his birth year is more reasonable.

The chapter begins with a reconstruction of Chen Susu's life based on available sources, especially Chen Susu's own poems, collected under the title *Er fen mingyue ji* 二分明月集 (Two-Thirds Bright Moon Collection). My discussion focuses on how Chen Susu modeled herself after popular literary figures, such as Xiaoqing 小青 (1595-1612),⁴ the Ming concubine later made into a famous literary character in tales and plays in the late Ming and early Qing—to construct a self-image defined by the prevalent values derived from literati cultural ideals in the *Er fen mingyue ji*.

The second part of the chapter examines the mutual efforts by both male and female literati to publicize and promote the Chen-Jiang love story. The story was celebrated and retold in the *chuanqi* drama *Qinlou yue* 秦樓月 by the famous playwright Zhu Suchen 朱素臣 (fl. 1644) from Suzhou. Many best-known literati of this time such as Wu Qi, Wu Weiye, Yu Huai, Chen Weisong, Wang Wan 汪琬 (1624-91), Li Yu, and You Tong wrote prefatory poems 題詞, commentaries, or postface for the play. Meanwhile, Wu Qi had Chen Susu's poetry collection *Er fen mingyue ji* published and wrote a preface for it.⁵ Moreover, Wu Qi used his influence in his literary circles, asking other women poets to write about Chen Susu. Amazingly, twenty women responded to his call to celebrate this courtesan. They wrote dedicatory poems on Chen Susu—poems that focused on her poetry, portrait, romantic love story, or the drama of her story. These writings are collected in a section called “Mingyuan tiyong” 名媛題詠 (Dedicatory verse by noted women), appearing as an appendix to the *chuanqi* drama. Of the twenty women,

⁴ On Xiaoqing, see Widmer, “Xiaoqing's Literary Legacy.” See also Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers* 91-106.

⁵ The preface to Chen Susu's poetry collection, “Chen Susu shiji xu” 陳素素詩集序 is included in Wu Qi's complete works, the *Linhuatang quanji* 4.45b-46a.

nineteen were gentry women poets and only one was a courtesan. Sixteen of them were famous in their day and their names are now recorded in Hu Wenkai's catalogue, but all of these famous women poets were women of the gentry class.

The valorization of Chen Susu as a literary and romantic courtesan demonstrates the efforts made by both men and women in the early Qing in reproducing the cultural glory of late Ming courtesans. However, despite their cooperative and collective efforts, courtesans became inevitably marginalized in male literary circles as talented and "romantic" (*fengliu*) women of the gentry flourished.

Love and Poetry: Chen Susu's Life Story

Chen Susu was a courtesan from Yangzhou during the Ming-Qing transition period. The love story between her and Jiang Xuezai occurred in the turmoil of the Manchu conquest of the south in the early Qing. After overcoming many difficulties, including capture by bandits, Chen Susu became Jiang Xuezai's concubine, as in the nonconformist fashion of late Ming romance. The love story was retold in the *chuanqi* drama *Qinlou yue* by Zhu Suchen. Accordingly, the name of Chen Susu was glamorized and she was made known to the world as a literary character. In this section, I will reconstruct Chen Susu's love story from several key sources such as Hu Wenkai's catalogue, *Ciyuan cong'an* 詞苑叢談 by Xu Qiu 徐鉉 (1636-1708), and the drama *Qinlou yue*. But the most important source about her life is her own surviving poetry collection, the *Erfen mingyue ji*. What I am particularly interested in examining here is how popular literary characters, such as Xiaoqing, affected Chen Susu's self-perceptions and self-presentations in her poetry. More specifically, I will explore how Chen Susu consciously modeled herself after

popular literary figures, to construct a self-image defined by the values of unrestrained male literati, such as the cult of *qing* (feelings, emotion, particularly romantic love) and the cult of *cai* (poetic talent). Emphasizing this aspect of Chen Susu's life, I will also discuss in conjunction the story of Xiaoqing, the beautiful, talented, passionate, but ill-fated late Ming concubine, a widely-known textual subject in writings and object of the cult of passion in the Ming-Qing transition period.

1. Hu Wenkai's catalogue

In his *Lidai funü zhuzuo kao*, the comprehensive catalogue of women's writings, Hu Wenkai provides the following brief entry for Chen Susu:

Susu, style name "Erfen mingyue nüzi" (Two-Thirds Bright Moon Lady or Lady from Yangzhou),⁶ was a native of Jiangdu (in Yangzhou Prefecture), Jiangsu. She was the concubine of Jiang Xuezai, a native of Laiyang.⁷

素素, 號二分明月女子, 江蘇江都人, 萊陽姜學在妾。

Hu Wenkai does not mention that Chen Susu was a former courtesan. As for Chen's poetry collection, entitled *Erfen mingyue ji*, he offers a more detailed description:

⁶ "Erfen mingyue," literally, "two-thirds of the bright moon," refers to the city of Yangzhou. The phrase is taken from the famous couplet of the mid-Tang dynasty poet Xu Ning's 徐凝 (fl. 813) poem entitled "Yi Yangzhou" 憶揚州 (Recalling Yangzhou). In the poem, Xu Ning recalls the beautiful and romantic time he spent in Yangzhou. The particular couplet reads: "If the beauty of the moonlit night under heaven is divided into three portions / Yangzhou recklessly takes two-thirds of it" 天下三分明月夜, 二分無賴是揚州. Since the Tang, the phrase "Erfen mingyue" has become a poetic reference to the city of Yangzhou. For the poem, see *Quan Tang shi* 474.5377.

⁷ Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 588.

The collection was printed in the early Qing, appearing as an appendix to the *chuanqi* drama *Qinlou yue*.⁸ In front of the poetry collection proper, there are two general comments made by the ladies Gong Jingzhao⁹ and Wang Duanshu. The collection includes a total of fifty-seven poems and three song lyrics by Chen Susu. At the very beginning of it, there is a note saying “[It is] annotated by ‘Songling nüshi’” (Lady Scribe from Songling). There are seven pages of dedicatory inscriptions by other noted women, collected within a section called “Mingyuan tiyong,” coming after the collection proper. [These women are] Pang Huixiang,¹⁰ Qian Fenglun,¹¹ Zhang Xuedian,¹² Gong Jingzhao, Jiang Qian,¹³ Xu Zhaohua,¹⁴ Shang Cai,¹⁵ Feng Xian,¹⁶ Gu Si,¹⁷ Zhu Yushu, Lin Yining,¹⁸ Zhuo Yanxiang, Wang Duanshu, Shao Sizhen,¹⁹ Wu Wenrou,²⁰ Liu Renyue, Zhang Ping,²¹ Zhang Fan,²² and Su Huiqing—a total of nineteen. Wu Tuci published it.²³

⁸ *Qinlou yue* is reprinted in several series. I have used the early Qing Kangxi Wenxutang edition 康熙文喜堂刊本 of *Qinlou yue*, reprinted in the series *Guben xiqu congkan, san ji* 古本戲曲叢刊三集, case 8 第八函, vol. 2 第二冊.

⁹ On Gong Jingzhao, see Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 811.

¹⁰ Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 792.

¹¹ Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 756-758.

¹² Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 529.

¹³ Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 424. Jiang Qian's name was recorded in Hu Wenkai. In the early Qing Kangxi Wenxutang edition of *Qinlou yue*, the name was recorded as “the sister of Tianshui (i.e., Jiang Xuezhai) 天水小姑.”

¹⁴ Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 473.

¹⁵ Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 503.

¹⁶ Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 665.

¹⁷ Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 802.

¹⁸ Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 396-97.

¹⁹ Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 401.

²⁰ Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 300.

²¹ Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 533.

²² Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 532-33.

²³ Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 588.

清初刊本,附於秦樓月傳奇之後.前有女士龔靜照,王端淑評.凡詩五十七首,詞三首,卷首題松陵女史評.後附名媛題詠七葉,龐蕙纓,錢鳳綸,張學典,龔靜照,姜倩,徐昭華,商彩,馮嫻,顧姒,朱玉樹,林以寧,卓燕祥,邵斯貞,吳文柔,柳人月,張蘋,張縈,蘇蕙卿.凡十九人.吳圖次爲之梓行.

Hu Wenkai's account is worth mentioning because of its easy accessibility for researchers. However, if we consult other sources, we find that Hu Wenkai's record has two mistakes. First, it was Wu Yuanci 蕙次 (also occasionally written as 園次) who published Chen Susu's *Erfen mingyue ji* rather than Wu Tuci. "Yuanci" was the courtesy name of Wu Qi, a leading scholar in the early Qing literati world who was also a native of Yangzhou like Chen Susu.²⁴ Second, there were twenty women who wrote commentary poems on Chen Susu rather than nineteen as Hu Wenkai claims. The name of Shang Jinghui 商景徽, the younger sister of Shang Jinglan and mother of Xu Zhaohua, was left out by Hu Wenkai.²⁵

2. The *Ciyuan congkan* by Xu Qiu, courtesy name Dianfa 電發²⁶

Xu Qiu was one of fifty successful candidates of Kangxi's 1679 special *Boxue hongci* examination. The twelve-juan *Ciyuan congkan* was a book containing his critique of *ci* poetry by contemporary writers and anecdotes about them. It was written during the years 1673 to 1678 and finally printed in 1688.²⁷ Although as we will see below, Xu Qiu

²⁴ I mentioned him in the Introduction, 26.

²⁵ For information about Shang Jinghui, see the entry on her in Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 503.

²⁶ For Xu Qiu's English biography, see Hummel, ed., *Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period* 313.

²⁷ Hummel, ed., *Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period* 313.

did not directly involve himself in the making of the *chuanqi* drama *Qinlou yue* about Chen Susu, as did some of his friends, he recorded the Jiang-Chen romance in detail in the ninth *juan* of his *Ciyuan congtao*:

Jiang Zhongzi (literally, second son of the Jiangs), a native of Laiyang, was devoted to his beloved woman Chen Susu, a courtesan from Guangling (Yangzhou), whose style name is “Two-Thirds Bright Moon Lady.” Later, Chen was taken by bandits back to Guangling. Jiang then stopped eating and sleeping. He sent a messenger to sneak into Guangling, giving Chen his message. In the message, Jiang swore to her that he would love her forever. Chen’s heartbreak was evident to the messenger. She cut off the gold ring she wore and sent it to Jiang as a token of her determination to return to him.²⁸ After Jiang received the gold ring, he was moved to tears and succumbed to grief. He went out to ask his friend Wu Tongben to compose a song lyric chanting the story. Wu wrote a song lyric to the tune *Zui chunfeng*. [...]²⁹

萊陽姜仲子，嬖所歡廣陵妓陳素素，號“二分明月女子。”後爲豪強攜歸廣陵，姜爲之廢寢食，遣人密致書，通終身之訂。陳對使悲痛，斷所帶金指環寄姜，以示必還之意。姜得之感泣不勝，出索其友吳彤本題詞。吳爲賦“醉春風”一闕。 [...]

²⁸ The two Chinese characters *huan* 環 “ring” and *huan* 還 “return” are homophones.

²⁹ I omitted the song lyric. For the whole quotation, see *Ciyuan congtao* 9.37b-38b (*SKQS-dianziban*).

Tongben was the courtesy name of Wu Shouqian 吳壽潛, the son of Wu Qi.³⁰ He was famous as a song lyric writer who likely abandoned all political ambitions and devoted his life to writing. He enjoyed a romantic companionship with his wife He Zi 賀字. The two often exchanged poems.³¹ The *Ciyuan congtao* recorded the love story between Chen Susu and Jiang Xuezhai (Zhongzi) as an anecdote to explain the song lyric by Wu Tongben on the Chen-Jiang love story. It is noteworthy that it was Jiang Xuezhai who actually asked Wu Tongben to write about his love story and to have it publicized. Obviously, Jiang Xuezhai was very much willing to be represented as a scholar-literatus involved in a romantic liaison with a courtesan. Following the above message, Xu Qiu also included a note, providing further information about Chen Susu's poetry collection, the *Er fen mingyue ji*:

Wu Yuanci sent to his younger brother Yuchuan by post service the *Er fen mingyue ji* and *Juanhong furen ji*,³² requesting his wife Madam Xiaowan to write commentary poems on the two collections. She composed two seven-character quatrains, and [the poems] read:

The mail box just arrived and I opened the letter.

Here come the collections of Mingyue and Juanhong.³³

You scholars of the inner chambers should pay respect

To the prefect of Wuxing, who always cherishes your talent.³⁴

³⁰ Hummel, ed., *Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period* 864.

³¹ On He Zi, see Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 650.

³² *Juanhong furen ji* was the poetry collection by Gong Jingzhao, whose courtesy name was Juanhong. As I mentioned earlier, Gong was one of the two writers who made the general comments on Chen Susu's *Er fen mingyue ji*. Pang Huixiang considered Chen Susu to be a lifelong friend who truly understood Gong Jingzhao (龔夫人一生知己). See Pang's comments on Chen Susu's poem entitled "Du Juanhong furen ji" 讀鵲紅夫人集, in *Er fen mingyue ji* 8b.

³³ "Mingyue" and "Juanhong" refer to the *Er fen mingyue ji* by Chen Susu and *Juanhong furen ji* by Gong Jingzhao.

吳蘭次以二分明月女子集, 鵲紅夫人集, 寄弟玉川, 乞其婦小峴夫人題

跋. 夫人有絕句云:

郵筒纔到一緘開, 明月鵲紅寄集來.

閨閣文人應下拜, 吳興太守總憐才.

[...]

From other sources, we know that Yuchuan was the courtesy name of Wu Keng 吳鏗 (also styled Wenwei 聞瑋), younger brother of Wu Qi,³⁵ while Xiaowan was the courtesy name of Wu Keng's wife Pang Huixiang.³⁶ Xu Qiu's note provides valuable information about certain patterns of literary critiques of women's poetry conducted by male and female literati in the early Qing literati circles. First, Wu Qi, who wrote prefaces for Chen Susu's *Er fen mingyue ji* and Gong Jingzhao's *Juanhong furen ji*,³⁷ played a leading role in promoting women's literary culture in the early Qing. In particular, several family members of Wu Qi, such as his son, younger brother, and his sister-in-law were involved in valorizing writings of Chen Susu and her love relationship with Jiang Xue'ai. Second, talented courtesans were highly appreciated and promoted in the early Qing literati world not only by male literati but also by gentry women. Third, the way of delivering poetry collections across regional distances by post suggests that in order to participate in male

³⁴ See *Ciyuan cong'an* 9.38b. Here I only translated the first poem while the second is omitted.

³⁵ Wu Keng, a native of Jiangdu probably married uxori-locally into and lived with his wife's family because he was recorded as a native of Wujiang, his wife's hometown. On Wu Keng, see *Ciyuan cong'an* 9.14b-15b; Zhang Huijian, *Ming Qing Jiangsu wenren nianbiao* 620, 690, 768, 869; Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 792.

³⁶ Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 792.

³⁷ As mentioned earlier, the preface to Chen Susu's poetry is included in the *Linhuitang quanji*. But the preface to Gong's collection was not included here. According to the biographical information of Gong Jingzhao provided in the *Zhongxiang ci*, Wu Qi appreciated Gong's literary talent and compiled her writings. See Xu Shumin and Qian Yue, comp., *Zhongxiang ci*, "Yu ji 御集" 9. The information that Wu Qi wrote a preface for Gong's writing was revealed in the entry on Gong Jingzhao, in Xu Naichang 徐乃昌, comp., *Xiaotanluanshi huiké guixiu ci* 小檀樂室彙刻閨秀詞.

dominant literary circles, early Qing writing women could either physically mingle with male literati, as in the cases of Wu Shan and Huang Yuanjie, cases discussed earlier, or they could keep in touch with the outside world across great distances by post.³⁸ Fourth, the annotator “Songling nüshi” (Female Scribe from Songling) of Chen Susu’s poetry collection was Pang Huixiang, sister-in-law of Wu Qi. Songling refers to Wujiang. Of the twenty women who participated in valorizing the Chen-Jiang literary romance, Pang Huixiang was the only woman from Wujiang.

The two quatrains by Pang Huixiang also appear as the first two poems collected in the “Mingyuan tiyong,” but the first poem is recorded with considerable textual variants. I quote and translate it as follows:

The poetry box just arrived and I opened the letter,
Here come the new poems by the Bright Moon Lady.
Scholars of the inner chambers should pay your respect,
Who else can match the talent from Yingchuan?

(“Mingyuan tiyong” 1a)

詩筒纔到一緘開，明月新篇寄得來。

閨閣文人應下拜，更誰能及穎川才。

Wu Qi served as prefect of Huzhou (Wuxing) from 1666-69.³⁹ He was dismissed from this post in 1669. Thereafter, Wu Qi lived for eleven years in Suzhou, Jiang Xuezhai’s native home where the love story took place. Probably because of Wu Qi’s dismissal

³⁸ By examining the collections of literati letters produced in the Ming-Qing transition period, including those by women, Ellen Widmer has demonstrated that writing letters was an important means by which to communicate with each other across great distances in the literati world in the seventeenth century. See Widmer, “The Epistolary World.”

³⁹ See Zhang Huijian, *Ming Qing Jiangsu wenren nianbiao* 732, 742, and 750. See also Hummel, ed., *Eminent Chinese of the Ch’ing Period* 864.

from the post, Pang Huixiang rewrote the last line by changing “the prefect of Wuxing always cherishes your talent” to “Who else can match the talent from Yingchuan?”

Yingchuan, modern Yu county 禹縣 in Henan, was the birthplace of the surname Chen.

Therefore, “Yingchuan cai” refers to Chen Susu’s poetic talent. Accordingly, the third line can be understood in two different ways. The focus of the poem was shifted from praises addressed to Wu Qi for his efforts to promote women’s poetry to admiration addressed to Chen Susu for her outstanding poetic talent.

3. The *chuanqi* drama *Qinlou yue* by Zhu He (or Zhu Hu) 朱 [白+奎], known by his courtesy name Suchen 素臣

Zhu Suchen was a productive playwright from Suzhou. In addition to the *Qinlou yue*, he also produced other plays. Among them are the famous *Shiwu guan* 十五貫, *Weiyang tian* 未央天, and *Jubao pen* 聚寶盆. But with the exception of his name, native place, and his works, little is known about his personal life. He probably lived as a professional playwright like the well-known Li Yu, who earned a living through his writing.

As I mentioned earlier in this section, the information about Chen Susu in Hu Wenkai’s account is taken from the early Qing edition of *Qinlou yue* by Zhu Suchen. The work is accompanied by Chen Susu’s poetry collection and dedicatory poems by other women, collected under the title of “Mingyuan tiyong.” The *Erfen mingyue ji*, together with “Mingyuan tiyong,” appears as an appendix to the drama.

The drama was named after the tune *Qinlou yue* (Moon over Qin Pavilion)” of a song lyric by Chen Susu, entitled “Zhenniang’s Grave.”⁴⁰ Zhu Suchen’s retelling of Chen Susu’s love story includes twenty-eight acts in two *juan*. But in the drama, the name of Chen’s lover Jiang Xuezai was changed to Lü Guan 呂貫. The drama *Qinlou yue* describes the love story between a scholar named Lü Guan and Chen Susu, the courtesan of Yangzhou. Lü Guan went sight-seeing in Tiger Hill (虎丘) in Suzhou. After he saw the song lyric entitled “Qinlou yue: Zhenniang’s Grave” by Chen Susu, he was impressed and attracted by her poetic talent and passion reflected in the poem. He searched everywhere for her. Finally, they met and fell very much in love. They exchanged poems with each other, expressing their love. But Susu was soon captured by bandits and forced to be the wife of the bandit chief. Certainly, she would rather die than marry him because she loved Lü. Lü sent to her through a messenger his vows that he would love her forever and she cut off her ring to send to Lü Guan as a keepsake. The story had the conventional happy ending (*datuanyuan* 大團圓)—after Lü Guan asked his friend Liu Yue to rescue Susu from the bandits, she was saved and became the concubine of Lü Guan.

4. The *Erfen mingyue ji* by Chen Susu

Chen Susu’s love story retold in Zhu Suchen’s *Qinlou yue* was hardly a creative one compared to the many conventional scholar/beauty romances produced in the Ming and Qing periods.⁴¹ However, this conventional story was obviously based on Chen Susu’s own writings, collected in the *Erfen mingyue ji*. As we will see below, the basic plots of

⁴⁰ *Qinlou yue*, appendix 3a.

⁴¹ See examples in Chen Qinghao and Wang Qiugui, comp., *Si wuxie huibao*.

the romance, or, more precisely, the important events that occurred in Chen's life such as chaos caused by war, her near escape, and her romance with Jiang, especially the detail of cutting off her ring to send to Jiang as a keepsake, were documented by Chen Susu herself through the writing of poetry. Remarkably, as indicated in one of her poems entitled "Finalizing My Own Poetic Manuscripts in Illness" (病中自訂詩稿), Chen Susu compiled her writings by herself.⁴² This means that Chen Susu consciously projected her self-perceptions into her poems by imitating conventional literary figures in popular fiction and drama, talented women who were obsessed with romantic love and poetic talent. In commenting on Chen Susu and her poetry, Wang Duanshu, a celebrated poet, literary critic, and contemporary of Chen Susu, explicitly and specifically pointed out that Chen Susu was "indeed a character that was identical to Xiaoqing" (的是小青一流人物).⁴³ Xiaoqing was a Ming concubine who was turned into a popular subject in writings by literati men and women and an object of the cult of *qing* in the late Ming and early Qing periods.⁴⁴

As told in her biographies, Xiaoqing, surnamed Feng, was a native of Yangzhou. She married Feng sheng (Mr. Feng) as a concubine when she was sixteen (Chinese *sui*). But because she married a man with the same surname of "Feng," which was considered a violation of the Confucian rites, her biographers often omitted her surname. Xiaoqing was a beautiful young woman brilliant at poetry and painting, but Mr. Feng did not

⁴² *Qinlou yue*, appendix 11b and 12a.

⁴³ *Qinlou yue*, appendix, *Zong ping er* 總評二. Wang Duanshu did not include Chen Susu in her *Mingyuan shiwei* because Chen Susu was an early Qing courtesan while the *Mingyuan shiwei* was intended to be an anthology of the Ming dynasty poetry only. See my discussion of the *Mingyuan shiwei* in Chapter 2, 130-33.

⁴⁴ Dorothy Ko has counted a total of sixteen plays on the Xiaoqing subject, most of which are believed to have been produced in the late Ming and early Qing. See Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers* 314 (note 85).

provide her with emotionally and literarily refined company (慙跳不韻).⁴⁵ In addition, his first wife was exceptionally jealous of her beauty and talent. Xiaoqing was exiled from home to live separately in isolation in the family villa in Gushan (Lone Mountain) where Xiaoqing devoted herself to reading and writing. Due to her excessive passion upon reading Tang Xianzu's 湯顯祖 (1550-1617) famous drama the *Peony Pavilion* 牡丹亭 and her extreme loneliness after she learned that her only friend, Madam Yang, had to leave Hangzhou, Xiaoqing collapsed and died in Gushan in the year *renzi* (1612) of Wanli, at the age of eighteen. Before she died, she had her own portrait drawn, an action in imitation of Du Liniang 杜麗娘, the heroine in the drama the *Peony Pavilion*. In the drama, Du Liniang drew her own portrait before she died.⁴⁶

Both Ellen Widmer and Dorothy Ko have offered a thorough investigation of the Xiaoqing story.⁴⁷ Widmer focuses on the retellings of the Xiaoqing story in fiction and drama by male writers as well as on some poems about Xiaoqing by women poets in the late Ming and the Qing. Ko concentrates on how romantic literary characters such as Du Liniang could go beyond the written pages of fiction and drama to inspire readers such as Xiaoqing, and how readers' emotional experiences could be made into new fiction and drama to inspire other readers. Both studies have convincingly shown how significant Xiaoqing's story became in the development of beauty/scholar literature in the cultural life of the late Ming and the Ming-Qing transition. Chen Susu was later transformed

⁴⁵ Wang Duanshu, comp., *Mingyuan shiwei* 10.17a.

⁴⁶ This narrative about Xiaoqing's story is mainly based on Widmer's article, "Xiaoqing's Literary Legacy."

⁴⁷ See Widmer, "Xiaoqing's Literary Legacy"; Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers*, Chapter 2, 91-106.

from a historical figure to a popular textual subject in early Qing writings by both men and women, such as the drama *Qinlou yue*, just like Xiaoqing.

The *Erfen mingyue ji* compiled by Chen Susu herself includes sixty poems: fifty-seven *shi* poems and three song lyrics. The central idea of her writing is to provide a poetic display of her deep feelings stirred up both by tragic events in her life and by her newly found love. Chen Susu does not mention Xiaoqing by name in her entire poetry collection. But as the popular poetic subject and the object of a passionate cult in the late Ming and early Qing, Xiaoqing was an obvious inspiration and model for Chen Susu in her self-representations in the *Erfen mingyue ji*. In her poem entitled “Inscribed on My Small Portrait in Illness” 病中自題小像, Chen Susu shows that as with Xiaoqing, she has an obsession with her image although she was too sick to make herself up:

Too tired to apply rouge, I cannot keep myself well.

The miserable person lodges in the No-Sorrow village.

Don't be surprised to see how haggard I am,

This is the soul of the slim and graceful Qiannü.

(*Erfen mingyue ji* 13a.)

粉癩脂慵不自存, 可憐人在莫愁村。

看來莫訝多憔悴, 此是亭亭倩女魂。

The last line of this poem—“This is the soul of the slim and graceful Qiannü”—was apparently quoted from one of Xiaoqing's poems, the poem written to Madam Yang before Xiaoqing died:

With anxiety gnawing at my heart, I write about my tears.

I come back only to find your old vermillion gate.

In the setting sun, an expanse of peach blossom shadows—

You know, this is the soul of the slim and graceful Qiannü.⁴⁸

百結迴腸寫淚痕, 重來惟有舊朱門.

夕陽一片桃花影, 知是亭亭倩女魂.

As I mentioned above, Madam Yang was Xiaoqing's only friend. This was the last poem before her death. She made a promise that her soul would come back to visit Madam Yang. However, Chen Susu quoted the final line by Xiaoqing not to express friendship, but to identify with Xiaoqing both emotionally and physically. Indeed, despite their different destinations in life, Chen Susu and Xiaoqing had much in common. Natives of Yangzhou, both of them were beautiful, talented, romantic, but self-pitying concubines. As historical figures they were both made into literary characters in drama. As Chen's contemporary, Wang Duanshu considered Chen to be identical to Xiaoqing. In my view, Chen Susu consciously identified herself with Xiaoqing in at least three respects: she was ill-fated, passionate, and poetically talented, just like Xiaoqing.

Chen Susu represents her identity as an ill-fated woman. In her poetic representations, her life was full of tragic events. Born into a poor lower-class family, Chen Susu's miserable life began with her childhood, but her life became even more tragically unbearable during the catastrophe of the Ming-Qing dynastic transition. Her poem below, entitled "Describing My Thoughts," reveals information about her family background, the terrible consequences of war, and the miserable sufferings of ordinary people like her during the turmoil of the Manchu conquest of the south in the early Qing:

⁴⁸ For the poem attributed to Xiaoqing, see Wang Duanshu, comp., *Mingyuan shiwei* 10.19b. The specific poetic line is an allusion to the Tang *chuanqi* story *Lihun ji* 離魂記 (Story of a wandering soul) by Chen Xuanyou 陳玄祐. In the story, Qiannü was lovesick and housebound, but her soul wandered, following her lover. For the story, see Wang Pijiang, comp., *Tangren xiaoshuo* 49-51.

Describing My Thoughts

I'm from a poor family.
I grew up in Yangzhou.
At the age of thirteen I learned embroidery.
At the age of fifteen I learned to play the zither.
During difficult times I found I was unable to protect myself:
Without intending to I lost my chastity.
Though I have only one blemish in a lifetime,
Who will again believe in my sincerity?
This is very hurtful, how can I talk of it?
My life is cast away like the feathers of a swan.⁴⁹

(*Erfen mingyue ji*, 1b-2a)

述懷

妾本貧家女, 少小在蕪城。
十三學刺繡, 十五學彈箏。
亂離不自持, 非意失吾貞。
百年一遭玷, 誰復憐我誠。
傷哉何所道, 棄擲鴻毛輕。

During the Manchu conquest of Yangzhou, Chen Susu lost almost everything precious in her life—her home, parents, and her chastity. She fled from Yangzhou, her native home, to the southern city Suzhou, where her love story took place. Pang Huixiang, the annotator of Chen Susu's poetry collection, provided a short note right after the poem,

⁴⁹ Translation by Ellen Widmer in Chang and Saussy, *Women Writers of Traditional China* 422.

classifying Chen Susu into the category of “*Hongyan boming*,” beautiful women who are ill-fated (紅顏薄命).”⁵⁰

Being in a romantic relationship with a scholar should be the start of a new happy life for a courtesan. However, Chen Susu’s tragic story in both her actual life and poetic representations did not end after she entered into the love relationship with Jiang Xuezhai. This is partly because she was kidnapped by bandits and taken back to Yangzhou soon after she met Jiang. But another reason for Chen Susu’s infatuation with the less happy aspects of her life lies in the larger literati trends of her day that suffering originated from *qing* and talent was a source of sorrow. In other words, tragic aspects of one’s life could be viewed as embodiments of one’s outstanding literary talent and passion. In this light, it is not surprising to see that most of her love poems are devoted to descriptions of her deep sorrow and pain caused by frustration and separation. She chose to focus on the less happy moments of her life such as those of loneliness, sickness, and sorrow. Her poems are full of images of tears, graves, cuckoo birds 杜鵑,⁵¹ autumn leaves, fallen flowers, or the setting sun, images that were conventional in Chinese poetics and often employed to evoke a melancholic scene. In the poem entitled “Huai qin” 懷親, she writes, “All night long I could not sleep, tears soaking my gown” 終夜難眠淚滿裳.⁵² In another poem describing her fallen hair, she writes: “My dark hair like yellow leaves / Falling one after one in the autumn” 綠鬢如黃葉, 蕭蕭下素秋.⁵³ In the song lyric to the tune *Qinlou yue* 秦樓月, she lists only several autumn images leaving the reader to imagine her feelings

⁵⁰ *Erfen mingyue* ji 2a.

⁵¹ According to legend, Du Yu 杜宇, the ruler of Shu 蜀 during the late Zhou dynasty, was obsessed with the wife of an official. He died lovesick and was transformed into the cuckoo bird. When weeping, the bird spits blood. The cuckoo flower is said to be spotted with the blood of the cuckoo bird.

⁵² *Erfen mingyue* ji 2a.

⁵³ *Erfen mingyue* ji 12b-13a.

behind these images: “Autumn mists, autumn rains, a few piles of yellow leaves” 秋煙秋雨幾堆黃葉.⁵⁴ In this self-representation, pain and grief seem to be the most essential motif of her poetry. Chen Susu’s obsessive melancholy makes her essentially identical to Xiaoqing.

Closely related to the above point, Chen Susu’s poetry conveys her personality as a woman obsessed with love (*qingchi* 情痴), just like Xiaoqing. Indeed, if we regard Chen Susu’s tragic self-image in another light, we find that the very tragic self could serve as a foil to highlight her identity as a “person rich in emotion” (*youqing ren* 有情人). The idea of *qing* is so evident in her collection that almost every poem is a result of her deep feelings. For her, *qing* was a supreme principle that exceeded all existing principles. On the moral level, the usual primacy of the five human relations was given to the ruler-subject relation, but for Chen Susu the male-female relationship was essential. The poem on Xi Shi 西施 is a case in point:

Mourning the Palace of Guanwa

The Palace of Guanwa was built specially for Xi Shi—

A beauty who toppled cities.⁵⁵

Seductive dances and tender songs—

she performed a hundred feminine charms.

Because of her, the well-armoured forces [of Wu] were utterly routed.

This woman from Zhuluo was too unfeeling!

⁵⁴ *Erfen mingyue ji* 3a

⁵⁵ The term “[a beauty who] topples cities,” *qingcheng*, is used to denote the charms of Xi Shi. It also implies that Xi Shi was the one who should be blamed for the decline of the Wu kingdom. It was derived from a line of the song lyric entitled “There is a Beauty in the North” 北方有佳人 by the Han court musician Li Yannian 李延年. Li sang the song before Emperor Wu to arouse his interest in Li’s younger sister, a beautiful dancer. For the poem, see Xu Ling, comp., *Yutai xinyong* 21-22.

(*Erfen mingyue ji* 2b)

弔館娃宮

娃宮特構爲傾城，艷舞嬌歌百媚生。

直使水犀兵盡散，苧蘿人亦太無情。

Xi Shi was a beauty from the Mountain Zhuluo in the State of Yue. She was sent by the king of her state, Gou Jian 勾踐, to the king of the enemy state Wu, Fu Chai, to avenge the defeat of Yue. Fu Chai indulged himself in the charms of Xi Shi. He built the Guanwa Palace for Xi Shi where she danced and sang for the king all day and everyday. As a result, Yue succeeded in conquering Wu. In Chinese literary and cultural tradition, Xi Shi was often depicted as a patriotic beauty who sacrificed herself for her country. However, under the prevalent values of the cult of *qing*, Chen Susu held a rather negative attitude towards Xi Shi. She severely condemned Xi Shi as an ungrateful woman who betrayed the excessive love of Fu Chai, the king of Wu. In her eyes, Xi Shi was simply a woman who lacked feelings (無情). By calling Xi Shi “the woman from the Mountain Zhuluo,” she shows her strong contempt for Xi Shi, the most famous beauty in ancient time. Pang Huixiang offers a comment on the poem, saying that “Chen’s reverse argument about Xi Shi was novel and made by no one else before” (翻案語未經人道).⁵⁶

In another poem entitled “The Grave of Mandarin Ducks” 鴛鴦墳, Chen Susu passionately celebrates the romantic love between men and women: “If we can long stay side by side like paired mandarin ducks / It does not matter if we have to live in the nether world” (但得翼長連, 何辭在九泉).⁵⁷

⁵⁶ *Erfen mingyue ji* 2b.

⁵⁷ *Erfen mingyue ji* 3b.

Chen Susu's unusual criticism of Xi Shi and her celebration of love reflect the larger literati trends in the early Qing. Her emphasis on *qing* as the supreme principle of human relationships can be traced back to the famous arguments by Feng Menglong and Tang Xianzu, great champions of *qing* in the late Ming. Feng Menglong's manifesto of the cult of *qing* trend was clearly stated in his preface to his anthology of anecdotes, the *Qingshi* 情史. As Dorothy Ko has summarized, "Feng wrote love as a supreme principle that governs all human relationships."⁵⁸ However, the most powerful voice in the late Ming cult of *qing* was generally acknowledged to be that of Tang Xianzu, the playwright of the famous *Peony Pavilion*. In his preface to the drama, Tang declared:

Love is of source unknown, yet it grows ever deeper. The living may die of *qing*, but by its power the dead live again. Love is not love at its fullest if one who lives unwilling to die for it, or if it cannot restore to life one who has so died. And must the love that comes in dream necessarily be unreal? For there is no lack of dream lovers in this world. Only for those love must be fulfilled on the pillow and for whom affection deepens only after retirement from office, is it entirely a corporeal matter.⁵⁹

This late Ming tradition of the cult of *qing* represented by Feng Menglong and Tang Xianzu continued to be in great vogue in the early Qing as demonstrated by many of Chen Susu's poems.

Chen Susu's poetry collection reveals that she was also a talented poet. Like many of her contemporaries, Chen Susu was deeply absorbed in writing, and her unfortunate life became a rich mine for literary composition. She recorded the most

⁵⁸ Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers* 81.

⁵⁹ Trans. by Cyril Birch, in *The Peony Pavilion* ix. As quoted in Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers* 79.

important occasions or events in her life, especially her emotional life. As I mentioned, she was the one who finalized and compiled her writings. Thus, it is obvious that she was deeply committed to the preservation of her own writings. Making her name known to the world and leaving behind a literary reputation to posterity seemed to have been the top priorities in her life. The song lyric below, which contributed much to her winning the scholar Jiang Xuezai as her lover and finally, her husband, demonstrates a high degree of Chen Susu's familiarity with Chinese poetic imagery, historical and literary allusion, and prosodic regulations of *ci* poetry. The song lyric, written to the tune *Qinlou yue*, subtitled "Zhenniang's Grave" 真娘墓, reads:

The fragrant flower is at rest,

The green mountain is so shut away you can't tell what year
and month it is.

Can't tell what year and month it is.

Pines wilt while the cypresses grow old—

It is hard to bind two hearts together.

The Lord of Heaven does not care that the flowers fall like snow.

[He] fritters away the time of the orioles and swallows—

To whom can I bare my heart?

To whom can I bare my heart?

Autumn mists, autumn rains, a few piles of yellow leaves.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ I have consulted with but modified Widmer's translation of the song lyric. For example, I believe the phrase "hard to bind two hearts together 同心難結," is a transformation of the line "Not a thing to bind hearts together as one" (無物結同心) from the poem entitled "Grave of Su Xiaoxiao" 蘇小小墓 by the famous Tang poet Li He 李賀 (791-817). Also, in the second stanza, my reading of the phrase "[He]"

(*Er fen mingyue ji* 3a)

香紅歇，

青山一閉無年月。

無年月。

松枯栢老，同心難結。

天公不管花如雪，消磨鶯燕憑誰說。

憑誰說？秋煙秋雨，幾堆黃葉。

According to the biographical note by the Tang poet Li Shen 李紳 (772-846), Zhenniang was the renowned Tang courtesan from Suzhou. She was good at singing and dancing. After she died, she was buried in front of the Tiger Hill Temple 虎丘寺. Her grave was always covered with flowers as she was missed by many passionate young men of Suzhou (吳中少年).⁶¹ The theme of Chen Susu's poem itself is a cliché: life is short and it is hard to find true love. The vocabulary and poetic images she uses in the poem are also highly conventional. But, her passion for love and desperation caused by the absence of a lover are so forcefully expressed that a strong individual voice appears in the poem.

The poem begins with descriptions of the gloomy surroundings of Zhenniang's grave. The images in these lines such as "withering flowers," "wilting pines," and "old

fritters away the time of orioles and swallows" is different from Widmer's. I believe Chen Susu is using a poetic convention to express her unhappy feelings for her lonely life. In Chinese poetic tradition, orioles and swallows are harbingers of spring and a cliché for one's youth and love. Chen Susu blames the Lord of Heaven for frittering away her youth and happiness by not granting her an ideal match. For Widmer's translation of this poem, see Widmer in Chang and Saussy, *Women Writers of Traditional China* 422.

⁶¹ See Li Shen's preface to his poem under the same title "Zhenniang's Grave," in *Quan Tang shi* 482.5484.

cypresses” all serve to evoke a desolate scene, indicating the transitoriness and delicateness of beauty and life. In the phrase “hard to bind two hearts together 同心難結,” she alludes to Li He’s famous line, “Not a thing to bind two hearts together 無物結同心,”⁶² expressing her deep sorrow for being lonely without love. In the second stanza, she cannot help but pour out her strong complaint. She blames the Lord of Heaven for wasting her beauty and youth by not granting her an ideal match. She employs two groups of seasonal images, which are highly conventional— (1) spring flowers, orioles, and swallows, and (2) autumn mists, rains, and piles of yellow leaves— contrasting them with each other to reveal the “life is short” motif, and thus producing dramatic effect in expressing her anxiety and desperation caused by the absence of a male lover. In addition, the tune *Qinlou yue* uses entering tone (入聲) rhymes, which is abrupt, vigorous, and intense. Its rhyming words such as *Xie* 歇, *yue* 月, *jie* 結, *xue* 雪, *shuo* 說, *ye* 葉 all together help to effectively express her strong sentiments. Chen’s ability to manipulate poetic conventions with regards to diction, image, and tonal prosody, won her not only love, but also a great reputation as a talented courtesan poet in the early Qing literati circles. The title of the song lyric later became Zhu Suchen’s drama, the retelling of Chen Susu’s story.

Less usual, and thus worthy of note, was that Chen Susu, as the compiler of her own writings, feels comfortable including in the *Er fen mingyue ji* as many as twelve love poems addressed to her by her lover Jiang Xuezai, referred to by the name Tianshui 天

⁶² For the text of the poem, see Li He’s poem entitled “Su Xiaoxiao mu” 蘇小小墓, in *Quan Tang shi* 390.4396.

水.⁶³ As Wang Duanshu suggests, Xiaoqing's real tragedy lies in the fact that she did not have a refined match cultivated enough to appreciate her passion and literary talent.⁶⁴ In this regard, Chen Susu was a fortunate woman because as both a woman and poet she was greatly appreciated and loved despite the many tragic events that occurred in her life. These poems provide textual testimony of the historicity of the Chen-Jiang romantic love story. By including love poems by Jiang Xuezai in her own collection, Chen Susu expresses her confidence and pride as a woman poet and lover of Jiang.

In addition, Chen Susu also includes a few poems she exchanged with Jiang, poems in which love was identical with sexual desire (*yu* 欲). The following poem entitled "Rhyming with a poem sent by Mr. Tianshui 和天水生見贈韻" (Second of two) illustrates this association:

Suddenly the parrot announces the visit of a guest.

I lift the curtain and in one smile I already have feelings for you.

How audacious, my Jade-like young man!

By the mimosa flowers, you ask my nickname.⁶⁵

(*Erfen mingyue ji* 5a)

猛聽鸚鵡喚客聲，褰簾一笑已含情。

玉郎可奈清狂甚，夜合花前問小名。

⁶³ These poems are appended to her poems in response to his original. "Tianshui" is Jiang Xuezai's style name. Wu Qi also referred to Jiang by Tianshui sheng 天水生 (see "Ti qing" 題情 1a, in *Qinlou yue*) or "Tianshui xiansheng" 天水先生 (see the poem entitled "Nianzu tang" 念祖堂, in *Linhuitang quanji* 18.21b).

⁶⁴ See Wang Duanshu, comp., *Mingyuan shiwei* 10.17a.

⁶⁵ Again, I have used Widmer's translation with a slight modification of the second couplet. For Widmer's translation of this poem, see Chang and Saussy, *Women Writers of Traditional China* 423.

In the last line, “*yehe hua*” (folded-at-night-flower) is a conventional metaphor that strongly indicates sexual fulfillment between men and women. In Chinese poetic tradition, there are two kinds of flowers called “*yehe hua*,” one of which is the magnolia flower; the other the flower of the mimosa tree, the so-called *hehuan shu* 合歡樹 (joined-pleasure-tree).⁶⁶ These images were often used in male-authored *shi* and *ci* poetry.⁶⁷ However, during the late Ming, literary women with the encouragement of men began to make use of male-dominant poetic conventions to express their own emotion and desire. Accordingly, images such as that of the *yehe hua*, which was a metaphor for sexuality, started to appear in poems by gentry women of the late Ming. For example, this image appeared in the poem by the talented gentry daughter Ye Xiaoluan 葉小鸞, a poem entitled “Wandering with immortals 游仙詩.”⁶⁸ Employing erotic images to describe women’s own emotional attachments as in Chen Susu’s poem discussed above was a late Ming and early Qing phenomenon. There are three reasons why some women felt at ease writing about sentiments of sexual desire in the late Ming and early Qing: 1) writing erotic conventions could be viewed as a pure literary performance; 2) under the strong influence of the Taizhou school, especially as represented by He Xinyin (1517-79) 何心隱, love, passion, and desire were regarded as aspects of the essential moral nature of humans;⁶⁹ and 3) according to the fashion of companionate marriage, unrestrained female

⁶⁶ Widmer translates “*yehe hua*” as “magnolia flower.” This flower is in flower during the daytime but closes its petals at night. But I prefer to translate “*yehe hua*” as “mimosa flower” as the double leaves of this tree are said to fold together at night. See the entries on “*yehe hua*” and “*hehuan*” in the section “Caomu bu” 草木部 in the *Gujin tushu jicheng*, vol. 554: 45.

⁶⁷ See, for example, Bai Juyi’s 白居易 poems entitled “Gui fu” 閨婦 and “Dui wan kai yehe hua zeng Huangfu Langzhong” 對晚開夜合花贈皇甫郎中. See *Quan Tang shi* 442.4947; 455.5155, respectively.

⁶⁸ See Zhang Yuzhang, et al, comp., [*Kangxi*] *Yuxuan Mingshi* 115.32b.

⁶⁹ See de Bary, “Individualism” 178-83.

literati emerged in response to nonconformist literati men. Pang Huixiang, a gentry wife, does not seem to have had any uneasy feelings towards the poem in which Chen Susu expresses her passion and desire in such a bold way. Pang simply placed a short comment after the poem, indicating that “One can imagine the moment 想見當時.”⁷⁰

Chen Susu’s poetic representations well illustrate how prevalent the values and fashions of literati culture were among women in the early Qing. The fact that Chen Susu and Pang Huixiang felt comfortable enough to write and comment on poems that contained sexual sentiments demonstrates how popular literary figures had a profound influence on women’s perceptions of their love, desire, and talent. From Chen’s writings, we see the Ming-Qing transition did not stop the libertine lifestyle of late Ming literati; on the contrary, the free style of the late Ming literati was even greatly accelerated during the early Qing.

Valorizing the Courtesan: Early Qing Textual Responses to Chen Susu’s Story

If placed in the context of hundreds of scholar-beauty romances in fiction and drama produced in the Ming and Qing, the Chen-Jiang love story retold in Zhu Suchen’s drama *Qinlou yue* was hardly an original one. However, what I am particularly interested in exploring is why so many well-known literati—both men and women were actively involved in promoting such a conventional story. Who were these men and women, what were their motivations behind the valorization of the Chen-Jiang story, and what are the implications of this early Qing phenomenon of promoting the courtesan within the larger historical and cultural contexts of the Ming-Qing dynastic transition? These are the basic

⁷⁰ *Erfen mingyue* ji 5a.

questions with which I am concerned. But before examining the collective efforts by both male and female literati to promote the Chen-Jiang love story, I will first provide a biographical sketch of Jiang Xuezhai, the hero of this story, as a historical figure, because almost all the literati behind the valorization of Chen Susu had personal connection with him, especially Wu Qi. An examination of Jiang offers a better understanding of the motives behind the idealization of the Chen-Jiang love story.

Jiang Shijie 姜實節 (1637-1709), known by his courtesy name Xuezhai, was born into a celebrated scholar-official family. He was the second son (仲子)⁷¹ of the famous scholar-official Jiang Cai 姜采 (1605-73), courtesy name Runong 如農, a native of Laiyang.⁷² Unlike many late Ming literati who abandoned political ambitions in order to live an independent life, Jiang Cai succeeded in the *jinshi* examinations in 1631, at the age twenty-seven (Chinese *sui*). He was appointed to vice-president of the Board of Ceremonies (禮科給事中) in 1642. But because he submitted a memorial sharply critical of the Emperor Chongzhen, the Emperor ordered him beaten in court and then imprisoned. In 1644, Jiang Cai was sent into exile to Xuanzhou (Xuancheng) in Anhui. On the way to Xuanzhou, the house of Ming collapsed and he received pardon from the Hongguang regime.⁷³ At that time, the Manchu conquest of China was far from complete. Accordingly, Jiang Cai had to flee from the northern war zone to the south. He finally settled down in Suzhou where he bought for his family a grand villa named Yi pu 藝圃

⁷¹ See Mao Qiling, “Zajian 雜箋” 24, in *Xihe ji* 西河集 23.12b (*SKQS-dianziban*); Xu Qiu, *Ciyuan congkan* 9.37b-38b.

⁷² For Jiang Cai’s biographical information, see entries on him in Zhang Huijian, *Ming Qing Jiangsu wenren nianbiao*. See also *Mingshi* 258.26b-29a.

⁷³ See Zhang Huijian, *Ming Qing Jiangsu wenren nianbiao* 579. See also *Mingshi* 258.26b-29a.

(Artistic Garden).⁷⁴ He started to spend much of his time on writing and the exchange of poetry with his friends and associates for more than twenty years.⁷⁵ The Ming-Qing transition helped to convert Jiang Cai from a strict official to a less conformist literatus.

The Yi pu was a property that previously belonged to the prominent late Ming scholar-official Wen Zhenmeng 文震孟 (1574-1636), a Donglin sympathizer who was able to rise as the grand secretary in Chongzhen's reign (1628-44).⁷⁶ Wen Zhenmeng died before the fall of the Ming. His son Wen Cheng 文乘 committed suicide after being captured by the Manchu army during the political cataclysmic turmoil of the dynastic transition.⁷⁷ It may have been because of these family crises that the Wens had to sell their luxurious family villa to the Jiangs.

Although he did not die for the fallen Ming as did Wen Cheng, the former owner of the Yi pu, Jiang Cai was widely recognized as a Ming loyalist official. After the fall of the Ming, he still claimed to be a Ming criminal official. He engraved a seal, with the style name "Old Soldier of Xuanzhou" (Xuanzhou laobing 宣州老兵).⁷⁸ On his deathbed, he asked his sons to bury him in Xuanzhou by following the late emperor Chongzhen's order. They buried their father in Jingting shan 敬亭山 of Xuanzhou after he died, which became a well-known event in the Jiangnan literati circles. Accordingly, Jiang Cai was

⁷⁴ See Chen Weisong, "Preface to poems on the Yi pu 藝圃詩序," in *Chen Jiantao siliu* 陳檢討四六 5.10b-15b (SKQS-dianziban).

⁷⁵ See Wang Wan, "Jiang shi Yi pu ji" 姜氏藝圃記, in *Yaofeng wenchao* 23.9b-11a.

⁷⁶ For Wen Zhenmeng's English biography, see Goodrich and Fang, *Dictionary of Ming Biography* 1467-71.

⁷⁷ See Zhang Huijian, *Ming Qing Jiangsu wenren nianbiao* 604.

⁷⁸ See the entry on Jiang Cai's *Jingting ji shi juan*, *buyi yi juan* 敬亭集十卷, 補遺一卷 in *Qinding Siku quanshu zongmu* 180.30a-30b.

portrayed as a Ming loyalist in writings by his contemporaries. He was even privately given by scholars the posthumous name Zhenyi 貞毅 (loyal and earnest).⁷⁹

The Jiang family was politically powerful and wealthy as well. Jiang Cai lived for almost thirty years after the fall of the Ming and he had eminent friends both in and outside of office. Many leading political or literary figures of his day became the frequent guests of his family villa. Among them were prominent scholar-officials of the early Qing, such as Wang Shizhen 王士禎 (1634-1711), Chen Weisong, Mao Qiling 毛奇齡 (1623-1716), Shi Runzhang 施閏章 (1619-83), Wang Wan, Song Luo 宋榬 (1634-1713), and Wu Qi. Many writings by these scholars about the Jiangs, especially writings on Jiang's family villa Yi pu were extant in their individual literary collections.⁸⁰ The Yi pu included scores of beautiful scenic sites, such as the Hong'e guan 紅鵝館 (Red Goose Pavilion), Zhao shuang tai 朝爽臺 (Morning Fresh Tower), and the Xiang cao ju 香草居 (Fragrant Grass Dwelling). Being considered the "most attractive place in Suzhou (最爲吳中勝處)," ⁸¹ it was one of the most important centers for contemporary literati

⁷⁹ See Mao Qiling, "Diao Jiang Zhenyi shi you xu" 弔姜貞毅詩有序, in *Xihe ji* 144.6b-7a. See also the poem entitled "Huangmen gao zhong ge" 黃門高冢歌, in Shi Runzhang 施閏章 (1619-83), *Xueyutang wenji_shiji* 學餘堂文集_詩集 22.3b (*SKQS-dianziban*).

⁸⁰ See, for example, writings on Jiang's family villa Yi pu are found in many individual collections: Wang Wan, "Jiang shi Yi pu ji" and "Yi pu shi yong 藝圃十詠," in *Yaofeng wenchao* 23.9b-11a and 42.22a-24a, respectively; Wang Shizhen, "Yi pu za yong shi'er shou 藝圃雜詠十二首," in *Jinghua lu* 精華錄 3.30b-33a; Shi Runzhang, "He Yi pu shi'er yong ji Jiang Zhongzi Xuezai 和藝圃十二詠寄姜仲子學在," in *Xueyutang wenji_shiji* 13.10b-13a; Song Luo, "He Yi pu za yong shi'er shou you xu 和藝圃雜詠十二首有序," *Xi pi lei gao* 西陂類稿 6.9a-11b; Wu Qi, "Yi pu shi wei Jiang Xuezai fu 藝圃詩爲學在賦," in *Linhuatang quanji* 18.21b-23b; Tian Wen 田雯 (1635-1704), "Yi pu shi'er yong Ruanting xiansheng ming zuo 藝圃十二詠阮亭先生命作," in *Lianyang shi chao* 蓮洋詩鈔 1.8b-10b, and Chen Weisong, "Yi pu shi xu," in *Chen Jiantao siliu* 5.10b-15b. For the English biographies of Chen Weisong, Shi Runzhang, Tian Wen, Wang Shizhen, Wang Wan, and Wu Qi, see Hummel, ed., *Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period* 103, 651, 719, 831-33, 840, and 864-65, respectively.

⁸¹ Chen Weisong, "Preface to poems on the Yi pu," in *Chen Jiantao siliu* 5.10b-15b.

entertainment and their social and literary gatherings.⁸² As I will discuss below, many writings by literati to glorify the name of the Jiangs, such as writings about their family villa Yi pu, the Chen-Jiang love story, and biographies of the Jiangs were commissioned by Jiang Xuezai himself.

Jiang Cai had two sons and Jiang Xuezai was his second son.⁸³ Like many late Ming and early Qing literati, Jiang Xuezai did not hold any office in his entire life. A poet and painter, he lived the life of a free literatus. He was particularly good at drawing pine, bamboo, and plum blossom, a conventional gesture among literati to show the nobility of their character.⁸⁴ As the son of a famous father, Jiang Xuezai greatly benefited from his father's wide social networks even though he remained out of office in his life.

Men behind the Making of the Drama Qinlou yue

Although, the authorship of *Qinlou yue* was recorded under the name of Zhu Suchen, this project involved many other well-known literati in the early Qing period. The preface writer for the drama was Wu Qi and he also composed a set of *qu* lyrics entitled "Ti qing" 題情 (Songs on feelings), a section placed after his preface to the drama. The annotator of the drama was Hushang Liweng 湖上笠翁, the famous playwright Li Yu. Meicun 梅村 [Wu Weiye] was the one who wrote a postface (dated 1671). Besides these writings, there are seven dedicatory poems in the *shi* or *ci* forms placed between the table of

⁸² See Wang Wan, "Jiang shi Yi pu ji," in *Yaofeng wenchao* 23.9b-11a.

⁸³ Mao Qiling, "Diao Jiang Zhenyi shi you xu," in *Xihe ji* 144.6b-7a.

⁸⁴ See Mao Qiling's poem entitled "Ti Jiang Shijie Suihan tu 題姜實節歲寒圖," in *Xihe ji* 144.3b; see also Li E's poem entitled "Ti Jiang Xuezai hua song wei Bao Xigang yunpan zuo 題姜學在畫松爲鮑西岡運判作," in *Fanxie shanfang ji, Xuji* 2.5b-6a.

contents and the drama proper. These poems were written by the following scholars, arranged in this order:

Houxi juren 後溪菊人 [Zhang Fang 張芳 (1612-95+), seven-character

regulated-verse],

Wuxia Hui'an 吳下悔菴 [You Tong; seven-character quatrain],

Yiren 伊人 [Gu Mei 顧湄; *ci*, to the tune *Xiang jian huan*],

Qinian shi 其年氏 [Chen Weisong; *ci*, to the tune *Chang xiang si*],

Shu Meishan Dunlao 蜀眉山鈍老 [Wang Wan; six-character quatrain],

Guangxia shanren 廣霞山人 [Yu Huai; seven-character quatrain],

Liweng 笠翁 [Li Yu; *ci*, to the tune *Queqiao xian*].

Accordingly, a total of ten male literati were involved in the valorization of the Chen-Jiang romance. Of the ten men, Zhu Suchen, You Tong, and Wang Wan were natives of Suzhou. Zhang Fang, Wu Weiye, Gu Mei, and Chen Weisong were from neighbouring districts of Suzhou, such as Jurong, Taicang, and Yixing. Wu Qi was a native of Yangzhou. But during the period of the writing of the drama, he lived in Suzhou, Jiang's hometown. However, from Wu Qi's poem entitled "Watching drama in Kuaixue tang" 快雪堂觀劇,⁸⁵ we see that Wu Qi also found time to become acquainted with poets such as Feng Yunjiang in Hangzhou Wang Ruqian's circles. Yu Huai, author of the *Banqiao zaji*, was a native of Fujian, but spent most of his time in Nanjing and Suzhou. He was obviously a core member of Wu Qi's literary circles as Wu Qi wrote many poems recording his activities with Yu Huai. Li Yu was the only one who belonged to the

⁸⁵ See Wu Qi, *Linhuitang quanji* 22.6a-6b. "Kuaixue tang" was the family villa of Feng Yunjiang, the son of Feng Mengzhen. As we have seen, Feng Yunjiang was a member of Wang Ruqian's circles.

Hangzhou literati circles but he also had a residence in Suzhou. Therefore, it is safe to say that these early Qing scholars were members of the literati circles in Suzhou and Hangzhou.

In studying women's literary culture in the late Ming and early Qing, Ellen Widmer has drawn critical attention to the relationship between women's active participation in literary culture and Ming loyalist efforts. Taking the city Hangzhou—a “major site of Ming loyalist resistance”—as example, she points out that “Hangzhou's role as a center for women's activities has something to do with its centrality in Ming loyalist efforts.” “[A] significant number of male loyalists in Hangzhou became interested in cultivating the talents of women writers, for example, Wang Ruqian (Ranming).”⁸⁶

If we take the early Qing efforts to promote cultural continuity of late Ming literati trends as literati efforts to show a sense of their Chinese identity, it is true that these efforts had to do with loyalism. However, my examination of the motivations of literati behind the publication of the *chuanqi* drama *Qinlou yue* demonstrates that although the making of the drama might have reflected some loyalist sentiments, personal friendship networks contributed much more to the completion of the work.

On the one hand, for these ten early Qing scholars who encountered the disaster of the dynastic transition, the making of the *Qinlou yue* reflects their efforts to seek the cultural continuity provided by the representation of late Ming courtesans, giving the sense of their defiance of Manchu authority. As mentioned above, Jiang Xuezai was regarded as the son of a Ming loyalist official. Besides his father Jiang Cai, his uncle

⁸⁶ See Widmer, “Xiaoqing's Literary Legacy” 126 (note 51).

Jiang Gai 姜垓 (1614-53) was also a Ming loyalist. In 1653, Jiang Gai wrote a poem to Wu Weiye, condemning Wu's collaboration with the Manchu regime.⁸⁷ Jiang Xuezhai's own writings also portrayed the Jiangs as Ming loyal subjects. A romance between such a loyalist scholar and a courtesan in the context of the Ming-Qing dynastic transition definitely gives a sense of "loyalist efforts."

Moreover, most of these scholars did not serve in the Qing or at least during the time of the making of the drama in the 60s of the seventeenth century. Yu Huai, Zhang Fang, Li Yu, Zhu Suchen, and Gu Mei were literary commoners who completely gave up any political ambitions. Wu Qi and You Tong were just dismissed from their posts during that period. Wu Weiye lived an idle life after a short period of serving in the Qing government while Chen Weisong lived as a literatus involved in many literary activities. The only scholar who held office in the 1660s was Wang Wan who appeared to be Jiang's family friend.⁸⁸

The tune *Qinlou yue*, originally derived from the great Tang poet Li Bai's 李白 (701-62) "Yi Qin'e 憶秦娥," was identified with loyalist sentiments for a lost country. According to Shao Bo's 邵博 *Wenjian houlu* 聞見後錄, after the Song moved its capital from Bianjing [Kaifeng] to the southern city Lin'an (Hangzhou), when listening to Li Bai's "Yi Qin'e" sung by a singing girl, people in the old capital city all wept with sorrow and sadness, sighing at the fall of the Northern Song.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ See Zhang Huijian, *Ming Qing Jiangsu wenren nianbiao* 655.

⁸⁸ See the entries on these scholars in Zhang Huijian, *Ming Qing Jiangsu wenren nianbiao*.

⁸⁹ Shao Bo, *Wenjian houlu* 19.6b (*SKQS-dianziban*).

However, as Peterson has argued, loyalism is also a very individual issue and personal predilections would have to be taken into account as well.⁹⁰ In the making of the drama *Qinlou yue*, personal situation played a much larger role than did loyalist sentiments. Some of these scholars such as Yu Huai and Li Yu did not serve in the Ming either. Some others such as Wu Weiye, Wu Qi, You Tong, Wang Wan, and Chen Weisong became collaborators to the Manchus right after the fall of the Ming by either taking examinations or holding appointments, or doing both in the new regime. In particular, You Tong, Wang Wan, and Chen Weisong, later became successful candidates of the *Boxue hongci* examination, a special examination that Kangxi held to recruit Chinese literati to government service.

As I have mentioned above, Wu Qi played a leading role in the process of promoting the Jiang-Chen love story. He wrote prefaces for both Chen Susu's *Erfen mingyue ji* and for the drama *Qinlou yue*. During his stay in Suzhou, with his organizing efforts, the *chuanqi* drama *Qinlou yue* was completed. Almost all of the literati who participated in the promotion of the romance were friends or associates of Wu Qi and their names appeared in Wu Qi's literary collection, the *Linhuitang quanji*. Not only that, Wu Qi also involved many of his family members, such as his son, younger brother, and his sister-in-law in the celebration of this literary romance.

But Wu Qi's efforts to promote the Jiang-Chen romance had little to do with his loyalty to the Ming. He had served in the Qing before. Made a Qing tribute scholar in 1652, Wu Qi was two years later appointed a secretary in the Grand Secretariat in Beijing. His fame as a playwright reached the Emperor Shunzhi who commanded him to compose

⁹⁰ See Peterson, "The Life of Ku Yen-wu."

a drama on the life of the famous Ming official Yang Jisheng 楊繼盛 (1516-55). Yang was sentenced to death for being critical of the powerful minister Yan Song 嚴嵩 (1480-1567). The drama, entitled *Zhongmin ji* 忠愍記, so pleased the emperor that he granted Wu Qi the same office Yang had once held, namely, a vice director of the bureau of personnel in the ministry of War. In 1666, Wu Qi was appointed prefect of Huzhou, Zhejiang, but three years later, he was dismissed from that post. Thereafter, he devoted his life to writing and other literary pursuits. He lived in Suzhou from 1670 to 1681. After that, he returned to his native home Yangzhou.⁹¹ In fact, from Wu Qi's collected works, the *Linhuitang quanji*, we see that Wu Qi was a lifelong friend of Jiang Xuezai. He went sightseeing in Suzhou with Jiang Xuezai.⁹² He also presented a poem to Chen Susu at a gathering held in the Hong'e guan in Jiang's family villa Yi pu when Chen was still a courtesan.⁹³ In the poem, Wu Qi highly praised the beauty and elegance of Chen Susu.

After Wu Qi was dismissed from his post as the prefect of Huzhou in 1669, he lived in poverty in Suzhou from 1670-1681. Many of Wu Qi's writings for the Jiangs were likely commissioned by Jiang Xuezai. Wu Qi in his poems recorded what he received from Jiang after he completed a certain piece of work for him. For example, after he composed a series of poems on Jiang's family villa Yi pu, Jiang Xuezai sent him gifts including the best of the four objects for a scholar's study (文房四寶) and a piece of

⁹¹ See Hummel, ed., *Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period* 864; see also Zhang Huijian, *Ming Qing Jiangsu wenren nianbiao* 651, 670, 680, 732, 750, 756, 823.

⁹² See Wu Qi's poem entitled "Xie Jiang Xuezai you Huqiu gui yin jiulou" 偕姜學在遊虎丘歸飲酒樓, in *Linhuitang quanji* 18.25b.

⁹³ The poem was entitled, "Hong'e guan xiao ji zeng Chen Susu Jiaoshu 紅鵝館小集贈陳素素校書," in *Linhuitang quanji* 18.33a-b.

orchid painting by Ma Xianglan, the well-known late Ming courtesan painter.⁹⁴ Jiang Xuezai also asked several other scholars to write something to eulogize the Jiangs. He asked Wu Qi's son Wu Tongben to compose a lyric song to chant his love relationship with Chen Susu.⁹⁵ He also asked Zhang Zhen 張貞 to be his guest to write "Huqiu er Jiang ci ji 虎丘二姜祠記" to celebrate the life of his father Jiang Cai and that of his uncle Jiang Gai.⁹⁶ On his family villa Yi pu, besides Wu Qi, several leading scholars such as Wang Shizhen, Shi Runzhang, Wang Wan, Song Luo, and Tian Wen were also asked to write about the Yi pu after its renovation was completed. These writings are extant in scholars' individual literary collections.⁹⁷ At Jiang Xuezai's request, Chen Weisong wrote the preface to for the collected writings by these scholars on the Yi pu.⁹⁸ Obviously, personal friendship played a more important part than loyalist sentiments in the valorization of the courtesan Chen Susu and her poetry.

As for Wang Ruqian, as we have seen, he had never served in his entire life. His efforts to promote women's literary culture started long before the fall of the Ming dynasty. Although he himself did not serve the Qing, his second son joined the force led by the influential military official Hong Chengchou 洪承疇 (1593-1665) in the Ming-Qing transition period. Once a Ming official, Hong submitted to the Manchus even before they arrived in Beijing. Sent to Nanjing under the title of Pacificator of Jiangnan (招撫江南) in 1645, Hong was responsible for the capture and execution of Huang Daozhou in 1646. He suppressed many Ming officials who stood against the Manchu

⁹⁴ See Wu Qi's poem, entitled "Yi pu shi cheng xie Jiang Xuezai song ming jian Ban guan Wu cao Lu yan Ma Xianglan hua lan qi," in *Linhuatang quanji* 7a-b.

⁹⁵ See Xu Qiu, *Ciyuan congtao* 9.37b-38b.

⁹⁶ See Zhang Huijian, *Ming Qing Jiangsu wenren nianbiao* 842.

⁹⁷ See Chapter 4, 286 (note 80).

⁹⁸ See Chen Weisong, "Preface to poems on the Yi pu," in *Chen Jiantao siliu* 5.10b-15b.

invaders.⁹⁹ Hong sent a gift to Wang Ruqian and Wang gratefully recorded this event in one of his poems.¹⁰⁰

Women Writers of the Poems Collected in the “Mingyuan tiyong”

As mentioned earlier, there are twenty women poets writing about Chen Susu on the subject of her poetry, her portrait, or the drama of her love story. These dedicatory writings are collected within the section called “Mingyuan tiyong,” appearing after the *Erfen mingyue ji* in the appendix to the *chuanqi* drama *Qinlou yue*. Similar to the geographic distribution of male literati involved in the *chuanqi* drama about Chen Susu, these twenty literary women were also clustered in the two major regions of Suzhou and Hangzhou.

Of the twenty women poets, seven are from Suzhou. Wu Qi’s sister-in-law Pang Huixiang was the key figure in the Suzhou female literary circles. As we have seen, at Wu Qi’s request, she composed two dedicatory poems on Chen Susu’s poetry collection in a seven-character quatrain form. It was she who edited and arranged dedicatory writings by women in the “Mingyuan tiyong.” The two poems by her are placed at the very beginning of this section. She was also the commentator on the poems in the *Erfen mingyue ji*. Other Suzhou women poets, such as Wu Wenrou, Zhang Ping, and Zhang Fan apparently followed Pang Huixiang by also writing two seven-character quatrains about the *Erfen mingyue ji*. Jiang Qian, Tianshui’s little sister (“Tianshui xiaogu”) wrote one poem about Chen Susu’s portrait also in the same prosodic form. Only Zhang

⁹⁹ See the entry on Hong Chengchou, in Hummel, ed., *Eminent Chinese of the Ch’ing Period* 359.

¹⁰⁰ See Wang Ruqian’s poems entitled “In the year Jiawu [1654]...” 甲午七月次兒蒙洪督師調至長沙軍前 and “My second son...” 次兒請假歸省督師贈余風雅典型匾額兒歸因敘親友, in Wang Ruqian, *Chunxingtang shiji* 5.14a-16a.

Xuedian and Liu Renyue wrote song lyrics, under the tunes *Yu meiren* 虞美人 and *Qinlou yue*, respectively.

Compared to most of the women in the Suzhou literary circles, who wrote about Chen Susu's poetry collection in the seven-character quatrain form, the majority of women in the Hangzhou female literary circles wrote about Chen Susu's portrait in various prosodic forms. Women who wrote *shi* poems are as follows:

Qian Fenglun (*fu* style, one poem);

Xu Zhaozhu (seven-character regulated-verse, 1 poem);

Lin Yining (seven-character ancient-verse, 1 poem);

Zhuo Yanxiang (seven-character regulated-verse, 2 poems);

Shao Sizhen (five-character regulated-verse, 1 poem).

Women who wrote song lyrics are as follows:

Shang Jinghui (To the Tune *Yuezhong xing* 月中行, 1 lyric);

Shang Cai (To the Tune *Wushan yi duan yun* 巫山一段雲, 1 lyric);

Feng Xian (To the Tune *Ruanlang gui* 阮郎歸, 1 lyric);

Gu Si (To the Tune *Yu meiren*, 1 lyric);

Zhu Yushu (To the Tune *Xijiang yue* 西江月, 1 lyric);

Wang Duanshu (To the Tune *Qinlou yue*, 2 lyrics);

Su Huijuan (To the Tune *Die lian hua* 蝶戀花, 1 lyric).

Not all of them were natives of Hangzhou and some of them came from neighbouring districts of Hangzhou, but these women stayed connected to the same literati circles.

These Hangzhou women poets were generally more accomplished and thus more famous than their counterparts in the Suzhou literary circles discussed above. Wang Duanshu,

who compiled the famous anthology of Ming dynasty women's writings, the *Mingyuan shiwei*, as I have discussed in Chapter 2, was one of the most celebrated and respected female literati in late imperial China. She was a native of Shanyin, but she was obviously an active member of Wang Ruqian's literati circle. She had poems addressed to Wang Ruqian.¹⁰¹ She was once approached by Li Yu to write a preface to one of his plays, the *Bimu yu* 比目魚 (Sole Mates).¹⁰² It is my speculation that Li Yu, as the commentator of the *chuanqi* drama *Qinlou yue*, likely played a similar role as did Wu Qi by involving women in the Hangzhou literary circles in the promotion of Chen Susu's poetry.

Moreover, Lin Yining, Qian Fenglun, Feng Xian, and Gu Si, were key members of the most well-known Hangzhou female literary society in the early Qing, the Banana Garden Poetry Society 蕉園詩社.¹⁰³ The founder of the club was Gu Yurui 顧玉蕊, niece of Gu Ruopu 顧若璞, who was famous for her erudition and chastity in the late Ming.¹⁰⁴ Gu Ruopu's father-in-law Huang Ruheng, as we have seen, was a core member of Wang Ruqian's Hangzhou literary circles. Qian Fenglun was the daughter of Gu Yurui while Lin Yining was Yurui's daughter-in-law. Gu Si was the grandniece of Gu Ruopu while Feng Xian was related to the Qians by marriage. As Dorothy Ko has noted, these talented women were all family or relatives of Gu Ruopu.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰¹ Like Wu Shan and Huang Yuanjie, Wang Duanshu was also a visitor to Wang Ruqian's Buxiyuan, writing to match Wang's rhymes. But her poems were excluded from Wang's collections by the compiler, Wang's grandson because of the limited space. See *Chunxingtang shiji* 5.33b and 5.75a. But Huang Yuanjie's poem was included. *Chunxingtang shiji* 5.28b. See also Widmer, "The Epistolary World" 10-11.

¹⁰² Hanan, *The Invention of Li Yu* 18. See also Widmer, "The Epistolary World" 11. The title "Sole Mates" is a pun on "Soul Mates."

¹⁰³ For a detailed account of members of the Banana Garden poetry club, see Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers* 232-42.

¹⁰⁴ On Gu Ruopu's biographical information and translations of her poems, see Chang and Saussy, *Women Writers of Traditional China* 302-13. See also Idema and Grant, *The Red Brush* 414-21.

¹⁰⁵ Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers* 232-42.

The Banana Garden Poetry Society has offered a perfect example to illustrate how fashionable it still was for early Qing women in the upper class to cross domestic and gender boundaries for their literary pursuits in a world often beyond the family, the world dominated by men. The following passage describing literary activities of women in the Banana Garden Poetry Club was quoted and translated by Ko:

At the time, Hangzhou people had extravagant habits. In the warm and clear spring, pleasure boats with brocade curtains swarmed the waters; sightseers on the lake rivaled those on the shore in gaudery. All were decked out in bright earrings, feather-shaped jades, and silk chiffon dresses with pearly tails, showing off [their fashion] to each other. Chai [Jingyi] Jixian alone would paddle a small boat with Feng [Xian] Youling, Qian [Fenglun] Yunyi, Lin [Yining] Yaqing, and Gu Qiji [Si], all high-class ladies [*dajia*, literally “great families’]. In plain dresses of raw silk and hair gathered into a single bun, these ladies passed around the writing brush and shared sheaves of paper. The pleasure-seeking women [*youmü*] in neighbouring boats beheld them and lowered their heads, feeling embarrassed that they were no match.¹⁰⁶

Chai Jingyi was another core member in the Banana Garden club. Compared to Gu Ruopu, their family matriarch who often claimed she composed poetry only after she had fulfilled her domestic duties,¹⁰⁷ these women had rather bold lifestyles. They had a wide social network outside the Banana Garden. As accomplished female poets, they not only

¹⁰⁶ Wu Hao 吳顯, comp., *Guochao Hangjun shiji* 國朝杭郡詩輯, 30.10b-11a. As quoted in Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers* 234, 236.

¹⁰⁷ For a discussion of one of her prefaces, in which she defends her writing of poetry, see Robertson, “Changing the Subject” 182-83.

wrote *shi* and *ci* poetry—the dominant orthodox literary genres in the pre-modern period, but also were knowledgeable about prevalent dramatic literature. Lin Yining was approached to contribute a preface to the *Three Wives Commentary on Peony Pavilion*. Gu Si was good at writing poetry and singing. The prominent early Qing scholar-official Wang Shizhen wrote about the woman poet Gu Si he knew:

Gu Si, courtesy name Qiji, is a native of Hangzhou. She married a certain Mr. E. In the year Gengshen of Kangxi [1680], she followed her husband to Beijing. I once read her *Jingyutang ji*. Her short *fu*, *shi*, and *ci* poetry were quite beautiful. On the ninth, I and like-minded friends drank in the small garden of Song Zizhao, Director of the Ministry Works. We decided to write poems only on the rhyme word *xie* [crab]. The next day, the poem by Mr. E was done first—it was written for him by Gu. The last few lines read:

By nature, I am simple and unrestrained,
I study without seeking a thorough understanding.
I read the *Erya*, but I don't know the text,
I thus mistake *pengqi* [small crabs] for [normal] crabs.”

I sighed in amazement. Gu is also skilled at singing. What I enjoyed the most is the song lyric composed by her, which has the line “the bright moon shining on a pair of faces.”¹⁰⁸

顧湄字啓姬。杭州人。適鄂生某。康熙庚申，從其夫至京師。嘗見其所著靜御堂集。小賦詩詞頗爲婉麗。九日予與同仁飲宋子昭 [宋旂] 工部小

¹⁰⁸ Wang Shizhen, *Gufu yuting za lu*, in Che Jixin, et al. eds., *Zhonghua yeshi*, vol. 12 (Qing dynasty, 2): 1252.

園,限蟹字韻.翌日,鄂詩先就.顧代作也.其末云:“予本澹蕩人,讀書不求解.爾雅讀不熟,蜚蜚誤爲蟹.”予驚歎.顧善歌,所制詞曲有“一輪月照一雙人面”之句,予最賞之.

Wang Shizhen was astonished at the poem Gu Si composed for her husband, not only because the poem was well written in the male literati style in terms of the language, tone, and mode, but also because the poem has shown Gu Si's erudition as a talented woman. The ancient word “pengqi,” referring to a kind of small crab, was not often seen and used. Her apology for not knowing the *Erya*, the earliest lexicographical dictionary, by heart, indicates the fact that she was a learned woman scholar because the *Erya* was illegible even for many literati men.

Gu Si's husband does not seem to have any official title as Wang Shizhen simply referred to him as “a certain Mr. E.” But obviously he enjoyed a companionate marriage with Gu Si. From Wang Shizhen's account, whether Gu Si sang the song on the occasions of literati gathering is not very clear to me. But apparently, Gu Si, as a gentry woman, participated in men's literary activities, through her husband, which is presented as plausible and fashionable in the early Qing literati world. No wonder that the “pleasure-seeking women (*younü*)” felt embarrassed by the talent, fashion, and freestyle of these talented gentry women.

The only woman poet who did not belong to either the Suzhou or Hangzhou literary circles is Gong Jingzhao, a native of Wuxi, who composed a poem in the form of four-character ancient verse. Gong Jingzhao was a talented but ill-fated woman poet who suffered an unfortunate marriage. Feeling for her ill-fate and appreciating for her poetic talent, Wu Qi had her writings compiled and published. Probably because of Wu Qi,

Gong Jingzhao and Chen Susu, two talented women poets became lifelong friends. Gong Jingzhao was one of two women, along with Wang Duanshu, who wrote general comments (總評) on Chen Susu's *Erfen mingyue ji*. These general comments are placed before the *Erfen mingyue ji* proper. It is interesting to note that in her comments, Gong Jingzhao urged Jiang Xuezai to immediately place Chen Susu in a "mansion of gold" so that she would not have to live in the courtesans quarters any longer and that he should not let down such as an emotional "thing" (寄語天水先生, 宜速置之金屋. 毋令久困花營, 負此有情物也).¹⁰⁹

Although these women wrote in various poetic forms with different emphasis, some on Chen's poetry collection and some on her portrait, they shared one thing in common—they all attempted to celebrate and valorize Chen Susu as both a woman and a poet. They praised highly Chen Susu's literary talent and beauty. For example, Pang Huixiang presents Chen Susu as a matchless female talent and a teacher of the inner chambers: "Scholars of the inner chambers should pay your respect / Who else can match the talent from Yingchuan?" 閨閣文人應下拜, 更誰能及穎川才¹¹⁰ Wang Duanshu appreciates both the literary mind and feminine charms of Chen Susu (文心艷質俱停妥).¹¹¹ Gu Si finds Chen Susu a good match of the legendary beauty Xi Shi but with an indication that Chen Susu was more romantic than Xi Shi because of her poetic talent (新妝髣髴疑西子. 弱態應如此. 除他誰更可同儔. 卻又多才, 西子遜風流).¹¹² In her poem, Shang Cai particularly celebrates not only Chen Susu's poetic sentences but also her

¹⁰⁹ *Erfen mingyue ji*, "Zong ping" 1a.

¹¹⁰ "Mingyuan tiyong" 1a.

¹¹¹ "Mingyuan tiyong" 4b-5a.

¹¹² "Mingyuan tiyong" 3b.

tender feelings reflected in her poems (艷句人爭詠, 柔情我亦憐)¹¹³ while Shang Jinghui feels more intimate to Chen Susu after reading her poems (見君佳句更相親).¹¹⁴ Both Shang Cai and Shang Jinghui express their intimate feelings towards the courtesan on a personal level, feelings among women.

These women's active participation in the promotion of Chen Susu further demonstrates that male literati networks played an important part in women's literary clubs. While gentry women poets had actually taken up the role that courtesans previously played in literati culture, courtesans became much less visible than before. It is striking that of the twenty women, nineteen were gentry women poets and only one was a courtesan. Fourteen of them were selected to be recorded as accomplished writers in the early Qing anthology of song lyrics by women, the *Zhongxiang ci*, compiled by Xu Shumin and Qian Yue, to which Wu Qi wrote a preface.¹¹⁵ Sixteen of them are now recorded in Hu Wenkai's catalogue, but all of the famous women poets were women of the gentry class. From this, we can see that the role of courtesans in men's literary circles had come to be much overshadowed by that of gentry women. Despite the collective effort of some literati men and women to valorize and promote courtesan culture, courtesans were beginning to be excluded in general from these circles and their decline had set in.

During the Ming-Qing transition, some male literati already complained about the paucity of cultivated courtesans in their time. For example, in a song lyric, You Tong poured out his disappointment and frustration when he struggled in vain to find a refined

¹¹³ "Mingyuan tiyong" 3a.

¹¹⁴ "Mingyuan tiyong" 2b.

¹¹⁵ See Xu Shumin and Qian Yue, comp., *Zong xian ci*. For a description of the anthology, see Chang "Ming and Qing Anthologies" 160-63.

and romantic courtesan: I really regret that I ever read the “Rhapsody on Gaotang” about the divine woman (*shennü* 神女) when I was young / Not a piece of cloud or a drop of rain of her is anywhere to be seen” (少年悔讀高唐賦，片雲片雨無尋處).¹¹⁶ Some other literati such as Zhuo Renyue were fascinated by the charms of talented gentry women, considering them to be the most romantic company.¹¹⁷ The so-called companionate marriage where the husband and wife shared intellectual interests was highly appreciated and promoted among literati. Li Yu passionately extolled Feng Xian (courtesy name Youling 又令), a member of the Banana Garden Poetry Club and the wife of Qian Zhaowu 錢照五, for Qian’s marriage to such a beautiful and talented woman:

To the tune *Jia’ou xing* to present to Qian Zhaowu

[Author’s note: his wife Feng Youling was a famous lady of talent]

What is the most difficult to have in life is an ideal match.

The wife of [Zhang] Chang lacked talent¹¹⁸

while Meng Guang was short on looks.¹¹⁹

While [Zhuo] Wenjun was endowed with both,

It is hard to speak of virtue when she was so easy.¹²⁰

The wife of Mr. Qian is really unique and matchless—

¹¹⁶ See his song lyric, “To the previous tune [Pusa man]” 前調 (Third of eight), in *Quan Qing ci* 全清詞, “Shun [zhi] Kang[xi] juan” 順康卷, ce 3, 1515. The “Gaotang fu” 高唐賦 (Rhapsody on Gaotang) and its sequel “Shennü fu” 神女賦 (Rhapsody on shennü) are written by Song Yu, describe the charming Goddess of Wushan 巫山神女 and the romantic dream rendezvous of her and the King of the state of Chu. The goddess appeared to be cloud at dawn and rain in the evening. Thus, in Chinese literature, the term yunyu 雲雨 (cloud and rain) was used to refer to sexual intercourse and “shennü” was used to refer to courtesans. For the two pieces of rhapsody, see Xiao Tong, *Wen xuan* 19.1a-11b.

¹¹⁷ See the song lyric by Zhuo Renyue quoted at the beginning of this chapter.

¹¹⁸ For the story of Zhang Chang 張敞 and his wife, see his biography in Ban Gu, comp., *Qian Han shu* 前漢書 76.23a-b (*SKQS-dianziban*).

¹¹⁹ For the story of Meng Guang and Liang Hong, see Chapter 3, 248.

¹²⁰ For the love story of Zhuo Wenjun 卓文君 and Sima Xiangru 司馬相如 (179-118 BCE), see Idema and Grant, *The Red Brush* 108-12.

She has all three merits without any flaw.
 On the day when wedding music accompanied her home,
 A pair of white jades, both competing to shine.
 Well matched not only in looks but also in talent.
 Each day you compete in writing without rest.
 On the mandarin duck pillows, you are husband and wife,
 But before the Bronze sparrow inkstone,
 you are two competing states.
 When one has this life, what else does he seek?
 There is only the light of spring, never autumn.
 She is both a perfect wife and mother of sons and daughters:
 Her face is like a peach blossom while
 her belly is like a pomegranate fruit.
 People in the world can only envy in vain,
 but they can never imitate you.
 Tell me how you cultivated yourself in the previous life.¹²¹

佳偶行贈錢君照五

(閩君馮又令, 名閩秀也)

人生最難得佳偶, 敝婦無才孟光丑。
 文君二者獲相兼, 德復難言合以苟。
 錢君內子真奇絕, 諸美能全無一缺。
 笙歌乍擁歸房日, 一雙白璧爭光輝。

¹²¹ See *Li Yu quanji*, vol. 2: 75.

貌既相猶才亦匹, 詞鋒日竟無休息.

鴛鴦枕畔是夫妻, 銅雀硯前稱敵國.

人生得此復何求, 但有春光不見秋.

宜家更復宜男女, 面似桃花腹似榴.

世人可羨不可學, 問君夙世憑何修.

Whether male literati were ready or not, respectable gentry writing women finally took over from courtesans the membership of literature already in the early Qing period.

Conclusion: Rethinking the Relationship of The Respectable and the Mean

Recent scholarship in Ming and Qing women's literary culture has pointed out that Qing courtesans no longer enjoyed the high degree of textual visibility and respectability as did their counterparts in the late Ming. The underlying reason given was that High Qing elite women such as Yun Zhu had a strong desire to morally distinguish themselves from courtesans. Accordingly, courtesan poets were marginalized in the Qing while respectable gentry women continued to flourish and finally replaced courtesans, becoming the dominant figures in female literary culture of late imperial China.¹²² The reason for deriving such a conclusion lies in the fact that these studies have focused on two distinct historical periods—the late Ming and High Qing while the early Qing period,

¹²² See Chang, "A Guide to Ming-Ch'ing Anthologies" 145-46 and Mann, *Precious Records* 53, 122-25, 136, 142.

the transitional period between the late Ming and High Qing, has received little scholarly attention.¹²³

The High Qing was regarded as “the golden age of Qing women’s literature,”¹²⁴ while courtesans had no part in this literature. They were beginning to be excluded in general from anthologies compiled by both men and women.¹²⁵ The decline of the literary courtesans was contrasted with the continuous glory of gentry writing women in this period. Liao Jingwen 廖景文 (1713?-82+) claimed that talented women had to marry romantic celebrities so that they could enjoy the happiness of poetic exchange (才媛必配名流, 然後得唱和之樂).¹²⁶ In an essay dedicated to his deceased wife, the high Qing scholar-official Jin Zhaoyan 金兆燕 (1719-89+), emotionally claimed that “I have made friends in half of the world, but the one who really knows me is the one in the inner quarters [my wife]” (交遊半天下, 而知己乃在閨中).¹²⁷

However, the decline of literary courtesans was already underway during the early Qing when great efforts by both literati men and women to promote writings by courtesans. In this chapter, through an examination of Chen Susu’s love story and the textual responses of literati men and women, I have demonstrated that, unlike their successors in High Qing, early Qing women in the upper classes did not marginalize courtesan poets on moral grounds; on the contrary, in valorizing the courtesan Chen Susu,

¹²³ Meyer-Fong’s study is one of the very few books that focus exclusively on the early Qing period, but her main focus is on the physical and cultural reconstruction of a particular city Yangzhou rather than on women’s literary culture. See Meyer-Fong, *Building Culture in Early Qing Yangzhou*.

¹²⁴ Liang Yizhen 梁乙真, *Qingdai funü* 146.

¹²⁵ See my Introduction, 7-8.

¹²⁶ *Guzao tang shihua* 古藻堂詩話. Quoted in *Qingqi ji* 清綺集 by Liao Jingwen 廖景文. As quoted in Deng Changfeng, “Liao Jingwen he ta de Qingqi ji” 廖景文和他的清綺集, in Deng Changfeng, *Ming Qing xiqujia kaolüe* 33.

¹²⁷ See Jin Zhaoyan, “Wang shi Jin ruren zhuan” 亡室晉孺人傳; quoted in Lu Eting 陸萼庭 “Jin Zhaoyan nianbiao” 金兆燕年表, in *Qingdai xiqujia congkao* 清代戲曲家叢考 151.

they even went one step further than their enthusiastic counterparts of the late Ming. In their songs dedicated to the courtesan poet Chen Susu, they collectively expressed their high appreciation and even admiration not only for Chen Susu's poetic talent, but also for her beauty and her emotional character. In these writings, Chen Susu was depicted as an emblem of prevalent literati values; she was still seen in terms of romantic love and poetic talent as an ideal match for literati men and as a role model for literary women in the early Qing.

This chapter serves as an example of the complexities of factors to which the decline of courtesans can be attributed. The case study of Chen Susu has shown the early Qing cooperative efforts by both literary men and women to reproduce the cultural glory of the late Ming courtesan on the one hand; but it has also shown their failure in doing so, on the other hand.¹²⁸ The demise of late Ming courtesan culture was already deeply rooted in its heyday.

¹²⁸ Hu Wenkai's catalogue has also reflected that almost all the literary courtesans recorded in the Qing period belong to the category of the survivor generation of the Ming eminent courtesans (such as Liu Rushi and Gu Mei). For courtesans of the Ming and Qing dynasties recorded in Hu Wenkai, see Appendix 1.

Conclusion

By situating late Ming courtesan culture in its larger socio-cultural context, my dissertation sets out to examine the significant but heretofore almost entirely ignored relationship between male poetry societies and the sudden and sharp rise of literary and literate courtesans in the late Ming. I have demonstrated that the flourishing of courtesan culture and appearance of more equalized gender relations in the late Ming were intimately related to a carefree lifestyle characterized by the tastes and values of “men of the mountains” (*shanren*). These men fashioned themselves as retired literati, devoting themselves to art and entertainment, interests independent of official concerns. Male poetry societies not only provided a fertile ground for late Ming eccentrics to express their cultural distinctions, but also created new space for courtesans and gentry women to play a significant role in literati culture. Valorization of courtesans and consumption of many other heterodox values and practices that characterized the late Ming literati world were the very fruits of this new nonconformist literati social formation that gained increasing influence and popularity in mid-and late Ming Jiangnan.¹

Western scholarship from Max Weber to Benjamin Elman has emphasized the close relationship between Chinese education and political power.² Because passing the examinations granted rank and power, nearly all those in late imperial China who could afford time and money to prepare for the examinations dedicated themselves to this process of selection. However, during the late Ming, many literati chose to remain out of

¹ Such values included individualism, contempt for office-holding, cult of *qing*, sympathy for women, self-promoting hypocrisy, aesthetic refinement, and religious syncretism—to name just a few.

² C. K. Yang, introduction, *The Religion of China: Confucianism and Taoism* xxviii-xxix; and Benjamin A. Elman, “Political, Social, and Cultural Reproduction via Civil Service Examinations in Late Imperial China,” and *A Cultural History of Civil Examinations in Late Imperial China*.

office in order to live independent lives. It became a remarkable commonplace that many late Ming literati who achieved great reputation in artistic fields, such as poetry, calligraphy, and painting, were no longer the traditional scholar-officials who accessed power and influence through civil examination and office—the traditional trajectory for educated elites.

As I have shown in Chapter 1, the new attitudes towards life that stressed refined taste and romantic male-female companionship can be traced back to a lifestyle epitomized by an earlier figure, the late Yuan scholar Yang Weizhen. Yang chose to remain outside officialdom, but enjoyed the company of friends (including women poets) and literary communities in scenic Hangzhou. He actively engaged in a variety of literary activities—forming poetry societies, taking charge of literary contests, exchanging poetry with male and female associates and friends, anthologizing writings by them. In particular, he encouraged and promoted women's direct participation in literati culture. He edited writings by individual women poets and also included them in anthologies of contemporary poetry. Yang Weizhen, who rejected public service, but seemed to have lived a fulfilled life as an eccentric literatus, provided a desirable model for late Ming nonconformist literati who sought alternatives to government service.

The Ming literati's idealization of withdrawal emerged as early as the mid-Ming Jiajing and Longqing reign periods. It first gained some popularity among officials, especially retired officials. These "officials of the mountains," to use Suzuki Tadashi's term,³ built private gardens and ponds and formed literary societies in order to escape from the drudgery of serving in office and enjoy a pleasurable private life. But the trend of literati's idealization of withdrawal from government office in the Ming was much

³ Suzuki, "Mindai sanjin kō" 365.

fuelled from the long Wanli era onward when the *shanren* type gained more and more influence and popularity in society. The rise of literary courtesans had much to do with this group of men. Literati such as Wang Zhideng and Chen Jiru completely abandoned all ambitions for degree and office, but they left behind great reputation as accomplished writers and multitalented artists. Their names were recorded in the “Wenyuan zhuan” of the *Mingshi*.⁴

Remaining out of office enabled these men to devote themselves more fully to the production of artistic works and to self-invention. To publicize their common identity as the traditionally privileged elite in society, these “men of the mountains” did not retreat to the mountains as did the lofty hermits of the past. Instead, they all swarmed to the most advanced urban centers of Jiangnan, such as Nanjing, Suzhou, and Hangzhou, where courtesan quarters clustered. They formed literary communities where courtesans were an important part. These literati men and courtesans associated with each other, writing, exchanging poetry, entertaining friends and themselves, and living a life as private citizens in comfort and dignity. The courtesan quarters became a space where literati culture flourished as never before. Through the writing brush, both commoner literati and courtesans successfully carved out a space for self-expression and to define/redefine their place in literature and society.

However, the idea of living as an independent writer without official salary and position was not universally accepted in the late Ming. For example, in a letter to her nephew Fang Yizhi, the subject of Peterson’s book, Fang Weiyi 方維儀, a native of Tongcheng (Anhui), known for her morality and integrity,⁵ openly expressed her

⁴ Chapter 1, 51-53.

⁵ On Fang Weiyi, see Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 81-83.

disagreement with Fang Yizhi's attitude towards office: "Your father and ancestors all held government office. Why should you become a scholar with commoner status" (汝父祖皆簪纓, 汝何苦以布衣稱學者)?⁶ The Japanese historian Kishimoto Mio 岸本美緒 has also observed that people in the Jiangnan region formed a complex structure of new social groupings connected both vertically and horizontally, including literati societies, friendship pacts, master-servant bondage, lineage organizations, and networks of vagabonds.⁷ That Kishimoto gave importance to literati societies and friendship pacts among these social groups corroborates my view of a culture dominated by fashions and values of the *shanren* that predominated in Jiangnan.

The rejection of the very goal of office-holding—the traditional trajectory along which educated men gained prestige, influence, and wealth in society—had fundamentally challenged the established labour division in terms of social, economic, and ritual responsibilities. Accordingly, the boundaries of separate spheres of *nei/wai* (male: outside/ female: inner) defined in normative gender ideology also became blurred. Recent scholarship has paid special attention to the "commonalities" or "similarities" between the cultural spheres of men and women in Ming-Qing China.⁸ As I have also shown in this thesis, such "commonalities" or "similarities" and more intimate emotional connections between men and women in terms of their literarily refined taste had to do

⁶ See Fang Weiyi, "Yu Mizhi zhi shu" 與密之姪書, in Jiang Yuanzuo, comp., *Xu Yutai wenyuan* 457. This letter should be written before the fall of the Ming dynasty as the Fangs were determined Ming loyalists.

⁷ Kishimoto Mio, "Rekinenki ni miru Shinsho chihō shakai no seikatsu," quoted in Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers* 31.

⁸ See Kang-i Sun Chang, "Ming-Qing Women Poets and Cultural Androgyny." In this article, Chang discusses the tendency toward "cultural androgyny" in Ming-Qing women's literary culture. Both men and women were very similar to each other in terms of their refined taste and artistic pursuits. Chang also points out that talented courtesans such as Liu Rushi had achieved a "capacity to erase traditional boundaries between male and female roles." See Chang, *The Late Ming Poet Ch'en Tzu-lung* 14-15. See also Carlitz, "Desire and Writing in the Late Ming Play 'Parrot Island'" 101-30.

with changed attitudes towards office-holding, the new social and private space they created for self-invention, and the transformed status of poetry from a public requirement in civil service examinations to a personal cultural vehicle shared by both men and women, including gentry women and courtesans.

Late Ming “men of the mountains” actively involved courtesans in their poetry societies. It was also this group of men who devoted particular efforts to the promotion of poetry by courtesans. As demonstrated in Chapter 2, they promoted courtesan poetry not only through compiling anthologies of writings by this group of women, but also used “prefaces” to their anthologies as sites to legitimize writings by courtesans. To rationalize and defend their efforts to promote writings by courtesans who were defined as the lowly in both Confucian didactic texts and official legal codes, late Ming anthologists often associated their efforts in collecting courtesan poetry with Confucius’ compilation of the *Shijing*, a collection that, as the preface-writers were eager to remind the reader, contained the “debauched odes” or “licentious songs” (*yin shi*).

As I have demonstrated in Chapter 4, the valorization of literary courtesans continued to be in vogue after the fall of the Ming as evidenced by the efforts made by both men and women in the early Qing to promote the courtesan Chen Susu and her poetry. But as we have seen, gentry women poets became so visible in literati circles that their role came to overshadow that of courtesans. Wang Duanshu, during the Ming-Qing transition, befriended Liu Rushi and extolled the courtesans Zhang Wan and Chen Susu.⁹ Wang had close connections with male literary circles and exchanged poetry with several prominent literati, such as Wang Ruqian, Qian Qianyi, and Mao Qiling. She also wrote a

⁹ On the connection between Wang Duanshu and Zhang Wan, see Chapter 1, 92-93 (note 180).

preface for Li Yu's play "Bimu yu."¹⁰ She was called a "society doyen" (映老社長) by Wu Qian 吳謙, a woman poet from Huizhou 徽州.¹¹ Her poetry collection *Yinhong ji* 吟紅集 was sponsored by members of a male literary society, the Tongqiu she 同秋社. At the end of the preface, "Ke Yinhong ji xiaoyin" 刻吟紅集小引, names of forty-seven men were inscribed as "alliance brothers of the Tongqiu she" 同秋社盟弟— among them was the prominent literati Zhang Dai. In the case of Wu Xiao 吳綯, her poetic exchanges with her male friends—leading scholars such as Gong Xian 龔賢 (1599-1689), Xu Shupi 徐樹丕, Zhang Dingyin 張頂印, Chen Kai 陳埏, Yu Huai, and Qu Dajun 屈大均 (1630-96)—were collected and compiled by Wu Shide 吳時德 into the *Tong sheng ji* 同聲集 (The collection of same tone).¹²

Apparently, gentry women and courtesans of the early Qing continued to interact socially with each other and to participate in male literary communities as was the case in the late Ming. Gentry women did not attempt to distance themselves from courtesans as did their counterparts in the High Qing. However, the paucity of cultivated courtesans in early Qing literati circles suggests that the decline of courtesan culture had set in much earlier before the High Qing classical revival. Although I am fully aware that there must have been a variety of factors that came together to bring an end to the glory of courtesan culture—factors such as the Manchu conquest, government repression of the Chinese

¹⁰ See Widmer, "The Epistolary World" 10-11.

¹¹ See Wu Qian 吳謙, "Hui lai ge" 惠來歌 with a subtitle "Ying[ran], the society doyen, promised to come to visit me long ago, but she did not come. I often write poems to urge her and also for correction" 映老社長許過我游久之不至詩屢促之並正. See Wang Duanshu, comp. *Mingyuan shiwei*, juan 15: 18a-b.

¹² Preface by Sun Qianru 孫汧如 dated 1668. See Zhang Huijian, *Ming Qing Jiangsu wenren nianbiao* 741.

literati, especially in the Jiangnan area,¹³ and the subsequent revival of Neo-Confucian orthodoxy—I contend that when courtesans considered marriage into gentry families as their destination, gentry women freely stepped out of their inner chambers to mingle with men, and companionate marriages came into great vogue in the literati world, there was little room left for courtesan culture to continue to grow.

¹³ Of particular note were the Qing edicts and regulations to ban literary societies and literati alliances during the Kangxi reign period and those to ban female entertainers during the reign of Yongzheng (1273-36). See Shan Jinheng 單錦珩, “Li Yu nianpu” 李漁年譜, in *Li Yu quanji*, vol. 1: 35. For the edict, see also *Huangchao wenxian tongkao* 皇朝文獻通考, *juan* 69: 20b-21a (*SKQS-dianziban*). Regarding Yongzheng’s edicts to ban the pleasure quarters, see Terada Takanobu 寺田隆信, “Guanyu Yongzheng di” 關於雍正帝. See also Feng Erkang, *Yongzheng zhuan*; Yang Qiqiao, *Yongzheng di*; Mann, *Precious Records* 126-28; and Kessler, “Chinese Scholars and the Early Manchu State.”

Appendix 1

Ming and Qing courtesans recorded in Hu Wenkai's catalogue:

胡文楷著錄明妓

卞賽 (Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 80)

眾香詞: 卞賽, 一曰賽賽, 上元名妓, 後爲女道士, 自稱玉京道人. 知詩詞, 工小楷, 善畫蘭, 鼓琴, 喜作風枝嫵娜, 一落筆畫十餘紙.

王曼容 (Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 87)

曼容, 北里名妓.

眾香詞: 王曼容, 字少君, 白皙而莊, 清揚巧笑, 殊有閨閣風. 其居表以長揚, 人遂呼爲長揚君. 曼容學字于周公瑕, 學詩于余宗漢, 學琴于許太初, 爭以文雅相尚, 后昵張郎, 遂絕跡不出. 社客稍稍星散, 過長揚而歎欷.

王微 (Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 88-90)

宮閨氏籍藝文考略: 王微, 字修微, 小字王冠, 自號草衣道人, 廣陵妓, 先歸茅元儀, 後歸許都諫譽卿. 所著有遠游篇, 宛在篇, 間草, 期山草, 未焚稿等集; 又撰名山記數百卷, 自爲序以行世.

朱斗兒 (Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 94)

眾香詞: 朱斗兒字素娥, 金陵妓. 風情搖曳, 詩畫皆工, 與陳魯南 [陳沂] 聯吟.

朱泰玉 (Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 97-98)

宮閨氏籍藝文考略: 朱無瑕字泰玉, 小字馥, 桃葉妓. 淹通文史, 工詩善書. 萬曆己酉[1609], 秦淮有社會, 集天下名士, 無瑕詩出, 人皆自廢.

吳娟 (Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 103)

眾香詞: 吳娟字麴仙, 上元人, 本名家女, 流落不偶. 卜居蔣園, 善作畫, 工小楷. 與莆田林茂之及金陵諸詞客相酬和.

李貞嬭 (Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 109)

宮閨氏籍藝文考略: 李貞嬭, 字淡如, 桃葉妓. 所著有韻芳集. 王宇稱其秦淮社集詩云: 出入風雅, 有何女郎能之, 足壓倒江南矣.

李無塵 (Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 109-10)

眾香詞: 李無塵字不染, 汴梁妓...能詩善畫蘭, 含英毓華, 蛻塵祛汶, 談謔竟歲月, 不涉一煙火語...真一代佳人也.

沙宛在 (Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 111)

宮閨氏籍藝文考略: 沙宛在字未央, 小字嫩, 自稱桃葉女郎。

周文姬 (Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 124)

紅雨樓題跋: 文姬尺素, 婉麗有情, 徐淑之答秦嘉, 不啻過也。周九倩攜以自隨, 足當舞蓑歌扇, 又何必恨章臺弱柳爲他人所折耶? 壬子[1612]閏十一月東海徐[火+勃]題。

呼文如 (Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 126-27)

文如, 江夏營妓, 後歸麻城邱謙之。

續玉臺文苑: 萬歷間江夏呼姬文如, 小字祖, 善琴能寫蘭, 且知詩詞。

胡蓮 (Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 133)

宮閨氏籍藝文考略: 胡蓮字茂生, 閩妓。

三台名媛詩輯引撲學堂文鈔: 天台女子胡茂生, 工詩畫, 隱居困溪。性不諧俗, 以詩畫游學士大夫間。一時閩巨公如曹石倉徐興公皆愛重之, 相與往來贈答。於花卉特喜畫菊竹, 妙處不減古閨閣名流。或自題其上, 娟秀動人。絹素扇頭, 人爭寶之。

范翮 (Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 134)

眾香詞: 范翮字留雲, 舊院妓。案定榜眼, 花品碧桃。體修而潔, 才慧而敏。

孫瑤華 (Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 137-38)

宮閨氏籍藝文考略: 瑤華字靈光, 金陵妓, 後歸新安汪忠孝。讀書賦詩, 好蓄古書畫鼎彝之屬。

徐驚鴻 (Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 147)

眾香詞: 徐驚鴻字飛卿, 眾以翮若驚鴻目之, 由是得名。

宮閨氏籍藝文考略: 徐翮, 一云名翮翮, 字飛卿, 一字驚鴻, 金陵妓。後爲尼, 號慧月。

朔朝霞 (Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 149)

眾香詞: 朔朝霞字曙光, 邀笛步妓。善舞...

朝霞, 金陵名妓。

郝文珠 (Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 151-52)

眾香詞: 郝文珠字昭文, 才藝殊絕, 談論風生。馮祭酒開之有酬文珠詩曰: 虛作秣陵游, 無由近莫愁。李寧遠聞之召掌書記。

宮閨氏籍藝文考略: 郝文珠字昭文, 金陵朱[珠]市妓。

露書云: 昭文居珠市...余嘗在其齋頭, 見信筆作報, 頃刻數百言, 不減黃庭, 信佳品也。

郝婉然 (Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 152)

婉然小名賽, 字蕊珠, 金陵妓. 楷書有昭文[郝文珠]門風.

馬守貞 (Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 152-53)

宮閨氏籍藝文考略: 馬守貞字月嬌, 小字玄兒, 以善畫蘭, 號湘蘭子, 金陵妓. 王穉登云: 姬稍工筆札, 通文辭, 書如游絲弱柳, 婀娜媚人, 畫蘭最善, 得趙吳興文待詔三昧.

崔嫣然 (Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 156)

宮閨氏籍藝文考略: 崔重文, 字嫣然, 小字媚兒, 金陵妓. 性耽圖史, 工詩. 潘之恆云: 嫣然口占揮毫, 麗藻橫溢.

寇皚如 (Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 156-57)

眾香詞: 寇皚如字貞素, 寇白門妹...或集桃葉渡百媚定爲狀元, 品比水仙, 取其露滴金盤, 風吹玉樹, 西吳茅止生結社秦淮, 皚如多宴集詩, 各體俱工. 若演劇登場, 儼一雲中仙子, 眾皆羨服.

張如玉 (Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 158)

眾香詞: 馬如玉字楚嶼, 本姓張, 家金陵南市樓, 從假母之姓爲馬...熟精文選唐音, 善小楷八分, 及繪事, 傾動當時. 姬心竊厭薄紈綺, 與同志品題花月, 指點江山, 意豁如也. 無論一時名流艷慕, 卽閨媛女娛, 見者如以膠投漆.

張喬 (Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 158-60)

粵東詩海: 張喬字喬婧, 號二喬, 廣州人. 先本吳籍...尤好詩詞...善彈琴, 工畫蘭竹...

梁小玉 (Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 160-63)

宮閨氏籍藝文考略: 小玉字玉姬, 號琅嬛女史, 吳興妓.
玉鏡陽秋云: 小玉著書, 從來鉛黛中無埒富者, 僅從集中諸序, 見其目耳. ...至其目九家之文, 袁以酸, 陳以甘, 李以辛, 屠以鹹, 虞以苦, 華亭以瘦, 雲杜以肥, 臨川以長, 宣城以短, 雖復昭容操衡, 殆無以過, 亦奇女子矣. 中郎以跳盪自命, 而目之以酸, 此語尤索解人不得.

陸夢珠 (Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 172)

婦人集: 陸姬夢珠, 或曰礪城大家女也. 曾爲侯門寵妓.

景翩翩 (Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 174)

眾香詞: 景翩翩字三昧, 建昌名妓. 博學能文, 謳歌繞梁[樑], 八閩士人無不與游.

馮湘 (Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 177)

湘字靜容, 玉峯名妓, 常乘畫舫泛半塘石湖間。

楊宛 (Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 183-85)

眾香詞: 楊宛字宛叔, 南曲名妓。豐姿綽約, 詩畫無雙。後歸吳興茅止生總戎, 多外遇, 旋叛奔田國戚, 以老婢畜之。復謀奔劉東平, 遭亂爲丐婦裝間行, 盜殺之。

楊琰 (Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 185)

眾香詞: 楊琰字玉香, 舊院妓。

頓文 (Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 189)

舊院名妓。

趙彩姬 (Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 191-92)

宮閨氏籍藝文考略: 彩姬字今燕, 金陵妓。

眾香詞: 今燕字彩姬, 南曲名妓。舉止風流, 姿容蘊藉, 殆欲界之佳人, 實清都之仙子。吳門張幼于中秋大會, 秦淮賦詩, 燕曰: 試從天上看河漢, 今夜應無織女星 [the poem entitled “Qixi, tong Zhao Jinyan fu” 七夕同趙今燕賦 was actually written by Zhang Youyu. See Qian Qianyi, comp. *Liechao shiji*, *Dingji* 321]. 遂名播湖海。廣陵冒伯麟贊其詞幽微精進, 絕無閨閣穠纖之態。因梓其[與]朱無瑕, 鄭無美同湘蘭子爲秦淮四美人合刻傳之。庶一片芳心, 與清言而共遠。千秋艷麗, 稱絕調以俱馳耳。

趙賽濤 (Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 192)

賽濤杭人, 被惡少掠賣, 爲臨清妓。

鄭妥 (Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 199-200)

眾香詞: 鄭妥又名如英, 字無美, 南曲名妓。

虞國儒云: 妥非獨於詩, 所爲尺牘, 或數十言, 或三四百言, 莫不淋漓委折。

薛素 (Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 203)

眾香詞: 薛素素, 吳郡人。能畫蘭竹, 作詩詞, 善挾彈走馬, 以女俠自命。... 廣陵陸弼爲挾彈歌贈, 白門蔡秉白復贊其南游草... 中年長齋繡佛, 歸富家翁爲房老。集有太原王稭登序。

薛瓊瓊 (Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 204)

瓊瓊, 湖南人。

宮閨氏籍藝文考略: 薛瓊瓊, 以被掠流落爲妓。

胡文楷著錄清妓

方是仙 (Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 224)

是仙字澹然, 吳興名妓. 性淡, 雅好山水游, 尤愛禪悟. (眾香詞著錄)

王尙 (Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 233)

尙字影香, 古燕大成人. 年十三, 落籍平康. (眾香詞著錄)

王麗娟 (Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 258)

麗娟, 山東濟南人. 妓, 小名金兒. (清閨秀藝文略著錄)

白梅香 (Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 269)

梅香字西來, 練川名妓. (眾香詞著錄)

吳娟娟 (Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 308)

See the entry on Wu Juan 吳娟 in Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 103. (眾香詞著錄)

吳卿憐 (Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 308)

卿憐, 江蘇吳縣人, 善歌能詩詞, 色藝兼勝. 平陽中丞得之, 寵幸備至. 平陽即敗, 流轉歸和州. (閨秀詩話著錄)

吳瑛 (Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 312)

瑛字澹如, 原籍太平, 雲間名妓. (眾香詞著錄)

李詠 (Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 338)

詠字文韻, 江蘇梁溪人, 誤適縣役某甲. 獨來滬上肆力於文字. 遂解吟詠. 在北里中獨以風雅聞. (合眾圖書館書目著錄)

李萼 (Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 340)

萼字文如, 湘南李孝廉女. 酷好李冶魚玄機詩. 常獨坐小樓, 搦管吟哦, 集成盈秩. 萼多病, 終爲道士. 風晨月夕, 雨窗雪案, 每對客惟以琴棋爲娛. (眾香詞著錄)

李蘋香 (Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 345)

蘋香, 上海名妓. (小黛軒論詩詩著錄)

沈隱 (Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 372)

隱字素瓊, 江蘇揚州妓. 僑居錢塘, 順治三年杭城破, 殉夏生死. (擷芳集著錄)

花妥 (Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 400)

妥字友鶯, 江蘇上元妓, 爲學士方樓岡賞識. (眾香詞著錄)

柳是 (Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 430-34)

是一名隱, 字如是, 江蘇吳江人. 常熟錢謙益妾. (然脂集, 眾香詞著錄)

柳聲 (Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 434)

聲字紫畹, 江蘇華亭人. 少穎異, 淪落平康, 色藝無雙, 久寓揚州, 一時推許, 後歸天長令. (眾香詞著錄)

范雲 (Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 447)

雲字雙玉, 又字玉公, 號然道人, 江蘇江都人. 金陵妓. (然脂集著錄)

徐橫波 (Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 479-80)

See the entry on Gu Mei 顧媚 in Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 805. (眾香詞著錄)

袁蓮似 (Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 493)

蓮似字素如, 六橋名妓. 善畫能琴, 歌有繞梁[樑]之聲. 留西湖作憶舊詩四章, 一時詞客屬和盈帙. (眾香詞著錄)

張婉 (Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 521)

婉字宛仙, 雲間名妓. (眾香詞著錄)

張慧卿 (Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 527)

慧卿, 江蘇揚州人, 青樓中妓. (小黛軒論詩詩著錄)

郭玉瑛 (Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 571)

玉瑛字茱萸, 蘇州妓. (然脂集著錄)

陳元 (Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 575)

元字圓圓, 江蘇武進人, 初爲女優, 名擅吳中. (眾香詞著錄)

陳素素 (Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 588)

素素, 號二分明月女子, 江蘇江都人, 萊陽姜學在妾. (擷芳集著錄)

喬容 (Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 626)

容字雲生, 北里名妓. 少與名流嫵婉, 濡染歲久, 頗通文詞. (眾香詞著錄)

楊絳子 (Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 676-77)

絳子, 浙江嘉興人, 柳如是妹. (小檀樂室閨秀詞鈔著錄)

葉星 (Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 684-85)

星字二珩, 福建妓. (然脂集著錄)

董白 (Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 688)

白字小宛，江蘇金陵人。後歸如皋冒襄。嘗薈萃閨閣雜事，爲奩艷三卷。年二十七以勞瘁死，辟疆作影梅庵憶語哭之。(然脂集，眾香詞著錄)

葛嫩 (Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 691)

嫩字蘂芳，江蘇上元人。才藝無雙。後歸桐城孫克咸。甲申之變，克咸移居松江，問道入閩，授監中丞楊文驄軍事，兵敗被執，并縛嫩，主將欲犯之，嫩大罵嚼舌碎，含血噴其面。將手刃之。(眾香詞著錄)

劉僊 (Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 719)

僊字蕊珠，金陵名妓，蕭疎逸致，澹宕佳懷，定花案以僊爲榜首。(眾香詞著錄)

顧媚 (Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 805)

媚字眉生，江蘇上元人，尚書龔芝麓姬。

柳絮集：徐橫坡字眉生，一字智珠，又字眉莊，本姓顧，名媚，江蘇上元人，禮部尚書合肥龔鼎孳側室。(眾香詞著錄)

介石 (Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 819)

介石，江蘇上元人，姓尤，名瑛，字鍾玉。本秦淮舊院妓，精音律，工尺牘，後悔之，祝發爲尼。(眾香詞著錄)

石巖 (Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 819)

石巖，浙江仁和人，俗姓蔣名英。琴棋書畫莫不臻妙。(眾香詞著錄)

秀卿，愛卿 (Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü* 824-25)

秀卿，愛卿姐妹，江蘇吳縣名妓。(閨集經眼錄著錄)

Appendix 2

Chinese texts of prefaces produced in the pre-Ming periods that are not included in Hu Wenkai's catalogue (*SKQS-dianziban*):

1. 史部/目錄類/經籍之屬/直齋書錄解題/卷二十: 29a. ([宋] 陳振孫著)
處士女王安之集 [1168]
簡池王亢子倉之女尚恭字安之年二十未嫁而死乾道戊子也亢自志其墓有任公鼎者爲作集序援歐公所序謝希孟爲比而稱其詩不傳今余家有之任蓋未之見也。
2. 集部/別集類/南宋建炎至德祐/文忠集/卷四十九: 22b-23a. ([宋] 周必大撰)
跋蕭臺詩 [1201]
永嘉錢君文子序其曾祖姑蕭臺詩三卷刻板醴陵縣治復求跋語予觀詩三百篇有當時婦人女子所賦而後世文人或不能及蓋發乎情止乎禮義之難也景祐中歐陽文忠公序謝希孟詩云隱約深厚守禮不自放有古幽閑淑女之風欲引而進之衛莊姜許穆夫人之列請以斯言附諸卷末嘉太元年九月二十四日。
3. 集部/別集類/南宋建炎至德祐/魯齋集/卷十三: 11b-12b. ([宋] 王柏撰)
跋怡齋吟稿
先君子與博士戴公爲同門友契好甚密予自束髮常得立侍左右先君之喪博士哭之甚哀撫諸孤甚厚未半年博士竟卒于中都哀誄傳播方知爲公夫人之作也益重博士之賢足以掩夫人之文聲與先君同日葬于婺女鄉兩塋相望不半里其後嘗展升堂之拜與公諸子亦密獲觀怡齋吟稿凜然貞潔之操見于比興間自在閒雅殊無粉澤之氣古之列女節婦未必有也夫人卒先兄適莊爲書埋銘一時哀挽有曰博士誄文千古恨怡齋吟稿一編塵遂爲絕唱不幸風規不振遺書散逸予嘗太息而言曰吟稿與塵俱不見誄文和恨總成空後六十年族孫珽攜一巨帙見過吟稿誄文恍然到目而幽刻亦在焉爲之驚喜感慨曰後世固有好雅之士不患不傳斯稿也正患斯稿之傳喪夫人之無後也雖然三百五篇多婦人女子之詩聖人未嘗不採所以興起人之善心導性情之正有補於世教也尙矣固不在家藏而私寶也予於是書于卷末云
4. 集部/別集類/金至元/安雅堂集/卷六: 5b-6b. ([元] 陳旅撰)
靜方詩集序
余在閩中時聞浦城鄭旼之母李氏聰慧而靜淑能孝於親義于夫又曉藝術以儒學爲女師蓋許明宋文宣之流亞也旼至京師以其母靜方集來余再閱之何其言之蒨秀而溫妥也夫言者德之文而詩又言之文者也婦德婦言觀于其詩而知之矣閩中山水清美鍾於婦人女子者已若此況道德文學之士蔚然爲海內之所慕尙者乎旼之言曰吾母得以孝節旌其門矣吾獨慮其詩之不聞于世也幸先生序之余謂昔歐陽文忠公嘗序閩女謝希孟之詩謂其隱約深厚守禮而不放希孟自此有聞於人子往求世之如文忠公者序而母詩則而母聞矣余言不足信於世也旼請不置於是始爲述其可信者於編端李氏名智貞詩曰靜方蓋取坤之文言傳云

Appendix 3

Xue Susu's poems recorded in anthologies produced in late Ming and early Qing,
arranged in chronological order (a total of 27 titles / 30 poems and two sentences):

Qinglou yunyu 青樓韻語 (1616), 17 題 21 首

卷一:

1. 獨酌 2
2. 謝王徵君敘詩 [*Zuili shixi*: 謝王徵君百谷敘詩]
3. 秋日邀何侍御飲得行字 [*Mingyuan shigui*: 秋日邀何侍御飲]
4. 中秋夜同蔡幼凝集楊姬舜華館中
5. 長橋宴客
6. 何侍御席上書事
7. 春日 [*Zuili shixi*: 秋日] 同友飲秦淮舟中
8. 桃葉渡頭同吳中翰坦愚飲
9. 夏日飲吳太學載伯齋中 [*Zuili shixi*: 飲吳太學載伯齋中]
10. 飲陸山人無從齋中因贈
11. 同蔡長卿孝廉飲因贈

卷二:

示李生 桂枝香 (詞 1 題 1 首 not counted)

12. 別蔡幼凝

卷三:

13. 寄友四首
14. 畫竹扇頭贈新知
15. 畫蘭
16. 史太學微伯見訪

Gujin mingyuan huishi 古今名媛彙詩 (1620), 1 題 1 首, 重複
畫蘭

Mingyuan shigui 明媛詩歸 (1625), 4 題 4 首, 其中 3 題 3 首重複.

- 秋日邀何侍御飲
17. 過蔡氏影雲樓賦贈
- 獨酌
畫蘭

Gujin nüshi 古今女史 (1628), 1 題 1 首, 重複.
畫蘭

Liechao shiji 列朝詩集 (1649), 3 題 3 首.

- 18. 雨夜
- 19. 畫蘭竹題贈蘇時欽
- 20. 懷人詩

Guixiu ji 閨秀集 (1652), 1 題 1 首.

- 21. 晚渡楊子江

Mingyuan shiwei 名媛詩緯 (1667), 4 題 4 首.

- 22. 春日過茅山
- 23. 雲陽道中即事
- 24. 焦山
- 25. 題沈君畫

Cuilou ji 翠樓集 (1673) 1 題 1 首重複.

- 懷人詩

Ming shi zong 明詩綜 (1702), 1 題 1 首重複.

- 春日過茅山

Yuxuan Mingshi 御選明詩 (1709), 3 題 3 首重複.

- 春日過茅山 (*juan* 91)
- 雨夜 (*juan*116)
- 畫蘭竹題贈蘇時欽 (*juan*116)

Zuili shixi 樵李詩繫 (1710); 8 題 8 首重複.

- 別蔡幼癡
- 謝王徵君百谷敘詩
- 秋日同友飲秦淮舟中
- 寄友
- 飲吳太學伯載齋中
- 畫蘭
- 畫蘭竹題贈蘇時欽
- 雨夜

Shanhu wang 珊瑚網 (1643); 1 題 1 首 2 句.

- 26. 薛素君自題畫山水 (*Shanhu wang* 1197)
- 27. 薛素君梅花蛺蝶 [蝶]: 不愁春信斷, 爲有夢魂來 (2 句) (*Shanhu wang* 1265)

Appendix 4

Wang Wei's poems recorded in anthologies produced in the late Ming and early Qing, arranged in chronological order (a total of 130 titles /146 poems; titles of poems that repeatedly appeared in anthologies are not recorded):

Gujin mingyuan huishi 古今名媛彙詩 (1620); 3 題 3 首

1. 夜月
2. 賦戲閨人
3. 永啓友夏入法相余以他事未得隨從賦此志愧

Mingyuan shigui 明媛詩歸 (1625), 卷 36; 88 題 98 首, 3 題 3 首, 重複.

4. 起步 2
5. 鸚鵡洲候月
6. 爲汪然明題夢草
7. 秋夜舟中留別
8. 憶昔 2
9. 秋夜送別
10. 中秋後二日同瞿彌仲來君餘雪柯麻衣和尚集虎丘[山]橋月下送眉公先生還雲間
11. 感懷
12. 中秋賦戲宛叔
13. 重晤元達并次朱先生韻
14. 陽臺山晚步
15. 寒夜泊湖上
16. 秋夜舟中懷宛叔
17. 秋日送夏長卿北去
18. 武林記夫[火]
19. 暮春歌
20. 日沉歌
21. 代送
22. 湖上留別王永啓譚友夏
23. 友人以斷腸草寄怨予心非而反之 [*Liechao shiji*: “有人以斷腸艸寄怨予偶見戲反之”]
24. 同鍾伯敬先生及諸子夜汎夾山草蕩二漾
25. 登大別山眺黃鶴樓鸚鵡洲諸勝同王幼度朱其勤李宗文張仲虎王子雲龍夢先熊元敬分韻
26. 天桂 [柱] 峯
27. 西湖寒夜與令則諸子話舊分賦
28. 吳江舟次
29. 次朱詠白先生韻
30. 參憨大師

31. 湖上再晤永啓
32. 湖上苦雨懷長卿令則
33. 寒夜訊眉公先生
34. 雨夜柬令則
35. 月下
36. 新秋閉關靈鷲山中
37. 送眉公先生過夾山漾
38. 宛叔招飲花下得狂字
39. 秋夜送別 [同題, 詩不同]
40. 重過嘉禾感懷
41. 冬夜渡江
42. 舟次江滸
43. 荅寄
44. 大堤曲 4
45. 懷蘇郎
46. 秋夜梁溪道中別御君
47. 初冬拜孫太初墓同友夏諸子 [*Liechao shiji*: “初冬拜外太祖墓”]
48. 獨汎
49. 探梅
50. 怨梅
51. 代梅答
52. 題王郎畫
53. 山齋同友坐月
54. 病中聽雨
55. 題姬人畫蘭 4
56. 送友人東歸
57. 寄別
58. 和宛叔
59. 新月
60. 送生甫
61. 冬夜
62. 偶賦
63. 丹陽道中作
64. 重晤友夏同泛夾山漾懷永啓
65. 送友夏友夏贈予詩有天涯淪落同之句 [*Liechao shiji*: “送友夏友夏贈詩有天涯淪落同之句”]
66. 孤山坐月
67. 次友夏韻
68. 秋夜 2
69. 有懷
70. 秋日閒賦

71. 宮怨
72. 近秋懷宛叔
73. 青羊澗
74. 廬山草堂 2
75. 庚申秋夜予臥病孤山, 閒讀虎關女郎秋夢詩. 悵然神往不能假寐漫賦一絕
併記幽懷. 予已作木石人尙不能無情. 後之覽者當如何耳
76. 代送項先生北去
77. 冬夜懷宛叔
78. 西陵懷譚友夏
79. 昌化道中作
80. 曉泊釣臺
81. 春日有懷
82. 泊金閨戲贈鄰舟女郎
83. 懷宛叔
84. 同太史過湖上未幾先歸予獨留湖上苦雨感賦
85. 送董太史還雲間
86. 戲代
87. 夢宛叔
88. 留別林天素

Gujin nüshi 古今女史 (1628); 3 題 3 首, 其中 2 題 2 首重複. 另有詞兩首 (not counted).

89. 女伴期入法相予以他事未往賦寄

Liechao shiji 列朝詩集 (1649), “Run ji” 閩集, *juan* 4; 53 題 60 首 (but the compiler indicates 61 poems); 24 題 26 首重複.

90. 仙家竹枝詞 二首同李夫人登武當山作
91. 偶作
92. 雪夜小汎
93. 別窗下蕉
94. 新秋逢人初度感懷諸女伴
95. 湖上次韻答黃夢暉夫人
96. 寒夜送夏夫人從楚入洛
97. 今夜寒
98. 舟居拈得風字
99. 哭黃夫人孟暉
100. 夜歸憶鄰舟女郎
101. 閒居
102. 汪夫人以不繫園詩見示賦此寄之
103. 讀張秀先傳偶題
104. 吳老夫人出訪山莊以詩見示次韻賦答

105. 擬燕子樓四時閨意 4
106. 哭韓夫人
107. 春夜留別
108. 挽趙凡夫 2
109. 月夜留宿馮夫人池上
110. 秋夜集石湖分得粧字
111. 過宛叔夢閣
112. 送遠
113. 問侍兒月上花梢幾許
114. 病中偶拈
115. 游牛首閱春江即目
116. 憶江南
117. 長至入雲棲
118. 園居

Guixiu ji 閨秀集 (1652); 17 題 19 首, 其中 10 題 11 首重複; 詞 1 題 1 首 (not counted).

119. 效古 2
120. 西溪探梅
121. 雨後梨花
122. 冬日渡江
123. 帝城雪曉
124. 七夕偶雨戲拈
125. 重過玉炤堂

Mingyuan shiwei 名媛詩緯 (1667); 9 題 9 首, 其中 7 題 7 首重複. 詞 1 題 1 首 (not counted).

126. 秋夜月下閱邸報
127. 九日泛石湖

Cuilou ji 翠樓集 (1673); 22 首, 重複.

Ming shi zong 明詩綜 (1702); 6 題 6 首; 其中 3 題 3 首重複.

128. 重過雨花臺望江有感
129. 夾山漾別陳仲醇
130. 湖上早起

Yuxuan Mingshi 御選明詩 (1709); 32 題 35 首, 重複.

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